

# UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

## Experts' views about prevention and prevention workforce training needs in Estonia

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### Background:

There is no unified understanding about substance use prevention in Estonia. Some knowledge exists, but most prevention strategies used by practitioners are based on intuition. Ineffective activities are often carried out and believed to be effective.

### What:

Three focus groups were carried out as a part of the EU-funded project UPC-Adapt, which aims to create an European training curriculum for a substance use prevention workforce.

Three main topics were discussed:

- substance use prevention and its importance in Estonia,
- prevention training needs in Estonia,
- how to design training for decision- and policy-makers in Estonia based on Universal Prevention Curriculum (UPC).

### Who:

Decision-makers, policy-makers and opinion leaders on both local and national level (n=23).

### When:

June 2017

## Results

### Substance use prevention and its importance in Estonia

#### Prevention is quite difficult to define

*"There is a conceptual confusion with the term "prevention". It can lead us to the conclusion that everything we do is prevention."*

*"Maybe we should not define the word prevention at all. Prevention is a way we do things."*

#### The primary actors in prevention are professionals working closely with people (teachers, medical workers, police, etc.)

*"The agents who should be more involved with prevention are teachers, family physicians, police... We have to use professionals who have access to people's home and are authorities for people."*

#### Politicians and high-level decision-makers should be kept out from making decisions regarding prevention

*"Prevention can only work when thinking ahead. Short-term approach means just filling out progress indicators. You can see the effects of prevention in 3, 5, 25 and even in 30 years. It would be ideal if the decision-makers on higher levels wouldn't be able to make big decisions. Governments change very quickly... There is no place for politicians in the prevention field."*

*"For politicians prevention still means fear-based approach, threats and requirements... but positive thinking and development is missing."*

### Training needs in the field of prevention

#### There aren't many curriculums or training courses that cover prevention

*"Prevention is quite a specific topic in terms of a university course, most lectures cover broader topics..."*

*"The professions that have close contact with children and families do not have the proper skills and training from universities."*

#### Specialists working with children should know about prevention

*"The training of specialists who work with children is extremely important... social workers, teachers, child protection workers... there should be up-to-date training where the focus is on cooperation."*

### Designing training based on UPC

#### The training should be multidisciplinary and involve different specialists and officials

*"Training could be organized by local governments... city doctor, educational specialist, social worker – they all should be involved. For sure, there is little focus for each profession on their own, but then they could see the unified approach of prevention."*

#### Training should be based on teamwork and cooperation

*"If we train only one person from a community and make them flourish... they will flourish for couple of days and then stop, because nobody understands them. The proper way is to boost up the region."*

#### Training should also cover advocacy: how to sell your ideas to politicians and management, how to explain the content of prevention to the practitioners

*"I guess it is a valued skill to sell the idea of prevention and inform decision makers on higher level. Usually, wrong and ineffective activities are used and labeled "prevention" just to demonstrate what has been done in a short time."*

### Conclusion:

#### UPC training is highly needed in Estonia. It is assumed to:

- boost up communities' prevention efforts
- give people proper knowledge about prevention and form a unified approach
- develop skills necessary for coordinating preventive strategies
- improve cooperation between different parties
- promote the use of evidence-based practices.



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