

Key Findings Summary of the 2014 NM Community Survey

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The New Mexico Community Survey is administered each Spring by San Juan County Partnership to provide the important feedback loop from the community about the success of substance-abuse prevention initiatives. This article summarizes key findings of the 2014 Community Survey. Thank you to all of you who took the time to participate in this year's survey, as well as our sponsors who allow us to conduct surveys at their locations.

Background

The purpose of the Community Survey is to evaluate substance abuse prevention initiatives locally in San Juan County, as well as contribute to statewide evaluation of prevention efforts. The survey is administered by programs funded by New Mexico BHSD/Office of Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP), which provides statewide data for evaluation of prevention efforts across New Mexico. SJCP has administered the survey annually, since 2008, excluding 2011.

The survey is designed to address those prevention objectives outlined by SJCP in relation to its OSAP-funded prevention programs. SJCP's objectives in regard to alcohol have been to increase awareness and enforcement of alcohol laws, increase perception of risk of arrest/legal consequences of drinking & driving, and reduce retail access to alcohol by minors and intoxicated. Strategies have included coordinating for stronger enforcement, and increasing publicity on law enforcement efforts related to DWI, as well as through increasing publicity about the 4th degree felony for providing alcohol to youth. These strategies follow from research that shows when someone perceives there is a high likelihood of legal consequences to behaviors such as drinking and driving or providing alcohol to minors, they are less likely to engage in the behaviors. Therefore, high levels of visible enforcement and increased knowledge of consequences have the power to reduce the behaviors in the long term. These environmental strategies are thus aimed at the long term goals of reducing DWI and underage drinking.

Related to the emerging trend of prescription misuse and painkiller abuse, SJCP's objective has been to reduce social access to prescription drugs and increase perception of risk of misuse. We know from research that the majority of teens and young adults who obtain non-prescribed prescriptions are obtaining them from friends and relatives, sometimes without their knowledge. We also know that young people as well as adults are often not aware of the dangers involved in taking non-prescribed prescriptions. With these strategies of reducing social access and increasing perception of risk, the long term goal is to reduce prescription drug misuse.

A 'standard' protocol, or method of conducting the survey, has been established, and is replicated each year. Surveys are conducted at a variety of community and retail locations in different areas of the county, in order to obtain a sample (of over 400 San Juan County residents) that is demographically similar to the county Census, in other words, that is good representation in terms of gender, race/ethnicity and geographic location. It is a targeted *convenience* sample, rather than a *random* sample, so we are cautious to generalize our results beyond the sample to the entire population. However, because we are consistent from year to year in our protocol, we are relatively confident to draw conclusions about trends across the survey results.

Alcohol Outcomes

In 2014, when asked how likely it is that "police would arrest an adult for giving alcohol to someone under 21," 58% of the survey respondents perceive it was very or somewhat likely. This is one of the indicators of community perception of current enforcement of alcohol laws. Looking at data from 2009 through 2014, there has been a steady, positive incremental improvement in the perception that someone would be arrested for providing alcohol to a minor. In 2009 this value was 53%. From an evaluation perspective, this improvement may

reflect sustained efforts to build community awareness about underage drinking in general and the 4th degree felony charge, as well as ongoing collaborative efforts with SJCP and community groups such as the DWI Planning Council/CDWI Advisory Council, and law enforcement agencies. For example, for several years, SJCP in collaboration with Youth in Action/MTAC have placed stickers on alcohol containers that inform purchasers that is a 4th degree felony to provide alcohol to minors.

Perception of risk of arrest for driving after drinking is another indicator of community perception of enforcement. San Juan County has strong levels of active law enforcement of DWI. There are an average number of 1,600 DWI arrests per year (2007-2011) across the county. And one of SJCP's prevention strategies is to increase community awareness of risk through publicizing law enforcement efforts, such as checkpoints, DWI arrest rates, etc. On the Community Survey measure of perception of risk, there were improvements from 2009 to 2013. In 2009 and 2010, 62% of respondents indicated that someone was very or somewhat likely to be stopped by police for driving after drinking. In 2012, that measure was 68%, and in 2013 it was 74%. And then we lost some ground between 2013 and 2014, back to 68%. These data support the importance of sustaining high levels of DWI enforcement and publicizing law enforcement efforts, in order to continue to increase perceived risk of arrest/legal consequences.

On measures of alcohol consumption, 35% of respondents reported past 30-day alcohol use and 19% reported binge drinking. Self-reported driving after 'perhaps having too much to drink' has also remained relatively consistent, with 4% of the 2014 survey respondents reporting having done so in the past 30 days.

It is worth noting that among youth in San Juan County, as reported on the Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (YRRS), self-report of risky alcohol use and driving after drinking have declined significantly over the past 10 years. For example, binge drinking among high school students has significantly decreased from 33.4% in 2003 to 16% in 2011. Similarly, drinking and driving among youth decreased from 13% in 2003 to 6.8% in 2011. A preliminary look at YRRS 2013 results, which will be officially published this fall, suggest even greater improvement among youth. Projecting these youth data trends into San Juan County's future bodes well for a brighter (and safer) road ahead.

Prescription Misuse Outcomes

Another focus of SJCP's prevention work is the reduction of prescription misuse. The Community Survey measures on this topic aim to understand some of the dynamics that contribute to misuse, such as sharing Rx with friends or family members, perceived risk of misuse, and not securing stored medications adequately. For example, 5.6% of survey respondents reported giving or sharing prescription drugs with someone. When asked about how much people risk harming themselves if they take painkillers for non-medical reasons, 60% respondents perceive "Great risk" of doing so. Over half of respondents, (58%) reported they keep their medication locked or safely stored away.

Looking over the past years of data, not sharing medications is trending in a desirable direction. We are hopeful that this trend is due to the information that has been disseminated over the past two years, and that the positive trend will continue. It was noted in Community Survey data that there were somewhat higher rates of self-reported sharing in the parent sample. Thus, the 'social access' strategies this coming year will focus on parents, with expanded information about the dangers of sharing and the need to track medicine cabinet inventory.

Self-report of safe storage of medications has decreased somewhat in the past few years (we want it to increase). One possible explanation might be that as people become more knowledgeable about what actually constitutes safe storage, they recognize that they do not in fact have their meds safely stored. It was also noted that older survey respondents had lower rates of safe storage than other age groups. Upcoming strategies include working with seniors to increase their safe storage and use of disposal opportunities.

Another strategy is designed to build awareness of “take-back” events for safely disposing of unused prescription drugs. Over time, there has been a significant increase in awareness of take back events, from 35% of survey respondents in 2012 to 44% in 2014, who had heard or seen information about the take-back events. SJCP efforts of publicizing take back events, local radio interviews, and stickers on pharmacy bags has made an impact on building community awareness.

In future surveys, the survey will also track actual participation in take-back events. We know that awareness of the issue is being built. So the anticipation is that with continuing these strategies, we will see a reduction in prescription and painkiller misuse. In general, these results help us better understand the dynamics, and provide a feedback loop from the community about what strategies are working, and where there is the need to focus efforts.

To download a summary of these results, go to www.sjcpartnership.org/CommunitySurvey2014-SJCP.pdf