



ATOD cultural needs assessment

The ATOD prevention needs within the Latino/Hispanic community in Renville County and the Native American community in Yellow Medicine County

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Background

In spring 2010, two Planning and Implementation (P&I) grantees, Annie Tepfer of Renville County and Ann Orren of Yellow Medicine County, expressed interest in identifying strategies to engage diverse cultural communities in coalition activities. They each identified a cultural community of interest, the Latino/Hispanic community in Renville County and the Native American community in Yellow Medicine County.

Wilder Research assessed alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) prevention needs within the two identified cultural communities. A total of four focus groups were conducted for this assessment. One youth and one adult focus group each were conducted within the Latino/Hispanic community in Renville County and the Native American community in Yellow Medicine County. The adult focus group in Renville County was facilitated in Spanish, while all other focus groups were facilitated in English.

The P&I coordinators worked within their respective communities to recruit focus group participants. In Renville County, a total of 17 youth and 12 adults participated in the focus groups. Youth ranged in age from 8 to 19 years old, with 6 youth under 12 years old, 10 youth between 12 and 18 years old, and 1 youth who was 19 years old. In the Yellow Medicine focus groups, a total 11 youth and 4 adults participated. All youth ranged in age between 12 and 18 years old.

Almost all youth focus group participants were involved in ATOD prevention activities within their county; thus, their thoughts and opinions may not be representative of youth within the broader community. Youth were active in ATOD prevention efforts and may be more likely to disapprove of underage substance use. They may also be more aware of current ATOD prevention efforts, leading to more informed suggestions and thoughts on expanding efforts within their county.

Youth and adults were asked about perceptions of ATOD use, concerns regarding ATOD use among youth, ideas for engaging youth and parents in ATOD prevention efforts, thoughts on current ATOD prevention efforts, and suggestions for ATOD prevention programming.

Key findings

The Latino/Hispanic community in Renville County

Community perceptions of ATOD use

“Smoking is not acceptable for anybody because it is damaging to oneself and others.” – Adult, Renville County

“We as Latinos, when we have a baptism or first communion, or maybe a football game, there is always alcohol.” – Adult, Renville County

All youth and most adult focus group participants felt ATOD use was unacceptable for everyone in their cultural community, especially youth. All youth and adults felt ATOD use was harmful to one’s health and body. Only a few adults felt alcohol use was acceptable as long as a person is of legal age to drink and can drink responsibly (i.e., control their behavior when drinking alcohol). In addition, a youth thought the use of wine in church was an acceptable use of alcohol.

While focus group participants generally disapproved of ATOD use, some adults felt smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol were “normalized.” They felt that it was common for youth to see parents and adults smoking and drinking. Several adults reported that they smoked cigarettes and it was difficult to quit. However, they reported not smoking in their homes or around their children. A few adults felt social drinking was common and that drinking occurred at a lot of different family gatherings and celebrations, such as barbeques, parties, and baptism/first communion celebrations.

Concerns about ATOD use among youth and adults

“It’s true that youth drink. They do it to be cool.” – Youth, Renville County

Youth participants generally felt concerned about ATOD use, seeing it as a problem among youth and adults within their community. They felt there was peer pressure among youth to drink alcohol to be “cool.” Youth were also concerned about beer drinking among parents and adults in their families. While youth reported observing their parents and other adults drink beer, they said their parents did not condone underage drinking. Additionally, youth said parents told them to not drink alcohol because parents did not want youth to be like them.

Adult focus group participants generally did not have any concerns about ATOD use within their community, due in part to their small size. They felt that there might be more ATOD use to be concerned about if their community was larger.

Community strengths

“Sports help keep kids safe. It keeps them focused.” – Youth, Renville County

“The church we go to started a youth group for Hispanic/Latino youth. They give youth counseling and volunteer activities.” – Adult, Renville County

“As parents, we are supposed to know our children and know when something is going wrong. Community is the key.” – Adult, Renville County

Youth activities were identified by adult and youth focus group participants as strengths in preventing youth ATOD use. Several youth and parents felt sports and church activities helped keep youth busy and away from ATOD. However, a couple of adults mentioned that the cost of participating in sports can be a barrier for families and youth, such as the cost of program fees, uniforms, and sports gear and equipment. In addition, the youth group at church gave youth volunteer opportunities, such as volunteering to prepare and send food packages and first aid kits to help relieve the Haiti disaster. The church is also a place where youth can get counseling if they need support to manage their stress and problems.

Adults also felt good communication between parents and youth is a potential protective factor against youth ATOD use. Many adults felt parents and youth need to be able to trust each other and confide in one another. They felt that when parents are involved in their children’s lives, parents can identify issues and intervene to provide support when needed.

Current community ATOD prevention efforts

“I joined the youth group because the other youth had a lot in common with me – they do not use drugs.” – Youth, Renville County

Youth were very knowledgeable about current ATOD prevention efforts. Youth reported learning about ATOD and the consequences of ATOD use in school. They mentioned a variety of school presentations and events about the negative impacts of ATOD use, such as mock car crashes and guest speakers. However, a couple of youth felt teachers did not pay attention to students and were unaware of ATOD use among youth.

Many youth were involved in the Teens Against Drugs and Alcohol (TADA) and the Putting All Communities Together (PACT) 4 youth group, ATOD prevention youth

groups coordinated by the Renville Alliance for Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse (RAPAD) coalition and the school district. The TADA and PACT 4 youth groups host activities and events within Renville County to increase awareness of underage alcohol use. Both youth groups typically have high participation from Latino/Hispanic youth.

Youth enjoyed participating in the TADA and PACT 4 youth groups because it gave them an opportunity to talk and learn about underage drinking. Youth especially liked meeting other youth who did not use ATOD and making new friends. The youth groups did many activities youth enjoyed, such as going on field trips, posting ATOD prevention posters, and learning about nature.

Adults were generally unaware of any ATOD prevention efforts within the school and broader community. However, they felt schools could be a place of support to keep youth ATOD free. Some adults expressed a sense of mistrust towards schools and school staff because they felt discriminated against as a minority group. They felt school staff could be more supportive by building positive relationships with youth and talking to youth about ATOD. Adults also felt school staff could better communicate with them about their children's behaviors and academic progress.

Suggestions for additional ATOD prevention efforts

“The school needs to help parents. I am very happy with the school that my children attend – if something happens they call me right away, but other schools don't do the same.” – Adult, Renville County

Youth and adult focus group participants felt parents played an important role in preventing ATOD use. They felt parents need to be involved in their children's lives and talk to their children about ATOD and the consequences of ATOD use. Youth also felt parents could be more conscious about not drinking in front of their kids, and that parents should check up on their children more often if their children go to parties.

Adult focus group participants reported that they would like to see more summer programs and activities for youth, in addition to more summer job opportunities to keep youth busy. In particular, they felt the local Red Cross could be a potential partner in sponsoring youth activities. Additionally, adults felt that the relationship and communication between parents and teachers could be improved, which would allow them to work together in keeping an eye on youth. They felt that teachers and school staff could help identify potential problems the youth may be experiencing at school and help parents to support their children so they stay on track.

The Native American community in Yellow Medicine County

Community perceptions of ATOD use

“For us, tobacco is sacred. It carries our prayers up to the creator.” – Adult, Yellow Medicine County

“Alcohol is thought of as a waste of time in our community. It’s poison and it’s frowned upon.” – Youth, Yellow Medicine County

“Alcohol is not part of the culture as a Native American person. It totally goes against everything in our culture. Alcohol changes your spirit.” – Adult, Yellow Medicine County

Youth and adult focus group participants felt ATOD use was stigmatized within their community, except for the use of tobacco in traditional spiritual ceremonies. Smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and using ‘hard’ drugs were unacceptable for youth and adults alike. They felt ATOD use was harmful to one’s spirit and body. However, tobacco is used in spiritual ceremonies as a form of prayer and spiritual medicine to cleanse one’s spirit. Youth and adults said tobacco is considered “sacred” in the Native American culture and regarded as a sign of respect when given as a gift to others. Several youth reported that their parents taught them about the use of tobacco for spiritual purposes only and never for recreational use. An adult mentioned that tobacco is typically not given to young children and is not inhaled when used in spiritual ceremonies.

Concerns about ATOD use among youth and adults

“A lot of other ethnic students do that stuff (alcohol and drugs). Most native teens are not doing that stuff because we learned that it is not right – that we have to be here for our grandchildren.” – Youth, Yellow Medicine County

Many youth and adult focus group participants were concerned about ATOD use within their community. Youth were particularly concerned about their peers smoking cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and drinking alcohol. However, some youth felt ATOD use was only a problem among non-Native youth. They felt Native youth learned from their culture that ATOD use was harmful to one’s health and spirit, which helped to prevent Native youth from using ATOD. Overall, youth and adults felt teenagers were pressured into using ATOD by their peers. A few adults also felt the media was a negative influence as youth see popular TV characters smoking and drinking.

Youth and adults were also concerned about ATOD use among adults in their community. Adults were concerned about parents drinking and smoking in front of their children. Several youth reported that their parents and other adults in their family drank

alcohol. However, while parents themselves drank, youth said parents guided youth away from alcohol use because parents wanted youth to be healthy.

Adult focus group participants were also concerned about the growing use of ‘hard’ drugs within the community. They felt the use of hard drugs was more common than before. They felt that marijuana was a gateway drug to ‘harder’ drugs, such as prescription pills, meth, and morphine patches.

Community strengths

“We (extended family) are always really close and we always look after each other.” – Youth, Yellow Medicine

“Elders are the ones you approach to learn something or share something. They have the best spirits – the strongest hearts.” – Adult, Yellow Medicine

“Young people who follow a spiritual path don’t gravitate towards alcohol and drugs. If they have those beliefs, they have an outlet.” – Adult, Yellow Medicine

“Going to sweat lodges helps cleanse your body. It gets anything bad out of you.” – Youth, Yellow Medicine

Youth and adults felt their network of family and friends was a prominent strength within their community in preventing youth ATOD use. Having a strong and close knit network of family and friends is important as everyone keeps an eye out for each other. Youth and adults said they would intervene if they found out that a young person in their circle of family and friends started using ATOD. Several youth felt that knowing family and friends were watching them and may possibly intervene if they started using ATOD was like peer pressure to *not* use ATOD.

Within the family and community network of support, adults also mentioned the high regard and respect for elders within the Native American community. Adults reported that elders earned respect through gaining wisdom and good judgment from life experiences. They felt elders are a source of support and guidance for younger generations to live long healthy lives. However, an adult felt there is a growing intergenerational gap between youth and elders. In response to the gap, the adult said there were efforts to increase community events to bring together youth and elders.

Cultural and spiritual beliefs were also a protective factor for Native youth. Adults and youth alike felt cultural and spiritual beliefs were empowering. Adults felt that it was an outlet for youth to manage problems and stress instead of turning to ATOD, while youth said that their culture emphasized taking care of one’s spirit, health, and body. Several youth participated in cultural activities that helped cleanse their body, such as going to

sweat lodges and playing the drums. Additionally, youth and adults talked about practicing and valuing the “Medicine Wheel,” a holistic concept of keeping oneself emotionally, spirituality, physically, and mentally healthy.

Current community ATOD prevention efforts

“We use them (youth from the youth council) as role models. They are mentors for the younger kids. They’re always helping out in the community.” – Adult, Yellow Medicine

“There are a lot of better activities you can do than get high or drunk. We (in the youth council) do fundraisers and (ATOD prevention) work that takes up our time.” – Youth, Yellow Medicine County

Almost all youth who participated in the focus group were involved in a youth council and participated in ATOD prevention efforts. The youth council is affiliated with United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), an organization comprised of over 200 youth councils throughout the United States and Canada. Adults said youth council members are very active within their community and are good role models for younger children. Youth enjoyed being in the youth council and felt motivated by the participation requirements of doing well in school and staying ATOD-free.

Youth participated in a variety of ATOD-prevention efforts, such as an annual Meth Walk. The Meth Walk helped to bring awareness about meth use in their community and its consequences. Youth felt the broader community was very supportive of the walk. Youth especially liked wearing the “Don’t meth with me” t-shirts during the walk.

One adult was also particularly aware of ATOD-prevention efforts within the community and mentioned having tobacco-free grant programs and ATOD-free activities for youth.

Suggestions for additional ATOD prevention efforts

“Kids should see the after-effects of ATOD use – maybe it will open their eyes to why they shouldn’t do it.” – Youth, Yellow Medicine County

“We have AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and MA (Meth Anonymous), but we need to have those kinds of groups for kids too – not just parents and adults.” – Youth, Yellow Medicine County

Youth focus group participants had a variety of ideas for additional ATOD prevention efforts, including:

- Having more presentations and events about ATOD and ATOD use, such as informational events about the negative impact of ATOD use on one's health and body, and hearing from recovered ATOD users
- Increasing youth programs and activities, such as the youth council, to keep them busy and involved in their community
- Posting ATOD prevention posters and fliers targeted at parents and adults
- Having a teen center to give youth a safe place to go to for help when they are experiencing problems
- Having youth therapy groups for youth to manage their problems
- Having youth support groups for youth using ATOD

In addition, youth felt family and friends can support youth who are using ATOD by being empathetic and non-blaming. They also felt family and friends can be good role models by not drinking or smoking themselves.

Adult focus group participants felt there could be more collaboration between the Chemical Health Coalition of Yellow Medicine County and the Native American community. They felt the coalition could partner with the Native American community to present ATOD information and increase awareness of ATOD use and its consequences within the community.

Recommendations

Youth and parents from the Latino/Hispanic community in Renville County and the Native American community in Yellow Medicine County shared their thoughts on ATOD use and ATOD prevention efforts within their communities. The following are recommendations for engaging cultural communities in coalition activities:

- Build upon the strengths of cultural communities; for example, work with families to support youth and highlight positive cultural/spiritual beliefs and values that align with prevention efforts
- Continue to engage active youth participation and leadership in ATOD prevention efforts
- Continue to provide and promote ATOD-free youth activities
- Designate a few youth advocates to promote the youth council/youth group and engage their peers
- Provide youth with healthy options for managing stress and problems, such as youth support or therapy groups
- Institute a parent group to engage other parents in coalition activities
- Include parent components in youth ATOD prevention activities and events
- Provide information to parents about how to talk to their children about ATOD
- Support and foster positive relationships and communication among parents, teachers, and other school staff around ATOD prevention efforts; for example, engage involvement from teachers and parents in ATOD prevention events and activities