

## **Moving Upstream to Address Addiction**

Ninety percent of people who abuse drugs began using before the age of 18. "Addiction is a pediatric disease," says John Knight, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School.

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is leading a national effort to increase understanding that addiction is a public health issue, not a personal failing. According to the [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#), the U.S. spends over \$700 billion a year in alcohol, tobacco and drug-related problems associated with health, crime and lost productivity in the workplace.

Beyond changing how people think of addiction, the foundation's Youth Substance Use Prevention and Early Intervention Strategic Initiative is supporting efforts to prevent and treat substance use disorders at early stages.

In a Philanthropy Southwest education session, Alexa Eggleston, Senior Program Officer for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation said the foundation has provided \$42 million in funding to 44 projects across the country, including Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas since 2013.

With the understanding that drug use accelerates between the freshman and senior years in high school, the initiative emphasizes an 'upstream' approach to 'screen and intervene.' Health care professionals in diverse settings – from school-based health centers to community health centers, juvenile justice settings and more – receive education and support to help them effectively integrate appropriate screenings into the care they provide to young people.

"What we've learned," said Eggleston, "is that a brief, science-based 'tell me what's going on in your life' type of conversation with supportive messages can help providers talk with young people as part of routine service delivery about the importance of making healthy decisions about alcohol and drug use. And for the small percentage of young people who may have already developed a substance use problem, they can quickly be referred to more intensive addiction services. This early preventive and intervention approach means we're not waiting until kids get kicked out of school or are in a really bad situation."

This approach also helps to coordinate and streamline care, said Amanda Jones, Clinical Director of Recovery and Transition Services for the Community Reach Center in Northglenn, Colorado. As one of the 350 sites participating in the Youth Substance Use Prevention and Early Intervention Strategic Initiative, Jones said there has commonly been a divide between behavioral health providers and those who focus on substance abuse. "This approach allows us to more holistically address substance abuse in common places where care is provided, and to better provide care."

"This is a movement in how people think about, talk about, and address youth substance use," said Eggleston. "The initiative is laying the groundwork for long-term change through communications and advocacy, promoting evidence-based practices, and aligning services across physical health care, behavioral health systems, and community supports nationwide."

"We want to partner with more foundations across the country to bring this framework to their communities."

Learn more: Read [The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Youth Substance Use Prevention and Early Intervention Strategic Initiative: Evaluating the Impact 2016 Executive Summary](#).