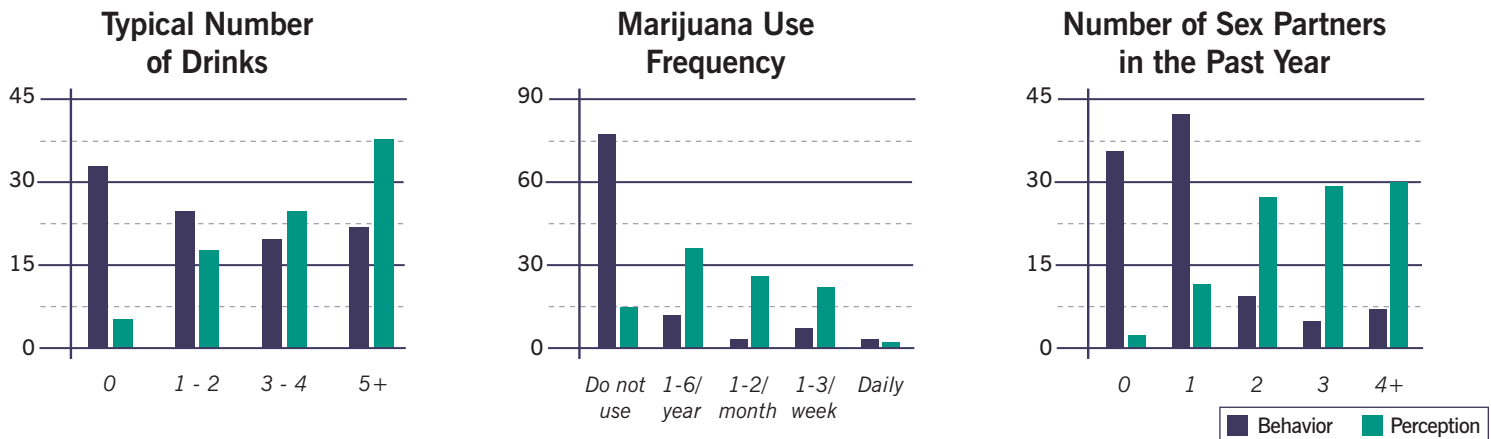


## STUDENT MISPERCEPTIONS OF HIGH RISK BEHAVIOR

Partners in Prevention (PIP) has been Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium since 2000. The coalition, made up of 21 universities in Missouri, works to promote healthy behaviors on college campuses. In order to gain an understanding of the current health behaviors of college students, PIP implements the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) each year. The data gathered from the 2014 MCHBS reinforces the existence of strong student misperceptions of risky behaviors.

### DISCUSSION

According to social norms theory, college student behavior is often influenced by their perceptions of what they think is "normal" or "typical". However, research indicates that students often misperceive typical health behaviors of other students. The social norms theory predicts that if students hold these misperceptions they will be more likely to partake in high-risk behavior. Conversely, if through prevention efforts we are able to correct



these misperceptions, we will be able to reduce high-risk behaviors. For example, college students typically think that other college students drink more than they actually do. Several campuses have documented success in reducing high-risk drinking by correcting these misperceptions.

Results from the 2014 Missouri College Health Behavior Survey strongly supports the existence of student misperceptions of high-risk behavior. The results reveal striking differences between student perceptions and actual behaviors of alcohol use, marijuana use and sexual activity. When queried about typical drinking, Missouri students report consuming an average of 2.6 drinks compared to perceptions that other students consume 4.2 drinks.

Likewise, 76% of Missouri college students report they have not used marijuana in the past year compared to the perception that 88% of college students have

smoked in this timeframe. Additionally, there are strong misperceptions regarding Missouri college student sexual behavior. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of Missouri college students report 0 to 1 sexual partners in the past year, while 86% report they think the typical student has had more than two sexual partners.

### SUMMARY

Recognizing these strong misperceptions between student behaviors and perceptions Missouri Partners in Prevention provides campuses with extensive support and resources to implement social norms campaigns to correct student misperceptions. For more information on these campaigns and technical assistance please visit: <http://pip.missouri.edu/sn.html>

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

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