

# Substance Use among Missouri College Students and Intentions to Change

**Partners in Prevention (PIP)** is Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 21 public and private colleges and universities in Missouri. Each year, PIP implements the MACHB (Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors), a statewide survey of college students designed to understand the role of alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), mental health issues, and power-based personal violence on student health and wellness. Some students report behaviors such as binge-drinking (consuming 5 or more drinks in a two hour period), using marijuana, or using tobacco products. However, many students are assessing their need to change behavior and reduce or quit substance use.

## The Transtheoretical Model

The transtheoretical model, often referred to as the stages of change model, conceptualizes the decision-making of an individual and their intention to change a certain behavior.<sup>1</sup> The model consists of 6 stages which indicate a person's willingness and ability to change. The first stage is **pre-contemplation**, where there is no intention to take action and individuals are unaware that their behavior may be problematic. The next stage is **contemplation**, where there is intention to start behavior change and individuals recognize issues with their behavior, but no action is taken. The **determination** (or preparation) stage follows and is when people are ready to take action and begin to make small changes. **Action** is the following stage, where the individual has changed their behavior. **Maintenance** is the next stage, where the behavior change is sustained and individuals work to prevent relapse. **Relapse** is included as the final stage as people may fall into old habits, though it is not an inevitable stage and individuals may remain in the maintenance stage. The stages of the model can be entered and

exited at any point, and may not follow the natural progression from pre-contemplation to relapse.

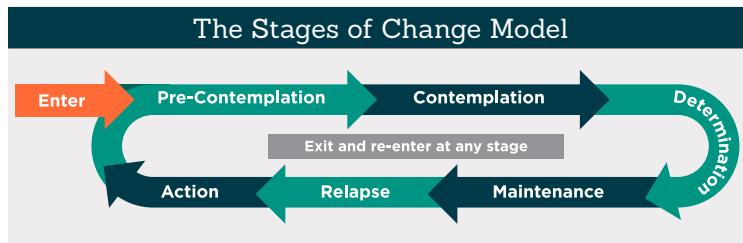
While the MACHB does not include questions on these states of change, there are questions about students' intentions to change behavior, summarizing these stages of change into: thinking about acting in a healthier way, ready to try acting in a healthier way, and currently trying to act in a healthier way.

## Alcohol Use

Of Missouri college students, 76% report consuming alcohol in the past year. Of those students, 27% are currently trying to drink in a healthier and safer way, 4% are ready to try to drink in a healthier and safer way, and 5% are thinking about drinking in a healthier and safer way. While these data are not overwhelming, it does indicate that over 1/3 (36%) of Missouri college students have identified issues with their drinking behaviors and are contemplating or working to change their behavior.

## Marijuana Use

Approximately 30% of Missouri college students report using marijuana at least once in the past year and 3.2% report daily use. Of students who report using marijuana at least once in the past year, 21% are



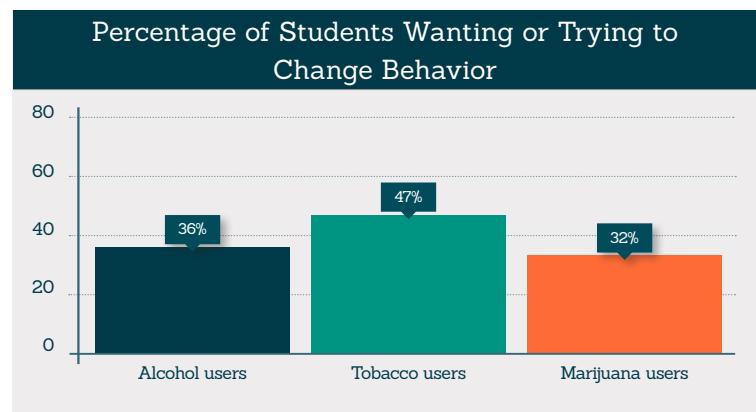
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currently trying to use less or quit, 3.3% are ready to use less or quit, and 7.7% are thinking about using less or quitting. Overall, around 1/3 of students who use marijuana are wanting or trying to use less or quit.. While there may be a perception that marijuana is not addictive, users themselves are identifying problems with use and are working to change their behaviors.

## Tobacco Use

Approximately 27% of Missouri college students report using some form of tobacco in the past year. Of those students, 32% are currently trying to quit or smoke less, 5.2% are ready to try smoking less or quitting and 9.8% of students are thinking about smoking less or quitting. This data indicates that almost ½ (47%) of students who use tobacco are wanting or trying to use less or quit. Additionally, of students who have used tobacco in the past year, 64% have tried quitting since entering college, but most (68%) have not sought assistance with quitting.



## Programs for Support

The data from the MACHB reflects that a significant portion of students are interested in changing their substance use behaviors. Regardless of the stage of change that they may be in, it is important to have programs for support available for those who may seek services. Signage and marketing about cessation services, intervention, and treatment resources let students know where they can go for help. Social norms messaging can also help to normalize behavior change and reshape how students think about their

own substance use, as well as their peers' use. Staff should be trained in detection and intervention and to be able to refer students to other resources if necessary. For alcohol use, programs such as BASICS (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students), Alcohol eCheckup To Go, and AlcoholEdu can provide students with an objective assessment of their use and tools for moderation management and protective behaviors. Similar brief interventions can be used for marijuana use, and there is also Marijuana eCheckup To Go. PIP also provides resources for tobacco cessation, such as training for staff and cessation items like lozenges, gum, and more. Additionally, as some students may want to quit using substances and enter recovery, it is important that recovery resources be available, whether on campus or in the community. The Missouri Alliance of Collegiate Recovery Organizations (MACRO) works to establish recovery programs at colleges and universities across the state. MACRO also provides funding for existing groups and hosts a yearly training for students in recovery to become certified peer support specialists. For more information on recovery resources at your campus, visit [macro.missouri.edu](http://macro.missouri.edu).

## Summary

Alcohol and other drug use may be seen as an inevitable or unchangeable part of college life. However, our data indicates that most students choose not to use drugs or tobacco products, and that most students who choose to use alcohol do so in a safe way. It can be easy to become frustrated with students who exhibit high risk behaviors and make decisions that negatively impact themselves and others, but our data indicates that students recognize problems with their substance use and are interested in making changes.

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### References

<sup>1</sup>The Transtheoretical Model (Stages of Change). Boston University School of Public Health, April 2016.

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