

Key Findings from 4-Year Institutions: 2026 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to building and sustaining healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 28 public and private colleges and universities in the state. The campuses in PIP work to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies, including education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, cannabis, other drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health concerns have on student health and well-being. This brief includes data for the twenty-one 4-year institutions in the coalition; 2-year campuses participate in a separate version of the survey, and their key findings will be published in another brief.

Data consistently shows that academic achievement and retention are impacted by the health, safety, and well-being of students. Substance misuse, experiences of interpersonal violence, and mental health concerns are intersectional issues that impact students' ability to succeed and thrive while attending institutions of higher education. Comprehensive and evidence-informed prevention and health promotion practices are an investment in the lives of students and the overall campus environment.

The following are key findings from the MACHB survey (N=4,759) of 4-year PIP member institutions from Spring 2026:

Retention

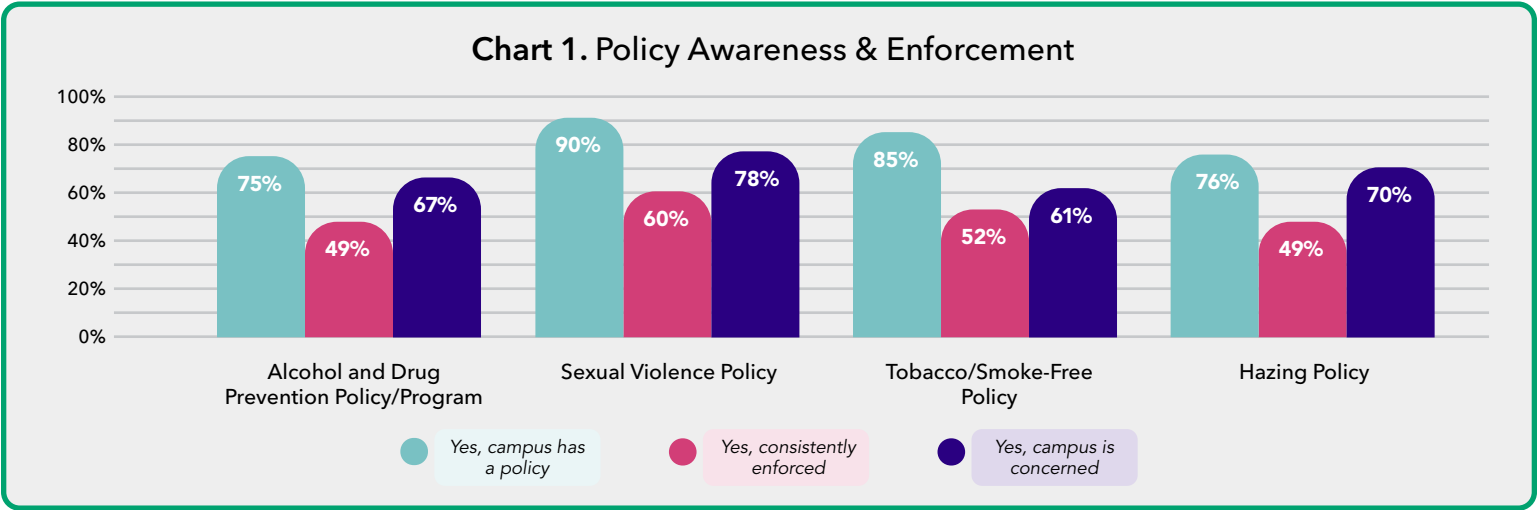
One-quarter (25%) of Missouri college students have thought about transferring from their current college/university in the past year. Additionally, almost 1 in 5 students (17%) say they have thought of discontinuing their college/university education in the past year. Students report that the top reasons contributing to their decision to either transfer or discontinue their education are their own mental health concerns (49%), financial concerns/better financial opportunities at other campuses (47%), lack of friends/loneliness/homesickness (38%), and difficulties keeping up with academic expectations (29%).*

Sense of Belonging & Engagement

Almost three-quarters (71%) of Missouri college students agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging to their campus community (slightly higher than 68% in both 2025 and 2024). The majority of students (82%) also believe that they have the responsibility to contribute to the safety and wellbeing of other students at their school. Around 74% of students report that they are currently involved in campus organizations/activities, which is a significant contributor to sense of belonging and engagement on campus.

Policies

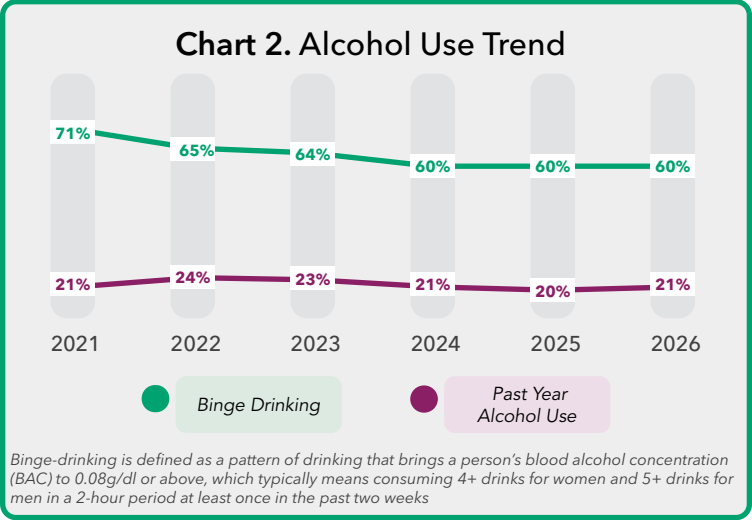
Students are asked to report 1) if they are aware of various campus policies, 2) how strongly they believe policies are enforced, and 3) if they believe the campus is concerned about preventing issues related to the policy areas. Results are included in **Chart 1**. Overall, most students are aware that various policies related to substance misuse and violence prevention exist and feel that the campus is concerned about the issues, but do not necessarily feel that policies are consistently enforced. Students were also much less familiar with policies, programs, or resources related to opioid overdose/response and recovery programs including the Good Samaritan Law/Medical Amnesty (38%), an opioid overdose prevention program (15%), naloxone training (15%), naloxone being available to students (19%), and collegiate recovery programs (18%), though it should be noted that not all campuses participating in the survey have these types of programs/policies/resources.



Alcohol Use

Most Missouri college students (60%) report using alcohol in the past 12 months. Binge-drinking is a high-risk alcohol use behavior that PIP closely monitors each year. The binge-drinking rate slightly increased to 21% in 2026 from 20% in 2025 and is below the national average of around 33%. Approximately 4.3% of Missouri college students engage in frequent binge drinking, defined as binge-drinking 3 or more times in the past 2 weeks. Past year alcohol use and binge drinking trends are shown in **Chart 2**.

The MACHB also tracks impacts of and safety behaviors for alcohol use in the past 12 months.* The top 3 reported consequences of alcohol use include hangover (34%), vomiting (25%), and blackout/ memory loss (16%). Students also report engaging in safety and protective behaviors related to alcohol use, with students saying they always engage in the following behaviors: knew where their drink was at all times (83%), eaten before/during alcohol consumption (73%), and had a sober friend in the group (55%).

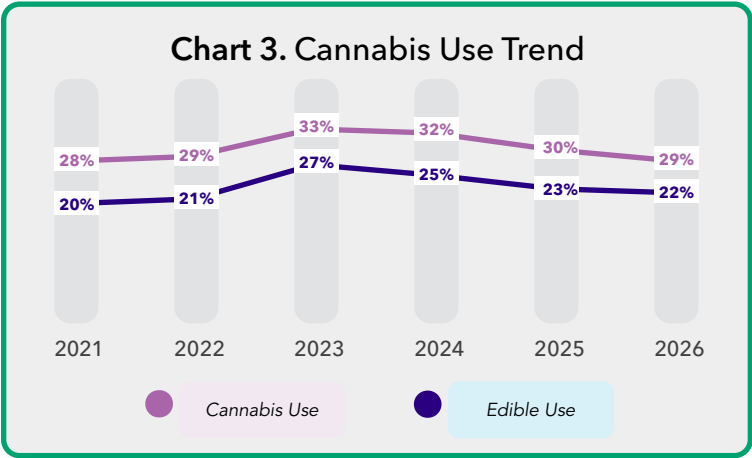


Underage Alcohol Use

Most Missouri college students who have consumed alcohol in their lifetime report they first started drinking before age 21 (57%). Almost half of Missouri college students under the age of 21 (49%) report consuming alcohol in the past 2 weeks (same as 2025). Underage students report that they obtain alcohol in a variety of ways, the most common being from over 21 friends (23%), from parents/siblings/family members (12%), or alcohol being readily available in their home (7.7%)*.

Cannabis Use

Cannabis use in any form (smoking, edibles, vaping, derivatives) in the past 12 months among Missouri college students decreased to 29% this year from 30% in 2025. In 2026, edibles/edible cannabis products and smoking were the most common form of cannabis used in the past year (both at 22% compared to 17% vaporized, and 6.4% in derivative form like wax/dabs/oils). Past year cannabis use and edible use trends are shown in **Chart 3**.



Approximately 11.3% of students report frequent cannabis use (using cannabis one or more times per week - a decrease from 12.5% in 2025). Of students who report using cannabis, 26% report driving after use at least once in the past 12 months and 22% report attending class after use. Students vastly overestimate how often their peers use cannabis; while 68% of students report that they have not used cannabis in the past year, most students (61%) believe that their peers use cannabis one or more times per month. Additionally, 38% of students who use reported that they were currently, ready to, or thinking about using cannabis less frequently or quitting.

New questions were included in 2026 about how students obtain cannabis, with most saying they purchase from a dispensary (50%), have a friend who gives it to them (39%), purchase from a friend or someone else (16%), obtain it at parties/social gatherings/concerts (16%) or their parents/siblings/family members give it to them (14%).

Illegal Drug Use & Drugs of Concern

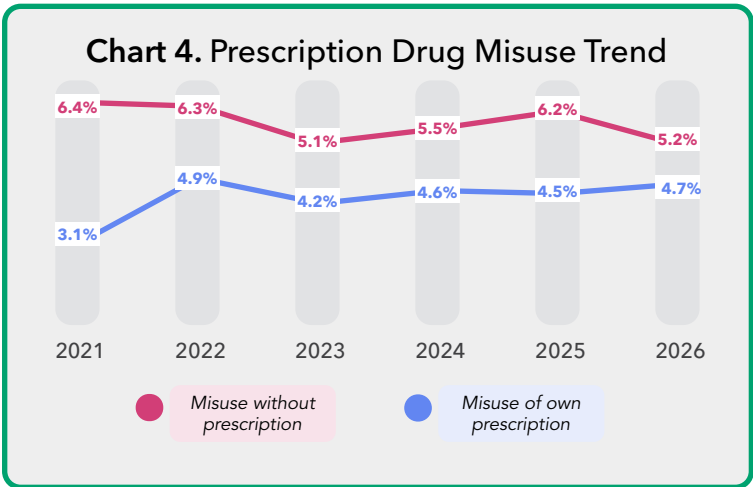
Approximately 8.8% of students report using at least one illegal drug/drug of concern in the past 12 months (a decrease from 11% in 2025) and use rates of various types are shown in **Table 1**. We have denoted “drugs of concern” as those that may be legal to purchase or obtain in Missouri with 2 asterisks.

Table 1. Illegal Drug Use and Drugs of Concern Used in the Past 12 Months

Delta-8 THC**	6.2%
Hallucinogens (LSD, PSP, mushrooms, etc.)	3.4%
Cocaine	1.3%
MDMA/Ecstasy/Molly	0.4%
Other (kratom, inhalants, K2, etc.)	0.4%
Heroin	0.1%

Prescription Drug Misuse

Approximately 5.2% of Missouri college students report prescription drug use without a doctor’s prescription in the past 12 months (a decrease from 6.2% in 2025). Additionally, 4.7% of students with a valid prescription report using in a manner other than prescribed in the past 12 months (a slight increase from 4.5% in 2025). Past year misuse of either type is included in **Chart 4**.

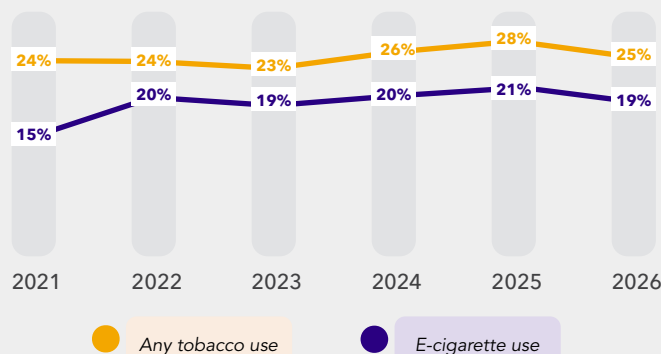


Of students who report misuse of either type, 24% have co-used with alcohol at least once, which can have serious health effects. Rates of misuse of specific drug categories, both with and without a prescription, are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Prescription Drug Misuse in the Past 12 Months

	Misuse without valid prescription	Misuse of own prescription
Pain medications (Oxycontin, Vicodin, etc.)	2.4%	1.9%
Stimulants (Adderall, Ritalin, etc.)	1.9%	1.7%
Sleep medications (Ambien, Halcion, etc.)	0.9%	0.9%
Benzodiazepines/sedatives (Xanax, Valium, etc.)	0.4%	0.6%

Chart 5. Tobacco/Nicotine Use Trend



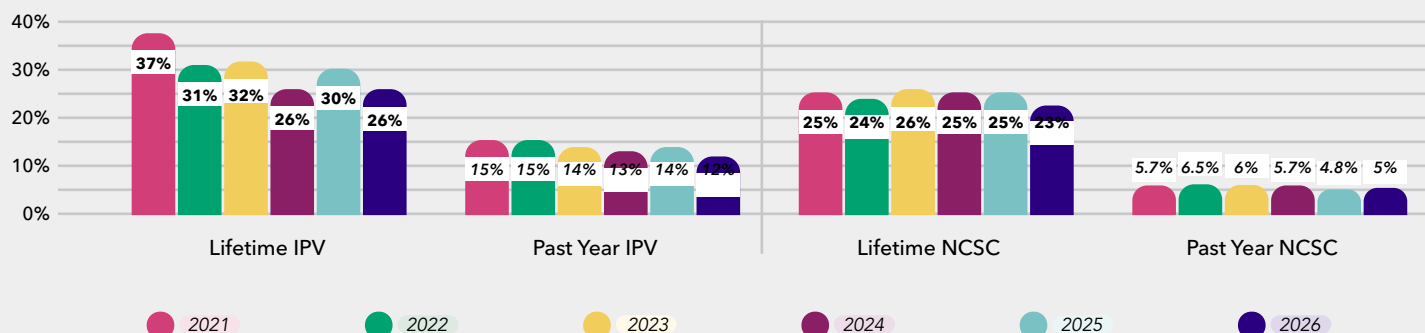
Tobacco & Nicotine Use

Twenty-five percent (25%) of Missouri college students report using tobacco/nicotine products at least once in the past 12 months (a decrease from 28% in 2025). Past year usage rates for various types of tobacco/nicotine products are as follows: e-cigarettes/vaporizers (19%), cigarettes (13%), smokeless tobacco/nicotine - including Zyn/nicotine pouches (7.9%), cigars (4%), and hookah (1.2%)*. PIP has continued to monitor smokeless tobacco/ nicotine products as these have gained popularity, and past year use rates increased again from 7% in 2025 (and up from 6.3% in 2024). Among students who have used e-cigarettes in the past year, over one-third (35%) report using every day. Additionally, students who use tobacco/nicotine say they have considered quitting (18%), tried to quit (20%), or successfully quit using (26%) since entering college. The trend of past year tobacco/ nicotine use and use of e-cigarettes (as the most popular type) is shown in [Chart 5](#).

Intimate Partner & Sexual Violence

One-quarter (26%) of Missouri college students report experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV)/an abusive relationship in their lifetime, and 12% report IPV in the past 12 months. The most common forms of abuse students report experiencing in the past 12 months include emotional/psychological/mental abuse (0.1%), verbal abuse (7%) or sexual abuse (3%)*. Almost 1 in 4 (23%) Missouri college students report experiencing non-consensual sexual contact (NCSC) in their lifetime, and 5% report NCSC in the past 12 months. Most instances of NCSC occurred off-campus in a house/apartment (45%) or on campus in residence halls (43%)*. Lifetime and past year IPV and NCSC trends are shown in [Chart 6](#).

Chart 6. Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Trend



Hazing

Questions about hazing (expected activities of someone joining or participating in a group) are included every other year on the MACHB. In 2026, of students currently involved in student activities/organizations, approximately 24% noted at least one act that would be defined as hazing occurring in their student organization, though individuals rates of these reported acts are very low (shown in [Table 3](#) - not inclusive of all response options)*. The student organizations that were most highly reported as where acts of hazing occurred were in PHA - Panhellenic Associations (1.9%), Intercollegiate/Varsity Athletics (1.6%), IFC - Intrafraternity Council (1.4%), or Sports Clubs/Intramural (1.3%).

Table 3. Acts of Hazing in Student Organizations

Participate in a drinking game	1.6%
Sing or chant alone or with other group members in public (not related to an event, game, or practice)	1.5%
Deprive yourself of sleep	1%
Associate with specific people and not others	0.9%
Be screamed, yelled, or cursed at by other members	0.7%
Be awakened during the night by other members	0.5%

Students also reported similar rates of witnessing these acts on-campus (24%), off-campus (28%), or both on and off campus (21%). Students were also unlikely to report that they considered any of these activities to humiliate, degrade, abuse, or endanger yourself/ someone else regardless of a person’s willingness to participate (14%). Additionally, among all students (not just those involved in student organizations) approximately 11% had witnessed a peer/friend/other student participate in an act that would be defined as hazing.

Bystander Intervention

Sixty-nine percent (69%) of Missouri college students feel that they have the skills to intervene/prevent a potentially harmful situation, while only 55% of students

they know where to go to find resources on bystander intervention/violence prevention and related trainings at their campus (both decreases from 2025, 72% and 57%, respectively). The vast majority of students (93%) report that they would want a peer to do something if they themselves were in danger of being harmed by someone else. Unfortunately, around half of Missouri college students had witnessed at least one potentially harmful situation in the past year related to substance misuse, bias and discrimination, or interpersonal violence - the top three acts witnessed in each category are shown in [Table 4](#).

Of students who witnessed at least one potentially harmful situation, most intervened by acting directly (35%), did something later to follow up and check-in (23%) or enlisted others to get help (21%). Generally, students report that the resources they are most likely to utilize in situations involving bystander intervention are friends/peers (69%), their family/spouse/partner (44%), or police/campus safety (42%)*.

Table 4. Acts of Violence/Harm Witnessed

Blacking out and/or passing out from drinking or other drug use	26%
Driving after drinking/using substances	21%
Alcohol poisoning/drug overdose	8.8%
Jokes or comments made reflecting group stereotypes	39%
Making stereotyped assumptions about a person based on their group membership	27%
Teasing someone in a way that reflects stereotypes of their group(s)	25%
Abusive relationship (i.e., verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, financial, or other abuse)	9.7%
Stalking (willfully and repeatedly following or harassing another person in circumstances that would cause them to fear for their safety or the safety of others)	6.9%
Non-consensual sexual contact (any non-consensual sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient)	6.1%



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Gambling & Sports Betting

The 2026 MACHB included new questions about gambling and sports betting given Missouri’s recent legislation legalizing sports betting in a referendum in 2024, which launched in December of 2025. The top 5 most highly indicated past year gambling and sports betting behaviors (at least once) are shown in [Table 5](#). Additional options included: played daily fantasy sports (8.7%), played games of skill for money (e.g., backgammon, mahjong, puzzles, word games, etc. - 6.3%), spent real money on social sports betting apps (5.8%), played dice, spades, or other ‘street games’ (5.1%), spent real money while playing social casino games (4.9%), played live or tournament poker (4.7%), played a video poker or other card game machine (3.9%), bet on esports (2.2%), bet on horse racing at a track/ off-track betting parlor (2.1%). Students do experience consequences of gambling with 6.5% reporting they have become restless, irritable, or anxious when trying to stop/cut down on the activities, 9.3% reporting they have tried to keep family/friends from knowing how much they spent on the activities, and 2.9% saying they had such financial trouble as a result that they had to get help with living expenses from family/friends/ welfare. Students had also experienced the following

at least once in the past year: bet more than they could afford to lose (9.3%), needing to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same excitement (8.1%), gone back another day to try to win money lost (21%), borrowed/sold things to get money to gamble (2.6%), felt they might have a problem with gambling (9.1%), have had people criticize their betting/be told they have a gambling problem (8.3%), felt guilty about the way they gambled/what happens when they gamble (10.9%), felt that gambling caused health problems like stress or anxiety (7.0%), or felt that gambling caused financial problems for them/their household (4.2%).

Table 5. Top Gambling & Sports Betting Activities

Purchased an instant scratch-off ticket	27%
Purchased a lottery, Powerball, or Mega Millions ticket	17%
Wagered on sports	12%
Played a slot machine	10.8%
Played live casino table games, excluding poker (e.g., blackjack, roulette, craps, baccarat)	9.1%

Chart 7. Food Insecurity

In the last 30 days, I cut the size of my meals or skipped meals because there wasn’t enough money for food

In the last 30 days, the food that I bought just didn’t last, and I didn’t have money to get more

In the last 30 days, I was hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food



Food Insecurity

To better understand experiences of food insecurity in the past 30 days, students are asked to report if they very often or always: cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn’t enough money for food (5.3%), the food that was bought just didn’t last and they didn’t have money to get more (4.8%), or being hungry but not eating because there wasn’t enough money for food (4.4%). Student responses related to food insecurity are shown in [Chart 7](#).

Well-Being

Students are asked to gauge their stress levels in the two weeks prior to completing the survey and in 2026, over one-third of students reported high-level stress (stress that is overwhelming - 28% or unbearable - 5.8%). The top sources of stress for students include school/academics (91%), time management (55%), and financial concerns (53%)*. When asked about the most important issues facing college students and what they could use the most support around, students indicated academic stress (73%), financial concerns (66%), and anxiety (63%) as the top three*. Students are also asked to report how many hours of sleep on average they get on a typical school night (Sunday-Thursday) with over half of students (62%) reporting seven or more hours of sleep. A new question was added this year to understand more about where students access health information and resources including the internet (49%), friends/family members/spouse/partner (46%), and campus counseling/health/wellness center services over resources like social media (23%) or language learning models (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, etc. - 9.1%)*.

Sexual Health

Questions related to sexual health and STI testing are also included on the 2026 MACHB. Forty-five percent (45%) of students report that they had not been tested for STIs in the past year because they are not sexually active, 38% **have not** been tested but are sexually active, and 14% of students are sexually active and have been tested in the past year. Among students who did not get tested, the most common barriers/factors contributing to their decision were not thinking they are at risk of getting an STI (45%), lacking access to testing, such as being too expensive/ not being covered by insurance, etc. (13%) or shame/ embarrassment (9.4%).

Mental Health

Missouri college students self-report experiencing issues related to mental health in the past 12 months, the most common being anxiety (59%) depression (41%), body/gender dysphoria (23%), panic attacks (22%), chronic sleep issues (22%), and disordered eating (22%)*. Students are also asked to report if

their mental health concern had been diagnosed by a mental health or medical professional. Almost half (45%) of those who had experienced a mental health concern had not received a diagnosis, 37% report being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, and 28% report being diagnosed with major depression*.

For students who had experienced at least one mental health concern in the past 12 months, 21% did not seek assistance. For those who did seek assistance, the most common sources of assistance were family/friends (36%), an off-campus medical doctor/mental health provider (35%) or the college/university counseling services (14%). Around 1 in 10 students (13%) said they did not seek assistance but practice self-care or other types of management on their own*. Barriers or reasons for not seeking assistance include not thinking assistance is needed (54%), cost being too expensive/ lacking insurance (26%), or being afraid of judgment (21%)*.

Suicide

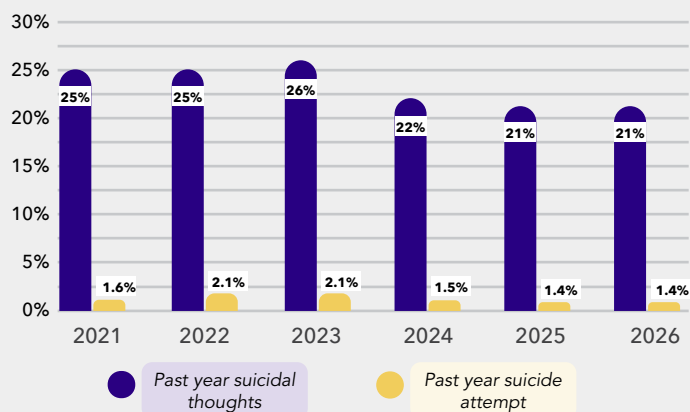
One-fifth (21%) of Missouri college students report having suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months (the same as in 2025). In the past 12 months, 1.4% of students reported attempting suicide. For those who had thoughts or attempts in the past 12 months, 40% sought assistance. The most common places students sought assistance were family/friends (59%), an off-campus mental health center/medical doctor (55%), or the college/university counseling services (30%)*. Top barriers to seeking help include not thinking assistance is needed (46%), being afraid of shame/judgment (33%), or fearing hospitalization (32%)*. Additionally, 33% of Missouri college students have been concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts or exhibiting suicidal behaviors in the past 12 months. Additionally, most students (87%) have heard of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Trend data for past year suicidal thoughts and attempts is shown in **Chart 8**.



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Chart 8. Suicidality Trend



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

New questions were added in 2026 to understand adverse childhood experiences, potentially traumatic events experienced in childhood (ages 0-17) that are associated with worsened long-term health outcomes. The percentage of students who endorsed experiencing ACEs in each category are shown in [Table 6](#). Among students who reported experiencing at least one adverse childhood experience, 31% thought it affected their health 'a lot' and 46% thought it affected their health 'some.'

Table 6. Adverse Childhood Experiences before Age 18

None of these	45%
Parent or adult in the home ever swore at, insulted, or put you down	32%
Lived with someone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide	27%
Lived with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs (including prescription drugs)	20%
Lost a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or another reason	16%
Ever felt that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special	16%
Parent or adult in the home ever hit, beat, kicked, or physically hurt you	14%
Parents or adults in the home ever hit, punched, beat, or threatened to harm each other	12%
Lived with someone who went to jail or prison	9.0%
Ever experienced unwanted sexual contact	8.5%
Didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect/care for you	7.3%

** question is "select all that apply"*

Summary

Partners in Prevention continues to monitor the critical health behaviors of college students. To reiterate, data consistently shows that academic achievement and retention are impacted by the health, safety, and wellbeing of students. Substance misuse, experiences of interpersonal violence, and mental health concerns are intersectional issues that impact students' ability to succeed and thrive while attending institutions of higher education. Comprehensive and evidence-informed prevention and health promotion practices are an investment in the lives of students and the overall campus environment. For more information about Partners in Prevention and to explore our research, visit www.mopip.org/pip/research/.

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