

Key Findings from 2-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 eight 2-year institutions in Missouri; 4-year campuses participate in a separate version of the survey, and their key findings have been published and are [available for review](#).

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=4,013) of 2-year institutions in Missouri from Spring 2026:

Retention

Just over one-third (37%) of Missouri college students at 2-year institutions have thought about transferring from their current college to a 4-year college in the past year. Additionally, almost 1 in 5 students (19%) said they have thought of discontinuing their college education in the past year. Students reported that the top reasons contributing to their decision to either transfer or discontinue their education were their own mental health concerns (21%), financial concerns/better financial opportunities at another college/university (17%), difficulties keeping up with academic expectations (16%), and the need to focus on job/career (15%).*

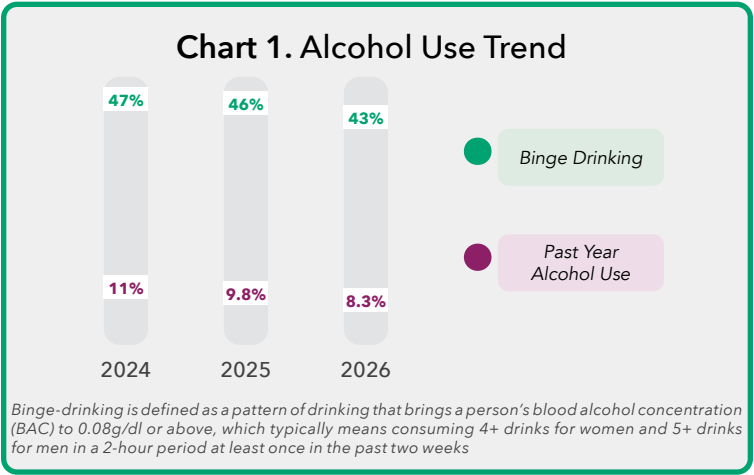
Sense of Belonging & Engagement

Slightly less than two-thirds (58%) of 2-year Missouri college students agreed that they feel a sense of belonging to their campus community. Students also believe that they have the responsibility to contribute to the safety and well-being of other students at their school (75%). Additionally, around 25% of students reported being involved in campus organizations/activities, which is a significant contributor to sense of belonging and engagement on campus.

Alcohol Use

Nearly half (43%) of Missouri college students reported alcohol use in the past 12 months. Binge-drinking (defined as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 g/dl or above, which typically means consuming 4+ drinks for women and 5+ drinks for men in a 2-hour period at least once in the past two weeks) is a high-risk alcohol use behavior that PIP closely monitors each year. The binge-drinking rate decreased to 8.3% in 2026 from 9.8% in 2025 and is below the national average of around 27%. Approximately 2% of Missouri 2-year college students engaged in frequent binge drinking, defined as binge drinking 3 or more times in the past 2 weeks (3% of males and 0.9% of females).

A three-year trend of past year alcohol use and binge drinking is shown in **Chart 1**.



The MACHB also tracks impacts of and safety behaviors for alcohol use include hangover (21%), vomiting (14%), riding with someone who drove after drinking (9%), and blackout/memory loss (7.4%). Students also reported engaging in safety and protective behaviors related to alcohol use, with students saying they always engage in the following behaviors: always keep track of their drink (82%), eaten before/during alcohol consumption (70%), and had a sober friend in the group (63%).

Underage Alcohol Use

Almost half of 2-year Missouri college students who have consumed alcohol in their lifetime reported that they first started drinking before age 21 (45%). Less than half of 2-year Missouri college students under the age of 21 (38%) reported consuming alcohol in the past 12 months, and 6% of underage students report binge-drinking in the past 2 weeks (down from 7.8% in 2025). Underage students reported that they obtain alcohol in a variety of ways, the most common being having a friend who is over 21 buy it for them (12%), from family members (9.3%), or alcohol being readily available in their home (7.2%).*



Want to share information with students about hosting responsible events?

Check out our Party Safe training!

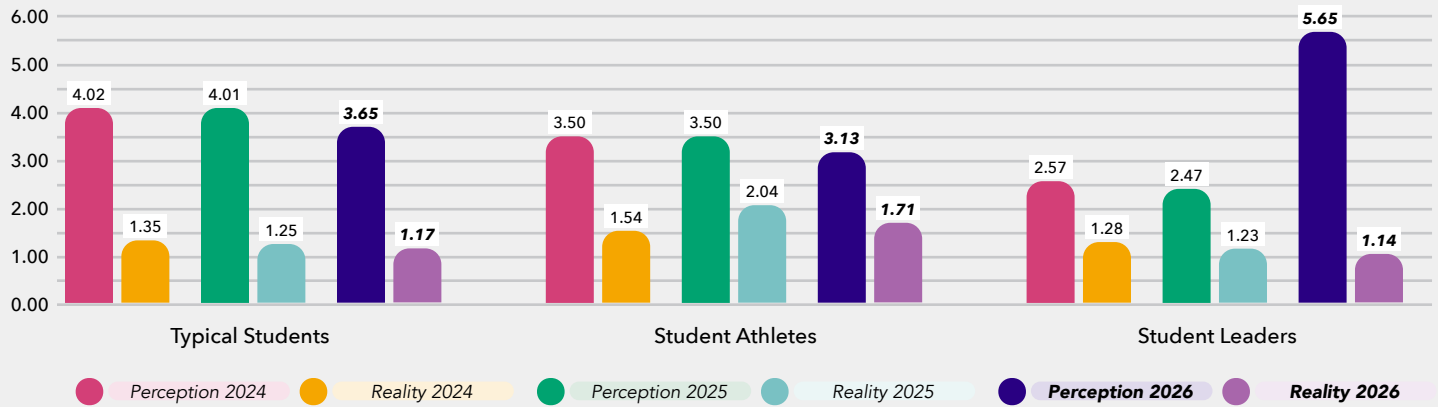
Social Norms about Alcohol Use

Survey findings indicate that students consistently overestimate how much their peers drink. On average, students reported consuming 1.17 drinks on a typical occasion, yet they perceived that the average student consumes 3.65 drinks. Similar patterns were observed among key student populations. Student athletes reported consuming 1.71 drinks on average, compared to a perceived norm of 3.13 drinks. Student leaders reported consuming an average of 1.14 drinks, while the average perceived norm for student leader drinking was 5.65 drinks. These findings suggest a substantial gap between actual alcohol use and perceived alcohol use across campus groups. Addressing these misperceptions through accurate and targeted communication may help reinforce healthier norms and support efforts to reduce high-risk drinking behaviors among students. A three-year trend of perceived versus actual past-year alcohol use across student populations is shown in **Chart 2**.

social norms
so·cial n0rms

“the customary rules that govern behaviors in groups and societies”
Social norms approach works to correct misperceptions that people hold about behaviors.

Chart 2. Perception vs. Reality About Alcohol Use



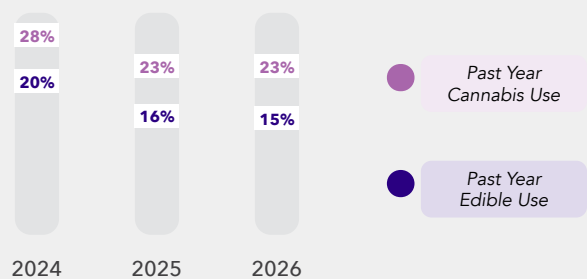
Cannabis Use

Cannabis use in any form (smoking, edibles, vaping, or derivatives) among 2-year Missouri college students remained at 23% in 2026, following a decline from 28% in 2024. In 2025, edible cannabis products and smoking were the most common forms of cannabis used in the past year (18% smoking, 16% edibles, compared to 14% vaporized, and 6.8% in derivative forms such as wax/dabs/oils). A three-year trend of past year cannabis use and edible use is shown in [Chart 3](#). Approximately 8% of students reported frequent cannabis use (using cannabis one or more times per week). Of students who reported using cannabis, 30% report driving after use at least once in the past 12 months, and 20% report attending class after use.

In the past 12 months, 74% of students did not use cannabis, yet 58% believe their peers use it at least monthly. Among those who did report cannabis use in the past year, 52% used it in social gatherings or friends' homes, while 40% used it at their family residence. This emphasizes both the role of social environments and the need for clear family expectations, even for college students.

Given the relatively recent change in Missouri state law that legalized cannabis for adult-use, questions about intentions to change use were included. Among students who currently use cannabis, 54% of students said there is no need to change, while 30% reported that they were currently ready to or thinking about using cannabis less frequently or quitting altogether.

Chart 3. Cannabis Use Trend



Illegal Drug Use & Drugs of Concern

Approximately 7.5% of students reported using at least one illegal drug/drug of concern in the past 12 months and use rates of various types are shown in [Table 1](#). We have denoted 'drugs of concern' 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**	4.7%	Other (kratom**, inhalants**, K2, etc.)	0.9%
Hallucinogens (LSD, PSP, mushrooms, etc.)	2.9%	MDMA/Ecstasy/Molly	0.6%
Cocaine	1.1%	Heroin	0.2%

Prescription Drug Misuse

Approximately 6% of 2-year Missouri college students reported prescription drug use without a doctor’s prescription in the past 12 months (similar to 6.2% in 2025). Additionally, 5% of students with a valid prescription reported using in a manner other than prescribed in the past 12 months (a slight increase from 4.4% in 2025). A three-year trend of past year misuse of either type is included in **Chart 4**. **Table 2** shows the rates of misuse based on type of prescription drug both with and without a prescription. Of students who reported misuse of either type, about 18% have co-used with alcohol at least once, which can have serious health effects.

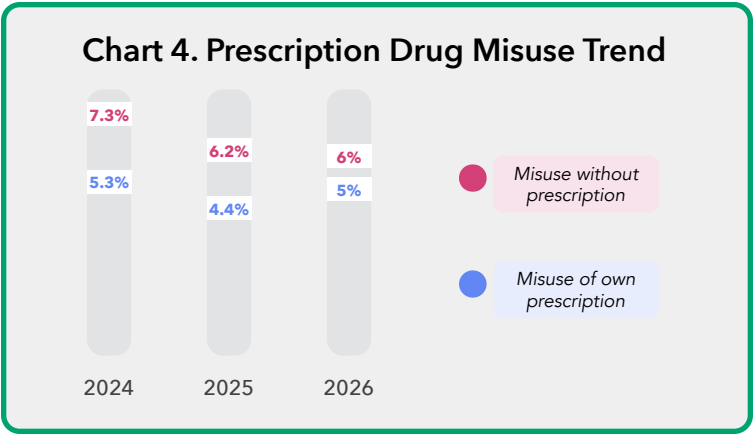


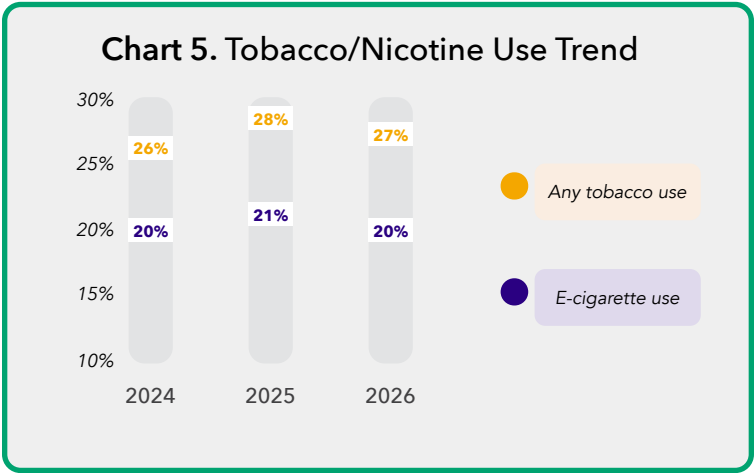
Table 2. Prescription Drug Misuse in the Past 12 Months

	Misuse without valid prescription	Misuse of own prescription
Pain medications (Oxycontin, Vicodin, etc.)	2.9%	2.1%
Stimulants (Adderall, Ritalin, etc.)	1.8%	1.8%
Sleep medications (Ambien, Halcion, etc.)	1.1%	1.2%
Benzodiazepines/sedatives (Xanax, Valium, etc.)	0.8%	0.7%

Tobacco & Nicotine Use

Twenty-seven percent (27%) of 2-year Missouri college students reported using tobacco/nicotine products at least once in the past 12 months (a decrease from 32% in 2025). Past year usage rates for various types of tobacco/nicotine products are as follows: e-cigarettes/vaporizers - including Zyn/nicotine pouches (5.9%), cigars (3.7%), and hookah (1%).* Among students who

have used e-cigarettes in the past year, more than half (55%) of students reported daily use. E-cigarette use was also commonly reported in outdoor public spaces (51%), in a car (45%), and in a bar or restaurant (43%). Additionally, students who use tobacco reported that they have considered quitting (23%), tried to quit (27%), or successfully quit using (28%) since entering college. A three-year trend of past year tobacco/nicotine use and use of e-cigarettes is shown in **Chart 5**.



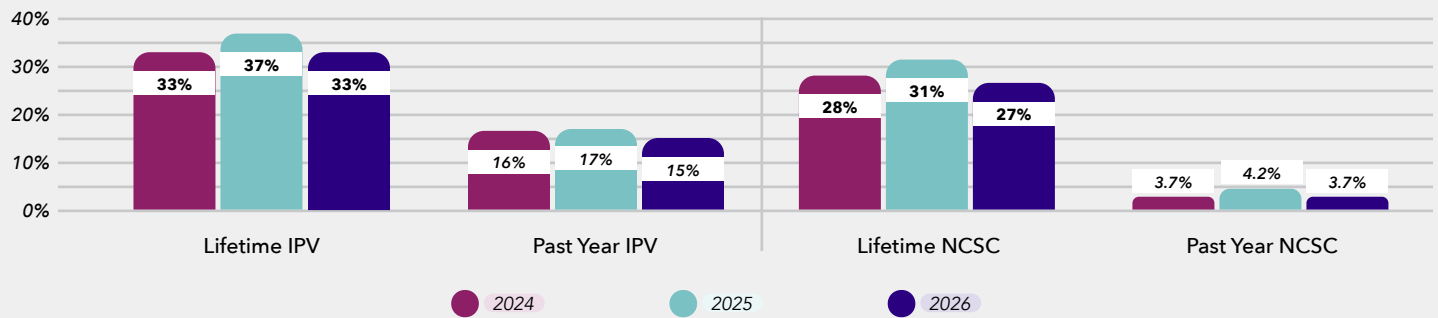
Check out our *“Time to Change”* program, that can help students find freedom from marijuana or nicotine!

Interpersonal Violence

Roughly 1 in 3 (33%) of 2-year Missouri college students reported experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime, and 15% 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 (12%), verbal abuse (10%), or financial abuse (3.1%).*

Nearly one-third (27%) of 2-year Missouri college students reported experiencing non-consensual sexual contact (NCSC) in their lifetime, and 3.7% report NCSC in the past 12 months. Most instances of NCSC occurred off-campus and not related to university events (80%) or on campus (12%).* Lifetime and past year IPV and NCSC are shown in **Chart 6**.

Chart 6. Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Trend



Note. Hazing was not included in this Key Findings document as the highest reported prevalence for 2-year Missouri college students for any hazing activity was only 0.3%

Bystander Intervention

About two-thirds (65%) of 2-year Missouri college students felt that they have the skills to intervene/prevent a potentially harmful situation, while only about half (49%) of students said they know where to go to find resources on bystander intervention/violence prevention and related trainings on their campus.

The vast majority of students (90%) reported that they would want a peer to do something if they themselves were in danger of being harmed by someone else. Students reported that the resources they are most likely to utilize in situations involving bystander intervention (situations involving substance misuse, bias and discrimination, interpersonal violence, or mental health) were friends/peers (56%), their family/spouse/partner (44%), or health/wellness/counseling services (25%).*



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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 December of 2025. These questions did not specifically call out "gambling and

sports betting," but rather were framed as "leisure activities for money." The top 5 most highly indicated past year gambling and sports betting behaviors (at least once) are shown in [Table 3](#). Additional options listed within the "leisure activities for money" category included: played games of skill for money (e.g., backgammon, mahjong, puzzles, word games, etc. - 6.8%), played daily fantasy sports (5.7%), spades, or other 'street games' (5.0%), spent real money on social sports betting apps (4.8%), played a video poker or other card game machine (4.3%), spent real money while playing social casino games (4.2%), played dice, played live or tournament poker (3.8%), bet on esports (2.8%), bet on horse racing at a track/off-track betting parlor (1.7%).*

Students do experience consequences of gambling and among those who reported at least one gambling behavior in the past year, 6.5% report they have become restless, irritable, or anxious when trying to stop/cut down on the activities, 9.3% report they have tried to keep family/friends from knowing how much they spent on the activities, and 2.9% say 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%),

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Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health

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 3. Top Gambling & Sports Betting Activities

Purchased an instant scratch-off ticket	34%
Purchased a lottery, Powerball, or Mega Millions ticket	25%
Played a slot machine	12%
Wagered on sports	9.5%
Played live casino table games, excluding poker (e.g., blackjack, roulette, craps, baccarat)	8.2%

Well-Being & Food Insecurity

Students were asked to gauge their stress levels in the two weeks prior to completing the survey, and in 2026, one-third (33%) of students reported high-level stress (stress that is overwhelming – 27% or unbearable – 6.3%). The top four areas that students were stressed about included academic stress (84%), financial concerns (55%), time management (50%), and job (50%).* When asked about their greatest support needs as college students, the most commonly reported concerns were academic distress (69%), followed by financial concerns (67%), anxiety (63%), and stress (60%).

Students were also asked to report how many hours of sleep on average they get on a typical school night (Sunday-Thursday), with about half of students (51%) reporting seven or more hours of sleep.

To better understand experiences of food insecurity in the past 30 days, students were asked to report if they sometimes, very often, or always: (1) cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn’t enough money for food (20%); (2) the food that was bought just didn’t last and they didn’t have money to get more (16%); or (3) being hungry but not eating because there wasn’t enough money for food (15%). Student responses related to food insecurity are shown in **Chart 7**.

Chart 7. Food Insecurity



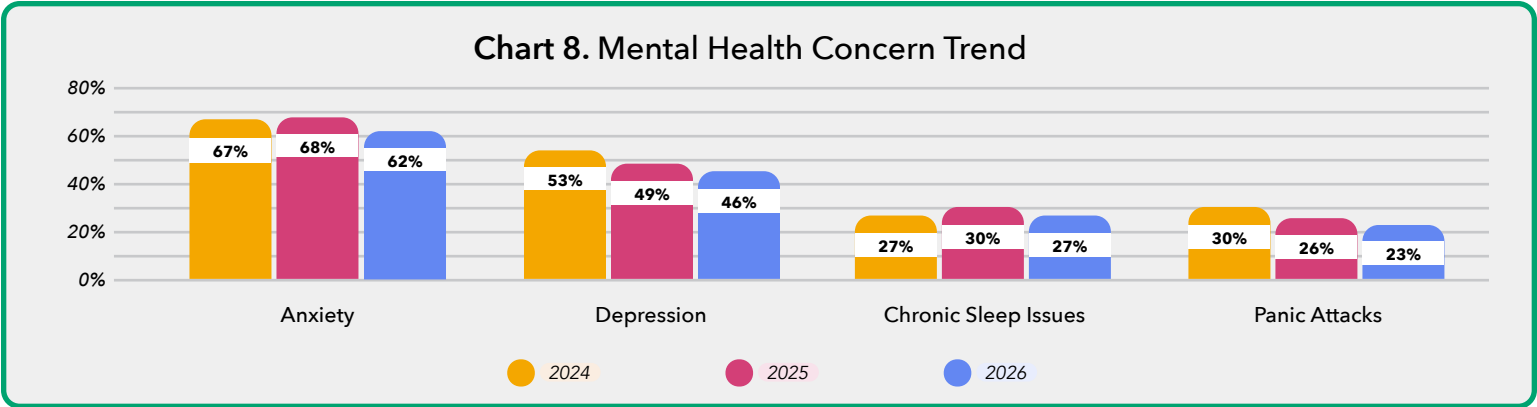
Sexual Health

Questions related to sexual health and sexually transmitted infections (STI) testing are also included on the MACHB. Forty percent (40%) of students report that they had not been tested for STIs in the past year because they are not sexually active, 41% have not been tested but are sexually active, and 15% of students 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 (42%), lacking access to testing (being too expensive/not being covered by insurance, etc. – 11%) or shame/embarrassment (6.1%).

Mental Health

Missouri college students attending a 2-year school self-reported experiencing issues related to mental health in the past 12 months, the most common being anxiety (62%), depression (46%), chronic sleep issues (27%), and panic attacks (23%).* Students were also asked to report if their mental health concern(s) had been diagnosed by a mental health or medical professional. Forty percent (40%) of those who had experienced a mental health concern had not received a diagnosis, 44% report being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, and 35% report being diagnosed with major depression.* A three-year trend for the top mental health concerns is shown in **Chart 8**.

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, their primary source of assistance was an off-campus medical doctor/mental health provider (40%), family/friends (31%), and Telehealth/virtual appointment (11%). Around 1 in 10 students (14%) said they did not seek assistance but practice self-care or other types of management on their own.*

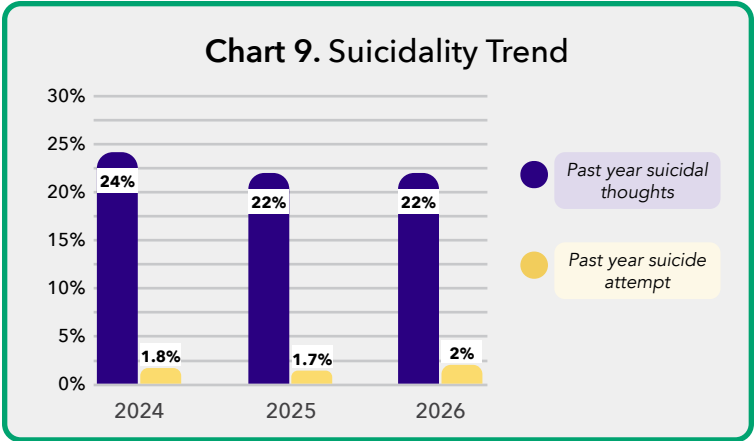


Suicide

Almost half (48%) of Missouri college students attending two-year schools reported having suicidal thoughts in their lifetime, and 22% of students reported having suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months (consistent with 22% in 2025). In the past 12 months, 1.5% of students reported attempting suicide. For those who had thoughts or attempts in the past 12 months, 39% sought assistance. Trend data for the past year's suicidal thoughts and attempts is shown in **Chart 9**.

The most common places students primarily sought assistance were off-campus mental health center(s)/ medical doctor (68%), family/friends (52%), or the emergency/crisis services (hospital ER, 988/911/other crisis line, 24%).* Additionally, 27% of Missouri college students at two-year schools have been concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts or exhibiting suicidal behaviors in the past 12 months.

However, 71% have not heard of the Ask. Listen. Refer. (ALR) program (an online suicide prevention program designed to help faculty, staff, and students prevent suicide).



Interested in learning more about our suicide prevention training?
Visit asklistenrefer.org

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 4](#). Among students who reported experiencing at least one adverse childhood experience, 35% thought it affected their health ‘a lot’ and 44% thought it affected their health ‘some’.

Table 4. Adverse Childhood Experiences before Age 18

None of these	37%
Parent or adult in the home ever swore at, insulted, or put you down	40%
Lived with someone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide	33%
Lived with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs (including prescription drugs)	29%
Lost a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or another reason	24%
Ever felt that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special	22%
Parent or adult in the home ever hit, beat, kicked, or physically hurt you	20%
Parents or adults in the home ever hit, punched, beat, or threatened to harm each other	18%
Lived with someone who went to jail or prison	14%
Ever experienced unwanted sexual contact	13%
Didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect/care for you	13%

** 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 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. For more information about Partners in Prevention and to explore our research, visit www.mopip.org/pip/research/.

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