

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY BRIEF

SUBSTANCE USE & MENTAL HEALTH

DATA & KEY POINTS

- **6.2% of Strafford County Middle School students** who completed the YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey) **reported using inhalants to get high**; an increase from 2023 (2)
- **Students who reported poor mental health** most of the time and those who have seriously considered suicide **had higher rates of all substance use**, including vaping, marijuana and alcohol, when compared to their peers who did not report those mental health concerns (2)
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Behavioral Health and Wellness (MTSS-B) programs are shown to increase academic achievement, reduce behavioral health concerns and improve school climate.
- According to the CDC, “Nearly 30 years of research show that comprehensive SSPs are safe, effective, and cost-saving.” and that they “do not increase illegal drug use or crime,” (1)
- **SSPs are an evidence-based programs** shown to decrease transmission of disease like Hepatitis-C, reduce overdose risk and fatalities, and connect people to treatment and other vital health services
- **Harm Reduction is a set of public health strategies** and ideas aimed at reducing problem outcomes in many aspects of life. *For example, wearing seatbelts in cars and helmets on bicycles are common harm reduction practices in everyday life.* [In relation to substance use, Harm Reduction incorporates strategies from safer use and managed use, to abstinence, addressing conditions of use, along with the use itself. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use substances.] (3)



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LEGISLATION

SB 557: Kratom Regulation SUPPORT

Kratom is an addictive opioid-like substance that has no age restrictions or safety standards in NH, allowing gas stations and convenience stores to sell to minors without oversight. SB 557 establishes a 21+ age requirement, prohibits child-targeted packaging, requires warning labels, mandates licensing, and bans synthetic versions.

HB 1630: Nitrous Oxide (Whippets) SUPPORT

Nitrous oxide sold for recreational inhalation has no restrictions despite documented brain damage, suffocation deaths, and targeted marketing to teens. HB 1630 prohibits the sale of nitrous oxide for recreational purposes, especially flavored products marketed to youth, while protecting legitimate uses (medical, food service, automotive).

HB 1538: Deceptive Vape Marketing SUPPORT

Vaping companies disguise nicotine products as highlighters, USB drives, smartwatches, and candy to hide use from parents and teachers. HB 1538 prohibits marketing vapes that imitate non-vape products, using child-appealing characters, or include video game features.

SB 624: Penalties for selling hemp-derived products SUPPORT

Sets stricter penalties for establishments that continue to sell hemp-derived products despite a state law that already bans the sale of these products.

SB 461: Measuring THC Concentrations SUPPORT

Requires measuring total THC concentration, including all forms that become psychoactive, just like we measure total alcohol content in beverages.

SB 498 Children's System of Care SUPPORT

would close the private health insurance coverage gap for children's behavioral health care coordination. This bill was designed to:

- Protect taxpayers by preventing state general funds from subsidizing private health insurance corporations.
- Require private health insurance companies to help pay for these mental health services, creating a partnership between public and private insurers.
- Allow Tier 3 of the Children's System of Care to work as intended for the first time.
- Help NH children get needed care, no matter what type of insurance they have.
- Contribute to more Granite State children and youth access the right care at the right time.

LEGISLATION

HB1754-FN Repeals the Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Behavioral Health and Wellness (MTSS-B) OPPOSE

MTSS-B is part of the Children's System of Care and is a “comprehensive, tiered system of social, emotional, and behavioral supports to promote student wellness and improve engagement in learning” (NH RSA 135:F). Repealing this program would remove key programs and infrastructure to support all students in our schools.

SB 549: prohibiting the state or local government from distributing or funding organizations that distribute drug paraphernalia. OPPOSE

This would be detrimental to Syringe Service Programs (SSP) and other programs funded by the State of NH working to prevention overdose and other harm-reduction strategies in NH.

CALLS TO ACTION

Support bills to regulate access to addictive products for teens and young adults underage

The issue goes beyond regulation. Marketing of these products is geared towards teens and young children, many products looking like sports' drinks and candies. The companies who create these products need to be held accountable in the name of public safety.

Support programs and policies that connect students to the support they need

The Children's System of Support, including MTSS-B and other prevention-based programs and organizations, work to support youth in our schools and communities. We need to improve the infrastructure that allows us to focus on evidence-based practices and oppose policies that look to dismantle those systems.

Support critical infrastructure across the continuum of care (COC) for substance use and mental health disorders

Treatment, recovery and harm reduction are all elements along the continuum of care that are necessary to ensure a robust array of services to meet the complex needs of people in our communities. We need to invest in and support these programs in our communities.

1. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Strengthening Syringe Services Programs (SSPs), March 20, 2024*
2. *Strafford County Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 2025*
3. *National Harm Reduction Coalition, harmreduction.org*