

WHY A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE OPIOID CRISIS

National Prevention Sciences Coalition Briefing: Best Strategies for Allocating the Pharmaceutical Settlement Dollars to Abate the Opioid Crisis

What is a Public Health Approach?

- Defining the scope and nature of the problem
- Identifying risk and protective factors
- Developing strategies to address determinants of substance use
- Disseminating knowledge and bolstering systems for widespread adoption
- Monitoring impact of interventions

Defining the Problem

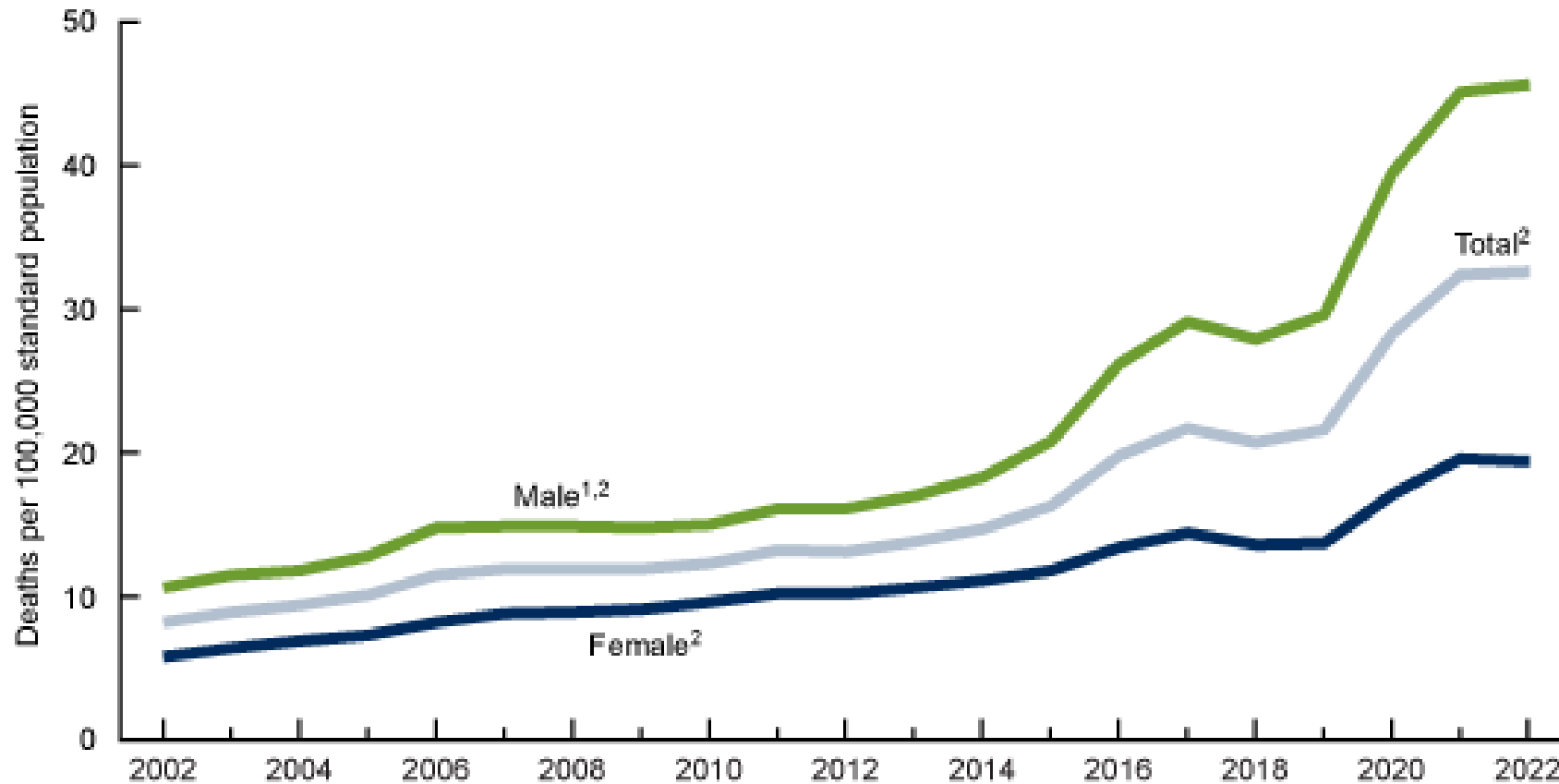
- Addiction is **defined as a disease** by most medical associations, including the AMA, for over thirty years.
- Like diabetes, cancer and heart disease, addiction is caused by **a combination** of behavioral, environmental and biological factors.
- Addiction involves changes in the structure and functioning of the **brain and body**. These changes typically are brought on by drug use but there may be pre-existing vulnerabilities to the disease.



“We do not treat addiction in this country like we treat other diseases.”

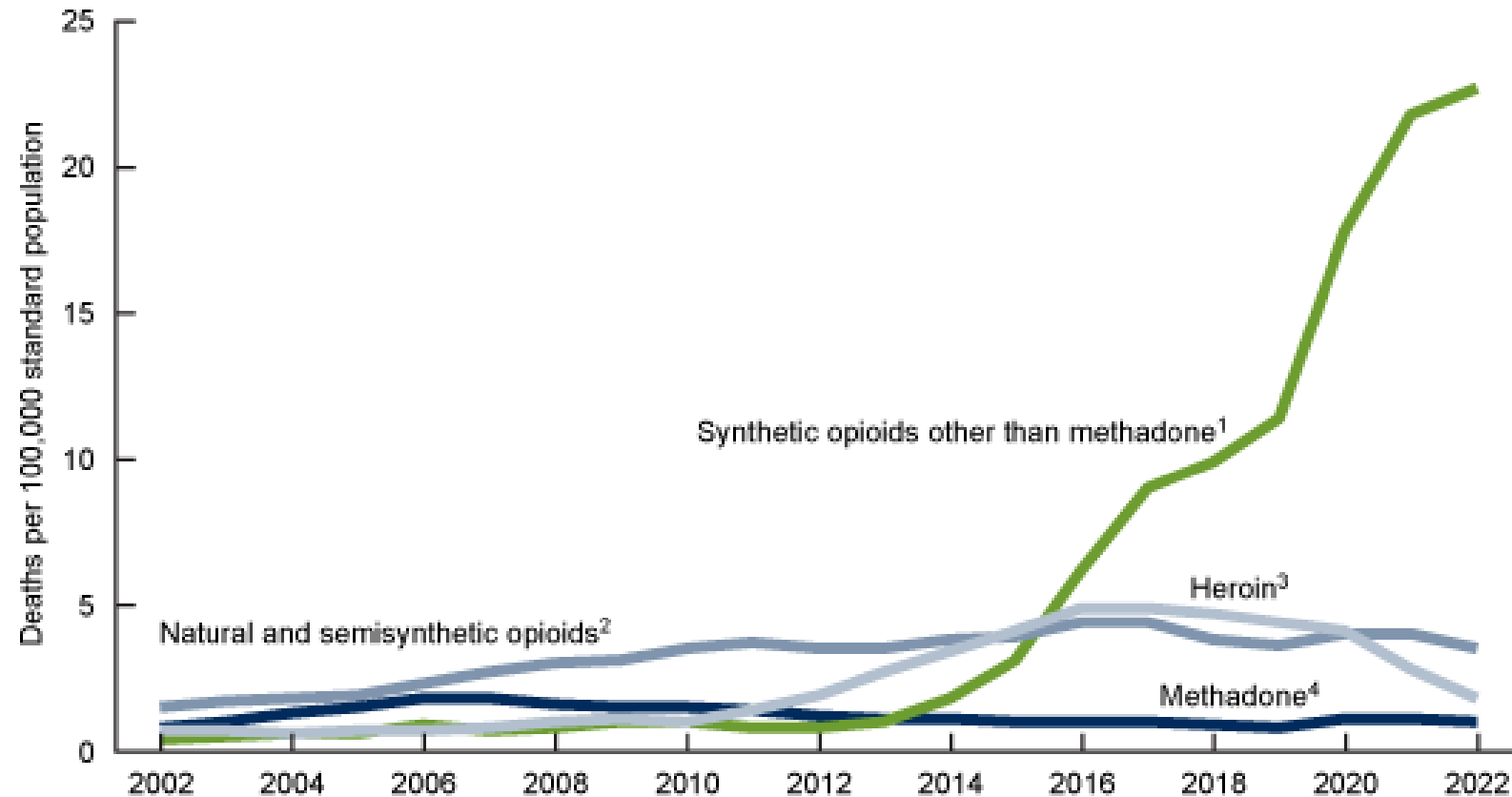
- The President’s Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis

Scope of the Problem



Source: [CDC](#). Age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths, by sex: United States, 2002–2022

Scope of the Problem



Source: [CDC](#) Age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths involving opioids, by type of opioid: United States, 2002–2022

Risk factors/vulnerabilities

Family substance use or history of addiction

Adverse childhood experiences (e.g., abuse, trauma)

Frequent moving, disruptive life transitions

Poor parent-child relationship

Mental health or behavioral problems

Early pubertal development

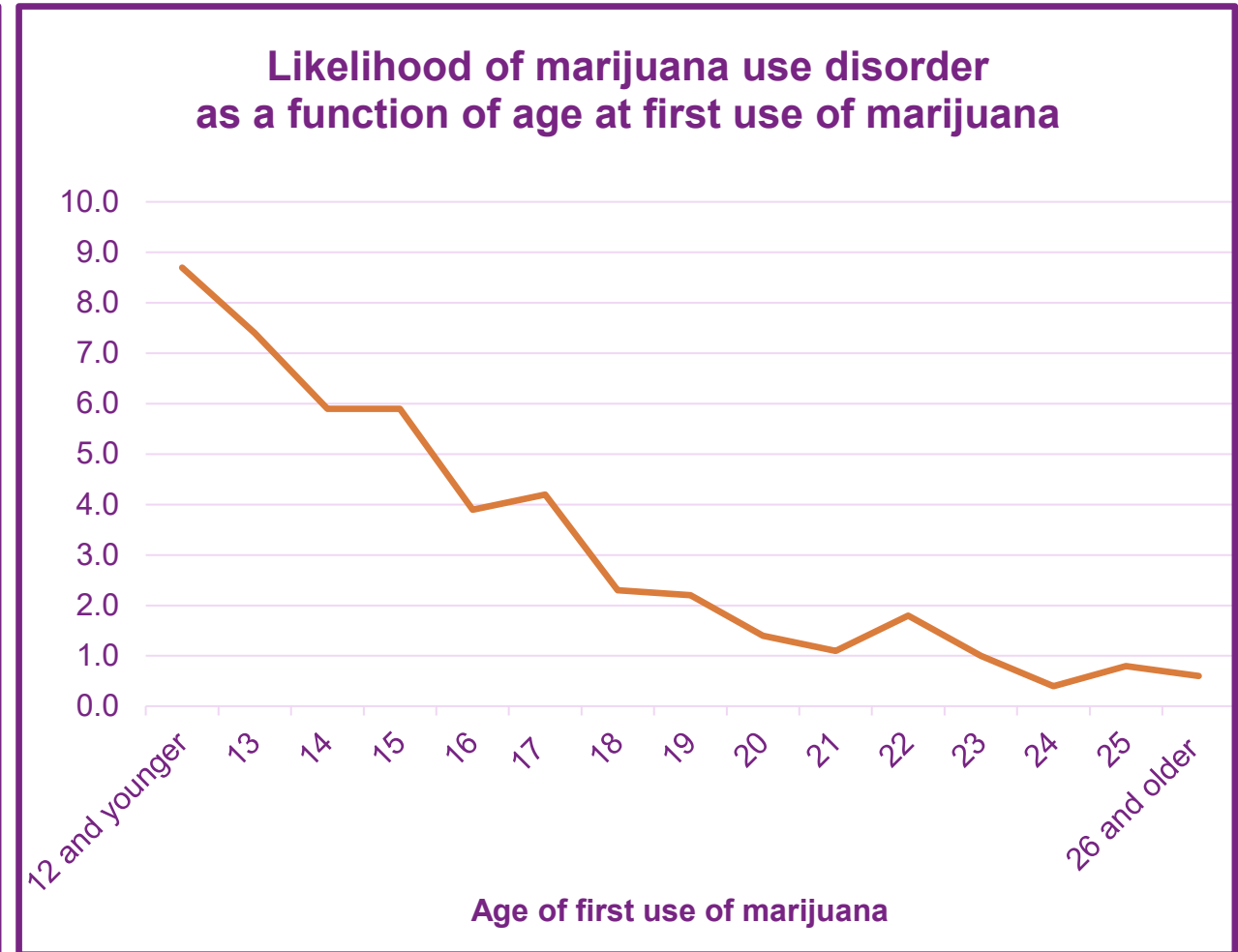
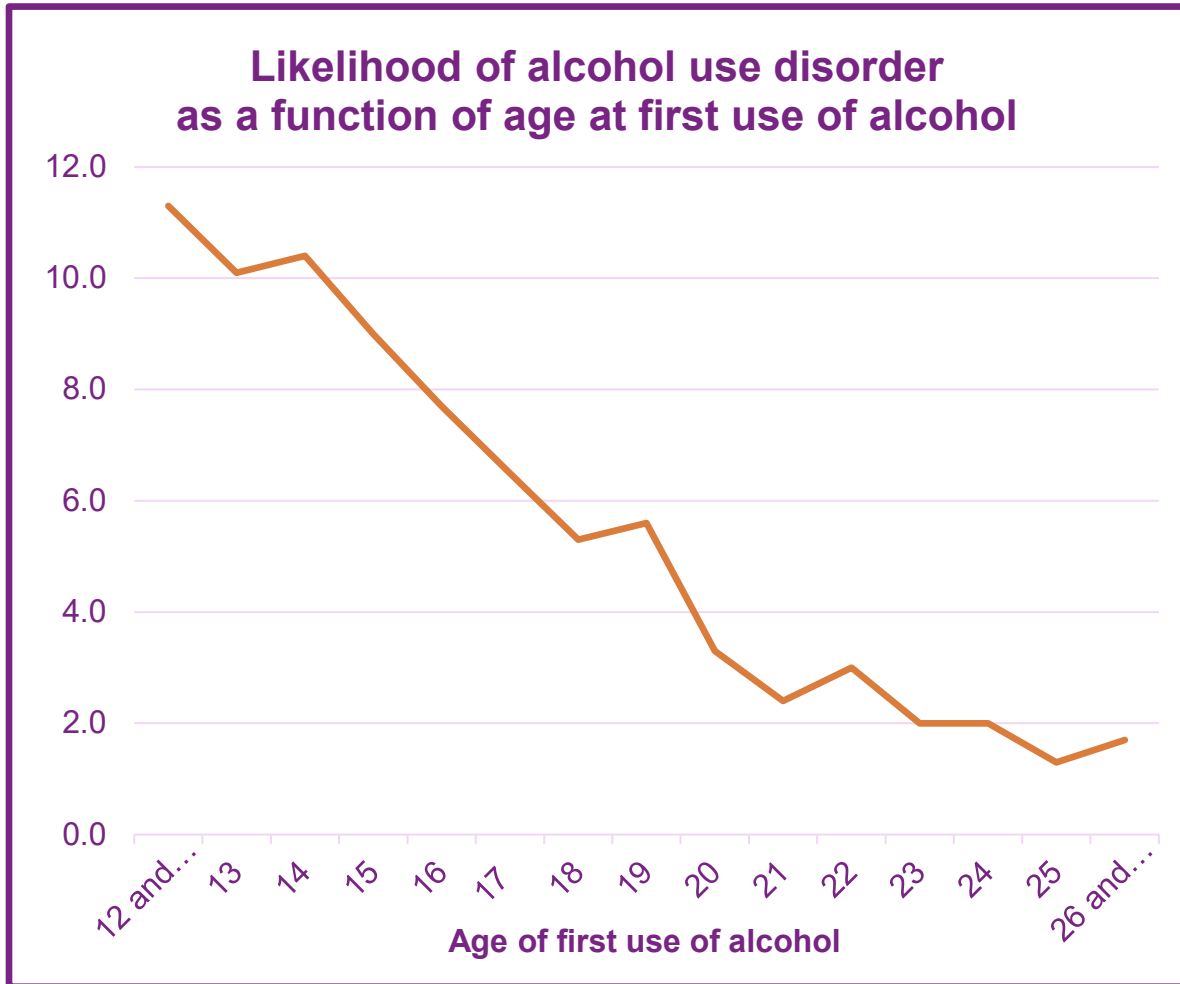
Low school attachment

Peer victimization, bullying

Marginalized identity, discrimination

Disorganized, high-crime neighborhood

Early use → significantly heightened risk of addiction



Source: Partnership's analysis of 2018 NSDUH data

Environmental protective factors

Effective parenting

A stable, nurturing, supportive home

Positive peer norms

Trusted positive adult role models/mentors

Strong attachments to family, school, community

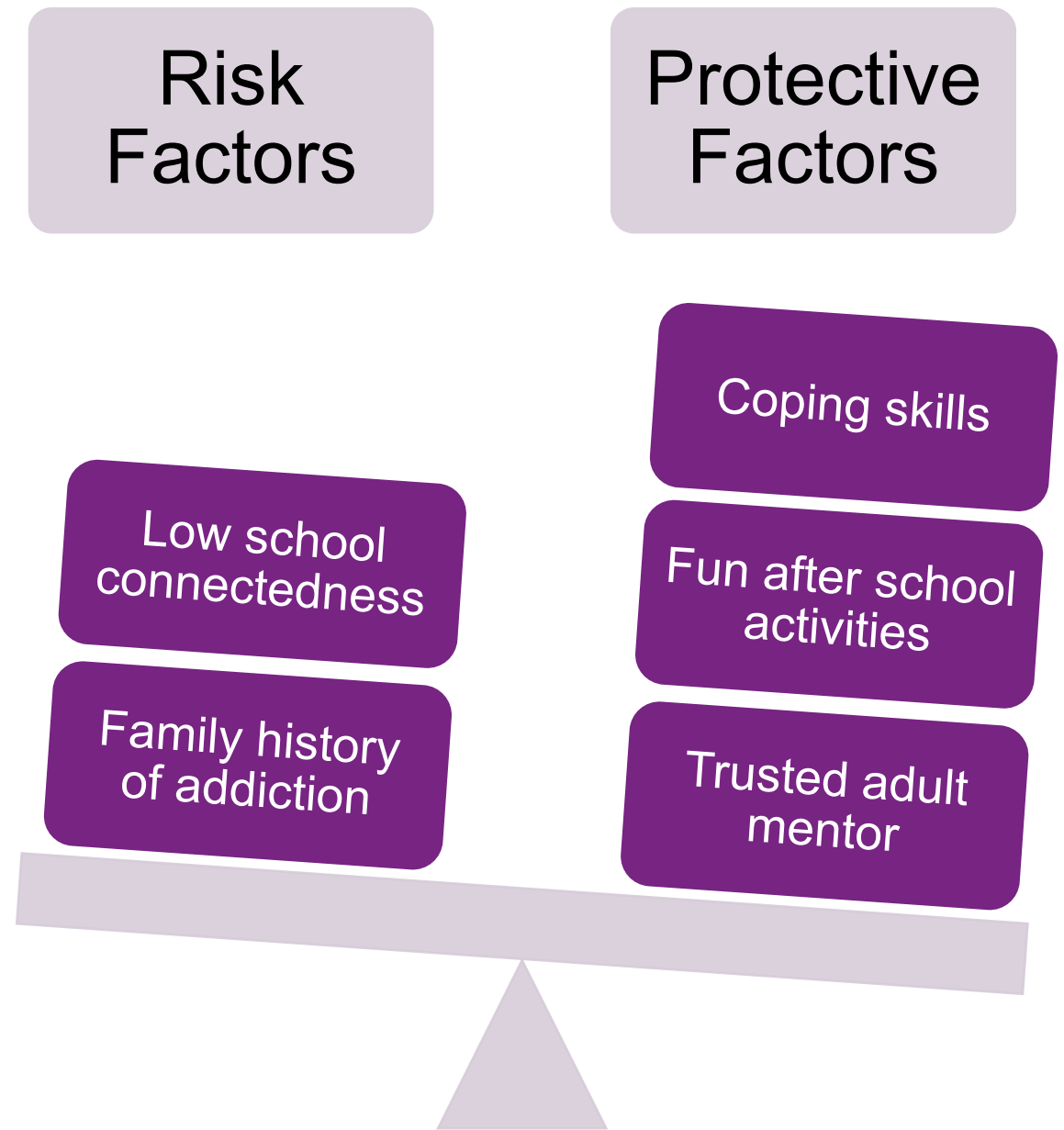
Extracurricular activities

Media literacy

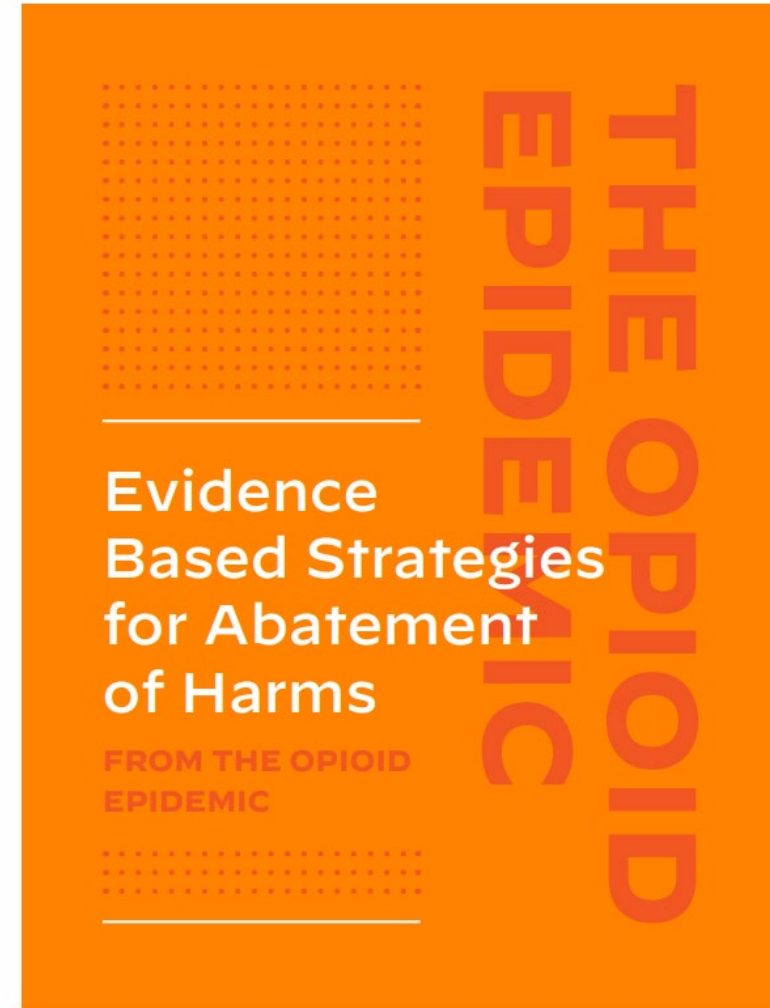
Safe neighborhoods

Effective policies

Balance of Risk and Protective Factors



Strategies to Address Determinants of Substance Use

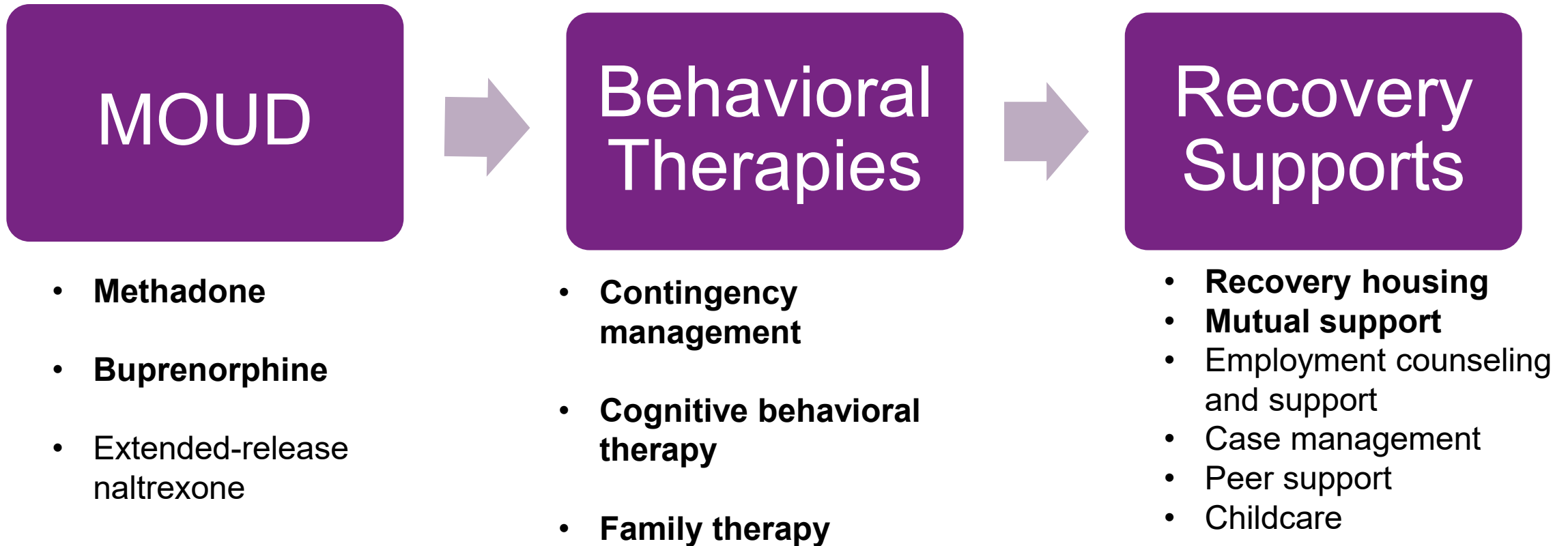


PREVENTION

- Early and broad approach framework
 - Interventions start early and continue through lifespan
 - Reducing risk factors and bolstering protective factors
- Delay initiation of use
- School and community-based prevention programs
- Public awareness and education
- Reduce access
 - For opioids: prescribing guidelines, safe storage and disposal
- Early identification of misuse

TREATMENT

Components of effective treatment for opioid use disorder:



HARM REDUCTION

- Harm reduction is an essential component of a comprehensive public health approach and aims to **reduce risks and negative consequences** associated with substance use (overdose, disease transmission)
- Highly **stigmatized** – often based on **misunderstanding** that it encourages drug use – which has been **disproven** by research
- Interventions include:
 - **Syringe services program**
 - Well-supported by research; core strategy in Master Settlement Agreement
 - **Naloxone distribution and access**
 - Well-supported by research; core strategy in Master Settlement Agreement
 - Drug testing equipment (e.g., fentanyl test strips)
 - Not well researched; some localities are using OSF for this intervention
 - Supervised consumption sites
 - Not well researched in U.S.; at least one state has indicated they plan to use OSF for this intervention

Disseminating knowledge and bolstering systems

- **Stigma** is a barrier to disseminating knowledge
 - Difficult to overcome **firmly entrenched** – and often **stigmatized beliefs** – about addiction
- Implementing a public health approach requires **systems change**
 - Integrating addiction treatment with the mainstream health care system (primary care, hospitals)
 - Improving adherence to evidence-based practices in addiction treatment
 - Evidence-based treatment in the criminal justice system
- Developing an **infrastructure** to support prevention
- Workforce development, training, clinical supports – opportunity for OSF investments
 - Funds must be used to supplement, not supplant existing funding!

Monitoring impact

- Data collection is **critical** for monitoring impact
- States/counties should use data to conduct **needs assessments** to determine spending priorities
- Use data to identify **existing resources** and **gaps**
- Once funding is distributed, monitor investments for **quality assurance** and **impact measures**
- Utilize data to ensure funds are being used to **achieve racial equity**

**NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED GUIDANCE FOR
OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS**

Principles for the Use of Funds From the Opioid Litigation

Developed by a coalition of organizations across the spectrum of the substance use field including physicians, addiction medicine specialists, recovery, treatment, and harm reduction. The Principles for the Use of Funds From the Opioid Litigation provide planning and process level guidance for state and local policymakers on how to effectively spend money from the opioid settlements.

Explore the Principles

<http://opioidprinciples.jhsph.edu>

Family Services

We empower parents and families with critical information and support them with our free services.

www.drugfree.org



Our **helpline** provides families with compassionate one-on-one direct support, including through **Facebook Messenger**. Our signature **Help & Hope by Text** program offers tailored resources and skills to families delivered via text.



We **connect parents in crisis** to one of our trained volunteer parent coaches for peer-to-peer support. This unique program provides families with guidance and support from someone who has *“been there.”*



Train community organizations in evidence-based strategies on how parents and caregivers can improve how they communicate about substance use and learn skills to encourage healthier choices.

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