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Encourage Healthy Behavior by Adolescents

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THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION,

Recognizing the importance of reducing alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among youth¹ and seeking to update that focus on prevention of initial risky behavior and the high incidence of injuries resulting from risky behaviors by adolescents and evidence-based interventions that prevent and ameliorate further problems; and

Noting that comprehensive approaches are more effective than programs that focus on a single behavior;²⁻⁴ and

Noting that tobacco use,⁵ alcohol and drug abuse,⁶ unsafe driving practices, violent behavior⁷ including attempting suicide,⁸ unprotected sex,⁹ poor nutrition,^{10,11} and lack of exercise¹⁰⁻¹² threaten the healthy development of youth into productive adults; and Observing that previous resolutions have considered specific unhealthy behaviors, their results, and methods of intervention;¹³⁻²⁶ and Recognizing that risky behavior is affected by core social institutions such as education, administration of justice, and economic opportunities;²⁷ and

Observing that publicizing adolescent violent behavior in newspapers,²⁸⁻²⁹ television,³⁰⁻³² and other media can lead to “copy-cat” behavior by adolescents and enactment of tougher penalties by voters; and

Noting that the majority of adolescents may engage in one or more of these behaviors at some time,^{27,33-35} but these behaviors are not normative; and

Recognizing that youth at high risk for life-threatening activities tend to engage in multiple risky behaviors;³⁶⁻⁴¹ and

Noting that adolescents at high risk for health and criminal problems also tend to have multiple predisposing factors,^{28,33,36,42,43} including poor academic achievement, lack a caring adult, and have access to illegal substances or guns;^{37,44} and

Recognizing that these predisposing and enabling factors tend to be complex, a more comprehensive approach to prevention and intervention is required; and

Observing that programs that focus on promoting academic success for all students, developing positive relationships with peers and adults, providing family support, and increasing family and community engagement have been effective in reducing risky behavior^{28,33,36,45-47} and that many of these programs include school-based health centers and family resource centers where multi-agency services can be coordinated; and

Finding that these elements are often present in programs known as community schools^{48,49} that provide activities outside of school hours for students, their families, and community members; and

Noting that intervention policies requiring expulsion and suspension drive students from school and inhibit their development;^{41,45,50} and

Recognizing that interventions involving mandatory minimum sentences and incarceration of youth with adult criminals encourages development of deviant behaviors and inhibits positive learning, forcing increasing dependence on society;^{28,51,52} therefore

1. Urges Congress and the states to enact legislation and provide appropriations that promote collaboration among government agencies to develop comprehensive and integrated programs and services for prevention of high-risk adolescent behavior, such as the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative;⁵³

2. Urges Congress, the states, and local communities to provide adequate funding for community schools that include after-school programs, preferably with community service opportunities, health education programs, family resource centers, and school-based health centers;

3. Urges Congress to fund collaborative research about the impact of community schools on prevention of risky behavior by adolescents, and disseminate the results to policy makers and professional and lay audiences;

4. Urges wire services and other media to publicize positive activity of adolescents;

5. Urges all states to enact legislation prohibiting media from publicizing names of those under the age of 18 who commit violent crimes, or their families;

6. Recommends that school districts implement alternative educational experiences in lieu of suspension and expulsion; and

7. Urges Congress and the states to repeal mandatory minimum sentences for juveniles; and

8. Urges Congress, the states, and local governments to house incarcerated youth under the age of 18 with others of similar age, and not to house them with incarcerated adults.

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