

Primary Prevention

Preventing Hazing Through Primary Prevention:
Research, Practice, and Compliance Considerations



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Who We Are

Hazing Prevention Research Lab

The Hazing Prevention Research Lab (HPRL) at the University of Maine, developed in partnership with StopHazing, is the home of HPRL researchers and affiliated scholars who study hazing and its prevention. These investigations include studies of experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of hazing, as well as studies on promoting healthy groups and teams in which hazing is less likely to occur. The HPRL is led by Dr. Elizabeth Allan, a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Maine and Principal at StopHazing. The lab has relaunched **the landmark National Study of Student Hazing**, updating the original study conducted in 2008 by Principal Investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Allan, and co-PI, Dr. Mary Madden. Alongside Dr. Allan, the current national study research team includes David Kerschner, Ph.D. Laura Santacrose, DrPH, MPH, and Devin Franklin, doctoral fellow at the University of Maine. **Affiliated scholars are here.**

StopHazing

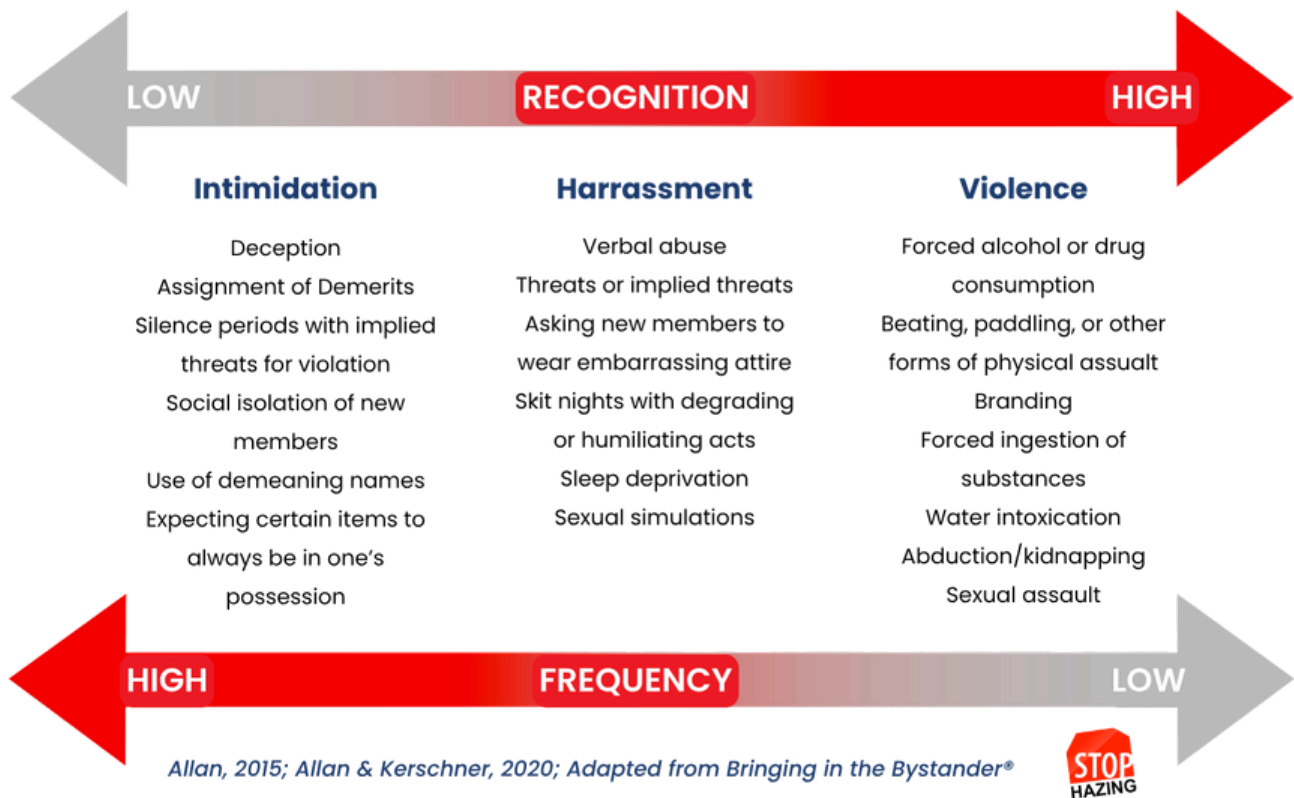
StopHazing is a global leader in hazing prevention research, education, and the development of practical, research-based resources and strategies. StopHazing's mission is to promote safe and inclusive school, campus, and organizational environments through research, resource sharing, and the development of data-driven strategies for hazing prevention and for promoting positive and inclusive group climates.

Overview

This brief is designed to help readers better understand the importance of primary prevention as a core strategy for hazing prevention in a postsecondary context, highlight actionable primary prevention strategies and resources, and connect prevention efforts to compliance requirements.

Though much media coverage on hazing surrounds violent and even deadly forms of hazing, hazing behaviors occur across a spectrum (Allan & Kerschner, 2020a; Allan & Kerschner, 2020b). Many hazing behaviors that occur with more frequency, such as social isolation, wearing embarrassing attire, and sleep deprivation, are often less recognized, while harassment and violent forms of hazing, including alcohol or other drug consumption, kidnapping, physical assault or sexualized acts, occur less frequently but are more often recognized as hazing.

THE SPECTRUM OF HAZING™



Public health frameworks can help inform hazing prevention strategies (Nation et al, 2003; Allan et al., 2018; Marchell et al., 2024).

A Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

What is a public health approach?

A public health approach is a multidisciplinary approach that draws on knowledge from a wide range of disciplines (including medicine, sociology, education, and economics) to address specific problems.

Why is hazing a public health issue?

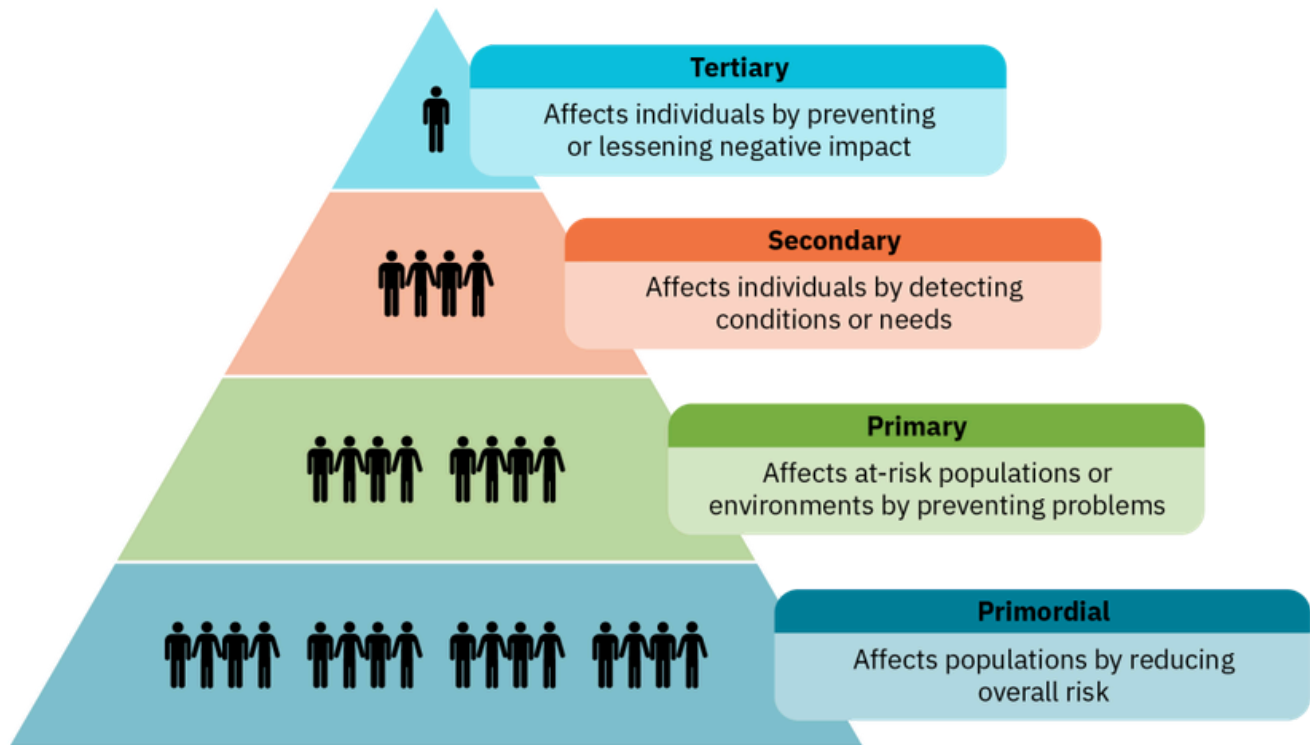
Interpersonal violence was recognized as a pressing public health problem in the 1990s (National Center for Injury Prevention, 2003). The World Health Organization defines violence as: “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation” (Mercy et al., 2017; Quigg et al., 2020).

Hazing falls within this definition because it can harm mental health, may involve violence such as sexual abuse and substance misuse, and creates conditions that threaten individuals' physical and psychological safety.

Public health approaches for sexual and relationship violence prevention, also referred to as interpersonal violence prevention, lay a foundation for a public health approach for hazing prevention (Stapleton & Allan, 2014).

This approach incorporates multiple levels of prevention, including **primordial prevention**, which addresses the social and environmental risks that contribute to harm before it occurs; **primary prevention**, which aims to prevent harm before it occurs by mitigating risk factors that increase the risk of harm and increasing protective factors that reduce the likelihood of harm; **secondary prevention**, which focuses on early identification of a problem and intervention when warning signs are present; and **tertiary prevention**, which centers on responding to harm and supporting those impacted (Keyes et al., 2025).

Levels of Prevention in Public Health



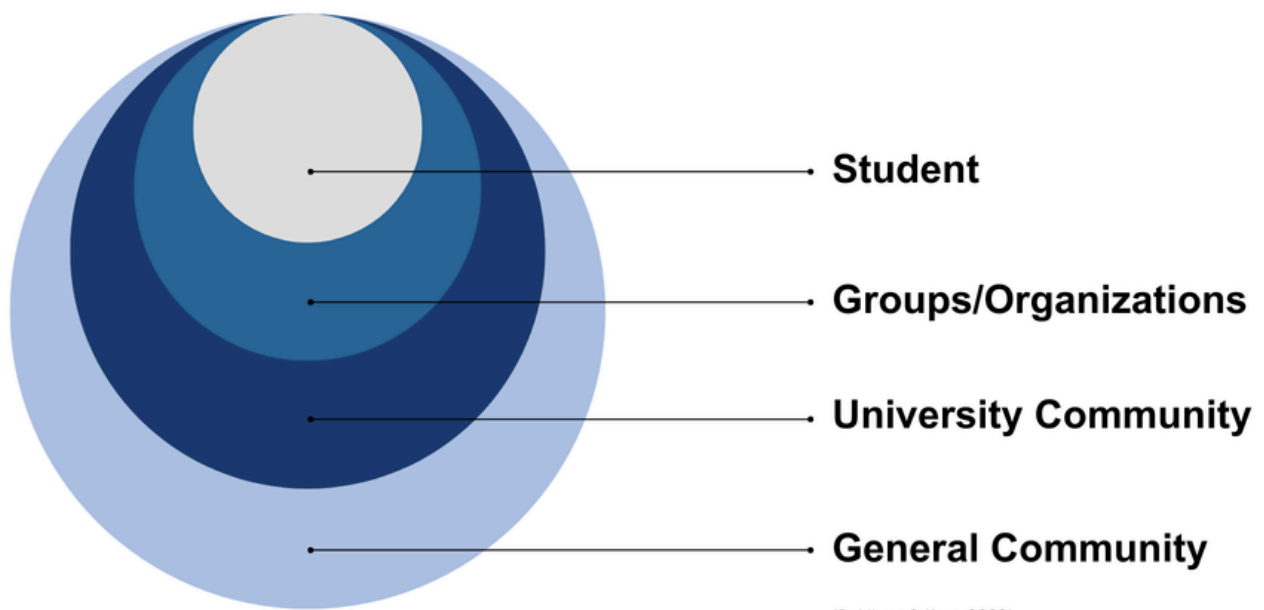
Levels of prevention in public health focus on different strategies to improve population health outcomes. See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023a; attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license

The levels of prevention are traditionally used to examine disease prevention but can also be used for other health-related challenges, including sexual violence and hazing.

While all forms of prevention are necessary, primary prevention enables individuals and communities to *prevent hazing from occurring in the first place.*

In 2018, StopHazing developed and published the only research-based framework for campus hazing prevention: the **Hazing Prevention Framework™ (HPF)**. The HPF draws from the Social Ecological Model (SEM) (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002), which addresses systems at multiple levels of the community or organization (i.e., the individual, interpersonal, organizational / institutional, community, and societal levels), as well as the strategic prevention framework (SPF) (SAMHSA, 2017), consisting of seven elements of prevention, including assessment, capacity, planning, implementation, evaluation, cultural competence, and sustainability. Also informed by the principles of prevention science (Nation et al., 2003), the HPF conceptualizes hazing prevention as non-linear, requiring multiple forms of intervention across the SEM and includes institutional commitment.

Social Ecological Model (SEM)



(Dahlberg & Krug, 2002)

When considering how to use a primary prevention approach to hazing, prevention experts focus on creating conditions that make hazing less likely by reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors across the SEM.

In the context of hazing, examples of primary prevention include skill-building to recognize and engage in healthy relationships, promoting strategies for building healthy group cohesion without hazing, promoting bystander intervention strategies, ethical leadership development, and visible leadership commitment.

Examples of Primary Prevention Across the Social-Ecological Model

Student Level

Individual

Building knowledge, shaping attitudes, and increasing self-efficacy through awareness of healthy and unhealthy group dynamics, educational campaigns, and in-person or online learning opportunities.

Institutional Level

University community

Establishing policies, systems, and organizational infrastructure that support prevention, including clear reporting processes, consistent enforcement, resource allocation, cross-campus collaboration, and institutional leadership commitment to creating safe and healthy environments.

Strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors to foster communities where belonging, inclusion, and healthy group cultures can thrive.

Group/ Organizational Level

Relationship

Promoting healthy relationships and group norms through bystander intervention, communication skill-building, education for friends, family, staff, and faculty, ethical leadership development, visible leadership commitment, and organizational/group/team standards, recognition, and accountability systems that reinforce healthy group practices.

Societal Level

General community

Implementing state and federal laws hazing prevention laws (Stop Campus Hazing Act amendments to the Clery Act) and national public awareness campaigns that shape overarching values and legal consequences regarding power, hazing, and interpersonal violence.

Aside: Historical Context:

Primary Prevention Under the Jeanne Clery Campus Safety Act

As a federal consumer information law, the Jeanne Clery Campus Safety Act (Clery Act) informs how colleges and universities prevent and respond to campus crime.

Primary prevention requirements were first introduced into the Clery Act in 2013 with the passage of the Violence Against Women Act amendments to the Clery Act, which required institutions of higher education to implement primary prevention and awareness programs for all incoming students and new employees on the topics of dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The federal regulations for the Act (2015) defined primary prevention as *“programming, initiatives, and strategies informed by research or assessed for value, effectiveness, or outcome that are intended to stop dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking before they occur through the promotion of positive and healthy behaviors that foster healthy, mutually respectful relationships and sexuality, encourage safe bystander intervention, and seek to change behavior and social norms in healthy and safe directions.”*

In 2024, the Stop Campus Hazing Act amended the Clery Act to include hazing prevention requirements, such as offering research-informed, campus-wide, primary-prevention programs addressing hazing designed to reach students, staff, and faculty. These strategies may include skill-building for bystander intervention, information about ethical leadership, and the promotion of strategies for building group cohesion without hazing.

Requirements under the Stop Campus Hazing Act are reinforced by elements of the Social-Ecological Model (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002) and the Hazing Prevention Framework (Allan et al., 2018) at the individual and group level through skill-building as a part of required student, staff, and faculty prevention education, in addition to also addressing the model at the institutional level (via required campus policies and transparency reports), and societal level (with federal law as the vehicle for change).

There are parallels between hazing and other college health issues, including sexual violence, mental health and wellness, and alcohol and other drug misuse (Goodwin, 2020; Fogel & Quinlan, 2021; Marchell et al., 2024, Chin & Johnson, 2011). Hazing and sexual violence share factors that influence whether students choose to report incidents, such as whether students understand available confidential and non-confidential resources and reporting and conduct processes and whether they trust that the campus will effectively respond to a report. Individuals can be hesitant to report when the person inflicting harm is someone they know or when alcohol or other drugs are involved. **Similar lessons from mental health and substance misuse research suggest that reducing stigma, increasing awareness of support, and implementation of amnesty policies can encourage help-seeking and reporting.**

Primary prevention approaches for hazing can allow institutions to connect hazing prevention to other other health-related initiatives on campus and infuse hazing prevention into other existing primary prevention strategies (StopHazing, 2020).

This is especially important because while secondary and tertiary prevention efforts are critical to deterring future behavior and preventing barriers to reporting, they alone do not prevent incidents from occurring (Franklin & Allan, 2025).

Barriers. Due to the ever-changing nature of higher education, institutions often find themselves responding to shifting external and internal pressures. As a result, limited time, staffing, and financial resources are frequently directed toward meeting immediate compliance requirements, responding to incidents, and managing crises rather than investing in long-term prevention efforts. This reactive environment can make it difficult to prioritize primary prevention strategies (Allan et al., 2024).

Everyone has a role to play. A focus on primary prevention encourages the broader campus community to be proactive rather than reactive; every individual plays a unique and important role in preventing hazing. Rather than placing responsibility solely on those directly involved in hazing incidents or the offices responsible for responding to them, primary prevention engages students, staff, faculty, coaches, advisors, and other institutional leaders in creating environments where healthy group behaviors are normalized, expected, modeled, and reinforced.

Primary Prevention Strategies

This section describes three complementary strategies for strengthening healthy group cultures and preventing hazing: **building group cohesion, developing bystander intervention skills, and fostering ethical leadership**. Together, these approaches provide practical ways for students, groups, and institutions to challenge harmful norms and traditions while creating communities where members can build meaningful connections without causing harm.

Strategies for Group Cohesion

Hazing behaviors are often normalized, tolerated, minimized, or dismissed as “tradition,” making them easy to overlook. Members may believe that hazing is necessary to build group cohesion and commitment (Allan et al., 2018, Allan et al., 2019). Helping groups and teams identify and practice healthy group behaviors, while exploring alternative activities that align with their values and goals, can shift unhealthy norms and traditions into healthy ones. This process also helps members distinguish between activities that genuinely strengthen the group and those that can cause physical and psychological harm.

StopHazing Resources for Group Cohesion

- **10 Signs of Healthy and Unhealthy Groups**: This free workshop and training guide, with access to presentation slides and speaking notes, explores the 10 signs of healthy and unhealthy groups and uses discussion questions and “Gut Check” scenarios to promote learning. This workshop was developed in collaboration with OneLove, expanding signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships to groups.
- **We Don’t Haze Film and Companion Guide**: This 17-minute research-based documentary, developed in collaboration with [Clery Center](#), explores themes related to belonging, connection, and group culture. The film and discussion guide includes testimonials by survivors of hazing as well as parents and loved ones of students who died from hazing, and offers tangible examples of traditions that foster positive relationships and strengthen communities without hazing.

Bystander Intervention

Bystander intervention is another primary prevention strategy often used in response to interpersonal violence (Berkowitz, 2009; Stapleton & Allan, 2014). Several decades ago, social psychologists Latané and Darley (1976) studied a very famous murder of a young woman named Kitty Genovese in which several people witnessed or heard screaming but did not respond, assuming others must have also heard and called for help. Based on this incident, these researchers developed the Bystander Intervention Model, which explains the cognitive steps a bystander must go through from recognizing and interpreting a behavior as a problem to taking action. This led to broader research that helps individuals understand the concept of diffusion of responsibility - the likelihood that individuals believe that someone else will intervene - and how to increase people's willingness and likelihood to intervene on behalf of strangers and friends (e.g., Moynihan & Banyard, 2011; Banyard et al., 2007).

Why Utilize Bystander Intervention for Hazing Prevention?

1. It can prevent harm.
2. It helps change social and community roles by calling attention to hazing behaviors that are often minimized, normalized, or dismissed as harmless pranks, antics, and traditions.
3. It discourages victim-blaming by placing accountability on the hazers.
4. It has a demonstrated impact on sexual violence prevention, and implementation can be translated to hazing prevention.

(Tabachnick, 2009)

Bystander intervention training focuses on providing bystanders realistic tools and strategies to recognize and interpret signs as a problem and to increase their sense of responsibility to take action within their own communities. These strategies may include interrupting a potential incident by creating a distraction or diversion, seeking support from others in addressing the issue (either in the moment or soon after), or speaking out against harmful norms or concerning behaviors. Because hazing can happen to those joining or participating in groups, there are often many people who may directly witness hazing behaviors or help facilitate the conditions that allow for hazing to occur. These individuals then also have the potential to intervene.



StopHazing Resources for Bystander Intervention

- **Bystander Intervention Guide**: This guide outlines the steps of bystander intervention and includes activities to engage learners in thinking critically about bystander intervention and hazing prevention. There is also a **HAZING Film Bystander Intervention Addendum** as a companion resource for the film HAZING by Byron Hurt.
- **We Don't Haze Film and Companion Guide**: This 17-minute documentary, developed in collaboration with Clery Center, explores themes of bystander intervention. The companion discussion guides and bystander intervention guide provide an overview of bystander interventions, details on the steps of bystander intervention, and examples and insights applied to hazing.
- **StandUp to Hazing™ Course Suite**: Our comprehensive hazing prevention course suite empowers entire campus communities—students, faculty, staff, and groups—with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to recognize, prevent, and respond to hazing, with an emphasis on bystander intervention techniques relevant to their individual roles and areas of influence within the campus community.

Ethical Leadership Development

Colleges and universities are environments of personal and professional growth and development that provide students with opportunities to examine their strengths, clarify their values, and determine how they want to contribute to their communities and the broader world. In and out of the classroom, attending a college or university helps students learn how to navigate complex situations, consider the impact of their actions on others, and make decisions that reflect their values and responsibilities to the groups they join. In other words, they help students develop ethical leadership skills.

Six Key Principles that Guide Ethical Leadership

(Northouse, 2025)

Respect	Providing others with freedom of choice, allowing them to be themselves, valuing their contributions, and treating them as worthy human beings.
Service	Contributing to the greater good and acting in ways that will benefit others.
Justice	Treating everyone fairly and equitably.
Honesty	Telling the truth, and representing reality as fully and completely as possible.
Community	Considering everyone involved when evaluating situations, being attentive to the interests of the community and the culture, and focusing on group goals and purpose.
Accountability	Making decisions with integrity and being responsible for individual impact.

In the context of hazing prevention, ethical leadership can help students align their actions with their values, challenge unhealthy or harmful group norms, take responsibility to foster healthier group behavior, and foster experiences that build belonging and healthy cohesion without causing harm.

Leadership theories such as the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Komives et al., 2013) and Relational Leadership Model (Komives et al., 2017) emphasize collaboration, shared purpose, and positive social change, providing useful approaches for helping students cultivate healthy group cultures and create communities where all members can thrive.



StopHazing Resources for Ethical Leadership Development

- **Making Space for Leaders to Lead Change: An Abbreviated Facilitator's Guide:** This interactive workshop explores group experiences through self-reflection in a way that engages leaders to create space to cultivate more inclusive, connected, and healthy group environments.
- **Practicing Values-Based Leadership & Decision Making: An Abbreviated Facilitator's Guide:** This workshop helps participants identify group values and understand how leadership decisions reflect group values and healthy environments free of hazing through interactive activities and discussion.
- **StandUp to Hazing™: Values in Action:** This online booster course helps learners recognize hazing, examine how personal values influence decision-making, and evaluate the impact of individual and group behaviors through realistic student group scenarios. Through interactive virtual situations, participants practice applying ethical leadership principles and bystander intervention strategies to prevent, interrupt, and respond to hazing-related situations.

Next Steps:

Strategies for Advancing Primary Prevention of Hazing

Primary prevention is an essential component of a comprehensive hazing prevention strategy and a key consideration for institutions seeking to create safer, healthier, and more inclusive campus environments. As colleges and universities continue to implement the requirements of the Stop Campus Hazing Act, campuses should assess how their current prevention efforts build individual, group, and institutional capacity to prevent hazing before it occurs. Identifying opportunities to strengthen primary prevention efforts through prevention-focused initiatives such as ethical leadership development, promoting bystander intervention, and healthy group dynamics is a great next step to consider.

By integrating research-informed primary prevention strategies into existing campus prevention efforts, institutions can move beyond the focus of responding to incidents and shift toward creating the conditions that make hazing less likely to occur. This process requires ongoing investment in prevention strategies, collaboration, and assessment of current strengths and opportunities for growth. Institutions vary in their available budgets, staffing, and capacity to take on new prevention initiatives; however, advancing hazing prevention does not always require significant new resources. Many meaningful steps can be taken by building on existing programs, partnerships, and institutional priorities and by using free or low-cost tools and resources.

Consider these action steps as you continue to advance hazing prevention in your community:

1. Assess how your institution has built capacity and knowledge among faculty, staff, and other campus partners to recognize, prevent, and respond to hazing.
2. Identify key protective factors (elements of campus culture and climate that protect from or diminish the likelihood of hazing) your prevention programs and initiatives should strengthen, such as building leadership and ethical decision-making skills.
3. Examine salient risk factors your prevention efforts should aim to reduce, including power imbalances, groupthink, cultures that emphasize secrecy, or high-risk environments.
4. Review current primary prevention programs and initiatives on related health topics on campus and identify opportunities to integrate hazing prevention education into these existing strategies.
5. Consider how hazing prevention efforts can be sustained through ongoing training, partnerships, evaluation, and alignment with broader institutional priorities.

StopHazing and the Hazing Prevention Research Lab offer a range of research-based and research-informed resources, tools, and training opportunities to support campuses in advancing sustainable hazing prevention aligned with both compliance requirements and institutional values.



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