

## U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Unhealthy Drug Use

*Clinicians should ask adults about their drug use and connect people who have a problem to care; more research needed to make a recommendation for teens*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – June 9, 2020 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today published a final recommendation statement on screening for unhealthy drug use. For the first time, there is enough evidence for the Task Force to recommend that primary care clinicians ask adults about their drug use and connect people who have a problem with drugs to the care they need to get better. **This is a B recommendation.** However, there was not enough evidence to make a recommendation for or against screening teens ages 12 to 17, so the Task Force is calling for more research in this important population. **This is an I statement.**

### Grades in this recommendation:

- B:** Recommended.
- I:** The balance of benefits and harms cannot be determined.

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Drug use is among the most common causes of preventable death, injury, and disability in the United States. Approximately 1 in 10 Americans who are 18 or older report unhealthy drug use, which includes the use of illegal drugs and the use of prescription drugs in ways that are not recommended by a doctor. Screening for unhealthy drug use refers to asking questions about drug use—not testing someone’s urine, saliva, or blood. Screening can include questions on routine intake forms or asking patients questions during an office visit. Screening should be implemented when services for accurate diagnosis, effective treatment, and appropriate care can be offered or referred.

“The physical, mental, and social effects of drug use can be grave for both individuals and families,” says Task Force vice chair Karina Davidson, Ph.D., M.A.Sc. “The good news is that primary care clinicians can help by asking adults about their drug use and providing a connection to treatment and support for those who need it.”

The Task Force also reviewed the evidence on asking teens about their unhealthy drug use but did not find enough evidence to make a recommendation for or against screening. Parents or caregivers who are concerned about teen drug use or who see physical or behavioral evidence of drug use should talk to the teen’s clinician about further assessment.

“We recognize the importance of addressing drug use in teens, but we need more research before we can make a recommendation for or against screening,” says Task Force member Carol Mangione, M.D., M.S.P.H. “In the absence of this evidence, clinicians should rely on their professional judgement to determine how best to help their teen patients.”

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement and corresponding evidence summary have been published online in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, as well as on the Task Force website at <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. A draft version of the recommendation statement and evidence review were available for public comment from August 13, 2019, to September 9, 2019.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Davidson is senior vice president of research, dean of academic affairs, and head of a new center focused on behavioral and cardiovascular health research at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research at Northwell Health. She is also a professor of behavioral medicine at the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra University/Northwell Health.

Dr. Mangione is the chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine and Health Services Research and the Barbara A. Levey, M.D., and Gerald S. Levey, M.D., endowed chair in medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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