

# Introduction

## TAKING CHARGE: Community-Based Environmental Risk Reduction

A two-hour course manual,  
part of a training series  
designed to engage California cities  
in preventing and reducing  
alcohol and drug problems

Product of Prevention by Design,  
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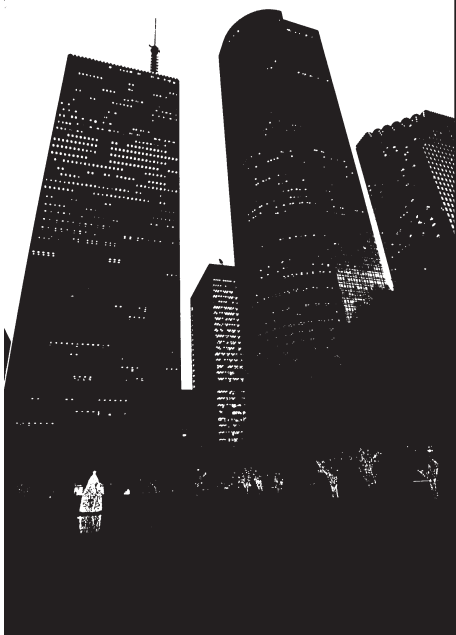
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# 1. Workshop Overview

## Purpose

This workshop introduces a systematic way that local communities - public agencies, organizations, and concerned groups and individuals - can manage (reduce) public health and safety problems related to the use and availability of alcohol and other drugs (AOD). Fried Wittman, Ph.D., director of Prevention by Design, developed the core concepts based on fifteen years of work with cities. He has drawn upon the work and experience of other prevention experts and local community experiences over this period. TAKING CHARGE seeks to disseminate this collective experience. This introductory workshop is based on an extensive manual developed by Dr. Wittman.

The complete manual is designed to be used in combination with free, available technical assistance to California counties and cities; the manual can also be used as a self-instructing resource to community groups interested in managing alcohol and drug risk in their communities.

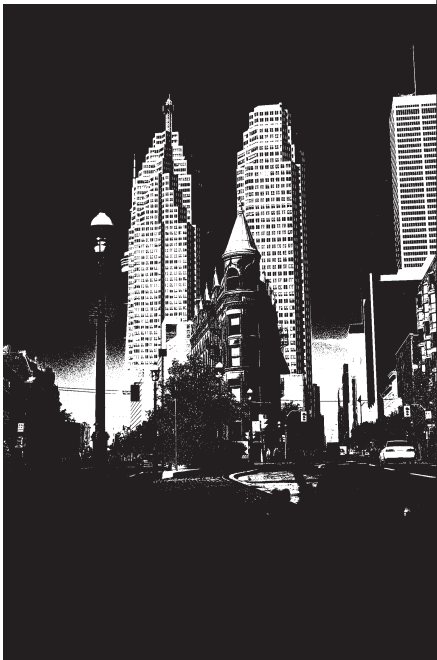
This workshop places TAKING CHARGE within the context of various purposes and scope of AOD prevention. The workshop also highlights how AOD problems are integrated in the range of issues and problems facing communities.

The workshop provides an overview on how TAKING CHARGE works:

- a) Identifying problem environments
- b) Using the three actor model of accountability
- c) Creating or enhancing a working group and coalition to manage C-BEER implementation
- d) Developing monitoring, data collection and evaluation methods to track project outcomes and needs in a continuous and systematic way.

## Workshop Objectives

- Introduce the TAKING CHARGE prevention model
- Increase perception of TAKING CHARGE prevention as a viable, doable approach that can improve community environments
- Stimulate interest in TAKING CHARGE model implementation in your community



## 2. Prevention in Context



### Expected Outcomes

- Participants understand focus and scale considerations for prevention
- Participants understand where TAKING CHARGE fits in the prevention continuum
- Participants can recognize one to three problem environments in their own community
- Participants can identify three actors with accountability for the problem environment
- Participants can name at least five potential members for an Alcohol Policy Workgroup
- Participants can identify a community group who can adopt TAKING CHARGE as part of their prevention agenda.

Most people understand the value of prevention; as the saying goes, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. However, preventing alcohol and drug problems is a complex process and related outcomes can be challenging to document.

In addition, there are many different prevention approaches used by a variety of community interests. The TAKING CHARGE model is based on the theory that alcohol and drug problems can be reduced by changing the community environments (broadly defined) where alcohol and drug use happens. This model—often called environmental prevention -targets community policies and enforcement priorities for managing alcohol/drug risk environments.

TAKING CHARGE specifically mobilizes cities - municipal agencies, community groups and residents - to use environmental strategies to manage risk environments.

Other approaches target individuals, generally youth, with information/ education/skills about the negative consequences of alcohol and drug use, and may help youth learn how to resist the invitation to use substances.

In fact, these two approaches are complementary, as the “invitation to use” comes from the community culture in symbolic and direct ways through advertising, sales practices and norms.

The focus of prevention can be sorted into three main categories:

- Problem oriented prevention, or a direct focus on alcohol and drug problems themselves;
- Focus on changing root causes or contributing conditions;
- Focus on youth development or positive assets development.

It's important to note that the role of the environment is embedded in all of these various orientations. For example, young people can develop leadership and problem solving skills by documenting their alcohol and drug environments and becoming change agents to reduce risk in these community environments (see [www.yli.org](http://www.yli.org) for examples).

Prevention efforts can occur at three levels in terms of scale:

- Low—individuals and families
- Medium—community institutions or neighborhoods
- Large—large scale changes, such as changing community policies regarding local ordinances about the location of alcohol outlets.

### **TAKING CHARGE Part of Prevention Continuum**

Managing risk in community environments is a needed complement to other prevention models. Research has demonstrated that information/education strategies alone are not sufficient to reduce alcohol and drug problem use. Reducing environmental risk by establishing community policy and enforcement priorities creates significant long-lasting change for current and future individuals passing through these environments. The environmental approach is a needed reinforcement to all education approaches.



## **3. TAKING CHARGE in Context**

TAKING CHARGE dissemination is timely for a number of reasons:

- The federal government is pushing for accountability for public investments across the board; the state government has passed this push on to city and county governments, including requirements for performance based contracting.
  - ➔ Accountability is a centerpiece of the model
- The County Alcohol and Drug Program Administrators Association of California and the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs has funded Prevention by Design to explicitly help county programs meet these demands for accountability through a five-step planning and evaluation process;
  1. Identify the Problems
  2. Prioritize the Problems
  3. Set Measurable Outcomes
  4. Use Proven Methods
  5. Evaluate and Monitor your Results
- TAKING CHARGE collects more than fifteen years of community field experience with the environmental model, and relies on evidence-based

## 4. Alcohol & Drug Problems are not Stand-Alone Issues in Communities

practice. TAKING CHARGE creates a local system to identify specific alcohol and drug problems - and take action that results in measurable change.

- The evidence is in. Several California cities now serve as powerful models to others about the effectiveness of the TAKING CHARGE approach.

A related motivation to participate in TAKING CHARGE is that many communities are challenged by a myriad of alcohol and drug related issues that decrease quality of life and strain public systems of care and safety nets.

It's important to understand that addiction is the visible tip of the iceberg of alcohol and drug problems. Your community may also face high levels of alcohol and drug-related violence and public nuisance, driving under the influence crashes, underage drinking and other problems that appear to "pop up" in law enforcement, medical, education and other community institutions.

These problems result from a combination of factors:

- Personal behavior
- The environmental surrounding sales and consumption
- The substance itself—alcohol and other drugs each have unique variables that influence how problems are manifested

TAKING CHARGE focuses on the community environments, which, unlike the other contributing factors, can relatively easily be changed in ways that minimize related problems.

We must first pay attention to the term "community environment". This is best understood as the sum of three parts:



## 5. Specifically Where Are The Problem Environments?

1. Entities with power in the community, such as public agencies, organizations or legislators;
2. Institutions with traditions and practices, such as schools, faith organizations and workplaces
3. Physical and social settings where people interact, such as commercial settings, parks and other public and private areas, events, and parties.

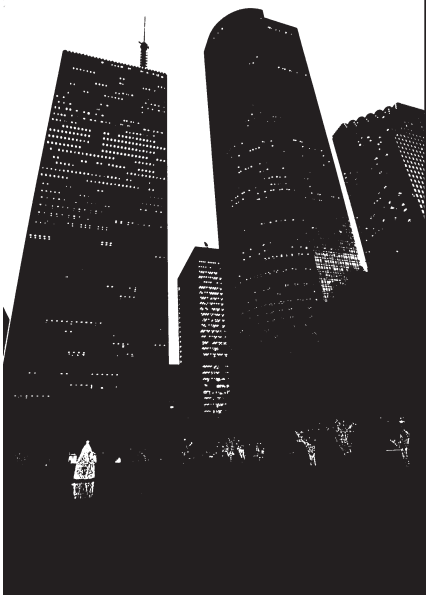
Prevention advocates must complete a “search and recover” mission as a first step to understand how AOD problems are manifested in these community environments. TAKING CHARGE organizes the community process in the following sequence:

1. Identify community alcohol and drug problems in a local context. This process of discovery is detailed below.
2. Select priorities and strategies. The community must identify where to begin, and select effective, proven strategies to use that can reduce risk in these problem environments.
3. Use local policy tools to modify the problem environments. A range of effective tools exists -all to be customized and fit for the local community -that are also detailed in the companion extensive manual.
4. Evaluate and monitor results. Vigilance is required; monitoring can help local government identify success as well as needs for further refinement.

TAKING CHARGE helps by organizing a municipal working group composed of representatives from relevant city agencies, such as police, planning and code enforcement. Ideally, the working group is balanced by a community-based coalition of more grass-roots stakeholders. These coalitions often exist through the auspices of county-funded prevention services or as purely local groups, such as Neighborhood Watches. The two groups function as a complete prevention system within a city.

TAKING CHARGE draws upon collective experience as well as offers unique ways to expand community understanding of AOD problems. This assessment process also completes Step One of the Five-Step process required for effective prevention practice.

Alcohol and drug problems are the proverbial elephant in the living room —everyone sees a different angle and is challenged to correctly name the

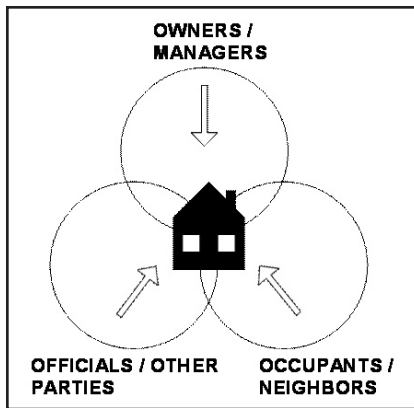


problem. In order to understand the scope and nature of local community problems, several tools are available:

- **ARCHIVAL DATA**, such as hospital records, police data, treatment data. A compilation of these data for your county is available in an annual handbook from the Community Prevention Institute, at [www.ca-cpi.org/aindicator\\_map.htm](http://www.ca-cpi.org/aindicator_map.htm).
- **SURVEY DATA**, such as annual student surveys (See the West Ed site at [www.wested.org/pub/docs/chks\\_surveys.html](http://www.wested.org/pub/docs/chks_surveys.html)), arrestee interviews or national household surveys. Local systems can develop their own survey tools, such as in Orange County, where an adult household survey was conducted on a variety of health issues, including substance abuse.
- **INTERVIEWS**, such as key informant interviews of leaders and gatekeepers, focus groups, and “Knock-and-talks” in neighborhoods. Technical assistance is available to train coalition members on interview and survey development skills.
- **DIRECT OBSERVATIONS** record events as they actually occur, such as drug-dealing on a street corner. Observations are gathered through Hotlines, or by using forms created to capture the specific information you’re looking for. Volunteers and youth can observe retail practices, for example, related to alcohol and tobacco sales. This information serves as a base for subsequent law or code enforcement action.
- **HEARINGS** gather information in fact-gathering sessions on a specific policy under consideration or in less formal settings.
- **DATA MAPPING** is a technique to pull the data together in one place. A data map describes the types of data needed to describe AOD problems, and organizes the information in relation to the problem or project at hand. Data mapping is extremely useful for program planning and evaluation. Again, the Regional Trainer is available to help with all aspects of data mapping.
- **GIS MAPPING** is more and more available as a tool to understand community alcohol and drug problems. Dr. Wittman has developed the Alcohol Sensitive Information Planning System (ASIPS) which adds GIS identifiers to police calls for service to map specific locations and types of crimes that involve alcohol and other drugs.



## 6. Environmental Accountability: Who's on First?



At the center of action in the TAKING CHARGE is the principle of accountability. Given the large role that the environment plays in creating the problem, exactly who has the power to modify this environment? Generally there are three actors or stakeholders who hold the key to improving risk environments:

- The owner/manager—responsible for day-to-day policy
- The occupant/neighbors—users of the environment
- Officials and public agencies—responsible to address specific alcohol and drug problems

TAKING CHARGE essentially organizes stakeholders in a process to:

1. Understand the nature of the problems (especially in relation to the data)
2. Focus on priorities and
3. Use proven tools to reduce the problems.

### City of Oxnard a Model

Oxnard used a similar approach to build a comprehensive system to manage alcohol. Using ASIPS and other data, the city developed a strong conditional use permit, a deemed approved ordinance, and requires responsible beverage service for special events. In addition, the Police Department has a dedicated Alcohol Prevention officer to make sure the system functions. The City works closely with a community coalition, CARE-VC, to identify resident concerns. Crime has dropped by more than half, and DUI rates fell by 23 percent.

Once the process is rolling, monitoring and evaluation become important. The process creates a data trail that also documents the prevention outcomes, aligned with state and federal reporting requirements.

For community action, TAKING CHARGE draws upon tools and strategies from nearly two decades of research and practice in prevention. These tools include municipal zoning and land use ordinances, special event management, nuisance abatement and organization/institution policies.

TAKING CHARGE is implemented in a collaborative manner by two related groups:

- 1) An Alcohol/Drug Policy Working Group (APWG) composed of principally official and municipal agencies and
- 2) A Community Coalition that is made up of residents and community organizations, involved area prevention contractors. Every community will be different; these groups may already exist in some cities or made need to be developed.



## 7. Management through Collaboration

The APWG is actively focused on analyzing the data, selecting priorities and strategies for action, coordinating action across city agencies and monitoring results. Typically APWG members are drawn from public safety, planning, community development, city manager, park and recreation and related departments. The APWG is very much a technical problem-solving group.

The Community Coalition works in a complimentary way to the APWG to identify community priorities for action, organize community interest, help gather data and information, serve a surveillance function and advocate for policy as needed.

Ideally TAKING CHARGE has a local sponsor (such as the County prevention agency) to support two positions: a local organizer and a data specialist

TAKING CHARGE brings a proven model into California cities by organizing a process and constituents. This focus on cities is timely for a number of reasons:

- **CITIES HAVE THE REAL POWER TO MANAGE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS.** Local control provides plenty of fuel for this prevention engine, and cities are experienced in using land use and enforcement tools for the public good.
- **TAKING CHARGE STIMULATES EFFECTIVE USE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES.** County and municipal agencies each carry a burden of alcohol and drug problems, and related costs, that are preventable. Police and EMT calls for alcohol and drug related services can be reduced and these resources can be directed to other priorities. Resources that had been exclusively directed to responding to alcohol/drug problems (enforcement and treatment) can now be directed to prevention and compliance, thereby reducing the need for response services.
- **TAKING CHARGE WORKS.** The model relies upon proven, effective strategies. Cities are a terrific lens to see prevention at work, and to document results in ways that make a difference to residents as well as state and federal government.
- **HELP IS AVAILABLE.** TAKING CHARGE is being rolled out to several California communities right now by Prevention by Design. TAKING CHARGE dissemination is supported by the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, and County Alcohol and Drug Program Administrators Association of California

## 8. Why Cities?

**“You can do it,  
we are here  
ready to help”**