Prevention science plays a vital role in human health and well-being. The enormous benefits of prevention efforts—in terms of reduced economic burden and human suffering—are undeniable. Imagine a world in which future cases of gun violence, substance use disorder, and child maltreatment are stopped before they even begin. Although it can be difficult to recognize the benefits of prevention in today’s world, we need only to be mindful of the world around us and notice positive outcomes in youth, families, and communities—and know that important factors have been at work, often for many years, to contribute to those successes.

In 1998, Mark Greenberg joined the faculty at Penn State and established the Prevention Research Center to focus on building and disseminating evidence-based solutions to prevent negative outcomes, including adolescent behavior problems, poor parenting, and academic failure. Early on, Mark identified a key partner in his efforts to build this internationally renowned research center: Edna Bennett Pierce. The impact of Edna’s early investment in the Center has multiplied over the years, and her devotion to its growth and impact remain strong today.

The Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center shares the College of Health and Human Development’s mission to enrich human well-being and strengthen intellectual, social, physical, economic, and emotional wellness. Our center is an intellectual hub, research engine, and springboard for programming around understanding the causes of social problems and building an evidence-base for their solutions. Our shared values cross disciplinary boundaries: Collaboration. Compassion. Curiosity. Impact. Integrity.

The future of prevention science will integrate advances made in technology and biomedical research; it will be sensitive to the changing needs of our population and the diversity among us; it will focus on promoting human flourishing; it will influence policymakers at all levels of the government; and it will continue to advance us toward an even brighter future.

Message from the Director
Stephanie T. Lanza
C. Eugene Bennett Chair in Prevention Research Director, Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center Interim Director, Consortium to Combat Substance Abuse Professor of Biobehavioral Health

Our focus areas

Promoting Human Flourishing
We cultivate important research and interventions focusing on promoting human flourishing—in terms of social-emotional development, mindfulness, compassion, and resilience—in the service of supporting diversity engagement and community well-being.

Training the Next Generation of Prevention Scientists
We have a long-standing tradition of mentoring and training graduate students and post-doctoral scholars, with many going on to lead prominent prevention research centers, excelling in their careers, and carrying on the tradition by mentoring others.

Foundational Science
Because changing behaviors requires a full understanding of their etiology, we take a contemporary, interdisciplinary approach to investigating risk, protection, and biological underpinnings of human health and behavior.

Innovation in Intervention Development
We develop and revitalize innovative and evidence-based interventions to maximize the relevance, reach, and impact in the everyday lives of individuals.

Dissemination and Implementation Science: Promoting Sustainable Impact
We support and investigate the conditions and processes necessary for the scale-up and dissemination and implementation of evidence-based programs to benefit individuals, families, and communities.

Scientific Outreach to Impact Policy and the Public
We communicate with key audiences to shape public understanding and policies at the federal, state, and local level, for improved public health.

Testimonial
Prevention science plays a vital role in human health and well-being. The enormous benefits of prevention efforts—in terms of reduced economic burden and human suffering—are undeniable. Imagine a world in which future cases of gun violence, substance use disorder, and child maltreatment are stopped before they even begin. Although it can be difficult to recognize the benefits of prevention in today’s world, we need only to be mindful of the world around us and notice positive outcomes in youth, families, and communities—and know that important factors have been at work, often for many years, to contribute to those successes.

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"The PRC is a world leader in prevention science, its faculty are internationally known for their cutting-edge research on the prevention of health problems. Our students and faculty routinely access articles, briefings and trainings led by PRC faculty."

—Prevention Science Institute, University of Oregon
**We “Do” Prevention Science.**

At the PRC, we work at the intersection of research, technology and practice to replace risky behaviors with protective behaviors and promote human flourishing.

We work with individuals, families and communities to help prevent addiction, physical and mental illness, adolescent behavior problems, academic failure, domestic violence, and more.

Our work doesn’t stop with science. Programs developed by the PRC and its faculty affiliates are being used across the globe. Here is a sampling:

**Family Foundations**
The Family Foundations program, funded by the National Institutes for Health, is a transition-to-parenthood program for couples that has demonstrated positive long-term impacts on children’s mental and behavioral health. By developing and practicing communication skills in 8 sessions before and after birth, couples build supportive co-parenting relationships—thereby reducing parental stress, depression, conflict and violence. We are now testing adaptations of the program for high-risk groups such as low-income couples, pregnant teens, heavy alcohol users, parents of a child with autism, and military families. The program has been adapted for research and use in countries on five continents; the Coparenting Relationship Scale, a measure developed and validated in the course of research on Family Foundations, has been translated and adapted for use in about 18 countries. Developer: Mark Feinberg

**Head Start/REDI (Research-based, Developmentally Informed)**
The REDI program was developed at Penn State as a way to build upon the existing Head Start program, which provides preschool education to low-income children. The REDI program aims to improve social and emotional skills, as well as early literacy and listening skills, by incorporating stories, puppets and other activities that introduce concepts like understanding feelings, cooperation, friendship skills and self-control skills. This program is funded by the National Institutes of Health, which has also funded the development of REDI programming for parents, an adapted version of REDI for childcare centers, and a longitudinal follow-up study of preschool participants through high school. Developer: Karen Bierman

**HealthWise South Africa**
Two studies, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, aimed to address HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, and substance use and promote positive use of free time among South African high school students in low income areas in the Western Cape. Collaborating with colleagues in South Africa, researchers evaluated the effectiveness of the HealthWise curriculum. In the second study, they sought to understand factors that increased implementation fidelity. Over 16,000 youth and approximately 70 teachers across 56 schools provided data. Developers: Linda Caldwell and Edward Smith

**PATHS® (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)**
The PATHS® curriculum, developed with funding from the National Institutes of Health, is a comprehensive program for promoting emotional and social competencies and reducing aggression and behavior problems in elementary school-aged children while simultaneously enhancing the educational process in the classroom. This innovative curriculum is designed to be used by educators and counselors in a multi-year, universal prevention model. Developers: Mark Greenberg, Carol A. Kusché, Celene Domitrovich, Rebecca Cortes

**Power of Parents**
The Power of Parents program empowers parents of middle school and high school students to have ongoing, intentional conversations about the dangers and consequences of underage drinking. All program materials were written by and based upon the research of Robert Turkis. The books and brochures for middle school and high school students are available in English and Spanish, and have been reaching a new family every 15 minutes for the past 8-10 years, according to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Developer: MADD, in consultation with Robert Turkis

**TESTIMONIAL**

The PRC’s impressive presence at our Society for Prevention Research conference, year after year, is just one indication of its influence in the world of prevention science. Each and every year, the conference program highlights the PRC’s outstanding, wide-ranging, cutting-edge contributions to our field, whether they be in the arenas of intervention, implementation/scale-up and policy research, or innovative methodologies, or training our next generation of prevention scientists. Most notably, over the years, these contributions clearly are translating to ongoing, positive impacts on the health and well-being of our children, families and communities.

Richard Spoth, Ph.D.
F. Wendell Miller Senior Prevention Scientist
Director, Partnerships in Prevention Science Institute
Iowa State University
The PROSPER (PROmoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience) delivery system supports the sustained, quality delivery of scientifically-proven programs for middle-school youth and their families. The programs offered through PROSPER have a successful track record of preventing risky behavior in youth, promoting positive youth development, and strengthening families. Our partnership approach includes ongoing evaluation and technical assistance to ensure that programs are implemented as intended, teams continue to perform effectively, and partnership goals are being met.

Community Coalitions
Research has consistently shown that community coalitions can produce positive health and behavioral outcomes for children and families. Communities That Care (CTC) is a framework for helping communities to use local data to assess their needs and then to select and implement evidence-based programs, policies, and practices that will address the problems they face and leverage their strengths. We support CTC and other coalition models throughout Pennsylvania.

SPEPT™
The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEPT™) is a scoring system that is used to estimate the impact of juvenile justice programs on reducing recidivism. The SPEP is a validated and data-driven rating system for evaluating effectiveness of juvenile justice programs.

The EPISCenter works closely with juvenile probation departments and juvenile justice service providers to conduct the SPEP. From preparing for the SPEP, to making sense of the assessment findings, to performance improvement, our staff are involved every step of the way.

TESTIMONIAL
The Prevention Research Center has been a pioneer in supporting the strong implementation of tested effective prevention interventions, and building community and state prevention infrastructure to build self-regulating communities to reduce adolescent problems and promote youth development.

Richard F. Catalano, Ph.D.
Co-founder, Social Development Research Group, School of Social Work, University of Washington
The National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives

The National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives (NPSC), housed within the PRC, was formed as a vehicle to facilitate the use of prevention science findings and evidence-based practices to improve social conditions that otherwise contribute to poor mental, behavioral and physical health. The NPSC is comprised of more than 700 scientists, educators, clinicians, practitioners, community stakeholders, policymakers and advocates, and is formally affiliated with nearly 70 national organizations and agencies. Domains of interest include inequalities and disparities, mental health, substance misuse, poverty, juvenile justice, child development and welfare, violence, and police-community relations, just to name a few. NPSC is uniquely situated to communicate scientifically-backed information directly to members of congress, as well as state legislative offices in the form of congressional briefings, in-person meetings, policy statements, op-eds and other media. In addition, NPSC is coordinating the formation of a new Congressional Prevention Policy Caucus on Capitol Hill.

Policy Briefs on Social and Emotional Learning

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the PRC have embarked on a journey to create policy briefs about social and emotional learning (SEL) to inform educators, leadership and policymakers. To date, current research has been synthesized and briefs produced for 10 key SEL topics: evidence-based practices in infancy, the preschool years, and in the elementary, middle and high school contexts, as well as briefs on school climate, teacher stress, parental involvement, the role of peer relations, equity, and the economic benefits of social and emotional learning investments. A summary brief was also produced. Additional briefs are being prepared with a focus on “what’s next” in terms of innovative strategies with potential to address the critical remaining challenges and opportunities for the sustainable scaling of SEL in families, schools and communities.

The Science of Using Prevention Science to Impact Policy

Through support from the William T. Grant, Susan and Michael Dell and Doris Duke Charitable Foundations, members of the PRC are working to grow scientific inquiry into how to best translate prevention science for policy audiences and facilitate its use in public policy decision-making. This includes better understanding how and when prevention research is being used in policy settings, modeling how policymakers’ beliefs, perspectives and backgrounds influence their legislative behavior, and conducting experimental research influencing policymakers’ behavior around the use of prevention research. Initiatives include the Research-to-Policy Collaboration Model, federal and state messaging trials, and rapid response efforts to meet the growing demands for scientific evidence in policy contexts.

DID YOU KNOW?

Penn State’s Administrative Data Accelerator leverages administrative data to accelerate the research-to-impact process, supporting 60+ faculty, 30+ active research projects, and 21+ active grants.
Penn State SELF (Student Engagement, Learning and Flourishing)
Research team: Stephanie Lanza, Gregory Fosco, H. Harrington (Bo) Cleveland
Penn State SELF is an intensive study of the health and well-being of a key population: Penn State undergraduate students across the Commonwealth. The data, to include 21 daily assessments and DNA, will serve as a resource for Penn State researchers studying young adult flourishing and provide the University with information that could enhance student experiences. This project is funded as part of Penn State’s Strategic Initiative Funding program, with co-sponsorship from the Social Science Research Institute and the Huck Institutes for the Life Sciences.

Mindfulness for College Students: The Art and Science of Human Flourishing Course
Research team: Robert Roese, Blake Colaianne, Mark Greenberg
Penn State, along with the University of Virginia and the University of Wisconsin, is conducting a quasi-experimental, matched-control group study using pre- and post-test data from college students taking “The Art and Science of Human Flourishing” to evaluate possible outcomes from the course, including increases in mindfulness, empathy, and compassion; an enhanced sense of meaning and purpose; improvements in mental health; and decreases in anxiety and depressive symptoms.

“The Watch Over: Using Apple Watches to Assess and Predict Substance Co-use in Young Adults”
Research team: Saeed Abdullah, Ashley Linden-Carmichael
The goal of this study is to observe substance use (alcohol, marijuana, vaping, and other drugs) and the combined use of multiple substances in young adults’ daily lives. Participants will respond to questions on either an Apple Watch or an iPhone in real time about their substance use, stress level, mood, and social context. We hope to gain insight about the emotional and situational conditions under which substance use and co-use occur to deliver intervention content to their own devices in moments of greatest risk.

Project OPTIONS: Examining the Efficacy of a Brief, Physician-Delivered Behavioral Intervention to Reduce Skin Cancer Risk
Research team: Kimberly Mallett, Robert Turrisi, Elizabeth Billingsley (Milton S. Hershey Medical Center)
The OPTIONS study seeks to combat the rising incidence and mortality of skin cancer which is the most common malignancy in the U.S. We developed a brief, 2-3 minute intervention designed to enhance patients’ use of sun protection, delivered by dermatologists. Patients who received the intervention reported significantly fewer sunburns and increased their use and consistent reapplication of sunscreen across 3 months.

“Alexa, I’m in pain!” A Real-Time Mindfulness Intervention to Control Pain: Delivery Through a Conversational Agent
Research team: Saeed Abdullah, Sebrina Doyle
This project will leverage the Amazon Alexa ecosystem to deliver interactive, personalized mindfulness practices based on techniques from the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program to support pain management strategies that can reduce opioid use in a low-cost, scalable, and accessible way. This project will evaluate how well this platform can build trust and rapport and obtain sustained high engagement with practices over a long period of time.

Better Together: Advancing STEM and Social Emotional Learning Through Pre-K Play
Research team: Karen Bierman, Meg Small, Lynn Liben, Jessica Menold, Scarlett Miller, Jennifer Connell, Sabrina Voltaire
Discovering that most STEM toys such as puzzles and blocks emphasize cognitive skills but limit parent-child experiences that support exploration, creativity, and joint problem solving, an interdisciplinary team is designing new play experiences that engage both parents and children. The team designed toys, a book series, and innovative activities to extend learning into real world contexts such as playgrounds and museums. Helping children to become curious, collaborative, scientific thinkers and doers will prepare them well for academic and career success. This study is funded by the National Science Foundation.
IMPACT
We forge new avenues to promote flourishing and prevent suffering.

COLLABORATION
We unite people with diverse perspectives to create sustainable solutions.

COMPASSION
We care for each other as we promote the well-being of all people.

CURIOSITY
We question the status quo and innovate to solve problems, while addressing the complexities of individuals, families and communities.

INTEGRITY
We serve our stakeholders with courage, honesty and scientific rigor.

prevention.psu.edu
prevention@psu.edu
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