

### Why get involved with reducing substance abuse?

**According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, substance abuse is the number one health priority facing the nation today.** Substance abuse also underlies many of the other problems we see in our communities, from domestic violence and academic failure to poverty, unemployment and crime, even some mental illness.

Early use of alcohol has been proven to affect brain development. A child who regularly uses alcohol or other drugs under the age of 15 is four times more likely to become dependent and experience other social, legal and health problems. The national average age when youth first use alcohol is 11 years for boys and 13 years for girls.

An effective community response to substance abuse requires a comprehensive strategy that involves multiple sectors of the community. Part of the solution is helping the public make the connection between substance abuse and its influence over other serious conditions in the community. Local coalitions employ education and awareness strategies, as well as specific programs and policies to reduce access to substances and decrease substance abuse, but many times they are missing a crucial element—access to the hearts and minds of the of the people.

Media that is committed to illuminating the depth and breadth of the issue can be instrumental in creating awareness and inspiring action in the community. A well-informed audience will make better, wiser decisions.

### What's in it for the media?

Local coalitions have great respect for their media partners. They are loyal and like you, they see media as a valuable tool to inform and educate. Here are some reasons why you will benefit from this relationship:

**Educate the public on an important health and public safety priority**—substance abuse is identified as one of the top three problems in most communities from both the health and public safety perspective. By championing one of the communities' key concerns, you have aligned yourself with an issue that touches everyone and you have a significant opportunity to heighten awareness and influence public understanding of the issue.

**Be a part of the solution**—by involving yourself in a community coalition to reduce substance abuse, you gain access to potentially newsworthy perspectives, local, state and national experts, current research and an opportunity to be a part of the solution.

**Create a vital communication link**—reducing substance abuse is a long-term proposition. Many times what is missing at the coalition level is the ability to keep the public informed and cultivate ongoing support for evolving goals, projects, important changes and new ideas. Media attention highlights progress and rejuvenates the crucial public will that sustains progress through the long haul.

Ultimately media creates credibility and drives public opinion among its audience. It empowers community members with knowledge and ideas and gives them a sense of ownership in the change process. We encourage you to exercise this influence to create a safer, healthier community now and for our future.