

# Characterizing Higher Education Prevention Professionals in Missouri

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 24 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies. The PIP Coalition is involved in a project collaboration with a research team at the University of Missouri examining support tools for faculty and staff engaged in alcohol and substance prevention work on college campuses. As part of this project, over 100 PIP coalition members took part in a survey about their experiences. The purpose of this research brief is to provide a snapshot of the characteristics of prevention professionals in institutions of higher education (in the PIP coalition) across the state of Missouri, regarding educational attainment and professional experience.

## Introduction

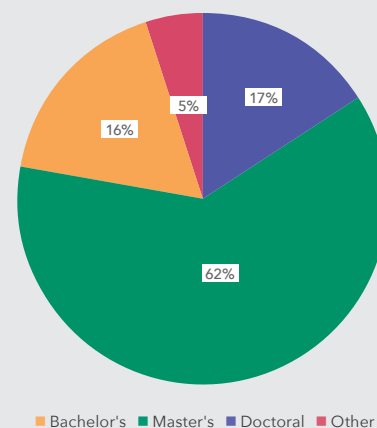
Professionals working in prevention on college campuses offer a wide variety of perspectives based on years of professional experience, roles held, education, and their own lived experience. These differing knowledge bases and skill sets are vital in delivering evidence-based practice and meeting the needs of diverse student populations. Retaining, supporting, and developing the skills of prevention professionals as individuals and teams is key in effectively preventing student substance use, as well as other health and wellness concerns. Under resourced efforts, often lacking in continuity of care, may impact rates of student substance use.

## Educational Attainment

Missouri prevention professionals are a highly educated demographic, with 62% of survey respondents reporting having obtained a master's degree, and 17% report having earned a doctoral degree, greatly surpassing national averages. In

the United States, 32% of residents (employed in all industries) report obtaining a bachelor's degree and 13% report having obtained an advanced degree (master's and/or doctorate) (McElrath, 2021) (Staff, 2019).

**Chart 1 - Rates of earning an advanced degree\***



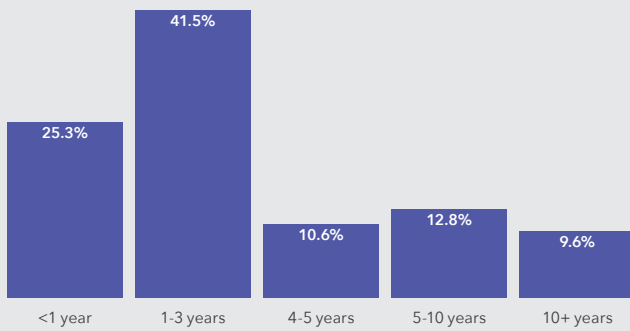
## Leadership

60% of prevention professionals report serving in a leadership role. This is defined as supervising full time staff, part time staff, or student staff/peer educators.

## Years of Experience in the Field

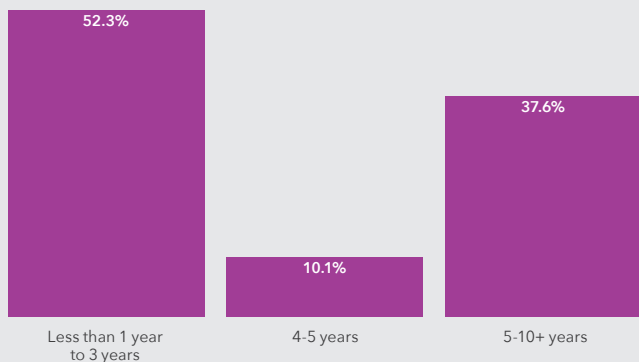
30.9% of prevention professionals report working in prevention/treatment in a college setting for 1-3 years, and 21.3% reporting 10+ years. However, only 11.7% reporting working in prevention/treatment for 4-5 years. This loss of professionals with an intermediate

Chart 2 - How long have you been in your current position?



experience level is also reflected in those working in positions in which substance related interventions for college students was part of their role, with only 6.4% reporting 4-5 years of experience. This trend continues for professionals engaged in alcohol related interventions for college students, with only 7.5% reporting 4-5 years of experience.

Chart 3 - How long have you worked in a profession in which alcohol-related intervention for college students was part of the job?



## Implications

Student affairs professionals have high rates of attrition, with approximately 50-60% leaving the field

within 5 years of graduation, on par with attrition rates of early childhood educators (Buford,2021). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a spike in staff attrition, and institutions are having difficulty replacing departed staff (Lederman, 2022). Mental health concerns and treatment needs on campuses have been steadily rising, and many institutions are facing higher student to faculty ratios post pandemic (Umpierres, 2021, Xiao,2017). Commonly cited motivations for resignation include lack of support, increased workload, and lack of recognition (Thompson,2018).

In Missouri, this lack of retention of prevention professionals with an intermediate experience level (4-5 years) may represent a loss of knowledge of institutional structures and processes, and insight on modern student receptiveness and preferences towards prevention efforts and interventions. The perspective gained from this experience level could ideally be transferred to newer professionals to bolster their preparedness and to senior level leaders in informing planning and policy making decisions. Additionally, this suggests that there may be a lack of continuity in services being provided directly to students at four-year colleges and universities. Importantly, current and past data suggests efforts should be devoted to retaining and supporting prevention staff.

## Resources

For more information on the "College Alcohol Intervention Matrix (College AIM): Adoption and Implementation Across College Campuses" study reported here, contact Ashley Helle, PhD at hellelab@umsystem.edu. This study is ongoing and further findings will be shared with the PIP coalition via future publications. This study is funded by NIH (AA028543; PI: Helle).

There are many resources available in the "Prevention Toolbox". The Alcohol and High-Risk topic discusses high risk drinking behavior and Alcohol Use Disorder

(AUD). The Prevention and Health Equity topic discusses culturally competent, trauma-informed, and intersectional prevention efforts pertinent to providing services to diverse campus communities.

Prevention Toolbox Links:

- [Alcohol and High-Risk Drinking](#)
- [Prevention and Health Equity](#)

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report prepared by Robin Arnold and Ashley Helle, Addiction Science Dissemination and Implementation Research Lab, Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri. Published May 2023.

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