Partners in Prevention

Missouri's higher education substance misuse prevention consortium

Volume 15 | Number 5

Intentions to Change Substance Use

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to building and sustaining healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 28 public and private colleges and universities in the state. The campuses in PIP work to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies including education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, cannabis, other drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health concerns have on student health and well-being. This brief focuses on intentions to change substance use among Missouri undergraduate college students.

The following are findings from the MACHB survey (N=4,759) of 4-year member institutions in Missouri from Spring 2026:

The Transtheoretical Model

The transtheoretical model, often referred to as the stages of change model, focuses on the decision-making of an individual and their intention to change a certain behavior[1]. The model consists of 6 stages which indicate a person's willingness and ability to change a behavior, which are described in Table 1 and visualized in Figure 1. The stages of the model can be entered and exited at any point and may not follow the natural progression from pre-contemplation to maintenance. The MACHB survey asks students to indicate if they are: 1) thinking about acting in a healthier/safer way, 2) ready to try acting in a healthier/safer way, or 3) currently trying to act in a healthier/safer way related to alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco/nicotine used.

Figure 1. Stages of Change Model

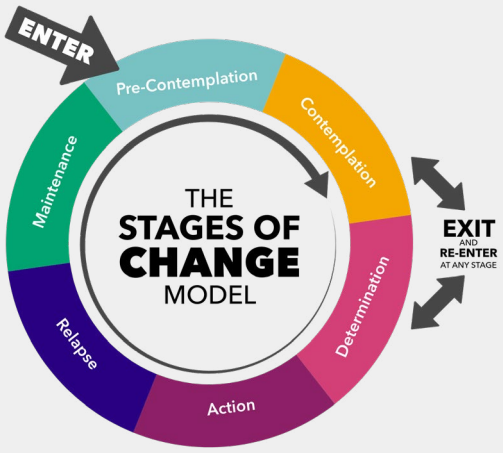


Table 1. Description of Stages of Change

Pre-Contemplation	No intention to take action; individuals are unaware that their behavior may be of concern
Contemplation	There is intention to start behavior change; individuals recognize issues with their behavior, but no action is taken
Determination (or Preparation)	Individuals are ready to act and begin to make small changes
Action	Active behavior change occurs
Maintenance	Behavior change is sustained and individuals work to prevent returning to previous behaviors
Relapse	Return to previous behaviors

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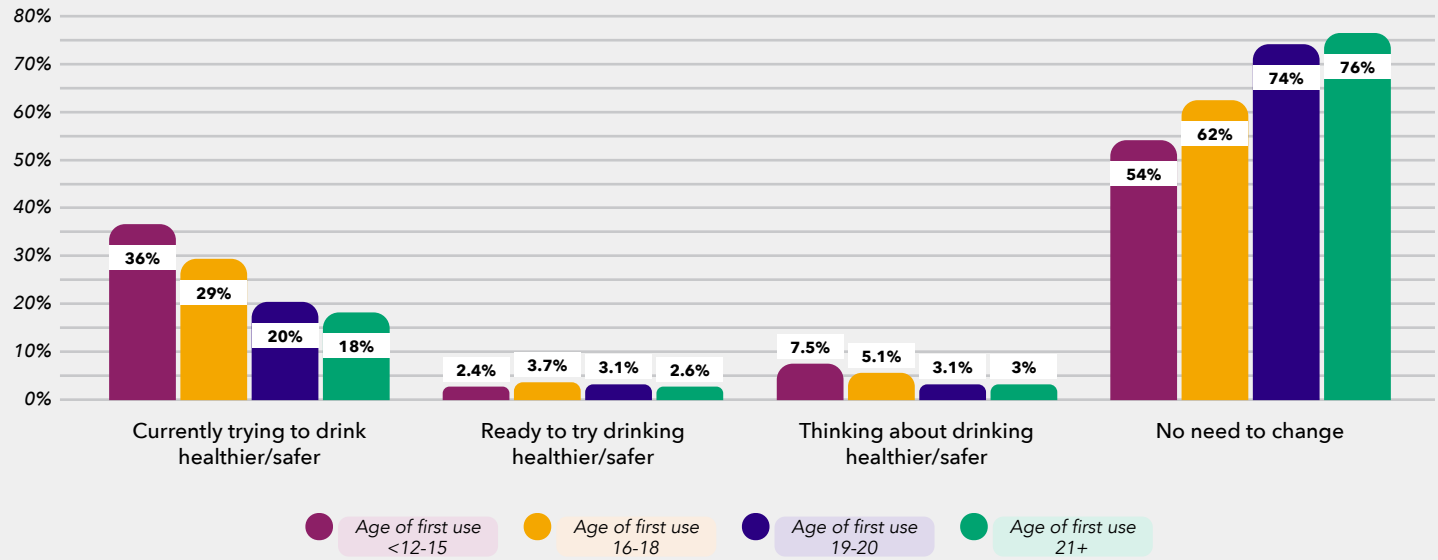
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Intentions to Change Alcohol Use

Of Missouri college students, 60% report consuming alcohol in the past year. Among all students who drink, 28% are currently trying to drink in a healthier and safer way, 3.1% are ready to try to drink and healthier and safer way, and 5.0% are thinking about drinking in a healthier and safer way. While these data are not overwhelming, it does indicate that around one-third (36%) of Missouri college students are contemplating or working to change their alcohol use behaviors.

The MACHB asks students to report how old they were when they first started consuming alcohol, and a younger age of first use is positively correlated with current intentions to change use, shown in **Chart 1**.

Chart 1. Intentions to Change Alcohol Use by Age of First Use



Students are asked to report if they have engaged in binge-drinking (consuming 5+ drinks for men or 4+ drinks for women in a two-hour period at least once in the past two weeks), and overall, 21% of Missouri college students report binge-drinking in the past two weeks. Interestingly students who did not binge drink were more likely to report that they were currently (33%), ready to try (5.7%), or thinking about (9.2%) drinking in a healthier or safer way compared to students who binge drink reporting that they are currently (25%), ready to try (1.8%), or thinking about (2.9%) drinking in a healthier/safer way. This demonstrates that some students engaging in more moderate alcohol use may be doing so because of experiencing consequences or previously engaging in higher risk use behaviors. These results are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Intentions to Change by Binge Drinking

	Students who do not binge drink	Students who binge drink
I am currently trying to drink in a healthier/safer way	33%	25%
I am ready to try drinking in a healthier/safer way	5.7%	1.8%
I am thinking about drinking in a healthier/safer way	9.2%	2.9%
I see no need to change the way I drink alcohol	52%	70%

Higher past month drinking frequency was also indicative of higher likelihood of intentions to change with students who reported consuming more often (6-19 days) saying they were currently, ready to try, or thinking about drinking in a healthier/safer way

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compared to students who did not drink in the past month or only drank 1-5 days, shown in Table 3.

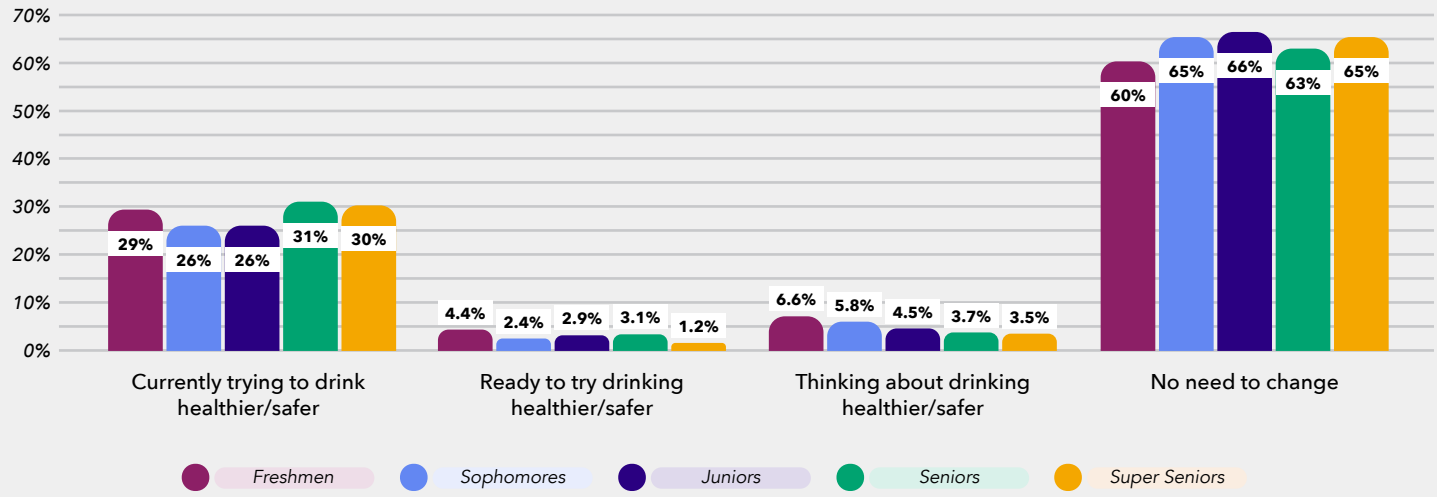
No significant differences were found in intentions to change alcohol use by age (over vs under 21), thoughts of transferring or quitting higher education, among those experiencing past year mental health concerns or suicidal ideation, or among those who did vs did not experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) before their 18th birthday.

However, intentions to change by year in school was one demographic category that showed more significant variation, with freshmen, seniors, and super seniors being more likely to indicate being in a stage of change, shown in Chart 2.

Table 3. Past Month Drinking Frequency and Intentions to Change

	Did not drink past month	Drank 1-5 days past month	Drank 6-19 days past month
I am currently trying to drink in a healthier/ safer way	**23%**	**27%**	**34%**
I am ready to try drinking in a healthier/ safer way	**1.4%**	**2.8%**	**4.8%**
I am thinking about drinking in a healthier/ safer way	**1.1%**	**4.2%**	**9.8%**

Chart 2. Intentions to Change Alcohol Use by Year in School



Intentions to Change Cannabis Use

Approximately 29% of Missouri college students report using cannabis at least once in the past year and 4.4% report daily use. Of all students who report using cannabis, 23% are currently trying to use less or quit, 4.6% are ready to use less or quit, and 10% are thinking about using less or quitting. Like intentions to change alcohol use, around one-third (38%) of students who use cannabis indicate intentions to change. Students who use cannabis may face added barriers when attempting to quit or cut back due to cultural rhetoric around cannabis 'not being addictive' and there may be stigma within the community of students who use that discourages help seeking for cannabis use disorder or dependence.

The MACHB asks students to report how old they were when they first started using cannabis, and a younger age of first use is positively correlated with current intentions to change use, shown in Chart 3.

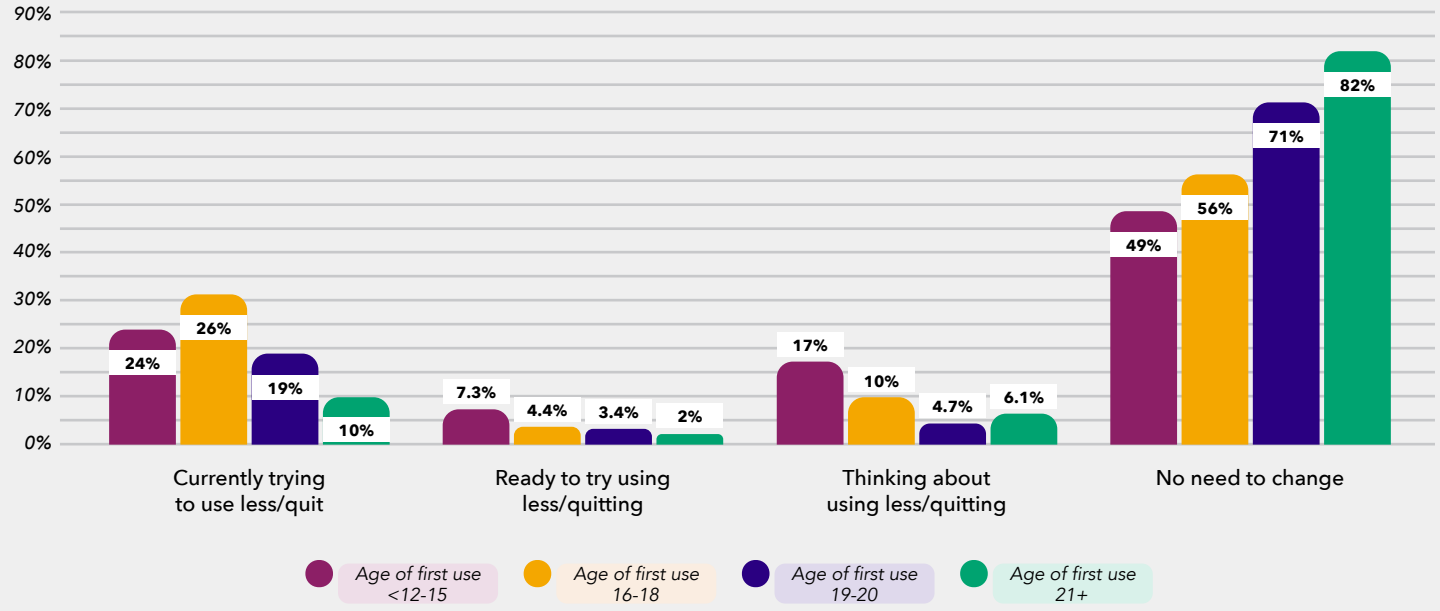
More frequent cannabis use was also indicative of higher likelihood of intentions to change with students who report frequent use (1 or more times per week) saying they were currently, ready to try, or thinking about

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quitting or cutting back on cannabis use compared to any past year use, shown in Table 4.

No significant differences were found in intentions to change cannabis use by age (over vs under 21), sex, year in school, thoughts of transferring or quitting higher education, among those experiencing past year mental health concerns or suicidal ideation, or among those who did vs did not experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) before their 18th birthday.

Chart 3. Intentions to Change Cannabis Use by Age of First Use



Intentions to Change Tobacco Use

Approximately 25% of Missouri college students report using some form of tobacco or nicotine products in the past year. Of those students, 31% are currently trying to use tobacco/nicotine less or quit, 5.7% are ready to try using tobacco/nicotine less or quitting, and 15% of students are thinking about using tobacco/nicotine less or quitting. This data indicates that over half (52%) of students who use tobacco/nicotine are wanting or trying to use less or quit. Additionally, 64% of Missouri college students who use tobacco/nicotine have considered or tried quitting since entering college.

Table 4. Cannabis Use Frequency and Intentions to Change

	Any past year cannabis use	Frequent use (1+ times per week)
I am currently trying to use cannabis less often/quit	**23%**	**32%**
I am ready to try to use cannabis less often/quit	**4.6%**	**7.7%**
I am thinking about using cannabis less and/or quit	**10%**	**19%**

More frequent tobacco/nicotine use is indicative of higher likelihood of intentions to change with students who report using frequently (1 or more times per week) reporting they were currently, ready to try, or thinking about quitting or cutting back on tobacco/nicotine use compared to any past year use, shown in Table 5.

No significant differences were found in intentions change tobacco/nicotine use by age (over vs under 21), year in school, thoughts of transferring or quitting higher education, among those experiencing past year mental health concerns or suicidal ideation, or among those who did vs did not experience adverse childhood

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Table 5. Tobacco/Nicotine Use Frequency and Intentions to Change

	Any past year tobacco nicotine use	Frequent use (1+ times per week)
I am currently trying to use tobacco/nicotine less often/quit	**31%**	**40%**
I am ready to try to use tobacco/ nicotine less frequently/quit	**5.8%**	**9.7%**
I am thinking about using tobacco/ nicotine less and/or quit	**15%**	**26%**

experiences (ACEs) before their 18th birthday.

However, intentions to change by sex showed that women were more likely to say they were currently trying to use tobacco/nicotine less or quit (33%) or ready to try to use tobacco/nicotine less or quit (6.7%) than men (28% and 4.1%, respectively) but both groups had the same percentage who are thinking about using less or quitting (15%).

Conclusion

While alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco/nicotine use are relatively prevalent among Missouri college students, a significant portion of students indicate interest in changing their behaviors. It's important to affirm these choices and provide resources for students who may want to decrease use or abstain entirely. Campuses should work towards providing both self-directed and assisted resources for students interested in cutting back on substance use or entering substance use recovery; the availability of programs and support is vital to helping students succeed at institutions of higher education.

Endnotes

1. The Transtheoretical Mode (Stages of Change). Boston University School of Public Health, April 2016.

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Resources *click logo for more information.*

MPACT

The MPACT Feedback program is a personalized feedback intervention (PFI) aimed at educating Missouri college students about alcohol, tobacco/nicotine, and cannabis use. The program takes about 30 minutes and includes a questionnaire to assess the student's current use of alcohol, tobacco/nicotine, and cannabis. Specific education about campus policies and resources are provided. Additionally, students are given feedback about their current use as it relates to other first year students at your campus. This data is taken from the Missouri Assessment of Collegiate Health Behaviors (MACHB). After the implementation of the program, your campus will receive a report of the substance use and abuse behaviors of your students in order to implement more effective prevention strategies in the first several months of campus. Reach out to our staff at **pip@missouri.edu** if you are interested in launching MPACT for your campus!

MACRO

MACRO works to establish and support collegiate recovery programs at colleges and universities across the state. PIP can provide funding for needs related to recovery meetings and activities, training on facilitating recovery groups, and more. Learn more at **mopip.org/MACRO**. Interested in learning more about how to support students in recovery on campus? Complete the MACRO Recovery Ally Training today – free for all students, faculty, and staff at institutions of higher education in Missouri!

TIME TO CHANGE?

Time to Change? is a virtual resource hub for Missouri college students considering quitting or cutting back on tobacco/nicotine or marijuana/cannabis. The site includes questionnaires to help students assess their use, information about benefits and what to expect when quitting, and resources to help students quit or cut back. Learn more by visiting **timetochangemo.org**.

For more information, visit mopip.org

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