Socio-Ecological Model

The social-ecological model is a multi-faceted public health model grounded in the understanding that to achieve sustainable changes in behavior, prevention efforts must focus on the individuals within the population of focus at the different levels of influence surrounding them. The theory is that the individual does not exist in a vacuum and that his/her behavior both influences and is influenced by the surrounding environment.

The social-ecological model consists of four levels that a prevention effort should strive to impact. Each are listed below:

▶ **Individual:** This level includes factors specific to the individual within the target population, such as age, education, income, health and psychosocial problems and encompasses the knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This level can be influenced by individual-level strategies such as educational and skill-building programs.

▶ **Relationship:** This level includes the individual within the target population's closest social circle – family, friends, and peers. These people could shape the behaviors of the individuals in the target population. This level can be influenced by enhancing social supports and social networks as well as changing group norms and rules.

▶ **Community:** This level includes the unique environments in which the individuals in the target population live and spend much of their time, such as schools, places of employment and worship, neighborhoods, sports teams, and volunteer groups. This level can be influenced by changes to rules,

regulations, and policies within the different community organizations and structures.

▶ **Societal:** This level includes the larger, macro-level factors that influence the behaviors of the individuals in the target population, such as laws, policies, and social norms. This level can be influenced by changing state and local laws, policies, and practices, as well as other initiatives designed to change social norms among the target population, such as a media campaign.

Societal
National/state/local laws and regulations, social norms

Community
Town, neighborhood, school, place of employment

Relationship
Family, friends, social networks
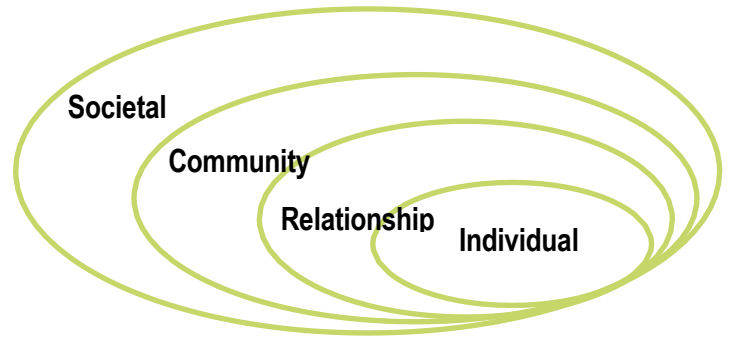
Societal
Knowledge, attitudes, skill

Sources:

"The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention." Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html. Accessed 21 Jun 2021.

"A Guide to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework." Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/20190620-samhsa-strategic-prevention-framework-guide.pdf. Accessed 21 June 2021.

Socio-Ecological Model

Applying the Model to Prevention

The socio-ecological model highlights the importance of working across levels to address the constellation of factors that influence both individuals and populations. The table below, organized by the levels of the socioecological model, offers examples of relevant risk and protective factors and related prevention strategies.

	Risk Factor	Protective Factor	Strategy Example
Individual	+ Genetic predisposition to substance misuse + Prenatal exposure to alcohol + Poor impulse control	+ Positive self-image + Self-regulation and control + Social competence	+ Life skills education + Social and decision-making education
Relationship	+ Parental permissiveness + Peer acceptance of heavy drinking	+ Positive parental involvement + Peer disapproval of substance use + Low peer substance use	+ Parental education on communicating disapproval of use + Peer refusal skills education
Community	+ Poor neighborhood safety + Law enforcement permissiveness of underage substance use	+ Availability of after school activities + Low perceptions of alcohol use among the general student population	+ Social marketing campaign to promote positive social norms
Societal	+ Laws favorable to substance use + Historical trauma	+ Limited availability of substances	+ Increase price or tax of alcohol