

**Western CT Coalition, RBHAO for Region 5  
Juul Annual Program Report, July 31, 2025  
Contract # 24MHA1074**

**Submitted by Kathy Hanley, Behavioral Health Program Manager**

## **Executive Summary**

During this initial funding period, we utilized several proven prevention frameworks. Following the steps of the **Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF)**, we began with a thorough regional assessment of underage use of e-cigarettes and nicotine. This assessment included a review of quantitative and qualitative data, identification of risk and protective factors and a comprehensive understanding of the retail environment. Building capacity was a major component of the work. We did this by connecting with existing WCTC partners, engaging with new sectors, forming a workgroup and prioritizing staff professional development. Utilizing **SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP)** strategies, we developed a workplan. The basis of our efforts were environmental strategies, providing education, and information dissemination. We provided 50 direct activities in the region and evaluated each by tracking outcome measures and knowledge gained.

**The Montana Summer Institute's Science of the Positive** is at the core of our work at WCTC and is used alongside the SPF and CSAP strategies. We believe that young people are resilient and care about themselves and others. The vast majority of those under 21 are not vaping or using nicotine. We identify the strengths of our communities such as the work of the Local Prevention Councils. We work toward closing misperception gaps with Positive Community Norms campaigns.

**Key Achievements:** Right away, we focused efforts on the retail environment. We have been monitoring the increase in registered ENDS (Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems) retailers for many years. As of 5/19/25, there were 262 registered dealers in our region. It was as high as 288 in January of 2025. In 2019, that number was 204 (29% increase). **Visits to 38 registered retailers (exceeding our goal of 25) within 10 towns/cities in our region provided us with insight into what young people are exposed to in their communities.** While most stores we visited were displaying proper signage and ID checking practices, we witnessed vast quantities of flavored products, some lapsed registrations, illicit cannabis, kratom, nitrous oxide and even vending machines selling tobacco products. With what we learned, we began engaging with all our local officials to begin discussions about the possibility of local regulations. We reached out to all 43 towns, were able to engage with 15, and learned that none of our municipalities have regulations in place. **We saw that as an opportunity to engage further and have seen some movement toward local ordinances in Danbury and Waterbury.**

There is a lack of awareness of cessation opportunities, therefore we promoted the CT Department of Public Health (DPH) cessation support resources. We widely shared their fact sheet at events, presentations, via social media, and on our website. We also shared the information with young people and community partners like schools, health districts and law enforcement. We distributed over 250 copies of that document in flyer and postcard form.

**Partnerships:** After a thorough review of our needs assessment and environmental scans in the region, a relevant issue emerged- the lack of safe disposal of vape products. In 2023, we considered putting vape disposal boxes in schools and wanted to learn more about how they can be disposed of properly. We connected with **Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRRA)** our local waste management and recycling authority. We learned that these products consist of hazardous waste, lithium-ion batteries and plastic, making them nearly impossible to dispose of properly. Raising awareness about this lesser-known negative impact of vape products is a strategy we have implemented. Another important partnership is with **Parents Against Vaping (PAVe)**. We met them at a MATCH (Mobilizing Against Tobacco for Connecticut Health) Coalition meeting and later invited them to speak at a conference we hosted in the spring of 2024. They offer great parent education and advocacy opportunities. We utilized PAVe's "Vapes are Trash" campaign in the spring of 2025 and we continue to learn from HRRRA about the challenges of safe disposal. These important partnerships will continue going forward.

**Challenges this year** included time constraints. We spent many hours pulling together the data for our regional assessment, building capacity by engaging with sector partners and planning. We also analyzed our data thoroughly and put it into visually pleasing formats like slide decks and infographics. These were worthwhile investments as the knowledge gained informed our work throughout the year, however, some of the activities we originally planned will be pushed to the fall and beyond.

#### **Future Goals and Planning:**

- Continue to address the risk factor of access to nicotine products by engaging with municipal leaders to fortify local regulations of ENDS dealers and by visiting shops in all 43 towns.
- Work with local law enforcement to increase readiness to partner with our statewide agencies on compliance checks.
- Education and information dissemination are a big part of this work. We will continue to attend events, offer presentations and share our digital library of resources.
- Share information on cessation support and work toward building additional support like screening, counseling and groups.
- Work with our school districts on restorative practice considerations for students who get caught vaping in school.

Our combined Underage Nicotine and Cannabis Prevention Workgroup will continue to meet monthly. Convening this diverse group of key stakeholders helps us advance our workplans and brainstorm strategies to protect those under 21.

### **Section 1. Key Staff Development**

This year the RBHAOs offered several professional development opportunities for all staff. These trainings and programs provided space for team building among our own staff, the opportunity meet the members of the other RBHAO staff and for us to work together by area of focus across RBHAOs. We all got to know each other better, learn from one another and experience the force of prevention across our state.

**The Impact Community Planning Group Program “Impact Planning”** was a phenomenal experience that brought the entire Juul cohort together to work the steps of the SPF. It helped us to forge our relationships and build common statewide goals that had already been outlined in our workplan but from a more data driven approach. We produced a logic model, mapped strategies and developed an action plan with a timeline of specific activities tied to those strategies. This provided us with a roadmap for implementation this year. I hope to go through the process again for our FY 2026 workplan.

The 5 RBHAOs gathered for these additional workforce development trainings:

- *Stanford REACH Curriculum and Resource Review Healthy Outcomes from Childhood Experiences* featuring speaker, Jerry Moe, the Senior Clinical Advisor at the National Association for Children Impacted by Addiction (NACoA)
- Positive Childhood Experiences (speaker Bob Sege from Tufts) and the Science of the Positive (speakers Ben Tanner and Stephanie Patton from The Montana Institute) offered at the “*Right Here Right Now*” 2-day conference

WCTC staff attended a Third Hand Smoke webinar offered by PTTC (Prevention Technology Transfer Center), and Substance Exposed Children facilitated by Chelsea Kapitancek. Two staff members are Tobacco Treatment Specialists.

Kathy serves as a Tri-Chair of the MATCH Coalition helping to facilitate monthly meetings and support its mission of reducing tobacco use. This experience has provided opportunities to better understand the legislative process and the importance of strong tobacco regulations.

#### Trainings Currently Offered (External Programs):

Training programs, workshops, and skill development initiatives offered under this contract award.

| <i>Subject Matter/Training</i>                                     | <i>EBP/ Promising?</i>                                       | <i>Staff Trainer</i>                                      | <i># of Annual Trainings Done</i>                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>CT Tobacco Laws and the Retail Environment</i>                  | No                                                           | <i>Kathy Hanley and Chelsea Kapitancek</i>                | <i>Once for our workgroup, December 2024</i>                   |
| <i>Underage Vaping: Addressing the Retail Environment</i>          | No                                                           | <i>Kathy Hanley and Chelsea Kapitancek</i>                | <i>2: NVCOG and New Milford Mayor, Feb 2025</i>                |
| <i>Law Enforcement Lunch and Learn: Underage Vaping</i>            | No                                                           | <i>Kathy Hanley, Chelsea Kapitancek and Kevin Monagan</i> | <i>Once for regional law enforcement partners</i>              |
| <i>Breathe Easier: Avoiding Nicotine and Managing Stress</i>       | <i>Utilization of EBP Stanford REACH and CATCH materials</i> | <i>Kathy Hanley and Kevin Monagan</i>                     | <i>Once for Salisbury School (Private High School</i>          |
| <i>Vaping Prevention and Harm Reduction: Nicotine and Cannabis</i> | No                                                           | <i>Kathy Hanley, Chelsea Kapitancek and Kevin Monagan</i> | <i>Once for Naugatuck Valley State College, Danbury Campus</i> |

#### High-Profile Presentations

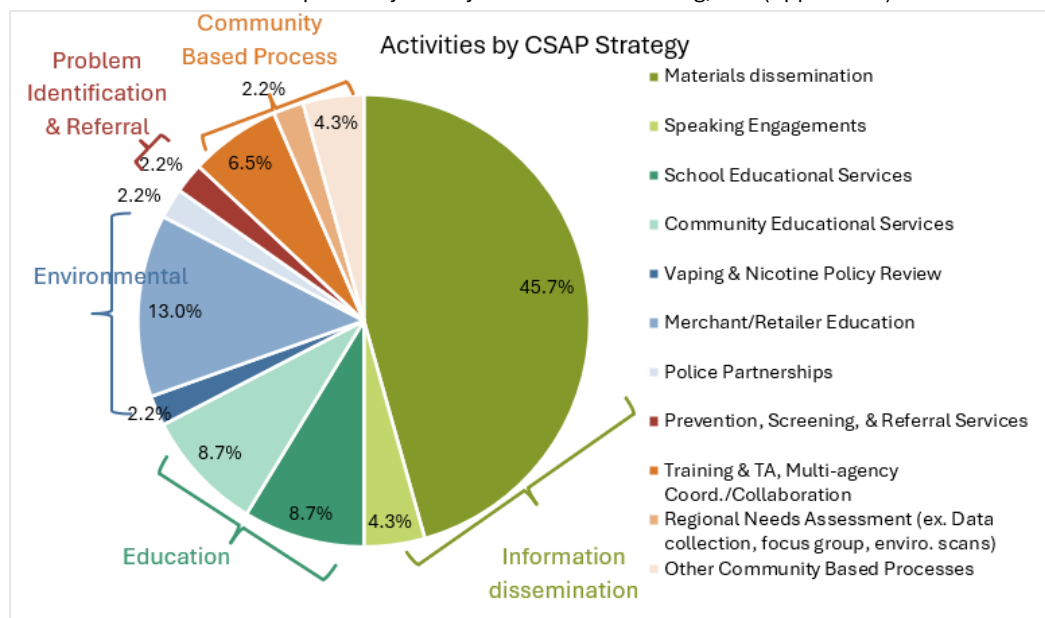
Presentations conducted at national, state, or institutional levels.

|                                                          |                                                                                  |                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Underage Vaping Prevention: Nicotine and Cannabis</i> | <i>The Regional Crisis Team/Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparedness</i> | <i>February 2025</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|

## Section 2. Process and Performance Measures

We engaged in a wide variety of activities throughout this first year of funding. 66% were in person efforts, 26% virtual, and 8% hybrid. Over 182 hours were spent on these direct activities with an average of about 3.5 hours for each. Figure 1 summarizes our activities for the year by CSAP strategy.

Figure 1. Summary of activities by CSAP Strategy. JUUL Evaluation Reporting through July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025  
Reported by B. Weyland Smith Consulting, LLC (Appendix A)



**Information dissemination** was an important focus strategy.

We distributed over 1,700 fact sheets, infographics, brochures and postcards related to nicotine, cessation supports, tobacco 21 and how to talk to kids about vaping. We created a digital resource library that is housed on our website and can be accessed by QR code on a small, folded business card. (see Figure 2)

**We visited 38 registered ENDS dealers within 10 towns in our region:** Watertown, Waterbury, Naugatuck, New Milford,

New Preston (Washington), Torrington, Danbury, Southbury, Middlebury, and New Fairfield. We planned carefully for these visits, downloading the current list of retailers, reviewing the compliance records and in some cases, mapping the stores to create a visual of the number of retailers and their proximity to schools, parks and other places where families may congregate.

Figure 2. WCTC Resource Library Folded Card



Figure 3. Retailer 2-pocket folder



**Retailers received a 2-pocket folder** (see Figure 3) with fact sheets about our program, tobacco 21, how to properly check ID, and the free mandatory retailer training. We included the following materials provided by the CT Clearinghouse: We Card postcard, Notice of Law signs, Tobacco 21 door decals, register and counter stickers, and “We ID” buttons. We created a **detailed reporting system** for these visits including a checklist of items on display, conversations with clerks, and any additional observations in and outside the store. A wide variety of flavored disposable vapes that are not FDA authorized are sold in these

stores. In some, we saw illicit cannabis, and other potentially harmful products like inhalants alongside soda, candy, snack foods. In our travels, we also discovered there are 2 tobacco vending machines (at over 21 establishments) in our region selling vapes and combustible cigarettes. These visits provided an opportunity to see what is being sold and to develop relationships with employees and stress the importance of protecting those under the age of 21.

**We chose to monitor compliance checks in 6 of our communities:** 3 urban periphery (Danbury, Naugatuck and Torrington), 2 suburban (Brookfield and New Milford), and one rural (Canaan). The charts below summarize compliance checks during 2 different time intervals (Figures 4 and 5)

**Compliance Check Baseline Data (2023-2024)** Figure 4. JUUL Evaluation Reporting through July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025. Reported by B. Weyland Smith Consulting, LLC (Appendix A)

| Target Communities | # Checks   | # Found Non-Compliant | % Found Non-Compliant |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| New Milford        | 43         | 4                     | 9.3%                  |
| Brookfield         | 18         | 0                     | 0.0%                  |
| Danbury            | 122        | 19                    | 15.6%                 |
| Canaan             | 2          | 0                     | 0.0%                  |
| Naugatuck          | 39         | 12                    | 30.8%                 |
| Torrington         | 103        | 8                     | 7.8%                  |
| <b>Total:</b>      | <b>327</b> | <b>43</b>             | <b>13.1%</b>          |

**Compliance Check First Follow-Up Interval (May 2024-June 2025)** Figure 5. JUUL Evaluation Reporting through July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025. Reported by B. Weyland Smith Consulting, LLC (Appendix A)

| Target Communities | # Checks   | # Found Non-Compliant | % Found Non-Compliant |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| New Milford        | 23         | 0                     | 0.0%                  |
| Brookfield         | 14         | 0                     | 0.0%                  |
| Danbury            | 99         | 13                    | 13.1%                 |
| Canaan             | 4          | 0                     | 0.0%                  |
| Naugatuck          | 39         | 7                     | 17.9%                 |
| Torrington         | 44         | 3                     | 6.8%                  |
| <b>Total:</b>      | <b>223</b> | <b>23</b>             | <b>10.3%</b>          |



The 6 communities selected all showed an increase in compliance rates. While this data can be influenced by many things, including the number of checks and the location of the checks, it can still be used for monitoring and appears to be improving at this stage of the grant. (JUUL Evaluation Reporting through July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025. Reported by B. Weyland Smith Consulting, LLC)

By using **pre and post surveys for training programs**, we were able to tailor presentations to meet the learning needs of the audience. For the Regional Crisis Team which is comprised of school staff (psychologists, counselors, administrators) we learned they were most concerned about health risks, addiction related to nicotine use, and how to help students (13 responses). 86% said they would use the information they learned in their work (7 responses). Most officers “strongly agreed” that they had an increased knowledge of the risks of underage vaping use, how the current retail environment impacts underage use, and gained a better understanding of their role in prevention, after attending our lunch and learn program (7 responses).

**Tabling surveys and focus group data** revealed misperceptions of peer vaping behavior. Students in both high school and college believe peer use of e-cigarettes to be higher than reported use from local and statewide surveys. Students at Naugatuck Valley State College in Danbury (5) thought 25-75% of their peers were vaping and at a focus group in New Milford, high school students (19) thought 40-60% of their peers vape. 79% of participants (57) who completed a Survey Monkey on 2 college campuses said their friends (most, some, few) vape. Understanding misperceptions is important for prevention messaging and for community norms campaigns.

### Section 3. Successes

Because of the **relationships** we built with community partners, we have taken great steps toward reaching workplan objectives this year. With help from Danbury Police Department’s Mark Williams, we hosted a lunch and learn for law enforcement on underage use of nicotine and cannabis and the retail environment. We connected with the Executive Director of the School-Based Health Centers (SBHC) statewide to discuss how we can work together to raise awareness about vaping prevention and increase screening and cessation efforts. We collaborated with Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRRA) to discuss the environmental impact of vapes and how we can work together to raise awareness. We were able to put together a regional vaping coalition that later evolved into a nicotine and cannabis prevention workgroup. This group that meets monthly helps us analyze data and brainstorm strategies toward achieving our workplan goals. We did extensive outreach to all 43 municipalities to assess readiness for local vape shop regulations. As a result, we presented to over 40 people at the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (comprised of the leaders of 17 municipalities) on the impact of the retail environment on underage nicotine and cannabis use and considerations for local regulations. We also met with the Mayor and Zoning Enforcement Officer of New Milford. This spring, both Danbury and Waterbury (see Figure 6) announced plans to put vape shop regulations and ordinances in place.

WATERBURY

#### Waterbury moves to regulate where new smoke and vape shops may open

By Paul Hughes, Staff Writer  
April 14, 2025

CT INSIDER

Gift Article

Figure 6. News headline April 14, 2025 (Hearst Media)

**We have strong prevention support in our region with the Local Prevention Councils (LPCs) and our Drug Free Schools Committee (DFS).** The LPCs have built capacity and implemented strategies to address vaping prevention for the last 6 years with LPC funding (2020-2025) and a WCTC mini grant (2018-2019). We highlighted their contribution to the reduction of youth vaping rates by creating an infographic (Figure 7 at right) from local youth survey data. Through info briefs and parent education, DFS has focused much of their energy on vaping prevention in their school districts during the last 5-8 years.

We spent time analyzing all the data from our regional assessment and **put together a comprehensive slide deck** from which we have developed presentations for various stakeholders- the regional workgroup, law enforcement, local officials and school personnel.

We **organized our resource library** digitally and ordered printed materials to be disseminated at events and at schools. Our webpage was updated to include this library and to streamline access to reputable prevention and cessation information online. School Resource Bundles we assembled include print materials, posters, quit kits, and “Vape/Smoke Free Campus” signs.

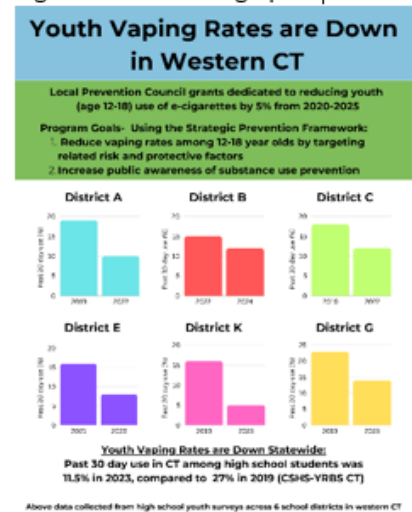
We had many meaningful conversations this year. At tabling events, many college students said they didn’t vape or use nicotine, but some shared their concerns about friends or their parents’ tobacco use. We were happy to provide information about CT cessation support programs. We had several school districts and health departments contact us this year when they learned about our program. Organizations are looking for vaping prevention resources and cessation support to share with their constituents; we were able to provide that service. A conversation with Salisbury School led to a presentation to students. We met with Cheshire Human Services about their need for cessation support services information.

We will continue to do more outreach with community partners to provide information and education. Parents can be challenging to reach effectively; leaning on developed relationships to reach this demographic will be important as we head into the next funding period. We made inroads with the Center for School Safety and Regional Crisis Team members, School Based Health Center staff, youth-serving agencies and Juvenile Review Boards that can set us up for protocols around vaping education, promotion of restorative practices, and include a positive peer norm campaign. We hope to establish a pilot program next year in schools where readiness is high and relationships with youth services are established.

#### **Key accomplishments and measurable outcomes include:**

- 300 students from Salisbury School were trained in vaping prevention utilizing the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) and Stanford University Research and Education to Empower Adolescents and Young Adults to Choose Health (REACH) curriculums

Figure 7. WCTC Infographic |



- Distribution of 250 DPH cessation fact sheets at various events throughout the year. It is also prominently listed on our vaping/tobacco prevention website and handed out with our Quit Kits and School Resource Bundles
- Presentation to 40 people at the Naugatuck Council of Governments monthly meeting to raise awareness of our program and risk factors for underage use focusing on access and how local regulations can help
- Direct mailer of Parents Against Vaping's "Vapes are Trash" campaign reached 21,556 households in 7 of our towns, aimed at raising awareness about safe disposal challenges

## Section 4. Challenges/Barriers

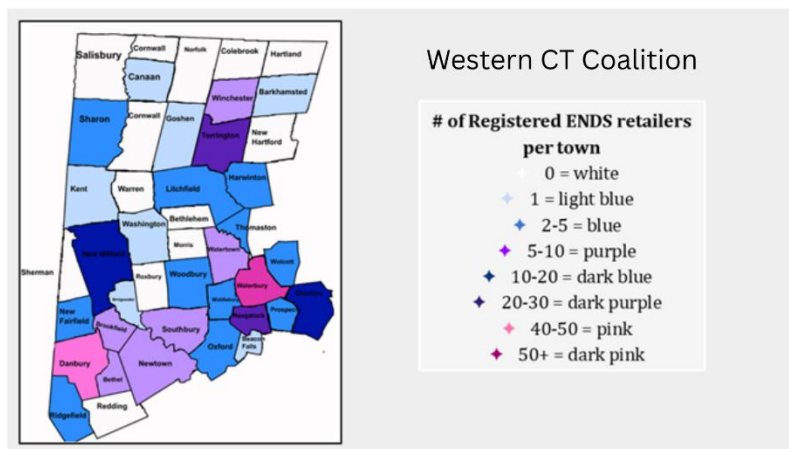
Time has been a factor. We spent 6-8 months of this initial funding period on assessment, analysis of data, capacity building and planning. Initiatives in 3 important areas will need to continue into the fall and 2026 funding period:

1. School-based initiatives like resource sharing and presentations to students were just getting started at the end of the 2025 school year. We did review school policies regarding restorative practices but still need to work on a more comprehensive assessment and offering training to districts statewide.
2. Groundwork was laid with healthcare sector engagement, but more work needs to be done to learn about screening tools, build upon cessation supports, and share resources. We look forward to continuing these efforts into this fall and the next funding period.
3. Plans are in place for next school year to offer a variety of parent education programming.

The retail environment poses a challenge. We identified access as a major risk factor for underage vaping and use of nicotine. As reported by the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP), **CT saw**

**a 42% increase in the number of ENDS (Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems) Dealers from 2020 (1,301) to 2025 (1,849).** As of May 2025, there were 263 registered ENDS retailers in our region. The number of shops is greatest in our more populated cities and towns. For example, the city of Waterbury has 59, Danbury 49, Torrington 24 and Naugatuck 23 (DCP data 5/19/25). There are on average 5-10 retailers in our suburban towns.

Figure 8. Registered ENDS Dealers 5/19/25, CT Department of Consumer Protection



## CT does not regulate e-cigarettes

**and other nicotine products like pouches equally** (refer Appendix B, legislative brief) and there seems to be low interest in a flavor ban. Enforcement of ENDS dealer registration is unknown. Police Departments in our region are in varying degrees of readiness and capacity to partner on compliance checks. By gaining a better understanding of statewide agency's roles in regulation,



the RBHAOs can be more effective as a community partner- educating retailers and advocating for local and state policy that protects youth.

Being effective on social media is challenging when we are up against an industry that can spend large sums of money developing marketing strategies that target underage people. We don't have the capacity to reach young people in a meaningful way on these platforms.

We should challenge ourselves to brainstorm ways to reach those age 18-20 who are not on college campuses. According to the BRFSS, CT adults age 18-24 vape at rates of almost 15%.

Where we needed to forge relationships with a new sector (healthcare), we leaned on relationships we have built with community partners over the years. Rather than cold-calling offices, we reached out to a long-time member of our coalition who works for CT Institute for Communities, Melanie Bonjour. Through this connection, we were able to talk with the Executive Director of the Statewide Association of (SBHCs) about partnering on vaping education.

We might also consider narrowing our focus within next year's workplan on activities where we have a high readiness and can potentially have a greater impact on underage use of nicotine. Developing strong partnerships with schools is a consideration for this focus.

## **Section 5. Opportunities**

We want to continue to gather current data about nicotine use among those under 21 including trends about peer normative behavior. We can consider utilizing other ways to disseminate information like a quarterly magazine/ newsletter and podcasts.

New partnerships have increased our capacity. We have convened an Underage Nicotine and Cannabis Prevention Workgroup made up of existing and new community partners. We will continue to meet monthly to share information and brainstorm activities that align with our workplan. Connecting with our local SBHC Coordinator has led us to a potential partnership with the statewide system of SBHCs. We now have a strong cohort among the Juul Coordinators statewide. These forged relationships have led to coordinated planning, cohesiveness in strategy implementation, and the sharing of ideas and resources.

Youth involvement in these endeavors is something we should build upon. We can learn more from youth themselves by engaging with our existing youth-serving partners in the region. We should consider their voice within campaign messaging, presentations and social media. Healthcare and substance use treatment providers who service those under the age of 21 can help us better understand screening and treatment and build a better network of cessation support resources.

## **Section 6. Lessons Learned/Recommendations**

Successful prevention is dependent on relationship building in the communities we serve. WCTC and prior to that HVCASA has had a long-standing reputation as a community partner in our service area. Because of the stakeholder relationships built, we were able to:

- Do a comprehensive assessment of underage use of nicotine
- Acquire important feedback on this topic from 11 of our school districts
- Build a new workgroup to address vaping prevention

- Begin important conversations with statewide school-based health centers
- Engage with local officials about local smoke shop regulations
- Partner with HERRA and PAVE to raise awareness about the environmental impact of vapes
- Talk with youth and young adults out in the community, at school and college campus events and tabling opportunities
- Educate law enforcement on this topic and begin building capacity for increased compliance checks

For the upcoming year, we recommend expanding engagement with school districts and college campuses to share information, provide education, deliver resources and promote restorative practices as a region-wide standard.

We can expand our initial assessment of underage use to include a better understanding of specific populations of concern; consider specific age groups, gender, race and sexual orientation. We can do that by reviewing our Regional Priority Report, current youth survey data and by having important conversations with stakeholders. We can also lean on the work that was done by CT's True to You Coalition which focused on tobacco use among the LGBTQ+ population.

Building capacity to support cessation is vital. We will continue to disseminate information about the CT Department of Public Health's cessation programs and distribute Quit Kits. Beyond those efforts, we can think about ways to expand cessation services with local youth serving and healthcare partners.

Since access to vape products is a major risk factor for underage use, hosting additional law enforcement lunch and learns or roundtable discussions will increase capacity around retailer compliance checks.

In addition, we can be more effective with retailer engagement by ensuring materials are culturally relevant to workers whose primary language is not English. Gaining a better understanding of other CT agency roles regarding retailer registration, regulation and compliance will help us to clarify our role when visiting retailers beyond education and information sharing. We want retailers to have a voice in our Underage Nicotine and Cannabis Prevention Workgroup.

We also recommend engagement with CT legislators to consider tighter regulations of newer nicotine products like disposable vapes and pouches. We should push for a flavor ban and raise awareness about holding the industry accountable for proper disposal of products that are nearly impossible to recycle in CT right now.

#### Appendices:

- A. Western Connecticut Coalition *JUUL Evaluation* Reporting through July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025  
Reported by B. Weyland Smith Consulting, LLC
- B. Vaping in CT: A Call to Action, legislative brief