



## Chapter 13. Taking Team Recommendations to Action...*The Spectrum of Prevention*

The *Spectrum of Prevention* was developed by Larry Cohen of the Prevention Institute. It is a model for programs to use to create long-lasting, positive changes in the community. To read the full article written by Larry Cohen and Susan Swift, please visit the Prevention Institute Website at 2004 [www.preventioninstitute.org/spectrum\\_injury.html](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/spectrum_injury.html).

The *Spectrum of Prevention* describes six levels at which prevention activities can take place:

Figure 1: Spectrum of Prevention

Level of Spectrum	Definition of Level
1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills	Enhancing an individual's capability of preventing injury or illness and promoting safety
2. Promoting Community Education	Reaching groups of people with information and resources to promote health and safety
3. Educating Providers	Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others
4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks	Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact
5. Changing Organizational Practices	Adopting regulations and shaping norms to improve health and safety
6. Influencing Policy Legislation	Developing strategies to change laws and policies to influence outcomes

### **Using the Spectrum of Prevention to prevent childhood and adolescent injuries**

This section defines the six levels of the Spectrum. An activity at any of the Spectrum's six levels constitutes an intervention. However, when these initiatives are used in combination, the Spectrum becomes a more transformative force for individual, community, and societal health.

<sup>1</sup> Larry Cohen and Susan Swift, "The Spectrum of Prevention: Developing A Comprehensive Approach to Injury Prevention," *Injury Prevention* 30 Sept. 2004 [www.preventioninstitute.org/spectrum\\_injury.html](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/spectrum_injury.html).

This inter-relatedness between levels of the Spectrum, or synergy, enables practitioners to maximize the result of any one prevention activity by strengthening the linkages between multiple efforts.

## 1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills

Strengthening individual knowledge and skills involves transferring information and know-how to increase an individual's resources and capacity for preventing injury or disease. In a trusting relationship with a person who is perceived to have expertise or authority, even brief comments have a lasting impact, particularly when reinforced over time or through community norms and practices.

Physician advice, for example, has been associated with reductions in morbidity, mortality, risk behaviors, and risk factors, and an increase in healthy behaviors. During check-ups, physicians have the opportunity during check-ups to ask children and their parents if they properly store medicines and household poisons and whether they use bicycle helmets. Such advice has been shown to increase the likelihood of bicycle helmet ownership for children. Responsibility for strengthening individual knowledge and skills need not be limited to physicians and human service professionals. Bicycle sales people can demonstrate how to properly fit a helmet for optimum safety. Many organizations and community agencies use individual skill building as the primary approach to help individuals learn healthy behaviors and change unhealthy habits.

## 2. Promoting Community Education

A community education approach aims to reach groups of people with information and resources for improving health. Community education is broadly targeted at groups or the population at large. Mass media campaigns have been shown to increase awareness, change attitudes, and provide a context in which other strategies can succeed, such as public policy change. Effective community education not only alerts individuals to new information, but also builds a critical mass of support for healthier behavior, norms, and policy change.

For example, "bike days," a community education approach in the field of unintentional injury, engages police, retailers, and local health practitioners. Bicycle enthusiasts conduct a variety of activities in schools and surrounding communities to promote cycling safety. "Bike days" events use performances by professional stunt bicyclists and "bike rodeos" to gain the enthusiasm of youngsters while teaching them the rules of the road and distributing and checking for correctly fitted helmets. Posters and the mass media promote the events, while educating and involving the public.

### 3. Educating Providers

Providers have influence within their fields of expertise and opportunities to transmit information, skills, and motivation to patients, clients, and colleagues. It is essential, therefore, that they receive education to improve their own understanding of prevention. Medical training has recently begun to place more emphasis on teaching doctors the value of advising children, adolescents, and parents about the injuries associated with unsafe practices. As a result, certain professionals (e.g., doctors, teachers, and childcare workers) can be highly effective advocates for policy changes related to their job experiences.

By expanding the notion of provider, it is possible to mobilize a broader group in advancing prevention and promoting wellness. Since 1990, traffic reporters in northern and southern California have attended conferences where they learn that "injuries are no accident," and that they have a critical role in educating the public. As injury prevention specialists outline how most injuries are predictable, and therefore preventable, traffic reporters learn that through 'injury sensitive' reporting techniques they can transmit prevention messages to large numbers of people every day, heightening public awareness of the problem.

### 4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks

Fostering collaborative approaches brings together the participants necessary to assure an initiative's success. Coalitions and expanded partnerships are vital in successful public health movements including injury prevention. Coalitions increase the "critical mass" behind a community effort, help groups to trust one another, and reduce the likelihood of resource squandering through unnecessary competition among groups.

Coalitions are useful for accomplishing a broad range of goals that reach beyond the capacity of any individual member organization. Like a jigsaw puzzle, each piece is important, and only when put together does the picture become clear. By working together, coalitions can conserve resources by reducing duplication and sharing expenses, foster cooperation between diverse sectors of society, and increase the credibility and often the impact of their efforts.

### 5. Changing Organizational Practices

Examining the practices of key organizations, such as law enforcement, health departments, and schools, has potential for affecting the health and safety of the greater community. This is usually the least understood and most frequently ignored component of the Spectrum, yet this level has enormous potential. By changing its own internal regulations and norms, an organization can affect the health and safety of its members.

For example, a school that has had several serious child pedestrian injuries may recognize that school practices have a potential role in preventing some of these injuries. Hiring crossing guards

represents an opportunity to change the practice of the school and serve to increase child safety. Similarly, altering organizational practices in a business can positively affect the work environment while benefiting staff and the people they serve.

## 6. Influencing Policy and Legislation

Changes in local, state, and national laws, as well as the adoption of formal policies by boards and commissions, fall under the umbrella of policy and legislation. Influencing policy usually presents the opportunity for the broadest improvement in health outcomes. Both institutional and legal policies can affect large numbers of people. In some cases, laws and policies already exist that could protect public health and safety, but an additional law, change in policy, better enforcement, or change in an organization's practices may be necessary to ensure its effectiveness.

For instance, a parents' group concerned about playground safety might approach the local government with their concerns about potentially unsafe surfaces that cause injuries when children fall. After an assessment of playground surfaces in local parks, the group proposes legislation to upgrade to safer surfaces and implement regulations on playground equipment. Requiring safe practices, implementing safety standards, and encouraging the use of safety equipment can prevent unintentional injuries.

## Data and Evaluation

Data and evaluation inform all levels of the Spectrum. Any proposed activity should be based on data showing 1) the issue is important, 2) the target population is appropriate, and 3) the intervention is promising. To develop a successful approach, it is essential to first review the data and determine an appropriate set of objectives. During implementation, ongoing evaluation of the overall approach and the individual activities at each level of the Spectrum will provide the information necessary for making ongoing adjustments to the activities that are best suited to meet overall objectives.