



# Drug Free Charlotte County Community Assessment

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## Executive Summary

Charlotte County has made advances in preventing teen substance use in the years since the coalition was formed. When the coalition was formed, it was dubbed “Scarlett Charlotte” by the local press as a result of one of the highest past 30-day uses of alcohol by high school teens in the state. In 2000, the past 30-day use of alcohol by high school teens was 54%.<sup>1</sup> By 2020, this dropped to 18.8%.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the 2000 rate for high school use of cigarettes was 27.1%, and in 2020 was 4.4%. Efforts by the coalition have had a positive impact.

Looking at the 2000 FYSAS in Florida Charts, 21% of Charlotte County high school teens used marijuana in the past 30-days. In 2020, it was 16.4% (2020 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, 2020). While the rate has fallen, it has been a rollercoaster of ups and downs in the past 10 years. Perception of harm from use decreased as media portrays use of marijuana more and more in a normalizing manner. The coalition is also concerned with the growing use of electronic vaping devices by teens, as they can be used to more discretely use marijuana through THC oils. The 2020 FYSA asked Charlotte County teens if they used a vape device for marijuana, with 9.4% of high school and 3% of middle school teens indicating use in the past 30 days. 88% of those teens (middle and high school) who vape marijuana also vape nicotine. (42% who vape nicotine also vape marijuana).

One of the key strategies employed by the coalition over the years is that of social norming and marketing. This strategy is based on research (Hansen, Ph.D. & Graham, Ph.D., 1991) suggesting the importance of addressing faulty perceptions of peer use as a strategy to reduce actual use. It also includes an emphasis on input from teens to form key prevention messages. This is also a strategy the coalition will use to more forcefully address marijuana use as the coalition moves forward.

Additionally, based on the input from local teens, the coalition promotes prevention messaging strategies with a strong emphasis in social marketing of facts with regard to risks of use of alcohol, marijuana and vaping. While data is heavily used in promoting the actual rates of use in the format of percent who do not use (supporting positive social norms), teens are now requesting more facts and information on risks of use. Educators and social workers in the school system also point to a need for even more education on risks of use. While activities occur in every elementary, middle and high school in the public school system, there is a recognition more is necessary to keep rates going down, and counter the normalizing of use through media.

Teen misuse or abuse of prescription medications is relatively low in comparason with other alcohol or marijuana. However, it is still seen as an important issue to continue to monitor closely. The coalition joined with other maternal and child health and service providers to assess and develop strategies to address substance exposed newborns, with gains made to address this issue in Charlotte.

During COVID-19, rates of overdose accelerated in the community according to a local news report.<sup>3</sup> This appears to mirror what is happening throughout the country. <sup>4</sup> According to the 2019 Medical Examiner’s Report, persons between 35-50 represent the largest age group of death by accidental overdose, followed by ages 26-34 (present or caused). Previously, those older than 50 were often closely behind ages 35-50. Ages older than 50 were the largest age group with prescription drugs present or the cause of accidental death.

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/prevention/fysas/2020/docs/county-reports/Charlotte.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fox4now.com/news/local-news/overdoses-are-on-the-rise-in-charlotte-county>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html>

## Overview of Community

### *Community demographics*

Charlotte County shares borders with Sarasota and Desoto Counties to the north, while Lee County is at its southern border, and Glades County to the east. On its western coast, the Gulf of Mexico provides over twelve miles of sandy shoreline and Charlotte Harbor is home to one of the world's largest protected marine estuaries at 270 square miles; 219 of which is natural shoreline.<sup>5</sup> Port Charlotte, an unincorporated area, was one of General Development Corporation's communities in Florida, drawing many to the area with the dream of a retirement home in Florida. Punta Gorda, the county seat, and the county, itself, is often noted as one of the top places to retire.<sup>6</sup> The county's status as a retirement destination is supported by its demographics.

Charlotte County grew from 159,935 in 2010 to 188,910 residents in 2019.<sup>7</sup> The largest segment of the population is over the age of 65, pegging the county as the second oldest county in the State of Florida and in the United States with a median age of 60.2.<sup>8</sup> In 2018, Together Charlotte, a community collaborative of residents, businesses, nonprofits and government, identified the concern that the community needs to address the loss of young adults, families and children, while number of retirees increase. According to data collected by the group, "*Charlotte County population projections increase 24% by 2025 for age 65 and older, and decline 2% for the 35-54 age range.*"<sup>9</sup>

In 2019, the white population made up 90.6%, a high majority of the total population and not unlike prior years. The Black or African American population is at 5.9% and Hispanic population is at 7.7%. The percentage of individuals over the age of five (5) who live in a home in which a language *other than* English is spoken is 10.0%.<sup>9</sup> This lack of diversity provides challenges for the prevention system, making sure to include strategies that reach pockets of different cultures and does not merely address the majority.

### *Factors unique to the community* (employers, migrants, unemployment, rurality, etc.)

Charlotte County is viewed as a mostly suburban area with a bit of agriculture. Like many counties along the gulf coast with a shoreline on the west and I-75 on the east, there is more undeveloped land to the east of the interstate. Recreational activities are often focused on water and off-trail activities. Clusters of retirement and 55 and over communities provide socializing most commonly within one's own housing community, and often appear to focus on adult and senior activities. While the community continues to seek additional ways for teens to socialize in safe environments, the demographics of the community can constrain these efforts.

Further, due to demographics, teens may find themselves competing with retirees for jobs that historically are considered entry into employment for their age group. These jobs, such as in fast food, cashiers and wait staff have some of the lowest median hourly wages at about or under \$10/hour, according to The Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board (November 2019: latest information provided). However, The Board reports that the average hourly wage is \$17.13, based on a 40-hour work week. This falls below their report of \$21.53 average hourly wage for the state and \$19.63 for the Workforce Region 24 average.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://cleared4takeoff.com/community\\_data/quality\\_of\\_life](http://cleared4takeoff.com/community_data/quality_of_life)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bestplaces.net/county/florida/charlotte>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/charlottecountyflorida,US/PST045219> , by Age

<sup>8</sup> [U.S. Census, 2019 Median Age by County data table](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/charlottecountyflorida,US/PST045219)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/charlottecountyflorida,US/PST045219>, by Race and Hispanic Origin

At the time of this community update, the impact of COVID-19 on employment is still ongoing, and not fully defined. FRED (Federal Reserve Economic Data) reports a jump in unemployment in the County in April 2020, climbing to 14.7%. Compare this to a rate of 3% in December 2019, and the impact of COVID-19 is seen. Fortunately, from April on, the rate has declined in nearly as dramatic fashion as it rose. As of October 2020, it was 5.2%.<sup>10</sup>

Housing is considered affordable if a household pays no more than 30 percent of its gross income for all housing costs. “Cost-burdened” households pay more than 30% of income for rent or mortgage costs. In 2017, Together Charlotte studied the housing market as related to poverty and community need. Based on 2016 data they uncovered<sup>11</sup>, 28,775 Charlotte County households (36%) pay more than 30% of income for housing. 14,218 households in Charlotte County (18%) pay more than 50% of income for housing. In total, 42,993 households are considered cost-burdened regarding housing costs. In Charlotte County and the surrounding metro area, the HUD Fair Market Rent for FY2020, representing rent for a typical modest apartment, was:

- \$799 for a studio apartment
- \$818 for a one-bedroom
- \$1022 for a two-bedroom
- \$1436 for a three-bedroom
- \$1794 for a four-bedroom unit.<sup>12</sup>

*2018 Median Household Income for Charlotte County is more than \$11,068 below national rate, and more than \$4,042 below state.*

U.S. Census

According to RentData.org, median rent prices in Charlotte County are:

- \$842 for a studio apartment
- \$862 for a one-bedroom
- \$1077 for a two-bedroom
- \$1513 for a three-bedroom
- \$1891 for a four-bedroom unit

Together Charlotte’s 2017 *Housing Report* notes that “it is important to note that Charlotte County is a seasonal community. Housing inventory can be difficult to measure as a result. For instance, many property owners only lease homes seasonally due to high demand and profit. Retirees moving to the community drive up housing costs which can price lower income residents out of the market.”

11.4% of households are living below the Federal Poverty Level in Charlotte County. However, according to The United Way ALICE Report updated in 2018, 34% of other households in Charlotte County could not afford basic needs (housing, child care, food, health care, and transportation).<sup>13</sup> ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households typically earn above the Federal Poverty Level of \$11,880 for a single adult and \$24,300 for a family of four, but less than the Household Survival Budget. From 2010 to 2016, the number of households living in poverty in Charlotte County decreased, but the number of ALICE household increased. Economic struggles are important considerations for the coalition as it addresses risk factors for substance use.

As discussed under demographics, Charlotte County is not a highly diverse community. However, it does provide unique considerations for assuring the delivery of cultural competent strategies. Geography is identified as a cultural consideration in the enhanced National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in Charlotte County, FL [FLCHAR5URN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/FLCHAR5URN>, December 8, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> <http://flhousingdata.shimberg.ufl.edu/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rentdata.org/punta-gorda-fl-msa/2020>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.uwof.org/alice>

Appropriate Services (CLAS) in health care by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>14</sup> In Charlotte County, geography really is an important consideration as the coalition plans culturally competent strategies for the county. The community's "bridges" form as sense of distinct and separate communities. It is not unheard of for someone to say, "I don't go over the bridge." Complicating this issue further, is the lack of a fixed-route transportation system. Under United Way's Household Survival Budget calculation, Charlotte County has a 52% gap to meet the basic threshold for transportation, even when income and nonprofit assistance is combined. Therefore, the coalition needs to ensure that activities and strategies "go to them", rather than focus on activities that require residents to come to "us."

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/pdfs/EnhancedCLASStandardsBlueprint.pdf> pg 24

## Current Substance - Related Local Conditions

Drug Free Charlotte County (DFCC) is fortunate to have strong partners in the Charlotte County Public School System, Charlotte County Sheriff Office, Punta Gorda Police Department, Charlotte Behavioral Health Care, Charlotte County Medical Examiner, Poison Control, local hospitals, and the Florida Departments of Health and Children and Families. These partners provide both data and opportunities for coalition members and staff to identify trends and assess our community's teen substance abuse issues. Coalition volunteers, including our teen leaders, conduct environmental retail scans, key informant interviews and other collection activities that provide further data used in our assessment.

### Teen Surveys in Partnership with the Schools

- *Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS)*. This survey provides excellent trend data, having been collected every two years (at the county level) since 2000. DFCC and Charlotte County Public Schools work with the Florida Department of Health and Department of Children and Family to conduct this survey. The 2020 FYSAS was conducted in February-March 2020, prior to any school closures related to COVID-19.
- *Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS)*. Designed and analyzed by Northern Illinois University, the TeeNS provides near real-time trend data as well as data on perception and teen norms. Charlotte County teens take this each year with results returned within six weeks, providing the advantage of knowing the data within the same year. The 2020 TeeNS was conducted in October 2020.
- *Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS)*. This survey is conducted every two years in combination with the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, with the same partners. The 2020 FYTS was conducted in February-March 2020, prior to any school closures related to COVID-19.

### Law Enforcement Data

- Both the Charlotte County Sheriff Office and Punta Gorda Police Department provide data on crimes and violations either caused by, or related to, drug or alcohol use. Data may also be collected from the state databases provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

### Florida Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Data

- Conducted through the Florida Department of Health every three (3) years.
- Surveys a random sample of adults on health and health behaviors.

### Other Community Data

- *Retail Data*. Teen and coalition volunteers conduct scans of local retailers who sell alcohol or tobacco. These scans look for signage and product placement that can promote (or hinder) underage alcohol and tobacco use. Data is collected on the number of licensed alcohol and/or tobacco retailers in the community.
- *Medical Examiner Data*. Our medical examiner's office provides critical data regarding deaths and overdoses resulting from alcohol or drugs.
- *Other School Data*. Suspension and graduation percentages provide data on community impacts often related to alcohol or drug use.
- *Local Substance Abuse Treatment Data*. The coalition receives data from local providers regarding primary substances related to admission and services.
- *Key Informant Interviews*. Key informant interviews are conducted to learn more about the local impact of substance use. This includes intercept surveys with teens on perception of peers and special surveys in the community.
- *Poison Control Data*. The Tampa Poison Control Center provides data on the types of calls received from Charlotte County callers which are related to drug-related poisonings.



### Underage Alcohol Use

Alcohol continues to be a priority issue for the coalition. It is historically the number one most used substances by Charlotte County high school teens. Progress continues in addressing this issue with data showing the percentage of teens reporting alcohol use during their lifetime has steadily decreased. In 2010 it was 50.2%, dropping to 32.5% in 2020. However, second only to tobacco, alcohol is the substance first used by children in Charlotte County. Middle schoolers report in the Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS) that the age of onset for alcohol use in Charlotte County dropped from 11.23 in 2019 to 11.09 years of age in 2020.

Research indicates that substance use interferes with the development of the adolescent brain.<sup>15</sup> The Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS) data indicates a relationship between use and grades, as shown in Figure 1 below.

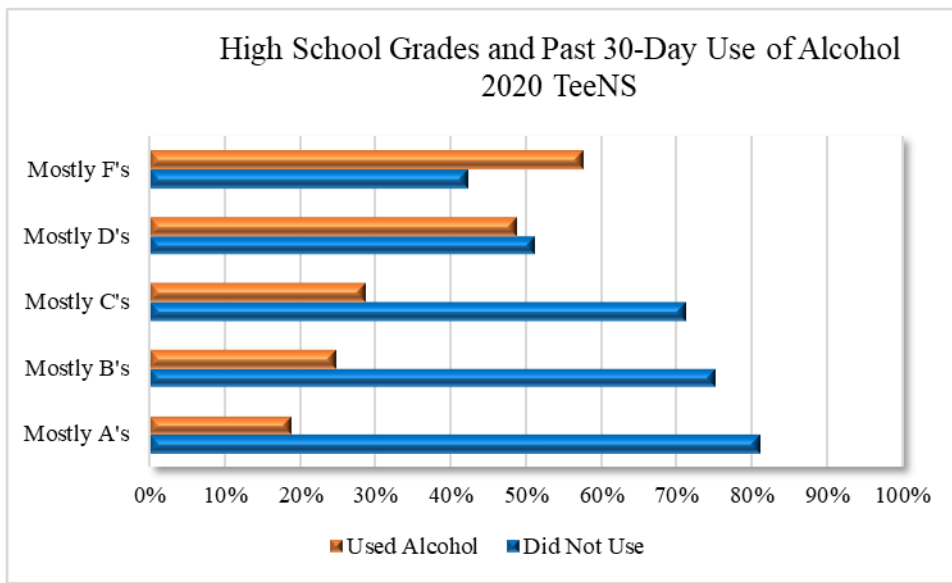


Figure 1: High school grades and past 30-day use of alcohol- TeeNS

### Past 30-Day Use Alcohol

From 2011 to 2020, past 30-day use of alcohol dropped by over 35% for high school teens in Charlotte County, according to Teen Norms Survey data. The 2020 TeeNS, shows 76% of high school teens in Charlotte County did not drink alcohol in the past 30-days, with 24% reporting use (see Figure 1). This data shows a decrease in alcohol use by two (2) percentage points since last year. The 2020 TeeNS was conducted in October 2020, reflecting the most real-time data available to the coalition.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2827693/>

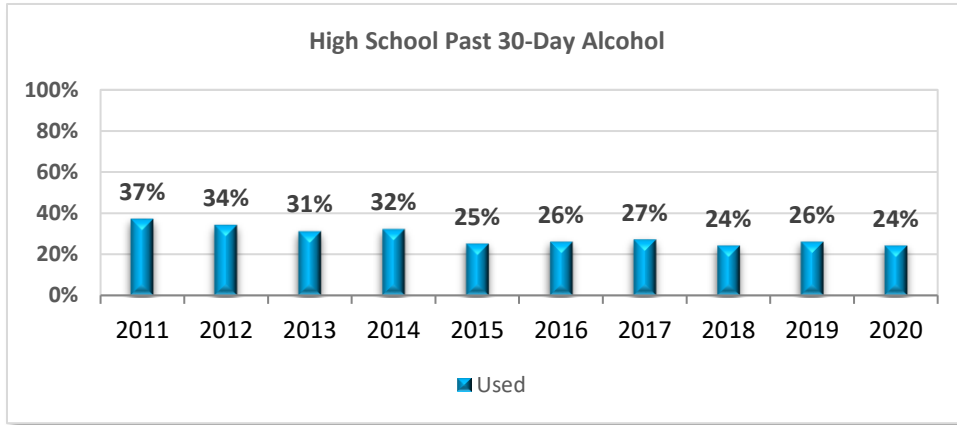


Figure 2: Past 30-day alcohol use - high school - TeeNS

From 2011 to 2020, past 30-day use of alcohol dropped by 20% for middle school teens in Charlotte County, according to Teen Norms Survey data. As Figure 2 indicates, 2020 TeeNS data shows 88% of middle school teens in Charlotte County did not drink alcohol in the past 30-days, with 12% reporting use (see Figure 2). This data for middle school use of alcohol in the past year rose from years, but remains below the highest rate of 15% in 2011.

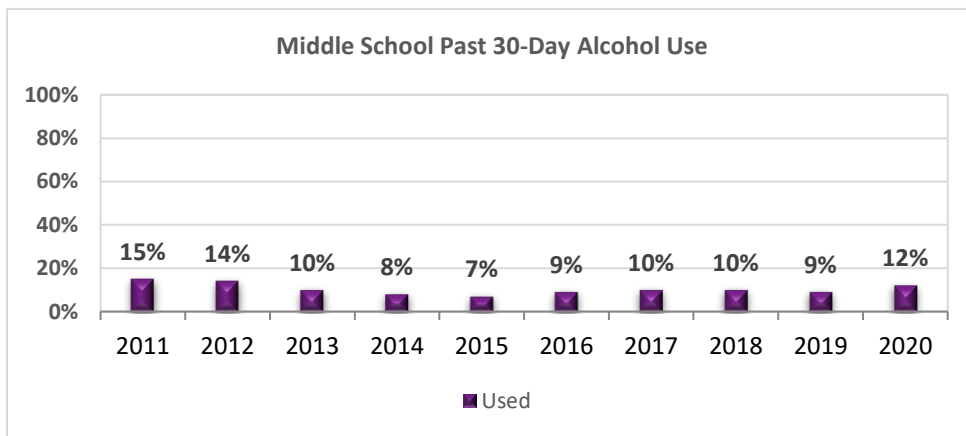


Figure 3: Past 30-day alcohol use - middle school - TeeNS

The TeeNS also provides insights on perception of peer use, which is discussed in a [later section](#).

The Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS) provides the coalition with additional data and the ability to compare local rates with regional and state rates. Table 1 indicates in 2020 Charlotte County percentages are below state percentages for past-30 day use of alcohol for both middle school and high school teens.

<i>Past 30-day use</i> FYSAS	Charlotte County- MS				Florida - MS			
	2014	2016	2018	2020	2014	2016	2018	2020
<i>Alcohol</i>	10.4%	7.9%	8.5%	8%	10.1%	8.3%	7.3%	8.2%
<i>Alcohol</i>	Charlotte County - HS				Florida - HS			
	2014	2016	2018	2020	2014	2016	2018	2020
	25.1%	23.1%	22.5%	18.8%	28.4%	25.5%	21.2%	19.9%

Table 1: Past 30-Day Alcohol Use - FYSAS

In recent years, differences between FYSAS data and the TeeNS are more pronounced. While only conjecture, these differences may lie within both the timing and implementation of the surveys. The TeeNS is taken within the first 30-days of the school year, while the FYSAS is taken mid-year. For example, the 2019 TeeNS was taken within the same school year as the 2020 FYSAS. Therefore, past 30-day data of the TeeNS includes behavior during the summer. While FYSAS data reflects behavior during the school year. Further, the TeeNS is given to all middle and high school students, while the FYSAS is done through random sampling. It can also be conjectured that youth being exposed to six (6) months of prevention messaging prior to taking the FYSAS may influence their behaviors and choices at that time. When the TeeNS is taken, it is usually after three or more months without exposure to prevention messaging in the schools. It is not possible to know if these circumstances play a role in the differences between the two surveys, or what other circumstances might have an impact. The coalition looks to **the overall trends** demonstrated by both surveys through the assessment process. Specific data points are examined within each survey, rather than compared to each other.

Source and Location of Teen Alcohol Use

It is important to understand how our teens obtain alcohol and where they are most likely to drink it. Key informant interviews with local teens indicate many teens, in both middle and high school, are aware of at least one parent who provides alcohol to their teen(s). Both the TeeNS and the FYSAS provide insights on these issues. TeeNS reports that both middle and high school teens, a relative is the most common source; parents being the number one source for those who have used alcohol in the past 30 days.

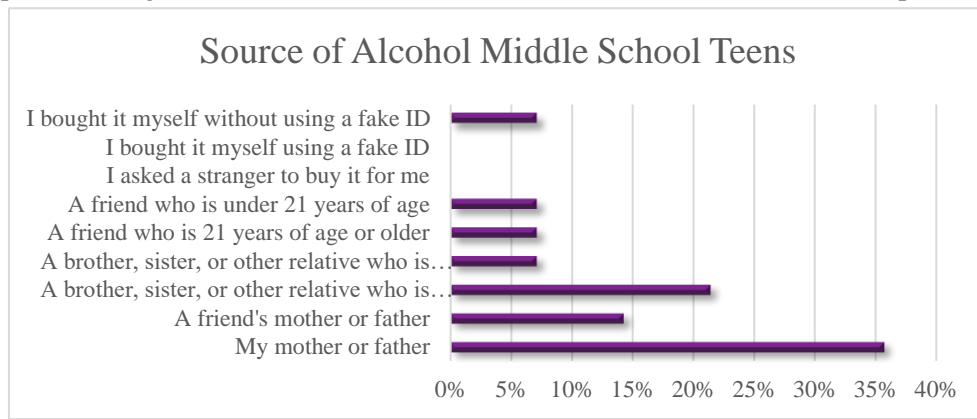


Figure 4: Source of alcohol - middle school - 2020 TeeNS

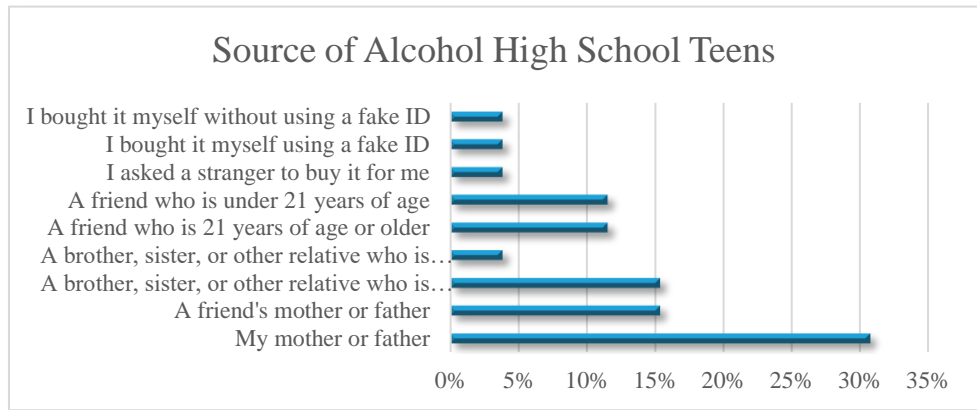


Figure 5: Source of alcohol - high school - 2020 TeeNS

The FYSAS also asks high school teens who report drinking alcohol, the location where they usually drink. In 2014, teens were more likely to drink in “another person’s home”, echoing statewide data. By 2020 both local and statewide data for the main location is indicated as in “my home.” It is important to note that this was asked *before* social distancing for COVID-19, and is *not a reflection* of stay-at-home recommendations.

Usual Drinking Location High School - FYSAS	2016		2018		2020	
	Charlotte County HS	State HS	Charlotte County HS	State HS	Charlotte County HS	State HS
<b>My home</b>	41.6%	37.7%	38.1%	41.0%	59.1%	42.7%
<b>Another person's home</b>	37.2%	40.0%	36.0%	38.3%	34.2%	35.2%
<b>Car or another vehicle</b>	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	1.5%	0.0%	2.4%
<b>Restaurant, bar or club</b>	1.0%	2.7%	1.1%	3.3%	0.0%	3.0%
<b>Public place</b>	5.6%	3.9%	2.9%	3.6%	0.0%	3.8%
<b>Public event</b>	1.3%	1.6%	0.6%	1.7%	1.5%	1.5%
<b>School property</b>	0.2%	1.3%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	1.2%
<b>Some other place</b>	13.1%	11.1%	17.9%	9.4%	5.2%	10.2%

Table 2: Usual Drinking Location - High School – FYSAS

Other person’s home may be a major location for alcohol used by teens, but, 86% of parents surveyed (n65) in April 2019 indicate they strongly disagree that it is okay for another parent or guardian to provide their son/daughter with alcohol under supervision. 14% either agreed or strongly agreed this would be okay. 77% indicated that they make sure the parties their teen attends are alcohol-free. Further, while Charlotte County teens indicate the most common location for drinking is their own home, parents surveyed (n66) in April 2019 disagreed even more strongly, with nearly 96% stating they strongly disagreed it is okay for their teen to drink alcohol in their home, under supervision.

Retailers, restaurants, public places and media can also impact teen’s perceptions that alcohol use is acceptable and part of social norms. Research demonstrates that the more alcohol advertisements seen by a teen, the more likely that teen is to use alcohol.<sup>16</sup> In fact, according to a fact sheet from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health noted this research with this statement:<sup>17</sup>

*A national study published in January 2006 concluded that greater exposure to alcohol advertising contributes to an increase in drinking among underage teens. Specifically, for each additional ad a young person saw (above the monthly teen average of 23), he or she drank 1% more. For each additional dollar per capita spent on alcohol advertising in a local market (above the national average of \$6.80 per capita), young people drank 3% more.*

Annual environmental scans are done of local retail establishments selling alcohol. As part of these scans, a count is made of alcohol advertising. In 2020, eighty-nine (89) stores were surveyed throughout the county, 69% within a half mile of a school or youth recreational site. There were 214 (2.4 av/store) alcohol ads outside and 568 (6.4 av/store) were found inside. Fifty-three (53) stores were surveyed in 2019 with 267 (5 av) alcohol ads outside and 501 (9.5 av/store) were found inside. While it may appear there has been a decrease in signage, the Spring 2020 survey included grocery stores, which usually have limited signage other than at product rack. Key informant interviews conducted with teens since 2016 consistently show they are aware of alcohol messages in restaurants, tv and stores, though in 2020 fewer middle school teens reported seeing much advertising.

<sup>16</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/204410>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.camry.org/resources/fact-sheets/alcohol-advertising-and-youth/>

### Perception as a Local Condition

Research consistently shows that perceptions of use of alcohol, marijuana and other drugs, among adolescence is one of the strongest predictors of future use and experimentation (Olds, Thombs, and Tomasek, 2005; Perkins, 2003; Haines 2003). **The more students perceive that their peers are engaging in at-risk behavior, the more likely a teen is to make the decision to engage in the same behavior** to fit in to what they perceive as the “norm.” Using an evidence based social norms marketing strategy<sup>18</sup>, the coalition develops prevention messaging to emphasize and support healthy norms. This includes countering false perceptions of peer use with the real data; supporting healthy norms of peer and parental disapproval of use, as well as the risks of use. To maintain strategy fidelity, input from local teens is used to identify both the key messages and the means by which to deliver these messages to teens.

### Perception of Harm or Risk – Alcohol

Research indicates that the greater the perception of harm for use, the less likely a teen is to engage in use of that substance.<sup>19</sup> In Charlotte County, even students who choose not to drink alcohol report a limited understanding of the harm associated with drinking alcohol regularly. The 2020 FYSAS reports 43.7% of surveyed teens (middle and high) report a perceived “great risk of harm” from drinking one or two drinks nearly every day. This is an increase from the percentage in 2012 (36.8%), rising each subsequent year. However, our community is below the percentage for the CFBHN Region of 45.5% and statewide percentage of 45.7% reporting great risk of harm from drinking one or two drinks nearly every day.

Figure 6 shows the perception of harm from use of alcohol compared to past 30-day use of alcohol for Charlotte County teens in sixth through twelfth grade. This shows an overall trend of past 30-day use declining as perception of harm increases. In 2020, the use went down to the lowest point, while perception of harm dipped slightly, but still at higher levels.

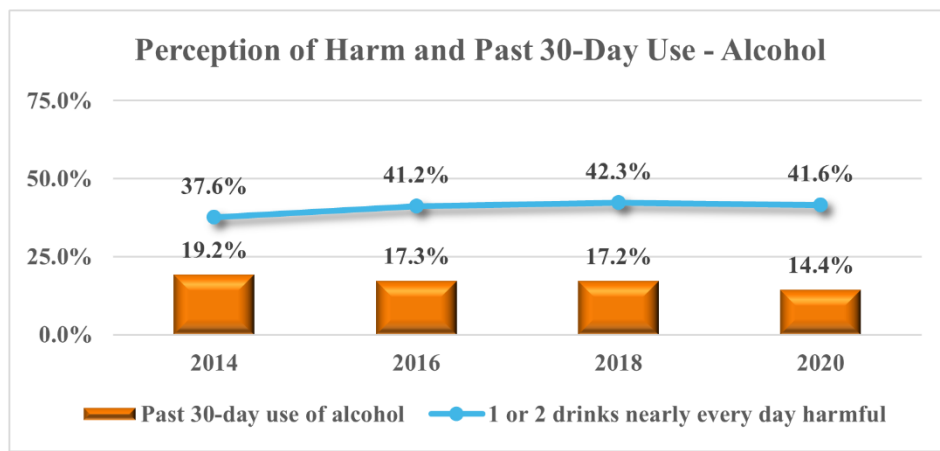


Figure 6: Perception of harm and past 30-day use - FYSAS

Perception of harm from use of alcohol can also be viewed from the perspective of how common is it for teens to engage in the risky behavior of either driving after using alcohol, or riding in a car with someone who used alcohol before driving. According to the 2020 TeeNS, 10% of high school teens in Charlotte County report driving after drinking and 15% report riding in a car with someone who had been drinking. This is an increase from 2019, when 6% of high school teens in Charlotte County report driving after

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5249059/> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4942845/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH099a/NSDUH099a/sr099a-risk-perception-trends.pdf>

drinking alcohol, and 12% report riding in a car with someone who had been drinking, reversing a downward trend that had been in place since 2017.

The 2020 FYSAS data, aligns with the TeeNS data indicating 15% of high school teens report **riding with someone who had been drinking**. This rate is higher than Suncoast Region (14.8%) and the state (14.7%). 2020 indicates another decrease in those Charlotte County high schools teens reporting driving under the influence of alcohol (4.7%). This is significantly lower than the TeeNS data reported in October 2020.

Perception of Peer Use – Alcohol

As seen in the following two figures, perception of peer use percentages for both middle and high school teens appear to follow the same *general* trajectory as actual use in the Teen Norms Survey, supporting it as a potential risk factor for use.

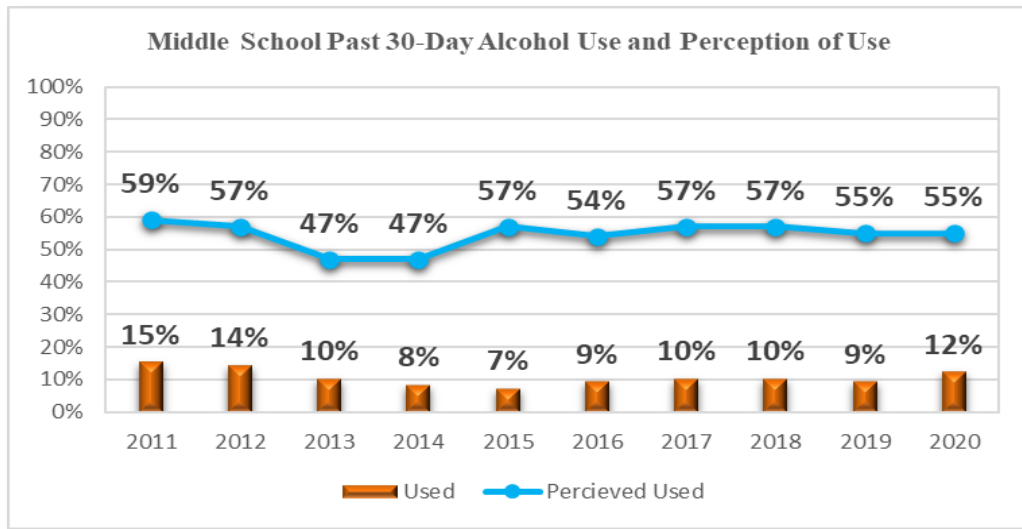


Figure 7: actual and perceived use of alcohol -middle school -TeeNS

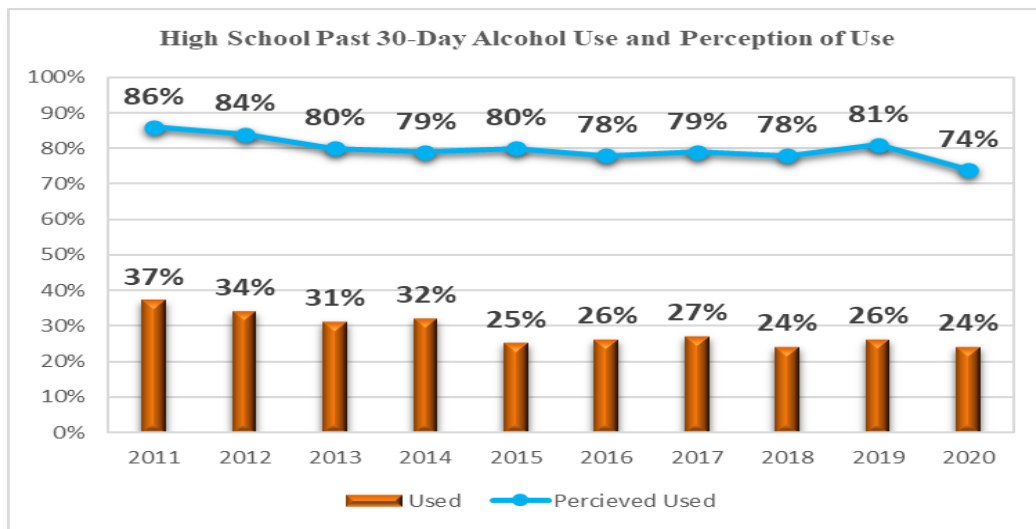


Figure 8: Actual and perceived use of alcohol – high school - TeeNS

Perception is also explored through intercept surveys given at the beginning of the school year and end, through the Prevention Partnership Program (PPG) grant staff. Intercept surveys are given to approximately 100 teens in each school. This provides an additional look at how teens perceive the use of alcohol by their peers by asking “*What percentage of your peers do NOT use alcohol.*” While data collection from the 19-20 school year was inhibited by pandemic school closures, data from the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter collection shows marked improvement from baseline (school start). Middle school perception of use was improved by 20% and high school by 41%. This is similar to previous years, reinforcing that consistent social norms messaging does help improve perception of peer use, which in turn, supports decisions not to use. Table 3 shows the improved outcomes the social norms activities and campaigns have had in perception of peer use among middle and high school teens in Charlotte County since the first quarterly surveying was done in 2015. Historically, the intercept survey in its entirety shows that without access to teens during the summer months, the perception that most peers do not use decreases from end of year rates to the following school start. Further, while there has been a substantial change in the social norms perceptions among local teens, the experience of the social norms activities and campaigns points to the need for consistent “dosing” of the message to support improved perception of actual social norms.

PPG Intercept Surveys		Fall 2015	Fall 2019	Spring 2020
% of peers who do NOT use alcohol (perception did not use)	Middle	10.92%	73.9%	88.5%
	High	11.93%	48.8%	68.7%

Table 3: PPG Intercept Surveys - Initial 2015 to Spring 2020

#### Perception of Peer Disapproval – Alcohol

Perception of peer use is not the only “peer perception” the coalition assesses. Perception of peer disapproval (to “drink alcohol regularly”) is also examined. Table 3 shows Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey data which shows in high school, Charlotte County teens are less likely to report peer disapproval than in our Suncoast Region (CFBHN) and statewide. Charlotte County middle school teens report slightly more peer disapproval that statewide, though lower than our region.

	2016			2018			2020		
	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State
Middle School	90.1%	91.3%	90.9%	86.0%	91.9%	90.9%	91.6%	92.2%	91.3%
High School	72.7%	78.2%	79.0%	74.4%	80.1%	81.2%	81.9%	83.4%	82.8%

Table 4: Perception of Peer Disapproval - Alcohol – FYSAS

#### Perception of Parental Disapproval – Alcohol

Parents are still the largest deterrent to use of alcohol among Charlotte County teens. However, teens perceive their parents disapprove of use at lower rates than data for both the state and our region (Central Florida Behavioral Health Network, CFBHN). The Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey provides data on the perception of parental disapproval for teens to “drink alcohol regularly.” For 2020, the perception of both middle and high school teens in Charlotte County that their parents’ disapproval of regular alcohol use is lower than the state and within our region, as per the FYSAS.

	2016			2018			2020		
	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State
Middle School	97.9%	97.9%	97.3%	97.9%	98.1%	97.6%	96.2%	97.7%	97.4%
High School	92.6%	92.6%	93.8%	94.1%	94.1%	94.2%	93.3%	94.4%	94.8%

Table 5: Perception of Parental Disapproval - Alcohol - FYSAS



Parents surveyed in April 2019 rated alcohol use by teens as third, in a list of their concerns about substance use. E-cigarettes and other drugs were ranked number one and two, respectively.

### Law Enforcement Data – Juvenile Alcohol Use

The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) reports a slight increase in intake for arrests due to an alcohol offense, but still at a low, historically. The following tables show DJJ and Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) data for alcohol-related juvenile arrests. Data from FY 2020 was not available at the time of this update.

Alcohol-Related Juvenile Arrest – Dept. of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY 18	FY 19
DJJ Intake	13	16	8	4	6	4	4
DJJ Diversion (civil citation)	6	7	5	4	1	1	0

Table 6: Alcohol Related Juvenile Offense – Dept. of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)

Alcohol-Related Juvenile Offenses – Fl. Dept. of Law Enforcement	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
DUI	1	4	1	0	1	0
Liquor Law Violation	14	9	7	3	4	3

Table 7: Alcohol Related Juvenile Offenses - Florida Dept. of Law Enforcement (FDLE)

### Binge Drinking

The Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey defines binge drinking as “having had five or more alcoholic drinks in a row in the past two weeks.” The 2020 FYSAS indicates 7% of teens in the county binged drink, decreasing from 2018 data. Separating middle school teens from high school teens, 3.5% of middle school teens (increase from 2018) and 9.4% (decrease from 2018) of high school teens in Charlotte County reported binge drinking behavior. Females have higher rates of both alcohol use and bingeing alcohol.

2018 FYSAS Past 30-Day Alcohol Use	Charlotte	Statewide	2018 FYSAS Binge Drinking	Charlotte	Statewide
Male	16.4%	13.8%	Male	9.2%	6.9%
Female	18.2%	16.8%	Female	6.9%	6.7%
2020 FYSAS Past 30-Day Alcohol Use	Charlotte	Statewide	2020 FYSAS Binge Drinking	Charlotte	Statewide
Male	11.2	13.7	Male	6.4	6.4
Female	17.5	15.9	Female	7.0	6.8

Table 8: Alcohol Use by Gender - FYSAS

### Adult Heavy Drinking

In 2002, adult binge drinking was reported at 18.4% by the Florida Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), the percentage dropped to 12.3% in the 2010 survey – below the State percentage of 15%. However, this percentage rose to 18% in the 2013 BRFSS, once again going above the state percentage of 17.6%, just below the upper quartile in the state. This is a 46% increase in our local percentage from 2010 to 2013. The 2016 BRFSS reports the county percentage decreased to 16.1%, ranking 29th out of 67 counties for highest percentage of “adults who engage in heavy or binge drinking”. The county also reports 7<sup>th</sup> highest percentage for adult heavy drinking in our region of fourteen counties (Central Florida Behavioral Health Network). This data has not been updated since the 2016 survey.



Adults who engage in heavy or binge drinking					
	2002	2007	2010	2013	2016
Charlotte	18.4%	14.9%	12.3%	18.0%	16.1%
State	16.4%	16.2%	15.0%	17.6%	17.5%

Table 9: Adult heavy drinking – BRFSS

The BRFSS also provides insights into the age of adults who report heavy drinking. Table 9 provides this detail, indicating ages 45-64 report the highest level of heavy drinking in Charlotte County. This trend changed from 2002 and 2007, where, as with the state data, the highest levels of heavy drinking among adults was ages 18-44. This may be reflective of Charlotte County’s status as a retirement community and high median age.

Year	Charlotte			Florida		
	18-44	45-64	65 & Older	18-44	45-64	65 & Older
2002	28.8%	19.0%	11.4%	21.9%	13.9%	8.8%
2007	19.6%	17.0%	9.8%	21.6%	14.6%	7.7%
2010	11.1%	16.0%	10.2%	20.9%	14.4%	6.8%
2013	24.9%	22.1%	9.4%	24.2%	16.9%	7.2%
2016	16.7%	24.5%	10.6%	23.1%	17.2%	8.7%

Table 10: Adults Who Engage in Heavy Drinking, by Age - BRFSS

Law enforcement data provides insight to local conditions related to adult heavy drinking. Data shows an increase in the number of arrests related to DUI (driving under the influence) until a drop in 2019. However, this data is not able to show if numbers are due to rate of vigilance or rate of persons driving under the influence.

DUI Arrests	Charlotte County Sheriff's Office	Punta Gorda PD	Florida Highway Patrol	Other	Total
2013	291	62	28	3	384
2014	292	3	52	-	347
2015	320	87	8	1	416
2016	325	71	28	1	425
2017	288	46	30	0	364
2018	399	68	32	13	512
2019	173	65	35	0	273

Table 11: DUI Arrest Data by Jurisdiction - UCR Data - FDLE.state.fl.us

Figure 9 shows whether impaired driving crashes were related to alcohol, drugs or a combination. Alcohol only crashes were the most prevalent, as well as led to more injuries. However, there was one more fatality related to drugs only.

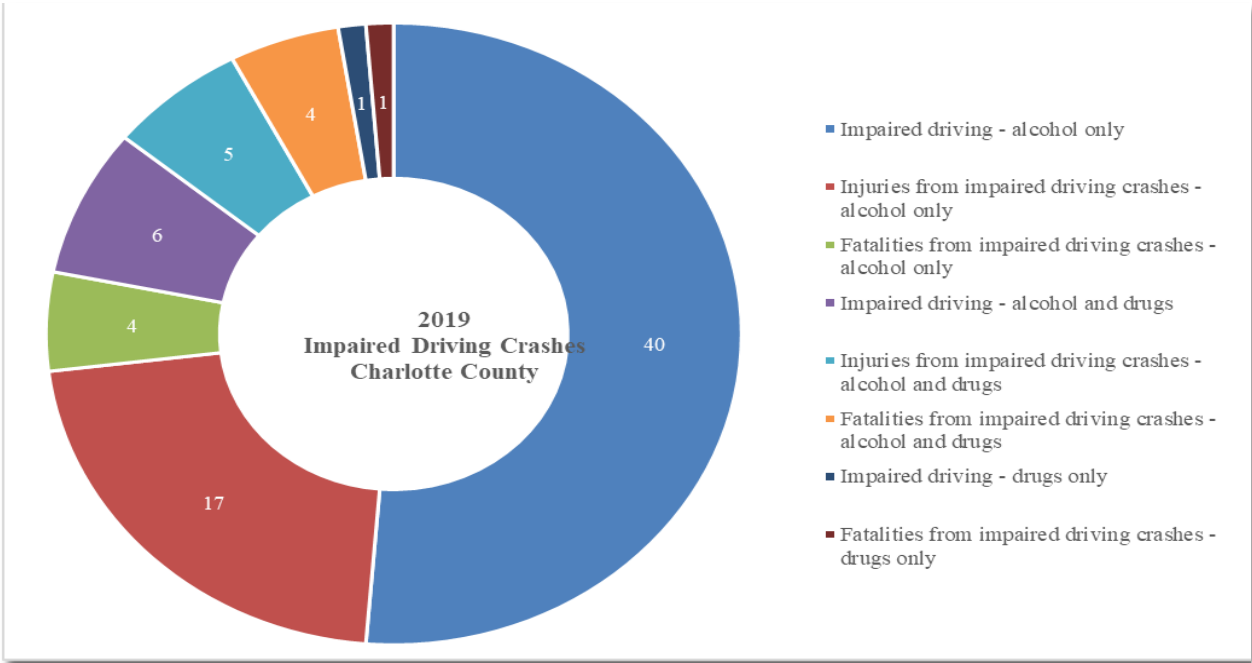


Figure 9: 2019 Impaired driving crashes - Charlotte County

Based on 2019 data, there are 401 establishments with a liquor license in Charlotte County. This averages approximately one (1) establishment per 1.5 square mile. Given the areas of preserved land, including Babcock Ranch Preserve, this is a conservative calculation. Recreational activities and community events usually include alcohol. At a 2016 Town Hall Meeting in Punta Gorda, this topic was discussed, with at least one family concerned about the lack of community events that do not include alcohol.

### Marijuana Use

Marijuana use by teens falls second most used substance by teens, behind alcohol (FYSAS and TeeNS). It is also the substance which is viewed **as least harmful** by our teens. Key Informant interviews (2020) with both school social workers and school resource officers indicated that vaping creates the biggest issues in the schools. SROs indicate that some of the devices have been found with THC. 2020 FYSAS data indicates that 3% of middle school teens report vaping marijuana (past 30-day) and just under 10% for high school teens (past 30-day). This compares to 8.5% vaping nicotine in middle school and 18.4% in high school. FYSAS data indicates that 88% of those who vape marijuana, also vape nicotine.

Teen key informant interviews report that middle and high school teens believe marijuana use is an issue and the source is through dealers, the streets, friends, or adults (parents). However, one middle school teen stated that it is not a problem as most are using medical marijuana and that the main source for teens is through doctors.

The 2020 FYSAS reports the percentage of teens reporting marijuana use during their lifetime has steadily decreased. In 2010 it was 27.8%, dropping to 22.4% in 2020. The age of onset for marijuana falls after tobacco and alcohol with middle school teens reporting in the 2020 Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS) that the age of onset for marijuana in Charlotte County rose from 11.16 in 2019 to 11.33 years of age.

Comparing Charlotte County to regional and state data, Charlotte County percentages for past 30-day youth marijuana use (middle and high school) fall slightly higher, according to the 2020 FYSAS. 12.3% of teens

in Charlotte County (middle and high school) report past 30-day use of alcohol, while this rate is 10.3% for the region and 10.7% statewide.

Research indicates that substance use interferes with the development of the adolescent brain.<sup>20</sup> The Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS) data indicates a relationship between marijuana use and grades, as shown below.

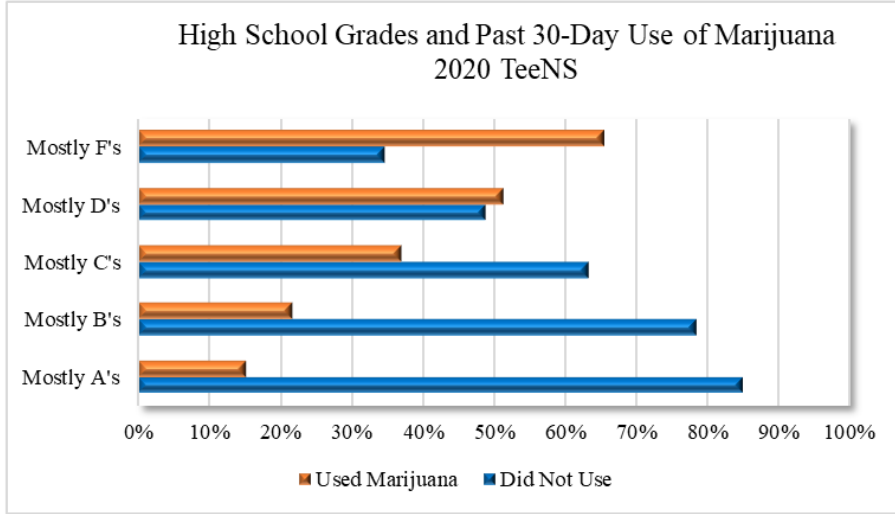


Figure 10: High school grades and past 30-day use of marijuana - TeeNS

#### Past 30-Day Use – Marijuana

Our most current data, the 2020 Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS), shows 78% of high school teens in Charlotte County did not use marijuana in the past 30-days, with 22% reporting use (see Figure 10). This falls to one of the lowest rates in the past 10 years.

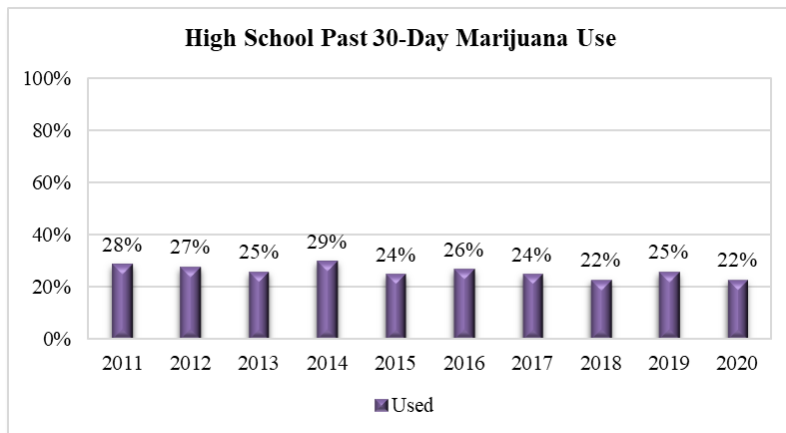


Figure 11: Past 30-day marijuana use - high school – TeeNS

Past 30-day use within middle school teens shows 90% did not use in the past 30-days, with 10% reporting use (2020 TeeNS). This rate has risen among middle school age teens in Charlotte County, with a steady increase since a low of 6% in 2014.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2827693/>

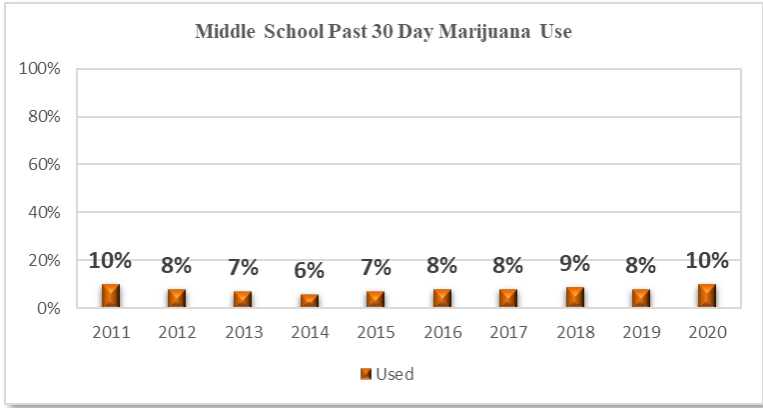


Figure 12: Past 30-day marijuana use - middle school – TeeNS

According to the 2020 FYSAS, Marijuana use among our teens continues to decrease overall, with 12.3% of Charlotte County teens reporting past 30-day use. This is down from 15.0% in the 2018 FYSAS. High school use fell from 20.9% (2018) to 16.4% (2020). While middle school data shows a slight increase to 5.9% (2020) from 5.7% (2018). The following table highlights these rates since 2016.

Past 30-day use FYSAS	Charlotte County- MS			Florida - MS		
	2016	2018	2020	2016	2018	2020
Marijuana	3.6%	5.7%	5.9%	3.2%	3.7%	3.8%
	Charlotte County - HS			Florida - HS		
	2016	2018	2020	2016	2018	2020
Marijuana	20.6%	20.9%	16.4%	17.0%	16.3%	15.9%

Table 12: Past 30-Day Use of Marijuana - FYSAS

### Perception of Harm or Risk - Marijuana

Research suggests perception of harm or risk of use of marijuana is a leading indicator of future use.<sup>21</sup> The higher one’s perception of harm or risk of use, the less likely it is that one will use marijuana. Figure 13 illustrates the perception of harm from use of marijuana held by sixth through twelfth grade teens in Charlotte County compared to reported past 30-day use of marijuana (FYSAS). Charlotte County trends appear to echo this research as a trend, if not year-by-year. 2014 perceptions may also reflect the increase in media advertising related to marijuana ballot issues in Florida.

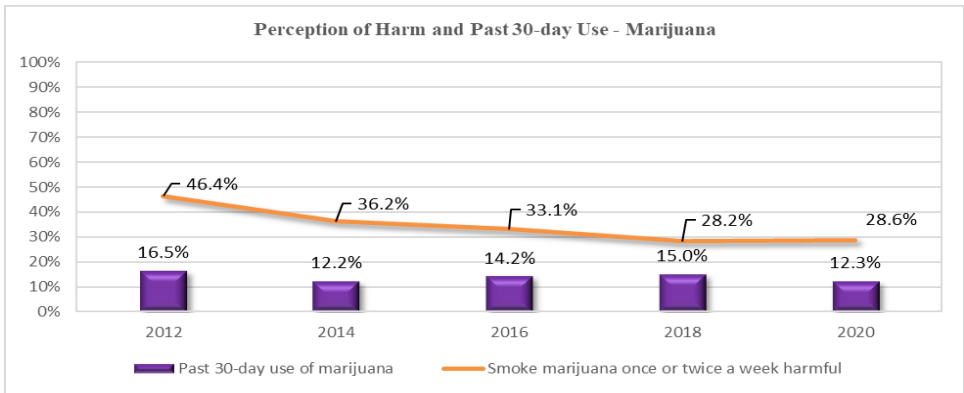


Figure 13: Perception of harm and past 30-day use - FYSAS

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report\\_2404/ShortReport-2404.html](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_2404/ShortReport-2404.html)

Perception of harm from use of marijuana can also be viewed from the perspective of how common is it for teens to engage in the risky behavior of either driving after using marijuana, or riding in a car with someone who used marijuana before driving. The 2020 FYSAS shows **22.2% of high school teens report riding with someone who had used marijuana**, higher than the state at 22.1%. This declined from 25.9% in 2018 in Charlotte County. The data also declined for teens in Charlotte County reporting **driving in a car with someone who is using marijuana: 10.7%** from 13.6% in 2018. However, Charlotte County remains higher than the state (9.0%) and Suncoast Region (9.1%).

Inaccurate perception of harm is also evident by the comments teens make to prevention staff in the schools. Comments include “its natural” – “it’s medicine, so safe to use” are examples made in both middle and high schools.

Perception of Peer Use – Marijuana

As detailed previously, research shows the importance of closing the gap between teens’ perceptions of peer use and the actual reported data. The theory is that promotion of positive norms – that most teens do not use – with the use of the actual data (92% of middle school teens do not use marijuana) will reinforce the healthy choices of our teens, and reduce the likelihood of teens choosing to use because “everyone is doing it.”

The figures below show the trends in actual use and perception of peer use of marijuana by Charlotte County middle and high school teens. Overall the trends in perception and use appear to follow similar trajectories, if not every year. The coalition uses this trend data to help identify how strongly social norms messaging is able to counter other social messaging that promotes use as “the norm.”

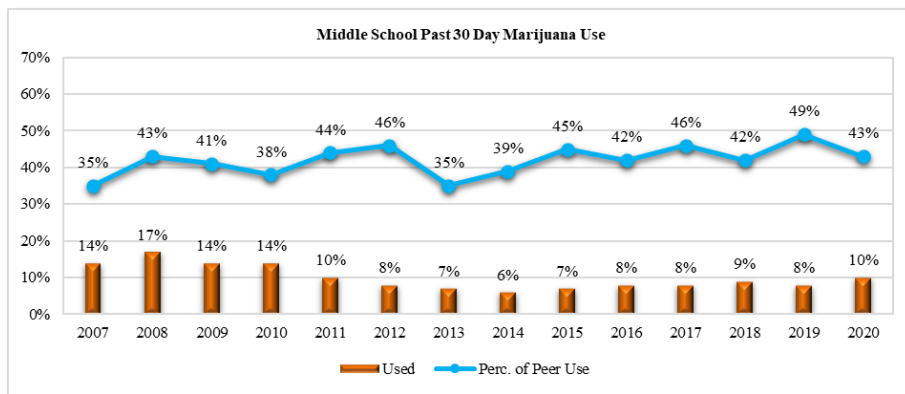


Figure 14: Actual and perceived use of marijuana - middle school - 2019 TeeNS

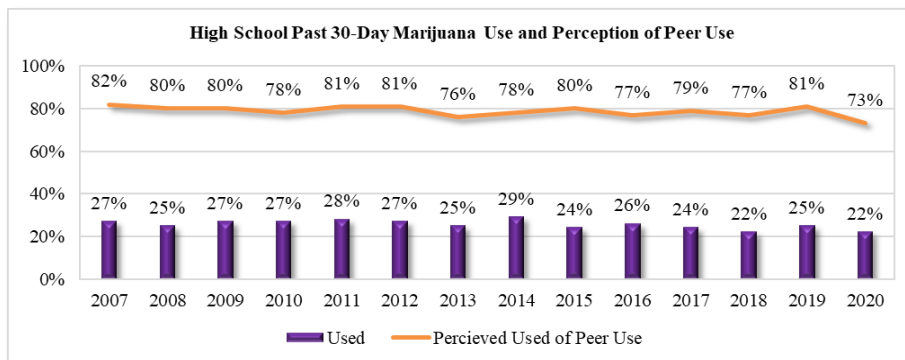


Figure 15: Actual and perceived use of marijuana -high school - 2019 TeeNS

Perception is also explored through intercept surveys given at the beginning of the school year and end, through the Prevention Partnership Program (PPG) grant staff. Starting in 2015, intercept surveys have been given to approximately 100 teens in each school, each quarter. This provides an additional look at how teens perceive the use of alcohol by their peers by asking “*What percentage of your peers do NOT use marijuana.*” While data collection from the 19-20 school year was inhibited by pandemic school closures, data from the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter collection shows marked improvement from baseline (school start). Middle school perception of use was improved by 24% and high school by 37%. This is similar to previous years, reinforcing that consistent social norms messaging does help improve perception of peer use, which in turn, supports decisions not to use. Table 13 shows the improved outcomes the social norms activities and campaigns have had in perception of peer use among middle and high school teens in Charlotte County. Historically, the intercept survey data points appears to indicate the decreased access to teens during the summer months may decrease the perception that most peers do not use from end of year rates to the following school start. This supports that while there has been a substantial change in the social norms perceptions among local teens, the experience of the social norms activities and campaigns points to the need for consistent “dosing” of the message to support improved perception of actual social norms.

<b>PPG Intercept Surveys</b>		<b>Fall 2015</b>	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Spring 2020</b>
% of peers who do NOT use marijuana ( <b>perception did not use</b> )	Middle	24.06%	70.6%	87.3%
	High	5.91%	44.8%	61.3%

Table 13: PPG Intercept Survey

#### Perception of Peer Disapproval – Marijuana

Perception of peer disapproval of marijuana use increased in Charlotte County middle and high school teens, after dropping in 2018. This follows a regional and statewide trend for increased perception of peer disapproval.

	2016			2018			2020		
	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State
Middle School	85.5%	87.6%	88.6%	79.5%	88.0%	87.0%	84.8%	89.2%	87.9%
High School	53.4%	58.3%	59.9%	54.6%	58.0%	59.1%	60.7%	63.1%	61.8%

Table 14: Perception of Peer Disapproval - Marijuana - FYSAS

#### Perception of Parental Disapproval – Marijuana

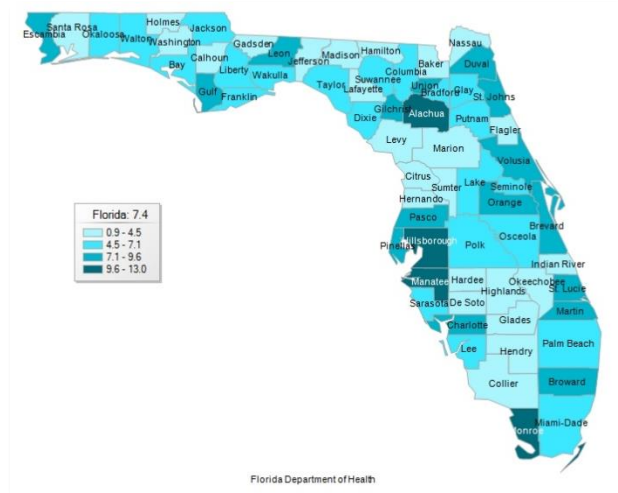
Parent disapproval for use of marijuana continues to trend below that of the state and region in Charlotte County. With parents being one of the main sources of “believable” information on alcohol and drugs (as reported in the 2020 Teen Norms Survey), it is important to see this trend upward.

	2016			2018			2020		
	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State
Middle School	95.1%	96.7%	97.0%	97.0%	96.0%	96.4%	95.6%	96.9%	96.5%
High School	82.0%	87.2%	88.6%	83.6%	86.6%	89.7%	82.8%	87.4%	87.1%

Table 15: Perception of Parental Disapproval - Marijuana - FYSAS

### Adult Use of Marijuana

The 2016 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BFRSS) surveyed adults in Florida on past 30-day use of marijuana. Charlotte County data indicates that 8.1% of adults used marijuana. This percentage is above the state percentage of 7.4%. The county is 13<sup>th</sup> highest out of 67 counties for adult use of marijuana, ranking 4<sup>th</sup> highest for our region (Central Florida Behavioral Health Network). Figure on the right provides a visualization of all counties. The darker counties have higher rates of adult use of marijuana, per most recent BRFSS.



### Prescription Drug Abuse/Misuse

#### Past 30-Day Use – Prescription Drugs

The Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey indicates that middle school age use of prescription drugs is higher than that of high school age teens in Charlotte County. Middle school rates rose for prescription pain relievers, prescription amphetamines, and over the counter drugs. However, high school use of all four (4) survey prescription types decreased from 2018. Use of prescription pain relievers and over the counter drugs dropped the most for Charlotte County high school teens, and are also well below state rate.

Past 30-day use by substance	Charlotte County						Florida Statewide					
	2016		2018		2020		2016		2018		2020	
	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS
Depressants	0.3%	2.1%	1.4%	1.5%	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	0.8%	2.4%	0.9%	1.6%	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>
Prescription Pain Relievers	2.4%	3.2%	0.8%	1.7%	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	1.6%	2.0%	1.0%	1.4%	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>
Prescription Amphetamines	0.5%	2.5%	0.5%	0.6%	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	0.5%	1.6%	0.5%	1.0%	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
Over the Counter Drugs	0.6%	3.3%	0.4%	1.8%	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	1.8%	2.1%	1.4%	1.8%	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>

Table 16: Past 30-Day Use of Medications - FYSAS

The Teen Norms Survey also provides data on teen use of prescription drugs without a prescription. The following figure provides a look at the five years this question is asked in Charlotte County. High school use dropped since 2015, while middle school use fluctuates throughout the years.

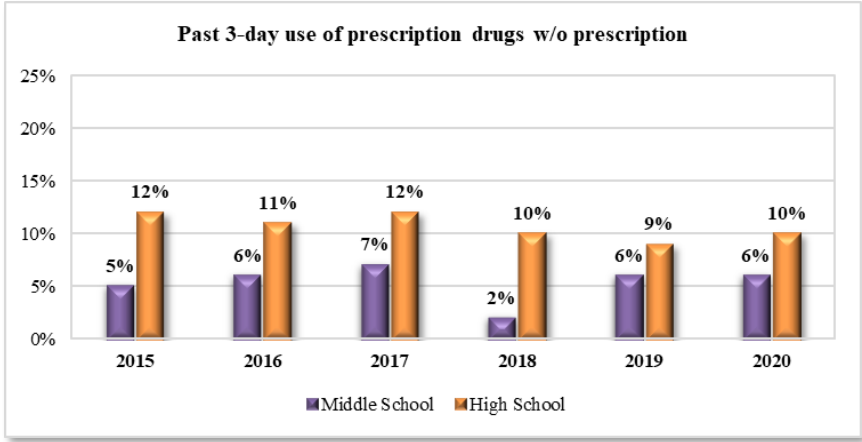


Figure 16: Past 30-Day Use of Prescription Drugs without a Prescription - TeeNS

Perception of Great Harm or Risk – Prescription Drugs

Charlotte County teens appear to understand the risks of prescription drug use at a rate higher than the state, as seen in the following figure. Perception of great harm or risk from use of prescription drugs is higher in Charlotte County than compared to the state.

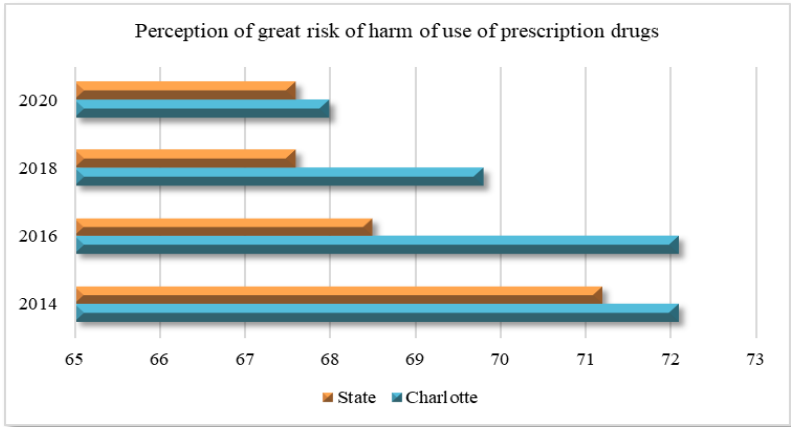


Figure 17: Perception of great risk of harm - Prescription Drugs, FYSAS

Perception of Peer Disapproval - Prescription Drugs

Perception of peer disapproval for prescription drug use (without prescription) fell among middle and high school teens in the county, while rising in the region. A similar increased in perception of peer disapproval for the state with middle school teens, but decreased slightly among high school teens statewide.

Perception of Peer Disapproval Use Prescription Meds	2018			2020		
	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State
Middle School	94.2%	95.0%	95.0%	93.3%	96.0%	95.2%
High School	91.8%	91.3%	91.8%	90.3%	91.5%	91.5%

Table 17: Perception of Peer Disapproval - Prescription Drugs - FYSAS



### Perception of Parental Disapproval – Prescription Drugs

Previously, Charlotte County middle school teens were more likely to perceive their parents disapprove of use of prescription drugs (without a prescription) than both regionally and statewide, but Charlotte County fell below both region and state rates in 2020. This data could tie in closely with the increase in past 30-day use, as reported by middle school teens in 2020. High school youth continue to report lower rates of perceived parental disapproval, as compared to our region and statewide data.

Perception of Parental Disapproval - Use Prescription Meds	2018			2020		
	Charlotte	CFBHN	State	Charlotte	CFBHN	State
Middle School	99.6%	98.0%	98.1%	97.4%	98.3%	97.9%
High School	96.8%	97.6%	97.1%	95.4%	97.8%	97.6%

Table 18: Perception of Parental Disapproval - Prescription Drugs – FYSAS

At school open houses in 2017, middle school parents were given a survey with regard to their awareness of safe storage and disposal of medications in the household. 31% of parents surveyed indicated they kept medications in a locked storage area. However, 55% indicated they stored medications in a medicine cabinet and 14% stored in a kitchen cabinet. A slight majority of responding parents (52%) indicate they use a safe disposal drop box to get rid of expired medications, followed by 26% who throw away and 22% who flush expired medications. While 38% were unaware of local safe disposal boxes, 58% were aware of at least one of the four boxes in Charlotte County. In 2019, a group of nine (9) parents were asked these same questions. While not a large group, their responses are similar to the findings in 2017. However, only about one-third are aware of take-back boxes. Due to the restrictions of the pandemic, this survey was not conducted in 2020.

### Prescription Drug Abuse in the Community

The Tampa Regional Poison Control Center provides a good starting point for the coalition to examine prescription drug abuse and misuse in the community.

Tampa Regional Poison Control reports that in 2019, forty-three (43) calls related to prescription drugs were received as compared to three (3) for street drugs. This is a rather dramatic decrease from the previous year with sixty-nine (69) calls related to prescription drugs and eighteen (18) for street drugs. Calls related to suicide attempts are also down. However, still high as compared to 2014, when the coalition first used this data. 2020 data was not finalized at the time of this assessment completion.

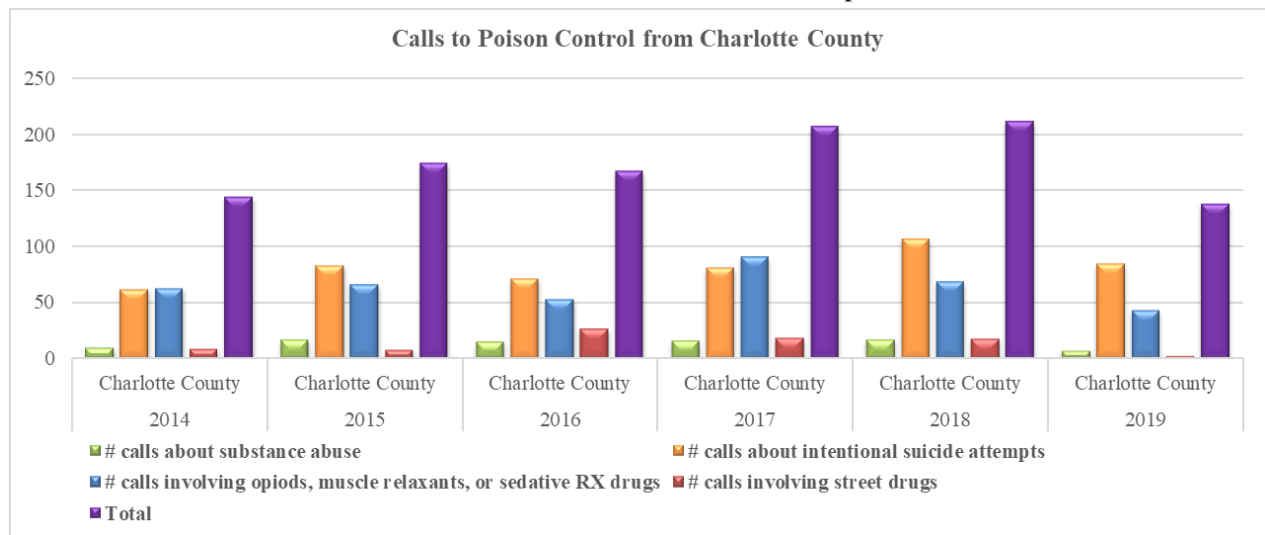


Figure 18: Poison Control calls from Charlotte County

In 2019, deaths caused by Fentanyl was the number one cause of accidental drug deaths in Charlotte County. Morphine and methamphetamine were the two drugs most often present. 2019 was also the year with the most death with heroin present or the cause in the past fifteen (15) years with four (4) deaths. The fifteen-year average is 1.5 deaths/year. Cocaine deaths (present or caused) are also on the rise. Over the past fifteen (15) years, an average of 10.6 deaths occurred in Charlotte County with cocaine present or the cause. The lowest was in 2013 with two (2), and the highest in 2007 with nineteen (19). In 2019, there were 12 deaths.

2019 ME Report	Total Deaths with Drug		
	total	cause	present
Alprazolam	17	2	15
Diazepam	1	0	1
Oxycodone	9	1	8
Hydrocodone	4	0	4
Methadone	5	1	1
Morphine	25	1	24
Cocaine	12	1	11
Heroin	4	0	4
Methamphetamine	25	0	25
Fentanyl	23	19	4
Fentanyl analog	0	0	0

Table 19: 2019 Medical Examiner Report

The Report indicates there is a nearly 16% decrease in total prescription drug related deaths for the county, but increases in accidental deaths with prescription drugs as cause or present for 2019. Accidental death caused by prescription drugs rose by an alarming 90.9%.

Prescription Drugs in Medical Examiner's Deaths Charlotte County	2018	2019	% Change
Total Prescription Drugs in ME Deaths (Present and Cause)	76	64	-15.8%
Total Prescription Drugs in ME Deaths (Present and Cause) Accidental Deaths	36	42	16.7%
Total Prescription Drugs in ME Deaths (Cause) Accidental Deaths	11	21	90.9%

Table 20: Prescription Drugs in Medical Examiner's Report - Charlotte County

Persons between 35-50 represent the largest age group of death by accidental overdose, followed by ages 26-34 (present or caused). Previously, those older than 50 were often closely behind ages 35-50. No deaths from any of the included substances were reported in Charlotte County for under the age of 25. Ages older than 50 were the largest age group with prescription drugs present or the cause of accidental death.

According to the Opioid Data Dashboard (Florida Health Charts),<sup>22</sup> in 2019, there were 222 non-fatal overdose emergency department visits in Charlotte County (provisional data), 74 involving opioids and less than 30 involving heroin.

Overdose and Hospital Use 2019	Jan-Mar (provisional)	Apr-Jun (provisional)	Jul-Sep (provisional)	Oct-Dec (provisional)	Total (provisional)
Non-fatal overdose emergency dept visits	38	53	65	66	222
Opioid involved non-fatal overdose emergency dept visits	10	16	26	22	74

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=ChartsProfiles.OpioidUseDashboard>

<i>Heroin involved non-fatal overdose emergency dept visits</i>	<5	9	6	10	<30
<i>All drug non-fatal overdose hospitalizations</i>	69	66	65	56	256
<i>Opioid involved non-fatal overdose hospitalizations</i>	26	22	17	17	82
<i>Heroin involved non-fatal overdose hospitalizations</i>	<5	<5	<5	<5	unknown

The Dashboard provides information on the number of prescriptions for opioids dispensed quarterly and annually, using E-Force (Prescription Drug Monitoring Program) data. Charlotte County rate of prescriptions dispensed per patient is equal to the state at 4.1. Charlotte County providers prescribe opioids at a rate of 36.2/prescriber. This fall significantly lower than the state rate of 147.9/prescriber.

<b>Prescription and Prescribers 2019</b>	<b>Jan-Mar</b>	<b>Apr-Jun</b>	<b>Jul-Sep</b>	<b>Oct -Dec</b>	<b>Year to Date</b>
<i>Number of Prescriptions Dispensed</i>	31,156	30,654	30,136	30,648	122,594
<i>Number of Unique Patients</i>	13,777	13,549	12,947	13,376	30,016
<i>Number of Unique Prescribers</i>	1,848	1,789	1,783	1,863	3,391
<i>Prescriptions Dispensed per Patient</i>	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.3	4.1
<i>Prescriptions Dispensed per Prescriber</i>	16.9	17.1	16.9	16.5	36.2

### Substance Exposed Newborns

According to the latest data available through the state (Opioid Data Dashboard), Charlotte County had 16 babies born substance exposed in 2018. The rate of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome in the count is 153.0/10,000 live births. This rate is above the state rate of 62.1/10,000 live births. Care must be taken when reviewing this data, as the number of births in Charlotte County may also impact this data. However, it is an issue in the community, and one the community has made great effort to address.

Since May of 2017, Drug Free Charlotte County is active in the Charlotte County Substance Exposed Newborn (SEN) Task Force. Currently, the group gathers data from BayFront Port Charlotte’s Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and is working to expand it’s data resources.

The NICU began to collect in January 2017. As of the end 2019, the most common substance found in mothers who delivered at the hospital (hospital tests all pregnant women presenting for treatment and/or delivery) was THC, followed by amphetamines. Likewise, THC was the most common substance found in newborns testing positive for a substance at birth in the local hospital. However, Amphetamines and Methadone were the most common substances found in newborns entering the NICU. Approximately 21.2% of newborns in the NICU were positive from one or more substances identified through drug testing. Nearly 10% of mothers delivering at the hospital showed positive results for one or more substance(s) identified through drug testing. The hospital tests any pregnant woman presenting for treatment, whether delivery or other reason. Of these women, 11% tested positive for one or more substance.

A key informant interview with Dr. J. Patel, a neonatologist from Johns Hopkins University working in the NICU in Charlotte County, was conducted in January 2019. Dr. Patel indicated one of the biggest challenges they see are with mothers on suboxone. According to many of these mothers, their prescribing physician indicated their child would not experience withdrawal if the mother used suboxone. Often, this creates confusion and conflict at the child’s birth when the medical staff informed the parent that the child would need to be monitored for withdrawal for several days. He stated that they are seeing less of an issue with prescription drugs due to the more restrictive prescription drug laws now in place. However, there is still an issue during pregnancy and infant withdrawal. He reports that THC is more prevalent. According to him,

this also creates an issue for breastfeeding, which the unit recommends and supports. However, with THC, this is not usually recommended. Dr. Patel also indicated that the presence of the Navigator-Advocate (Kids Thrive! Collaborative, which Drug Free Charlotte County is a partner) shows great promise for ongoing support to the infants after they are discharged. He also indicated strong support for the work of the Substance Exposed Newborn Task Force.

The good news is that the work of the SEN Task Force and Kids Thrive! Collaborative is having an impact locally. In 2019, eight (8) newborns who were born exposed (confirmed with testing), did not require NICU placement. This has never happened at the local hospital since it had a NICU. The parent(s) of these newborns practiced the non-medicinal interventions they learned through Kids Thrive! Collaborative that helped ease the symptoms of withdrawal for the newborn, and helped calm and ease his/her stress.

### Other Substance Use

Data from the 2020 FYSAS regarding past 30-day use of other substances by Charlotte County teens is shown in the table below.

% Past 30-day use by substance	Charlotte County						Florida Statewide					
	2016		2018		2020		2016		2018		2020	
	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS
<b>Cigarettes</b>	2.8	7.4	0.4	2.8	2.0	4.4	1.4	4.8	1.2	3.5	3.1	9.6
<b>Vape/E-Cig</b>	9.5	17.2	8.0	9.5	---	---	5.1	12.8	6.4	19.2	---	---
<b>Vape Nicotine</b>	---	---	---	---	8.5	18.4	---	---	---	---	5.8	15.6
<b>Vape Marijuana</b>	---	---	---	---	3.0	9.4	---	---	---	---	3.0	10.0
<b>Synthetic Marijuana</b>	---	1.0	---	1.6	---	0.3	---	1.0	---	1.1	---	0.9
<b>Inhalants</b>	2.6	1.2	1.2	2.6	3.5	0.9	2.2	1.2	2.8	1.1	2.8	1.2
<b>Club Drugs</b>	0.5	1.9	0.1	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.8	0.2	0.5	0.4	1.3
<b>LSD, PCP, or Mushrooms</b>	0.6	1.1	1.1	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.3	1.4	0.4	1.1	0.4	1.3
<b>Meth</b>	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.8	0.0	1.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3
<b>Cocaine or Crack Cocaine</b>	0.6	1.4	1.4	0.6	0.2	0.9	0.3	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.5
<b>Heroin</b>	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.7	0.0	1.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3

Table 21: Past 30-Day Use of Other Substances – FYSAS.

Synthetic marijuana use dropped in 2020 after a slight rise in 2018, falling below statewide rate. In 2013, as part of a law enforcement crack down on synthetic drugs, the county developed and passed an ordinance banning their sale. Heroin use in high school teens went up to 1.2%, nearly doubling from 2018 and well above state rate.

While cigarettes continue rank number one as the first substance used by Charlotte County teens<sup>23</sup>, it is ranked third as a substance used in the past 30-days.<sup>21</sup> Vaping is a device to use a substance, so not ranked as a substance. Vaping and e-cigarette use within the past 30-days is falls just below alcohol use in both the FYSAS and TeeNS 2020 data for the county. Charlotte County rates for vaping nicotine is higher than statewide in both middle and high school teens. Vaping marijuana falls just above statewide rates, but below the statewide rate for high school. The FYSAS data in 2020 also indicates that 88% of those Charlotte County teens who vape marijuana, vape nicotine. However only 10% of teen who vape nicotine also smoke cigarettes. Vaping may be contributing to the rise in high school use of cigarettes, as they become addicted to nicotine through a vape devices.

Looking at data for e-cigarette use among Charlotte County adults is available only for 2016. The 2016 BRFSS indicates that 3.1% of adults in Charlotte County reported use of e-cigarettes, as compared to 4.7% statewide.

Vape stores are found close to most high schools in the area, and while local teens’ perception of harm from use of these devices has increased since 2018, 18% of high school teens and 17% of middle school teens do not see “any harm” from use of electronic devices (2020 TeeNS). Only marijuana use is seen as less harmful (as compared to alcohol, cigarettes, prescription drugs and vaping).

<sup>23</sup> 2020 Teen Norms Survey in Charlotte County

Pre and post interviews (2018) with several local community members indicated that prior to receiving information on vaping, they had very positive feelings about using such a device. From "...it helps people stop smoking..." to "...it smells good," their perception was that there is little harm in it. However, they did express their perception changed after receiving information from prevention provider and learning more about the risks of use. The challenge for the coalition is to reach more adults and community members with the information who do not usually frequent the coalition's social media or events. Presentations by the coalition to local civic groups have also revealed that many in the community are unaware of the use of vaping devices beyond a smoking cessation tool, and few were aware of "Juul" devices. While recent news coverage of incidences of severe lung illness tied to vaping has helped bring increased awareness and understanding of the harms for use, prevention staff still report youth and adults who are not aware of risks.

### *Summary of Substance-Related Problems*

Underage alcohol use is the most used substance among Charlotte County teens. It is also one of the first substances used by local children. Historically, Charlotte County has come far in reducing underage use. In 2000, over half of high school teens used alcohol, and in 2020, this had dropped to 18.8%.<sup>24</sup> The Teen Norms Survey, conducted in all Charlotte County Public Middle and High Schools, reports similar use. However, in 2011 to 2020, this annual survey dropped thirteen (13) percentage points for past 30-day use of alcohol by high school teens. Likewise, there is a decrease in the heavy use of alcohol by adults in the community. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System conducted every three years in Florida, indicated adult binge or heavy drinking in Charlotte County was above the state percentage of use in 2002 at 18.4%, but in 2016, it not only had dropped, but at 16.1%, it is now lower than the state.<sup>25</sup>

Past 30-day use of marijuana is at one of the lowest rates in past 10 years in Charlotte County, but still higher than regional or state rates. The coalition is concerned about the continued decline in perception of harm for use and perception in parental disapproval of use. Both are key protective factors. Vaping is a key mechanism for using marijuana, with 9.4% of high school teens reporting use of vape devices for this purpose. Of those, 88% also vape nicotine. While only 4.4% of high school teens and 2% of middle school teens report cigarette use, 18.4% in high school and 8.5% in middle school report use of vape devices for nicotine. 42% who vape nicotine, also vape marijuana. Vape devices might be a gateway to marijuana use, even when used first for nicotine.

Teen misuse or abuse of prescription medications is relatively low in comparison with other alcohol or marijuana. During COVID-19, rates of overdose accelerated in the community according to a local news report.<sup>26</sup> This appears to mirror what is happening throughout the country.<sup>27</sup> According to the 2019 Medical Examiner's Report, persons between 35-50 represent the largest age group of death by accidental overdose, followed by ages 26-34 (present or caused). Previously, those older than 50 were often closely behind ages 35-50. Ages older than 50 were the largest age group with prescription drugs present or the cause of accidental death.

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<sup>24</sup> Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey Data

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/Brfss/DataViewer.aspx?bid=10>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.fox4now.com/news/local-news/overdoses-are-on-the-rise-in-charlotte-county>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html>

## Challenges and Obstacles to Addressing Problems

COVID-19 brought unexpected and new obstacles to implementing prevention strategies and addressing local issues. However, coalition and provider staff took time to strategize unique and flexible ways to provide prevention in the community. Very quickly there was a pivot to online meetings and creating video, both “live” and taped, and emphasizing support to the community via social media. The coalition was also fortunate to be able to be at the “zoom table” for county-wide efforts to address the stress of the pandemic on families and youth in the community. Therefore, information, education and support materials were distributed through food banks and meal distribution sites. Prevention staff assisted at summer camps through the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs, providing a way for prevention activities with youth. A major focus of the messaging strategies included how to use healthy coping mechanisms and dealing with the stress of the pandemic without using alcohol or drugs. There was also an understanding that this unprecedented time of stress and uncertainty also provided a unique opportunity to focus on family bonding, one of the key protective factors.

The coalition joined with Lee, Collier, and Hendry Counties to create joint messaging and activities through a parent-focused Facebook page and creating a regional Teen Leadership Council. Monthly “Facebook Live” town halls with topics to help parents and caregivers were planned with partners. The benefits of this regional partnership are recognized, making this a strategy to continue beyond the pandemic.

Aside from the obstacles of the current environment of the COVID-19 pandemic, the coalition continues to work to address obstacles and risk factors impacting substance use trends. As identified in previous annual assessments, use of vaping devices is a critical concern. Use of vaping devices jumped significantly beginning the end of the 2017-18 school year. School citations for tobacco use are issued when a student is found with a vaping device. By far these are related to vaping devices. Teens report, and scans confirm, that some retailers sell the replacement pods for as little as \$1. School personnel report that teens indicate they do not believe there is harm in using the devices, as they are not cigarettes and just fruit flavors. The discreteness of many of the devices makes it easy to conceal both possession as well as use. This poses difficulty for enforcement. The coalition continues to work to get information and education in the schools, countering youth perceptions that vaping is not really harmful, even with THC.

Legalization of marijuana, with the media attention and normalizing it within our cultural, as well as countering the perception of alcohol as a main part of “fun and being an adult” are major challenges for the coalition. Developing strategies and prevention messages to promote healthy choices are key for success. This must be done with input from our local teens, so that the messages and activities are not only accepted by teens, but successfully present the positive message of being alcohol and drug free. With relaxed regulations on sale and delivery of alcohol, there may also be an increase in accessibility for youth. Data from the February 2020 FYSAS, prior to the pandemic shutdowns, youth in Charlotte County were reporting parents and friends’ parents as key sources of alcohol. Messaging to parents about the importance of teens not using alcohol, its harm to brain development, and risks of use as a coping mechanism, are critical, but, reaching those parents who do not understand this continues to be difficult.

Many of the families in our community are struggling economically. This added stress can impact children and teens as well as parents. Teens in an unstable family situation are at higher risk for use of substances. It also impacts the ability of the coalition to reach parents with information and education, who are often working split shifts and multiple jobs as they struggle to make ends meet. The coalition is able to bring more prevention services to at-risk teens, but the challenge is the need to reach children and teens at even earlier ages, including building parenting skills to parents of those younger children. One way the coalition is working to address these obstacles is by being active with county-wide groups and task forces, including Together Charlotte, Women United, Kids Thrive Collaborative, Healthy Charlotte, ACEs Task Force, SEN

Task Force, and the Family Services Center Provider Network. The ACEs data from the 2020 FYSAS reinforces the importance of addressing trauma and family stability early and consistently. It is clear that substance use among teens is a likely coping mechanism and building healthy coping skills and resiliency has become a critical foundation for prevention in Charlotte County.

Even as teachers and school social workers acknowledge a need for more education on drugs and alcohol (Key Informant Surveys), it is more and more difficult to get the education into the classroom. Testing schedules and time required to provide the teaching necessary for the testing, make scheduling difficult. While conducting evidence based programs with 8-10 sessions was possible in the past, it is very difficult to bring them into the classroom now. The coalition is looking at innovative ways to work around this, including establishing partnerships with youth serving organizations through which services can be provided in the community and outside of the school day. As the 2019-20 school year began, the state issued a mandate for five (5) hours of mental health education in grades 6-12, followed by “some” in k-5 which includes substance use education. As a result, the coalition, provider and school staff developed a plan for substance use education to reach all students to meet this state mandate. This helps address the identified need for more education and the coalition will work with the provider and school staff to ensure that it is quality education, not just checking the box for the mandate. While changes had to be made due to the pandemic, the school continued to schedule these educational activities in the 20-21 School Year.



## Problem Statements

**Problem 1:** Alcohol – Too many Charlotte County teens are using alcohol. 2020 FYSAS data indicates 14.4% of teens (6-12th grade) reported they have used alcohol in the past 30 days. 32.5% of teens report alcohol use during lifetime. The 2020 Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS) reports that the age of onset for alcohol use in Charlotte County, as reported by middle school teens, is just over age 11. SAMHSA reports 74% of adults with addiction issues began substance use before age 17.<sup>28</sup> In order for the coalition to address its mission of preventing addiction, preventing teen substance use is critical. Further, ACEs may be contributing to use, with nearly 30% of those using alcohol having 4 or more ACEs as compared to less than 15% with fewer ACEs, pointing to a need for coping skills and focus on resiliency.

**Problem 2:** Marijuana - Too many Charlotte County teens are using marijuana. 2020 FYSAS data indicates 12.3% of teens (6-12th grade) reported they have used marijuana in the past 30 days. 22.4% of teens report alcohol use during lifetime. The 2020 Teen Norms Survey (TeeNS) reports that the age of onset for marijuana use, as reported by Charlotte County middle school teens, is just under age 11.5. SAMHSA reports 74% of adults with addiction issues began substance use before age 17.<sup>29</sup> In order for the coalition to address its mission of preventing addiction, preventing teen substance use is critical. Further, ACEs may be contributing to use, with 33% of those using alcohol having 4 or more ACEs as compared to less than 15% with fewer ACEs, pointing to a need for coping skills and focus on resiliency.

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<sup>28</sup> Use Initiation among Treatment Admissions Age 18 to 30. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

<sup>29</sup> Use Initiation among Treatment Admissions Age 18 to 30. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

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