

MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF CHESHIRE YOUTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2026 AT 5:00 P.M.,
84 SOUTH MAIN ST, CHESHIRE, CT 06410

Present: Phillip Belcher, Susan Pappas, Marlena Soble, Amy Russell, Sally LaRusso, Margie Rogers and Kristina Veilleux

Staff/Guests: John Bajor (Minutes Clerk)
Dawn Cronin (Cheshire Junior Women)
Abigail Wood Maldonado (Western CT Coalition)
Lisa Zaborowski (Cheshire YMCA)
Sandy Hernandez (Cheshire Library)
Elizabeth Mayne (Parks and Recreation)
Michelle Piccorillo (Human Services)
Deb Manke (Town Council)
Nick Deschino (Cheshire YMCA)
Imina Raid (Youth Liaison)

Absent: Margie Rogers and Kristina Veilleux

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Philip Belcher requested the meeting be called to order at 5:03 PM

MOTION by Sally LaRusso called the meeting to order and begin

SECONDED by Susan Pappas, with motion passing unanimously by those present

2. ROLL CALL / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

The pledge was recited and roll taken by John Bajor

3. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

A quorum was determined to be present

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

There were no corrections to the previous minutes

MOTION by Sally LaRusso to approve the prior meeting minutes as is

SECONDED by Marlena Soble, with motion passing unanimously by those present

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5. HUMAN SERVICES UPDATE AND COMMITTEE MEMBER SHARING:

Senior Center:

- Our AARP Income Tax Program appointments are full. All requests are waitlist only.
- We are continuing our partnership with the American Red Cross and have a Blood Drive scheduled for Thursday, March 12th from 1pm- 6pm.
- Connecticut Paid Leave Presentation is on Wednesday, March 18th at 5:30pm. CT Paid Leave can provide up to 12 weeks every year . In this presentation, CT Paid Leave staff will discuss how to access, navigate, and apply for the program and shed light on caregiver rights. This program is open to the public.
- The next AARP Age-Friendly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 15, 2026.
- Monthly in-person AARP safe driving classes will be offered at the Senior Center beginning in April. The first class is on April 22 from 9am-1pm. These classes are open to the public. The details will be the April newsletter.

Cheshire Junior Women:

- Hosting Spelling Bee for 5th and 6th graders at Dodd on March 26th.
- Waiting to receive scholarship applications from the seniors; scholarship is for \$1,000 and students were asked, “How has one of your community service projects impacted you? How will you continue to implement your community service experience in the future?”

Cheshire Parks & Recreation:

Artsday

- Cheshire Performing Fine Arts Committee and Artsplace will be hosting Artsday on Sunday, March 15th at the Youth Center. Registration is going on now for both participants and teen volunteers. Space is limited so please register soon. For more information call Artsplace 203-272-2787.

Youth Basketball

- Championship games for most leagues will be this Saturday, March 7th. Boys in Grades 3-6 will have their championship games next Saturday, March 14. The George Welch High School league will have its championship games on Tuesday, March 10 at 6:30 p.m. in the CHS West Gym; this game will start with a brief award ceremony to present the Barry Sutherland Sportsmanship Award and some other grade level awards. All are welcome to attend.

Cheshire YMCA:

- Pre-school summer adventure camp opened
- “Sloper Plunge” was held: 200 jumpers from Cheshire and Southington which raised \$100,000
- March 6: LiveStrong Event
- March 18: Hit Back at Parkinson’s
- April: Matter of Balance and Race to Chase (Triathlon: Swimming, Cycling, Running)
- Summer: Golf Strength and Mobility (fee required)

Chesprocott:

- Community Health Assessment underway. This is performed every three years and will include surveys and informal interviews

Cheshire Human Services:

- Business Cards have been designed for Cheshire Mental Health and Wellness Resources. Cards will be distributed to medical offices with goal of enhancing access to mental health resources.



6. 2025 REGIONAL PRIORITY REPORT “DATA WALK”:

- The Western Connecticut Coalition covers 43 towns for mental health and addiction (wctcoalition.org/resources/prevention2).
- Instead of distributing 40-page project reports, posters were generated to capture the main points in bullet form.
- Posters will be viewed on Suicide, Problem Gambling, Vaping and Nicotine, Alcohol and Cannabis.
- Overall Goal: Is this something that Youth and Human Services should take on with a question-and-answer period following a 20-minute viewing and discussion

7. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Marlena Soble to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 PM

SECONDED by Susan Pappas with motion passing unanimously by those present.

Next meeting will be on May 6th

Attest: *J. B. J.*
John Bajor

Vaping and Nicotine Use

1 Key Issue

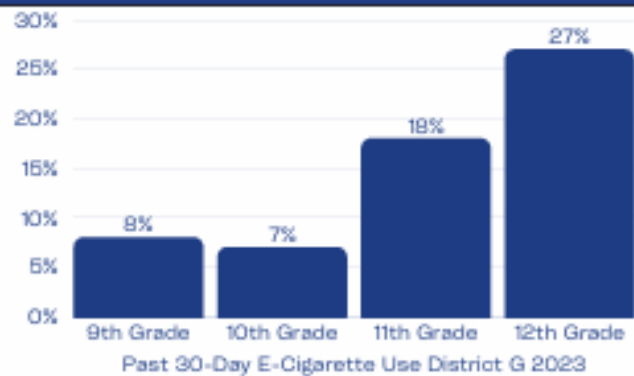
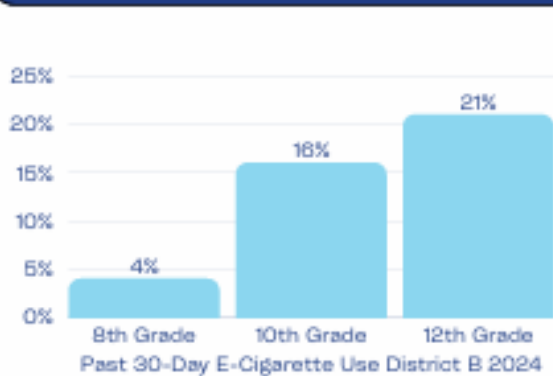
While most surveyed youth in Western CT do not vape or use nicotine, the past 30-day use of e-cigarettes ranges from 3% to 27% among those in grades 9-12.

2 Risk Factors

In 2023, 28% of surveyed youth who use e-cigarettes reported that they got them from a vape shop. One school district, saw an increase in that reporting from 26% to 39%.

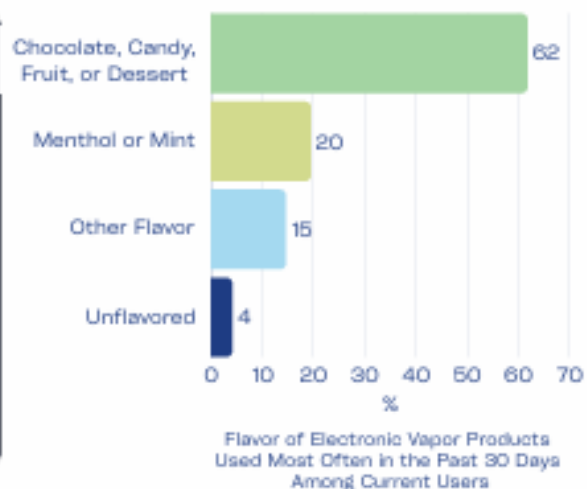
3 Recommendations

- Increase state and local regulation of vape shops to include density caps, limitation on signage, and registration checks and balances.
- Implement a **comprehensive flavor ban** on all tobacco products, including menthol flavored products.
- Amend the CT definition of tobacco and nicotine products to align with federal standards and ensure all vape and emerging nicotine products are included under CT tobacco regulations.



4 Community Strengths & Strategies

- The primarily volunteer-based **Local Prevention Council program** in CT is vital to prevention. Utilizing evidence-based strategies, their work has contributed to a reduction in youth use of e-cigarettes since 2019.
- Leveraging the Juul settlement funds, **the RBHAOS have a cohort of prevention professionals** across the state dedicated to reducing the harms of nicotine use among those most vulnerable - under 21.



Sources: Search Institute Attitudes and Behaviors Survey Results in Region 5, CT Department of Consumer Protection, CT YRBS 2023

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Cannabis

Key Issue

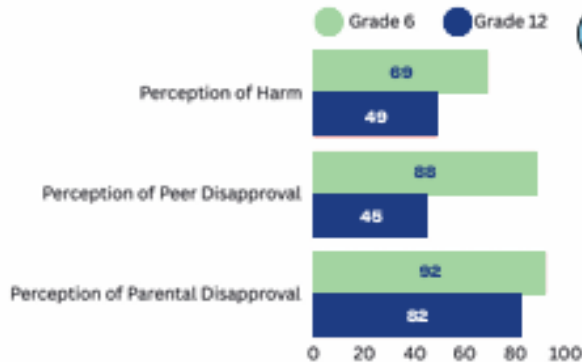
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While the majority of youth in Region 5 do not use cannabis, there has been an increase in the number of youth who have "ever used", or are "currently using" cannabis. There has also been an increase in the perception that cannabis is easy to access.

CT Poison Control Cannabis-Related Calls
Ages 0 - 17 (2017-2024)



Connecticut Youth Survey Data:
Perception of Cannabis Use



Source: Connecticut Youth Voices Count Surveys, 2019 - 2024 (n = > 44,000)

Key Findings

- CT Poison Control reports that between 2017 and 2024, it received an average of 40 to 60 cannabis-related calls per month for children aged 17 and under.
- The perception of risks decreases as grade level increases. Cannabis is the substance with the lowest perception of risk among youth in grades 6 - 12.
- There are several instances of registered ENDS retailers (i.e. vape shops, smoke shops, convenience stores) selling illicit cannabis products; on regional surveys, youth report accessing cannabis products from these retailers.
- From a representative sample of regional youth surveys, among youth who reported vaping nicotine in the past 30 days, 44.7% reported vaping cannabis.

Recommendations

3

- Institute a cap on smoke shop density** to prevent excessive retailer concentration and reduce youth access to cannabis products.
- Implement stricter packaging and labeling regulations** to prevent accidental consumption and ensure clear dosage guidance.
- Commit 5% of cannabis retail revenue to prevention efforts**, including dedicated funding for cessation programs to provide youth-focused intervention and treatment options.

Community Strengths & Strategies

4

- Two Local Prevention Councils in Western CT were awarded \$57,000 each for an 18-month period of **Cannabis Coalition Prevention Grants**.
- Increased collaboration with DMHAS and DCP** has led to expanded outreach and educational efforts at licensed cannabis retailers and registered ENDS retailers.
- The establishment of the **Region 5 Underage Cannabis and Nicotine Workgroup** has incited an increased level of representation, awareness, and capacity for cannabis prevention strategies throughout Western CT.

Sources: CT DPH Cannabis Health Statistics (2025), Connecticut Poison Control (2025), CT YRBS (2024), Regional School Surveys (Search Institute, Youth Voices Count) (2024), CT DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey

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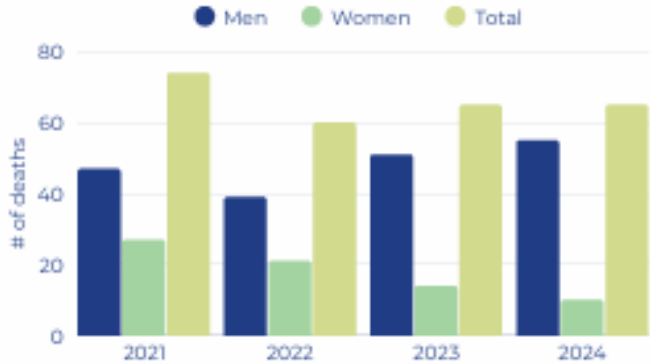
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Suicide

Key Issue

Suicide is a **public health concern** with an impact that is felt across the lifespan and among our communities. Suicide deaths in Western CT have slightly decreased or stayed steady since 2021. Male deaths are consistently higher than female deaths in the region.



Key Findings

- In Western CT, while requests to 211 decreased slightly from 2023 to 2024, there was an **increase of almost 700 requests to 211** for crisis intervention and suicide.
- An average of 19.3% of students surveyed over five districts indicated having "seriously considered" attempting suicide in the past 12 months. In another two districts, 18.8% of students reported "attempting suicide ever in their lives". This dataset found **higher reports of suicide attempts in female students** - a pattern consistently shown in regional data.
- Groups with notable risk factors that require attention include LGBTQIA+ individuals, emerging adults, and older men.

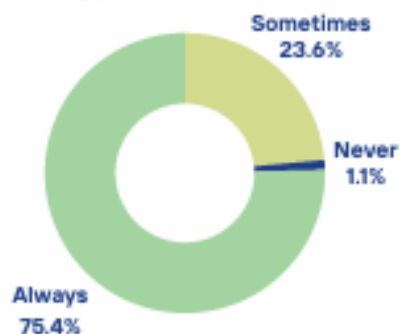
Recommendations

- Dedicate stable funding to the **Regional Suicide Advisory Boards** to continue and enhance the important prevention and postvention work being done across the lifespan in their communities.
- Gather regional adult mental health and suicide data, particularly adult men, to inform prioritization processes and suicide prevention and postvention planning.

Community Strengths & Strategies

- In 2023 and 2024 Western CT Coalition trained over **1,094 individuals** across various sectors and settings in Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), evidence-based training that teaches simple steps to help save a life.
- The Regional Suicide Advisory Board trains and builds capacity around response after a loss that mitigates risk and promotes safety (suicide postvention), including supporting communities in creating local **Suicide Postvention Information Networks (SPINs)**.

How likely QPR participants are to ask someone "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" if concerned



Sources: CT VDRS, Regional School Surveys (Survey Institute, Youth Voices Count), 211counts.org

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Problem Gambling

Key Issue

1

Problem gambling, sometimes referred to as disordered gambling, includes gambling behaviors which disrupt or damage personal, family, or vocational pursuits. Symptoms include increasing preoccupation with gambling, needing to bet more money more frequently, irritability when attempting to stop, and continuation of the gambling behavior despite serious negative consequences.

Key Findings

2

In focus groups, youth showed awareness of gambling risks like money loss and addiction. Common activities included sports betting, dice, card games, loot boxes, and lottery tickets—some received as gifts. Middle schoolers often gambled with snacks or game currency. Most reported seeing ads for CT Lottery, casinos, DraftKings, and FanDuel across media.

Prevalence of "Ever Gambling" High School Students: School "A" 2024
Gambled 1+ in 12 months

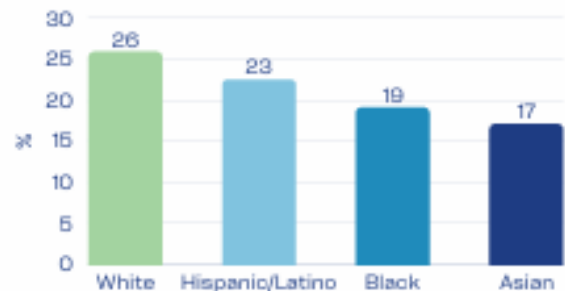


Recommendations

3

As sports betting grows, so does the need for stronger safeguards. Some states are exploring stricter rules—like loss limits and self-exclusion—to protect users. Experts warn current regulations are not enough, and betting platforms are being urged to adopt more ethical features like cooling-off periods and safety alerts.

Prevalence of "Ever Gambling" among CT High School Students across Race/Ethnicity, 2023



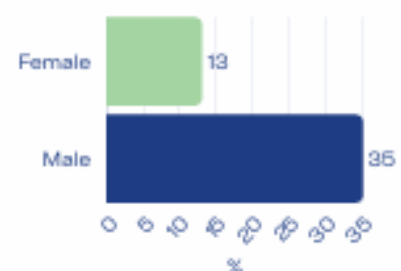
Community Strengths & Strategies

Education and advocacy

4

- Promotion of Help Line, MCCA, and Self-Exclusion programs.
- In-person "Community Conversation" presentations (age-appropriate programs for elementary school through senior citizens).
- Tabling events at schools, public events.
- **The only 18+ inpatient treatment facility is in Danbury**

Prevalence of "Ever Gambling" among CT High School Students across Sex, 2023



Sources: RG.org, Naugatuck, New Milford, Wolcott (2022)

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Alcohol

Key Issue

1

- Alcohol was identified as the **top priority substance** in the 2021, 2023 and 2025 priority reports for Western CT.
- It ranked as the 3rd overall concern, after depression and anxiety, in 2025.

Key Findings

2

- Canaan, our **smallest community** by population, (1,082) **sold 75,536 nips in 6 months with one liquor store** (Nips Per Capita [NPC] 69.81). Our second highest NPC is Winchester/Winsted (NPC 27.46). Winchester previously had Western CT's highest nip sales per year, outselling our larger regional cities like Waterbury and Danbury.
- From 2015-2022, **26.3% of suicide deaths had alcohol in their system** according to toxicology reports. 19.7% had an alcohol BAC above the legal limit.
- Danbury, one of our three urban periphery communities, led the state in DUI arrests (138) between January and June 2024.



of recently surveyed students in one school district reported **not driving after drinking** or riding with driver who's been drinking three or more times in the last 12 months.



Between 2022-24, Western CT experienced an estimated 840 crashes involving a DUI; 25 of which were fatal and 129 which resulted in possible injury.

Recommendations

3

- Develop and implement a multilingual, ADA-compliant Western CT community survey on alcohol use (including perceptions of risk, consumption, and consequences).
- Gather baseline data from a diverse cross-section of the community, providing region-specific insights that support prioritization, planning, and tracking through qualitative data across Western CT.

Community Strengths & Strategies

4

- New relationships with local retailers and other civic groups have enabled WCTC to focus more attention on adult alcohol use.
- Western Connecticut Coalition distributed over 1,500 coasters with information on standard drink sizes to more than 30 local restaurants.

WCTC Regional Priority Report 2023 and 2025; UCONN CT Crash Data Repository, CTVDRS 2024, 2021 and 2022-2024; [B5 Nips](#)

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