



# RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

## Research Solutions Inc. – April 2026 Prevention Newsletter

### Spring into Prevention: Understanding Youth Substance Use and the Significance of 4/20

As spring brings renewed energy and growth to Northeast Arkansas, it also offers an opportunity for reflection and community engagement. Research Solutions Inc. (RSI) is proud to highlight important prevention initiatives this season, including insights from the Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment (APNA) and the significance of Alcohol Awareness Month and April 20th (4/20)—a date commonly associated with cannabis use.

#### Understanding Youth Substance Use: Insights from APNA

The Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment (APNA) survey, administered in late 2025 to students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12, serves as a critical tool for guiding prevention and intervention efforts across Region 4, which includes Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Mississippi, Poinsett, and Randolph counties. The survey collects confidential and anonymous data on youth behaviors related to substance use, mental health, violence, and bullying, enabling communities to implement targeted, evidence-based strategies.

#### Key Findings

- Alcohol remains the most commonly used substance among youth, with reported lifetime use increasing by grade level:
  - - 6th Grade: 9.5%
  - - 8th Grade: 16.4%
  - - 10th Grade: 23.5%
  - - 12th Grade: 27.9%
- • 15.8% of students reported consuming alcohol within the past 30 days.
- • Vaping is also a concern, with 12.8% of 12th graders reporting use.
- • Early initiation of substance use begins as young as 10 years old, underscoring the importance of early prevention efforts.

Despite the presence of dry counties within Region 4, youth continue to access alcohol, often through sources such as alcohol stored in the home or provided by older peers. These findings emphasize the need for community-wide prevention strategies that strengthen protective factors and reduce access to substances.



# RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

## April is Alcohol Awareness Month

April is nationally recognized as Alcohol Awareness Month, a time dedicated to increasing understanding of alcohol use, misuse, and Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). Alcohol can significantly impact the developing adolescent brain, affecting memory, decision-making, and emotional regulation. Early use is also associated with a higher likelihood of developing substance use disorders later in life (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 2023).

Communities can support prevention by:

- Encouraging open conversations between parents and youth.
- Promoting responsible adult behaviors.
- Securing alcohol within the home.
- Supporting evidence-based school and community prevention programs.

## The Significance of 4/20: A Prevention Perspective

April 20th, commonly known as “4/20,” is widely recognized as a cultural symbol associated with cannabis use. For prevention professionals, this date represents an opportunity to engage youth and community members in meaningful conversations about health, safety, and informed decision-making. Effective prevention focuses on education rather than fear-based messaging, emphasizing how cannabis use can impact brain development, learning, memory, and mental health—particularly during adolescence, when the brain continues to develop into the mid-20s (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2024).

Communities can promote healthy alternatives by:

- Creating safe, substance-free events.
- Encouraging youth engagement in positive activities.
- Strengthening protective factors such as supportive relationships.
- Promoting accurate, science-based information about cannabis use.

## Building a Healthier Future Together

The combined insights from the APNA survey, Alcohol Awareness Month, and the significance of 4/20 highlight the importance of a coordinated, community-wide approach to prevention. Early education, strong protective factors, and collaborative partnerships among families, schools, and community organizations are essential to reducing substance misuse and promoting resilience among youth. Research Solutions Inc. remains committed to supporting Region 4 through evidence-based strategies, community collaboration, and data-driven decision-making.



# RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

## References

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2023). Underage drinking. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health.  
<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2024). Marijuana and the developing brain. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health.  
<https://nida.nih.gov>