NIH-funded research shows effectiveness of community-based, substance abuse prevention interventions begun during middle school years.

Middle school students from small towns and rural communities who received any of three community-based prevention programs were less likely to abuse prescription medications in late adolescence and young adulthood.

The research, published today in the American Journal of Public Health, was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and the National Institute of Mental Health, all components of the National Institutes of Health.

"Prescription medications are beneficial when used as prescribed to treat pain, anxiety, or ADHD," said NIDA Director Dr. Nora D. Volkow. "However, their abuse can have serious consequences, including addiction or even death from overdose. We are especially concerned about prescription drug abuse among teens, who are developmentally at an increased risk for addiction."

Prescription drug abuse — taking a medication without a prescription or in a way (higher dose, snorted) or for reasons other than prescribed (to get high) — has become one of the most serious public health concerns in the United States.

According to the 2012 Monitoring the Future survey of U.S. teen substance use, prescription and over-the-counter medications were among the top substances abused by 12th graders in the past year. In 2011, about 1.7 million people 12-25 years old, or more than 4,500 young people per day, abused a prescription drug for the first time, according to the latest National Survey on Drug Use and Health