

New app allows users to post photos of drug and alcohol practices in their community

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Credit: Rutgers University

A game of beer pong placed besides the game Candy Land in a local drug store. A machine-gun shaped bottle of liquor. A security officer standing guard next to a prescription drug drop-off box in Walgreens. These are a few examples of the dozens of photos taken by local community members using a new mobile app called "Be The One." Prevention specialists hope the app will help paint a picture of the conditions that protect citizens– or put them at risk – for substance abuse.

The app, developed by researchers at the Rutgers School of Social Work (SSW) and prevention specialists at the New Jersey Prevention Network, is part of a federal prevention effort known as Partnerships for Success. Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the initiative aims to encourage the development of local solutions to addiction issues.

"The photos assist with data collection that helps to identify trends and give researchers a more accurate understanding of where abuse exists among young users," says Kristen Powell Gilmore, principal investigator on the project at the Rutgers School of Social Work who has been working with SSW professor N. Andrew Peterson, to integrate research and environmental prevention practices for more than eight years.

The Be The One app incorporates many of the central goals of the partnership initiative. On one level, the app asks users to "Be The One" to share their views, literally, by snapping photos of anything related to drug or alcohol use in their community – positive or negative. Users may search for images by county and upload photos anonymously. In turn, these pictures are analyzed by the Rutgers/NJPN research team and regional coalition members. From the community images, members of local coalitions formed to prevent abuse – are able to assess where their efforts are working and address gaps in their current prevention services.

Currently, primary users of the app are members of 18 local prevention

coalitions in New Jersey across 21 counties, with the goal that their engagement and sharing will result in more widespread usage of the app.

In addition to photography, the app offers users other means to aid in prevention efforts:

- Be the One to Check provides a brief assessment quiz to help users gauge whether they or someone they care about is at risk for a drug and/or alcohol problem.
- Be the One to Help explains New Jersey's Overdose Prevention Act a lifeline legislation laws that protect those who report drug or alcohol-related problems from prosecution, in hopes of encouraging users to report incidents of overdose or abuse.
- Be the One to Ask features several resources – including a platform to ask questions and receive answers related to substance abuse and contact information to encourage users to join (Be the One to Join) a local [substance abuse](#) prevention collation.

The hope of developers is that all of the components of the app will inspire users to Be The One to make a positive difference in their communities.

Burlington County Coalition for Healthy Communities coordinator Marc Romano anticipates a significant increase in his group's effectiveness though use of the app. "Be The One will enable our coalition and community members to highlight what is working in the community and what might need attention in a seamless and intuitive way," Romano said. "We will able to share that information visually with the entire community to strengthen our interventions."

The app will be promoted to the public starting this fall and is available now as a free download through the Apple Store and GOOGLE PLAY.

More information: Anyone interested in learning more about Be The One or connecting with the regional prevention coalition in your area, contact School of Social Work project coordinator, Clare Neary at cneary@ssw.rutgers.edu

Provided by Rutgers University

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