

# Moving Prevention Upstream

Why do we believe in the importance of upstream prevention? To understand, imagine standing along the bank of a rushing river...

There are people struggling in the water. It's clear that without help, they could drown. Person after person are pulled to shore. They're weak and cold, and some are clearly ill. Before long, more people float by. It's a struggle to rescue as many people as possible. The question is: What else could be done to help them?

The rush of people isn't stopping. Upstream, there are people clinging to tree branches and rocks in the water. They haven't been swept away by the current yet, but they still need help. Life preservers are thrown to those in the water. The question is: Where are they all coming from?

Life jackets are being handed out when there is a distant scream. Upstream, someone falls through a hole in an old bridge and splashes into the river below. That's it! If someone doesn't post warning signs or repair the bridge, more people will fall in. Heading upstream with a toolbox, it's clear: Fixing this bridge will help keep people safe today and for years to come.



## Why intervene here?

It's important to help people in urgent need. When individuals face a crisis, **tertiary prevention** services offer vital treatment options that help individuals cope and recover. These interventions are essential for dealing with the consequences of trauma. The next step? Helping people avoid them.

## Why intervene here?

Giving people tools and support for improving their own health is key. **Secondary prevention** programs provide a critical early response to behavioral health challenges. Such midstream interventions can help individuals avoid further harm. The next step? Addressing trauma's root causes.

## Why intervene here?

Helping people build resilience can prevent harm before it occurs. That's why **primary prevention** takes place upstream. By addressing the root causes of public health challenges, these interventions have the power to strengthen and protect communities as well as individuals.

# Fixing the bridges in our communities can prevent harm before it occurs.

Many people must contend with a “broken bridge” in their life or community. That’s because mental and behavioral health challenges can sweep us toward negative outcomes like a strong current. When that happens, our ability to sink or swim is often impacted by social determinants of health, the conditions in which people are born, live, work and grow.

These upstream factors, which include socioeconomic status, housing, education, access to health care and more, can influence our health outcomes. Poverty, for example, can contribute to toxic stress that, in turn, may lead to negative consequences like harmful substance use, chronic disease or suicide. But we can help communities reduce and prevent trauma’s most devastating effects by investing in prevention early and at every stage.

It's time to shift our focus from behaviors like harmful substance use to the root causes of those behaviors. When we work together to address the underlying, and often interconnected, causes of trauma and its related harms, we take another step closer to preventing public health’s toughest challenges before they can take root.

Visit [resilient.wisconsin.gov](https://resilient.wisconsin.gov) to find out how we’re using upstream prevention strategies to address the root causes of trauma and build resilience in communities across our state.