



# The Icelandic model

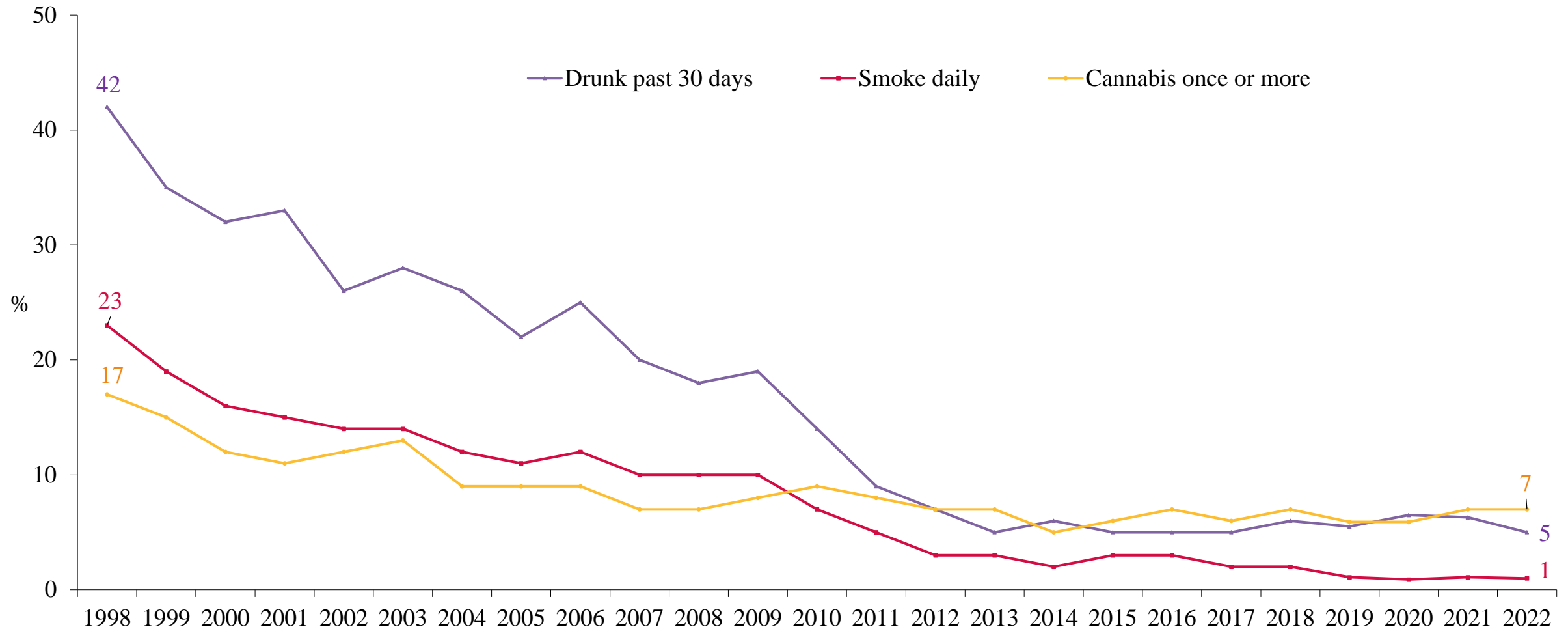
## Improving lives based on Evidence

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# Based on the Icelandic Prevention Model



From high to low in substance use – 15/16 year-old students





The Planet Youth approach:  
Exporting the Icelandic Prevention Model

# The Five Guiding Principles of Planet Youth Guidance Program

1

**Apply a primary prevention approach** that is designed to enhance the social environment.

2

**Emphasize community action** and embrace public schools as the natural hub of neighborhood/area efforts to support child and adolescent health, learning, and life success.

3

**Engage and empower community members** to make practical decisions using local, high-quality, accessible data and diagnostics.

4

**Integrate researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and community members** into a unified team dedicated to solving complex, real-world problems.

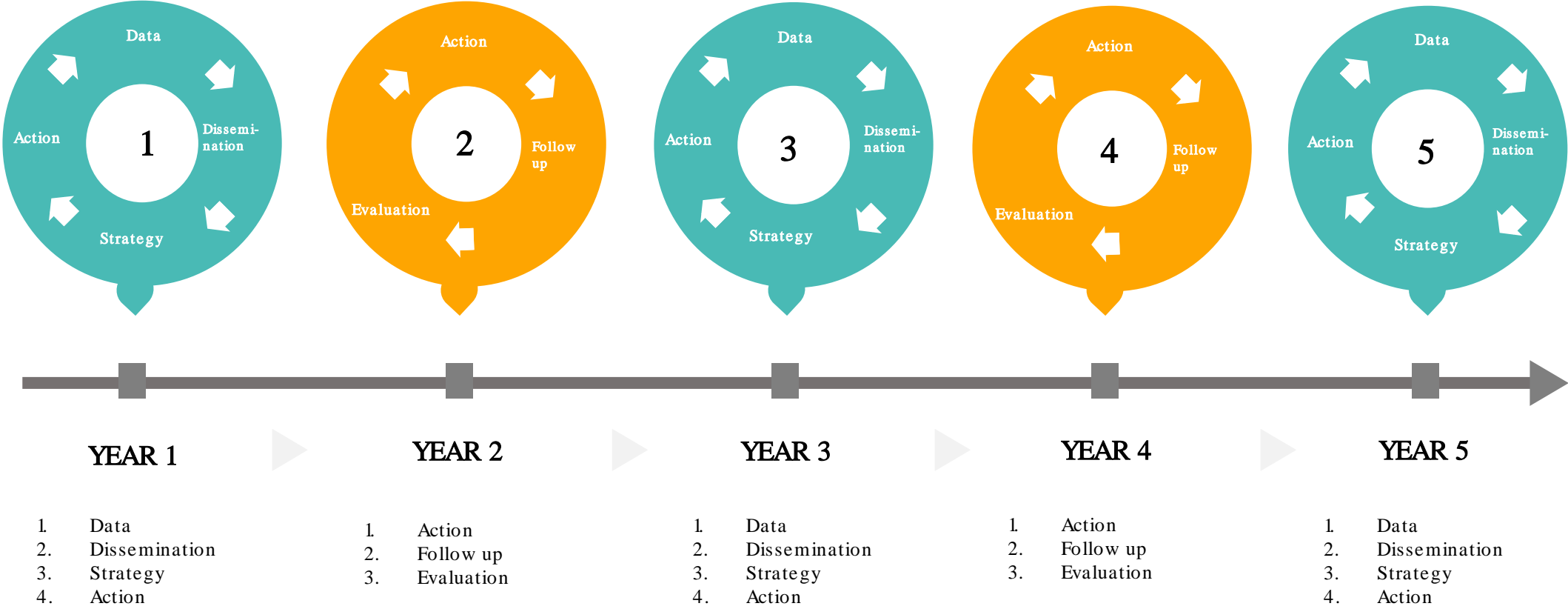
5

**Match the scope of the solution to the scope of the problem**, including emphasizing long-term intervention and efforts to marshal adequate community resources.

# The Planet Youth Guidance Program: The 10 core steps of the Icelandic Prevention Model



# The Planet Youth 5-year guidance program overview



# Examples of what Planet Youth specialists do

- **Advice** on coalition building and development
- **Training** in collaborative substance use prevention approaches
- **Training** in data collection
- **Training** in presenting and using the results
- **Data analysis and reporting**
- **Training** in designing and executing dissemination and action plans
- **Advice** in developing interventions and strategy
- **Community development advice**
- **Project management support** to partners
- **Evaluation** of processes

Fundamental question  
**WHAT CAN BE DONE?**





# Substance use - Large scale problems

## What can be done?

The obvious answer is simply to eliminate substances in any form...

## A second answer tackles the issue from another angle

Namely driving down demand! It calls for more long-term thinking, but the results are also more rewarding



# Summer of 1998

## Substance use among 10th-grade students



42%

Drunk in the past 30 days



23%

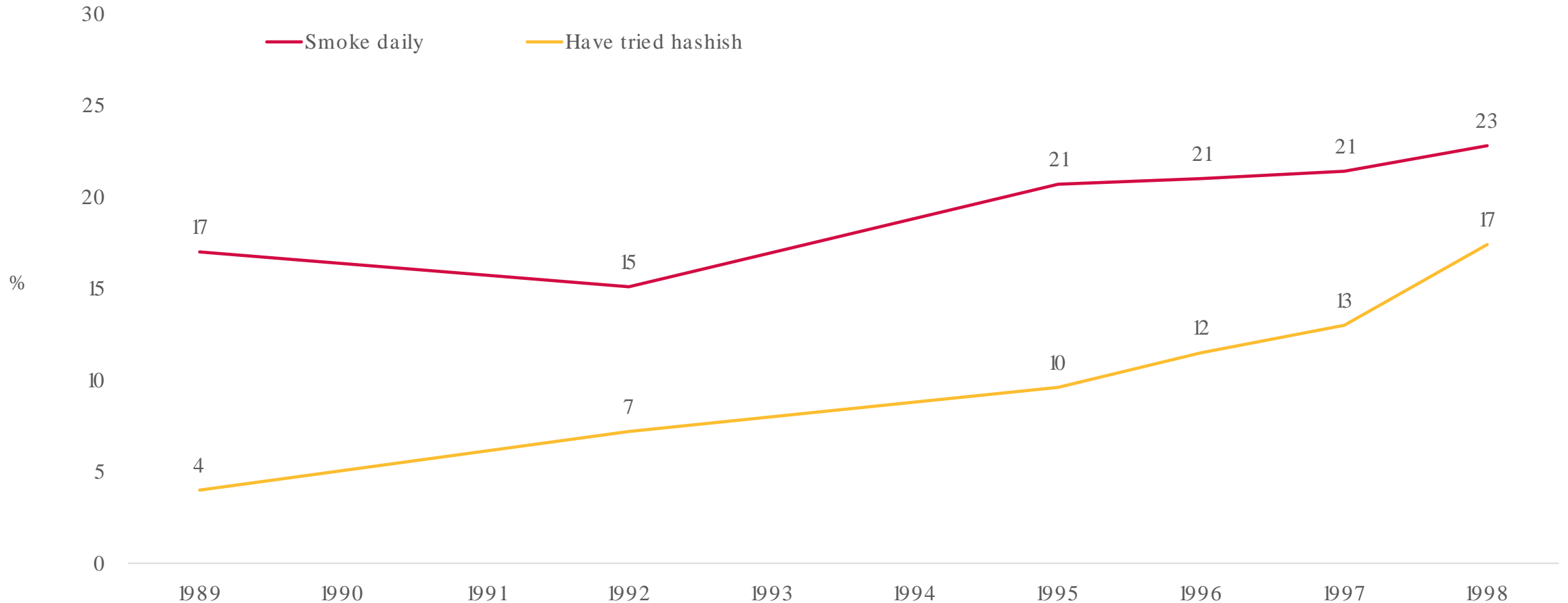
Smoke daily



17%

Lifetime cannabis use

# Trends in substance use among 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in Iceland from 1989-1998



There were numerous prevention projects being carried out!

- Their focus was putting the responsibility of substance use on the child itself - not the community that the children live in
- None of them used research as a base for the work
- Unfortunately – something that still describes quite a lot of the prevention work being carried out worldwide



# They were never asked about...

- ✓ Wellbeing
- ✓ Substance use
- ✓ Family circumstances
- ✓ Leisure activities
- ✓ Risk behavior

**Nothing** about us without us



BUILDING ACTION  
ON DATA USING  
KNOWLEDGE TO  
BUILD A BETTER  
FUTURE FOR  
CHILDREN



**DATA**

# WHY IS THIS DATA IMPORTANT?

- ✓ Data allows community stakeholders to understand the situation in the community.
- ✓ To take informed actions to increase protective factors, decrease risk factors, and ultimately change the environment of children and youth.



# Indicators

local community networks

parents and family

anxiety

Sleep

peer group economic and psychological issues

negative **life events** and strain

physical **health** status

values and attitudes

**internet** gambling

depressive symptoms

lifestyle and leisure time activities

Health status indicators

substance **USE**

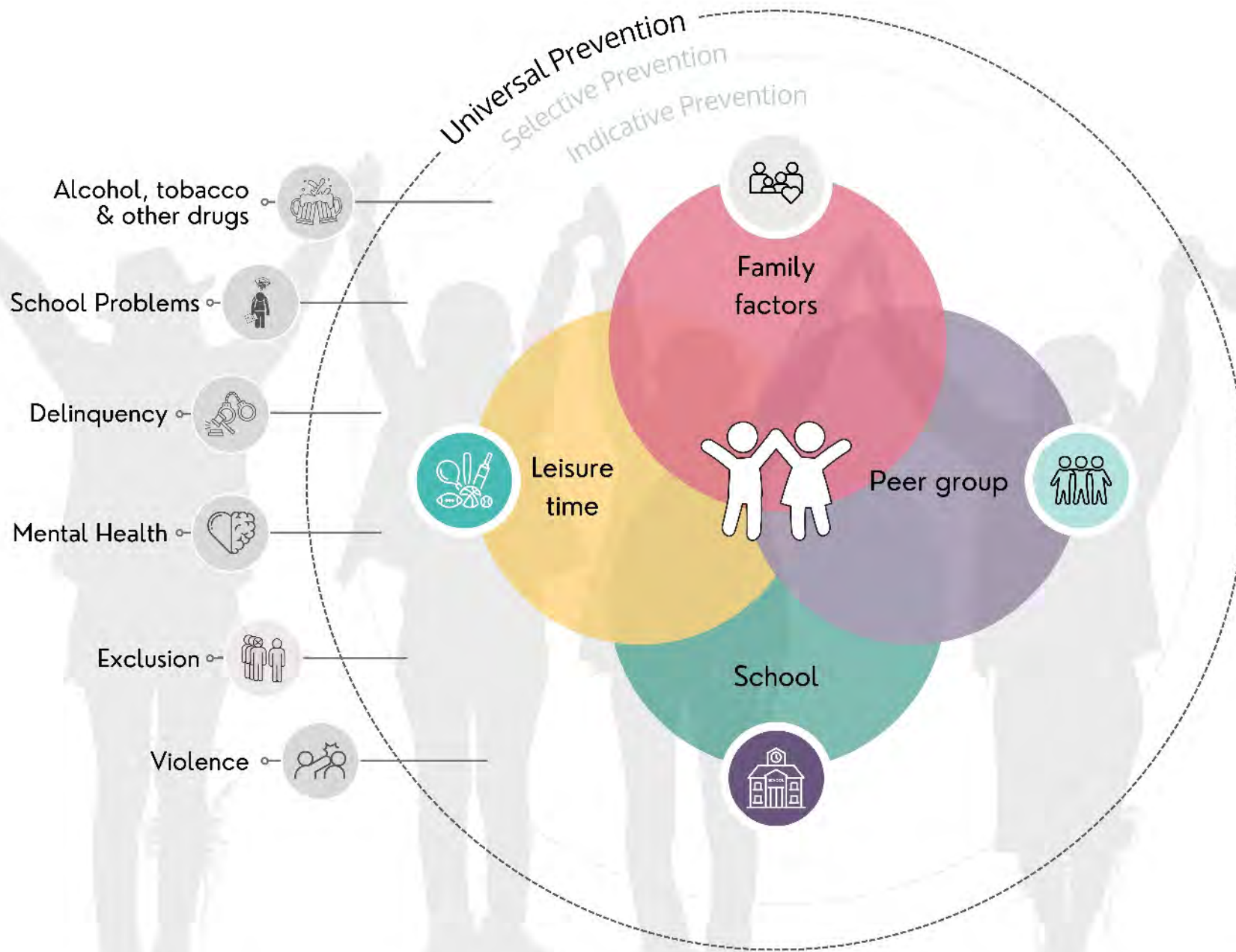
**studies and school**

violence and **delinquency**,  
and more ...



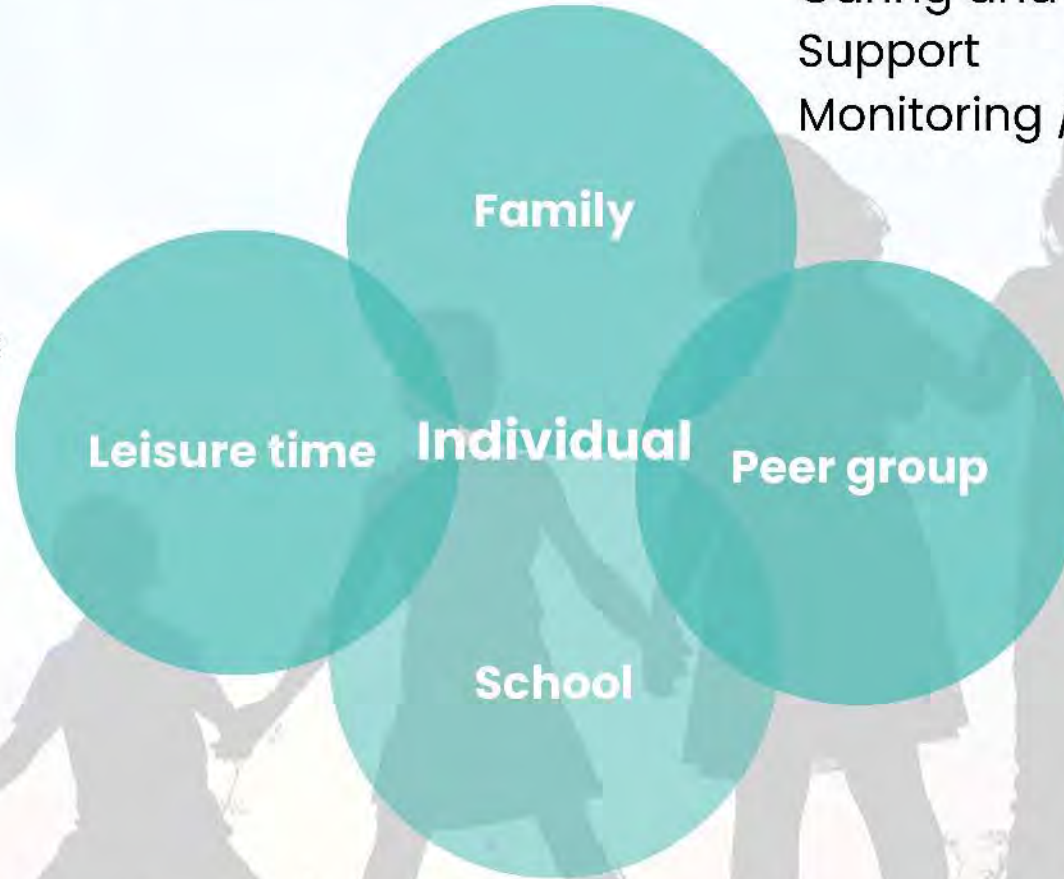


Our focus is universal  
prevention



# Icelandic prevention model

Organized activities  
vs.  
unorganized

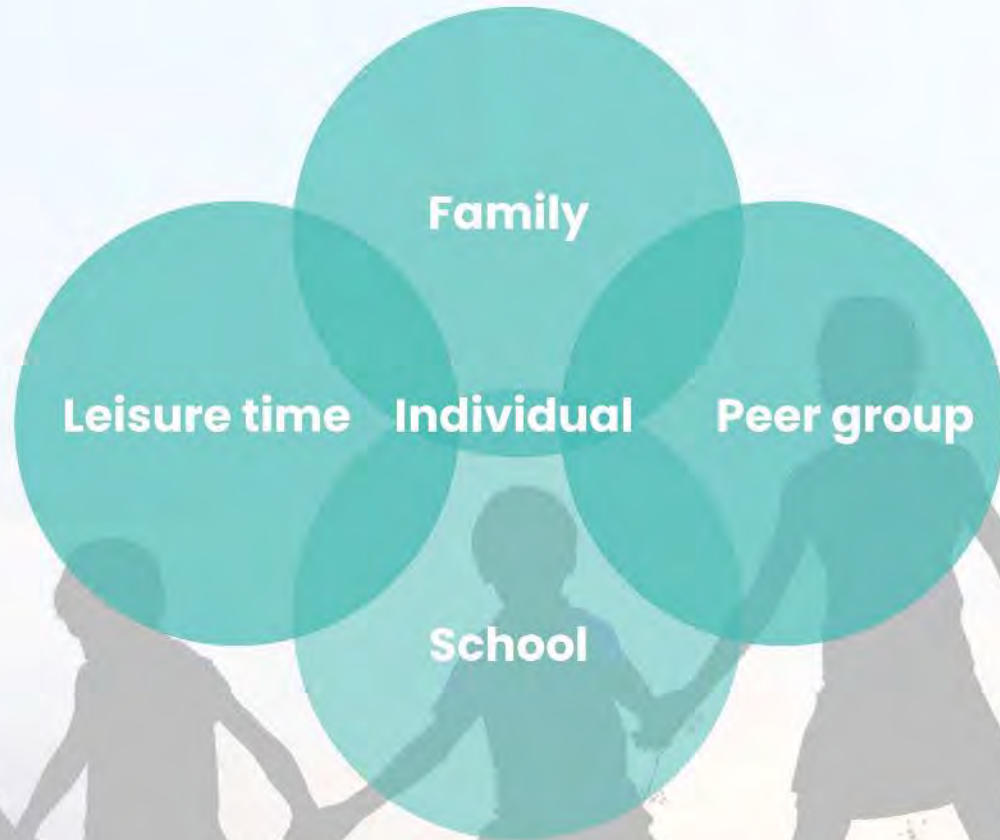


Time spent with parents  
Caring and warmth  
Support  
Monitoring / Control

Positive and negative effects.  
How we as parents approach  
the peer group  
Staying outside late  
Hanging out in malls

Inside and outside of school, at  
home, bullying e.t.c.

# Icelandic prevention model



## Understanding risk and protective factors is the key

### **Risk:**

Factors in the life of young children and adolescents that increase the likelihood of substance use.

### **Protective:**

Factors in the life of young children and adolescents that decrease the likelihood of substance use

# Then



42%



23%



17%



37%



25%

## VS

# Now

Drunk in the past 30 days

5%



Smoke daily

1%



Lifetime cannabis use

7%



Time spent with parents during weekends

74%



Sport participation 4x a week or more

41%



# Examples of action

- ✓ **Neighborhood level:** Parental watch.
- ✓ **Community level:** A pre-paid leisure card to participate in formal, structured youth activities.
- ✓ **National level:** Media campaigns aimed at discouraging adolescent alcohol use and cigarette smoking.



What does the  
data tell us?

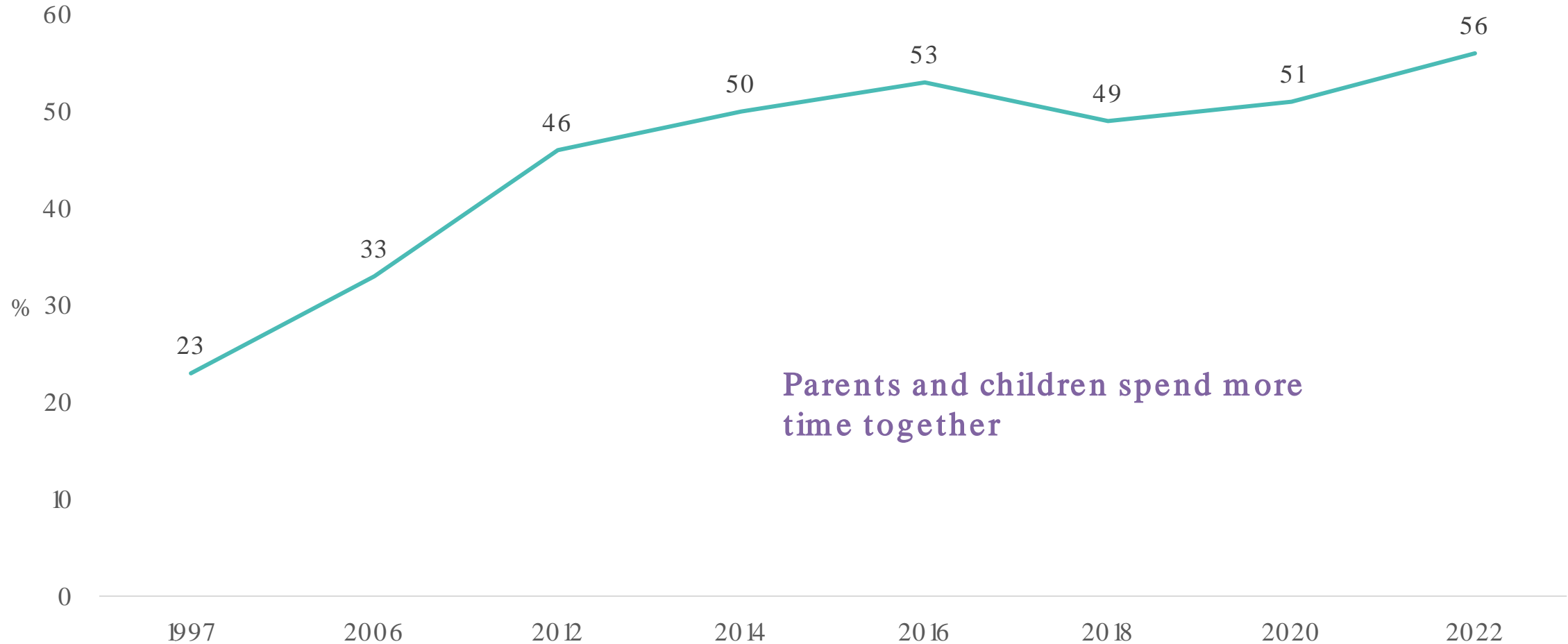




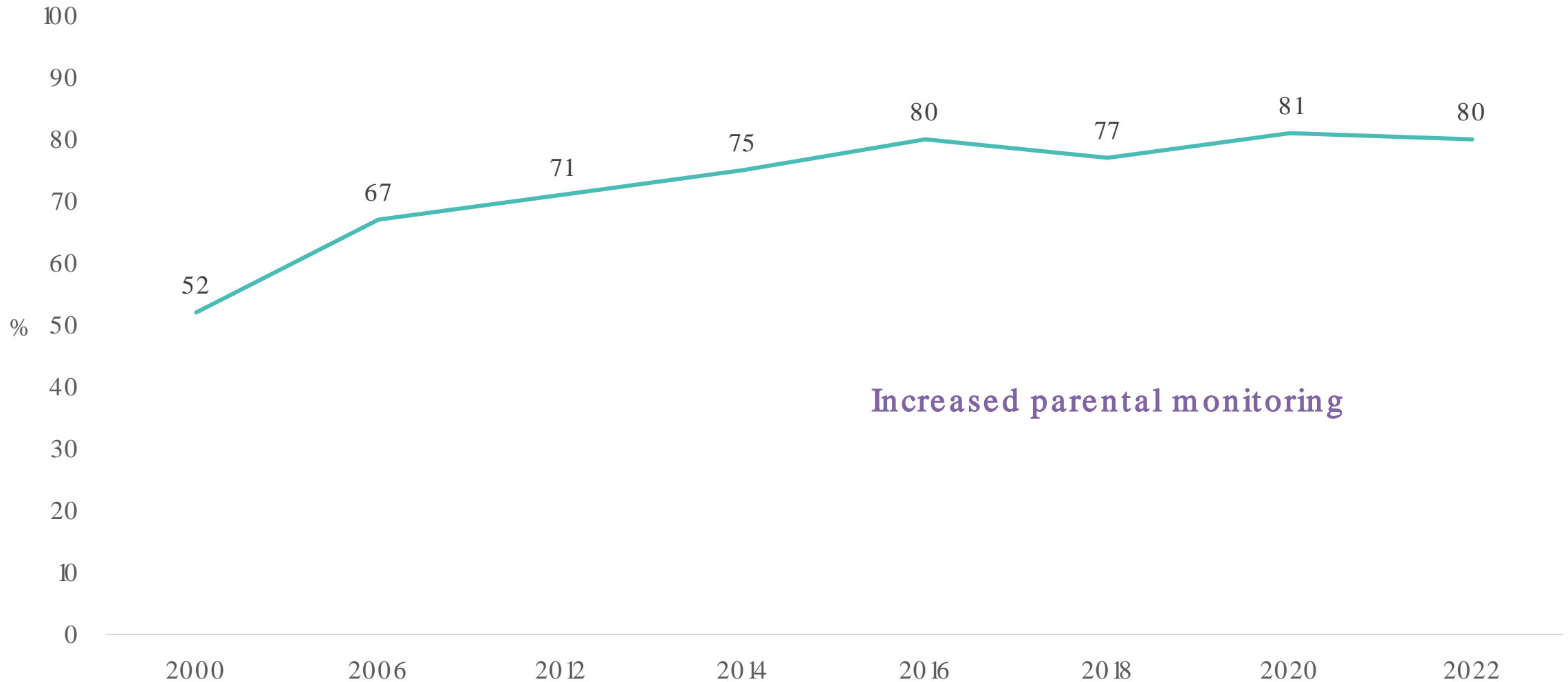
PARENTS PLAY A KEY ROLE AS A  
PROTECTIVE FACTOR



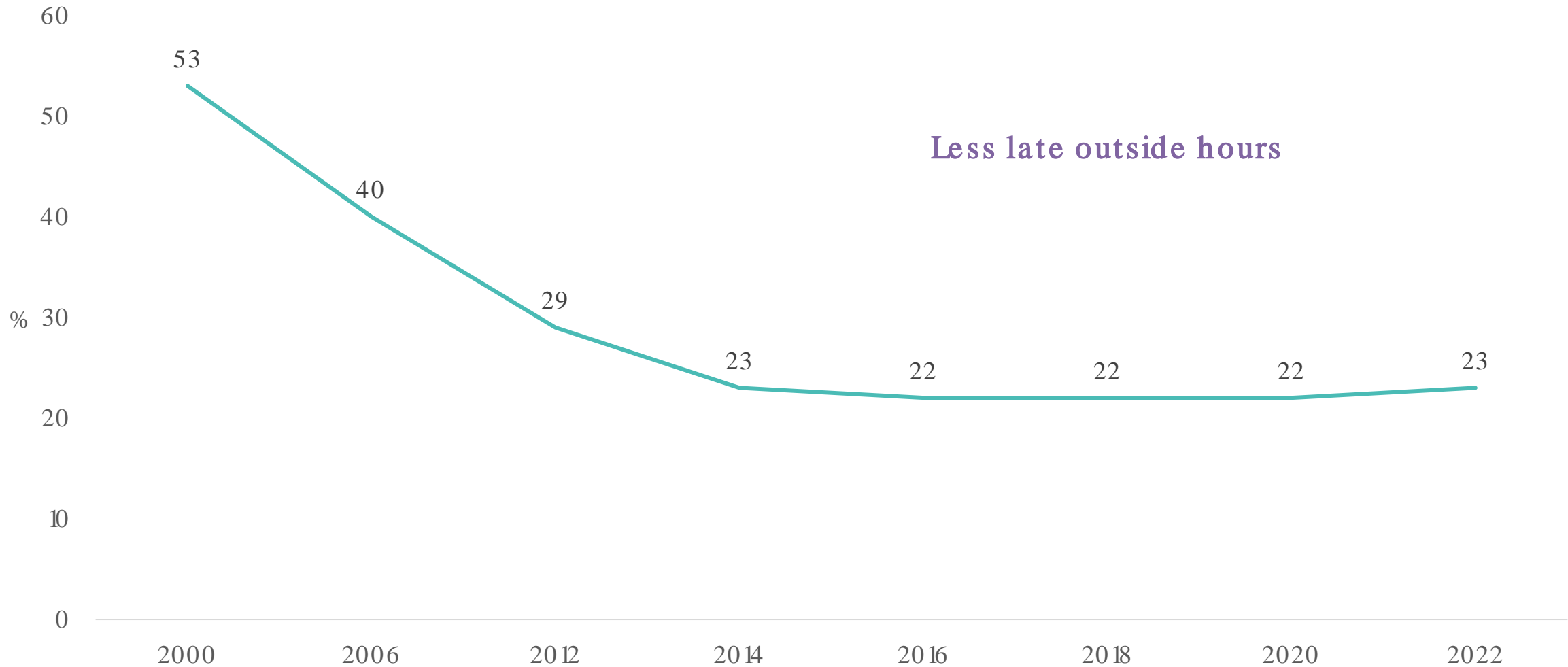
# Rates of students in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade who spend time (often/almost always) with their parents during weekdays



# “My parents know where I am in the evenings” (applies very or rather well to me) 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade



# Rates of students in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade who have been outside after 10 pm, 3 times+ in the past week



Organized activities

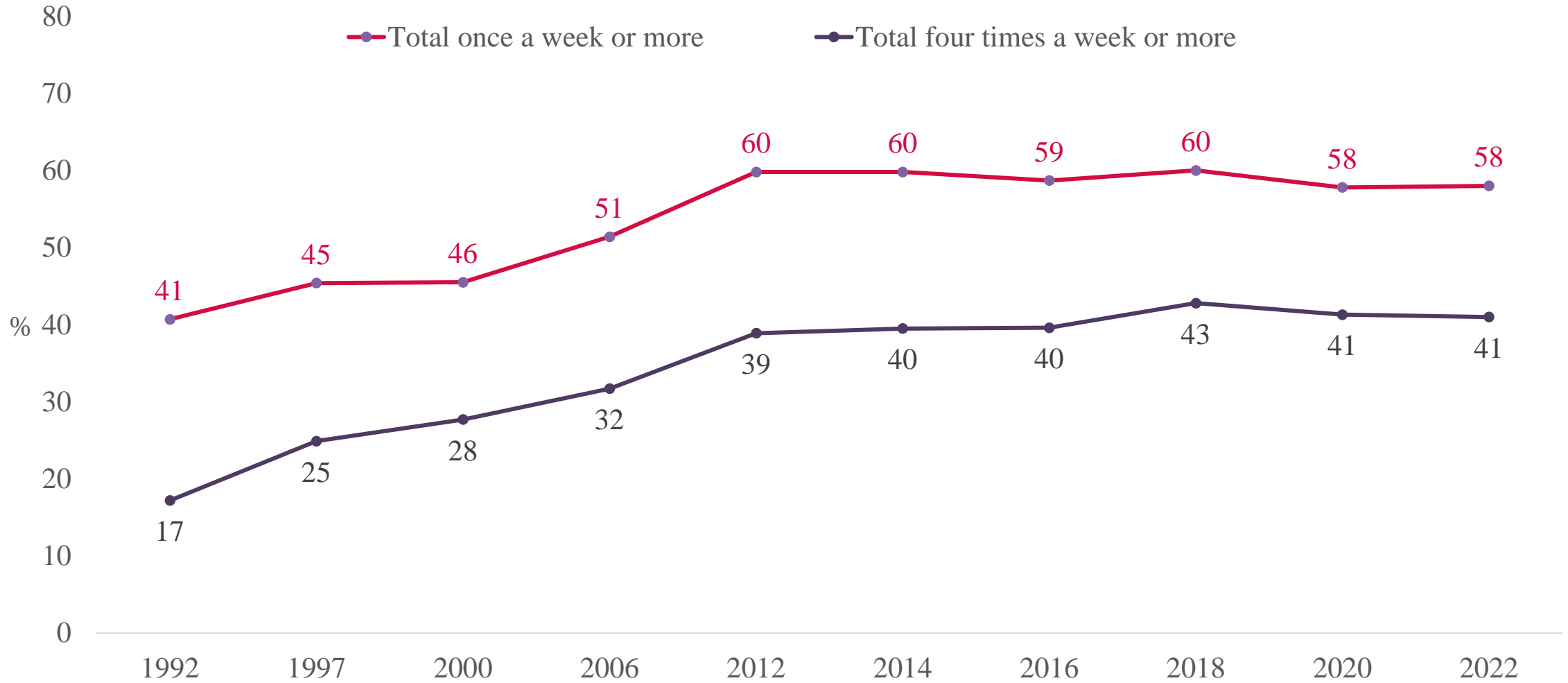
# It is not the facility that has a protective factor

The adult professional in charge

- the coach
- the music teacher
- the art teacher
- the employee in the youth club
- ...
  
- Have become an important socialization agent in Iceland
- Municipalities fund participation fees for children and adolescents - leisure card
- There is room for everyone



# Trends in formal sports participation (ages 14-15), 1992-2022



Focus is on close community

✓ How could an average figure on alcohol use in your country help prevention workers in your community/ municipality?

✓ “Average” doesn’t tell all the story!





## Measure often

- ✓ Continuously
- ✓ At least bi-annually
- ✓ Things change fast in the lives of adolescents







# Immediate feedback

- Make sure practical information is out immediately after data collection
- Not 3-4 years later but almost immediately
- Every school, every parent, and every prevention worker can have access to the current situation in the close community



# The core elements of the Icelandic prevention model

## Evidence base

To know where we are going, we have to know where we stand! Based on solid research.

## Community approach

With a focus on changing the social circumstances of young people and through that influencing their behavior.

## Research – policy – practice

To create and maintain a dialogue between research, policy and practice





# Worldwide concern

New types of drugs

Lack of sleep

Lack of good mental health

To much screen time

To young children on social media



# We have to educate

- We have to start early
- Not only parents of teenagers
- Approach as a public health issue





And we have  
done it before!









# OUR RESPONSIBILITY



- ✓ Time - We don't change things overnight
- ✓ Not a project - It's about changing the way we think and then act in a different way
- ✓ It's about empowering those that care – and making them the norm

