# SAMHSA's Theory of Change
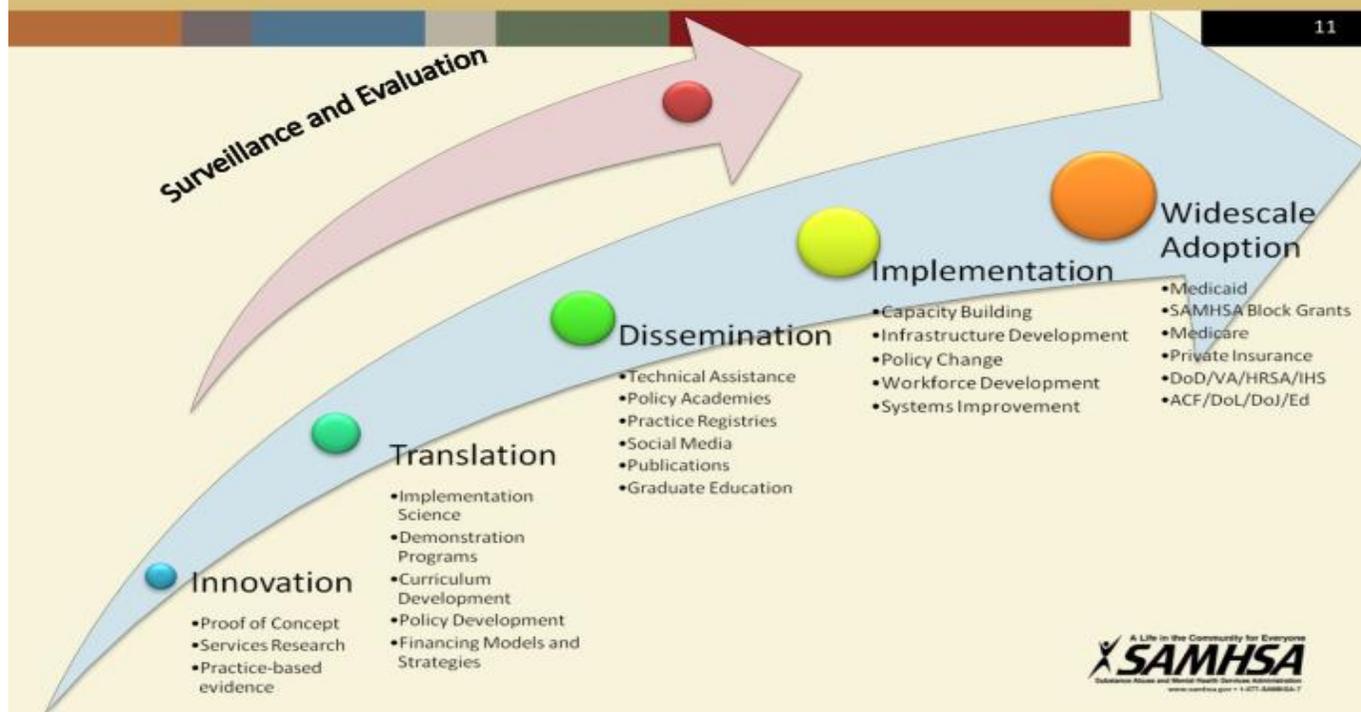
## What is a Theory of Change?

Theory of change (TOC) describes how and why a desired change is expected to happen. The TOC connects the intervention activities with the expected outcomes.

## Why use a Theory of Change model?

Interventions that are based on theory are more likely to be effective and thus recommended by SAMHSA. TOCs also facilitate program evaluation because the important outcomes are explicitly defined.

## Current Evidence-Based TOC Models

| Ecological System Theory - *Multi-level* | Health Belief Model - *Individual* |
|---|---|
| Ecological systems theory incorporates multilevel interventions that emphasize the interaction and interdependence of factors across individual, interpersonal, and community contexts/systems.. | An individual model that addresses an individual's perceptions of: 1) the threat posed by a health problem, 2) the benefits of avoiding the threat, and 3) factors influencing their decision to act. |
| **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) -** *Interpersonal* | **Communication Theory -** *Community* |
| An interpersonal model that assumes behavior is based on a series of internal and external factors. SCT describes an ongoing, dynamic process of environmental, personal, and human behavior factors that influence each other. | A community level model that explores the who, what, when, and how messages pertaining to a health problem. The central question this model seeks to answer is, "How do communication processes contribute to, or discourage, behavior change?" |

## How to Use an Existing Theory of Change Model to Guide Interventions

1. Identify a long-term goal(s).
2. Inquire about preferred and/or fundable TOCs.
3. Choose a TOC that incorporates your community's needs, goals, and accessibility.
4. Create the appropriate/feasible interventions that fit into your TOC model.

# Example of an applicable use of a TOC:
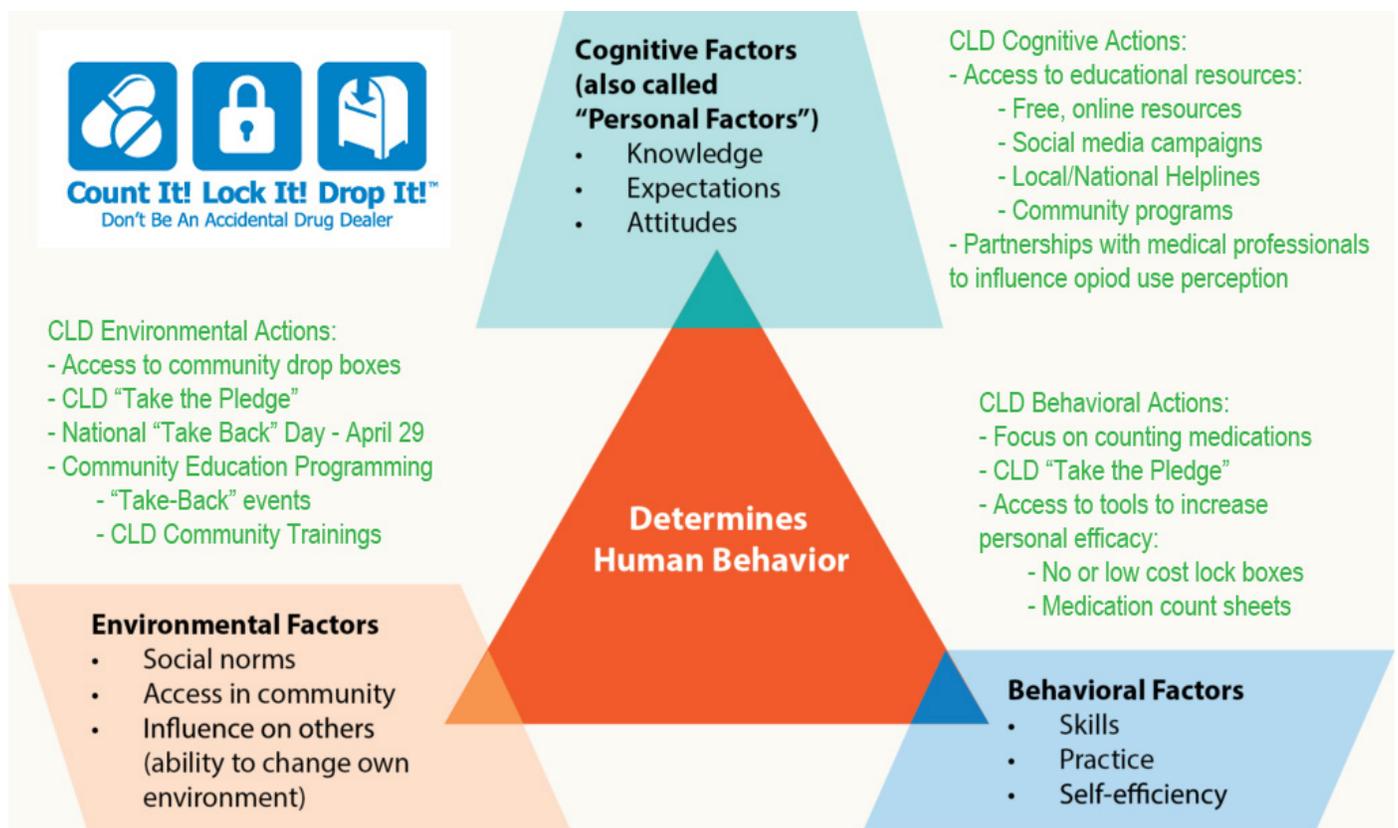
**Resources**:

Anderson, A. (2005). An introduction to theory of change. *Evaluation Exchange*, Summer, Volume XI, 2. http://www.hfrp.org/evalution/the-evaluation-exhange/issue-archive/evaluation-methodology/an-introduction-to-theory-of-change.

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. (2009). *Identifying and Selecting Evidence-Based Interventions Revised Guidance Document for the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant Program.* HHS Pub. No. (SMA)09-4205. Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Health Community Capacity Collaborative (2016). *Social cognitive learning theory.* Retrieved from: https://sbccimplementationkits.org/sbcc-in-emergencies/social-cognitive-learning-theory/

US Department of Health and Human Services (2005). *Theory at a glance: A guide for health promotion practice.* (NIH Publication No. 05-3896). Bethesda, MD: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Wandersman, A. (2009). Four keys to success (Theory, implementation, evaluation, and resources/system support): High hopes and challenges in participation. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(1-2), 3-21.