**The Scope of Substance Abuse in America**

**Compiled by Daryel Erickson**

Substance use, including underage drinking and the non-medical use of prescription and over-the-counter medications, significantly affects the health and well-being of our nation’s youth and people of all ages:

* An estimated 10 million people aged 12 to 20 report drinking alcohol during the past month.[1](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/nationalpreventionmonth/index.aspx#foot-1) To put that in perspective, there are more Americans who have engaged in underage drinking than the number of people who live in the state of Michigan.[2](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/nationalpreventionmonth/index.aspx#foot-2)
* Approximately 23 million Americans—roughly the population of Australia—are current illicit drug users.[3-4](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/nationalpreventionmonth/index.aspx#foot-3) Marijuana use and non-medical use of prescription medications are the most common types of drug use in America.
* Almost 18 million Americans are classified with alcohol dependence or abuse.[5](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/nationalpreventionmonth/index.aspx#foot-5)
  + Heavy alcohol use can cause serious damage to the body and affects the liver, nervous system, muscles, lungs, and heart.[6](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/nationalpreventionmonth/index.aspx#foot-6)
  + Alcohol is a factor in approximately 41 percent of deaths from motor vehicle crashes.[7](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/nationalpreventionmonth/index.aspx#foot-7)

**Stopping substance abuse before it begins can increase a person’s chances of living a longer, healthier, and more productive life.**

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Issues: [Binge Drinking](http://www.cadca.org/category/issues/binge-drinking), [Prescription Drug Abuse](http://www.cadca.org/category/issues/prescription-drug-abuse)

Drug type: [Heroin](http://www.cadca.org/category/drug-type/heroin), [Marijuana](http://www.cadca.org/category/drug-type/marijuana), [Prescription Drug](http://www.cadca.org/category/drug-type/prescription-drug-abuse)

More Americans are using heroin and marijuana today than in previous years, according to the [2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)](http://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/advisories/1309033910.aspx" \t "_blank). The NSDUH report, released this week by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), found that 7.3 percent of Americans were current users of marijuana – up from 5.8 percent in 2007. Daily or almost daily use of marijuana also increased from 5.1 million people in 2007 to 7.6 million people in 2012.

In addition to marijuana, the use of heroin also rose significantly. The number of people aged 12 and older who used heroin in the past year rose from 373,000 in 2007 to 669,000 in 2012. The rate of current illicit drug use among people 12 or older also rose from 8.1 percent in 2008 to 9.2 percent in 2012.   
  
On a more positive note, the rate of past month prescription drug abuse among young adults ages 18-25 decreased from 6.4 percent in 2009 to 5.3 percent in 2012. Among 12- to 17-year-olds, past month drinking, binge drinking and heavy drinking rates also remained lower than in 2002 and 2009.

“These findings show that while we have made progress in preventing some aspects of substance abuse we must redouble our efforts to reduce and eliminate all forms of it throughout our nation,” said SAMHSA Administrator Pamela S. Hyde. “These statistics represent real people, families and communities dealing with the devastating consequences of abuse and addiction. We must strive to prevent further abuse and provide the hope of treatment and recovery to all people needing help.”  
  
During the press briefing on Wednesday, Hyde said that while it’s encouraging to see that alcohol abuse and binge drinking is trending downwards among young people, it’s concerning to see that more than 81 percent of the people who had their first drink in 2012 were under age 21. Additionally, more than 70 percent of underage drinkers didn’t pay for the alcohol they used and about 30 percent reported drinking alcohol at home.   
  
“It’s not safe for the developing brain of a young person [to drink alcohol] whether at home or anywhere else,” Hyde said.   
  
The report showed some other areas of continued improvement including a drop in the rate of past month use of tobacco products among 12 to 17 year olds – from 15.2 percent in 2002, to 8.6 percent in 2012. Similarly between 2002 and 2012, the percentage of youth aged 12 to 17 with substance dependence or abuse declined from 8.9 percent to 6.1 percent.  
  
Hyde stressed that parents and caregivers have a strong role to play when it comes to preventing kids from trying drugs, calling them “America’s strongest preventionists.” She noted that marijuana use was much less prevalent among youth who perceived strong parental disapproval for trying marijuana one or twice, than for those who did not.  
  
The 2012 report also showed that many Americans needing treatment for a substance use disorder are still not receiving specialty treatment. According to the report 23.1 million Americans aged 12 or older needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem in 2012 and only 2.5 million (or 10.8 percent of those in need) received it in a specialized treatment setting.  
  
NSDUH is a scientifically conducted annual survey of approximately 70,000 people throughout the country, aged 12 and older. Because of its statistical power, it is a primary source of statistical information on the scope and nature of many substance abuse and mental health issues affecting the Nation.  
  
The complete survey findings are available on the SAMHSA web site at: [http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2012SummNatFindDetTables/Index.aspx](http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2012SummNatFindDetTables/Index.aspx" \t "_blank).