

ALERT!

The Nation's Fastest Growing Drug Problem



PRESCRIPTION DRUG abuse is the Nation's fastest-growing drug problem, and the Center's Disease Control and Prevention has classified prescription drug abuse as an epidemic. While there has been a marked decrease in the use of some illegal drugs like cocaine, data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) show that nearly one-third of people aged 12 and over who used drugs for the first time in 2009 began by using a prescription drug non-medically.

Some individuals who misuse prescription drugs, particularly teens, believe these substances are safer than illicit drugs because they are prescribed by a healthcare professional and dispensed by a pharmacist. Addressing the prescription drug epidemic is not only a top priority for public health, it will also help build stronger communities and allow those with substance abuse disorders lead healthier, more productive lives.

RESEARCH

According to the recent Monitoring the Future survey – the Nation's largest survey of drug use

among young people – showed that prescription drugs are the second most abused category of drugs after marijuana. In addition, the latest National Survey on Drug Use and Health shows that over 70 percent of people who abused prescription pain relievers got them from friends or relatives, while approximately 5 percent got them from a drug dealer or from the Internet. Further, opiate overdoses, once almost always due to heroin use, are now increasingly due to abuse of prescription painkillers. In our military illicit drug use increased from 5% to 12% among active duty service members over a three-year period from 2005 to 2008, primarily attributed to non-medical use of prescription drugs.

The number of prescriptions filled for opioid pain relievers – some of the most powerful medications available – has increased dramatically in recent years. From 1997 to 2007, the milligram per person use of prescription opioids in the U.S. increased from 74 milligrams to 369 milligrams, an increase of 402%. In addition, in 2000 retail pharmacies dispensed 174 million prescriptions for opioids; by 2009, 257 million

prescriptions were dispensed, an increase of 48%. As the chart below demonstrates, these increases mirror increases in prescription drug abuse.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Because prescription drugs are legal, they are easily accessible. Parents, law enforcement, the medical community, and all levels of government have a role to play in reducing

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