



FACT SHEET

DRUG ABUSE RESEARCH AND THE HEALTH OF THE NATION

The College on Problems of Drug dependence (CPDD) is the leading scientific society in the drug abuse field. Founded in 1929 as a committee of the National Academy of Sciences, CPDD is now an independent organization promoting scientific research on the drug abuse problems.

- Cocaine has been used by over 22 million Americans, about 1 million of whom are now regular abusers.
- Heroin is used by 2 million Americans, about 1 million of whom are now physically dependent addicts.
- Because drug abuse is associated with myriad health problems (hepatitis, tuberculosis, AIDS) and because drug abusers typically receive poor preventive health care, drug abusers are substantively over-represented in hospital settings--especially in emergency rooms where health care is most expensive.
- Women, ages 18-34, seek treatment more often than any other age category, yet only 30% of these women can obtain the treatment they need.
- Female alcoholics have death rates 50 to 100% higher than male alcoholics and die on the average 15 years younger than women who don't abuse alcohol.
- Of 59 million women of child bearing age (ages 14-44), nearly 5 million are using illicit drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin.
- Women who are pregnant and abusing drugs have a high incidence of obstetrical complications including pre-term birth, fetal growth retardation, gestational infections and placental accidents. o Heavy or frequent alcohol use during pregnancy may result in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), the leading preventable cause of birth defects and mental retardation. Children with FAS suffer growth deficiencies, facial malformations and mental retardation. Some children who exhibit only one or two of these signs are considered to have fetal alcohol effects.
- Infants exposed to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in utero are more likely to be born prematurely and to have low birth weight. These newborns experience increased infant mortality rates. The long term effects of prenatal drug exposure are only now surfacing as the first wave of these children enter school. Some exhibit learning and attention deficits while others seem to have suffered no lasting effects. It is not yet known to what extent the higher intellectual functions of these children, such as abstract thinking, have been adversely affected. The home and school environment of these children appears to have a significant effect on whether treatment outcomes are positive or negative.
- Drug abuse treatment therefore can be effective, and it is much less costly than the alternative: Per patient costs are:
 - Treatment \$3-8 thousand per year.
 - Incarceration \$40-70 thousand per year.
 - Untreated \$50-100 thousand per year in criminal activity.
 - AIDS \$100 thousand per year.

- Research has developed new treatments that work and save health care dollars. Both medications and behavioral treatments are effective. This research requires federal support, because unlike other diseases, little private sector support is available.
- Three medications are now available for the treatment of heroin addiction; these are methadone, LAAM, and naltrexone.
- Innovative treatment with heroin detoxification using methadone, clonidine and naltrexone have reduced acute medical care with substantial savings per patient.
- Although naltrexone was developed to treat heroin addiction, it has now been reported to also reduce alcohol abuse.
- A combination of medication treatment and psychotherapy/behavioral treatment reduces cocaine abuse by half.
- To deliver these therapies in an effective way requires trained health providers and training for them. The number of health care professionals in substance abuse treatment needs to be markedly augmented.

CPDD recommends:

- that drug abuse be viewed as a medical and public health problem.
- that drug abuse should increasingly be addressed through research, prevention, and treatment.
- allocation of Federal drug abuse expenditures be redistributed from interdiction and criminal justice activities (now 70%) to public health and research activities (now 30%); If only 1% of interdiction and criminal justice expenditures were instead allocated to the research budget of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the health of individuals suffering from drug dependence could be dramatically improved.