



A Response to the Epidemic of Prescription Drug Abuse

Prescription drugs are the second-most abused category of drugs in the United States, following marijuana.¹ When taken as directed for legitimate medical purposes, prescription drugs are safe and effective. However, they are just as dangerous and deadly as illegal drugs when used for non-medical reasons.

While we must ensure better access to prescription drugs to alleviate suffering, it is also vital that we do all we can to reduce the diversion and abuse of pharmaceuticals.

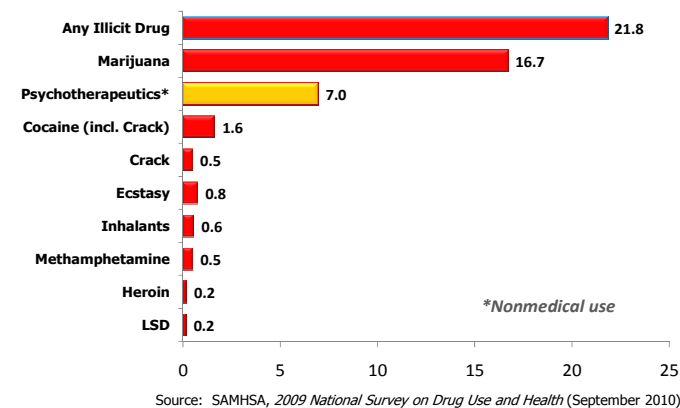
Because prescription drugs are legal, they are easily accessible, often from a home medicine cabinet. Further, some individuals who abuse prescription drugs, particularly teens, believe these substances are safer than illicit drugs because they are prescribed by a healthcare professional.

According to the 2009 *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, among people age 12 or older who reported using pain relievers non-medically in the past year, 70 percent got the drugs from a friend or relative (either for free, purchased, or by theft). Another 18 percent reported getting the drug from one doctor. Only about 5 percent reported obtaining pain relievers from a drug dealer or other stranger, and less than half of one-percent bought the drugs on the Internet. Among those who said they obtained the pain reliever from a friend or relative for free, 80 percent reported that the friend or relative had obtained the drugs from just one doctor.²

It is important, therefore, for prescription drugs to be disposed of properly and not left where they can be easily diverted and abused.

Prescription Drugs (Psychotherapeutics) Used Non-Medically Are Second Most Abused Drugs After Marijuana in the U.S.

Past Month Users, Aged 12 or Older (Millions)



ONDCP seeks to foster healthy individuals and safe communities by effectively leading the Nation's effort to reduce drug use and its consequences.

Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan

Prescription drugs have great potential for relieving suffering, but also potential for abuse. Any policy in this area must strike a balance between maximizing legitimate access and use of these medications while minimizing their diversion, misuse, and abuse.

In 2011, the Office of National Drug Control Policy released the prescription drug abuse prevention plan, *Epidemic: Responding to America's Prescription Drug Abuse Crisis*, which expands upon the Administration's *National Drug Control Strategy*. The plan outlines action in four major areas to reduce prescription drug abuse:

- **Education.** A crucial first step in tackling the problem of prescription drug abuse is to educate parents, youth, and patients about the dangers of abusing prescription drugs while requiring prescribers to receive training in the safe and appropriate use of these drugs.
- **Monitoring.** Implement prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) in every state, and enhance PDMPs to make sure they can share data across states and are used by healthcare providers.
- **Proper Medication Disposal.** Develop convenient and environmentally responsible prescription drug disposal programs to help reduce prescription drug diversion.
- **Enforcement.** Provide law enforcement with the tools necessary to eliminate improper prescribing practices and reduce “pill mills” and “doctor shopping.”

The complete plan can be found here:

<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/prescriptiondrugs/>

Classes of Prescription Drugs

The most commonly misused prescription drugs fall into three classes:³

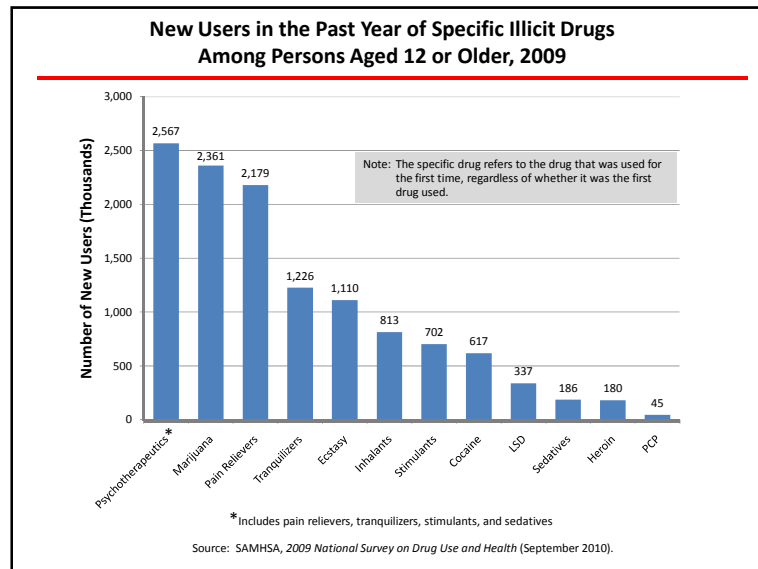
- **Opioids** include oxycodone (Percocet, Tylox, OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin, Lortab), and methadone (Dolophine).
- **Central nervous system (CNS) depressants** include butalbital (Fiorinal/Fioricet), diazepam (Valium), and alprazolam (Xanax).
- **Stimulants** include methylphenidate (Ritalin) and amphetamine/dextroamphetamine (Adderall).

Prescription Drug Abuse Fast Facts

- Among 12th graders, pharmaceutical drugs used non-medically are six of the ten most-used substances.⁴
- From 1998 to 2008, the proportion of all substance abuse treatment admissions age 12 or older who reported any pain reliever abuse increased more than fourfold.⁵
- Prescription painkillers are considered a major contributor to the total number of drug deaths. In 2007, for example, nearly 28,000 Americans died from unintentional drug poisoning, and of these, nearly 12,000 involved prescription pain relievers.⁶

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- Nearly one-third (29 percent) of people age 12 or older who used illicit drugs for the first time in the past year began by using prescription drugs non-medically.⁷
- According to a 2008 Department of Defense survey, about one in nine active-duty service members (11 percent) reported past-month prescription drug misuse.⁸
- The estimated number of emergency department visits linked to non-medical use of prescription pain relievers nearly doubled between 2004 and 2009.⁹
- In 2009, the number of first-time, non-medical users of psychotherapeutics (prescription opioid pain relievers, tranquilizers, sedatives, and stimulants) was about the same as the number of first-time marijuana users (see chart, above).¹⁰
- Approximately two million adults age 50 and older (2.1 percent of adults in that age range) used prescription-type drugs non-medically in the past year.¹¹
- Substance abuse treatment admissions for individuals age 50 or older nearly doubled from 1992 to 2008, climbing from 6.6 percent of all admissions to 12.2 percent. The percentage of primary admissions for prescription drug abuse among older individuals increased from 0.7 percent to 3.5 percent over the same time period.¹²



¹ Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): National Findings, SAMHSA (2010).

² Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): National Findings, SAMHSA (2010).

³ All brand names and trademarks are properties of their respective holders.

⁴ 2010 Monitoring the Future, University of Michigan (2010).

⁵ Substance Abuse Treatment Admissions Involving Abuse of Pain Relievers: 1998 and 2008, SAMHSA (2010).

⁶ Unintentional Drug Poisoning in the United States, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 2010.

⁷ Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): National Findings, SAMHSA (2010).

⁸ 2008 Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military Personnel, Bray, et al. (September 2009).

⁹ Highlights of the 2009 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Findings on Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits, SAMHSA (December 2010).

¹⁰ Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): National Findings, SAMHSA (2010).

¹¹ The NSDUH Report, Illicit Drug Use Among Older Adults, SAMHSA (December 29, 2009).

¹² The TEDS Report, Changing Substance Abuse Patterns among Older Admissions: 1992-2008, SAMHSA (2009).



Office of National Drug Control Policy

www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.gov

www.TheAntiDrug.com

www.AboveTheInfluence.com

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