

# Preventing and Treating Substance Abuse

*"We cannot arrest our way out of the problem of chronic drug abuse and drug-driven crime."*

*Barry R. McCaffrey, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1999*

## The Data

- **One in eleven Americans has a substance dependence or abuse problem.** About 15 million people abuse alcohol only; about 4 million abuse illicit drugs; another 3+ million abuse both. Three-fourths of them are employed. The abuse rate is highest among Native Americans and lowest among African Americans. (*2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, SAMHSA, USDHHS)
- **Societal costs of drug abuse are enormous.** In 2000 the societal costs were about \$161 billion, including \$110 billion in productivity losses and \$14 billion in health care costs. ([www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/pdf/drug\\_datasum.pdf](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/pdf/drug_datasum.pdf)) The cost to incarcerate drug use offenders is \$20,000-\$50,000 per person per year. (*Drug Court Resources— Facts and Figures*, [www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org))
- **Violence is associated most with alcohol abuse.** More than all other drugs *combined*, alcohol is implicated in violence, including domestic violence, assault, homicide, and suicide. ([www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/substance.asp](http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/substance.asp))

## The Issues

- **The path to dependence and abuse starts early.** Early initiation of use is highly related to later incidence of dependence or abuse. Use before age 15 increases the risk about five times over for later dependence or abuse. (*2003 National Survey...*, above)
- **The key risk factors are known.** Individuals' low impulse control, lack of parental supervision, substance-using peers, and drug availability in homes, schools and communities all play a role in the likelihood that an individual will abuse substances. ([www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/risk.html](http://www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/risk.html))
- **The key protective factors are known, too.** Individual self-control and self-esteem, parental monitoring, academic success, high expectations from others, and decreased accessibility of alcohol and drugs all play a role in the likelihood that an individual will not abuse substances. ([www.safeyouth.org](http://www.safeyouth.org), above)
- **Low-income communities are inundated by substance marketers.** One study showed that a state's poorest zip code has nine times as many liquor stores as its richest zip code. The poorest area has 59 liquor stores for every 100,000 people compared to 6 per 100,000 in the richest area. (*Capital News Service*, April 18, 2003, [www.journalism.umd.edu/cns/wire/2003-editions](http://www.journalism.umd.edu/cns/wire/2003-editions))
- **The war on drugs swells prison populations.** Three-fourths of the increase in admissions to America's prisons over the last two decades came from non-violent offenses, the bulk of which were drug offenses. While there are 5 times as many white drug users as black, black men are being incarcerated at a rate over 13 times that of white men. ([www.cjcj.org/pubs/poor/pp.html](http://www.cjcj.org/pubs/poor/pp.html))

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## Options for Philanthropy

- **Investing in cost-effective, results-oriented prevention programs.** Research shows that \$1 of investment in prevention saves up to \$10 in treatment for abuse. Effective prevention programs focus on the specific local problem, strengthen protective factors, and target modifiable risk factors. ([www.nida.nih.gov/infobox/lessons.html](http://www.nida.nih.gov/infobox/lessons.html)) Because parents play such a critical role as protective factors, building their skills to communicate effectively may prove to be cost-effective.
- **Facilitating inclusion of those most affected by the issue in planning and implementation.** Those at-risk of, or experiencing, substance abuse and family members affected by the problem, have critical perspectives to offer. La Bodega de la Familia ([www.labodegadelafamilia.org](http://www.labodegadelafamilia.org)), for example, found that its substance abuse treatment efforts for people released from incarceration were significantly aided by family involvement in the planning and delivery of treatment. Similarly, youth involvement in shaping youth prevention and treatment programs is critical.
- **Convening critical stakeholders around specific issues.** Because substance abuse is highly correlated with other problems like domestic violence, other forms of violence, academic failure, and mental illness, planning and intervention will benefit by the collaboration of stakeholders relevant to specific issues. The specialized nature of the work of practitioners in each area and their specialized networks and funding sources suggest that it may take intentional and regular convening by a neutral party to foster effective collaboration.
- **Engaging in policy advocacy for prevention and treatment.** Two under-addressed issues are local policies to limit the number of liquor stores in any given neighborhood and criminal justice system reform to provide adequate drug treatment in prison and detention alternatives for people with drug offense arrests.

## Key Resources

- **National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.** Offers data bases, publications, practitioner resources, media materials, and information by specific drugs and for diverse audiences. ([www.healthy.org](http://www.healthy.org))
- **National Institute of Drug Abuse.** Provides information tailored specifically for students and young adults, parents and teachers, and researchers and health professionals, based on the latest scientific knowledge. ([www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov))
- **National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center.** Sponsored by the CDC, provides professionals, parents, and youth with resources and tools for addressing substance abuse within the larger framework of youth violence. ([www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/subabuse.asp](http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/subabuse.asp))



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