



Backgrounder

Facts About Prescription Drug Diversion and Abuse

An Important, Growing Challenge America Must Address

The National Prescription Drug Threat Assessment (NPDTA) provides facts that illustrate in unambiguous terms the threat posed by the distribution, diversion and abuse of controlled prescription drugs (CPD) in the United States.

The report's highlights include the following facts:

- Unintentional overdose deaths involving prescription opioids increased 117 percent between 2001 (3,944) and 2005 (8,541), the most recent year data is available.
- There were approximately 6.9 million current (past month) non-medical users of CPDs aged 12 or older in 2007, the latest year data is available.
- Violent and property crimes associated with CPD diversion and abuse have increased in all regions of the United States over the past five years.
- The economic costs of diversion and abuse of CPDs is steep. For example, the estimated cost to public and private medical insurers is \$72.5 billion a year.
- CPD diversion typically involves individuals who doctor-shop or forge prescriptions; unscrupulous physicians or pharmacists; rogue Internet pharmacies; and thefts, with gangs becoming increasingly involved in the retail distribution of diverted CPDs.
- The National Drug Threat Survey indicates that methamphetamine is the greatest drug threat nationwide, however the danger from pharmaceutical abuse is the fastest growing trend.

Other facts about Controlled Prescription Drugs from the NPDTA:

- In 2007, an estimated 2.7 million individuals aged 12 or older reported having used an illicit drug for the first time within the past 12 months, with nearly a third (30.6 percent) using pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants or sedatives.
- Among prescription psychotherapeutics, pain relievers are by far the most widely abused—more than sedatives and tranquilizers combined. All three are primarily abused by young adults and adolescents aged 12-25.
- The number of treatment admissions for prescription opioids increased 74 percent between 2002 and 2006.
- Nearly half of law enforcement agencies reported high availability of diverted pharmaceuticals (49 percent) in 2008, up from 41 percent the year before, with higher levels of gang involvement CPD distribution.
- While CPD's usually account for about 11 percent of all prescription drugs dispensed at legitimate "brick and mortar" pharmacies, they often account for as much as 95 percent of prescription drugs dispensed at rogue Internet pharmacies investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration.
- Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs, which have been implemented in 32 states, have proven effective in reducing prescription drug abuse.

For an electronic copy of the 2009 National Prescription Drug Threat Assessment please go to the National Drug Intelligence Center at www.usdoj.gov/ndic/. For more information on DEA please go to www.dea.gov.