

III. The Mission

Responsible public policy seeks to reduce access to and availability of marijuana. Once people know the facts about the drug, it is important that they work to develop a comprehensive approach for preventing and reducing its use. Moreover, law enforcement agencies at all levels should make it a top priority to intensify detection and removal of marijuana-growing operations.

- Curbing access to marijuana is a major challenge. A 2001 survey found that 55 percent of kids age 12-17 agreed that marijuana would be “fairly easy” or “very easy” to obtain and was available from a wide variety of sources.⁴²

Our responsibility as employers, colleagues, neighbors, family members, and friends is to get the marijuana user beyond denial and into effective treatment and lifelong recovery.

- Reduce the denial gap
 - Of the 5.6 million people who met the criteria for drug dependence and abuse specified in the 4th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 2001, 4.6 million (92 percent) did not acknowledge they had a problem.⁴³
- Treatment works
 - Federal spending for substance-abuse treatment has risen sharply in recent years, increasing from about \$2.2 billion in 1993 to nearly \$3.3 billion in 2003.⁴⁴
 - The federal government sponsored the Cannabis Youth Treatment Study (CYT),⁴⁵ which developed innovative and effective treatment methodologies.
 - ❖ Using these treatment approaches, the percentage of young people reporting abstinence from marijuana use went from 4 percent upon entering the study to 13 percent within 3 months, and to 34 percent after 6 months. The percentage of those having no past-month symptoms of marijuana abuse or dependence went from an initial 19 percent to 39 percent within 3 months, and to 61 percent after 6 months.
 - ❖ The CYT study found that brief interventions, or structured efforts to interrupt and stop an individual’s drug use, could be very successful, especially with low-severity clients (such as those who are not yet dependent).
 - ❖ The advantage of brief interventions is that they can be carried out in non-medical environments by non-medical staff. The screening and brief intervention approach is currently being used in a variety of settings (such as emergency rooms and social service agencies), and it has been found to be both clinically and cost effective.

Treatment for marijuana is widely available in a variety of forms. There is no “wrong pathway” to treatment.

- Drug courts, or supervised programs that offer alternatives to incarceration, are a common means of providing treatment for drug users. Established to handle the growing caseload of low-level drug offenses, drug courts separate non-violent users from people charged with trafficking and other serious drug crimes.
 - ❖ Recidivism rates among all drug court participants have ranged from 5 percent to 28 percent; for graduates of drug courts, the recidivism rate is less than 4 percent.⁴⁶
 - ❖ Drug courts are expanding rapidly, and the federal government is helping to fuel this growth. The President's proposed FY 2004 budget includes an increase in drug-court funding from the currently enacted \$45 million to \$68 million.⁴⁷ More than 1,000 drug courts are in operation around the country, and approximately 400 are in development. To date, some 300,000 adults and juveniles have enrolled in drug court programs.⁴⁸
- Communities can take action now. We urge treatment programs and providers to employ these proven methods. For materials and more information, visit www.health.org.

Related Issues

1. Marijuana v. tobacco and alcohol: the case against legalization

- Alcohol and tobacco pose significant risks, especially to young people.
- Alcohol and tobacco cost society a great deal every year in terms of crime, lost productivity, tragedies, and deaths. Why legalize marijuana and add a third drug to the current list of licit threats?
- As a result of legal settlements and vigorous public education efforts, many Americans are aware of the dangers of dependence and addiction associated with alcohol and tobacco use. Even so, alcohol and tobacco remain a significant part of the American health problem.

Why legalize marijuana and add a third drug to the current list of licit threats?