



# FACT SHEET

## OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY

Office of Public Affairs

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# The National Drug Control Strategy

## A 21st Century Approach to Drug Policy

### Overview – A Strategy Informed by Science

President Obama believes in the pursuit of an America built to last – a Nation with an educated, skilled workforce with the knowledge, energy, and expertise to succeed in a highly competitive global marketplace. Yet, for too many Americans, this future is limited by drug use, which inhibits the ability of our citizens to remain healthy, safe, and achieve their full potential.

The *National Drug Control Strategy (Strategy)* represents a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to drug policy. It outlines innovative policies and programs and recognizes that substance use is not just a criminal justice issue, but also a major public health concern.

Discoveries in neuroscience have revealed that addiction is a chronic disease of the brain – a disease that can be prevented, successfully treated, and from which one can recover. This scientific understanding serves as the foundation for the Obama Administration’s drug policy strategy and guides the Administration’s decision-making on public health and safety.

### Addressing the National Opioid Epidemic

The abuse of opioids, a group of drugs that includes heroin and prescription painkillers, has a devastating impact on public health and safety in this country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 110 Americans, on average, died from drug poisoning every day in 2011.<sup>1</sup> Prescription drugs were involved in more than half of the 41,300 drug poisoning deaths that year, and opioid pain relievers were involved in nearly 17,000 of these deaths.<sup>2</sup> About 4,400 drug poisoning deaths involved heroin. Drug poisoning deaths outnumbered deaths from gunshot wounds or motor vehicle crashes.<sup>3</sup>

Since day one, the Obama Administration has deployed a comprehensive and evidence-based strategy to address the threat posed by opioid drugs. The 2014 *Strategy* builds upon a series of actions focused on improving education for patients and health care providers, supporting the expansion of state-based prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs), developing more convenient and environmentally responsible disposal methods to remove unused medications

from the home, and reducing the prevalence of pill mills and diversion through targeted enforcement efforts. To address the urgent problem of overdose, we are significantly bolstering support for medication-assisted opioid treatment and overdose prevention, expanding the government-wide response to the prescription drug abuse epidemic, and pursuing action against criminal organizations trafficking in and dealing opioid drugs.

Working with Federal Government or community partners, our major accomplishments in this area over the past year have included:

- Fast-track approval by the FDA of an auto-injector for opioid overdose reversal;
- Release of an *Opioid Overdose Toolkit* by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA);
- Public Education and Prevention efforts through 670 Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Program coalitions;
- The launch of approximately 60 new continuing education or continuing medical education programs on safe prescribing and substance misuse that health care personnel and prescribers may take for credit toward licensure requirements;
- Interstate data-sharing by 24 of 49 state PDMPs; and
- Issuance of boxed warnings concerning the effect of long-acting extended-release opioids on newborns.

## **Preventing Drug Use Before it Begins**

Stopping drug use before it begins – particularly among young people – is the most cost-effective way to reduce drug use and its consequences. Research shows that every dollar invested in a school-based substance use prevention program has the potential to save up to \$18 in costs related to substance use.<sup>4</sup>

In support of efforts to prevent drug use, the President’s plan:

- Promotes national, state, and community-based programs (including DFC) that are evidence-based and work to prevent substance use in schools and in the workplace;
- Provides information on effective prevention strategies, including environmental approaches, for use by youth advocates, parents, local prevention service providers, law enforcement officers, faith-based representatives, health care workers, and community organizers nationwide; and
- Spreads prevention to the workplace through programs that ensure the safety and wellness of employees and their families.

## **Intervening Early, Before a Medical Condition Becomes Chronic**

Early detection and treatment of a drug problem by a health care professional is more effective and less costly than dealing with a chronic substance use disorder.

To bolster early intervention efforts, the President's *Strategy*:

Works to expand programs such as Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) that can help reduce adverse health and safety consequences from substance use;

- Supports education and legislation aimed at providing health care professionals with continuing education and training on addiction and safe prescribing practices for opioid painkillers; and
- Seeks to reduce opioid overdose deaths by expanding comprehensive overdose prevention measures, including the use of the lifesaving overdose-reversal medicine naloxone among first responders.

## **Making Access to Treatment a Reality for Millions of Americans**

Of the 23.1 million Americans aged 12 or older who needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem in 2012, only 2.5 million received treatment at a specialty facility.<sup>5</sup> Treatment works and should be made more available to the millions who need it. To expand access to treatment, the Administration's *Strategy*:

- Details actions to implement the Affordable Care Act, which ends discrimination against people with substance use disorders by requiring insurance companies to cover treatment for these disorders just as they would cover any other chronic disease;
- Promotes the use of medication-assisted treatment to help guide people into recovery;
- Works to expand treatment and reentry services for those incarcerated; and
- Expands health insurance coverage for all Americans, including college and university students and Native Americans.

## **Eliminating Barriers to Recovery**

Millions have made the successful journey from addiction to recovery. For many, the journey started with secular or faith-based treatment programs. Others found their way into recovery through medication-assisted treatment or mutual aid without treatment. Their stories show there is hope for everyone with a substance use disorder and that recovery is not only possible, it can be a positive force that transforms individuals, families, and communities.

The Obama Administration is committed to spreading the promise of recovery across the Nation and around the globe. As part of this effort, ONDCP has made recovery a cornerstone of its *Strategy* and is devoted to supporting the millions of Americans in recovery by taking action to remove barriers to recovery, eliminate the stigma of being in recovery, and expand access to community-based recovery support services. Similarly, we are sharing our experiences internationally and learning from others about policies and programs that support recovery. The Obama Administration's *Strategy* supports the lifelong process of recovery by:

- Working to lift the stigma associated with substance use disorders by partnering with those in the recovery community to speak out about their successes and encourage others to seek treatment;

- Reviewing and reforming laws and regulations that unfairly target those with substance use disorders and impede recovery, including laws and regulations that restrict access to housing, employment, and obtaining a driver’s license or student loan; and
- Supporting youth and young adults in recovery and promoting approaches for assisting youth in recovery via school- and campus-based recovery efforts, including recovery schools and collegiate recovery communities.

## Taking a ‘Smart on Crime’ Approach to Drug Enforcement

High rates of incarceration take a toll on our Nation. In response to this problem, the Strategy supports a wide array of “smart on crime” reforms to stop the revolving door of the criminal and juvenile justice systems by addressing the offenders’ criminal activities as well as their underlying substance use disorders. These reforms support ongoing initiatives previously announced by the Department of Justice, including an overhaul of Federal mandatory minimum sentencing policies and an expedited review of clemency applications for certain non-violent, low-level offenders. To protect public safety while building trust in our criminal justice system, the President’s *National Drug Control Strategy*:

- Focuses limited law enforcement resources to address the greatest threats to public safety;
- Promotes the diversion of non-violent drug offenders into treatment in lieu of incarceration through innovative programs like Drug Courts and other community services; and
- Highlights innovations that show promise in reducing rates of incarceration while protecting public safety, such as such as Hawaii’s Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) and the Drug Market Intervention program.

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*For more information on Obama Administration efforts to reduce drug use and its consequences while implementing effective drug policy reform, visit [www.wh.gov/drugpolicyreform](http://www.wh.gov/drugpolicyreform)*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Health Statistics/CDC, National Vital Statistics, unpublished special tabulations (June 10, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Health Statistics/CDC, National Vital Statistics, unpublished special tabulations (June 10, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Health Statistics/CDC, National Vital Statistics Report, Final death data for 2011 (June 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Miller, T., & Hendrie, D.(2009).Substance abuse prevention dollars and cents: a cost-benefit analysis. DHHS Pub.No.(SMA) 07-4298.Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

<sup>5</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Results from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings*, NSDUH Series H-46, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 13-4795. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013