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**STATUS OF DRUG USE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE
MAJOR CHALLENGES**

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SECRETARIAT FOR MULTIDIMENSIONAL SECURITY**

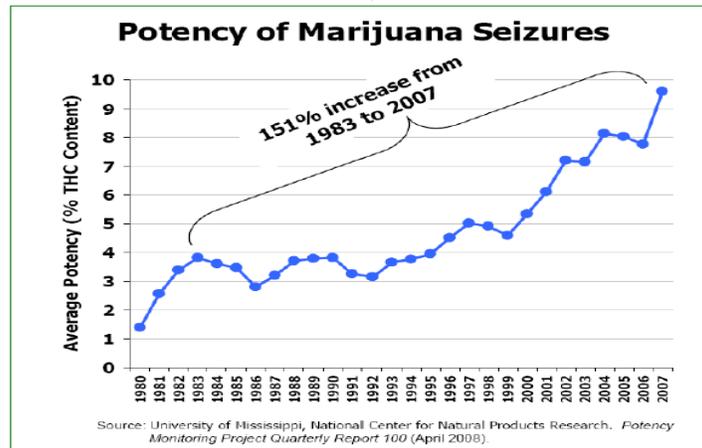
**STATUS OF DRUG USE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE
MAJOR CHALLENGES**

- Drug use varies greatly from country to country in our hemisphere, with different kinds of drugs being used at differing rates.. There are also wide variations within countries, a significant matter when decisions have to be taken on reducing the demand for drugs through substance abuse prevention and treatment.
- *Marijuana: World-wide¹, between 3.3 and 4.4 percent of the world's population aged 15 to 64 used marijuana in the previous 12 months, and in the Western Hemisphere, that figure was about 7 percent, or twice the global average and greater than the European average of around 5.3 percent.*
- According to United Nations' estimates in its 2009 report, between 143 and 190 million people used marijuana in the past year. In the Americas, according to the same report, the number of marijuana users in the past year was approximately 42 million people, which means that *the region accounts for between 22 and 29 percent of the total number of marijuana users worldwide.* About 75 percent of marijuana users are concentrated in North America (Canada, Mexico and the United States.
- Marijuana use varies widely across the region. In some countries, fewer than 1 percent of the population aged 12 to 64 are users, while in others, the figure exceeds 10 percent.
- *The marijuana that is produced and consumed today is not the same as in earlier decades. A University of Mississippi study shows a 151 percent increase in the active ingredient of marijuana (THC) in the United States between 1983 and 2007 (Graph 1).*

Graph 1: Changes in THC content in marijuana

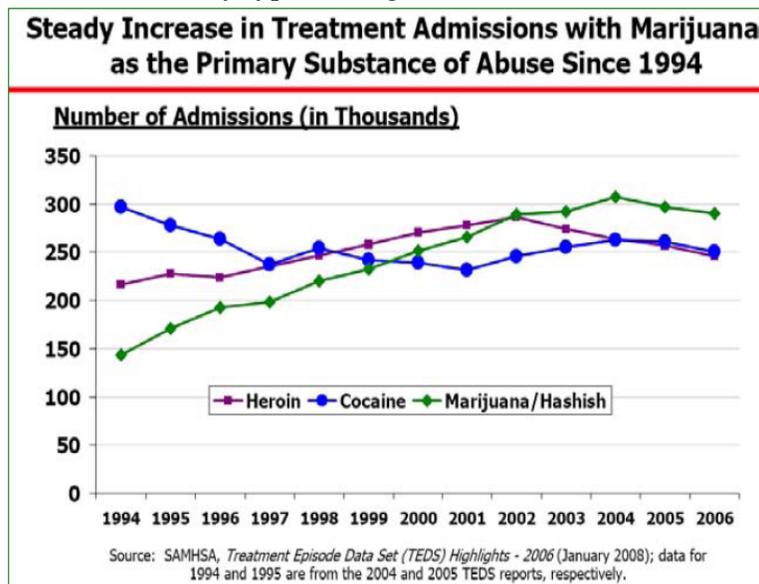
¹ UNODC: World Drug Report, 2009. <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/WDR-2009.html>.

United States, 1980-2007



- The number of patients who are in drug treatment for marijuana abuse is on the rise in those countries for which we have trend data. In the U.S., the number of patients in treatment for marijuana abuse doubled from 1994 to 2006; marijuana is now the drug for which there is the greatest demand for treatment (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Number of treatment admissions in the United States, by type of drug, 1994-2006



- A number of studies have shown that many people do not regard occasional or experimental marijuana use as being very risky. There is a general perception that access to marijuana is relatively easy. The supply of marijuana is also high. These three factors, taken together with high rates of use, the increased potency of

marijuan, and the growing number of people seeking treatment for marijuana abuse, mean that marijuana is a definitely a drug that demands particular attention.

- **Marijuana produces dependence.** About 25 percent of people who used marijuana in the previous 12 months showed signs of dependence (population aged 15 to 64 in five countries of South America, 2006). The figure in the U.S. was 16 percent (population aged 12 and over, 2008).
- Marijuana use among high-school students in the Caribbean countries is high and exceeds **tobacco use**.
- Trends in marijuana use show the following:
 - Canada: Significant increase in past-year prevalence among the population aged 15 and over: 7.4 percent in 1994 to 14.1 percent in 2004 and a significant decrease in 2008 to 13.6%.
 - Argentina: Use by high-school students doubled last year: 3.5 percent in 2001 to 8.1 percent in 2007.
 - Uruguay: Large increase in past-year high-school population use: 8.4 percent in 2003 to 14.8 percent in 2007.
 - Chile: Use in the past year by high-school students has stabilized in recent years: 15.5 percent in 2005 to 15.7 percent in 2007. Significant increase in marijuana use among the general population, from 5.3 percent in 2004 to 7 percent in 2006.
 - Mexico: Slight but constant increase in use by the high-school population at any time during their lifetime, from 5 percent in 1997 to approximately 9 percent in 2006.
 - United States: Marijuana use has stabilized among the population aged 12 and over, with past-month prevalence of about 6 percent.
- ***Cocaine: Between 0.4 and 0.5 percent of the world's population² aged 15 to 64 have said they have used cocaine at some time in the previous year. This is equivalent to between 15.6 and 20.8 million people. In the Americas, the average rate of use is four times higher than the world average, reaching 1.6 percent, or about 9.5 million users.***
- In other words, ***approximately 50 percent of the world's cocaine users are found in our Hemisphere.***

² UNODC: World Drug Report, 2009. <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/WDR-2009.html>.

- Of the total number of cocaine users in the Americas, 75 percent are in North America, 24 percent in South America, and fewer than 1 percent in Central America and the Caribbean.
- In percentage terms, cocaine use in our Hemisphere **is twice that in European countries.** Past-year prevalence of 1.6 percent versus 0.8 percent.
- There are significant differences in cocaine use among the countries of our region. In some countries, use of cocaine in the previous 12 months in the general population is below 0.2 percent (Ecuador, Guatemala, and Barbados, for example), and in others it is higher than 1.5 percent (Argentina, Canada, and the United States).
- **Cocaine use is also present,** at disturbing levels, **among the high-school population.** Although cocaine use is low in the Caribbean countries, it is high in some countries of North and South America, with 3 percent or more of high-school students using cocaine in the past last year in the United States (10th grade), Canada, and Uruguay.
- Cocaine base (called “basuco” or “paco” in Spanish) is a problem of great concern in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, because of its problematic use, principally by marginalized groups, the high level of abuse and dependence, and a high level of demand for treatment. In Chile, for example, the number of people treated for cocaine base dependence in treatment centers financed by the Government is larger than the total number treated for marijuana and cocaine combined.
- In high schools, the use of cocaine base increased from 0.6 percent in 2005 to 1.1 percent in 2007 in Uruguay, and remained constant last year in Argentina at about 1.5 percent and in Chile at 2.5 percent.
- In other parts of the hemisphere, in particular Central America and Mexico, requests for treatment for crack use are high. In Costa Rica, for example, the number of crack patients in treatment exceeds the number for marijuana and cocaine combined.
- **Heroin:** We know that some countries in the region have a large number of patients in treatment for heroin abuse and dependence, such as Brazil, Canada, the

United States and Mexico. We in the OAS are concerned about what might happen with heroin in the near future in other countries of the hemisphere.

- ***Inhalant use is alarming among high-school students in Brazil and some Caribbean countries: use of inhalants at least once during the*** past-year is over 10 percent in some countries such as Brazil, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, followed closely by Barbados and Guyana. Additional studies are needed to identify more precisely the types of inhalants being used, since they probably vary from country to country.
- Alcohol is widely consumed in all countries, and its use warrants careful attention. While there are considerable differences among students aged 13 to 17 in different countries, current use (defined as use in the past 30 days) in some countries is more than 50 percent. For example, in Colombia (50.3 percent), Dominica (51.6 percent), Uruguay (54.7 percent), Argentina (59.8 percent), and Saint Lucia (60.8 percent). Even among students aged 14 and under, alcohol use is widespread in these same countries, with past month use over 35 percent, and as high as 52.5 percent in Saint Lucia.
- This is a matter of concern, but so too is the way in which alcohol is consumed. Indeed, in a number of countries (including some with low rates of alcohol use), 50 percent or more of those who drank alcohol in the past year said that, on at least one occasion in the previous two weeks, they “had had five drinks or more in one sitting.”
- While male high-school students generally tend to consume more alcohol than female students, the differences are marginal in many countries and, in some, females report drinking more.
- **Problem drinking affects a large part of the population.** Internationally-used criteria show that, depending on the country, between 5 and 18 percent of the adult population shows signs of problem drinking.
- ***It can be said on the basis of available information that, (with variations among countries) approximately 9 percent of the youth and adult population shows signs of abuse of or dependence on drugs or alcohol or both; in other words, almost one person in 10 has an abuse or dependence problem.***

- Conclusion: More information is available today than ever before, giving us a better understanding of both the drug problem in the Hemisphere and its impact. While this information is needed for a comprehensive evidence-based assessment that will inform national drug policy, it is still insufficient. More and better information and research on specific population groups, including local studies, is still needed.