



# CRIMINAL JUSTICE FAX



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RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH DIVISION

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## Meth Use Has Many Costs

The estimated total cost of the system's response to a single<sup>1</sup> methamphetamine-related criminal case in San Diego County is almost \$94,000.

The Meth Strike Force, San Diego Police Department, and SANDAG worked together to collect, analyze and estimate the costs of one meth case to local taxpayers. The total was calculated by researching one defendant's arrest and incarceration history and documenting the cost of her contacts with publicly-funded entities, such as law enforcement, local and state detention facilities, probation, parole, and treatment providers. Worth noting is that although this defendant was a young adult (24 years old), she already had been arrested six times, spent 134 days in local custody, served two prison sentences, and is currently on probation and parole, all of which added to the above-calculated costs of her meth use.

These costs would have been even higher if she was a parent or had medical complications such as positive HIV status. Among female meth-using arrestees in San Diego County as part of SANDAG's Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, 79 percent are parents. When children are caught in the crossfire of their parent's drug use and subsequent incarceration, there may be additional substantial costs born by the County's Child Welfare Services (CWS), as well as by law enforcement for transporting the minor(s) to a safe location and interacting with CWS staff. According to CWS, more than 300 children were removed from meth homes in the first four months of 2006 in San Diego County.

The prevalence of methamphetamine use throughout San Diego County has been well documented with official statistics from providers of drug treatment and prevention programs, as well as by law enforcement agencies. Data collected from interviews conducted by SANDAG with adults booked into local detention facilities reveal that between 2000 to 2005, there was an increase in the percent of both male and female arrestees testing positive for meth from 28 percent to 44 percent (for males) and 29 percent to 51 percent (for females). These interviews also indicate that two out of three arrestees reported ever having tried meth, and more than two out of five (41% of women and 45% of men) had used it in the past 30 days.<sup>2</sup>

Of growing concern is that meth use is expanding from the Southwestern states to other areas of the nation. According to a National Association of Counties 2006 survey, county law enforcement officials across 44 states reported meth as the number one drug problem in their county.<sup>3</sup> In 2000,

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this one case was not randomly sampled and its description here is not meant to represent all or the majority of meth cases. Acknowledging that some cases will cost the system more, and some will cost the system less, this project was completed to draw attention to how just one case can result in a number of different costs over time and across many systems.

<sup>2</sup> Burke, C. (2006). *2005 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region*. San Diego, CA: SANDAG.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of Counties. (2006). *NACo survey: Meth remains number one drug problem; Meth-related crimes continue to grow*. Press Release. [On-line]. Available at [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).



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approximately 8.8 million individuals age 12 and older said they had ever tried meth<sup>4</sup>. This number rose to approximately 12.3 million in 2003<sup>5</sup>. The increase in the use of this illicit and harmful drug is apt to have a negative fiscal impact on several segments of the community, most certainly the criminal justice system and medical and treatment providers.

These data provide valuable information to policymakers as they review meth-related law enforcement, prevention and treatment strategies. For more information regarding the scope of methamphetamine use in San Diego County, please visit the Meth Strike Force Web site at [www.no2meth.org](http://www.no2meth.org).

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<sup>4</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2006). *Research Report Series – Methamphetamine Abuse and Addiction*. [On-line]. Available at [www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/methamph/methamph2.html](http://www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/methamph/methamph2.html).

<sup>5</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2006). *NIDA InfoFacts: Methamphetamine*. [On-line]. Available at [www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/methamphetamine.html](http://www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/methamphetamine.html).