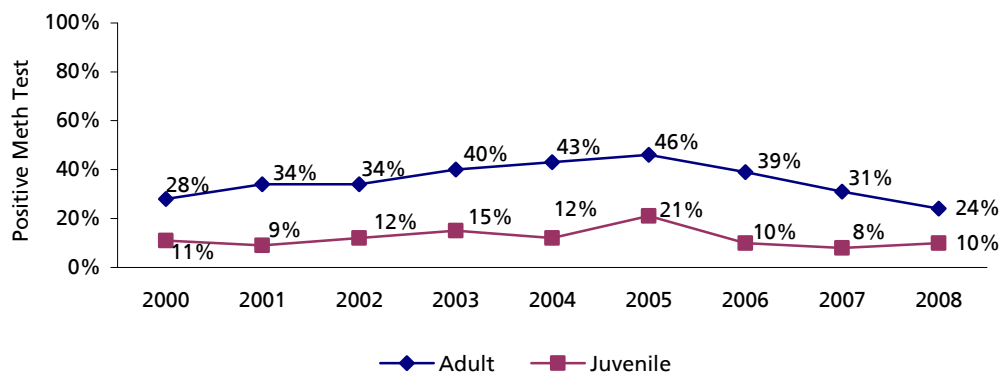


## THE UNKNOWN COST AND FUTURE OF METH USE IN THESE UNCERTAIN ECONOMIC TIMES

Two recent studies released by CASA at Columbia University<sup>1</sup> and RAND<sup>2</sup> highlight the costly toll substance use has had on local and national budgets. CASA conservatively estimated that in 2005, state governments spent approximately 15 percent of their budgets (19% of California's) on substance abuse and its damages, for a total of \$467.7 billion nationally. When the lens is turned on methamphetamine (meth) specifically, the costs are also staggering with the nation spending an estimated \$23.4 billion in 2005. Closer examination of these expenditures reveals that only about two percent of each of these budgets (overall and meth alone) was spent on prevention, with the majority consumed by addressing the negative consequences of drug use (e.g., loss of life, criminal justice costs).

San Diego County has a long and dubious history with meth. However, perseverance, commitment, and aggressive action on the part of the alcohol and drug treatment community, law enforcement, and policy makers have resulted in positive outcomes. Data collected through SANDAG's Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program show that meth use among arrestees (a strong indicator of meth trends) in San Diego County has been on the decline for both adults and juveniles since a peak in 2005 (21% and 46%, respectively). In 2008, 24 percent of adults and 10 percent of juveniles tested positive for meth (Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 1**  
**METH USE AMONG SAN DIEGO COUNTY ARRESTEES SHOWS A DOWNWARD TREND**



SOURCE: SANDAG; Substance Abuse Monitoring Program 2008 data.

Rather than a cause for celebration, these data sound a warning of what lies ahead as decision makers are forced to make difficult budget-related decisions. Without a legislative mandate, prevention and intervention programs are often the first to be dismantled during tight fiscal times. Combating meth use and production requires constant vigilance. Time will reveal what impact fewer resources will have on this fight.

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<sup>1</sup> Author (2009). *Shoveling up II: The Impact of Substance Abuse on Federal, State, and Local Budgets*. Available at [www.casacolumbia.org/absolutenm/articlefiles/380-ShovelingUpII.pdf](http://www.casacolumbia.org/absolutenm/articlefiles/380-ShovelingUpII.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Nicosia, N., Pacula, R., Kilmer, B., Lundberg, R., & Chiesa, J. (2009) *The Economic Costs of Methamphetamine use in the United States*. available at [www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG829.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG829.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 2008 SAM data will be available through a series of SANDAG bulletins to be released between July and August 2009.