

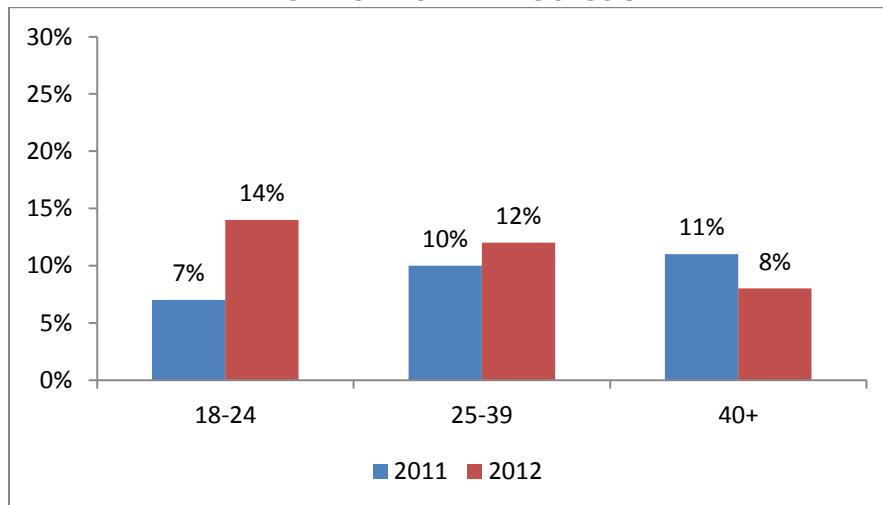
Heroin Use Up in 2012, Driven in Part by More Prescription Drug Abuse by Young Adults

Over the years, San Diego County has had a less significant issue with heroin use, compared to other areas of the country. For example, in 2002, only 5 percent of San Diego County adult male arrestees tested positive for opiates, compared to 25 percent in Chicago, Illinois.¹ However, statistics recently released by SANDAG that are consistent with other countywide indicators suggest that the popularity of this drug is growing and the recent increase in use may be related, at least in part, to the abuse of prescription painkillers.

The percent of positive drug tests for opiates as part of the San Diego County SAM Program doubled between 2002 and 2012.

To measure drug trends for the San Diego County SAM Program, arrestees booked into local detention facilities are interviewed about their recent drug use history and asked to provide a urine sample, supplementing the self-report information that is usually only gathered in other studies. Ten-year trend data show that the percent of adult arrestees who tested positive for opiates has doubled – from 5 percent in 2002 to 10 percent in 2012 for adult males and from 6 percent to 12 percent for adult females. In addition, for the first time ever, younger arrestees (between the ages of 18 and 24) were significantly more likely to test positive for opiates (14%) in 2012, compared to those between the ages of 25 and 39 (12%) and 40 and older (8%). In 2011, younger arrestees were less likely to test positive, compared to older arrestees.

Figure 1
PERCENT POSITIVE FOR OPIATES UP AMONG YOUNGER ARRESTEES, DOWN FOR OLDER ARRESTEES IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY



SOURCE: SANDAG

¹ Data for Chicago, IL were compiled as part of the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program (ADAM). Chicago is one of the remaining five sites that still collects data for this program, but only interviews adult male arrestees. San Diego County was an original ADAM site and SANDAG was

Other concerning statistics described in the recently released SAM CJ Bulletin include:

- The percent of adult arrestees who reported ever trying heroin increased to 26 percent in 2012, from 17 percent in 2002, and the proportion of these individuals who used heroin in the past 30 days also increased (from 26% to 42%).
- Over three-quarters (79%) of individuals who used heroin in the last year reported it was “very easy” or “easy” to get.
- More than 1 in 4 (27%) of those who ever tried heroin reported that they had used prescription opiates before trying heroin, and almost two-thirds (63%) of these individuals said they started using heroin as a substitute for the prescription opiates, often because of increased availability and cheaper cost.
- Younger adults (18 to 24) were significantly more likely to report ever having abused a prescription opiate² (46%), compared to 32 percent of those between the ages of 25 and 39 and 28 percent of those 40 and older.
- The proportion of heroin users who reported their preferred method of use was injection decreased (from 65% in 2002 to 58% in 2012), consistent with the growing trend of prescription drug abuse leading to heroin use.
- Of those who ever reported trying heroin, 43 percent reported they had overdosed before (compared to 4% of those who had never tried it) and 45 percent had visited an emergency room for a drug-related incident (compared to 17%).

Statistics tracked by the San Diego County Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force are consistent with the trends reported here, further supporting the need to monitor and address this issue through a comprehensive strategy that involves prevention, treatment, and enforcement efforts. Specifically, between 2007 and 2012, there were increases in the number of seizures of heroin at San Diego County Points of Entry increased (from 111 to 470), the percent of treatment admissions indicating a primary drug of choice for heroin (from 17% to 23%), and the number of heroin overdose deaths (from 57 to 74).

With recent estimates showing that illicit drug abuse costs the U.S. \$193 billion annually (due to lost productivity, health care costs, and crime-related costs),³ this is an issue that affects all of our communities. Annual bulletins summarizing the results of these interviews can be found on-line at www.sandag.org/sam. Please check back regularly as updated reports and aggregate data are updated or contact the CJ Division at (619)699-1900.

² Prescription-type opioids include Methadone, Codeine, Dilaudin, Percocet, Vicodin, Demerol, Fentanyl, Morphine, and Oxycotin.

³ National Drug Intelligence Center (2011). The economic impact of illicit drug use on American society. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.