

Rimrock Foundation  
1231 N. 29th St. Billings, MT 59101  
(406) 248-3175 1-800-227-3953  
www.rimrock.org

## GETTING THE FACTS ABOUT SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND TREATMENT

Substance abuse is a national public health problem that affects millions of people and imposes enormous financial and social burdens on society. It destroys families, victimizes individuals and communities, and suffocates the educational, criminal justice, and social services systems. It is a disease that can affect anyone, regardless of age, cultural background, or profession. Below are some important facts about substance abuse, addiction, treatment, and recovery.

### General

A significant number of American workers abuse substances, and some of this use occurs at work. Most current drug users age 18 and older are employed in fact, 73 percent work, including 6.7 million full-time workers and 1.6 million part-time workers, according to the *1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse*.

### Drug Abuse Among Targeted Populations

#### Youth/Adolescents

The number of workers ages 16 to 24 will increase by more than 3 million between 1996 and 2006, making this group the largest it has been in 20 years.

In 1997, 11 million current drinkers (used alcohol during the 30 days prior to the survey) were ages 12 to 20. Of this group, 4.8 million, more than 40 per cent, engaged in binge drinking (5 or more drinks on one occasion in the past month), including 2.0 million heavy drinkers (5 or more drinks on one occasion on 5 or more days in the past month). I

Past year alcohol use among twelfth-graders increased from 72.5 percent in 1996 to 74.8 percent in 1997. In addition, lifetime use increased from 79.2 percent in 1996 to 81.7 percent in 1997.

#### Older Workers

As the baby-boom generation ages, the median age of the workforce will rise to a new record in 2006. Although those aged 25 to 44 will continue to be the largest number of workers, those aged 45 to 64 will account for an increased share of the labor force by the year 2006. This latter age group will grow by more than 30 percent by the year 2006.

Given the aging of baby boomers, researchers and health professionals are increasingly concerned with tracking the health status and levels of substance use among older Americans. Although the use of illicit drugs is very limited in people 65 and older, this population consumes more prescribed and over-the-counter medications than any other age group in the United States. Thus, experts agree that the greatest concern for drug misuse or abuse in this population is prescription medicines.

Mixing alcohol with prescription drugs and an aging body make older people more vulnerable to problems from using alcohol and from taking medications.

### Use of Illicit Drugs and Alcohol by Full and Part-time Workers

### Illicit Drug Use

In 1994, just over 9 percent of male and 5 percent of female full-time workers aged 18 to 49 reported current illicit drug use. The prevalence of illicit drug use by all full-time workers was 12.4 percent between the ages of 18 and 25, 8.6 percent between the ages of 26 and 34, and 5.4 percent between the ages of 35 and 49.

Approximately 60 percent of illegal drug users work for companies with 500 or fewer employees. 6 In addition, a study breaking down work establishments by size found that 11 percent of workers in the smallest firms (fewer than 25 employees) reported current illicit drug use. This rate is significantly higher than the 5.4 percent rate of illicit drug use found in companies with 25 to 499 employees and those with 500 and more employees.

The highest rates of current illicit drug use reported by full-time workers aged 18 to 49 in 1991-1993 were in construction (17.3 percent), food preparation (16.3 percent), and waiters and waitresses (15.4 percent). The lowest rates of current illicit drug use in full-time workers aged 18 to 49 in 1991-1993 were found among police and detectives (1 percent), administrative support staff (2.2 percent), teachers (2.3 percent), and child care workers (2.6 percent).

### Alcohol Abuse

In 1997, 6.8 percent of Americans employed full-time reported heavy drinking in the past month. The highest prevalence of heavy drinking in the past month was 12 percent among workers aged 18 to 25. Of the 11.2 million heavy drinkers in 1997, 30 percent also were current illicit drug users.

### Crime and Substance Abuse

By the year 2000, if current trends continue, this nation will break the \$100 million per day barrier in money spent to incarcerate individuals with serious drug and alcohol problems.

### Effectiveness of Treatment

In a major before-and-after drug abuse treatment study of 4,411 people in federally funded treatment, the prevalence of illicit drug abuse was cut by about one-half for each illicit substance (i.e., cocaine, marijuana, crack, or heroin), and the number of those troubled by alcohol abuse dropped by more than two-thirds 5 to 16 months after treatment.

The percentage of people selling drugs, shoplifting, or beating someone up in the past year dropped by almost 80 percent 5 to 16 months after treatment. In addition, the percentage of clients receiving welfare declined from 40 percent to 35 percent an almost 11 percent overall decrease.

### **Center for Substance Abuse Treatment National Helpline 800-662-HELP**

Through this toll-free, confidential service, supported by the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, trained specialists provide information on alcohol and drug abuse and available treatment options. They also provide referrals to treatment programs, self-help and family support groups, and crisis centers nationwide.