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## Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention

Prescription drug abuse is emerging as one of the most serious prevention issues in this country today. No longer just the “silent” misuse or abuse of medications by women, people with chronic pain, and the elderly, prescription drug abuse is fast becoming a trend among young people, cutting across economic and cultural boundaries, metropolitan and rural areas.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), reports that prescription drug abuse accounts for about a third of all drug abuse in the United States. Clearly, this is an issue we can no longer ignore.

### According to the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse:

- In 1999, an estimated nine million people aged 12 and over (about 2 percent of the population) were using prescription drugs non-medically: including pain relievers (2.6 million), sedatives or tranquilizers (1.3 million), and stimulants (0.9 million).
- In 1999, 1.5 million persons used pain relievers non-medically for the first time—and alarming rise compared to the mid-1980’s when the figure was less than 400,000.
- 12 to 14 year-olds reported prescription medications as one of two primary drugs used.

Prescription drugs tend to be inexpensive and relatively accessible. Their abuse is arguably more dangerous than illicit drugs as their concentration is “pure and strong.” Disturbingly, survey data also show that abuse of prescription drugs prevails in all age groups:

- Persons aged 18 to 25 are more likely than persons in other age groups to begin abusing prescription drugs.
- Between the ages of 12 and 17, girls are more likely than boys to begin prescription drug abuse and are more likely to abuse stimulants and sedatives than other prescription drugs.
- Women using a sedative, anti-anxiety drug, or hypnotic are almost twice as likely as men to become addicted.
- People aged over 65 represent about 13 percent of the US population, but consume one-third of all prescription drugs. These patients often suffer from multiple diseases for which they take multiple drugs and are therefore more vulnerable to unintentionally misusing and becoming habituated to prescription medications.
- Data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse indicate that the most dramatic increase in new users of prescription drugs for nonmedical purposes occurs in 12- to 17-year-olds and 18- to 25-year-olds.
- It also appears that college students’ nonmedical use of pain relievers such as oxycodone with aspirin (Percodan) and hydrocodone (Vicodin) is on the rise.
- Overall, men and women have roughly similar rates of nonmedical use of prescription drugs. An exception is found among 12- to 17-year-olds: In this age group, young women are more likely than young men to use psychotherapeutic drugs nonmedically.