

# **MAKING THE DRUG PROBLEM SMALLER, 2001-2008**

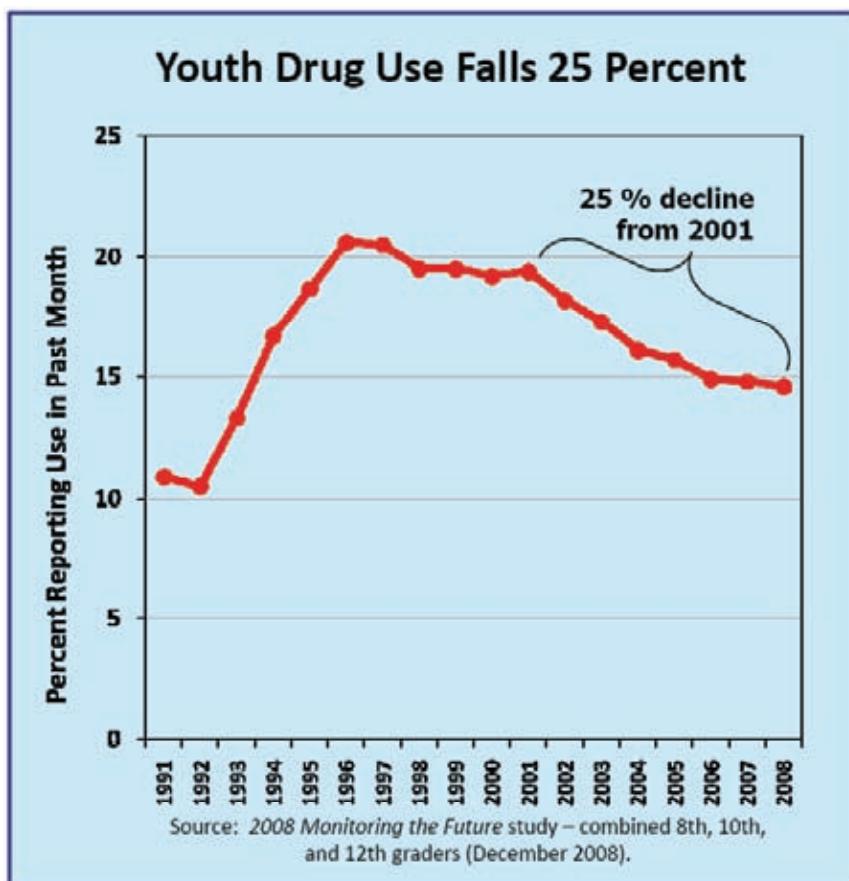


**Office of National Drug Control Policy  
Executive Office of the President  
Washington, DC 20503**

**December 2008**

## MAKING THE DRUG PROBLEM SMALLER

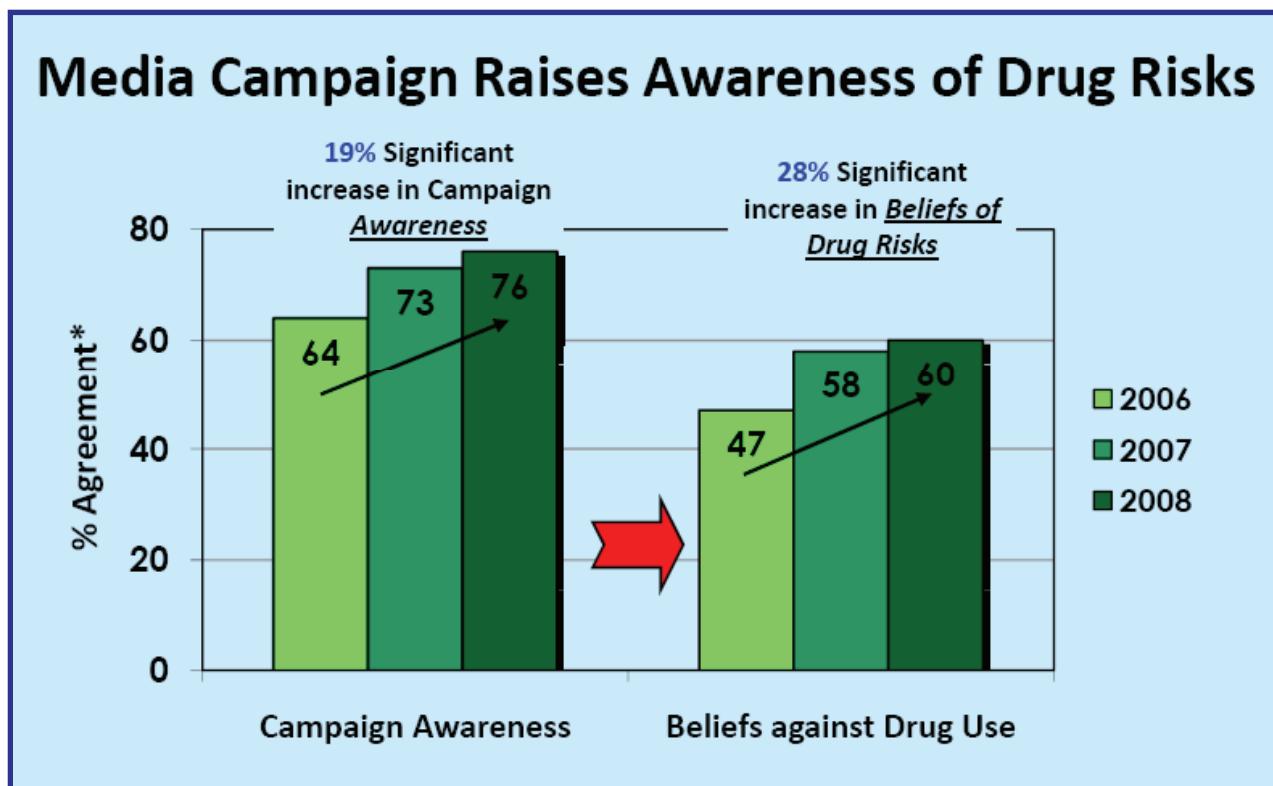
A major preoccupation of parents since the 1960s, the problem of illegal drug use has been implicated in everything from urban crime to undermining worker productivity and lowering SAT scores. In fact, drug abuse can rightly be blamed for worsening social problems such as teen pregnancy, undermining the safety of public housing, polluting Andean watersheds to fostering terrorism in the hemisphere. The good news is that drug use is down, in some cases down sharply, with the use of some drugs at or near historic lows. Drug use among young people has only been lower in three of the past 17 years.



Evidence is building, moreover, that these reductions in drug use, which have largely erased the run-up that began in 1993, are the result of innovations in the way we educate young people about the harms of illegal drugs, provide help to those already embarked on a career of drug use, and interdict the drugs and drug traffickers seeking to compromise the integrity of our borders.

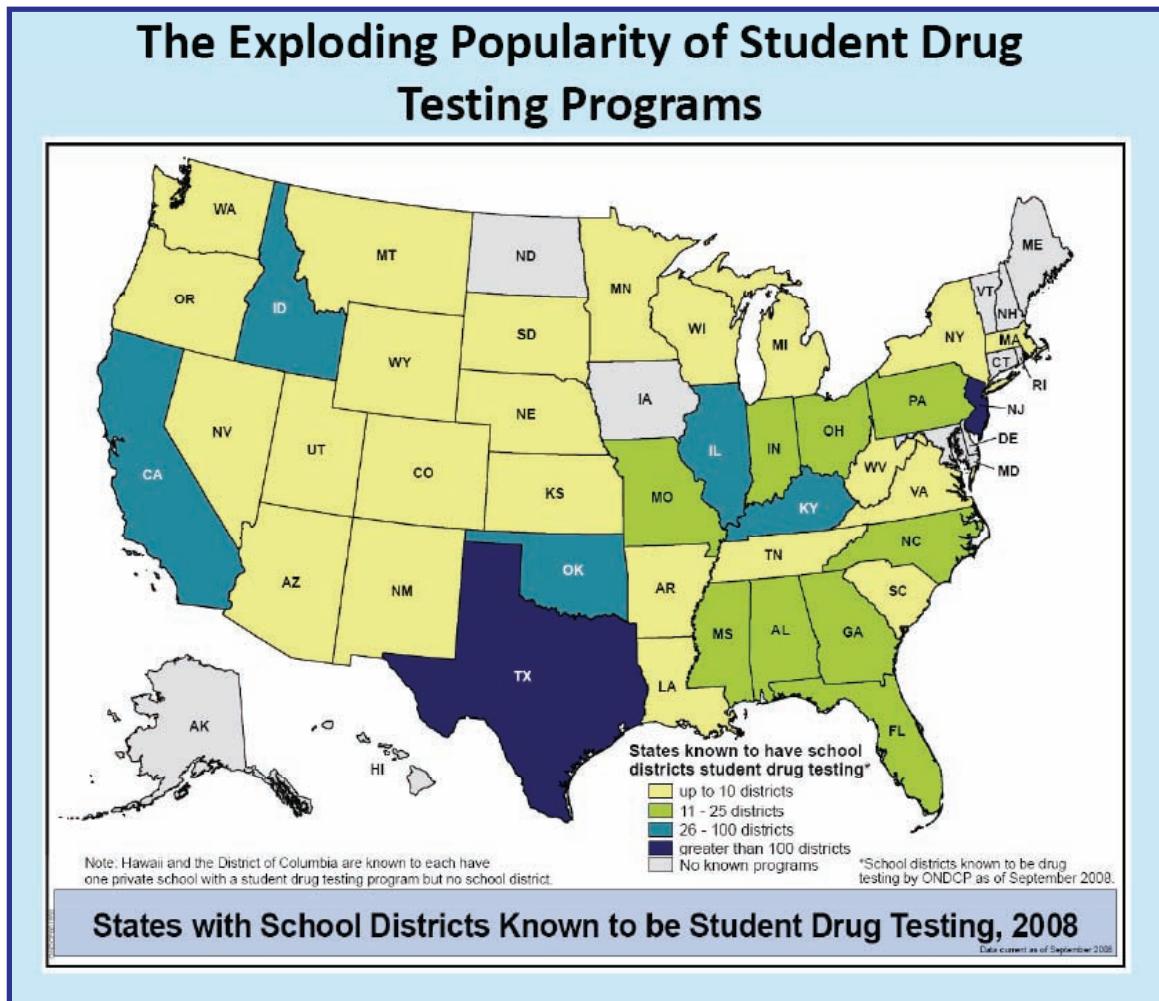
## ***Stopping Use Before it Starts***

The *National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign*, for example, combines paid and donated advertising to reach young people and their parents to change teen beliefs and intentions toward drug use. The media campaign has been in existence for years, but in its more recent incarnation the campaign has been refocused to take advantage of more sophisticated advertising techniques and best practices, as well as using new technologies in wide use among young people, such as social networking sites and text messaging, and has contributed to increasing youth perceptions of risk and social disapproval of drug use.



The campaign has become adept at responding to new drug threats. When teen abuse of prescription drugs began to rise, the campaign worked with the Partnership for a Drug Free America to launch an unprecedented effort to educate parents about the harms of misuse. After a debut in the Super Bowl (the TV event most watched by parents and teens together) and an innovative advertising and marketing blitz, parental awareness of this emerging problem more than doubled, from 31 to 67 percent.

Student drug testing, an approach first popularized for student athletes but then hamstrung by a decade of litigation, has exploded in popularity over the past eight years, with 1,839 school districts currently operating programs, in addition to many private schools. The purpose of random testing is not to catch, punish, or expose students who use drugs but to prevent drug dependence and to help drug-dependent students become drug-free in a confidential manner.



The psychology behind student drug testing programs is straightforward. They give kids an “out,” says Flemington, New Jersey school Superintendant Lisa Brady, who started a student drug testing program as principal of Hunterdon High School. “Kids will tell you that the program gives them a reason to say no. They’re just kids, after all; they need a crutch. Being able to say, ‘I’m a cheerleader,’ ‘I’m in the band,’ ‘I’m a football player,’ and ‘My school drug tests’—it really gives them some tools to be able to say no.” Not surprisingly, drug use fell sharply after the program was initiated.

## ***Involving the Community***

In addition to outreach efforts like the media campaign and student drug testing programs, the effort to contain drug use among your people has been aided by an upsurge in local community groups. Research confirms that established coalitions significantly reduce drug and alcohol use among young people as compared to areas without coalitions. Community coalitions come in as many shapes and sizes as there are coalitions, but the best among them identify a specific problem and relentlessly target a solution. A little over a decade ago, for instance, a group of parents in Kansas City, Kansas, decided that they had had enough of teenage drinking and drug use and set out to do something about it. What came to be known as the Tri-County Northland Coalition pulled together existing community efforts that were being run out of 15 area school districts. The group targeted keg parties, taking out billboard and newspaper ads to get out the message that parents could be held legally liable for allowing keg parties.



But they did not stop there. The coalition followed up through an initiative with local merchants to tag every keg rented in the tri-county area. Keg tracking, as it is called, links rented kegs back to the person who actually paid for them. If the police come upon a keg party, they can take that keg back to the place where it was rented and then find out who rented it. Hotel and motel managers are given a schedule of local proms and asked to warn customers not to rent rooms for underage parties.

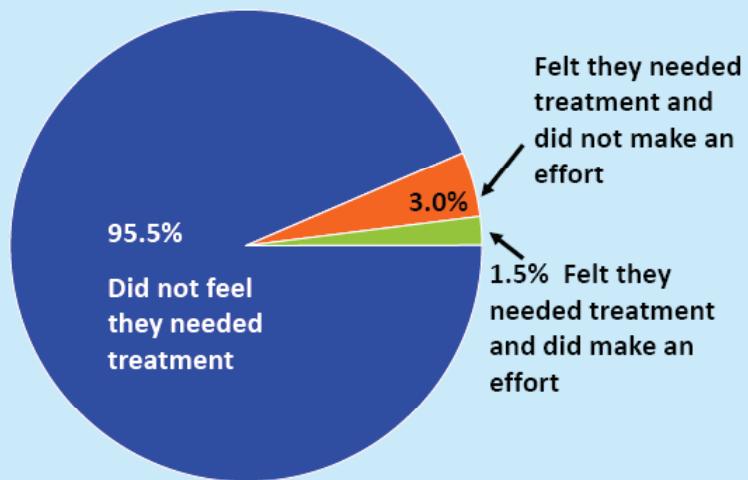
## ***Targeting the Workplace***

Curbing the use of illegal drugs by young people is key: research demonstrates that people who do not initiate drug use as young people are statistically much less likely to begin using as adults. Reductions in youth drug use over the past eight years mean that some 900,000 fewer young people are taking drugs each month than was the case in 2001. The overwhelming majority of these young people will grow up without ever embarking on a career of drug use and, ultimately, addiction.

As critical as it is to keep drug use from ever starting among young people, drug policy also needs to look to the needs of the addicted, and those whose drug use has not yet led them into addiction. While young people are a distinct group, and the pool of the addicted is relatively small, the category of drug-using individuals whose use has not led to full-blown addiction is larger and includes hard-to-identify individuals, many of whom are in the workforce and who may go years without showing the ill effects of their drug use. These are the people who use drugs and appear not to be suffering any consequences, who spread the contagion of drug use, and yet who surveys repeatedly indicate are highly unlikely to believe they need treatment.

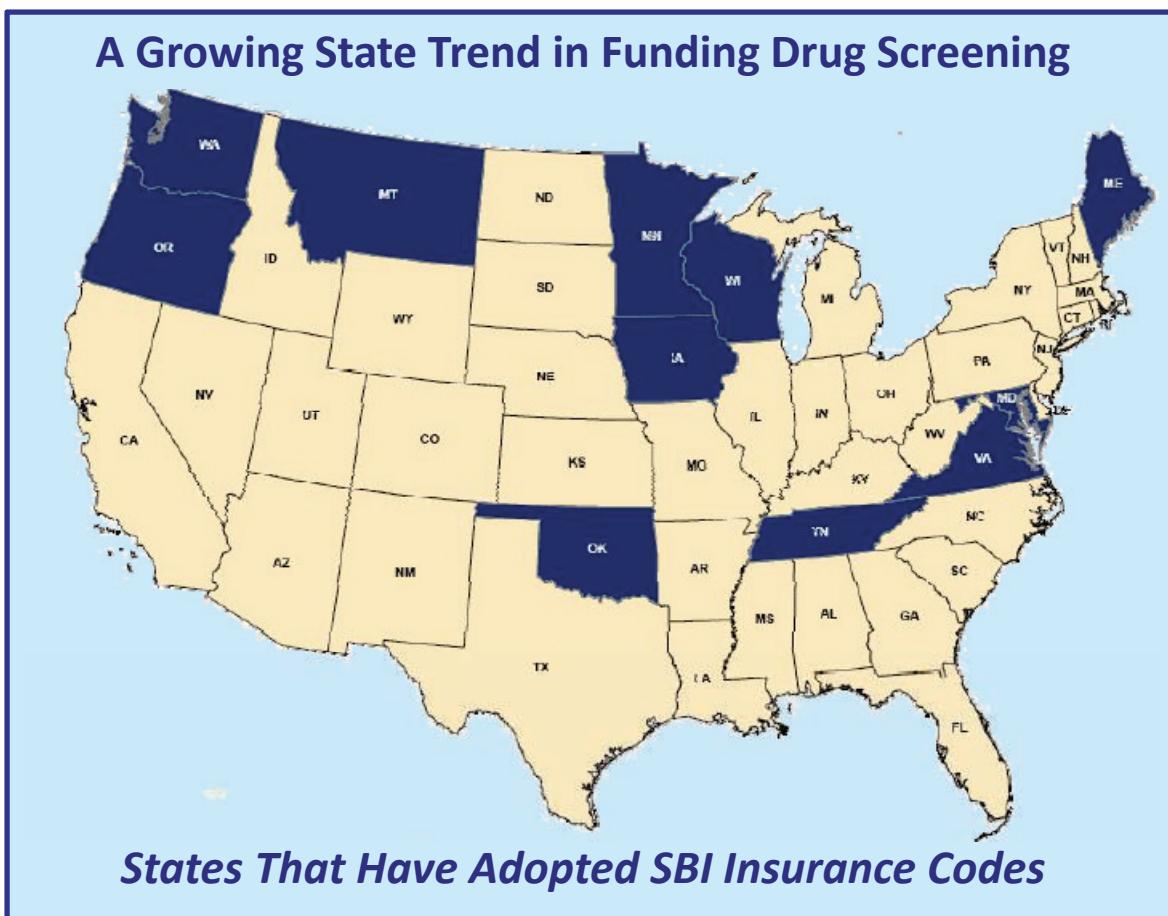
*Surveys show that 96 percent of drug dependent individuals do not believe they need help.*

### **Most Dependent Users do not Think They Need Treatment**

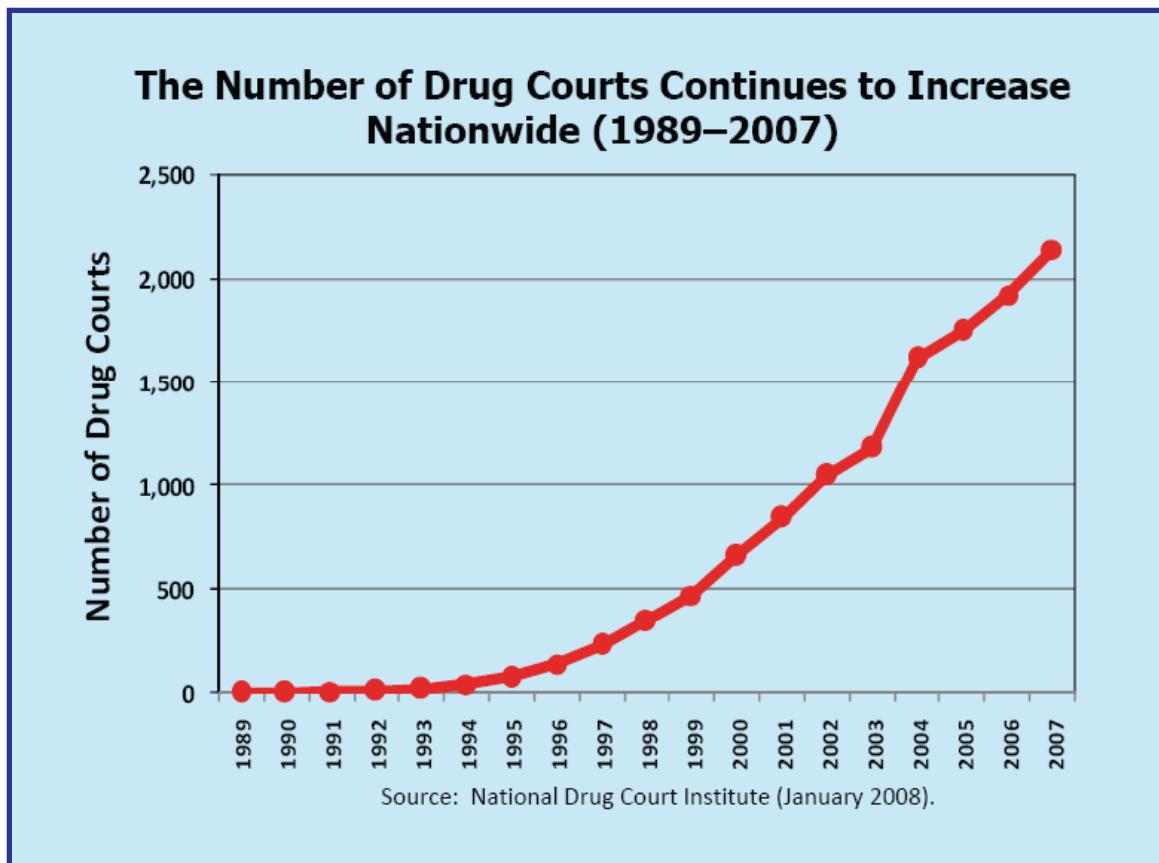


Source: SAMHSA, 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (September 2008).

Reaching these individuals is critical, but difficult. Yet it is especially important to intervene with users during this “honeymoon” phase. A new, national focus on “brief interventions” has been leveraging the existing medical infrastructure—which already has extensive experience in identifying problem drinkers—to screen for drug use and offer appropriate and often brief interventions. In Chicago, for example, Cook County Hospital emergency room staff as well as doctors and nurses in other areas of the hospital are trained to flag signs of developing drug use and direct users to treatment. Medicaid and Medicare now provide for reimbursement for brief interventions, and eleven states have adopted billing systems that make it easier to obtain reimbursement for such interventions.



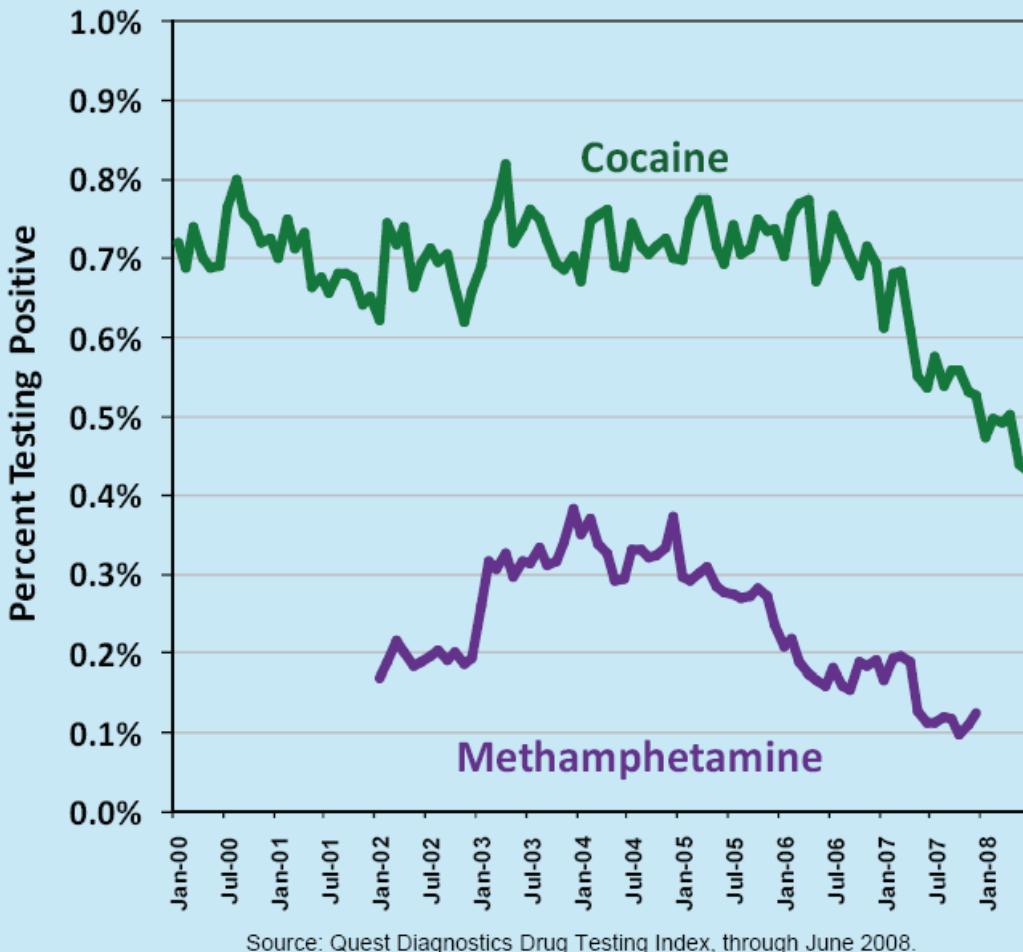
For non-violent offenders with substance abuse problems, drug courts present an alternative to incarceration. Drug courts closely monitor these offenders through regular drug testing and channel them to treatment. By the end of 2007, there were over 2,100 drug courts across the country.



### ***Improving Treatment***

Drug using individuals whose needs go beyond a brief session with a counselor have new options thanks to an innovative program launched by the President in his 2003 State of the Union address. The *Access to Recovery* program uses vouchers to expand treatment capacity where it is most needed and allow clients to play a more significant role in the development of their own treatment plan. *Access to Recovery* also gives clients the option of working with faith-based providers, who have come forward to provide important recovery support services such as childcare, transportation, and mentoring.

## A Declining Trend in Positive Workplace Drug Tests

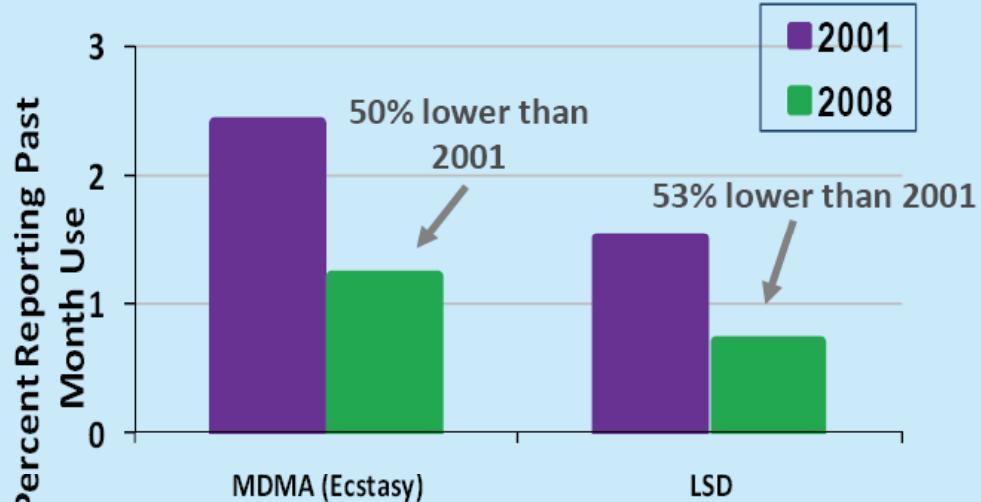


### ***Driving Down Use by Reducing Availability***

New efforts such as brief interventions appear to be contributing to a reduction in drug use as identified through workplace drug testing—such tests now show the lowest levels of cocaine and methamphetamine use on record. Yet reductions of this magnitude—cocaine positive tests are down 38 percent in just two years—typically also involve a restriction in supply.

*Workplace drug tests now show the lowest levels of cocaine and methamphetamine use on record.*

## The Collapse in Youth Use of Ecstasy and LSD

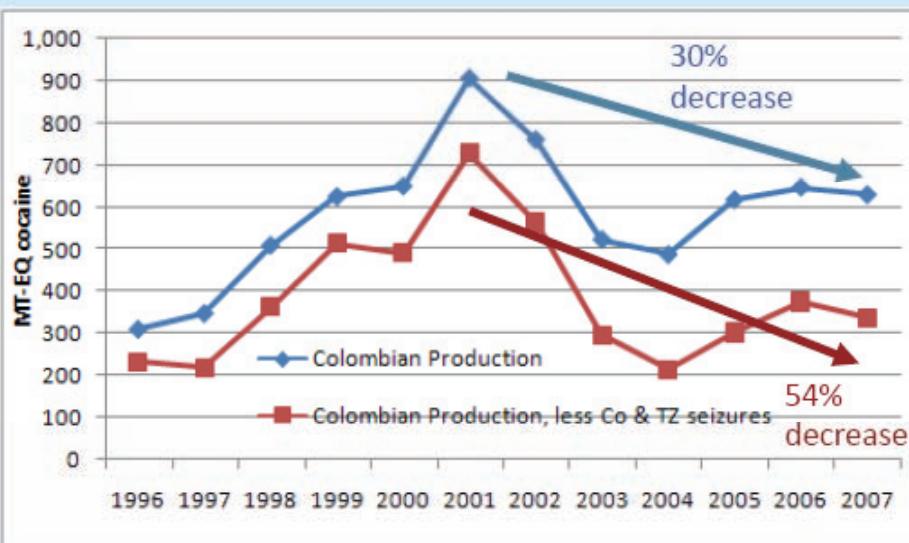


Source: 2008 Monitoring the Future study special tabulations for combined 8th, 10th, and 12th graders (December 2008).

Similar reductions in youthful use of drugs such as Ecstasy and LSD—both of which have dropped by half or more since 2001—were correlated to the disruption of criminal networks used to distribute those drugs. Similarly, the dramatic reduction in workplace cocaine positives in the past two years correlates with reductions in the amount of cocaine exported from Colombia (down 30 percent from the peak, in 2001) and the aggressive campaign being waged by the Government of Mexico against traffickers during the past two years.

*Reductions of this magnitude—cocaine positive tests are down 50 percent in just two years—typically involve a restriction in supply.*

## Less Cocaine from Colombia and More of it Is Seized



Sources: United States Government (September 2008 and May 2008).

## Less Cocaine Means Higher Prices



Source: Drug Enforcement Administration, System To Retrieve Information on Drug Evidence (November 2008).

The growth in seizures and disruption south of the U.S. border has not only driven up seizures of both cocaine and methamphetamine; it has also demonstrably driven up the prices of both drugs, a key condition for cutting down on use. This is in keeping with the strategy of the U.S. Government, which is to disrupt the market for illegal drugs and to do so in a way that both reduces the profitability of the drug trade and increases the costs of drugs to consumers. In other words, we seek to inflict on this business what every legal business fears—escalating costs, diminishing profits, and unreliable suppliers. The evidence suggests that reductions in the amount of cocaine exported to the United States have translated into sharply higher cocaine prices.



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