



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Have A Happy Drug Free New Year!

As the New Year begins, we need new ideas to combat America's growing drug problem. In addition to the considerable physical and emotional trauma associated with substance use problems in the lives of individuals, families, and communities, the burden on the U.S. economy in terms of health, social, productivity, and criminal justice costs is unacceptably high. Substance abuse can be reduced, however, at less cost if we change course and adopt strategies that work.

For many years the strategy to combat drug abuse in America has been primarily one of a law enforcement approach. Yet, in spite of increased federal and state drug control budgets and record high drug related incarcerations, drug problems and drug epidemics in the U.S continue. The federal drug control budget is now in excess of \$20 billion annually and two-thirds goes to interdiction, eradication, and law enforcement.

Drug interdiction, the law enforcement approach to stopping drugs at the source, never has been and never will be the solution to America's drug problems. We must accept that reducing demand at home is the most effective international strategy, because as long as there is demand, supply will develop.

At a time when the federal budget is limited following massive government bailouts, drug control programs need to be reevaluated to make sure that funding goes only to programs that work. American citizens must come to realize that this country's drug problem is a health problem with

social and economic implications and that the solutions are in public health approaches that focus on drug prevention, drug treatment, and drug education. We must get serious about the development of community based public health programs that focus on substance abuse. These programs work to reduce many of the root causes of abuse.

Drug Prevention

One of the most cost-efficient and effective ways of preventing drug abuse is to invest in our youth and keep them interested and involved in life. A report by the National Center for the Advancement of Prevention, under contract with the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, stated that "alternative programming appears to be most effective among those youth at greatest risk for substance abuse and related problems." According to the report, alternatives are defined as "those that provide targeted populations with activities that are free of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs." State and federal funding should be increased for afterschool programs, mentoring programs, skills building and job training programs, and summer jobs for youth. Drug prevention information delivered to children must be fact based and accurate. Drug prevention messages should be delivered by trained educators and health professionals and reinforced by parents. Parents have perhaps the largest role to play in preventing substance abuse, and must be involved in finding solutions. Parent training programs through the workplace should be encouraged and employers must receive incentives to make drug prevention information available in the workplace.

To help us combat substance abuse, go to
www.LiveDrugFree.org and click on "Donate!"

Drug Treatment

We must find a way to make substance abuse treatment available on request like any other health service. A recent study by researchers at the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) indicated that 48% of the need for drug treatment, not including alcohol abuse, is unmet in the United States. Making treatment services widely available undermines the drug market and reduces the harm caused by drug abuse. A study by the RAND Corporation found that treatment is 10 times more cost-effective than interdiction in reducing the use of cocaine in the United States and that every additional dollar invested in substance abuse treatment saves taxpayers \$7.46 in societal costs. The National Treatment Improvement Evaluation Study (NTIES) conducted by the Center for Substance Abuse and Treatment found that with treatment: drug dealing decreased by 78%, shoplifting declined by almost 82%, and assaults (defined as 'beating someone up') declined by 78%. Furthermore, there was a 64% decrease in arrests for any crime, and the percentage of people who largely supported themselves through illegal activity dropped by nearly half—decreasing more than 48%.

Treatment needs to be broadly defined and should include abstinence based programs, mental health treatment, sexual abuse counseling, and spousal abuse and child abuse services to face the underlying causes of addiction. Treatment also must

be designed to meet the needs of special populations—especially women, children, and minorities.

Drug Education

School based drug education programs have an important impact on substance abuse problems. On the basis of thousands of studies over the past 30 years, “best practices” are now clearer than ever. It can now be stated with confidence that ongoing delivery of evidence based drug education programs through the high school years can, when delivered as intended, clearly delay use of substances and quite possibly reduce associated problems through a critical period of development when substance use tends to escalate. Because of this effectiveness, school drug education represents a sound public investment. We must increase the number of in-school and afterschool drug education programs in our communities. A recent cost analysis of a school drug education program found that for every \$150 invested per participant in a program, \$840 is saved in health care, economic, and social costs. School drug education is an important element in the overall response to America’s drug problem.

Substance abuse exacts a very significant toll in the U.S. To avoid these costs, an array of programs focused on drug prevention/early intervention, drug treatment/harm reduction, and drug education must be established and strengthened if we are to impact the problem and save lives.

To help us combat substance abuse, go to www.LiveDrugFree.org and click on “Donate!”