



The Oregonian

Oregon's per capita drug use above 2006 U.S. average

Study - Treatment admissions in the state for prescription drugs rose 332% in a decade

Friday, August 08, 2008

MAXINE BERNSTEIN

The Oregonian Staff

Oregon's per capita drug use exceeded the national per capita average in 2006, according to a state annual drug threat assessment released Thursday.

The report found that Oregonians most used marijuana, methamphetamine and illicit painkillers and stimulants, said Chris Gibson, who heads the Oregon High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program.

Formed in 1999, the state program helps provide federal funds to multiagency drug task forces in Multnomah, Marion, Clackamas, Washington, Umatilla, Deschutes, Jackson and Douglas counties.

While local methamphetamine lab seizures have continued to decrease largely because of strict controls on pseudoephedrine, methamphetamine addiction in Oregon is still widespread. Mexican drug traffickers import meth from labs in Mexico and other states, the report says.

Oregon is listed as one of the top seven marijuana-producing states in the country. Large outdoor marijuana grows have been discovered on public and private property, according to the report. In 2007, law enforcement eradicated more than 240,000 outdoor marijuana plants, six times the amount seized in 2005, Gibson said.

Illicit use of prescription drugs is the fastest growing type of substance abuse nationally and in Oregon. In Oregon, treatment admissions for illicit prescription drugs increased 332 percent in the past 10 years, surpassing admissions for cocaine in 2005, the report says.

Drug-related deaths increased 8 percent statewide in 2007, with overdose deaths rising from 213 in 2006 to 231 in 2007. Heroin was responsible for the sharpest increase, and the largest number of deaths in 2007. Between 2006 and 2007, meth-related deaths dropped for the first time since 2001, declining by 21 percent, the report says.

Multnomah County reported the highest number of drug-related deaths in Oregon, 111 in 2007.

Paul Schmidt, assistant special agent in charge of the Oregon DEA office, joined with Oregon State Police Superintendent Tim McLain and Portland Chief Rosie Sizer to call for continued enforcement. Law enforcement has identified 140 drug-trafficking organizations in Oregon.

"If we don't work together, we're not going to get the job done," Schmidt said.

Maxine Bernstein: 503-221-8212; maxinebernstein@ news.oregonian.com

©2008 Oregonian