



Americans Spend Nearly \$150 Billion on Illicit Drugs Annually, Researchers Find

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American spending on cannabis, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine reached nearly \$150 billion in 2016, according to a new RAND Corporation report. According to the new research, a large proportion of drug spending comes from people who use drugs on a daily or near-daily basis.

Researchers estimate that from 2006 to 2016, the total amount of money spent by Americans on these four drugs fluctuated between \$120 billion and \$145 billion each year. By contrast, a different analysis says that spending on alcohol in the US was estimated to be \$158 billion in 2017. This means illicit drug spending now rivals that of alcohol spending.

In terms of cannabis, total spending increased by approximately 50 percent from 2006 to 2016, from both illegal and state-licensed sources. Americans spent around \$52 billion on the drug, up from \$34 billion more than a decade ago. In fact, the market for cannabis is roughly the size of the cocaine and methamphetamine markets combined. Additionally, the size of the retail heroin market is now closer to the size of the marijuana market than it is to the other drugs, according to the analysis.

“To better understand changes in drug use outcomes and the effects of policies, policymakers need to know what is happening in markets for these substances,” said Greg Midgette, the study's lead author, an assistant professor at the University of Maryland and an adjunct policy researcher at RAND, a non-profit research organization. “But it is challenging to generate these estimates, and given that critical data sources have been eliminated, it will likely be harder to generate these figures in the future.”

Researchers from RAND also used a variety of sources of information about drug use and drug prices to also estimate the number of people who use these substances and how much they consume. This data, on top of the estimated expenditures on cannabis, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine, allowed the researchers to come up with the figures. Click the link to see Schenectady's top rehab placement programs.

The report shows that after falling precipitously from 2006 to 2010, the consumption of cocaine continued to fall through 2015, which then increased in 2016. The results suggest that there were 2.4 million individuals who used cocaine on four or more days in the past month in 2015 and 2016.

In 2016, consumption grew among a stable number of users as the price per pure gram declined, results suggest. Consumption of heroin increased approximately 10 percent per year between 2010 and 2016, according to the analysis. Meanwhile, most heroin consumed in the United States comes from poppies grown in Mexico, the introduction of synthetic opioids like Fentanyl into heroin markets has increased the risk of using heroin and complicated market analyses.

From 2010 to 2016, the number of individuals who used cannabis in the past month increased by nearly 30 percent, from 25 million to 32 million. As for methamphetamine, researchers say their estimates are subject to the greatest uncertainty because national data sets do a particularly poor job of capturing its use. In 2003, the federal government discontinued a critical data collection effort known as the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring or ADAM. Methamphetamine use was believed to be at its first peak from 2004 to 2006.

ADAM was used to collect detailed information about drug market transactions from arrestees. It also included a voluntary urine screen that could only be used for research purposes. ADAM was brought back in 2007, although it was only a limited version, and it was eliminated again in 2013 when methamphetamine consumption was believed to be picking back up.

“While there is considerable uncertainty surrounding national methamphetamine estimates, multiple indicators suggest methamphetamine use has exceeded its previous peak around 2005,” said Beau Kilmer, co-author of the report and director of the RAND Drug Policy Research Center. “While there is much more we can do reduce opioid use disorders and poisonings involving synthetic opioids, we cannot ignore the growing problems associated with methamphetamine use.”

Researchers from RAND believe that a version of the ADAM program that covers urban and rural areas can help understand methamphetamine abuse. If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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