OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
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FACT SHEET: A 21st Century Drug Policy

"...this Administration remains committed to a balanced public health and public safety approach to drug policy. This approach is based on science, not ideology—and scientific research suggests that we have made real progress."

- President Barack Obama

President Obama believes in the pursuit of an America built to last – a Nation with an educated, skilled workforce with the knowledge, energy, and expertise to succeed in a highly competitive global marketplace. Yet, for too many Americans, this future is limited by drug use, which inhibits the ability of our citizens to remain healthy, safe, and achieve their full potential.

Today, the Obama Administration is releasing a science-based plan that works to reduce drug use and its consequences while pursuing drug policy reform. The *2013 National Drug Control Strategy* represents a 21st century approach to drug policy that outlines innovative policies and programs and recognizes that substance use disorders are not just a criminal justice issue, but also a major public health concern.

The *Strategy* is informed by Science, Research, and Evidence

Groundbreaking discoveries in neuroscience have revealed that addiction is a chronic disease of the brain that can be prevented and successfully treated. This scientific understanding serves as the foundation for the Obama Administration's drug policy and guides the Administration's decision-making on public health and safety.

The *Strategy* Emphasizes Prevention over Incarceration

Preventing drug use before it begins – particularly among young people – is the most cost-effective way to reduce drug use and its consequences in America. Recent research has concluded that every dollar invested in school-based substance use prevention programs has the potential to save up to $18 in costs related to substance use disorders.[1]

In support of efforts to prevent drug use, the President's plan:

- Promotes national and community-based programs - including the Drug-Free Communities Support Program - that are evidence-based and work to prevent substance use in schools, on college campuses, and in the workplace;

- Provides information on effective prevention strategies to law enforcement agencies, communities, and parents nationwide; and
- Spreads prevention to the workplace through programs that ensure the safety and wellness of employees and their families.

The *Strategy* Empowers Health Care Professionals to Intervene Early, Before a Condition Becomes Chronic

Early detection and treatment of a substance abuse problem by a health care professional is more effective and less costly than dealing with a chronic substance use disorder. To bolster early intervention efforts, the President's *Strategy*:

- Works to expand programs like Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT), which can help reduce adverse health and safety consequences from substance use;
- Supports education and legislation aimed at providing health care professionals with continuing education and training on addiction and safe prescribing practices for painkillers; and
- Seeks to reduce opioid overdose deaths by expanding comprehensive overdose prevention measures, including the use of naloxone by first responders.

The *Strategy* Makes Access to Treatment a Reality for Millions of Americans

Of the 21.6 million Americans aged 12 or older who needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem in 2011, only 2.3 million (10.8 percent) received it.[2] Treatment should be made more available. To expand access to treatment, the *Strategy*:

- Details actions to implement the Affordable Care Act, which – for the first time in history – ends discrimination against people with substance use disorders by requiring insurance companies to cover treatment for substance use disorders as they would for any other chronic disease;
- Works to expand treatment and reentry services for those incarcerated; and
- Targets expansion of care for populations with an unmet need for substance abuse treatment, including veterans, college and university students, and Native Americans.

The *Strategy* Gives a Voice to Americans in Recovery

Today, millions of Americans are successfully in recovery from substance use disorders and are healthy, responsible, and engaged members of their communities. The Obama Administration's *Strategy* supports their lifelong process of recovery by:

- Working to lift the stigma associated with addiction by partnering with the recovery community to speak out about their successes and encourage others to seek treatment; and
- Reviewing and reforming laws and regulations that unfairly target those with substance use disorders and impede recovery from addiction, including those laws and regulations that restrict access to housing, employment, and attaining a driver's license or student loan.

The *Strategy* Takes a "Smart on Crime" Approach to Drug Enforcement

Domestic and international law enforcement efforts will always play a vital role in protecting communities from drug-related crime, but the President's *Strategy* acknowledges that the United States cannot arrest or incarcerate its way out of the drug problem. As a result, the *Strategy*:

- Works to implement innovative criminal justice reforms, including specialized Drug Courts, to break the cycle of drug use, crime, arrest, and incarceration by diverting non-violent drug offenders into treatment instead of prison;
- Supports innovative diversion programs that identify offenders with a substance use disorder and refer them to community services while focusing limited law enforcement resources on more serious offenders; and
- Examines innovations, such as Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) and the Drug Market Intervention program, that show promise in reducing rates of incarceration while protecting public safety.

The *Strategy* Addresses a Global Problem in the Spirit of Shared Responsibility

Drug issues are a truly global challenge requiring shared solutions. Previous distinctions between "producer" and "consumer" countries are falling away. Today, all countries must view drug policy as a public health and public safety issue that requires a modern, evidence-based response. The President's *Strategy*:

- Expands global drug prevention and treatment initiatives both bilaterally and through cooperation with multilateral organizations;
- Promotes alternative livelihoods for farmers in regions of the world susceptible to drug production and trafficking; and
- Promotes collaboration with international partners to expand and modernize law enforcement and criminal justice institutions.

For more information on Obama Administration efforts to reduce drug use and its consequences while implementing effective drug policy reform, visit www.wh.gov/drugpolicyreform

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[1] Jones, D. E. ; foster, E.M.; and Group, C.P. Service use patterns for adolescents with ADHD and comorbid Conduct disorder, *J. Behavioral Health Service Res*. 366 (4): 436-449, 2008

[2] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2012). Results of the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 12-4713. Rockville, MD. P. 84.