

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 2017 NSDUH

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is the most comprehensive survey of substance use, substance use disorders, mental health and the receipt of treatment services for these disorders in the United States. The following are key highlights based on NSDUH analysis:

- In 2017, the number of individuals initiating heroin use during the past year was significantly lower than the number of heroin initiates in 2016. Data show that the 2016 number of heroin initiates (170,000) was more than double that seen in 2017 (81,000).
- Transitional aged youth (young adults aged 18-25 years) continue to be a source of concern in various domains captured by NSDUH. This population has higher rates of cigarette use, alcohol use, alcohol use disorder, heroin-related opioid use disorder, cocaine use, methamphetamine use, and LSD use than their younger and older counterparts; although, of note, a significant decline in misuse of prescription opioid pain relievers¹ has been observed (8.5 percent in 2015 to 7.2 percent in 2017) and a modest (non-significant) decline in heroin use (0.7 percent in 2016 to 0.6 percent in 2017) was observed. However, in 2017, 18-25-year-olds had higher rates of methamphetamine and marijuana use than they did in 2016.
- Positive findings include a significant increase in the number of individuals with substance use disorders who are receiving specialty illicit drug use treatment for their disorders. This was particularly evident for those with heroin use disorder and opioid use disorders.
- Pregnant women appear to be another population of concern. While not all comparisons between 2017 and prior years are significant, data appear to be trending in the wrong direction with respect to the use of illicit drugs, including cocaine, marijuana, and opioids, among pregnant women. Approximately 7.1 percent of pregnant women report using marijuana, with 3.1 percent reporting daily use, a significant increase since 2015.
- Marijuana use, in general, also appears to be an issue of note. While youth (aged 12-17 years) marijuana use has declined in comparison to recent years, young adult marijuana use has increased in comparison to all prior years. Although the trends in use differs for youth and young adults, marijuana use, in both youth and young adults, appears to be associated with opioid use, heavy alcohol use, and major depressive episodes.
- The issue of the need to address co-occurring mental and substance use disorders is also evident in the NSDUH. Approximately 8.5 million adults are living with a co-occurring mental and substance use disorder. Those who have any mental illness or serious mental illness are significantly more likely to use cigarettes, illicit drugs, and marijuana, misuse opioids and prescription pain relievers, and binge drink than individuals with no mental illness.
- Transitional aged youth also appear to have increasing rates of serious mental illness and major depressive episode with severe impairment. Up in comparison to 2015, 5.3 percent of transitional aged males and 9.7 percent of transitional aged females had serious mental illness, and 6 percent of males and 11 percent of females had major depressive episode with severe impairment in 2017. Rates of suicidality also significantly increased for transitional aged youth, underscoring the importance of addressing the mental health needs of this group in the nation.

¹ The misuse of prescription opioid pain relievers includes use in any way not directed by a doctor, including use without a prescription of one's own; use in greater amounts, more often, or longer than told to take a drug; or use in any other way not directed by a doctor. Because NSDUH respondents were asked about the misuse of only prescription opioids, this estimate for opioid misuse may underrepresent people who misused fentanyl that was illicitly manufactured in clandestine laboratories (i.e., as opposed to the misuse of diverted fentanyl that was produced by the pharmaceutical industry).