

## Prescription Drug Abuse and Solutions to Methamphetamine in Maine

Maine has experienced a dramatic rise in prescription drug abuse and drug trafficking, which has resulted in increased threat to public safety and health. As a result, the number of drug-related deaths and “drug-affected” births has increased. Both the volume and the complexity of drug-related crime have increased. Rural areas have found themselves ill-prepared to combat criminal behavior that is (1) often connected to urban or international sources, and (2) which has expanded to include and emphasize pharmaceuticals. It is well-known, but not well-quantified, that prescription drug trafficking and abuse is in turn driving other crimes, including for example murder, robbery, burglary, and assault.

Communities suffer the consequences of substance abuse in terms of increased health care needs and criminal justice resources. A recent report by Maine’s Office of Substance Abuse (OSA) estimated the total cost of substance abuse in Maine for 2005 was \$898.4 million, equal to a cost of \$682 for every resident of Maine. Costs associated with crime (\$214.4 million) comprised the largest proportion of those costs (23.9%), and costs associated with substance abuse treatment (\$25.2 million) comprised the smallest proportion of total cost (2.8%)<sup>[1]</sup>. Many of these costs are related to prescription drug misuse and abuse. Prescription drugs are the most often-associated substance for inpatient substance abuse related hospital admissions in all Maine counties (2006 MHDO).

Twelve percent of students in grades 6-12 reported using prescription drugs for purposes other than their intended use at some point within their lifetime<sup>[2]</sup> and nearly five percent of Mainers ages 12 and older reported recreational use of pain relievers in the past year<sup>[3]</sup>. Over 40 percent of exposures reported to the Northern New England Poison Center were associated with pharmaceuticals. Maine’s drug-related deaths rose from 34 in 1997 to 176 in 2005 climbing exponentially in 2002 with 92% of all drug-related deaths between 2002 and 2005 involving prescription drugs<sup>[4]</sup>. There were 165 “drug affected babies” born in Maine hospitals in 2005. Those numbers increased to 201 in 2006, 274 in 2007 and last year reached 343<sup>[5]</sup>. Increases have been most pronounced in the more rural, northern areas of the state. These “drug-affected” babies are said to have Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) which is described as a generalized disorder characterized by signs and symptoms indicating dysfunction of the automatic nervous system, gastrointestinal tract and respiratory system.

The MDEA’s statewide arrests in 1998 was 50 or 7% of all arrests directly linked to prescription drugs. In 2003, that had climbed to 75 or 16% and in 2008 prescription drug-related arrests outpaced cocaine arrests attaining 259 or 39% of all arrests. Compared to the rest of the nation, Maine has both the most law enforcement agencies reporting prescription drugs

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<sup>[1]</sup> OSA, 2007

<sup>[2]</sup> 2006 Maine Youth Drug Abuse Use Survey

<sup>[3]</sup> 2005-2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

<sup>[4]</sup> Maine Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

<sup>[5]</sup> Maine Department of Health and Human Services

contributing to property crime (32.4%), and the most law enforcement agencies reporting that prescription drugs contribute to violent crime (26.8%)<sup>[6]</sup>.

Clearly, substance abuse is a critical social concern in Maine and has personal, social and economic consequences.

In response to this problem, Maine established rules for prescription security blanks, a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, unwanted household prescription drug mail-back program, and various community-based efforts at increasing awareness of and combating prescription drug abuse. Numerous reports have called for an increase in enforcement resources, specifically the MDEA.

For the first 6 months of 2009, prescription drug-related arrests is 41% of all arrests. MDEA seizures for the first 6 months of 2009:

<b>Pharmaceutical (ml) Narcotics</b>	614
<b>Pharmaceutical (du) Narcotics</b>	6,225
<b>Pharmaceutical (du) Stimulants</b>	329
<b>Pharmaceutical (du) Tranquilizers</b>	1,456
<b>Pharmaceuticals (du) Total</b>	8,009

*On-line Methamphetamine Awareness Training for Public Safety First Responders.* During the past three years the Maine Chiefs of Police Association (MCOPA) has led an effort to implement an online component within Maine's overall public safety training delivery system. In this process the MCOPA has partnered with Maine's public safety training providers to insure that the system develops in such a fashion as to serve the widest possible range of needs and expectations.

The MCOPA contracted with a Maine firm, Justice Planning and Management Associates (JPMA), to serve as overall developer, systems integrator, and application service provider. Using funds supplied by a host of state and federal agencies, the MCOPA effort has led to the creation of the nation's most comprehensive and technically advanced online training system serving public safety first responders.

The MCOPA has focused on moving forward in a participative fashion and several of Maine's leading public safety training providers have signed formal Memoranda of Understanding with the MCOPA in support of the program including: Maine Sheriffs Association; Maine Fire Chiefs Association; Southern Maine EMS; Maine Municipal

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<sup>[6]</sup> 2005 National Drug Threat Survey, as reported in Beenak et al., 2007

Association; Maine Criminal Justice Academy; Maine State Police; Southern Maine Community College; and Maine Community Policing Institute. A fundamental tenet of the Maine Public Safety Online Training Initiative is that there should be a single Internet-based training “portal” through which first responders can address and document a host of training requirements. It strives to address the training needs of Maine law enforcement officers and other first responders in a consistent, user friendly fashion, regardless of whether those training requirements are generated from the various agencies of the federal government, the Maine Bureau of Labor Standards, the Maine Human Rights Commission, in-state professional licensing bodies such as the Board of Trustees of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, or any other source. A two-hour on-line class will be developed for open source use by Maine public safety first responders.

*Maine Methamphetamine Community Response Toolkit.* The Maine Methamphetamine Prevention Project and the Maine Alliance to Prevent Substance Abuse developed a Methamphetamine Community Response Toolkit with the assistance of an AmeriCorps intern over the fall and winter of 2007-2008. This project was funded through collaboration between the Maine Alliance to Prevent Substance Abuse (a statewide substance abuse advocacy organization), the Maine Office of Substance Abuse and the Maine Primary Care Association. The Maine Methamphetamine Community Response Toolkit is a comprehensive approach to addressing methamphetamine abuse, with a specific focus on empowering local communities to take action to prevent the spread of Methamphetamine use and manufacture in Maine.

The Maine Methamphetamine Community Response Toolkit is a Community Action Guide with over 20 different (reproducible) sections on how to mobilize the community to fight back against meth. Also included is a master Methamphetamine PowerPoint slide library with presentation slides and talking points. These slides include the effects of meth, meth statistics, photos of meth, meth detection, meth laws, the dangers of meth, identification of meth labs, and many more important topics. The purpose of this request is to produce enough tool kits to supply each of the 28 newly created Comprehensive Community Health Coalitions (CCHCs) in Maine’s eight new Public Health Districts with two copies of the kit, and with training for their new Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinators, and others, who will then in turn train other pertinent members of their coalitions and their local community. Personnel involved in the project would be the Methamphetamine Prevention Project Coordinator as well as a part time assistant for organizational purposes.

*This information was supplied by the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency.*

*For more information on statewide advocacy and education efforts contact the Maine Alliance to Prevent Substance Abuse at 207-621-8118 or by e-mail [mboyd@masap.org](mailto:mboyd@masap.org)*

*To learn more about substance abuse rates in Maine and prevention practices Visit The Maine Office of Substance Abuse at [www.maine.gov/dhhs/osa/index.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/osa/index.htm)*