



## Fact Sheet: Prescription Drug Abuse – A DEA Perspective

- In 2009, there were 7 million Americans aged 12 years and older who abused prescription drugs\* for non-medical purposes within the past month, up from 6.2 million in 2008. This represents a 13 percent increase in just one year.
- In 2009, on average, 6,027 persons per day abused prescription pain relievers for the first time. The total number of individuals that initiated drug use with prescription drugs exceeds the number of individuals that initiated drug use with marijuana.
- Every day, on average, 2,500 teens use prescription drugs to get high for the first time.
- 1 in 7 teens admit to abusing prescription drugs to get high in the past year. Sixty percent of teens who abused prescription pain relievers did so before the age of 15.
- Fifty-six percent of teens believe that prescription drugs are easier to get than illicit drugs.
- 2 in 5 teens believe that prescription drugs are “much safer” than illegal drugs. And 3 in 10 teens believe that prescription pain relievers are not addictive.
- Sixty-three percent of teens believe that prescription drugs are easy to get from friends’ and family’s medicine cabinet.
- According to the Center for Disease Control, prescription drugs, including opioids and antidepressants, are responsible for more overdose deaths than “street drugs” such as cocaine, heroin, and amphetamines.
- The number of emergency room visits attributable to pharmaceuticals alone is up 97% between 2004 and 2008
- The number of persons seeking treatment for pain reliever abuse is up more than fourfold between 1998 and 2008
- DEA works closely with the medical community to help them recognize drug abuse and signs of diversion, and relies on their input and due diligence to combat diversion. Unfortunately, egregious drug violations by practitioners do sometimes occur – fortunately doctor involvement in illegal drug activity is rare. When violations do occur, DEA will pursue criminal, civil, and administrative actions against such practitioners as warranted.

\* “Prescription drugs” refers to abuseable pharmaceuticals controlled under federal law enforced by the DEA.

([http://www.justice.gov/dea/concern/prescription\\_drug\\_fact\\_sheet.html](http://www.justice.gov/dea/concern/prescription_drug_fact_sheet.html))