

Truth or *D.A.R.E.*

Analyzing government intervention of America's drug epidemic.

March 03, 2020

Introduction

America has been at war with drugs for over a century. During the Vietnam War, many United States soldiers began to use drugs like marijuana, heroin, cocaine, and psychedelics like LSD and mushrooms. They began to use this variety of drugs as a coping mechanism against the many struggles they faced while at war. As reported by The Department of Defense, in 1971, 51% of soldiers had used marijuana, 28% had used either heroin or cocaine, and 31% had used psychedelics.

Outside of the war, United States citizens were also using and abusing similar drugs. In the 1960s, the "heroin epidemic" raged through the United States. Heroin addiction became common among the younger population, with about 40% of addicts being under the age of 35 years old. In the 1970s, drugs like marijuana and LSD were being used more frequently. The results from a Gallup poll conducted in 1973 said that at least 12% of adults had used marijuana. While 12% is relatively small, it was seen that this percentage of adults using marijuana nearly doubled within 4 years.

As a result of the increased drug use in years prior, in the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon officially recognized the epidemic and declared a "war on drugs" with the goal of

DRUG-RELATED CRIMINAL LAW ENFORCEMENT COSTS THE UK £3.3 BILLION EVERY YEAR

\$51 BILLION SPENT ON THE WAR ON DRUGS IN THE U.S. EVERY YEAR

ENDING THE WAR ON DRUGS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION FROM **RICHARD BRANSON**

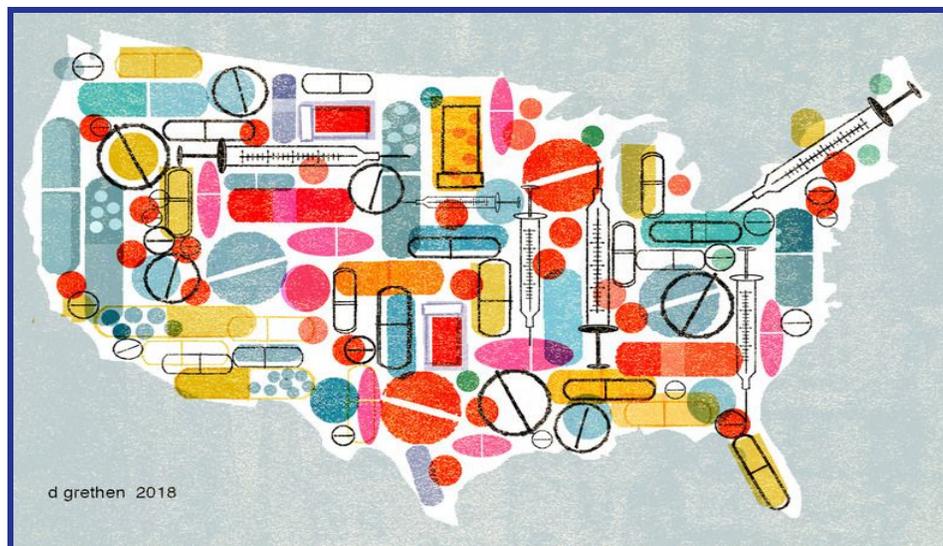
1.6 AMERICANS MILLION ARE ARRESTED EVERY YEAR FOR DRUG OFFENSES

OVER 100,000 LIVES LOST TO THE WAR ON DRUGS IN MEXICO IN THE LAST 9 YEARS

ILLEGAL DRUGS ARE WORTH LITERALLY MORE THAN THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD

prioritizing efforts to stop illegal drug use. These efforts include using propaganda as a means to scare people from using drugs, as well as enforcing stricter laws regarding narcotics: extreme measures that the government takes to ensure that drug-related deaths decrease. Propaganda was used as a way to prevent drug use through scare tactics. For example, marijuana was painted to be the cause of insanity, sex crimes, and various other mental disorders and heinous acts. The laws that were enforced were also extreme. They increased jail time for both those who sold drugs along with those who used drugs. Nelson Rockefeller, New York's governor in 1973, even called for a mandatory 15-year prison sentence for both those who sold drugs and those who abused drugs. This was one of the strictest and most extreme sentences proposed to date for drug crimes. The effectiveness of these measures remains ambiguous as the rate of unintentional drug overdose deaths in the United States steadily increases. As reported by the Center for Disease and Control Prevention, the deaths per 100,000 people have gone from 1,000 to almost 10,000 from the span of time between 1970 and 2006 in the United States. More recently in 2017, the count rose to more than 70,000 overdose deaths. With the rise of drug associated deaths, the question of whether or not the measures taken by the government during the war on drugs proved to be successful in intervening in the drug epidemic in the United States or if we can consider different approaches in order to achieve better results.

With the consistent, deadly issues involving drugs throughout the United States, what can the government do to improve the issues? Does it all start with our drug education in American schools? Should we become less strict on our drug laws to improve government regulation and safety? Can the answer be found in the shortcomings of our current rehabilitation sites? As we move forward, we will analyze current standards and consider possible solutions to decrease drug usage and drug-related deaths.

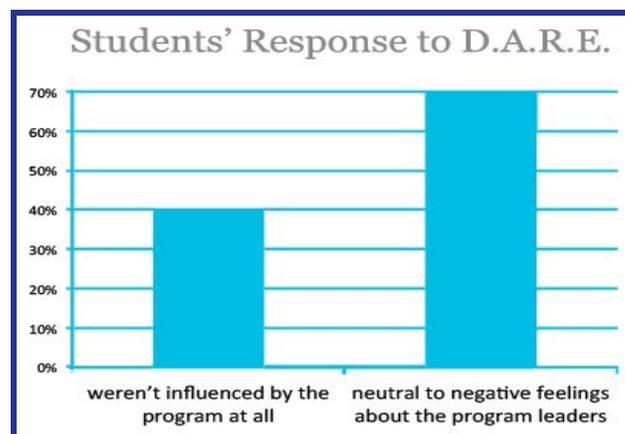


Approach 1: Government-Sponsored Drug Education Programs

Should the government intervene with drug education programs in public schools?

The Drug Abuse Resistance Education, also known as D.A.R.E., happens to be the largest anti-drug program in the United States. Its teaching tactics tend to scare students about drugs rather than actually informing them. In a study done by Joel Brown, Ph. D., forty percent of students said they were not influenced by the program, and seventy percent of students did not agree with the anti-drug stance. The United States allows schools to choose what program, if they desire an education program, regarding drug education; however, when it comes to powerful substances, such as drugs, minimizing possible overdoses or substance abuse requires a new route of teaching that is not present in our schools today.

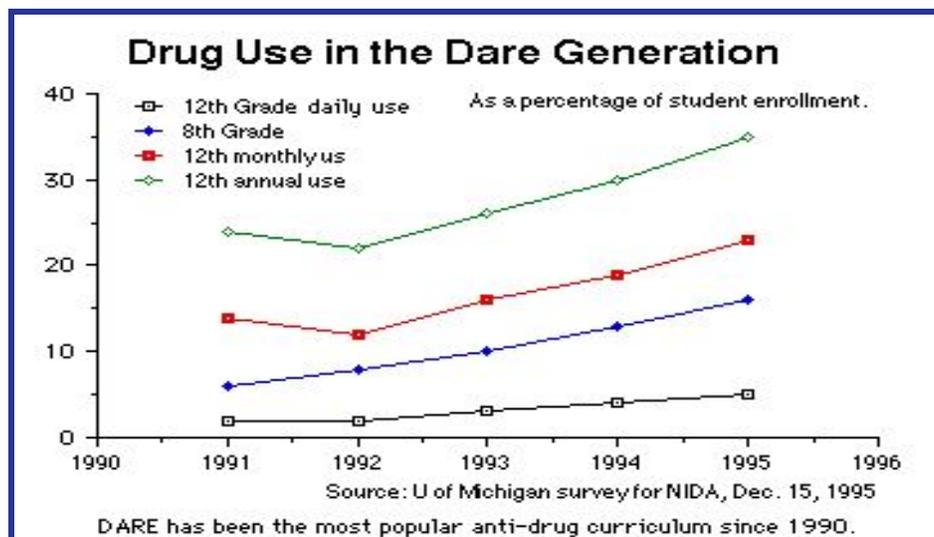
D.A.R.E. has had its chance since 1983, it is time for a more effective approach to teaching our youth about drugs. According to Doctor Brown's study, elementary-aged students openly accepted the message while thirty percent of middle schoolers and ninety percent of high schoolers responded negatively to the program. The main idea surrounding drug education programs within schools is to warn and scare students about substance abuse before it becomes an issue. Although there is no possible way to protect the youth from access to tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, heroin, or other substances, programs must teach students the proper way to handle themselves in situations that involve these substances and how to recognize dangerous circumstances. The government should step in to ultimately decrease deaths due to drug abuse in society. Creating a nationwide program will provide equal opportunity for education to all schools, and each student can receive proper education surrounding drugs. Instead of intimidating, programs can teach how to recognize drug situations, how to know how much is too much, how to help someone if they overdose, and how to protect themselves in a peer pressuring position. Informing the youth on how to handle themselves or others when involved in drugs will help to decrease the national overdose death rate significantly.



Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased knowledge amongst the youth in drug education ● Decreased amount of overdose deaths nationally ● Allowing students to recognize drug situations ● Students are more likely to accept this way of teaching ● All schools have equal drug education opportunities ● Allowing education to all kinds of schools in the suburbs, rural areas, and urban areas ● Provide better education than health class programs ● Students have a better knowledge of the effects of common use, coping skills, and communication skills when dealing with drug use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students more likely to try different types of drugs ● May still reject this type of teaching in schools ● Funding a nationwide drug initiative program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increasing taxes ○ Public not willing to pay ● Disapproving viewpoints from the parents of the children ● Not allowing schools to choose how to teach drug education ● Students more encouraged to try dangerous substances and get addicted if done incorrectly ● Parents wanting to teach their children themselves about drugs ● Not wanting government intervention

Key Questions:

- How should drug education include “real-world conditions” to further inform the youth on how to handle drug-related situations?
- What is the impact of drug education in school?
- How should we create a program that students will accept and follow?
- How could we fund a government-sponsored education program?

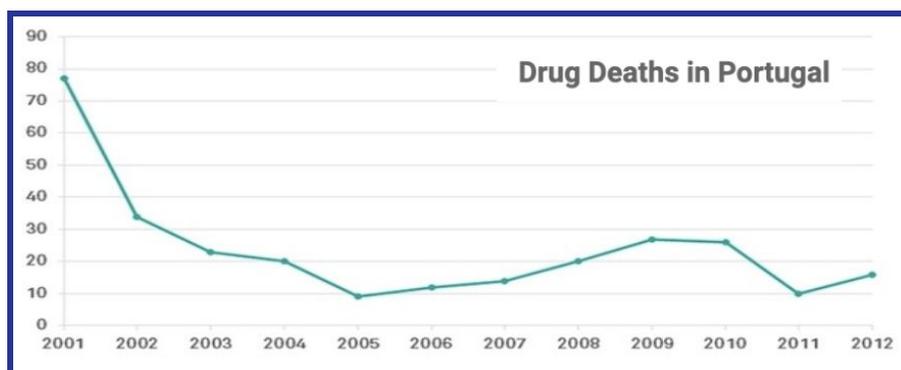


Approach 2: From Criminal Penalties to Legalization

What legal system will make society the most safe and just?

In the late 80s, Portugal was plagued by heroin addiction and drug-related deaths. Users would inject themselves in the middle of the city block and crime rates were incredibly high. One in ten people were using heroin and Portugal's government was terrified for the future. HIV spread from contaminated needles, giving Portugal the highest HIV rate in the EU. Out of necessity, Portugal became an expert in treating addiction over the next two decades. In 2001, Portugal became the first country in the world to decriminalize all drugs. Instead of arresting users, they would give them small fines, access to addiction clinics, and education on drug abuse. Users were also provided with free, safe needle kits and condoms, drastically reducing the spread of HIV. The Guardian found that "HIV infection plummeted from an all-time high in 2000 of 104.2 new cases per million to 4.2 cases per million in 2015 (Ferreira)," and TIME found that "Between 1998 and 2011, the number of people in drug treatment increased by over 60% (Bajekal)." Drug legalization advocates point to Portugal as a success case.

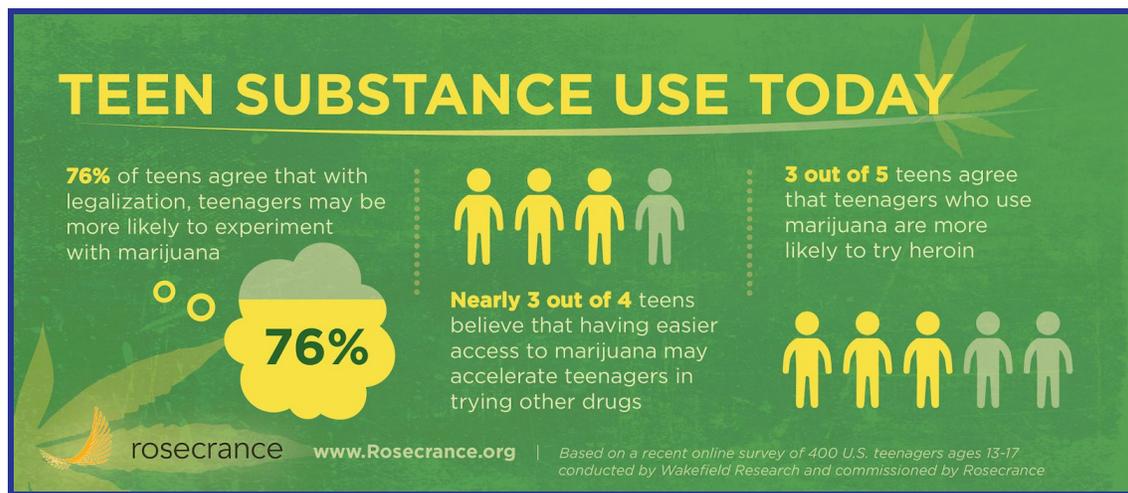
Advocates of decriminalization believe that decriminalization should be implemented in countries all over the world and argue that it's foolish to continue with the war on drugs. Some even argue that Portugal hasn't gone far enough, citing the lack of "prison needle exchange" programs, low accessibility to overdose medication, and the overall stagnant policies in Portugal since 2001. These advocates tend to be in favor of legalization, which would eliminate any fines and enable the government to regulate the sale of drugs. The hope is that this would result in uncontaminated and labeled drugs, thus decreasing the overdose rate. Critics, however, point out that the legal sale of drugs will just create a dangerous black market. On the other side of the argument, opposers to decriminalization and legalization believe that harsh punishments and decreased accessibility will prevent drug addiction. They argue that without fear of legal retribution, people will be more inclined to try drugs and argue that the United States doesn't have the facilities to treat the influx of addicts. These three sides show the diverse opinions people have on such an important, and deadly topic.



Benefits of Criminal Penalties	Drawbacks of Criminal Penalties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential minimization of drug users ● Safer, more moral society ● Decreased accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rise of black market trades ● Increased number of criminal records ● Rising deaths caused by laced drugs ● Racial profiling

Benefits of Decriminalization	Drawbacks of Decriminalization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduced fear of asking for help while consuming drugs ● Safe injection sites with clean needles ● Less disease ● Reduced stigma for drug users ● Allows government system to focus more on recovery and rehabilitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Less fear of legal repercussions could result in more usage ● Increased supply of drugs would result in a decrease in price ● Drugs would still be laced and improperly measured

Benefits of Legalization	Drawbacks of Legalization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No criminal charges ● Regulation of sales would result in unlaced drugs and accurate quantity ● Comprehensive knowledge of effects ● Less stigma ● Increased funding from government for addiction clinics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Black market formation ● Increased accessibility may lead to an increase in usage ● Raises the question of what the government should do with money from drug sales



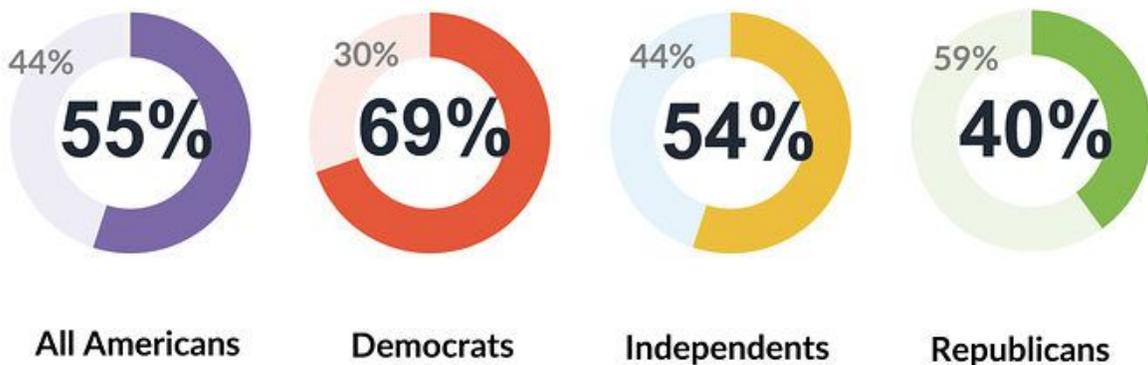
Key Questions:

- How are current drug policies effective? Is there any policy or parts of policies you would change?
- Is drug regulation an overstep of the government? Why or why not?
- What are some personal biases you hold about drug users?
- Does drug criminalization disproportionately target people of color?
- What drugs do you think should be legal?
- What connections can you make between alcohol and other drugs?
- If the government were to legalize drugs, should the government be able to profit off of the taxation of drugs? Why or why not?
- Should drugs be taxed the same as every-day use items, like clothing, or should they have a sin tax? Why or why not?
- How do you think the legalization of drugs enhances the safety of drug-users and the community at large? How would it hinder it?
- Do you think people deserve jail sentences for minor, non-violent drug uses? Why or why not?

Democrats and Independents Support Decriminalizing Drug Offenses; Republicans Oppose

Would you favor or oppose recategorizing drug offenses from felonies to civil offenses, meaning they would be treated like minor traffic violations rather than crimes?

% who favor recategorizing drug offenses



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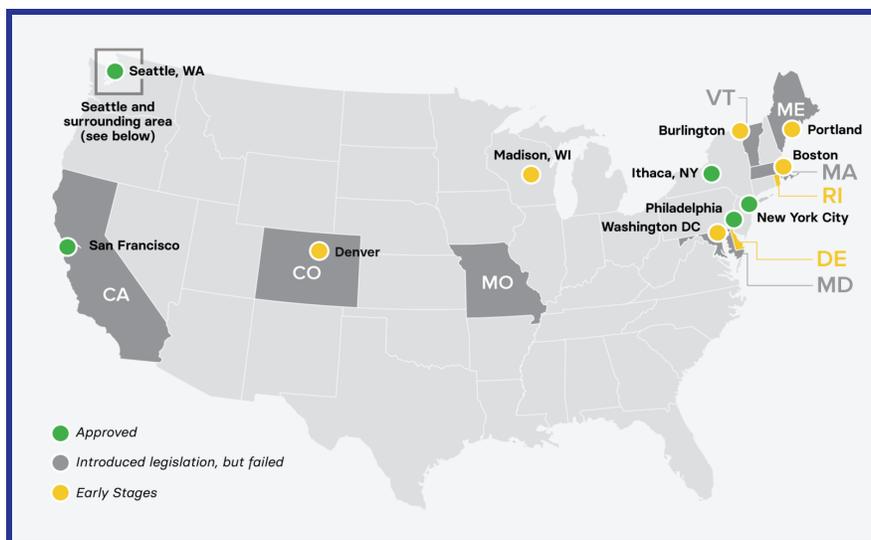
Approach 3: Government Sponsored Rehabilitation: Favoring Rehabilitation over Punishment

Will Government sponsored rehabilitation be able to fight the drug epidemic better than more punitive measures?

As a democratic society, the idea of the government providing security to its citizens is key. We, as citizens of the United States, trust that our leaders support and champion our health and safety. These values we believe in translate directly to fighting drug addiction. Instead of putting funding and focus into punitive measures for those struggling from drug addiction, it may be beneficial for the government to shift energy into helping those afflicted get the help they need.

Government sponsored programs such as Supervised Injection Facilities (SIF) and rehabilitation centers can help promote these values of security. It will also strengthen the values and unity of the local community coming together in order to address and help deal with the growing epidemic. The concept of SIFs remains controversial within the country, as many individuals do not realize the benefits to the sites. Those who are addicted are able to be educated on their own disease, as well as prevent an overdose, which, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, killed 70,237 individuals in the U.S. in 2017.

In addition, government funding for rehabilitation centers is largely underfunded and greatly helpful for those afflicted with addiction who are of lower socioeconomic status. Rehabilitation is often costly, and cost may act as a deterrent for those who truly do want to get help. Right now, funding for these centers comes largely from federal grants and Medicaid reimbursements. Expansion of funding on both the federal and state levels may allow for these centers to grow and for more of those who are addicted to have access to treatment. Government sponsored rehab centers would not only act as a guide for those getting off their addiction, but as a deterrent to those who are contemplating using drugs as a means of relief. This is because the government has the ability to spread these centers across the country, thus influencing more people. If the government were to act like an advertising unit, they could easily spread these sites around, show how badly affected these addicts are, and potentially deter new users. In essence, a government funded and supervised program could reverse the effects of this new epidemic and return a plethora of American citizens back to a normal way of life.



Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allow for addicts to inject under supervised conditions (Under Gov't sponsored injection sites) ● Allows the government to monitor addicts, giving way to the potential revelation of dealers ● The government can help protect the addicts, and foster programs around them, leading to more positive relations between the people and government ● The rehab would ultimately help the economy grow, as it is (potentially) getting more people off the drugs, and into the workforce ● The drug epidemic in America would decrease ● The prison systems would no longer be run amuck with people who have drug related offenses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ultimately reducing the amount of overall drug users/prisoners ● Communities would spring up with old and young addicts supporting each other, working through their addiction ● Cleaner America, with less chances of people becoming addicts ● Creation of jobs for countless nurses, doctors, EMTs, hazardous material disposers, therapists, psychologists, among others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential for addicts to not get cured ● Weak communities are fostered but don't actually provide support for those trying to recover ● FUNDING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where will it come from, and how much will the government put in ● Will the public be open to such changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allow addicts to inject, possibly in their local communities, knowing that they won't get in trouble ○ Use their tax payer dollars to fund sites that won't directly affect them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May lead to the free-rider problem ● More prisoners may be released back into the world free of drug charges, but may do illegal things to go back on the drugs ● Failure to go ahead and completely commit to the program by every state can create massive discrepancies, leading addicts who want help to travel to other states, flooding their programs and creating a mess ● Pertaining to injection sites, this is viewed as safe places, so more people use drugs knowing full well that they can go ahead and use drugs without getting in trouble.

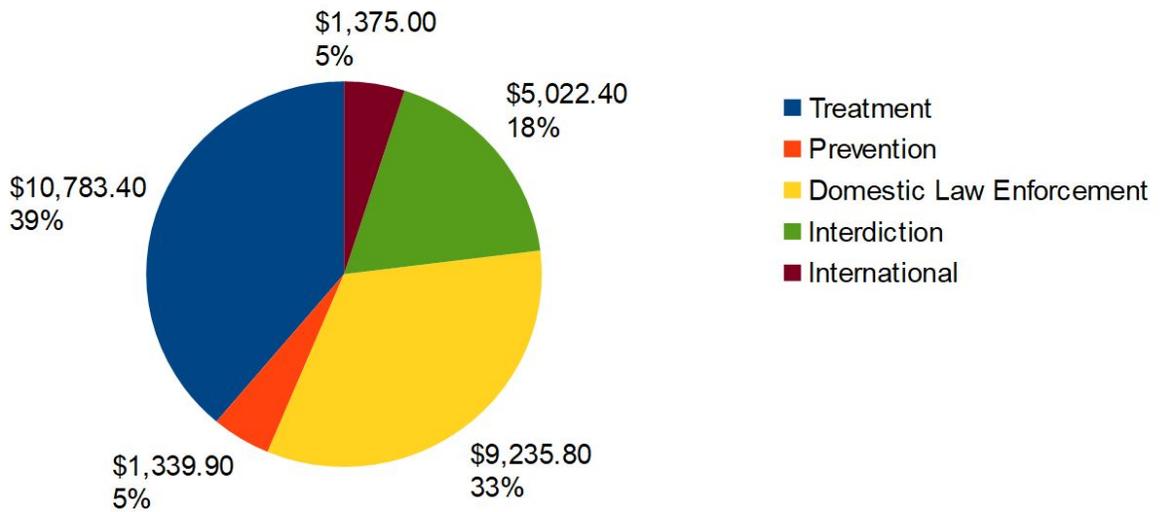


Key Questions:

- Is it the government's responsibility to get involved with drug rehabilitation?
- Which should be prioritized by the government: citizens' safety or punitive measures?
- Where should funding for SIFs or government sponsored rehabilitation come from?
- How effective would such rehabilitation measures be in fighting the drug epidemic?

US Drug Control Spending FY2018 Budget Request

Budget Authority in Millions. Source: ONDCP, May 2017



Conclusion:

Drug abuse has become a huge problem in the United States — one of the worst in the world. With the ongoing, worsening epidemic throughout the country, there is a necessary change needed to be taken. Students must be properly addressed about the issue from a young age; no more avoiding the delicate subject. The government must begin to use their power to intervene with the problem. And to the people that still happen to fall victim to the crippling addiction of these toxins, rehabilitation resources must begin to improve their subpar methods so that people can finally seek the treatment they need — treatment that works. Hopefully by addressing this issue through increased dialogue and education, we can prevent countless casualties.



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