Adolescent Substance Use:
America’s #1 Public Health Problem

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A Report by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University
9 in 10 People Who Are Addicted*
Begin to Smoke, Drink and/or Use Other Drugs Before Age 18

- 91.4% of those addicted to nicotine
- 91.6% of those addicted to alcohol
- 96.1% of those addicted to illicit or controlled prescription drugs

*Have a substance use disorder, defined as meeting clinical criteria for nicotine dependence or alcohol or other drug abuse or dependence.
The Earlier Teens Use Any Substance, the Greater the Risk of Addiction

- 28.1% First Use Before 15
- 18.6% First Used 15 to 17
- 7.4% First Used 18 to 20
- 4.3% First Used 21+

Source: CASA analysis of the National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2009.
Adolescence is the critical period for the onset of substance use and its consequences:

- Teen brain is more prone to risk taking, including substance use
- Teen brain is more vulnerable to damage from substances, including addiction
Percent of High School Students Using Addictive Substances, 2009

- **Lifetime Use**: 75.6%
- **Current Use**: 46.1%

**Source**: CASA analysis of the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS), 2009.
Percent of High School Students Using Top 3 Addictive Substances, 2009

- Alcohol: 72.5% (Ever Used), 41.8% (Currently Use)
- Cigarettes: 45.3% (Ever Used), 19.5% (Currently Use)
- Marijuana: 36.8% (Ever Used), 20.8% (Currently Use)

Source: CASA analysis of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 2009.
Crippling Consequences of Teen Substance Use

• **Academic:** lower grades & academic attainment, higher unemployment

• **Health:** traffic accidents, risky sex, chronic health problems, brain damage, addiction, fatal health conditions, unintentional injuries, homicides, suicides

• **Crime:** juvenile & adult property, violent & substance-related offenses
Prevalence of Substance Use Disorders Among High School Students

- 11.9% (1.6 million) of all high school students
- 19.4% of those who have ever tried any substance
- 33.3% of current substance users
Substance Use Disorders Among High School Students

- Any Substance Use Disorder: 11.9%
- More Than One Substance Use Disorder: 7.7%
- Alcohol Use Disorder: 7.1%
- Marijuana Use Disorder: 4.9%
- Nicotine Dependence: 2.9%
- Prescription Drug Use Disorder: 1.3%
- Other Illicit Drug Use Disorder: 1.2%

Source: CASA analysis of the National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2009.

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Substance Use Disorders Among High School Students, Dropouts & Juveniles in the Justice System

- High School Students: 11.9%
- High School Dropouts: 34.8%
- Juveniles in the Juvenile Justice System: 44.0%
- Juveniles in the Adult Correction System: 52.4%

Teen Substance Use Results in Staggering Costs to Society

Costs of Teen Use:

- $68 billion/year for underage drinking ($2,280/year for every adolescent in the U.S.)
- $14.4 billion/year for juvenile justice

Teen Use Drives Lifetime Costs:

- $467.7 billion/year in government spending on substance use/addiction ($1,500/year for every person in the U.S.)
- 96 cents of every $1 goes to cope with the consequences; only 2 cents for prevention & treatment
Families Present Mixed Messages to Teens About Risks of Substance Use

- 46.1% of children under 18 (34.4 million) live with risky substance user
- 42.6% of parents of high school students say that their teens’ refraining from substance use is one of their top 3 concerns
- 20.8% of parents of high school students think marijuana is a harmless drug
- Home/family is most common source of addictive substances, after friends
Schools Miss the Mark

- Only 27% of high school teachers say their schools train staff to identify & respond to student substance use
- Less than 40% of high school teachers think their school’s prevention efforts are effective
- Three-quarters of high school teachers were unable to name a professional who is available to help students with substance use problems
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School Responses to Evidence of Student Substance Use Often Punitive


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Advertising & Media Messages

Glamorize Substance Use

• Odds of becoming a tobacco user increase with exposure to tobacco marketing

• Exposure to TV & movie portrayals of drinking linked to teen drinking
  - 77% of the most popular TV shows among teens & adults mention or depict drinking

Advertisements like this one for Jose Cuervo tequila glamorize substance use

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Compounding the Risk

- Genetic predisposition or family history of substance use disorders
- Adverse childhood events (e.g., abuse or neglect)
- Co-occurring mental health or behavioral problems
- Peer victimization or bullying
- Other risky behaviors
- Subgroups at risk: child welfare, juvenile offenders, dropouts, minority sexual identity
Referrals to Treatment Typically Occur When Teens Are Deeply in Trouble

Source: CASA analysis of the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), 2008.
Few Teens Receive Quality Treatment

- 1.6 million high school students meet medical criteria for a substance use disorder involving alcohol or other drugs
- Only 6.4% of them (99,913) received treatment in past year
- Only 28% of treatment facilities offer specialized care for adolescents; most offer substandard care
The Solution

1. Help the public understand the risks of teen substance use, the nature of addiction & its origins in adolescence.

2. Prevent or delay the onset of substance use for as long as possible through the implementation of effective public health measures.

3. Identify teens at risk for substance use through routine screenings, as we do for other public health problems.

4. Intervene early with teens who are using to prevent further use & its consequences.

5. Provide appropriate treatment to teens identified as having a substance use or co-occurring disorder.
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