

## Message to Community Coalitions about Marijuana

Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug among today's youth. Among kids age 12-17 who use drugs, approximately 60 percent use marijuana only.<sup>1</sup> Between 1991 and 2001, the number of 8<sup>th</sup> graders who used marijuana doubled from one in ten to one in five.<sup>2</sup>

And it's no wonder that many kids think marijuana is harmless – they're only getting one side of the story. Marijuana is in everything from jokes on late night television to summer teen blockbusters. Parents admit to being ambivalent about the drug and unaware of its risks to young users. And we're up against well-financed and organized campaigns to promote marijuana for medicinal purposes and legalization.

So what can we do about it?

We can start by working together to send kids – and parents – a new fact-based message about marijuana. We can use the best new science to educate the public about the significant health, social, learning and behavioral effects of the substance on teen users. And we can speak out and take a stand against marijuana in our communities.

While it's true that other drugs may be more addictive and cause more severe harm, the fact is that far more youth use marijuana than all other illicit drugs combined. And as long as we focus only on the most severe drugs, we let marijuana “off the hook” and contribute to the mixed messages we're sending our kids. The fact is, cigarettes and marijuana are now tied as the illegal substance kids report is the easiest for someone their age (12 – 17) to buy.<sup>3</sup>

Marijuana is addictive and can hurt young bodies and minds at a crucial time in teens' lives. Studies show that young marijuana users are far more likely to take risks, such as having sex, driving while high or riding with someone who is, or using other illicit substances. And kids who use marijuana don't do as well in school. They also face later problems in life such as loss of jobs or failure to get a scholarship.

The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign (Media Campaign) launched this initiative to tell kids the other side of the story. Marijuana can do great damage to their futures, and they deserve to know the truth.

As leaders in the effort to raise healthy, drug-free youth, you are critical in reinforcing these messages in your own communities, schools and homes. Let's work together to dispel the myths about this drug. The materials included in this **Marijuana Awareness Kit** can help you bring this important prevention message to your community.

## Involve Your Community in the Media Campaign's Marijuana Prevention Initiative

This **Marijuana Awareness Kit** is intended to provide community coalitions, drug prevention organizations, youth-serving organizations, parenting groups and other groups with resources to

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<sup>1</sup> National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Monitoring the Future, 2002

<sup>3</sup> National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 2001

help you successfully integrate these messages into your program or community outreach initiative.

The **Marijuana Prevention Initiative**, launched in Fall 2002, is a national effort to dispel common myths and misconceptions about marijuana. The initiative is targeted to youth, parents and other influential adults, including physicians, nurses, educators, community leaders, social services providers, journalists and the entertainment industry. It includes national advertising for parents and teens, partnerships and a range of other outreach activities designed to get the message out that marijuana is a serious drug with serious consequences.

This **Awareness Kit** includes information about the marijuana prevention initiative and numerous template materials and resources to help you create your own activities and conduct effective outreach in your community. Each community is different, so please feel free to adapt the information to your local markets and needs.

We also encourage you to share this information with your partners – schools, businesses and other civic, health, service and faith-based organizations in your community – to help broaden the reach of your efforts.

We thank you in advance for helping us bring the marijuana prevention message home to your community.

## Use the Marijuana Awareness Kit in Your Community

This tool kit is designed to be simple and user-friendly. Many of the template materials can be used “as is” or customized to include specific information about your community.

This tool kit includes the following materials and resources:

- ✓ **Fact Sheet:** *Marijuana Initiative*
- ✓ **Fact Sheet:** *Kids and Marijuana: The Facts*
- ✓ **Resources:** Links and information about ordering marijuana resources
- ✓ **Outreach Ideas:** Suggestions for local outreach and activities
- ✓ **Feature Story:** *Marijuana and Kids: Not a Harmless High*
- ✓ **Feature Story:** *Marijuana: How to Tell Your Kids to Say No, Even if You Didn't*
- ✓ **Point-Counterpoint:** How to make the case against marijuana to kids
- ✓ **Get the Right Angle:** A tool for youth-to-youth discussions about marijuana
- ✓ **Marijuana Quiz:** For adults
- ✓ **Marijuana Quiz:** For youth
- ✓ **Talking Points:** Main messages about marijuana
- ✓ **Op-Ed:** A sample opinion editorial piece for your local paper
- ✓ **Letters to the Editor:** Two sample letters for your local paper
- ✓ **Radio PSA Scripts:** Sample scripts for distribution to your local stations
- ✓ **Marijuana Presentation:** A PowerPoint presentation with notes/talking points

We suggest that you start by reviewing the suggested activities chart and the materials and decide what your organization can do to use the marijuana prevention message in your community. The chart includes information about incorporating the enclosed materials into suggested activities. We'd like to know if the Marijuana Awareness Kit was helpful to you and your community. E-mail us at [nyac@aed.org](mailto:nyac@aed.org) and tell us what you think!