

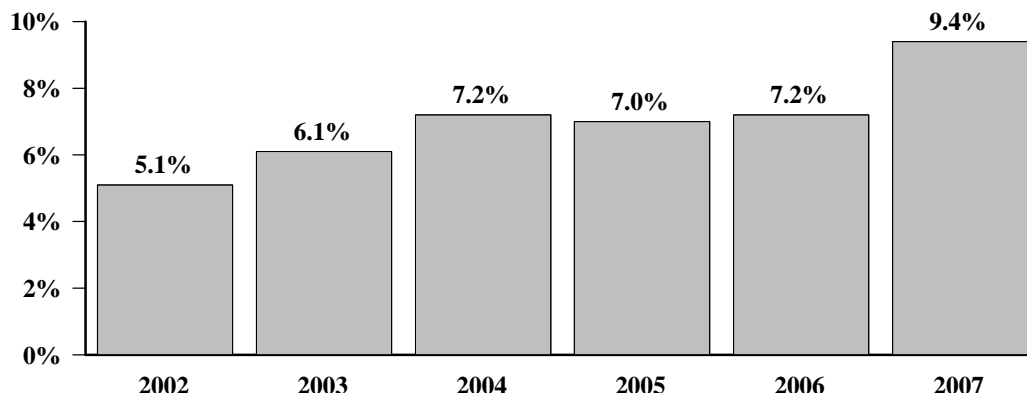
**A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research**

**University of Maryland, College Park**

***Illicit Drug Use Increases Among Adults Ages 50 to 59;  
Trend Driven by Aging Baby Boom Generation***

Illicit drug use among older adults has increased in recent years, according to data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). The percentage of adults ages 50 to 59 who reported using at least one illicit drug\* in the past year—primarily marijuana and nonmedical use of prescription drugs—increased from 5.1% in 2002 to 9.4% in 2007 (the most recent year for which data are available). Additional analyses show that this trend was driven by the aging of the baby boom generation—those born between 1946 and 1964. This cohort has a much higher lifetime illicit drug use rate than earlier cohorts and represents an increasing proportion of persons ages 50 to 59. The rate of illicit drug use among this age group, however, remains lower than that of other age groups. For example, 33% of adults ages 18 to 25 and 19% of youths ages 12 to 17 reported past year illicit drug use in 2007 (data not shown). Noting that the future treatment needs of this population has become a growing public health concern, the authors stress the importance of developing effective primary care screening and intervention strategies and expanding substance abuse treatment programs to address the growing needs of this population.

**Percentage of Adults Ages 50 to 59 Reporting Past Year Illicit Drug Use, 2002 to 2007**



\*Illicit drug use: Any use of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or nonmedical use of pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Han, B., Gfroerer, J., and Colliver, J., Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "An Examination of Trends in Illicit Drug Use Among Adults Aged 50 to 59 in the United States," *OAS Data Review*, August 2009. Available online at [http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k9/OlderAdults/OAS\\_data\\_review\\_OlderAdults.pdf](http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k9/OlderAdults/OAS_data_review_OlderAdults.pdf). For more information, contact Beth Han at [beth.han@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:beth.han@samhsa.hhs.gov).

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