

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

University of Maryland at College Park

***ONDCP Releases Spring 1996 National Pulse Check***

The *Pulse Check* is a series of qualitative interviews with ethnographers, treatment professionals, and law enforcement officers designed to provide a timely glimpse of the drug scene in specific areas across the country. The most recent *Pulse Check* presents findings from interviews conducted in April 1996. Among the findings were the following:

- "Heavy **cocaine** and **crack** use is becoming more concentrated in a core of older, regular users" (p. 10). Sources in Texas, California, Colorado, and Florida reported that cocaine users are older, established drug users, and in Los Angeles, cocaine and crack users were described as "an aging population." Baltimore is the only city that had a continuous rise in new users.
- One indicator of increased **marijuana** availability mentioned by several sources may be the appearance of a "wide variety of cigarette rolling papers marketed in convenience and video stores" (p. 12). Sources in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. noted the reappearance of bongs and water pipe paraphernalia.
- While prices of **heroin** have remained stable in other major cities, one Baltimore ethnographer reported that prices have dropped significantly since the last Pulse Check. According to the source, "it is hard to imagine prices falling any lower, and there is no size or purity difference between a \$6 and a \$10 capsule--just the time of day the sale is made" (p. 8).
- Treatment providers across the nation reported that more heroin users are **injecting** than inhaling. Last winter providers reported a 50/50 split between the two modes of use. In this series of interviews, providers reported 75% of treatment clients are injecting. This shift may indicate that "inhalation is a transition phase that changes to injection when addiction is established" (p. 9).
- Sources in Colorado and Maryland reported that there is a growing market for **methadone**, a synthetic narcotic used to treat heroin addiction. In Baltimore, "people are using it for habit management when their habit is out of control--not as the drug of choice" (p. 7).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *Pulse Check: National Trends in Drug Abuse*, Spring 1996. To receive a complimentary copy, contact the ONDCP Drugs and Crime Clearinghouse at 800-666-3332.

**\$65.4 MILLION AVAILABLE IN "HEALTHCARE FOR THE HOMELESS" GRANTS**

The federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is accepting applications for 1997 funds under a program to provide primary health care and substance abuse services to the homeless. For more information, contact Jean Hochran, Chief, Health Care for the Homeless Grants, 301-594-4430.

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