

Obama's Drug Control Strategy & Prevention

Preventing Drug Use

Chapter 1 of the recently published American drug strategy looks at what the Obama Administration will do to strengthen efforts to prevent drug use in communities.

In an accompanying video Gil Kerlikowske, Director of National Drug Control Policy, says about the strategy:

It's focused on prevention – to keep kids from developing drug problems. In fact, I'm proud to say that the added emphasis on prevention is reflected in the 2011 drug budget, which calls for a significant increase in Federal support for state and local prevention efforts.

He also sets out the goals of the strategy which he says are:

“reducing youth drug use by 15%, curbing drugged driving by 10%, and reducing drug-related deaths by 15%, within 5 years.”

“Preventing drug use before it begins is a cost-effective, common-sense approach to promoting safe and healthy communities.”

The strategy starts from a presumption that prevention is a “cost-effective, common-sense approach” to take, but recognises that all too often the efforts to prevent drug use have been poorly resourced, limited in scope and delivered as a one-time only attempt.

The strategy argues there are five important lessons to be drawn from the development of prevention science in recent years.

- First, that research has led to robust interventions which ‘offer the promise’ of preventing harm from drug use in both the short and longer term.
- Second, the risk period for developing a substance use problem is virtually over by the time young people reach the age of 21.

- Third, risk factors for drug use are also predictors for a range of other problems in adolescence.
- Fourth, that prevention programmes are more effective when designed to reach young people in a range of settings – including schools and the home.
- Fifth, that adults’ drug use is a strong predictor for young people’s use.

The strategy then goes on to describe how they want to use the principles suggested by this learning to delivering better prevention in the USA.

Community

They start by saying that effective prevention has to be owned by the community in which it is being delivered. Government’s role is to facilitate this by adapting its bureaucracy to meet this principle.

To achieve this they say the government will undertake a number of actions.

Develop Prevention-Prepared Communities

The federal government will create funding streams that allow communities to:

“focus on youth to conduct epidemiological needs assessments; create a comprehensive strategic plan; implement evidence-based, developmentally appropriate prevention services through multiple venues; and address common risk factors for mental, emotional, and behavioral problems, including substance abuse and mental illness.”

Collaborate with States to Support Communities

Given the federal nature of the USA the government pledges to work with States to pursue this agenda. They also point out that 20%

of the block grant is supposed to be aimed at prevention.

Spread Prevention to the Workplace

The strategy sees the workplace as an excellent venue in which to provide parents with messages about effective prevention actions they can take to help their children avoid the problems that drugs and alcohol might cause. They also point out that large numbers of young people are employed, particularly in the restaurant and catering industry and appear to be keen for public health messages to be delivered there.

Settings

The paper is keen for prevention not to be seen as something that just happens in one setting.

To achieve this they say they will:

Strengthen the Drug Free Communities Program

They see the Administrations role as providing “best practices information to community coalitions and to integrate their work into new Federal prevention efforts.”

An individual prevention program in a single setting can be valuable, but young people invariably spend time in many settings across a community and require protection in all of them.

Revamp and Reenergize the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign

This is the public health campaign, similar to FRANK in England.

They say they will:

“increase its emphasis on teen-centric television, print, and digital media and place more relevant content on teen destination websites It will also be tailored to high-risk youth populations who suffer disproportionately from drug problems.”

Support Mentoring Initiatives, Especially Among At-Risk Youth

The strategy says that evidence suggests that mentoring can have a very positive impact on young people, “reducing their drug and alcohol use, improving their relationships and academic

performance, and reducing the likelihood they will initiate violence.”

They point to funding available to take this work forward.

Mobilize Parents to Educate Youth to Reject Drug Use

The Administration wants to acknowledge the critical role that parents play in influencing their children’s behaviour and points to some work being done to engage fathers in particular.

Information on Youth Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Use

The strategy sees a critical role for the Administration in disseminating information on the best prevention interventions so they are unlocked for communities to use them in their efforts to reduce harm.

Support Substance Abuse Prevention on College Campuses

The strategy recognises that the biggest group of drug users are amongst those 18-25 years old and they

therefore see prevention as having a crucial role to play during those years and see university settings as an area in which a positive difference can be made.

Expand Research on Understudied Substances

The government suggests that they have a significant role in supporting research particularly where substances are not well understood; examples given are inhalants, steroids and cognitive enhancing drugs.

Prepare a Report on Health Risks of Youth Substance Use

Perhaps an area where we in the UK are ahead of the curve has been in using NICE to help policy makers to understand not only the risks that

vulnerable young people face, but also what interventions we can use to support them.

The Obama Administration say they will now ask the Surgeon General to:

“produce a new report that includes the latest information on the risks of abusing prescription drugs as well as marijuana, other drugs, and alcohol that will be vital to enhancing our efforts to prevent drug use.”

Prevention and Enforcement

The strategy recognises that many in the criminal justice system are working to increase their contribution to preventing drug harms.

To aid this they will.

Provide Information on Effective Prevention Strategies to Law Enforcement

The strategy suggests that many in the law enforcement community lack information on which prevention activities they could implement. This is something that the Administration will seek to rectify through producing papers aimed at this professional group.

Enable Law Enforcement Officers to Participate in Community Prevention Programs in Schools, Community Coalitions, Civic Organizations, and Faith-Based Organizations

The strategy argues that police officers and others involved in fighting drug crime have a significant and positive role to play in preventing drug use.

Strengthen Prevention Efforts along Southwest Border

The strategy recognises the need to think about the particular needs of areas that are affected by Mexico’s drug problems, and looks to create some strategic responses to them.

Preventing Drugged Driving

The Administration wants to see drug driving have the same priority as drink driving.

They say that the need to do so is reflected in the fact that *“16 percent of weekend night-time drivers tested positive for drugs”*.

To address this they will:

Encourage States to Adopt Per Se Drug Impairment Laws

Laws at the State level are too varied according to the strategy.

Collect Further Data on Drugged Driving

They say that robust data will be at the heart of their response to the issue.

Enhance Prevention of Drugged Driving by Educating Communities and Professionals

The government will develop information to explain the dangers inherent in drug driving.

They say:

“Parents can help by talking to their children about alcohol and drugs and the dangers of driving after drinking alcohol or using drugs. Communities can reinforce the message that there are serious consequences associated with abusing alcohol or drugs.”

Provide Increased Training to Law Enforcement on Identifying Drugged Drivers

The strategy argues that a visible enforcement presence can have a strong preventative effect and promise to increase the number of officers who have been through training to recognise the signs of drug driving.

Develop Standard Screening Methodologies for Drug-Testing Labs to Use in Detecting the Presence of Drugs

The strategy argues:

“Better methods and technology to detect drug use by drivers would have a preventive effect and greatly facilitate the enforcement, prosecution, and adjudication under existing drugged driving laws.”