

# The NHSDA Report

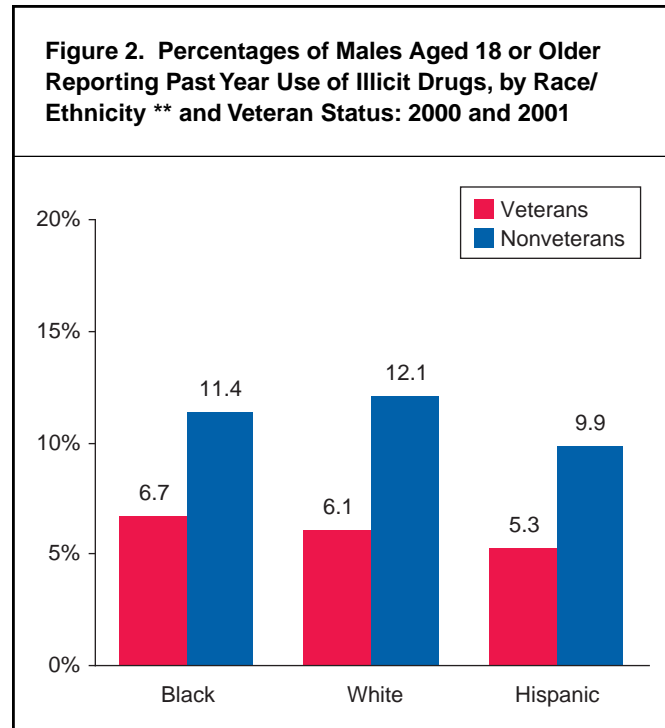
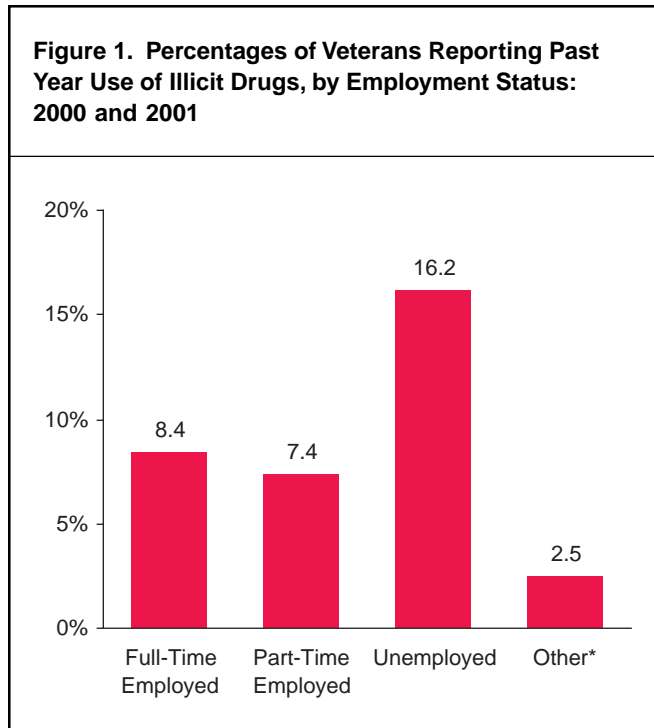
November 11, 2002

## Illicit Drug Use among Veterans (2000 and 2001)

### In Brief

- Almost 2 million veterans, or 6 percent of the population of veterans in the United States, reported using illicit drugs in the past year
- Within all age categories, male veterans and nonveterans had similar rates of past year illicit drug use
- Of the 256,000 veterans in need of treatment for illicit drug use in the past year, 20 percent had received treatment during the past year

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) asks respondents aged 12 or older about their past year use of illicit drugs. “Any illicit drug” refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens (including LSD and PCP), heroin, or any prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. Respondents also are asked about veteran status; a veteran is defined as an individual who has served in any of the U.S. Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps) but who is not currently serving. The NHSDA includes questions designed to determine substance abuse and dependence using criteria in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV). Respondents were classified as needing treatment for an illicit drug problem if they had dependence on or abuse of an illicit drug in the past year or if they received treatment in the past year for an illicit drug problem at a specialty facility (i.e., drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities [inpatient or outpatient], hospitals [inpatient only], and mental health centers). All findings



presented in this short report are annual averages based on combined data from the 2000 and 2001 NHSDAs.

According to the 2000 and 2001 NHSDAs, approximately 27 million<sup>1</sup> veterans aged 18 or older were living in the United States, representing approximately 13 percent of the adult U.S. population. Approximately 94 percent of all veterans were males. About 56 percent were aged 55 or older, 42 percent were aged 26 to 54, and 2 percent were aged 18 to 25. An estimated 84 percent were white, 9 percent were black, 5 percent were Hispanic, and 1 percent were Asian.

### Illicit Drug Use among Veterans

According to the 2000 and 2001 NHSDAs, an estimated 6 percent of all veterans living in the United States used an illicit drug in the past

year. Veterans aged 18 to 25 (30 percent) were more likely to have used an illicit drug in the past year than veterans aged 26 to 54 (12 percent) and veterans aged 55 or older (2 percent). Among veterans, rates of past year illicit drug use were similar between males and females, as well as between whites, blacks, and Hispanics. Veterans who were employed either part time (7 percent) or full time (8 percent) were less likely to have used illicit drugs during the previous year than veterans who were unemployed (16 percent) (Figure 1).

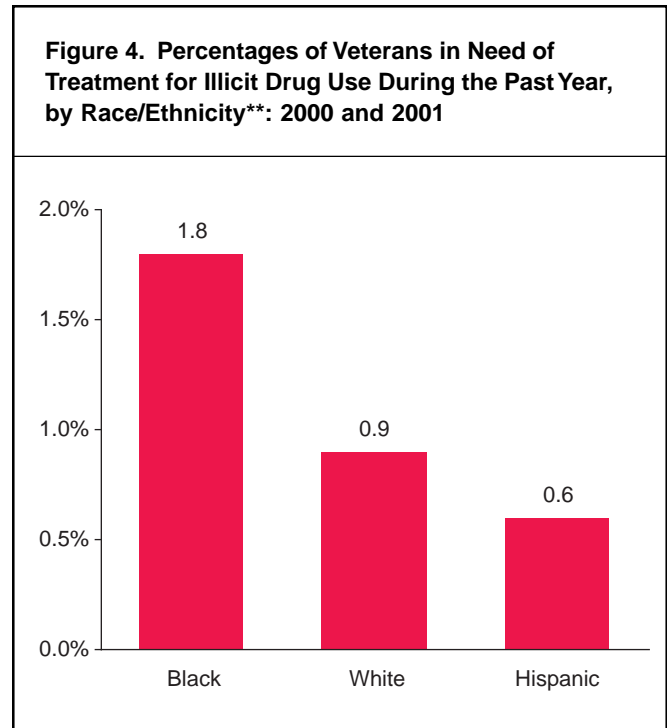
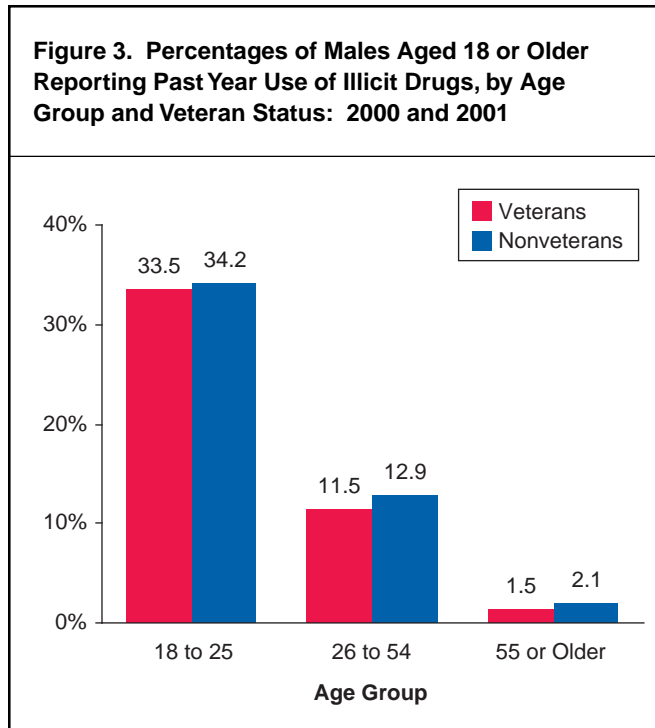
### Differences in Illicit Drug Use Between Veterans and Nonveterans

Because the majority of veterans were males, comparisons between veterans and nonveterans were limited to males aged 18 or older. Among males aged 18 or older, the

rate of any illicit drug use was lower among veterans (6 percent) than nonveterans (16 percent). This difference was consistent for whites, blacks, and Hispanics (Figure 2). However, because veterans were on average older than nonveterans, comparisons within specific age groups may indicate a different pattern. When compared by age group, male veterans and nonveterans had similar rates of past year illicit drug use (Figure 3).

### Veterans in Need of Treatment for Illicit Drug Abuse

An estimated 256,000 veterans (approximately 1 percent of the total veteran population) living in the United States were in need of treatment for illicit drug abuse during the year prior to the survey. An estimated 52,000 veterans, or 20 percent of those in need of treatment



for illicit drug abuse, received treatment at a specialty facility in the year prior to the survey.

Veterans aged 18 to 25 (5 percent) were more likely to be in need of treatment for illicit drug abuse during the past year than veterans aged 26 or older (1 percent). Male veterans were no more likely to be in need of treatment than female veterans. Black veterans were more likely to be in need of treatment than white or Hispanic veterans (Figure 4).

**End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This estimate is comparable with what was reported by the Department of Veterans Affairs in June 2002: *About VA* (available at [http://www.va.gov/about\\_va/](http://www.va.gov/about_va/) and accessed on October 28, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Nonmedical use of any prescription-type pain reliever, tranquilizer, stimulant, or sedative; does not include over-the-counter drugs.

**Figure Notes**

\* Retired, disabled, homemaker, or "other"

\*\* Small sample sizes prevented analyses of American Indians/Alaska Natives and Asians.

Source ( all figures): SAMHSA, 2000 and 2001 NHSDAs.

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2000 and 2001 data are based on information obtained from 69,000 persons aged 12 or older each year, including adults aged 18 or older who were asked about veteran status. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

*The NHSDA Report* is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Information and data for this issue are based on the following publications and statistics:

Office of Applied Studies. (2001). *Summary of findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 01-3549, NHSDA Series H-13). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Office of Applied Studies. (2002). *Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 02-3758, NHSDA Series H-17). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available on-line: <http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov>.

Additional tables available on request.



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