



# NNOAC *Insight*

*The Official Position of the National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition*

*February 2024*

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## **DRUG POLICY & BORDER SECURITY**

Drug seizures, substance use disorder rates and accidental overdose deaths are rising throughout our nation and without some changes in course by our elected leaders and policy makers, the tragedies caused by substance use disorders will continue. The NNOAC is focused on bringing an end to the devastation caused by this deadly epidemic.

Our national drug policy is failing miserably. Changes to state and federal laws and policies – including legalization and decriminalization of some drugs – have made it easier for drug traffickers to avoid arrest and prosecution at the expense of thousands of American families that continue to be victimized by them. Programs designed to curb drug use have only encouraged users by enabling their substance use disorders.

Marijuana abuse is an increasing problem, especially among our young people, and it is no coincidence that marijuana use by young people is the highest in states that have legalized marijuana for medical and recreational purposes. By actively promoting “medical” qualities of marijuana, legalizers are sending the message that marijuana use is “safe” which also reduces the perception of harm associated with its use, ultimately leading many people to abuse marijuana and other more harmful chemical substances. Even social scientists who advocate various decriminalization policies admit that a reduction in the perception of harm and the perception of social disapproval leads to increased use; empirical evidence proves that point.

The truth is undeniable: increased marijuana use has devastating and widespread consequences. It leads to higher substance use disorder rates, increases in workplace accidents and violence, and more calls for public safety services. The increasing costs for emergency medical care, treatment for substance use disorders, public health programs and insurance premiums are putting heavy financial burdens on our citizens and their state and local governments. More marijuana-related poisonings and hospitalizations are occurring, and there is a thriving and persistent illegal secondary market for marijuana - often involving foreign drug cartels. The recent dramatic increases in deaths due to accidental overdose, traffic crashes and fatalities caused by drug impaired drivers should not be acceptable to anyone, and government policies should not increase the likelihood of these consequences.

As the substance abuse epidemic in our Country continues to grow, along with it comes more tragedy. The announcement of more than 112,000 Americans dying from drug poisonings between May of 2022 and May of 2023 was not news to our nation’s narcotic officers but continues to be a shock to many in our society. Fentanyl, synthetic opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine, and other deadly poisons are taking a huge toll on American lives and culture.

The illegal business enterprises that are manufacturing and distributing those poisons in our communities bear primary responsibility for killing our fellow citizens, and they remain the biggest threat to our collective well-being. The NNOAC and our law enforcement partners have been

warning about this for years and urging aggressive law enforcement action, yet we have all but been ignored.

Although policymakers have rightly pushed more resources over the past decade into treating those who suffer from substance use disorders, we still have a skyrocketing death rate. Clearly, law enforcement – drug enforcement in particular – must be re-embraced and fully resourced so that we can play a more significant role in curtailing the threat to our country.

While the relative ease with which Mexican cartels and transnational drug trafficking organizations transport drugs across our porous borders is inexcusable, we are simply stunned by the amount of control they are allowed to exert, and the control they have been allowed to wield over drug distribution and violent crime inside our borders when they arrive.

Until our borders are secure, source countries are sanctioned for their complicity, and trafficking organizations and their actors are prosecuted and punished for their murderous activities, the flow of drugs into the United States will continue and our citizens and their families will continue to needlessly suffer tragic loss of human life. It is way past time for our government to take back control of our borders to keep drug traffickers, their poisons, and their criminal organizations out of our country.

Our government has the all the legal authority it needs to do what is necessary to protect our citizens. It is a matter of choice for our top policymakers in the administration and in Congress to prioritize resources for this purpose. It's time to make different choices, because current data clearly show that policy and budget choices in recent years have gotten us nowhere, and in fact have made things worse. Protecting our law-abiding citizens and their families must become an even greater priority.

We must change course and pass laws that hold drug offenders accountable and keep chronic violators and repeat offenders away from the communities that they continue to victimize. We also must pass budgets that enable law enforcement to effectively investigate, interdict, and prosecute traffickers and efficiently share criminal intelligence and information. Aggressive, smart, targeted drug enforcement is needed now more than ever.

It is time for Congress and our leaders to get serious about re-investing in collaborative law enforcement efforts to stop the needless increases in drug deaths. Every day our NNOAC our members go to work trying to save lives and protect our communities, often while being ridiculed by those who oppose the very idea of enforcing laws that are designed to protect our citizens.

We ask that Congress step up and support our efforts, pass effective laws and policies that we need to reduce drug deaths, and finally bring an end to the terrible toll that drug trafficking organizations are inflicting on our country.