



**Committee: US Congress**

**Topic: Designing a strategy to restore drug neighborhoods**

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The United States Congress is the only institution with legislative power in the United States, meaning that it is the only part of the government with the power to make or change laws. It has the overall aim of consolidating national unity, where every citizen's rights and freedoms are respected, by joining different leaders from across the nation. The United States Congress was created in 1789 by the Constitution of the United States. The congress is bicameral, composed of the house of representatives and the senate. In total it constitutes 541 members (441 from the House of Representatives and 100 from the Senate).

### **Introduction to the topic**

Drug abuse is a never-ending problem that has stormed US citizens for decades, but recently it has been at the peak of consumption. Drug abuse consists of the overconsumption of substances that have psychological effects when ingested. Its consumption also costs the US over 270 billion each year with medical aids, job productivity diminishes, and decreasing taxable citizens, without talking about the 750,000 lives it takes (directly or indirectly) each year.

Drugs don't target individuals alone, but they affect entire communities and spread as a disease until a whole neighborhood has changed its dynamics. From insecurity and violence to loss of opportunities and stress, the presence of drugs in a neighborhood has proven to decrease the quality of life there. A neighborhood falls into the hands of drugs when a significant percentage of its population consumes them regularly. This can further expand into other citizens being exposed to the substances, increasing the addict count, or even into gangs and drug dealers using the zone for drug commercialization and distribution.

### **Statistics for the problem**

#### **Deaths**

Illicit drug overdose deaths have nearly increased by a factor of six from 1999 to 2020 (from 16,700 to 91,600 deaths per year). That number increases when you consider

legal drugs such as alcohol (over 95,000 more deaths) and cigarettes (over 480,000 deaths, including secondhand smokers). Even though it affects primarily the consumer, drugs affect the people that surround them too, such as secondhand smokers, people who suffer violence from drug abusers, drivers affected by car accidents by other drunk drivers, and the deaths and oppression that creating and distributing drugs brings with them.

Even though everyone is prone to consume any type of drug, no matter their socioeconomic status (SES), there are trends for drug acceptance and use. Children raised in families with high SES are more likely to consume alcohol or marijuana, in contrast to children raised in families with lower SES, who are more likely to start smoking. Also, another point to consider is that families with a low SES tend to be more tolerant of drug use. The most commonly used drugs in the United States are marijuana, methamphetamine, heroin, alcohol, cigarettes, medical prescriptions, and cocaine.

### **Effects on neighborhoods**

Drugs usually affect a greater percentage of the population in large cities than in small towns. Drugs tend to negatively affect the quality of life of the users and the people around them. This can come in the form of medical bills, health problems, acquired debt (economic impacts of buying drugs), reduction of hygiene, and negative effects on social life. This can further expand violence among people in the area and lower the productivity of the workers in certain zones.

Peer pressure is considered a risk factor in the bias on the usage of drugs both among children and adults. Also, certain factors, like socioeconomic status and the simplicity to find drugs in an area help to increase drug usage among citizens of a neighborhood. Even though spending to fight the usage of drugs all across the nation has increased over the years, it has been overshadowed by the steep rise of drug usage (and its effects).

### **Drug-Free Communities Act**

The Drug-Free Communities Act was approved on June 27, 1997, by the Congress of the United States of America. It allowed a spending spree of USD 143,500,000 over a span of five years. Its main job was to help reduce drug usage among several communities in the United States, by creating awareness about drugs among the citizens through drug-free programs and education to parents. An interesting approach

of the program was the implementation of leaders for each neighborhood, to respect the place's history and overall have a higher success rate. With that law, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it was created the Drug-free Communities Program, which is joining efforts with the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to create awareness and prevent and reduce youth substance use. Even though the federal funding of the Drug-Free Communities Act ended in 2002, substance abuse treatment facilities had grown by 18%.

## **Drug-Free Communities Program**

The Drug-Free Communities Program is the nation's leading effort in mobilizing communities to prevent and reduce drug use among the youth. The program seeks to reduce substance abuse in communities by granting up to \$125,000 per year on 5-year periods to communities' coalitions to strengthen their infrastructure of awareness and prevention of drugs. It consists of having community leaders representing 12 sectors, which include: youth, parents, businesses, media, schools, youth-serving organizations, law enforcement, religious organizations, civic and volunteer organizations, healthcare professionals, state and local governments, and other organizations involved in reducing illicit substance use. In 2022 alone, there have been over 700 grants to coalitions all across the country.

Nowadays, 1 in 5 Americans live in a DFC community and since its implementation in 1997, over half of Americans have lived in a community supported by the program. It is also demonstrated that the program has had a huge success in reducing substance use in the communities it shelters. Even though the program had accomplished astonishing results, the overall use of substances nationwide has increased, calling for further action.

There are other programs too, such as the Caring School Community Program, Alcohol, and Drug Abuse Council Drug Awareness Program, among others, which, even though they present different approaches to the solution, we should embrace them all since we all have the same fight.

## **Basic concepts**

Drugs: a medicine or other substance which has a physiological effect when ingested or introduced into the body.

Illicit drug: Drugs that are illegal to have, such as marijuana, heroin, or cocaine

Licit drug: Drugs covered by the law, such as caffeine, cigarettes, and alcohol.

Neighborhood: A district, especially one forming a community within a town or city.

Addiction: the chronic medical disease that makes recipients lose control over doing, taking, or using something to the point that it can be harmful.

Drug restoration and awareness programs should be one of the main concerns of the United States government. If considering all of the collateral deaths it causes, substance abuse is easily the leading cause of death in the nation. A successful solution can save millions of lives over the years and even save national sovereignty. We must also acknowledge that big prices might be justified considering the economic impact drugs have, the overall increase in citizens' health, and most importantly, the lives it saves.

## Recommendations

- Take into consideration that a single solution may not be effective enough since we are talking of neighborhoods of different socio-economic statuses and ethnicity.
- Keep in mind that there are different types of drugs, with different backgrounds for obtaining and using them, as well as their legality.
- Empathize with different ethnicities that live in the nation.
- Seek for the overall health of the neighborhoods.

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