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DHHS Issues Brief: Marijuana Use in New Hampshire

Concord – The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services (BDAS) is today issuing “Marijuana Use in New Hampshire,” the fourth in a series of issue briefs highlighting rates and trends in substance misuse among children and adults. As the brief indicates, New Hampshire has one of the highest rates of marijuana use in the past month among 12 to 17 year olds with about one in ten adolescents (9.6%) reporting regular use according to the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

“This is a disturbing finding,” said BDAS Director Joe Harding. “It is an alarming rate and well above the U.S. average of 7.6% of 12 to 17 year olds nationally reporting regular marijuana use. This underscores the need for us to collaborate with not only our partners in the field, but also businesses, law enforcement, the medical field, and schools to implement proven strategies to prevent youth use of marijuana.”

Young adults in New Hampshire are also reporting regular marijuana use at a rate higher than most other states. According to the 2012 NSDUH, more than one in four 18 to 25 year olds in the state (26.0%) report having used marijuana at least once in the prior month, that is the fifth highest rate in the nation. Other states in the top ten for young adult marijuana use include other northern New England states as well as the first two states to have legalized recreational use of the drug, Colorado and Washington.

New Hampshire is one of many states that have debated the benefits and risks of marijuana use over the last several years, particularly as legislation has been proposed to legalize the possession of small quantities of the illicit drug which is of concern to prevention advocates.

“Young people hear about our state debating this issue and may think that marijuana is safe,” says Shannon Bresaw, Director of the Capital Area Regional Public Health Network. “Research shows when people don’t perceive an action as risky they are more likely to engage in that risky behavior.”

The brief provides strategies and resources for communities and the public to learn about the risks and dangers associated with marijuana use, with a strong focus on the risks and dangers of early use.

To read the brief visit www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bdas/, www.drugfreenh.org, and www.nhcenterforexcellence.org.