

# Should coerced treatment replace prison for first time, non-violent drug offenders?

Yes for situations where drug use is out of control. But most people who use drugs do so socially and in moderation. This applies the same to marijuana, cocaine and heroin as it does to alcohol.

The federal government estimates:

- **87 million Americans have used illegal drugs** <sup>1</sup>
- **27 million used them last year** <sup>1</sup>
- **3.6 million are dependent on an illegal drug** <sup>2</sup>

Forcing a moderate drug user into treatment is like putting someone who drinks a bottle of beer or a glass of wine a day into Alcoholics Anonymous!

**Providing treatment where needed is vital. But so is reform of harsh laws; federal funding of syringe exchanges; expanded methadone availability; marijuana as a medicine; and recognition of the racial, ethnic, class, and generational prejudices at the roots of our current drug laws.**

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#### **Sources:**

1: "Summary of Findings from the 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse," Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, US Dept. of Health and Human Services (Washington, DC: SAMHSA, August 2000), p. G5, Table G5. (Lifetime use, any illicit drug: 87,734,000; Use in past year, any illicit drug, 26,220,000.)

2: "Summary of Findings from the 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse," Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, US Dept. of Health and Human Services (Washington, DC: SAMHSA, August 2000), p. 36. ("In 1999, an estimated 3.6 million Americans [1.6 percent of the total population age 12 and older] were dependent on illicit drugs.")