

## 20 Years of Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) Data in San Diego County – 2019 Youth Trends

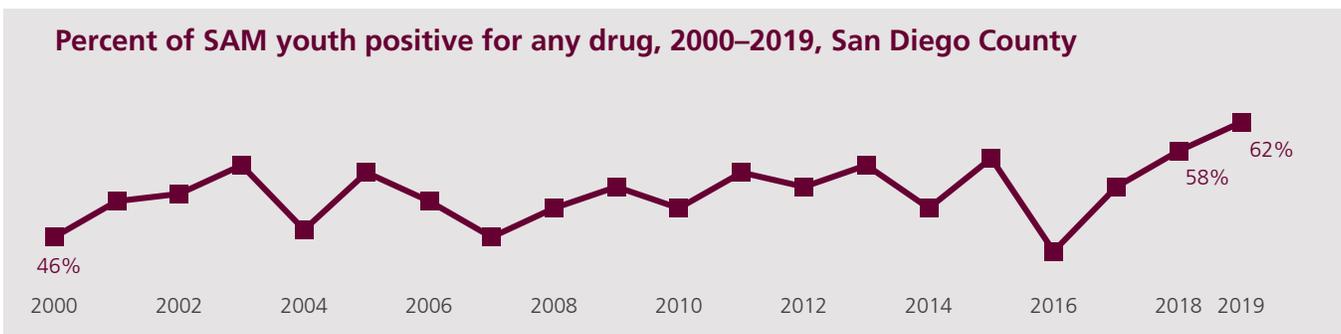
As one of the original Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) sites funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), SANDAG has a long history of collecting and sharing data regarding objective drug use trend data over time. When the DUF program, which had been renamed Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) was discontinued at the national level, San Diego County was the only site that continued compiling data without interruption.<sup>1</sup> While the juvenile justice system has changed dramatically over these past two decades,<sup>2</sup> these data and the stories the youth confidentially share with the SAM interviewers remain an important data source for local prevention, treatment, and intervention groups.

### Highlight 1

Just over 3 in 5 (62%) youth interviewed for SAM in 2019 tested positive for an illicit substance, up from 46% in 2000 and the highest rate in the past two decades. The five drugs tested for include marijuana, methamphetamine, opiates, cocaine/crack, and PCP.



Percent of SAM youth positive for any drug, 2000–2019, San Diego County



### Highlight 2



Marijuana is the drug of choice for the youth interviewed, with 57% positive for it in 2019, a 20-year high. Over the past several years, marijuana has more often become the first substance youth have tried, the perceived harm of using it has gone down, and youth who have used it in the past 30 days use it at a greater frequency, compared to alcohol.

**57%**

positive for marijuana in 2019

**91%**

report marijuana is easy to obtain

**58%**

report marijuana is first drug they have tried

**12.5**

average age of first marijuana use

**14.7**

average number of days in last 30 used marijuana

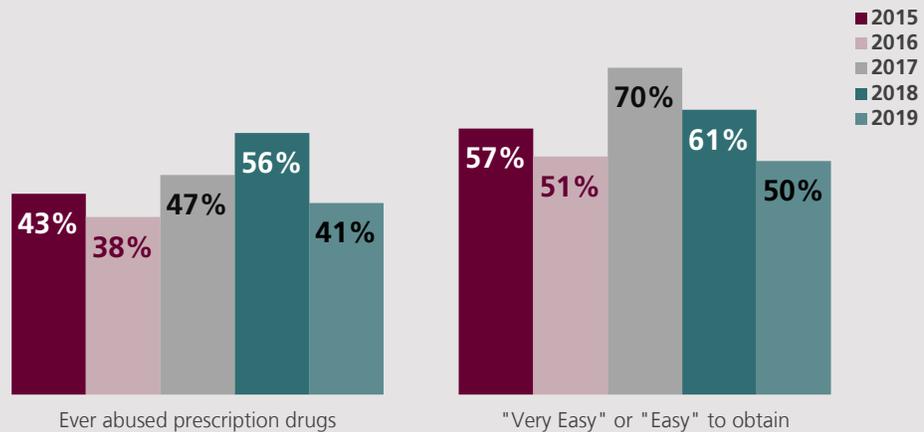
<sup>1</sup> As part of the SAM project, anonymous and confidential interviews with adults and juveniles arrested and booked into local detention facilities are conducted. In addition, because a urine sample is provided upon request, anonymous and confidential data testing can be conducted over time. The County of San Diego HIDTA is gratefully acknowledged for their support of this program.

<sup>2</sup> In 2000, the juvenile arrest rate in San Diego County was 64.6 per 1,000 youth and in 2018, the most recent data available, it had declined to 10.0. The increased focus on deterrence and alternatives to detention has changed the population of youth that is interviewed and it is possible that at least some of the data trends reported here reflect the needs of youth with a greater level of need than when booking into Juvenile Hall was a more common practice.

## Highlight 3

Self-reported prescription drug abuse was down among youth in 2019, with 41% reporting ever taking a prescription drug they were not prescribed, the second lowest rate in the past five years. In addition, fewer youth reported it was **"VERY EASY"** or **"EASY"** to obtain prescription drugs illegally in 2019, compared to the previous four years. The most commonly abused prescription drugs in 2019 remained tranquilizers, codeine, and Percocet.

Percent of SAM youth who ever abused a prescription drug and reported it was **"VERY EASY"** or **"EASY"** to obtain



## Highlight 4

In response to public health concerns and increased usage by youth, new questions regarding vaping were added to the interview in 2019. The majority (76%) reported they had tried vaping, about 3 in 5 (59%) of these had done so in the past 30 days, half (49%) had vaped at school, and the most common substances vaped included flavored nicotine (90%) and marijuana/THC (73%).

# 76% have ever vaped



**59%** of these youth have vaped in the past 30 days

**12.8** days average number of days vaped in last 30

**90%** have vaped flavored nicotine

**73%** have vaped marijuana/THC

**49%** have vaped at school

**59%** think vaping is not harmful and **65%** prefer it to smoking cigarettes