

COUNTERING PRO-MARIJUANA INFLUENCES

North Coastal Prevention Coalition – Service to Science Initiative

Background

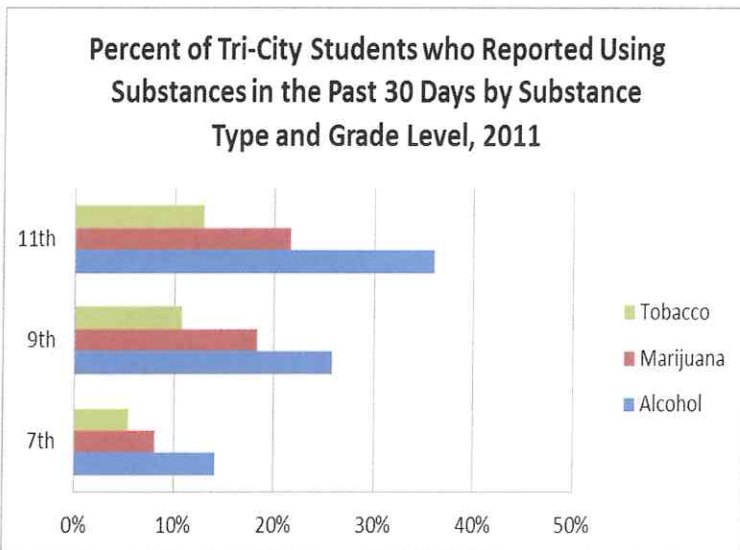
The North Coastal Prevention Coalition (NCPC) has been involved in promoting healthy environments and reducing the harm of substance abuse in the north coastal region of San Diego County, California since 1993. The mission of NCPC is *to reduce the harm of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other drugs in the cities of Carlsbad, Oceanside and Vista through community action, education, support and collaboration*. NCPC efforts focus on community level changes to reduce youth access to alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other drugs and to promote positive social norms to prevent substance abuse. Since 1998, NCPC has partnered with the Vista Community Clinic (VCC), which serves as the fiscal agent for NCPC grants and contracts.



Project Overview

In 2010, NCPC was awarded a National Exemplary Award for Innovative Substance Abuse Prevention Programs, Practices, and Policies by the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD) for its Countering Pro-Marijuana Influences project, which began in 2004 in partnership with the HARM Initiative (Health Advocates Rejecting Marijuana) in San Diego County.

As a result of this award, NCPC was invited to apply for the Service to Science (STS) Initiative. STS is a national initiative of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) designed to enhance the evaluation capacity of local innovative programs and practices. NCPC was successful in its application and received evaluation technical assistance in 2012, and was awarded funding in 2013 to carry out an enhanced evaluation plan in partnership with California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and Policy Solutions Group.



NCPC’s Countering Pro-Marijuana Influences project implements a variety of environmental prevention strategies to reduce marijuana use – particularly among youth. NCPC works with policymakers to implement private and public policies restricting the sale of drug paraphernalia and pro-drug merchandise, ordinances to prevent the proliferation of marijuana dispensaries, and continued growth of its annual event to counter the ‘unofficial marijuana holiday’ of April 20 (aka 4/20).

As in many areas of California, teen marijuana use had surpassed cigarette use in NCPC’s region as early as 1999 for some grades, and remains higher than tobacco use to this day [figure at left combines California Healthy Kids Survey data from Carlsbad (CUSD), Oceanside (OUSD), and Vista (VUSD) Unified School Districts, 2011].

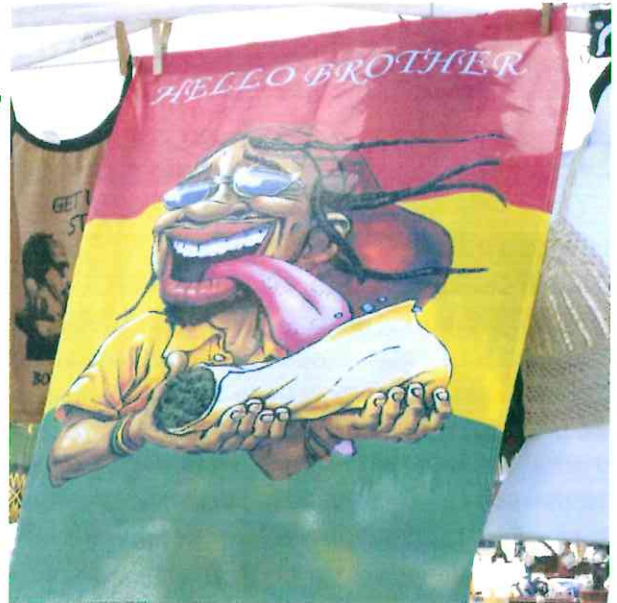
Source: California Healthy Kids Survey, 2011 (results combined for CUSD, OUSD, and VUSD).

Project Strategies and Community Actions

Strategies to counter pro-marijuana influences were developed in collaboration with prevention organizations throughout San Diego County in 2004 under the HARM Initiative (Health Advocates Rejecting Marijuana). HARM is comprised of prevention leaders, law enforcement and community members to help coordinate, support, develop and implement marijuana prevention strategies in San Diego County. **HARM's strategies focus on two primary goals: 1) Reducing the retail availability of marijuana and drug paraphernalia, and 2) Reducing community and media messages that encourage or trivialize marijuana use, particularly among youth.** As a local coalition, it was NCPC's role to assess, plan, and implement HARM campaign strategies in the cities of Carlsbad, Oceanside, and Vista.

Reduce Retail Availability of Marijuana and Drug Paraphernalia

- NCPC mobilized key leaders and community members to advocate for local bans on marijuana dispensaries. As explained in an August 2008 memo from the California Attorney General's Office, the for-profit sale of marijuana through storefronts (or otherwise) is prohibited and not in compliance with California's 'Compassionate Use Act' of 1996. **The cities of Carlsbad, Oceanside and Vista do not permit marijuana dispensaries,** and the City Attorney's offices have spent significant resources closing those that open illegally.
- Through a combination of zoning ordinances (Oceanside) and internal permitting processes (Carlsbad and Vista), NCPC helped prevent the proliferation of smoke shops/head shops in its region. This reduced access and availability of drug paraphernalia.



Reduce Community Messages that Encourage or Trivialize Marijuana Use

- NCPC worked with community event organizers to prevent the sale and marketing of pro-drug merchandise by implementing vendor policies. Oceanside Harbor Days was the first event to adopt such a policy in 2004. **As of 2013, nearly 20 events throughout San Diego County implement the policy prohibiting the sale of 'tobacco, tobacco/drug paraphernalia, or any item that promotes the use of illicit drugs,'** including the San Diego County Fair with an annual attendance of over 2 million people.
- Since 2004, NCPC has sponsored an annual **'420 Remix – A Celebration of Sober and Drug Free Life Choices'** event on April 20 to counter the pro-marijuana messages common on that day. Over ten thousand youth have participated since the inception.
- Youth groups throughout the County implemented 'drugwear' campaigns to reduce the sale of pro-drug items at mainstream retail outlets. As a result, many retailers removed such products (including Vans shoes, pictured at right).



Key Evaluation Findings

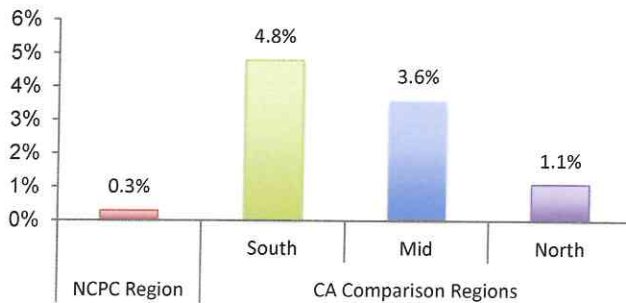
The evaluation enhancement consisted of two parts: longitudinal quantitative analyses of California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) data and a qualitative component conducted as Participatory Action Research (PAR) to contextualize the longitudinal findings. This was conducted by professors in the Department of Sociology at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM).

CHKS data was obtained from WestEd from a total of 12 different school districts (3 from NCPC's region and nine other comparison districts split across three regions). The comparison districts were matched with the program districts on several characteristics including racial and economic factors. Data covered the school years 1998/99 to 2009/10.

Marijuana Use in the Last 30 days:

- While past 30-day use of marijuana increased in all four regions from 1998/99 to 2009/10, **the increase was significantly less in the NCPC program region.**

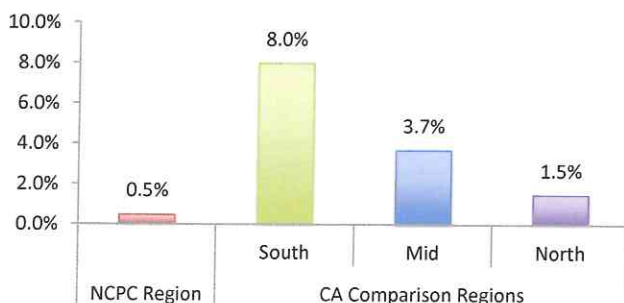
Figure 2: Marijuana Usage Last 30 Days: Change Baseline (1998/99) – Endpoint (2009/10)



Marijuana Use Over Lifetime:

- All regions showed an increase in lifetime marijuana use from 1998/99 to 2009/10, **though the NCPC program region showed the smallest increase (.50%).** This increase was significantly smaller than all the other comparison regions.

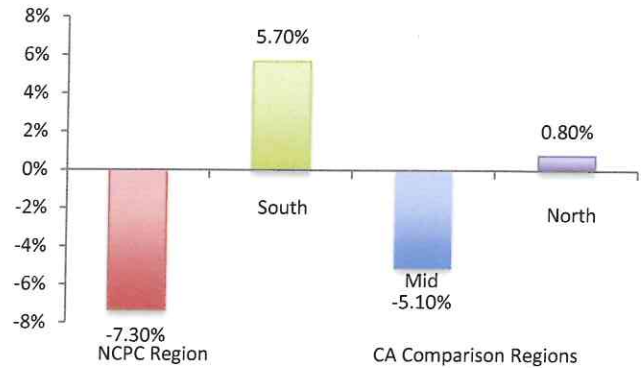
Figure 3: Marijuana Usage Lifetime: Change Baseline (1998/99) – Endpoint (2009/10)



Ease of Access to Marijuana:

- Students reporting marijuana was 'fairly' or 'very' easy to obtain decreased 7.3% in the NCPC program region from 1998/99 to 2009/10.** This decrease was significantly better than the comparison regions.

Figure 9: Marijuana Access: Change Baseline (1998/99) – Endpoint (2009/10)



Challenges and Lessons Learned:

Interviews were conducted with program staff, coalition leadership, and key stakeholders familiar with program efforts. **The interviews revealed three main themes:**

- The challenge of uniformly applying/conducting program strategies in different communities:**
 - Local jurisdictions had different procedures for prohibiting dispensaries and/or regulating drug paraphernalia sales.
 - NCPC's '420 Remix – A Celebration of Sober and Drug Free Life Choices' held annually on April 20 changed over time and was difficult to involve and engage the entire region.
- Public policies and politics work against the message of the program:**
 - Changes in federal priorities regarding marijuana enforcement, and public confusion with State and local laws, make it challenging to create a fine-tuned marijuana prevention message.
- Battling big money and the media's normalization of marijuana:**
 - Small local campaigns stand against nationwide movements to legalize marijuana.
 - Pro-marijuana movements' effective use of the media to disseminate their message has changed public opinion.

Recommendations for Community Coalitions

Identify what's doable

As a community coalition, NCPC supports broader efforts aimed at state and national policy, but focuses its limited time and resources on local efforts. Program strategies were developed to counter pro-marijuana influences observed within its region – from an increasing number of smoke-shops to pro-drug merchandise at street fairs and retail stores. Community partners were then engaged to tackle local issues.

Utilize the media to increase public awareness

Involving the media was a key component of program strategies to inform the public and build community support. From press conferences, letters to the editor, and community events, media coverage helped spread the word about teen marijuana use and community strategies to prevent it. Communities should consider involving the media based on community realities and local needs.

Strengthen and enforce policies to prevent drug use

This project showed that policies matter. When ordinances and policies were implemented in communities to reduce drug paraphernalia shops and pro-marijuana messaging, those communities exhibited better outcomes than communities without such policies. Policies aren't limited to State or National laws, but can include local ordinances and voluntary business policies (such as refusing to sell pro-drug merchandise).

Strengthen and enhance collaboration with new and existing partners

Success would not have been found if it were not for multiple interests rallying behind a common cause. Coalitions should work outside their comfort zone to find new partners. These partners can be crucial when trying to convey anti-drug messages to the wider community.

Expect challenges – and adapt for success

Community characteristics and fluctuations in political will mean that coalitions need to stay aware of political changes and be ready to adjust program implementation strategies when necessary. In addition, the increasing 'business' of marijuana brings challenges as big money and media representations normalize marijuana use. Still, this program provides evidence that even local public and private policy interventions can impact population-level change at the community level.

Resources and Additional Information

Research Support for Comprehensive Community Interventions to Reduce Youth Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use and Abuse, 2010, CADCA National Coalition Institute, 625 Slaters Lane, Suite 300, Alexandria VA 22314, www.cadca.org



Marijuana Legalization Issues – Top 10 Messages Against Legalization, Smart Approaches to Marijuana, www.learnaboutsam.com



For a complete Executive Summary and links to additional references, visit www.northcoastalpreventioncoalition.org

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