



## Problem Statement

Northern New Mexico has a long history of drug abuse that spans several generations. The trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs are a great burden on citizens, local government, public health systems, social service agencies, education institutions, and law enforcement. These burdens are manifested and measured in many ways; however, the most striking evidence of the impact is the disproportionately high number of drug-related deaths (overdoses, homicides, accidents, or other fatal incidents) that occur in each of our communities.

Like most jurisdictions coping with the crises of widespread addiction, the northern region of New Mexico is also experiencing an increase in drug trafficking, theft, and other crimes that come with increased demand for illegal drugs. Police officers and many officials in the state's criminal justice system believe that the high rates of crime, domestic abuse, and assault and battery are directly attributable to the widespread demand for and abuse of drugs.

**This issue brief provides background for the Northern New Mexico Drug Interdiction Summit being convened in Espanola, New Mexico, February 2010.** Statistics from Rio Arriba County are used as an illustration of the significance of the issues in the region.

**Drug Interdiction Defined:** The interception of illegal drugs being smuggled by air, sea, or land.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, the state Department of Health has focused attention on drug abuse problems in northern New Mexico, primarily because the consequences of drug abuse in this area have been severe since the mid 1990s. However, the issue is significant throughout the state, as the following data indicates:

- New Mexico has the highest drug overdose death rate in the United States.
- Nine of the 10 leading causes of death in New Mexico are partially caused by alcohol, tobacco, or other drug abuse.
- Drug overdoses account for more than 80% of drug-related deaths.

- The most common drugs causing death are morphine, heroin, cocaine, alcohol, methadone, and oxycodone (the active ingredient in some prescription pain relievers).
- It is estimated that at least 90% of all criminal cases are directly related to drug dependency.<sup>2</sup>

## Drug Threat Assessment

The largest drug threat in New Mexico is the movement of drugs and drug proceeds by Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (MDTOs), which have established local, multiple-drug distribution organizations that are capable of distributing multiple kilogram quantities locally and regionally.<sup>3</sup> The Region III Drug Task Force based in Santa Fe identifies powder cocaine, crack, marijuana, and heroin as highly available. Powder cocaine is the major threat in Santa Fe, while Rio Arriba County is inundated with heroin. Mexican-based groups operate throughout both counties, distributing marijuana as well.<sup>4</sup>

Heroin abuse is endemic in the upper Rio Grande and Espanola Valley areas of New Mexico encompassing portions of Bernalillo, Rio Arriba and Santa Fe Counties. In Rio Arriba County, multigenerational heroin abuse is common in the communities of Abiquiu, Alcalde, Chimayo, and Espanola. Children of those users often start abusing the drug as teenagers. Their parents and grandparents usually abuse and often distribute the drug.<sup>5</sup>

### Rio Arriba County Drug Use 2005<sup>6</sup>

(Use by high school respondents, reported on 2005 Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey)

Heroin (past 12 months)	4%
Methamphetamine (past 12 months)	6%
Cocaine (past 30 days)	6%
Marijuana (past 30 days)	11%

A 2007 school survey in New Mexico reported that approximately 25% of students in grades 9 to 12 had used marijuana in the past month, compared with 20% nationwide. New Mexico students also reported higher use of cocaine, inhalants, heroin, methamphetamine, and Ecstasy (a hallucinogenic drug) than students nationwide.<sup>7</sup>

Drugs are a key factor in crime as many addicts need money to meet their addiction leading to robbery, prostitution, and scams. Often, those who are arrested are either intoxicated at the time of their arrest or are committing a crime to support their drug habit.<sup>8</sup>

New Mexico Select Offenses Arrests 2006 <sup>9</sup>		
Offense	Juvenile	Total
Larceny	1,102	4,039
Drug Abuse Violations	927	5,775
Liquor Laws	620	3,716
Robbery	334	2,290
Burglary	266	984

Rio Arriba Drug Arrests <sup>10</sup> (7/1/06 to 7/1/07)				
Drug	Sale & Manufacturing	Possession	Juvenile	Total
Heroin	3	7	0	10
Methamphetamine	0	0	0	0
Cocaine	2	25	0	27
Marijuana	4	48	25	77
Prescription Drugs	2	5	4	11
<b>Total Arrests</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>125</b>

According to the New Mexico Drug Enforcement Advisory Committee, the statewide total arrests for most of 2007 were approximately 2,500 with 42% of these offenders having prior felony convictions.

### Gang Threat Assessment

In the last decade, gang violence has escalated throughout the state. The New Mexico correctional system is reported to be one of three states to have the highest percentage of inmates who are considered a security threat group (STG), a term used to denote a prison gang that most often is responsible for any drug handling inside correctional facilities. The New Mexico Children Youth and Families Department has documented gang members as young as nine years old. It reports that violent gangs are migrating to New Mexico to expand their drug networks. New Mexico law enforcement personnel perceive gang activity to be a problem that is getting worse when compared to the previous year, five years ago, and 10 years ago.<sup>11</sup>

Most Frequent Gang Member Offenses <sup>12</sup>	
Offense	% Ranking in the Top 3
Drug Sales	59%
Aggravated Assault	54%
Graffiti/Vandalism	54%
Drug Possession	35%
Burglary	32%

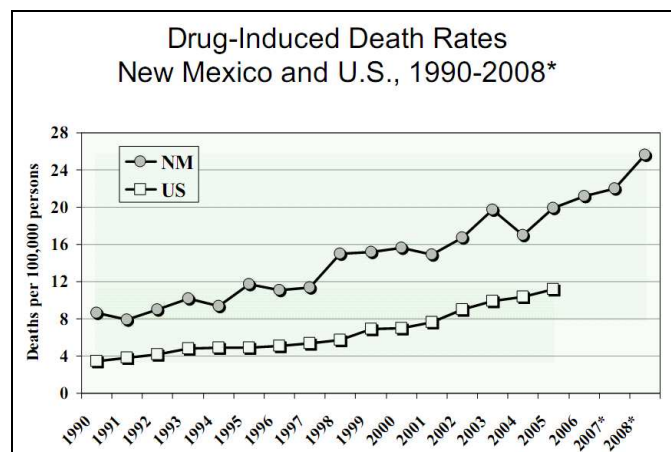
### Violent Crime Assessment

New Mexico's population is about 2 million. Based on the FBI's Uniform Crime Report 2006 data, for violent crime, the state reported an incident rate of 643 per 100,000 people. New Mexico was the second most dangerous state in which to live in 2007, according to the Morgan Quinto Press, a publishing and research company that compiles crime statistics.

Crimes Handled by the City of Espanola Criminal Investigations Division 2006 <sup>13</sup>	
Crime	Number
Weapons	148
Aggravated Assault	140
Burglary	85
Drugs	26
Robbery	16
Homicide	0

### Health Threat Assessment

The physical and physiological health of someone who has a drug addiction is also compromised, leading to problems ranging from heart disease to memory loss that have long-term consequences.<sup>14</sup> Drug-related deaths are also of concern in New Mexico. There has been a 250% increase in overdose deaths caused by the combination of illicit and prescription drugs since 2003.<sup>15</sup> For many years New Mexico has ranked among the top three states for drug-induced deaths. Most are the result of unintentional drug poisoning or overdose.<sup>16</sup>



\*US: CDC Wonder, NM Vital Records and Health Statistics, NMDOH, 2008.

Studies have shown that many Hispanic youth can be considered at high risk for substance abuse problems.<sup>17</sup> Again, this is significant to New Mexicans because 44% of our population is Hispanic.<sup>18</sup>

New Mexico Drug Induced Deaths 2005-2007 <sup>19</sup>	
Race/Ethnicity	Rate per 100,000
Hispanic	25
White	20
African American	17
American Indian	10
Asian/Pacific Islanders	6

Rio Arriba County is one of three counties in the state with the highest unintentional drug overdose death rates from 2005 to 2007.

Northern New Mexico Drug-Related Deaths 1999-2003 <sup>20</sup>		
County	Deaths	Rate per 100,000
Los Alamos	10	11
Rio Arriba	90	44
Santa Fe	129	19
Taos	29	19

In 2005, New Mexico statistics show that an estimated 48,000 individuals had an illicit drug abuse, dependence, or addiction problem. Studies also show that 45,000 individuals were in need of drug addiction treatment, but did not receive it.<sup>21</sup>

### Economic Threat Assessment

The cost of substance abuse in the U.S. is estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars per year, including the costs of medical care, treatment services, criminal justice, and lost productivity.<sup>22</sup> This economic burden falls particularly heavily on New Mexico, since it is one of the nation's poorest states with the third highest percentage of people living in poverty in 2005 (18.5%).<sup>23</sup>

### Federal and State Alliances

The Executive Office of the White House, **Office of National Drug Control Policy** (ONDCP) establishes policies, priorities, and goals for the nation's drug control program. ONDCP's National Drug Control Strategy directs the nation's anti-drug efforts and establishes a program, budget, and guidelines for cooperation among federal, state, and local entities. The overarching goal of the strategy is to reduce drug use through a balanced approach that focuses on:

- Stopping use before it starts through concerted community-based efforts aimed at creating an environment where drug use is not accepted

- Healing drug users by improving access to treatment and ensuring the quality of treatment services
- Disrupting the market for illegal drugs through a combination of law enforcement investigation, interdiction, diplomatic efforts, targeted economic sanction, financial programs and investigations, and institutional development initiatives<sup>24</sup>

New Mexico is one of five states that comprise the **Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area** (HIDTA). This area has been designated by the ONDCP as an area that exhibits serious drug trafficking problems and harmfully impacts other areas of the country. The HIDTA program improves the effectiveness and efficiency of drug control efforts among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies through resource and information sharing, implementing joint initiatives, and providing agencies with infrastructure equipment and technology. These agencies assess drug trafficking problems and design specific initiatives to reduce or eliminate the production, manufacture, transportation, distribution, and chronic use of illegal drugs and money laundering.<sup>25</sup>

The **Region III Drug Enforcement Task Force** is responsible for enforcing and investigating narcotic law violations within Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, and Taos counties. The task force consists of law enforcement officers assigned from the New Mexico State Police, Santa Fe County Sheriff's Department, and the Santa Fe City Police Department. In 2009:

- 341 narcotic cases were investigated
- 154 arrests were made
- 58 kilograms of narcotics, plus 1094 drug-related plants, were seized, for an approximate street value of \$2,000,000.<sup>26</sup>

### Potential Solutions<sup>27</sup>

Most professionals involved in drug interdiction activities agree that reducing the demand for illegal drugs and deterring crime requires a multi-dimensional strategy. This includes a wide range of interventions aimed at enhancing public safety and health, promoting economic development and growth, revitalizing neighborhoods, and strengthening and supporting functional families in order to improve the quality of life for adults and especially youth. Systematic community planning is critical for the long-term reduction of substance abuse and crime in the northern New Mexico region.

The following table presents strategies that might impact drug use and trafficking in northern New Mexico and elsewhere.

**Potential Drug Interdiction Strategies**

**Law Enforcement**

Increasing:

- Interdiction efforts by law enforcement on roadways leading to Santa Fe and Rio Arriba Counties
- Information sharing between Northern NM and Albuquerque Metro law enforcement agencies because of the connection between drug distribution networks<sup>28</sup>
- Street-level narcotic enforcement
- Tactical operations targeting open-air drug markets and drug houses
- Capacity to identify and locate drug houses and nuisance properties
- Multi-agency drug enforcement operations
- Police presence
- Gang enforcement training
- Landlord participation in crime-free multi-housing programs
- Crime mapping and analysis capacity
- Intelligence sharing
- Program evaluation

**Community-Oriented Policing**

Improving:

- Relations between police and neighborhood residents
- Police presence in neighborhoods
- Community involvement in the adjudication process
- Information sharing
- Program evaluation

**Neighborhood Revitalization**

Improving:

- Capacity of residents to coordinate restoration strategies
- Economic development
- Job and skill development
- Program evaluation

**Treatment**

Improving:

- Linguistically and culturally sensitive prevention and treatment programming for drug abuse, gangs, and violence that address risk and protective factors
- Program evaluation

**Conclusion**

Government, law enforcement, criminal justice officials, health officials, and community members have a role to play in addressing drug interdiction issues. Ideally, the recommendations that result from this summit will lead to action plans that will keep the drug trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs from reaching epidemic proportions in northern New Mexico.

**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, US Department of Defense, 2005.
- <sup>2</sup> Espanola Westside Weed and Seed Proposal, 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, NM Factsheet, 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> Southwest Border HIDTA, New Mexico Region, Investigative Support Center. Annual Threat Assessment, 2008. A Regional Approach to Measuring the Threat.
- <sup>5</sup> National Drug Intelligence Center, US Department of Justice, Drug Market Analysis, 2009
- <sup>6</sup> Espanola Westside Weed and Seed Proposal, 2008, numbers rounded.
- <sup>7</sup> NMDOH, The State of Health in New Mexico, 2009.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Drug Trends, NM Drug Trends, www.usdrugtrends.com/new-mexico.htm.
- <sup>9</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, NM Profile of Drug Indicators, 2008.
- <sup>10</sup> Espanola Westside Weed and Seed Proposal, 2008.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> NMDOH, The State of Health in New Mexico, 2009.
- <sup>16</sup> US: CDC Wonder, NM Vital Records and Health Statistics, 2008.
- <sup>17</sup> NCADI, SAMHSA Health Information Network, ncadi.samhas.gov/govpubs/MS441.
- <sup>18</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, NM Profile of Drug Indicators, 2008.
- <sup>19</sup> NMDOH, Drug Deaths, 2009, numbers rounded.
- <sup>20</sup> NMDOH, NM Epidemiology Profile, 2005, numbers rounded.
- <sup>21</sup> Stop Addiction, New Mexico Drug Rehab Report.
- <sup>22</sup> Population Reference Bureau, U.S. Census Bureau 2000-2006.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Information provided by Ernie Ortiz, Regional Director, NM HIDTA.
- <sup>25</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, HIDTA Factsheet, 2008.
- <sup>26</sup> Information provided by Ralph Lopez, Program Manager, Region III Drug Enforcement Task Force.
- <sup>27</sup> Espanola Westside Weed and Seed Proposal, 2008.
- <sup>28</sup> National Drug Intelligence Center, US Department of Justice. Drug Market Analysis, 2010 (in draft).

This brief was developed in preparation for the February 2010 *Northern New Mexico Drug Interdiction Summit*. Participants are encouraged to read it in advance.

The Summit is sponsored by the City of Espanola, the Espanola Weed and Seed Program, the McCune Foundation, and the U.S. Attorney's Office-District of New Mexico. It is organized by New Mexico First.



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