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## Report on drug use in Toronto released

The Toronto Research Group on Drug Use (RGDU), a partnership of more than 20 agencies, has released the 2004 *Drug Use in Toronto* report highlighting illegal drug use in the City. The report provides an overview of the use of specific drugs among various population sub-groups based on recent surveys and other data. Among the findings in this year's report:

- Marijuana use is increasing among all groups surveyed and is approaching the highest levels since monitoring began 30 years ago. This includes students at 23% and the general adult population at 15%. Survey results show a significant proportion of licensed drivers report having driven after smoking marijuana. The high rates of use among students suggest the need for public safety messages in schools concerning marijuana use and driving.
- Surveys indicate very high levels of drug addiction among homeless teens. Many of these youth suffer from concurrent disorders, i.e. mental health and drug addiction. There is currently no residential treatment in Toronto for these youth. Thousands of teens continue to live on the streets and self-medicate with illicit drugs.
- A ten-fold increase in methadone treatment for heroin addiction is credited for a significant decrease in heroin-related deaths in Toronto, from a peak of 67 deaths in 1994 to 25 in 2001.
- Crack cocaine continues to be the most popular drug among homeless and marginalized populations. This has been true for more than a decade in Toronto. Smoked and injected crack cocaine causes serious health and social problems among those living in poverty.
- Data show increased use of other dangerous drugs, including oxycodone and methamphetamine. In 2002, 27 deaths resulted from use of oxycodone, a narcotic pain reliever, compared to the previous peak of seven in 2001. Chewing or dissolving and injecting tablets intended for timed-release adds to the risk of oxycodone-related poisonings, which are being noted in many cities.
- The 2003 data show inhalant (solvent) use reported by 8% of junior high and high school students, and 3% reported sniffing glue. This potentially fatal practice was most popular among the youngest students surveyed. These elevated levels of inhalant use locally mirrors trends reported in the United States, where use is associated with teens being at home alone after school and having very low levels of risk awareness.
- There are increased reports of drug-related poisonings related to the contamination of illicit substances. The variety of drugs available, including popular designer drugs and poly-drugs (combined substances) and the potential for serious injury or death, underline the need to strengthen coordination among agencies to minimize the harm of drug use in the City.

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