

**Substance Abuse Briefing Document**  
**Presented to the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities**  
**September 20, 2007**

**Substance abuse** is a recurring pattern of alcohol or other drug use which impairs a person's functioning. For the purposes of this brief document, the rate of binge drinking (i.e., drinking more than five drinks on at least one occasion) is used as an indicator of alcohol abuse and the rate of drug-induced deaths (i.e., intentional and unintentional poisonings) is used as an indicator of drug abuse.

**CRITERION #1: MAGNITUDE**

---

- In 2005, 14% of Washington adults reported binge drinking during the past month; this rate has remained relatively constant from 1990-2005.
- In 2005, there were 921 drug-induced deaths, 139 of which were suicides, and another 8,128 deaths where drugs contributed to the death.
- From 1990 to 2005, the age-adjusted rate of drug-induced deaths in Washington increased from 5 per 100,000 to 14 per 100,000.

**CRITERION #2: ASSOCIATION TO HEALTH OUTCOMES**

---

- Alcohol abuse can lead to liver disease, such as fatty liver, alcohol-induced hepatitis, and cirrhosis of the liver, and can increase the risk of osteoporosis, pancreatitis, cancer, and infections. Alcohol use is also associated with injuries and deaths related to motor vehicle crashes, falls, drowning, fires, and violence.
- Alcohol abuse during pregnancy is associated with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.
- Long term effects from drug abuse can result in damage to the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, and can suppress the immune system. Injection drug use increases the risk for blood-borne diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis B and C.
- Drug use during pregnancy is associated with low birth weight, prematurity, and congenital malformations.

**CRITERION #3: DISPARITY**

---

- In Washington from 2003-2005, the prevalence of binge drinking was highest among American Indian/Alaska Natives (17%), followed by whites (15%), blacks (14%), Hispanics (11%), and Asians/pacific Islanders (9%), for an Index of Disparity of 58%.
- From 2003-2005, drug-induced death rates (per 100,000) in Washington were highest for American Indians and Alaska Natives (35), followed by blacks (20), whites (14), Hispanics (8), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (3), for an Index of Disparity of 542%.
- In Washington, men had higher rates of binge drinking and drug-induced deaths than women.

**The Index of Disparity** is the average of the difference in rates between the racial/ethnic group with the "best" rate and all other racial/ethnic groups.

*Keppel KG et al., Measuring progress in healthy people 2010. Statistical Notes, no 25. NCHS, 2004.*