

## Huge Success: 10 Years After Portugal Legalizes All Drugs

By [Mark Berman](#) [Opposing Views](#) on Jul 18, 2011

This month marks the 10-year anniversary of Portugal's radical decision to decriminalize the possession of all drugs -- not just marijuana, but cocaine, heroin and everything else in Keith Richards' suitcase. Many experts predicted disaster -- a nation of drug abusers.

Well, 10 years later, the opposite has happened.

According to a report on *AlterNet.org*, Portugal was in the midst of a staggering epidemic of HIV infection among drug users who used needles when it took the drastic step of legalizing all drugs.

It certainly worked for HIV infections, considering they plunged 17%. Meanwhile, drug deaths were cut by half overall.

As far as drug usage, just 10% of adults in Portugal now smoke marijuana. That is the lowest rate in the European Union, and is miniscule compared to the 40% rate in the United States. Heroin use is also down dramatically.

"There is no doubt that the phenomenon of addiction is in decline in Portugal," Joao Goulao, President of the Institute of Drugs and Drugs Addiction, said at a news conference to mark the 10th anniversary of the law.

Glenn Greenwald, who conducted a study of Portugal's drug usage in 2009 for the Cato Institute, told *Time* magazine, "Judging by every metric, drug decriminalization in Portugal has been a resounding success. It has enabled the Portuguese government to manage and control the drug problem far better than virtually every other Western country."

He added, "By freeing its citizens from the fear of prosecution and imprisonment for drug usage, Portugal has dramatically improved its ability to encourage drug addicts to avail themselves of treatment. The resources that were previously devoted to prosecuting and imprisoning drug addicts are now available to provide treatment programs to addicts."

Despite the apparently encouraging results out of Portugal, they are unlikely to sway American officials to make the same move. Government agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration are fiercely devoted to fighting the war on drugs in the same manner it has been conducted for the past 40 years.