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## LOCAL

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### Drugs a \$1 billion monkey on D.C. taxpayers' back

By: HAYLEY PETERSON  
Special to The Examiner  
06/07/09 8:41 PM EDT

Drug use in the nation's capital will eat up nearly \$1 billion — almost one out of every five D.C. taxpayer dollars — in the coming fiscal year, based on information from a new study.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse lumped together all costs associated with drug use in 2005 to determine how much federal, state and local governments were spending. Expenses ranged from health care for smoking-related diseases to incarceration for drug dealers to recovery programs for alcohol and prescription drug addictions.

According to the center's calculations, 18.9 percent of the District's \$4.2 billion budget in 2005 went to drug-related costs.

In Maryland, the figure was 14.9 percent. In Virginia, according to the study, it was 11.1 percent.

Dena Iverson of the D.C. Department of Health pointed out that the data were from 2005 and "a lot of things have changed since then." When asked for specifics, Iverson said she "had people working on it," but never returned further calls.

If the 2005 percentage still holds true, drugs will take a nearly \$1 billion toll on D.C. taxpayers in the year that begins Oct. 1.

The reach of drugs in the District is extensive. One out of every five inmates in D.C. is charged with a drug-related offense, and 40 percent of the 1.2 million emergency room visits each year are related to substance abuse, city officials told The Examiner.

"In the District, despite the millions of dollars that are poured into the drug effort, we still have an open-air market — where drugs are sold out in the open," said Timothy Lynch, a national scholar on drug policy at the Cato Institute. "[That] should be an indication about how poorly enforcement efforts are doing."

Calls to Attorney General Peter Nickles for this story were not returned.

Despite the crushing financial toll of drugs on the city, only \$50 million will specifically go toward prevention through funding for the Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration.

The additional \$950 million will come from the budgets of various city government agencies, from child and family services to the departments of corrections, mental health and education.

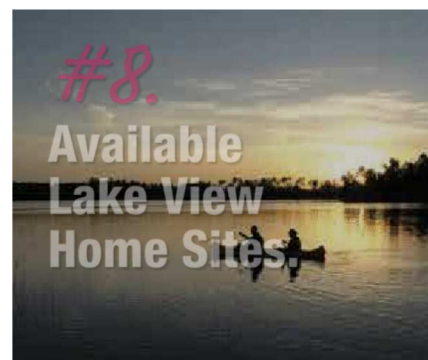
In Fairfax, the county's Alcohol and Drug Services can't keep up with the pressing demand for immediate drug treatment.

"There are not enough treatment dollars out there," Alcohol and Drug Services chief Will Williams said.

Dick Kunkel, who heads Montgomery County's Adult Addictions Program, agreed.

"In this economic time when resources are tight, when you have to battle for resources between education, public safety and others, it's hard to get the money you need," Kunkel said.

Said Williams: "Legislators try to force us into answering, 'What is the most pressing issue?' Well, they are all pressing."



#### Reader Comments

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#### brogers

Jun 7, 2009

You are constantly screaming for more money at the taxpayers expense. Enough already!

#### marleneb

Jun 7, 2009

Stop the war on drugs which has not accomplished a thing and stop bleeding the taxpayers. Smokers, contrary to popular belief out of Washington, do NOT cost taxpayers a thing, they feed your coffers that you so blatantly waste in Washington!

#### ichoosefreedom

Jun 8, 2009

I have a suggestion on how to save money. STOP buying Nicotine Replacement Therapy products. They have a 98.4% FAILURE RATE for quitting smoking 1 year or longer. If Planned Parenthood tried to get the government to pay for condoms with a 98.4% failure rate, would they give them the money?

#### DM

Jun 8, 2009

Obviously drug prevention does not work. I think the prevention programs stay in business for PAYCHECKS. Some prevention is per NANNY-ISM only.

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