

Drug Trends in Phoenix and Arizona: 2013

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ABSTRACT

Two key findings for the Phoenix area (Maricopa County) in 2013 were a 5-year increase in treatment admissions for other opioids (opioids other than heroin) and cocaine-related inpatient hospital admissions in Maricopa County, which declined during 2007–2012, were relatively flat in 2013. Cocaine treatment episodes (as a percentage of total treatment episodes) declined during 2007–2009 but were stable during 2010–2013. Amphetamine-related hospital admissions increased during 2009–2013 (most amphetamine-related hospital admissions are probably related to methamphetamine, a type of amphetamine). The bulk of this increase in amphetamine-related hospital admissions was among patients age 40 and older (i.e., older users). Heroin/opioid-related hospital admissions rose in 2013, extending an upward trend that has continued since 2005 (heroin/opioid-related hospital admissions include admissions related to heroin and other opioids). Primary heroin treatment episodes (as a percentage of total treatment episodes) increased in 2013. Marijuana/cannabis-related hospital admissions increased in the second half of 2013. In order, the top four drugs identified among items analyzed by the National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) from the Maricopa County area during 2013 were marijuana/cannabis, methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine. Oxycodone, a prescription opioid, was the fifth most common drug report identified among drug items seized and analyzed by NFLIS laboratories in 2013. MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) (ecstasy) reports among drug items analyzed by NFLIS laboratories decreased in 2013. The price for a pound of methamphetamine reportedly decreased from a range of \$5,500–\$7,500 in the first half of 2013 to a range of \$3,300–\$4,100 in the second half of 2013. Cross-border marijuana trafficking using ultralight aircraft appears to have picked up in the Yuma area recently. Emergent human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) rates related to injection drug use have declined slowly but steadily over the past several years.

INTRODUCTION

Area Description

Maricopa County, which includes the State capital, Phoenix, is Arizona's primary population center, with 4,009,412 residents in 2013, making it the fourth most populous county in the United States. In 2012, 57.9 percent of the population were White (non-Latino); 30.0 percent were Latino; 5.6 percent were Black; 3.9 percent were Asian; and 2.7 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native. Maricopa County is located in the central part of Arizona and includes more than 20 cities and towns, as well as multiple Indian reservations, the largest of which are the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community and the Gila River Indian Community.

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Data Sources

This report is based on the most recent available data obtained from the following sources:

- **Treatment episodes data** came from the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Division of Clinical Recovery Services, Bureau of Grants Management, Training and Administration, Evaluation Unit. Treatment data include clients age 18 and older. The amount of funding available for treatment in Arizona has fluctuated in recent years, largely due to the economic recession. This fluctuation could have impacted some types of drug treatment episodes more than others, making temporal trends in drug treatment episodes challenging to interpret. Treatment episode data in this report should be considered with this caveat in mind.
- **Hospital admissions (inpatient) data** came from analyses conducted by the University of Arizona, Department of Family and Community Medicine, using hospital discharge records from the Arizona Hospital Discharge Data System operated by the Arizona Department of Health Services.
- **Law enforcement data**, including price information and drug trafficking patterns, were obtained from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Phoenix Field Division.
- **Self-reported youth drug use data** were obtained from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), Arizona High School Survey, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- **Forensic drug analysis data** were obtained from the National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS). NFLIS methodology allows for the accounting of up to three drugs per item submitted for analysis. The data presented (reports) are a combined count including primary, secondary, and tertiary reports for each drug.
- **Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) data** were obtained from the ADHS, Bureau of Epidemiology and Disease Control, Office of HIV/STD Services.
- **Population data** were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau.

DRUG ABUSE PATTERNS AND TRENDS

Cocaine/Crack

In 2013, ADHS/DBHS data indicated that primary cocaine treatment episodes constituted 4 percent of the total treatment episodes in Maricopa County (Phoenix area) (exhibit 1). Primary cocaine treatment episodes (as a percentage of total treatment episodes) declined during 2007–2009 and then remained fairly stable through 2013 (exhibit 2). Cocaine-related inpatient hospital admissions in Maricopa County declined during 2007–2012 but were relatively flat in 2013 (exhibit 3). In 2013, cocaine-related hospitalizations were substantially lower than heroin/opioid-related, cannabis-related, and amphetamine-related admissions (most amphetamine-related hospital admissions involve methamphetamine, a type of amphetamine). In 2013, approximately 10.1 percent of Arizona high school students surveyed in the YRBS reported use of cocaine in their lifetime, a statistically significant decline from 15.1 percent in 2003 (exhibit 4).

Cocaine was the fourth most common drug reported for Maricopa County among drug items seized and analyzed by NFLIS laboratories in 2013 (exhibit 5). The number of Maricopa County NFLIS cocaine reports decreased from 729 reports in 2012 to 661 reports in 2013 (exhibit 6). The price for an ounce of powder cocaine was approximately \$600–\$800 in the second half of 2013; the price for an ounce of crack cocaine was approximately \$650–\$800.

Heroin

Primary heroin/morphine treatment episodes, as a percentage of total treatment episodes, increased from 10 percent in 2007 to 20 percent in 2010. Such episodes decreased to 13 and 14 percent in 2011 and 2012, respectively, and then rose to 19 percent in 2013 (exhibit 2). Such fluctuations could be due in part to an administrative (funding-related) artifact, as noted in the Data Sources section. Heroin/opioid-related hospital admissions in Maricopa County increased in 2013, extending an upward trend that has generally continued since 2005 (exhibit 3). Heroin/opioid-related hospital admissions include admissions related to heroin and admissions related to other opioids (e.g., oxycodone and hydrocodone). Hospital data coding is such that specific types of opioids cannot be separated for analysis. In 2013, approximately 4.7 percent of high school students surveyed in Arizona reported use of heroin at some point in their life (exhibit 4).

Heroin was the third most common drug reported among drug items seized and analyzed by NFLIS laboratories in Maricopa County in 2013 (exhibit 5). NFLIS reports identified as heroin increased in 2013 to 1,720 reports (from 1,334 reports in 2012) (exhibit 6). The price for a gram of black tar heroin was approximately \$60–\$70 in the second half of 2013; the price for a gram of Mexican brown heroin was approximately \$70–\$90.

Other Opiates/Narcotics

As a percentage of treatment episodes, other opioids increased steadily from 3 percent in 2008 to 8 percent in 2013 (exhibit 2). In 2013, oxycodone and hydrocodone were the fifth and seventh most common drug reports, respectively, among items analyzed by NFLIS laboratories (exhibit 5). NFLIS reports of oxycodone and hydrocodone among items analyzed were lower in 2013 than in 2012 (with oxycodone declining from 455 reports in 2012 to 449 reports in 2013 and hydrocodone reports declining from 193 to 150 reports from 2012 to 2013), but buprenorphine reports increased from 108 to 134 reports from 2012 to 2013 (exhibit 7).

In 2013, approximately 10.6 percent of Arizona high school students surveyed reported taking a prescription drug (such as OxyContin®, Percocet®, Vicodin®, Adderall®, Ritalin®, or Xanax®) without a doctor's prescription in the past 30 days, compared with 12.9 percent in 2011 and 12.6 percent in 2009. In the second half of 2013, the street low-high pill prices for selected pain medications were as follows—codeine, \$2–\$3; hydrocodone, \$1–\$2; methadone, \$10–\$13; morphine, \$1–\$2; oxycodone, \$6–\$40; OxyContin®, \$15–\$80; Percocet®, \$2–\$6; and Vicodin®, \$2–\$5. A methadone wafer was \$10–\$13.

Benzodiazepines/Barbiturates

Two benzodiazepines—alprazolam and clonazepam—were among the top 10 drugs most frequently reported by NFLIS for Maricopa County in 2013, ranking sixth and ninth, respectively (exhibit 5).

Methamphetamine/Amphetamines

In 2013, methamphetamine was the most common primary illicit drug involved in treatment episodes in Maricopa County (exhibit 1). Amphetamine-related hospital admissions were stable during 2008 and the first half of 2009, but they began to increase in the second half of 2009 and generally continued doing so through 2013 (exhibit 3).

In 2013, in Maricopa County, 15 percent of the amphetamine-related hospital admissions involved persons younger than age 25, whereas 44 percent involved persons age 40 and older (exhibit 8). (Most amphetamine-related hospital admissions are probably related to methamphetamine, a type of amphetamine.) During 1991–1994, the ratio of amphetamine-related hospital admissions for those younger than 25 to amphetamine-related hospital admissions for 40–59-year-olds rose and eventually reached a level of approximately 3.5:1 (i.e., those younger than 25 outnumbered 40–59-year-olds by about that ratio). A more even ratio of the two age groups was seen from 1996 through 2006. But in 2007, admissions for 40–59-year-olds began outpacing admissions for those younger than 25, reaching a ratio of about three 40–59-year-olds to one admission younger than 25 in 2010.

In 2013, approximately 4.7 percent of Arizona high school students surveyed in the Arizona YRBS reported use of methamphetamine during their life; this was a statistically significant decline from 10.6 percent in 2003 (exhibit 4).

Methamphetamine was the second most common drug identified among seized drug items analyzed by NFLIS laboratories in Maricopa County in 2013 (exhibit 5). The number of reports for methamphetamine increased from 1,846 reports in 2012 to 2,374 reports in 2013 (exhibit 6). The price for a pound of methamphetamine reportedly decreased from a range of \$5,500–\$7,500 in the first half of 2013 to a range of \$3,300–\$4,100 in the second half of 2013.

Marijuana/Cannabis

Seventeen percent of treatment episodes in 2013 involved marijuana/cannabis as the primary drug of abuse, making it the third most common illicit drug associated with treatment episodes (exhibit 1). Marijuana treatment episodes, as a percentage of total treatment episodes, increased from 17 percent in 2010 to 24 percent in 2011, then decreased to 20 and 17 percent in 2012 and 2013, respectively (exhibit 2). Such fluctuation could be due in part to an administrative (funding-related) artifact, as noted in the Data Sources section. Marijuana/cannabis hospital admissions increased from 2007 through the first half of 2011, dropped slightly and remained lower with little change through the first half of 2013, then rose in the second half of 2013 (exhibit 3). In 2013, approximately 43.3 percent of high school students surveyed reported using marijuana during their life (exhibit 4).

Marijuana/cannabis was the most common drug identified among items seized and analyzed by NFLIS laboratories in Maricopa County in 2013 (exhibit 5). Reports for marijuana/cannabis decreased from 2012 to 2013 (from 3,399 to 2,771 reports) (exhibit 6). The price for a pound of marijuana was approximately \$400–\$650 in the second half of 2013; the price for a hydroponic ounce was approximately \$300–\$500.

There was a report that cross-border marijuana trafficking using ultralight aircraft may have increased in the Yuma area recently.

“Club Drugs”

The percentages of treatment episodes with MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine)/ecstasy and LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) as the primary drugs of abuse were relatively low in 2013 (such episodes were included in the “Other Drugs” category of exhibit 1). In 2013, approximately 6.9 percent of the high school students in the Arizona YRBS reported using ecstasy (MDMA) in the past 30 days.

Maricopa County NFLIS reports identified as MDMA among analyzed drug items decreased from 36 in 2012 to 22 in 2013. NFLIS reports of TFMPP (1-[3-trifluoromethylphenyl]piperazine) decreased from 45 in 2012 to 9 in 2013. NFLIS reports of BZP (1-benzylpiperazine), which is sometimes marketed as MDMA, decreased from 19 in 2012 to 1 in 2013. There were no NFLIS reports of LSD in 2012 and one report of LSD in 2013.

PCP (Phencyclidine)

There were six NFLIS reports for PCP among analyzed drug items for Maricopa County in 2013.

Other Drugs

In 2013, approximately 4.5 percent of high school students in the Arizona YRBS reported sniffing glue, breathing the content of aerosol spray cans, or inhaling paints/sprays to get high on the past 30 days. About 5.9 percent of the students reported taking steroid pills or shots without a doctor’s prescription during their lifetime.

There were 86 NFLIS reports of carisoprodol among analyzed drug items in 2013; carisoprodol ranked 10th among drug reports in Maricopa County in 2013. NFLIS reports of synthetic cannabinoids were low, but they varied chemically from 2011 through 2013 (exhibit 9).

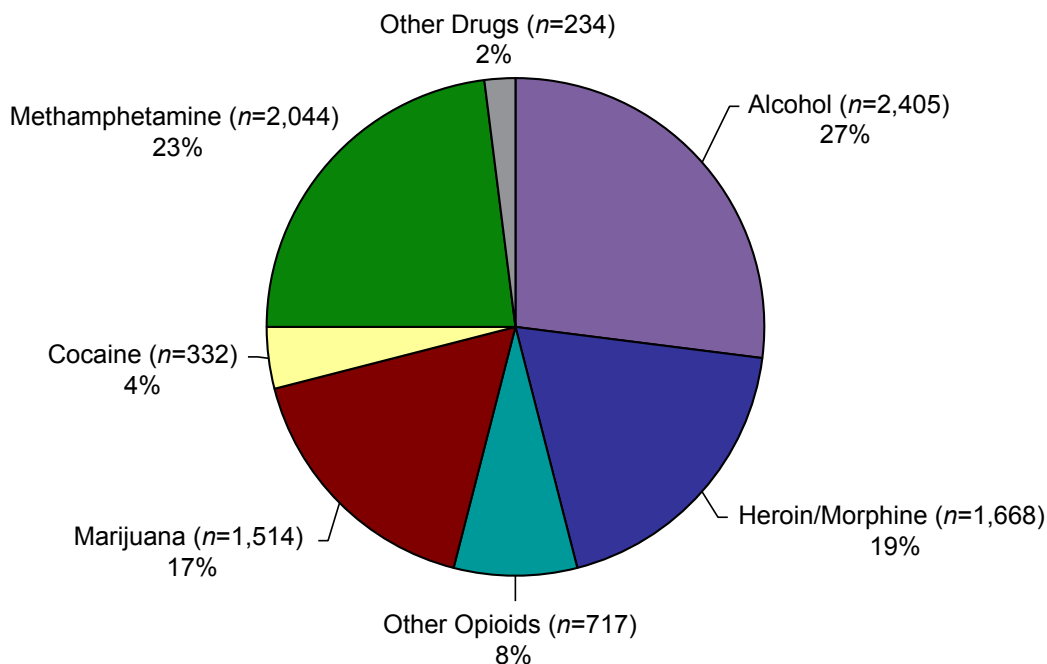
INFECTIOUS DISEASES RELATED TO DRUG ABUSE

HIV/AIDS

Five-year emergent HIV/AIDS rates related to injection drug use have declined over the past several years (exhibit 10).

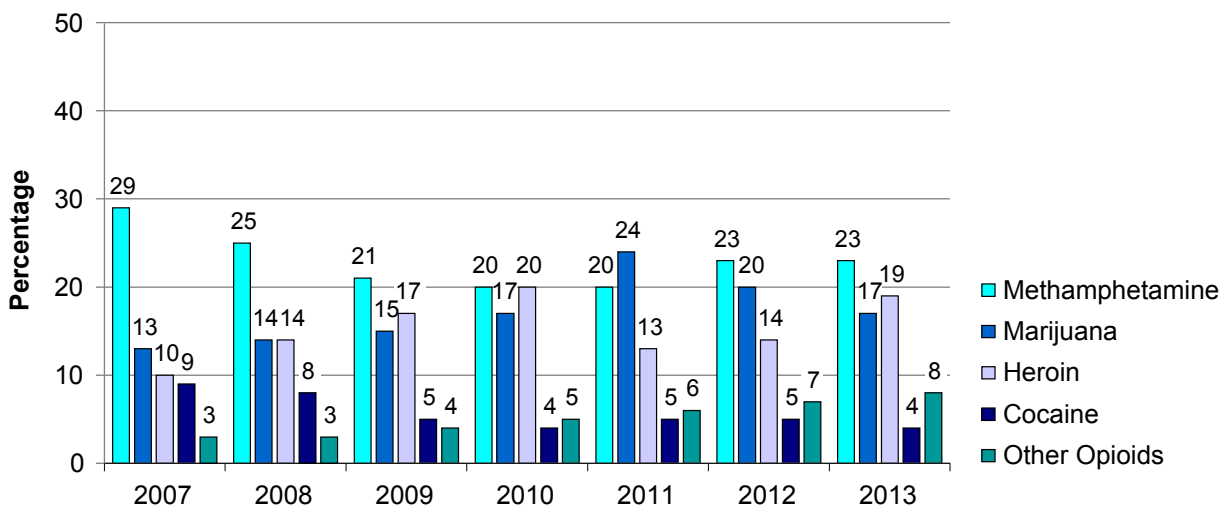
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Exhibit 1. Number and Percentage of Treatment Episodes by Primary Substance of Abuse, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area): 2013



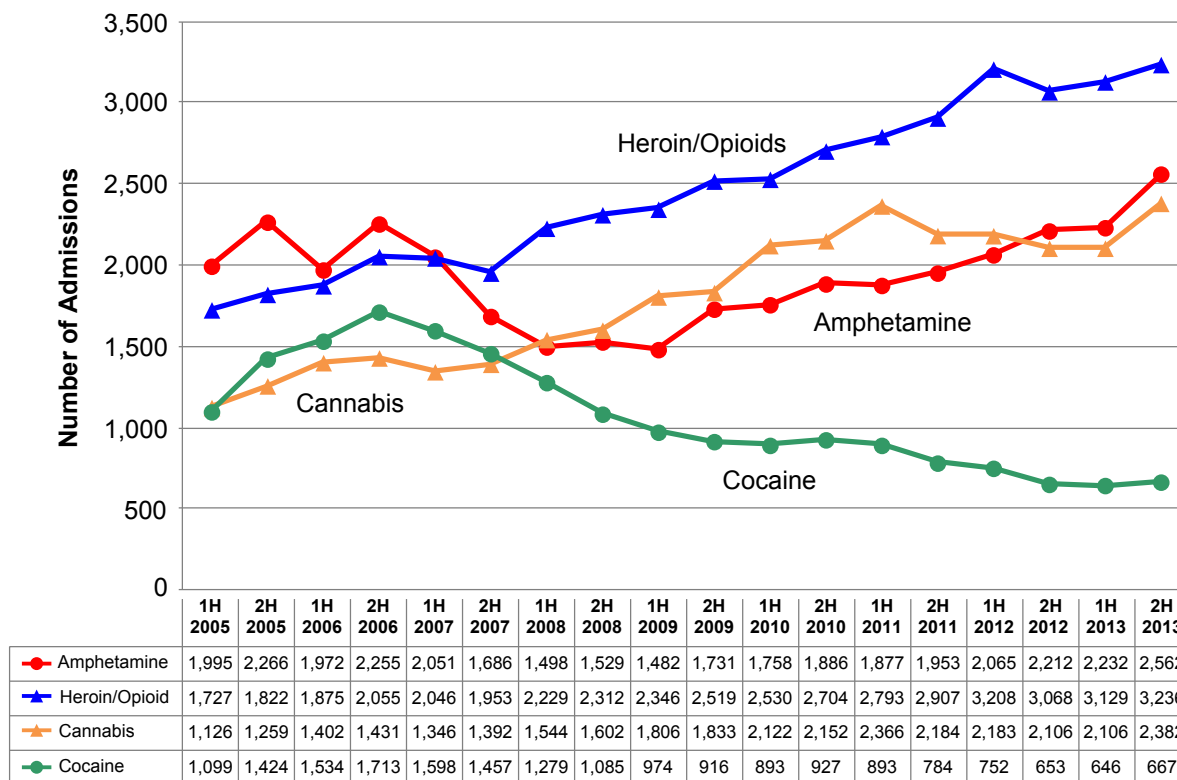
SOURCE: Arizona Department of Health Services

Exhibit 2. Percentage of Treatment Episodes by Primary Substance Used, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area): 2007–2013



SOURCE: Arizona Department of Health Services

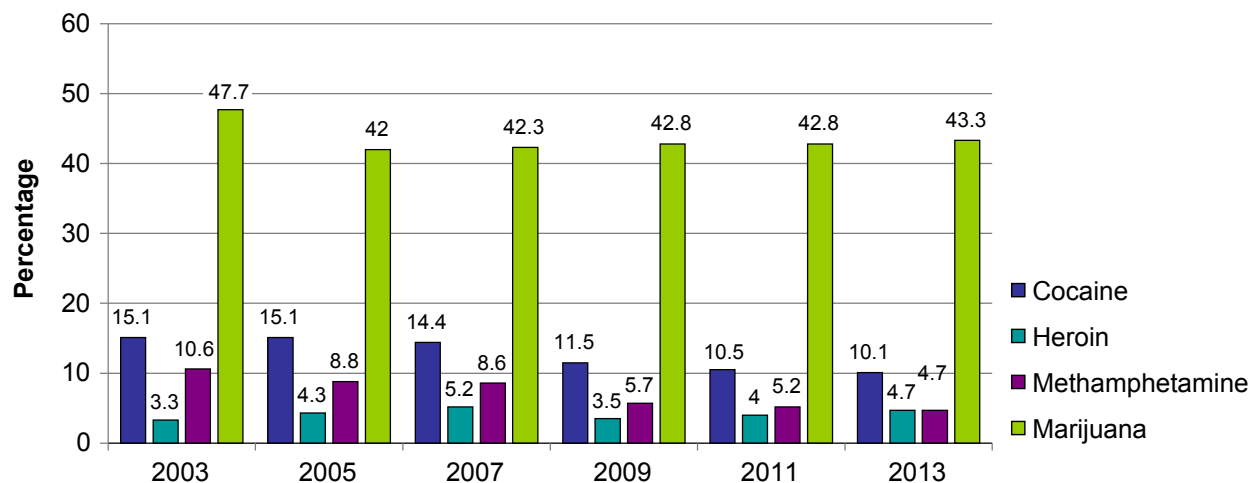
Exhibit 3. Number of Hospital Admissions Related to Cocaine, Amphetamine,¹ Marijuana/Cannabis, and Heroin/Opioids, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area): 2005–2013, by Half-Years



¹Most amphetamine-related hospital admissions are probably related to methamphetamine, a type of amphetamine.

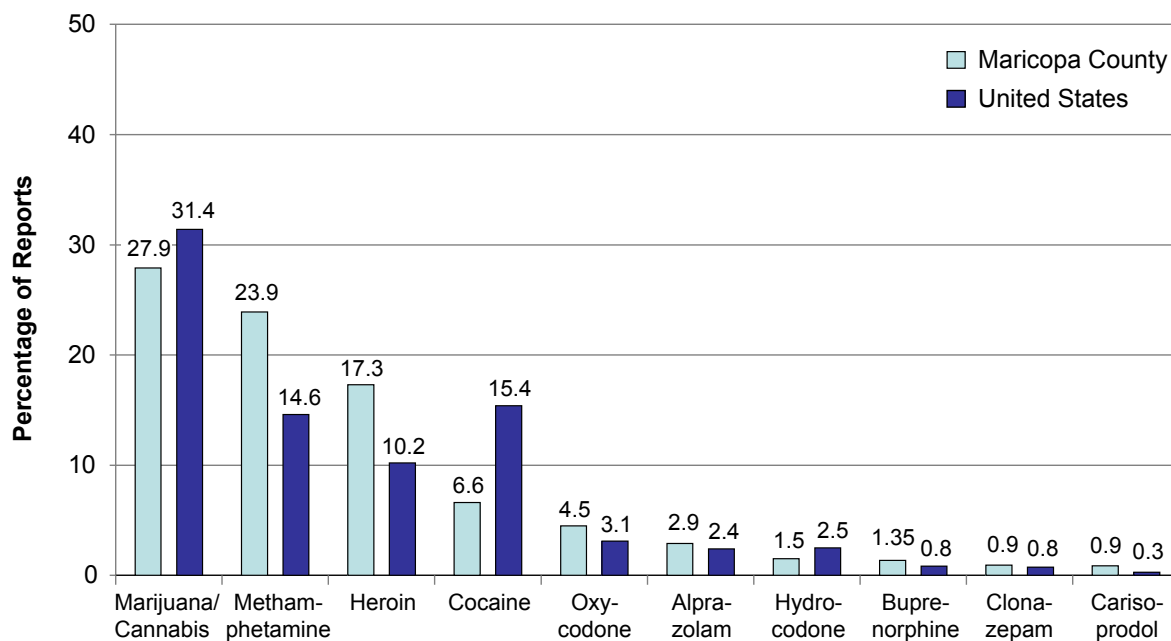
SOURCE: Arizona Hospital Discharge Data System, Arizona Department of Health Services; analysis by the University of Arizona Department of Family and Community Medicine

Exhibit 4. Reported Lifetime Use of Cocaine, Heroin, Methamphetamine, and Marijuana, by Percentage, From the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Arizona High School Survey: 2003–2013



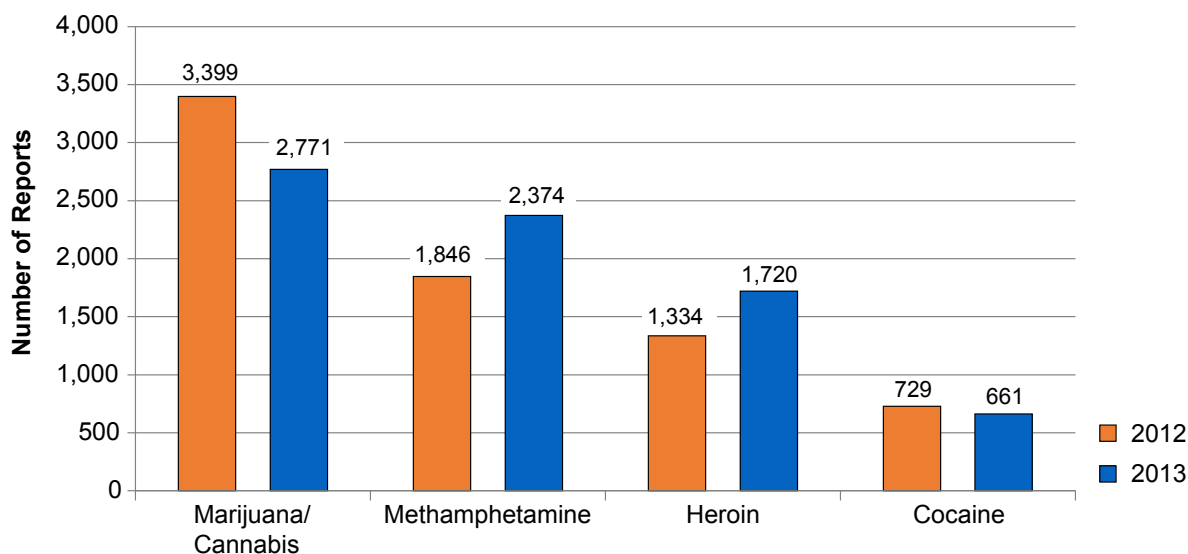
SOURCE: YRBS, CDC

Exhibit 5. The 10 Most Common NFLIS Drug Reports Among Drug Items Seized and Analyzed by Forensic Laboratories, as a Percentage of Total Reports, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area) and the United States: 2013



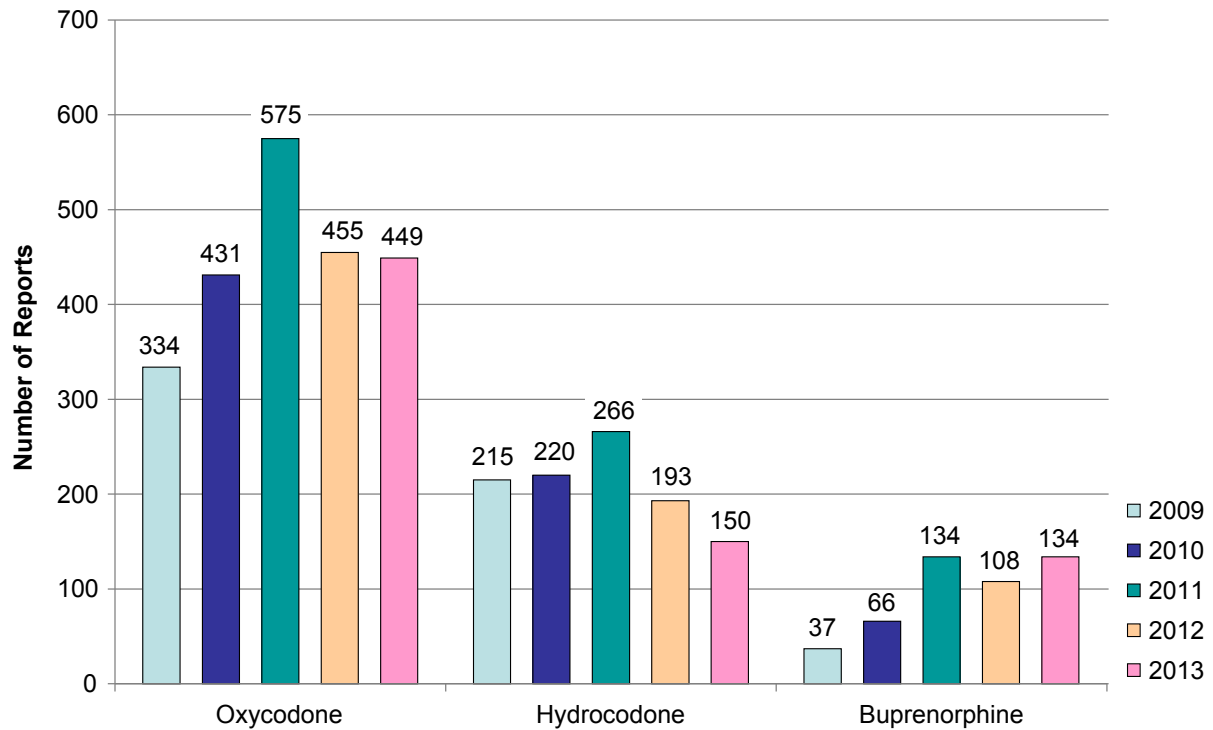
Source: NFLIS, DEA

Exhibit 6. Number of Marijuana/Cannabis, Methamphetamine, Heroin, and Cocaine NFLIS Drug Reports Among Drug Items Seized and Analyzed in Forensic Laboratories, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area): 2012–2013



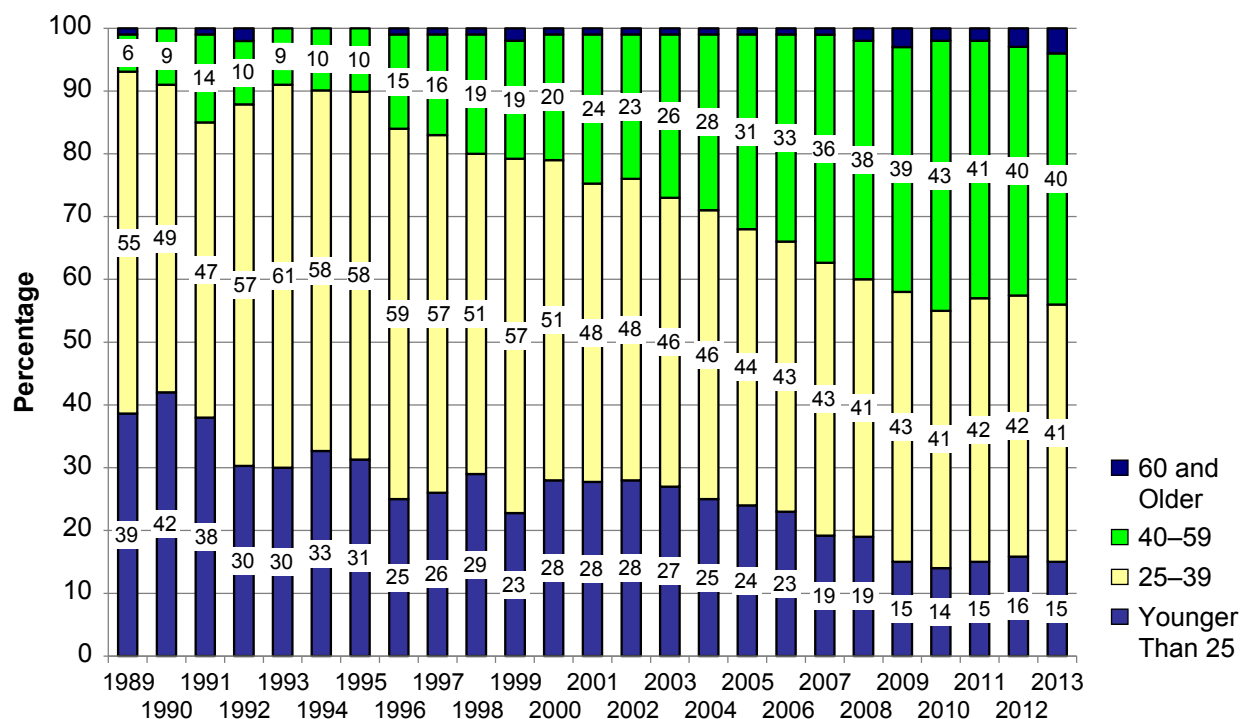
Source: NFLIS, DEA

Exhibit 7. Number of Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, and Buprenorphine NFLIS Drug Reports Among Drug Items Seized and Analyzed in Forensic Laboratories, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area): 2009–2013



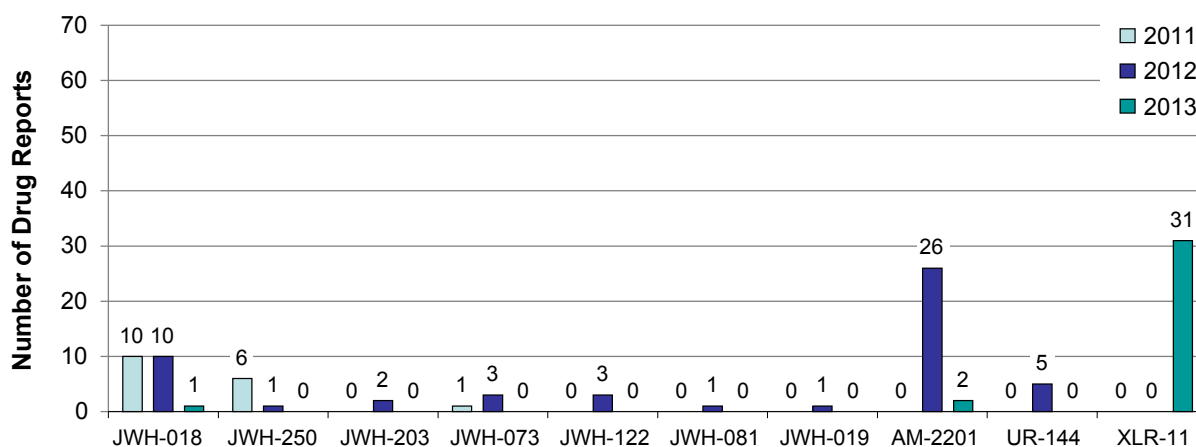
SOURCE: NFLIS, DEA

Exhibit 8. Percentage of Amphetamine-Related¹ Hospital Admissions by Age Group, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area): 1989–2013



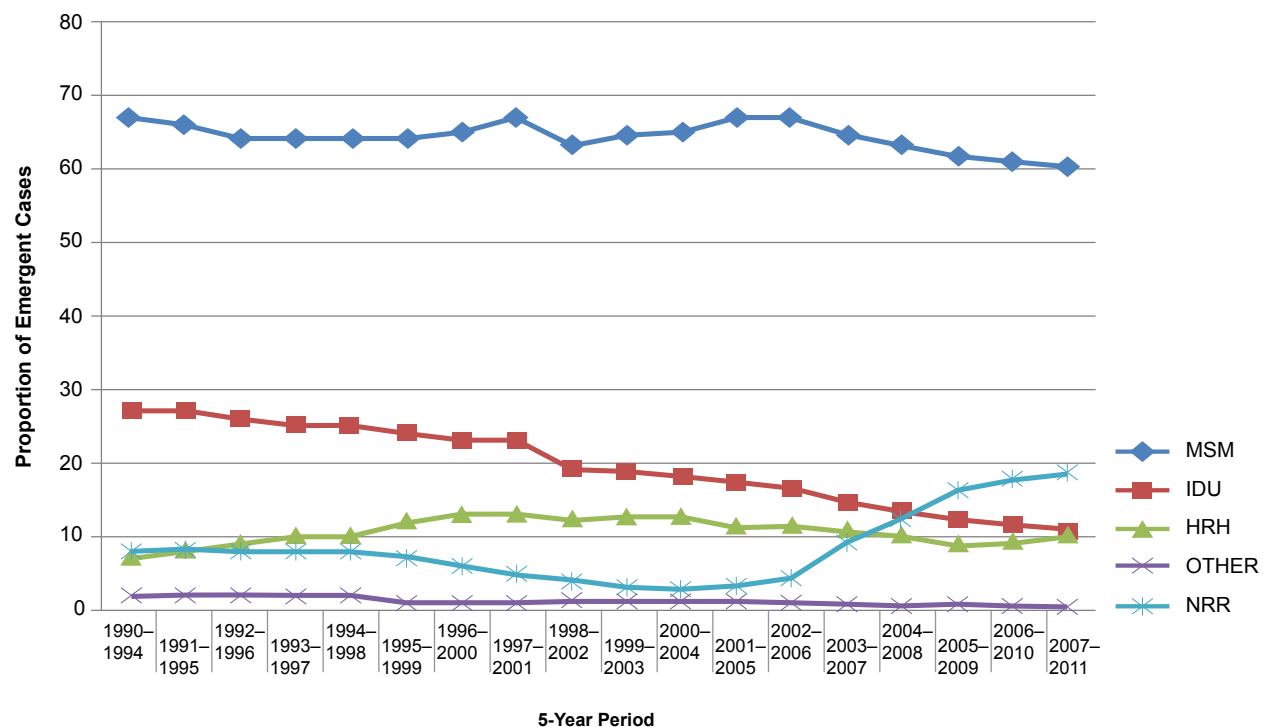
¹Most amphetamine-related hospital admissions are probably related to methamphetamine, a type of amphetamine.
 SOURCE: Arizona Hospital Discharge Data System, Arizona Department of Health Services; analysis by the University of Arizona Department of Family and Community Medicine

Exhibit 9. Number of NFLIS Drug Reports for Synthetic Cannabinoids Among Drug Items Seized and Analyzed in Forensic Laboratories, Maricopa County (Phoenix Area): 2011–2013



SOURCE: NFLIS, DEA

Exhibit 10. Estimated 5-Year Emergent HIV/AIDS Rates Per 100,000 Population, by Year and by Reported Risk Category,¹ Arizona: 1990–2011



¹Risk categories include the following: MSM=men who have sex with men; IDU= injection drug user; HRH=high-risk heterosexual; NRR=no reported risk.

SOURCE: Arizona Department of Health Services