Some Good News on Meth

December 15, 2008 By Peter Staley

I had to dig to find this bit of good news, and sadly, it's gone unreported anywhere else. On December 5th, SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, released its annual report on drug-related visits to hospital emergency departments (EDs) in the U.S.

While the report provides an overall conclusion that "no significant changes in ED visits from 2004 to 2006, or from 2005 to 2006, were detected for any of the major illicit drugs (cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and stimulants) or for alcohol," they set a very high bar (>40%) for classifying any changes as "significant."

The good news is that meth-related ED visits dropped 39.7 percent between 2004 and 2006 (see the table below), and it's been a steady drop over the three year period.

This jibes well with previously released data by Quest Diagnostics showing a huge decline in positive tests for meth in workplace drug screenings. After increasing 73 percent from 2002 to 2004, positive tests for meth in workplace drug screenings dropped more than 50 percent between 2005 and 2007:

All great news, but the gay community shouldn't celebrate yet. Meth use among gay men has always represented a small proportion of overall meth use in the U.S.. The bulk of its use occurs among low-income white heterosexuals. There's obviously been a decline in use nationwide, but we don't know yet if that means gay men are using less.

I get the sense that they are, but we still don't have the data to prove that.

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