



# ADAI RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 04-05 February 2004

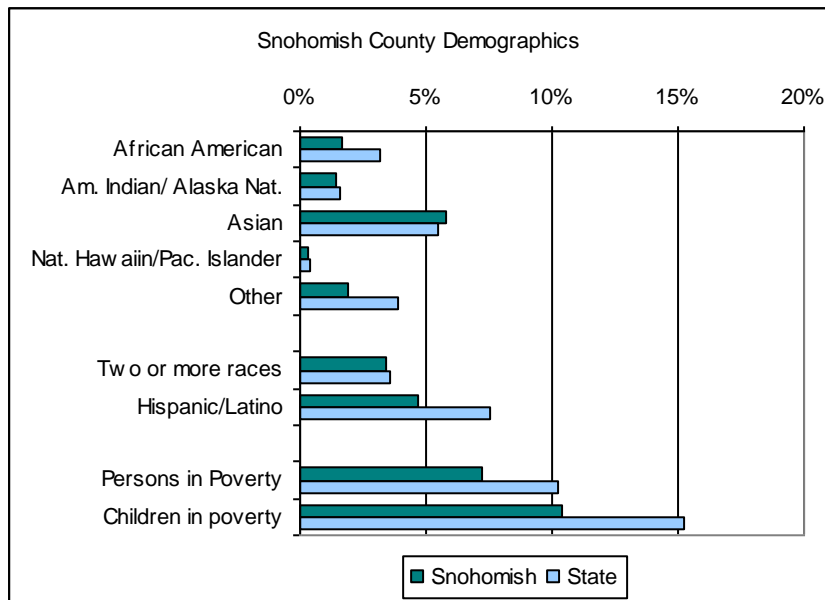
## SNOHOMISH COUNTY – DRUG USE EPIDEMIOLOGY

### LOCATION AND POPULATION OVERVIEW

Snohomish County is located in Western Washington on Puget Sound. Covering 2,090 square miles, the County's topography ranges from saltwater beaches, and farmlands in the west to dense forest and alpine wilderness in the Cascade Mountains to the east. Sixty-eight percent of the County is forest land, 19% is rural, 8% is urban/city and 5% is agricultural.

Snohomish is the third most populous county in the State, and one of the fastest growing. The year 2000 population was 606,024. Between 1990 and 2000, Snohomish County population grew by 30%. The population living in unincorporated areas is 291,385, and the population living in incorporated areas is 314,639. Everett is the largest city and has a diverse economic base including a large commercial airplane assembly plant. The city also includes a naval station and a deep water port.

According to 2000 Census results, the County's population has a higher proportion of Caucasians and a lower proportion of African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos than the State as a whole. Overall the County has a much lower level of poverty than the State.



### ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE - ADULTS

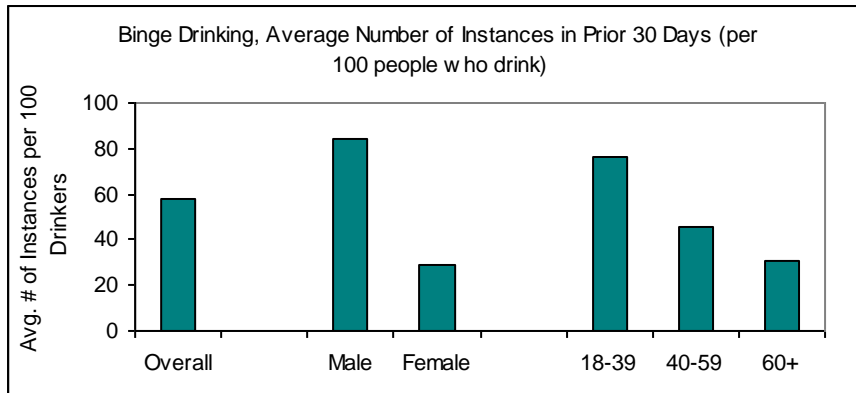
Survey data on adult alcohol use were collected from the County and the State as part of the Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System survey conducted by the Washington State Department of Health and the Snohomish Health District. No recent survey data on adult drug use is available.

### Alcohol Use

A majority (61.5%) of Snohomish respondents reported using any alcohol in the month prior to the 1999 survey, similar to the State average of 60.7%. Drinking one to two drinks per week was reported by 74.8% of those who drink.

### *Adult Binge Drinking*

Binge drinking, having five or more drinks on a single occasion, was reported by 21.3% of County respondents who drink alcohol compared with 14.2% statewide. The figure below illustrates that, among those who drink, binge drinking is more common among those who are younger and male.

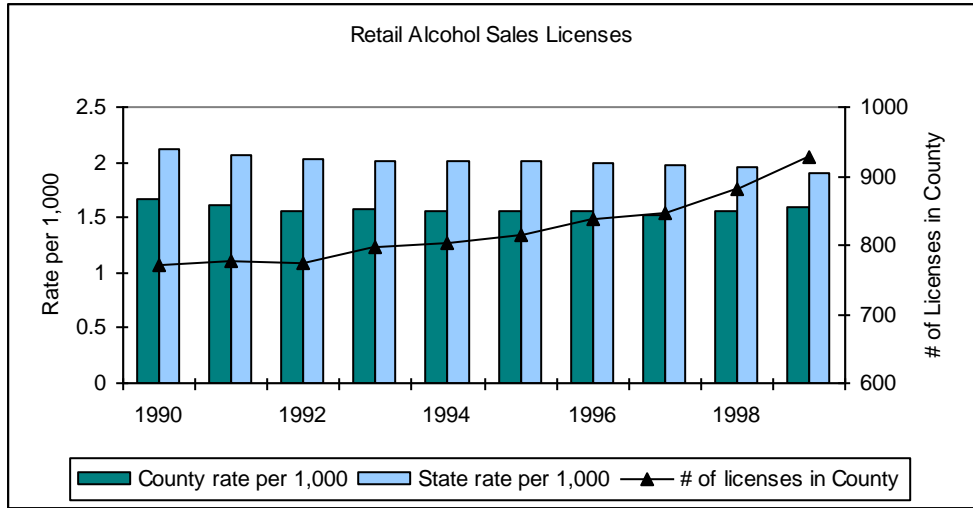


Driving after they have had 'perhaps too much to drink' was reported by 2.3% of those surveyed, similar to the State average of 2.8%.

### *Alcohol Retail Sales Licenses*

The number of alcohol retail sales licenses in a county is an important measure of the availability of alcohol. Sales licenses indicate the number of active licenses at locations including restaurants, grocery stores and wine shops; it does not include liquor stores.

While the number of alcohol sales licenses increased throughout the 1990's (represented by the black line), the rate per 1,000 county residents remained flat (as indicated by the vertical bars)<sup>1</sup>. During this same time the State rate decreased slightly, yet is still well above the County rate. Rates are based upon the total number of licenses divided by the population, then multiplied by 1,000. This allows for adjustments as the number of county residents changes over time and also allows for comparisons between counties with populations of different size.



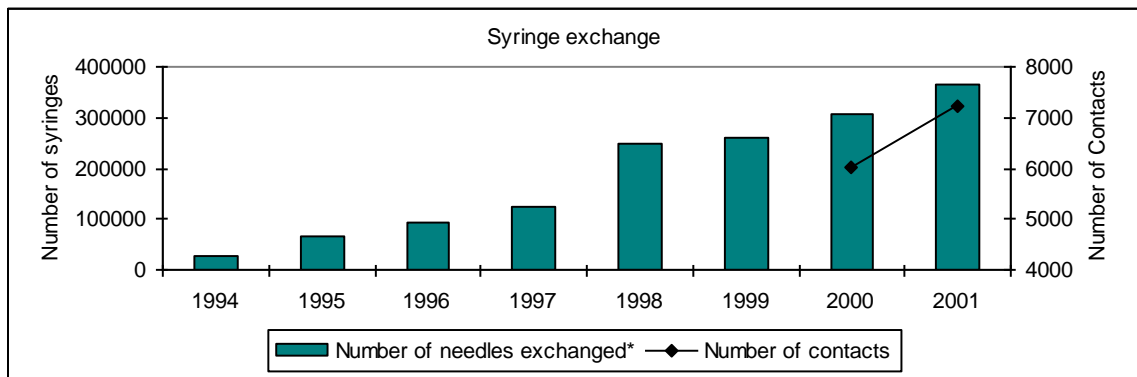
**Other Drug Use**

Illegal drug users are generally a hidden population. Estimates of the prevalence of illegal drug use can be difficult to obtain. Population surveys are one way to estimate the number of drug users; however no recent survey data are available on the level of illegal drug use among adults in the County. Indicator data provide indirect evidence of the nature of substance abuse and are available from organizations that work with drug users.

Treatment data, presented later in this report, is the best approximation of drug use currently available. Mortality data are an indicator of the serious effects of drug use, currently data on deaths due to specific drugs is unavailable for the County.

**Needle Exchange**

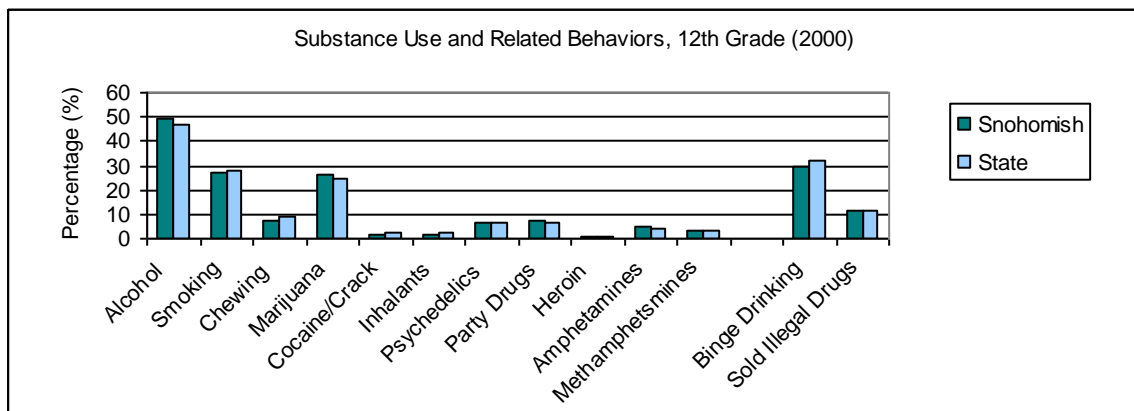
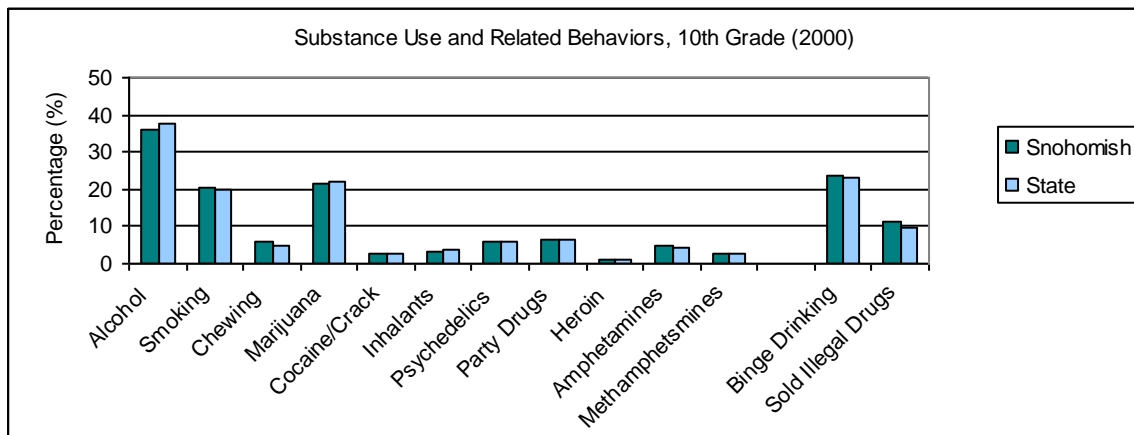
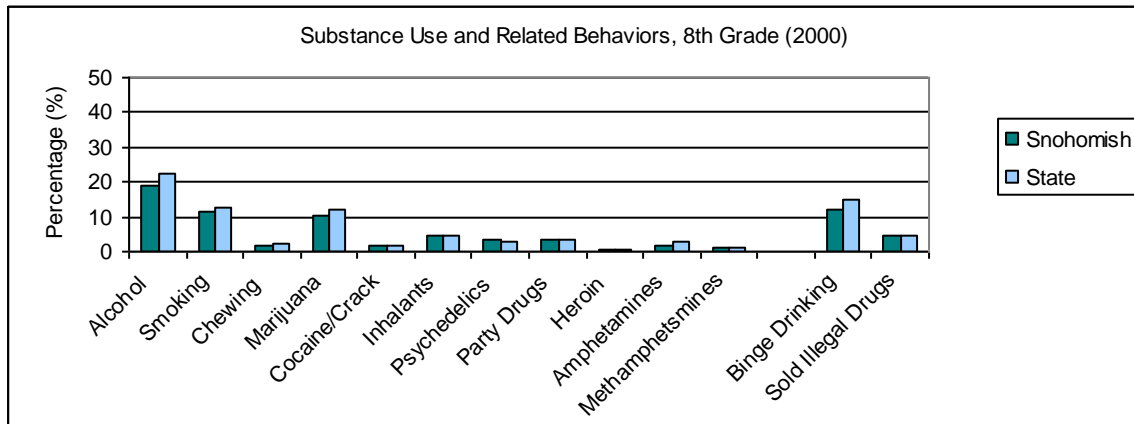
Currently the Snohomish County needle exchange has a drop-in site one evening a week and responds to pages for syringe exchange throughout the community three days a week. Staff report that methamphetamine injectors generally appear younger than heroin injectors. The total number of syringes exchanged in 2001 was 363,141, more than a thirteen-fold increase since 1994. There were over 7,200 contacts with clients in 2001, this includes seeing the same client multiple times.



**ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE - YOUTH**

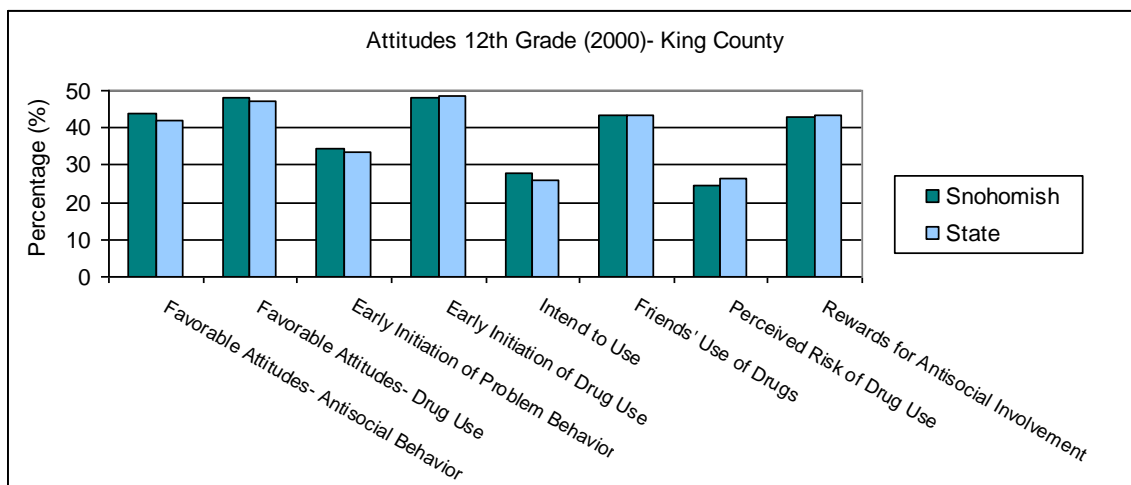
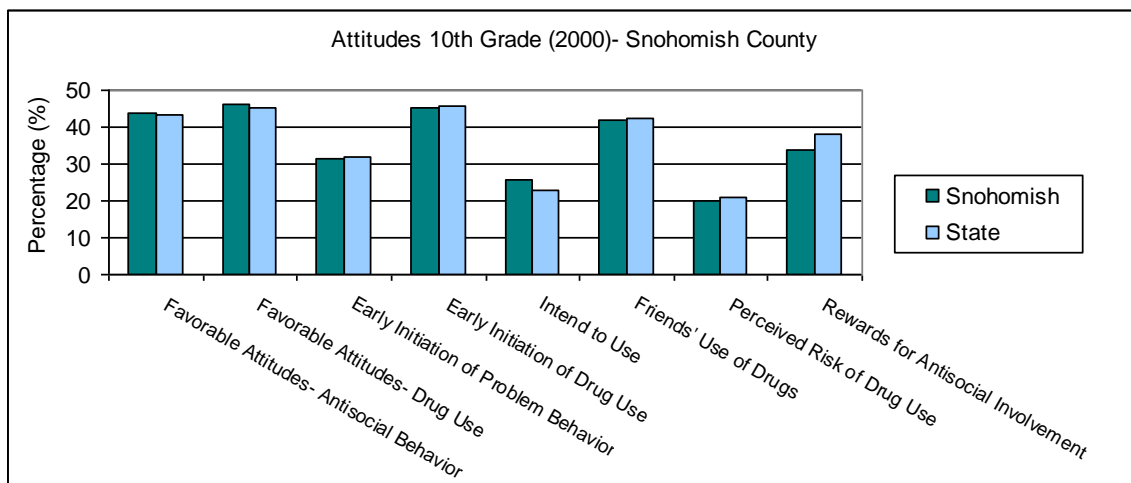
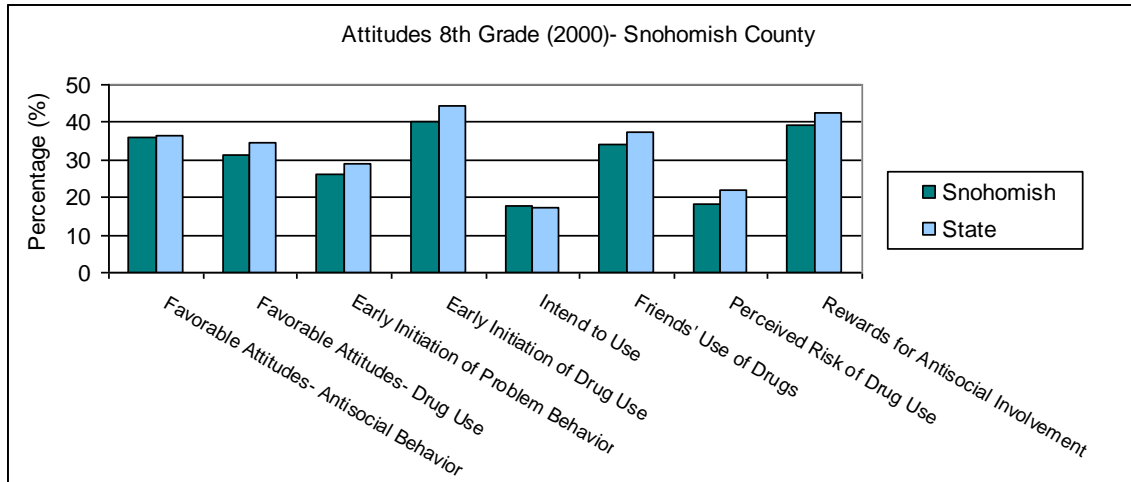
Alcohol is the most commonly used substance followed by marijuana and cigarettes. Psychedelics, party drugs and amphetamines are the next most commonly used illegal drugs. Binge drinking increased for each grade level, with 29.5% of County 12<sup>th</sup> graders admitting to consuming 5 or more drinks at a time in the previous month compared to 31.8% across the

State. Approximately 5% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 10% of 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported having sold illegal drugs in the previous year.



Peer Attitudes Towards Drug Use and Antisocial Behavior

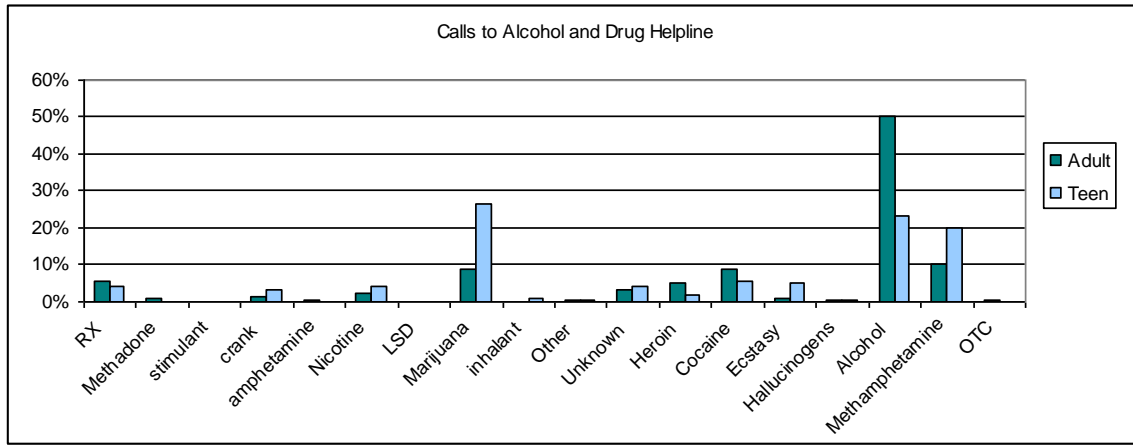
County-wide school surveys point to minimal differences between the County and the rest of the State. Relatively high levels of risk factors are present by 8<sup>th</sup> grade. About one-third of 8<sup>th</sup> graders indicated they had favorable attitudes towards anti-social behaviors and drug use. Forty percent reported early initiation of drug use. Intending to use drugs increased with age, with over a quarter of 12<sup>th</sup> graders indicating that they intended to use drugs. About 34% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported that they had friends who had used drugs and 39% felt that there were rewards for antisocial behavior. Only 18% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders felt that drug use was risky, this number increased only slightly for those in higher grade levels.



**ALCOHOL AND DRUG HELPLINE**

Snohomish County adults made 83% of the 2,317 calls to the Helpline in 2001. Half of adult calls were regarding alcohol, more than twice the proportion of youth calls. Methamphetamine and cocaine were the two most common illegal drugs adults referred to at 10% and 9% respectively. Among youth marijuana was the most common substance mentioned, followed by alcohol and methamphetamine. Methamphetamine made up 20% of youth calls, double

the proportion of adult calls and higher than the State average of 15%. Note that the number and types of calls vary greatly statewide and are impacted substantially by local referrals, education, prevention and intervention efforts.



**POISON CENTER**

The Washington Poison Center receives calls from throughout Washington State made to its toll free number. In 2001 there were 1,389 calls from Snohomish County residents related to commonly abused illegal, prescription and over-the counter drugs to the Poison Center<sup>1</sup>. (See the end of this document for important details about this data source.) The majority of these were for over-the-counter and prescription medicines. The two most commonly identified opiates were oxycodone and codeine.

Calls regarding street drugs and stimulants were dominated by substances lumped into the category of amphetamines, 116 of 181 calls. Poison center staff report that this is used as a 'catch all' term for stimulants, including methamphetamine, that are not identified more specifically and does not necessarily refer to amphetamines as commonly referred to by those in the substance abuse field (N. Hasting, August 19, 2002, personal communication). The number of calls for other street drugs were quite small.

Drug Category	Drug Name	Total # of Exposures
<b>Prescription &amp; Over the Counter</b>		<b>1,208</b>
	Antihistamines	353
	Opiates	292
	Dextromethorphan- cough med.	277
	Benzodiazepine	182
	Other depressants/sedatives	104
<b>Street Drugs</b>		<b>181</b>
	Amphetamine	116
	Marijuana	24
	Cocaine	13
	Mushrooms: hallucinogenic	10
	Heroin	5
	PCP	2
	LSD	4
	Methylphenidate	3
	GHB & analog/precursor	1

	Mescaline/peyote	1
	Ketamine and analogs	1
	Methamphetamine	1
<b>Sub-total- Street, Prescription and Over the Counter Drugs (Summed from above)</b>		<b>1,389</b>
<b>Alcoholic Beverages</b>		<b>138</b>

## **NEED FOR TREATMENT AND THE TREATMENT GAP**

### Treatment Services

There are 39 State certified alcohol and other drug treatment programs in the County, including three Department of Corrections facilities. Most treatment modalities are available in the County with services ranging from DUI assessment to intensive inpatient treatment. Medically monitored detoxification is available in the County. Opiate substitution treatment is not available in the County. There are drug court programs for both youth and adults.

### Treatment gap

The estimated gap in Clark County between needed treatment and actual treatment utilization is 72.6% for those under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, slightly below the State's, (see the table below)<sup>1</sup>. This means that only 27.4% of people who are in need of alcohol or other drug treatment services receive such services.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of adults &lt;200% FPL and eligible for DASA services</b>	<b>% of adults &lt;200% FPL and in need of Treatment</b>	<b>Number of adults &lt;200% FPL Receiving Treatment</b>	<b>Number of Adults not Receiving Treatment</b>	<b>Treatment Gap</b>
<b>Snohomish</b>	61,608	11.3%	1,910	5,070	72.6%
<b>State Total</b>	868,734	11.1%	25,395	71,207	73.7%

\*Federal Poverty Level, 200% FPL = \$36,200 for a family of four in WA (2002)

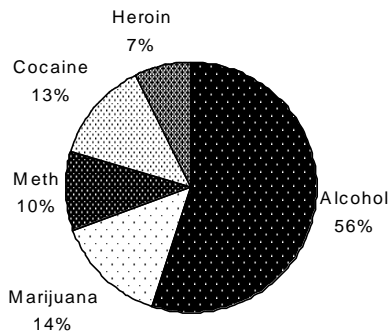
This estimate of treatment gap is based upon the Washington Needs Assessment Household Survey of substance use and treatment need done in 1993-94 and adjusts for new population numbers. There are some limitations to these data because patterns of drug utilization are known to have changed since this survey, e.g. the rise in methamphetamine use. However, this is the best available data on estimating the need for treatment services in the State.

## **ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENT ADMISSIONS**

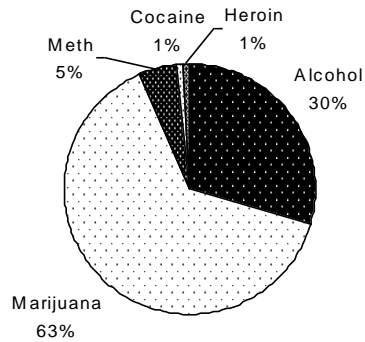
Admission to treatment reflects many factors including treatment demand (self referral and professional/court referrals), treatment availability (locally and regionally), funding, outreach and intervention programs, and changes in local and state policies. It is very important to note that available data is only for publicly funded treatment, it is likely that those receiving privately funded treatment differ in terms of demographics and the types of substances abused. Data on those receiving privately funded treatment are unavailable.

Among adults, alcohol is the most common drug treated in the County, followed by marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin (publicly funded treatment)<sup>1</sup>. Youth treatment admissions follow a very different pattern with over half of admissions for marijuana followed by alcohol with 30% of admissions.

Adult Publicly Funded Treatment Admissions 2001

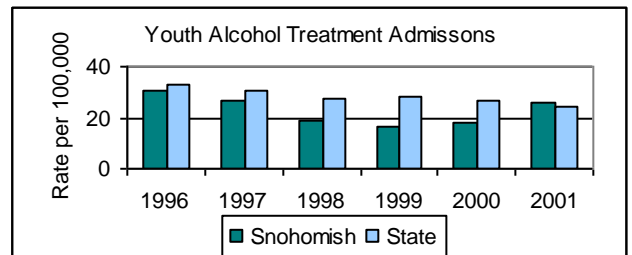
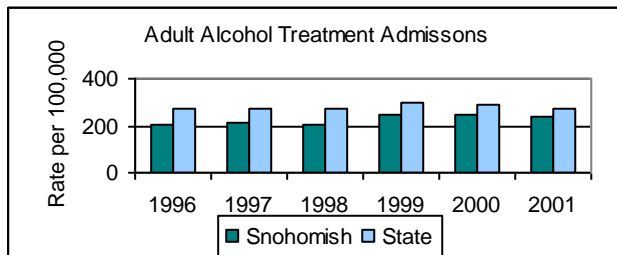


Youth Publicly Funded Treatment Admissions 2001



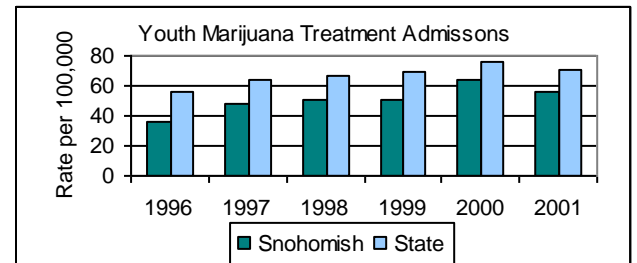
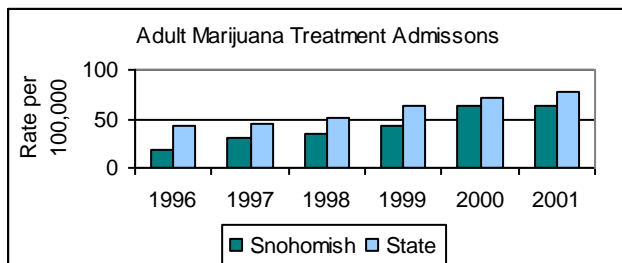
Alcohol

Treatment admissions for problematic alcohol use were even during 1996 to 1998. In 1999, there was an increase in admissions that has been maintained through 2001 when the rate was 239 per 100,000. This is equivalent to 1,477 admissions. Throughout this time the County rate has been below the State's. Youth admissions have also remained at a lower level than the State, though a different pattern is evident. Youth admissions were at a low point in 1999 with 16 per 100,000, followed by an increase to 26 per 100,000 in 2001, which was still a bit below the 1996 rate.



Marijuana

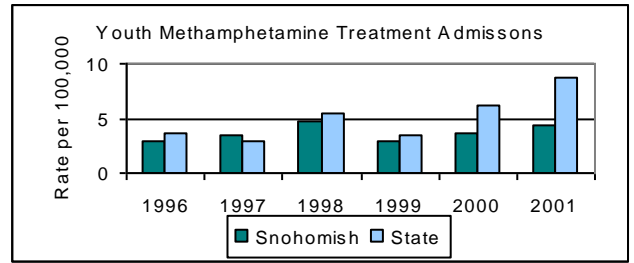
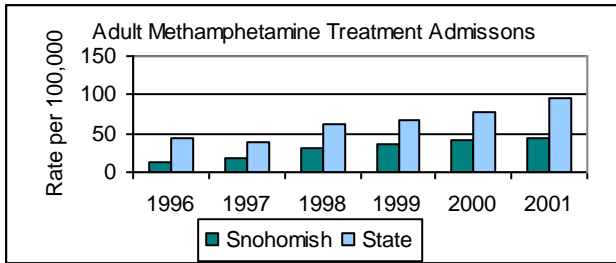
Marijuana treatment admissions were at a rate of 63 per 100,000 for adults in 2001, triple the 1996 rate. Youth treatment admissions have also trended upwards, though not as much as adults'. The County rate has remained lower than the State's for youth and adults.



Methamphetamine

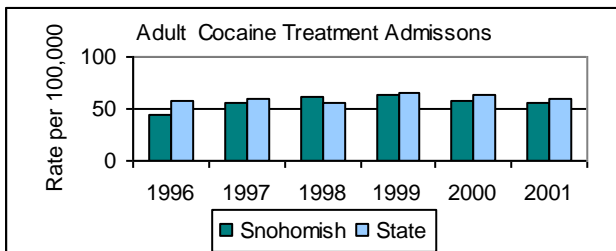
Lower levels of treatment for methamphetamine are evident in the County compared to the State, though the rate increased substantially for adults. Youth rates are relatively low and have varied from year to year. In 2001, 27 youth were admitted to treatment with methamphetamine as their primary drug.





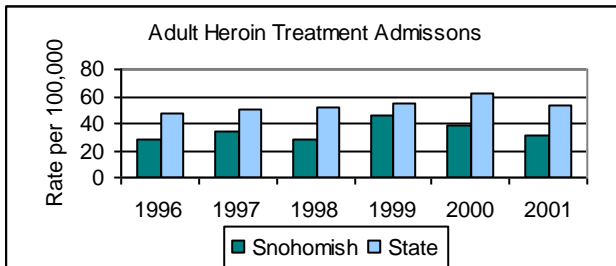
**Cocaine**

Adult admissions to treatment have increased from 1996 to 2001, when they were slightly lower than the State. Youth admissions are infrequent and the rate has varied substantially, from 1996 to 2001 there were a total of 82 admissions.



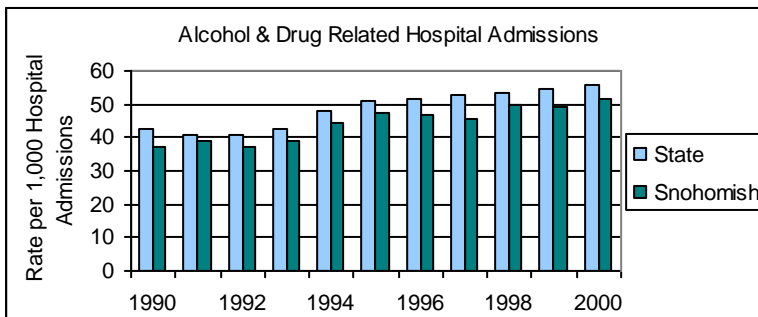
**Heroin**

Heroin treatment admissions peaked in 1999 when there were 272 adult admissions in which heroin was primary. The County rate has remained well below the State's. Youth treatment admissions are rare with 22 from 1996 to 2001.



**HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS FOR ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS**

Alcohol and other drug hospital admissions increased slowly but steadily, at a rate slightly below the State.



**DRUG TRAFFICKING AND PRODUCTION**

Mexican nationals are involved in the trafficking of multiple types of drugs including heroin, cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine. In addition, marijuana is grown locally and is also available from sources up and down the west coast including Northern California, Oregon and British Columbia, Canada. Approximately one third of methamphetamine used is produced in the State.

Law enforcement reported 33 known drug trafficking organizations in 2001<sup>1</sup>.

Notable law enforcement activity during January-June 2002 includes:

- May 2002, a large anhydrous ammonia leak in Arlington was caused by thieves suspected of intending to use the product to manufacture methamphetamine.

**Prices per NW HIDTA 2002 Threat Assessment**

Drug	Unit	Price
Heroin	Gram	\$100
Cocaine	Gram	\$50
Methamphetamine	Gram	\$40
Marijuana	Ounce Pound	\$250-\$300 \$2,500-\$3,000

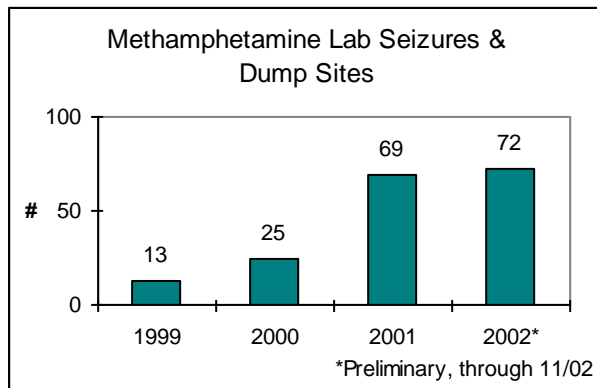
Heroin prices in Snohomish County are at the high end of the price range seen in King County. Prices for a gram of cocaine are more expensive than King and Pierce counties. A gram of methamphetamine is within the price range found in King County.

Marijuana Cultivation Seizures

There were 44 marijuana cultivation seizures in 2001 and 28 in 2000. These are the highest numbers for any county in either year. NW HIDTA reported that Snohomish was one of the major counties when it came to large outdoor growing operation around the State.

Methamphetamine Laboratories

Methamphetamine laboratories and dump site reports increased five fold from 1999 to 2001. The rate for 2001 was 11 per 100,000 residents compared to the State average of 32 per 100,000. Preliminary data through November 2002 indicates that there will be slightly more lab seizures and dump sites, but that the rate of increase has dropped substantially. King County to the south is on track to have a decrease in 2002 compared to 2001, while Skagit County to the north, is seeing a substantial increase.



**SUMMARY**

In Snohomish County, alcohol and marijuana are the dominant drugs according to treatment and survey data. Cocaine is the next most common drug among adults receiving treatment, followed by methamphetamine. Youth treatment data are dominated by marijuana

admissions, 63%, followed by alcohol at 30%. Overall, treatment rates are lower in the County than throughout the State. School surveys of youth report alcohol as the most common drug used, followed by marijuana. Psychedelics and 'party drugs' are the next most commonly reported illegal drugs by twelfth graders. Methamphetamine labs and dump sites increased substantially in 2001 and have remained at new higher levels in 2002. The County reports the largest number of marijuana cultivation seizures in recent years. Injection drug users exchanged over 360,000 syringes in 2001.

### **Sources and Data Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Management Services Administration, Research and Data Analysis Division (2001). *Risk and Protection Profile for Substance Abuse Prevention Planning in Snohomish County* (Rep. No. 4.40-31). Olympia, WA: Author.

<sup>2</sup> Washington Poison Center. *American Association of Poison Control Centers, Toxic Exposure Surveillance System, Annual Report 2001, Washington Poison Center*. Seattle, WA: Author.

Data note: The majority of calls to the Poison Center are made from private residences regarding poisonings that occur in the home, health care facilities represent the second largest group calling the poison center. Calls related to symptomatic exposure or intoxication from drugs of abuse are more likely to be placed by health care facilities compared to information only calls which are more likely to be placed from residences (information only calls are not included in the data presented). Most calls from health care facilities are regarding serious cases or unusual presentations in which substance specific medical advice or consultation is desired.

Not every poisoning or exposure is reported to the Poison Center and the total numbers reported do not equal the total number of poisonings that actually occurred statewide. Therefore data do not indicate the prevalence of symptomatic exposures to substances used, but rather point to serious or unusual situations involving substances. Multiple substances may be recorded for each call. Information requests related to pill identification are referred to the FDA.

<sup>3</sup> Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Trends in Washington State 2002 Report.

Data note: These data exclude Detox, Transitional Housing and Group Care Enhancement, private pay admissions. Includes total admissions – counts may be duplicated for an individual based on multiple admissions or multiple modalities of care.

<sup>4</sup> Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Threat Assessment 2002.

*Snohomish County – Drug Use Epidemiology, February, 2004.* (ADAI Research Brief 04-05). Prepared by Caleb Banta-Green, MPH, MSW. Seattle: Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute, University of Washington. Preparation of this report was funded in part by the Washington State Department of Social & Health Services' Division of Alcohol & Substance Abuse. URL: [http://depts.washington.edu/adai/pubs/arb/arb04\\_05.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/adai/pubs/arb/arb04_05.pdf)