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# NIDA NOTES

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**Director's Column**

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## **Professional Exchanges Strengthen Drug Abuse Research, Prevention and Treatment**

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Drug abuse affects many, if not all, aspects of a person's life and is typically linked to social, psychological, and medical problems. Therefore, neither drug abuse researchers nor treatment practitioners can operate in an isolated way.

If we are to continue to make progress against drug abuse and its inevitable consequences to the individual, his or her family, and the community, we must create opportunities for drug abuse practitioners and researchers to exchange information with investigators and clinicians in other fields who are faced with drug abuse issues. Bringing together drug abuse researchers and professionals from other fields allows NIDA to disseminate its research findings, to learn about research being conducted elsewhere that is relevant to our mission, and to attract promising investigators to drug abuse research. More sharing and collaboration with related professional fields is likely to give rise to new strategies for the study of drug abuse and addiction and their consequences.

Exploring each other's research offers new perspectives. Ideas spark new ideas. We see the problems and solutions differently. It's an interactive process in which everyone benefits.

It is important to point out that the benefits of these exchanges extend beyond research to practice. They give practitioners the chance to learn about the best approaches to treatment that have been developed through research. At the same time, they allow practitioners to share their treatment concerns and issues with researchers.

To foster this type of exchange, NIDA has conducted several conferences that have attracted researchers and practitioners from a variety of professions. NIDA's National Conference on Drug Abuse Prevention Research, held in Washington, D.C., last September, brought together more than 400 scientists, community leaders, educators, parents, prevention providers, law enforcement personnel, and policymakers to examine proven science-based prevention strategies and to discuss the needs and concerns of community leaders and practitioners.

Last year, our National Conference on Marijuana Use: Prevention, Treatment, and Research—the first national conference of its kind—disseminated the latest information about the use and effects of marijuana to an audience of 570 researchers, treatment and prevention services providers, and educators.

In this same spirit of collegial sharing, NIDA and the American Psychological Association (APA) Science Directorate cosponsored the Conference on Drug Abuse (CODA), held last August in conjunction with the APA convention in Toronto. (See [NIDA Holds Conference on Drug Abuse at Annual APA Convention](#)) Psychologists and drug abuse researchers used the conference as a forum for discussing the connections between drug abuse and psychological disorders in a number of ways.

For instance, research psychologists have made many important contributions over the decades that have helped us gain a better understanding of the psychological and behavioral elements of drug abuse. However, there remain many areas of study in which we need the expertise of psychologists and behavioral scientists. For example, we need to know more about the effects of drugs on cognition, memory, and learning. More information is needed about the influence of drugs on social development and behavior in groups. Social psychologists, with their specialized training, have the expertise required to better understand the effects exposure to violence has on drug abuse. We also need to know more about the behavioral aspects of drug abuse among adolescents. These are just a few of the areas in which research psychologists and behavioral scientists can help move drug abuse research forward.

Several funding mechanisms are available at NIDA to support researchers from other professional fields who would like to pursue drug abuse research in areas of interest to the Institute. These include predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships, mentored career development awards, summer fellowships, minority research fellowships, young investigator awards, and others. A large part of NIDA's Intramural Research Program is devoted to training drug abuse researchers.

I believe that a closer relationship between investigators from other fields and drug abuse researchers can only lead to better research and stronger interventions for patients. We hope that CODA and conferences like it will stimulate new research proposals, foster collaborations, and encourage prospective researchers to enter the drug abuse research field.

Other conferences on drug abuse might be held in conjunction with annual meetings of medical and public health researchers and practitioners. Similar conferences might be developed for annual meetings of AIDS researchers, teachers, sociologists, and individuals working within the criminal justice system. We are exploring the possibility of developing such collaborative events.

It is well known that drug abuse is linked to a host of behavioral, medical, public health, educational, and social problems faced by professionals in other fields. Sharing the science of our respective fields is one of the best ways to stimulate innovative research. If we are going to create more effective drug abuse prevention and treatment programs, we must come up with new ideas and strategies. One way to do that is to communicate with colleagues whose research interests intersect with our own.

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