

**Talking Points**  
**Amb. Namm**  
**2017 National Drug Prevalence Survey**  
**Dissemination event- Bahamas**

- In 2015, the INL department of the US Embassy in the Bahamas contributed US\$241,947.00 to the Organization of American States (OAS) through the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) to support the implementation of the National Household Drug Prevalence survey and a qualitative study focused on Drugs and At Risk Youth ages 18-25 in the Bahamas.
- The execution of this project has been a collaborative effort between the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs (OID) unit of CICAD which provided the methodology, technical support, funding, training, and overall coordination for this study, the Health Information and Research Unit (HIRU) of the Ministry of Health which was the local implementing agency for the project, and the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (NADS) of the Ministry of National Security which provided support and oversight.
- The aim of this project is to provide the relevant authorities in The Bahamas with the information that they will need to estimate the national level of drug use as well as to define the characteristics of the persons who are users and to explore other drug related issues within the society in order to develop evidence-based drug policies and programs.
- This study was conducted in two parts:
  - The first was a national survey in which a team of enumerators were dispatched across selected islands of the Bahamas to interview a member of randomly selected households about substance use and to gain their opinion on the issues related to drugs in the society.
  - The second was a rapid situation assessment in which the OID contracted the local consulting agency Caribe Sigma and lead researcher Dr. Sandra Smith

and a team of skilled interviewers to conduct interviews with key persons who can provide insight into the issues related to drugs and at risk youth in the country.

- The methodology for the household study was developed by the OID and is known as the Inter- American Uniform Drug Use Data System or its Spanish acronym SIDUC. This protocol is in accordance with the 2010 Hemispheric Drug Strategy which promotes the use of standardized methodologies for the collection of drug data across the hemisphere. Data collection using this method allows for the comparison of drug data between countries and for trend analysis over time.
  - The OID has developed SIDUC protocols tailored to specific populations such as secondary school students, university students, treatment center patients, adult prison populations and of course, national household studies.
- Bahamas joins only three other Caribbean countries that have been able to implement one of these fairly complex surveys with the last 4 years. These countries are Guyana, Jamaica and Suriname. As has been the pattern in the other countries, in addition to presenting data on the results from the national household drug prevalence study as well as preliminary findings from the rapid situation assessment on drugs and at risk youth ages 18-25 in the Bahamas, results will also be presented on the characteristics of persons seeking treatment for problematic substance use in the Bahamas from another one of the information systems supported by the OID.
- This event allows the Ministry of Health to share the results from these studies to key stakeholders. More importantly, it's serves as forum for discussion and the generation of policy ideas based on the evidence presented.
- The 60<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of CICAD was held in November, 2016 here in Nassau, and among other things, the commissioners approved the Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for 2016 to 2020. This plan allows member states to reiterate their commitment to addressing the drug problem by placing individuals at the core of drug policies and

taking into account gender, age and cultural issues, as well as, inputs from civil society and other social actors. The first paragraph of the plan mentions the need to take an evidence – based approach to dealing with the drug problem and this study and the coordination of the stakeholder policy meeting is a step towards fulfilling this requirement.

- One other issue that has been topical recently is the regulation of marijuana. The Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM) has set up a commission to explore regional legislation on marijuana and Jamaica became the first Caribbean country to decriminalize the possession of a small quantity of cannabis and has made other amendments to their Dangerous Drugs Act as it relates to the use of marijuana for various reasons such religious, medicinal or recreational use. As the OAS aims to be in the forefront of providing countries with the best available information to make important decisions and design national drug policies, this study also examined among other things, the opinions and perceptions of the general public on the issue of marijuana regulation.
- So as you can see the OID Unit of CICAD has been very busy here in the Bahamas and this speaks to the commitment of the authorities here to take an evidence-based approach to their policy making and programing. The Bahamas, as the Current Chair of CICAD, has also participated actively in several other activities and projects organized by the MEM Unit and the Demand Reduction Unit among others.
- I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this event and I would like to thank our donor, the INL Section of the US Embassy here in Nassau for their continued support of these important activities. Finally I would like to thank and congratulate all of the persons here who made these studies happen.
- The Ministry of Security for giving the green light to proceed and overseeing the studies through NADS.
- The Ministry of Health for their excellent collaboration and for agreeing to implement the household survey through the HIRU
- Dr. Sandra Smith and her team for undertaking the rapid situation assessment on at risk youth.

- The National Drug Council for their support in coordinating and providing CICAD with the treatment data.
- The Bahamas Statistics Department and their survey team for doing a terrific job in support of this project.

This was a truly collaborative effort and is an example of how different persons and entities in a country must work together if they want to successfully combat the challenges and the consequences of drugs.