

Impaired Driving

Background

Substance-impaired driving is a national traffic safety concern. While alcohol impaired-driving remains a persistent challenge involved in almost a third of all traffic fatalities in the United States each year, drugs other than alcohol have rapidly become a growing factor in impaired driving crashes, injuries and deaths.

According to the latest National Roadside Survey from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, drug use among nighttime weekend drivers has risen by 25 percent since the previous survey in 2007, and driver use of cannabis has spiked by 46% in that same period of time.

Additionally, the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that an estimated 20.5 million people ages 16 and older reported driving under the influence of alcohol in the past year, while 12.6 admitted they drove under the influence of illicit drugs.

Addressing the Problem: What Works



Education and Outreach

AAA has hosted impaired driving summits in over half of the states across the nation. These summits foster stronger coordination among members of the criminal justice system and policymakers. AAA also educates the public through member publications, the news media, social media channels and online platforms to raise awareness and understanding of the legal and safety implications of substance-impaired driving.



Effective Laws and Programs

REQUIRE IGNITION INTERLOCKS FOR ALL CONVICTED ALCOHOL-IMPAIRED DRIVERS: An ignition interlock device is an alcohol breath-screening device installed in a vehicle, and used as a condition of license reinstatement typically after a period of suspension. The driver must blow into the device, and the vehicle will only start if the registered BAC level is below the preset limit. An ignition interlock does not detect drugs other than alcohol, but serves as a proven tool to separate drinking from driving.

As legalization of marijuana spreads across the states, legislators are faced with increasing pressure to issue guidance and policy. Here are a few ways to enact effective traffic safety legislation:

AVOID DRUG PER SE LAWS: States should avoid enacting per se standards for drugs other than alcohol. Some states have zero tolerance laws whereby it is illegal to drive with any detectable amount of a prohibited substance, while other states have established non-zero per se limits, most notably for cannabis. These laws are not based on research evidence connecting a driver's level of impairment to the presence or concentration of drugs in their body—a relationship that's well-established for alcohol. Instead, AAA recommends state policies providing that a positive confirmatory drug test may allow an inference of impairment only when accompanied by other evidence of impaired driving.

SUPPORT DWI AND DRUG COURTS: AAA supports programs coordinated by a judge, a prosecutor, probation staff, and substance abuse treatment staff to address the underlying drug and/or alcohol misuse problems in order to change individual behavior. Evaluations have shown that DWI courts reduce recidivism (i.e., repeat offenses) among offenders established to wrestle with substance misuse.





Enforcement

LEVERAGE HIGH-VISIBILITY

ENFORCEMENT: HVE is a proven method for reducing impaired driving and other traffic safety issues such as non-use of seatbelts. HVE may also be effective at reducing drugged driving. HVE combines public advertising campaigns with specialized enforcement such as saturation patrols and sobriety checkpoints. Combining HVE and specialized enforcement involving Drug Recognition Experts may provide an effective way to deter unsafe and unlawful behavior

TRAIN POLICE TO RECOGNIZE DRUG

IMPAIRMENT: The Drug Evaluation and Classification (DEC) Program trains officers to apprehend drug-impaired drivers. The course certifies officers as Drug Recognition Experts (DREs) who become highly effective at detecting and identifying drivers impaired by drugs and/or alcohol. The Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) Program is intermediate training that provides officers with general knowledge related to drug impairment. The ARIDE program is designed to bolster the use of DREs when drug impairment is suspected.



Data and Research

States should increase drug and alcohol testing for drivers involved in all fatal and serious injury crashes. States also should improve reporting of arrest and conviction data. Specifically, records should indicate if alcohol, drugs or both are responsible for an impaired driving arrest/conviction.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety conducts important and actionable research that advances the understanding of substance-impaired driving issues. This research has played an essential role in strengthening stakeholder engagement and advocacy at the state and federal levels.

RELEVANT AAA FOUNDATION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY RESEARCH

[Cannabis Use Among Drivers in Fatal Crashes in Washington State Before and After Legalization](#)

This study examines marijuana involvement in fatal crashes in Washington State before and after recreational use of cannabis became legal in the state.

[An Evaluation of Data from Drivers Arrested for Driving Under the Influence in Relation to Per se Limits for Cannabis](#)

This study examines the relationship between toxicological test results and performance on a battery of physiological and psychomotor measures used by law enforcement officers among drivers arrested for DUI.

[Overview of Major Issues Regarding the Impacts of Alcohol and Marijuana on Driving](#)

This document provides an overview of issues related to marijuana consumption, driving impairment and blood testing as well as the potential impacts of social and legal factors.

[Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol and Marijuana: Beliefs and Behaviors, United States, 2013-2015](#)

Provides estimates of self-reported use and driving under the influence of alcohol and marijuana, and related perceptions and beliefs among drivers 18 and older in the United States, and to show changes in these behaviors 2013-2015.

[2019 Traffic Safety Culture Index](#)

The Traffic Safety Culture Index (TSCI) is a nationally representative survey that has been conducted annually since 2008 to identify American drivers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to traffic safety issues. The 2019 report includes statistics related to perceived risks of, and perceived likelihood of getting caught by police for driving while impaired by cannabis.

What You Can Do

Avoid driving if you've consumed alcohol and/or other drugs, including potentially impairing prescription and over-the-counter medications. Impaired driving is a criminal behavior regardless of whether a drug is prescribed, obtained over-the-counter, bought in a retail setting, or considered an illicit substance.

Further, just because a drug is legal does not mean it is safe to use while operating a motor vehicle. If you get behind the wheel while you're under the influence of any impairing substance, you put yourself, your passengers and others on the road at risk of injury or death.

AAA Resources

Contact trafficsafety@acg.aaa.com to learn more about the dangers of substance-impaired driving, potential countermeasures, and AAA's driver education and training programs.