

Drug Policy Alliance  
www.drugpolicy.org

For Immediate Release:

Contact: Laura Thomas (415)283-6366

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Tommy McDonald (510)229-5215

New England Journal of Medicine Publishes Groundbreaking Study Finding That Prescription Heroin Leads to Reduction of Crime and Overdose Deaths

Results Consistent with Findings from Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland and Spain

Drug Policy Alliance Says Heroin Prescription Programs Are Needed and Long Overdue in the United States

Today the New England Journal of Medicine published the groundbreaking results of the North American Opiate Medication Initiative (NAOMI), demonstrating that prescribed heroin can be a successful treatment for opiate dependence. The trial demonstrated successful reduction in drug use, illegal activity, and retention in treatment when participants received prescription heroin. Such results are consistent with results from similar trials in other countries. Prescribed heroin, or heroin assisted treatment, has the potential to help the estimated one million people in North America dependent on opiates.

“The NAOMI results are clear that prescription heroin reduces crime, and overdose deaths,” said Laura Thomas, deputy state director of the Drug Policy Alliance. “The reason this effective treatment isn’t available in the United States right now is politics. The science is there.”

NAOMI was a randomized, controlled trial conducted in three Canadian cities from 2005 to 2008. It compared oral methadone to injectable diacetylmorphine (heroin) and injectable hydromorphone as a treatment for opiate dependence in individuals with chronic, relapsing opiate dependence. Participants in the heroin arm of the trial had lower levels of illicit behavior, lower levels of other drug use, and better retention in treatment. They had stronger improvements in health status, employment, and social relations.

Ethan Nadelmann, executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance, said “The success of NAOMI, combined with similar results in other countries, leaves little question that heroin prescription would reduce crime, and overdose fatalities in the United States as well. Recent votes in Germany and Switzerland, combined with similar evidence of public support in other countries, show that the public will support even controversial drug policies when they have proven results. There is no question that heroin prescription programs are needed and long overdue in this country. All that stands in the way is ideology and the backward assumption that it can never happen in the United States.”