This document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

Support RAND

- Browse Books & Publications
- Make a charitable contribution

For More Information

- Visit RAND at www.rand.org
- Explore RAND Europe
- View document details

Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Unauthorized posting of RAND PDFs to a non-RAND Web site is prohibited. RAND PDFs are protected under copyright law. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please see RAND Permissions.
This product is part of the RAND Corporation technical report series. Reports may include research findings on a specific topic that is limited in scope; present discussions of the methodology employed in research; provide literature reviews, survey instruments, modeling exercises, guidelines for practitioners and research professionals, and supporting documentation; or deliver preliminary findings. All RAND reports undergo rigorous peer review to ensure that they meet high standards for research quality and objectivity.
Issues in estimating the economic cost of drug abuse in consuming nations

Report 3

Rosalie Liccardo Pacula, Stijn Hoorens, Beau Kilmer, Peter H. Reuter, James R. Burgdorf, Priscillia Hunt

Prepared for the European Commission
This study has been produced by the Trimbos Institute and RAND with the financial support of the Commission of the European Communities (contract JLS/2007/C4/005). The study does not necessarily reflect the opinions and views of the European Commission, nor is it bound by its conclusions.

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

RAND® is a registered trademark.

© Copyright 2009 European Communities

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the European Commission.

Published 2009 by the RAND Corporation
1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050
4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2665
Westbrook Centre, Milton Road, Cambridge CB4 1YG, United Kingdom
RAND URL: http://www.rand.org
RAND Europe URL: http://www.rand.org/randeurope
To order RAND documents or to obtain additional information, contact Distribution Services: Telephone: (310) 451-7002;
Fax: (310) 451-6915; Email: order@rand.org
This report considers the current feasibility of constructing an estimate of the global cost of drug use. While national estimates exist for seven developed countries, most countries have yet to construct a comprehensive estimate. Furthermore, it is impossible to compare the existing national estimates because of differences in the construction, which may reflect varying political and social environments that influence the nature of use and its related harms.

This report lays out a conceptual framework for initiating the construction of country-specific estimates in a fashion that would facilitate cross-national comparisons. It demonstrates the difficulty in trying to implement this framework using existing data, as current data available in the various countries suffer from inconsistencies in definitions, coverage, and measurement. For example, in Australia a death caused by a car-accident involving a drugged driver would be included as a drug-related death; the EMCDDA definition only includes deaths in which drugs were the direct cause. Similarly, although it is clear what is meant conceptually by an injection drug user, the measurement of the total number of injection drug users within some countries is based on injection drug use among the treatment population and in other countries it is based on nationally representative surveys. The pitfalls and assumptions necessary to construct a comparable estimate using existing data, therefore, are quite significant.

We conclude that it is not possible at this time to develop a meaningful comparative estimate of the cost of drug use across countries. We believe, however, that steps could be taken to improve the consistency of measurement in many of the indicators in future years through coordinated international efforts, not unlike that currently being undertaken by the EMCDDA for the European Community.