The Drug Policy Alliance is the leading organization in the United States working to end the war on drugs, repair its harms, and build a better approach. We envision a just society in which the use and regulation of drugs are grounded in science, compassion, health, and human rights. We fight every day and at every policy level – local, state, federal, and international – to change laws, advance justice, and save lives.
We all deserve to live our lives with dignity, within whole and loving communities, with the freedom to determine what is best for ourselves, with compassion and support in our times of need, without threat or violence.

The war on drugs has been sold to us as an essential strategy for our protection. But right now, we have more people dying of drug overdose than ever before. More people arrested for drug possession than any other offense. Millions of lives derailed and millions of families shattered.

How can this be?

It is because the war on drugs has never been about our protection, or health or justice, but about controlling certain people. Craven politicians designed it as a way to target those who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, or poor, dividing all of us in the process and diminishing our power. As a tool of oppression – as a war on people – it has proven horribly efficient. Now, with its relentless pursuit of punishment above all else, the drug war is driving the dual crises we face today: overdose and mass criminalization.

With more than a half-century of the drug war behind us, it does not matter who you are – we have all been hurt by it. Who among us has not been harmed, whether personally or through our friends and family, by addiction, overdose, policing, or mass incarceration? Who among us would not be better off if the trillion dollars wasted on the drug war had instead been invested in the potential of our communities?

DPA is building the bridge to health and justice, to dignity and autonomy – to the lives everyone deserves. We expose the lies at the center of the drug war. We tear down its regime of punishment. We create in its place better ways of helping people who need it. And through our work, we seek to build a movement that is expansive, inclusive, and powerful.

We had a big year in 2021, showing once again that our dreams are as achievable as they are urgent.

In the following pages, you will read about how we shrunk the reach of the criminal legal system and promoted the wellbeing and rights of people who use drugs; how we legalized marijuana for justice; and how we worked to uproot the drug war from all aspects of our lives. The sum of our efforts are the people whose lives have been saved or improved by the policies we changed.

Thank you for believing in our vision and building with us.

Sincerely,

Kassandra Frederique, Executive Director

Derek Hodel, Board President
Last June marked 50 years since President Nixon declared that the United States would “wage a new, all-out offensive” on “drug abuse.” This proclamation marked the start of the drug war – a war on people – that pumped hundreds of billions of dollars into law enforcement, fueled hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths, and drove mass criminalization.

Criminalization has not made our communities safer or healthier. It has done the opposite – leading to a poisoned drug supply and a burgeoning overdose crisis. It empowers law enforcement to harass, arrest, prosecute, deport, incarcerate, and even justify killing people with impunity – targeting Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and under-resourced people at vastly disproportionate rates. Criminalization also stigmatizes drug use, preventing the adoption of proven lifesaving overdose prevention interventions and diverting financial resources away from health-based solutions in favor of investments in law enforcement.

We are in a state of emergency that has never been more palpable – more than 100,000 people died of an accidental drug overdose in the U.S. during the first year of the pandemic, the highest figure on record. DPA is responding to this crisis by fighting for urgent, systemic change in the way that drug use is addressed.

DECRIMINALIZING DRUG USE, BUILDING ALTERNATIVES

Decriminalization at the federal level

DPA is advancing holistic reforms that treat drug use as a health issue, not a criminal problem. We are addressing the core belief that people’s behavior or use of drugs, especially that of Black and Latinx people, must not be controlled or criminalized.

With the support of Reps. Cori Bush and Bonnie Watson Coleman, we introduced the Drug Policy Reform Act in Congress. This bill would federally decriminalize drug possession and invest in crucial health services. It is a major opportunity to begin turning the page on the punitive drug war and start a new chapter focused on respect and dignity.
Decriminalization at the local and state levels

In Washington, D.C., we launched a campaign – #DecrimPovertyDC – in partnership with HIPS, one of the city's leading harm reduction service providers, along with 50 other organizations, to enact decriminalization legislation in 2022. We also drafted and introduced decriminalization legislation in New York and Vermont, and provided support to allies in Maine, Massachusetts, and Washington for their decriminalization efforts.

In California, where we are laying the foundation for a future decriminalization initiative, we helped repeal mandatory minimum sentencing for a range of drug offenses, amending repressive mandates established during the height of the 1980s drug war era.

In 2020, DPA passed a groundbreaking ballot initiative that made Oregon the first state in the nation to decriminalize drug possession and increase access to health and harm reduction services. In the year that followed, thousands of Oregonians avoided the life-long consequences of a drug arrest, and together with our state partners we secured more than $300 million for services over the next two years. We are now collaborating with local allies to get drug possession convictions expunged from people’s records.

In New York, DPA and our allies passed bills that decriminalized syringes, expanded access to medications for addiction treatment in jails and prisons, and addressed biased policing.

The war on drugs stands as a stain on our national conscience since its very inception. It is essential that we change tactics in how we address drug use away from the failed punitive approach and towards a health-based and evidence-based approach.

REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN as she introduced the Drug Policy Reform Act

PREVENTING OVERDOSE AND REDUCING HARMS

As we fight to decriminalize drugs and divest from policing and punishment, we are also building and funding health-centered alternatives – including evidence-based treatment and harm reduction services for people who use drugs.

Last spring, Congress extended the Trump Administration's temporary emergency scheduling of fentanyl-related substances. DPA vehemently opposed this approach, which is rooted in fear and unnecessary law enforcement. We are instead fighting for policies grounded in public health like the STOP Fentanyl Act, which provides a comprehensive health response to fentanyl use.

Following months of determined advocacy, we secured $30 million in the first-ever dedicated federal funding for syringe services programs and other harm reduction providers. Syringe access is an essential component of an evidence-based drug policy, as sharing or reusing syringes increases the risk of HIV and hepatitis C infection.

We are also advancing the opening of overdose prevention centers (OPC), also known as supervised consumption sites, which provide a safe space for people to consume pre-obtained drugs, avoid arrest, and access other services. In December, New York City became the first place in the country to open a sanctioned OPC. This unprecedented victory followed more than a decade of advocacy by DPA, VOCAL-NY, and other harm reductionists with radical visions. In another major success last year, Rhode Island authorized a two-year pilot OPC program, based on DPA’s model. We are deeply involved in OPC legislation in four other states, and campaigning for federal action that would prevent the Department of Justice from interfering with local OPC implementation.

In New York, DPA and our allies passed bills that decriminalized syringes, expanded access to medications for addiction treatment in jails and prisons, and addressed biased policing.
The vast majority of Americans support marijuana legalization. The momentum picked up in 2021, with DPA helping pass legalization legislation in three additional states. Despite this, nearly every minute, one person in the U.S. is arrested for marijuana possession. Due to targeted policing and enforcement, this has a particularly devastating impact on Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, and non-citizens—despite similar rates of use.

ADVANCING MARIJUANA POLICY REFORM IN CONGRESS

DPA is leading the fight to pass the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act, our signature bill that would effectively end federal marijuana prohibition and repair its harms. If passed, it would deschedule marijuana as a controlled substance, expunge marijuana convictions, reduce marijuana sentences, and ensure that people are no longer banned from receiving federal benefits due to marijuana activity.

It would also reinvest marijuana tax revenue into communities that have been most harmed by criminalization. DPA has spearheaded coalition efforts to move the MORE Act forward since its inception, working with House Judiciary Chairman Jerry Nadler and then-Senator Kamala Harris to draft and introduce it in Congress, creating the Marijuana Justice Coalition to build support, and successfully passing it in the House. This was the first time a Congressional chamber voted to deschedule marijuana.

DISMANTLING MARIJUANA PROHIBITION AT THE STATE LEVEL

In one historic week last spring, both New York and New Mexico legalized marijuana with policy models that begin repairing the harms of prohibition. These momentous victories were the result of multi-year advocacy campaigns led by DPA and our partners.

For over a decade, DPA has been on the frontlines of the fight to end marijuana prohibition in New York State. Our hard work came to fruition with the passage of the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act, which sets a new gold standard for regulation with the strongest record expungement and comprehensive restitution for past harm beyond the criminal legal system, plus powerful community reinvestment, social equity, and racial and economic justice provisions. DPA is delighted that New York’s Office of Cannabis Management is now led by executive director Chris Alexander, a former DPA staffer with a deep commitment to making the racial and economic components of the bill a reality.
In New Mexico, lawmakers passed the Cannabis Regulation Act and amendments to the Expungement of Criminal Records Act, both of which put equity and social justice at the forefront. These policies, which DPA had been advocating for close to a decade, legalize the sale and cultivation of marijuana, promote diversity and equity in the new industry, and provide vital expungement and resentencing provisions for people with past marijuana arrests or convictions.

New Jersey also legalized marijuana, with legislation that will allow expungement of marijuana possession records and allocate substantial sales tax revenue to areas most harmed by the drug war. This followed a successful ballot question in 2020 where voters overwhelmingly demonstrated their support for legalization. DPA had worked towards this victory, alongside partners in the state, for nearly two decades.

In April, Virginia became the first state in the South to legalize marijuana. The legislative campaign was expertly coordinated by DPAs allies, including Marijuana Justice – led by Chelsea Higgs Wise. “Marijuana Justice is grateful to DPA for teaching us equitable policy and regulatory solutions to pass along to key decision-makers. Without DPA’s support, Virginia may not have legalized with key components that prioritized social equity and opened opportunities for small marijuana business owners,” Chelsea said.

DPA has also been working defensively as some states attempt to reverse progress. Last May, Mississippi’s Supreme Court overturned the 2020 medical marijuana ballot initiative that passed with 74% of the vote – a victory that was the result of several years of advocacy by DPA and our partners. Nonetheless, our allies resolutely kept up the fight for justice. In early 2022, lawmakers finally passed a bill, which the governor signed, to establish a medical marijuana program in the state.
The harms of the war on drugs go far beyond arrest and incarceration. It takes people’s income and livelihood, forces them from their homes, and tears families apart. Its roots are deeply embedded in almost every aspect of daily life, doling out punishment instead of support.

Our new initiative, Uprooting the Drug War, is a series of reports, webinars, and other materials that form a crucial element of DPA’s organizational strategy. The reports were authored by Loren Siegel, a longtime DPA thought partner. The project brings together advocates, researchers, and directly impacted people to explore the ways in which the drug war has infiltrated and shaped six key systems.

**EMPLOYMENT**

Workers are denied jobs due to drug tests and drug-related criminal records. Even in states where marijuana is legal, employers may still terminate a worker for a positive marijuana test.

**CHILD WELFARE**

Parents can have their children taken away for a single positive marijuana test. Separating kids from their parents often leads to the harms from which these policies claim to protect.

**IMMIGRATION**

Drug offenses are the most common reason for ICE arrests, and the second-most common reason for non-citizens being deported.
THE DRUG WAR

The goal of Uprooting the Drug War – a natural extension of DPA’s work to decriminalize drug use and possession – is to create momentum to dismantle the drug war in all its forms.

One of our first campaigns, which we will be pursuing in 2022, seeks to eliminate employee drug tests that indicate if a drug is present in a person’s body, but do not indicate if they are impaired. Drug testing unjustly blocks thousands of people from accessing stable employment.

EDUCATION

Students face random drug testing in one-third of all school districts, with kids as young as 11 being tested in some areas. Drug use often leads to students being denied an education, and is now the second-most common reason that students are referred to police.

In many states, people with felony drug convictions are banned from receiving, or have limited access to, certain public benefits – including TANF and SNAP – that could help their families out of poverty and improve health and safety.

HOUSING

People who are evicted from public housing for alleged “drug activity” face multi-year bans from future access to public housing, even if they were never convicted of a drug offense. In some jurisdictions, people face eviction for calling emergency services to respond to an overdose.

PUBLIC BENEFITS

In many states, people with felony drug convictions are banned from receiving, or have limited access to, certain public benefits – including TANF and SNAP – that could help their families out of poverty and improve health and safety.
The drug war has its roots in the United States, but it also causes devastating harms across the world.

Over the past decade, DPA has supported the Global Commission on Drug Policy, a group of world leaders and intellectuals advancing drug policy reform at the international level. In December, our executive director, Kassandra Frederique, moderated a panel discussing the launch of the Global Commission’s 10th anniversary report: “Time to End Prohibition.” The event’s esteemed panelists included former heads of government from Colombia, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Switzerland.

Discussing the longstanding conflict in his country between the government and drug trafficking groups, former Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos told Kassandra that “peacebuilding and prohibition are a contradiction.” This remark points to an intrinsic flaw at the core of the global drug war: prohibition is an inherently violent and repressive policy that will always threaten human rights, health, and security.

We see this play out in the U.S. and parts of Europe with surging overdose deaths, mass criminalization, and discriminatory policing. In parts of Latin America, the stability and security of entire states are threatened by drug war-fueled conflicts. In West Africa, prohibition prevents access to essential drugs prescribed for pain relief, mental health disorders, and palliative care – blocking whole communities from basic healthcare. While in parts of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, people face execution by the state – even extrajudicially – for alleged drug offenses.

The panel explored the creation of a new international drug control agenda that diverges from the failures of prohibition, and instead refocuses on decriminalizing drug use, widening access to essential controlled medicines, providing non-coercive treatment and harm reduction services, and moving towards the full regulation of all drugs. DPA will continue working with our partners at the Global Commission and across the world to pursue these goals and ensure true justice for all.
GROWING THE MOVEMENT BY FUNDING THE MOVEMENT

The war on drugs is a war on people. This is not DPA's fight alone – it is a fight that must happen in partnership with allies across movements. From economic justice to housing to immigration and more, the drug war impacts all of our lives in myriad ways. It will take all of us to end it.

DPA's Advocacy Grants Program is a function of our movement building work and funds grassroots organizations working across sectors on drug policy reform. Only by working together, across issue areas, can we begin to disentangle the drug war and the culture of criminalization it promulgates.

SEEDING PARTNERSHIPS

HIPS is a Washington, D.C.-based organization that promotes the health, rights, and dignity of people impacted by sexual exchange or drug use due to choice, coercion, or circumstance. In 2021, HIPS was the recipient of a Special Opportunities grant to partner with DPA in leading a local campaign to decriminalize drug possession and support community organizing work with drug users and allies.

Tamika Spellman, the Policy and Advocacy Director at HIPS, recently shared what it means to her to be a part of this intersectional movement and how she views HIPS’s role:

"HIPS brings the voice of the people into this movement – especially the homeless, those that have mental health crises, and sex workers. We ensure there is a clear understanding that at no time was this war on drugs helpful to anyone.

“If we can decriminalize the possession of drugs, we can take away a lot of the other systemic issues that play a part in putting people into bad places. That is why HIPS partnered with DPA on the #DecrimPovertyDC campaign. We must stop criminalizing the poor and poor people's issues.

“We shouldn't be criminalizing any part of drug use. We need to find ways to stop people from hurting and help them. Until then, we don't have the freedoms and the liberties that we think we have.”

Promoting Policy Change Grantees

A New PATH
Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition, Inc.
Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition
Black Futurists Group
The Brotherhood Sister Sol
California Society of Addiction Medicine
Center for Living and Learning
Chicago Urban League
DanceSafe
DRCNet Foundation
Drug Policy Forum of Hawai‘i
Drug Truth Network
Evergreen Health
Harm Reduction Action Center
Health Equity Alliance
Independent Media Institute (Alternet)
Institute of the Black World 21st Century
Intercambios Puerto Rico
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children
Movement for Family Power
New York Academy of Medicine
New York State Harm Reduction Association
Partnership for Safety and Justice
People's Harm Reduction Alliance
Protect Families First
Public Defender Association
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
San Francisco Drug Users' Union
Texas Harm Reduction Alliance
The Hood Incubator
The Ordinary People Society
Truth Pharm
VOCAL-NY
William C. Velasquez Institute
Women With a Vision

Special Opportunities Grantees

El Punto en la Montaña
HIPS
Littleglobe
Salvation and Social Justice
Safety & Justice Oregon*

* through Drug Policy Action
The Drug Policy Alliance is a 501(c)(3) organization.

**ASSETS**

- Cash & cash equivalents: $6,013,267
- Investments: $415,707
- Grants receivable (net): $8,880,323
- Prepaid expenses & other assets: $57,395
- Due From Drug Policy Action: $105,536
- Deposits: $88,794
- Property, equipment & leasehold improvements (net): $4,422,641

**LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS**

**LIABILITIES**

- Accounts payable & accrued expenses: $551,148
- Accrued compensated absences: $363,151
- PPP loan payable: $2,207,400
- Mortgage payable: $2,341,616

**TOTAL LIABILITIES**: $5,463,315

**NET ASSETS**

- Unrestricted: $5,379,154
- Temporarily restricted: $9,141,194

**TOTAL NET ASSETS**: $14,520,348

**TOTAL ASSETS**: $19,983,663

**STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES**

**EXPENSES**

- Program expenses: $6,590,133
- Management: $2,673,119
- Fundraising: $1,678,041

**TOTAL EXPENSES**: $10,941,293

**SUPPORT & REVENUE**

- Contributions unrestricted: $9,998,843
- Contributions temporarily restricted: $6,185,151

**TOTAL INCOME**: $16,183,994

**CHANGE IN NET ASSETS**

- Net assets, beginning of year: $8,871,660
- Net assets, end of year: $14,520,348

**CHANGE IN NET ASSETS**: $5,648,688
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
JUNE 1, 2020–MAY 31, 2021

Drug Policy Action is a 501(c)(4) organization that administers ballot initiative campaigns and supports lobbying efforts.

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

LIABILITIES
Accounts payable & accrued expenses $ 7,541
Due to Drug Policy Alliance $ 105,536
TOTAL LIABILITIES $ 113,077

NET ASSETS
Unrestricted $ 9,716,508
Temporarily restricted $ 692,576
TOTAL NET ASSETS $ 10,409,084

ASSETS
Cash & cash equivalents $ 4,904,046
Investments $ 5,568,115
Grants receivable (net) $ 50,000
TOTAL ASSETS $ 10,522,161

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS $ 10,522,161

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

EXPENSES
Program expenses $ 6,131,760
Management $ 31,622
Fundraising $ 440
TOTAL EXPENSES $ 6,163,822

SUPPORT & REVENUE
Contributions unrestricted $ 7,372,532
Contributions temporarily restricted (4,286,977)
TOTAL INCOME $ 3,085,555

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS
Net assets, beginning of year $ 13,487,351
Net assets, end of year $ 10,409,084
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS $(3,078,267)
BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

DRUG POLICY ALLIANCE

ALEJANDRO MADRAZO
Professor of Law, Centro De Investigación y Docencia Económicas

ANGELA PACHECO
Former District Attorney, 1st Judicial District, New Mexico

ANTONIA HYMAN
Associate, Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz

CHRISTINE DOWNTON, TREASURER
Former Vice Chairman and Founding Partner, Pareto Partners

DEREK HODEL, PRESIDENT
President of Board; Independent Consultant

GEORGE SOROS
Chairman, Soros Fund Management

JOSIAH RICH, MD
Professor of Medicine and Community Health, The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University

JOY FISHMAN
Harm Reduction Advocate

KEMBA SMITH PRADIA
Advocate and Author

PAMELA LICHTY
President, Drug Policy Forum of Hawai’i

SVANTE MYRICK
Executive Director, People for the American Way

DRUG POLICY ACTION

JUAN CARTAGENA
Civil Rights Attorney

CHRISTINE DOWNTON, TREASURER
Former Vice Chairman and Founding Partner, Pareto Partners

DEREK HODEL, PRESIDENT
President of Board; Independent Consultant

KENNETH MONTEIRO, SECRETARY
Former Vice President, Secretary and General Counsel, Ford Foundation

SONDRA YOUDELMAN
Campaigns Director, People’s Action