

# Project looks to put drug on ice

A new program hopes to recruit young people to deliver the message about avoiding meth

[By Helen Altom](#)

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"When you're doing 'ice,' everything's fast, everything's going like 500 mph. All you think about is getting high. I started doing things I normally wouldn't do. I would have sex with my dealer for money. I'd have sex with guys for money. I lost myself completely in one month. ... My name is Gloria. I'm 15 years old. I'm from Lahaina, Hawaii."

Gloria's message is one of many tragic stories of methamphetamine, or "ice," use among isle teens and young adults that the Hawaii Meth Project hopes will stop others from trying it.

The privately funded nonprofit project today launched a statewide prevention program to reduce first-time meth use through a media campaign, public service messages, public policy and community education and outreach.

Costs to Hawaii for treatment, health care, foster care services, crime and lost productivity are estimated at \$500 million per year, said Cindy Adams, executive director of the meth project.

"The only way to manage it is to get in front of it, and the way to get in front of it is to prevent it," she said in an interview.

Hawaii is the seventh state to initiate a Meth Project, which began in Montana in 2005, Adams said.

In two years, she said, Montana dropped to 39th place in national ranking for meth abuse from the fifth highest (now Hawaii's position).

"In Hawaii, I've got to believe there is a tremendous opportunity to make a significant difference here," she said.

Dr. William Haning, associate professor of psychiatry in the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine and director of the Addiction Psychiatry Program, said there is increased understanding in how to cut cravings for the highly addictive drug.

"The biggest impediment to this has been keeping people clean or dry enough to benefit from psychosocial treatments," he said.

Volunteers sought

For more information about the Hawaii Meth Project, see [www.hawaiimethproject.org](http://www.hawaiimethproject.org). To volunteer, call 529-6253 or toll-free (877) 445-METH.

Oahu Family Court Judge Michael Broderick said in a news release: "Meth is one of the most addictive, destructive drugs we've ever seen, in both the staggering financial burden and profound human costs.

"Once someone has begun using, it's very difficult to get them to stop. The Hawaii Meth Project is crucial to our efforts to combat this epidemic by preventing our young people from ever trying meth."

Adams said the project will use TV, radio, Internet and print ads with teen addicts in rehabilitation centers describing the devastating effects of methamphetamine use.

"It is heartbreaking to hear them talk about what they went through."

The project conducted statewide surveys and held focus groups of teens, young adults and parents to understand attitudes and behaviors related to methamphetamine. A comprehensive 2009 statewide Hawaii Meth Use & Attitudes Survey report was compiled.

Primary emphasis is on 12- to 17-year-olds, and 18- to 24-year-olds are a secondary target, Adams said.

"Not even once" is the key message.

But Haning said: "I don't think 'Just say no' is an informed approach to any modification, whether adult or child. One of the best ways I know of to get some kid clean or into recovery or to immunize them against usage of these drugs of abuse is get them to hang out with peers who demonstrate an interest in doing other (positive) things.

"An adolescent can best reach another adolescent."

The project is seeking volunteers for outreach programs, which Adams feels will be most effective in conveying experiences like Gloria's, and it is collaborating with businesses, government agencies and other entities.

Charles Schwab, founder and chairman of the Charles Schwab Corp., and his wife, Helen, part-time Big Island residents, are funding the Hawaii program, but the goal is to make it self-sustaining, Adams said.

## **Disturbing data**


- » Hawaii ranks fifth highest in the nation for meth use by people age 12 and older.
- » 7.3 percent of 10th-graders have used meth, according to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey -- an 87 percent jump from 2005.
- » 11 percent of Hawaii teens and 18 percent of young adults report having close friends who use meth, and 18 percent of teens and young adults have family members who have been treated for meth.
- » 19 percent of teens and 36 percent of young adults say meth is readily available; 12 percent of teens and 27 percent of young adults say they have been offered the drug.
- » Meth-related drug offenses are the biggest contributor to violent crime and property crime in Hawaii, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Source: Hawaii Meth Project

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