



FAMILY HEALTH

RI RANKS 50TH NATIONALLY

TABLE 12

FAMILY HEALTH MAJOR INDEX RANKINGS		
Measure	National Rank	New England Rank
Family Health	50th	6th
Tobacco-Alcohol-Obesity	29th	4th
Illicit Drugs	50th	6th
Sexually Transmitted Disease	26th	6th
Infant Survival	41st	5th
Self Mortality	18th	3rd

Source: Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity and American Conservative Union Foundation

Illicit Drug Use

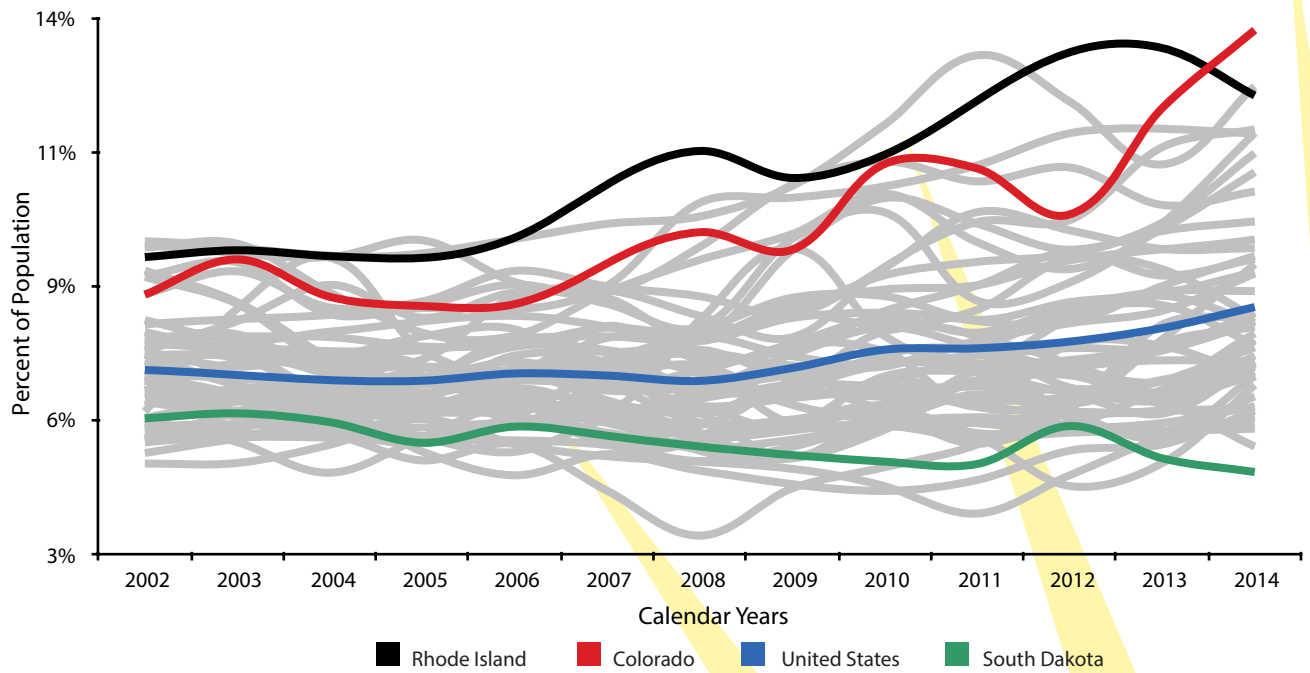
► **Rhode Island ranks LAST nationally on this FPI sub-index**

Illicit drug use imposes a heavy economic and social burden on society in general and Rhode Island in particular. A recent study by the National Drug Intelligence Center found that the total cost of illicit drug use in the United States in 2007 was \$193 billion — from increased crime (\$113 billion), declining health (\$11 billion), and lost productivity (\$68 billion).³⁷ For the Ocean State, among the many benefits of tackling this problem would be the improved productivity of the state’s existing labor force.

37 “The Economic Impact of Illicit Drug Use on American Society,” U.S. Department of Justice: National Drug Intelligence Center, April 2011. <http://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs44/44731/44731p.pdf>

As shown in **Chart 13**, Rhode Island’s illicit drug use (as a percentage of population) has always exceeded the national average.³⁸ More troubling, however, is that the growth in illicit drug use between 2002 and 2014 has significantly outpaced the national average (37 percent versus 19 percent, respectively).

CHART 13
Illicit Drug Use
 Calendar Years 2002 to 2014



Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity, and American Conservative Union Foundation

Overall, the data shows that the burden of illicit drug use in Rhode Island is not only substantial, but also growing faster than in the rest of the nation. Lowering Rhode Island’s illicit drug use rate to the national average must be a priority. In human terms, that would mean 46,000 fewer Rhode Islanders suffering under illicit drug use — falling from 131,000 people to 85,000 people.

To its credit, in 2016, Rhode Island passed into law a series of bills to address opioid misuse and abuse in the state, including opioid prescribing limits, treatment reform, insurance mandates, and prescription drug monitoring.³⁹

The burden of illicit drug use in Rhode Island is growing faster than in the rest of the nation.

38 Rhode Island’s 2016 FPI ranking for illicit drug use was based on 2013 data. Since then, new data has been released for 2014 which is reflected in Chart 13.

39 Townley, Charles, “Rhode Island Becomes the Latest State to Pass Opioid Legislation in 2016,” National Academy for State Health Policy, July 11, 2016. <http://nashp.org/rhode-island-becomes-the-sixth-state-to-pass-opioid-legislation-in-2016/>

Criminal Justice Reform

Another way to reduce Rhode Island’s high rate of illicit drug use is to reduce prison time for drug users.

America’s prison system is a revolving door of incarceration and recidivism for people who are addicted to illicit drugs and/or subjected to their ill effects. Consider the following facts from a comprehensive study published by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse.⁴⁰

First, illicit drug use often leads to the commission of other crimes as well as incarceration:



Illicit drugs are implicated in the incarceration of three-quarters (75.9 percent) of all inmates in America. In addition to the inmates who were convicted of a drug law violation, 54.3 percent of alcohol law violators, 77.2 percent of those who committed a property crime, 65.4 percent of inmates who committed a violent crime, and 67.6 percent of those who committed other crimes either committed their crime to get money to buy drugs, were under the influence of drugs at the time of the crime, had a history of regular drug use or had a drug use disorder.⁴¹

Second, illicit drug use plays a substantial role in recidivism:

Substance-involved offenders are likelier to recidivate than those who are not substance-involved. Over half (52.2 percent) of substance-involved inmates have one or more previous incarcerations compared with 31.2 percent of inmates not substance-involved. High rates of recidivism translate into burdensome incarceration costs for society, averaging \$25,144 per inmate, per year and ranging from a lower of \$10,700 in Alabama to a high of \$65,599 in Maine. Breaking the cycle of re-arrests and re-incarceration requires breaking the cycle of addiction.⁴²

40 "Behind Bars II: Substance Abuse and America's Prison Population," The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, February, 2010. http://www.centeronaddiction.org/modal_forms/nojs/webform/161
 41 Ibid, pg. 13
 42 Ibid, pg. 5

Finally, illicit drug use leads to an inter-generational incarceration problem:

In 2016, American prisons and jails held an estimated 1.0 million substance-involved parents with more than 2.2 million minor children; 73.7 percent (1.7 million) of these children are 12 years of age or younger. The minor children of inmates are at a much higher risk of juvenile delinquency, adult criminality and substance misuse than are minor children of parents who have not been incarcerated. Almost four-fifths of incarcerated mothers (77 percent in state prison and 83 percent in federal prison) reported being the primary daily caregiver for their children prior to their imprisonment compared with 26 percent of fathers incarcerated in state prisons and 31 percent incarcerated in federal prisons.⁴³

In Rhode Island, there are slightly fewer mothers in prison (66 percent of incarcerated females are mothers), but a significantly higher number of fathers (54 percent of incarcerated males are fathers) as compared with national averages.⁴⁴ A few suggested policy reforms would include: probation reform, sentencing reform, *mens rea* reform, and a reduction in over-criminalization.⁴⁵

2016 Reforms Stalled

Unfortunately for Rhode Island, a series of criminal justice reform bills — with support from both the left and the right and from many community leaders — was passed in the Senate and supported by the governor, yet did not receive action and was ultimately killed in the House. The Center strongly recommends that a modified and expanded version of this package of bills be re-introduced and passed in 2017.



Solving the drug user/recidivism problem will also benefit Rhode Island’s economy in the long run. Incarceration is very expensive and ultimately leads to unnecessarily high government spending, higher taxes, greater crowd-out of the private sector, and lower incomes for all Ocean State residents (as discussed previously in the *Economics* section).

43 Ibid, pg. 4

44 “Family Prosperity in Rhode Island: Criminal Justice Reform Brief,” Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity

45 Ibid, pg. 3