

since they provide a direct and pluralistic link between the government and the 'grass roots'. As we shall see, NGOs are crucial actors which have defined a wide variety of important social issues related to narcotrafficking. Some of these issues include those associated with race, gender, sexuality, poverty, and health.

In many ways, the AIDS epidemic represents a crucial intersection between narcotrafficking and the social issues noted above. It primarily involves the trafficking and consumption of illicit narcotics which are used intravenously, especially cocaine and heroin. Specialists note that despite the 'War on Drugs' which began in the 1980s, drug consumption is at a crescendo as we approach the new millennium.² The relatively low price of cocaine suggests that there is more of that illicit drug on the streets than ever, and a 1999 report by the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board indicates the increased presence and use of heroin in Canada.³ Beyond the direct link between injection use of cocaine and heroin to newly diagnosed cases of HIV, there exists related issues such as the medical use of marijuana for those suffering from AIDS. As we shall see, each illicit drug is characterized by its own constellation of politics, although there are some significant concentric areas between them. The analysis shall begin by examining a variety of issues related to AIDS and the use of illicit narcotics, and will then turn to a menu of feasible options aimed at addressing what may be shortcomings in existing policy.

An epidemic of cocaine use first appeared in Vancouver during 1991-1992,⁴ with problems concentrated in the downtown East Side along the corridor of East Hastings Street. More recently, such problems have spread throughout the metropolitan region, particularly in communities directly located along the Sky Train which links downtown Vancouver to other highly populated areas of the Lower Mainland.⁵ As the following table demonstrates, newly reported cases of AIDS in the 1990s are linked to issues associated with injection drug use and with matters of sexuality.

Persons Testing Newly Positive for HIV by Risk Category, 1992-1997