



# Decriminalising illicit drug use in Portugal: Impacts on prevalence & patterns of illicit drug use

Dr Caitlin Hughes - DPMP, NDARC

Never Stand Still

Faculty of Medicine

School of Public Health and Community Medicine

Co-author: Professor Alex Stevens , University of Kent

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# The Portuguese reform

July 2001: Drug use/possession and acquisition of *all* illicit drugs became a public order offence

Aim: Discourage and/or treat drug use

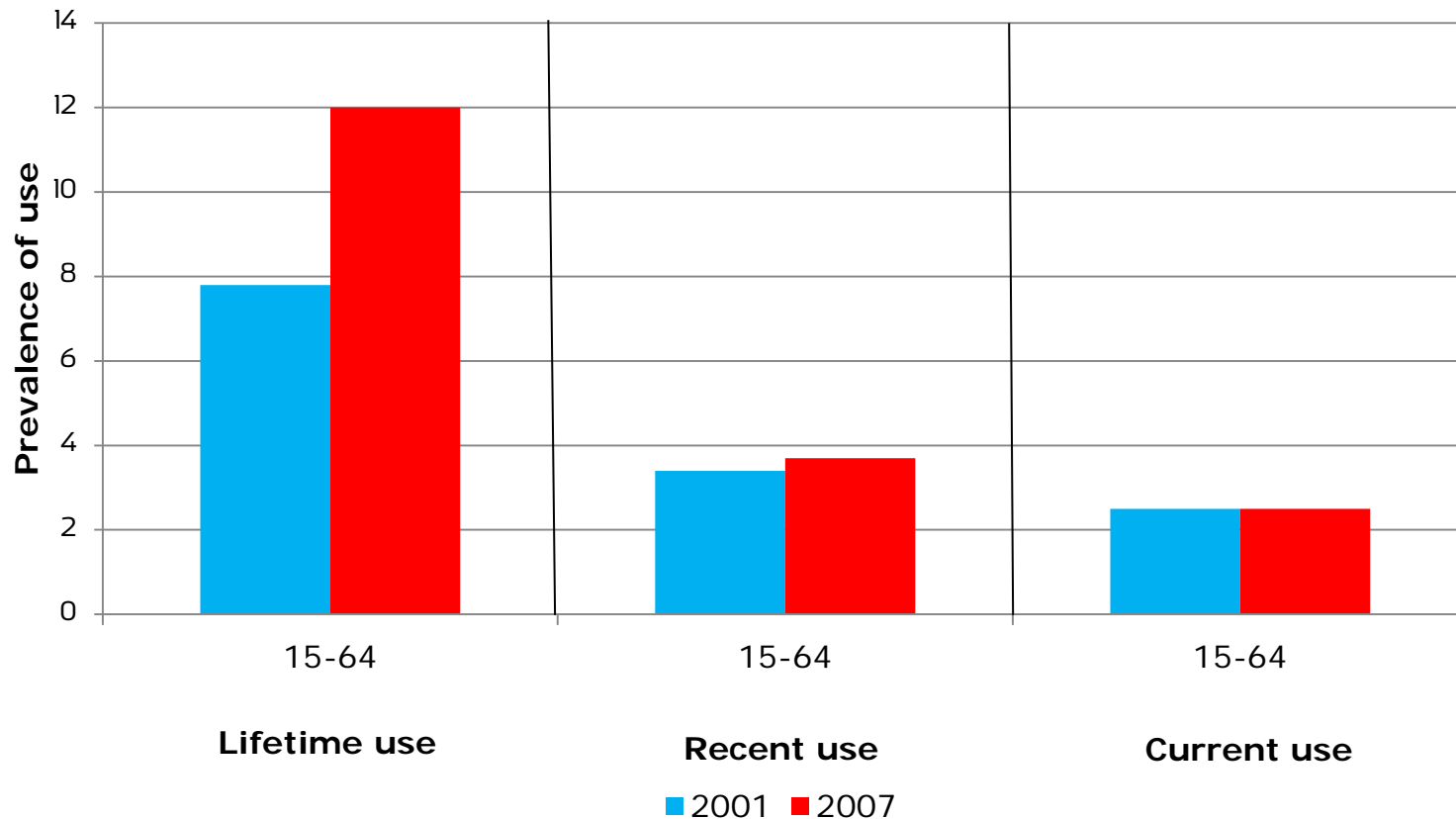
Detected users sanctioned through Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction (CDTs) and may receive:

- Referral for assessment of treatment needs
- Bans on attending a designated bar
- Fine

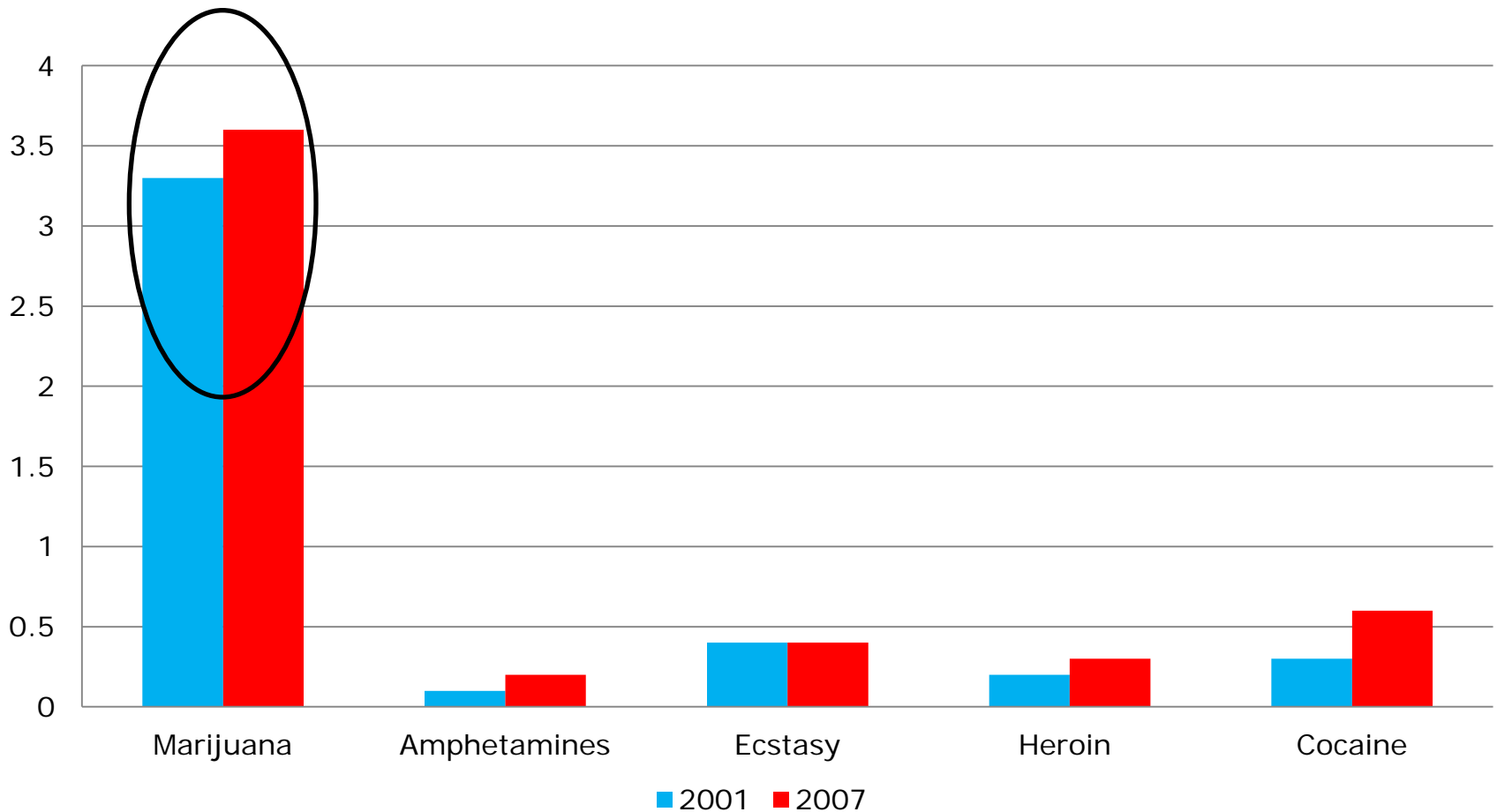
Introduced as part of a new national drug strategy that expanded services for harm reduction, treatment, social integration and law enforcement



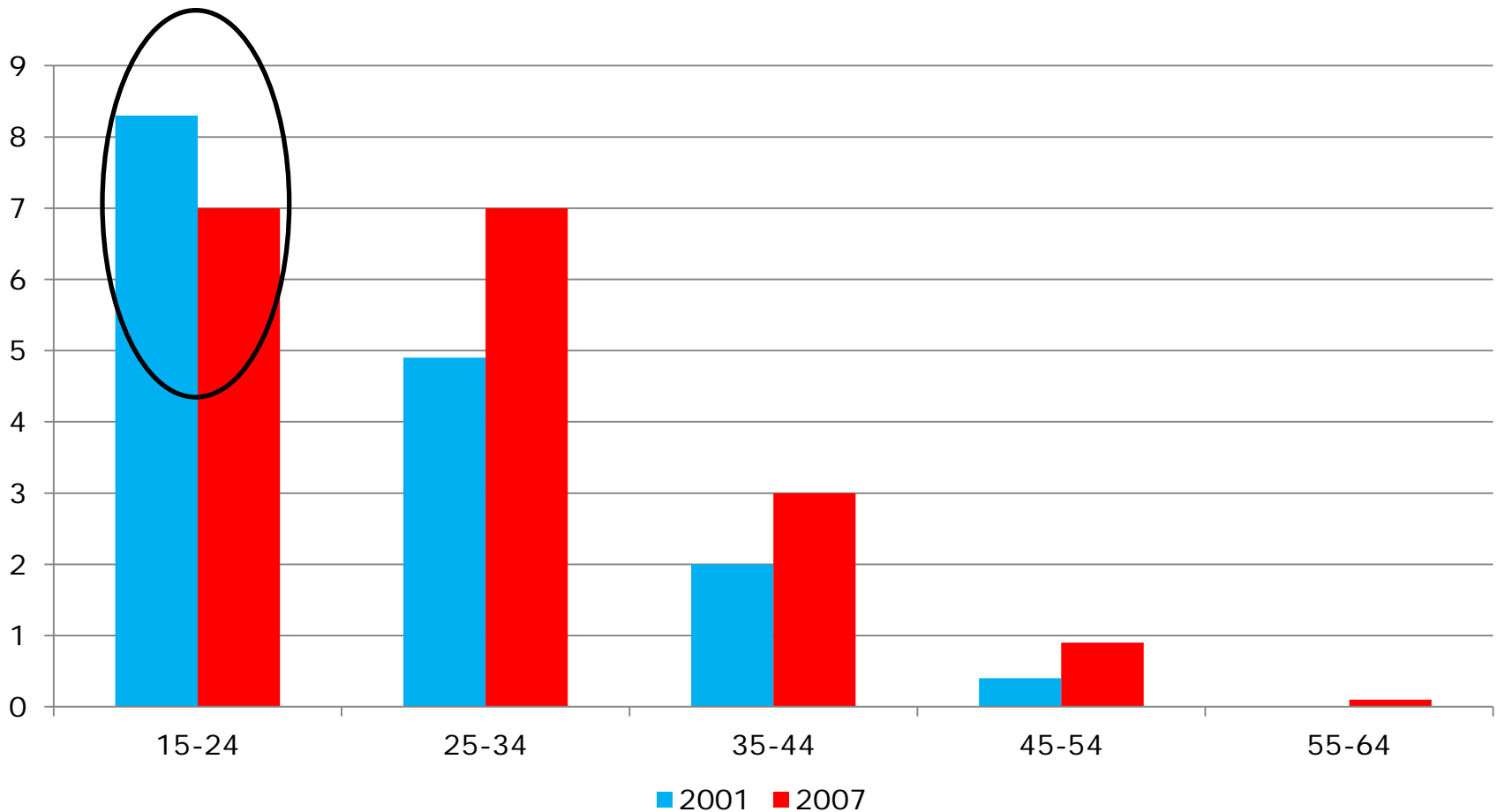
# Trends in any illicit drug use - general population (aged 15-64)



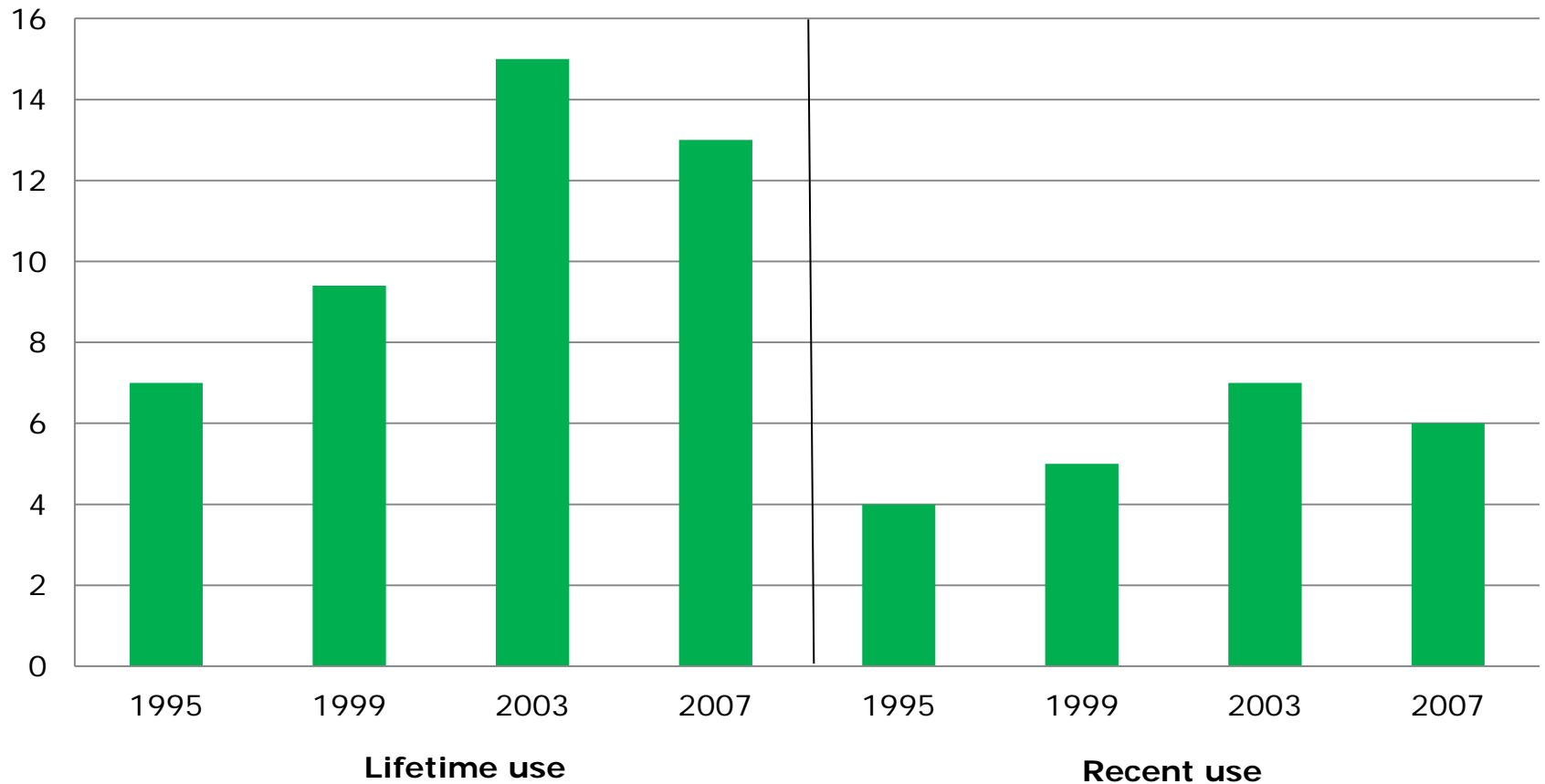
# Trends in recent use - by drug type



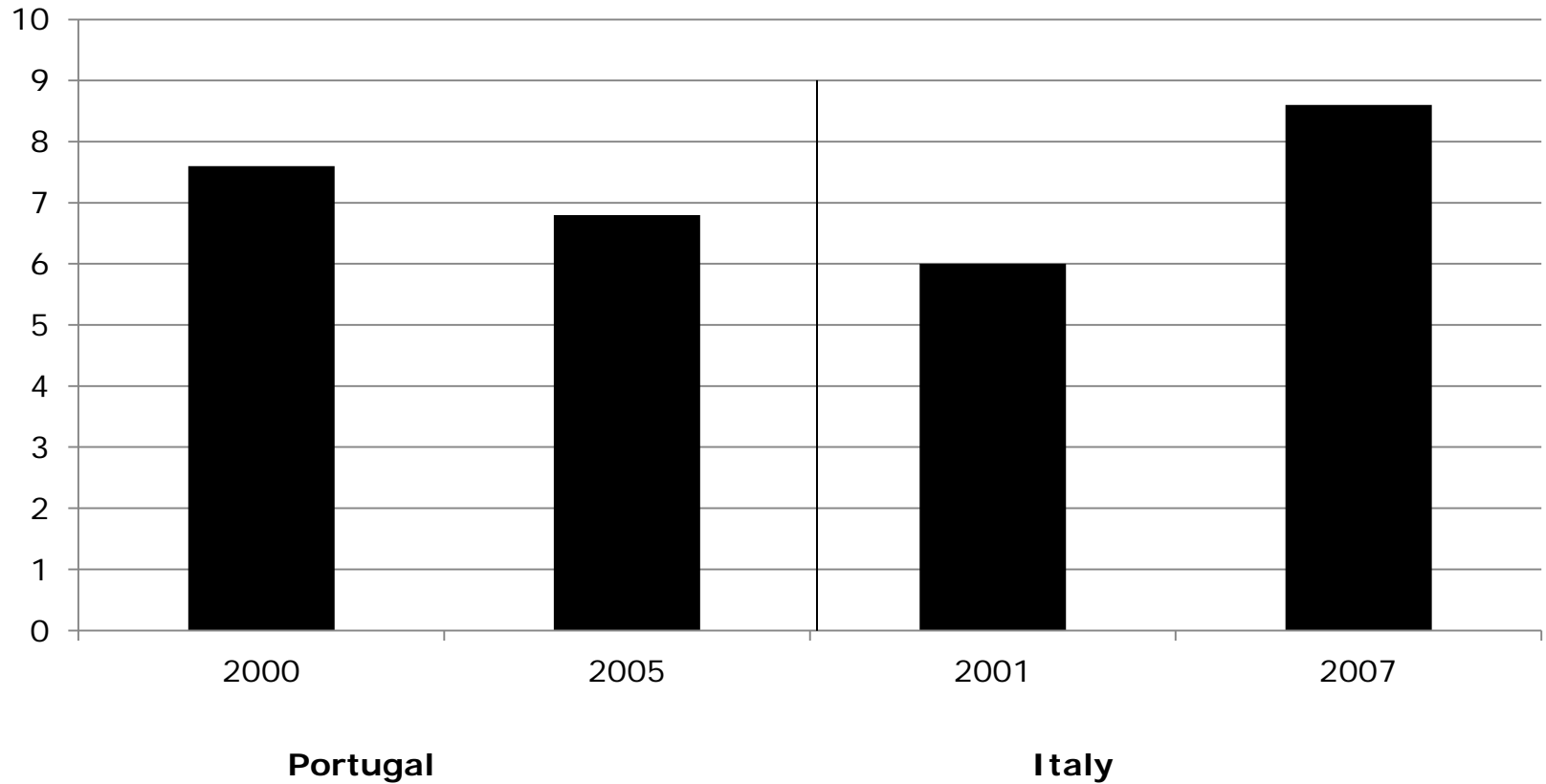
# Trends in recent use - by age group



# Trends in youth - lifetime and recent cannabis use (students aged 16)



# Trends in number of problematic drug users per 1000 population aged 15-64 - Portugal vs. Italy



# Implications

Ten years post reform there is evidence of only a small increase in recent drug use

Equally if not more importantly increases have occurred amongst mainly cannabis - not the most harmful drugs - heroin and methamphetamine

Furthermore, increases have been offset by reductions in the prevalence and frequency of use amongst youth and problematic drug users (populations amongst whom drug use is *most* burdensome to the general community)

This provides strong evidence that decriminalising illicit drug use, possession and acquisition will not inevitably lead to a rampant increase in illicit drug use and that it may even assist governments to reduce net harm to the general community

Decriminalisation may therefore offer a model for other nations that wish to provide less punitive responses to illicit drug use



Thank you

Contact details:

Caitlin Hughes

P: 02 9385 0132

E: [caitlin.hughes@unsw.edu.au](mailto:caitlin.hughes@unsw.edu.au)

For more information on the impacts of the reform:

Hughes, C. E. and Stevens, A. (2010) What can we learn from the Portuguese decriminalization of illicit drugs?  
British Journal of Criminology.

For more information on the Drug Policy Modelling Program:

[www.dpmp.unsw.edu.au](http://www.dpmp.unsw.edu.au)