Impaired Driving Issue Brief

MADD IMPAIRED DRIVING ENDS HERE.

Supporting Drug Evaluation and Classification Programs

Background

While **alcohol-impaired driving** remains a leading and persistent challenge, **drugs other than alcohol** have rapidly become a growing factor in crashes, injuries, and fatalities. To combat drug-impaired driving, the **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)** and the **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)** sponsor the **Drug Evaluation and Classification (DEC) Program**. Under the DEC Program, law enforcement officers are eligible to receive Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) training as well as additional training to become a Drug Recognition Expert (DRE).

DRE officers are able to better identify drivers who may be under the influence of a drug or driving in an impaired condition by checking for signs and symptoms of drug use as well as the presence drugs.

The ARIDE program is designed to bridge the gap between basic Standardized Field Sobriety Testing (SFST), which focuses primarily on alcohol, and the advanced DRE program. The goal of ARIDE is to provide a broader base of officers with the knowledge to identify and articulate the observable signs of impairment, related to drugs, alcohol, or a combination of both at the roadside, that warrants calling a DRE for a full evaluation.

Specialized training programs for law enforcement officers, such as ARIDE and DRE, equip officers to recognize signs of impairment and are among the most effective tools available to combat drugged driving. However, implementation of these programs varies widely across states due to differing challenges related to program expansion, long-term sustainability, and support from court officials and law enforcement leadership.

In 2024, AAA partnered with IACP to conduct its third survey of DEC program coordinators, aiming to identify state-level barriers and opportunities in funding, capacity, training, DRE retention, administration, and policy support.[28]

Key Survey Findings

- While most states don't report insufficient funding as a problem, some DEC program coordinators report they need funding for additional resources that cannot be purchased using Highway Safety Grants, including recruitment efforts and food for training.
- Many states note that funds are needed to backfill patrol officers who are in DEC program training or support overtime costs for off-duty call-outs for DRE evaluations and testimony.
- Some states have issues serving rural regions or are geographically too large for the current number of DREs to cover.
- Most states report having trouble retaining active DREs. As DREs are among the best officers, they are often promoted to other positions and let their certification lapse voluntarily.
- Officers face burnout and frustration due to the lack of prosecutions. Confusion about impaired driving laws in states with legalized cannabis and decriminalized drugs might be a factor here.
- Education is needed on the impairing effects of cannabis. Increased drug-impaired driving arrests have been observed in states with legalized recreational or medicinal cannabis and in neighboring states. However, some states see a reluctance to prosecute due to a lack of education on the impairing effect of cannabis on driving.

Policy Recommendation

The DEC program is an effective tool for combating drugged driving by providing law enforcement with diagnostic expertise. States and traffic safety organizations should work with their DEC program coordinator on the opportunities noted in the survey to help strengthen the DEC program in their state.

Relevant Research

For more resources and tools visit newsroom.aaa.com/impaireddriving.

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