

**Addiction Should be Treated as Public Health Issue: Kerlikowske**

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Addiction should be treated as a public health issue, National Drug Control Policy Director R. Gil Kerlikowske told participants of a recent conference on prescription drug abuse.

Addiction is a brain disease, and should not be treated as a moral failure, he said.

Drug overdoses kill more Americans than traffic crashes or gunshot wounds, he told the group. He praised prescription drug take-back events for removing drugs from the home that might otherwise fall into the hands of young people and others who may abuse them, the Associated Press reports.

Kerlikowske touched on a range of issues, including medical marijuana, cocaine use and heroin use. He said the popularity of medical marijuana sends the wrong message to young people, and noted there has been a 40 percent drop in cocaine use since 2006.

There has been a decrease in the number of people abusing prescription drugs, from 7 million in 2010, to 6.1 million in 2011, he said. Kerlikowske expressed concern about the rise in heroin use.