

Reported drug abusers in further decline but cannabis abusers rise by 8 per cent (with photos)

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first three quarters of 2019 at its quarterly meeting today (December 13). The committee noted that while the total number of reported drug abusers decreased by nearly 20 per cent compared to the same period last year, there was a continued increase of reported cannabis abusers, and that the cannabis abuse problem among young abusers persists.

According to the latest figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), the total number of reported drug abusers in the first three quarters of 2019 decreased by 19 per cent (from 5,739 to 4,625) compared with the same period in 2018. The number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 also decreased by 10 per cent (from 383 to 346).

In the first three quarters of 2019, the total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers dropped from 3,194 to 2,389, recording a 25 per cent decrease compared to the same period last year. The total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) also decreased by 13 per cent (from 3,263 to 2,849) compared to the same period last year. Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 1,026) remained considerably higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 124).

Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused among all reported drug abusers, but the number of reported abusers decreased by 25 per cent (from 3,193 to 2,387) compared with the same period last year. Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") continued to be the most common type of psychotropic substance abused; the number of reported abusers decreased by 15 per cent (from 1,241 to 1,055) compared with the same period last year.

However, the number of reported cannabis abusers increased by 8 per cent (from 365 to 393). For reported young drug abusers aged under 21, cannabis continued to be the most common type of drug abused, followed by cocaine and "Ice". Compared to the same period last year, the number of reported cannabis abusers aged under 21 increased by 40 per cent (from 117 to 164), while that of reported cocaine and "Ice" abusers decreased by 32 per cent (from 211 to 144) and 28 per cent (from 71 to 51) respectively.

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 14 per cent (from 1,353 to 1,169) compared with the same period last year. About half (48 per cent) were young adults aged between 21 and 35. The median history of drug abuse of newly reported abusers (i.e. the time for abusers to be reported to the CRDA by reporting agencies from their first drug abuse) was 5.6 years, compared with 4.7 years in 2018, indicating that hidden drug abuse still requires attention.

The CRDA figures for the first three quarters of 2019 are available on the Narcotics Division's (ND) website (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).

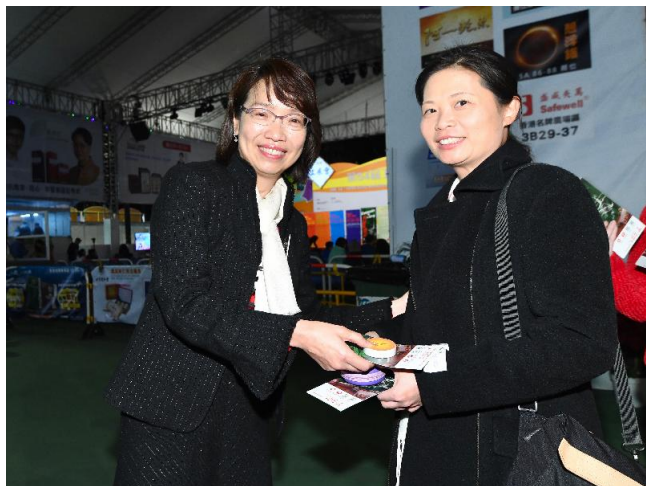
The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, said, "The rise in the number of reported cannabis abusers, especially among young people aged under 21, remains a cause for concern. Cannabis is addictive and can cause serious harm to mental health, may induce anxiety and hallucination, and increase the risks of respiratory problems and cardiovascular diseases. Members of the public should correctly understand the harms of cannabis abuse, pursue a healthy lifestyle and refrain from drug temptations."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "Some overseas jurisdictions have earlier legalised the recreational use of cannabis, and have in recent months further broadened the scope of products that can contain cannabis. Products containing cannabis could appear in different forms, including food, drinks, topical products for applying to skin, hair or nails, as well as cannabis extract. These products may be available for sale in local stores of these jurisdictions. Members of the public should pay attention to the packaging labels of the products concerned while making purchases, and should not bring such products to Hong Kong to avoid breaching the law inadvertently."

After the meeting, Dr Cheung; the Chairman of the ACAN Sub-committee on Preventive Education and Publicity, Mr Chan Wing-kin; the Chairman of the ACAN Sub-committee on Treatment and Rehabilitation, Professor Cheung Yuet-wah; and Ms Law, with the support of the Vice-chairman of the District Fight Crime Committee (DFCC) (Wan Chai District), Mr Yeung Ka-shing, distributed anti-drug leaflets and souvenirs at the 54th Hong Kong Brands and Products Expo at Victoria Park to appeal to members of the public to remain vigilant and stay away from drugs, especially during the Christmas and New Year holidays. Persons coming across drug problems can seek help through the ND's instant messaging service 98 186 186 or 24-hour hotline 186 186.

Other participants at today's event included ACAN members Mr Chan Man-ho, Mr Fan Hoi-kit, Miss Li Ka-yan and Dr Annissa Lui; member of the ACAN Sub-committee on Preventive Education and Publicity Mr Ryan Wong; and member of the DFCC (Wan Chai District) Mr Lui Hon-fai.





[“Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2018” published](#)

The Government released today (December 13) the "Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2018". The key analyses (see Annex) were presented to the Commission on Poverty (CoP) at its meeting held this afternoon.

Adopting the analytical framework of the poverty line endorsed by the CoP, the Office of the Government Economist in collaboration with the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) updated and analysed poverty statistics using the data from the General Household Survey by the C&SD as the basis. This is the seventh annual update of the poverty situation analysis since the publication of the first official poverty line in 2013. The major findings were as follows:

* In 2018, after taking into account the Government's recurrent cash policy intervention, the poor population amounted to 1 024 300 persons and the poverty rate was 14.9 per cent. Compared with the pre-intervention (i.e. before tax and social welfare transfer) poverty figures (1 406 500 persons and 20.4 per cent respectively), recurrent cash policies effectively lifted 382 200 persons out of poverty and reduced the poverty rate by 5.5 percentage points.

* The figures for the poor population and the poverty rate in 2018 were slightly higher than those in 2017 (before policy intervention: increased by 29 800 persons and 0.3 percentage point; after recurrent cash policy intervention: increased by 15 500 persons and 0.2 percentage point). This is mainly because of the acceleration of population ageing, which offset the positive impacts brought about by favourable economic and employment conditions and the Government's strengthened efforts in poverty alleviation.

* The poverty alleviation impact of recurrent cash policies was the most notable since the release of the poverty line in 2013, mainly reflecting the

strengthened effectiveness of the enhanced Working Family Allowance (WFA) and the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA). Among various recurrent cash benefits, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and OALA had the largest impact on poverty alleviation, lifting 163 000 persons and 147 100 persons out of poverty respectively and reducing the overall poverty rate by 2.3 percentage points and 2.1 percentage points.

* The child poverty situation improved visibly in 2018 as a result of the provision of additional subsidies to families with children under the WFA. The enhanced WFA reduced the child poverty rate by 1.8 percentage points, a notable improvement as compared to the 1.1-percentage-point reduction in 2017. The post-intervention child poverty rate also fell to a record low of 16.8 per cent.

* The post-intervention elderly poverty rate rebounded by 0.4 percentage point compared with 2017 to 30.9 per cent in 2018. The increased poor elders mainly resided in elderly households without any income before government intervention. Even with government benefits, there was still a gap between the household income of some elders and the poverty line. Nevertheless, further analysis indicates that over 80 per cent of the poor elders residing in non-CSSA households (accounting for 89.2 per cent of overall poor elders) had no financial needs, reflecting that some retired elders possessed certain amounts of savings and assets. The actual living standards of elders might be understated under the existing poverty line analytical framework, which adopts household income as the sole indicator. Elderly poverty statistics should therefore be interpreted with caution.

* Other than recurrent cash measures, the Government has been spending significant resources to provide the grassroots with various non-recurrent cash (including one-off relief measures) and in-kind benefits. After taking into account both recurrent and non-recurrent cash measures, the post-intervention poverty rate fell to 13.3 per cent in 2018. After taking into account recurrent cash measures as well as in-kind benefits (comprising mainly public rental housing), the post-intervention poverty rate fell further to 10.6 per cent, lifting additional 294 000 persons out of poverty. This indicates the important role of public rental housing in the Government's poverty alleviation work.

* The Government is committed to providing a variety of support to the needy groups through different services and subsidies. Some non-means-tested universal measures, such as the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme and the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities, are not covered in the poverty line analytical framework, but have helped increase the disposable economic resources of needy households, thereby improving their living standards.

* In 2019, the local economy has weakened visibly, which will likely have repercussions on the earnings and employment prospects for the grassroots. Structural factors such as population ageing would also continue to put pressure on poverty indicators. The Government will closely monitor Hong Kong's poverty situation and continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach in poverty alleviation by providing appropriate assistance to grassroots

families to ease their poverty situation and achieve poverty prevention.

The Report has been uploaded to the CoP's dedicated website (www.povertyrelief.gov.hk).

Third-term Commission on Poverty convenes eighth meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the eighth meeting of the third-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (December 13).

The CoP was briefed on the poverty statistics and analysis for 2018 produced jointly by the Office of the Government Economist and the Census and Statistics Department. The CoP discussed the analysis and noted that the Government would publish the "Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2018" after the meeting. The report would also be uploaded to the CoP's dedicated website (www.povertyrelief.gov.hk).

Meetings of Legislative Council and its Committees

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

Details of the meetings of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and its Committees to be held in the LegCo Complex during the week from December 16 to 20 are available in the meeting schedule attached.

The information in the meeting schedule is subject to change. Please refer to the "LegCo Calendar" on the LegCo Website (www.legco.gov.hk) for the latest details of meetings.

Members of the public are welcome to observe open meetings of LegCo and its Committees. Interested individuals and groups are advised to make advance booking of seats by calling the LegCo Secretariat at 3919 3399 during office hours. Members of the public can also listen to or watch all open meetings via the "Webcast" system on the LegCo Website.

Safe Driving and Health Campaign encourages commercial vehicle drivers to pay attention to road safety and health

A spokesman for the Transport Department (TD) today (December 13) said that the Safe Driving and Health Campaign was launched to promote commercial vehicle drivers' awareness of safe driving and maintaining good health through a series of promotional and educational activities to enhance road safety.

The spokesman said that with busy traffic in Hong Kong, apart from passenger and driving safety, commercial vehicle drivers should also pay attention to their health conditions.

"Safe driving attitude and behavior", "respect other road users", "no drink driving and drug driving", "maintain good health conditions" and "mutual respect between drivers and passengers" are the five Campaign themes this year. The Campaign is to encourage proper driving attitudes and good driving habits among commercial vehicle drivers through various channels and programmes including radio broadcasts, interviews, interactive games, free health check-ups, and website and multimedia publicity.

Free health check-ups for commercial vehicle drivers are one of the Campaign's activities. Drivers can register by texting to WhatsApp or WeChat at 6594 1936. Successful applicants will receive a registration number for booking at designated health centres.

The spokesman said, "Limited health check-ups are available on a first-come, first-served basis. We appeal to commercial vehicle drivers to make their reservations early and encourage their counterparts to join the Campaign. They should also be mindful of their health conditions and build a healthy lifestyle."

Campaign ambassadors Mr Power Chan and Ms Mimi Lo will meet commercial vehicle drivers to promote the road safety message. In addition, drivers are welcome to browse the new dedicated Facebook page to obtain more road safety information, and participate in the interactive games with prizes. The first prize game on proper use of roundabouts, which offers gift coupons to 150 winners, has been launched to raise their awareness of safe driving.

For details of the Campaign, please visit the dedicated Facebook page (www.facebook.com/TDSafeDrivingandHealthCampaign) or call 2804 2600.