

Number of youth drug offence cases increases substantially

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug abuse and drug situation in the first three quarters of 2021 at its quarterly meeting today (December 16). The total number of persons arrested for drug offences, particularly young arrestees, has surged significantly. There was also a notable increase to the number of young drug abusers, and the situation of cannabis abuse among them is worrying.

According to figures from law enforcement agencies, the total number of persons arrested for drug offences in the first three quarters of 2021 increased by 28 per cent (from 2 678 to 3 423) as compared to that in the same period last year. The number of arrestees aged under 21 increased by 40 per cent (from 366 to 518), and 40 per cent of them were involved in cannabis-related offences.

Figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) revealed that the number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 in the first three quarters of 2021 increased substantially by 79 per cent (from 411 to 734). Among them, the number and proportion of students also increased (from 140 to 298 and from 35.4 per cent to 42.5 per cent). The most common locality of youth drug abuse is one's own or friend's home (53 per cent), followed by clubs, buildings, hotels or bars (35 per cent).

Driven by the rising number of reported young drug abusers, the total number of reported drug abusers in the first three quarters this year slightly increased by 4 per cent (from 4 636 to 4 808) as compared to that in the same period last year.

The number of cannabis abusers continued to increase. The number of reported cannabis abusers increased by 60 per cent (from 515 to 826) as compared to that in the same period of 2020. The number of cannabis abusers aged under 21 went up by 93 per cent (from 210 to 405). Cannabis remained the most common type of drug abused for reported drug abusers aged under 21, accounting for 55.6 per cent in the age group.

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Donald Li, said, "Drug trafficking is a serious criminal offence and young age is not a valid mitigating factor for being given a penalty. As Christmas and New Year holidays are approaching, I wish to remind members of the public, especially young people, not to be exploited by drug traffickers for quick money."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "The Government attaches great importance to the rising trend of young people's involvement in drug offences. The Policy Address announced by the Chief Executive this year covers a new initiative to help students understand the harm caused by drug correctly, and stay vigilant against the lure of taking drugs and taking

part in illegal acts related to drugs. Relevant government bureaux and departments, including the Narcotics Division (ND) of the Security Bureau, the Education Bureau, law enforcement agencies, etc, will continue to step up work related to education and publicity as well as law enforcement."

The number of newly reported drug abusers in the first three quarters increased by 39 per cent (from 1 100 to 1 524) compared with that in the same period last year. Among them, the number of newly reported young drug abusers increased by 86 per cent (from 281 to 522). The median drug history of newly reported abusers (i.e. the time for abusers to be reported to the CRDA by reporting agencies from their first drug abuse) in the first three quarters this year was 3.1 years, compared with five years in 2020. The median drug history of newly reported youth drug abusers aged under 21 was 1.2 years.

In the first three quarters of the year, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) increased by 20 per cent (from 2 734 to 3 289) compared to that in the same period last year. The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers decreased by 23 per cent (from 2 459 to 1 882). Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 1 410) remained substantially higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 81).

Heroin remained the single most common type of drug abused among all reported drug abusers, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 23 per cent (from 2 454 to 1 882) compared to that in the same period last year. Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") continued to be the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 10 per cent (from 976 to 881). It was followed by cocaine and cannabis, the number of abusers of which went up by 58 per cent (from 528 to 835) and 60 per cent (from 515 to 826) respectively.

Figures in the first three quarters of 2021 recorded by the CRDA, in particular their comparison with those in the same period in 2020, might have been affected by the situation of COVID-19. Due to the pandemic, reporting agencies might have come into contact with fewer drug abusers during the above periods, and might have needed more time to report information of drug abusers to the CRDA. The ND and the ACAN will pay close attention to the number of reported drug abusers in the whole year of 2021 and the possible impact of the pandemic on the statistics, as well as make reference to other sources of statistics and information in order to analyse the drug trends.

The CRDA figures for the first three quarters of 2021 are available on the website of the ND (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).

Anyone who encounters drug problems is encouraged to make use of the ND's instant messaging service 98 186 186 or 24-hour hotline 186 186 to seek help.