

Total number of reported drug abusers declined but drug abuse among young adults and hidden drug abuse still warrant attention

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first quarter of 2018 at its quarterly meeting today (June 12). The total number of reported drug abusers declined compared to the same period in 2017. However, hidden drug abuse and drug abuse among young adults still call for attention.

According to the latest figures of the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), the total number of reported drug abusers in the first quarter of 2018 decreased by 6 per cent (from 2,357 to 2,209) as compared to the same period last year, while the number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 decreased by 29 per cent (from 154 to 110).

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 23 per cent (from 414 to 320). Over half (51 per cent) were young adults aged between 21 and 35.

The latest CRDA figures also revealed that 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 5.3 years in the first quarter of 2018, while the figure for 2017 was 4.3 years, indicating that hidden drug abuse remains a concern.

In the first quarter of 2018, the total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers increased by 13 per cent (from 1,323 to 1,494) when compared to the same period in 2017. The vast majority were heroin abusers (1,493). The total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) declined by 28 per cent (from 1,307 to 946) when compared to the same period in 2017. Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 267) was substantially higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 51), suggesting the continued prevalence of psychotropic substance abuse.

Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") continued to be the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, with the number of reported abusers having dropped by 41 per cent (from 573 to 337) as compared to the same period in 2017. Other major types of psychotropic substances recording a lower number of reported abusers included triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone (from 283 to 251), cocaine (from 236 to 213), ketamine (from 250 to 110), cannabis (from 109 to 93), cough medicine (from 79 to 58) and nimetazepam (from 10 to seven).

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, said, "Despite the drop of the total

number of reported drug abusers, over half of the newly reported drug abusers were young adults, indicating the need for continued attention to the drug abuse problem of this age group. As PSAs may not display obvious withdrawal symptoms, they may not be easily identified. Members of the public should therefore have an awareness of hidden drug abuse, and encourage those in need to seek help. Young persons should make wise choices, knowing how to say no to drugs and pursue a healthy lifestyle. Persons with drug problems can seek help through the 24-hour hotline 186 186 or the instant messaging service 98 186 186 of the Narcotics Division (ND) of the Security Bureau."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Manda Chan, said, "With the summer holidays approaching, ACAN and the ND will step up anti-drug promotions, including the launch of new television and radio Announcements in the Public Interest on the harms of 'Ice' and cocaine abuse, and encouraging early help seeking. Advertisements will also be placed on public transportation networks, in entertainment venues, and on popular websites, mobile applications and social media platforms.

"Youngsters are encouraged to make good use of the summer holidays to participate in healthy activities. Don't take drugs out of curiosity or peer pressure. Don't be used by criminals to engage in drug trafficking. Drug trafficking is a serious offence with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of \$5 million."

The CRDA figures for the first quarter of 2018 are available on the ND's website (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).