

Total number of reported drug abusers declines but youth drug abuse warrants attention

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first quarter of 2019 at its quarterly meeting today (June 13). The total number of reported drug abusers declined compared to the same period in 2018. However, increased reported young drug abusers aged under 21 and increased cannabis abuse warrant continuous 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 2019 decreased by 17 per cent (from 2 447 to 2 033) as compared to the same period last year, while the number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased by 15 per cent (from 129 to 148). Over 60 per cent of drug abusers took drugs at their own homes or their friends' homes only.

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 2 per cent (from 403 to 394). Half (50 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 4.8 years, compared with 4.7 years in 2018.

In the first quarter of 2019, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) increased by 7 per cent (from 1 135 to 1 209) compared to the same period in 2018. The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers declined by 33 per cent (from 1 565 to 1 056). Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 345) was substantially higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 37).

Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 32 per cent (from 1 564 to 1 056) compared to the same period in 2018. Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") continued to be the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, with the number of reported abusers having increased by 7 per cent (from 405 to 435). Triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone and cocaine followed, with the numbers of reported abusers having decreased by 1 per cent (from 289 to 285) and 7 per cent (from 263 to 245) respectively. Meanwhile, the number of reported cannabis abusers increased by 57 per cent (from 109 to 171).

For reported young drug abusers aged under 21, cannabis was 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 increased (from 38 to 67), while that of reported cocaine and "Ice" abusers decreased (for cocaine, from 74 to 66; for "Ice", from 23 to 19).

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, said, "The total number of reported

drug abusers in the first quarter of 2019 declined, but the noticeable rise of cannabis abuse, particularly by youths aged under 21, calls for attention. Cannabis is a drug and is addictive. It can cause serious harm to mental health, and increase the risks of respiratory problems and cardiovascular diseases. ACAN and the Narcotics Division (ND) are strengthening relevant publicity and educational measures to assist members of the public, especially young people, to have a correct understanding of the harms of cannabis abuse. Persons coming across drug problems can seek help through the ND's 24-hour hotline 186 186 or instant messaging service 98 186 186."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Manda Chan, said, "With the legalisation of recreational cannabis in some overseas countries and regions, members of the public travelling to these places are reminded to pay careful attention to the domestic cannabis laws. Bringing into Hong Kong cannabis or any products (including food or drinks) that contain controlled cannabis compounds is a criminal offence.

"For the coming summer holidays, parents are encouraged to arrange healthy extra-curricular activities for their children. Through more communication with their children, parents are in a good position to provide them with guidance and assistance for handling problems and advise them to refrain from trying drugs under the influence of others."

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