

Total number of reported drug abusers in 2019 declines but number of cannabis abusers substantially increases

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) noted the local drug situation in 2019. While the total number of reported drug abusers decreased compared with that in 2018, there was a substantial increase in the number of cannabis abusers, especially among young people aged under 21. Drug abuse among young adults aged between 21 and 35 and hidden drug abuse still warrant attention.

According to the latest figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), the total number of reported drug abusers in 2019 decreased by 17 per cent (from 6,752 to 5,614) compared with 2018. The number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased slightly by 1 per cent (from 474 to 479).

In addition, the number of reported cannabis abusers continued to increase in 2019, by 5 per cent compared with 2018 (from 483 to 506). For reported young drug abusers aged under 21, cannabis was the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, with the number of reported abusers rising by 48 per cent (from 154 to 228).

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 11 per cent (from 1,727 to 1,544) compared with 2018, and among them 46 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 5.5 years, compared with 4.9 years in 2018, indicating that the problem of hidden drug abuse persists.

The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers dropped from 3,627 in 2018 to 2,874 in 2019, registering a fall of 21 per cent. The total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) decreased by 13 per cent (from 4,000 to 3,471) from 2018. Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 1,336) continued to be substantially higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 181).

Heroin remained the most common type of single drug abused among all reported drug abusers, but the number of reported abusers decreased by 21 per cent (from 3,626 to 2,872) compared with that of 2018. Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") continued to be the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, with the number of reported abusers falling by 18 per cent from 2018 (from 1,570 to 1,291).

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

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, said today (April 6), "Although the total number of reported drug abusers in 2019 decreased compared with that of 2018, the number of cannabis abusers, especially young abusers aged under 21, continued to increase and is a matter of concern. Cannabis is a drug. Taking cannabis will cause addiction, hallucination, IQ loss, anxiety, depression and more. Members of the public should be clearly aware of the harmful effects of taking cannabis. Young people should also stay vigilant and should not try drugs out of curiosity or peer pressure. Anyone encountering drug problems or knowing that his or her family members or friends have drug problems can seek help through the ND's instant messaging service 98 186 186 or 24-hour hotline 186 186."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "Some overseas jurisdictions have legalised the recreational use of cannabis in recent years. Products containing cannabis in different forms are available for sale in the local shops or online stores in these jurisdictions. Members of the public, especially young people, may have the misconception that cannabis is not harmful. To tackle the problem head-on, we will continue to strengthen publicity work to provide correct information on the harms of cannabis abuse, rectify mistaken concepts about this drug, and help members of the public identify cannabis products so that they can avoid breaching the law inadvertently."