

## Total number of reported drug abusers in Hong Kong in decline but cannabis abuse still requires attention

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first half of 2019 at its quarterly meeting today (September 18). While the total number of reported drug abusers declined compared to the same period in 2018, there was increased cannabis abuse, especially among younger people.

According to the latest figures of the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), the total number of reported drug abusers in the first half of 2019 decreased by 14 per cent (from 4 197 to 3 612) as compared to the same period last year, while the number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased slightly by one person (from 268 to 269).

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 6 per cent (from 891 to 835) as compared to 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 5.2 years, compared with 4.7 years in 2018, indicating that hidden drug abuse remains a concern.

In the first half of 2019, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) continued to be higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers. Both figures decreased as compared to the same period last year, by 2 per cent (from 2 258 to 2 206) and 24 per cent (from 2 425 to 1 838) respectively. Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 741) was substantially higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 79).

Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 24 per cent (from 2 424 to 1 838) compared to 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 increased slightly by one person (from 826 to 827). Triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone and cocaine came next, with the numbers of reported abusers having decreased by 5 per cent (from 530 to 506) and 19 per cent (from 569 to 461) respectively. Meanwhile, the number of reported cannabis abusers increased by 35 per cent (from 234 to 316).

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 increased by 60 per cent (from 80 to 128), while that of reported cocaine and "Ice" abusers decreased by 29 per cent (from 152 to 108) and 27 per cent

(from 52 to 38) respectively.

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, said, "Despite the decrease in the total number of reported drug abusers in the first half of 2019, the continued increase of cannabis abuse, particularly among youngsters aged under 21, warrants our sustained attention."

Dr Cheung stressed that cannabis is a drug. Young people may have the misconception that cannabis is not harmful to health, but as a matter of fact cannabis abuse is addictive and can lead to severe damage to mental health. In this respect, ACAN in co-ordination with the Narcotics Division (ND) has been strengthening preventive education and publicity to facilitate a correct understanding of the harms of cannabis abuse and rectify mistaken concepts about this drug.

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Manda Chan, said, "Youngsters are encouraged to develop a healthy lifestyle. Don't try drugs under peer influence, or as a means for relieving pressure or boredom. If there are any drug problems, help can be sought from parents, teachers or social workers, or through the ND's 24-hour hotline 186 186 and instant messaging service 98 186 186."

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