

Legislative Council Panel on Security Youth Drug Abuse

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the latest youth drug abuse situation and a package of initial measures recommended by the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse (the Task Force) to be implemented in the short to medium term.

CURRENT ANTI-DRUG POLICY

2. The current anti-drug policy is embodied in the “five-pronged” approach - law enforcement and legislation, treatment and rehabilitation, preventive education and publicity, research and external cooperation. It has been drawn up on the advice of the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) and its sub-committees, with members coming from various fields including youth, social work, medicine, academia and Legislative Council Members. The Fight Crime Committee (FCC) and the District Fight Crime Committees also discuss the youth drug abuse problem from time to time.

3. We keep our treatment and rehabilitation programmes under regular review through the formulation of a “Three-year Plan on drug treatment and rehabilitation services in Hong Kong” every three years, which is done in consultation with the anti-drug sector¹. We also keep in touch with anti-drug workers from subvented and non-subvented treatment centres, youth groups, social welfare organisations, etc through the Drug Liaison Committee.

¹ The Plan maps out the future direction which drug treatment and rehabilitation services should take. The formulation of the Plan for 2006-08 has gone through a consensus building process among the stakeholders, and provides us a platform, together with the stakeholders, to reflect on our efforts and develop complementing strategies and programmes in view of the latest drug trend. A working group led by the Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Treatment and Rehabilitation was set up to develop the Plan. A number of focus groups and consultation sessions were conducted to gather views from the service sector direct. ACAN and the Drug Liaison Committee were consulted before the Plan was finalised.

4. The Chief Executive in his 2007 Policy Address announced the appointment of the Secretary for Justice, the incumbent Deputy Chairman of FCC, to lead a high level inter-departmental task force to tackle youth drug abuse. The Task Force makes use of the existing anti-crime and anti-drug networks to consolidate strategies to combat the problem from a holistic perspective.

DRUG ABUSE SITUATION

5. ACAN and the Government all along collect and publish two sets of data about the number of reported drug abusers and other relevant information, i.e. information and data from the regular survey of drug use among students conducted on a four year cycle and the standing Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) based on voluntary reporting. We also make reference to other information or figures, including thematic studies, admission statistics from treatment and rehabilitation service agencies, drug-related arrest and seizure figures, in our policy and programme work.

6. The table at Annex summarises the latest key data from the CRDA². A few observations are pertinent, as follows -

- (a) The total number of reported drug abusers has been on a declining trend from a peak of 18 513 abusers in 2001. However, 2007 registered a total of 13 491 drug abusers, representing a 1.8% increase over 2006. The change might be attributed to an increase in young drug abusers (aged under 21) [see sub-paragraph (b) below].
- (b) The number of reported young drug abusers fluctuated quite significantly. The number in the past three years reversed the declining trend of 2000 to 2004 and began to

² The reporting network of the CRDA covers law enforcement agencies, treatment and rehabilitation organisations, welfare agencies, hospitals, etc. As information is submitted by the reporting agencies to the CRDA voluntarily, CRDA figures do not represent the total number of abusers but they do reflect the trends of abuse.

rise. The number stood at 2 919 in 2007, representing a 13.1% increase over 2 581 in 2006.

- (c) There has been a shift from the use of heroin to psychotropic substances. From 1998 to 2007, reported heroin abusers decreased from 13 588 to 7 390, but reported psychotropic substance abusers increased from 3 412 to 7 810. In 2007 the number of reported psychotropic substance abusers exceeded the number of reported heroin abusers for the first time.
- (d) Among those aged under 21, 99% abuse psychotropic substances.

As regards the survey of drug use among students, the last one was conducted in 2004. Results revealed that about 3.4% (i.e. 17 300) of secondary students had attempted drug abuse in their lifetime, including some 0.8% (i.e. 4 300) who had abused drugs in the 30 days prior to the survey.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE

7. Over the past few months, the Task Force has conducted in-depth examination of the youth drug abuse problem and devised a series of initial measures that can be implemented in the short to medium term. As announced by the Financial Secretary in his Budget speech on 27 February, additional resources of \$53 million has been earmarked in 2008-09 to support the measures. The initial measures the Task Force is planning to pursue cover a range of areas as set out in the following paragraphs.

Preventive Education and Publicity

8. According to CRDA, more than 99% of the reported young drug abusers abuse psychotropic substances. While the public is generally aware of the harms of conventional drugs such as heroin, there are misconceptions that psychotropic substances are “soft” drugs, not

addictive, and not harmful to health. Parents, school principals, teachers and school social workers may not be well equipped with drug knowledge or skills in imparting drug education at schools or home and in identifying signs of drug abuse and handling drug-related cases. Feedback from the service sector also indicates that some schools may not be ready to embrace anti-drug education.

(a) Launching a territory-wide campaign

9. We will launch a large-scale territory-wide campaign in June to correct the misconceptions and change wrong attitudes about psychotropic substance abuse, foster a drug free culture among the youth and mobilise the whole community against youth drug abuse. At the district and community level, we will appeal to various sectors for support for the campaign and seek collaboration with stakeholders including District Councils, District Fight Crime Committees, private corporations, professional and community organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs), etc to organise anti-drug activities and programmes to complement the central publicity efforts.

10. Having regard to the views received from various quarters that the present references to “濫藥” do not convey the same degree of seriousness as the reference to “吸毒”, the Task Force has recommended the use of the Chinese term “精神科毒品” to refer to psychotropic substances. More colloquial terms like “丸仔毒品” or “K仔毒品” may be used in publicity materials.

(b) Equipping school personnel and parents with knowledge and skills to deliver anti-drug education, identify high-risk youth and handle drug abuse cases

11. We will encourage all schools to develop a healthy school policy with an anti-drug element. Training and briefing will be provided for school principals, teachers, guidance teachers, school social workers and parents to enhance their knowledge and skills. A set of resource kits will be produced for ready reference.

(c) Strengthening anti-drug preventive education for students

12. We will strengthen students' knowledge, value and attitude against drug abuse by enhancing the drug education elements in the formal and informal curriculum. Both life skills and refusal skills training will be strengthened in guidance programmes to help steer students away from drugs. Anti-drug education activities for students will also be intensified to educate students on the scourge of drugs at an early age.

Treatment and Rehabilitation

13. Many psychotropic substance abusers are "hidden" and/or are not motivated to seek help, and remain out of reach of the existing help networks. Outreaching programmes with suitable interventions should be useful for identifying and motivating abusers to come forward for early treatment and rehabilitation. There are also concerns raised about the inadequate provision of downstream treatment and rehabilitation services, including counselling, medical and residential drug treatment services.

(a) Enhancing day and overnight outreach service

14. At present, there are 16 district youth outreaching social work teams (YOTs) operated by NGOs on subvention to reach out to young people, in particular those who are at risk and who do not normally participate in conventional social or youth activities. Separately, 18 Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres operated by NGOs on subvention provide overnight outreaching services to young night drifters. We will enhance YOTs and overnight outreaching service to identify and engage young drug abusers early, provide immediate intervention, and facilitate referrals of needy cases to the Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers (CCPSAs).

(b) Setting up two additional CCPSAs

15. Currently there are five CCPSAs serving five regional clusters of the territory. To cater for the likely increase in caseloads and

to draw up anti-drug programmes that best suit the district situation, we will set up two additional CCPSAs and re-demarcate the service boundaries of existing centres to provide enhanced community-based rehabilitation services to young drug abusers.

(c) Strengthening the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme by enhancing services of the Juvenile Protection Section (JPS) of Police and Community Support Service Scheme (CSSS) of NGOs

16. At present, JPS operated by Police provides referral services and conducts supervisory home visits in respect of young offenders, including drug abusers, cautioned under the Police Superintendents' Discretion Scheme. CSSS operated by NGOs on subvention provides support services to these offenders. In response to the surge in arrests of young offenders, we will strengthen the JPS and CSSS to identify early young offenders prone to drug abuse, enhance the frequency of home visits, and strengthen support services to assist these offenders to reintegrate into the community.

(d) Providing more subvented places in drug treatment and rehabilitation centres (DTRCs)

17. DTRCs operated by NGOs provide treatment and rehabilitation services to those drug abusers who seek residential treatment voluntarily. To complement Government's overall early intervention efforts to identify young drug abusers, we will provide more subvented places in DTRCs as part of the downstream support services.

(e) Enhancing the provision of psychiatric medical social services in the Substance Abuse Clinics (SACs) and strengthening SAC services

18. At present, there are no designated medical social workers to provide support and welfare services to drug abusers who have mental health problems at SACs under the Hospital Authority. In anticipation of the increasing attendance at SACs, designated medical social workers will be assigned to strengthen the psychosocial intervention and treatment for the patients and provide more intensive welfare support to their

families.

19. Separately, we will strengthen the Substance Abuse Clinic (SAC) services in response to the demand from the anti-drug sector. As part of its public medical services, the Hospital Authority is planning to re-open its SAC at the Queen Mary Hospital and to open a new SAC in the Kowloon East Region in 2008-09.

(f) Enhancing training of anti-drug workers

20. We will continue to accord a high priority to the professional training of anti-drug workers. Our next plan is to provide training to private medical practitioners to enhance their awareness and knowledge of the youth drug abuse problem, so that they may participate in preventive education programmes or provide medical advice and treatment, and referral services should they encounter patients who have drug abuse problems. As appropriate, we may make use of the Beat Drugs Fund to pursue this measure.

Law Enforcement

21. Our law enforcement agencies are already taking stringent, persistent enforcement actions, including frequent raids by the Police of entertainment venues and intensified efforts by the Customs at boundary control points. There are increasing concerns that youngsters now choose to take drugs in schools, private premises or upstairs mini-discos and karaokes. There is a need for the Police to enhance their intelligence-gathering capabilities against these new trends and maintain closer liaison with the school community to collect information concerning student involvement in illegal activities. There are also observations that drugs are now smuggled into the territory in frequent but small batches. 2007 also records a rise in the number of cross-boundary drug trafficking cases by youngsters.

(a) Strengthening the Police School Liaison Programme (PSLP)

22. At present there are 25 School Liaison Officers and 33 Secondary School Liaison Officers under the PSLP. We will deploy

more officers to the programme to enhance the frequency of school visits, strengthen preventive education activities, liaise more closely with schools on the practical enforcement of the law and collect information concerning student involvement in illegal activities.

(b) Enhancing intelligence-gathering capabilities of the Police

23. In view of the increasing popularity of the Internet among youngsters and the potential use of the Internet platform by criminals to disseminate information on the sale, distribution and abuse of illicit drugs, the Police will set up a Narcotics Intelligence Team to gather intelligence in relation to drug crimes, and to closely monitor the changing drug trends.

(c) Enhancing the detector dog services at the boundary control points

24. Stationing detector dogs at the control points is one of the most effective means to detect drug possession and trafficking given the heavy traffic of passengers and cargoes. Having regard to the latest drug smuggling trends via the land boundary, we will enhance the detector dog services to strengthen enforcement actions and deterrent effect against drug abusers and traffickers.

Research

25. We will conduct the next round of the survey of drug use among students later this year, with the coverage extended to include students from primary four to post secondary. Future rounds will be conducted more frequently, at three-year intervals.

WAY FORWARD

26. Implementation of the recommended measures is subject to the passage of the 2008-09 Budget. The Task Force will continue its deliberations in the coming months with a view to drawing up further proposals to be implemented in the longer term. It plans to sum up its

work in around October.

27. The Administration is determined to combat the youth drug abuse problem in a concerted, holistic and sustainable manner. We will continue to tap the views of ACAN, FCC, Drug Liaison Committee, anti-drug workers and the public in formulating anti-drug initiatives, and enhance inter-departmental efforts and partnership with various sectors in this battle against drugs.

Security Bureau
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Number of Drug Abusers (1998 to 2007)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Heroin abusers	13 588	13 003	12 188	1 1575	11 826	10 357	10 147	9 757	8 112	7 390
Psychotropic substance abusers	3 412	3 549	5 561	6 022	5 581	5 219	6 196	6 335	7 407	7 810
Total number of abusers	16 992	16 314	18 335	18 513	17 966	15 790	14 854	14 115	13 258	13 491
Aged under 21	2 841	2 482	4 020	3 902	3 002	2 207	2 186	2 278	2 581	2 919

Note - An abuser may abuse both heroin and psychotropic substances.

Source - Central Registry of Drug Abuse