

For discussion  
on 13 April 2018

**Legislative Council Panel on Security**  
**Drug Situation in Hong Kong in 2017**

**Purpose**

This paper provides information to Members on the drug situation in Hong Kong in 2017 and the Government's anti-drug efforts in response to the latest drug situation.

**Background**

2. The Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) is set up to provide relevant drug abuse statistics for monitoring changes in drug abuse trends and characteristics of drug abusers. It is a voluntary reporting system recording the details of drug abusers who have come into contact with and have been reported by the reporting agencies, including law enforcement agencies (LEAs), treatment and welfare agencies, tertiary institutions, hospitals and clinics.

3. Compiled statistics of the CRDA are reported to the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) and released on a quarterly basis. By its nature, while the CRDA does not measure the exact size of the drug abusing population in Hong Kong at any particular time, statistics derived therefrom are indicators of the trends of drug abuse over time. Other relevant sources also provide reference on the drug situation, including drug-related enforcement statistics (e.g. on arrests, prosecutions and convictions).

4. The above data and findings provide useful information on the latest drug situation in Hong Kong, and support an evidence-based approach to the formulation of anti-drug policy and measures.

## **The 2017 CRDA Statistics**

### Profile of Drug Abusers

5. The key statistics on drug abusers reported to the CRDA in 2017 are at **Annex**. There was a continued decline in the total number of reported drug abusers in 2017 (at 6 725), which was 18% lower than that in 2016 (at 8 239). Their average age had increased from 39 to 41 years, while the average age of first abuse remained at 19 years. For reported young drug abusers aged under 21, the number also continued to record a decline of 12% (from 518 in 2016 to 455 in 2017). Their average age remained at 18 years, while their average age of first abuse had increased from 15 to 16 years.

6. The number of newly reported drug abusers in 2017 (at 1 535) was 24% lower than that in 2016 (at 2 024). Those aged under 21 had decreased by 6% (from 365 in 2016 to 342 in 2017). Meanwhile, the proportion of young adults aged 21-35 remained at a relatively high level (1 102 (54%) in 2016 and 759 (49%) in 2017).

7. Half of the newly reported abusers had a drug history of at least 4.3 years (4.6 years in 2016).

### Type of Drugs Abused

8. For drug types, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) (at 3 952) continued to be higher than that of narcotics analgesics abusers (at 3 702). The higher rate was more evident among the newly reported cases (number of PSAs and narcotics analgesics abusers at 1 343 and 201 respectively). Methamphetamine (commonly known as “Ice”) continued to be the most popular psychotropic substance abused, followed by triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone and cocaine. The total number of reported “Ice” abusers decreased by 31% (from 2 489 in 2016 to 1 727 in 2017), that of triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone abusers decreased by 11% (from 984 in 2016 to 875 in 2017), while that of cocaine abusers increased by 5% (from 801 in 2016 to 839 in 2017).

9. For reported young drug abusers aged under 21, the most popular psychotropic substance abused was cocaine, followed by “Ice” and cannabis. Increased cocaine and cannabis abuse was observed. While the total number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 decreased by 12% (see paragraph 5 above), the number of reported cocaine abusers

increased by 24% (from 183 in 2016 to 227 in 2017), and that of reported cannabis abusers increased by 31% (from 95 in 2016 to 124 in 2017).

### Reasons and Localities

10. Regarding the reasons for taking drugs, the most common ones for all reported drug abusers were “to avoid discomfort of its absence”, “to relieve boredom/depression/stress” and “to identify with peers”. On the localities of taking drugs, 58% of the drug abusers took drugs at home or friend’s home only.

### Enforcement

11. The total number of drug-related arrests in 2017 increased by 1% (from 4 734 in 2016 to 4 798 in 2017), with the highest proportion attributable to “Ice”-related cases (27%), followed by cocaine-related cases (18%). The total number of persons prosecuted for all drug offences decreased by 2% (from 3 566 in 2016 to 3 510 in 2017), with 12 persons aged under 16 convicted of trafficking in dangerous drugs (24 in 2016).

### **Observations**

12. Based on the above latest figures, we have the following observations -

- (a) **continued decline in the number of drug abusers** – the total number of reported drug abusers continued to decline as revealed in the 2017 statistics (see paragraph 5 above);
- (b) **continued relatively high proportion of newly reported abusers being young adults** – the proportion of newly reported drug abusers being young adults (aged 21-35) remained at a relatively high level (see paragraph 6 above);
- (c) **continued prevalence of psychotropic substance abuse, with high prevalence of “Ice” abuse** – “Ice” continued to be the most popular type of psychotropic substance abused (see paragraph 8 above). Cocaine and cannabis abuse increased among reported young drug abusers aged under 21 (see paragraph 9 above); and

- (d) **hidden drug abuse still a concern** – despite a slight dip when compared with 2016, the median drug history of 4.3 years of newly reported cases still calls for attention (see paragraph 7 above). This concern on hidden drug abuse is further underlined by the finding that most drug abusers took drugs at home or friend’s home only (see paragraph 10 above).

## **Anti-drug Efforts**

13. Our anti-drug policy and measures have been underpinned by a five-pronged approach, comprising preventive education and publicity (PE&P), treatment and rehabilitation (T&R), legislation and law enforcement, external cooperation and research. Despite the declining number of reported drug abusers, the fight against drugs is a long-term haul requiring continuous concerted efforts under the five-pronged approach to respond to the latest drug trends. Specifically, major initiatives will be taken forward along the directions outlined below.

### PE&P

14. The PE&P campaign in the coming year will continue to enhance community awareness of the drug problem, especially the harms of “Ice”, cocaine and cannabis abuse, promote early identification of hidden drug abusers, and encourage early help-seeking. Specifically, we will continue to promote anti-drug messages through different media platforms (including electronic platforms such as popular websites, mobile applications and social media) so as to maximise the access to different target groups, especially the youth and young adults. Possible collaboration with different organisations to organise suitable programmes at venues frequented by young adults will be pursued. Help-seeking through the 24-hour helpline “186 186” and the instant messaging service “98 186 186” will be further promoted.

15. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Drug InfoCentre as an anti-drug PE&P hub will continue to launch different programmes for individual target groups, including exhibitions, activities and sharing sessions promoting healthy lifestyles among young people, visits and talks for students, parents and anti-drug partners, etc.

16. For schools, suitable anti-drug training for teachers, school management personnel and students will be maintained. Secondary schools will be encouraged to implement the Healthy School Programme with a Drug Testing Component. A new trial programme, namely “Participate in Sports, Stay Away from Drugs” has also been introduced to broaden the reach of anti-drug messages to secondary schools.

### T&R

17. T&R services are available to drug abusers with different needs, including compulsory treatment programmes operated in drug addiction treatment centres by the Correctional Services Department, voluntary residential programmes implemented in drug treatment and rehabilitation centres by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), voluntary outpatient methadone treatment programme administered by the Department of Health, substance abuse clinics in all seven hospital clusters of the Hospital Authority, and community-based counselling centres for PSAs and centres for drug counselling run by NGOs.

18. In March 2018, we issued the Three-year Plan on Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Services in Hong Kong for 2018-2020, as formulated on the basis of the views and ideas of anti-drug service providers and stakeholders. The Plan sets out the strategic T&R directions in light of the major drug trends, facilitating anti-drug service providers to review and develop their plans and programmes in the three-year period.

### Beat Drugs Fund (BDF)

19. The BDF has been supporting worthwhile anti-drug projects. Since its establishment, the BDF has funded over 1 000 projects covering PE&P, T&R and research, with a total grant of over HK\$1.25 billion<sup>1</sup>. The Governing Committee of the BDF Association will, taking into account the latest drug situation and the advice of ACAN, draw up specific priority areas in the annual BDF Regular Funding Scheme (RFS) to guide applicants in planning suitable anti-drug projects responding to the latest drug problems. The prevalent drug trends (see paragraph 12 above) will provide the basis for formulating the priority areas in the 2018 RFS.

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<sup>1</sup> The annual financial statement and annual reports of the BDF Association ended 31 March 2017 are available at <http://www.nd.gov.hk/pdf/Beat%20Drugs%20Fund%20Association%20-%20Reports%20and%20financai%202017.pdf>.

Legislation, Law Enforcement and External Cooperation

20. The LEAs will continue with the strategy of targeting drug supply at source through stemming the illegal import of dangerous drugs, strengthening the patrol of drug abuse black spots, and adopting measures to combat drug trafficking. They will also continue with the liaison and intelligence exchange with regional and international counterparts, and conduct joint operations as appropriate.

21. The growing psychotropic substance abuse and continuous emergence of new synthetic drugs pose new challenges to legislative control and law enforcement globally. We will remain vigilant in monitoring overseas and local drug trends, and take timely action to bring new drugs under legislative control.

**Advice Sought**

22. Members are invited to note this paper.

**Narcotics Division  
Security Bureau  
April 2018**

**Summary of Central Registry of Drug Abuse Statistics for 2017**

**Profile of Drug Abusers**

- (a) the total number of reported drug abusers in 2017 was 6 725, 18% lower than that in 2016 (at 8 239);
- (b) the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 recorded a decline by 12%, from 518 to 455;
- (c) the number of newly reported drug abusers in 2017 (at 1 535) was 24% lower than that in 2016 (at 2 024). Among them, those aged under 21 decreased by 6% (from 365 to 342), and those aged 21 and above decreased by 28% (from 1 659 to 1 193). The proportion of those being young adults (aged 21-35) remained at a relatively high level (49% in 2017 and 54% in 2016);
- (d) half of the newly reported abusers in 2017 had abused drugs for at least 4.3 years, compared with 4.6 years in 2016. Among the newly reported young drug abusers aged under 21, half had abused drugs for at least 1.5 years, the same as in 2016;
- (e) the number of male abusers fell by 19% (from 6 745 to 5 488), and the number of female abusers fell by 17% (from 1 494 to 1 237);
- (f) compared with 2016, the average age of young drug abusers aged under 21 remained at 18 years, while their average age of first abuse had increased from 15 to 16 years. As for all drug abusers, the average age had increased from 39 to 41 years, while the average age of first abuse remained at 19 years;

**Type of Drugs Abused**

- (g) in 2017, the number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) (at 3 952) was higher than the number of narcotics analgesics abusers (at 3 702). Among those newly reported, the number of PSAs (at 1 343) was considerably higher than the number of narcotics analgesics abusers (at 201);
- (h) compared with 2016, the number of PSAs reduced by 25% (from 5 295 to 3 952), while that of the narcotics analgesics abusers

(mainly heroin abusers) decreased by 9% (from 4 060 to 3 702);

- (i) heroin remained to be the single most popular type of drug abused among the reported abusers. However, the total number of reported heroin abusers in 2017 (at 3 699) was 9% lower than that in 2016 (at 4 058);
- (j) methamphetamine (commonly known as “Ice”) continued to be the most popular psychotropic substance abused in 2017. Compared with 2016, the number of reported “Ice” abusers decreased by 31% (from 2 489 to 1 727), with 8% of whom aged under 21. Triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone came second while cocaine came third. The number of reported triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone abusers was 11% lower (from 984 to 875) than that in 2016, with less than 1% of whom aged under 21. However, the total number of reported cocaine abusers increased by 5% (from 801 in 2016 to 839 in 2017), with 27% of whom aged under 21;
- (k) compared with 2016, the number of abusers of most other types of psychotropic substances had seen a reduction – ketamine (having dropped by 52% from 1 262 to 604), MDMA (having dropped by 52% from 54 to 26), cough medicine (having dropped by 43% from 432 to 246), cannabis (having dropped by 14% from 448 to 386) and nimetazepam (having dropped by 14% from 29 to 25);
- (l) while the total number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 decreased by 12% (from 518 in 2016 to 455 in 2017), the number of reported cocaine abusers increased by 24% (from 183 in 2016 to 227 in 2017), and that of reported cannabis abusers increased by 31% (from 95 in 2016 to 124 in 2017);
- (m) the number of drug abusers taking more than one type of drugs in 2017 was 25% lower than that in 2016 (from 2 040 to 1 533)<sup>1</sup>;

### Others

- (n) the most common reasons for all drug abusers reported for taking drugs were to avoid discomfort of its absence (49%), to relieve boredom/depression/stress (43%), and to identify with peers (32%).

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<sup>1</sup> For an abuser taking more than one type of drugs, he/she would be counted more than once in analysing individual types of drugs and “multiple counts” of the same person would occur.



For young drug abusers aged under 21, to identify with peers (56%) was the most common reason for taking drugs, followed by to relieve boredom/depression/ stress (50%) and out of curiosity (30%);

- (o) 58% of the drug abusers were reported to have taken drugs at home/friend's home only, another 21% at both home/friend's home and other localities, and the remaining 20% at other localities only. Among the young drug abusers aged under 21, the three most popular localities for taking drugs were home/friend's home (73%), public areas like recreation area/public park/public toilet (23%) and party gathering in club house/building/hotel/bar (15%);
- (p) abusers of heroin and triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone had a relatively higher frequency of abusing drugs in general, with a median monthly frequency of abusing drugs at 60 times. The corresponding figures for other types of PSAs were much lower, e.g. 30 times for cough medicine abusers, 24 times for nimetazepam abusers, 13 times for "Ice", ketamine and MDMA abusers, and 9 times for cocaine abusers; and
- (q) 73% of the reported drug abusers had previously been convicted. Among them, most had previous convictions of either drug-related offences only (32%) or both drug-related and other offences (30%), while 10% had previous convictions of other offences only.