

Media Release

For immediate release

Drug Seizures

Today saw a seizure of 313kg of crystal methamphetamine that was being imported into South Australia.

It is commendable that the SA Police working with the Australian Federal Police and a range of other agencies have been able to detect this shipment and stop its distribution. Those responsible for importing these drugs are clearly intent on maximising profit without any regard for the harm they do to others. The Police and criminal justice system should rightly focus on those profiting from the significant harm caused to individuals, families and communities by the distribution of drugs.

Interrupting supply (stopping drugs entering the market) is important. Reducing the availability and increasing the price of illicit drugs can lessen the amount being used in the community.

However, even such a large drug seizure as seen today is likely to have a very limited effect on price or supply. Whilst there has been limited research on how big seizures affect the market, those that have been done show that the effects are small and short lived. Where a large seizure increases the price, it can make it more lucrative for others to enter the market or grow their business.

As long as there is demand people will seek to import or manufacture drugs for profit. To reduce demand requires that less people take up or continue to use drugs, or that they reduce their level of usage. To achieve that requires effective early intervention, prevention and treatment strategies. At the moment there is little funding for evidence-based health education about drugs and alcohol in our schools and communities. We need more and it needs to be based on evidence of what works in changing people's drug use. We know that scare campaigns and over-simplification can make the situation worse. Education and prevention strategies need to be targeted at relevant groups, be culturally and age appropriate and include education on alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs.

Currently only about 60% of those seeking treatment are able to access it. Many have to wait or travel significant distances to get to a treatment service. We need more treatment options in the places where people can access it easily and at the time that they are open to change. Being placed on a waiting list can too often cause motivation to be lost and the opportunity for effective intervention can be missed.

Our systems need to differentiate between those people who use drugs (and may sell them to support their dependence) and those who deal in them primarily for profit. For someone who uses drugs their dependence is a significant health problem and should be treated as such. Criminal penalties for such people can result in significant, lifelong negative consequences, often much harsher than their behaviour warrants. These consequences can trap people who use drugs in a cycle of use and criminality that is harmful to the individual and to our community. We need to break that cycle. These alcohol and drug strategies should be developed in consultation with health experts in the drug and alcohol field and funded to enable them to be effectively implemented.

For further information:

Michael White, Executive Officer

0416176611 or email michael@sandas.org.au.

P: (08) 8231 8818

(08) 8212 9020

F: (08) 8231 8860

E: sandasinfo@sandas.org.au