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In reply please quote:

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MEDIA RELEASE

Reducing cannabis consumption

Treatment is a better way of reducing cannabis consumption among heavy users than arrest, imprisonment or workplace drug testing, according to a new report by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

The Bureau surveyed a representative sample of nearly a thousand NSW residents aged 18-29 to ascertain whether they had ever used cannabis and how often.

More than 20 per cent of those surveyed had used cannabis in the last twelve months and 38 per cent of this group had used cannabis at least once a week or more often.

Thirty-nine per cent of those who had used cannabis in the last twelve months said that they would be willing to try treatment if one were available to help them stop using cannabis.

Frequent users of cannabis (i.e. every day/few times weekly) were more likely to say they would seek treatment to reduce their cannabis use than occasional cannabis users.

Significant proportions of respondents also said that they would stop or use less cannabis if imprisoned (71.3%), if drug testing were introduced into their workplace (68.6%), if the price of cannabis doubled (58.7%) or if they were arrested (57.9%).

The prospect of arrest and imprisonment, however, appears to exert more effect on casual users of cannabis than frequent cannabis users. Such users are very unlikely to get caught and probably do not use cannabis frequently enough to pose a risk to themselves or to others.

Commenting on the findings, the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that they provided strong support for programs such as the MERIT (Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment).

'Most of the risks associated with cannabis use stem from those who use the drug very frequently', he said. 'Programs, such as MERIT provide a far more effective way of dealing with those whose cannabis use has become problematic than imprisonment'.

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