

NEW NATIONAL CANNABIS CENTRE RESPONDING TO INCREASING DEMAND

- EMBARGOED UNTIL 1030 AEDT TUESDAY 29 APRIL 2008 -

At least 200,000 Australian adults are believed to be dependent on cannabis, with around one in ten people who ever try the drug becoming dependent on it at some time in their lives.

Cannabis continues to be the most popular illicit drug in Australia and around the world, with new figures showing that just over a third (33.5 per cent) of adult Australians have tried the drug.

As the number of Australians who have problematic cannabis use has increased, so has the number of people seeking treatment, particularly young people. The rate of treatment seeking for cannabis problems has more than tripled since 1992.

Fifty per cent of presentations to drug treatment among 10-19 year olds are related to cannabis, compared to 25% for alcohol and 10% for amphetamines.

In response to this growing demand the Australian Government has funded the establishment of the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) at the University of NSW.

The Centre was launched today by the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon.

NCPIC is the first such Centre internationally that brings together the capacity for high quality research on cannabis issues and treatment development with the capacity to translate that evidence into workforce training and community information provision.

Professor Jan Copeland has been appointed the Director of NCPIC and believes “the Centre is unique in that it has been created to bridge the gap between research and practice.”

“This approach will deliver direct benefit to the community in improving knowledge on cannabis-related information and providing high quality services,” said Professor Copeland. “These services will include a free national information and helpline and web-based information and assistance.”

“Evidence about cannabis-related health problems is unfolding like those of tobacco smoking did in the 1970s and beyond,” said Professor Copeland. “Scientists are now turning their attention to this previously neglected drug and some of those who began using in the 1970s and 80s, before any harms were recognised, are experiencing problems associated with their cannabis use.”

“Cannabis dependence and the negative impacts on mental health are now widely recognised. The effects of cannabis on the developing brain, from before birth to adolescence are, however, only now being explored.”

The Australian Government is providing more than \$12 million over three years for the Centre and its activities.

“In response to the growing need among service providers and the general community, NCPIC will be keeping a range of target audiences up to date with the latest findings in the area,” said Professor Copeland. “We will also ensure that we develop new approaches for assistance and information provision in this incredibly important area.”

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