

Reducing the supply of illegal drugs—a billion dollar return

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has today drawn attention to recently released reports from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) which demonstrate the benefits to the Australian community from reducing the supply of illicit drugs available in our country.

Major Brian Watters, Chairman of the ANCD said “For some time now the ANCD has been encouraging all the sectors that make up Australia’s comprehensive drug strategy to measure the costs and benefits of their services. Recently we were pleased to see an analysis of the returns on investment from needle and syringe programs and today it pleases us greatly to see that the AFP have begun developing an index which can start to measure the real value of their efforts.”

“The ‘drug harm index’ which draws on work already done internationally and in Australia, estimates that the AFP has returned more than one billion dollars worth of benefits to the community in the last 2 years. Basically, the index calculates that reducing the supply of illicit drugs reduces a range of social harms and returns over \$5 to the community for every \$1 spent.”

As a result of the co-operative efforts of the AFP, Customs and state and territory police, almost 6 tonnes of illicit drugs have been seized since 1998, including about 1.3 tonnes of heroin and 2.6 tonnes of cocaine. This is a significant increase when compared to results from previous years.

“Further AFP research in the ACT has shown that reducing the supply of heroin decreases the purity of the drug available on the streets. This not only contributes to a decrease in the number of overdoses but also an increase in the number of people seeking treatment. It is gratifying to think that because of this work by our police and treatment providers many more families are able to celebrate Christmas together” Major Watters continued.

Major Watters concluded - “The Australian drug strategy is admired by many countries. This is because it recognises that there are substantial benefits to be gained by both reducing the supply of illicit drugs and increasing access to treatment, prevention and harm reduction programs. More and more research in the drugs area is showing that there are much greater benefits that can flow to our community from integrating the efforts of law enforcement, health and education services.”

10 December 2002

The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues.

For further information, please contact:

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The AFP reports can be viewed at:

<http://www.afp.gov.au/raw/publications/researchreports/Issue2/drug.html>

<http://www.afp.gov.au/raw/publications/researchreports/Issue3/summary.html>