

Drug testing and “say no” programmes in schools don’t work

Compulsory drug testing in schools and other recommendations based on the American “say no to drugs” school programmes won’t work, says Cate Kearney, chief executive of the Alcohol Drug Association New Zealand.

Kearney, whose association runs the national alcohol drug helpline, working with and referring to the 170 treatment services around the country, says that the American Drug Policy of “say no” and scare tactics about drugs has been “incredibly ineffective” and that drug testing in schools is the wrong approach, and will only alienate young people.

She was responding to a series of recommendations made to Parliament’s Law and Order select committee today by anti-drug campaigner Mike Sabin.

“His first recommendation calls for a national office of drug control policy. But there already is a Drug Policy Team in the Ministry of Health that reports directly to Minister Anderton, whose portfolio covers supply control and problem limitation,” Kearney says.

“Secondly, he’s called for an end to ‘harm minimisation’ and replacing it with ‘harm elimination’, encouraging youth to reject drug use. But this doesn’t work. Hard messages and scare tactics have been proven not to work with young people. What works is giving them all the information they need to make their own decisions.”

For the same reason, Kearney says, another recommendation for a hard-hitting anti-drug media campaign wouldn’t work either.

“Telling people with an addiction they shouldn’t do something doesn’t work, and telling young people they shouldn’t do something doesn’t work either. They have to be able to make up their own mind that something is wrong.”

Another recommendation Kearney refutes is the call by Sabin for a dedicated methamphetamine crisis line. ADANZ has for several years run the national alcohol drug helpline, which refers people to the treatment service that is right for them, she says.

Since July 1 2007, the helpline has fielded over 14,000 calls – 1120 of them about methamphetamine. “We are well used to these calls, supporting users and their families. There are not enough calls to establish a stand-alone line,” she says.

“We offer brief intervention, family support, refer people to services and have printed material and material available online for people concerned about their own or someone else’s drug use.

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