



DR. DON WEATHERBURN
DIRECTOR

In reply please quote:

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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW Drug Court evaluation: Interim report on health and well-being of participants

Four months after entering the NSW Drug Court program, offenders are in much better health, are more socially capable and show clear evidence of having substantially reduced or eliminated their illicit drug use.

These are the main findings to emerge from study into the effect of the NSW Drug Court Program on the health and well-being of Drug Court participants.

The study was conducted by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research as part of its evaluation of the NSW Drug Court.

Two hundred and two NSW Drug Court participants were interviewed prior to commencing the Program, and 112 (55 per cent) of these offenders were re-interviewed after being on the Program for four months. Most of those unable to be contacted had been terminated from the Program.

On entering the Program, Drug Court participants were well below national population norms in terms of physical and mental health.

Four months after entering the Program male participants were within national population norms in terms of physical health and showed substantial improvements in mental health and social functioning (e.g. they had a more stable home life).

But the most interesting finding in the study was a dramatic reduction in weekly spending by Drug Court Program participants.

On entering the Program they spent a median weekly amount of \$1000 per week. Four months later their spending had fallen to just \$180 per week. This figure is very close to legitimate weekly earnings, suggesting a significant reduction in or elimination of illicit drug-use and crime.

Despite the demands of the Drug Court Program (e.g. frequent urine checks, coerced treatment, sanctions for non-compliance with Program rules) the study also found a high level of participant satisfaction with the Program.

Over 80 per cent of participants interviewed four months after entering the Program were satisfied or very satisfied with it.

Commenting on the findings the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that they were extremely encouraging, despite the high rate of termination from the Program.

“It’s important to remember that Drug Court participants generally have large heroin habits, long criminal records and a history of not responding to previous court sanctions”, he said.

“It is quite unrealistic to expect all these people suddenly to turn into law-abiding, healthy and responsible citizens. The improvements we are seeing are much better than might reasonably have been expected in the circumstances”.

Further enquiries:

Dr Don Weatherburn: 02 9231 9190 (wk), 0419 494 408 (mob)