

National survey of Australians stopped for cannabis offences: Assessing benefits of varied police responses

1 September 2014

Researchers are seeking Australians who have been stopped for cannabis use or possession to take part in an online survey that will determine for the first time the most effective police response to these offences.

Over 53,000 Australians are stopped by police for cannabis use or possession every year, but their experiences vary greatly. Some attend court and receive a criminal record, some are issued with a civil fine, others receive a formal caution notice and others will simply be given a warning.

A research team from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at the University of New South Wales led by Dr Marian Shanahan have established an online survey to uncover which approach achieves the best outcomes for the individual and for society.

“We do not currently know which intervention is the most effective or least costly at changing cannabis use, decreasing rates of crime, or improving employment and the general health status of users,” Dr Shanahan said.

“Although cannabis diversion programs have a long history in Australia, we don’t really know how diversionary tactics such as fines and cautions stack up against being charged and going to court.”

“The survey results will benefit all Australians, including both those who are stopped for cannabis use and those who pay taxes for the various police responses.”

It is also expected the results will feed into better informed drug policy.

The survey is open to Australians aged over 17 years who have been stopped for minor cannabis use and possession offences in the last three to nine months. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential.

“We are interested in hearing from as many eligible people as possible, including people of all ages, from all states and territories, including rural and regional areas,” said Dr Shanahan.

The survey takes 15 minutes to complete and is available at: www.cannabisdiversionsurvey.com.au

– End –

The study is funded by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund (NDLERF).

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvements Grants Fund.

Media contacts:

Erin O'Loughlin
Communications Officer, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
P: (02) 9385 0124 / 0402 870 996 / erin.oloughlin@unsw.edu.au

NOTES FOR NSW EDITORS

There were over 20,000 arrests for cannabis use possession in NSW in 2012. Detailed information on cannabis arrests for each NSW Local Government Area (LGA) can be found at http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/bocsar/bocsar_crime_stats/bocsar_detailedspreadsheets.html