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Through Education

Is the PM's P strategy really working?

The Prime Minister today released the indicator and progress report on this government's methamphetamine strategy, first implemented in October 2009 and not surprisingly was confident their tactics were working, but there are question marks about whether the approaches taken will actually translate into real and sustainable success according to MethCon Group director Mike Sabin.

"The success of a strategy in this field is very hard to glean within six months of implementation and while it may look impressive to see record seizures of precursors and more Police busts, these efforts in themselves, while commendable, will simply have the net effect of super-charging the market if they are not met by equivalent efforts to drive down demand" claimed Mr. Sabin.

Mr. Sabin, who is involved in numerous international drug policy 'think tanks' and forums, is concerned that the government's strategy is effectively a renewed effort to do the same thing, but do it harder and hoping that it will achieve a different outcome, something he has not seen succeed anywhere in the world with this drug.

"The latest strategy has a strong focus on tackling the gangs and suppliers but neglects the customers that ensure their survival" said Mr. Sabin.

"It is great to see strategies aimed at reducing supply and initiatives such as enhanced proceeds of crime legislation to strip finances and assets from dealers is long overdue, but we are fooling ourselves to expect that enforcement agencies would come anywhere close to ever seizing even a quarter of what is produced and sold out there" claimed Mr. Sabin.

He said that the three main indicators of success are price, purity and availability. "When you are succeeding you will see price increase markedly, purity drop and the drug will be far harder to get. It is not until you see this happening over a long period of time that you can claim you are winning".

The government's first report shows that the drug is just as easy to get and has not altered in price or purity despite massive increases in precursor seizures and Police arrests. "This would indicate to me that there is a lot of drug manufacture going on that is not being detected, but is keeping the market supplied" said Mr. Sabin.

Even if the price does increase however, Mr. Sabin believes that it will have a negligible impact on demand. "Just look at cigarettes and alcohol for example. There have been astronomical increases in the prices of these products in the last 15 years and the demand continues to drive supply, more than ever" said Mr. Sabin.

"The issue that arises out of steady demand and increased price is that more dealers want to enter the market to supply, because they have the same amount of people paying more for the drug. This can and will give the market a boost rather than suppress it" said Mr. Sabin.

"It is economics 1 – 0 – 1, supply is driven and dictated by demand and the smart money in a successful strategy is in prevention and demand reduction through education, social marketing and prevention focused strategies" claimed Mr. Sabin.

"I commend this government for working hard to address this problem, but I am concerned that by following a legacy of the previous government through the failed policy of harm minimisation, which effectively stonewalls social marketing and prevention education, we will simply see short terms 'wins' usurped by the underlying entrenchment of use and demand".

Mike Sabin

Managing Director

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(NZ's only specialist methamphetamine education providers)
