

## Drugs drive crime:

On a day when the government is meeting to discuss drivers of crime it is worth looking beneath the veneer of the Police offence statistics for the past 10 years to understand just how endemic the violence caused by methamphetamine and drug abuse has become in New Zealand and the need for strategies to address this according to MethCon Group director Mike Sabin.

"Again through 2008 violent offences continued to increase unabated but when you look at the past 10 years you get a far better feel for the way our communities have been held to ransom by failed drug policy", said Mr. Sabin.

"Violent offences and serious assaults increased by 51 percent and 59 percent respectively. Robbery has increased by 57 percent, while intimidation and threats have increased by 73 percent with offences involving grievous harm increasing by a staggering 105 percent, up from 92 percent last year" said Mr. Sabin.

"During the same 10 year period there has also been dramatic increases in offences related to methamphetamine including 169 percent increase in supply offences, 208 percent increase in possession for supply, 400 percent increase in importation, while importation of pseudoephedrine to manufacture the drug has increased by well over 10,000 percent with methamphetamine manufacture increasing by over 9500 percent since 1998", claimed Mr. Sabin.

On the back of that we have also become some of the highest recorded use rates of cannabis in the world with 80 percent of those aged 25 in this country now saying they have used the drug", said Mr. Sabin.

"My point is that there is a clear nexus between increased drug abuse in this country, particularly with regard to methamphetamine, and violent crime. While alcohol is a lead contributor to violence, what are we doing to actually identify and respond to poly drug abuse, which is far more common than any other form of drug abuse?"

"For example, as much as 89 percent of our prison population are drug users and yet too often we hear that alcohol is the driver of violent crime and disorder. Drugged driving is more frequently a contributor to fatal vehicle accidents than alcohol use alone, but what do we do to identify drugged drivers on our roads?" said Mr. Sabin.

"Beyond this, why has New Zealand become the highest recorded users of methamphetamine and cannabis in the world over the past 10 years? The answer is quite simple; since 1998 our national drug policy has focused centred on 'harm minimisation'. Rather than focusing on prevention of drug use and healing drug abusers to a point of abstinence, our national drug policy has focused on accepting drug use as an inevitability and finding 'safe ways' to use, while treatment has been more about methadone maintenance programmes and giving addicted users clean needles", said Mr. Sabin.

Justice Minister Simon Power signalled their clear intentions to look at new approaches to address the drivers of crime and I commend the government for having a forum to begin this process as it goes to the heart of solving the cause of the

problems rather than tinkering with the symptoms. The role of drug abuse as a driver cannot be underestimated and I would encourage efforts to arrive at strategies which reflect this", said Mr. Sabin.

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(NZ's only specialist methamphetamine education providers)

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