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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW Drug Court: Monitoring report

In its first 17 months of operation (from 9 Feb., 1999 to 30 June, 2000) the NSW Drug Court assessed 698 persons for entry onto its Program.

Of these, 313 had commenced the Program, 10 had graduated and 133 had been terminated, leaving 170 participants still on the Program. All up, there were a total of 8,485 appearances before the Drug Court in its first 17 months.

Eighty-two per cent of Drug Court participants had not been sentenced for an offence committed after commencing the Program. Of the 56 Program participants sentenced for committing an offence, 36 had had their involvement with the Program terminated.

Most (77 per cent) of those sentenced for committing an offence while on the Program were convicted of theft offences.

A total of 7,519 urine tests for use of prohibited drugs have been reported to the court over the first 17 months of its operation. Fifty-four per cent of participants tested negative for prohibited drugs at their last urine test.

Over 82 per cent of participants have had some form of custodial sanction imposed on them for breaching their program conditions. The average length of such sanctions has been five days.

The periods being spent by Drug Court applicants in detoxification are turning out longer than originally envisaged.

Originally, applicants for the Program were expected to spend about 7 days in detoxification assessment. At present the average period between entering a detoxification unit and either entering the Program or being rejected from it is over 17 days.

The number of urine tests being conducted is also running below expectations. Originally it was envisaged that urine tests would be conducted twice a week in Phase 1 of the Program, once a week in Phase 2 and once a fortnight in Phase 3.

As at June 30, 2000, only forty-four per cent of participants have had one or more urine tests per week, on average. The low rate of testing may be due in part to the fact that urine tests are not always recorded (e.g. when an offender admits to using drugs) or always able to be conducted (e.g. when someone absconds from the Program or is).

Commenting on the findings, the Director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that the Drug Court was generally operating well, given its very considerable workload.

'The cost-effectiveness of the Drug Court and its impact on the health and social functioning of participants remains to be seen. Reports on these issues will be completed next year.'

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