

# \$350m to boost war on drug abuse

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THE war against drug abuse has been given a \$350 million boost with a pledge to set up a fund to finance extra law-enforcement measures, treatment and education.

Two new residential treatment centres and a counselling centre are to be built for young people in the western New Territories and more money given to organ-



isations fighting drug abuse and treating addicts.

All drug treatment and rehabilitation agencies will be given monthly government grants and non-governmental organisations increased subsidies.

"We will establish a Beat Drugs Fund of \$350 million

to finance projects relating to drug abuse, preventative education, publicity, research, training, law enforcement and treatment and rehabilitation," a government policy commitment document said.

However, no major funding will be given to the territory's nine self-funding religious organisations, which treat a total of 500 addicts.

"We are still not subvented, which means there will be no improve-

ment in our facilities, our working conditions and no relief on our financial burden," said Jacob Lam Hay-sing, director of the Christian Zheng Sheng Association.

Nor will money confiscated from the illegal proceeds of drug-related crime be channelled into the fund, which the Government hopes will be topped up by donations from commerce and industry.

Commissioner for Narcotics Alasdair Sinclair said

the fund showed a commitment by the Government to fulfil its promise at the Governor's Drug Summit in March to step up the fight against drug abuse.

Mr Sinclair said drug agencies would be invited to submit applications for a slice of the fund once it had been granted by the Legislative Council.

The new rehabilitation and counselling centres, to be run by Caritas and the Hong Kong Christian Association, would target young

men under 25 and complement the four officially operated centres catering for men and women.

"If the level of drug abuse in Hong Kong ever reached the level of Europe or the US it would be very difficult to bring it down again," Mr Sinclair said.

He said the Government was still examining subsidising religious organisations, but needed to study their work further. He also ruled out channelling the proceeds of confiscated

drugs - \$200 million during the past six years - into the fund because such proceeds were "unpredictable".

The fund will supplement an annual \$450 million budget on drug abuse and it is hoped it will help continue a downward trend in the number of reported addicts this year - down 9.7 per cent in the second quarter from 7,856 to 7,096, following a drop of 7.1 per cent in the previous quarter.

However, the trend among the young is upward.

Chris Simpson, of drug support group Kely, urged the Government to spend the money on reducing demand rather than restricting supply which he said was necessary but could never be achieved.

Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers, a wholly government subsidised volunteer organisation, has already received \$50 million this year and plans to build a treatment centre for heroin addicts under 25.

Spokesman Cheng Miu-nar said extra money could be used to extend its effort in helping female addicts.

Jenny McGlynn, administrator of Life Education Activity Programme, said the fund could help the organisation get into more primary schools.

"In view of the alarming rise in drug abuse among our young people, we urge the Government to use a substantial part of this funding for preventative drug education," she said.

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