Details of Priority Areas for the 2020 Funding Exercise of Beat Drugs Fund Regular Funding Scheme

Treatment and Rehabilitation (T&R)

(a) Projects that take into account the latest demographic characteristics of drug abusers and cater for their varying needs in quitting drugs. They may include young adults (aged 21 – 35), female drug abusers including pregnant women/mothers, people of diverse race and sexual minorities. The projects could be on a pilot basis, community or residential based, or involve treatment in a hospital setting or in an outreaching mode.

As revealed by the 2019 statistics of the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), a relatively high proportion (46%) of the newly reported drug abusers is in their young adulthood (aged 21 - 35). They need help in respect of job and adaptation skills to prepare for a normal life after completing the T&R programmes. In addition, many of them may already have their own families and are parents. This points to the need for projects to take into account - family circumstances that may impact on the individual. Moreover, there may be difficulties for some drug abusers who are in employment to quit their jobs or those who have substantial family commitments to join residential programmes in drug treatment and rehabilitation centres.

2. In view of the above, the anti-drug sector is encouraged to continue to explore the feasibility and service modes of community-based or residential programmes with more flexible terms and/or targeted services to help drug abusers to quit drugs having regarding to their varying needs in young adulthood.

3. The anti-drug sector is also encouraged to continue to explore effective means to help female drug abusers, including pregnant drug abusers and drug-abusing mothers to quit drug. As regards drug abusers of diverse race and sexual minorities, having due regard to their specific cultures, characteristics and needs, service providers can continue to develop and implement suitable targeted projects to reach out to these groups for providing T&R services to achieve abstinence.
(b) Projects that support family members of drug abusers, which could serve as a means of engaging hidden drug abusers in families, strengthening the motivation of drug abusers to quit drugs and maintain abstinence, as well as preventing inter-generational drug abuse patterns

4. Family relation is one of the main factors attributing to whether a drug abuser would be able to quit drug successfully. Family support is important throughout the process from identification, treatment, rehabilitation to minimising relapse and maintain abstinence. Projects that enhance family members’ involvement in staying alert to drug abusing behaviour around them and help to impart skills for motivating drug abusing family members to seek help and quit drugs are encouraged.

5. In view of the continued prevalence of “Ice” abuse as well as increased cannabis abuse among youngsters aged under 21 and concerns about the mental health of the abusers, projects that could enhance family members’ awareness of the harmful effects of these drugs and their skills in the care and support of the abusers are encouraged. Family support projects seeking to help relieve the emotional distress of drug abusing parents and enhance their parenting skills could be explored with a view to strengthening their motivation to quit drugs and tackling inter-generational drug abuse problems. Closer collaboration with dedicated services can be further explored.

(c) Projects that promote/strengthen collaboration among various sectors and service modes to help the increasingly complex psychotropic substance abuse (PSA) cases to quit drug, especially those involving “Ice”, cocaine and/or cannabis abuse, and to facilitate a continuum of T&R services for drug abusers to achieve abstinence. Key players may involve community-based service units, residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres, medical services, law enforcement agencies, other welfare service units as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or bodies serving specific groups

6. The drug history of drug abusers suggests that they may already have suffered from serious or even irreversible bodily and brain damage before any T&R service can reach them. They may have their own families and children, and their drug taking behaviour will have taken its toll on the families involved, which will further complicate the cases. Many frontline social workers have continued to face the challenge of not just handling the abusers’ physical discomfort or bodily dysfunction, but also the psychiatric
symptoms induced by prolonged substance abuse (e.g. hallucination, depression, paranoid delusions, and mania). As evidenced by the prevalent “Ice”, cocaine and/or cannabis abuse cases, before these symptoms are put under control with medical help, it would be difficult to engage the drug abusers to provide effective anti-drug counselling and treatment. For specific drug abuser groups, the cases can be more complicated.

7. Projects that promote collaboration among various sectors and service modes to help abusers to quit drug, especially those strengthening collaboration between medical and social service units, to facilitate case referral and provision of a continuum of services to achieve abstinence, are therefore encouraged. Examples include outreaching medical support to drug abusers, early engagement of drug abusers in the hospital setting, collaboration with other welfare service units (e.g. those providing family support or child services), and collaboration between community-based and residential T&R service units, to facilitate concerted efforts for the effective delivery of T&R and aftercare services as well as responding to other service needs of drug abusers.

(d) Projects that facilitate early identification of drug abusers and intervention, including but not limited to peer snowballing, closer collaboration with parties which may have contact with drug abusers in their services for case referral for drug quitting, etc.

8. Having regard to the drug history of drug abusers, the anti-drug sector is encouraged to continue to explore means to facilitate early identification of drug abusers so that they could be offered help to quit drugs before drugs cause serious/irreversible damage to their health and well-being. Projects may include and not limit to peer snowballing for existing T&R service recipients to encourage their drug-abusing peers to seek help, or outreaching to high-risk youth (e.g. school dropouts) for prevention work and early intervention. Newer and more innovative methods may also be tried and developed, and their effectiveness evaluated.

9. The anti-drug sector may also continue to explore closer collaboration with parties (such as medical professionals and medical social workers) which have contact with drug abusers in their services for case referral. With a relatively high proportion of the newly reported drug abusers being young adults (aged 21 – 35) and the continued prevalence of PSA especially cannabis and “Ice” among youngsters, projects that step up outreaching efforts in tertiary institutions, workplaces or other high-risk
projects, enhance awareness of help-seeking channels in those contexts, and identify and encourage those with drug problems to quit drugs and seek help early, are encouraged.

(e) Projects that strengthen aftercare services for those who have successfully quit drugs so as to minimise relapse and facilitate reintegration into society. Examples include counselling at post-treatment stage, occupational therapies, vocational training, provision of job placement opportunities, job counselling, mentorship programmes, etc.

10. The road to abstinence is often lengthy and arduous. Relapse is widely known to be a challenge to T&R services. It is generally believed that abusers, if can be engaged in meaningful activities like employment or study, are better able to stay away from drugs although this is not the single determinant. The anti-drug sector is encouraged to continuously explore and implement projects to sustain the effects of T&R programmes, minimise relapse and facilitate the reintegration of rehabilitated drug abusers into society. Projects may include and not limit to educational and vocational training programmes, occupational therapies, job placement, job counselling, mentorship programmes and other aftercare services. Job skill training leading to acquisition of vocational qualifications can also enhance the self-recognition and self-esteem of drug rehabilitees, thus empowering them to resist the temptation of drug and stay abstinence so as to live a responsible life.

(f) Projects that provide structured training or platforms for experience sharing among anti-drug workers, medical professionals and related sectors/personnel to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge of handling cannabis abuse cases and the increasingly complex cases involving other psychotropic substances

11. Feedback from many frontline social workers and medical professionals has suggested increasing difficulties in handling cases with drug induced psychiatric symptoms as a result of the prevalence of PSA and especially the popularity of “Ice”, cocaine and cannabis. Some have further pointed to the need for the anti-drug sector to deepen the understanding of the harmful effects of cannabis and the T&R skillsets necessary for engagement and intervention of cannabis abusers who usually have incorrect perception over the health harms that cannabis may bring, tend to have a more relaxed attitude towards their drug-taking behaviours and are less reluctant to seek
help or stay in drug treatment. Projects that can promote more training and experience sharing among social workers, anti-drug workers and medical professionals, especially by those who have more experience in handling cannabis cases and other PSA cases, are therefore encouraged. These projects may also involve other relevant streams of social or medical services, such as those dedicated to family support and/or mental wellness of clients, to help foster a better understanding of the needs of persons with drug problems, and share good practice or techniques in handling them.

**Preventive Education and Publicity (PE&P)**

(g) Projects that enhance awareness of drug harms of cannabis, particularly in providing correct information on the harms of cannabis abuse, rectifying mistaken concepts and helping identify cannabis products, among members of the general public especially young people and parents, as well as specific target groups (such as high-risk youth, post-secondary/tertiary students, people of diverse race and/or sexual minorities);

12. As revealed by the 2019 CRDA statistics, the number of cannabis abusers rose by 5% as compared to 2018, and those aged under 21 increased more notably, by 48%. The situation is alarming. The legalisation of use of recreational cannabis or the discussion of the issue on the national agendas in a few overseas jurisdictions, and a wide range of cannabis products (including food, drinks, topical products for applying to skin, hair or nails, as well as cannabis extracts) available in some overseas jurisdictions, may further fuel the misconception, especially among young people, that cannabis is not harmful. On the other hand, there have been suggestions from members of the community that whilst parents are commonly concerned with their children taking cannabis and using cannabis products, they have limited knowledge of the drug harm and symptoms of possible drug abuse of their children. More parental education should be conducted. These developments suggest that anti-drug education efforts need to be stepped up to enhance awareness of the drug harms of cannabis, provide correct information on the harms of cannabis abuse, rectify mistaken concepts and help identify cannabis products (which are unlawful in Hong Kong) and possible drug abuse for early intervention, among members of the public, especially young people and parents. Projects using means and avenues that are popular among the youth are encouraged. Meanwhile, projects that seek to raise the awareness of the harms of cannabis among various specific target groups (see paragraph 14 below) should also be welcomed.
Projects that enhance awareness of the harms of other popular drugs, such as “Ice” and cocaine, among members of the general public and specific target groups (such as high-risk youth, post-secondary/tertiary students, people of diverse race and/or sexual minorities), particularly in providing preventive education on drug harms, promoting attitudinal change towards drugs and encouraging early help-seeking.

The 2019 CRDA statistics revealed that despite a lower number of abusers reported, such drugs as “Ice” and cocaine continued to be among the most popular psychotropic substance abused. There is thus a continued need to enhance awareness of the harms of these drugs.

The 2019 CRDA statistics showed that about 37% of the newly reported drug abusers started to abuse drugs at the age of 16 – 20. While the Narcotics Division has engaged NGOs and implemented school-based initiatives to provide specific anti-drug education programmes to students at upper primary to secondary levels, groups such as high-risk youth and post-secondary/tertiary students may not have received frequent anti-drug messages and may not have adequate understanding of the harms of drugs and the help network. On the other hand, for specific groups such as people of diverse race and sexual minorities, tailored anti-drug messages on top of those disseminated through mainstream media or channels may be needed in order to strengthen the effect of anti-drug PE&P to them. Therefore, PE&P projects with approaches that address the needs and characteristics of various specific target groups should be encouraged. Flexible arrangements to suit individual education institutes, course structures, social backgrounds, cultures and customs, and taste and trends (e.g. use of new media and electronic platforms) are welcomed.

Projects that target young adults (aged 21 – 35), young persons who fall outside the school network, employers and/or business operators, with a view to enhancing the awareness of the drug problem, improving understanding of the harms of prevalent drugs, developing resilience towards drug temptation, facilitating identification of hidden abusers, encouraging early help-seeking, and establishing a drug-free culture at workplace.

The 2019 CRDA statistics have revealed that the proportion of newly reported abusers being young adults (aged 21 - 35) remained at a relatively high level (46%). Young adults and young people falling outside the school...
network may commonly face pressure from different sources (e.g. family, work, unemployment, peers and financial burden) that may put them at the risk of drug abuse, but they may not receive frequent anti-drug messages and reminders. In this connection, employers and business operators, if equipped with the knowledge of the drug problem and drug harms as well as skills in identifying drug abusers and encouraging their early help-seeking, can play a helpful role in the anti-drug cause. Projects to disseminate anti-drug knowledge and messages to young adults, young persons outside the school network, employers and/or business operators are therefore encouraged. Projects that can facilitate employers and/or business operators to instill an anti-drug awareness at workplace or implement anti-drug measures/initiatives are welcomed.

(j) Projects that enhance the awareness of families, especially at-risk families (e.g. teenage mothers, parents or family members being ex-drug abusers, and family members being high-risk youth), of the drug problem, and strengthen the role and abilities of family members in preventing drug abuse, identifying drug-abusing family members, handling drug problems and seeking help early

16. Family is commonly the first line of defence against the drug problem as family members play an important role in preventing drug abuse, identifying drug-abusing family members and seeking help. On the other hand, members of at-risk families are more susceptible to the influence of drugs, be it falling prey to drug abuse themselves or facing the adversities relevant to their drug-abusing family members. Strengthening PE&P efforts targeting families, such as the provision of family-based prevention services with intervention and empowerment methods (e.g. for instilling knowledge of drugs, improving family bonding and communication, handling conflicts between family members, and identifying drug-abusing symptoms), can reduce the risk of drug abuse by family members and improve their resilience against drug problems. Projects with innovative outreaching methods, engagement plans and effective intervention methods for recruiting families, particularly at-risk families, are encouraged.

(k) Projects that promote community acceptance of T&R services and facilities and reintegration of rehabilitees into society

17. Community support and acceptance are essential to helping drug abusers return to normal life and remain abstinent. A supportive social environment is also crucial to setting up new facilities to provide accessible
and useful services to persons with drug problems. Advocacy and engagement projects with dual emphasis on engaging community stakeholder’s support for drug rehabilitees’ reintegration into society and advocating relocation of T&R facilities into communities are encouraged.

(i) Projects that enhance the awareness of the dire consequences of engaging in drug trafficking activities

18. Law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong from time to time detect cases involving persons who are lured or baited to transport drugs into or out of Hong Kong or offer themselves as the recipients of drugs delivered through post or courier services. Young people are particularly vulnerable as they may not be aware of the serious consequences of taking part in drug trafficking. Indeed, in 2019, the number of defendants under 21 convicted of trafficking in dangerous drugs increased by about 40%. The situation warrants attention, and enhanced efforts should be made to educate members of the public, especially young people, about the severity of drug trafficking offences in Hong Kong and the consequences of committing such offences. Projects that could effectively deliver anti-drug trafficking messages and the relevant legal consequences to vulnerable groups are encouraged.

Research

(m) Researches on the characteristics of PSA, particularly on psychotropic substances which have gained prevalence in Hong Kong such as “Ice”, cocaine and cannabis to provide more information about the drug harms and to identify suitable treatment methods

19. The prevalence of PSA suggests the need to understand more about the different aspects of the problem. In particular, research studies to look into the nature and harmful effects of psychotropic substances which have gained prevalence in Hong Kong, such as “Ice”, cocaine and cannabis, are encouraged. Researches that aim at developing more effective treatment models to address the latest PSA problem that could be applied in Hong Kong’s context and for sharing with the anti-drug sector would be given more weight.

(n) Researches on the behavioural patterns (e.g. reasons for hidden drug abuse, relapse and its prevention, and impacts of inter-
generational drug abuse) of different groups of drug abusers (e.g. female drug abusers, pregnant drug abusers, working drug abusers, and drug abusers of diverse race)

20. The latest demographic characteristics of drug abusers continue to suggest that it will be useful to study the behavioural patterns (e.g. reasons for hidden drug abuse, relapse and its prevention, and impacts of inter-generational drug abuse) of various sub-groups of drug abusers so as to facilitate more effective intervention, drug-quitting process, relapse prevention and reintegration into the community. Researches that would bring practical benefits to T&R and PE&P initiatives are encouraged.

(o) Researches on the methods of collecting and analysing qualitative information to complement the drug situation in quantitative terms

21. In view of the increasing concern over hidden drug abuse as partly reflected by the longer time taken for a drug abuser to be reported by a reporting agency of the CRDA, methods of collecting qualitative information on the pattern, characteristics and consequences of drug abuse, as well as insider knowledge of the latest drug abuse trend will be useful to help better understand the overall drug scene in Hong Kong. Development of a framework of collecting qualitative information using interviews and ethnographic studies, implementation of the framework by collecting the qualitative information to demonstrate its usefulness, integration and analysis of the qualitative information collected with currently available quantitative data, and a study on the feasibility of collecting similar qualitative data using the same framework in future are welcomed.

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