

## **P Calls to Helpline Rise Significantly and reveal heightened violence**

Calls to the national Alcohol Drug Helpline from people concerned about P have risen in the last three years from 1,245 in 2003 to 2,368 in the past year, according to CEO, Cate Kearney.

The Alcohol Drug Helpline, which is marking its tenth anniversary this week as a national service, was set up as the Alcohol Helpline, and since 2002 has been the national helpline for calls about other drugs as well.

“The rise in calls about methamphetamine has introduced an element of crisis and violence not previously experienced in Helpline calls,” she said. “Most are lengthy calls, as acutely distressed callers tell their graphic stories. Helpliners who work four or more shifts per week have taken up to 170 calls each about methamphetamine in the last six months.”

Kearney said that most methamphetamine callers, whether calling about themselves or about someone close, were phoning because they had reached crisis point.

“Usually they or the person close to them has spent all their money, is in debt, has been stealing, lost their job or their health, is neglecting their children, is violent, psychotic, has changed personality, is delusional or is destroying the fabric of the family. Sometimes all of these things have happened,” she said.

“Many of the parents who call tell us about their 30-something children who are or were in highly paid employment. Many parents have given large loans to their children not knowing they were paying for the habit.”

“About 60% of the calls these days are about alcohol, which is slightly lower than a few years ago, now that other drugs are of more concern,” Kearney said. “The second most common drug people call about is cannabis, and that hasn’t changed much either. But the drug that is causing increasing concern these days is methamphetamine, or P.

“P has come from nowhere to 12% of our calls, and cannabis from 6% to 13%, so the two drugs now make up 25% of all calls,” she said.

Partly as a result of the rise of P use, callers to the Helpline now received a greater level of ‘brief interventions’, Kearney said. This included a discussion about the problem and a plan for change.

“It’s certainly brought a whole new dimension to the Helpline and has required significant training for our staff in learning how to handle these calls, many of them now from people who’ve reached crisis point,” she said.

“The Alcohol Drug Helpline (0800 787 797) receives around 15,000 calls a year now – a significant increase over the 30 calls it received in its first few months of operation in 1997. In total, over 10 years, the helpline has taken 110,000 calls, over half of them made in the last four years since the helpline was extended to cover other drugs.”

**For further information, please phone Cate Kearney, chief executive, ADANZ, provider of Alcohol Drug Helpline. Phone 379 8626, 021 301 566**