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New research shows party pills stopping illegal drug use

The Social Tonics Association of New Zealand (STANZ) today welcomed the release of new independent research showing that party pills are playing a critical role as a safer alternative to illegal drugs.

According to research by Massey University's Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation (SHORE) and commissioned by the Ministry of Health, 15 per cent of a telephone sample have used party pills over the last year, and around a third of young New Zealanders.

STANZ Chairman, Matt Bowden, said he was particularly pleased that more than 45 per cent of party pill users who have also used illegal drugs used party pills to avoid illegal drugs. More than 44 per cent mainly used party pills when previously they had used illegal drugs.

"One third of respondents who had used party pills, which extrapolates to an enormous number of kiwis, said that they had recently stopped their illegal drug use. This is hugely significant research and almost certainly New Zealand's biggest ever success in reducing illegal drug use," he said.

"Nearly four times as many people are using party pills as a gateway off illegal drugs as the number of people who used party pills before using illegal drugs," he said.

"Party pills are serving their purpose as a safer, legal alternative to illegal drugs. People are choosing safer legal alternatives and, as senior New Zealand police officers have noted, we are seeing a significant drop in demand for methamphetamine type drugs simply because party pills are available.

"This was my stated intention in developing safer drug alternatives – thousands of people are quitting more dangerous drugs to use safer alternatives. The findings in this research are of international significance," said Mr Bowden.

"This is effective harm minimisation in action. This is precisely why New Zealand is now leading the world for all the right reasons in that we haven't had a single ecstasy-related death in five years.

Mr Bowden said he was pleased that most users of party pills gave up using them quite early, that there was very low incidence of any form of addiction to party pills, that there is extremely low level of long-term use and that only 0.3 per cent reported any significant negative impacts, despite a lack of common-sense regulatory controls around the industry," he said.

"Party pills are being used across the entire community. The fact that at least 20 million have been sold without any lasting negative effects is an exemplary safety record.

"We share the view of 60 per cent of respondents that tighter controls are required around how party pills are manufactured, labelled, marketed and sold. We are lobbying Government to introduce more sensible regulation and very much hope to see these introduced as soon as possible."

"The Expert Advisory Committee on Drugs has warned of the possibility that if party pills were prohibited there could be a swing back to lethal illegal drugs. This research released today confirms this," he said.

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