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MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION,
CHILD CARE AND YOUTH
MINISTER FOR SPORT**

MEDIA RELEASE

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First study into illicit drug use by elite athletes

The first comprehensive study of athletes' use of and attitudes to illicit drugs has been released as part of the Government's \$20.1 million *Illicit Drugs in Sport: National Education and Action Plan*.

The Minister for Sport Kate Ellis announced the results of the study at the Australian and New Zealand Sports Law Association (ANZSLA) conference in Canberra today.

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) study of just under 1,000 athletes, mostly aged 20 to 29, focussed on the illicit drugs cannabis, methamphetamine, ecstasy, cocaine, GHB and ketamine.

The research found elite athletes' use of illicit drugs was lower than the general population across each category of drugs surveyed.

"This is landmark research that gives us a better understanding of the use of illicit drugs by high-performance Australian athletes," Ms Ellis said.

The study showed 3.7 per cent of the surveyed athletes used cannabis in the past year, compared to 20.8 per cent of the same age group in the general population. Only 68 athletes (7%) of the total sample reported using one of the six illicit drugs covered by the study in the previous year.

Additionally, one third of the athletes were offered or had the opportunity to use an illicit drug in the past year, but the majority chose not to do so.

"This information builds an evidence base for future action and will be useful as we implement the \$20.1 million *Illicit Drugs in Sport: National Education and Action Plan*."

"The plan aims to harness the power of positive sporting role models and prevent the use of illicit drug use in the community through education support programs."

"The plan also offers support for national sporting organisations to detect and deter the use of illicit drugs in sport," Ms Ellis said.

The athletes surveyed came from eight national sporting organisations including rugby league, rugby union, hockey, athletics, netball, softball, diving, triathlon, as well as the Australian Institute of Sport.

The study's chief investigator Dr Matthew Dunn said the research also looked at the attitudes of athletes towards deterrents.

"Most of those surveyed felt that current drug testing is a significant deterrent and that current penalties are appropriate," Dr Dunn said.

"A significant proportion felt there should be less severe penalties for use of illicit drugs compared with performance enhancing drugs, such as steroids.

"Overall, our work shows that this group has the opportunity to use illicit drugs but the incidence of use is low compared with the general population," Dr Dunn said.

The full report can be found at www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au

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