

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

3238. Mrs C.L. Edwardes to the Minister for Health

I refer the Minister to *The West Australian* of 10 August 2004 and the article titled 'Mental health chaos: doctors' and ask -

- (a) in the past twelve months how many youth and adolescents have been referred to mental health specialists;
- (b) of the youth and adolescents referred to mental health specialists how many were suffering from psychoses that was found to be drug induced;
- (c) is the Minister aware of increasing evidence that THC causes mental imbalance that can lead to aggressive and violent behaviour;
- (d) is the Minister aware of increasing evidence that THC is a contributing factor in cases of youth schizophrenia;
- (e) if not, will the Minister make himself aware of this research; and
- (f) if not, why not?

Mr J.A. McGINTY replied:

- (a) There were 891 admissions to WA public hospitals of adolescents and youths (aged 12-17 years) with mental health problems during the financial year 2003-2004. In the same period, 36338 occasions of service for mental health problems were provided to adolescents and youths by public community mental health services.
- (b) Of the above, there were 66 admissions (7%) of adolescents and youths to WA public hospitals, where the principal problem was mental and behavioural disorders related to drug use (opioids, cannabinoids, stimulants including caffeine, volatile solvents, and multiple drugs and psychoactive substances). In the same period, 349 (1%) occasions of service were provided to adolescents and youths by public community mental health services for problems as outlined above.
- (c) There has been debate in the medical literature regarding the role of cannabis use in schizophrenia and whether cannabis use either can trigger a 'cannabis psychosis' or precipitates schizophrenia in vulnerable persons. Nevertheless, it is accepted that cannabis use can exacerbate the risk of schizophrenia and is associated with a range of mental health problems. Many studies examining the link between THC and aggressive behaviour have not controlled for confounding factors, such as the use of other drugs, particularly amphetamine type stimulants. There is no direct evidence of a causal link between THC and aggression. For example, the Canadian "Report of the Special Senate Committee in Illegal Drugs: Cannabis" (2002) states that cannabis use does not cause aggression.
- (d) I am advised that there is conflicting evidence about the role of the THC in cases of youth schizophrenia and further research is required to fully understand the magnitude of all contributing factors.
- (e) Not Applicable.
- (f) Not Applicable.