



THE AUDIT OFFICE
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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MEDIA RELEASE

Effectiveness of Cautioning for Minor Cannabis Offences

Cannabis use costs the NSW economy over \$700 million a year with about eight per cent of the population using cannabis. The NSW Government's cautioning schemes are reducing some of these costs by diverting more than 39,000 minor cannabis offenders from the courts over the last ten years. However, more can be done to encourage those cautioned to seek help for their cannabis use, particularly our youth.

These are some of the findings in a report, *Effectiveness of Cautioning for Minor Cannabis Offences* released today by the Auditor-General, Peter Achterstraat.

Cautioning saves money and reduces reoffending

"Cautioning has saved at least \$20 million in NSW court costs over the last ten years", Mr Achterstraat said.

"Cautioning reduces reoffending. Only five per cent of adults cautioned for minor cannabis offences appeared in court for a similar offence within two years, compared to nearly 14 per cent who were initially dealt with by a court," he added.

Very few adults cautioned are seeking help for their cannabis use

"Less than one per cent of the adults cautioned for the first time, voluntarily call the drug helpline as a result of their caution. More concerning is that less than 2 in 5 cautioned for a second time contact the helpline even though it is mandatory to do so," Mr Achterstraat said.

More adults but fewer youths are being cautioned

"We need to do as much as possible to keep our youth out of the courts. Young offenders found with cannabis have a greater chance of ending up in the courts today than they did ten years ago," Mr Achterstraat said.

"Police do not have the authority to compel young offenders to seek help for their cannabis use. The Police can only issue a caution and refer them to local drug treatment services. Compounding this is a lack of youth treatment options in some regions," Mr Achterstraat said.

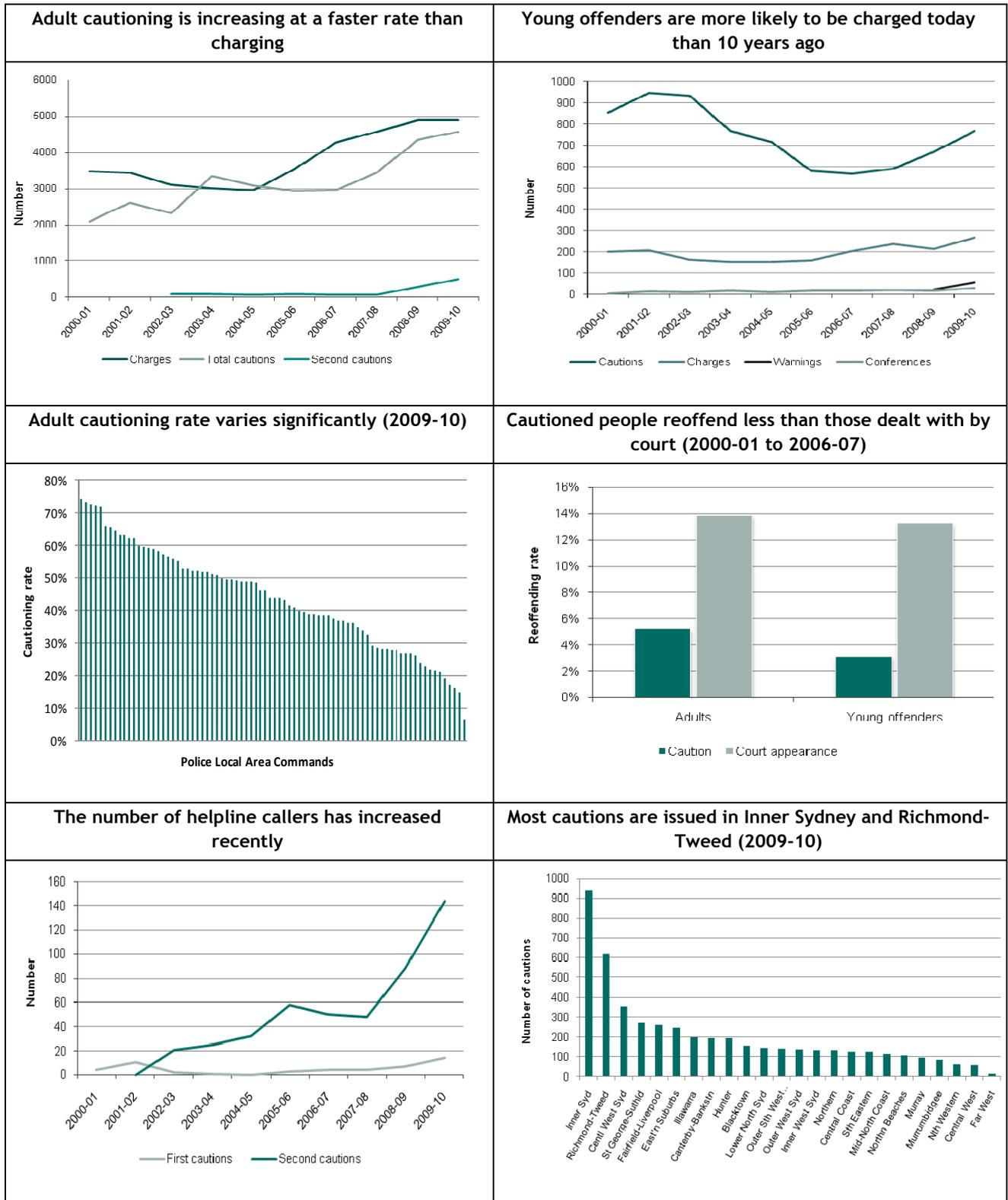
Effective cautioning is a good thing - it keeps people out the courts, reduces reoffending, and saves money.

"Cannabis use is illegal and has significant monetary and social costs both to individuals and the community. Cannabis users who are cautioned instead of going to court should take personal responsibility and seek help to address their drug use," Mr Achterstraat said.

Further information

A full copy of the report is on the Audit Office's website.

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Local government areas with the highest number of cannabis possession offences (2009, BOCSAR) are Sydney (2019), Byron (554), Lismore (524), Blacktown (458), Wollongong (299)