

State action needed on drug education

Thursday, June 25, 2009 » 09:25am

Governments must give more support for frontline anti-drug programs despite a report saying global markets for cocaine, opiates and marijuana are steady or in decline, an expert says.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime's annual world drug report for 2009 found about 28 million people worldwide were heavy drug users likely to be physically or psychologically dependent on drugs.

But production of opium and coca had declined significantly, the report found.

The chief executive of Anex, the Association from Prevention and Harm Reduction Strategies Australia, John Ryan, said the federal government was spending more money than ever to strategically manage drug use.

But under the latest national health care agreement, spending by the states in harm reduction such as needle exchanges had 'flatlined', with some funding being channelled into general health spending.

'This is leading to a debilitating effect on Australia's harm reduction programs. In addition, agencies delivering programs are spending their time arguing for money rather than controlling drug problems,' he said.

Coordinated international policing, supported directly by the federal government, had made a significant impact on the amount of drugs available in Australia, Mr Ryan said.

'All of these gains could be jeopardised if we go backwards on demand reduction strategies,' he said.

'It is imperative that we ensure significant support for frontline services is in place to reduce demand for drugs.

'We are now at a pivot point in our drug strategy. We cannot run the risk of downgrading services that reduce demand and control problems, otherwise suppliers will find ways to increase quantities arriving on our shores.'