

## MONTANA METH PROJECT

5 June 2008

**The Hon. A.L. EVANS:** Honourable members may by now have seen two television ads discouraging binge drinking which were publicised by the minister on 29 May 2008. These advertisements will run over the next seven months at a cost of \$600,000. Family First applauds these advertisements as an effective way of discouraging binge drinking. I was reminded on seeing these ads of how similar they are to the advertisements used on the Montana Meth Project that I have raised in this place previously. The minister said, almost a year ago to the day, on 30 May last year, in reply to my last question about the Montana Meth Project:

I have had an opportunity to look at the Montana advertising program; it is quite compelling to watch and quite powerful. I am not sure of its suitability here in Australia, but I asked my department to look at it and assess whether it fits or is appropriate to be included as part of South Australia's education program.

In the face of the ice epidemic in Australia, and given that the minister's new binge drinking advertisements are 'quite compelling to watch and quite powerful', my question to the minister is: will she now run a South Australian version of the Montana advertising campaign to also send a compelling and powerful message to our young people to deter them from using meth?

**The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Environment and Conservation, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health):** I think I have spoken on this issue on a number of occasions because it is an area that has been raised by the honourable member more than once. We have had a look at this. The Montana Meth Program commenced in September 2005 in the US and included a mass media campaign and other policy and law enforcement initiatives. The program states on its website that the methamphetamine use by young people in Montana is dramatically higher than the national average and that

the state is in the top 25 per cent of states in the US in relation to the misuse of that substance.

The Montana Meth Project has the goal of reducing prevalence of first-time methamphetamine use by changing the attitudes and beliefs of young people about the risks and also the social acceptability of meth use. The Montana Meth Project aims to raise awareness about risks. The campaign message is 'Meth—not even once'. It is not clear whether this campaign has directly impacted the prevalence of methamphetamine use in Montana. The 2007 Montana Meth Use and Attitudes Survey Report states:

Usage appears to be neither higher nor lower than in past surveys.

However, the survey does indicate changes in perceptions of risk associated with methamphetamine use by young adults and parents.

Obviously in terms of the policy initiatives, particularly concerning advertising campaigns that are very costly, we very much try to focus on evidence-based programs and those that can be evaluated, where possible, as actually being effective. The Montana campaign was not designed to deal with the circumstances surrounding methamphetamine use in Australia or with consideration of Australia's National Drug Strategy.

The Montana rates of methamphetamine use differ from South Australian rates. In 2005, the Montana Youth Risk Behaviour Survey found that 8.3 per cent of Montana high school students had used methamphetamine, whereas in the 2005 Australian secondary school students survey in South Australia it was reported that the figure was 4.5 per cent of students, so it is roughly half that reported in Montana. SA rates are not significantly different from those around Australia as a whole, and this is in contrast to Montana. As the program states, the usage rates of methamphetamine amongst young people in Montana are much higher than the national average rates.

For social marketing campaigns to be effective they must be tailored to suit the audience. The Australian government focus-tested two of the

advertisements for the Montana Meth Project as part of the development of the current phase of the National Illicit Drug Campaign and, according to those focus tests conducted here, the materials were considered to be attention-grabbing—as I stated when I first watched them; they are certainly compelling viewing—but they were also found to be lacking in credibility, particularly with high risk groups. In fact, when they were focus-tested here in Australia, they did not resonate with the group we would obviously be targeting.

The third stage of the Australian National Drugs Campaign which aims to prevent young people using illicit drugs was launched in August 2007, and the campaign includes a new methamphetamine commercial called 'Don't let ice destroy you.' It features a clinician in an emergency department treating someone suffering from psychosis caused by using a form of methamphetamine or ice.

I know that the member, as I did, found the Montana message to be very compelling and very dramatic, but when it was tested here for the Australian cultural climate, if you like, it did not resonate, so it is unlikely that we would proceed with a similar advertisement. Obviously we are focus-testing messages that resonate with our high risk groups. The campaign's advertising will run in print media, television and online.