Methodology

The researchers were commissioned to develop a viable performance measurement framework for drug law enforcement in Australia. The framework was developed following meetings and workshops with personnel from drug law enforcement agencies in every jurisdiction. This included more than 100 in-depth interviews throughout the various stages of the project. In addition, the researchers conducted a detailed literature search concerning drug law enforcement performance measurement. The researchers trialled the implementation of the framework in two field sites, namely the Australian Customs Service and NSW Police.

Key findings:

- Australian drug law enforcement agencies have, for many years, used seizure and arrest data to measure the effectiveness of their work. While these measures are simple, visible and well understood measures of law enforcement effort, they are in many cases not clear measures of law enforcement performance.

- Four high-level outcomes were identified as being important during the project. These outcomes and their associated performance measures appear below.

1. Reducing drug crime and drug-related crime
   - trends in illicit drug detection/seizures; trends in the weight of illicit drug detections and seizures; trends in illicit drug arrests, street prices, and perceived purity and availability of illicit drugs; changes in the places in which users obtain their illicit drugs; changes in trafficking modes; changes in the profile of illicit drug traffickers; and trends in robberies.

2. Reducing organised crime
   - trends in the weight of illicit drug detections/seizures; changes in trafficking modes; and changes in the profile of illicit drug traffickers.

3. Improving public health
   - trends in the types and frequency of illicit drugs consumed; trends in blood borne diseases; trends in drug-related deaths; trends in drug-related emergency department presentations; trends in ambulance attendances at overdoses; and trends in clients participating in drug treatment.

4. Improving public amenity

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing as part of its commitment to the National Drug Strategy.

www.ndlerf.gov.au
- trends in the level of safety felt by the community; and trends in community concern about ‘the drug problem’.

• This framework focuses on a set of key measures that were viewed by law enforcement agencies as being central to measuring the impact of drug law enforcement on drug markets and on overall community health and wellbeing.

• Key elements of the framework were further developed and tested in field trials in two NSW Police Local Area Commands. Specifically, a tool was developed which involved the enhancement of a standard offender debriefing process currently applied to all arrestees for the purpose of gathering local crime intelligence. This involved the inclusion of questions on illicit drug market activities.

• The performance measures implemented need to be meaningful and relevant to those working at all levels of the drug law enforcement process.

• One of the clear messages from the research was that without strong executive level commitment to the implementation of the performance measurement framework, the system will flounder.

• The researchers outlined a four stage process for developing performance measurement frameworks in drug law enforcement. These were:
  1. Develop multiple high-level outcomes.
  2. Identify adequate measures.
  3. Develop methods for dealing with outcome time lag (that is the difference in time between initiating a process and this having an impact on outcomes).
  4. Identifying tools for attributing outcomes to the interventions.

Implications for police

Australia spends approximately $1.4 billion on drug law enforcement in Australia. The framework developed by the authors will assist the law enforcement sector to account for the benefits that flow from this expenditure. Importantly, the linking of drug law enforcement activities to higher level outcomes permits an examination of which drug law enforcement activities contribute most to these higher level outcomes. Indeed, a lack of clarity concerning the nature of the higher level outcomes can make performance measurement meaningless. The linking of drug law enforcement activities to higher level outcomes is also likely to lead to more effective prioritisation of drug law enforcement activities towards those that most contribute to higher level outcomes.

It should be noted that the framework’s measures are not prescriptive since, depending on the context, certain measures may not be relevant to a given agency or level of drug law enforcement activity. In addition the relative importance of different measures are likely to change over time and therefore law enforcement agencies will be required to decide on the best suite of measures to be used.

In short, there are significant potential benefits to law enforcement agencies considering the adoption of all, or parts of this drug law enforcement performance measurement framework. These benefits are likely to stem both from increased accountability and an enhanced ability to identify which activities most contribute to higher level objectives.

A full copy of this report is available on the NDLERF website at www.ndlerf.gov.au

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing as part of its commitment to the National Drug Strategy.

www.ndlerf.gov.au