

# Warning marijuana is 'not a soft drug

August 1, 2006 - 4:18PM

Marijuana is not a soft drug and Australians should be aware of how dangerous it can be, an anti-drug campaigner says.

Drug Free Australia chairman Craig Thompson is urging the community, young people in particular, to change their thinking about cannabis because of its serious effects on health.

"The road fatalities caused by cannabis-intoxicated drivers, links to cannabis and psychosis, birth defects and greater potency of the drug are just a few issues of enormous concern," Mr Thompson said.

He says cannabis continues to be accepted as a low-risk, non-addictive drug, but this is not the case.

"There's recognition among experts that marijuana is an addictive drug now, but that's not widely known," Mr Thompson says.

"People think it's kind of a soft drug that you can have a bit of a nibble at without too many consequences, but treatment agencies and even addicts that I've spoken to say that it's cannabis that's hardest to get off."

He said both national and international studies have found that drivers intoxicated with cannabis pose a high risk of road accidents, while medical practitioners have confirmed the drug's use is linked to psychosis.

"The link between cannabis use and birth defects is one of the most horrendous issues of all," Mr Thompson said.

"Medical practitioners (are warned) about health risks such as impairment of foetal brain development, relative prematurity, smaller length and head circumference, malformations, higher rate of miscarriage and peri-natal death."

Mr Thompson also said marijuana had been gaining in potency over the past 20 years.

"There is definite evidence of stronger plants in more recent times," he said.

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