

Keep up good work fighting crystal meth

THE ISSUE

National and state studies indicate that use of crystal meth has declined significantly. Encouraging figures gathered nationally and in Hawaii indicate a downturn in the use of crystal methamphetamine, described as a crisis only a few years ago. Government and nonprofit agencies should accelerate what has proven successful to achieve further decline in the use of the dangerous drug.

According to a report this month by Quest Diagnostics' Drug Testing Index, workplace screenings conducted on the mainland last year showed more than a 50 percent decline in the percentage of positive tests over a two-year period, from 28 testing positive for meth in 2004-05 to 14 percent in 2006-07. Quest Diagnostic is the nation's largest diagnostic tester.

The survey didn't include Hawaii, but another report released earlier in the month by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration did. It shows that Hawaii adults and adolescents admitted into meth treatment programs rose from 2,888 in 2002 to a peak of 3,658 in 2005, but declined to 3,469 in 2006 and 3,323 last year.

As encouraging as those numbers might be, Hawaii could take a lesson from Montana, which was ranked as having America's fifth-worst meth problem in 2005 but now is ranked 39th, with teenagers' use dropping by 45 percent and adult use plummeting by 70 percent.

Much of the credit in Montana belongs to the Meth Project, a nonprofit organization that overwhelmed the media, billboards and Internet sites with drug-prevention advertisements beginning in 2005.

Nationally, John Walters, director of the National Drug Control Policy, attributes the improvement to changes in state and federal laws and tighter controls along the U.S.-Mexican border. Also, Mexico has stopped issuing import permits for key meth precursor chemicals.