

METHAMPHETAMINE USE IN RURAL AUSTRALIA: PATTERNS, PREVALENCE AND CORRELATES OF USE IN NON-METROPOLITAN VS METROPOLITAN USERS

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Introduction and Aims: Anecdotal reports suggest a high and increasing level of methamphetamine use in rural Australia, but no detailed examination has been undertaken to-date. This study investigated whether lifetime and recent methamphetamine (including crystal methamphetamine) use differed among city, regional, and rural populations, and impacts on treatment services.

Design and Methods: Secondary analyses of data from the 2007, 2010, and 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Surveys were undertaken. Data from the 2006/07, 2009/10, and 2012/13 Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Datasets were also examined.

Results: Lifetime and recent use of any form of methamphetamine were significantly ($p < .05$) higher among rural participants, compared to those living in regional areas, cities, or the general Australian population. Between 2007 and 2013, recent crystal methamphetamine use remained stable in cities, but significantly ($p < .05$) increased in rural areas (from 0.8% to 2.0%). Methamphetamine-related treatment episodes significantly ($p < .01$) increased between 2006/07 and 2012/13 in all (metropolitan, regional, and rural) areas, with the smallest proportional increase seen in rural services.

Discussions and Conclusions: This paper provides the first documented evidence of higher levels of methamphetamine (including crystal methamphetamine) use among rural Australian populations. These findings warrant targeted attention, especially given the pre-existing health and social vulnerabilities of rural Australians. The lack of corresponding increases in service utilisation requires urgent investigation to establish whether it reflects lack of capacity (and the need for expanded services) or other factors. Interventions tailored to the unique circumstances of rural areas will be highlighted.

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