

UNRAVELLING METHAMPHETAMINE USE AND ITS IMPACT IN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction and Aims: There is increased interest in methamphetamine use in Australia and associated risks and harms. Greater clarity is required regarding levels and patterns of use. Patterns, prevalence, demographic profiles, treatment demand and intervention implications for methamphetamine users are examined.

Design and Methods: Secondary descriptive and inferential analyses of NDSHS, hospital morbidity, and national minimum data set.

Results: While population level methamphetamine use has been 2% since 2007, between 2010 and 2013 significant shifts occurred: weekly use increased (9% vs 16%); female weekly users increased (33% to 47%); and preference for ice (22% vs 50%) and smoking (19% vs 41%) doubled. Methamphetamine users' age increased (28.9yrs vs 30.9yrs) whilst ice users declined (29.5yrs vs 28.8yrs). Population prevalence was greater in rural/remote regions than major cities (2.6% vs 2.1%). Distinctly different demographic profiles for frequent and infrequent ice and methamphetamine users were identified in terms of age, gender, employment, residence and marital status, mental health and risk taking behaviours.

Increased health service utilisation was highlighted. Significant increases for methamphetamine-related hospitalisations and methamphetamine-related psychotic disorders increased 312% (2008/09-2012/13). Specialist drug treatment episodes for methamphetamine use increased 4-fold (2009/10-2012/13) with disproportionately large numbers of episodes of care for Indigenous people aged 15-19 and 20-24.

Discussion and Conclusions: While the overall proportions of methamphetamine users in Australia appears unchanged, the shift to ice and smoking may have increased risks and harms with a concomitant demand on treatment services identified. The different demographic profiles of methamphetamine and ice users identified will be explicated, with the different response strategies required for different target groups.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Effective tailored interventions are required that reflect the needs of different sub-populations, as well as the longer term detox and slower full recovery period required for methamphetamine users. Service redesign issues will also be highlighted.

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