



NATIONAL DRUG AND
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES • SYDNEY • AUSTRALIA

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Heroin remains Australia's injecting drug of choice NDARC to release 2008 Illicit Drug Reports

Heroin continues to be the illicit drug most commonly injected by Australians although its frequency of use has reduced in most cities, research of emerging drug trends collated by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at the University of New South Wales has found.

The findings are reported in the 2008 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) and the Ecstasy and Related Drug Reporting System (EDRS) - Australia's largest drug monitoring systems - to be released at the National Drug Trends Conference this weekend (**Sunday, 23 November**).

The IDRS monitors the price, purity, availability and use of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. The EDRS examines ecstasy and related drug markets. Both are intended to serve as strategic early warning measures, identifying emerging trends of local and national concern in illicit drug markets

The reports' chief investigator at NDARC, Dr Lucy Burns, says the most significant trend identified was stabilization of the drug market.

“Although heroin remained the drug of choice among injecting drug users, its level of usage has actually decreased, indicating a continued lack of access to high quality heroin. In Sydney, for example, the median days of use decreased from 96 to 72 (out of the past 180 days),” Dr Burns says.

Other key findings:

- The use by injecting drug users of methamphetamine (which comes in different forms including 'speed', 'ice' and 'base') also declined overall. However, the use of one form of the drug – 'ice' - appears to have increased slightly at the national level, although there are significant fluctuations across jurisdictions. NSW showed the greatest increase since 2003 in the proportion of injecting drug users who reported use

of ice/crystal methamphetamine in the preceding six months (69 percent in 2008 up from 38 percent in 2003).

- Despite recent concerns about the illicit use of use pharmaceutical opioids, use of morphine, oxycodone, methadone and buprenorphine by injecting drug users has been relatively stable.
- NSW was the state where ecstasy was most easily obtained. Seventy-four percent of recreational ecstasy users said the drug's availability was "very easy", compared to the national average of 49 percent.
- Use of ecstasy created a range of problems for users. Almost one-third (30 percent) of regular ecstasy users reported their drug use interfered with their responsibilities at home, school or work and 28 percent found themselves recurrently in at-risk situations when under the influence of drugs.

"These findings suggest continuing need for education of young people about the effects of ecstasy and other recreational drugs," Dr Burns says. "With these systems we can detect emerging drug trends and this allows for governments, law enforcement and health workers to plan and implement effectively targeted policy to reduce drug-related harm throughout Australia."

Guest speakers at the conference include: Professor Don Weatherburn from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (*Did the heroin shortage increase amphetamine use? A time series analysis*); - Mr Jeremy Douglas, UNODC Vienna (*The global SMART programme: monitoring synthetic drug markets around the world*); Dr David Caldicott, Royal Adelaide Hospital (*Monitoring illicit drug related harm: how to reach the data that social surveys can't*).

What: *The 2008 National Drug Trends Conference* - including the first release of the national 2008 findings in illicit drug use, markets and related harms.

When: Sunday 23rd November 2008, 9am-3.30pm.

Where: Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre.

For more information about the conference go to
<http://notes.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/page/Conference>

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