



NATIONAL DRUG AND
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

AMPHETAMINE DEATHS UP – NEW OVERDOSE FIGURES RELEASED

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There was a total of 75 “drug induced” deaths in Australia in 2004 where methamphetamine was mentioned, compared to only 50 in 2003, according to new figures released today by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC).

The rate of methamphetamine related deaths among those aged 15 to 54 years has now increased from 4.4 in 2003 to 6.6 per million persons in 2004.

Methamphetamine was determined to be the underlying cause of death in 22% (n = 17) of all methamphetamine related deaths in 2004. Just under half of these deaths (44%) occurring in New South Wales (n=33). Just under one-third (28%) of these deaths occurred in Victoria, and 15% occurred in Western Australia.

These findings are consistent with indicators of methamphetamine availability in Australia. Recent years have seen increases in Australian border detections of methamphetamine, particularly crystal methamphetamine, which is a particularly strong form of methamphetamine. We have also seen increases in the number of clandestine lab detections in Australia. These suggest that the availability of methamphetamine in stronger forms has increased in recent years.

Dr Louisa Degenhardt, lead author of the report, stresses that although the increase is of concern, heroin overdose continues to be a far greater problem.

“Even though the number of deaths has increased, it is still far lower than the number of deaths due to opioids,” said Dr Degenhardt. “Opioids remain by far the drugs that account for the majority of illicit drug related deaths, despite the fact that methamphetamine is used by so many more people.”

The figures also show gradual increases in deaths among older age groups (particularly those aged between 45-54 years) due to opioids.

“Often we forget older users of illicit drugs, yet these appear to be the group where increases in fatal overdoses are occurring. Clearly we need to be doing more to help this older group to reduce their risks of overdosing on the drug,” said Dr Degenhardt.

“We need to respond to the increasing popularity of methamphetamine. We need to educate young recreational drug users about the risks associated with the drug, and we also need to direct efforts at limiting both the supply of methamphetamine and demand for the drug. Effective treatments for methamphetamine use are going to be increasingly important to circumvent the harms associated with methamphetamine.”

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