



NATIONAL DRUG AND  
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

## **NUMBER OF DEPENDENT METHAMPHETAMINE USERS RISE ACROSS AUSTRALIA**

For immediate release

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Research released today from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) has estimated that there are around 73,000 dependent methamphetamine users in Australia. These figures suggest that there are more heavy methamphetamine users in Australia than there are heavy heroin users (estimated at 45,000 in 2002), and that the size of the methamphetamine problem is the same league as dependent heroin use during the peak of the heroin problem in the late 1990s.

These results were presented at the 2005 NDARC Annual Symposium held today at the Masonic Centre in Sydney.

Dr Rebecca McKetin, Research Fellow with NDARC at the University of NSW, said that the rise in the popularity of high purity crystalline methamphetamine (commonly known as 'ice') has probably played a major role in the number of people who are becoming dependent on the drug and experiencing other problems.

"These statistics emphasise the growing need for treatment approaches for methamphetamine dependence," said Dr McKetin. "Only around one in ten methamphetamine users had received treatment for their methamphetamine use in the past year. This compares to over half of heroin users having been in treatment for their heroin use during the same time."

"These findings are not particularly surprising. Methamphetamine use has been relatively common in Australia for some time, and its use has always been far higher than heroin. What is surprising is the number of people who are experiencing dependence or other problems associated with the use of methamphetamine."

Psychosis is one of the particularly concerning problems associated with methamphetamine use, and we have seen a 58% rise in the number of recorded hospital admissions for stimulant-related psychosis since 1999.

In the year 2003-2004 there were 3,190 hospital separations (i.e., episodes of care) in Australia for mental and behavioural disorders due to stimulant use. Around half of these were for psychosis.

“There is very limited evidence about what works when treating people who are dependent on methamphetamine. Most of our treatment approaches are geared toward heroin use and alcohol use,” said Dr McKetin.

“The nature of methamphetamine dependence is quite different, and so is the population group that you’re dealing with. People who use methamphetamine often say that they don’t find the available services appealing or accessible. We simply don’t have the same coverage of drug treatment for methamphetamine users, and this is something that needs to be improved.”

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