

# THE FACTS ON ILLICIT DRUG USE

Illicit drug use has many social, health and economic impacts on Australian society.<sup>1</sup>

- In 2004, 38 per cent of people aged over 14 had used an illicit drug of some type, including cannabis, at least once in their life and 15 per cent had used an illicit drug in the previous 12 months.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2004, cannabis was the most commonly used illicit drug ever used (34 per cent) followed by meth/amphetamine (9 per cent).<sup>3</sup>
- In 2004, the average age of initiation for cannabis was 18.7 years and meth/amphetamine 20.8 years.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2004, one-in-five Australians aged 20 to 29, had used meth/amphetamines at least once in their lifetime, and 11 per cent had taken the drug in the past 12 months.<sup>5</sup>
- The estimated cost of illicit drug use to the Australian community is estimated to be \$6 billion.
- In 2005, one in 10 prisoners was imprisoned for drug-related offences.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2005, it was estimated that there were about 73,000 dependant meth/amphetamine users<sup>7</sup> – almost double the 45,000 heroin users.<sup>8</sup>
- A study showed that the prevalence of psychosis was 11 times higher among regular methamphetamine users than the general population. Another showed that 23 per cent of regular users of the drug had experienced symptoms of psychosis in the previous year.<sup>9</sup>

- Hospital presentations for methamphetamine psychosis in 2004-05 were 1,510, compared to 1,028 in 1999-00.<sup>10</sup>
- In 2005, there were 68 methamphetamine-related deaths – compared to 50 deaths in 2003.<sup>11</sup>

The most recent National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported a 30 per cent reduction in the proportion of people reporting recent illicit drug use over the previous six years.

However, despite these reductions, almost two in every five Australians have still used an illicit drug at some time in their life.

- In 2004, over one third (38 per cent) of the population aged 14 years and over had ever used an illicit drug.
- In 2004, 21.3 per cent of 14 to 19 year olds had recently used an illicit drug.
- In 2004, the average age at which new users first tried illicit drugs increased to 19.4 years of age, from 18.6 years of age in 2001.
- In 2004, almost one in five people (19.6 per cent) who used an illicit drug in the previous month reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- In 2004, around seven out of ten illicit drug users obtained their drug from friends or acquaintances.

1. These statistics on illicit drug use were derived from a combination of sources including: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2004, and National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre – Australian Drug Trends 2006.
2. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2004
3. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2004
4. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2004
5. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2004
6. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Statistics on Drug use in Australia 2006
7. Estimating the number of regular and dependant methamphetamine users NDARC – Mcketin et al. 2005
8. Estimating the number of current heroin users in Australian 1997 – 2002 NDARC – Degenhardt et al.
9. The Prevalence of psychotic symptoms among methamphetamine users, *Addiction 101* – Mcketin et al. 2006
10. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Statistics on Drug use in Australia 2006
11. 2004 Cocaine and amphetamine related deaths in Australia - NDARC



# THE FACTS ON ILLICIT DRUG USE cont...

## CANNABIS

### Prevalence of use

In 2004, cannabis was the most commonly-used illicit drug in Australia, with 33.6 per cent of the population aged over 14 having used it in their lifetime.

In 2004, cannabis continued to be the most common illicit drug used by young people in Australia, with 25.5 per cent of teenagers aged 14 to 19 years using it in their lifetime.

Recent cannabis use by teenagers aged 14 to 19 years dropped between 2001 and 2004 - from 24.6 per cent to 17.9 per cent, reflecting a broader trend of reduced cannabis use among teenagers.

Across all age groups, males were more likely than females to have ever used cannabis in their lifetime (with the exception of those aged 14 – 19 years).

### Harms and potential consequences

These include mood swings, memory impairment, weight gain, increased risk of cancer of the lung, mouth, throat and tongue, panic attacks, delusions, hallucinations, paranoid thinking and other mental health problems.

Cannabis serves as a barrier against self-awareness, and may interfere with a young person's development including possible interference with reproductive function.

## METHAMPHETAMINES

### Prevalence of use

In 2004, methamphetamines were the second-most-widely used illicit drug in Australia, with 9.1 per cent of the population aged over 14 using them in their lifetime.

Use is particularly common among young adults aged 20 to 29, with one in five (21 per cent) having used methamphetamine in their lifetime, and 10.7 per cent have taken the drug in the previous 12 months.

The emergence of high-purity crystalline methamphetamine, or ice, is a concern because it has been associated with higher levels of dependence than other forms of methamphetamine, such as speed.

The current market for methamphetamine encompasses a wide range of patterns of use – from infrequent use (in pill form or smoking), through to heavy dependant injecting use of the drug.

There are about 73,000 dependent methamphetamine users in Australia.

Recent methamphetamine use for teenagers aged 14 to 19 years dropped between 2001 and 2004 - from 6.2 per cent to 4.4 per cent.

### Harms and potential consequences

These include paranoia, hallucinations, chronic sleep problems, teeth and gum damage, high blood pressure, panic attacks, anxiety, nervousness, decreased emotional control, severe depression, skin lesions, violent behaviour, psychosis, nerve cell damage. There is a high risk of addiction, including through smoking.

## ECSTASY

### Prevalence of use

There was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of the population aged over 14 that had ever used ecstasy between 2001 and 2004 - from 6.1 per cent in 2001 to 7.5 per cent in 2004.

One in eight (12 per cent) of people aged 20 to 29 years and about one in 20 (4.3 per cent) of teenagers had used ecstasy in the previous 12 months.

In 2004, 6.2 per cent of teenagers aged 14 to 19 years had ever used ecstasy.

In general in 2004, males were more likely than females to have ever used ecstasy, with the exception of those aged 14 to 19 years.

### Harms and potential consequences

These include chronic sleep problems, cracked teeth through grinding, high blood pressure, dehydration, anxiety, nervousness, hallucinations, decreased emotional control, lethargy, severe depression, nerve cell damage, thermal meltdown, death from heart failure.<sup>1</sup>

1. NOTE: The prevalence figures quoted above are drawn from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) National Drugs Strategy Household Surveys in 1998, 2001 and 2004. The harms and potential consequences for each drug are drawn directly from the National Drugs Campaign booklet 'Talking with Your Kids about Drugs'.

