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Key Points

- In 2005 the recent use of heroin remained fairly stable in most states except QLD and the NT where it decreased slightly. The price of a gram of heroin increased in all jurisdictions except in NSW and the ACT where it remained stable. The price per cap remained stable in all jurisdictions except VIC, TAS and the NT where it increased. Heroin remained the cheapest in NSW and the ACT.
- Methamphetamine powder and methamphetamine base were considered “easy” to “very easy” to obtain, and availability was stable. Respondents also reported the availability of crystal methamphetamine was ‘easy’ to ‘very easy’ to obtain (mixed reports in some states), however a quarter also reported it as ‘difficult’. The proportion of participants reporting recent use of crystal methamphetamine decreased in all jurisdictions except in TAS and SA where it remained stable. Speed and base recent use remained relatively stable in the majority of jurisdictions.
- The price of a cap of cocaine was relatively stable in NSW, the only state where sufficient numbers were able to comment. The proportions of IDU reporting recent cocaine use remained fairly stable in all jurisdictions except the NSW where it increased slightly. The frequency of cocaine use among IDU doubled in NSW and remains low and sporadic in all other jurisdictions.
- Cannabis remained readily available in all jurisdictions. Hydroponically grown cannabis continued to dominate the market. The use of bush, hash and hash oil was noted in all jurisdictions. The potency of hydroponic cannabis continued to be rated by IDU as high and bush cannabis as medium.

A National Overview of the 2005 IDRS

The key findings of the 2005 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) are presented in this Bulletin. The IDRS monitors emerging trends in the use, price, purity and availability of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. The annual data collection includes a survey of injecting drug users (IDU), a survey of key experts who are professionals in the field of illicit drugs, and the analysis of existing indicator data on drug-related issues. This year is the fifth year that all three components of the IDRS were conducted in every state and territory in Australia.

This bulletin contains a summary of the main findings from the 2005 national IDRS, based on interviews with 943 IDU (at least 100 in each jurisdiction) and 263 key experts. Injecting drug users are recruited as they are considered a sentinel group to detect illicit drug trends. The information from the IDU survey is therefore not representative of illicit drug use in the general population, but is indicative of emerging trends that warrant further monitoring.

Drug trends in this publication are cited by State/Territory, although they represent trends in the capital city of each jurisdiction. Further details will be published in the national and State IDRS *Drug Trends* annual reports, which will be available through NDARC in early 2006.

Heroin

Estimates of the price of a gram of heroin by jurisdiction appear in Table 1. Prices for all drugs are based upon recent purchases by IDU. For comparison, equivalent figures from previous years are presented in all tables. Other data presented below include purity, availability and use of heroin.

Price: The median price of a gram of heroin increased by between \$10 to \$100 per gram in most jurisdictions except NSW and the ACT where it remained stable. The median price of a gram of heroin ranged from \$300 in NSW and the ACT to \$550 in WA. Median ‘cap’ (street deal) prices were around \$50 in all jurisdictions except TAS (\$90) and the NT (\$80, Table 1). Similar numbers of IDU reported that the price of heroin was stable in the six months preceding interview, with the exception of TAS and NT where only small numbers were able to comment.

Table 1: Median price of last IDU purchase of a gram of heroin by jurisdiction, 2000-2005

	Median price \$ per gram					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
NSW	220	320	300	300	300	300
ACT	300	485	350	350	300	300
VIC	300	450	400	380	300	310
TAS	375	325	350*	350*	350*	360*
SA	320	350	450	425	320	400*
WA	450	750	550	550	500	550
NT	600	550	500*	-	400	500*
QLD	350	450	350	400	380	400

* median price based on small numbers (n < 10)

Purity: IDU were asked what the purity or strength of heroin was currently and if there has been any change in purity in the preceding six months. Of those able to comment, most IDU reported heroin purity to be low (43%) to medium (37%, Table 2). Around a third (31%) of IDU reported the purity of heroin to be stable in the six months preceding interview.

Availability: In 2004, the majority of IDU who commented on the availability of heroin thought it was 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain except in TAS and the NT where it was reported to be 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to obtain (Table 2). The availability of heroin remained stable in the preceding months, except in the NT and TAS, where only small numbers were able to comment.

Table 2: Current purity and availability of heroin among IDU who commented by jurisdiction, 2005

	National	NSW	ACT	VIC	TAS	SA	WA	NT	QLD
Current purity	N=591	n=140	n=106	n=132	n=12	n=61	n=63	n=22	n=55
Low	43	49	41	51	33	41	30	68	26
Medium	37	35	44	31	42	33	46	23	44
High	9	5	11	6	0	12	14	5	15
Fluctuates	11	11	4	12	25	15	10	5	16
Current availability	N=603	n=140	n=109	n=134	n=11	n=64	n=63	n=24	n=58
Very easy	50	64	40	63	18	48	44	0	36
Easy	36	26	48	31	18	39	37	17	57
Difficult	12	9	12	6	9	9	19	58	7
Very difficult	3	1	0	1	55	3	0	25	0

Use: Compared to the 2004 IDRS, the proportion of IDU that reported recent heroin use decreased slightly in QLD and the NT and remained stable in the other jurisdictions. TAS and the NT reported the lowest levels of heroin use (Table 3).

Table 3: Proportion of IDU who reported use of heroin in preceding six months, by jurisdiction 2000-2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
National	78	66	68	65	69	66
NSW	95	96	96	97	95	88
ACT	92	83	89	88	91	86
VIC	97	90	94	90	86	89
TAS	38	24	21	26	19	19
SA	73	65	48	55	60	61
WA	80	55	64	63	69	69
NT	56	36	22	16	34	24
QLD	82	63	81	64	79	64

Nationally, the median frequency of heroin use in the last six months preceding interview remained fairly stable at 70 days (maximum of 180 days). However, the frequency of heroin use decreased in all jurisdictions except in TAS, WA and QLD. NSW reported the great drop from 120 days in 2004 to 96 days in 2005.

Methamphetamine

As in previous years the 2005 IDRS distinguished between methamphetamine powder (speed), methamphetamine base (base) and crystal methamphetamine (ice).

Price: The median price for a gram of methamphetamine powder ranged from \$90 (NSW, n=10) to \$300 (TAS, n=15 and WA, n=27). Reported prices increased in most jurisdictions except in NSW and the ACT where it decreased and in QLD where it remained stable. A point of speed was \$41.50 in SA, \$40 in VIC and \$50 in the other jurisdictions. The median price of a point of base was \$50 in all jurisdictions except in VIC (\$45). A point of crystal methamphetamine ranged from \$65 in the NT to \$50 in all other jurisdictions. The majority reported the price of all forms of methamphetamine to be stable.

Purity: IDU were asked to describe the current purity of methamphetamine powder (speed), base and crystal (ice). Speed had the highest proportion report the purity as low, base as medium and ice as high. The largest proportion of IDU who commented described the purity or strength of all three forms of methamphetamine as stable in the six months preceding interview.

Availability: The majority of respondents in all jurisdictions reported that methamphetamine powder was 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain and that availability was stable. Among those who could comment, base

was also considered to be 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain, and availability stable. Those that commented on crystal methamphetamine in each jurisdiction had mixed reports with some states reporting it as 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain and others 'difficult' or very difficult' to obtain. The availability of methamphetamine remained stable in most jurisdictions.

Use: The proportion of IDU reporting use of powder methamphetamine in the six months preceding interview remained fairly stable in all jurisdictions except in the ACT and TAS where it increased slightly. The ACT reported the greatest increase from 41% in 2004 to 59% in 2005. The use of base generally remained stable in all jurisdictions except in QLD where it decreased. The use of crystal methamphetamine decreased slightly in all jurisdictions except in TAS and SA where it remained relatively stable. The decrease reported ranged from 2% in TAS and SA to 15% in WA and QLD (Table 4).

Cocaine

Estimates of the price of cocaine by jurisdiction appear in Table 5. Cocaine price, purity and availability were reported by small numbers of respondents in all jurisdictions except NSW.

Price: The number of people who reported on the median price of cocaine per gram was less than ten in all jurisdictions except in NSW (n=14). The median price for a gram of cocaine was lowest in the ACT (n=3) and NT (n=1) at \$250 a gram and highest in WA (\$475, n=1). The median cost of a 'cap' of cocaine was highest in the NT at \$100 (however only three people commented) and was lowest in NSW (n=61), ACT (n=5), VIC (n=1) and WA at \$50 (n=1, Table 5).

Table 4: Proportion of IDU reporting recent use of different forms of methamphetamine by jurisdiction, 2000-2005

	SPEED						ICE					BASE					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
NSW	32	42	39	31	35	38	14	29	25	38	45	38	23	23	32	31	38
ACT	63	63	51	48	41	59	17	72	34	65	73	62	36	30	13	25	28
VIC	49	74	70	70	65	75	9	52	26	50	41	29	32	20	18	11	13
TAS	77	45	35	51	60	76	6	56	20	69	52	50	52	74	46	72	79
SA	51	47	56	53	44	39	11	58	56	48	48	46	59	65	51	46	61
WA	81	87	77	71	61	61	51	85	74	80	83	68	56	56	40	45	54
NT	70	63	67	60	60	69	6	24	20	34	32	21	18	21	30	26	16
QLD	58	80	55	58	61	65	13	75	39	60	51	36	75	42	50	60	40

**did not ask about base in 2000*

Table 5: Price of last purchase of cocaine by jurisdiction, 2000-2005

	Median price \$ per gram						Median price \$ per cap					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
NSW	200	200	200	200	290	280	50	50	50	50	50	50
ACT	-	-	-	200	350 [^]	250 [^]	-	-	-	-	-	50 [^]
VIC	250 [^]	250	200 [^]	250 [^]	200 [^]	350 [^]	80 [^]	50 [^]	50 [^]	-	-	50 [^]
TAS	300 [^]	450 [^]	233 [^]	250 [^]	325 [^]	400 [^]	65 [^]	100 [^]	100 [^]	80 [^]	-	60 [^]
SA	225 [^]	200 [^]	250 [^]	250 [^]	190 [^]	315 [^]	75 [^]	50 [^]	50 [^]	-	50 [^]	60 [^]
WA	250	300	350	250	-	475 [^]	50	-	-	-	-	50 [^]
NT	-	-	-	-	250 [^]	250 [^]	-	-	-	-	60 [^]	100 [^]
QLD	-	-	-	300	200 [^]	300 [^]	-	-	-	-	150 [^]	-

[^] Median prices are based on small numbers (n < 10)

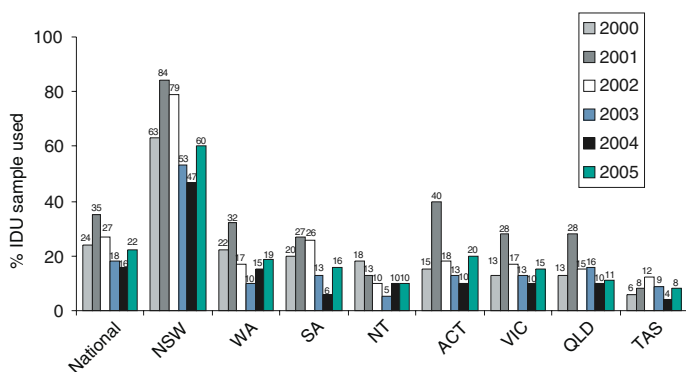
Note: Dashes represent no (or one) purchase of stated amount

Purity: IDU were asked to describe the current purity or strength of cocaine and if there had been any change in purity in the six months preceding interview. IDU reports of the purity of cocaine were variable. Of those able to comment (only 16% of the sample), a quarter (26%) reported the purity as low, 40% as medium and 28% as high. Thirty five percent of IDU reported that the purity had remained stable, 30% thought it was decreasing, 10% thought it was increasing, 13% fluctuating and a further 12% did not know.

Availability: Cocaine nationally was considered 'very easy' (36%), 'easy' (24%), difficult (28%) and very difficult (11%) to obtain. Reports between jurisdictions differed. In NSW and WA over 70% reported availability to be either 'very easy' or 'easy' (although numbers were very small in WA) whereas in the ACT, VIC, TAS and SA over 60% reported 'difficult' or 'very difficult'.

Use: Nationally since 2001 the recent use of cocaine has steadily decreased, however in 2005 recent use remained fairly stable expect in NSW where a slight increase was observed. The frequency of daily use among those that used cocaine continues to be low (9% in 2005, 6% in 2004) in comparison to 2002 (24%) in NSW, and remained sporadic in all other jurisdictions.

Figure 1: Proportion of IDU samples that reported using cocaine in preceding six months, by jurisdiction, 2000-2005



Cannabis

Since 2003, the IDRS has differentiated between hydroponic and outdoor-grown ('bush') cannabis. Hydroponic cannabis continues to be the form most commonly used in all jurisdictions, followed by outdoor-grown cannabis. Hash and hash oil is not commonly used, with the highest prevalence of use of these forms reported in SA.

Price: The price of an ounce of hydroponic remained cheapest in SA at \$200 (most expensive in NSW, WA, QLD and NT at \$300) and the price for an ounce of bush ranged from \$200 in NSW, VIC, TAS, SA and the NT to \$250 in the ACT. Gram prices for both forms varied from \$20-\$25, consistent with previous years. In SA, the median price for both hydroponic and bush cannabis remained at \$25 for a bag

containing approximately two and a half grams (Table 6). The majority of IDU in all jurisdictions reported that the price of both hydroponic and outdoor cannabis had remained stable in the preceding six months.

Table 6: Median price of last purchase of cannabis by jurisdiction, 2000-2005

	Price \$ per gram								
	2000	2001	2002	2003		2004		2005	
				Hydro	Bush	Hydro	Bush	Hydro	Bush
NSW:	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
ACT	25	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
VIC	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
TAS	25	25#	25	25	25	25	25	25	22.5
SA	25*	25*	25*	25*	25*	25*	25*	25*	25*
WA	25^	25^	25	25	20	25	25	25	25
NT	25	25	25	25	25	25	23	25	25
QLD	25	25	25	25	15	25	20	25	25

* approximately 2.5 grams # approximately 1.5 grams ^ approximately 2 grams

Potency: As in previous years, the IDU in all jurisdictions perceived potency of hydroponic cannabis as 'high', except in the NT who reported the potency as 'medium'. All jurisdictions reported the potency of hydroponic cannabis as stable. Outdoor grown ('bush') cannabis was perceived to be of 'medium' potency and stable in all jurisdictions.

Availability: Hydroponic cannabis was considered 'very easy' or 'easy' to obtain by the majority of IDU in all jurisdictions, and availability was described as stable. Reports on bush cannabis availability were more mixed, but it was generally described as 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain.

Use: As in all previous years of the IDRS, cannabis use was common, and hydroponic cannabis continued to dominate the market with the majority in all jurisdictions reporting it as the form most used. The use of outdoor crop or bush cannabis in the six months preceding interview was reported in all jurisdictions by over 40% of respondents (42% in VIC to 75% in the ACT). The use of hash (5% in NSW to 24% in SA) and hash oil (2% in NSW, VIC to 18% in SA) in the preceding six months was also reported in all jurisdictions.

Diverted Pharmaceuticals

The injection of pharmaceutical preparations has been identified as an issue that requires monitoring. Substantial proportions of IDU report recent injection of morphine which remains highest in the NT and TAS (Figure 2). A decrease in morphine injection was reported in all jurisdictions except in WA where it increased slightly and in NSW

where it remained stable. The recent injection of benzodiazepines has gradually reduced since the discontinuation of tempazepam gel capsules in May 2002. In 2005 the number reporting recent benzodiazepine injection reached the lowest levels reported in each jurisdiction except in the NT. A third (35%) of the TAS sample and 28% of IDU in WA reported injection of pharmaceutical stimulants in the six months preceding interview (Figure 2). The injection of illicit methadone syrup (49%) and illicit physeptone (40%) is highest in TAS. Thirty one percent of IDU in WA reported the injection of illicit buprenorphine followed by 23% in VIC, 16% in QLD and less than 15% in the other jurisdictions.

Figure 2: Proportion of IDU that reported recent injection of morphine and pharmaceutical stimulants by jurisdiction, 2005

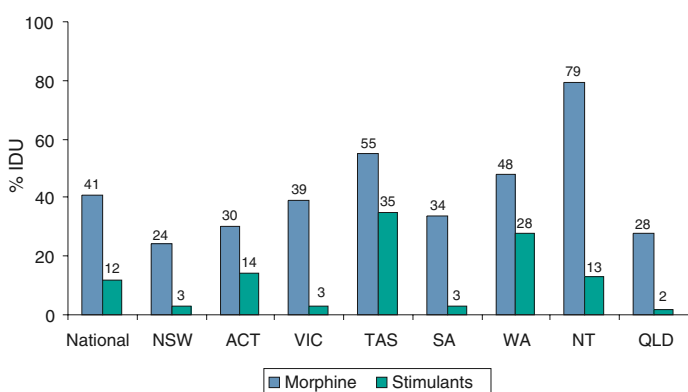


Table 7: Proportion of IDU that reported recent injection of benzodiazepines, by jurisdiction, 2000-2005

	National	NSW	ACT	VIC	TAS	SA	WA	NT	QLD
2000	21	13	15	36	36	5	21	12	16
2001	24	18	14	40	37	9	14	27	27
2002	21	19	6	21	38	13	30	17	25
2003	17	20	9	15	31	8	12	30	11
2004	14	13	7	16	30	9	12	20	8
2005	8	2	2	6	23	2	7	21	7

Conclusions

In 2005, recent use of heroin decreased slightly in QLD and the NT and remained stable in the other jurisdictions. TAS and the NT reported the lowest levels of recent heroin use. Frequency of use also decreased in most jurisdictions. The price of a gram of heroin increased in all jurisdictions except in NSW and the ACT where it remained stable.

Substantial proportions of IDU continue to use all forms of methamphetamine. The proportion of participants reporting recent use of crystal methamphetamine decreased in all jurisdictions. Speed and base recent use remained fairly stable in the majority of jurisdictions.

The proportions reporting recent cocaine use remained fairly stable in all jurisdictions except in NSW where it increased slightly. NSW continues to have the highest level of cocaine use. The frequency of cocaine use among IDU doubled in NSW and continues to remain low and sporadic in all other jurisdictions.

Hydroponically grown cannabis continued to dominate the cannabis market, and was considered 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain in all jurisdictions. The price and availability was considered to be stable, and the potency 'high' for hydroponic cannabis and 'medium' for bush cannabis.

There are jurisdictional differences in the types of diverted pharmaceutical preparations that IDU inject. TAS reported the highest level of injecting benzodiazepine, morphine and pharmaceutical stimulants.

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