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Key Points

- While heroin remained the most commonly reported drug of choice for injecting drug users (IDU), prevalence and frequency of recent use decreased. There were, however, large jurisdictional differences in heroin markets and patterns of use.
- IDU continued to use all three forms of methamphetamine, with prevalence of use remaining relatively stable over the past few years (Figure 1). Jurisdictional variations were seen in both prevalence and frequency of use. Increases were observed in prevalence of ice/crystal use, although frequency of use remained relatively low at a median of 10 days nationally (i.e. less than once per fortnight). The proportion of IDU who reported daily methamphetamine use was 5% nationally.
- NSW remained the only jurisdiction where sizeable numbers of participants reported recent cocaine use, and were able to provide information on price, purity and availability. Prevalence and frequency of cocaine use in NSW have increased slightly, while in other jurisdictions it remained low and sporadic.
- The cannabis market (price, potency and availability) remained stable. The use of cannabis by IDU remained common and frequency of use among users remained high, usually daily.
- Use, diversion and injection of pharmaceutical preparations continued to occur, with jurisdictional differences in patterns of use observed.

Notes on interpretation: 'Prevalence' data in this bulletin refer to the proportion of participants who had used the drug on at least one occasion in the last six months. 'Frequency' data refer to the number of days on which those participants had recently used the drug. 'Recent' refers to the six months preceding interview.

An overview of the 2006 IDRS: the injecting drug user survey findings

Introduction

The key findings of the 2006 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) IDU surveys 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 (KE) who are professionals in the field of illicit drugs, and the analysis of existing indicator data on drug-related issues. This is the sixth 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 IDU survey component of the 2006 national IDRS, in which 914 participants were recruited (NSW n=152; VIC n=150; QLD n=112; ACT, TAS, SA, WA and NT, n=100 each).

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, and is not representative of other illicit drug users (e.g. in other geographical areas, occasional users, etc), but it is indicative of emerging trends that may warrant further monitoring and/or investigation.

Drug trends in this publication are cited by State/Territory, although they represent trends in the capital city of each jurisdiction. Further details, including key expert and indicator data, will be published in the national and jurisdictional IDRS *Drug Trends* annual reports, which will be available through NDARC in early 2007. Previous years' findings are available in national and jurisdictional reports on the NDARC website, <http://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/page/IDRSReports>.

National Overview

Heroin

Heroin remained the most commonly reported drug of choice for IDU (48%). However, in 2006 the prevalence of heroin use decreased in all jurisdictions except in SA and QLD where it remained stable. Prevalence of use remained highest in NSW, VIC and the ACT, and lowest in the NT and TAS. Frequency of heroin use also decreased in most jurisdictions. The price of a gram of heroin remained stable or increased slightly across jurisdictions, and the price per cap remained mostly stable. Heroin was cheapest in NSW, VIC and the ACT, and availability was generally reported to be either stable or decreasing across all jurisdictions in the last six months. Purity was rated as 'low' to 'medium' by the majority of participants.

Methamphetamine

In 2006, 23% of IDU nominated methamphetamine as their drug of choice, a figure which has remained stable over the past several years. Prevalence of recent use of ice/crystal methamphetamine increased to varying extents in all jurisdictions, while use of speed powder tended to have remained stable or had decreased. Patterns of recent base use remained generally stable, with the exception of a large decrease noted in TAS and to a lesser extent WA. Nationally, frequency of use of each form of methamphetamine remained relatively low, at 12 or less days in the last six months. Prices for speed powder, base and ice remained fairly stable, although there were variations within and across jurisdictions. Overall, the three main forms of methamphetamine (speed powder, base and ice/crystal) were generally considered 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain. While there were variations across jurisdictions, availability of all forms of methamphetamine was generally reported to be stable. Of the three forms, ice/crystal was the most often reported to be of 'high' purity, and speed powder was commonly reported to be 'low' or 'medium'. Base reports were more mixed, ranging from 'high' to 'low'.

Cocaine

Similar to previous years (2003-2005), the prevalence of cocaine use in the six months preceding interview remained at 20% or less in all jurisdictions except NSW where it was substantially higher (67%). The frequency of cocaine use among IDU continued to increase in NSW (median days of use = 20, i.e. just under once per week), while remaining low and sporadic in all other jurisdictions. The price of a cap of cocaine remained stable at \$50 in NSW, which remained the only jurisdiction where sufficient numbers (i.e. >10 people) were able to comment.

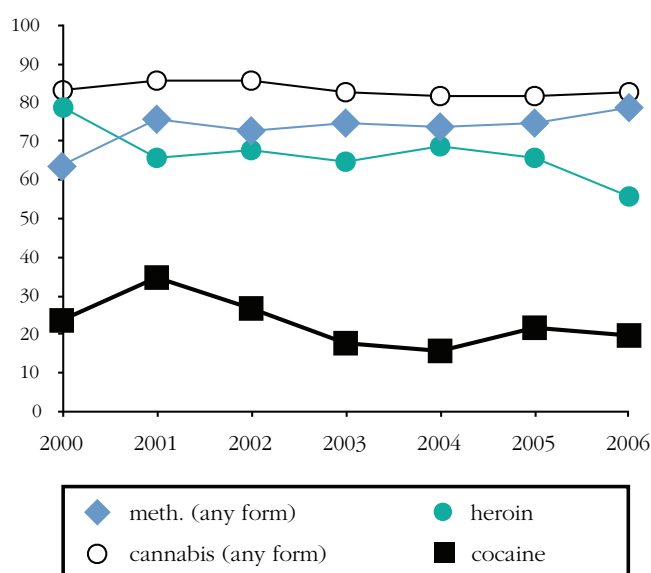
Cannabis

As in previous years of the IDRS, cannabis use among IDU was common in all jurisdictions. Frequency of cannabis use tended to be daily. Cannabis remained readily available in all jurisdictions. The price per gram varied by type (hydroponic or bush cannabis) and by jurisdiction. Hydroponically grown cannabis continued to dominate

the market. The use of bush was also noted in all jurisdictions. The potency of hydroponic cannabis continued to be rated by IDU as high and bush cannabis as medium.

For prevalence of use and detailed market characteristics of these drugs (i.e. price, purity/potency and availability) for each jurisdiction please see 'Jurisdictional Overviews' section.

Figure 1: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, Australia, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Pharmaceuticals

The use, and particularly the injection, of illicitly obtained opioids remains an issue of concern, particularly in the context of low heroin availability and purity. Morphine remains the most commonly injected pharmaceutical, and an increase was observed in prevalence of use (includes both licitly and illicitly obtained morphine) over the preceding six months (from 44% in 2005 to 52% in 2006, nationally). Use remained highest in the NT and TAS, the jurisdictions where heroin has traditionally been the least available. Morphine injection increased or remained stable in all jurisdictions except VIC where it decreased. Oxycodone use over the six months preceding interview (includes both licitly and illicitly obtained oxycodone) remained stable in some jurisdictions (NSW, TAS, WA, NT) and increased to some extent in others (ACT, VIC, SA, QLD). However, frequency of use, as with all diverted opioid medication, remained sporadic.

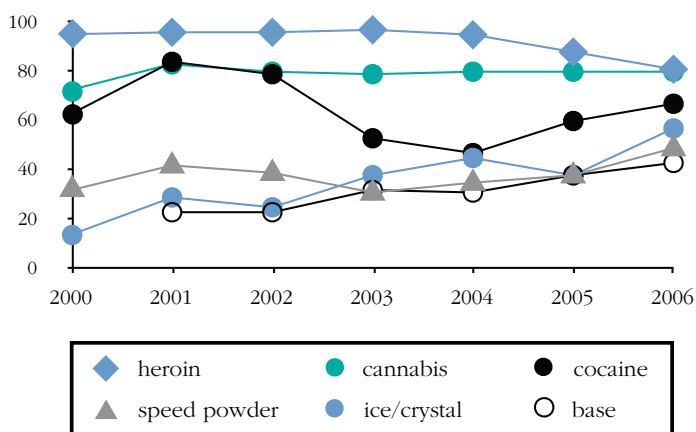
Two-thirds of participants nationally reported the recent use of benzodiazepines (whether licitly or illicitly obtained). Benzodiazepine injection was reported by 12% of the national sample, with the highest prevalence reported in TAS (34%) and the NT (19%). Frequency of benzodiazepine injection remained sporadic at 10 days nationally (i.e. less than once per fortnight).

Jurisdictional Overviews

New South Wales (Sydney)

Use

Figure 2: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, NSW, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 1: Median prices, NSW, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$300	\$300
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$90	\$100
Base (gram)	\$160*	\$200
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$350	\$325
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$50	\$50
Cocaine (gram)	\$280	\$300
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$20	\$20
Bush (gram)	\$20	\$20*
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$285
Bush (ounce)	\$200	\$200*

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

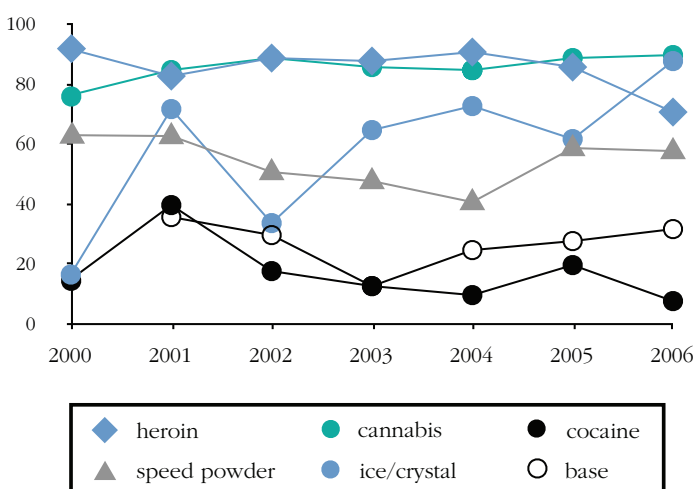
Table 2: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, NSW, 2006

	Heroin (%)		Methamphetamine (%)		Cocaine (%)		Cannabis (%)	
	n=132	n=78	Speed powder	Base	Ice/crystal	Hydro	Bush	
Availability			n=71	n=86	n=99	n=111	n=40	
Very easy	32	45	41	57	33	68	28	
Easy	39	37	48	31	46	32	30	
Difficult	25	13	9	8	21	0	35	
Very difficult	5	5	3	4	0	1	8	
Purity/potency	n=133	n=71	n=66	n=83	n=97	n=113	n=39	
Low	65	42	14	8	26	2	15	
Medium	21	28	46	31	38	20	59	
High	9	23	32	46	25	76	21	
Fluctuates	5	7	9	15	11	2	5	

Australian Capital Territory (Canberra)

Use

Figure 3: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, ACT, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 3: Median prices, ACT, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$300	\$340*
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$125	\$175*
Base (gram)	\$280*	\$250*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$300*	\$410
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$50*	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	\$250*	[no purchases reported]
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$20	\$20
Bush (gram)	\$20	\$15
Hydro (ounce)	\$290	\$300
Bush (ounce)	\$250	\$190

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

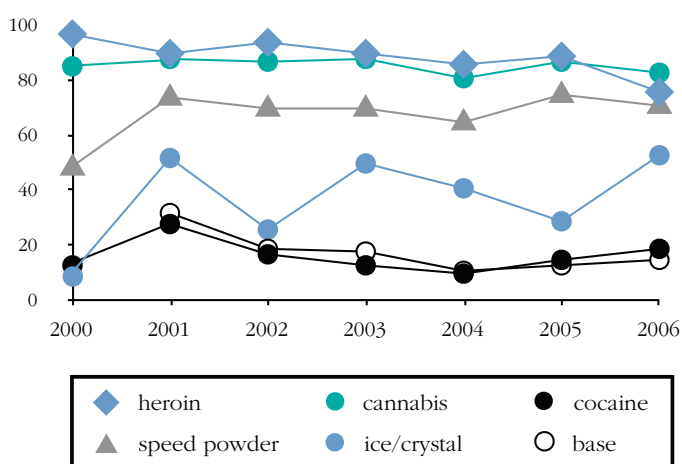
Table 4: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, ACT, 2006

	Heroin (%)		Methamphetamine (%)		Cocaine (%)		Cannabis (%)	
	n=72	n=59	n=19	n=83	n=6	n=85	n=44	n=44
Availability								
Very easy	33	34	32	51	0	42	23	
Easy	40	56	47	42	0	52	57	
Difficult	22	7	21	7	67	6	21	
Very difficult	4	3	0	0	33	0	0	
Purity/potency								
Low	65	40	40	14	25	5	7	
Medium	27	30	25	27	25	20	59	
High	3	21	25	43	50	73	27	
Fluctuates	5	9	10	16	0	2	7	

Victoria (Melbourne)

Use

Figure 4: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, VIC, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 5: Median prices, VIC, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$45	\$40
Heroin (gram)	\$310	\$350
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$40	\$35
Base (point)	\$45*	\$50*
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50*	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$200	\$200
Base (gram)	\$150*	\$180*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$300*	\$200*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$50*	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	\$350*	\$400*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$20	\$20
Bush (gram)	\$20	\$10*
Hydro (ounce)	\$250	\$200
Bush (ounce)	\$200*	[no purchases reported]

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

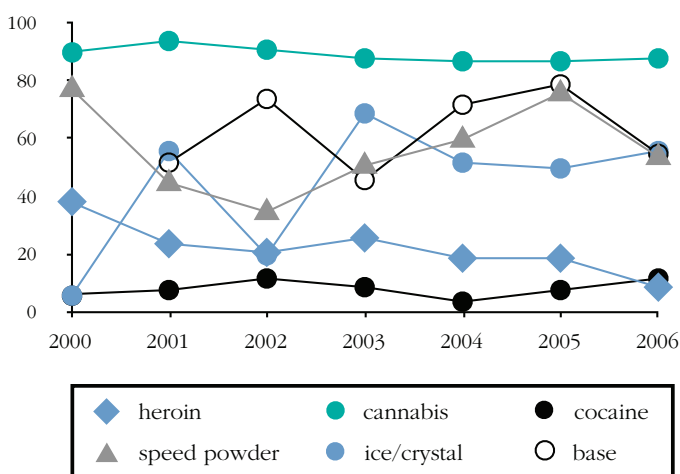
Table 6: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, VIC, 2006

Availability	Heroin (%)	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%)	Cannabis (%)	
	n=97	Speed powder n=65	Base n=2	Ice/crystal n=27	n=6	Hydro n=93	Bush n=14
Very easy	57	59	0	37	33	71	29
Easy	30	29	50	44	67	25	29
Difficult	12	5	50	19	0	4	43
Very difficult	1	8	0	0	0	0	0
Purity/potency	n=96	n=65	n=2	n=27	n=5	n=92	n=14
Low	34	23	50	7	0	1	21
Medium	44	34	0	44	20	34	43
High	8	25	50	30	60	60	29
Fluctuates	14	19	0	19	20	5	7

Tasmania (Hobart)

Use

Figure 5: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, TAS, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 7: Median prices, TAS, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$90*	[no purchases reported]
Heroin (gram)	\$360*	[no purchases reported]
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$300	\$300*
Base (gram)	\$325	\$300
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$340*	\$300*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$60*	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	\$400*	[no purchases reported]
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$25	\$25
Bush (gram)	\$23.75*	\$15*
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$250
Bush (ounce)	\$200	\$170

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; $n < 10$)

Availability and Purity/Potency

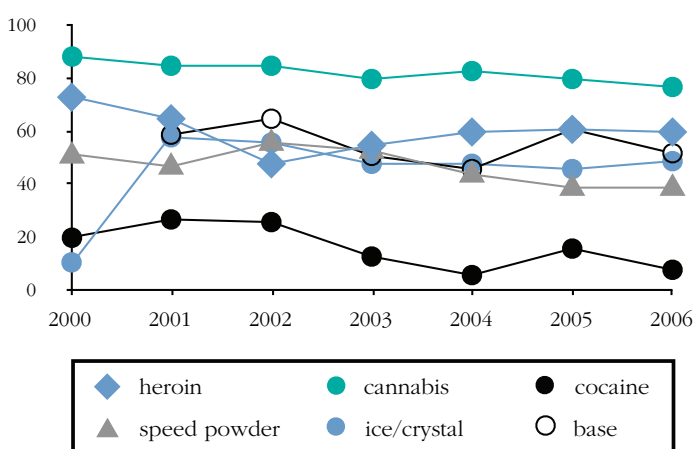
Table 8: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, TAS, 2006

Availability	Heroin (%)	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%)	Cannabis (%)	
	n=3	Speed powder n=51	Base n=51	Ice/crystal n=48	n=3	Hydro n=65	Bush n=52
Very easy	0	43	31	23	0	72	56
Easy	33	49	61	52	33	26	42
Difficult	0	8	6	21	0	2	2
Very difficult	67	0	2	4	67	0	0
Purity/potency	n=6	n=50	n=50	n=48	n=5	n=67	n=52
Low	17	34	12	2	20	2	15
Medium	50	28	30	21	60	31	71
High	17	6	26	52	20	58	6
Fluctuates	17	32	32	25	0	9	8

South Australia (Adelaide)

Use

Figure 6: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, SA, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 9: Median prices, SA, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$400*	\$400*
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$41.50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$200	\$150*
Base (gram)	\$200	\$200
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$300	\$215*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$60*	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	\$315*	\$400*
Cannabis		
Hydro (approx. 2.5g)	\$25*	\$25*
Bush (approx. 2.5g)	\$25*	\$25*
Hydro (ounce)	\$200	\$200
Bush (ounce)	\$200	\$160*

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

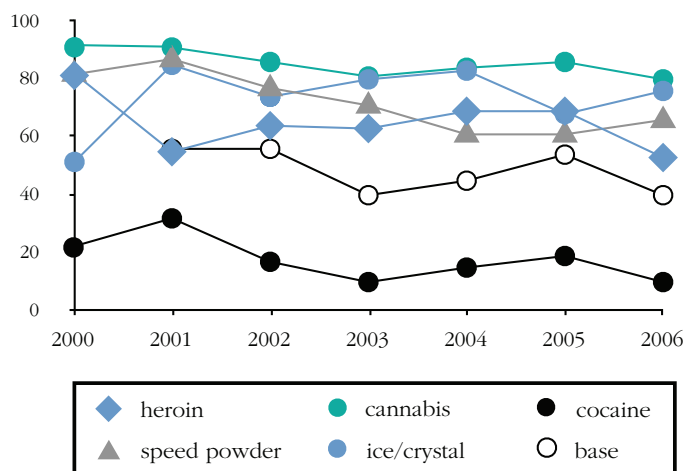
Table 10: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, SA, 2006

	Heroin (%)		Methamphetamine (%)		Cocaine (%)		Cannabis (%)	
	n=52	n=23	Speed powder	Base	Ice/crystal	Hydro	Bush	
Availability			n=45	n=27	n=3	n=61	n=38	
Very easy	37	65	44	37	0	38	26	
Easy	40	26	47	44	33	51	42	
Difficult	15	9	4	15	67	12	26	
Very difficult	8	0	4	4	0	0	5	
Purity/potency			n=43	n=28	n=3	n=60	n=39	
Low	65	25	5	0	33	2	10	
Medium	12	29	16	32	67	17	46	
High	12	25	51	46	0	67	39	
Fluctuates	12	21	28	21	0	15	5	

Western Australia (Perth)

Use

Figure 7: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, WA, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 11: Median prices, WA, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50*	\$50*
Heroin (gram)	\$550	\$550
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$300	\$300
Base (gram)	\$300	\$325*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$400	\$400
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$50*	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	\$475*	\$350*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$25	\$25
Bush (gram)	\$25	\$25*
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$280
Bush (ounce)	\$232.50	\$200

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

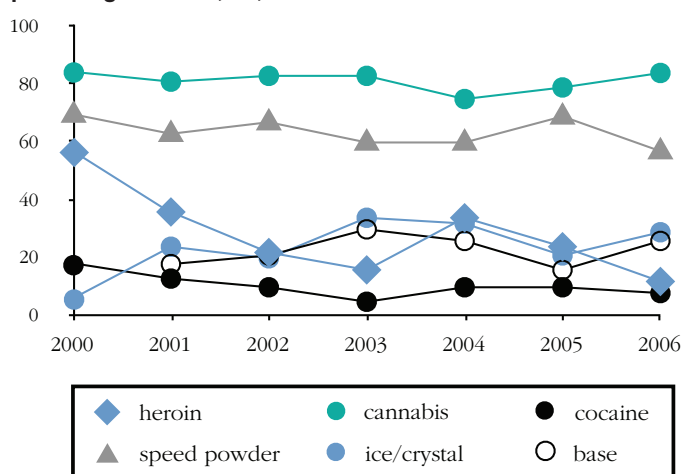
Table 12: Perceptions of current availability of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, WA, 2006

	Heroin (%)		Methamphetamine (%)		Cocaine (%)		Cannabis (%)	
	n=48	n=56	n=28	n=65	n=3	n=73	n=35	n=35
Availability								
Very easy	19	36	36	37	33	36	20	
Easy	42	45	32	48	0	51	54	
Difficult	31	16	29	14	33	14	23	
Very difficult	8	4	4	2	33	0	3	
Purity/potency								
Low	65	43	21	8	0	0	9	
Medium	17	32	25	25	0	26	66	
High	8	19	36	63	75	69	20	
Fluctuates	10	6	18	5	25	5	6	

Northern Territory (Darwin)

Use

Figure 8: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, NT, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 13: Median prices, NT, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$80*	\$50*
Heroin (gram)	\$500	\$600*
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$60
Base (point)	\$50*	\$60
Ice/crystal (point)	\$65	\$90
Speed powder (gram)	\$280	\$250
Base (gram)	\$250*	\$250*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$250*	\$800*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$100*	\$125*
Cocaine (gram)	\$250*	\$250*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$25	\$30
Bush (gram)	\$25	\$25*
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$300
Bush (ounce)	\$200	\$200*

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

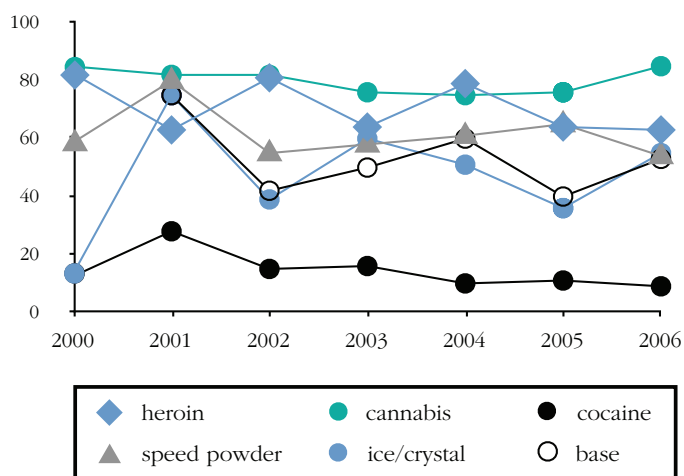
Table 14: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, NT, 2006

Availability	Heroin (%)	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%)	Cannabis (%)	
	n=5	Speed powder n=53	Base n=18	Ice/crystal n=15	n=7	Hydro n=71	Bush n=31
Very easy	0	17	17	7	0	30	13
Easy	60	53	50	47	14	62	68
Difficult	20	26	33	33	57	9	19
Very difficult	20	4	0	13	29	0	0
Purity/potency	n=4	n=54	n=18	n=15	n=7	n=70	n=31
Low	75	69	39	13	29	13	19
Medium	25	20	39	33	14	36	58
High	0	2	17	47	14	46	16
Fluctuates	0	9	6	7	43	6	7

Queensland (Brisbane)

Use

Figure 9: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by IDU in the six months preceding interview, QLD, 2000-2006



NB: Prevalence of base use first monitored in 2001

Price

Table 15: Median prices, QLD, 2005-2006

	2005	2006
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$400	\$400
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50*	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50*	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$200	\$200
Base (gram)	\$200*	\$200
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$200*	\$275
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	[no purchases reported]	\$50*
Cocaine (gram)	\$300*	[no purchases reported]
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$25	\$25
Bush (gram)	\$25*	\$20*
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$290
Bush (ounce)	\$230*	\$250*

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

Table 16: Perceptions of current availability of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by IDU who commented, QLD, 2006

Availability	Heroin (%)	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%)	Cannabis (%)	
	n=72	Speed powder n=65	Base n=54	Ice/crystal n=49	n=7	Hydro n=84	Bush n=49
Very easy	25	45	26	22	29	43	22
Easy	53	42	57	43	29	45	51
Difficult	19	12	17	29	14	11	25
Very difficult	3	2	0	6	29	1	2
Purity/potency	n=73	n=65	n=52	n=48	n=7	n=85	n=48
Low	73	43	15	2	29	6	10
Medium	18	26	31	23	29	26	58
High	4	14	40	71	29	59	19
Fluctuates	6	17	14	4	14	9	13

CONCLUSIONS

- Drug markets for heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, and – to a lesser extent – cannabis varied between jurisdictions.
- There appeared to have been a decline in the prevalence and frequency of heroin use among the IDRS sample, with purity perceived to be ‘low’ or ‘medium’ by the majority of participants across all jurisdictions.
- IDU continued to use all three forms of methamphetamine, with the prevalence of use of each form varying by jurisdiction. Increases were observed in the prevalence of ice/crystal use, although frequency of use remained relatively low in most jurisdictions.
- NSW continued to be the only state where a large proportion of participants reported recent cocaine use. Prevalence and frequency of use in NSW have increased slightly since 2005.
- The cannabis market (price, potency and availability) remained stable. The use of cannabis remained common among the majority of IDU.
- IDU continued to use and inject pharmaceutical preparations (opioids and benzodiazepines). There were jurisdictional differences in the prevalence of use and the types of diverted pharmaceutical preparations that IDU injected. TAS continued to report the highest levels of benzodiazepines and morphine injection.

Participating researchers and research centres

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Rebecca Jenkinson, Brendan Quinn and Craig Fry, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre Inc. (VIC)

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