

KEY POINTS

Findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System, 2000.

1. The average purity of heroin seizures in Australia is 53%. The purity of heroin is high in all jurisdictions in which seizures were made. Heroin is cheapest in NSW and most expensive in the NT. The price of heroin has declined in NSW and SA. Compared to previous years, heroin users appear to be using more frequently, and using larger amounts of heroin.
2. The average purity of amphetamine seizures in Australia has increased since 1999 (23% v 16%), and almost all seizures are of methamphetamine (95%). There are reports in all jurisdictions of increased availability and use of a more pure form of crystalline methamphetamine ('ice', 'shabu') that is sold in small quantities ('points' or 0.1 gram). Amphetamine is cheapest in SA and VIC.
3. Cocaine use is uncommon in all jurisdictions except for NSW. In NSW, the use of cocaine among IDU has become entrenched, and is strongly associated with heroin use. The average purity of cocaine seizures in Australia is 48%, similar to 1999.
4. Cannabis is easy to obtain in all jurisdictions, and the potency is rated as high. Cannabis costs between \$200-\$300 per ounce, and is cheapest in SA.

INTRODUCTION

This issue of the Drug Trends Bulletin presents the findings of the 2000 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS). The IDRS monitors the price, purity, availability and use of the four main illicit drug types (heroin, amphetamine, cocaine and cannabis). The 2000 IDRS is the first year in which all states/territories were funded to conduct all components of the IDRS: 1. A survey of injecting drug users (IDU); 2. A survey of key informants who were professionals in the field of illicit drugs; and 3. Analysis of existing indicator data on drug-related issues. This bulletin contains a summary of the main findings from the national IDRS. Drug trends in this publication are cited by state/territory, although primarily represent trends in the capital city of each jurisdiction. Further details will be published in the national and local IDRS Drug Trends annual reports, which will be available through the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre early in 2001.

The 2000 IDRS was extended to include the collection in NSW, QLD and SA of detailed data on designer drugs such as ecstasy. These data, and a discussion of methodological considerations for monitoring this class of drug, will be presented in local and national IDRS reports also to be published by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre early in 2001. A summary of the designer drug component of the 2000 IDRS will be presented in the Drug Trends Bulletin due to be published in April 2001.

Funded by the
Commonwealth
Department of
Health and
Aged Care

HEROIN

Estimates of the price and purity of heroin by jurisdiction appear in Table 1.

Price: Heroin remains cheapest in NSW, where the median price of one gram of heroin is \$220. 2000 is the third consecutive year in which the price of heroin in NSW has decreased. Heroin "caps" are also cheapest in NSW (\$25), and are \$50 in other jurisdictions. The price of heroin has declined markedly in SA, from \$400 per gram in 1999 to \$310 in 2000. Heroin is most expensive in the NT (\$600 per gram).

Purity: The average purity of heroin seizures across Australia is 53%, a decrease compared to last year (65%). The purity of heroin in all jurisdictions is high, and has stabilized at the purity levels previously found only in NSW. It should be noted that the figure for TAS represents a single seizure. Excluding this, NSW has the highest purity seizures. No seizures were made in the NT.

Availability: As in 1999, heroin is easy to obtain in all jurisdictions, with the exceptions of the NT and TAS, where the majority of users report that heroin is difficult to obtain. There are higher levels of use of other opioids, such as morphine, in these jurisdictions.

Use: There were consistent reports from both IDU and key informants of increased heroin use, and among younger people in particular, in NSW, SA, VIC, WA and the ACT. The frequency of use and amount used by existing heroin users is reported to have increased in several jurisdictions (NSW, SA, VIC, ACT). In the NT and TAS, morphine use is more common than heroin use.

AMPHETAMINE

Estimates of the price and purity of amphetamine by jurisdiction appear in Table 2.

Price: The price of amphetamine ranges from \$50 to \$200 a gram. Amphetamine powder is cheapest in SA and VIC (\$50), and most expensive in WA (\$200). In some jurisdictions the market explicitly differentiates between amphet-

amine powder and purer forms of methamphetamine known by a variety of street names; in all such cases, the former is consistently cheaper than the latter.

Purity: The average purity of seizures across Australia is 22%, an increase from 1999 (16%). Purity varies markedly across jurisdictions. As in 1999, amphetamine purity is highest in QLD (28%). Purity is lowest in TAS (7%) and the NT (5%). In comparison to 1999, there have been marked increases in purity in WA (23% v 12%), SA (17% v 7%), and VIC (16% v 11%). Although not reflected in Table 2, AFP seizures also indicate a large increase in purity in NSW (36% v 14%) (in previous years, only AFP data were available for NSW, whereas Table 2 includes local seizures as well as AFP seizures).

Availability: Amphetamine is easy to obtain in all jurisdictions except for VIC, where perceptions of availability are mixed. Most of the illicit amphetamine available is powder methamphetamine (95%). There are reports of more pure forms of crystalline methamphetamine ('ice', 'shabu') in all jurisdictions, which can be purchased in small quantities such as 'points' (0.1 gram).

Use: The trend towards the use of crystalline methamphetamine ('ice', 'shabu') in all jurisdictions represents the emergence in this country of a powerful new form of the drug. International research indicates that the widespread use of crystalline methamphetamine is likely to be associated with adverse psychological and physical side-effects.

COCAINE

Estimates of the price and purity of cocaine by jurisdiction appear in Table 3.

Price: The price of cocaine varies between \$200 and \$300 per gram. The price in the ACT is estimated from only three purchases. Excluding this, cocaine remains cheapest in NSW (\$200), with price increases reported in SA, WA and QLD.

Purity: The average purity of cocaine seizures

Table 1. Price and purity of heroin by jurisdiction

	PRICE (\$)		PURITY %
	Gram	Cap	
NSW	220	25	62
SA	310	50	48
VIC	300	50	54
ACT	300	50	54
WA	450	50	53
QLD	350	50	51
TAS	300	50	75
NT	600	50	na

na=No seizures

Table 2. Price and purity of amphetamines by jurisdiction

	PRICE (\$)	PURITY %
	Gram	
NSW	90	15
SA	50	17
VIC	50	16
ACT	180	10
WA	200	23
QLD	80	28
TAS	80	7
NT	80	5

Table 3. Price and purity of cocaine by jurisdiction

	PRICE (\$)	PURITY %
	Gram	
NSW	200	47
SA	300	na
VIC	250	47
ACT	170	26
WA	250	34
QLD	250	51
TAS	300	na
NT	250	na

na=No seizures

Table 4. Price and potency of cannabis by jurisdiction

	PRICE (\$)		POTENCY
	per Gram	per Ounce	
NSW	20	300	High
SA	25*	220	High
VIC	20	280	Med-High
ACT	25	300	Med-High
WA	25	300	High
QLD	25	300	High
TAS	25	300	High
NT	25	300	High

* approximately two grams

Prices are median prices of purchases by IDU. Purity figures represent the average purity of police seizures for the 1999/2000 financial year. Figures for the potency of cannabis represent ratings made by key informants and/or users. Amphetamine purity figures represent the purity of amphetamine and methamphetamine seizures.

across Australia is 48%, similar to 1999 (50%). No seizures of cocaine were made in TAS or the NT.

Availability: Cocaine is considered easy to obtain in NSW, and difficult to obtain in all other jurisdictions.

Use: As in 1998 and 1999, cocaine use is rare in all jurisdictions except for NSW. In Sydney, cocaine use peaked in late 1998 and has since become entrenched among the IDU population, and among heroin users in particular.

CANNABIS

Estimates of the price and potency of cannabis by jurisdiction appear in Table 4.

Price: An ounce of cannabis costs between \$200 and \$300, and a gram costs \$20 or \$25. As in 1998 and 1999, cannabis is cheapest in SA. In SA, the median price of an ounce is \$220, and two grams cost the same as one

gram costs in other jurisdictions. The price per ounce of cannabis has fallen in NSW (\$350 to \$300) and VIC (\$300 to \$280).

Potency: As in previous years, the potency of cannabis is considered either high or medium to high in all jurisdictions.

Availability: Cannabis is considered easy to obtain in all jurisdictions, and availability is stable.

Use: There are reports of an increase in younger cannabis users in NSW, ACT and the NT. In all jurisdictions, hydroponically grown cannabis heads remain the form of cannabis most frequently used, and waterpipes ('bongs') remain the preferred means of smoking cannabis.

CONCLUSIONS

Several major trends have emerged from the 2000 IDRS:

1. Heroin remains cheapest in NSW, with a large fall in price noted in SA;
2. Increases in the availability and use of a powerful form of crystalline methamphetamine have been noted in all jurisdictions, smaller quantities are available for purchase, and the purity of amphetamine seizures has increased;
3. Cocaine remains entrenched among IDU in Sydney, but is still rare in other jurisdictions; and
4. High potency cannabis remains easy to obtain in all jurisdictions, and is cheapest in SA.

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