

# DRUG TRENDS BULLETIN

## KEY POINTS

1. Compared to 2001 the availability of heroin increased in most jurisdictions, particularly in those in which heroin has traditionally predominated. The price of a gram of heroin decreased in all jurisdictions except SA, whereas the prices for a cap of heroin remained stable. Heroin remained cheapest in NSW and most expensive in the NT. The purity and number of heroin seizures analysed has decreased.
2. All forms of methamphetamine were cheapest in SA. Methamphetamine powder and base were considered to be easy to obtain and the availability stable. Crystal methamphetamine was more difficult to obtain in some jurisdictions. The use of methamphetamine among IDU has stabilised or decreased in most jurisdictions.
3. Frequency of Cocaine use decreased in prevalence and frequency among IDU in NSW, and in other jurisdictions it remained relatively uncommon and infrequent. There was an association in NSW between increased heroin supply and decreased cocaine use. The purity of cocaine seizures analysed has remained stable.
4. Cannabis remained easy to obtain in all jurisdictions. Declines in price were noted in NSW, SA, the ACT, QLD and TAS. Hydroponically grown cannabis continued to dominate the market. The use of bush, hash and hash oil was noted in all jurisdictions. The potency of cannabis continued to be rated by IDU as high.

## INTRODUCTION

The findings of the 2002 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) are presented in this Drug Trends 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 informants who are professionals in the field of illicit drugs, and the analysis of existing indicator data on drug-related issues. In 2002, 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 national IDRS, based upon interviews with 929 IDU (at least 100 in each jurisdiction) and 274 key informants. 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 the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre early in 2003. The purity data is based on analysis of state police data provided by the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence. NSW data and AFP data are not yet available and will be included in the national and state reports.

Prepared by Courtney Breen, Dr Louisa Degenhardt & Amanda Roxburgh, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre

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# IDRS

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## HEROIN

Estimates of the price of heroin by jurisdiction appear in Table 1. Prices for all drugs are based upon recent purchases by IDU. For comparison, equivalent figures from 2000 and 2001 are presented in all tables.

**Price:** The price of a gram of heroin decreased in all jurisdictions except SA. The median price of a gram of heroin ranged from \$300 in NSW to \$550 in WA. Median cap prices remained at \$50 in all jurisdictions except NT (\$85) and TAS (\$82.50). Heroin remained cheapest in NSW, and most expensive in the NT. Compared to 2001, more IDU reported price as stable or having decreased in the preceding six months.

**Purity:** The purity and number of heroin seizures analysed has decreased in 2002 (Table 8).

**Availability:** The 2001 IDRS reported a reduction in the availability of heroin in NSW, VIC, QLD, WA and the ACT, jurisdictions with established heroin markets. In 2002, the majority of IDU who commented on the availability of heroin thought it was easy or very easy to obtain, except in the NT. Larger proportions of the 2002 samples in NSW, VIC, QLD, ACT and SA reported that access to heroin had become easier or was stable in the preceding six months.

**Use:** The prevalence of heroin use increased in QLD, WA & ACT, most notably in QLD where the proportion of IDU reporting heroin use in the preceding six months returned to the 2000 level. The prevalence of use remained stable in NSW and VIC. In SA the prevalence and frequency of use decreased. Heroin use remained uncommon in TAS and the NT.

The median number of days heroin was used in the preceding six months has not returned to the levels prior to the heroin supply shortage of early to mid 2001, except in NSW (Table 2).

## METHAMPHETAMINE

The 2002 IDRS distinguished between methamphetamine powder (speed), methamphetamine base and crystal methamphetamine (ice). In 2001

the distinction was between methamphetamine powder and the more potent forms (base and ice), making comparisons between years difficult.

**Price:** All forms of methamphetamine remained the cheapest in SA. The median price for a gram of methamphetamine powder ranged from \$50 (SA) to \$250 (WA and the ACT). Prices for methamphetamine powder have remained stable across jurisdictions. The median price of a point of base ranged from \$25 (SA) to \$50 (NSW, ACT, WA, TAS and NT). A point of crystal methamphetamine ranged from \$25 in SA to \$80 in NT (\$50 in all other jurisdictions).

**Purity:** There is no clear trend in purity of methamphetamine (Table 8).

**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 to obtain and the availability stable. Among those who could comment, substantial proportions in SA, WA and QLD reported crystal methamphetamine was easy to obtain and it was difficult to obtain in NSW, ACT, VIC and TAS.

**Use:** The proportion of IDU reporting use of powder methamphetamine in the six months preceding interview has decreased or stabilised in all jurisdictions but SA (Table 3). The median number of days of methamphetamine use decreased in all jurisdictions except NSW, VIC, and TAS where it remained stable (Table 4). The use of crystal methamphetamine has decreased in VIC, ACT, QLD and TAS. The use of base has decreased in VIC and QLD.

## COCAINE

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

**Price:** Small numbers ( $n < 10$ ) of IDU in all jurisdictions except NSW reported purchasing a gram or cap of cocaine. Gram prices in VIC, TAS and QLD

Table 1. Median price of last IDU purchase of heroin by jurisdiction

HEROIN		PRICE GRAM \$		
		2002	2001	2000
		NSW	300	320
SA	450	350	310	
VIC	400	450	300	
ACT	350	485	300	
WA	550	750	450	
QLD	350	450	350	
TAS	*350	325	300	
NT	*500	600	600	

\* median price based on small numbers n<10

Table 2. Median days of heroin use among IDU who had used heroin in the preceding six months across jurisdictions, 2000-2002.

HEROIN		Median number of days		
		2002	2001	2000
		NSW	180	158
SA	24	30	60	
VIC	60	65	176	
ACT	48	50	160	
WA	24	30	90	
QLD	80	70	100	
TAS	6	3.5	5	
NT	2	6	28	

Table 3. Proportion of IDU reporting use of methamphetamine by jurisdiction, 2000-2002

METHAMPHETAMINE		POWDER			CRYSTAL			BASE*	
		2002	2001	2000	2002	2001	2000	2002	2001
		NSW	39	42	32	25	29	14	23
SA	56	47	51	56	58	11	65	59	
VIC	70	74	49	26	52	9	20	32	
ACT	51	63	63	34	72	17	30	36	
WA	77	87	81	74	85	51	56	56	
QLD	55	80	58	39	75	13	42	75	
TAS	35	45	77	20	56	6	74	52	
NT	67	63	70	20	24	6	21	18	

\*did not ask about base in 2000

Table 4. Median days of use of methamphetamine among IDU who had used in the preceding six months across jurisdictions, 2000-2002

METHAMPHETAMINE		Median number of days		
		2002	2001*	2000*
		NSW	9	7
SA	36	52	51	
VIC	24	25	6	
ACT	7	21	10	
WA	60	75	20	
QLD	7	50	24	
TAS	25	24	25	
NT	8	26	20	

\* In 2000 and 2001 IDU were asked how many days they had used speed in the last 6 months. In 2002 they were asked days used speed, days used base and days used ice, as well as overall number of days used any methamphetamine. The 2002 figure represents any methamphetamine and therefore may be an overestimate.

were similar to prices reported in NSW, where cocaine has been cheapest in previous years.

**Purity:** The purity of seizures analysed has remained stable across jurisdictions. There were decreases in the number of seizures analysed in 2002 in SA, VIC and QLD (Table 8).

**Availability:** Cocaine was considered easy or very easy to obtain in NSW and QLD. Substantial proportions in other jurisdictions reported it was difficult or very difficult. Availability was considered stable by most of those that responded in all jurisdictions.

**Use:** The prevalence of cocaine use decreased in ACT, QLD WA and VIC (Table 6). The frequency of use in all jurisdictions, except NSW, remained sporadic. In NSW there was a decrease in the median number of days IDU reported using cocaine from 90 days in 2001 to 24 days in 2002.

## CANNABIS

**Price:** The price last purchased for of an ounce of cannabis varied from \$180 (SA) to \$300 (NSW, QLD and the NT) (Table 7). The price of an ounce of cannabis declined from 2001 by \$20-\$30 in NSW, SA, the ACT, QLD and TAS. Gram prices varied from \$20-\$25, consistent with previous years. In SA, bags of approximately 2 grams were sold for \$25. The majority of IDU in all jurisdictions reported that the price had remained stable in the preceding 6 months.

**Potency:** As in previous years, in all jurisdictions, the IDU perceived potency of cannabis as high and stable.

**Availability:** Cannabis was considered very easy or easy to obtain by the majority of IDU in all jurisdictions, and availability was described as stable.

**Use:** Hydroponically grown cannabis was the predominant form of the drug used, with over 70% in all jurisdictions reporting hydroponic as the form most often used in the past six months (ranging from 71% in TAS to 89% in VIC). The use of outdoor crop or bush cannabis in the six months preceding interview was reported in all jurisdictions by

over half of respondents (54% in NSW to 82% in WA). The use of hash (14% in NSW to 39% in SA) and hash oil (4% in NSW to 23% in NT) in the preceding six months was reported in all jurisdictions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The major trends from the 2002 IDRS include:

- \* The availability of heroin increased in 2002, although the prevalence and frequency of use has not returned to the same levels as seen in 2000. The increased availability was associated with a reduction in the price of a gram.
- \* Substantial proportions of IDU continue to use all forms of methamphetamine. There was a decrease in the use of methamphetamine powder in all jurisdictions except in SA, where methamphetamines remain the cheapest.
- \* Frequency of Cocaine use decreased among IDU in NSW. Cocaine use remained relatively uncommon and infrequent in 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.

## Participating researchers and research centres

Courtney Breen, Amanda Roxburgh and Dr Louisa Degenhardt, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (National & NSW)

Catherine Rushforth, Australian Institute of Criminology (ACT)

Barbara Gray, Anthea Duquemin and Susan Vesperman, Department of Health and Community Services (NT)

Jane Fischer, Stuart Kinner and Prof Jake Najman, Queensland Alcohol and Drug Research and Education Centre (QLD)

Dr Marie Longo, Paul Christie, Dr Rachel Humeniuk and A/Prof Robert Ali, Drug and Alcohol Services Council (SA)

Raimondo Bruno and A/Prof Stuart McLean, University of Tasmania (TAS)

Craig Fry, Rebecca Jenkinson & Peter Miller, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre Inc. (VIC)

James Fetherston and Simon Lenton, National Drug Research Institute (WA)

Table 5. Median price of last IDU purchase of cocaine by jurisdiction, 2000-2002

		PRICE GRAM (\$)			PRICE CAP (\$)		
		2002*	2001	2000	2002*	2001	2000
		NSW	200	200	200	50	50
SA	250	200	300	50	50	-	
VIC	200	225	250	65	100	80	
ACT	250	165	170	65	50	-	
WA	350	300	250	-	-	-	
QLD	220	200	250	-	80	-	
TAS	200	-	300	-	-	-	
NT	-	-	250	-	-	-	

\* Except in NSW, median prices are based on small numbers (n<10)  
Dashes represent no (or one) purchase of stated amount

Table 6. Proportion of IDU who had used cocaine in the preceding six months across jurisdictions, 2000-2002

		Proportion IDU reporting cocaine use		
		2002	2001	2000
		NSW	79	84
SA	26	27	20	
VIC	17	28	13	
ACT	18	40	15	
WA	17	32	22	
QLD	15	28	13	
TAS	12	8	6	
NT	13	13	18	

Table 7. Median price of last IDU purchase of cannabis by jurisdiction

		PRICE GRAM \$			PRICE OUNCE \$		
		2002	2001	2000	2002	2001	2000
		NSW	20	20	20	300	320
SA	25*	25*	25*	180	200	220	
VIC	20	20	20	250	250	280	
ACT	20	20	25	250	280	300	
WA	25	25	25	250	250	300	
QLD	25	25	25	300	320	300	
TAS	25	25*	25	250	280	300	
NT	25	25	25	300	300	300	

\* approximately 2 grams # approximately 1.5 grams  
^ median price based on small numbers (n<10)

Table 8. Median purity of heroin, methylamphetamine and cocaine by jurisdiction 2001-2002

	HEROIN % (n)		METHYLAMPHETAMINE % (n)		COCAINE % (n)	
	2002	2001	2002	2001	2002	2001
NSW	* *	49 (173)	* *	5 (526)	* *	51 (101)
SA	22 (298)	43 (253)	15 (551)	* *	- -	69 (21)
VIC	15 (534)	43 (1471)	15 (746)	6 (834)	37 (47)	47 (101)
ACT	21 (20)	39 (80)	7 (61)	3 (82)	36 (5)	36 (2)
WA	20 (44)	49 (204)	23 (499)	19 (650)	31 (16)	35 (25)
QLD	19 (179)	42 (412)	20 (987)	29 (1016)	- -	69 (31)
TAS	- -	- -	25 (48)	4 (24)	44 (1)	45 (1)
NT	- -	31 (3)	6 (37)	6 (32)	24 (1)	- -

\* data not available  
Dashes represent no seizures analysed

