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Key Points

1. In 2003 the availability of heroin was reported to be stable in those jurisdictions in which heroin has traditionally predominated. The price of a gram of heroin remained stable in most jurisdictions. Heroin remained cheapest in NSW.
2. Methamphetamine prices remained stable in 2003. Methamphetamine powder and base were considered to be 'easy' to obtain, and availability stable. Compared to 2002, more respondents reported that crystal methamphetamine was 'easy' to 'very easy' to obtain and the availability as stable or easier to obtain in the preceding six months. In 2003, the proportion of IDU that reported recent use of crystal methamphetamine has increased in all jurisdictions but SA.
3. The price of a gram of cocaine remained stable in NSW, the only state where sufficient numbers were able to comment. The proportions of IDU reporting recent cocaine use decreased in all jurisdictions. The frequency of cocaine use among IDU in NSW decreased substantially, and remained sporadic in all other jurisdictions.
4. Cannabis remained easy to obtain 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 cannabis continued to be rated by IDU as high.

A national overview of the 2003 IDRS:

The findings of the 2003 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 informants who are professionals in the field of illicit drugs, and the analysis of existing indicator data on drug-related issues. This year is the fourth 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 national IDRS, based on interviews with 970 IDU (at least 100 in each jurisdiction) and 272 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 NDARC in early 2004. The purity data is based on analysis of state police data provided by the Australian Crime Commission (ACC). The number of seizures and the total median purity of ≤ 2 and > 2 g seizures analysed are presented. Not all illicit drugs seized are subjected to forensic analysis. The purity figures reported therefore relate to an unrepresentative sample of the illicit drugs available in Australia, and this should be considered when drawing conclusions from the purity data presented

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 previous years are presented in all tables.

Price: The price of a gram of heroin remained stable in all jurisdictions except QLD, where it increased from \$350 to \$400, and in SA and VIC, where it decreased by \$25 and \$20 respectively. As in 2002, the median price of a gram of heroin ranged from \$300 in NSW to \$550 in WA. Median cap prices were \$50 in all jurisdictions. Heroin remained cheapest in NSW. Compared to 2001 and 2002, more IDU reported that the price of heroin was stable in the six months preceding interview.

Table 1.
Median price of last IDU purchase of a gram of heroin by jurisdiction, 2000-2003

	2000	2001	2002	2003
NSW	220	320	300	300
ACT	300	485	350	350
VIC	300	450	400	380
TAS	300	325	*350	*350
SA	310	350	450	425
WA	450	750	550	550
NT	600	600	*500	-
QLD	350	450	350	400

* median price based on small numbers $n < 10$

Purity: In 2002/2003 there appears to be a stabilisation of the purity of the seizures analysed (Table 7, page 5).

Availability: In 2003, the majority of IDU who commented on the availability of heroin thought it was 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain and had remained stable in the preceding months, except in the NT and TAS, where only small numbers were able to comment.

Use: Compared to the 2002 IDRS, the proportion of IDU that reported recent heroin use remained stable in most jurisdictions except QLD, where the proportion decreased to levels reported in 2001.

The frequency of heroin use increased in the ACT, VIC, and SA, and decreased in QLD. The median number of days of heroin use 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 and SA (Table 2).

Table 2.
Median days of heroin use among IDU who had used heroin in the preceding six months across jurisdictions, 2000-2003.

	2000	2001	2002	2003
NSW	180	158	180	170
ACT	160	50	48	93
VIC	176	65	60	76
TAS	5	3.5	6	5
SA	60	30	24	72
WA	90	30	24	20
NT	28	6	2	5
QLD	100	70	80	49

Methamphetamine

The 2003 IDRS distinguished between methamphetamine powder (speed), methamphetamine base and crystal methamphetamine (ice).

Price: The median price for a gram of methamphetamine powder ranged from \$100 (SA) to \$260 (WA). Reported prices remained stable (VIC, WA, NT and QLD) or increased (SA). Small numbers reported on price in NSW, the ACT and TAS. Larger numbers than in previous years reported buying points of speed. A point of speed was \$25 in SA, \$40 in VIC and \$50 in the other jurisdictions. The median price of a point of base ranged from \$30 in SA to \$40 in VIC and \$50 in all other jurisdictions. A point of crystal methamphetamine ranged from \$35 in QLD to \$50 in all other jurisdictions. The majority reported the price of all forms of methamphetamine as stable, except in TAS, where the majority did not know if the price of crystal methamphetamine had changed, as the ready availability of this form was new to TAS.

Purity: There is no clear trend in purity of methylamphetamine, although purity remains below 30% (Table 7, page 5).

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 availability stable. Larger numbers were able to comment on crystal methamphetamine in 2003 and the majority of those in all jurisdictions reported it was 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain and that it had remained stable or become easier recently.

Use: The proportion of IDU reporting use of powder methamphetamine in the six months preceding interview has stabilised in all jurisdictions (Table 3, page 3). The use of base decreased in SA, WA, TAS and the ACT and increased slightly in the NT and NSW. The use of crystal methamphetamine increased in all jurisdictions but SA.

Table 3.
Proportion of IDU reporting use of methamphetamine by jurisdiction, 2000-2003

	POWDER				CRYSTAL				BASE*		
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2000	2001	2002	2003	2001	2002	2003
NSW	32	42	39	31	14	29	25	38	23	23	32
ACT	63	63	51	48	17	72	34	65	36	30	13
VIC	49	74	70	70	9	52	26	50	32	20	18
TAS	77	45	35	51	6	56	20	69	52	74	46
SA	51	47	56	53	11	58	56	48	59	65	51
WA	81	87	77	71	51	85	74	80	56	56	40
NT	70	63	67	60	6	24	20	34	18	21	30
QLD	58	80	55	58	13	75	39	60	75	42	50

*did not ask about base in 2000

Cocaine

Estimates of the price of cocaine by jurisdiction appear in Table 4. Cocaine price, purity and availability were reported by small numbers of respondents in all jurisdictions except NSW.

Table 4.
Median price of last IDU purchase of a gram of cocaine by jurisdiction, 2000-2003

	2000	2001	2002*	2003*
NSW	200	200	200	200
ACT	170	165	250	200
VIC	250	225	200	250
TAS	300	-	200	250
SA	300	200	250	-
WA	250	300	350	250
NT	250	-	-	-
QLD	250	200	220	300

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

Price: With the exception of NSW, small numbers (n<10) of IDU in all jurisdictions reported purchasing cocaine. Cocaine remained cheapest in NSW at \$200 a gram, and a cap of cocaine remained stable at \$50.

Purity: The purity of seizures analysed has remained relatively stable from 2001/02 at approximately 20-40%. More seizures were analysed in 2002/03. (Table 7, page 5).

Availability: Cocaine was considered 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain in NSW although 28% reported it had become more difficult in the preceding six months. Substantial proportions in other jurisdictions reported it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult'.

Use: The proportion of IDU reporting recent cocaine use decreased in NSW, the ACT, QLD, WA and VIC (Table 5). The frequency of use decreased substantially in NSW and remained sporadic in all other jurisdictions.

Table 5.
of IDU who had used cocaine in the preceding six months across jurisdictions, 2000-2003

	2000	2001	2002	2003
NSW	63	84	79	53
ACT	15	40	18	13
VIC	13	28	17	13
TAS	6	8	12	9
SA	20	27	26	13
WA	22	32	17	10
NT	18	13	13	5
QLD	13	28	15	16

Cannabis

Price: The price of an ounce of cannabis remained cheapest in SA (Table 6). 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 six months.

Table 6.
Median price of last IDU purchase of cannabis by jurisdiction, 2000-2003

	PRICE GRAM \$				PRICE OUNCE \$			
	2000	2001	2002	2003**	2000	2001	2002	2003**
NSW	20	20	20	20	300	320	300 [^]	310
ACT	25	20	20	20	300	280	250	322.5
VIC	20	20	20	20	280	250	250	280
TAS	25	25 [#]	25	25	300	280	250	300
SA	25*	25*	25*	25*	200	200	180	200
WA	25	25	25	25	300	250	250	270
NT	25	25	25	25	300	300	300	305
QLD	25	25	25	25	300	320	300	310

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

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

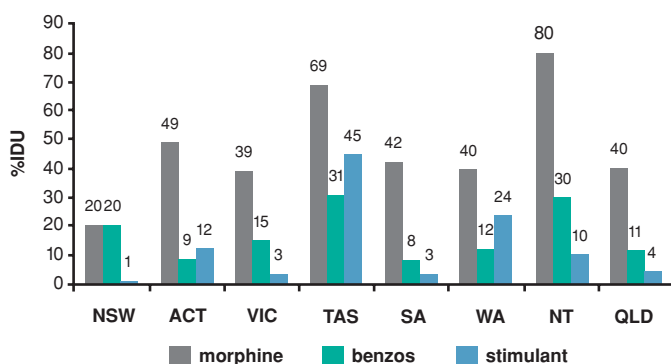
Availability: Cannabis was considered 'very easy' or 'easy' to obtain by the majority of IDU in all jurisdictions, and availability was described as stable.

Use: 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 half of respondents (53% in NSW to 80% in TAS). The use of hash (4% in NSW to 38% in SA) and hash oil (2% in NSW to 23% in SA) in the preceding six months was also reported in all jurisdictions.

Diverted pharmaceuticals

The injection of pharmaceutical preparations has been identified by the IDRS as an issue that requires monitoring (Figure 1). Substantial proportions of IDU report recent injection of morphine. Morphine injection remains highest in the NT and TAS with increasing proportions reporting injection in the ACT. Almost half (45%) of the TAS sample and 24% of IDU in WA reported injection of pharmaceutical stimulants in the six months preceding interview. Benzodiazepine injection continues to occur among significant minorities in TAS (31%), the NT (30%) and NSW (20%). The injection of illicit methadone syrup (46%) and illicit phsyseptone (56%) is highest in TAS. Thirty percent of IDU in VIC reported the injection of illicit buprenorphine followed by 15% in WA and less than 10% in the other jurisdictions.

Figure 1.
Proportion of IDU that reported recent injection of morphine, benzodiazepines and pharmaceutical stimulants by jurisdiction, 2003



Conclusions

- In 2003 the availability of heroin continued to increase since the shortage of 2001, although the prevalence and frequency of use has not returned to the same levels as seen in 2000. Compared to the 2002 sample, more participants in 2003 reported that the price of heroin had remained stable in the preceding six months.
- Substantial proportions of IDU continue to use all forms of methamphetamine. There was an increase in the use and availability of crystal methamphetamine in all jurisdictions except SA. Substantial proportions of IDU in TAS, WA and the ACT use pharmaceutical stimulants.
- The proportions reporting recent cocaine use decreased in all jurisdictions. The 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'.
- There are jurisdictional differences in the types of diverted pharmaceutical preparations that IDU inject.

Participating researchers and research centres

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Table 7.
Median purity of analysed seizures¹ of heroin, methylamphetamine and cocaine by jurisdiction, 2001-2003

	HEROIN % (n)			METHYLAMPHETAMINE % (n)			COCAINE % (n)		
	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
NSW	49 (173)	* *	26 (187)	5 (526)	* *	9 (488)	51 (101)	* *	27 (52)
SA	43 (253)	22 (298)	19 (247)	* *	15 (551)	22 (921)	69 (21)	- -	21 (24)
VIC	43 (1471)	15 (534)	23 (480)	6 (834)	15 (746)	23 (546)	47 (101)	37 (47)	31 (39)
ACT	39 (80)	21 (20)		3 (82)	7 (61)	12 (67)	36 (2)	36 (5)	- -
WA	49 (204)	20 (44)	24 (39)	19 (650)	23 (499)	18 (435)	35 (25)	31 (16)	59 (6)
QLD	42 (412)	19 (179)	23 (206)	29 (1016)	20 (987)	19 (961)	69 (31)	- -	41 (46)
TAS	- -	- -	70 (8)	4 (24)	25 (48)	12 (43)	45 (1)	44 (1)	- -
NT	31 (3)	- -	* *	6 (32)	6 (37)	* *	- -	24 (1)	* *

Source: ABCI 2001, 2002. ACC 2003

1. Seizures $\leq 2g$ and $>2g$ combined * data not available Dashes represent no seizures analysed. All figures have been rounded to nearest integer.

Figures do not represent the purity levels of all Western Australian seizures. The Western Australian Forensic Science Lab does not analyse all seizure less than 2 grams.

This table underestimates the numbers of samples that are tested.