

# Crystal methamphetamine use, routes of administration and use of commercial ball pipes among people who inject drugs in Australia

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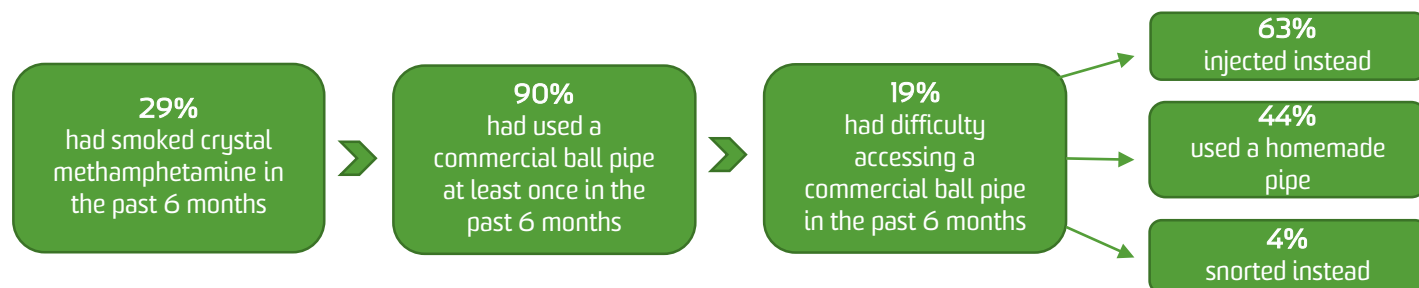
## The issue

- Increases in crystal methamphetamine use have been associated with a rise in methamphetamine-related harms when taken by injecting or smoking<sup>[1]</sup>.
- It is an offence in most parts of Australia to possess any implement for using methamphetamine (e.g. a pipe) other than a needle and syringe<sup>[2]</sup>.
- Research has revealed that smoking is an increasingly favoured route of administration<sup>[3]</sup>, but information about smoking practices and equipment use is lacking.
- The use of homemade pipes can result in various harms including cuts, burns, blisters and open sores inside the mouth of those who smoke crystal methamphetamine<sup>[4]</sup>.

## What our work found

We conducted interviews with people who regularly inject drugs (IDRS; N=902) recruited from Australian capital cities in May-July 2019 for the [Illicit Drug Reporting System \(IDRS\)](#).

- Three in four participants (76%) had used crystal methamphetamine in the past 6 months.
- Over one-quarter (29%) had smoked crystal methamphetamine in the past 6 months.
- Most IDRS participants who had smoked crystal methamphetamine had used a ball pipe (90%).
- One in five (19%) participants who smoked crystal methamphetamine had difficulties obtaining a commercial ball pipe in the past 6 months.
- Three in five (63%) of those who had difficulties accessing a pipe had injected instead, and more than two in five (44%) had used a homemade pipe (e.g., foil, lightbulb).



## Implications

- Difficulties accessing commercial ball pipes led to greater frequency of injection and use of homemade pipes among this sample.
- Legislative changes banning commercial ball pipes also create a barrier to provision of safer smoking equipment and for health education for those who smoke crystal methamphetamine.
- Safe smoking kits have been used in other countries as a way of engaging this population<sup>[4]</sup>, and may be a way of facilitating safer smoking and greater health service engagement in Australia.

## References

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