

## Tasmanian Drug Trends 2019: Methamphetamine use, markets, and harms

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### Key findings:

- At a general population level, the prevalence of methamphetamine use appears to have declined nationally (2013 vs 2016).
- More recent analysis of methamphetamine deposits in wastewater suggest that the volume of methamphetamine consumed in Tasmanian catchments is approximately two thirds that of the national average. This may reflect lower population prevalence of use, lower frequency of use, and/or lower purity.
- Among people who frequently inject drugs in Hobart, the overall proportion of people reporting recent methamphetamine use has remained stable over the past decade, but in recent years the frequency of use, and in particular the frequency of higher purity crystalline methamphetamine use has increased. Data from the statewide needle/syringe program support this trend.
- Among frequent ecstasy consumers in Hobart, which make up a larger proportion of the drug consuming population, methamphetamine use overall has remained stable in the past 3 years, and infrequent. This group have also seen a substantial shift to use of crystalline methamphetamine.
- Methamphetamine is now the primary drug for one quarter of closed presentations for drug treatment in Tasmania, up from one tenth a decade ago. There remains a substantial treatment gap, with around half of the people interviewed for the IDRS likely experiencing methamphetamine dependence and the majority of these were not engaged in treatment.

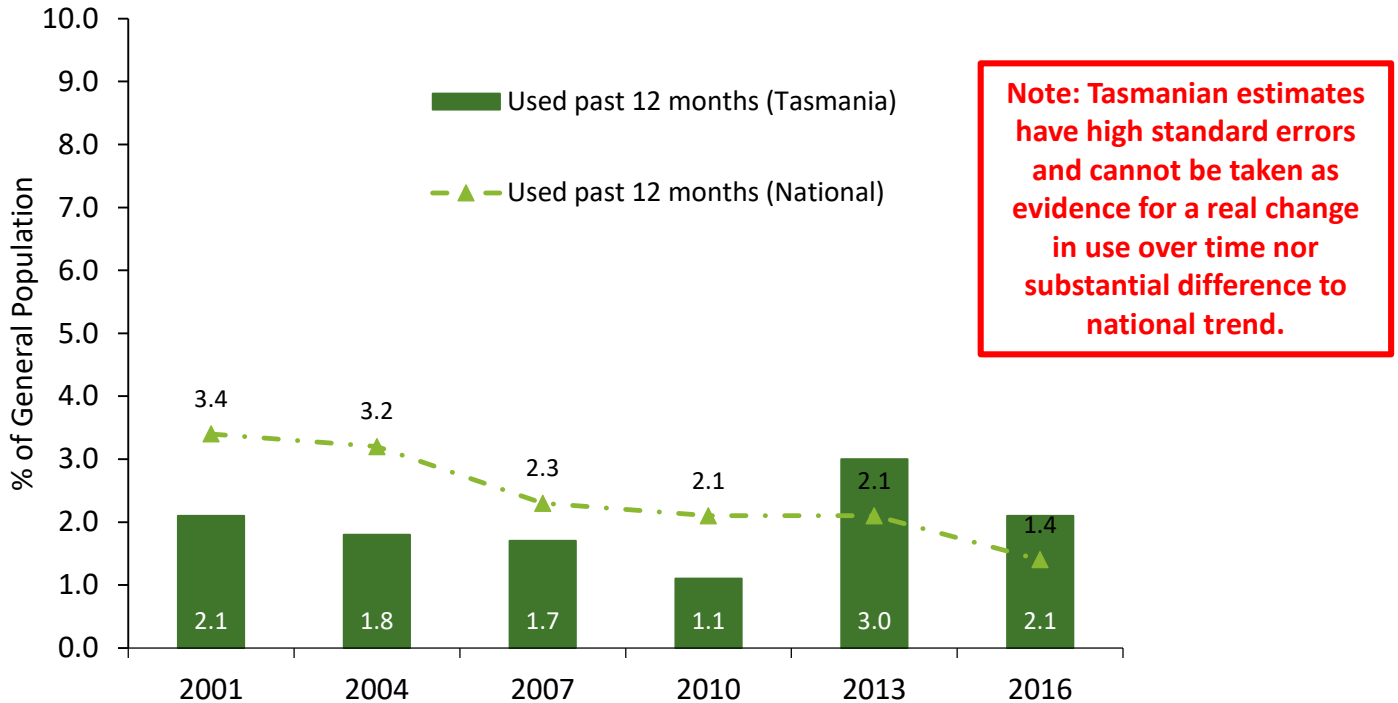
### Key information gaps:

- There is no clear information available about the extent of use of methamphetamine outside of these high substance use engagement samples in the Hobart area. Regional differences in the consumption of methamphetamine, treatment demand and treatment engagement are unknown. Similarly, there is limited information about issues relating to methamphetamine use among young people.
- There is limited information about purity trends in methamphetamine seizures to assist in interpretation of wastewater data and to assess likely harms.

### Methodology

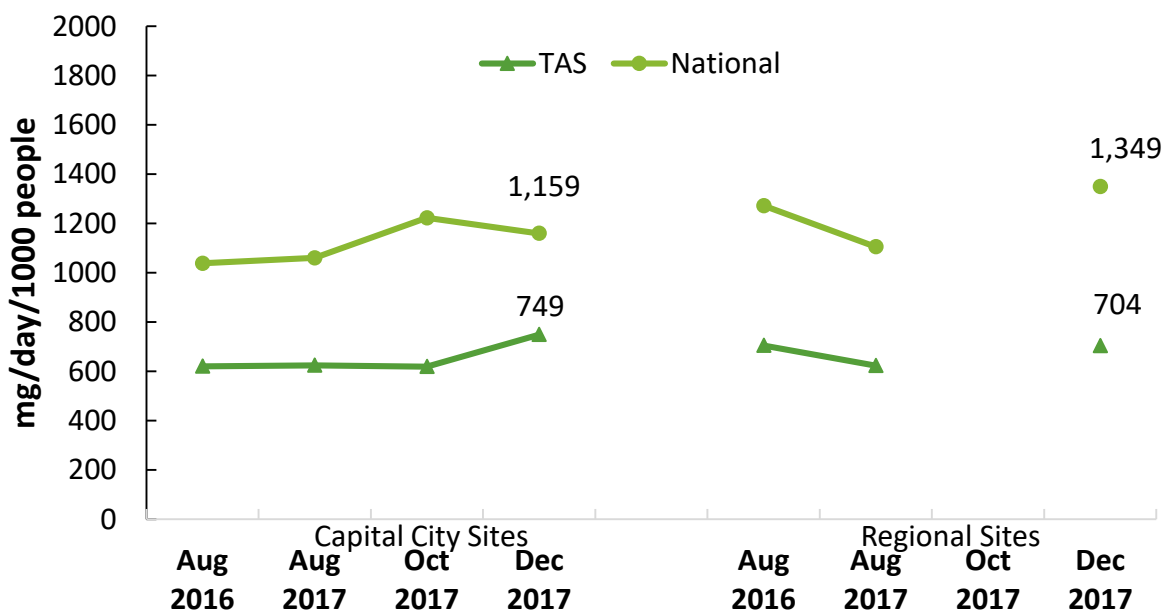
This bulletin provides an overview of key data sources that relate to methamphetamine use in Tasmania. For the methodology of each data source please refer to prior Tasmanian Drug Trends reports (e.g. Bruno et al, 2018). In particular it is important to note that the Illicit Drug Reporting System and Ecstasy and Related Drug Reporting System projects focus on very frequent consumers of substances and are not representative of substance consumers at the population level.

## Prevalence of methamphetamine use in Australia and Tasmania among those aged 14 years and over, 2001-2016



Source: AIHW National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001-2016

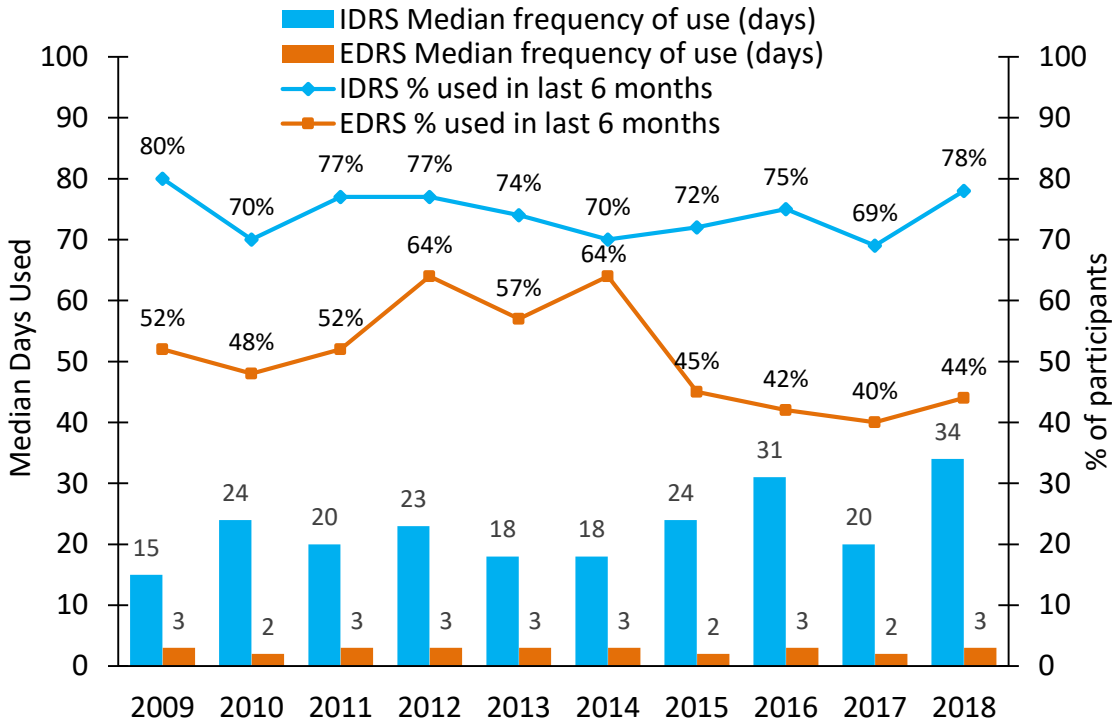
## Consumption of methamphetamine in wastewater monitoring, 2016-17



Source: AIC National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program

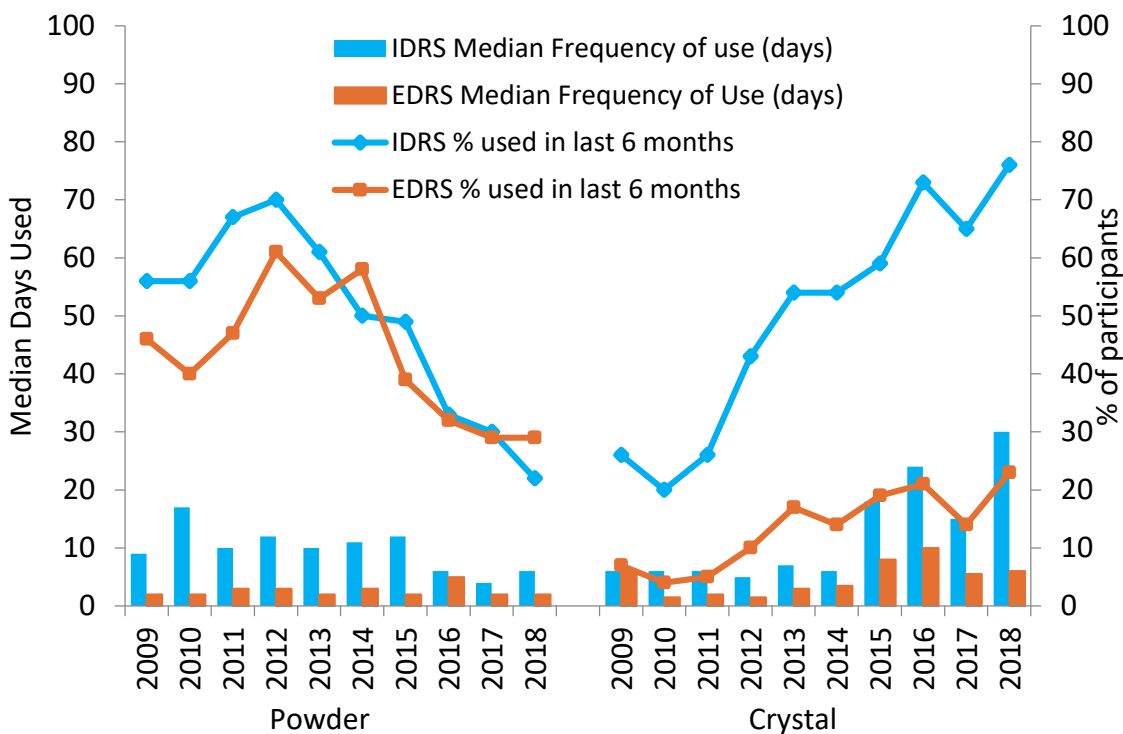
Wastewater estimates suggest a lower volume of methamphetamine consumed at a population level at Tasmanian sites than the national average. This may reflect less people consuming, less frequent consumption and/or lower purity methamphetamine, or a combination.

## Prevalence and frequency of use of methamphetamine in the preceding 6 months, 2009-2018



Source: IDRS and EDRS Interviews

## Methamphetamine forms used in the preceding 6 months, 2009-2018



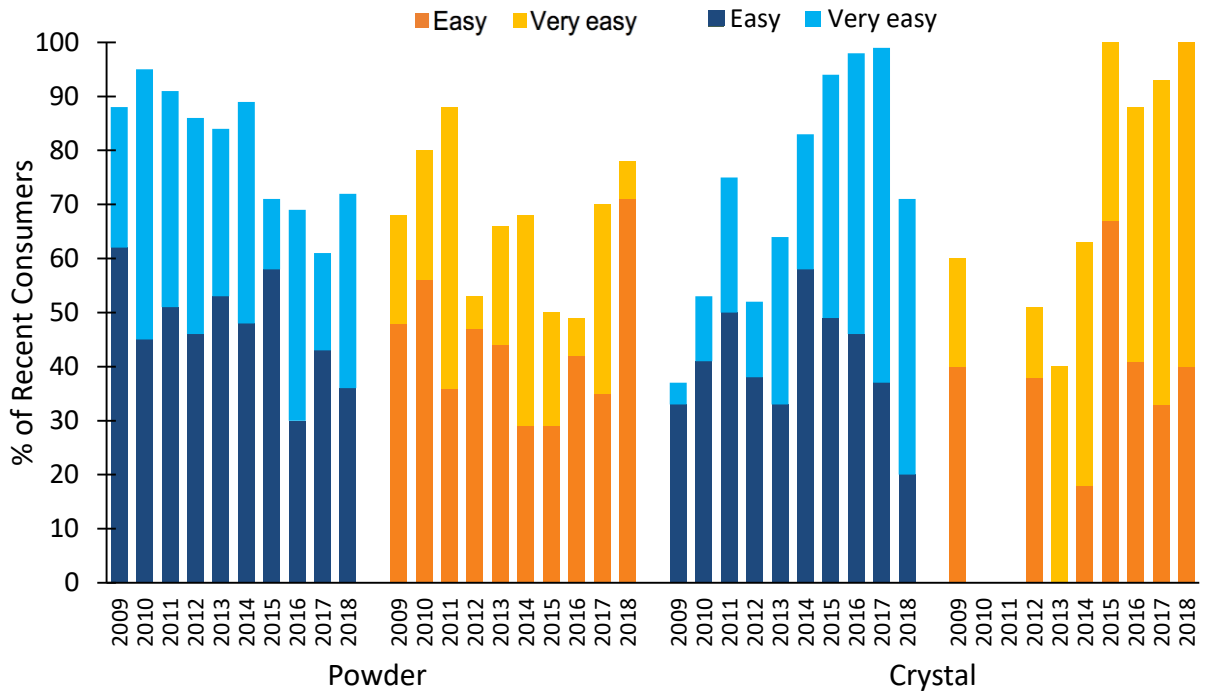
Source: IDRS and EDRS Interviews

### Key points:

Among people who frequently inject, the proportion of people who use methamphetamine has not substantially changed in the past decade. However, in the past 5 years there have been increases in the frequency of this use, and in particular an increase in use of higher potency crystal methamphetamine.

Among frequent ecstasy consumers, methamphetamine use has remained stable in the past 4 years and in general remains infrequent (less than monthly). Like other groups, use of higher potency crystal methamphetamine, while infrequent, has been increasing.

## Perceived methamphetamine availability for the preceding 6 months, 2009-2018



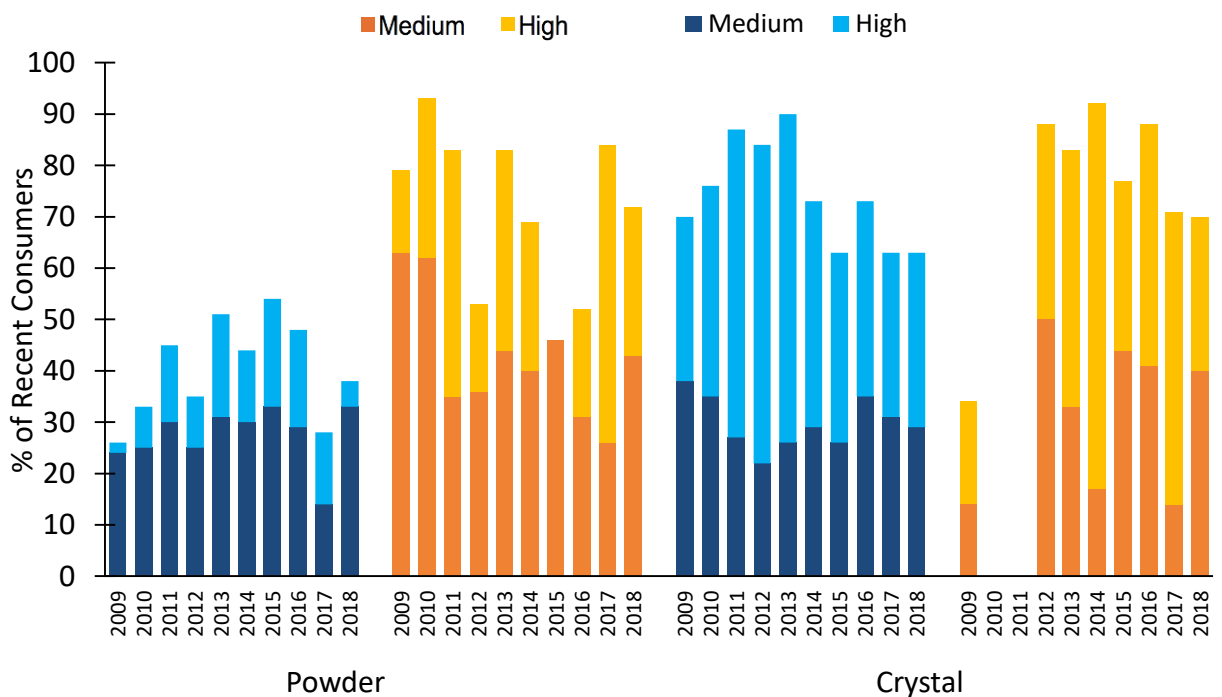
### Key points:

Consistent with trends in use, consumers report crystal methamphetamine as more easily available than powder forms, and that availability of powder forms has been declining over time.

There is limited purity data available in Tasmania on seized methamphetamine. Nationally, seizure analysis suggests a slight decrease in purity between 2015/16 and 16/17, and Tasmanian consumer data is consistent with this trend.

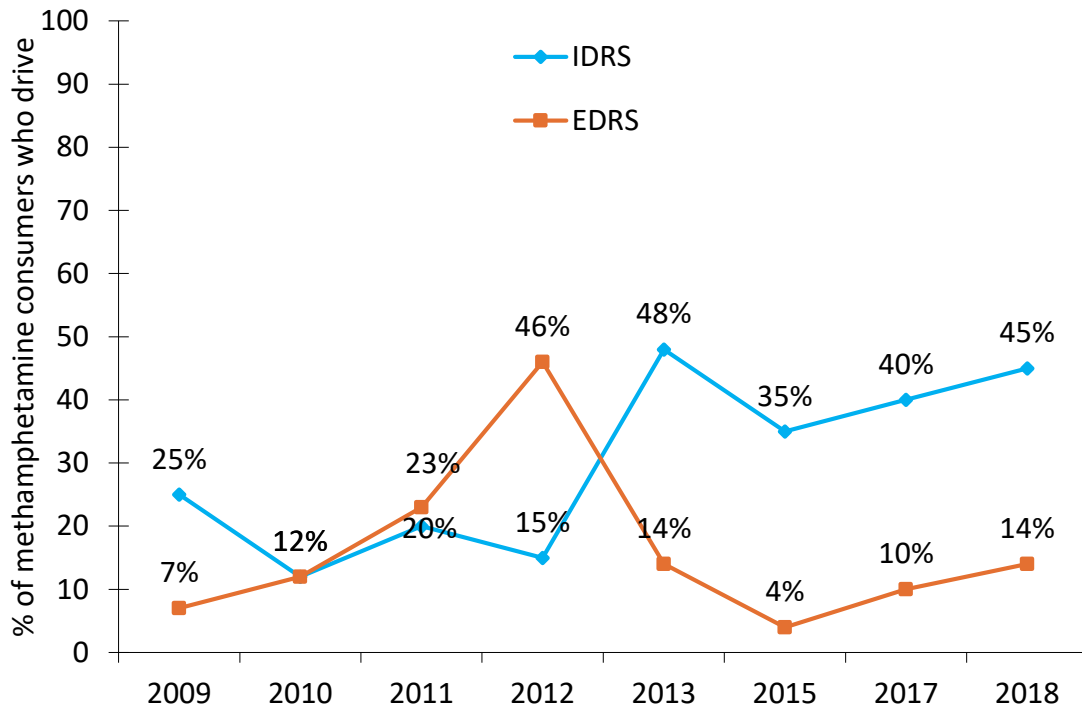
Source: IDRS and EDRS Interviews

## Perceived purity of methamphetamine used in the preceding 6 months, 2009-2018



Source: IDRS and EDRS Interviews

## Trends in driving under the influence of methamphetamine, controlling for use, 2009-2018



Source: IDRS and EDRS Interviews

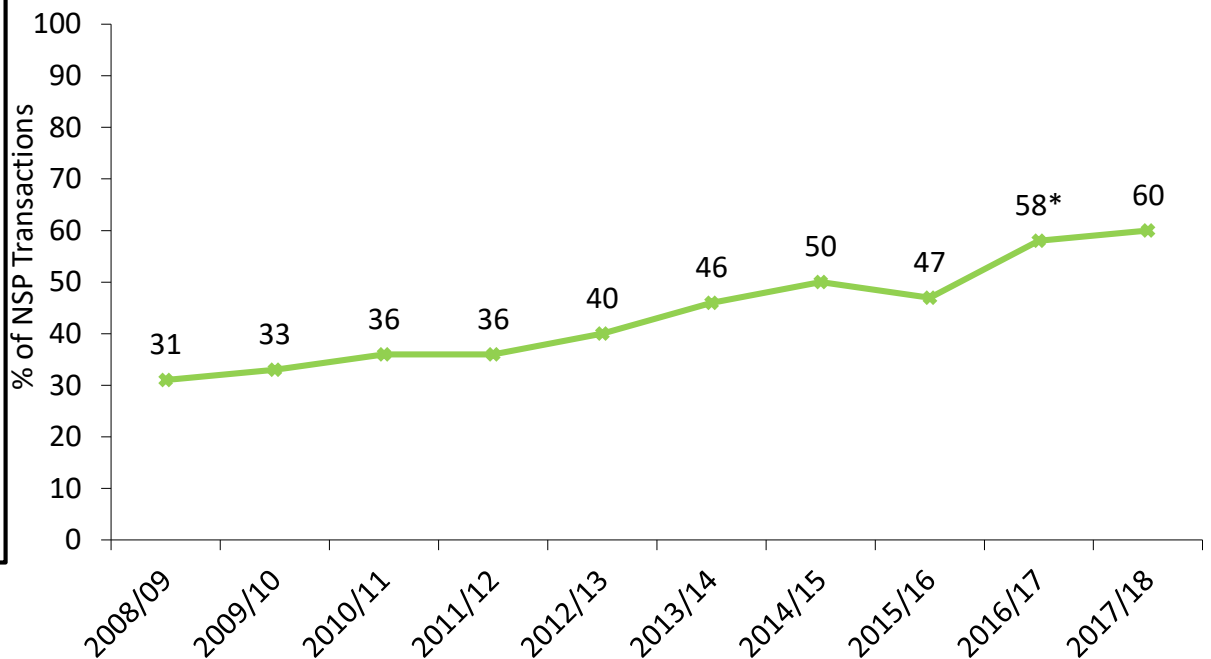
### Key points:

The IDRS and EDRS samples are convenience samples, and not representative of all people that consume substances. However, among the people interviewed who drove, the proportion of methamphetamine consumers that drove soon after taking the drug has remained largely stable since 2013. Notably, around half of the EDRS participants had been roadside breath tested, and one in 10 had been drug tested in the past 6 months. Among the IDRS participants, 60% had been breath tested and one third had been dug tested in this time.

## Proportion of Tasmanian non-pharmacy Needle and Syringe Program clients reporting methamphetamine as 'drug about to inject' 2008/09-2017/18

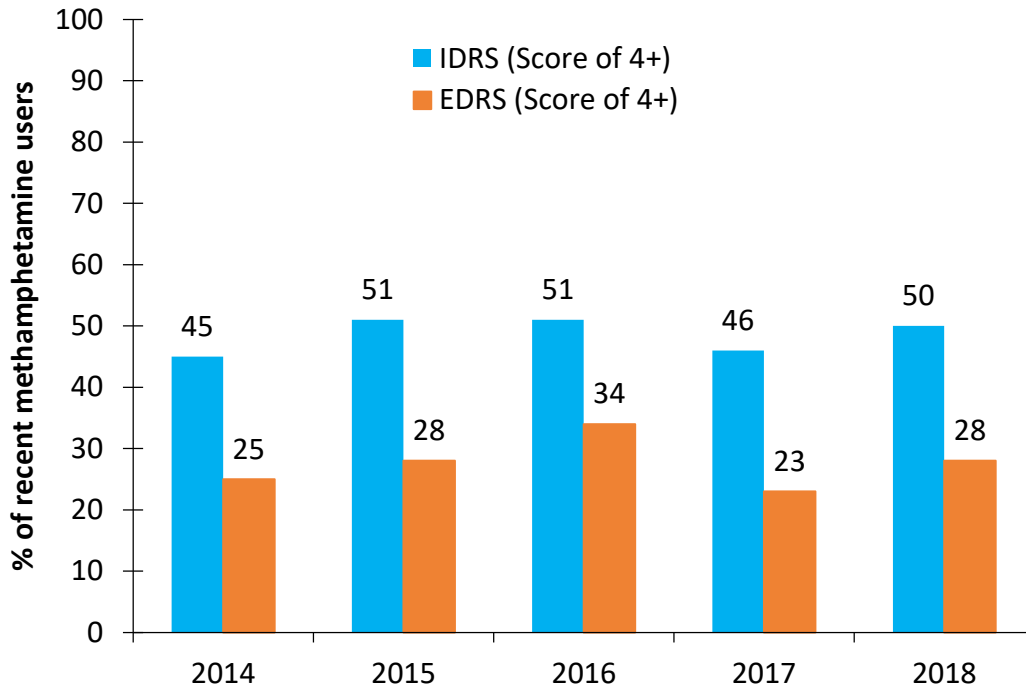
### Key points:

When accessing sterile injecting equipment consumers are asked the drug that they are about to inject. While it is important to note that the rate of attendance at outlets has steadily declined over the past decade, the proportion accessing equipment for methamphetamine has been increasing.



Source: Population Health, Department of Health and Human Services

## Proportion of recent methamphetamine users screened as likely dependent on the Severity of Dependence Scale, 2014-2018



Source: IDRS and EDRS Interviews

### Key points:

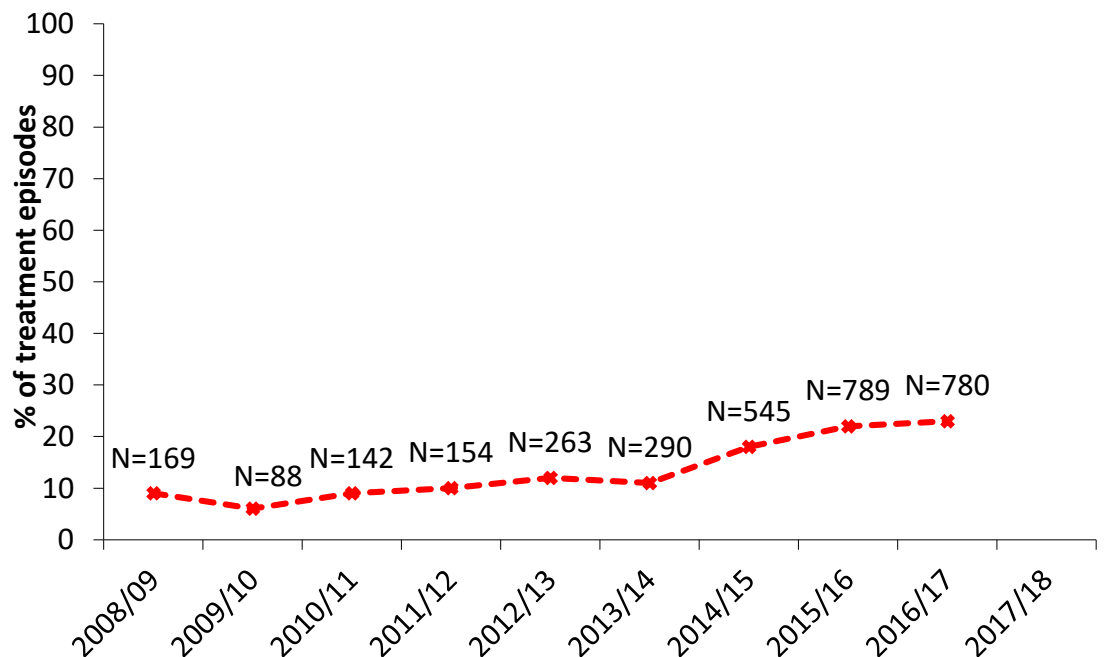
The IDRS and EDRS surveys incorporate a screening tool that identifies people at high likelihood of experiencing meth/amphetamine dependence.

In both studies, around 60% of those identified as likely dependent were not in any form of drug treatment, and for people who injected in particular, those who were in drug treatment were typically receiving interventions appropriate for opioid, not amphetamine, dependence.

### Key points:

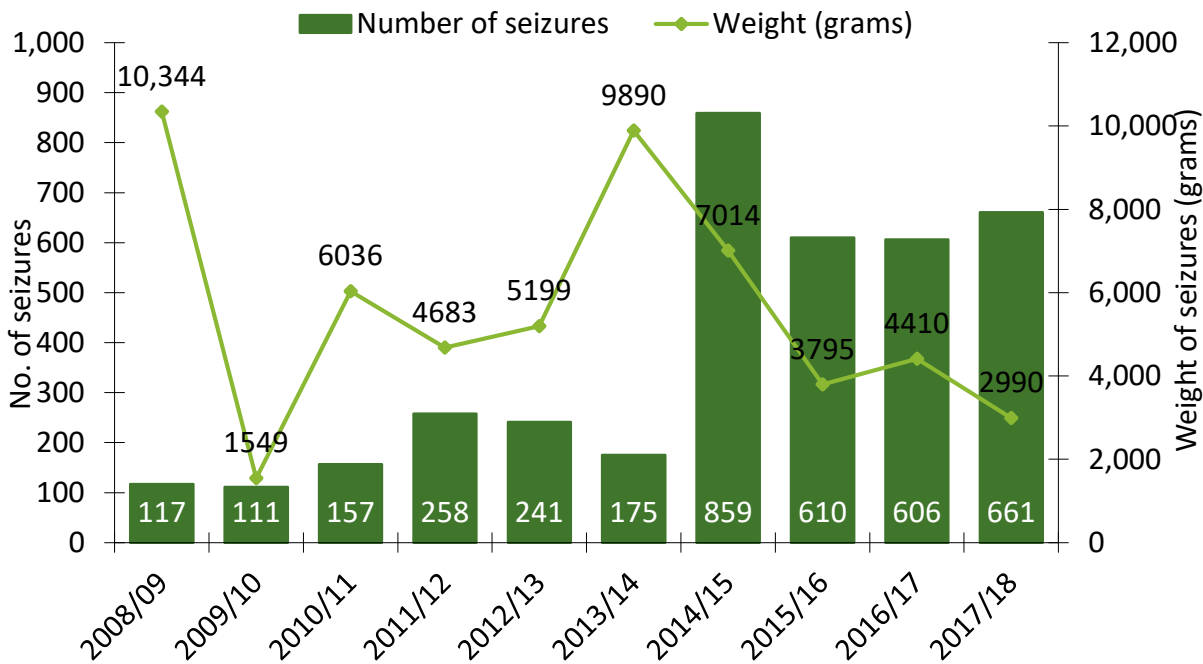
Treatment episodes for meth/amphetamine problems now represent around one quarter of all presentations, up from around one tenth a decade ago. There is a substantial lag between first experience of problems and treatment seeking (e.g. Kenny et al, 2011) and a low penetration of treatment among meth/amphetamine consumers (e.g. Degenhardt et al, 2016).

## Closed treatment episodes provided for own methamphetamine use in Tasmania, 2008/09-2017/18



Source: AIHW Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia

## Seizures of methamphetamine by Tasmania Police, 2008/09-2017/18



Sources: Australian Crime Commission, State Intelligence Service, Tasmania Police

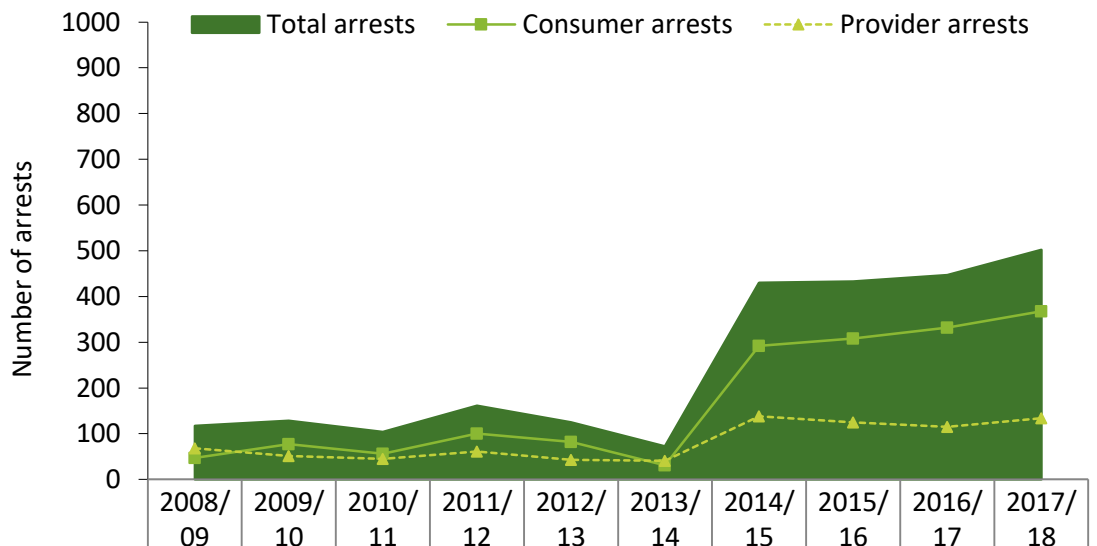
### Key points:

The total number of methamphetamine seizures has substantially increased over the most recent 3 financial years reported. While data from 2017/18 are preliminary the number of seizures has remained similar; while weight of seizures are down there have been multiple very substantial seizures recorded in the 2018/19 period.

### Key points:

Total methamphetamine related arrests, particularly consumer-related arrests, have substantially increased in recent years in comparison with earlier in the decade. This may reflect a combination of increased consumption and increases in focus on meth/amphetamine by law enforcement. The state government has declared an increased focus on methamphetamine (June 18)

## Number of arrests for methamphetamine related offences in Tasmania, 2008/09-2017/18



	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Total arrests	117	128	104	161	125	72	430	433	447	502
Consumer arrests	47	77	56	100	82	31	292	308	332	368
Provider arrests	68	51	45	61	43	41	138	125	115	134

Note: Totals may differ from those reported in the Department of Police and Emergency Management annual report due to differences in counting rules. Data in 2016/17 and 2017/18 were provided by Tasmania Police State Intelligence Service. These data are preliminary and subject to revision. In 2017/18 86 further arrests where status was not provided were excluded.



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- Kenny, P., Harney, A., Lee, N., Pennay, A. (2011). Treatment utilization and barriers to treatment: Results of a survey of dependent methamphetamine users. Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention and Policy, 6, 3
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## The following researchers and research institutions contributed to IDRS and EDRS:

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## Suggested citation

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