

What can the IDRS and EDRS tell us about the so-called 'ice epidemic' in Victoria?

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Background

- Over 100 articles this year in Victoria's print media suggest an *epidemic* of 'ice' (crystal methamphetamine) use in the state, related to increases in harms such as ambulance attendances (Lim et al. 2014)

EXAMPLES OF ICE IN THE MEDIA

OUT-OF-CONTROL USERS

'vicious' 'killer' 'raging ice addict' 'ice attack'

ORGANISED (ETHNIC) CRIMINAL GROUPS

'ice crime gangs'

THE 'EVIL DRUG'

'horror' 'drug fights'

DRUG WAR RHETORIC

'victims'

'united fronts'

'wars'



Aims

- To explore these issues, **IDRS/EDRS** participant surveys from 2008-2014 were used to examine trends in:
 1. MA use
 2. perceptions of purity and availability of MA

Methods

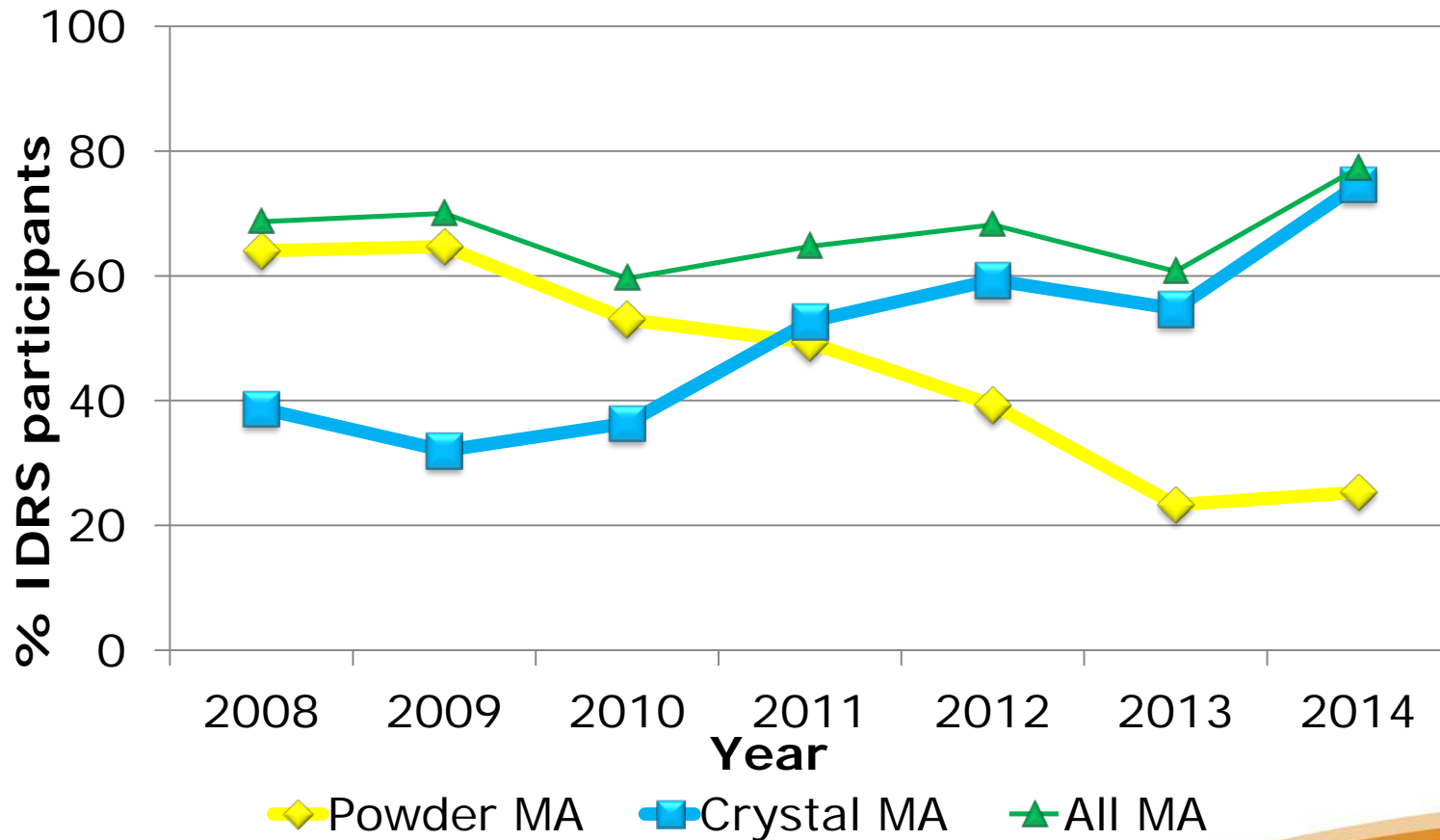
- **IDRS**: Structured interviews with 150 people who inject drugs (PWID) regularly in Jun 2008–2014, across Melbourne
- **EDRS**: Structured interviews with 100 people who reported regular psychostimulant use (RPU) in May 2008–2014, across Melbourne
- Data from 2008–2014 were analysed for trends in MA use prevalence and purity and availability perceptions (χ^2 test for trend)

Results: Characteristics of crystal MA use by 2014 IDRS and EDRS participants

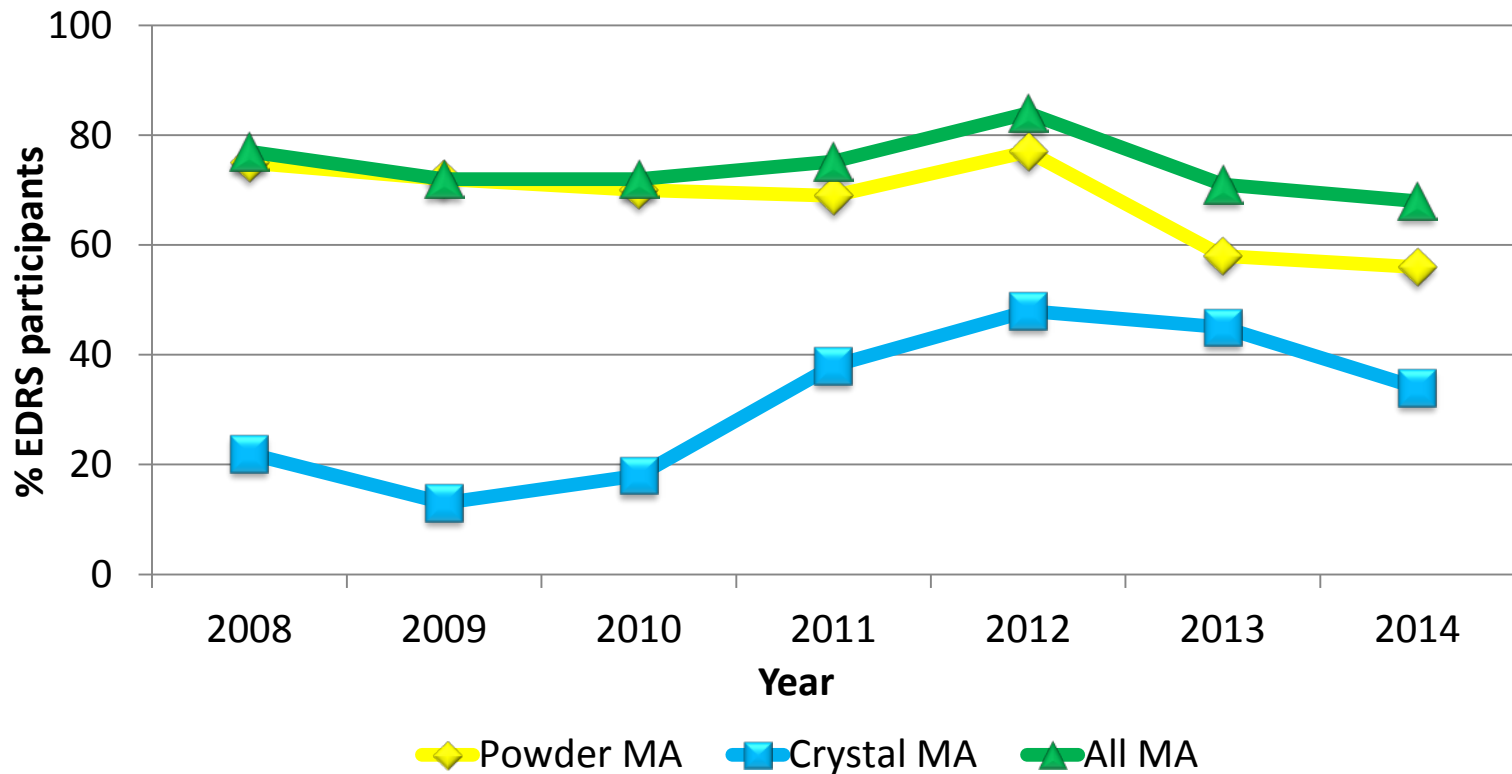
- EDRS participants reported primarily smoking the drug and using relatively large amounts compared with IDRS participants

	2014 IDRS N=150	2014 EDRS N=100
Lifetime IDU (%)	100	10
Crystal MA drug of choice (%)	17	9
Crystal MA used most in past month (%)	26	11
History of crystal MA use (%)	93	42
Recent crystal MA use (%)	75	34
Quantities used, past six months (median grams, IQR)		
Typical session of use	0.1 (0.06-0.1)	0.2 (0.125-0.3)
Heavy session of use	0.1 (0.1-0.25)	0.35 (0.2-1.0)

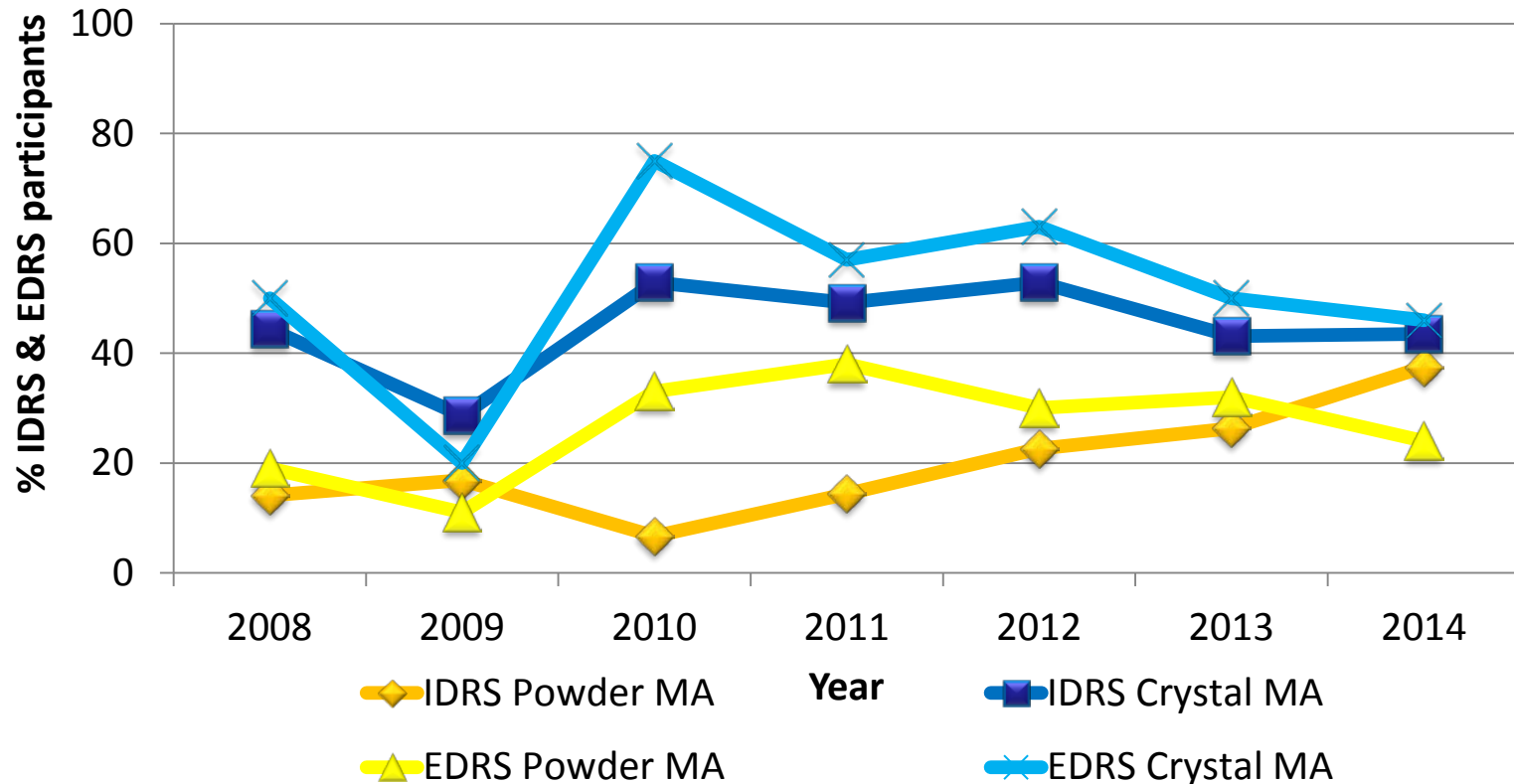
Results: Trends in IDRS participant reports of recent MA use, 2008–2014



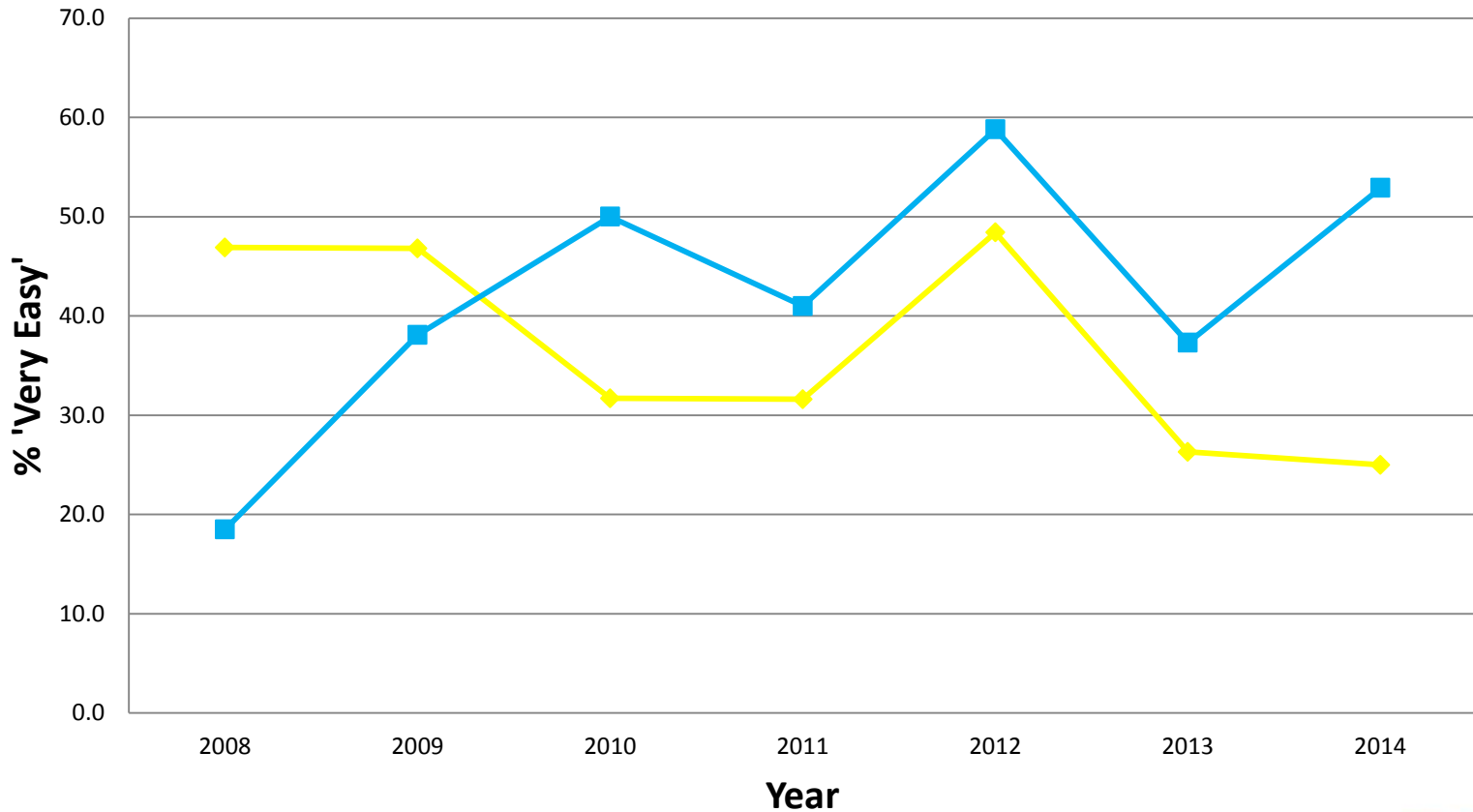
Results: Trends in EDRS participant reports of recent MA use, 2008–2014



Results: Trends in IDRS/EDRS participant reports of 'high' purity MA, 2008–2014

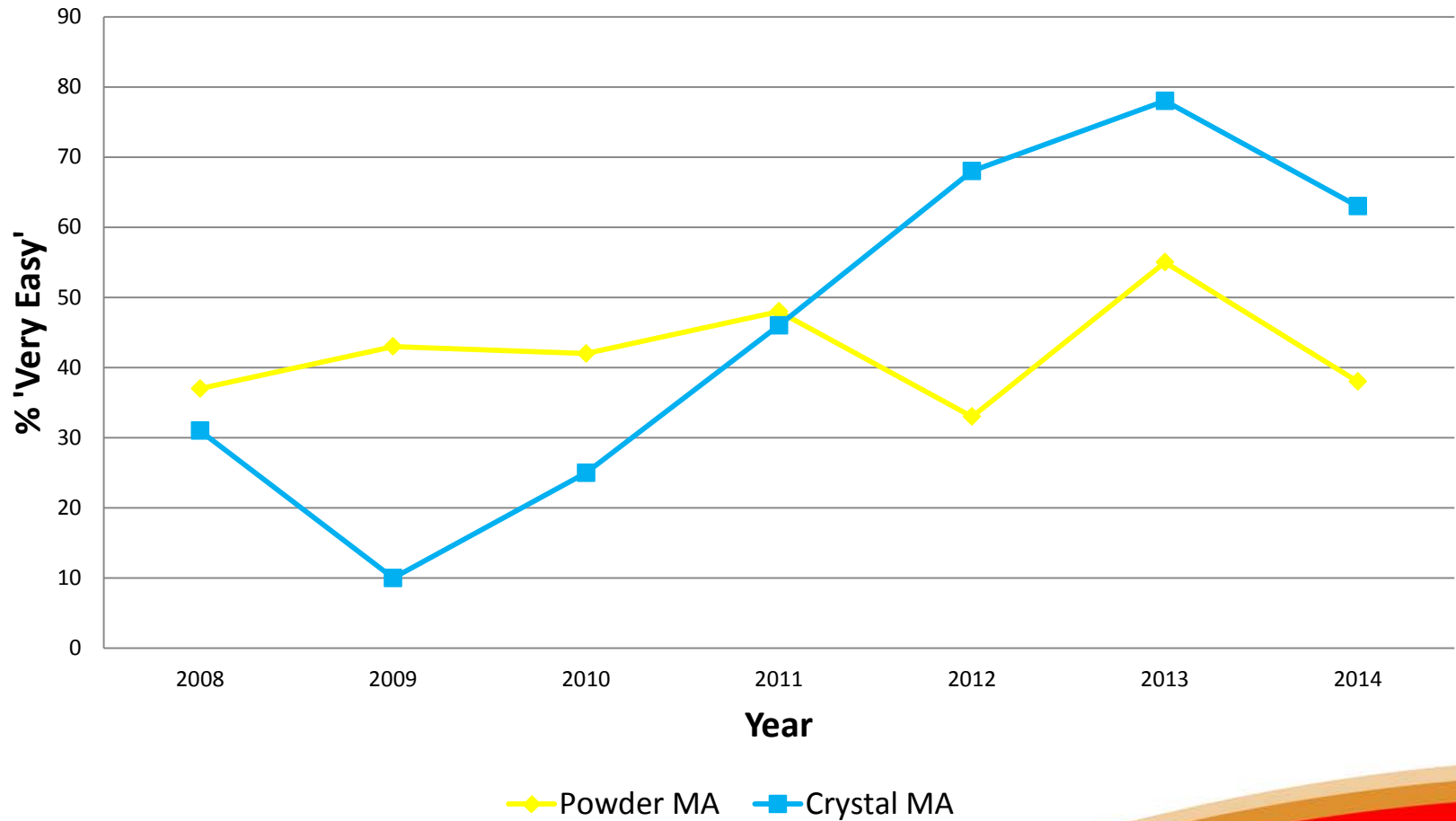


Results: Trends in IDRS participant reports of 'very easy' availability MA, 2008–2014



—◆— Powder MA —■— Crystal MA

Results: Trends in EDRS participant reports of 'very easy' availability MA, 2008–2014



Conclusions

In response to the 'ice epidemic', millions of dollars have been invested in Victoria.

But what is the evidence of an epidemic?

- Few changes observed in the **IDRS** and **EDRS**. MA use overall has remained relatively stable, consistent with the few changes evident in the NDSHS (AIHW, 2011, 2014)

What other explanations are there?

- Purity data from seizures by Victoria Police show that crystal MA has increased in purity since 2007/08 ($p < 0.001$).
- These factors are most likely driving increases in indicators of harm, rather than prevalence of use.
- These data highlight the need for targeted education and response directed to the small part of the population at risk of experiencing methamphetamine related harms.