

For immediate release: Wednesday, 15 February 2023

## World-first trial to investigate new medication for methamphetamine dependence

**In a world-first, Australian researchers are trialling a new medication to help people who want to stop using crystal methamphetamine or 'ice'.**

Led by researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at UNSW Sydney, the Tina Trial will investigate if the antidepressant drug, mirtazapine can help people to stop using ice. Currently there are no medications available to treat methamphetamine dependence.

[The Tina Trial](#) is the largest trial of its kind ever attempted in Australia. It is being conducted at frontline clinical services in Wollongong, Geelong, Brisbane and Perth.

Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund, NDARC is leading the randomised controlled trial in collaboration with Deakin University, Monash University, the University of Wollongong, and the University of Sydney.

Lead researcher, NDARC's Associate Professor Rebecca McKetin says studies in the USA have found mirtazapine helps people reduce their methamphetamine use and improves their mood and sleep.

"Having a medication to help people come off methamphetamine would revolutionise treatment," Associate Professor McKetin says.

"The Tina Trial is the first trial in the world to definitively show whether mirtazapine can be used to treat methamphetamine dependence in routine clinical practice."

Mirtazapine (sold as Avanza) is an antidepressant drug that is already available in Australia.

Associate Professor Olivia Dean from Deakin University and Barwon Health says reusing existing medications for new applications fast tracks new treatments.

"If proven effective, it would provide a relatively cheap treatment option that could be quickly put into clinical practice," Associate Professor Dean says.

Addiction psychiatrist and Clinical Director at Turning Point, Associate Professor Shalini Arunogiri says that most people who seek help for methamphetamine use also have mood and sleep problems that can perpetuate the cycle of drug use.

"Having a medication that can address both substance use and these mood and sleep problems will provide a more integrated treatment approach," Associate Professor Arunogiri says.

The lack of treatment options is a significant barrier for people who use methamphetamine.

"Having a medication would encourage a lot of people to try treatment who might otherwise go without help," says Professor Peter Kelly from the University of Wollongong.

"The next step is to show that this medication can be used safely and effectively as a frontline treatment for people using ice in Australia."

“Harm Reduction Australia welcomes this new, multi-site study aimed at improving medication-assisted treatment options for people with methamphetamine dependence,” says Executive Director, Dr Annie Madden.

“This study signals an important step towards ensuring people with methamphetamine dependence also have access to effective, evidence-informed treatment if they seek it.”

The research team is recruiting participants in Brisbane, Wollongong, Geelong and Perth. Recruitment information can be found here: [www.tinatrial.info](http://www.tinatrial.info).

For more information about the Tina Trial research team please visit the NDARC website: [www.tinatrial.info](http://www.tinatrial.info).

Participating health services:

- Biala City Community Health Centre, Brisbane City, Queensland Health
- Next Step Drug and Alcohol Services, East Perth, Western Australia Mental Health Commission
- Barwon Health, Geelong
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Drug and Alcohol Services, Wollongong, NSW Health

ENDS

---

## Media contacts

### National

- Associate Professor Rebecca McKetin, NDARC, UNSW Sydney: 02 9385 0294 | [r.mcketin@unsw.edu.au](mailto:r.mcketin@unsw.edu.au)
- NDARC Communications Team: 0401 713 850 | [ndarc.media@unsw.edu.au](mailto:ndarc.media@unsw.edu.au)

### Geelong

- Associate Professor Olivia Dean, Deakin University and Barwon Health: 03 4215 3300 | [o.dean@deakin.edu.au](mailto:o.dean@deakin.edu.au)
- Lydia Kearney, Deakin University Communications: [l.kearney@deakin.edu.au](mailto:l.kearney@deakin.edu.au)
- Jono Pech, Barwon Health Communications: [comms@barwonhealth.org.au](mailto:comms@barwonhealth.org.au)

### Wollongong

- Professor Pete Kelly, Wollongong University: 02 4239 2382 | [pkelly@uow.edu.au](mailto:pkelly@uow.edu.au)
- Ben Long, University of Wollongong: +61 2 4221 3887 | +61 429 294 251 | [benl@uow.edu.au](mailto:benl@uow.edu.au)

### Perth

- Leah McLeod, Senior Media and Communications Officer, Office of the Commissioner, Mental Health Commission: 0436 470 845 | [leah.mcleod@mhc.wa.gov.au](mailto:leah.mcleod@mhc.wa.gov.au)

### Brisbane

- Kate Carey, Principal Media and Communications Advisor, Metro North Health: 07 3647 9522 | 0418 804 269 | [kate.carey@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:kate.carey@health.qld.gov.au)

## Harm Reduction Australia

- Dr Annie Madden, Executive Director Harm Reduction Australia: 0414 628 136 | [executivedirector@harmreductionaustralia.org.au](mailto:executivedirector@harmreductionaustralia.org.au)

Associate Professor Shalini Arunogiri Phone 0417 740912 | [shalini.arunogiri@monash.edu](mailto:shalini.arunogiri@monash.edu)

