

## 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

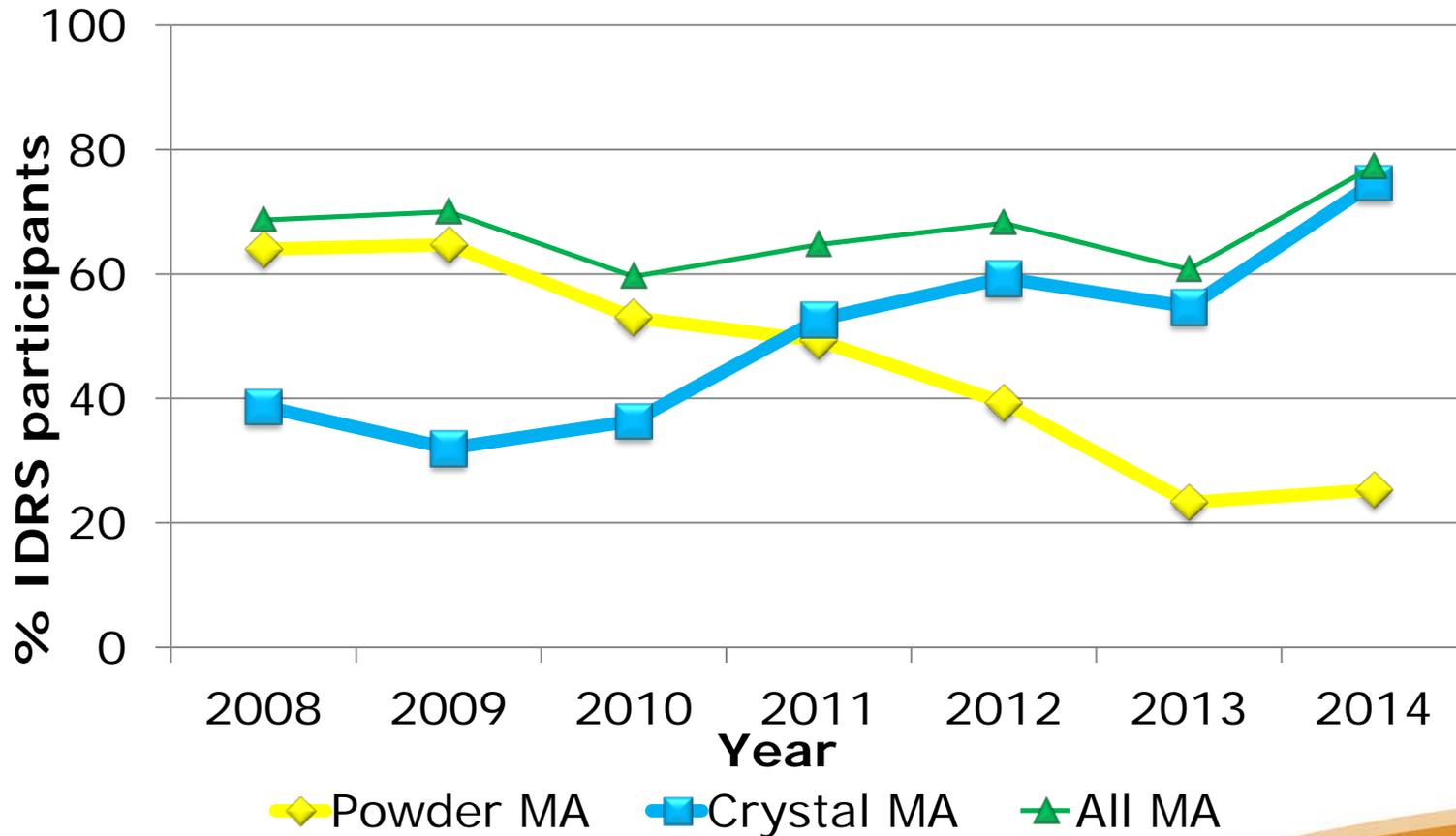
- **IDRS**: Structured interviews with 150 people who inject drugs (PWID) regularly in Jun 2008–2014, across Melbourne
- **EDRS**: Structured interviews with 100 people who reported regular psychostimulant use (RPU) in May 2008–2014, across Melbourne
- Data from 2008–2014 were analysed for trends in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

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

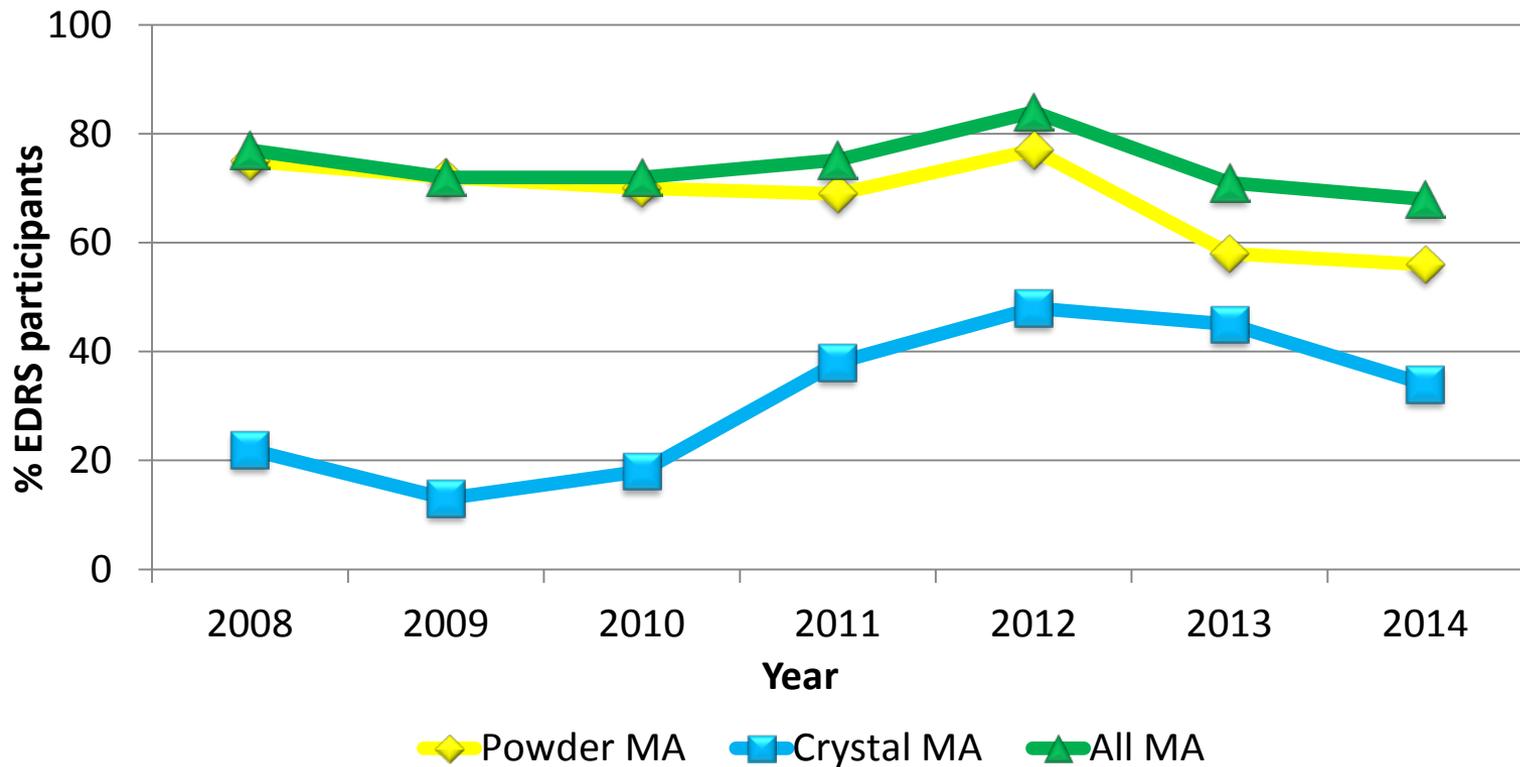
- EDRS participants reported primarily smoking the drug and using relatively large amounts compared with IDRS participants

	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)

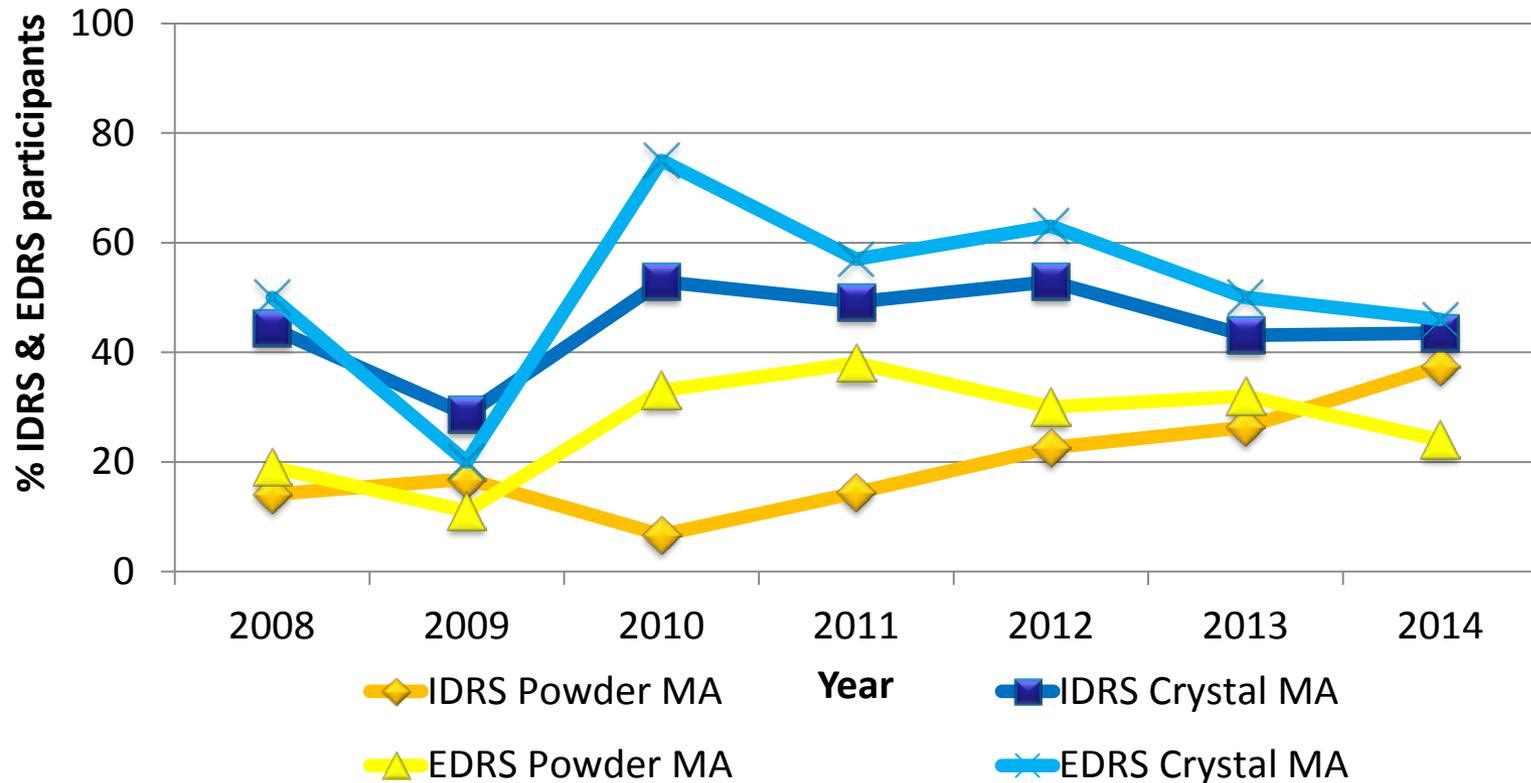
## Results: Trends in IDRS participant reports of recent MA use, 2008–2014



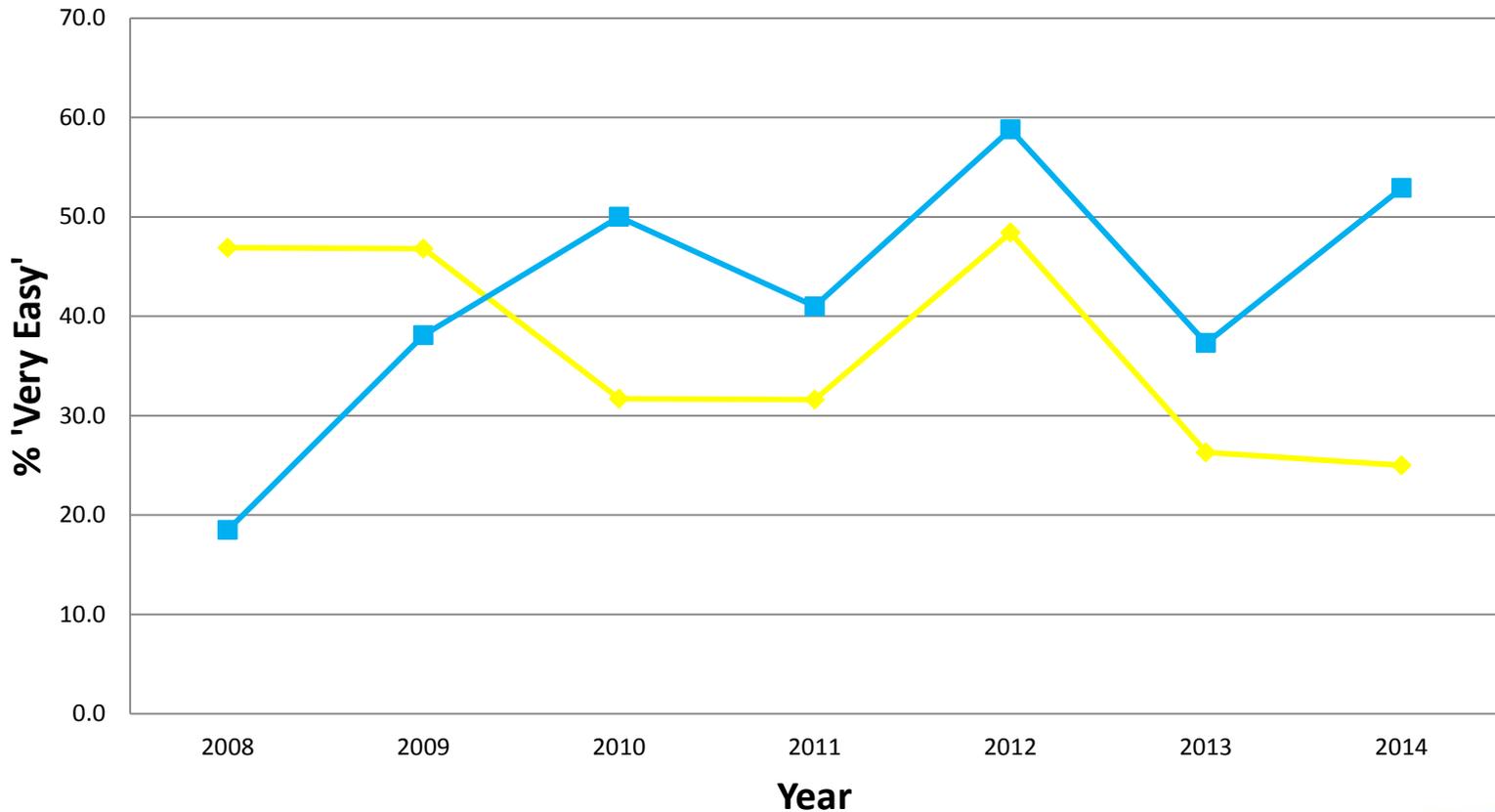
# Results: Trends in EDRS participant reports of recent MA use, 2008–2014



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

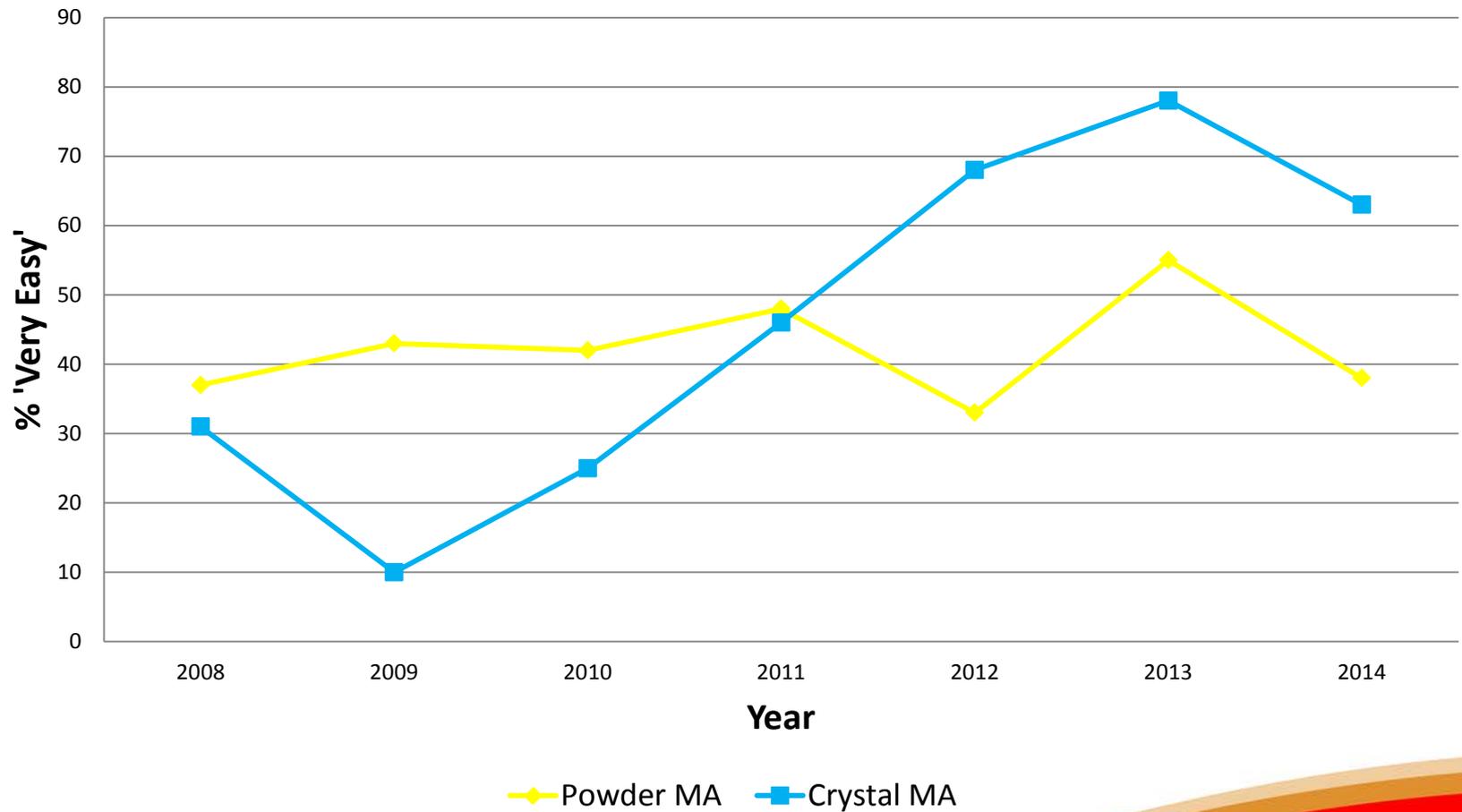


# Results: Trends in IDRS participant reports of 'very easy' availability MA, 2008–2014



—◆— 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.