



Submission to the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee:

Inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines, particularly ice, in Victoria.

Submission by: Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO)

Date: 6th November 2013

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Acknowledgements: We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the regional, metropolitan and RAPIDS COATS assessors and the research and development team in preparing this submission

ACSO thanks the committee for the opportunity to make this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact ACSO to arrange further input. As the terms of reference are broad ACSO will only seek to cover the criteria within our area of expertise.

Key Points

- There has been an increase in the number of clients reporting amphetamine use including methamphetamine use over the past two years
- The average age of methamphetamine users is younger than other drugs
- Clients using crystal methamphetamine are exhibiting behaviours that are increasingly characterised by more erratic behaviour
- Each region is reporting differences in the trends relating to crystal methamphetamine use including method of administration and poly substance issues
- Methamphetamine is rarely a substance used in isolation

Introduction

Established in 1983 as a drop in centre for ex-prisoners, ACSO is a courageous organisation with a **vision to create a safe and inclusive community freed of crime and prisons.**

It's our goal to reduce re-offending and our **mission is to help people transition from prison, assist them in the community, stop them from re-offending and divert others from committing crime.** Our ethos is simply to create another chance; to promote recovery and to support rehabilitation and re-integration people back into the community.

Our commitment to our vision and mission has seen ACSO become a "provider of choice" in the delivery of forensic services and programs for people who are transitioning from prison back into the community, along with those with complex and multiple needs who are in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system"

We offer innovative services responding to unemployment, mental illness, disability, homelessness, substance use and offending behaviour throughout the metropolitan area and regional Victoria. These services are delivered through our 'wrap around' service delivery model that integrates ACSO's Housing, Complex Care, Clinical, Employment and Community Enterprise Divisions to achieve better outcomes for our clients and the communities we serve.

Established in 1997 the **Community Offenders Advice and Treatment Service (COATS)** is a state-wide program that administers both State funded and Commonwealth funded (NIDS) treatment pathways. COATS provides specialist drug and alcohol assessments, treatment planning and brokerage (including purchase of) treatment for clients referred from the criminal justice system, thus providing a link between Justice and Drug Treatment services.

COATS currently facilitate over 25,000 referrals and assessments each year. Without COATS these clients would not receive the timely and targeted treatment response which is vital to breaking the cycle of reoffending. It provides expert assessment and recommendation to a range of services and authorities including the Adult Parole Board, courts, community corrections, youth justice and drug treatment providers.

1. Examine the channels of supply of methamphetamine including direct importation and local manufacture of final product and raw constituent chemical precursors and ingredients;

ACSO will not be addressing this criterion as it does not fall within our area of expertise.

2. Examine the supply and distribution of methamphetamine and links to organised crime organisations including outlaw motorcycle gangs;

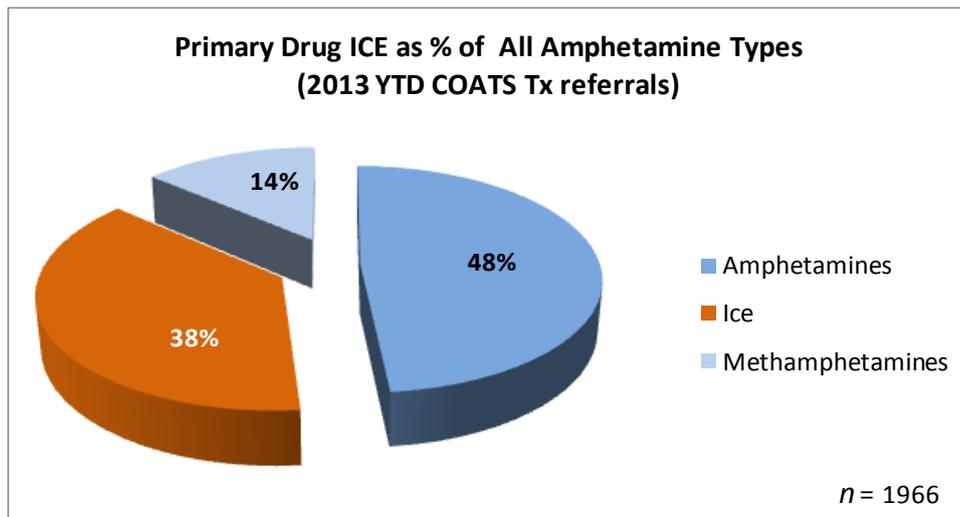
ACSO will not be addressing this criterion as it does not fall within our area of expertise.

3. Examine the nature, prevalence and culture of methamphetamine use in Victoria, particularly amongst young people, indigenous people and those who live in rural areas

We have observed an increase from 25% to 32% over the past year alone (October 2012 to October 2013) in the number of clients presenting with primary drug type of Amphetamine. These clients will be a mixture of recreational users as well as those with long term dependency. We have also become aware of some limitations in reporting the prevalence of methamphetamine use. These limitations arise as some referral sources such as police or

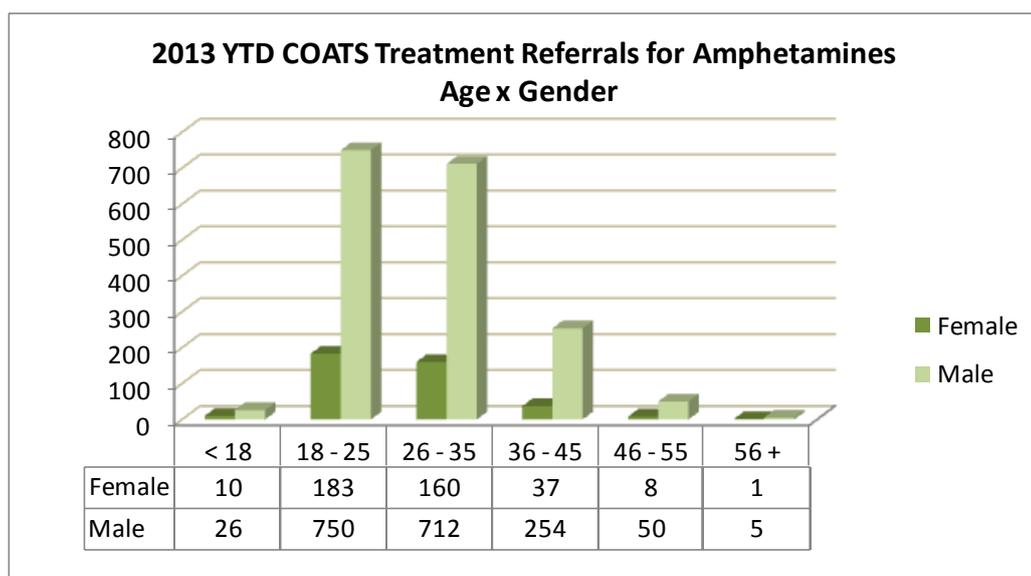
diversion programs do not have the ability to distinguish categories such as crystal methamphetamine and amphetamine and some referral sources use classification rather than substance type which limits our ability to draw absolute conclusions about trends.

The following data is taken from clients referred through our COATS programs to specialist drug treatment and includes clients placed on Community Corrections Orders, released on Parole or currently in prison being considered for Parole and those clients referred through a range of diversionary programs. Currently (2013) our records show that crystal methamphetamine (ICE) comprises approximately 38% of all referrals to treatment when the primary drug category is amphetamines.



*Notes: Amphetamines are all amphetamines other than ice or methamphetamine
YTD = 1/1/2013 - 21/10/2013*

Our data reveals that the vast majority of COATS clients whose primary drug of concern is Amphetamine, are male and between the ages of 18 and 35.



Our records show that the mean or average age of clients whose primary drug of concern is Amphetamine was over 30 and has now dropped to be under 30 years. The decrease in age of users has been consistent with other substances such as cannabis and ecstasy.

COATS employs over 35 specialist forensic alcohol and other drug assessors who are based around the state in all regions of Victoria and together completed over 6000 assessments for clients on correctional orders or those being considered for parole last financial year. These assessors have a wealth of experience with some having over 20 years' experience in the sector. We asked our assessors in each region to comment on trends related to crystal methamphetamine use and included a summary of this feedback in Appendix 1..

COATS process referrals and undertake assessments for a range of clients; some will be reporting recreational use who have been referred through police drug diversion and others reporting long term dependency with long prison terms related to substance abuse. Like most drugs clients give a range of reasons for use of methamphetamines, from seeking pleasure and confidence for recreational users to self-medication for clients with history of attention deficient hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). ACSO assessors have also noted an increased impact on families where a significant other is using methamphetamine in particular noting relationship breakdown and domestic violence due to behaviour whilst substance effected.

It has been noted that crystal methamphetamine is increasingly being reported in Indigenous communities across the state however the mode of administration remains mostly smoking and unlike heroin is more readily available locally. Numbers of treatment referrals, where the COATS client is known as Indigenous and whose Primary Drug is Amphetamine, have steadily increased over time, and as a proportion it is less than alcohol and cannabis but more than heroin clients.

4. Examine the links between methamphetamine use and crime, in particular crimes against the person;

The behaviour of clients using crystal methamphetamine can be increasingly erratic and we have an increase in reports from clients who have little recall of their behaviour whilst substance effected often reflecting with a great deal of remorse on their actions which result in violence or assault against loved ones. ACSO is committed to enhancing our data collection and evaluation systems and is keen to further capitalise on our unique data set to further explore the relationship between substance use including methamphetamine and offending behaviour. We are actively working with the Department of Justice and Department of Health Victoria to identify means of tracking outcomes for clients who traverse both the criminal justice system and health systems to further understand the impact of drug treatment programs on recidivism.

5. Examine the short and long term consequences of methamphetamine use;

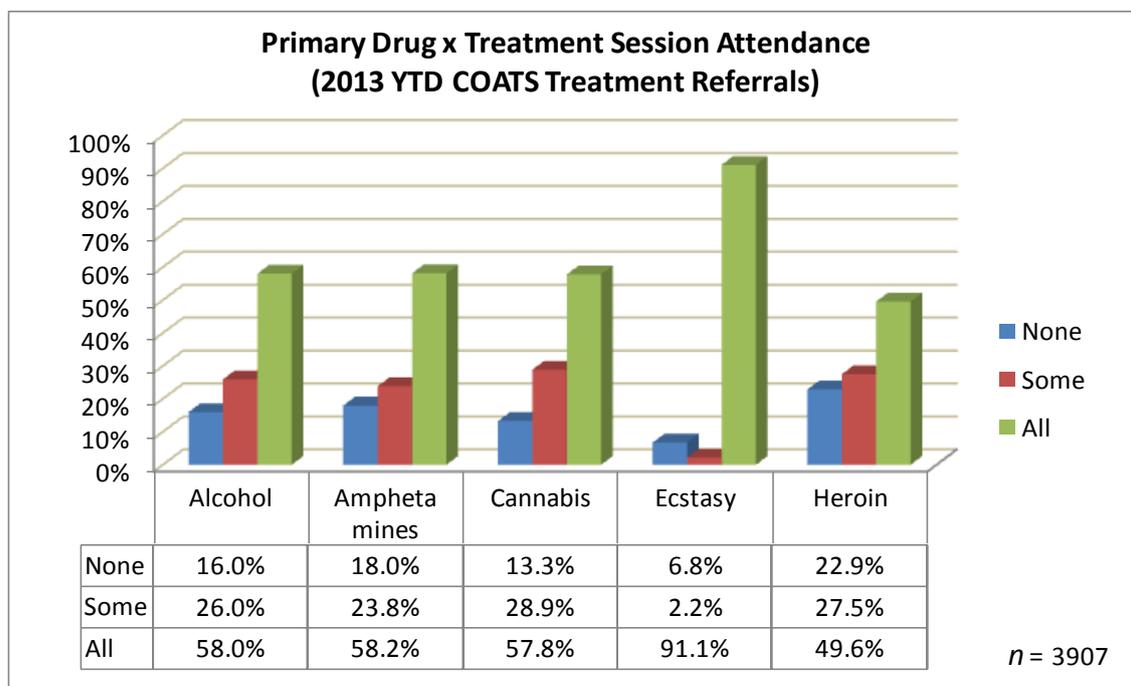
ACSO supports material published by Australian Drug Foundation and Annex which provide detail on effects on users of methamphetamine use. With an increased association between behavioural concerns and methamphetamine use ACSO is concerned about the short term and long term impact on families and dependents including the burden on the emergency services and police.

6. Examine the relationship of methamphetamine use to other forms of illicit and licit substances;

ACSO has noted that methamphetamine users are less likely to become physically dependent and more psychologically dependent on these drugs. We have also noted that clients reporting methamphetamine use often report using depressants as a means of managing withdrawal symptoms and as a result experience long term effects and additional risks of overdose as clients report mixing stimulants and depressants which can mask the degree of sedation experienced by the user.

7. Review the adequacy of past and existing state and federal strategies for dealing with methamphetamine use;

The current drug treatment system is struggling to service clients with methamphetamine use; clients are often hesitant to enter the drug treatment system. According to our records, 2013 COATS Clients whose primary drug was Amphetamine, completion rates is on par with alcohol and cannabis.



Notes: YTD = 1/1/2013 - 21/10/2013

8. Consider best practice strategies to address methamphetamine use and associated crime, including regulatory, law enforcement, education and treatment response (particularly for groups outlined above);

We have reports of clients using methamphetamine requiring longer periods of withdrawal or rehabilitation and would support the provision of a specialist forensic residential treatment facility which could ensure provision of targeted drug treatment and behavioural interventions addressing offending.

For three decades ACSO has helped rehabilitate some of Victoria's most notorious prisoners, pioneering work with violent and sex offenders that has resulted in less crime and successful reintegration in the community. As a crime prevention organisation, we know that prison is not always the right solution and we are confident that high quality reintegration programs reduce reoffending, but this cannot be prioritised above community safety.

ACSO supports Corrections reform that calls for parole to be a privilege and not a right. However, we also know that Victorian prisons have many offenders with a mental illness, disability and history of homelessness. Our experience shows that community safety is increased when parole monitoring and supervision is closely integrated with housing, employment, behaviour change programs and community access and acceptance. The true solution lies in genuine partnerships between the Offender, Corrections, Reintegration Agencies and the Community – employers, family and friends.