

**FAMILIES AND FRIENDS FOR DRUG LAW REFORM**

**SUPPLEMENT TO  
THE SUBMISSION OF FAMILIES AND FRIENDS FOR DRUG  
LAW REFORM TO  
THE INQUIRY OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STANDING  
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND DISABILITY  
INTO THE USE OF CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE**

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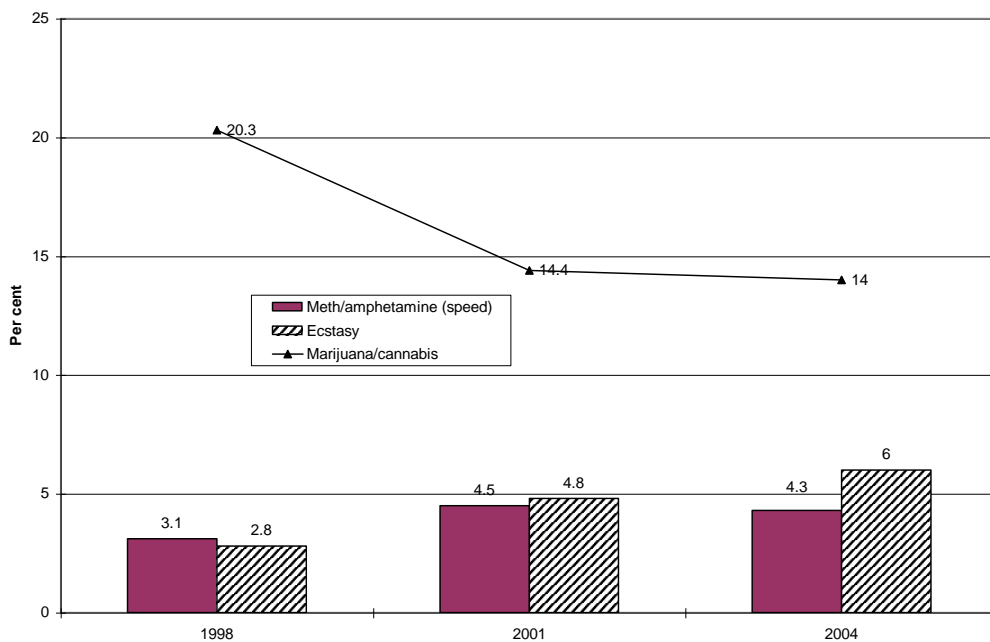
The following supplements the submission of Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform lodged on 14 February 2007 to the inquiry into the use of crystal methamphetamine of the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Disability. It corrects some errors in the charts included in that submission, takes account of information that has become available since or addresses issues that have assumed prominence, such as the banning of ice pipes.

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## METHAMPHETAMINE USAGE IN THE ACT Household survey

Between 2001 and 2004 the household survey figures for the ACT show a stable consumption rate of the population who had tried methamphetamine in the past year. This is about 4.4% of the population above 14 years of age. In contrast, usage of ecstasy which commonly includes methamphetamine has continued to rise steadily from 2.8% in 1998 to 6% in 2004. In the same time there has been a big decline in cannabis usage.

**Figure 1: Recent use of methamphetamine, ecstasy and cannabis in the ACT as a proportion of the population aged 14 years and over**



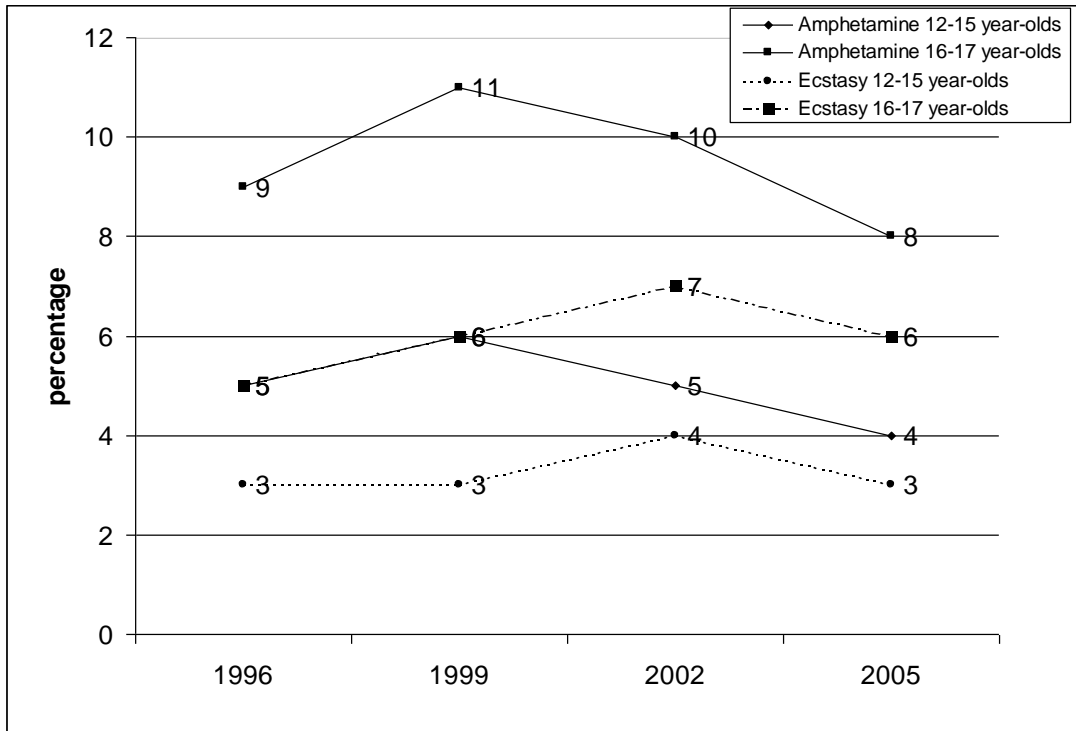
SOURCE: State and territory supplements of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, National Drug Strategy Household Surveys for 1998, 2001 and 2004.

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## Secondary school survey

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform has not seen the ACT figures from the 2005 secondary school survey. The following are national figures since 1996.

**Figure 2: Secondary students in Australia who have ever used “amphetamine” and ecstasy**



SOURCE: Victoria White & Jane Hayman, *Australian secondary school students' use of over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2005* (National Drug Strategy monograph series no. 60, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra, June 2006) table 12, p. 29 & table 19, p. 37.

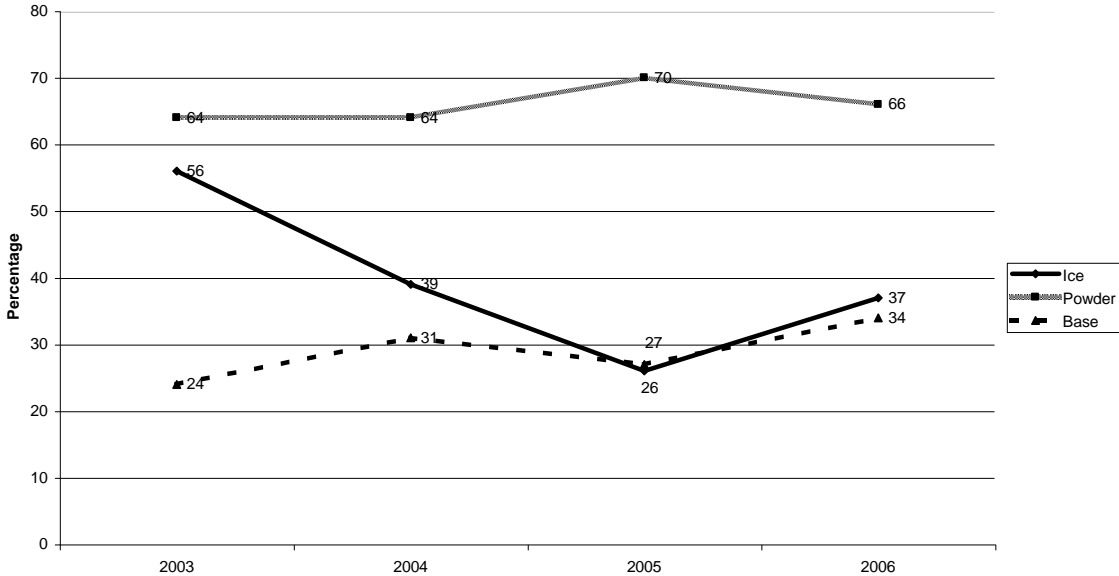
The published results for the ACT from the 2002 survey show a decline in “amphetamine” use from 9% of 16-17 year olds in 1999 to about 7.5% in 2002 suggesting that the ACT has followed national trends.<sup>1</sup>

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**Survey of ecstasy and related drug markets in the ACT**

The annual survey under the ecstasy and related drugs survey looks at a sample of ecstasy users, a drug that is not generally injected. The four surveys between 2003 and 2006 suggest a steady rate of use of methamphetamine base and powder among this population and some decline in the use of the crystalline form.

**Figure 3: Use in the past six months of methamphetamines by ACT ecstasy users between 2003 and 2006**

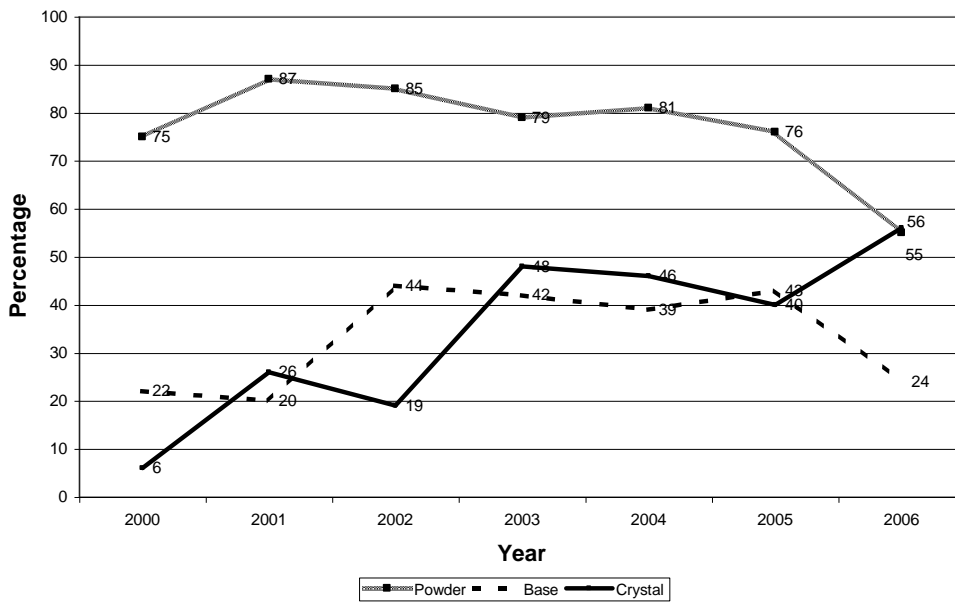


SOURCE: Ecstasy and related drugs surveys published by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

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It is useful to consider the similar survey carried for New South Wales which has been undertaken in Sydney for the reason that it has taken place since 2000, early in the penetration of crystal methamphetamine into the Australian market. It suggests a divergence in the pattern of use from that in the ACT, particularly in 2006.

**Figure 4: Use in the past six months of methamphetamines by New South Wales ecstasy users between 2000 and 2006**

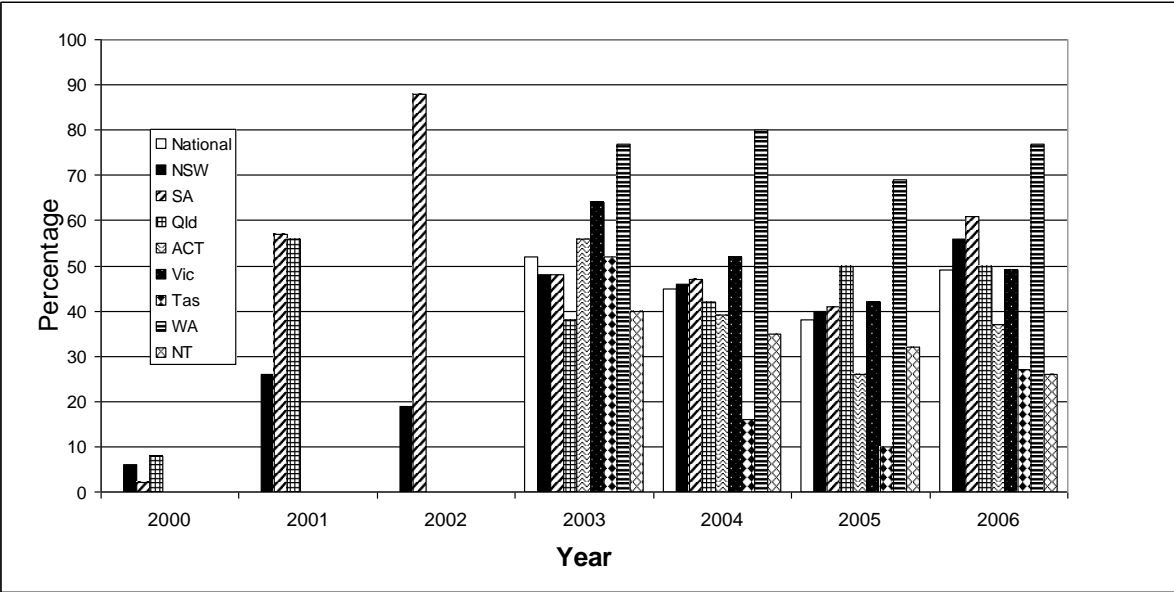


SOURCE: Ecstasy and related drugs surveys published by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

There are large variations between jurisdictions and, in a number of cases, over time in the levels of recent use of crystal methamphetamine reported across Australia in the ecstasy and related drugs surveys.

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**Figure 5: Use in the past six months of methamphetamines by ecstasy users in Australia between 2000 and 2006**

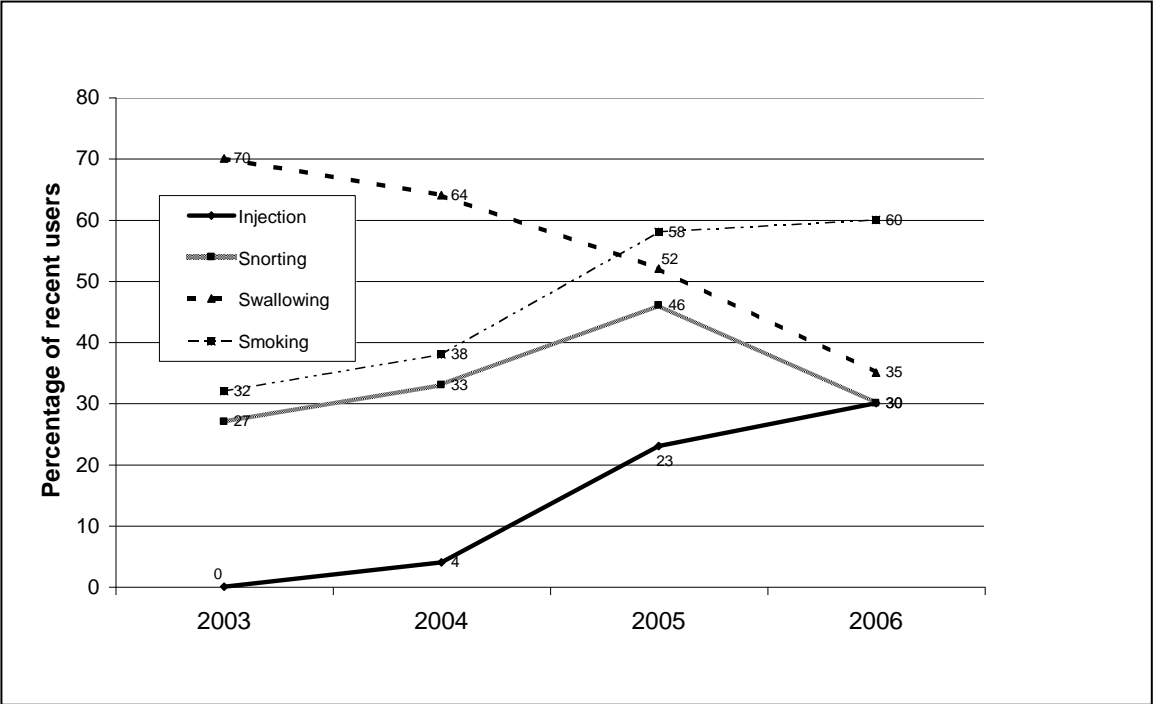


SOURCE: Ecstasy and related drugs surveys published by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

The ecstasy and related drugs surveys inquire about the method of consumption. In the case of crystal methamphetamine, the ACT surveys show a worrying trend of increased smoking and particularly of injection. Glass pipes are used to vaporise and smoke the crystalline form of the drug.

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Figure 6: Method of consumption of crystal methamphetamine by ACT ecstasy users between 2003 and 2006



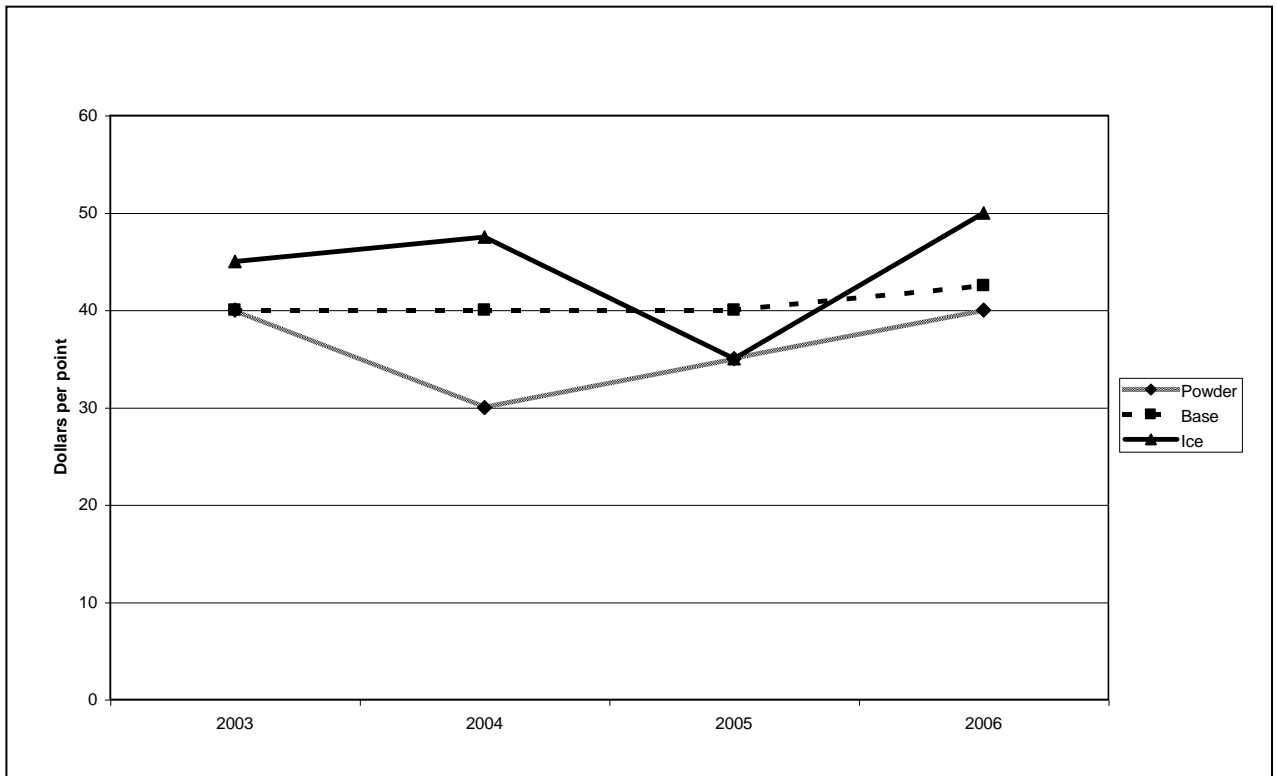
SOURCE: Ecstasy and related drugs surveys published by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

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## EFFECTIVENESS OF DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT

The effectiveness of drug law enforcement should be subject to continuous evaluation. Drug market indicators are collected which show if law enforcement is reducing supply. If law enforcement is having a positive effect, price should increase, purity should decrease and availability should reduce. That is not occurring. Available data for the ACT for 2006 indicates that the median reported price for a point of crystal methamphetamine is \$50 and that 74% of those surveyed said availability was easy to very easy and 77% that availability was stable or had become easier.<sup>2</sup> As the following chart shows, the median price of \$50 represents an increase compared to the previous year but this was merely a rise to the level of that prevailing in Sydney and indeed across nearly all the country.

**Figure 7: Median price per point of crystal methamphetamine in the ACT**



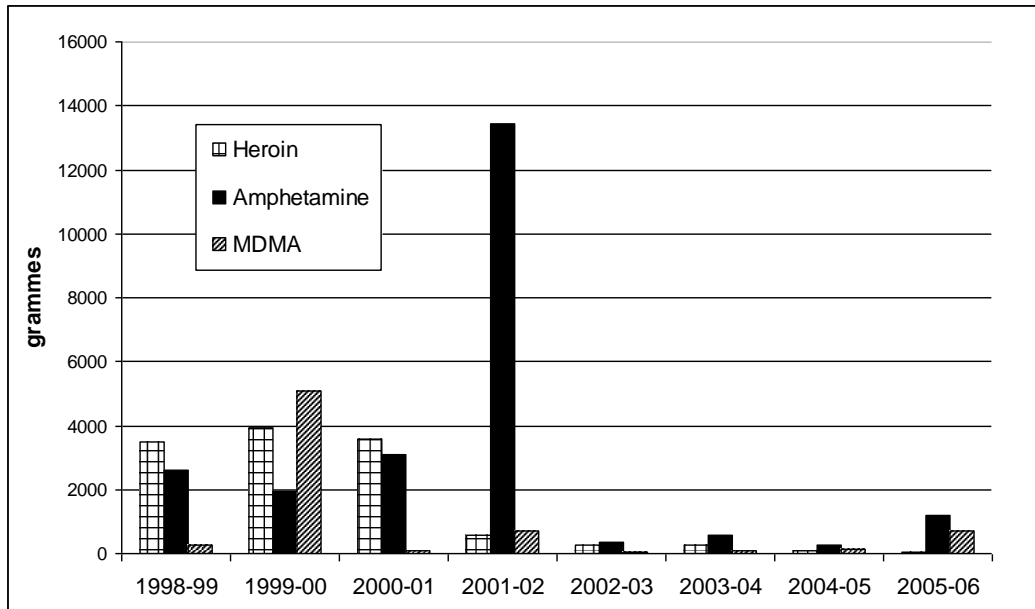
SOURCE: Ecstasy and related drugs surveys published by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.



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Law enforcement seizures in the ACT as shown in the following chart bear no direct relationship to the market indicators of fairly stable price and stable or easy availability. This invites the conclusion that law enforcement is ineffective in reducing the availability of methamphetamine in the ACT.

**Figure 8: Selected drug seizures by weight in the ACT**



SOURCE: Most recent figures for each year from ACT Policing annual reports, 1999-2000 table 4.3; 2000-01 p. 28; 2001-02 p. 30; 2002-03 table 2a.7; 2003-04 table 2.5; 2004-05 table 2.6; 2005-06 Table B.8: Drug seizures

### ALL ILLICIT DRUGS ARE NOT EQUALLY DANGEROUS

A lot of work is being put into classifying the relative harm of drugs both legal and illicit. A report by British experts published in March in *The Lancet* ranks 20 legal and illicit drugs according to their harm measured. It does so under three parameters: physical harm, dependence and social harm.<sup>3</sup> The study ranked them in the following order of harmfulness with the most harmful first:

- |                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Heroin           | 11. Cannabis          |
| 2. Cocaine          | 12. Solvents          |
| 3. Barbiturates     | 13. 4-MTA             |
| 4. Street methadone | 14. LSD               |
| 5. Alcohol          | 15. Methylphenidate   |
| 6. Ketamine         | 16. Anabolic Steroids |
| 7. Benzodiazapines  | 17. GHB               |
| 8. Amphetamine      | 18. Ecstasy           |
| 9. Tobacco          | 19. Alkyl nitrates    |
| 10. Buprenorphine   | 20. Khat              |

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### PILL TESTING

A large proportion of the contents of tablets sold as ecstasy are methamphetamine and a medley of other drugs. On the basis of the analysis of seized tablets, the 2003-04 *Illicit drug data report* states:

“It is still common for tablets marketed as ecstasy to be incorrectly represented as containing MDMA, when in fact they are compressed methylamphetamine tablets with additives such as ketamine and caffeine. The majority of ecstasy tablets seized in Australia continue to contain a variety of products, often with little or no MDMA. As such, the purity of phenethylamines fluctuates across time and jurisdictions. Tablets have been found to include such combinations as: methylamphetamine with additives such as ketamine and caffeine; amphetamine and caffeine; amphetamine and MDMA; MDMA and MDA; MDA, caffeine, and LSD; and LSD and clonazepam.”<sup>4</sup>

Other evidence for the continuing inclusion of a high proportion of methamphetamine in what is sold as ecstasy comes from the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program. It is conducted by the Institute of Criminology of police detainees in a number of sites around Australian but not the ACT.

“DUMA data indicate there is a greater discrepancy between urinalysis results and self-report data for MDMA compared to methylamphetamine. Sixty-three percent of detainees who stated they had used MDMA in the past 48 hours did not test positive to MDMA. Of those who self-reported using MDMA in the past 48 hours, 67 percent tested positive to methylamphetamine (with no positive results for MDMA) suggesting that a substantial proportion of detainees are consuming methylamphetamine, and not MDMA.”<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the important information on the composition of illicit drugs is not routinely gathered in the ACT and what is gathered for the purpose of prosecutions is not routinely published. The annual survey of trends in ecstasy and related drug markets in the ACT includes the level of phenethylamines (which include the MDMA of ecstasy) but not what other active ingredients may be.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- (a) The Government should analyse and regularly publish the contents of synthetic illicit drugs.
- (b) Prompt public warnings of drugs being passed off as less dangerous ones.

The uncertainty of what drugs contain is of concern to drug users. As the 2006 survey of trends in ecstasy and related drug markets in the ACT reports, many users of illicit drugs take steps to find out the contents of drugs they obtain.<sup>7</sup> They seek to avoid particularly dangerous drugs.

The pros and cons of drug testing were canvassed by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission in its report on amphetamines and other synthetic drugs.<sup>8</sup> That committee recommended that a feasibility study being developed in Victoria “for an illicit tablet monitoring and information service be

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monitored and, as appropriate, the outcomes independently evaluated by the appropriate Commonwealth government agency”.<sup>9</sup>

### **Recommendation:**

The ACT Government should monitor and evaluate the outcome of the experience in Victoria and elsewhere of pill testing at dance parties.

9 May 2007

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1. ACT Health, *Substance use and other health-related behaviours among ACT secondary students: results of the 2002 ACT secondary student alcohol and drug survey* (Health series no. 37, ACT Health, Canberra, December 2004), 54
  2. Matthew Dunn, Louisa Degenhardt, Gabrielle Campbell, Jessica George, Jennifer Johnston, Stuart Kinner, Allison Matthews, Jaclyn Newman and Nancy White, *Australian trends in ecstasy and related drug markets 2006: Findings from the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS)*, NDARC monograph no. 61 (National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales, 2007) pp. 62 & 68 at [http://notes.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/resources/Mono\\_7/\\$file/Mono.61.pdf](http://notes.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/resources/Mono_7/$file/Mono.61.pdf).
  3. David Nutt, Leslie A King, William Saulsbury, Colin Blakemore, “Development of a rational scale to assess the harm of drugs of potential misuse” in *The Lancet*, vol 369 pp. 1,047-53 (24 March 2007) at [www.thelancet.com](http://www.thelancet.com).
  4. Australian Crime Commission, *Illicit drug data report 2003-04* (Australian Crime Commission, Canberra, March 2005), phenethylamines 8.
  5. *Ibid.*, phenethylamines 9
  6. Gabrielle Campbell & Louisa Degenhardt, *ACT trends in ecstasy and related drug markets 2006* (Technical report no. 276, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Sydney, 2007) p. 18 at [http://notes.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/resources/TR+268-272/\\$file/TR.269.pdf](http://notes.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/resources/TR+268-272/$file/TR.269.pdf) visited 5/05/2007
  7. Gabrielle Campbell & Louisa Degenhardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 89, 93, 116.
  8. Australia, Parliament, Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission, *Inquiry into the manufacture, importation and use of amphetamines and other synthetic drugs (AOSD) in Australia* (Canberra, February 2007) §§4.59-4.71 at [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee-acc\\_ctte/aosd/report/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee-acc_ctte/aosd/report/index.htm).
  9. Australia, Parliament, Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission, *op. cit.*, §4.71.