

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAMPLE OF METHAMPHETAMINE USERS: FINDINGS FROM THE NIMAC SURVEY

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Introduction / Issues: Limited information exists about demographics and characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (hereafter Aboriginal) people who use methamphetamines in Australia. We describe results of a national survey of current methamphetamine users, which is part of a larger research project aimed at assisting Aboriginal communities address methamphetamine use.

Method / Approach: A cross-sectional survey of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people aged 16 years or older, who reported using methamphetamine at least once in the previous year was administered via Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) during 2017 and 2018. Data was collected on electronic tablets by peers or ACCHS staff, and comprised questions on demographics, methamphetamine history and use, other risk behaviours, mental health and health service utilisation.

Results: A total of 764 people participated in the survey across 11 study sites, resulting in 734 valid records. Of these 433 (59%) identified as Aboriginal and 329 (45%) were women. Most participants were resident in regional and outer regional areas reflective of study sites. Most (57.2%) reported using methamphetamine fortnightly or less, 50.1% reported smoking or inhaling, and 42.8% reporting injecting methamphetamine. Patterns of use, socioeconomic status, mental health status and severity of dependence were similar between population groups. Aboriginal participants were more likely to be living with larger groups of family members.

Discussions and Conclusions: This survey has recruited one of the largest samples of current methamphetamine users in Australia with a large proportion of Aboriginal people, using a methodology that is feasible, acceptable and repeatable.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The data provide important information about patterns of use and contexts surrounding methamphetamine use that will inform service provision at the partner ACCHS and more broadly. The data have directly informed the development of prevention and treatment approaches in later phases of the larger study.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Nil