



Australian Government
Department of Health

SECRETARY

14 December 2016

Ms Sophie Dunstone
Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Dunstone

Inquiry into crystal methamphetamine (ice)

I am pleased to provide a supplementary submission from the Department of Health (the Department) for consideration by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement following re-initiation of the inquiry into crystal methamphetamine (ice) on 12 October 2016. Terms of Reference (f) and (g) are relevant to the activities of the Department and is the focus of this supplementary submission.

The Australian Government shares the concerns about the harm ice is doing in the community. Reducing the impact of ice is a priority for the Australian Government.

The National Ice Taskforce Final Report

In April 2015, the Australian Government established a National Ice Taskforce (Taskforce), led by former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Mr Ken Lay APM. The Government asked the Taskforce to provide advice on the development of a National Ice Action Strategy.

The Taskforce consulted widely with experts and communities all around the country and received around 1,300 public submissions.

The Taskforce found that Australian families, communities and frontline service workers are struggling with the fallout from a growing number of dependent ice users. The report found the need for more coordinated and more targeted efforts to reduce the demand and supply of ice. The Taskforce acknowledged the critical role of law enforcement efforts, but

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recommended that tackling this issue must also include education, training and better access to treatment and services.

In the Final Report, the Taskforce made 38 recommendations under five key priority areas: support families, communities and frontline workers; Target prevention; Tailor services and support; Strengthen law enforcement; and Improve governance and build better evidence. These recommendations are intended to supplement current activities by all governments and the non-government sector under the National Drug Strategy. The Final Report focuses on action that the Taskforce understood to be of particular importance to make an impact on ice use, therefore complimenting investments already being made.

The Government's response to the National Ice Taskforce Final Report

In response to the 38 recommendations in the Final Report of the Taskforce, and in consultation with the Australian National Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drugs, the Commonwealth Government developed a comprehensive package of achievable actions across the five key priority areas identified in the report to tackle the problem of ice use.

In December 2015, the government announced an additional \$298.2 million over four years from 1 July 2016 towards a number of measures to reduce the impacts associated with drug and alcohol misuse to individuals, families and communities. This funding will strengthen education, prevention, treatment, support and community engagement and includes:

- \$241.5 million in funding for Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to commission further drug and alcohol treatment services to meet local need — with a focus on culturally appropriate mainstream services and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- \$24.9 million to support communities to deliver locally-based and tailored ice prevention and education activities;
- \$13 million to introduce new Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for Addiction Medicine Specialists from 1 November 2016;
- \$10.7 million to support clinical research into new treatment options, training of professionals and evaluating the effectiveness of clinical care for those using methamphetamines, which includes a new Centre for Excellence for the Clinical Management of Emerging Drugs of Concern research body; and
- \$8.1 million to more broadly improve our data sources on emerging trends in ice and other illicit drug use patterns, treatment options and early identification of newly emerging drug threats.

These new measures are in addition to the Commonwealth's already extensive efforts to combat the use of ice and other harmful drugs.

This response also underpins the National Ice Action Strategy and will fund the activities or actions under each of the five key priority areas.

The National Ice Action Strategy

The Commonwealth's new investment to tackle the problem of ice underpins the new National Ice Action Strategy, which was agreed at the 11 December 2015 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting.

The goal of the National Ice Action Strategy is to reduce the prevalence of ice use and resulting harms across the community. The National Ice Action Strategy includes achievable actions across a range of areas that will help governments, service providers and communities to work together to reduce the supply and use of ice in Australia, and the harm it causes the community.

The Commonwealth Government will provide additional investment to the National Ice Action Strategy, which will significantly strengthen the response to ice use in Australia, building upon the wide range of existing efforts already being undertaken by all governments. State and territory governments are committed to tackling drugs like ice and will continue to progress initiatives and consider making additional investments in their own jurisdictions where appropriate.

The overall objective of the National Ice Action Strategy is to prevent people from using ice in the first place, help those who are using to stop, and to reduce the harms the drug is causing to users and the community. The National Ice Action Strategy will ensure that:

- families and communities have better access to information, support and tools to help them to respond to drug and alcohol issues;
- prevention messages are targeted at high-risk populations and accurate information about drugs and alcohol is more accessible;
- early intervention and treatment services are better tailored to respond to drug and alcohol related harms and meet the needs of the populations they serve;
- law enforcement efforts are better targeted to disrupt the supply of illicit drugs; and
- better evidence is available to drive responses to the effects of drugs and alcohol in our community.

A number of initiatives under the National Ice Action Strategy require joint Commonwealth-state action, while others involve Commonwealth or state-only action.

The implementation and monitoring of the National Ice Action Strategy is the responsibility of all governments and will be a key component of the next National Drug Strategy (currently under development, see details below). All government agencies involved in the implementation of measures under the National Ice Action Strategy are engaging on a regular basis to ensure progress is on track.

Significant progress has been made in regards to the implementation of Commonwealth Health measures under the National Ice Action Strategy since the announcement in December 2015.

- Funding to PHNs to commission additional drug and alcohol treatment services commenced on 1 July 2016. PHNs have been undertaking extensive planning and consultation to increase knowledge and understanding of the drug and alcohol sector. All PHNs have completed regional Needs Assessments and Drug and Alcohol Treatment Activity Work Plans detailing the additional drug and alcohol treatment activities planned for commissioning under the announced funding. All PHNs are expected to have commissioned drug and alcohol treatment services on the ground by 1 January 2017 with some PHNs already delivering services.

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- Funding of \$19.2 million over four years has been provided to the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to establish up to 220 Local Drug Action Teams (LDATs) across Australia. By 2020, there will be up to 220 LDATs operating across Australia with 40 LDATs operational by March 2017. More information on opportunities to become involved with the national LDATs Program can be found on the ADF's website www.adf.org.au.
- Funding of \$4.6 million over four years has been provided to the ADF to expand the Good Sports Program to include a module *Tackling the Issue – Managing Illegal Drugs*. At its core, the program helps build community capacity and confidence to address issues and harms relating to illegal drugs at a local level. Sporting clubs can enrol now through the ADF's website (www.adf.org.au) to take part in the Good Sports Program.
- Funding of \$1.7 million over four years has been provided to the University of Adelaide to expand the Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) and Brief Intervention (BI) Program. This expansion will increase opportunities for effective and opportunistic screening, brief intervention and referral to treatment for substance use disorders.
- From 1 November 2016, new items were listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) for services provided by addiction medicine specialists. The existing specialist items which addiction medicine specialists can currently access do not reflect the consultative nature between health professionals involved in addiction medicine practice. The new items will enable the delivery of quality private sector services for addiction medicine and assist to meet the needs of patients who are unwilling or unable to attend public clinics. The items benefit patients in rural and regional Australia through the provision of improved rebates for telehealth and increase patient access by promoting workforce development.
- A new Centre of Excellence for the Clinical Management of Emerging Drugs of Concern will be established to support clinical research into new treatment options, training of health professionals and evaluating treatment effectiveness. A tender assessment is underway to select a preferred provider. The Centre is expected to be operational in early 2017.
- The revised and updated National Comorbidity Guidelines (*Guidelines on the management of co-occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions in alcohol and other drug treatment settings, 2nd edition*) were released on the Department of Health website in June 2016, and officially launched at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre Annual Research Symposium on 12 September 2016. Funding has also been provided for the printing and dissemination of 5000 hardcopies to drug and alcohol treatment services and tertiary education providers Australia-wide, as well as the development of an accompanying online training program. The Guidelines aim to achieve increased knowledge and awareness of co-occurring mental health conditions in drug and alcohol treatment settings, increased uptake of evidence based care, and improved health outcomes for people with co-occurring mental health and drug and alcohol conditions.
- The Government is providing funding to expand the Victorian Ambulance Project to establish and maintain a National Surveillance System for Alcohol and other Drug Misuse and Overdose. This project will provide detailed and timely data regarding alcohol and other drug acute harm and overdose, and address gaps in evidence needed to inform policy, intervention and evaluation activities at both a state and national level.

- The ‘Positive Choices’ online web-portal (www.positivechoices.org.au) was launched in December 2015 and provides access to interactive evidence-based drug education resources for parents, teachers and students. Funding of \$2.5 million has been provided for ongoing maintenance of the web-portal and for further expansion and development of new resources, including resources for Indigenous parents, teachers and students.
- The development of the online ‘Cracks in the Ice’ Community Toolkit. The website aims to improve access to evidence-based information about methamphetamine, raise awareness about the potential harms and mental health problems associated with methamphetamine use, and provide information about how to access services and/or support. While the website is currently in development individuals can subscribe at cracksintheice.org.au to be notified once the Cracks in the Ice Community Toolkit website has been launched.
- On 28 October 2016, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre launched the expanded Counselling Online program available at www.counsellingonline.org.au to provide a national online counselling service for people affected by substance misuse. The Counselling Online program aims to improve access to online interventions and improve health outcomes for people affected by drug and alcohol misuse.
- On 11 December 2015, COAG agreed to establish a new Ministerial Drug and Alcohol Forum (MDAF) to oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of Australia’s national drug policy framework, including the NIAS and that it will report directly to COAG. Following final endorsement of the proposed governance arrangements through the COAG Health Council (7 October 2016) and the COAG Law, Crime and Community Safety Council (21 October 2016), planning for the first MDAF meeting is underway. Draft Terms of Reference and initial work plan recommendations were agreed at the first meeting of the supporting National Drug Strategy Committee of senior officials on 30 November 2016.

The Department is responsible for coordinating the whole of government’s response for the monitoring and reporting activities under the National Ice Action Strategy and the first of four Annual Progress Reports is expected to go to COAG in the first quarter of 2017.

Any other developments relating to crystal methamphetamine

The National Drug Strategy 2015–2025

The National Drug Strategy is a joint national framework overseen by the states and territories with the Commonwealth. New national alcohol and drug governance arrangements have delayed the finalisation of the next iteration of the National Drug Strategy. However, until the next National Drug Strategy is finalised, the current National Drug Strategy remains Australia’s national drug policy framework.

Review and approval of the next iteration of the National Drug Strategy will be a priority action of the MDAF.

National Drugs Campaign

Planning and development for the next phase of the National Drugs Campaign (NDC) is currently underway.

Commission on Narcotic Drugs

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One of Australia's objectives at recent sessions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) has been to promote international cooperation in dealing with new psychoactive substances (NPS) and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), including methamphetamine.

Australia was successful in having its resolution on 'Promoting international cooperation in responding to new psychoactive substances and amphetamine-type stimulants, including methamphetamine' adopted by the CND at its 58th session in March 2015. The resolution sought to keep ATS issues at the forefront of the CND and enhance the scope of these considerations to include, in particular, methamphetamine. The resolution emphasised the importance of combining regulatory and treatment delivery responses to address emerging illicit drug issues and improve health outcomes.

At CND59, in March 2016, the Australian delegation led negotiation on a resolution "Promotion of measures to target new psychoactive substances and amphetamine-type stimulants". The resolution focused on: international co-operation in monitoring the movement of precursor chemicals used in the manufacture of NPS and ATS; sharing national approaches to reducing access to prevalent, persistent and harmful NPS that remain outside the system of international scheduling; and supporting the WHO to prioritise assessments of NPS when making scheduling recommendations. Australia also hosted a side event on addressing methamphetamine-related harms, featuring the work of the National Ice Taskforce and the National Ice Action Strategy at CND59.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bowles PSM