ICE USE AMONG RURAL AUSSIES DOUBLES RATES IN METRO AREAS
Study provides first evidence of alarming methamphetamine burden in rural areas

(Sydney: Monday 31 October 2016) Concerns that methamphetamine use among rural Australians is on the rise have now been confirmed with the first documented evidence released today at the APSAD Scientific Alcohol and Drugs Conference.

The study – the most detailed examination to date – found lifetime and recent methamphetamine and recent crystal methamphetamine (ice) use is significantly higher among rural than other Australians, at rates double or more.

In addition, recent crystal methamphetamine use in rural Australia has more than doubled since 2007 – increasing by 150 per cent from 0.8 per cent to 2.0 per cent of people reporting lifetime and recent use.

“For some time now there have been anecdotal reports suggesting a high and increasing level of methamphetamine use in rural Australia, but this was unsupported by evidence. Now we have this proof, the next challenge is to understand why and determine how we can best tackle this problem,” said Professor Ann Roche, Director of the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction at Flinders University.

Significantly, more rural men and employed rural Australians use methamphetamine than their city, regional or Australian counterparts, with use most prevalent in men aged 18-25 years.

Recent methamphetamine use in rural teens aged 14-17 years also appears to be much higher than in urban areas.

The study has raised particular concerns given rural Australians already have poorer health outcomes, with shorter life expectancies and significantly higher mortality rates, mental illness, chronic disease, family and domestic violence and more.

“A complex, variable picture has emerged of methamphetamine use across the country,” said Professor Roche. “What is clear is that there has been a disproportionally larger increase in the misuse of methamphetamine, including crystal methamphetamine, in rural locations compared to other Australian locations.

“At the same time, it’s very concerning there has been no increase in the number of people accessing help in rural areas. We need to urgently establish whether existing support services simply don’t have the capacity to deal with demand for drug treatment, or whether there are other significant reasons.”

Contributing factors to rural drug problems include lower educational attainment, low socio-economic status, higher unemployment, isolation and the deliberate targeting of rural communities by illegal distribution networks.
“Our findings warrant targeted attention, especially given the pre-existing health and social vulnerabilities of rural Australians. We need tailored strategies and interventions to address this growing health problem,” said Professor Roche.

The research is being presented for the first time at the annual summit of the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD), the APSAD Scientific Alcohol and Drugs Conference, held in Sydney from 30 October to 2 November.

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RELATED RESEARCH MONDAY
- **Ice campaign/youth**: Did the federal government’s campaign, ‘What are you doing on ice’ really work?
- **Barriers to treatment**: What are the most significant obstacles preventing people seeking treatment for their methamphetamine use? *Available upon request*
- **Women/Methamphetamines**: A look at the specific treatment barriers faced by women and how to overcome them.
- **The global burden of methamphetamine disorders**: An overview of the proportion of disease burden attributable to substance use disorders and differences in the distribution and burden of amphetamine use disorders between countries, age, sex, and year.
- **New treatment for methamphetamine addiction**: Treatment options for methamphetamine dependence are currently limited, but a drug licensed in Australia for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder could be an important innovation. *Available upon request*
- **Comorbid mental and substance use disorders**: The top 10 causes of burden of disease in young Australians (15-24 years) are dominated by mental health and substance use disorders.

OTHER MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS
- Opening by The Hon. (Pru) Prudence Jane Goward, MP NSW Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, and Assistant Minister for Health
- Cannabis as Medicine in Australia: Where are we now, where are we heading to, where might we end up? Professor Nicholas Lintzeris
- Friend or Enemy? Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Gallop, Director, Graduate School of Government, University of Sydney and Former Premier of Western Australia

About APSAD Sydney 2016
The APSAD Scientific Alcohol and Drugs Conference is the southern hemisphere’s largest summit on alcohol and other drugs attracting leading researchers, clinicians, policy makers and community representatives from across the region. The Conference is run by the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD), Asia Pacific’s leading multidisciplinary organisation for professionals involved in the alcohol and other drug field.

- **View the APSAD Sydney 2016 Conference Program**
- **Read more about the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD)**
- **Contact Petrana Lorenz to arrange an interview or find out about other key topics.**

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