MEDIA RELEASE
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Use and possession offences by drug type in Victoria

The Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) has today released its fifth ‘in brief’ research paper titled What drug types drove increases in drug use and possession offences in Victoria over the past decade? The research shows that while cannabis accounted for almost 40% of all drug use and possession offences recorded in the year to March 2016, over the past five years there have been significant increases in the rates of ecstasy, methamphetamine, prescription and ‘other’ drug offences. The only decrease over the past five years was in the rate of use or possess amphetamine offences. Use and possession of heroin offences remained stable from 2006 to 2016.

CSA Chief Statistician Fiona Dowsley said that while previous CSA research has shown that rates of drug use and possession offences increased in regional Victoria at a faster rate than elsewhere in the state, this new research highlights which drug types drove those changes.

“In 2012, cannabis was the only drug type that had higher rates of offending in regional Victoria compared to metropolitan Melbourne. Over the past five years however, we have seen the rates of amphetamine, ecstasy, methamphetamine and prescription drug use and possession offences in regional centres overtake those seen in Melbourne.”

In addition, the paper released today provides insight into the differences in the characteristics of offenders recorded for use and possession offences for different drug types. Approximately 1 in 5 drug use and possession offenders were female. Additionally, at the time of their first offence cannabis users were more likely to be either younger (aged 10-19) or older (45 or older), while ecstasy offenders were more likely to be 20 to 29 years of age. Heroin, methamphetamine, and prescription drug offenders were more likely to be over 25 when they first offended.


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WHAT DRUG TYPES DROVE INCREASES IN DRUG USE AND POSSESSION OFFENCES IN VICTORIA OVER THE PAST DECADE?

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Drug use and possession offences by drug type

- There were statistically significant increases for drug use and possession offences for most drug types over the past decade.
- The largest average annual increase was recorded for methamphetamine (up 114.6% on average per year), followed by ‘other’ (+26.8%), prescription drugs (+23.9%), ecstasy (+13.0%), and cannabis (+5.7%).
- The only drug types which did not increase significantly were amphetamines and heroin, which remained stable over the past ten years.
- As a proportion of all drug use and possession offences, methamphetamine has increased from 0.1% of all offences in 2006 to 27% of all offences in 2016.

Geographic location of offences by drug type

- By the year to March 2016, only two drug type categories (heroin and ‘other’) had a higher rate of drug use and possession offences in metropolitan Melbourne compared to regional Victoria.
- The rate of cannabis use and possession offences has been higher in both rural and regional Victoria (compared to metropolitan Melbourne) for most of the past ten years.

Characteristics of alleged offenders

- Cannabis offenders were more likely to be either younger (between 10 and 19) or older (45 or older) at the time of their first offence than other drug offenders. On the other hand, those recorded for ecstasy offences were more likely to be aged 20 to 29 when they first had a drug offence, and heroin, methamphetamine and prescription drug offenders were more likely to be 25 or older.
- A higher percentage of heroin (22.5%), methamphetamine (22.1%), and prescription drug (21.8%) offenders were female compared to the overall percentage of alleged drug use and possession offenders who were female (19.0%).
- Conversely, males were more likely to be cannabis (82.0%) and ecstasy (83.3%) offenders compared to the overall percentage of offenders who were male (81.0%).
- 74.1% of all alleged drug use and possession offenders were recorded as using just one drug type.
- Around 72% of cannabis offenders were recorded for using just that drug.
- On the other hand, prescription drug offenders were the most likely to use or possess multiple drug types, with only 21% recorded for just prescription drug offences and almost half (48%) recorded for at least two other drug types, alongside prescription drugs.