

STIGMA AND CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE ('ICE') USE IN AUSTRALIA

WHAT IS STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION?

Stigma is often described as a mark of disgrace that's applied to people when something about them, or the way they live, is viewed and judged negatively by others. This leads them to be treated negatively or discriminated against by others as a result. Discrimination can include things like harassment, bullying, social exclusion, aggression, and violence.

STIGMA AND CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE ('ICE') USE

People who use illegal drugs (including crystal methamphetamine) can be affected by stigma and discrimination, particularly if they experience problems with drug use or develop a dependence on drugs.

A **recent survey** of over 2000 people conducted by the *Cracks in the Ice* team indicated that stigmatising attitudes towards people who use crystal methamphetamine are common in Australia. It also showed many Australians who use crystal methamphetamine experience discrimination in everyday life.

Common attitudes towards people who use crystal methamphetamine in Australia found in the survey included:



% of the 1544 people surveyed who hadn't used crystal methamphetamine before

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION?

Stigma and discrimination can impact the wellbeing of people who use drugs like crystal methamphetamine in several ways.

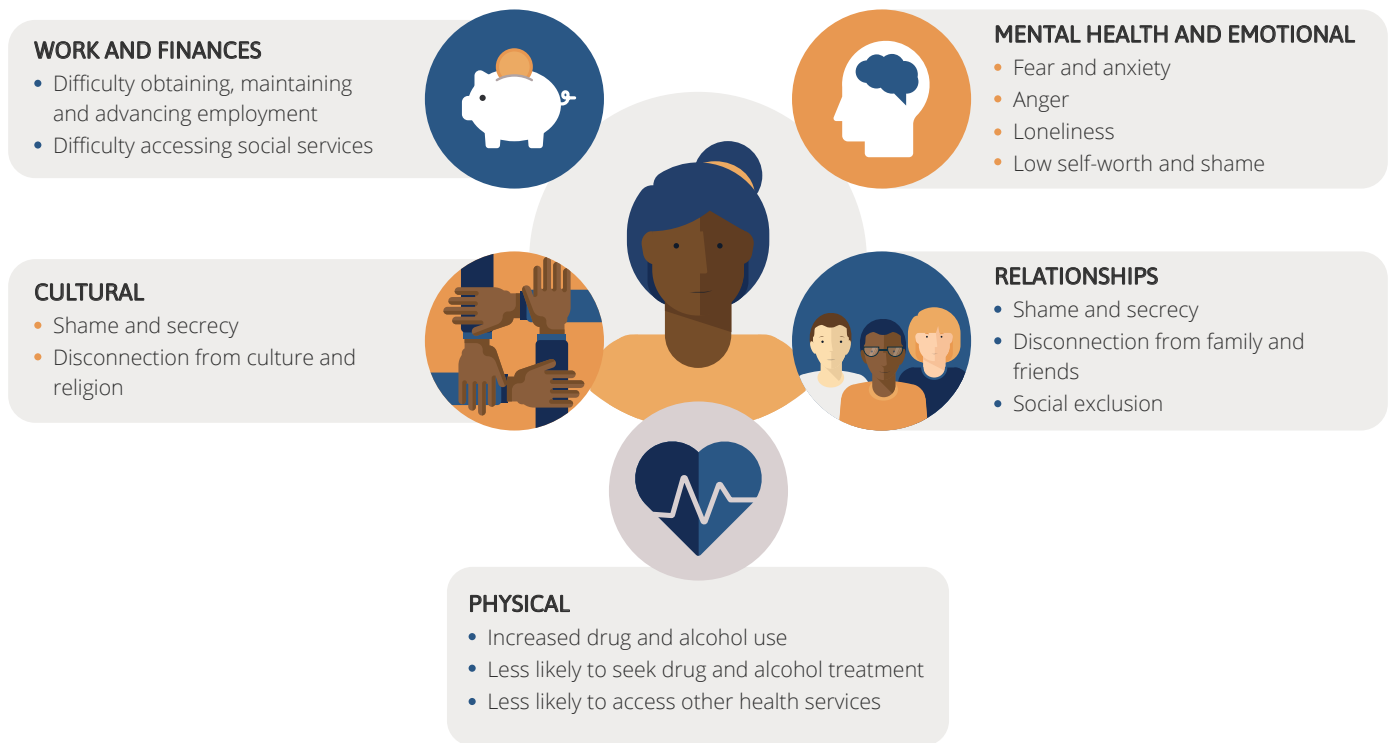
Stigma and discrimination can lead people to experience powerful feelings of fear, anger, loneliness, and hopelessness. Sometimes people will also feel other emotions such as shame, embarrassment, and self-hate if they start to believe the negative views others have of them. This experience can sometimes be called self-stigma or internalised stigma.

Fear of being stigmatised or discriminated against can stop people seeking treatment and support from health and social services when they experience problems with drug use. Sometimes people who use drugs also end up using them in greater amounts or more frequently as a way of coping with the experience of being stigmatised.

A recent study of a small sample of Australians who have used crystal methamphetamine showed that the specific stigma attached to crystal methamphetamine use in Australia can have serious impacts. Specifically, it found that negative perceptions of crystal methamphetamine use in Australian society and in the media lowered participants' self-esteem and their sense of worth, isolated them from their family and friends, and restricted their job prospects.

Family and friends can also experience stigma and discrimination due to a loved one's use of crystal methamphetamine. Sometimes these experiences can cause difficulties and even breakdowns in relationships.

More impacts are summarised in the infographic below:



HOW DO WE REDUCE STIGMA?

There are many steps we can take to reduce the stigma surrounding crystal methamphetamine and other drug use in Australia:

- **Get the facts about crystal methamphetamine use in Australia and avoid reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions.** To check your own misconceptions and knowledge about crystal methamphetamine take the [Cracks in the Ice quiz](#) or read through the common myths listed below.
- **Use person-centred language** when talking about people who use crystal methamphetamine or other drugs (e.g. “person who uses crystal methamphetamine” not “ice user/addict”). This can help others to see the whole person rather than just their use of drugs.
- **Increase your understanding of the experiences and perspectives of people who use crystal methamphetamine.** Watch *The Truth About Ice* and *You Can't Ask That* videos shown below. Visit *Cracks in the Ice* to learn about the common reasons why people use drugs like crystal methamphetamine.

- **Provide nonjudgmental support to loved ones who you think might be having problems with crystal methamphetamine or other drug use.** Learn more about how to do this on *Cracks in the Ice*. The most important thing is to gently encourage them to seek support and remind them that there is no shame in asking for help.
- **Engage with people who have lived experience of alcohol and other drug use in your work.** If you work with people who use crystal methamphetamine or other drugs, drawing from the expertise of people with lived experience brings a critical perspective to clinical work.
- **Share this factsheet with others to spread the word and help stop stigma.** Only through taking steps together will we be able to put a stop to the stigma attached to crystal methamphetamine use in Australia and help people who use these drugs feel safe and supported.

CHECK YOUR OWN MISCONCEPTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE OF CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO USE CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE



MYTH

FACT

Australia is in the grip of an “ice” epidemic.

Although the effects of crystal methamphetamine use can be serious, crystal methamphetamine use is far less common than other illicit substances like cannabis (marijuana) and ecstasy (MDMA).

It is impossible to recover from crystal methamphetamine dependence.

While challenging, with the right treatment and support, recovery from crystal methamphetamine dependence is possible. There are services available to those seeking help and advice on their drug use.

Crystal methamphetamine will cause psychosis and violence in all people.

Most people who use crystal methamphetamine will not experience psychosis or become violent. These are only potential side effects of using the drug and are more likely to affect people who use the drug regularly or heavily.

If you try crystal methamphetamine once, you’re hooked.

Although crystal methamphetamine is a powerful drug that can cause dependence in some people, not all Australians who use it become dependent on the drug.

People who use crystal methamphetamine differ in appearance to others in the community.

People who use crystal methamphetamine don’t look any different from others in the community.

People using crystal methamphetamine never want treatment.

People who use crystal methamphetamine do access treatment, particularly when it’s in a form that’s appropriate for them and targets the multiple factors that lead to crystal methamphetamine use and its impacts on their life.

Adapted from **Crystal Methamphetamine In The Media: A guide to non-stigmatising and accurate reporting**

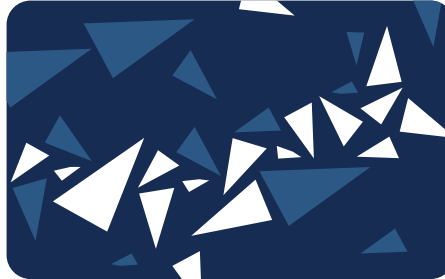
LEARN MORE ABOUT CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE AND THE EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WHO USE IT

Ice Breaker

Using ice can lead to insomnia

True False

[Take the full quiz](#)



TEST YOURSELF BY TAKING
THE CRACKS IN THE ICE QUIZ



REFERENCES:

1. Alcohol and Drug Foundation. (2019). Understanding the impact of stigma.
2. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). (2017). You Can't Ask That (Ice Users) [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://iview.abc.net.au/video/LE1617H007S00>
3. Axelsson, M., & Snell, T. L. (2021). Breaking the ice: narratives of recovery from crystal methamphetamine. *Australian Psychologist*, 56(1), 81-92. doi:10.1080/00050067.2021.1893600
4. Cama, E., Brener, L., Wilson, H., & von Hippel, C. (2016). Internalized Stigma Among People Who Inject Drugs. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 51(12), 1664-1668. doi:10.1080/10826084.2016.1188951
5. Corrigan, P. W., Kuwabara, S. A., & O'Shaughnessy, J. (2009). The Public Stigma of Mental Illness and Drug Addiction. *Journal of Social Work*, 9(2), 139-147. doi:10.1177/1468017308101818
6. Crisp, A., Gelder, M., Goddard, E., & Meltzer, H. (2005). Stigmatization of people with mental illnesses: a follow-up study within the Changing Minds campaign of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. *World psychiatry*, 4(2), 106.
7. Deen, H., Kershaw, S., Newton, N., Stapinski, L., Birrell, L., Debenham, J., . . . Chapman, C. (2021). Stigma, discrimination and crystal methamphetamine ('ice'): Current attitudes in Australia. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 87, 102982. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102982
8. Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
9. Luoma, J. B., Twohig, M. P., Waltz, T., Hayes, S. C., Roget, N., Padilla, M., & Fisher, G. (2007). An investigation of stigma in individuals receiving treatment for substance abuse. *Addict Behav*, 32(7), 1331-1346. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2006.09.008
10. Regen, M., Murphy, S., & Murphy, T. (2002). Drug users' lay consultation processes: symptom identification and management. *Advances in Medical Sociology*, 8, 323-341.
11. Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). (2017, December). The Truth About Ice [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2017/12/05/busting-methamphetamine-myths-truth-about-ice>