

Wastewater drug monitoring program provides insight into Australia's drug consumption

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Queensland has some of the highest fentanyl consumption and MDA excretion levels in the country, according to the latest report by [The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission](#) (ACIC).

The eighth report has been released on the same day as a new contract was signed between The University of Queensland and the ACIC for the delivery of The National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program (NWDMP).

Key results:

The NWDMP April 2019 results, compared to December 2018, for Queensland show that:

- average nicotine, alcohol, methylamphetamine, cocaine and heroin consumption increased in both capital city and regional sites
- average methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA) excretion decreased in both capital city and regional sites
- average oxycodone and fentanyl consumption decreased in both capital city and regional sites
- average cannabis consumption decreased in the capital city site and increased in regional sites.

ACIC Chief Executive Officer Mr Michael Phelan APM and UQ's Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences Associate Dean (Research) Professor Christina Lee signed the \$4.8 million contract to extend the collaboration for a further four years.

The wastewater data analysis conducted by UQ's Queensland Alliance for Environmental Health Sciences (QAEHS) and The University of

South Australia (UniSA) enables ACIC to estimate the annual national consumption of illicit drugs and legal drugs that can be abused in Australia.

QAEHS Director Professor Kevin Thomas said the team had worked closely with ACIC and UniSA since the program commenced in 2016 to provide eight publicly released reports so far.

"To conduct the analysis we rely heavily on the cooperation from [wastewater treatment plants](#) to provide samples that are collected, frozen and mailed to our labs," Professor Thomas said.

"Using cutting-edge equipment and innovative techniques we can identify which drugs are used and accurately measure the level of [drug](#) use and the areas that have the highest consumption.

"These data are used to identify areas where appropriate responses can be taken, including targeted prevention and treatment programs.

"The results play a significant role in shaping future regional and national policies to reduce drug harm."

The eighth NWDMP report reveals that across the three capital city and seven regional sites monitored in April 2019, Queensland together with South Australia had the highest average regional consumption and second highest capital city consumption of fentanyl nationally.

Queensland also had the highest average regional excretion of MDA, second highest average capital [city](#) and regional consumption of methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) and the second highest average regional consumption of cocaine in the country.

ACIC Chief Executive Officer Mr Michael Phelan APM said that much

of the harm that Australians suffered at the hands of organized crime was due to the illicit drug trade.

"Extending this valuable program to provide a further four years of drug [consumption](#) data will enable [law enforcement](#), policy, education, regulatory and health agencies to build a more comprehensive picture of drug use in Australia," Mr Phelan said.

"The ACIC would like to acknowledge the valuable support and specialist expertise of The University of Queensland and the University of South Australia, which provide the NWDMP with leading-edge, coordinated national research on illicit and licit drugs and the wastewater treatment plant operators which provide invaluable contributions to the program."

Provided by University of Queensland

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