

# Methamphetamine-related deaths in Australia quadrupled over 20 years, study finds

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A new study has found there has been a four-fold increase in methamphetamine-related deaths in Australia during the last two decades. The findings are [published](#) in the *International Journal of Drug Policy*.

Australia has one of the highest rates of amphetamine dependence globally, with a 2019 government survey estimating more than 5% of Australians have used amphetamines at some point in their life. However, this figure is suspected to be much higher.

The study identified the most significant rise in deaths between 2009 and 2016, peaking at a record high of 2.4 deaths per 100,000 in 2020.

While there has been a decrease in people taking amphetamines over time, regular use among those who use it, and among people who inject drugs, has risen significantly.

Methamphetamine is the predominant form of amphetamine used in Australia.

First author of "20-year trends in Australian [methamphetamine](#)-related deaths, 2001–2020" and Burnet Ph.D. candidate, Oisin Stronach, said the most common cause of methamphetamine-related death in Australia was methamphetamine poisoning.

"The sharp rise in methamphetamine poisoning deaths highlights the urgent need for effective medications to treat methamphetamine dependence and more harm reduction programs," he said.

"There was a notable increase in deaths due to intentional self-harm between 2009–2014, highlighting the mental health issues experienced among people who use methamphetamines."

Previous Australian research on methamphetamine-related deaths has been limited to shorter timeframes, or a single cause of [death](#).

This study extends earlier research by exploring trends nationally over 20 years from 2001 to 2020 to provide a comprehensive picture of methamphetamine-related deaths over time and by cause in Australia.

"Methamphetamine puts a strain on the heart and [blood vessels](#) by quickly raising [heart rate](#) and [blood pressure](#), which can lead to [heart problems](#)," Mr. Stronach said.

"Research showed a large proportion of people who died from methamphetamine-related causes have pre-existing [heart disease](#)."

The diverse nature of methamphetamine-related deaths highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates prevention, treatment, and harm reduction.

These can include access to safe injecting facilities, engaging with older people who use methamphetamine, more mental health support and pharmacotherapy options to treat dependency and withdrawal.

**More information:** Oisín Stronach et al, 20-year trends in Australian methamphetamine-related deaths, 2001–2020, *International Journal of Drug Policy* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugpo.2024.104548](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2024.104548)

Provided by Burnet Institute

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