



Research in Practice

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Increase in use of methamphetamine

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Key findings

- Recent data from the Australian Institute of Criminology's Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program shows an increase in the use of methamphetamine among police detainees.
- Voluntary urinalysis undertaken by detainees shows that in the first three-quarters of 2011, 21 percent of police detainees tested positive to methamphetamine—up from 16 percent in 2010 and 13 percent in 2009.
- Trend analysis suggests that the continuing decline in methamphetamine use since 2004 may have ended, with rates of use among police detainees increasing in both 2010 and 2011.
- Self-report data also indicates that methamphetamine is considered by users to be higher in quality and easier to obtain in 2011 compared with earlier years. Methamphetamine users also report an increase in the number of people selling the drug.
- These data are consistent with findings recently released by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (Stafford & Burns 2011) and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2011).

What is DUMA?

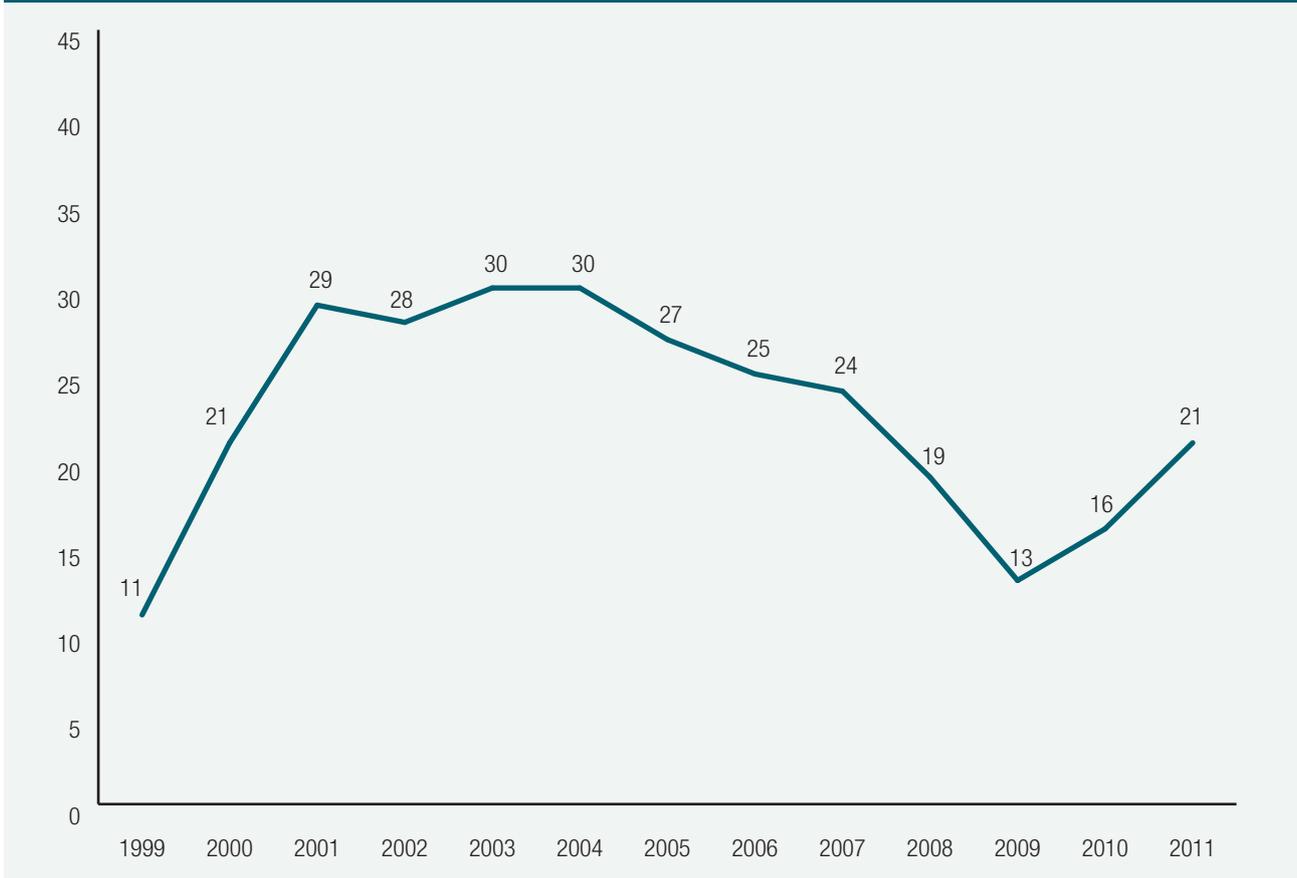
Commencing in 1999, the DUMA program is Australia's largest and longest running data collection system on drugs and offending, and captures information on more than 4,000 alleged offenders (not yet convicted) each year across nine locations throughout the country. DUMA currently operates from sites in New South Wales (Bankstown, Parramatta and Kings Cross), Queensland (Southport and Brisbane), Western Australia (East Perth), South Australia (Adelaide) Victoria (Footscray) and the Northern Territory (Darwin) and is comprised of a two-staged methodology using an interviewer-administered self-report survey, followed by voluntary urine testing. DUMA is unique in this regard, with urinalysis providing a reliable and objective measure of the prevalence of very recent drug use among the police detainee sample. Regular analysis of DUMA data facilitates ongoing monitoring of drug use rates, including the timely provision of data to local law enforcement, health and criminal justice practitioners. For further information about the DUMA program see Gaffney et al. 2010.

Results

Between 1999 and 2011, DUMA program staff interviewed 42,079 adult police detainees. Of these, 32,776 (78%) voluntarily provided a urine sample that was later tested for a range of different drug classes, including methamphetamine. The annual results, aggregated across all sites, show that methamphetamine use by police detainees more than doubled (from 11 to 29%) in the three years between 1999 and 2001. After 2001, rates of use stabilised at approximately 30 percent of detainees until 2005 when they began to decline. Five years later, in 2009, after a consistent yearly decline, the prevalence of methamphetamine use was recorded as 13 percent—the lowest proportion since 1999. Since then, however, rates of use have increased to 16 percent in 2010 and then to 21 percent in 2011, based on data from the first three quarters (see Figure 1).

In addition to urinalysis data, DUMA interviewers also collect a range of key drug use and drug market indicators in an effort to better understand the nature and context of local drug markets. The first of these seeks to measure the extent to which detainees perceive changes in the availability of methamphetamine by asking how easy it is to get now compared with

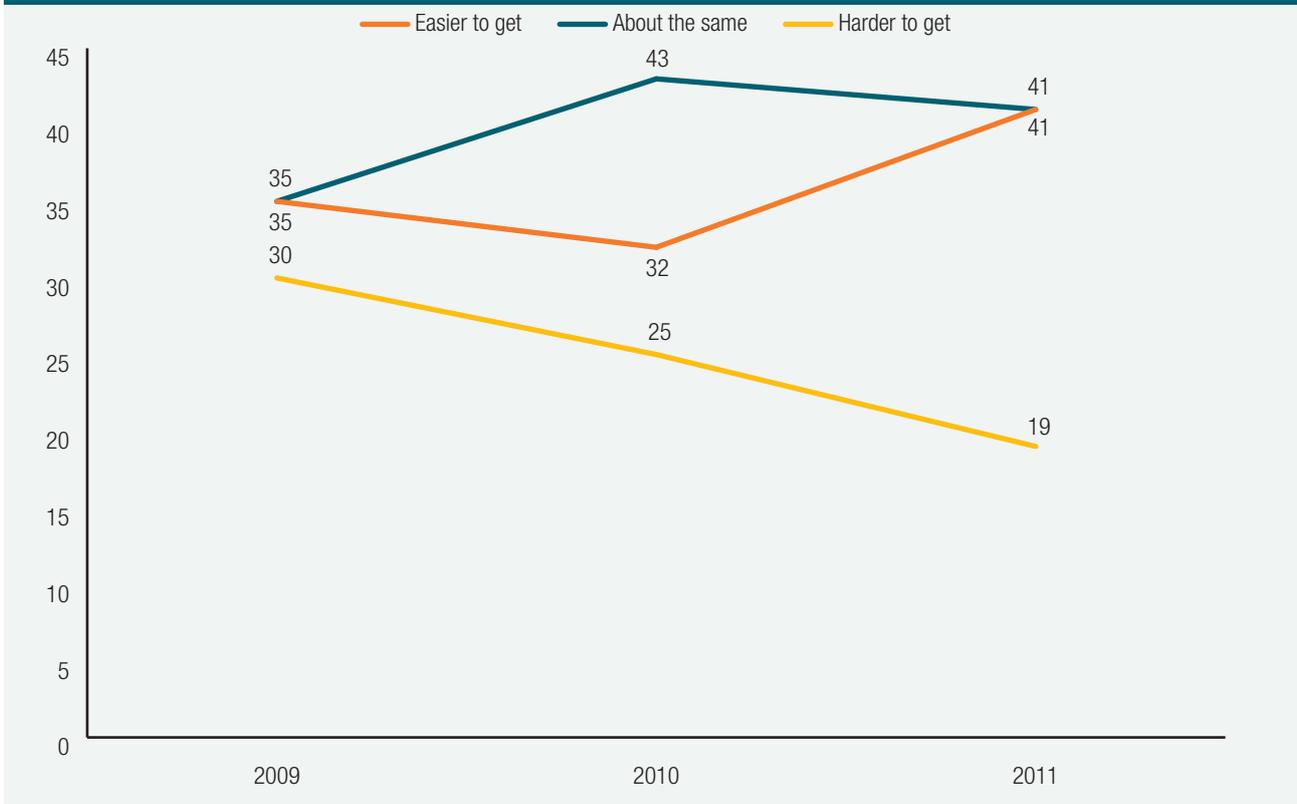
Figure 1 Proportion of detainees who tested positive to methamphetamine (%)



Note: Data for 2011 only include the first 3 quarters of the year, as the fourth quarter was yet to be collected at the time of analysis

Source: AIC DUMA collection 1999–2011 [computer file]

Figure 2 Changes in the perceived level of ease in obtaining methamphetamine, 2009–11 (%)



Note: While the DUMA questionnaire asks police detainees about 'methamphetamine', the information provided by detainees may also relate to other types of amphetamines

Source: AIC DUMA collection 1999–2011 [computer file]

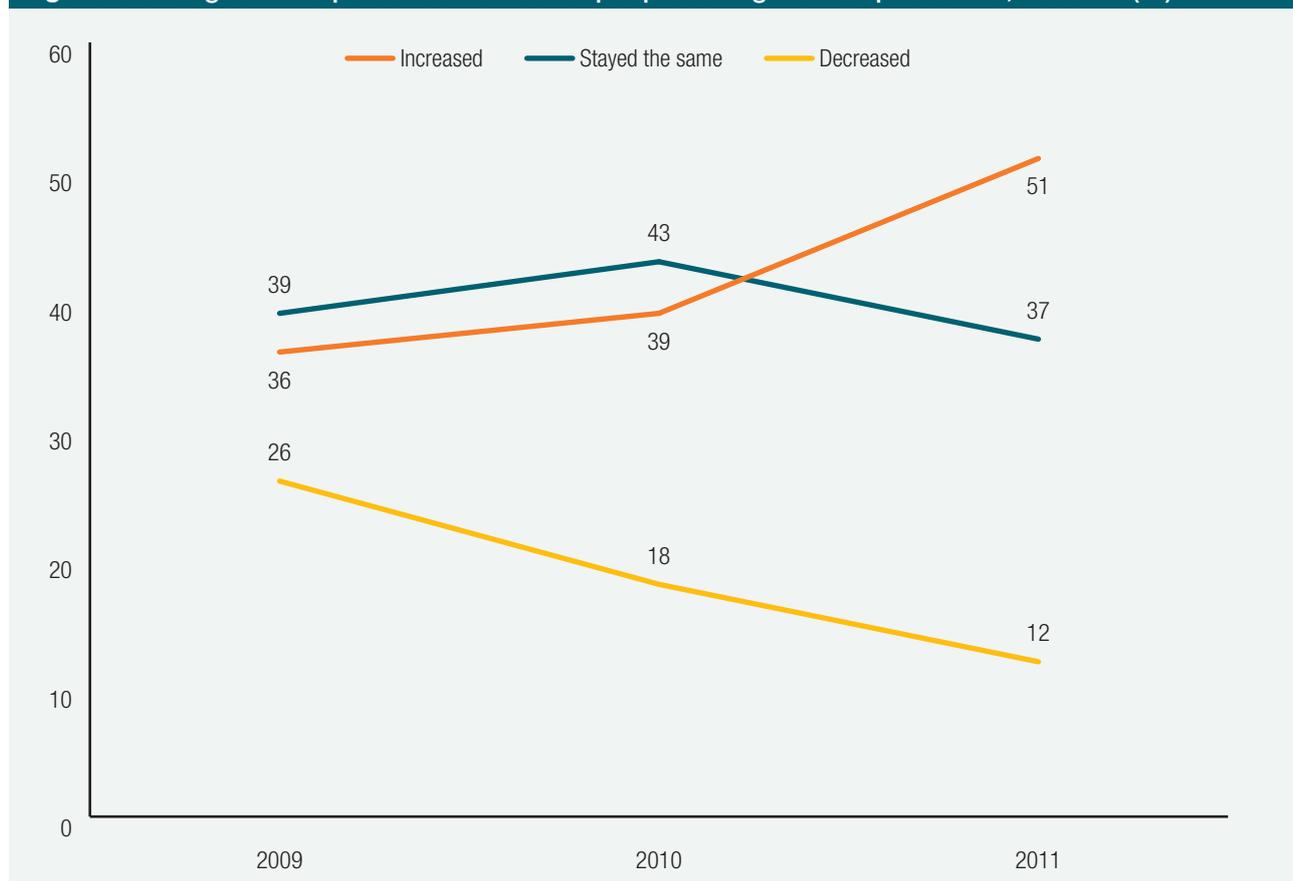
three months ago. The proportion of detainees who reported that methamphetamine was 'easier to get' increased from 35 percent in 2009 to 41 percent in 2011, whereas the proportion who said it was 'harder to get' decreased substantially between 2009 and 2011 from 30 percent to 19 percent (see Figure 2). The proportion of detainees who reported that the availability of methamphetamine was 'about the same' also increased from 35 percent in 2009 to 41 percent in 2011. Overall, these data appear to indicate a generalised increase in the availability of methamphetamine because not only are more detainees in 2011 reporting that methamphetamine is easier to get, but substantially fewer have reported difficulty in obtaining methamphetamine (see Figure 2).

Detainees were also asked if the number of people selling methamphetamine had changed over the past three months. In 2011, a larger proportion of detainees believed that there were more dealers selling the drug than was reported in 2010 and 2009. Specifically, in

2011, half of all methamphetamine users (51%) believed that the number of people selling the drug had 'increased' recently, compared with only 39 percent of detainees in 2010 and 36 percent in 2009. Conversely, significantly fewer detainees reported that the number of people selling methamphetamine had 'decreased' recently—12 percent in 2011, down from 26 percent in 2009 (see Figure 3).

Finally, police detainees who used methamphetamine were asked whether the quality of methamphetamine had changed in the previous three months. The proportion who believed the quality of methamphetamine had improved increased from 18 percent in 2009 to 26 percent in 2011, whereas the proportion who believed the quality had declined fell by almost a third from 47 percent in 2009 to 30 percent in 2011 (see Figure 4). The proportion who said the quality of methamphetamine had 'stayed the same' also increased substantially from 19 percent in 2009 to 28 percent in 2011 (see Figure 4).

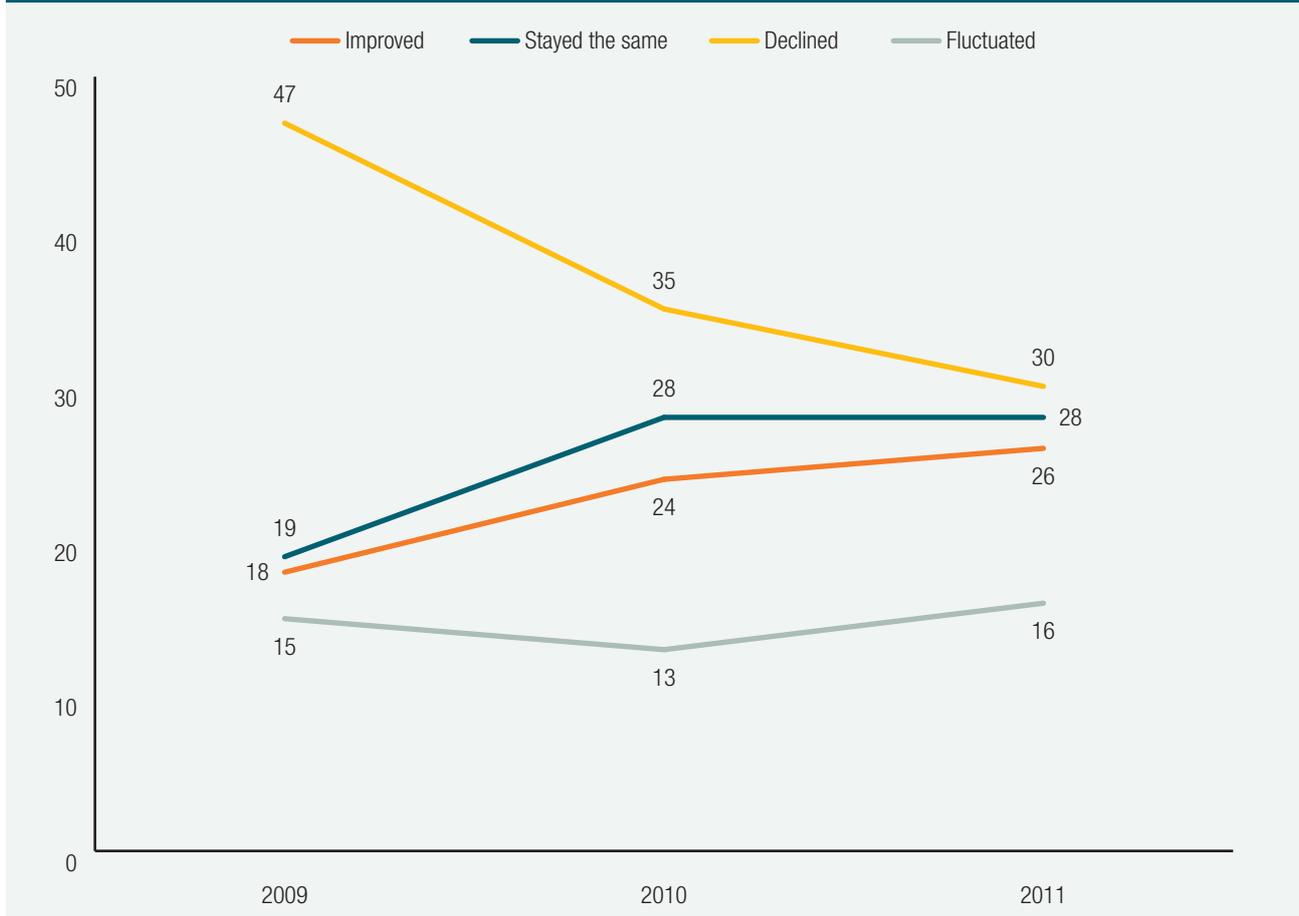
Figure 3 Changes in the perceived number of people selling methamphetamine, 2009–11 (%)



Note: While the DUMA questionnaire asks police detainees about 'methamphetamine', the information provided by detainees may also relate to other types of amphetamines

Source: AIC DUMA collection 1999–2011 [computer file]

Figure 4 Changes in the perceived quality of methamphetamine, 2009–11 (%)



Note: While the DUMA questionnaire asks police detainees about ‘methamphetamine’, the information provided by detainees may also relate to other types of amphetamines

Source: AIC DUMA collection 1999–2011 [computer file]

Discussion

The Australian Institute of Criminology analysed urinalysis results and self-report data from a sample of police detainees interviewed as part of the DUMA program. Trend analysis demonstrates that after falling to a low of 13 percent in 2009, methamphetamine use among police detainees has once again increased—with 21 percent of detainees reporting methamphetamine use, according to data collected so far in 2011. Self-report data suggests that methamphetamine has become easier to obtain, that more dealers are selling the drug and that the quality is perceived to have improved.

It is important to note that these DUMA findings are consistent with recently released data from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, which also found that use of crystal methamphetamine/ice among a sample of regular injecting drug users increased from 39 percent in 2010 to 45 percent in 2011 (Stafford & Burns 2011). In addition, these

DUMA findings provide general support for conclusions reached in another report released earlier this year by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which indicated that use of amphetamine-type substances has been increasing in a number of countries throughout the world (UNODC 2011). In this context, DUMA data provide an invaluable insight into patterns and changes in local drug market activity.

References

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