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An Australian clinical research priority setting study
for substance use disorder due to methamphetamine and
emerging drugs of concern

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Methamphetamine and Emerging Drugs Working Group*

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Background

- In April 2015, the Australian government established a 'National Ice Taskforce' to report actions required to address increasing crystal methamphetamine use in Australia
- *The National Ice Action Strategy*¹ was published with the Taskforce's recommendations
- The overall objectives of the strategy:
 - Prevent people from using crystal methamphetamine
 - Help those who are using to stop
 - Reduce the harms crystal methamphetamine is causing to consumers and the community
- Amongst recommendations: ensure better evidence is available to drive Australia's responses to crystal methamphetamine

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Background

- A funded activity of *The National Ice Action Strategy* was the establishment of a National Centre for Clinical Excellence in treatment, research and training for emerging drugs of concern, with an initial focus on 'ice'
- NCCRED was funded to four consortium partners, three academic and one national healthcare provider:
 - The National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA, Flinders University)
 - The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC, University of New South Wales)
 - The National Drug Research Institute (NDRI, Curtin University)
 - St Vincent's Health Australia



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Priority Setting

- In 2018, NCCRED formally established - Director appointed under the governance of a Board of Management and Independent Chair
- A key performance indicator for the Centre is to develop, implement, support, and disseminate innovative and effective evidence-based treatment interventions
 - Crucial to achieving this aim, is the conduct of clinical trials
- Given restricted resources in the public research setting, a priority setting study was undertaken:
 - **Primary Aim:** Determine the clinical research priorities as identified by the Alcohol and Other Drug sector and key stakeholders, for the treatment of substance use disorders due to methamphetamine and emerging drugs of concern
 - **Secondary Aim:** Determine differences in research priorities by respondent type (profession, lived experience, age, gender, etc)

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Methods

- No established gold standard for research priority setting^{1,2}
- A review of 165 studies of health research prioritisation (2001-2014) (including 15 in Australia, 0 Australian AoD) found 26% used the Child Health Nutrition Research Initiative (CHNRI), 19% used non-specific methods (including expert panels and focus groups), 3% did not identify / describe an approach³
- A survey of 66 groups in the Cochrane Collaboration found under half (43%) had a system in place to inform prioritisation of topics for Cochrane Reviews, and disparate approaches were used⁴
- The study undertook the guidance provided in the Nine Common Themes of Good Practice³, a published checklist for guiding research priority setting procedures, including:
 - Context; Comprehensiveness of approach; Inclusiveness; Information gathering; Planning for implementation; Criteria; Methods for deciding on priorities; Evaluation; Transparency

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Methods

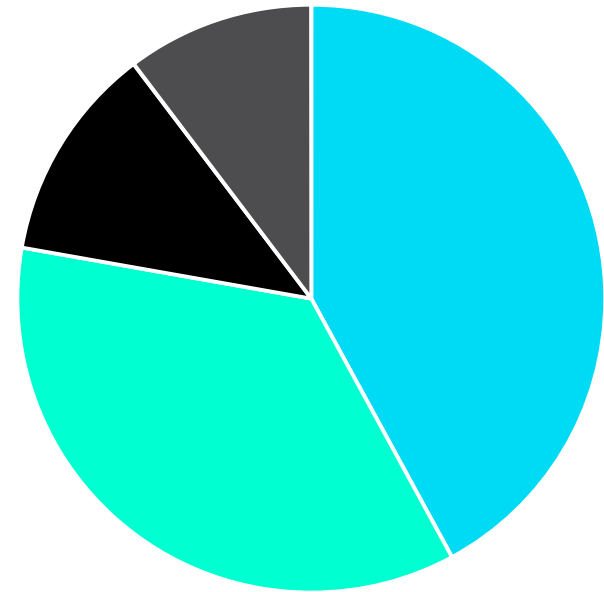
- In addition to the Nine Common Themes of Good Practice, several other components of other methodologies were incorporated or were satisfied by the methods described by the protocol
- The study consisted of four phases:
 1. Online survey of key stakeholders
 2. Qualitative thematic analysis (of survey responses)
 3. Brief literature review assessing the themes identified by respondents (against peer-reviewed data)
 4. Independent expert panel
 - Review the results, overlaying these with their independent clinical and research expertise and the availability of current literature, to engage in ranking themes against a pre-established set of criteria:
 - Answerability, effectiveness, deliverability, burden of disease, equity, novelty, potential for translation, affordability/feasibility, acceptability/ethical aspects, applicability, rationale

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Results

- Survey available & promoted for 4 weeks (07 Feb – 07 Mar 2019)
- 47 individual responses
 - average completion rate = 90%
 - average time spent completing the survey = 12 minutes

Respondents (could select multiple)



■ researchers (53%)

■ clinicians (45%)

■ family/friend (15%)

■ someone who uses methamphetamine / emerging drugs (13%)

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Results

- Independent expert panel convened with all responses and brief literature available
- Via a consensus review of responses and expertise, the key themes and priorities were identified by the expert panel
- Each panel member was then invited to rank their top 3 (in order of preference) for each of methamphetamine and emerging drugs
- Results were collated to determine the key priorities for NCCRED research

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Key priorities

For methamphetamine:

- Overcoming barriers to intervention uptake (e.g. at time of crisis in emergency departments or primary health care)
- Pilot pharmacotherapy trials for adults seeking treatment
- Effective communication strategies for consumers on available treatments and the evidence-based options

For emerging drugs:

- Fixed-site community-located drug checking / pill testing (connected to an early warning system)
- Feasibility of social media and other creative opportunities to alert consumers and reduce harm
- GHB overdose and withdrawal management
- Early warning system / shared information system – pooling and sharing of information – and assessing impact on reducing harm

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Limitations

- Small sample size
 - Although comparable in scale to other national and even international exercises
 - Some priority setting exercises do not survey stakeholders at all
- Survey design
 - Guided PICOT format may have dissuaded participants
 - However, options for free text

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Working with the priorities

NCCRED Funding

- Competitive NCCRED Seed Funding funding rounds to address identified clinical research priorities

NCCRED Fellowships

- NCCRED Clinical Research Fellows appointed and developing projects addressing the research priorities

NCCRED Research activities

- Focusing on the identified priorities
- Grant applications and partnerships focused on the priorities

National Centre for Clinical
Research on Emerging Drugs

Thank You

For more information:

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