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Standing Committee on Health and Disability
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601



Re: Inquiry into the use of crystal methamphetamine in the ACT

The AIDS Action Council of the ACT would like to submit the following comments to your inquiry into crystal methamphetamine use in the ACT.

Increasing use of the drug has implications in relation to our stated mission of 'reducing HIV transmission rates in the ACT' in a number of ways. The primary concern is that there may be a link between crystal methamphetamine use and the possibility of an increase in unsafe sexual activity. It is also concerning that there may be an increase in unsafe injecting practices which may lead to HIV infection.

Homosexually active men are the population group in Australia most at risk of HIV infection. HIV-negative gay men who use the recreational drug methamphetamine are twice as likely as men who do not use the drug to become infected with HIV, according to research presented to the Sixteenth International AIDS Conference in Toronto in 2006. Other research has pointed to an 'association' between crystal methamphetamine use and unprotected sexual activity, although a causal connection has not yet been proven.

Methamphetamine use by gay men has also been the subject of other studies, one of which found that gay men often use the drug to self-medicate for mental health problems. Another study found that patterns of HIV serostatus disclosure whilst under the influence of methamphetamine influenced the types of risky sex gay men engaged in.

A further study found that methamphetamine users had problems adhering to their HIV medication, accessing HIV care, and that healthcare providers often did not assess the needs of methamphetamine users.

Other research has found a connection between the use of methamphetamine and risky sex amongst gay men. The drug can lower sexual inhibitions and increase sexual desire. As its use can lead to erectile dysfunction, it has been suggested that users are more likely to be receptive partners in anal sex, or use drugs to counter erectile dysfunction. Unsurprisingly, unprotected receptive anal sex is a primary sexual risk activity for HIV seroconversion.

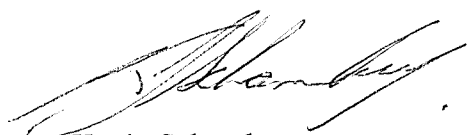
Mental health disorders were spontaneously mentioned by 19 of the men in one study, with depression being the most common. Many of the men with mental health

problems said that they had started to use methamphetamine, or increased their use of the drug, because of their mental health problems.

It is also of concern to us that crystal methamphetamine use may lead to an increase in unsafe injecting practices which may lead to HIV infection as well as hepatitis infection. HIV infection in Australia as a result of injection drug use and represents a small percentage of the total number of infections reported.

Our agency would strongly support initiatives to improve education and awareness of the risks of HIV and other infection arising from crystal methamphetamine use, along with education about potential risky sexual behavior that may eventuate for users under the influence of the drug.

Yours Sincerely,



Kevin Schamburg
Acting General Manager
AIDS Action Council of the ACT

7/2/07

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