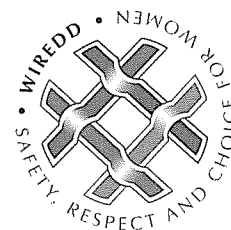


 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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Toora Women Inc
PO Box 6260
Phillip DC
ACT 2606



The Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Disability
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

To Whom It May Concern

Response to the inquiry into the use of crystal methamphetamine-ice- in the ACT.

Toora Women Inc auspices two Drug and Alcohol Services: **WIREDD** (Women's Information Education on Drugs and Dependency) and **Lesley's Place**. Toora Women Inc is a feminist organization and from its early days maintains a strong commitment to addressing the issues of alcohol and drugs and their affect on women.

WIREDD provides counselling, support groups, information, outreach and training on women and drugs and dependency to the ACT community . WIREDD aims to make available to women and the broader community gender specific information that can assist in the minimisation of the harm associated with drugs, drug misuse, chemical dependency or any other dependency.

Lesley's Place is a shared accommodation, drug and alcohol recovery house for women and women with children, who have completed a supervised withdrawal and need short term day to day support in their recovery. Lesley's Place also offers an outreach service that provides continuity of support before, during and after detoxification. Lesley's Place has also a Halfway Recovery house for women and women with children who are in recovery and actively looking for housing but need some additional support with the ongoing recovery process.

The information provided below was collected anecdotally through daily contact with women who accessed WIREDD. Also, a small survey was conducted at Lesley's Place with women receiving outreach support and women residing at the accommodation service.

The findings are as follows:

- **Information on the availability and use of crystal methamphetamine**

Women reported that ice is easy to acquire, is affordable when compared with other illicit drugs and that they 'can obtain it anywhere'.

- **The demographic profile of users interviewed**

The women interviewed were between 24 and 45 years old. Some of the women were single and others had children. A number of the women were highly educated.

wiredd@toora.org.au

- **The perception of the drug among users and within the community**

The women interviewed stated:

- That using ice made them feel good
- That the effects lasted a long time
- That ice was not as dangerous as other drugs, not as addictive, however it's usage resulted in many negative consequences.

Women expressed that, in their view, the community based its views about ice on information presented by media, which is mostly very negative.

- **The consequences of regular use for users, their families and the community**

Women reported that they were not aware of the long term side effects of the drug and consequently 'kept topping up' at the beginning of their drug use. They were not aware that this could cause an overdose.

The women reported that becoming psychotic as a result of ice use can be a very traumatic experience. Some reported that they felt highly paranoid having used ice. Most of the women reported that they had been admitted to the Psychiatric Unit at Canberra Hospital where they had difficulty communicating and engaging with health professionals as a result of their feelings of paranoia and persecution.

Communication had been difficult for both the women and health professionals. Both groups appeared to misinterpret defensive behaviour as aggression. One woman stated she was 'very happy to see some fire fighters' and went to hug them, resulting in the police being called as it was seen that she was attacking them. While in hospital one of the women could not talk due to her paranoia which was interpreted as her not being cooperative.

In one instance, the immediate family of a user were very distressed and communication proved to be difficult.

- **Education, support and treatment of users, their families and the community**

All the women interviewed reported the following:

- ☐ That information on ice and its consequences is minimal.
- ☐ That there is no specific gender specific information on ice and its use.
- ☐ That there is no information on how to use ice safely; and
- ☐ No mention on the possible mental health effects.

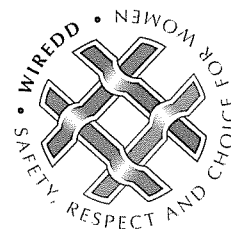
Women suggested that it would be helpful to have information on how to use the drug safely and how to take care of one's own health simultaneously; for example how to use the drug in moderation, the importance of eating regularly and taking time to rest.

If women have access to information on the affects of ice on their mental health it could provide the opportunity for prompt action. One woman said it took her three psychotic episodes before realising that it was a consequence of her ice use.

- **Implications for health and law enforcement sectors**

To address this issue it will be important to:

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- ❑ Break the stigma that all people who are using ice are violent.
- ❑ To have a safe place for women when they need to be admitted to hospital
- ❑ Educate Mental Health staff on the affects of ice on users and in particular to focus on the importance of a sensitive communication style.
- ❑ Provide educational opportunities for users to benefit from other people's stories about the effects from ice use. This could enable women to easily recognise similarities with the symptoms and seek earlier support.

If you need more information, please don't hesitate to contact us on 62488 600 (WIREDD) or 6241 7233 (Lesley's Place). We are also interested in participating in public hearings regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely

for

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Lesley' Place
Coordinator

Paulina Hellec
~~WIREDD~~
Coordinator

30th January 2007

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