

Crystal methamphetamine in the media:

A guide to non-stigmatising and accurate reporting

There is a high level of stigma and discrimination associated with crystal methamphetamine ('ice') use. Stigma and discrimination not only affect the person using the drug, but also their families, friends and community. This resource is to be used alongside the *Mindframe* for Alcohol and Other Drugs [guidelines](#) and includes information to assist with accurate portrayals of crystal methamphetamine use and harms in the media, as well as specific advice for communicating safely and promoting help-seeking behaviour.

When communicating about crystal methamphetamine remember:

1 The person behind the substance

- Characterising a person by their crystal methamphetamine use is unhelpful and stigmatising. Instead use person-centred language. For example, instead of 'ice addict' describe a person as 'a person who uses crystal methamphetamine.' See the language section for more information.
- Presenting all people who use crystal methamphetamine as delinquent, psychotic and violent is inaccurate and can lead to further stigma, which can prevent help seeking behaviour. Although the use of crystal methamphetamine can increase paranoid thoughts, mood swings and irritability, which can make some people more likely to exhibit violent behaviours, most people who use this drug do not become violent or aggressive.
- Be sensitive and remember the way in which a person who uses crystal methamphetamine is portrayed in the media can impact their life as well as the lives of their families and significant others. It can make them feel isolated, shamed and less likely to seek support. This happens more so for crystal methamphetamine than for other drugs due to the particularly high level of stigma surrounding it.

2 Helpful ways to communicate

- Where possible report on crystal methamphetamine statistics in the context of the prevalence of other drugs such as cannabis, MDMA, cocaine, alcohol and tobacco. The harm of one drug does not disappear with the emergence or increased use of another drug. E.g. methamphetamines (including crystal methamphetamine) are more likely to be considered a drug of concern in Australia by the general population, despite the fact alcohol remains the most prevalent drug and is associated with greater harm. It is important to consider multiple sources of data on prevalence as well as checking sources and asking for expert opinion.
- Crystal methamphetamine use is a public health issue and media portrayals should reflect this. The easiest way to achieve this is to report on crystal methamphetamine use as you would any other health condition.
- There are many treatment options that have been shown to be effective for those that require support. Portraying dependence as a treatable condition may contribute to improved understanding and reduced stigma among the general public.



3 Harmful ways to communicate



- Reporting or portraying crystal methamphetamine in a way that encourages panic can increase stigma and discrimination and prevent people from seeking help. For example using the terms “ice epidemic” or “ice scourge” perpetuates stigma.
- Sensationalising or exaggerating negative facts about crystal methamphetamine, or selectively reporting about the drug’s prevalence or effects at the expense of accuracy, can cause public panic.
- Avoid reporting inaccurate, stereotypical or stigmatising images and descriptions of people who use crystal methamphetamine (e.g. ‘meth mouth’, before and after photos). Extreme physical conditions associated with crystal methamphetamine use are uncommon and should not be reported as the norm for all people who use the drug.

4 Language

- Language used to describe people who use crystal methamphetamine can impact how they perceive themselves and how others view them. Inaccurate and irresponsible use of language and terminology is stigmatising for people who use crystal methamphetamine and can prevent them from seeking help.

Use these terms	Instead of
✓ Crystal methamphetamine use	✗ Ice abuse, ice misuse, problem ice use
✓ Person who uses crystal methamphetamine	✗ Ice user, ice abuser
✓ Person with a dependence on crystal methamphetamine	✗ Ice user, ice addict, meth-head
✓ Person who has stopped using crystal methamphetamine	✗ Clean, sober, drug-free
✓ Person with lived experience of crystal methamphetamine dependence	✗ Ex-ice addict, former ice addict, used to be a...
✓ Currently using crystal methamphetamine	✗ Using again, fallen off the wagon, had a setback

Adapted from *Language Matters* from the Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies and NSW Users and Aids Association.

5 Help-seeking

- Include help-seeking information in all reporting and portrayals of crystal methamphetamine as it helps to reduce barriers and normalise help-seeking behaviour. See information below about relevant support contacts for crystal methamphetamine.



National AOD Hotline
1800 250 015



Cracks in the Ice
cracksintheice.org.au/when-and-where-do-i-get-help

6 Quick links

Mindframe for Alcohol and Other Drugs guidelines
mindframe.org.au/AODguidelines

Information and resources about crystal methamphetamine
cracksintheice.org.au