



Illicit drug markets in Queensland: 2015–16 intelligence assessment

This is a de-classified version of an intelligence assessment provided to law enforcement agencies and government. It is published by the CCC to inform the community about current issues in law enforcement and crime prevention.

© Crime and Corruption Commission 2016

Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without permission. Inquiries should be made to the publisher, the Crime and Corruption Commission.

Crime and Corruption Commission

GPO Box 3123, Brisbane QLD 4001

Level 2, North Tower Green Square
515 St Pauls Terrace

Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Phone: 07 3360 6060

(toll-free outside Brisbane: 1800 061 611)

Fax: 07 3360 6333

Email: mailbox@ccc.qld.gov.au

www.ccc.qld.gov.au

Contents

- Introduction 2
- Key findings 2
- Summary 3
- Methylamphetamine 4
- MDMA 6
- Cannabis 8
- Heroin 10
- Cocaine 12
- New and emerging psychoactive substances 14
- Illicit pharmaceuticals 16
- Performance and image enhancing drugs 18
- Appendix: Scope of the assessment 20
 - Methodology 20
 - Risk assessment process 20

Introduction

The sale and distribution of illicit drugs remains the most pervasive form of organised crime in Queensland. Though difficult to quantify, its high cost to the state is clear in the toll it takes on individuals, families and communities, the impost on the state health system and related services, and the increasing pressures on law enforcement.

This strategic intelligence assessment profiles the main illicit drug markets currently operating in Queensland, and the extent of organised crime involvement in them. It looks at current and emerging trends, factors influencing changes in demand and supply, and associated harms. It is intended to:

- help Queenslanders understand the nature, impact and real cost of organised crime in and to their communities
- make people aware of the risks and potential harms associated with particular drugs.

Key findings

- The demand for illicit drugs and the potential profits from supplying them has made Queensland an attractive market for interstate and international crime groups.
- Since 2012, there has been greater targeting of regional areas such as Toowoomba, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Townsville and Cairns, especially by interstate groups.
- Organised crime has a significant presence in the methylamphetamine, MDMA, cocaine, heroin, and cannabis markets in Queensland, and a limited presence in the New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), pharmaceuticals, and Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs (PIEDs) markets, though their involvement in the PIEDs market is increasing.
- Methylamphetamine continues to be rated as the illicit drug market that poses the highest level of risk (Very High) — due to the high level of involvement by organised crime, its ready availability, and the significant harms the drug causes to individual users and the community.
- Following a contraction in the MDMA market in 2008-2011, the availability of MDMA in Queensland has increased since 2012.
- Although the heroin market in Queensland is small and has been assessed as stable, in the past three years there has been growth in this market internationally and in other Australian states. This market will be closely monitored by the CCC in coming years to identify any change in supply and demand for heroin in Queensland.
- The level of risk posed by the cocaine market in Queensland has heightened since 2012 due to the increased risk of harm from adulterants, such as levamisole and NPS, being added to cocaine sold and consumed in Queensland.
- The risk posed by the NPS market in Queensland has stabilised in response to the increased availability of traditional illicit drugs.

Summary

Since 1999 the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) has undertaken regular intelligence collections and assessments on illicit drug markets in Queensland to identify risks and monitor trends. The CCC uses this information to direct its own priorities and focus within the organised crime environment. This information is also provided to law enforcement agencies and the Queensland government.

In 2015 the CCC conducted an updated assessment of the risk posed by the primary illicit drugs in Queensland, with a particular focus on organised crime involvement in these markets. The purpose of this assessment was to identify changes and emerging trends since our previous assessment in 2012. Further information about how we conducted this assessment, and how the risk associated with each illicit drug market was determined, is detailed in the Appendix.

The demand for illicit drugs and the huge profits to be made from supplying them in Queensland, particularly in regional areas, has made Queensland an attractive market for interstate and internationally based crime groups to expand their criminal activities. Our previous assessment of illicit drug markets conducted in 2012 identified that organised crime groups were starting to establish themselves in areas previously unaffected by traditional drug supply chains. Since 2012 there has been greater targeting of regional areas such as Toowoomba, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Townsville and Cairns, particularly by interstate-based crime groups.

Demand for illicit drugs and huge profits from supplying them has made Queensland an attractive market for interstate and international crime groups to expand their criminal activities here.

Methylamphetamine continues to be rated as the illicit drug market that poses the highest level of risk (Very High) — due to the high level of organised crime involvement and the significant harms the drug causes to individual users and the community. The main change in this market since 2012 has been a shift in the *form* of methylamphetamine, with increased supply and demand for high purity crystal (“ice”) rather than powder, and an increase in imported final product compared with locally produced methylamphetamine.

The level of risk associated with the cocaine market in Queensland has been elevated from medium to high due to the increased harm associated with consuming cocaine that has been cut with unsafe adulterants. The level of risk associated with the PIEDs market has increased from low to medium due to heightened organised crime involvement in this market, greater domestic manufacture of these substances, and the broadening user groups in regional areas of Queensland.

Other significant trends included an increase in MDMA availability after the global shortage of 2008–2011, leading to a resurgence in this market. Since our 2012 assessment there has also been increased detection of hydroponic “grow houses” for cultivating cannabis. New psychoactive substances (NPS) continue to be a concern in Queensland due to the potential for significant harms, though this market has not expanded as expected. Internationally and in other Australian states there has been growth in the heroin market. The CCC will continue to closely monitor this market to assess any change in availability and use in Queensland.

This document summarises key findings from our assessment of the main illicit drug markets in Queensland. It is intended to raise community awareness about the risk associated with illicit drug use and the role of organised crime in producing and supplying these substances.



Methylamphetamine

Market assessment: VERY HIGH with an increasing market trend

What is it?

Methylamphetamine is a harmful synthetic substance that is part of a larger group of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). In Queensland methylamphetamine is available in powder, capsule, pill, crystal (“ice”), paste or liquid forms.

The methylamphetamine market in Queensland

- Methylamphetamine continues to be the fastest growing illicit drug market in Queensland. Law enforcement and health agencies identified that this market remains the most significant drug market in Queensland, showing strong and consistent demand, high levels of organised crime involvement and causing significant harms to the user and the community.
- The last three years has seen considerable growth in the methylamphetamine market. Most notably, there has been a shift in the main form of methylamphetamine available and used in Queensland from predominantly powder form to crystal (ice).
- The number of methylamphetamine seizures and arrests continue to increase. Methylamphetamine has been detected in almost all areas of Queensland, with the majority of methylamphetamine trafficking charges occurring in the Brisbane region, closely followed by Central region.
- There has also been a shift away from clandestine domestic production — which previously accounted for most methylamphetamine on the Queensland market — to importations of high-purity final product (crystal methamphetamine) from overseas.
- The ready availability of ice in Queensland has attracted new users, including people who have not previously used drugs, and broadened the overall methylamphetamine user group.
- Methylamphetamine is reported to be easy/very easy to obtain in Queensland, and the frequency of methylamphetamine use has increase since our previous assessment.

Organised crime presence

- Organised crime groups are entrenched in the methylamphetamine market in Queensland.
- Interstate organised crime groups are targeting regional areas of Queensland for the supply of crystal methylamphetamine because of the higher profit margins associated with supplying these areas.

crank crystal meth whiz
base ice speed crack

What you should know

Methylamphetamine, particularly ice, is a very harmful drug that poses significant risks to individual users and the Queensland community.



- Methylamphetamine has been linked to extreme weight loss, itchy skin, mood disturbances (including psychosis), insomnia, repetitious behaviour, violence and deaths. The number of deaths, overdoses, and drug-related episodes associated with methylamphetamine continues to trend upwards.
- Poly drug use — such as using ice in conjunction with other drugs — can increase the risk of experiencing adverse health effects.
- The purity of methylamphetamine has increased significantly since 2012, which creates greater risk for the user and increases the likelihood of addiction.
- The expansion of the ice market is having significant impacts on law enforcement and health resources. Queensland police have reported domestic violence, traffic accidents, armed robberies, serious sexual offences, attempted murders, murders and wounding associated with ice use.
- Health services, particularly hospital emergency departments, are seeing an increasing number of ice-related presentations. Several hospitals throughout Queensland have introduced new policies and procedures to help reduce the number of assaults on staff by people under the influence of ice.



MDMA

Market assessment: HIGH with an increasing market trend

What is it?

The chemical 3,4-methylenedioxymethylamphetamine (MDMA) is an amphetamine-type substance commonly known as “ecstasy” when sold in pill or tablet form.

The MDMA market in Queensland

- Following an earlier contraction in the MDMA market between 2008 and 2011, the availability of MDMA in Queensland has increased since 2012. The purity of ecstasy-type substances entering the Queensland market has also increased.
- The Queensland MDMA market is volatile and dependent on international trends in the availability of precursors and end product.
- This drug continues to be popular among younger drug users, and is typically used in social settings such as nightclubs and music festivals.
- In the past three years, the majority of ecstasy-group seizures occurred in the Brisbane and South Eastern Region.
- The MDMA and new psychoactive substances (NPS) markets are closely related. Forensic testing of ecstasy pills frequently identifies the presence of NPS such as NBOMe-type substances. The recent contraction in the NPS market is likely attributed to the increased availability of MDMA.
- There has been an increase in demand for and supply of MDMA crystal. MDMA crystal is reportedly higher in purity than MDMA powder.

Organised crime presence

- Organised crime has a significant involvement in the MDMA market, and the increased availability of MDMA internationally is likely to continue to attract organised crime groups to this market.
- Entrepreneurial individuals are using online websites to import large quantities of MDMA for onselling to social circles for profit. Local clandestine laboratories producing MDMA-type substances have also been detected.

What you should know



- In Queensland ecstasy tablets contain a range of diverse substances and adulterants. Some of these substances are harmful and have been associated with deaths.
- Organised crime groups are likely to become increasingly involved in the sale of potentially harmful counterfeit MDMA pills as demand for MDMA increases.
- Substances sold as ecstasy (that are actually cheaper, more harmful alternatives) have also been linked to deaths in Queensland, interstate and overseas.
- The higher purity of MDMA now available in Queensland may add to the harms and risk of overdose among ecstasy users who have become used to lower purity pills — particularly those who are used to taking multiple pills at a time to achieve the desired effect.
- Overseas there have been detections of high concentration MDMA pills (200mg compared to 30mg). Significant health effects and fatalities are expected if these substances were to enter the Queensland market.



Cannabis

Market assessment: HIGH with a stable market trend

What is it?

Cannabis is derived from the *Cannabis sativa* plant. Cannabis plants are cultivated either outdoors (“bush” cannabis) or indoors (hydroponic cannabis). The psychoactive ingredient in cannabis is tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which has analgesic effects. Cannabis remains the most widely used illicit substance in Australia.

The cannabis market in Queensland

- The cannabis market in Queensland is an established and stable market. Cannabis use in Queensland is higher than the national average.¹
- In recent years there have been detections of cannabis oil extraction laboratories indicating there may be increasing demand for high purity cannabis.
- The majority of cannabis produced in Queensland is bush cannabis. Most hydroponically grown cannabis available in Queensland is sourced from South Australia and Victoria.
- The number of ‘grow houses’ identified in Queensland is increasing however, with recent detections of grow houses in all areas of the state.
- Cannabis continues to be a drug of concern in North Queensland, particularly within Indigenous communities in that region.
- South Eastern region accounts for the majority of cannabis trafficking charges, followed by Central and Brisbane regions.

Organised crime presence

- Organised crime groups in Queensland are involved in producing and distributing locally cultivated bush and hydroponic cannabis, and in transporting cannabis into Queensland from other states, particularly South Australia and Victoria.
- There has been increased participation by interstate organised crime groups, particularly Australian-Vietnamese crime groups, in cultivating hydroponic cannabis in “grow houses” in Queensland.
- Family-based crime networks continue to maintain a presence in the Queensland cannabis market.
- Organised crime groups are increasingly using the services of professional facilitators, including real estate agents and electricians, in establishing grow house facilities.

¹ Aust. EDRS 2014 & 2015.

skunk marijuana hooch
grass pot ganja cones

What you should know



- A number of short and long-term health effects have been associated with cannabis use. These include increased heart rate; a decrease in motivation, memory and attention; decreased motor skills; respiratory issues; anxiety, paranoia, depression, psychosis and addiction as well as the increased risk of developing more severe mental health disorders such as schizophrenia.
- Cannabis is increasingly being used in combination (mixed) with “ice”, called “snow cones”. Health agencies report that patients presenting after having consumed both cannabis and “ice” typically exhibit worse symptoms. Poly drug use can increase the risk of overdose, paranoia and other mental health problems.
- There are risks associated with cultivating cannabis in hydroponic grow houses. These dwellings are at risk of fire due to the substantial amounts of power required to operate them. This risk is heightened considering that most electrical work is performed by individuals who are unlicensed or amateur handymen. Other health risks associated with grow houses include respiratory illness resulting from inadequate ventilation, intense humidity and chemical exposure.
- Using street cannabis for medicinal purposes carries a risk as the dose and potency is not regulated or tested.



Heroin

Market assessment: HIGH with a stable market trend

What is it?

Heroin is a highly addictive semi-synthetic opioid drug synthesised from morphine (derived from the opium poppy). The active ingredient in heroin, diacetylmorphine, is a painkiller from the opioid family. Heroin is often “cut” with other substances such as caffeine and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM).

The heroin market in Queensland

- The heroin market in Queensland is small and remains concentrated in pockets of south-east Queensland, with the majority of heroin seizures occurring in the greater Brisbane region. Very little heroin is available outside the south-east corner of Queensland.
- Opioid pharmaceuticals, such as OxyContin®, fentanyl and morphine, are being used as substitutes in areas of the state where there is a lack of heroin.
- Cheap high-purity heroin sourced from Mexico and Columbia has become readily available in the United States in recent years. This has driven an increase in heroin use and a shift by some pharmaceutical users to heroin. There are indicators of some recent growth in the heroin market in Australia, particularly in New South Wales and Western Australia.
- If higher quality, cheaper heroin entered the Queensland market, there would likely be a significant expansion of the heroin market — with uptake by both traditional heroin users and illicit pharmaceutical users. Growth in the heroin market in Queensland may also be influenced by the availability of opioid pharmaceuticals.
- The Australian market is predominantly supplied with heroin from South East Asia. There has been a slight increase in the detection of South West Asian (Afghanistan) origin heroin in Australia. This heroin is less refined and more suited to smoking.

Organised crime presence

- Australia’s geographic isolation, and the costs and complexities associated with importing heroin into Australia, contribute to the relatively high price of heroin in Australia compared to other international markets.
- Australian-Vietnamese organised crime groups continue to have a strong hold in the heroin market in Queensland, although there is evidence they are diversifying into other markets (such as methylamphetamine and cannabis).
- Internationally there is evidence that Chinese organised crime groups are forging partnerships with South American organised crime groups to traffic heroin (and other illicit) drugs into Australia.

smack hammer gear
dragon junk china white
harry

What you should know



- Heroin is one of the most harmful illicit substances and is frequently associated with overdoses and deaths.
- Health effects associated with heroin use include: collapsed veins, tuberculosis, weakening of the immune system, and insomnia. Injecting drug users are the highest-risk group for acquiring hepatitis C, and are overrepresented among the HIV positive population due to risky needle sharing practices.
- Queensland is vulnerable to a resurgence in the availability and use of heroin. Close monitoring of the Queensland market, as well as interstate and international markets, is important to detect growth and changes in supply routes.
- There have been reports of ice addicts in New South Wales and Queensland using heroin to help with “coming down”.



Cocaine

Market assessment: HIGH with a stable market trend

What is it?

Cocaine is a strong central nervous system stimulant that is extracted from the native South American coca plant. The most common form of cocaine is cocaine hydrochloride, a white crystalline powder that has a bitter taste, numbs the gums, and is water soluble. Other forms of cocaine that are smoked (such as crack and freebase) are rarely detected in Australia.

The cocaine market in Queensland

- The cocaine market in Queensland has grown slightly over the past three years but remains smaller than other traditional illicit drug markets.
- There has been an increasing trend in the number of detections of cocaine in Queensland and an increase in the number of users reporting that cocaine is 'easy' to access.
- The number of people using cocaine has increased in some areas of Queensland, particularly on the Gold Coast; however, it continues to be used mainly within higher socioeconomic groups and as a "special occasion" drug.
- In the past three years, the Gold Coast policing district accounted for the largest number of cocaine seizures in Queensland.

Organised crime presence

- This lucrative market is likely to continue to attract organised crime groups attempting to establish a greater foothold in Queensland, particularly in the south-east.
- The consistently high price of cocaine and reliance on international importations continues to inhibit further growth in the Queensland cocaine market.

nose candy charlie
blow coke snow
happy dust white lady

What you should know



- The physical and social harms associated with cocaine use are lower in comparison to other traditional illicit drugs. However, the effects from ingesting cocaine do not last for long, which may result in people using more of the drug to sustain the effects and lead to dependency.
- Cocaine is cut with a diverse range of substances, some of which are potentially toxic. These include ketamine, clenbuterol, PMMA, 2CB, alpha-PVP and levamisole. For example, PMMA has been associated with deaths, and ingestion of levamisole, a cattle de-wormer, can reduce the body's immune system, causing common infections to become potentially life threatening.
- Forensic testing has identified a trend towards adding levamisole to wholesale quantities of cocaine during production, because it makes the product appear purer and increases weight.
- To date, little research has been conducted on the long-term health effects of cocaine use, or the ingestion of harm adulterants such as levamisole.



New and emerging psychoactive substances

Market assessment: MEDIUM with a stable market trend

What are they?

The term, “new and emerging psychoactive substances” (NPS) describes the vast range of substances designed to mimic the effects of traditional illicit drugs (such as LSD, amphetamines, ecstasy, cocaine, cannabis). These substances are also called novel substances, drug analogues, mimetics, designer drugs, synthetics, research chemicals, legal highs and herbal highs. In April 2013, Queensland’s *Drugs Misuse Act 1986* was amended to include all substances that are intended to have the same effect as a scheduled dangerous drug.

What do they look like?

NPS are sold in various forms, including pills, capsules, powder, sprays, blotter tabs and leaf material (cannabimimetics). They are packaged in various forms and under various brand names. They are also frequently mislabelled as plant food, research chemicals and bath salts, with a notation that the product is “not for human consumption”. The declared ingredients also sometimes differ from the actual composition. In some cases, NPS pills and blotter tablets bear logos and patterns to traditional illicit drugs.

The NPS market in Queensland

- The NPS market remains volatile and subject to rapid changes depending on availability of traditional illicit drugs.
- Although the demand for NPS has decreased, these substances continue to be prevalent in central and northern areas of the state due to the decreased availability of traditional illicit drugs.
- NPS continue to be falsely marketed as legal highs, research chemicals and herbal tea, although community awareness about the illegal status of these substances has increased.
- Young user groups continue to be identified as consumers of NPS.
- Demand for cannabimimetics has decreased, but the popularity of hallucinogenic-type NPS continues to increase.
- NPS with hallucinogenic effects are frequently detected in pills marketed as MDMA.

Organised crime presence

- Although there have been examples of organised crime involvement in the NPS market in Queensland, this has decreased in recent years.
- The NPS market is largely made up of personal users importing small to medium quantities for personal use, and entrepreneurial suppliers importing larger quantities and onselling for profit.

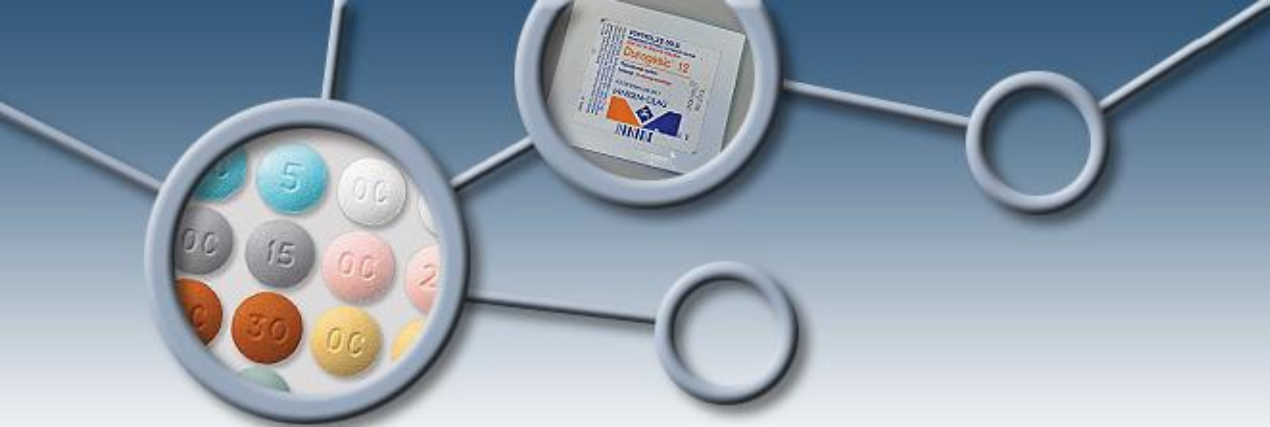
bath salts legal highs herbal highs
spice full moon kronic
synthetics

What you should know

Adverse health impacts and fatalities associated with NPS use are well documented in the media.



- In January 2015, two males in Mackay died shortly after consuming synthetic cannabis. The men died in separate incidents within days of each other.
- There have been several anecdotal reports of people (particularly younger users) presenting to hospital for treatment after consuming an NPS.
- The high potency of NPS and the low fatal-to-active dosage ratio of some NPS is a particular health risk associated with these substances.



Illicit pharmaceuticals

Market assessment: MEDIUM with a stable market trend

What are they?

The term “pharmaceutical drugs” includes prescription drugs as well as over-the-counter medications. Many of the pharmaceuticals that are diverted onto the illicit market have an important and legitimate use in managing serious and chronic pain.

The illicit pharmaceuticals market in Queensland

- For some users, pharmaceutical drugs have evolved from a substitute for illicit drugs to a “drug of choice”. However, these drugs continue to be used as substitutes for illicit drugs in some regional areas of Queensland, particularly where there is a shortage of traditional illicit drugs.
- Doctor shopping² and diversion via family and friends with legitimate prescriptions are the most common methods for obtaining pharmaceuticals for misuse.
- The most misused prescription drugs in Queensland are opioid analgesics (e.g. OxyContin®) and benzodiazepines (e.g. Xanax®).
- There has been occasional evidence of “homebake” or “hillbilly heroin” being manufactured in Queensland, using pharmaceutical products containing codeine such as oxycodone.
- An emerging trend in the United States has been pharmaceutical opioid users switching to heroin due to the increased availability of heroin. Anecdotally, this has been attributed to greater restrictions being placed on opioid-prescribing practices and difficulties in accessing prescription drugs.

Organised crime presence

- Most diversion and supply of pharmaceutical drugs on the illicit market is done by users of these drugs who are funding their own addictions.
- However, intelligence indicates that some semi-organised groups and individuals are recognising the profits involved in this market and becoming increasingly involved in supplying these substances.
- As well as increasing use among the general population, there is consistent demand for pharmaceuticals among persons in correctional centres. Intelligence indicates that buprenorphine (Subutex® and Suboxone®) is a popular commodity for trade within correctional centres.

2 “Doctor shopping” describes the process of obtaining a prescription legitimately through a medical practitioner by feigning symptoms targeted at acquiring the desired prescription, or requesting the prescription for the medication directly.

zanies downers normies
tranks fent benzos roofies

What you should know



- Generally, it is not unlawful to possess a scheduled dangerous drug if it has been prescribed for medical purposes and it is being appropriately used for that purpose. However, if there is no prescription or it is not being used as prescribed, offences may apply (under the *Drugs Misuse Act 1986* and the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996).
- The misuse of pharmaceuticals has been linked to gastrointestinal tract complications, renal failure, anaemia and liver failure.
- Pharmaceutical drugs are being used in combination with other illicit drugs to assist with “coming down” or to alleviate the negative effects associated with some drugs. Mixing prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs with other illicit drugs is also increasingly common. However, poly drug use can multiply the effects of each drug (including adverse reactions) and increase the risk of overdose, severe paranoia and other mental health problems.
- There have been several recent detections of counterfeit pharmaceuticals in Queensland. These often look identical to real products. Intelligence indicates that some of the pharmaceuticals purchased over the internet are counterfeit. The increase in online pharmacies and websites may result in more detections of counterfeit pharmaceuticals.
- Counterfeit pharmaceuticals are associated with significant health risks as they may contain either incorrect quantities of active ingredients or completely different and possibly toxic ingredients.



Performance and image enhancing drugs

Market assessment: MEDIUM with an increasing market trend

What are they?

The term “performance and image-enhancing drugs” (PIEDs) covers a broad range of substances including steroids, insulin, human growth hormone (HGH), clenbuterol and erythropoietin (EPO). Steroids are synthetically produced variants of the naturally occurring male sex hormone testosterone, and include both anabolic and androgenic steroids (AAS).

The PIED market in Queensland

- The market for PIEDs has continued to grow in Queensland over the past three years, largely due to demand from young males seeking muscular and athletic physiques. It remains smaller than traditional illicit drug markets.
- The use of PIEDs in regional areas of Queensland such as Toowoomba, Mackay, Rockhampton and Gladstone has increased.
- PIEDs are being illegally supplied and obtained over the internet and through distributors within the fitness industry. Other methods of illegal supply include theft and diversion from veterinary clinics and hospitals and from unethical medical practitioners.
- The production and supply of PIEDs in Queensland is likely to increase with growing demand from niche user groups and the increased involvement of organised crime groups.

Organised crime presence

- There is evidence of increased organised crime involvement in this market and in the emerging domestic production of steroids. Organised crime groups are importing PIEDs in powder form and manufacturing the final product in Queensland.
- There has been several detections of “home brewing” set-ups in Queensland in the past twelve months. Some of these operations have been quite sophisticated, with commercial-style labelling and sophisticated custom-built laboratories with hidden compartments.
- There is evidence that outlaw motorcycle gang (OMCG) members and associates are involved in the PIEDs market as manufacturers and suppliers.

What you should know



- In 2014 anabolic and androgenic steroidal agents were reclassified as a schedule one dangerous drug in the *Drugs Misuse Regulation 1987* (Queensland). The penalties for possessing, supplying, and importing PIEDs in Queensland is now the same as heroin, cocaine, MDMA, and methylamphetamine.
- There is growing evidence about the link between PIEDs and irritability and aggression. This was one of the main drivers for the rescheduling of PIEDs to a schedule one drug.
- Pharmaceutical drugs are being used in combination with other illicit drugs to assist with “coming down” or to alleviate the negative effects associated with some drugs. Mixing prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs with other illicit drugs is also increasingly common. However, poly drug use can multiply the effects of each drug (including adverse reactions) and increase the risk of overdose, severe paranoia and other mental health problems.
- The use of some PIEDs over an extended period of time may result in serious side effects, both physically and psychologically. These include liver tumours, abnormal enlargement of the heart muscles, hair loss and acne, as well as an increase in the risk of blood-borne viruses through injection. The use of PIEDs by adolescents can impede growth.
- Some PIEDs are being mixed domestically in unsanitary conditions with unknown cutting agents. This heightens the risk of infection for users.

Appendix: Scope of the assessment

Methodology

This assessment brings together information obtained from:

- a review of relevant literature, including open source and classified material from Queensland, other Australian jurisdictions and international sources
- a review of relevant legislation
- a review of relevant law enforcement investigations
- a review of Australian Criminal Intelligence Database (ACID) holdings
- analysis of information obtained from semi-structured interviews during consultations with key law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders
- analysis of information obtained from CCC coercive hearings
- analysis of CCC intelligence holdings
- analysis of published and unpublished quantitative data.

The project team conducted a series of consultations with representatives from law enforcement agencies, other government agencies, research agencies and private organisations, including:

- the Australian Crime Commission (ACC)
- the Australian Federal Police (AFP)
- the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP)
- the Queensland Alcohol and Drug Research and Education Centre (QADREC) at the
- Queensland Health
- the Queensland Police Service (QPS)
- Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services (QHFSS).

Risk assessment process

The table below summarises the level of risk for drug markets determined in the current assessment and also the previous four illicit drug market assessments. The risk assessment methodology used for the 2015 illicit drug markets assessment was used in the 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2012 assessments. By using the same methodology, comparisons over time can be made. The risk assessment process aims to support decision-making about strategic and operational priorities by the CCC and other law enforcement agencies by identifying the current and predicted level of threat and, more broadly, the risk associated with specific illicit drug markets in Queensland.³ This risk assessment relies on a series of factors to determine the level of risk:

Desire × confidence = **intent**
Resources × knowledge = **capability**
Intent × capability = **likelihood of threat**
Likelihood of threat × harm/consequences = **RISK**

3 More detail about the risk assessment methodology used in our assessments is detailed in Appendix 2, *CMC 2012, Illicit drug markets in Queensland, Brisbane: CMC.*

Intent consists of the desire by an individual or group to undertake an activity and having the confidence to succeed.

Capability relates to how realistic it is that the individual or group will be able to undertake the activity in terms of resources and knowledge.

Threat relates to the likelihood that a person or group will successfully undertake an activity that may cause harm. The likelihood of this success is dependent on their intent and capability.

Harm assesses what physical, psychological, economic and political effects the threat will have should it occur.

Risk is a combination of the threat of an activity occurring and the harmful consequences of that activity. Risk is commonly given a probability rating that is expressed in qualitative terms.

The CCC’s assessed levels of risk for illicit drug markets in Queensland

Drug market	2004	2009	2012	2015
Methylamphetamine	Very high ↔	Very high ↓	Very high ↑	Very high ↑
MDMA (ecstasy-group substances)	High ↑	High ↔	High ↑	High ↑
Cannabis	Medium ↔	High ↔	High ↔	High↔
Heroin	High ↑	High ↔	High ↓	High↔
Cocaine	Medium ↑	Medium↑	Medium↑	High↔
NPS	Not rated	Low ↑	Medium ↑	Medium ↔
Pharmaceuticals	Low ↑	Low ↔	Medium ↑	Medium ↔
Performance and image enhancing drugs	Not rated	Not rated	Low ↑	Medium ↑

Note: Estimate of market trajectory ↑ = increasing, ↓ = decreasing, ↔ = stable.

Acknowledgements

During this assessment consultations were held throughout Queensland with representatives from the Queensland Police Service (QPS), The Australian Crime Commission, Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services (QHFSS), the Australian Federal Police, Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) and Queensland Health as well as representatives from independent health agencies and support services. Additionally, data was provided by the QPS, DIBP, QHFSS, Queensland Health, and the National Research Centre for Environmental Toxicology. The assistance and support provided by our law enforcement partners and other agencies during this assessment is acknowledged and appreciated by the Crime and Corruption Commission.



Crime and Corruption Commission
QUEENSLAND



Crime and Corruption Commission
GPO Box 3123
Brisbane QLD 4001
Level 2, North Tower Green Square
515 St Pauls Terrace
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Phone: 07 3360 6060
(toll-free outside Brisbane: 1800 061 611)
Fax: 07 3360 6333
Email: mailbox@ccc.qld.gov.au
www.ccc.qld.gov.au