

## Acute health service use among people who died from methamphetamine-related causes in New South Wales and Victoria

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**Introduction:** Despite increased methamphetamine-related harms in Australia, little is known about healthcare contacts amongst those who die from methamphetamine-related causes. The study aims to describe the proportion and incidence rates (IRs) of acute health service contacts preceding methamphetamine-related deaths in New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria (VIC).

**Method:** This retrospective study examines acute health service use among people who died from methamphetamine-related causes in NSW and VIC (2008–2021), using linked ambulance, emergency department, and hospital data (2007–2021). Proportions reflect individuals with any service contact across the full period before death and in the year before death. IRs were based on total contacts per person-time for the full period, year before death, and annually.

**Results:** There were 2,075 methamphetamine-related deaths in NSW and 2,045 in VIC between 2008–2021. Across both states, emergency departments were most accessed, ranging from 88–89% across the entire period prior to death (60–64% in the year prior); IRs ranged between 1.2–1.4 contacts per person-year for the entire period prior to death and 2.4–2.7 in the year before death. Eighty percent in both states were admitted to hospital prior to death (43% in the year before death), with IRs of 0.8 contacts per person-year overall, increasing to 1.4 in the year before death. Ambulances attended 73–75% of decedents across the entire period and 47% in the year before death; IRs rose from 0.6–0.7 to 1.4 per person-year. IRs of ambulance, emergency department and hospital contacts increased over time in NSW and VIC.

**Discussion:** The high proportion and increasing incidence rates of acute healthcare contact in the year preceding death involving methamphetamines highlights points of engagement where earlier intervention strategies could be strengthened, particularly in emergency departments.

**Implications for Practice and Policy:** Findings suggest the need for pathways from acute settings into ongoing care for people who use methamphetamine.

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