

# Other Drugs

## Key points

- Customs made a record 1268 seizures of performance- and image-enhancing drugs in 2000–01.
- Seizures of steroids by domestic police services have increased threefold since the previous reporting period.
- The period 2000–01 had the highest recorded number of steroid-related arrests compared to other reporting periods.
- Evidence suggests that injecting drug users are using pharmaceuticals containing morphine or benzodiazepines to compensate for the heroin shortage.

## Performance- and image-enhancing drugs

### Anabolic and androgenic substances

Anabolic and androgenic substances (steroids) are synthetic derivatives of the male hormone testosterone. All have both anabolic (muscle-building) and androgenic (masculinising) effects.

Steroid abusers use both human and veterinary products. Human steroids are of higher quality but are more difficult to obtain legally; lower quality veterinary steroids are most commonly used because of their availability and cheaper price. People most attracted to steroids are: athletes—for enhanced sporting performance; body builders—to increase muscle definition and mass; occupational users—for example, in the security industry to increase strength and muscle size; and adolescents wishing to emulate those with a muscular physique (CEIDA 2001).

### Effects

Among the desired effects of steroids are increased muscle growth, strength and endurance, leading to improved performance and feelings of wellbeing and confidence. To achieve these effects, however, steroid users

**Plate: 7.1: Hormones seized in a postal consignment from the United States, declared as vitamins (Australian Customs Service)**



need to commit themselves to a strict diet and exercise regime.

Steroid use also has undesirable and harmful side-effects, both physical and psychological, particularly when large quantities are used. Unwanted physical side-effects include hair loss, liver problems, acne, sleeplessness, headaches, raised cholesterol, permanent short stature in adolescents, tendon injuries, water retention and hypertension. Among the psychological side-effects are aggression, depression, irritability, mood swings, a decrease or increase in libido, paranoia and dependence.

Adverse side-effects for men include prostate problems, shrunken testicles, low sperm count, and abnormal breast development. Adverse side-effects for women include clitoral enlargement, smaller breasts, permanent deepening of the voice, menstrual irregularities, potential foetal damage, and increased body and facial hair.

### Administration

Steroids are generally taken orally in tablets and capsules or injected intramuscularly. They can also be absorbed via skin patches, creams, suppositories and nasal sprays, but these are less common. Users take the drug in cycles or courses varying from six to 16 weeks. A cycle can take the form of a pyramid: the dose is increased

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to a peak then gradually reduced. A tapering technique can also be used: large doses are taken initially and are tapered off towards the end of the cycle. Some users administer a constant level of steroids during the cycle (CEIDA 2001).

Injectable steroids are the most sought after. Street names for steroids include 'roids', 'gear', 'juice' and 'product'.

## DHEA

Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) is an androgenic substance that occurs naturally in the human adrenal gland. Synthetic forms are produced as tablets, capsules, creams and sprays. In Australia, under Schedule 8 of the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations, the importing of synthetic DHEA without a Commonwealth Government permit is prohibited. DHEA is available in countries such as the United States and New Zealand and is widely advertised on the Internet.

The body's own production of DHEA declines dramatically after the age of 40, which is why the drug is popular among older people

who seek its claimed anti-ageing and energy-boosting effects. The common side effects associated with using DHEA are: acne and skin oiliness; unwanted facial hair growth in women; irritability or mood changes; over stimulation and insomnia. Less common side effects may include fatigue, headaches, menstrual irregularities, increased hair loss and heart irregularities (Erowid 2001).

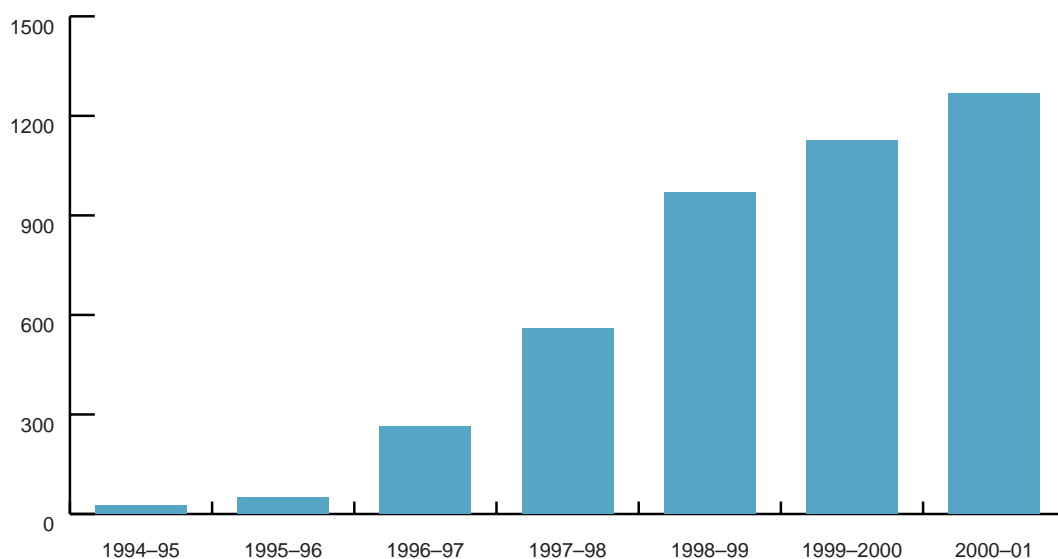
## HGH

Human growth hormone (HGH) is a synthetic substance available only on prescription. It is a performance enhancer used mostly by elite athletes. Among the unwanted side-effects of long-term HGH use are bone growth on the elbow and forehead, enlarged hands and fluid retention.

## EPO

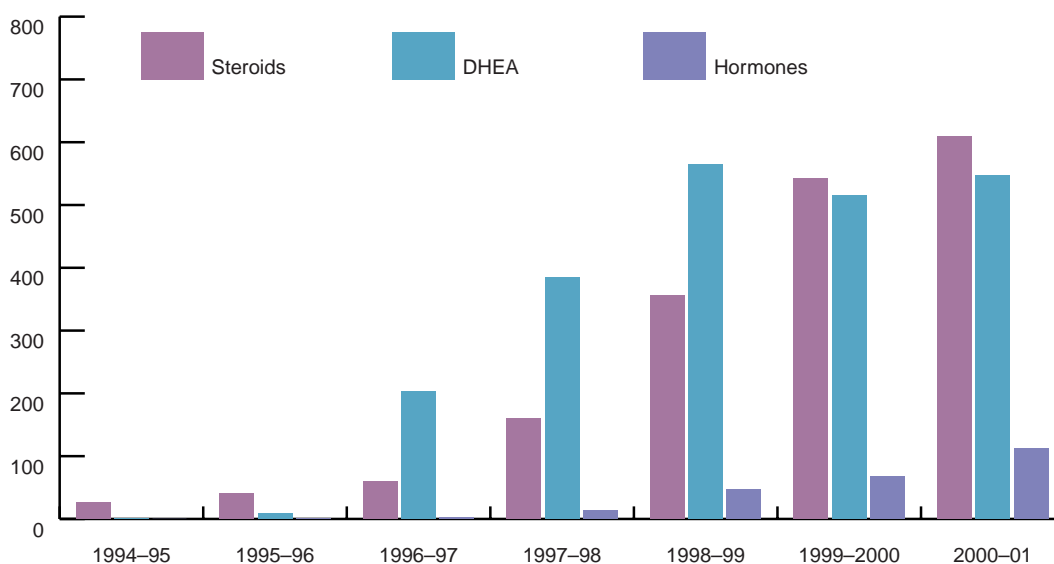
Erythropoietin (EPO) in its synthetic form is one of the most sought after performance-enhancing drugs for endurance athletes. It boosts endurance by increasing the concentration of red blood cells which transport oxygen to

**Figure 7.1: Performance- and image-enhancing drugs: Customs border seizures by number, 1994-95 to 2000-01 (Australian Customs Service)**



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**Figure 7.2: Performance- and image-enhancing drugs: Customs border seizures by number and drug type, 1994–95 to 2000–01 (Australian Customs Service)**



working muscles. Tests for EPO were conducted during the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games as it is a banned substance in competitive sports.

A prohibited drug under Schedule 7A of the *Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations*, EPO does have legitimate medical uses. To import EPO, a person must have a permit from the Therapeutic Goods Administration if they are not a competitor, or be able to demonstrate that it was prescribed for medical treatment.

## Importations of performance- and image-enhancing drugs

During 2000–01 the Australian Customs Service made a record 1268 seizures of performance- and image-enhancing drugs, including record numbers of steroid and hormone seizures. This represented an increase of over 12 per cent on seized in 1999–2000. The number of seizures has been increasing since 1994–95. See Figure 7.1.

Among the performance- and image-enhancing drugs seized by Customs in 2000–01 were steroids (predominantly androstenedione-type steroids but also testosterone, nandrolone,

methandienone, oxymetholone, etc), DHEA and hormones. Figure 7.2 shows Customs border seizures of performance- and image-enhancing drugs by type for 1994–95 to 2000–01.

Steroids were the most common performance- and image-enhancing drugs seized by Customs in 2000–01 with a record 609 seizures. DHEA continues to account for a high proportion of performance- and image-enhancing drug seizures by Customs, increasing slightly from 516 in the previous reporting period to 547 for 2000–01.

Hormone seizures have been increasing since the single seizure in 1995–96, but account for a very small proportion of Customs performance- and image-enhancing drugs seizures for this reporting period. In 2000–01 Customs made a record 112 hormone seizures, almost double the 67 seizures in the previous period. Hormones represented 8.8 per cent of all seizures for performance- and image-enhancing drugs.

Many Customs seizures of performance- and image-enhancing drugs involve small quantities, usually for personal use. Many of the substances are more easily obtainable

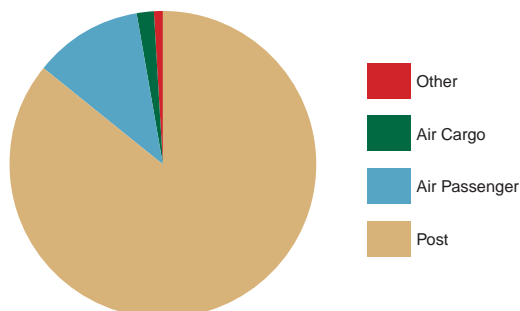
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overseas and are frequently ordered over the Internet where they are marketed for their anti-ageing and general health effects (DHEA, androstenedione and norandrostenedione). The seizures often consist of one to two bottles containing 60 to 180 tablets or capsules. Other forms of performance- and image-enhancing drugs seized by Customs are sprays, creams, lozenges, ampoules, vials, powder and ready-to-use syringes.

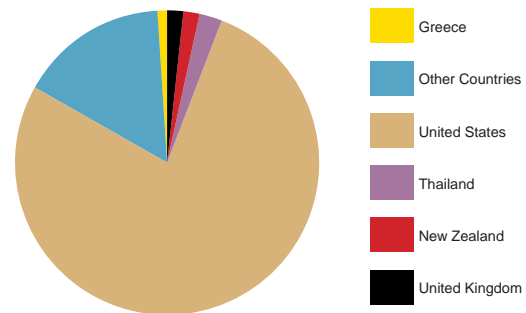
Whilst Customs has continued to seize smaller quantity importations, there were examples of large seizures during 2000–01. A record seizure of over 10 kilograms of steroids in several separate air cargo consignments from Greece was made in November 2000. Other larger seizures included over 2.4 kilograms of steroids in five separate mail articles from Thailand in December 2000 and 250 vials of steroids and human growth hormones together with nearly one kilogram of steroids in a passenger's baggage from Thailand in August 2000.

Australian Customs Service activities and targeting in the lead-up to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games reflected broader community protection and key supply-reduction roles under the Commonwealth Government's Tough on Drugs in Sport strategy. In one instance, Customs officers at Sydney Airport intercepted an arriving Uzbekistan Olympic Official with 15 vials of human growth hormone.

**Figure 7.3: Performance- and image-enhancing drugs: methods of importation, by number, 2000–01 (Australian Customs Service)**



**Figure 7.4: Performance- and image-enhancing drugs: country of origin, 2000–01 (Australian Customs Service)**



Eighty-six per cent of seizures in 2000–01 were through the postal stream, reflecting the predominantly small size and Internet-ordered nature of most imports. Air passengers brought in the second highest proportion and this stream has increased proportionally since 1996–97. Figure 7.3 provides details on methods of importation of performance- and image-enhancing drugs in 2000–01.

The United States, where many performance- and image-enhancing drugs can be bought over the counter, is the main embarkation point for performance- and image-enhancing drugs seized by Customs (see Figure 7.4). Seventy-eight per cent of seizures in 2000–01 originated in the United States. Seizures involving larger quantities and more tightly controlled steroids usually originated in Greece, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.

## The domestic situation

### Arrests/domestic seizures

Steroid-related arrests increased to 90 in 2000–01, 18 per cent greater than in 1999–2000. Seventy-four arrests were recorded for 1999–2000 and 87 in 1998–99. Across all agencies there were 81 consumer arrests and nine provider arrests. These figures also reflect an increase from the previous period (68 and six respectively). Figure 7.5 shows steroid-related arrests from 1996–97 to 2000–01.

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Data relating to the total seizure of steroids within Australia also reflected an increase for this period. There was a total of 36 seizures with a total weight of 6654 grams, compared with a total of 12 seizures with a total weight of 6127 grams in 1999–2000. The number of seizures for this reporting period is therefore three times that of the previous period. This may have been due to a heightened awareness by federal and state authorities towards the possibility of steroidal induced performance by athletes at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

## Availability

Current information available to the ABCI indicates that performance- and image-enhancing drugs are generally obtained through deliberate or unintentional illicit importations, and illicit diversion from pharmaceutical suppliers or the veterinary industry.

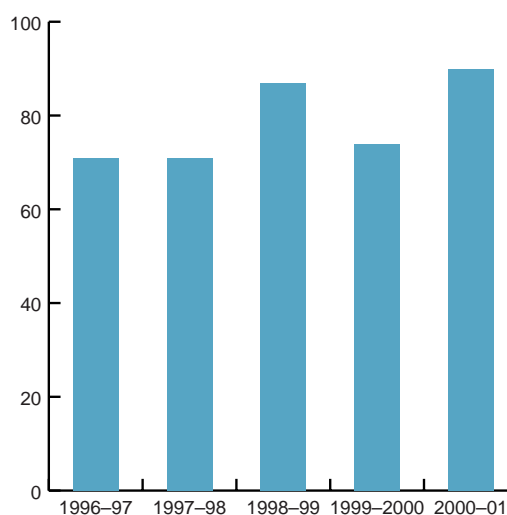
There is growing concern that steroids are being ordered from overseas distributors or intermediaries through Internet Web sites. Potential purchasers are encouraged to order their steroids using commercially available encryption software. Whilst the Web site disclaimer generally indicates that users should check their legal obligations regarding local legislation on steroids, the benefits to a user are apparent ease of purchase, together with discreet and timely forwarding via postal service of the drugs.

Investigations conducted during the reporting period by Western Australia Police revealed that certain Australian former body builders had based themselves in Thailand and established a gymnasium. The principals of the gymnasium offered steroids for sale through their Web page. New South Wales Police found steroids were often located when searching for other drugs, specifically cocaine, and that steroids were more obtainable than LSD.

## Patterns of use

Steroids in Australia are used mainly for enhanced physical appearance. Some athletes look to steroids to improve their performance by obtaining greater strength and endurance.

**Figure 7.5: Total number of steroid-related arrests, 1996–97 to 2000–01 (ABCI)**



**Note:** 1999–2000 figure does not include data for the Australian Capital Territory.

The seizures reported by law enforcement agencies reflect steroid involvement by persons in the fitness, body building and security industries.

The main distribution networks are centred around gymnasiums where body builders may obtain steroids through reliable sources. Principals of some gymnasiums are actively involved in the sale and distribution of performance- and image-enhancing drugs to their membership. Other users are known to include members of outlaw motor cycle gangs and persons involved in the security industry linked to the entertainment industry.

## National impact

Whilst seizure of steroids has tripled from the previous period, this may have been due to the focus by Australian authorities on performance- and image-enhancing drugs and their potential impact on the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Seizures of performance- and image-enhancing drugs have shown a steady increase over the last five years. Customs seizures of

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steroids at the border increased by 12 per cent from 1999–2000, with the majority (86 per cent) being postal imports. Steroid seizures are predominantly small amounts which reduces the chances of detection.

There is a movement towards obtaining steroids ‘on order’ through Web sites and more users may be taking advantage of commercially available encryption to avoid the attention of Australian authorities. The popularity and demand for performance- and image-enhancing drugs will remain as areas of the community seek to improve their appearance through enhanced body strength and size. The focus on beauty and physique within the media and physical fitness industry is the main driver for people attracted to these drugs.

## LSD, mushrooms, GHB and ketamine

LSD, psilocybin-containing mushrooms, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) and ketamine continue to be available in the Australian illicit drug market. Table 7.1 briefly describes their characteristics.

### LSD

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) is a semi-synthetic drug and the most commonly used form of hallucinogen. In its purest state, LSD is a white odourless powder consisting of lysergic acid compounds of the ergot (sclerotia/spore capsule of a parasite mushroom) (Interpol 2001). It is commonly sold on impregnated squares of paper called ‘tabs’.

### Importations

The Australian Customs Service detected seven tabs of LSD in three importations during 2000–01. Two of the importations consisted of three tabs each and were posted in the United Kingdom destined for Victoria. This reflects a reduction from the previous period when 209 tabs were detected.

### The domestic situation

To date, LSD production has not been detected in Australia and because it is difficult to obtain the chemicals needed to produce the drug, it is unlikely to occur in the future. The United States is the main source of LSD for the world market.

There has recently been a resurgence of LSD detected at dance parties and entertainment venues, with most police services in Australia identifying the same patterns of use. Hong Kong Police advised the New South Wales Police/Australian Federal Police Joint Asian Crime Group of the same trend occurring in Hong Kong dance venues.

Anecdotal information indicates the continuance of LSD being distributed on a relatively small scale compared to other high profile drugs, with tabs the most popular medium of distribution and use. Dealers continue to favour poly-drug distribution, because the profit gained from selling LSD is low in comparison to other illicit drug markets.

The Queensland Police Service indicated that distribution patterns for LSD are similar to those of MDMA with users having a propensity towards both drugs. The distribution is mainly centred around hotels and nightclubs with most of the market concentrated in more populous areas. In far northern Queensland a person was apprehended with 28 LSD tabs that were apparently obtained on the Gold Coast. Several seizures of tabs in Queensland were reported bearing a “joker’s face”.

There were 16 seizures of LSD in South Australia in quantities varying from one to 975 tabs. The latter was seized in conjunction with cannabis, cocaine, amphetamines and MDMA. The street price reported by South Australia Police was \$10 per tab when purchased as a sheet.

Western Australia Police Service encountered the following variety of tabs: 6745 tabs with a ‘superman’ logo; 21 detections with a ‘smiley face’ logo; and three tabs without a logo. The tabs were generally wrapped in alfoil to protect the LSD content from any degradation due to

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light. Prices reported were \$8 to \$10 per tab when purchased as a sheet or \$15 to \$20 for an individual tab. The New South Wales and Northern Territory Police reported the current price for a tab as \$25. Indications are that the price of LSD tabs has remained stable into this reporting period.

Authorities are concerned that LSD is not only being used on its own or in conjunction

with other drugs, but recently has been identified as an ingredient in other designer drugs.

Tablets that contained methylamphetamine were analysed by the Queensland Health Scientific Services, and upon 'grinding' the tablets were found to contain shredded paper. Further analysis showed this shredded paper to be LSD tabs. Western Australia and New South Wales forensic science laboratories reported

**Table 7.1: Summary of LSD, Mushrooms, GHB and Ketamine (*The Vaults of Erowid 2000a & 2000b, CEIDA 2000, NDARC 2001, ABCI*)**

Drug name	Description	Properties	Administration	Common names	Effects
Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)	Diluted crystalline LSD is a chemical solution usually soaked into perforated blotting paper, which is divided into small tabs (about the size of a fingernail). Also, but rarely, found in liquid, powder or tablet form	A normal tab contains 25 micrograms of LSD, which has powerful hallucinogenic properties	Tab usually placed on or under the tongue. Can also be absorbed through skin. Liquid is mixed with drinks	Acid, blotters, dots, trips, cubes, robots, clearlight, strawberries	Altered perception of colour, shape and size; mood changes, paranoia, clouded thought and sense of danger; increased heart rate and blood pressure; low body temperature; twitching muscles. Takes effect within 30–60 minutes and lasts up to 12 hours
Mushrooms	Brown- or tan-coloured fungi	Main hallucinogenic effect comes from naturally occurring psilocybin	Usually eaten by mixing with other food or brewing as tea	Magic mushrooms, golden tops, blue meanies, mushies	Effects similar to those of LSD; 30–60 minutes to take effect and lasting up to four to six hours
Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB) or sodium oxybate	Odourless, colourless liquid with salty taste. Sometimes a blue food dye is added for presentation	Sedative effect on the central nervous system. Originally used as an anaesthetic	Oral consumption, usually mixed with drinks	Grievous bodily harm, fantasy, liquid ecstasy, liquid X, Georgia Home Boy	Euphoria, dizziness, relaxation, loss of inhibition; high dose can cause vomiting, coma, disorientation, and impairment of movement and speech
Ketamine	Synthetic veterinary anaesthetic, available in liquid, tablet or powder form	Anaesthetic and hallucinogenic properties	Intravenous or intramuscular injection, snorted as a powder or taken orally (it is soluble in water and alcohol)	Special K, Kitkat, vitamin K, ket, K, horse tranquilliser, cat valium	Effects similar to those of GHB and LSD; high dose can cause complete dissociation, nausea, and unconsciousness

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similar findings, with cut-up LSD tabs found in methylamphetamine tablets and powders.

The Victoria Forensic Science Centre collects LSD tab logos along with data derived from various drugs from all police services. The market for LSD centres around suppliers dealing in polydrugs and 'young' male users. Availability of the drug is affected by increasing trends in MDMA and amphetamine-type stimulant use.

## Mushrooms

Mushrooms containing psilocybin grow wild in many areas of the world, including Australia. They are collected and consumed for their hallucinogenic effects which are similar to those produced by LSD.

## Importations

During 2000–01 Customs detected 24 attempted importations. The majority of detections involved syringes containing psilocybin mushroom spores in solution. This figure is less than for the previous two years; there were 28 detections in 1999–2000 and 33 in 1998–99. Fifteen importations arrived from the United States, five from the Netherlands, two from Sweden and one each from Indonesia and Germany. The largest number of importations were detected in Victoria (10); there were eight in New South Wales, three in Western Australia and one each in Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia. Twenty-three of the detected importations were in the postal stream; one was imported by an airline passenger.

## The domestic situation

Australian police services rarely encounter 'magic' mushrooms and while they are a hallucinogen, their use and popularity appears to be limited. The Queensland Police Service made two seizures in the reporting period, one was a person in possession of 30 mushrooms weighing approximately half a kilogram. The New South Wales Police reported that mushrooms were available but their prevalence was low.

Anecdotal evidence suggests the average price is approximately \$50 for a bag containing

eight magic mushrooms. Given the reduction in numbers of psilocybin-containing mushrooms seized at the border and by police services, there would appear to be a movement away from this hallucinogen.

## GHB

GHB was initially used as an anaesthetic but was withdrawn from the market because it produced side-effects such as nausea, uncontrollable shaking and coma. It was also found to be inadequate as a pain reliever. It is used as an illicit drug for its anaesthetic and relaxant properties and also because it is easy to make.

GHB's effects vary greatly, depending on factors such as body weight, the quantity taken, and other substances (such as alcohol) taken with it. The user's general state of health is also important. There is a fine line between a dose that produces the desired effects and one that might lead to a coma. GHB has also been used as a stupefying drug in sexual assaults.

## Importations

In 2000–01 Customs detected three importations of GHB at the border (there were four detections for 1999–2000). One importation came from the United States, one from South Africa and one from Switzerland. Two detections were in the postal stream and the other was imported in an air cargo consignment.

## The domestic situation

In a recent study of recreational GHB use by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (2001), it was revealed that most of the users interviewed (76 users) would typically use GHB with other drugs. Fifty-eight per cent reported using MDMA with GHB, whilst other drugs used were alcohol, amphetamine, cannabis and ketamine. Other findings indicated 50 per cent of users lost consciousness under the influence of the drug, and there were just as many negative side effects for people who had used GHB once or twice as there were for those who used it extensively (NDARC 2001).

The availability of GHB, according to the Northern Territory Police, decreased over the

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reporting period and it was mainly used in the night-club scene by young adults. There was a number of reports that GHB had been used as a stupefying drug to aid sexual assaults. Legislative changes regarding GHB, by way of it now being scheduled in the Northern Territory's *Misuse of Drugs Act 1990*, and negative media coverage, have possibly impacted on GHB popularity.

Queensland Police Service reported a number of attempted importations of GHB from New Zealand into Brisbane, with the Gold Coast as the final destination. The Queensland Crime Commission noted the use of steroids in conjunction with GHB. Western Australia was the only jurisdiction to indicate a price for GHB, with a unit costing between \$40 and \$70. As in the previous reporting period, there were very low incidences of GHB seizures or related offences within Australia. This may be a reflection of increasing international controls which have reduced its general availability. There have been a significant number of attempts to import the prohibited precursor of GHB, gammabutyrolactone (GBL). GBL is often purchased over the Internet and sometimes supplied with the other necessary substances to create GHB. Customs is working with the Therapeutic Goods Administration, as the responsible policy agency, to implement controls on the GHB precursor, 1,4-Butanediol.

## **Ketamine**

Ketamine hydrochloride is used as a veterinary anaesthetic and has very limited legitimate uses for humans. It is not a common anaesthetic because of its hallucinogenic properties and its effects usually last only 30 to 60 minutes. It is normally obtained through illicit diversion of veterinary drugs.

It appears that the availability and subsequent use of ketamine remains generally low in Australia, as it is a hallucinogen rarely encountered by law enforcement authorities. This drug is mostly used by night-club patrons from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

## **Importations**

While ketamine is not a prohibited import, Customs ensures that suspected illicit imports are brought to the attention of State or Territory police services for possible action under their own legislation.

During March 2001, Customs detected over 55 kilograms of ketamine powder in a sea cargo container of citric acid from China. At the rear of the container, behind and underneath the packages of citric acid, were three cardboard drums labelled ketamine hydrochloride. The officers referred the import to Victoria Police which subsequently seized the contents of those drums.

Each of the three drums contained a bag of white powder that was found to contain 90 per cent pure ketamine hydrochloride on analysis. Ketamine is listed as a drug of dependence under Schedule 11 of the Victorian *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (a trafficable quantity is two kilograms).

Customs is working closely with the Commonwealth Therapeutic Goods Administration to review the border controls for ketamine. The Therapeutic Goods Administration, which has policy responsibility for administering the Customs Regulations in relation to drugs, is working to establish appropriate controls during 2001–02.

## **The domestic situation**

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre recently interviewed 100 ketamine users. Its findings support the view of police services that ketamine is increasing in popularity in the rave/dance and night-club culture. The user demographics revealed most users were mature males in the middle to higher socio-economic group, with 74 per cent preferring to use ketamine with MDMA (NDARC 2001). The study appears to provide further evidence that hallucinogenic drug users, as in the LSD market, are moving towards a polydrug environment.

The use and availability of ketamine in Australia remains low and agencies rarely come into contact with this drug. The Northern Territory Police reported one 70 gram seizure of

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ketamine for the reporting period—0.1 gram is the normal retail quantity at street level. Authorities report finding ketamine in methylamphetamine tablets in some States and are also concerned that ketamine can be used in a similar manner as GHB to commit sexual assaults.

Diversion of ketamine from veterinarian fields, its use with methylamphetamine or as the preferred drug of choice, are ongoing concerns for police services. Ketamine can also prevent the users from feeling pain, making them at higher risk of suffering injuries.

## Pharmaceuticals

Pharmaceuticals are drugs that improve health and increase life expectancy. They are obtained over the counter from pharmacies or through medical prescription. Pharmaceuticals are not classified as illicit drugs but their diversion from lawful consumption to illicit use is of concern to health and law enforcement authorities alike.

Illicit drug users will often use pharmaceutical drugs when more sought after depressant, hallucinogenic or stimulant type drugs are difficult to obtain. Pharmaceuticals are generally obtained through the following methods:

- lawfully obtained through a medical practitioner by feigning symptoms;
- using stolen prescriptions;
- using forged prescriptions;
- forced entry of pharmaceutical and surgical establishments; and
- through 'doctor shopping'.

According to the Health Insurance Commission, doctor shopping occurs when individuals visit 15 or more health practitioners, have more than 30 Medicare consultations and obtain more Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme prescriptions than are clinically necessary in a year. The Health Insurance Commission in recognition of this problem, introduced the Doctor Shopper Information Management System. This 'e-intelligence' software significantly reduces the

time taken to generate reports that identify incidences of doctor shopping. Any evidence gained can then be passed on in a timely manner for further investigation (HIC 2000).

## The domestic situation

### Australian Capital Territory

During 2000–01 the illicit use of prescription drugs, particularly benzodiazepines by heroin users, was reported by most Australian Capital Territory drug and alcohol agencies. According to the Australian Federal Police (Australian Capital Territory region), benzodiazepine, particularly diazepam, is often used by heroin addicts as a drug supplement between heroin 'hits'.

Within the Australian Capital Territory a 'voluntary undertaking scheme' was developed in an attempt to minimise the level of doctor shopping by injecting drug users. The scheme works by individuals agreeing to obtain benzodiazepines only from a particular doctor and pharmacy. A total of 195 voluntary undertakings currently operate in the Territory.

The Australian Federal Police (Australian Capital Territory region) reported an increase in drug-facilitated sexual assaults, generally involving Rohypnol or similar substances. Although it is difficult to quantify the extent of these assaults, as many victims are unable to recall events, there were over 70 reported cases for the period. A police operation targeting educational institutions and night-clubs seeks to reduce the incidence of drug-induced sexual assaults by way of media releases, and the circulation of posters and pamphlets.

### New South Wales

New South Wales Police established that in general the trade names of pharmaceuticals illicitly obtained for the reporting period were Sudafed, Actifed, Demazin, Logicin, Codral, Ventolin and Sinutab. A 'runner' involved in doctor shopping will attend numerous pharmacies in a particular area and purchase products containing pseudoephedrine, such as Sudafed. Groups of 'runners' were known to travel in vehicles and enter pharmacies separately.

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There was an increase in break and enters at general practice surgeries, veterinary surgeries and pharmacies during 2000–01. Rohypnol, Serapax, Valium and Normison were reported to be selling for \$20 a tablet at street level. Thefts from pharmaceutical companies are becoming more prevalent, which may be due to a tightening of procedures within individual pharmacies. There were instances of the use of falsified documentation, including import authorisations with fictitious pharmaceutical company names, from developing countries, which had the aim of obtaining chemicals and precursor type drugs.

## **Northern Territory**

Health-practitioner dispensation of morphine-based prescription drugs decreased over the reporting period, according to the Northern Territory Police, possibly due to Northern Territory Health Department efforts directed towards the control of doctor shopping. This involved the identification of both the doctors suspected of over-prescribing drugs and individuals requesting scripts in excess of their needs.

Tablets containing morphine were sold at street level for \$50 to \$100, their use and distribution was facilitated primarily by people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The market for this type of drug is addiction-based as opposed to occasional.

## **Queensland**

The Queensland Police Service reported that there had been an increase in the variety of products containing pseudoephedrine that were being targeted by individuals or groups for diversion to the manufacture of methylamphetamines.

The majority of pharmaceutical drugs seized in Far North Queensland were MS Contin capsules, often used by heroin users as a substitute, which have become more popular as a result of the continuing heroin shortage. There were reports that 200 milligram capsules of MS Contin were being dissolved in water and injected by users. Of ongoing concern to police and health practitioners was the high prescrip-

tion rate for the types of drugs used by illicit drug offenders.

## **South Australia**

South Australia Police reported that seizures of illicitly-used pharmaceuticals involved predominantly dexamphetamine, steroids, morphine derivatives or benzodiazepines. As reported by other States and Territories, the use of morphine derivatives and liquid benzodiazepines were popular amongst heroin users seeking alternatives during the heroin shortage. There were instances of ram-raids on pharmacies to obtain Sudafed tablets.

An initiative currently under development is the establishment of a 'forged prescription database'. Proformas completed by pharmacies are fed into this electronic repository and people suspected of forging prescriptions to obtain drugs are then followed up by the relevant Police Local Service Area.

## **Tasmania**

Heroin use in Tasmania has historically been low. However, injection of pharmaceutical preparations of drugs such as morphine, methadone and benzodiazepines by users is an ongoing concern. Wider application of morphine-based pain relief for chronic pain has provided greater opportunities for illicit drug users to obtain drugs through doctor shopping, forged prescriptions, legitimately obtained prescriptions that have been fully or partially on-sold to non-authorised recipients, and diversion from methadone maintenance programs.

While patterns of use and availability remained stable in 2000–01, there were indications of an increase in the intravenous use of benzodiazepines and Normison was the most commonly used brand. MS Contin was the most commonly used morphine with prices ranging from \$40 to \$50 for 60 milligram tablets and \$80 for 100 milligram tablets.

Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services officers and police continued to work collaboratively to identify suspicious purchases or transactions, advising pharmacies and doctors on physical security and undertak-

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ing health promotion and education initiatives with medical practitioners.

## Victoria

According to Victoria Police the reduced availability of heroin has meant prescription drugs gained popularity. This has resulted in users targeting pharmacies with thefts and ram-raids to obtain pharmaceuticals. Drugs were also obtained by falsifying prescriptions and doctor shopping.

Most seized drugs containing temazepam, such as Normison, were in liquid form, which gives injecting users increased psychotropic effects by comparison with temazepam tablets. In a bid to reduce prescription of temazepam capsules, the Victorian Department of Human Services will be seeking support from general practitioners in only prescribing temazepam tablets, and only to patients who are known to them.

Another initiative called Pharmacy Watch involves the Victorian Department of Human Services, the Pharmacy Society and Victoria Police crime prevention officers. The aim of Pharmacy Watch is to advise pharmacies on physical security and matters relating to the diversion of certain pharmaceuticals into illicit drug manufacturing.

## Western Australia

According to the Western Australia Police Service, there were instances of pharmaceuticals being found secreted in the ends of asthma inhalers and in the bottom of food tins. MS Contin 100 milligram tablets, referred to as 'grey nurses', had a street value of \$100. Drugs containing temazepam or benzodiazepine were very popular among heavy injecting users.

Doctor shopping and subsequent diversion to the amphetamine manufacturing market were of most concern to police. In an attempt to reduce doctor shopping in Western Australia, police officers trained in the investigation of clandestine laboratories liaised with pharmacies in relation to information sharing. The intended result of this partnership was that pharmacies could identify suspicious purchases

of precursor drugs. Other initiatives involved the distribution of brochures and posters to health practitioners to reduce instances of illicit diversion of pharmaceuticals.

## National impact

The diversion of pharmaceuticals to the illicit drug market has brought about administrative and policy changes by health practitioners that will have greater impact on users. The period has seen several initiatives undertaken by some States, Territories and the Health Insurance Commission to address and reduce the incidence of doctor shopping. The most notable was the introduction of the Doctor Shopper Information Management System. With this system, reports that originally took approximately a week to produce are now being generated in approximately 30 seconds (HIC 2000).

In 1997–98 there were an estimated 67 000 to 92 000 dependent heroin users in Australia, with a median estimate number of 74 000 (Hall *et al.* 2000). According to the Health Insurance Commission, in 1999–2000 there were 8780 people in Australia who met the criteria for 'doctor shoppers' (HIC 2001). The heroin shortage has affected the illicit pharmaceuticals market as it has the illicit drugs market in general. Licit drugs containing morphine or benzodiazepines were diverted from their prescribed application to illicit use by injecting drug users to compensate for the lack of heroin. According to the *2000 Annual Report on Drug Use Among Police Detainees*, which tested drug use by detainees in four police watch-houses in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, 37 per cent of females and 21 per cent of males on average, tested positive to benzodiazepines (Makkai *et al.* 2001).

Concern is increasing among government health agencies that drug users are injecting the liquid contents of temazepam capsules, which are normally used to treat insomnia. There is growing evidence that the misuse of this pharmaceutical can cause severe vascular injury to the user and consequently impact on emergency and health services.

# Other Drugs

The availability of particular pharmaceuticals and their relatively low costs compared with illicit drugs, will continue to make them attractive to organised criminal elements and opportunistic drug users alike.

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