

# Illicit Drug Statistics



## Introduction

The ACC utilised the National Illicit Drug Reporting Format (NIDRF) data processing system to process seizure, arrest and purity data for the 2003–04 report. This allowed for more accurate analysis of law enforcement data and assists in moving towards nationally standardised data holdings.

The movement towards more accurate data has been facilitated by the continued efforts of police statisticians and/or information managers in each of the state, territory and Commonwealth agencies over the period covered by this report. The need to improve law enforcement illicit drug data was progressed further at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Illicit Drug Statistics workshop in July 2003.

## Counting Methodology

The following methodology was used to develop a count of arrests by drug type:

- where a person has been charged with multiple consumer or provider offences for a particular type of drug, that person is counted once only as a consumer or provider of that drug;
- where consumer and provider charges for a particular drug type have been laid, the provider charge takes precedence and the person is counted only as a provider of that drug;
- a person who has been charged in relation to multiple drug types is counted as a consumer or provider for each drug type; and
- a person is counted on each separate occasion that they are charged.

## Data Sources

Three sources of drug statistics are used: offence and seizure data, drug purity data, and drug price data.

### Arrest and Seizure Data

Arrest and seizure data were supplied by:

- New South Wales Police;
- Victoria Police;
- Queensland Police Service;
- Western Australia Police Service;
- South Australia Police;
- Tasmania Police;

- Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services;
- Australian Federal Police; and
- Australian Federal Police – ACT Policing.

## Drug Purity Data

The purity tables do not represent the purity figures for all seizures of that drug type, only those that have been analysed at a forensic laboratory. Drug purity figures for Victoria, Queensland, and the Australian Capital Territory represent the purity level of drugs seized by police during the relevant quarter. Figures for South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and those supplied by the Australian Forensic Drug Laboratory represent the purity level of drugs received at the laboratory during the relevant quarter. Specifically, the Western Australian Forensic Science Laboratory does not analyse all seizures less than two grams. As a result, the purity table will underestimate the number of samples that are tested.

The time between the date of seizure by police and the date of receipt at the laboratories can vary from a few days to several months, and in isolated cases, years. The purity table represents those seizures analysed during the financial year 2003–04, not necessarily all seizures during that period.

New South Wales Analytical Laboratory only tests for purity levels on cases larger than the traffickable level—three grams for amphetamine, methylamphetamine, heroin, cocaine and 0.75 grams for phenethylamines. Additionally, the laboratory will only test a limited number of samples per case. The laboratory also tests purity levels on controlled operations for the New South Wales Police, including undercover units.

The Northern Territory Forensic Laboratory was unable to provide purity data for this report.

ACT Policing does not test for purity on all seizures—only those which are larger than the traffickable amount. All samples lodged by ACT Policing with the ACT Government Analytical Laboratory are tested, but not all are tested for purity. The ACT Government Analytical Laboratory was unable to provide purity data for inclusion in this report. Purity data for the ACT was provided by ACT Policing.

## Drug Price Data

Data on prices for illicit drugs were collected quarterly from each of the police services and are based on information supplied by covert police units and police informants.

## Limitations of the data

### Overview

Despite limitations in the current data set, *Illicit Drug Data Report 2003–04* provides the best collection of arrest and seizure statistics available in Australia. The NIDRF data processing system has enabled the ACC to improve statistical quality and reliability.

### Seizure Data

The seizure data presented in Table 27 include only those seizures for which a drug weight was recorded. Consequently, it undercounts both the number of seizures and the amount of drug seized for all drug types. Amphetamine and cannabis data are most likely to be affected by the variety of measurement methods and these figures should be treated with caution when making comparisons between jurisdictions or over time. This table includes seizures by the AFP and state police services.

### Datasets

Since the development and implementation of the NIDRF processing system, limitations continue with the administrative datasets used to compile the statistics, but to a lesser degree. The following factors should be considered when utilising the data to develop assessments or conclusions:

- a lack of uniformity across all states and territories in the recording and storing of data on illicit drug arrests and seizures;
- ongoing problems with quality control, resulting in the absence of essential information from some records;
- differences in applying a uniform counting and data extraction methodology across all jurisdictions;
- differences in definitions of consumer and provider offences across and within jurisdictions over time;
- differences in the way drugs and offences may be coded;
- insufficient drug identification; and
- an inability to identify seizures resulting from joint operations, for example, those involving a state or territory agency and the AFP.

### Recording and Storage Methods

The lack of consistency between law enforcement agencies in the way they record illicit drug arrests and seizures presents difficulties when data is aggregated and compared. Disparities exist in the level of detail recorded for each offence, the methods used to quantify the seizures, the way offence and seizure data is extracted, and the way counting rules and extraction programs are applied.

## Quality Control

Missing, incomplete and non-specific information relating to drug seizures makes it impossible to calculate precisely the total quantity of each drug type seized. It is thus difficult to analyse trends on a comparative basis across a number of years. This has been a particularly pertinent issue since the 2001–02 report as the NIDRF system allows for increased scrutiny of large seizures that may not have been queried in the past.

## Drug Identification and Coding

Not all illicit drugs seized by law enforcement are scientifically analysed to establish the precise nature of the drug. In some cases, only seizures of a predetermined weight or those that are the subject of a ‘not guilty’ plea are scientifically analysed. In some instances, an initial field test may be carried out to provide an indication as to the seized drug, but all other seizures are recorded at the discretion of the investigating officer and without further qualification.

A number of jurisdictional data systems do not differentiate between amphetamine-type stimulants and 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), which restricts the ACC’s ability to monitor and report on national trends in MDMA seizures and arrests. Similar problems exist with a range of other drugs including ketamine and gamma-butyrolactone (GBL) and in some jurisdictions, seizures of these drugs are recorded as ‘Other Drugs’. Monitoring and reporting on national trends of these drugs is therefore limited.

## Consumers and Providers

Offenders are classified as consumers or providers in order to differentiate between people who have been apprehended for trading in, as opposed to using, illicit drugs. Those charged with supply-type offences—importation, trafficking, selling, cultivation and manufacture—are classified as providers. Those charged with user-type offences—possessing or administering drugs for their own use—are classified as consumers.

In some cases the jurisdictions allocate consumer and provider codes, and in others the ACC applies the codes based on the information on the type of offence committed. Further, there are some differences in the methodologies jurisdictions use for applying consumer and provider codes. For example, in some states and territories, the quantity of the drug involved determines whether an offence is regarded as a consumer or a provider offence. Also, the threshold quantity that determines whether a person is to be charged as a provider varies over time, both within and between states and territories.

## Jurisdictional Issues

The comparability of law enforcement data across states and territories is problematic. For the information of agencies and individuals wishing to interpret the data, specific issues regarding jurisdictional data have been identified by the ACC and the relevant jurisdiction. These issues have been summarised by each jurisdiction provided in this report and are represented below.

### New South Wales

New South Wales Police provided the ACC with data extracted from the COPS database, with appropriate caveats. The State Crime Command provided details of known drug weight prices.

The recording systems of the New South Wales Police and the AFP do not have joint agency operation identifiers and as a result double counting may occur.

### Victoria

Victoria Police provided offender and seizure data. Drug quantities and weights reported are estimates only and are not validated by forensic results.

Victoria rewrote its extraction program and improved the data quality checks. Further data quality processes have been implemented to improve future data.

### Queensland

Queensland Police provided the offender and seizure data. The Police Service Statistical Services section compared the Queensland arrest and seizure data aggregated by the NIDRF system with their own statistics and found only small differences between the aggregations.

### South Australia

South Australia Police provided offender and seizure data, but did not include this data for offenders participating in the Drug Diversion Program.

### Western Australia

Western Australia Police provided offender and seizure data. Western Australia Police introduced a new incident recording system in 2002–03, which changed its method for recording drug seizures. For this reason, care should be exercised when comparing data across years.

## Tasmania

Tasmania Police provided offender and seizure data. Tasmania Police are currently rewriting their data extraction program to improve ease of future extraction and data quality.

## Northern Territory

Northern Territory Police provided offender and seizure data. The offender data-set from the Northern Territory contained records that do not identify offenders as consumers or providers.

## Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Federal Police – ACT Policing provided offender, seizure and purity data. Data is comparable with figures in the 2002–03 report. As some previous Australian Capital Territory data were not provided by ACT Policing, comparison across these years should be undertaken with caution.

## Australian Federal Police

The Performance and Planning Area provided national offender, seizure and purity data for the AFP. Joint seizures with Australian Customs Service are represented within AFP figures in Table 26. Totals may differ from those reported in the AFP Annual Report 2003–04 due to the different counting rules applied.

## Explanatory Notes

The following information applies to terms used in this report.

### Arrest

‘Arrest’ incorporates all recorded law enforcement action against a person for suspected unlawful involvement in illicit drugs. It incorporates enforcement action by way of arrest, summons, diversion program, cannabis expiation notice in South Australia, simple cannabis offence notice in the Australian Capital Territory, drug infringement notice in the Northern Territory, and ‘notice to appear’ in Queensland. Some charges may subsequently have been dropped or the defendant may have been found not guilty.

## Seizure

‘Seizure’ is the confiscation by a law enforcement agency of a quantity of an illicit drug or a regulated drug being used or possessed unlawfully, whether or not an arrest is made in conjunction with that confiscation.

The amount of drug seized may be recorded by weight, volume and linear measurement, or as a unit count (for example, number of tablets, plants or bags). The method of estimating the amount of drug seized varies between and within jurisdictions. For example, seizures of amphetamine in tablet form may be weighed or counted. Similarly, seizures of cannabis plants may be weighed, counted or measured.

## Heroin and Other Opioids

‘Heroin and other opioids’ include opiate analgesics such as heroin, morphine, opium, codeine and opioid analgesics such as methadone and pethidine.

## Cocaine

‘Cocaine’ includes cocaine, coca leaf, and coca paste.

## Amphetamine-type Stimulants

‘Amphetamine-type stimulants’ include amphetamine, methylamphetamine and crystalline methylamphetamine. Amphetamine-type stimulant arrest and seizure tables include phenethylamines.

## Phenethylamines

Phenethylamines include 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA—commonly known as ‘ecstasy’), 3,4-methylenedioxyethylamphetamine (MDEA), 3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA), dimethoxyamphetamine (DMA) and paramethoxyamphetamine (PMA).

## Cannabis

‘Cannabis’ includes cannabis plant, leaf, resin, oil, seed and all other forms.

## Hallucinogen

‘Hallucinogen’ includes tryptamines such as lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and psilocybin (mushrooms).

## Steroid

'Steroid' includes anabolic and androgenic steroids such as testosterone, nandrolone and stanozolol.

## Other Drugs

'Other drugs' includes phencyclidine (PCP, or angel dust), diazepam, lignocaine, benzocaine, dothiepin, flunitrazepam, other prescription drugs, and any drug not included elsewhere.

## Symbols and Abbreviations

The following symbols and abbreviations are used in the tables:

na	Not available
n.e.c.	Not elsewhere classified
no.	Number
r	Revised figure
%	Percent
..	Not applicable
–	Zero or rounded to zero

Figures that have been rounded may not add to totals.