



INITIATIVES

KEY POINTS

- Australia continues to work with Asian and Pacific Island government agencies and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to strengthen regional partnerships.
- During 2007–08, the Australian Government continued to deliver a number of initiatives including the *National Precursor Strategy*.
- The implementation of the National Clandestine Laboratory Database in 2008 will significantly enhance law enforcement intelligence capabilities.
- Since its introduction, approximately 63 per cent of pharmacies nationwide have signed up to use *Project STOP*.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines some of the initiatives that reflect the Australian Government's commitment to countering the threat posed by illicit drugs. Illicit drug initiatives have been developed by law enforcement, health authorities and other government and non-government agencies in the pursuit of effective outcomes. The contribution to this chapter was provided primarily by the Attorney-General's Department, as the central policy and coordinating element of the Attorney-General's portfolio. The Australian Crime Commission (ACC) intends to provide a more comprehensive coverage of Australian Government initiatives in future reports.

INTERNATIONAL

The Australian Government recognises that as domestic controls improve, there will be an increased demand for precursor chemicals sourced from outside Australia. The government has been proactive in responding to the anticipated increase in the supply of precursors from neighbouring regions.

The Australian Government has been working with Asian and Pacific Island government agencies and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to strengthen regional partnerships. In particular, the Attorney-General's Department has continued to promote strong regional dialogue through its leadership of the Asian Collaborative Group on Local Precursor Control (ACoG) and the South Pacific Precursor Control Forum (SPPCF).

The ACoG comprises 17 Asian member countries. It met in September 2007 and February 2008 to discuss regional action on priority areas including information and intelligence exchange, building forensic capacity and enhancing national regulatory measures.

The South Pacific Precursor Control Forum (SPPCF) comprises nine Pacific Island member countries. In 2007, the SPPCF discussed and developed strategies for a regional approach to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals into the manufacture of synthetic drugs.

Through these meetings, the SPPCF established a regional network of government and industry officials. This has assisted in building SPPCF members' technical and operational understanding of synthetic drugs and precursor diversion, trafficking and transportation. A draft Regional Strategic Plan (RSP) was also developed which includes a number of long, medium and short-term goals to address synthetic drug and precursor matters.

NATIONAL


The illegal production of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), including methylamphetamine and MDMA, is dependent upon access to precursor chemicals. Regulating the legitimate market for these chemicals and restricting illicit drug manufacture is an internationally recognised strategy for reducing the supply of ATS.

In 2007–08, the Australian Government continued to deliver a number of initiatives under the *National Strategy to Prevent the Diversion of Precursor Chemicals into Illicit Drug Manufacture* (the *National Precursor Strategy*). The National Precursor Strategy contributes to the supply reduction aspect of the *National Illicit Drug Strategy*. The strategy aims to prevent legitimately available chemicals being diverted into illicit drug manufacture.

Implementation of the *National Precursor Strategy* is informed and supported by the National Working Group on the Prevention of the Diversion of Precursor Chemicals into Illicit Drug Manufacture (the Precursor Working Group). The Precursor Working Group is represented by 45 members from commonwealth, state and territory law enforcement agencies, forensic and health services, and non-government members including the pharmaceutical and chemical industries.

With the assistance of the Precursor Working Group, the *National Precursor Strategy* is being delivered against four broad outcomes:

- enhanced intelligence and information sharing capacity among law enforcement and regulatory agencies
- enhanced law enforcement, forensic and judicial responses through training
- national regulatory approaches to control access to chemicals and equipment while recognising the legitimate needs of business and the public
- awareness raising for key stakeholders on the problems and issues surrounding precursor chemical diversion.



A key priority of the *National Precursor Strategy* has been the development of a national framework for the control of chemicals and equipment across the entire supply chain. This is being developed in response to a directive from the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) and a report from the Productivity Commission on Chemicals and Plastics Regulation. The aim is to minimise the opportunity for diversion into illicit drug manufacture whilst maintaining access for legitimate business.

The Attorney-General's Department has been developing the framework in collaboration with the Precursor Working Group. The Attorney-General's Department and the ACC have conducted an environmental scan of current regulatory controls in Australia and are nearing the completion of a risk-assessment analysis tool to inform proposed control measures. The development of the framework is on track for completion and presentation to the MCDS in 2009.

The *National Precursor Strategy* has also had success with a number of other key initiatives including:

■ **National Clandestine Laboratory Database (NCLD)**

The NCLD is a secure national repository for information derived from clandestine laboratory seizures. The ACC hosts the NCLD, which has been made accessible to law enforcement agencies since May 2008. The database assists law enforcement to better target their drug investigations by integrating information on seized clandestine laboratories from all law enforcement and forensic agencies in Australia. The NCLD has significantly enhanced law enforcement intelligence capabilities.

■ **National Awareness Raising Campaign for Pharmaceutical, Chemical and Science Industries**

The ACC, together with the Attorney-General's Department, the Plastics and Chemicals Industry Association and Science Industry Australia, hosted seven awareness raising forums around Australia. These forums highlighted the impact of amphetamine-type stimulants and the vulnerabilities of precursor chemicals being diverted into illicit drug manufacture. Each forum featured key speakers from law enforcement, health and industry. The forums were well received, with more than 760 attendees.

■ **Chemical Diversion Congress**

The Congress is a key meeting of chemical diversion experts aimed at achieving supply reduction objectives through partnership and education. The 11th Annual National Chemical Diversion Congress was held in Hobart in September 2007. The Congress attracted over 200 national and international representatives. Key discussions reaffirmed the need for consistency in regulatory approaches, engagement with smaller industries and the need for awareness raising initiatives to reach a broader audience.

■ **National rollout of *Project STOP***

Project STOP is a real-time database which records the transaction history of people attempting to purchase pharmaceutical products containing pseudoephedrine. *Project STOP* provides pharmacists with an enhanced ability to distinguish between legitimate therapeutic need and attempted diversion of these drugs. In addition to assisting pharmacists, the information contained within *Project STOP* can assist law enforcement with illicit drug investigations. Approximately 63 per cent of pharmacies nationwide have currently signed up to use *Project STOP* since its introduction in August 2007.

■ **Establishment of a Scheduling Working Party**

The Scheduling Working Party was established as a sub group to the Precursor Working Group in March 2008 and subsequently convened its first meeting in June 2008. The Scheduling Working Party is an independent body comprising representatives from law enforcement, forensics and industry. The primary focus is to provide recommendations to the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs and the MCDS with regard to appropriate controls for emerging precursor chemicals, plants and drugs.

■ **Training of Customs and Border Protection officers**

Between 2005 and 2008, 18 training courses have been delivered to over 360 frontline Customs and Border Protection officers. The course is designed to increase officers' awareness of the threat of illicit drug precursors at the border and enhance their ability to identify, detect and handle these chemicals.

■ **Training of forensic chemists**

Forensic training activities have been undertaken in response to the increasing number and complexity of illicit drug manufacturing sites in Australia. To date, three novice clandestine laboratory forensic chemist and two clandestine laboratory forensic chemist and investigators courses have been completed.

■ **Precursor Chemical Information Resource (PCIR)**

The Precursor Chemical Information Resource was designed to assist law enforcement officials in identifying and handling precursor chemicals. The resource will be provided to law enforcement, forensic and health officers.

The ACC continues to work with partner agencies to develop intelligence relating to the importation, manufacture and trafficking of ATS and other illicit drugs and precursor chemicals. ACC coercive powers, including examinations and notices to produce documents, have been instrumental in achieving these outcomes.¹ The ACC has contributed towards initiatives which include development of an ATS prosecutors sentencing handbook, regulating the condition of sale of precursor chemicals and prohibiting the importation of tablet presses. ACC intelligence continues to inform policy, legislative and regulatory reform.

¹ The ACC's coercive powers enable it to source information that can not be accessed through traditional policing methods. These allow the ACC to: summons witnesses to appear before the ACC; require witnesses to give evidence; and require persons to provide evidence.