

# INJECTING ICE IN THE COUNTRY Healthier Approaches

## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF ICE USE

There is a well-established connection between ice use and poor mental health. Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) clients who inject ice often experience anxiety and depression, and may experience drug-related psychosis (a dislocation from reality). The greater the level and duration of use, the greater the likelihood that your clients will suffer from poor mental health.

[penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry](http://penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry)



## Background

There are a range of factors that influence the mental health of clients who use ice:

- The amount, frequency and purity of the methamphetamine used.
- A history of mental illness in the family.
- A personal history of trauma to the brain and poor cognitive functioning.
- Existing anxiety and/or depression.
- Incorrect management of existing medications, meaning the client misses correct and timely doses due to erratic substance use. This means they are not receiving the therapeutic dose needed to keep them stable.

While the mental health impacts of ice use are complex and often require the expertise of specialist mental health workers to address, there are some simple things that NSP workers can do to help clients:

- Provide a genuine and warm welcome to the service.
- Promote eating and hydration before, during and after use.
- Encourage rest and recovery.

The significant community attention about the issue of ice is often related to aggressive, agitated and violent behaviours portrayed in the media. While the effects of ice can make people elevated and erratic, these behaviours can often be managed with little or no incidence of violence or aggression.

NSP clients will often present to your service at the withdrawal stage - and the lack of sleep and low energy levels can affect mood and behaviour.

In less severe cases clients might be more suspicious or guarded, and may have trouble interpreting the world around them. In more severe cases they might experience delusions, hallucinations and illogical or incoherent speech. In this situation, clients may have a hard time controlling their feelings and emotions - and they may appear like a different person from the previous times they have been in the service.

## Summary

It's important for NSP workers to understand the impact that ice intoxication and withdrawal has on mood and behaviour. For many people that use ice, the lack of food, sleep and water for extended periods means they are going to significantly depleted and not functioning well.

Knowing this will build your capacity to communicate with clients, showing care and compassion to support them during difficult times. It will also give you the confidence to know how to respond to situations, and de-escalate if things get out of hand.

From a service perspective, it's valuable to have some clear and agreed procedures and protocols about how you're going to manage situations where client's behaviour impacts you, other staff or clients.

Please consider contacting your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation for additional services and supports for your Aboriginal clients, or visit [www.vaccho.org.au](http://www.vaccho.org.au).

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