



7 December 2016

Ms Sophie Dunstone
Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
le.committee@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Dunstone

Re: Inquiry into crystal methamphetamine (ice)

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Law Enforcement. I congratulate the Committee for deciding to inquire into this significant social concern. Palmerston Association is a service provider, and therefore I have limited my submission to a commentary on emerging treatment issues in relation to methamphetamine use.

Serving the community for almost 40 years, Palmerston Association is a leading and respected specialist not for profit provider of alcohol and other drug services in Western Australia, operating from eight offices in Western Australia, including the South Metro Community Alcohol and Drug Service (Fremantle, Rockingham, Mandurah), South East Metro Community Alcohol and Drug Service (Thornlie and Armadale), Great Southern Community Alcohol and Drug Service (Albany, Katanning), Palmerston Perth and Palmerston Farm Therapeutic Community (a therapeutic community south of Perth). We are funded through tendered contracts with the State and Commonwealth Governments – in the latter case through the Department of Health and the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Our core services include:

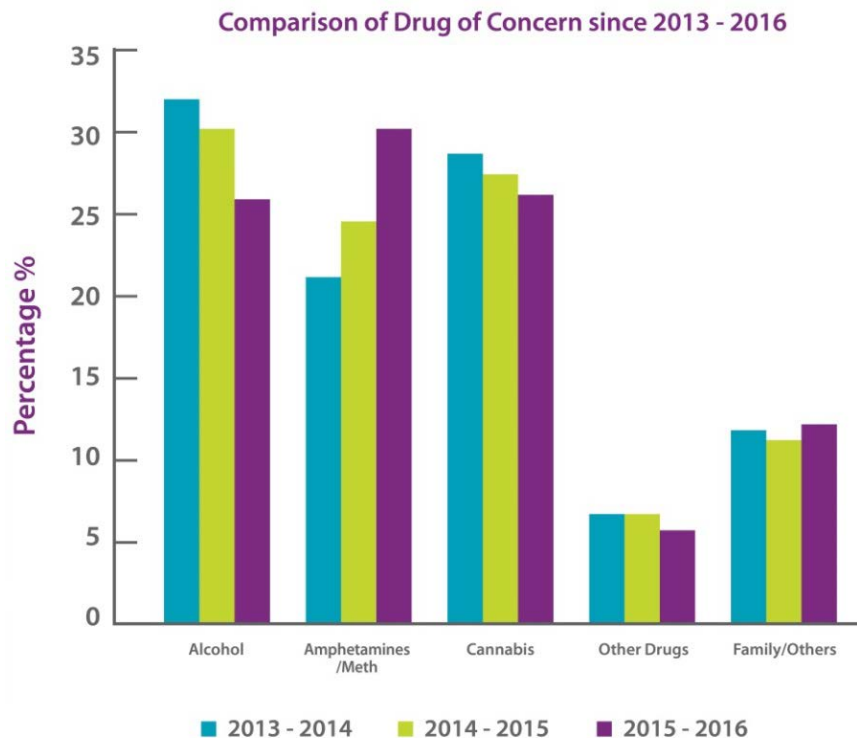
- early intervention supporting individuals, families and the community
- counselling and group work for people experiencing alcohol or other drug problems
- family support for those experiencing difficulties with a family member's drug use
- groups specifically designed for women, men, young people, parents or families
- education and training for other service providers, client groups, and the general community
- support and consultation to the local community and organisations such as schools, community groups, other service providers and private enterprise
- dedicated youth counselling services including outreach counselling
- residential support
- partnerships with other complementary organisations.

Our clients

During the 2015/16 financial year, Palmerston provided support to 5450 clients of all ages from as young as 13 to over 60 years either in a community or residential setting. This is an overall increase of 18% in demand over the past two years. Whilst the largest single cohort remains the 30 to 39 year bracket, 42% of our clients are under the age of 29 years. The gender breakdown remains constant (64% male, 36% female).

Changing patterns of drug use

The following table shows the changing patterns of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) use over the last three years. For the first time, methamphetamine as the primary drug of concern has outstripped alcohol in the aggregated organisational data. Thirty percent (30%) of the 5450 clients identified meth as their problem drug. This trend is reflected in five of our eight branches with the other three branches showing cannabis as the primary drug of concern.

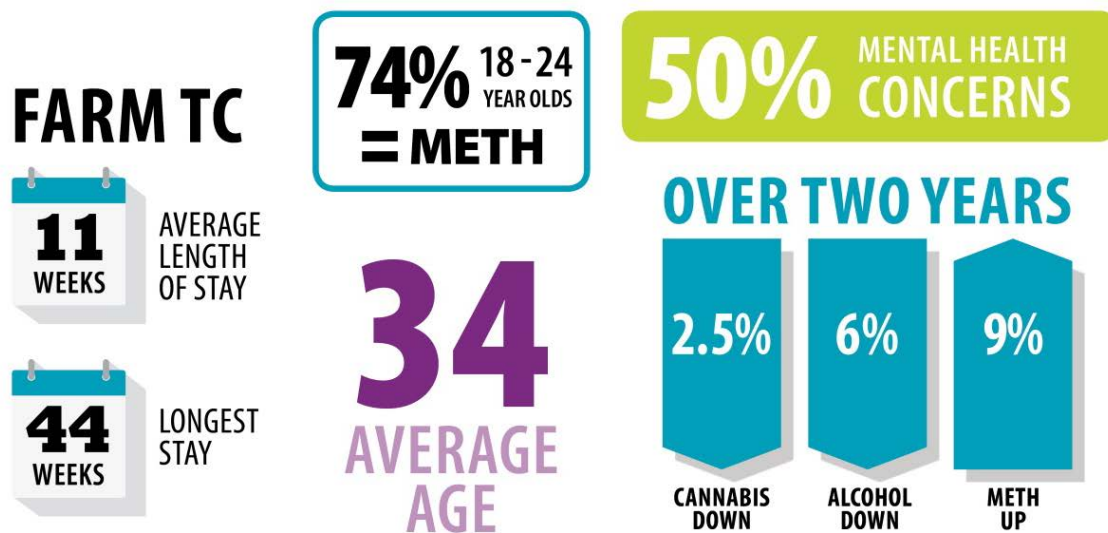


Palmerston Farm Therapeutic Community residential services

During the 2015/16 year, we supported a record number of residents through the Farm TC program. One hundred and eighty (180) people took part in the residential program representing a 16% increase on the previous financial year.

This increase in resident numbers could reflect the growing awareness in the community about methamphetamine and its toll on individuals and families. For the first time, meth has outstripped alcohol as the primary drug of concern for our residents. Two years ago, meth was the primary drug of concern for 38% of our residents, whereas this financial year, 53% reported meth as the problem drug. Alcohol was the primary drug of concern for 28% of residents (compared to 47% two years ago). The average length of stay was 11 weeks.

We have seen more young people coming to the service. We supported 61 young people under the age of 24 years, an increase of 4% on the previous year. Seventy four percent (74%) of this younger cohort (18-24 years) reported methamphetamine as their problem drug. This is an increase of 13% on the previous year.



From the above, the Committee can clearly see that the demand from methamphetamine is utilising a significant proportion of our resources, and requires a comprehensive strategy which Palmerston is endeavouring to provide.

Such demand for services inevitably leads to consequential waitlists and the need to support clients waiting for a service. Palmerston provides wait list groups and phone support services for these clients and also provides information about alternative services where appropriate.

Palmerston was aware of the emerging meth issue in early 2015 and I instigated organisational wide meth training for our clinical staff. This required a significant investment to train over 100 staff. The commitment was essential to ensure we could offer the best possible response to clients presenting with meth issues and also their families. This training needs to be ongoing.

Family support with ICE

Families need advice on how to help their relatives who are struggling with their AOD use and in particular methamphetamine (ice) use. The 2015 National Ice Task Force report highlighted the stress and anxiety of families in dealing with ice.

Palmerston developed meth specific family programs to support families in their struggle. These have been very well attended and have helped family members gain a deeper understanding of the impact of meth on brain function and behaviour.

As one parent commented:

"This program and the ongoing family support is something my wife and I have been searching for but until now unable to find. All of the resources have been focused on the user, but as the main support mechanism, the family unit has had little guidance, that is until now. The fact that the room was full to capacity is testament to the need for such services."

The three week structured program provides families with information on the impact of meth, coping skills, services available and a forum to speak with other people in similar circumstances. During the year, nearly 200 family members have been supported through these sessions.

Our clients as former children in state care

In a recent snapshot of our metropolitan clients, the survey showed that for 7% of our clients, there was a known history of state care as a minor, well above the national average of 8.1 per 100,000 (0.81%). This over representation of former wards of the state in our population is most concerning and requires further attention as an area of early intervention potential.

With the support of the State Government, Palmerston has appointed five dedicated meth counselling specialists and we are considering trialling Saturday clinics in an effort to be more accessible.

The National Ice Taskforce's (NIT) Final report and the government's response to the NIT report.

The NIT was congratulated at the time of the release of its report for delivering a comprehensive, realistic and sensible report. The 38 recommendations were all practical and targeted. Similarly, it was encouraging that the federal Government responded positively with new funding for treatment, among other initiatives.

Palmerston submits to the Committee that the delay in the commissioning of these funds is very disappointing and a lost opportunity for the thousands of people in need of support. In WA, there has been little evidence that the funds have been commissioned, other than short term funding for six months January to June 2017. These funds have been channelled through PHNs which were originally designed with a mandate to tackle chronic disease and support to primary health care. There is still a lack of clarity about the commissioning of funding targeting alcohol and other drugs and this requires urgent review and attention.

Summary and action

Increasing demand on AOD treatment services is demonstrable. Our programs work and specifically designed family programs have a positive effect on parents' coping skills.

Palmerston respectfully submits to the Committee that it seeks to ensure:

- the urgent commissioning of the federal funding
- strengthen support for families
- greater recognition of the correlation between children in care and AOD use in later life, as evidenced by the snapshot data above.

I have attached our annual report for 2015/16. It contains the voices and stories of some of our clients and will give your committee members insight into our clients. Importantly, they will give committee members insight into the behavioural change that can and does occur, and the hope that that families need to feel.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further clarification.

Yours sincerely

Sheila McHale
Chief Executive Officer
Palmerston Association Inc