

suggested a greater popularity of substances perceived as more suitable for home consumption, including psychedelics (for instance, LSD and 2C-B), and dissociatives (for example, ketamine). Preliminary results also suggested that occasional users might have reduced or stopped using drugs during the pandemic, while regular users increased their drug consumption.

861. Prevention and treatment services in most European countries resumed operations by June 2020, although at reduced capacity because of COVID-19 preventive measures. The number of people who use drugs entering treatment remained at lower levels throughout the year, likely because of a greater use of telemedicine. Meanwhile, restrictions on external service providers and social-distancing measures also disrupted treatment services in prison settings.

862. In May 2021, EMCDDA published a technical report entitled “Drug-related deaths and mortality in Europe”, highlighting that an estimated 9,200 deaths had involved one or more illicit drugs in the European Union and Norway and Turkey in 2018. Opioids were the main driver of those fatal overdoses, and men in their thirties and forties accounted for most of those deaths. The number of fentanyl-related deaths decreased markedly in Estonia and Sweden in 2018, while Scotland had some of the highest fentanyl-related mortality rates in Europe. Given that situation, the Government of Scotland introduced Buprenorphine (which contains buprenorphine) as a treatment option for people who use heroin in prisons and across the country and, in July 2021, allocated substantial funding for front-line services in order to get more people into treatment. England and Wales also recorded the largest number of drug-related deaths in 2020 (about 4,500) since 1993. According to the Office for National Statistics, about half of those deaths occurred in 2019 but were recorded in 2020 owing to delays in registering deaths. Apart from that, the increase was possibly driven by an ageing cohort of people who use drugs and the new trends of polydrug use, including combining gabapentinoids and benzodiazepines with heroin or morphine.

863. In the light of the considerable number of people who use opiates and cocaine and of drug-related deaths in the United Kingdom, an independent review was undertaken for the Government. The report (“Review of drugs part two: prevention, treatment, and recovery”) put forth a list of recommendations on treatment and recovery services. Specifically, the report contains a call for a reform in central government leadership, increased funding for drug use treatment and wider recovery support, and the strengthening of local authority accountability.

864. In Ireland, drug use treatment and prevalence data suggest an increasing dominance of cocaine. While opioids continue to be the primary drug of concern and accounted for 37 per cent of drug use treatment cases in 2020, the number of treatment cases involving cocaine increased from 24 per cent in 2019 to 27 per cent in 2020. Cocaine was also, for the first time, the most common drug among new treatment cases in 2020. Findings from the Irish National Drug and Alcohol Survey also point to considerable increases in cocaine usage, from 1.8 per cent of males aged 25–34 reporting recent use of cocaine in the period 2002–2003 to 9.4 per cent in the period 2019–2020, considerably higher than that recorded in most other European countries.

865. According to data collected through the French “addictovigilance” system from 2010 to 2019, health harms related to the misuse of gabapentinoids (gabapentin and pregabalin) in France (hospitalization for serious neurological, psychiatric or cardiac effects, requests for support and deaths) were recorded and the intrinsic misuse potential of pregabalin was confirmed. The increasing misuse of gabapentinoids, in particular of pregabalin, in the country since 2018 highlights the importance of specific monitoring of substance use-related disorders even after marketing authorization has been given.

## F. Oceania

Exploitation of Pacific island States for trafficking in drugs to Australia and New Zealand continues and there are indications that the region is also being used to traffic synthetic opioids to the United States and Europe.

Data on the prevalence of drug use and on treatment demand in Pacific island countries remain unavailable. The provision of prevention and treatment services throughout the region needs to be ensured if progress is to be made towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3, on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

### 1. Major developments

866. Transnational crime, including drug trafficking, continues to increase in the Pacific islands, with small craft being utilized by organized criminal groups for drug trafficking, in particular to Australia and New Zealand. In addition, Pacific island States are emerging as transit

points for trafficking in synthetic opioids to Australia, the United States and countries in Europe.

867. Non-parties to the three international drug control conventions remain concentrated in Oceania,<sup>61</sup> which remains vulnerable to exploitation by organized criminal groups for large-scale trafficking in drugs and laundering of the proceeds of drug-related crimes and to other related risks, including domestic drug use. **The Board calls upon non-parties to take steps towards accession to the conventions and encourages regional and bilateral partners to provide support to this end, so that these States can benefit from the implementation of the conventions in terms of improving the availability of controlled medicines, preventing drug trafficking and use and ensuring the provision of evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation services.** This would contribute to progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3, on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, in particular targets 3.5 and 17.18 of the Goals, on strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance use, and enhancing capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, and increasing significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data, respectively. The 2030 Agenda, which contains the Goals, was adopted by the General Assembly in 2015 as a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. Regional and bilateral initiatives to prevent and address drug trafficking continue and the Board remains engaged with countries in Oceania, including through the implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Board and the Oceania Customs Organization.

868. New Zealand enacted temporary legislation to permit the operation of drug- and substance-checking services during the 2020/21 summer festival season. In 2021, New Zealand introduced the Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill (No. 2), which is intended to enable a permanent regulatory system for drug- and substance-checking providers. However, the possession of controlled drugs and unapproved psychoactive substances remains illegal.

<sup>61</sup>Of the 10 States yet to accede to the 1961 Convention as amended, 7 are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Of the 13 States not party to the 1971 Convention, 8 are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Of the seven non-parties to the 1988 Convention, four are in Oceania: Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

## 2. Regional cooperation

869. In November and December 2020, the Australian Border Force held train-the-trainer courses for customs and immigration officials from the region in the use of the Pacific Small Craft Application, which was developed by the Australian Border Force for Oceania Customs Organization members to improve the collection and sharing of information on small craft within the region. In April 2021, the Oceania Customs Organization and the Australian Border Force conducted training for border law enforcement agencies of Fiji on the use of the application. The Oceania Customs Organization has recognized that small craft remain a threat to all countries in the Pacific as they are used for a number of illicit activities, including drug trafficking by organized criminal groups. In June 2021, online training was held for Oceania Customs Organization members, including officers who are to serve as regional coordinators for the application. The training session was followed by a meeting of the Pacific Small Craft Application Regional Coordinators Forum to discuss the implementation of the technology within each jurisdiction.

870. In December 2020, the INCB GRIDS Programme provided access to and training on its latest intelligence tools for the Oceania Customs Organization and its members throughout the Pacific. The training was held within the framework of the 2019 memorandum of understanding between the Oceania Customs Organization and INCB, which is aimed at facilitating the sharing of information and the development of actionable intelligence for customs officers in the Pacific. Recognizing the critical role that customs administrations play in intercepting emerging dangerous substances, in particular in the Pacific, 11 front-line customs officers in Australia, Fiji, Micronesia (Federated States of) and Palau participated in the event. GRIDS Intelligence is a state-of-the-art secure analytics package that visualizes global real-time NPS trafficking incidents, providing intelligence profiles of dangerous non-scheduled substances for profiling and risk assessment by law and regulatory enforcement focal points. The training also provided an opportunity to highlight the emergence of Pacific island States as trafficking points for synthetic opioids.

871. In March 2021, the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, the Pacific Immigration Development Community, the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre and the Oceania Customs Organization conducted a joint pilot exercise on operation command with 26 participants from Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands. The exercise was conducted as part of ongoing efforts to improve

communication and networking processes to combat transnational crimes, which continue to increase in the region.

872. In August 2021, the Oceania Customs Organization held its annual conference, at which member customs administrations noted that the threat in the Pacific remained high from, inter alia, trafficking in drugs and welcomed the WCO Operational Guidelines for the Facilitation of Situationally Critical Medicines and Vaccines. Reference was made to the capacity-building activities carried out in the Pacific, including training on vessel searches, border security assessments, small craft targeting, cargo search, disruption of criminal business activities, risk assessments, document examination, and investigations and intelligence. In June 2021, the Oceania Customs Organization held a criminal business disruption workshop with the participation of 23 member customs administrations, law enforcement agencies from Fiji, the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre, the Pacific Transnational Crime Network, the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Pharmaceutical Security Institute, the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific, INCB and UNODC.

873. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of four countries in Oceania, namely Australia, Kiribati, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, and the international drug control framework. They are available upon registration to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

### 3. National legislation, policy and action

874. The Fiji Revenue and Customs Service announced the signing of an agreement with the Fiji Police Force for the sharing of information through the INTERPOL database and the National Customs Enforcement Network, with a view to further strengthening the country's border management system. The Fiji Police Force also announced the establishment of a narcotics bureau.

875. In June 2020, the Parliament of the Marshall Islands adopted an amendment to its national legislation, renaming the Narcotic Drugs (Prohibition and Control) Act the Prohibited Drugs (Prohibition and Control) Act. To reflect the substances present on the illicit market, the Act places methamphetamine, synthetic cathinones and "ecstasy" under national control.

876. In Palau, a canine detection unit was established to support law enforcement efforts, including drug detection.

877. In December 2020, the Therapeutic Goods Administration of Australia announced a final decision to reschedule certain low-dose CBD preparations from Schedule 4 (prescription medicine) to Schedule 3 (pharmacist-only medicine), which would allow low-dose CBD preparations approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration of up to a maximum of 150 mg per day to be supplied by a pharmacist over the counter for adult consumption without a prescription. The decision also covered limits on dosage form and packaging requirements, including pack size and the use of child-resistant closures.

878. In June 2021, the Narcotic Drugs Amendment (Medicinal Cannabis) Act 2021 was adopted in Australia. The legislation is aimed at reducing the burden of the licence assessment process by providing for a single medicinal cannabis licence to replace the previous three-licence structure that was required for cultivation, production, manufacture and research activities, and by providing for the majority of licences to be permanent. The amendments were presented as reaffirming the commitment of the Government to the availability of a safe, legal and sustainable supply of cannabis-derived medicines for patients.

879. In December 2020, the Parliament of New Zealand passed time-limited legislation, the Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Act 2020, permitting the operation of drug- and substance-testing services during the 2020/21 summer festival season. However, it will remain illegal for members of the public to possess controlled drugs and unapproved psychoactive substances. The Act is to be repealed automatically 12 months after commencement. As mentioned in paragraph 868 above, New Zealand also introduced the Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill (No. 2).

880. In October 2021, Tonga hosted a national symposium on illicit drugs. The panel discussions were focused on three strategic focus areas: (a) demand reduction; (b) supply reduction; and (c) harm reduction. The symposium revealed that the main illicit drugs circulating on the local market were methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. It also revealed an increase in the proportion of people being admitted to the psychiatric unit at the main hospital with drug-related issues, from 31.7 per cent in 2016 to 47.4 per cent in 2018.

## 4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

881. Most drug seizures in Oceania are accounted for by Australia and New Zealand. However, continued reports of seizures in other countries of the region illustrate the exploitation of Pacific island States for trafficking in drugs to Australia and New Zealand.

882. The Fiji police service reported seizures of methamphetamine, as well as the seizure of over 4 tons of cannabis plant on the island of Kadavu, over the period June 2020–March 2021. The Government of the Federated States of Micronesia reported the seizure of cannabis shipped in a parcel from the United States.

883. In December 2020, the Samoa police reported the eradication of approximately 4,000 cannabis plants and the Samoa Customs and Revenue Service reported a record seizure of 500 grams of methamphetamine, together with 2 kg of cannabis. This was followed in January 2021 by a further record seizure in Samoa, of 900 grams of methamphetamine concealed in packages shipped from the United States. The Government of Tonga reported seizures of methamphetamine and cannabis, as well as of cocaine that had washed up on the shores of Vava'u in July 2021.

884. A record 38.5 tons of illicit drugs were seized in Australia in the 12-month period from July 2019 to June 2020, including 18 tons of ATS and 10.6 tons of cannabis. This marked a 45 per cent increase compared with the previous year and a 314 per cent increase compared with the 12-month reporting period 2010/11. There are indications that the illicit markets for ATS and cannabis remain large, with the potential to expand. In addition, the illicit market for cocaine continued to expand and the heroin market, while relatively small, also appeared to be expanding.

885. Preliminary drug seizure data from New Zealand Customs show that the amounts of methamphetamine seized at the country's border increased in the first half of 2021, reaching 381.8 kg, compared with the same period in 2020, when they reached 105 kg, while the volume of "ecstasy" seized decreased, from 197.6 kg to 27.8 kg. The amount of cocaine seized remained stable at about 10 or 11 kg.

886. Of people self-reporting drug use in Australia and New Zealand, the proportion who purchased drugs over the darknet (based on a non-representative convenience sample of some 3,600 people per year in Australia and 3,200 people in New Zealand) increased from 6.0 per cent

in January 2014 to 17.5 per cent in January 2021, suggesting that the popularity of the darknet for drug purchases in the two countries remains above the global average (namely 4.7 per cent in January 2014 and 14.5 per cent in January 2021, based on roughly 100,000 self-selected people from more than 50 countries each year).

## 5. Prevention and treatment

887. There is a persistent lack of data on drug use and treatment demand in Pacific island States. **The Board recommends that these States prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug control policy, and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to this end.**

888. Wastewater analysis in April 2021 covering 56 per cent of the population of Australia indicated signs of recovery in the illicit market for methamphetamine, which remained the most-consumed illicit drug in the country. Fentanyl and oxycodone consumption decreased to the lowest levels recorded by the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Programme. Heroin consumption continued to decline and cocaine consumption also decreased. "Ecstasy" consumption decreased from the record level seen in December 2019.

889. Of a sample of people who had injected drugs at least once monthly in the preceding six months, 9 per cent reported an increase in using their own needles and 13 per cent reported injecting more alone following the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Among the sample group, the prevalence of recent (past six months) use of heroin increased from 55 per cent in 2019 to 63 per cent in 2020. The proportion of respondents reporting recent methamphetamine use decreased from 78 per cent in 2019 to 72 per cent in 2020. While reported recent use of cocaine had declined from 35 per cent in 2001, an increase was seen between 2019 and 2020, from 13 per cent to 17 per cent. Recent use of cannabis reached the lowest level (67 per cent) since monitoring commenced. Morphine was the pharmaceutical opioid most commonly used without a prescription (15 per cent) and the non-medical use of fentanyl was reported by 6 per cent of respondents. A decrease in recent use of codeine without a prescription was seen, from 9 per cent in 2019 to 4 per cent in 2020. Nearly half (48 per cent) of the sample were engaged in drug use treatment, reflecting an increase compared with 2019 (42 per cent).



890. Among adults detained by police in Australia, past-month use of methamphetamine decreased from 55 per cent in the period January–February 2020 to 38 per cent in the period April–June 2020 and then increased to 39 per cent in the period October–November 2020.

891. In Australia, between the 12-month reporting period 2015/16 and the 12-month reporting period 2019/20, amphetamines replaced cannabis as the most common illicit drug of concern leading to treatment. The number of closed treatment episodes<sup>62</sup> where amphetamines were the principal drug of concern increased from about 12,500 episodes to 61,000 episodes over the 10-year period to 2019/20. In 2019/20, nearly 8 in 10 treatment episodes within the amphetamines group were for methamphetamine as a principal drug of concern, having increased from 12 per cent in the 12-month reporting period 2010/11. Over the same period, the number of treatment episodes for cannabis rose by 27 per cent and the number of treatment episodes for cocaine increased about fourfold.

892. According to provisional data, the proportion of drug-induced deaths involving amphetamines increased by a factor of four over the period 2009–2019 in Australia. The proportion of drug-induced deaths involving cocaine increased by a factor of 2.5 over the period 2016–2019. While natural and semi-synthetic opioids were the most commonly identified opioid in opioid-related deaths in the period 1997–2018, heroin was the most commonly identified opioid in opioid-related deaths in 2019. The rate of opioid-induced deaths involving heroin doubled in the period 2009–2019.

893. The New Zealand Health Survey for the period 1 July 2019–19 March 2020 found that past-year prevalence of use of cannabis and amphetamine prior to the pandemic was 14.9 per cent and 1.1 per cent respectively, which was similar to the previous survey period but represented an increase compared with earlier years.

894. Wastewater monitoring covering up to 75 per cent of the population in New Zealand indicated that methamphetamine use in the first quarter of 2021 had

decreased by 14 per cent compared with the previous quarter, and by 30 per cent compared with the first quarter of 2020. The lowest level of “ecstasy” consumption since reporting began was recorded in the first quarter of 2021, representing a 53 per cent decrease from the previous quarter. Cocaine consumption remained relatively stable but represented a decrease of 41 per cent compared with the first quarter of 2020. Comparison of wastewater data in one week of May 2021 and April 2021 indicated an increase in the quantities detected of methamphetamine (27 per cent increase), “ecstasy” (43 per cent increase) and cocaine (37 per cent increase). Total detected levels of “ecstasy” in May 2021 remained lower than in May 2020 and May 2019. The total level of cocaine detected in May 2021 indicated an increase compared with the quantity consumed in May 2020 and May 2019.

895. In 2021, the early warning system of New Zealand, operated by the Drug Information and Alerts New Zealand of the National Drug Intelligence Bureau, issued alerts about dangerous synthetic cannabinoids, possibly linked to a number of deaths and hospitalizations, and about tablets containing a dangerous amount of eutylone that had been likely sold as “ecstasy”.

896. In Oceania, the level of availability of narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes remains skewed, with lower levels of availability seen in the Pacific island States. In 2020, Australia and New Zealand, representing 0.4 per cent of the global population, accounted for 4 per cent of global consumption of morphine. During the period 2019–2020, there was a marked decrease in the reported consumption of opioid analgesics in Oceania. However, the level of consumption of opioids, including fentanyl and oxycodone, in Oceania remains among the highest in the world, and represents a risk for potential misuse and overdose. Determining levels of consumption of psychotropic substances for Oceania remains a challenge, as over a quarter of the countries in the region have not provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past several years. A slight improvement for 2020, however, suggests that continuous efforts in this regard will facilitate better assessments on the availability of psychotropic substances in the region.

<sup>62</sup> A treatment episode is considered closed when treatment is completed or has ceased; there has been no contact between the client and treatment provider for three months; or there is a change in the main treatment type, principal drug of concern or delivery setting.