

F. Oceania

Increasing use of drugs, in particular methamphetamine, and the activity of organized criminal groups are challenging many communities in the Pacific region, as a spillover effect of increasing trafficking in cocaine and methamphetamine through Pacific island States.

Information on the extent of drug use and treatment demand in Pacific island States remains unavailable. Governments in the region are urged, with the support of bilateral partners and regional and international organizations, to prioritize the collection of such data and the provision of evidence-based prevention and treatment services.

1. Major developments

894. Trafficking in cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine is increasing in the Pacific region, and the methods used to traffic the substances are evolving. The Pacific island States and territories continue to be used as transit areas for cocaine trafficked between Latin America and Australia and New Zealand. In addition, the Pacific islands have become sites of illicit production and consumption, in particular of methamphetamine, and local drug trafficking networks are reported to be working with transnational groups.

895. Trafficking in fentanyl and other dangerous opioids is expanding to markets in Oceania, representing an escalating global challenge. For example, a record seizure of fentanyl was made in Australia in February 2022 and

New Zealand continues to report encounters with emerging non-medical synthetic opioids, as highlighted below.

896. Oceania is characterized by vast and porous maritime borders and remains highly vulnerable to large-scale drug and precursor trafficking and related risks such as money-laundering, domestic drug use and local illicit production of drugs. Moreover, non-parties to the three international drug control conventions remain concentrated in this region. **INCB again calls upon non-parties to take steps towards accession to, and full implementation of, the conventions. The Board also encourages regional and bilateral partners to provide support to this end, so that these States can benefit from adherence to the conventions, particularly in improving the availability of controlled medicines, preventing and addressing drug trafficking, and providing evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.** The Board remains committed to supporting countries in Oceania, including through the implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Oceania Customs Organization and the Board and activities carried out through the GRIDS Programme and INCB Learning.

897. Oceania is among the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of the reported consumption of narcotic drugs, there is a wide disparity between countries in the region regarding the consumption of opioid analgesics. Australia and New Zealand reported much higher levels of consumption than other Pacific island countries. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Oceania remains a challenge, as only a third of the countries and territories in the region have provided consumption data to the Board on any psychotropic substance for the past several years. The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes while ensuring the rational use of these substances in countries reporting high levels of consumption. **The Board encourages the international community, relevant regional organizations and bilateral partners to support small island developing States in Oceania and other regions in improving the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.** Further information on recent developments is contained in the supplement to this annual report, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ E/INCB/2022/1/Supp.1.

2. Regional cooperation

898. To help address the expansion of trafficking in fentanyl and other dangerous opioids to markets in Oceania, Australia, New Zealand and, in coordination with the Oceania Customs Organization, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Solomon Islands participated in the INCB Operation GAPZ in the period from November 2021 to January 2022. Participating agencies exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical gabapentin, pregabalin, xylazine and zopiclone trafficked through international post, express mail and courier services and related modalities.

899. In March 2022, under the framework of the INCB GRIDS Programme, INCB and partner organizations conducted an interregional stakeholder consultation on public-private partnerships for the prevention of dangerous substance trafficking through the Internet. Front-line officers from Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and the Oceania Customs Organization participated in the event, which was aimed at strengthening the efforts of Governments and, through them, private sector partners, to cooperate in the prevention of the misuse of legitimate Internet-related services for trafficking in dangerous non-medical synthetic opioids.

900. In May 2022, the Oceania Customs Organization, supported by the Australian Border Force, provided training for border enforcement officials of member agencies in maritime border security, including on drug trafficking and use of the Oceania Customs Organization Pacific Small Craft Application, which assists members in the collection of information on the movement of yachts in the region. Officers from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and the Northern Mariana Islands participated. The Oceania Customs Organization highlighted the increase in drug trafficking in the Pacific and also noted that a significant quantity of information was being shared between States in the tracking of yachts around the region. In November 2021, law enforcement officials from Fiji and Tonga received UNODC training on the investigation of maritime crime, including drug trafficking cases.

901. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyls, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including five participants from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and the Oceania Customs Organization, who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

902. The first Pacific Regional Law Enforcement Conference, on the theme “Partnering to disrupt crime in the Pacific”, was held in August 2022 in Denarau, Fiji, in partnership with the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, the Oceania Customs Organization and the Pacific Immigration Development Community. The main aim of the conference was to establish a network of researchers and law enforcement practitioners and develop a body of research on law enforcement issues and practices in the Pacific in view of the growing criminal networks in the region. UNODC participated in the conference, highlighting challenges posed by the expansion of the illicit synthetic drug market to regions neighbouring the Pacific region, its spillover effects, and recommendations to address the situation.

903. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including 3 participants from Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Oceania Customs Organization. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multi-lateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

904. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of the trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 4 participants from Australia and the Oceania Customs Organization. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

905. A total of 22 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of five countries in the region, namely, Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries in expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and in gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

3. National legislation, policy and action

906. In Australia, reforms relating to pharmaceutical opioids continue to be implemented, including smaller pack sizes for immediate-release prescription opioid products and updated product indications, warning statements in text boxes and warning statements regarding the substance class on packaging and inserts. Regulations are now in place to limit the use of fentanyl patches for the treatment of pain in patients with cancer, patients receiving palliative care and in exceptional circumstances, as well as where other analgesics are not suitable or have been proved not to be effective and where the pain has been found to be opioid-responsive. The indication for fentanyl patches was also updated to reflect that they are not for use in patients who are not already tolerant to opioids.

907. The Fiji Revenue and Customs Service established the Air Cargo Control Unit in Nadi, Fiji, in January 2022 under the framework of the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme and funded by the Australian Border Force. The Unit will profile air cargo consignments in order to prevent, inter alia, drug and precursor trafficking.

908. The Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Act (No. 2) 2021 was adopted in New Zealand in November 2021. The legislation provides a permanent legal framework for drug-checking services that conduct scientific tests on unidentified substances in order to determine their likely identity and composition, interpret results and provide information to persons providing samples, with the aim of reducing risk and harm by helping people to make informed decisions about the use of particular drugs, without promoting their use or claiming that their use is safe. The Act was enacted following the expiration of temporary legislation on drug- and substance-checking services that had been in force in the period from December 2020 to December 2021.

909. The New Zealand Parliament enacted the Land Transport (Drug Driving) Amendment Act in March 2022, establishing a roadside oral fluid testing system to test drivers for recent drug use. Random roadside drug testing is expected to come into force as of 2023 to deter drug-impaired driving, and will follow an approach similar to that of breath alcohol testing, with the establishment of criminal limits and infringement thresholds for 25 drugs. Approximately 30 per cent of all road deaths in the country in 2019 were related to the use of substances other than alcohol.

910. The Misuse of Drugs (Classification and Presumption of Supply) Order 2022 was approved by the Parliament of New Zealand in May 2022, changing the classification of

49 substances in the schedules of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975, including the scheduling of a number of fentanyl analogues, synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids, prescription medicines and precursor chemicals. A temporary drug classification order for the benzodiazepine derivate etizolam was issued in New Zealand, effective as of 17 February 2022. The order was due to expire on 16 February 2023, with the possibility of a one-year extension.

911. In December 2021, the Parliament of Papua New Guinea adopted the Controlled Substance Act 2021, and the Dangerous Drugs (Amendment No. 1) Act 2021 amending the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952, providing for the regulation of controlled substances and establishing criminal offences relating to the use of illicit drugs, precursor chemicals and related implements.

912. Following the amendment in November 2020 of the Illicit Drugs Control Act of Tonga, which was aimed at addressing illicit manufacture, trafficking and use of methamphetamine, the Illicit Drugs Control (Amendment) Act 2021 entered into force in November 2021, introducing, inter alia, a section on offences relating to the supply of drugs to children and the involvement of children in drug trafficking.

913. The Parliament of Vanuatu enacted the Industrial Hemp and Medical Cannabis Act in November 2021 to regulate and control the import and cultivation of hemp and cannabis seeds and the manufacture and export of industrial hemp and medical cannabis. Consequently, the Parliament adopted legislation amending the Dangerous Drugs Act to allow for the cultivation of cannabis for the purpose of producing industrial hemp and medical cannabis.

914. A number of countries and territories in Oceania are taking steps to participate in international organizations and initiatives. In November 2021, the Federated States of Micronesia joined INTERPOL. In March 2022, the Papua New Guinea Customs Service joined the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme in order to train and equip customs and other law enforcement personnel in the identification and prevention of the cross-border movement of illicit goods. In June 2022, the Government of Solomon Islands announced that the country would join WCO.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

915. While Australia and New Zealand continue to account for most of the drugs seized in Oceania, trafficking in cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine is increasing in

Pacific island States, where the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine is emerging alongside the continuing illicit cultivation of cannabis.

916. Between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022, the Australian Federal Police seized 18,789 kg of illicit drugs and precursors, comprising 8,139 kg of methamphetamine, 2,564 kg of khat, 2,044 kg of cocaine, 1,371 kg of precursors, 1,155 kg of cannabis, 857 kg of heroin and 440 kg of GBL. Major operations in the period from July 2021 to June 2022 resulted in large seizures of cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin that had been trafficked to and within various parts of Australia. Australian authorities reported a record seizure of more than 11 kg of pure fentanyl concealed in a sea container that had arrived at the port of Melbourne, Australia, in February 2022. All previous seizures of fentanyl in the country had been of quantities smaller than 30 grams. Police made a record seizure of more than 1,800 kg of methamphetamine concealed in two shipments of marble stone in sea containers arriving in Port Botany, Australia.

917. Cocaine and methamphetamine trafficking increased in New Zealand in 2022. A record seizure of more than 700 kg of cocaine was effected in February 2022, in a shipping container that had departed from South America and arrived in Tauranga, New Zealand. In the same month, authorities made a record seizure of 613 kg of methamphetamine that had arrived at Auckland Airport in an air consignment. The Government of New Zealand reported decreased trafficking in cannabis resin, plants and oil, opium, heroin, morphine, diverted or counterfeit pharmaceutical opioids and MDMA.

918. New Zealand reported a significant decrease in seizures of synthetic cannabinoids, eutylone and etizolam in 2021. However, customs and police authorities in New Zealand communicated incidents through the INCB IONICS platform related to numerous seizures of the non-controlled substances GBL and eutylone during Phase 2 of Operation Skipjack.

919. In Fiji, there was a reported increase in drug-related offences related to domestic cannabis cultivation and the use of the country by drug trafficking networks as a transshipment point for drug trafficking to other countries in Oceania. An increase was also seen in drug trafficking within the country. A joint operation between the customs and police services resulted in the detection of methamphetamine at the airport in Nadi, Fiji.

920. In March 2022, the customs authorities of the Northern Mariana Islands seized 2.2 kg of methamphetamine, representing the largest seizure of the substance made by customs authorities in the territory in the last five

years. A further seizure of 1.8 kg of methamphetamine was made in the territory in June 2022.

921. The law enforcement authorities of Samoa reported the seizure of over 1,100 cannabis plants and the eradication of an illicit cannabis cultivation site in November 2021.

922. Information on the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2022 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁶⁹

5. Prevention and treatment

923. There are indications of increased levels of drug use and treatment demand in Pacific island States. However, there continues to be a lack of data on the situation. **The Board reiterates its recommendation that these States prioritize the collection of data on drug use prevalence and treatment demand. This will aid the development of evidence-based drug control policies and drug prevention and treatment services. The Board continues to encourage bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to these States in this regard.**

924. Wastewater analysis covering about 56 per cent of the population of Australia showed an increase in consumption of methamphetamine over the period from December 2021 to April 2022. Consumption of cocaine, MDMA, tenamfetamine (MDA), oxycodone, fentanyl, cannabis and ketamine decreased, with record lows seen in the consumption of MDMA, tenamfetamine (MDA), oxycodone and fentanyl. While consumption of heroin in capital cities remained relatively stable over that period, consumption of heroin increased outside of capital cities.

925. Among a sample of adults who had injected drugs at least once monthly in the preceding six months and who resided in capital cities in Australia, methamphetamine surpassed heroin as the preferred drug in 2021 for the first time since monitoring began. Reported cocaine use among the sample remained stable compared with 2020, and recent cannabis use was at the lowest level since monitoring began. Six per cent of the people sampled reported recent use of non-prescribed fentanyl, the same level as in 2020. Surveys in 2021 of a sample of people who regularly used MDMA (“ecstasy”) and other illicit stimulants indicated that recent use of “ecstasy” had declined significantly in 2021 but that use of methamphetamine had remained stable between 2020

and 2021. Recent use of cocaine and ketamine had increased significantly over the same period.

926. Among a sample of adults detained by police in Australia in 2021, 77 per cent had tested positive for at least one type of drug, less than the proportion that had done so in 2020 (82 per cent). About half of the people in the sample had tested positive for methamphetamine (50 per cent) or cannabis (45 per cent). Self-reported past-month use of methamphetamine was stable for most of 2021 until declining in October and November, while past-month cannabis use increased in July and August of that year.

927. Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic led many treatment services to adapt their practices by offering online services and telehealth appointments. In Australia, following a consistent increase in the number of treatment episodes relating to amphetamines between the 12-month reporting period 2011/12 and the 12-month reporting period 2019/20, the number of such treatment episodes declined in the 12-month reporting period 2020/21. A total of 79 per cent of such treatment episodes in the period 2020/21 were for methamphetamine. Treatment for heroin use continued to decline.

928. The Alcohol and Drug Foundation of Australia developed an evidence-based toolkit, Path2Help, to provide advice and additional support for families and friends of people experiencing harm from alcohol and illicit drugs. The toolkit comprises a national online directory linking to locally available support and information services. Through additional resources to support activities aimed at reducing drug and alcohol use and harms during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of new prevention initiatives were supported, including the development of a new digital and online support programme entitled “become”, for people who have experienced trauma and who may be experiencing problems with alcohol and drugs, and new factsheets for the Positive Choices online portal to support families, students and teachers in dealing with alcohol and other drug issues during the pandemic. Also under the Positive Choices programme, the “Illicit Project”, for the prevention of drug and alcohol use among older adolescents, was launched. In addition, as part of the “Cracks in the Ice” online toolkit, new factsheets were developed, providing information on COVID-19 and crystal methamphetamine use and harms.

929. Preliminary estimates indicate that there were 1,842 drug-induced deaths in Australia in 2020, with the rate of drug overdose deaths involving amphetamines reaching the highest level since monitoring began. The rate of drug overdose deaths involving cocaine increased fivefold in the period 2014–2020. Heroin was the most commonly identified opioid in opioid-induced deaths in 2020. According to the National

¹⁶⁹E/INCB/2022/4.

Coronial Information System covering Australia and New Zealand, opioid-related deaths reported to a coroner in Australia more than doubled over the period from 2001 – a year in which drug-related deaths were exceptionally low owing to the low availability of heroin – to 2018, to 1,393 deaths. The most commonly identified opioid drugs contributing to death were morphine, codeine, heroin, methadone, oxycodone, tramadol and fentanyl, and opioid-related deaths frequently involved other types of drugs. Between 2001 and 2019, the number of benzodiazepine-related deaths reported to coroners in Australia more than tripled, to 1,238 deaths in 2019. A total of 307 drug-related deaths were recorded in New Zealand in 2019, representing 8 per cent of all reported deaths that year.

930. The research report entitled “The New Zealand illicit drug harm index 2020” was published in 2022 and estimated the total cost of personal and community harm resulting from the use of illicit drugs in New Zealand at \$1,904.3 million New Zealand dollars, with the largest proportion of personal harm attributed to the use of methamphetamine and the largest proportion of community harm attributed to the use of cannabis.

931. According to the New Zealand Health Survey for the period September 2020 to August 2021, the prevalence of past-year cannabis use among people aged 15 years and above was 15.3 per cent. The prevalence of cannabis use at least weekly among the same age group was estimated at 4.5 per cent. The prevalence of past-year use of amphetamine-type stimulants was estimated at 1 per cent among people aged 15 years and above, and at 1.2 per cent among people between 16 and 64 years of age.

932. Wastewater monitoring covering up to 75 per cent of the population of New Zealand found that the quantity of methamphetamine consumed in the second quarter of 2022 was greater than the average quantity detected over the

previous four quarters and that the methamphetamine consumption detected over the period from July 2021 to June 2022 had settled at a higher level than in previous years. Consumption of “ecstasy” continued to increase in most districts after a period of low consumption and availability in 2021. The quantity of cocaine consumption in the second quarter of 2022 was greater than the average for the previous four quarters.

933. The methamphetamine reduction initiative “Te Ara Oranga”, which had been successfully trialled in the Northland region of New Zealand, was expanded to the eastern Bay of Plenty. The initiative links evidence-based health services with police prevention and enforcement activities and involves community organizations. It is aimed at reducing methamphetamine demand through projects that align the resources of the police, district health boards, non-governmental organizations and the community.

934. In 2022, the early warning system of New Zealand, High Alert, which is aimed at reducing drug-related harm in communities, issued an alert about fentanyl found in white powder sold as cocaine or methamphetamine and linked to instances of serious harm. It also issued an alert about the detection, for the first time in the country, of the opioid metonitazene, which has a greater potency than fentanyl. The service also issued notifications about a new synthetic cathinone detected for the first time in the country, dimethylpentylone; the toxic chemical diethylene glycol being marketed as 1,4-butanediol (1,4-BD); a highly potent opioid, *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene (also known as etonitazepyne), found in fake oxycodone tablets; potential adulteration of GBL and GBL-type substances; and misrepresented MDMA.

935. In Fiji, the use of drugs was seen to be increasing as a spillover effect of the use of the country as a trans-shipment point for drug trafficking to other countries in Oceania.