



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Home Affairs**



# **HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO**

## Illicit Drugs Action Plan



## Introduction

Illicit drugs are the life-blood of transnational, serious and organised crime (TSOC) groups targeting Australia and continue to have a devastating impact across communities, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas. Australians are high consumers of illicit drugs, consuming in excess of 15 tonnes each year, worth more than \$9.3 billion in street prices. This provides a highly lucrative market for organised criminal networks who seek to profit by importing illicit drugs that harm Australians and destroy communities.

Since 2006, drug-induced deaths in Australia have increased<sup>1</sup>. In 2017 alone it is estimated there were 1,795 drug-induced deaths in Australia.<sup>2</sup> As well as causing deaths, illicit drugs harm the broader community, heavily impact government services and first responders (police, doctors, nurses and paramedics), and drive street-level volume crime.

This Home Affairs Illicit Drugs Action Plan (the Action Plan) outlines the Home Affairs Portfolio's priorities and actions to combat illicit drugs. It demonstrates how the Portfolio works collaboratively to combat the illicit drug threat and draws upon lessons learned from Australia's past and current responses to drive action for the future.

The Action Plan covers new and existing initiatives and is being implemented by the Department of Home Affairs and its relevant portfolio agencies:

- Australian Border Force (ABF)
- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC)
- Australian Federal Police (AFP)
- Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), and
- Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC)

Each agency has an important role in targeting the production, importation and distribution of drugs into and across Australia. This Action Plan focuses on the threat from methylamphetamine – in particular, its crystalline form 'ice', which constituted 57 per cent of the Australian methylamphetamine market in 2016<sup>3</sup>.

**Photo: The South Australian Joint Agency Ice Strike Team located 18 kilograms of methamphetamine in 4WD recovery winches in March 2019 (image courtesy of AFP)**



1. Increased from approximately 6 drug-induced deaths per 100,000 people in 2006, to 9.8 deaths per 100,000 in 2017. Drug-induced deaths are those directly attributable to use of illicit drugs, some prescription medicines and some medicines available over-the-counter. Deaths attributed to alcohol or tobacco use are excluded. From Chrzanowska, A., Dobbins, T., Degenhardt, L. & Peacock, A. (2019). Trends in drug-induced deaths in Australia, 1997-2017. Drug Trends Bulletin Series. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre,

UNSW Sydney. <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/trends-drug-induced-deaths-australia-1997-2017>

2. Ibid.

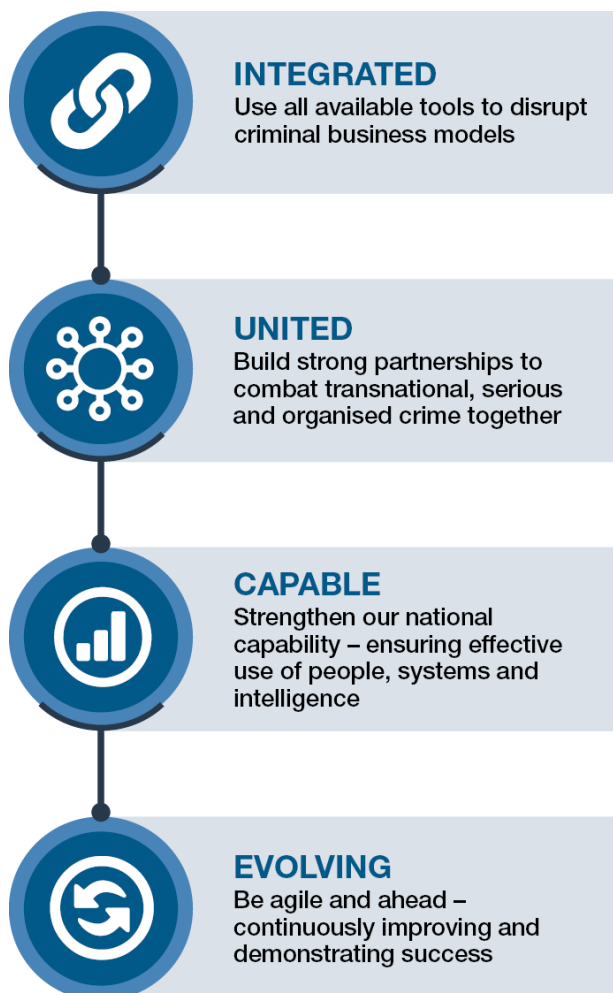
3. *National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 2016*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, p68.

## A strategy-driven response

The Home Affairs Portfolio is guided by three key Government strategies when delivering policy and operational responses to keep Australians safe from illicit drugs.

### National Strategy to Fight Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime (TSOC)

The *National Strategy to Fight Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime* (the National Strategy) provides a framework to guide national efforts to prevent and disrupt TSOC in all its forms, including the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. It provides that in order to combat the threat of TSOC, our efforts need to be:



## National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 (NDS)

Led by the Department of Health, the NDS provides a national framework that identifies priorities, guides action by governments in partnership with service providers and the community, and outlines a national commitment to harm minimisation by reducing demand, supply and harm. The NDS takes a balanced approach to drugs policy by recognising the need for both law enforcement and evidence-based prevention and treatment.

The Home Affairs Portfolio focuses on supply reduction activities to support the NDS, such as limiting the diversion of precursor chemicals into the illicit drug market, harnessing intelligence (such as wastewater analysis and detection capabilities at the border) to identify high-risk areas and inform operational activities, and international capacity-building to strengthen regional responses to illicit drug production and trafficking.

### National Ice Action Strategy (NIAS)

Implemented in 2015, the NIAS is led by the Department of Health and focuses on initiatives to combat ice across all three pillars of the NDS. The Home Affairs Portfolio's role is to address those initiatives focused on reducing supply and enhancing data and research. Since the launch of the NIAS, significant progress has been made against these supply-focused initiatives.

## Key supply reduction initiatives under the NIAS

- strengthen international cooperation through developing a new international supply disruption strategy – **complete**
- run a national 'Dob in a Dealer' campaign to encourage the public to report information on drug manufacture and distribution in the community – **complete**
- develop a pilot infrastructure platform to inform the design and development of a National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS) – **complete**
- achieve greater national consistency of controls on precursor chemicals and equipment used to manufacture ice – **ongoing**
- work through existing structures to disrupt the production and supply of ice in regional and remote areas – **ongoing**
- strengthen the eligibility criteria of the Aviation Security Identification Card and Maritime Security Identification Card schemes to target TSOC – **in progress**
- increase the quality and quantity of drug use data in Australia by continuing the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program and wastewater testing – **ongoing**
- develop a national cooperative scheme to target the unexplained wealth of people involved in TSOC – **in progress**



# Australia's illicit drug problem

## Methylamphetamine poses the greatest threat

Wastewater analysis shows that methylamphetamine is the most consumed illicit stimulant drug<sup>4</sup> in Australia (**Figure 1**) and is increasing (**Figure 2**). Strong demand, along with high domestic prices, provides a lucrative market for criminal groups. The drug is appealing to users for its availability, high purity, strong effects, and its capacity to be smoked rather than injected.

Methylamphetamine not only harms users but also is damaging to the Australian community. It has a strong link to crime – particularly property and violent crime, including domestic violence. When examining police detainees who tested positive for methylamphetamine, the AIC found:

- **65%** were arrested for a property offence
- **30%** were arrested for a violent crime, and
- **44%** attributed their violent crimes to their drug use.

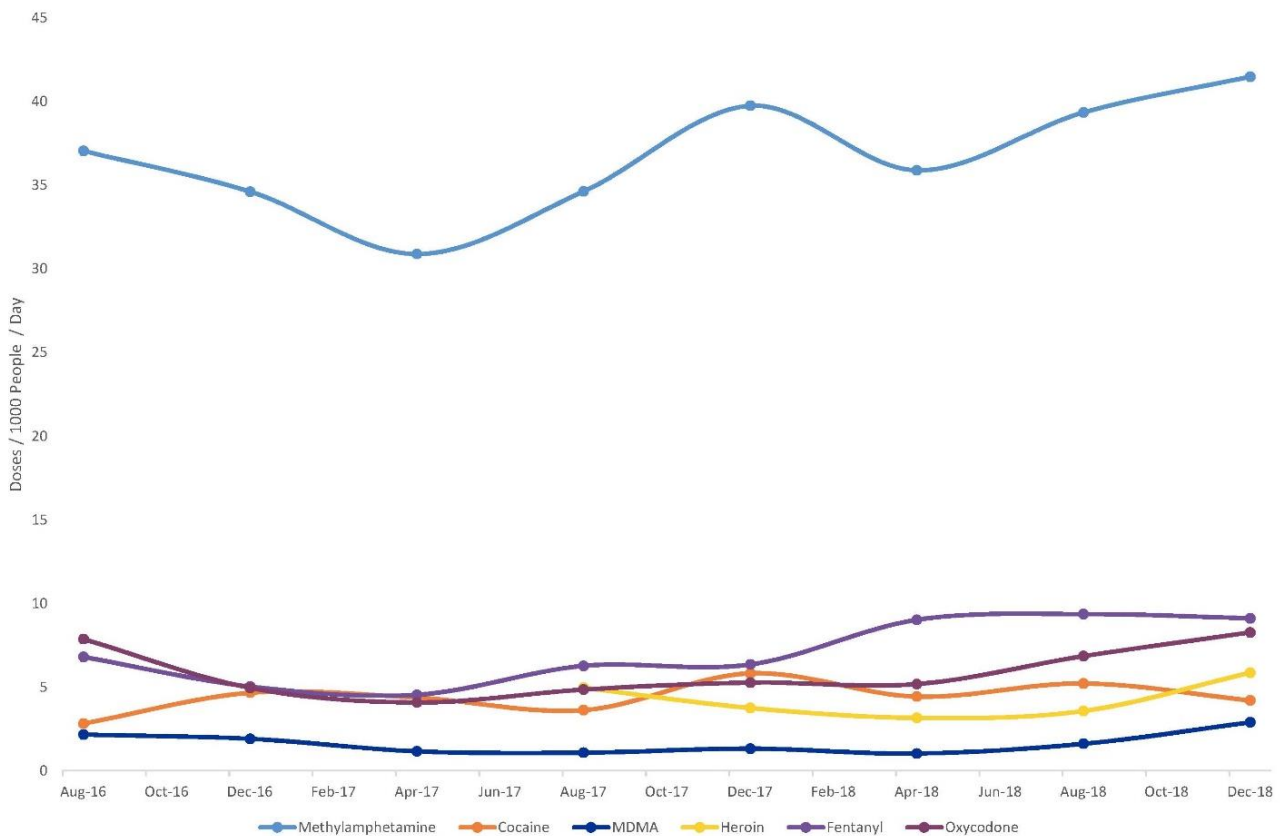
These statistics illustrate the strong link between methylamphetamine and criminality.

State / territory	Estimated drug consumption (kilograms per annum)				
	Methylamphetamine	Cocaine	MDMA	Heroin	TOTAL
Australian Capital Territory	93.0	81.2	14.4	15.3	203.9
New South Wales	2,604.5	2,397.8	450.5	222.2	5,675.0
Northern Territory	75.5	27.4	24.1	1.0	128.0
Queensland	1,893.3	576.6	223.2	66.2	2,759.3
South Australia	1,159.5	129.2	66.6	34.8	1,390.1
Tasmania	127.1	15.5	16.7	4.5	163.8
Victoria	2,477.7	819.9	291.3	359.4	3,948.3
Western Australia	1,416.8	67.9	74.9	46.8	1,606.4
<b>National</b>	<b>9,847</b>	<b>4,115</b>	<b>1,162</b>	<b>750</b>	

**Figure 1:** Drug consumption in Australia by jurisdiction (kg per annum), drawn from the seventh report of the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program, April 2019

4. Seventh report of the ACIC's National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program (NWDMP), April 2019. This report compares methylamphetamine, MDMA, cocaine and heroin. Cannabis is not included in the comparison as there are currently difficulties relating to

its analysis in wastewater (as the specific marker for cannabis consumption is excreted in extremely small amounts) and with determining standard dosage for cannabis.



**Figure 2:** Comparison of drug consumption in Australia, Aug 2016 – Dec 2018, drawn from the seventh report of the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program, April 2019

## Combating methylamphetamine supply is challenging

### A diverse supply chain

A significant challenge in tackling the current methylamphetamine market is its diverse supply chain which involves a wide variety of participants. In the past the supply chain of illicit drugs into Australia was not as complex; typically involving a few large TSOC groups, and profits largely remaining onshore.

By contrast, the current methylamphetamine market has a flexible manufacturing process (as it can be produced domestically or offshore) and involves a large number and decentralised network of participants across Australia and overseas. The profits from methylamphetamine sales are difficult to trace, as they may be laundered or moved offshore, which falls outside the remit of Australian law enforcement agencies. These characteristics make it difficult to disrupt the market and apprehend key players.

## Technology and Globalisation: A transnational threat

While improved technology and globalisation has produced many benefits, it has also empowered serious and organised criminal groups to grow their business by operating transnationally. Many groups now operate as transnational entities using complex business structures and supported by professional facilitators including lawyers, accountants and informational technology experts (an example is provided at **Figure 3**).

TSOC groups are constantly evolving, exploiting new and emerging technologies – most notably encrypted communications – to facilitate and obfuscate their illicit activity.

Their ability to adapt to technological advancements, coupled with a complex trade and

financial system and a business model that transcends state borders, help them remain flexible and readily able to evolve in response to law enforcement and private sector preventative measures. This makes it increasingly difficult to identify, disrupt and prosecute criminal activity.

Globalisation has further fuelled the trade in illicit drugs and provided TSOC groups unprecedented access to global markets. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime data indicates that the Australian illicit drug market is among the most profitable in the world, making Australia a highly appealing proposition for TSOC groups.

*Photo: A University of Queensland researcher testing wastewater as part of the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program (image courtesy of ACIC)*







Figure 3: Example of current supply chain of Methylamphetamine into Australia

# Our current response: United, capable and integrated

## What the Portfolio is doing every day to keep Australians safe

Home Affairs Portfolio agencies each have an important role in combating the production of illicit drugs and their importation into Australia. The table below illustrates how the Portfolio is addressing the illicit drug supply chain across the three pillars of the NDS (reducing demand, supply and harm).

DEMAND		SUPPLY					HARM
Demand	Pre-existing conditions (e.g. weak governance and drug regulation)	Precursors	Manufacture	Importation	Domestic trafficking	Criminal profit	Consumption/Harm
<b>CURRENT EFFORTS</b>							
		<b>Australian Border Force (ABF)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intelligence-informed disruption of precursors at the border</li> </ul>		<b>Australian Border Force (ABF)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intelligence-informed disruption of illicit drugs at the border</li> <li>Enforcement of drug prohibition policy and legislation</li> <li>Regulation of staff and service providers operating within the supply chain (e.g. 'Fit and Proper' assessments)</li> <li>Advisory committees to oversee customs broker licencing practices and investigation of potential breaches</li> </ul>			
	<b>AUSTRAC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement with international partners to increase sharing of financial intelligence information and inform disruption of TSOC groups involved in bringing illicit drugs into Australia</li> <li>Multi-agency taskforces with intelligence and law enforcement partners</li> </ul>		<b>AUSTRAC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advanced analytic detection capabilities to help partner agencies target:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>importation, trafficking and drug commodities (e.g. precursor chemicals, other drugs)</li> <li>money laundering activities</li> <li>organised crime group members and associates</li> <li>locations of potential activity</li> </ul> </li> <li>Provision of intelligence to support investigations by operational agencies</li> <li>International capacity-building to increase capability to identify criminal transactions and money laundering activity</li> </ul>				
	<b>Department of Home Affairs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cross-agency counter-drug working groups and committees</li> <li>Policy and legislative reform to divert precursor chemicals</li> <li>International capacity-building to address pre-existing conditions conducive to illegal drug activity</li> <li>Bilateral and multilateral engagement with international counterparts to strengthen border management</li> </ul>						
	<b>Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research and analysis of trend data to inform evidence-based policy and operational responses across the Portfolio</li> <li>Evaluation activities to enhance future responses</li> </ul>						
	<b>Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intelligence and research to inform policy and operational responses across the Portfolio</li> <li>National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program (NWDMP)</li> <li>Assessment and designation of Australian Priority Organisation Targets (APOTs) and the coordination and de-confliction of operational activity.</li> <li>International engagement</li> </ul>						
	<b>Australian Federal Police (AFP)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigation of Commonwealth drug offences</li> <li>International capacity-building efforts to increase capability to disrupt illicit drug crime</li> <li>Cooperation with law enforcement partners through information sharing and capacity surges</li> <li>Leading offshore investigation and disruption of criminal activity and seizures of illicit drugs</li> <li>Bilateral and multilateral engagement with international law enforcement partners through sharing of operational intelligence to disrupt TSOC groups involved in bringing in illicit drugs into Australia</li> </ul>						
<b>COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS</b>							
	<b>Commonwealth Illicit Drugs Joint Agency Task Force (CID JATF)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CID JATF brings together all Commonwealth agencies with a role in combating illicit drug demand, supply and harm (Health, Education, Foreign Affairs, Social Services and Home Affairs Portfolio agencies). Its role is to ensure that our law enforcement activities complement activities to reduce demand and harm, and that we are using Commonwealth capabilities effectively to address the illicit drug threat.</li> </ul>						
	<b>South Australian Joint Agency Ice Strike Team (SA JAIST)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The SA JAIST targets importation and trafficking of methylamphetamine and its precursors into South Australia. South Australia Police (SAPOL) lead the JAIST, with assistance from the AFP, ABF, ACIC, Department of Home Affairs, ATO and AUSTRAC.</li> <li>Participating Commonwealth agencies support SAPOL by providing intelligence and operational support to identify international origins and supply chains for significant domestic seizures of ice and precursors.</li> </ul>						

## Taking action: Evolving our response

In order to effectively address the threat posed by illicit drugs, particularly methylamphetamine, the Home Affairs Portfolio must leverage all the tools and resources available to it. Focusing on reducing supply is crucial, as wastewater and operational data have shown there is a correlation between large-scale seizures and a decrease in drug consumption during the proceeding period.

Through this Action Plan, the Home Affairs Portfolio will implement activities to combat illicit drug supply in Australia, with a particular focus on reducing the supply of methylamphetamine and its precursors. This includes implementation of the Australian Government's 2019-20 Budget investment, which provided the Home Affairs Portfolio with **\$152.1 million** to target TSOC involvement in the illicit drug trade. The Home Affairs Portfolio will also work with partners such as the Department of Health, and Department of Education to ensure the Portfolio's activities to reduce illicit drug supply are complemented by demand reduction and harm minimisation activities.

### An intelligence-led focus

The Home Affairs Portfolio will take an intelligence-informed and evidence-based approach to target our efforts to counter illicit drugs towards activities that will have maximum effect. This includes:

- **Extending the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program (NWDMP):**  
The Government has provided the ACIC with **\$4.8 million** over four years to continue and enhance the NWDMP. The NWDMP provides vital data on illicit drug consumption in Australia, giving law enforcement and criminal intelligence agencies new insights into how the supply and demand of illicit drugs is changing. The seventh report under this program was released on 7 April 2019. The report covers 54 per cent of the population (about 13 million people), with 50 wastewater treatment plants across Australia participating in the collection of the wastewater samples.

- **Continuing Australian Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre (AGICC):**The Government has provided **\$6.6 million** over four years to the ACIC to continue the AGICC. The AGICC informs and coordinates an intelligence-led response to outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs) and other known gangs operating across state, territory and international borders, including providing intelligence support to the National Anti-Gang Squad.

### Coordinated and collaborative

The Home Affairs Portfolio will engage across all levels of government and with international partners to ensure a collaborative, coordinated approach to combatting illicit drugs at home and abroad. We will also build and strengthen our partnerships with the private sector and academia to increase our understanding of illicit drugs and raise awareness of the ongoing impact these drugs have on our community. This includes:

- **Supporting the South Australian Joint Agency Ice Strike Team (JAIST):**  
The Government has provided **\$2.5 million** to the AFP to continue to provide Commonwealth support to the JAIST. This Commonwealth support helps the JAIST to identify the international origins and supply chains for significant domestic seizures of ice and precursors, particularly through the mail stream. The South Australia JAIST has already seen significant successes, including 17 arrests and the seizure of approximately 60 kilograms of methylamphetamine; 9 kilograms of methylamphetamine precursors; 320 litres of Gamma Butyrolactone (GBL); 22,000 tabs of LSD and smaller quantities of other drugs.

- **Enhancing the National Anti-Gangs Squad (NAGS):** The Government has provided **\$94.3 million** (over four years) for the AFP to enhance the NAGS. Through the NAGS, the AFP works with state and territory police to detect, deter and disrupt the activities of OMCGs, including their role in the importation and distribution of illicit drugs. This funding will enable Australian law enforcement and our international partners to continue to create a hostile environment for OMCGs in Australia and, importantly, offshore – as many OMCGs are now establishing themselves overseas in an attempt to avoid Australian law enforcement.
- **Strategic deployment of AFP Liaison Officers:** Recognising the importance of working with international partners to combat illicit drug supply offshore, the AFP continually assesses its international footprint. Efforts to combat drugs offshore result in displacement of the supply of drugs. In response to current threats and priorities the AFP will deploy additional officers and recalibrate existing resources in South East Asia to respond to international drug trafficking trends and support international policing partners (for example, AFP/Cambodian Transnational Crime Team).

## Attack the criminal business model

While the size and characteristics of TSOC groups vary, they are all motivated by profit. TSOC groups operate like a business, and like all businesses, there are operational and logistical needs – supply, demand, management, resource input, professionals for legal, accounting and information technology, and financial services. TSOC groups can only operate through the development and exploitation of partnerships with a wide range of individuals.

These common business requirements that enable offending also provide the opportunity to disrupt TSOC in all its manifestations, including illicit drugs. The Home Affairs Portfolio will target the criminal business model, using all the tools and levers available to Government and its partners. This includes:

- **Enhancing ABF capacity to detect illicit drug importation through international mail:** Australia's international mail gateways are a key component of the criminal business model as they are a critical method of importing drugs into Australia. To attack this part of the criminal business model the Government has provided **\$9.7 million** to the ABF to enhance its capability to detect illicit drug importation through international mail. This will include saturation screening at all of Australia's international mail gateways. The ABF is also exploring technological opportunities to implement enhanced data analytics, intelligent threat identification and automatic threat detection powered by improved access to data and advances in screening technology.
- **Forecasting the future of international mail:** The ABF is working with partners in the mail sector to create a blueprint outlining the future direction for border processing of inbound international mail. The blueprint will help identify options for transforming the business model and processes currently employed. While the blueprint is a holistic document that seeks to reform all international mail processes and outcomes, there is a strong focus on disrupting the supply chain of illicit drugs into Australia, including methamphetamines.

## Pursue a full-spectrum response

While our focus will be on supply reduction, we will continue to work in concert with non-traditional partners including the Departments of Health, Education and Social Services to ensure our law enforcement activities are complemented by prevention and harm minimisation measures, including education and awareness raising and treatment services. This includes:

- **Establishing the Commonwealth Illicit Drugs Joint Agency Taskforce (CID JATF):** The CID JATF brings together all Commonwealth agencies with a role in combatting illicit drug demand, supply and harm (Health, Education, Foreign Affairs, Social Services and Home Affairs portfolio agencies). Led by Home Affairs and the Department of Health, the CID JATF is intended to provide member agencies with a forum to strategically coordinate activities to combat illicit drugs. It allows agencies to share information and intelligence (including ACIC wastewater analysis data) on key issues and high-risk areas to inform the decision making of operational agencies.

In the 2019-20 Budget the Australian Government provided more than **\$185 million** to the Department of Health for initiatives to reduce demand for illicit drugs and minimise the harm that they cause. This includes drug treatment and research activities, drug prevention activities in regional areas, improvement of opioid prescribing practices and increased awareness of appropriate pain management treatment.

## Ensuring effective and efficient responses

An effective response to illicit drugs requires the full utilisation of administrative, legislative and regulatory powers in a timely and coordinated manner to maximise impact. This includes ensuring existing legislative frameworks, law enforcement and regulatory powers and criminal offences are fit for purpose to investigate and disrupt illicit drug supply.

The Home Affairs Portfolio will **modernise the Commonwealth legislative framework to combat illicit drugs**. The Department of Home Affairs will undertake a comprehensive review of current Commonwealth illicit drug legislative frameworks, including both the *Criminal Code Regulations 2019* and relevant offences under the *Criminal Code Act 1995*. There will be a particular focus on ensuring they are fit for purpose and adaptable to meet the operational requirements to target new and emerging illicit drug threats. It is vital to ensure law enforcement and regulatory officers have adequate investigatory powers in the targeting of illicit drug supply both onshore and offshore.

Evolving technology and the anonymity of the internet provides unprecedented opportunities for TSOC groups to facilitate the supply of illicit drugs directly to consumers and into Australian communities. An evaluation of existing drug offences could identify vulnerabilities and gaps that have arisen with the prevalence of new and emerging technologies, such as the ease at which users are able to acquire illicit drugs through anonymous online transactions. Through these anonymous interactions, users are able to perceive or justify a disconnection between themselves and criminal actors. Through this review and any subsequent legislative changes, the Commonwealth will further strengthen its approach to countering illicit drugs.



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