

Crystal Methamphetamine

A Profile of
its Use in Grey and Bruce Counties,
the Associated Challenges, and
Recommendations for Action

Final Report Executive Summary

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for the Grey Bruce Crystal Meth Steering Committee

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Executive Summary

Over the past year considerable concern has been expressed about the negative health impacts from the use of methamphetamine in Bruce and Grey Counties by some of our residents. This concern was first identified by a group of Bruce and Grey County service providers at community meetings. In response to the degree of concern expressed at the stakeholder meetings, the Grey Bruce Community Health Corporation, which provides addiction treatment services, sought and received approval to allocate \$10,000 from its budget to undertake a planning process to gather more information about the extent and impact of the problem and produce a report to guide future action.

Information was collected through: community consultations, key informant surveys, a parent focus group meeting and other input from families, and client surveys. The emerging picture is very disturbing.

Local Concerns

The concerns identified include the following.

The Increasing Prevalence of Crystal Meth Use

It is of great concern that the number of people presenting to the local courts or service agencies with crystal meth problems are increasing. The age at which young people use the drug is decreasing. Families of 14 year olds are seeking support for their children's drug use.

The Addictive Nature of the Drug with Long-Term Negative Consequences

Crystal meth is addictive and is made with highly toxic chemicals. Family members told us ***“It is not a drug, it is a poison that is killing our kids. It gets a hold of them before they know it.”*** Its use can result in violent behaviour, weight loss and users often have rotting teeth. It causes increased heart rate and blood pressure, which can lead to strokes and death. Other effects include risk of convulsions, respiratory problems, irregular heartbeat, and extreme anorexia. With long-term use, psychosis can develop which will last after the person has stopped using the drug.

The Profound Impact of Use on a User's Loved Ones

“Parents are neglecting their kids and their own health to use meth.” There are long-term implications of parental/maternal crystal meth use on the health and development of the fetus and of children born to meth users. The quality of life for both users and family members is negatively affected. Family members are extremely distraught and

their lives are very chaotic. Community attitudes and the stigma associated with crystal meth use make the family's journey *“a very dark and tumultuous process.”*

The Negative Impact on the Service System and the Broader Community

Safety hazards to others in the community include violent behaviour common to those who use the drug. The costs to taxpayers are increasing as a result of the loss of quality of life for users and the increasing number of crimes committed to procure the drug. The production of crystal meth results in toxic contamination of the space where it is produced and where the waste products are discarded, and there is significant risk of fire or explosions at meth “labs”.

The Lack of Parent and Community Awareness

The fact that many parents do not understand the side effects of crystal meth and how much damage this drug will do is of concern. Some parents have given up – don't know where to go for support and help. There is little or no information available to increase public awareness of this growing problem, which is becoming a significant issue in our communities.

The Response of the Justice System

There are not enough deterrents to the use, production and sale of crystal meth. Users who receive sentences and/or early release without the provision of rehabilitation services and ongoing support are at increased risk of continued and escalated drug use. A strong message must be sent that those in possession of, trafficking, and producing crystal meth will face serious penalties.

Locations Where Crystal Meth Use is Considered Most Prevalent

Survey respondents indicated that crystal meth is being used in communities throughout Grey and Bruce Counties. Many of the respondents expressed the belief that based on their experience the problem is most prevalent in the Walkerton, Hanover, Durham, Chesley, and Kincardine areas. Other identified communities of concern were: Port Elgin, Paisley, Wiarton, Lucknow, Meaford, Dundalk, Mildmay, Cargill, Teeswater, and Owen Sound.

Developing a Comprehensive “Four Pillar” Community Response

The best practice model for a comprehensive and coordinated drug strategy is one that addresses four distinct but inter-related issues: Enforcement, Harm Reduction, Prevention and Education, and Treatment. The complex nature of drug-related concerns requires integration and coordination of services across the four Pillars, and the development of new approaches that will promote relationships among community members, associations, and organizations. Working together to maximize assets and leverage additional resources is key to an effective drug strategy.¹

The active engagement of service providers from all sectors in the information collection

¹ *The Windsor-Essex County Community Drug Strategy Framework*, pp. 15-16, City of Windsor, April, 2008.

process is a very positive first step. Continued work is needed to *“forge closer links, communication and cooperation between agencies.” “We need to all work together to help educate and fight against this.” “A consistent, comprehensive drug and alcohol strategy is needed.”*

The Challenges and the Needs or Opportunities for Service Enhancement

The challenges that we need to address, and the needs or opportunities for service enhancement suggested through the planning process are summarized below for each of the four pillars.

1. Challenges

2. Needs or Opportunities for Service Enhancement

Enforcement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • court sentences • capacity of enforcement, court and probation personnel to deal with complex issues associated with crystal meth use • costs/manpower requirements for police • violent crimes and property crimes associated with drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stronger sentencing • dedicated resources to promote communication and collaboration among service providers • additional resources • increased community awareness
Harm Reduction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harm to children from parent’s use • approach/understanding among medical staff re effects of crystal meth on users • costs of drug screening for CAS • safety of workers who provide in-home care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance support for children exposed to crystal meth or at risk • enhance linkages between and training for allied professionals • easier access to drug screening • training for first responders and in-home workers
Prevention and Education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting the message out about the dangers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extensive education and awareness campaign • targeted awareness such as “Meth Watch”
Treatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of best practice guidelines and specialized treatment resources for meth • limited capacity and accessibility of existing treatment resources • client readiness for treatment • multiple organizations/agencies • negative impact on families • health impacts • lack of awareness of services available • high potential for return to drug use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance local treatment resources to ensure a timely and appropriate response • enhance linkages between and training for allied professionals • family support and counselling • enhanced access to mental health counselling • assistance with dental care • educational materials for former users • increased advertising of available services and support • enhanced peer support and other social supports

Community Consultation

A draft of this Report was released at a community meeting on March 27, 2009 in Walkerton. The meeting was attended by approximately 90 people, including Bruce County and Grey County Councillors, the MPP for Huron Bruce, family members, representatives of the Southwest Local Health Integration Network and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, members of the Project Steering Committee and representatives from a number of organizations involved in the provision of service to people impacted by crystal meth use.

The following panel members provided their response to the draft Report and recommendation for action:

- Dr Hazel Lynn, Medical Officer of Health, Grey Bruce Health Unit
- Claude Anderson, Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association
- Clayton Conlan, Federal Crown Attorney, Owen Sound
- Kent Smith, Area Manager, Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services
- Sandy Stockman, Executive Director, Grey Bruce Community Health Corporation

The panel members expressed agreement with the proposed recommendations for action. It was noted by one panel member that meth use is a community problem and there is a compelling need for a timely, local response. Other participants at the meeting reinforced the magnitude of the problem, echoed the local concerns identified in the Report, and endorsed the need for community action.

Recommendations for Action

The following are the recommendations for action to address the issues identified in the Report.

Develop a Coordinated Local Response

1. Establish a Task Force to lead a comprehensive coordinated four pillar strategy to respond to the challenges associated with crystal meth use identified in this Report.
 - Engage local elected officials from Bruce and Grey Counties in the planning process and encourage them to provide leadership to the Task Force
 - Invite representatives from each of the sectors that make up the four pillars: enforcement, harm reduction, prevention and education, and treatment, to participate on the Task Force or working groups
 - Invite family members and recovering addicts to participate
 - Suggested mandate of the Task Force to include:
 - Ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response to the problem of methamphetamine production, sale and use in Grey-Bruce
 - Secure funding from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and other sources to design and implement strategies to prevent and address methamphetamine use in Grey-Bruce

- Provide a regular forum to promote and facilitate stakeholder collaboration
- Network with provincial, federal, and community groups who are addressing methamphetamine-related issues.

Enforcement

2. Work with the court system to:
 - Strengthen the penalties for persons convicted of crystal meth offences, particularly production and trafficking and;
 - Improve linkages between the criminal justice system and treatment providers to collaboratively develop strategies to engage users in treatment.
3. Work with local police services to identify their needs and develop strategies for:
 - Implementing policing methods dedicated to the investigation, prosecution and conviction of people involved in the production and sale of crystal meth
 - Acquiring investigative equipment/training.

Harm Reduction

4. Work with first responders (police, fire and ambulance) and others that work with at risk families (e.g. Children's Aid Societies, Healthy Babies Healthy Children) to more clearly define needs for:
 - enhanced support for children exposed to crystal meth or at risk of improper care
 - education related to meth use and the safety of workers who enter homes with meth labs
 - safety equipment for local enforcement staff when inspecting meth labs
 - enhanced linkages between and training for allied professionals
 - easier access to drug screening.

Education

5. Implement a large scale education, awareness and prevention campaign Grey-Bruce wide. Elements of the campaign should include:
 - Education of students beginning at Grade 6 on the dangers of crystal meth use
 - Community programs such as "Meth Watch"
 - Community education on the dangers of crystal meth use including the effects on children exposed to crystal meth
 - Pro-active education to increase awareness and acceptance of treatment and support services for those using meth as well as their families or friends.

Treatment

6. Enhance the capacity of the local addiction system to serve people affected by crystal meth use.

- Ensure ready access to residential withdrawal management services that can provide a quick response and a safe supportive environment in which clients can withdraw from crystal meth use. Services should include: assessment, supportive counseling, referral to ongoing treatment services, and access to peer support.
 - Community treatment services targeted specifically to crystal meth. Services should include: comprehensive assessment, individual and group counseling, service coordination and case management.
 - Programs specifically for youth.
 - Enhanced outreach services in more communities, in locations that are frequented by/acceptable to the target population.
 - Assistance with transportation to services if required.
 - Counseling, education and support for families of meth users.
 - Increased access to mental health counseling to ensure a timely response and services for those with co-occurring mental health and addiction problems, including those with moderate mental health problems who are not currently eligible for service as a priority population for the mental health system.
 - Educational materials, peer support and relapse prevention supports for former users.
7. Develop strategies to enhance linkages between and training for professionals in all human service sectors that deal with the at risk population to increase capacity for early identification and intervention.
 8. Work with relevant stakeholders to enhance peer support and other social supports including street-based outreach and drop in programs in high risk communities.
 9. Increase advertising of available services and support, and provide financial resources to family support groups to offset the cost of meeting space, supplies and advertising of group meetings.
 10. Provision of affordable dental health care for former users.