

# METHAMPHETAMINES

Information to Support  
a Return to Wellness





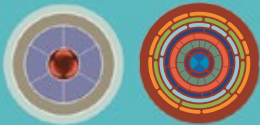
## There is growing concern about the use of methamphetamines in First Nations communities.

This booklet provides information about the effects of methamphetamines and how a **strengths based, culturally grounded approach** can reduce stigma and support a return to wellness for individuals, families and communities.

This resource was developed by the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation with guidance from the Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations People in Canada (HOS) and the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum (FNMWC)

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# WHAT WE KNOW about First Nations Peoples and Substance Use

Trauma experienced over multiple generations coupled with limited access to health care has resulted in higher rates of mental health issues and substance use for First Nations Peoples in Canada.

## Trauma has resulted from:



the loss of cultural practices  
and languages



the disruption of family  
structures



the elimination of a chance  
to observe and acquire  
healthy emotional  
self-regulation  
and parenting skills



the destruction of individual,  
family, and community  
support networks



Despite higher rates of substance use, many find resiliency for their wellness, grounded in culture, language, ceremony and Indigenous Knowledge, supported by nurturing relationships with land, family and community. (FNMWC 2015)

# CRYSTALLIZED METHAMPHETAMINES

- Known as CRYSTAL METH
- Resembles ice or glass, sometimes transparent, odourless
- Comes in various colours (pink, brown, yellow, blue)



It stimulates the central nervous system – increasing brain activity



Can be snorted, smoked, injected, swallowed or inserted into body cavities



Effects last 6 to 24 hours





## What is crystallized methamphetamine **MADE FROM?**

- Purity varies depending on ingredients
- Key ingredient is pseudoephedrine (active ingredient in cold medications)
- Chemicals added are cheap, toxic and/or flammable, commonly available in household stores
  - hydrochloric acid
  - brake fluid
  - Ammonia
  - nail polish remover (acetone)
  - anti-freeze
  - lithium (battery acids)
  - Lye
  - paint thinners
  - drain cleaners
  - lantern fuel or lighter fluid
  - match tips/road flares (red phosphorous)

## Why is crystallized methamphetamine the **DRUG OF CHOICE**?

- Easy access, low cost, free samples from illicit drug trade leading to fast addiction
- Appetite suppressant, weight loss
- Decreases negative feelings/ depression
- Immediate and extreme high
- Creates feelings of strength, alertness, motivation
- Increases sexual desire
- Produces stimulant effects and opioid use causes depression so some people use both to try to find a balance (self-medicate)

(Ellis 2018)



Canada experienced a **590% increase** in crystal meth possession offenses between 2010-2017

(CCSA, 2018)

# Signs of methamphetamine INTOXICATION

- Increased heart rate, breathing, and sweating
- Chemical smelling breath
- Rapid speech
- Restlessness
- Sleep deprivation
- Jaw clenching or teeth grinding
- Dehydration
- Risky, unpredictable and violent behaviours
- Paranoia, hallucinations, or psychosis
- Tremors

(Desjarlais, 2015)



**Avoid stigmatizing behaviour...**  
**DON'T ASSUME!**

Someone showing these symptoms does not automatically mean they are using drugs.



First Nations people who use crystalized methamphetamine are often looking for a way to regain a sense of control and power to cope with issues resulting from intergenerational trauma (residential schools) and personal traumatic experiences in their life (family violence, sexual abuse, neglect or racism). (FNMWC, 2015)



Indigenous Knowledge systems which thrive on connection and human values such as kindness, respect, sharing and strength, can be powerful interventions to facilitate shifts in thinking, belief, and behaviour.

(FNMWC, 2015)

## Tips for **HELPING** individuals who are using crystallized methamphetamines

Intense emotions, heightened aggression and destroyed relationships can cause people who take methamphetamines to be isolated, paranoid, and at high risk of attempted and successful suicide.

- Expect the unexpected (violent behaviour, assaults)
- Be aware of underlying trauma and emotional issues
- Engage in a calm, helpful way to reduce their agitation and paranoia
- Rethink treatment plans and options

(Dejarlais, 2015)



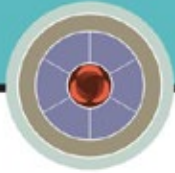
# HONESTY and TRUST matter

- Fear of stigma, punishment, or being denied services can lead people to resist reporting their methamphetamine use, which in turn increases risks for other health challenges.
- The truth can help wellness workers determine which medical interventions to use or avoid.
- Listening can create a safe space where honesty can be expressed, building trust.
- Use non-stigmatizing language and ways of being and doing to build trust and encourage honesty.
- Some First Nations treatment centres include culture based programs adapted to complex needs of people with a methamphetamine addiction.

(Richards 2019)



Honesty is a foundational value for Indigenous Peoples. As described in the Anishnabemowin tradition, honesty is one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings which support personal well-being and living a life in harmony within community and nature. When we are honest with ourselves, we can be honest, truthful and trustworthy with others, and walk through life with integrity.



### **Family/community relationships –**

Individuals who remain well-connected to their community through group events, (i.e., gatherings, feasts, and Indigenous ceremonies), and through connections to family and the land may be less likely to engage in risky substance use and therefore face fewer secondary risks

(HOS, 2011)

## Tips for **BUILDING TRUST** with someone using crystallized methamphetamines

1. Speak slowly, clearly and softly  
- they may hear sounds too loud and fast.
2. Listen to understand.
3. Offer water and soft, easy to swallow food.
4. People high on crystallized methamphetamines can sometimes have unpredictable behaviours, so keep a safe distance - they may see movement as a threat.
5. Keep your hands visible and move slowly.
6. Keep them talking to help them process their emotions/experiences.
7. Avoid bright lights and loud noises.
8. Try to guide the person to a safe, non-violent state of mind.

(Richards, 2019 and Cleary, 2017)



## Drawing on strength from **CULTURAL CONNECTIONS**

This is a story shared by a Kookum (grandmother) who did outreach in a city. Her encounter with a man high on crystal meth provides evidence of how cultural connections can support a return to wellness.

When Kookum approached this man to greet him, she soon discovered he was high and displaying erratic behaviour. She then saw that the man was carrying a knife.

Kookum drew on the strength of community relationship and language, by calmly and softly repeating the man's name.

She instinctively knew her language would help her break through to the man.

Eventually he recognized his own language and snapped out of his behaviour and apologized to her.

"I'm so sorry Auntie, I don't know where I am."



Language is medicine, as it holds a connection to Indigenous Knowledge, values, ways of being and worldview. Communities where the language is spoken widely also enjoy higher levels of health and wellness and lower rates of suicide and suicide ideation.

# SHORT TERM EFFECTS

- Increased feelings of confidence, energy, alertness
- Reduces negative feelings
- Increased heart rate (to dangerous levels based on dosage)
- Feelings of invincibility, delusions of grandeur
- Hallucinations and talking to people who are not there
- Appetite suppressant, insomnia and staying awake for days without eating
- Stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting
- Addiction occurs quickly causing people to build tolerance and use more for the same effect
- Changes in sexual behaviour



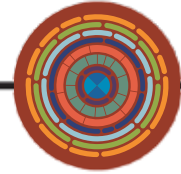
# LONG TERM EFFECTS

- Changes in the brain and central nervous system (increased craving and drug seeking)
- Damage to the heart and other major organs
- Severe dental and skin deterioration
- Severe weight loss
- Experience little pleasure from activities other than drug use
- Anxiety, poor decision making, impulsivity
- Homicidal and suicidal thoughts

NOTE: Not everyone who uses crystal meth gets addicted. Some use it in a high-functioning way to cope with mental health challenges or other aspects of wellness.



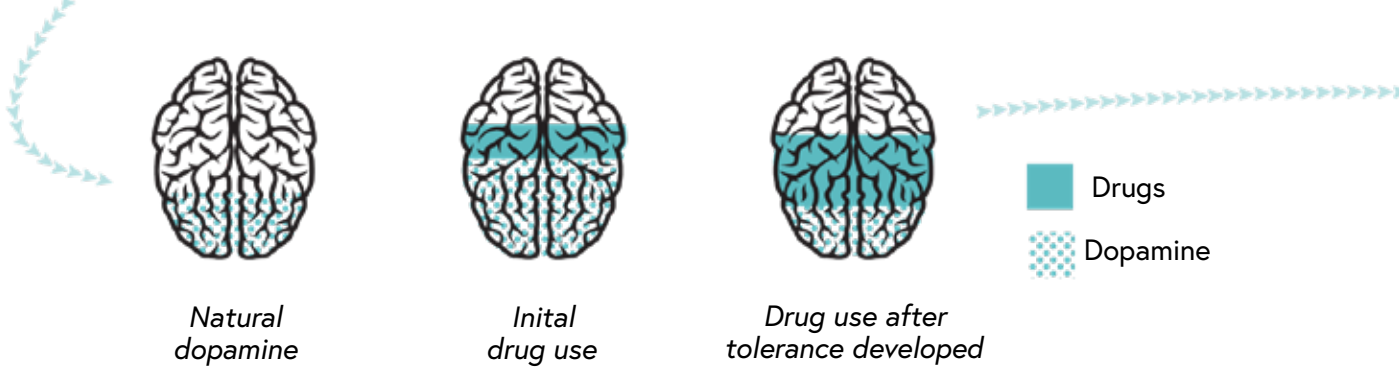
YIKES!



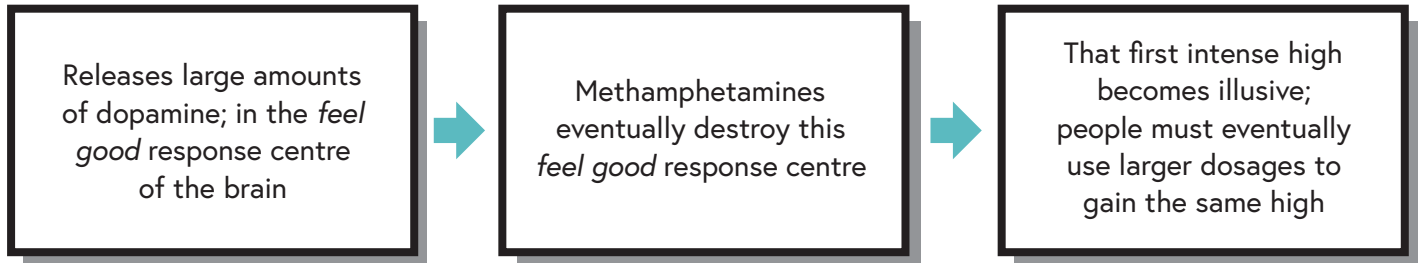
Individuals with severe addiction and/or mental health or chronic health issues require effective screening, assessment and referral; culturally competent services; and ongoing support and monitoring throughout their healing journey. Those who access these care options, benefit from strong connections to support networks, such as family and community.

(FNMWC, 2015)





## What crystallized methamphetamine **DOES TO THE BRAIN**



Health promotion and prevention programming can help people build self-awareness, self-esteem, healthy boundaries, and effective assertiveness skills, which can reduce, delay or prevent future substance use or mental health issues. (HOS, 2011)



## The **CRASH/TWEAKING** PHASE

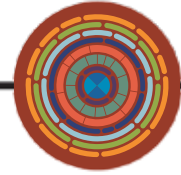
*Tweaking* is when a person experiences maximum positive effects from the methamphetamines.

This is followed by an intense crash with symptoms that mimic psychosis (talking to oneself or people who aren't there).

### When the tweaking stage ends

- people feel overwhelmed
- anxiety sets in and they become paranoid and agitated
- this can lead to unpredictable and dangerous behaviour including suicide
- these feelings get so bad they want to use again to get away from the crash symptoms

**It's a vicious cycle.**



The FNMWC emphasizes supporting people with drug addictions and those close to them requires a range of client-centred, culturally competent approaches available throughout the healing journey.

These services and supports build on individual, family, and community strengths; consider the holistic needs of clients; and are offered in a range of settings, such as communities, treatment centres, and on the land.

(FNMWC, 2015)



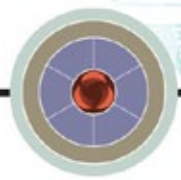
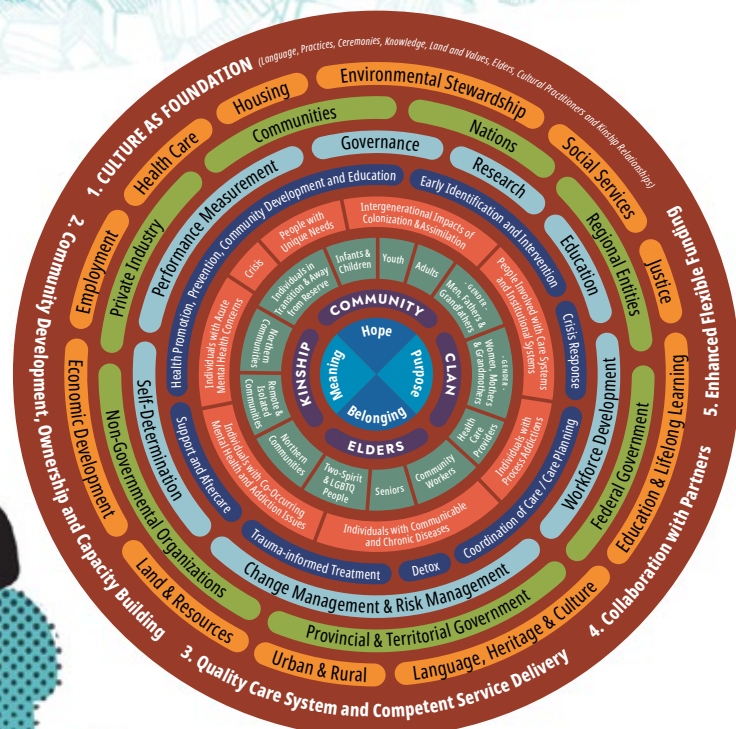
## Crystallized methamphetamine effects on **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

The FNMWC framework provides an understanding of crystallized methamphetamine that is **grounded in culture** and supported by connections to the Indigenous social determinants of **health, clan, kinship, community and Elders**.

- families become afraid for their loved ones, unsure how to help or keep them safe
- families and communities can feel threatened from unpredictable behaviours
- upsets the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness for individuals, families, caregivers and communities
- public safety concerns leads to increased calls to police, when treatment and support can be a more effective way of supporting community safety or wellness
- children living in contaminated homes can have methamphetamines in their system equal to those who use it (The Feed 2017)
- damages respect and trust in family relationships
- creates pregnancy challenges
- creates high risk for HIV, Hep C, and other infectious diseases from needle use and unsafe sex







Support from family, peer networks and friends, as well as access to housing, education, work and opportunities to celebrate cultural identity, helps support a person to be productive and connected to their community.

(HOS, 2011)





## Dangers of a **CRYSTAL METH LAB IN COMMUNITIES**

- labs put community at risk from dumped chemical waste
- meth cooking fumes spread throughout home being used
- makes homes unlivable
- most dangerous when building is not properly ventilated
- known to explode and catch fire creating hazardous fumes
- waste contaminates the soil, water, air, people and animals in Creation



Every pound of crystal meth produced results in five to ten pounds of toxic crystal meth waste.



# Where is methamphetamine **COMING FROM?**

- Global trade scaled down to local/regional distributors
- Pure super potent methamphetamine called *ice* comes from international drug trafficking with formulas designed in international *super labs*
- Local or regional labs
- Small cook operations conducted by individuals
- *Shake and bake* is a small-batch method using a soda bottle to mix methamphetamine from commonly available cleaners and chemicals

(Schnur S.& Kovatch B. 2019)



This method can be common in rural areas and puts communities at risk; bottles like this could explode just by touching them or trying to remove the cap.

(Photo: Boston Globe)



## TERMINOLOGY

**Crystal meth** common name for crystal methamphetamine.

**Amphetamines** drugs including ecstasy, cocaine, amphetamine, and methamphetamine.

**Amphetamine powder** commonly called speed.

**Lab** where illegal amphetamines are made.

## SLANG/STREET NAMES

Meth

Crystal

Cristy

Stove top

Pure

Redneck Cocaine

Rocket Fuel

Speed

Tweak

Base

Crank

Ice

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This resource has been developed as part of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation's Pharmacology Training. Contact us about our training courses and presentations that have been developed to assist communities and treatment centres in addressing methamphetamines and other substances.





## **ABOUT THUNDERBIRD PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION**

The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation is a leading culturally centred voice on First Nations mental wellness, substance use and addictions in Canada. The organization supports an integrated and wholistic approach to healing and wellness serving First Nations and various levels of government, through research, training and education, policy and partnerships, and communications.

The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation is a division of the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation Inc.

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