



BrassetsGroup

Report

Ketamine Use in Australia

January 2024





BrassetsGroup

About Us

Brassets Group are a 100% Australian owned, small to medium enterprise, headquartered in Brisbane, Australia.

We have developed an engaged work community, fostering our values, beliefs, and behaviours to deliver great work in an enjoyable environment.

Founded in 2011 by Managing Director Steve Brass and Clinical Director, Deb Brass, Brassets Group now employ a global network of clinical specialists, servicing the Asia Pacific region.

Brassets Group are recognised as the Clinical experts in the field of Drug and Alcohol Testing and Program Management for Government Departments, Police and Law Enforcement, Critical Infrastructure Management Organisations, Shipping, Transport and Logistics and Multinational Organisations.

Our Mission

At Brassets Group, we believe that corporate responsibility means creating products and services that truly make a difference in the world, and contribute to a safer, more sustainable future.

Our mission is to develop and deliver cutting-edge clinical services and technologies that not only meet the needs of our customers, but also support the greater good.

We achieve this through a relentless focus on innovation, an exceptional team of experts, and a commitment to sustainable practices.

We are proud to be leading the way towards a safer and more secure world. And we believe that our work is not only important, but essential for the future prosperity of our planet.



Ketamine Use in Australia

The following report provides an overview of ketamine use in Australia, focusing on various aspects such as patterns of use, geographical distribution, attitudes towards alternative medical use, illegal use and the seizure of ketamine intended for illegal distribution. By examining these factors, the report aims to shed light on the current landscape of ketamine consumption in Australia, offering insights into its prevalence, societal impact, and emerging trends. Additionally, the report seeks to identify potential areas for intervention and policy development to address the challenges posed by ketamine use beyond its prescribed medical applications.

What is Ketamine?

Ketamine, when used as prescribed, is an anaesthetic that is used by medical professionals and veterinarians. Ketamine creates a disconnection between the mind and body and is a versatile agent with properties of an anaesthetic, sedative, amnesiac and painkiller all in one. Furthermore, it does not depress the respiratory drive the way that many opiates do. Recreationally this disconnection, or disassociation is a sought-after effect and users report changes in thoughts, feelings, consciousness and hallucinations or a dream like state.

Due to its widespread use in veterinary medicine, it has earned the nickname "horse tranquilizer." Ketamine is a schedule 8 drug in Australia. Schedule 8 medicines are drugs of dependence that are prescription medicines which have a recognised therapeutic need. However, these medicines also have a higher potential for misuse, abuse, and dependence.

Ketamine can be found in various forms, including white crystalline powder, tablet form, or dissolved into a liquid. Due to its growing popularity as a party drug, there are indications that drug users seeking alternatives to MDMA may turn to anaesthetics such as Ketamine in times of limited availability (ACIC, 2017). The Australian Drug Trends 2022 report found the most common administration of Ketamine was snorting with approximately 95% of participants reporting this method, with a median price of approximately \$200 per gram. It has also been detected as an adulterant in tablets sold as ecstasy (ACIC, 2017).

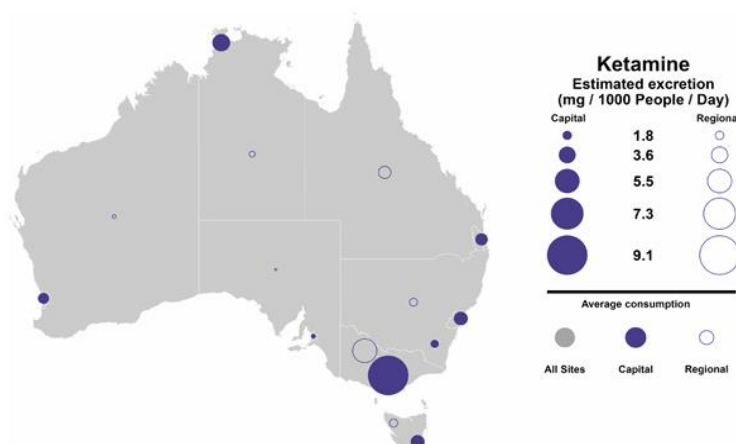
What are the effects of Ketamine?

When ketamine is consumed the onset of action is quite rapid. Nb, this will also depend on the mechanism of consumption. Once in the body it will be rapidly metabolised to norketamine which is still active but 3-5 times less potent than ketamine itself. Norketamine peaks in the bloodstream around 1.3 hours after dosing. Norketamine is further metabolised to Hydroxynorketamine (HNK) and dehydroxynorketamine (DHNK) which reach peak levels in around 4 hours. Ketamine (and its metabolites) are primarily eliminated via the kidneys through urine however can be detected in hair, oral fluid, blood.

Since 2000, numerous studies and clinical trials have investigated the antidepressant effects of Ketamine. A recent drug trial conducted by UNSW Sydney and the affiliated Black Dog Institute in 2023 yielded promising results for the use of Ketamine in treating treatment-resistant depression. (UNSW Sydney News, 2023). Such trials have contributed to the availability of Esketamine products, such as Spravato, for the treatment of adults with treatment-resistant depression (TRD) and depressive symptoms in adults with major depressive disorder (MDD) who have suicidal thoughts or actions. The findings from these trials highlight the potential of Ketamine as a treatment option for individuals struggling with severe forms of depression.

How prevalent is Ketamine?

Data collected by the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program (2023) found that in April 2023, detection of Ketamine reached a record high since the inclusion of Ketamine in 2020. Ketamine was added to the wastewater report in 2020 due to growing concerns of misuse. The data shows Ketamine use between December 2022 and April 2023 has increased in both regional areas and Capital cities. The key areas of concern being Victoria, with a large presence both regionally and in Melbourne. As well as high numbers in Darwin.



The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states, the use of ketamine increased from 0.4 percent in 2016 to 0.9 percent in 2019, mainly due to recent use doubling among people in their 20s over this period (1.2 percent to 3.9 percent) (AIHW, 2020). These statistics underscore the growing misuse of ketamine across Australia.

Ketamine's popularity as a party drug is of increasing global concern. In The Australian Drug Trends 2022 report 49% of participants reported using Ketamine as a party drug in 2022. Similar surveys conducted in the US, UK, China, and Malaysia also report a significant increase of recreational Ketamine Usage (Science Direct, 2016). As highlighted in the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program report (2023) Independent reporting available to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) shows large scale manufacture and consumption of ketamine in Asia as well as increasing consumption in Europe. The increased consumption and manufacturing of Ketamine indicates a growing accessibility and abuse potential of the drug.

How are authorities addressing the issue?

In July 2023, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) made significant strides in combating ketamine trafficking with two major operations resulting in substantial seizures and arrests. The first operation saw the seizure of 174kg of ketamine, valued at approximately 6.9 million dollars, by the AFP. Of the seized ketamine, 80kg was intercepted in transit, with an additional 80kg suspected to be buried at a property in Lara, regional Victoria. (AFP, 2023)

In a separate operation, two individuals were arrested and charged with attempting to possess a commercial quantity of unlawfully imported ketamine. This 84kg shipment of ketamine was initially sent to Melbourne and subsequently transported to Sydney, highlighting the extent of the drug's distribution network within the country (ABF, 2023).

Conclusion

The analysis of ketamine use in Australia reveals a complex landscape influenced by various factors. Ketamine, initially used as an anaesthetic for medical and veterinary purposes, has gained popularity as a recreational drug, with the increasing detection of ketamine in wastewater and its association with party drug use raise concerns about its widespread recreational consumption.

Recent law enforcement operations by the Australian Federal Police demonstrate the government's efforts to combat ketamine trafficking, highlighting the scale of the challenge.

Addressing its impact will require a comprehensive approach involving healthcare, law enforcement, and drug testing initiatives to mitigate potential harms and ensure its appropriate use within the bounds of medical practice. This holistic approach will be crucial in tackling the complexities of ketamine use and safeguarding public health in Australia.

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“ In a world full of unknowns, our team thrives on creating innovative clinical solutions to help organisations navigate business complexities with clarity and purpose.

Deb Brass, Clinical Director, Brassets Group ”

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