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NDRI success in NHMRC and ARC grants: Over \$2.5m for new research into methamphetamine treatment, naloxone uptake and PIED injecting

NDRI researchers have been awarded more than \$2.5 million in prestigious and highly competitive grants for research to address the harms caused by illicit drug use in Australia.

[Associate Professor Rebecca McKetin](#), together with a team of Australian researchers (Professors Dan Lubman, Paul Dietze, Michael Berk, Amanda Baker, Gregory Carter and Dr's Olivia Dean, Peter Kelly, Peter Higgs, Alyna Turner, Brendan Quinn and Wenbin Liang), has been awarded \$1.55m by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to lead a world-first out-patient trial of a promising new medication, *N-acetyl-cysteine (NAC)*, for dependence on crystalline methamphetamine ('ice').

The multi-site N-ICE trial will be conducted in collaboration with Deakin University, Monash University, the University of Wollongong, the University of Newcastle, La Trobe University, the Burnet Institute and Turning Point.

Ice is a significant and growing public health concern in Australia, with an estimated 160,000 Australians now dependent on the drug, but for which no approved medications are currently available. Associate Professor McKetin said that the research team was delighted to receive funding to trial the medication.

"If found to be effective, this medication has the potential to be a cost-effective treatment option for ice dependence," said Associate Professor McKetin.

[Professor Suzanne Fraser](#) and [Dr Robyn Dwyer](#) have been awarded an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant of \$502,000 to conduct a project investigating barriers to the uptake of 'take-home' naloxone (THN) for reversal of opioid overdose in Australia. Other project investigators are Professor Paul Dietze (Burnet Institute), Dr Joanne Neale and Professor John Strang (Kings College London).

A second ARC grant of \$472,000 has been awarded to Professor Suzanne Fraser and [Professor David Moore](#) to conduct a study into performance and image enhancing drug (PIED) injecting in Australia. Little is currently known about PIED injecting, which is increasing and is associated with serious health issues including the transmission of blood-borne viruses, especially hepatitis C. Other project investigators are Dr Kate Seear (Monash University), Dr Campbell Aitken (Burnet Institute) and Ms Kay Stanton (Darebin Community Health Service).

NDRI researchers have also been successful on several grants led by researchers from other institutions.

[Professor Dennis Gray](#) is an investigator on the new NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence aimed at building Indigenous research capacity to find solutions to alcohol problems, which will be led by Professor Kate Conigrave from the University of Sydney.

[Professor Simon Lenton](#) is an investigator on an NHMRC funded project bringing together an international team which aims to assess the global health risks associated with the availability of drugs on the 'dark net' or the 'hidden web'. This research will be led by Dr Monica Barratt, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), University of New South Wales.

[Ms Jocelyn Jones](#) and [Dr Mandy Wilson](#) are investigators on an NHMRC-funded project looking at the sexual health and attitudes of Australian prisoners to be led by Professor Tony Butler, Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales.

[Dr Kiran Pienaar](#) is an investigator on an ARC-funded project to be led by Associate Professor Kane Race, Sydney University, which will look at drug enhancement and experimentation among sexual and gender minorities.

"The success of NDRI researchers in the current grant round is testament to the quality of their work and its relevance to Australia's response to mitigate the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use in this country" said NDRI Director Professor Simon Lenton.