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## **HOLD THE ICE, THANKS – THE LINK BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND METHAMPHETAMINE**

A new study by Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre has confirmed a strong association between ice use and mental health problems. The research, which is the first of its kind, looked at Australians' experiences of methamphetamine use, dependence and withdrawal and linked the users' mental health problems to the time they were using meth.

"We found that mental health problems among regular methamphetamine users began, on average, about a year after they started using regularly and around the same time their use became problematic," says Dr Nicole Lee, Head of Research at Turning Point and the lead researcher on the study.

The study found that there was only about one year between first use of methamphetamine and problematic use of the drug, and an average of five years between the first problems emerging and the user seeking help. The research also discovered that the average age of first use was around 18 years with a short time of only two years before regular use started.

According to Dr Lee, other studies have found that around 80% of regular methamphetamine users will have some kind of mental health problem, primarily depression. Many of them will go to their GP first for help with the mental health problem but won't necessarily disclose their ice use.

"Help seeking is low among methamphetamine users and we need to identify ways to attract users who may be having mental health or other problems into treatment sooner. GPs and others need somewhere to refer people when methamphetamine use has been identified."

Dr Lee says the new methamphetamine clinics that Turning Point is establishing, funded by the Commonwealth Government and due to open in January '08, will go a long way to addressing this issue. The clinics, based in Melbourne, will provide a holistic approach to methamphetamine treatment with clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and addiction medicine specialists on site.

**For more information about this press release please contact:**

Dr Nicole Lee                      (03) 8413 8416 or 0403 958 803