



## **Methamphetamine Reporting Act Michigan State Police Methamphetamine Investigation Team and Michigan Intelligence Operations Center**

### **Introduction**

Under the Public Health Code (1978 PA 368, Part 72)<sup>1</sup> methamphetamine is a Schedule II substance, which means the drug has a high potential for abuse, minimal medical use, and can lead to serious psychological and physical dependence. Methamphetamine is a synthetically produced central nervous system stimulant that produces long-lasting effects including heightened senses of alertness and euphoria as well as increases in heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, and body temperature. Side effects from prolonged abuse can include agitation, tremors, hypertension, memory loss, hallucinations, psychotic episodes, paranoid delusions, and violent behavior.

Pursuant to the Methamphetamine Reporting Act (2006 PA 262)<sup>2</sup>, Michigan State Police (MSP) is required to report to the Michigan Legislature current methamphetamine trends. Accordingly, this report will address trends and statistics in methamphetamine manufacturing, use, and distribution, as well as provide recommendations of possible solutions to methamphetamine problems.

### **Overview of Methamphetamine in Michigan**

Methamphetamine has been seized as a powder, in solution, and in crystal form. The crystal form is also known as “crystal meth” and “ice” due to the large, ice-like crystals that form during a conversion process. MSP reporting notes a significant rise in the popularity of crystal methamphetamine throughout the state over the past few years. While powder methamphetamine, which is locally manufactured utilizing the “one-pot” method, still exists throughout the state, it has become less prevalent than crystal methamphetamine.

Reporting from the field continued to identify a logic pattern for the preference of methamphetamine as a result of the increased presence of heroin, fentanyl, and synthetic opioids. The Michigan HIDTA drug threat rating lists heroin and fentanyl as the number one drug threat. The total number of incidents related to heroin being cut with fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and other synthetic opioids continue to increase. As a result, heroin users purchase heroin and methamphetamine to be ingested simultaneously this is commonly referred to as a “speedball.” Methamphetamine is used to counteract effects on heart rate and respiration, which are both lowered by heroin. The intent of the mixture is to allow the user to experience a high from heroin and prevent their heart rate and respiration from dropping so drastically it results in death.

The continued demand for methamphetamine in Michigan created a market for crystal methamphetamine. Manufactured in Mexico and trafficked into Michigan, crystal methamphetamine

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has become readily available and inexpensive. Crystal methamphetamine provides users with the same methamphetamine high without the risks associated with purchasing components and manufacturing methamphetamine in a clandestine laboratory.

To strategically track and combat the emergence of crystal methamphetamine in Michigan, Michigan Incident Crime Reporting (MICR) arrest codes were created in 2018 specifically for the use, possession, distribution, and manufacturing of the substance. Prior to 2018, MICR reporting did not delineate between crystal methamphetamine and powder methamphetamine. It should be noted that it will take up to two years of gathering data under the new MICR code in order to identify and analyze statistical trends specific to crystal methamphetamine.

## **Methamphetamine Manufacturing in Michigan**

### ***Powder (one-pot) Methamphetamine***

Many different chemicals commonly found in the household can be used in the production of methamphetamine. Some of these chemicals are ether, lithium (batteries), alcohol, sodium hydroxide (lye/drain opener), iodine, ammonia, salt, red phosphorous (match books and flares), toluene (brake fluid), and hydrochloric acid. Additional items can be used to aid in the production method including coffee filters, funnels, blenders, and aluminum foil. There are no regulations on the sale of these ingredients making it difficult to associate purchases with the production of methamphetamine. There is one common ingredient in most methamphetamine manufacturing methods, the precursor ephedrine/pseudoephedrine. Instead of regulating all household chemicals, the decision was made to track the precursor used in the most common manufacturing methods.

The most common method used in 2019 was the one-pot method of manufacture. Pseudoephedrine, ammonium nitrate, sodium hydroxide, lithium metal, a non-polar solvent, and water are combined in one reaction vessel resulting in the production of methamphetamine. The ease of manufacturing methamphetamine with the one-pot method, the reduced reaction time, and the fact that all components are commercially available resulted in the increased popularity of the one-pot method. As a result, the seizure of other types of methamphetamine labs decreased. The one-pot method poses additional dangers due to the increased possibility of fire from



**One-Pot labs.**

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volatile component materials combined in one container.

Since 2005, Michigan has restricted the sale of medications containing pseudoephedrine through the federal Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005<sup>3</sup>. This initiative mandated that pharmacies secure these medications either behind the counter or in a locked case, requiring customers to ask for assistance from pharmacy staff. In addition, anti-theft devices were placed inside packaging containing ephedrine and/or pseudoephedrine. Pharmacies were also required to keep a log of customers who purchased this type of medication and maintain it for a minimum of six months. The customer logs were available to law enforcement upon request.

Initially, this approach showed signs of success as local methamphetamine production dropped slightly through 2008. However, the success was short-lived as determined methamphetamine producers found workarounds by applying techniques such as “smurfing” rings. Smurfing is the term used to describe individuals who make multiple purchases of products containing pseudoephedrine from multiple retailers and then either selling that product to the methamphetamine cook or trading it for drugs. Requiring customers to present identification and sign a pharmacy logbook at the point of purchase are both ways to deter smurfing. However, this deterrent method has not been as effective in recent years as individuals continue to use false identification and work in larger groups to obtain excess amounts of pseudoephedrine.

Since 2012, in accordance with 2011 PA 84 (MCL 333.7340a)<sup>4</sup>, Michigan pharmacies and drug retailers are required to track the sale of any medication containing pseudoephedrine. The purchase of medicine containing pseudoephedrine from a participating retailer requires gathering of identifying information at the point of sale and that information is submitted to the National Precursor Log Exchange (NPLEx). This is a real-time electronic logging system used to track the sales of the methamphetamine precursor pseudoephedrine in the United States. The system cross-references the sale to other pseudoephedrine purchases to determine if it is within the lawful limit. The sale may be blocked for exceeding the limit, and the block is recorded in the database. By utilizing NPLEx, law enforcement can identify individuals with patterns of pseudoephedrine purchases that are consistent with purchase patterns for the manufacturing of methamphetamine. This information is then used to identify methamphetamine manufacturers and build criminal cases.

During 2019, there were 476 registered users in Michigan across 199 law enforcement agencies, narcotics teams, corrections departments, and parole/probation offices actively utilizing NPLEx. These agencies conducted 14,558 searches, ran 5,730 queries, and had 4,226 active watch hits. This was a substantial decline from the use of NPLEx in 2018 where the 435 registered users conducted 41,271 searches, ran 15,937 queries, and had 9,078 active watch hits. With the increased presence of crystal methamphetamine, the focus of law enforcement changed effecting the use of NPLEx. The data in NPLEx is not valuable for building investigations when the primary manufacture location is Mexico, and the preferred method to mass produce crystal methamphetamine does not require pseudoephedrine. Therefore, law enforcement’s use of NPLEx declined in 2019.

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Figure 1: Sales information for pseudoephedrine. Sales of pseudoephedrine steadily decreased over the past five years, and blocked purchases decreased from 2016 to 2018. This decrease is likely attributable to the increased demand for crystal methamphetamine, as well as one-pot methamphetamine cooks and their smurfs becoming familiar with the laws for pseudoephedrine purchase limits. From 2018 to 2019, there was a 20% increase in the number of blocked purchases. This increase is likely a result of fewer active investigations using the data in NPLEx to identify suspicious purchases, and building cases resulting in lab seizures.

**Figure 1**

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Purchases	Blocks	Purchases	Blocks	Purchases	Blocks	Purchases	Blocks	Purchases	Blocks
Sales	2,249,083	59,076	2,197,326	65,632	2,122,815	53,535	1,880,592	46,694	1,876,190	56,145
Grams	4,894,039	199,045	4,798,247	219,458	4,631,321	187,541	4,172,267	173,629	4,054,760	174,337
Boxes	2,331,899	74,084	2,274,764	83,548	2,196,857	70,389	1,949,575	64,367	1,929,794	63,070

Source: NPLEx



Powder methamphetamine continues to remain available throughout the state. In 2019, according to MICR data, there were a total of 31 arrests in the state for methamphetamine manufacturing, a 55% decrease compared to 2018. This significant decrease is likely attributed to the significant increase in availability of crystal methamphetamine throughout the state. As a direct result, diversion and investigative efforts also shifted away from traditional one-pot laboratories and focused more on crystal methamphetamine investigations.

When law enforcement officials seize a clandestine drug laboratory site, such as a methamphetamine lab, the agency seizing the laboratory becomes the hazardous waste generator under federal law and is required to provide the materials for the hazardous waste clean-up. The clean-up must be conducted by certified law enforcement hazardous material specialists.

In 2011, Michigan implemented the Authorized Central Storage (ACS) Program provided by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The program allows state and local law enforcement to remove chemicals and waste from small labs and temporarily store the chemicals/waste in a safe and secure location pending final removal by a DEA hazardous waste vendor. This system reduced the costs of the clean-up.

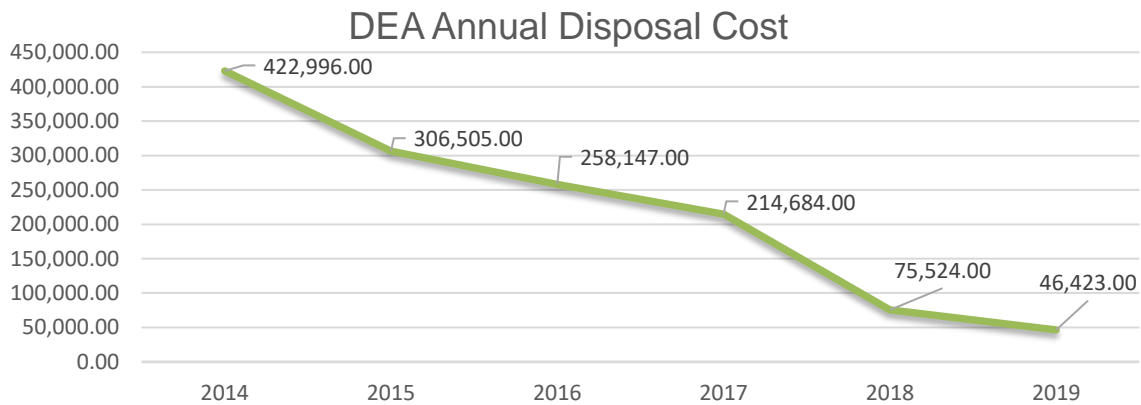


**ACS waste container.**

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During 2019, Michigan’s ACS program processed 84 labs/dumpsites/chemical component seizures, a 65% decrease from 2018. The waste generated in 2019 totaled over 1,816 pounds. The DEA paid \$46,423 for disposal of the ACS waste on behalf of Michigan’s container program in 2019, a decrease of \$29,101 from 2018 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**



Source: DEA

Figure 4: The container totals from 2015 through 2019. There has been a steady decline in the number of total lab incidents over the last five years. These tracked methamphetamine-related incidents include those that require hazardous waste material clean-up, such as laboratory dump sites and chemical/glassware component seizures as well as active labs.

**Figure 4**

Container Site	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bridgeport	176	115	82	50	10
Coldwater	65	55	46	12	6
Houghton Lake	89	64	66	29	16
Ionia	94	84	73	26	4
Jackson	80	87	61	18	2
Kalamazoo	296	157	45	12	11
Lansing	124	79	39	14	7
Negaunee	86	66	34	49	16
Paw Paw	157	122	65	19	5
St. Clair	N/A	27	33	11	4
Taylor	5	7	14	5	3
DEA Direct	2	3	2	0	0
	1174	866	560	245	84

Source: ACS

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### **Crystal Methamphetamine**

Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (MDTO's) mass produce crystal methamphetamine utilizing the Phenyl-2-Propanone (P2P) method. The P2P method does not require the use of pseudoephedrine, which is banned in Mexico, to manufacture methamphetamine. MDTO's continue to increase the potency and production of crystal methamphetamine, with most methamphetamine seized at the southern border of the United States being 90%+ pure. Due to a high demand, MDTO's continue to expand in virtually every region of the United States.

MDTO's have discovered innovative methods of smuggling methamphetamine, with the most common being methamphetamine in solution. Methamphetamine in solution is finished methamphetamine that is dissolved into a solvent for ease of concealment to cross the border into the United States. The most common solvents used for dissolving methamphetamine are acetone, water, or methanol. Once dissolved, a common method of concealment is in fuel tanks of commercial vehicles. The commercial tanks have a large gallon capacity and diesel fuel is lighter than the methamphetamine in solution, meaning the solution will separate and rest below the diesel. Other common concealment methods include laundry detergent containers, beverage bottles, and in large drums.



***Methamphetamine in solution.***  
***Photo courtesy of Customs and Border Patrol.***



***Methamphetamine in solution found in fuel tank.***  
***Photo courtesy of Customs and Border Patrol.***

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Once smuggled inside the United States, the methamphetamine is converted into crystal methamphetamine at locations known as conversion labs. The most common method involves adding acetone to the solution and adding heat until the solution boils. Crystals form as the solvent evaporates and slowing the evaporation process results in formation of larger crystals. It is common to place containers in a refrigerator or freezer or use air conditioning units to lower room temperature. In some instances, heating sources and/or fans are used to speed up the process of evaporation. These methods typically produce smaller “shards” than the natural evaporation process. The smaller shards are usually less desirable by users and dealers, however in certain circumstances, it is necessary for dealers to use these methods to keep up with the demand for their product. To date, there have been no known conversion labs found in Michigan. Most of the conversion labs seized in the United States have been in California, Arizona, and Georgia.

Investigators from MSP, along with other city and county law enforcement agencies across the state, utilize one of eight MSP forensic laboratories. These labs are strategically located throughout the state in order to best serve partnering law enforcement agencies. Once evidence is submitted for testing, toxicology is conducted on the evidence and the results are returned to investigators to further aid in investigation and prosecution.

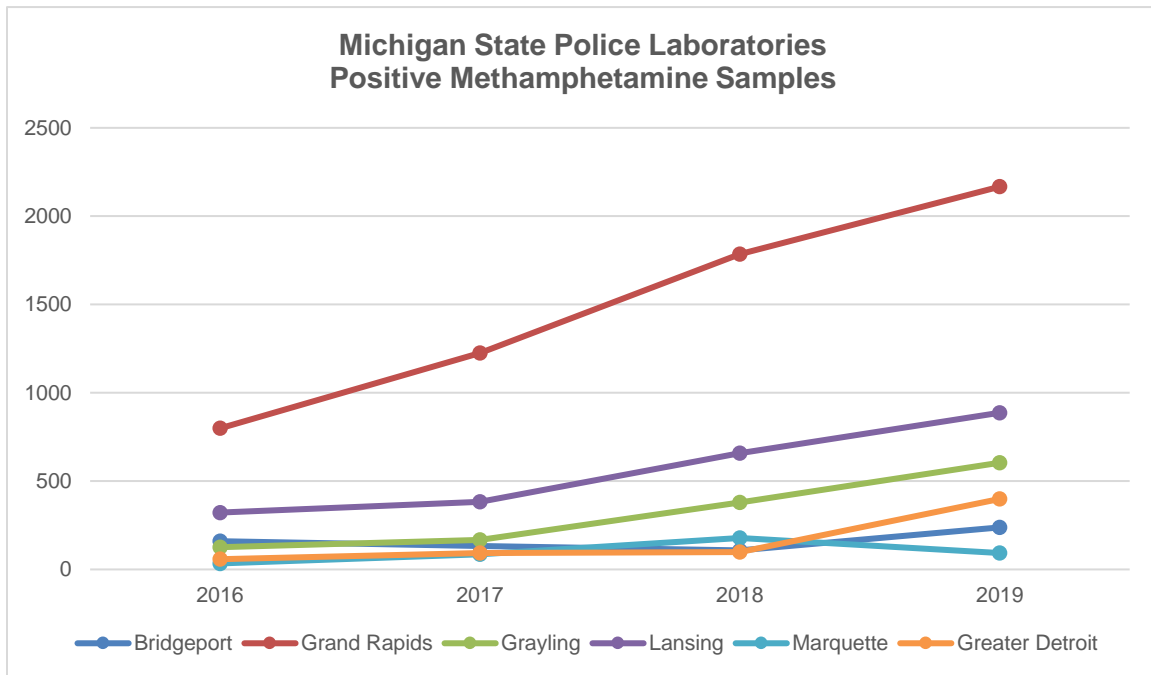


**Crystal methamphetamine conversion labs.  
Photos courtesy of Customs and Border Patrol.**

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Figure 5: The number of samples that tested positive for methamphetamine at each individual lab (Greater Detroit consists of three separate labs in the metro Detroit area) from 2016 through 2019.

**Figure 5**



Source: MSP Laboratories

## **Methamphetamine Use, Possession, and Delivery in Michigan**

The MSP Criminal Justice Information Center (CJIC) maintains records of arrest codes in the MICR system. When a subject is arrested for a drug crime, the crime is assigned a code designating the type of crime charged. Specific charges for methamphetamine in powder and crystal forms were established in 2018. These crimes include methamphetamine delivery, methamphetamine possession, methamphetamine manufacture, and methamphetamine use. Additional charges related to manufacturing methamphetamine include operating/maintaining a methamphetamine lab, operating/maintaining a methamphetamine lab involving hazardous waste, operating/maintaining a methamphetamine lab in the presence of a minor, and operating/maintaining a methamphetamine lab near a specified place, such as a church or school.

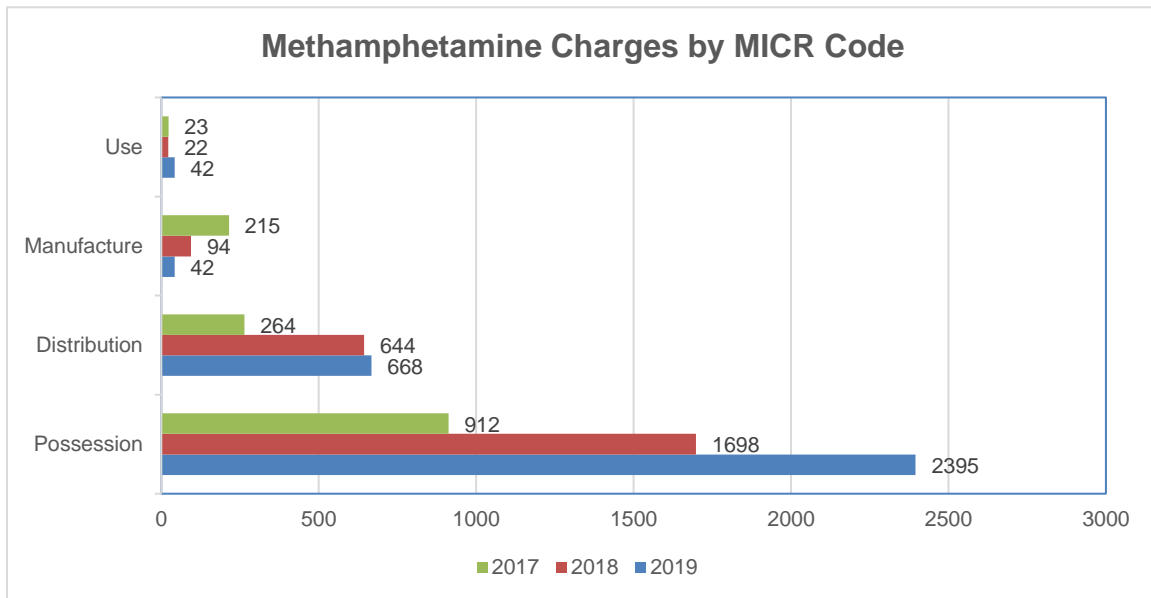
Methamphetamine use data is the most difficult reporting category to quantify since proof of use requires either individual drug testing or the witness of drug use by law enforcement personnel. The MICR system arrest codes for methamphetamine use are seldom utilized since use is difficult to prove in court. Most potential use charges are filed as possession in order to assure prosecution. Thus, MICR data is an unreliable indicator of use trends in Michigan. Virtually any of these arrests

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may include the presence of methamphetamine at the crime scene, and it is possible that methamphetamine possession charges may be included under manufacturing charges.

Figure 6: Methamphetamine use, possession, manufacturing, and distribution MICR arrest data for 2017 to 2019. Methamphetamine manufacturing charges decreased 56% from 2017 to 2018 and decreased 55% from 2018 to 2019.

**Figure 6**

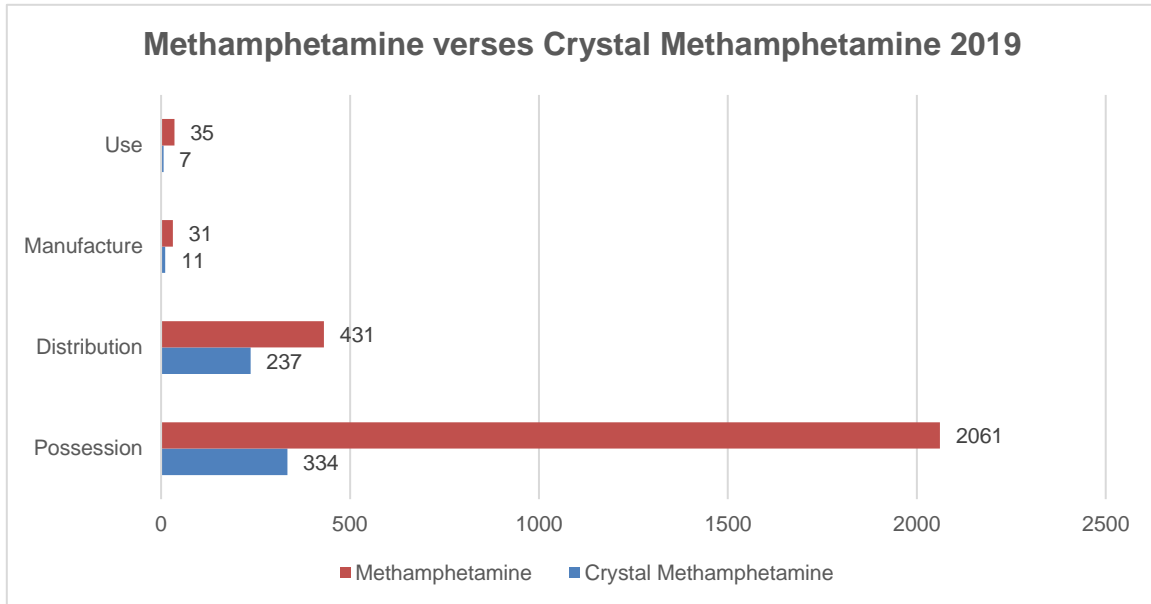


Source: MICR Data

It should be noted that the numbers in Figure 6 are inclusive of both methamphetamine powder and crystal methamphetamine since the arrest codes to differentiate between them were not created until 2018. An interesting trend to note is the continued increase in distribution and possession charges from 2017 to 2019 along with a continued decrease in manufacture charges. The product in demand is being manufactured elsewhere and trafficked into Michigan with increased availability. This demonstrates the continued presence of methamphetamine with a corresponding reduction in the presence of clandestine methamphetamine labs.

Figure 7: The breakdown for 2019 with the separate arrest charges for use, possession, manufacture, and distribution of methamphetamine powder and crystal methamphetamine.

**Figure 7**

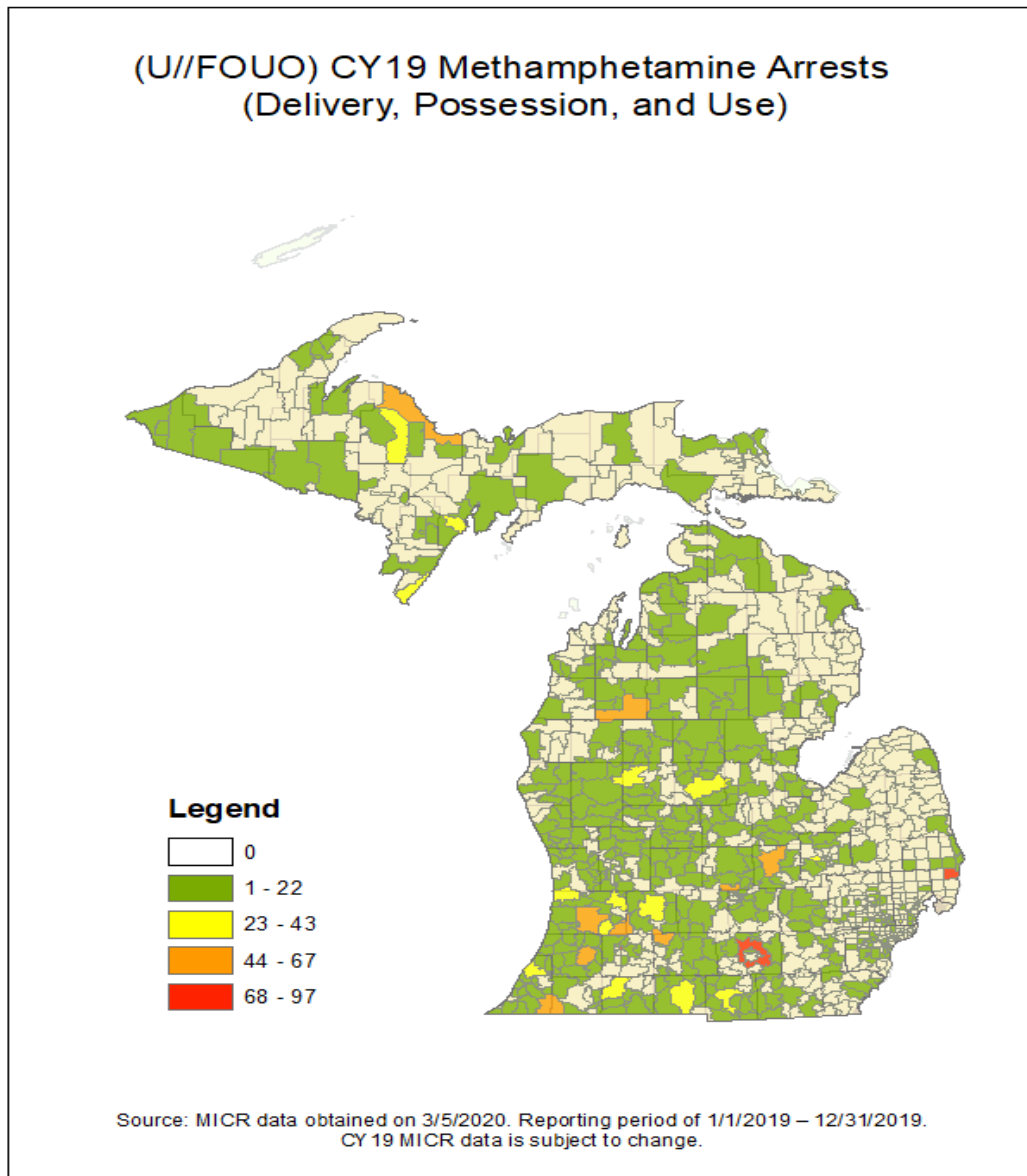


Source: MICR Data

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Figure 8: Mapped locations of methamphetamine delivery, possession, and use arrests by Michigan state and local law enforcement during 2019. The displayed colors depict the number of methamphetamine arrests per zip code. MICR data shows 3,108 methamphetamine delivery, possession, and use arrests occurred during 2019. This is a 26% increase from 2018 arrests (2,469). The flood of crystal meth in the Michigan drug market likely caused more people to become involved in meth use, possession, and distribution.

**Figure 8**



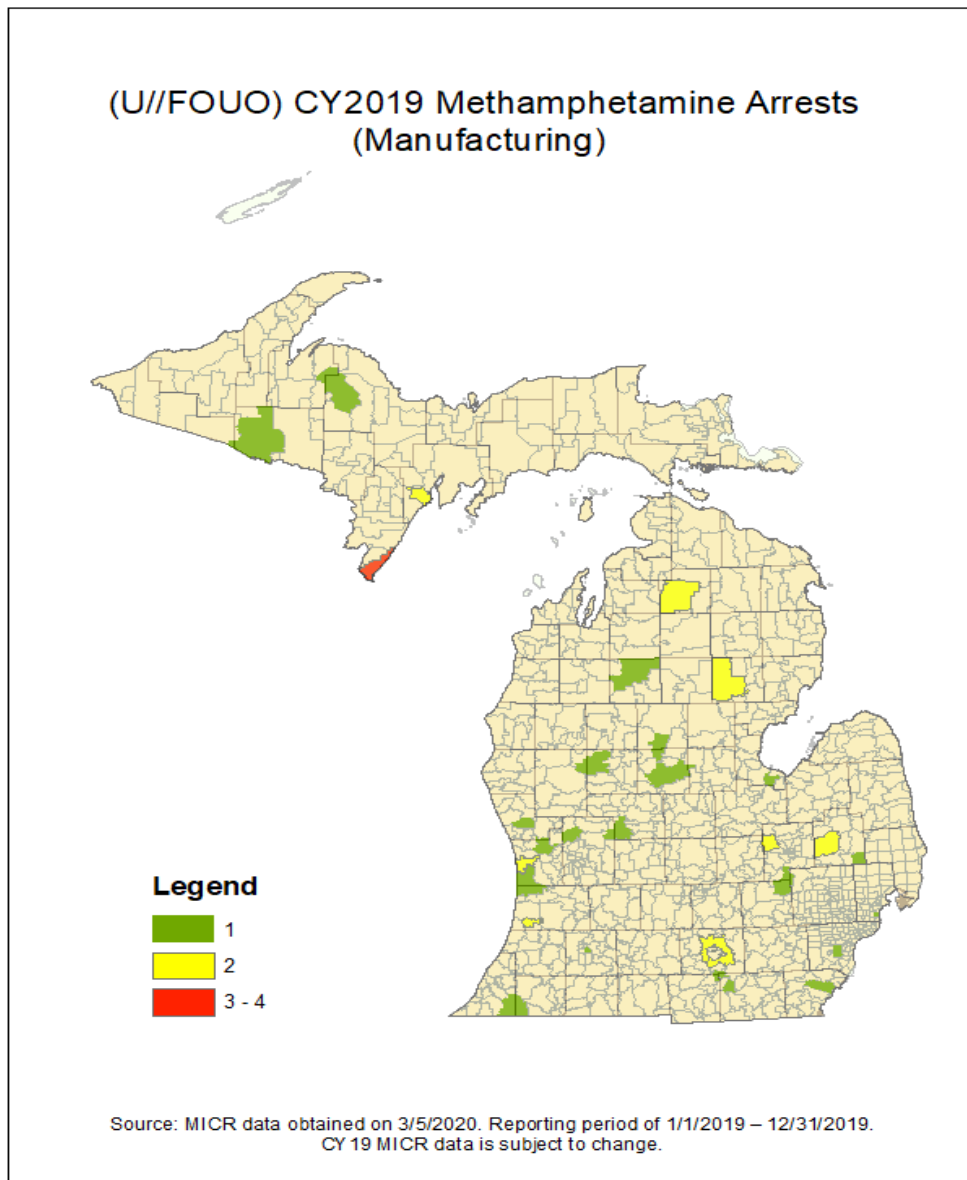
**Source: MICR data obtained on 03/05/2020. Reporting period 01/01/2019-12/31/2019. 2019 MICR data is subject to change.**

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Statewide, law enforcement responded to 3,150 total methamphetamine-related incidents in 2019, which is a 21% increase from the 2,607 in 2018. Of those, 3,108 (or 99%) were attributed to delivery, possession, and use arrests and 42 (1%) were attributed to lab and manufacturing arrests. Methamphetamine remains a threat to Michigan law enforcement and the community due to the unpredictability of the chemicals used in the production process and their damaging effects on the environment.

Figure 9: Locations of methamphetamine lab and manufacturing arrests by Michigan state and local law enforcement during 2019. The displayed colors depict the number of arrests per zip code.

**Figure 9**



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Distribution methods vary throughout the state. In the case of powder methamphetamine, most cooks typically use their own product, usually at their residence, at an associate's residence, at a motel/hotel, or in their vehicle. As such, distribution methods typically do not exist, and when they do, they are usually done locally hand-to-hand.

Distribution of crystal methamphetamine is quite different. Since crystal methamphetamine is not produced in-state, manufacturers rely on alternate methods to introduce it into Michigan. The two most common methods of transporting crystal methamphetamine into Michigan observed in 2019 were through the postal service and by vehicle.

Utilizing the postal service, manufacturers and high-level dealers, from the southwestern United States, ship large quantities of crystal methamphetamine through the mail either to dealers in larger Midwestern cities, or directly to the user. Many of these deals/transactions are organized through social media messaging platforms, or through the dark web utilizing virtual currency such as Bitcoin®.

Transporting crystal methamphetamine into Michigan by vehicle is commonly done using personal and commercial vehicles along the I-75 and I-94 corridors. In 2019, many seizures were conducted as a result of users/dealers driving to larger cities outside the state to pick up large quantities of crystal methamphetamine and drive it back to Michigan. Other methods observed include utilizing passenger busses and commercial tractor/trailers.



**Crystal methamphetamine seized from a postal delivery.**



**Crystal methamphetamine seized from a vehicle delivery.**

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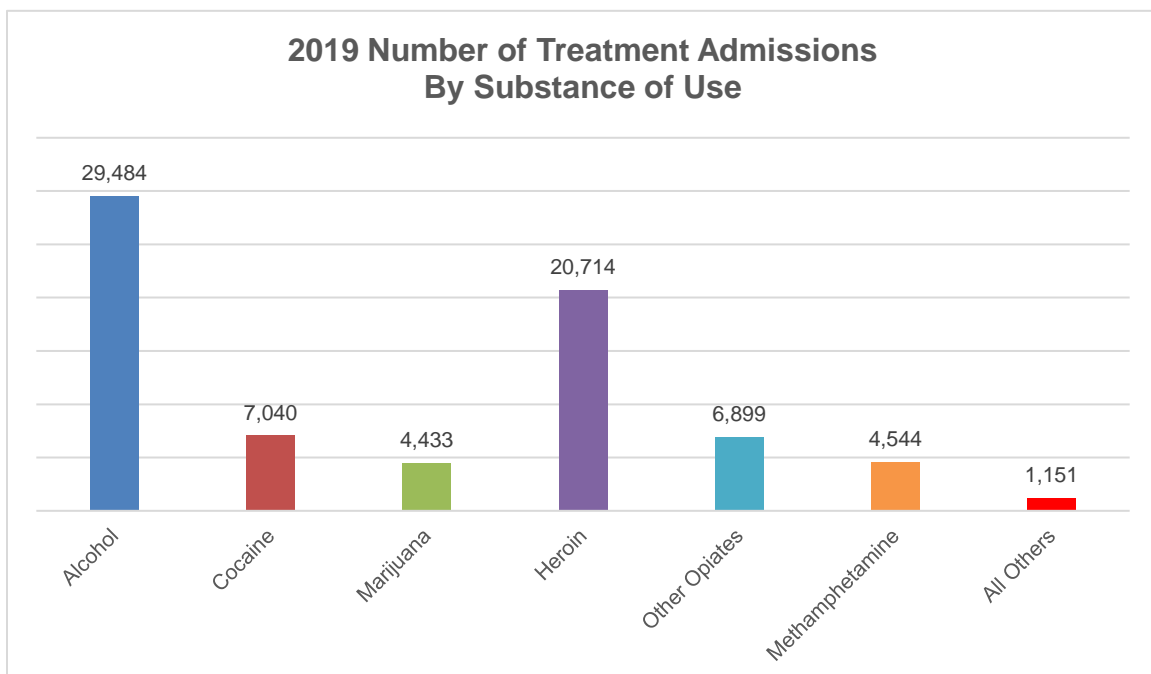
## Treatment Admissions

Individual drug testing only occurs among specific populations, which are not always a good indicator of abuse trends among the general population. Many individuals with substance use disorders only seek treatment when ordered to do so after arrest and sentencing. A large percentage of the population seeks treatment in privately funded treatment facilities. Publicly funded substance use disorder treatment facilities keep and report admission data to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). Privately funded treatment centers, however, are not required to report admissions data to MDHHS.

Treatment statistics show that admissions for methamphetamine substance use problems fall behind other drugs including alcohol, heroin, cocaine, and other opiates. Those with a methamphetamine use disorder are less likely to seek out treatment for addiction.

Figure 10: 2019 publicly funded substance use disorder treatment admissions by primary substance of use. According to the MDHHS, methamphetamine admissions increased 52% from 2018 to 2019.

**Figure 10**



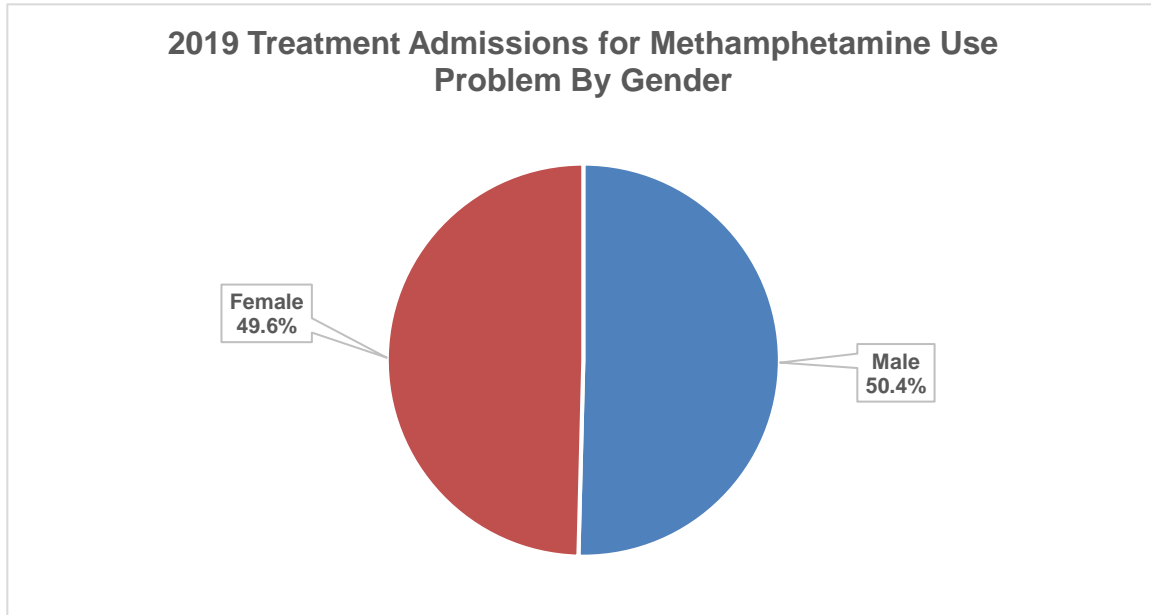
Source: MDHHS

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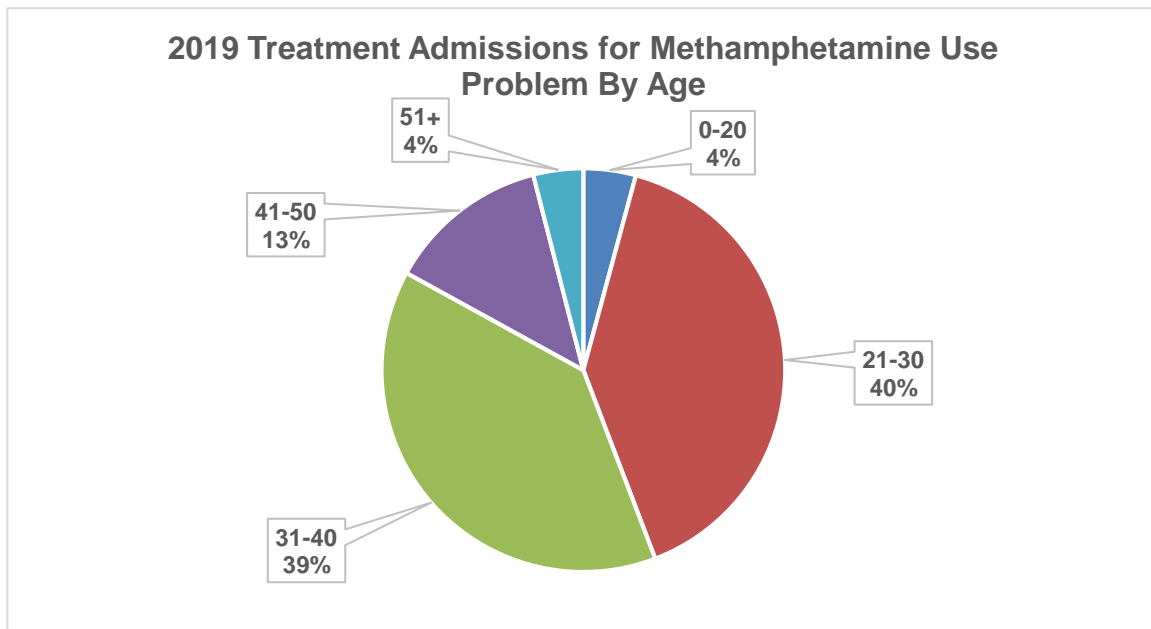
Additionally, Figures 11 through 13 breakdown 2019 methamphetamine admissions by demographics.

**Figure 11**



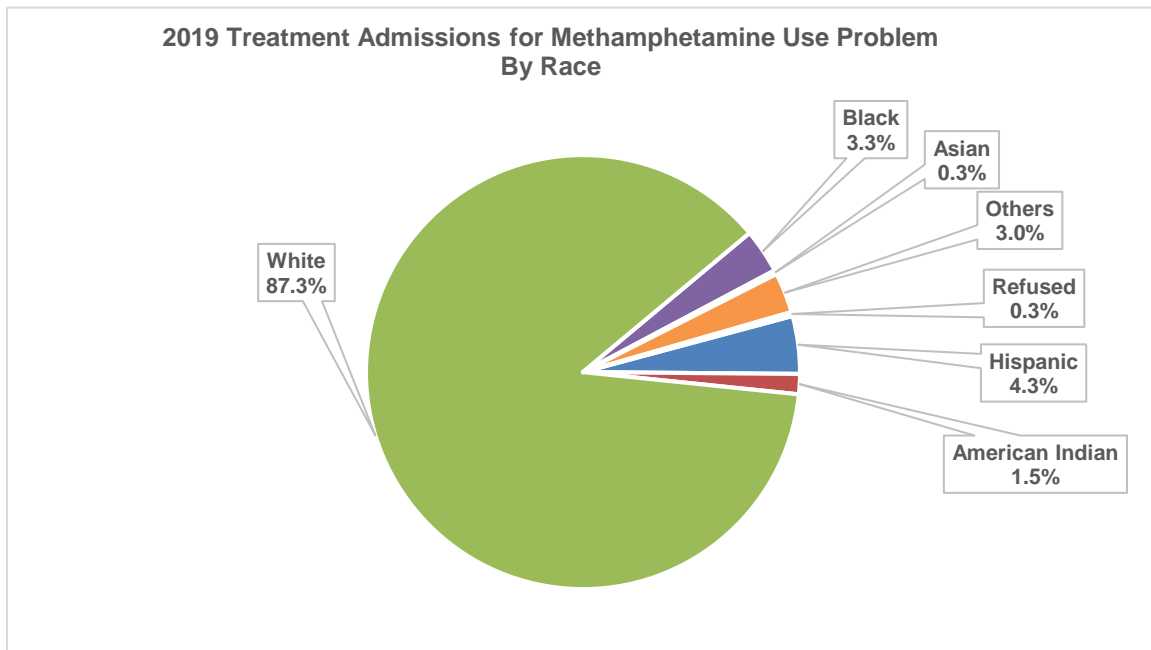
Source: MDHHS

**Figure 12**



Source: MDHHS

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**Figure 13**

Source: MDHHS

## **Drug Endangered Children**

Drug Endangered Children (DEC) are children under the age of 18 found in homes with caregivers who are manufacturing controlled substances in/around the home (methamphetamine labs), or where caregivers are dealing/using controlled substances and the children are exposed to the drug or drug residue (methamphetamine homes and/or drug homes).

The most critical issue with the production of methamphetamine by small labs is the harm it causes to the numerous DEC throughout the state. The production of methamphetamine poses significant hazards such as toxic waste, fires, and exposure to chemicals that can result in serious harm or death. The children affected and/or injured are required by law (2006 PA 266)<sup>5</sup> to endure decontamination and medical evaluation including drug testing, forensic interviewing, and photographs. The children's personal items that were at the scene of the methamphetamine lab are considered contaminated and the items will not be returned to the children. The residence is tagged as a site of illegal drug manufacturing, and the state or local health department decides whether the residence needs to be remediated. If remediation is determined possible, a qualified company conducts the costly remediation at the responsibility of the homeowner.

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## **RECOMMEDATIONS:**

### ***Powder (one-pot) Methamphetamine***

Early methamphetamine initiatives had a positive effect on older, traditional methods of local methamphetamine production in the state, as evidenced by the significant decrease in the number of anhydrous ammonia style laboratories, near elimination of Red Phosphorous laboratories (once a popular manufacturing method), and the necessity of manufacturers to change production methods and precursor acquisition strategies. Methamphetamine cooks still diversify their efforts to obtain the drug by importing from outside sources due to law enforcement pressure. In addition, methamphetamine manufacturers continue to find ways around pseudoephedrine laws by utilizing “smurfs” to purchase cold medicine containing pseudoephedrine from multiple pharmacies around the state. The real-time electronic tracking of pseudoephedrine does not serve as a deterrent to lab operators; however, this is still a valuable tool for investigators.

In order to further combat the manufacturing of powder methamphetamine, the following recommendations are made:

- Continue to enforce existing laws established under the Methamphetamine Abuse Reporting 2014 PA 276<sup>6</sup>, and the Public Health Code (1978 PA 368)<sup>7</sup>.
- Continue to target and prosecute offenders who violate purchase limits.

### ***Crystal Methamphetamine***

Crystal Methamphetamine has clearly become the drug of choice for many addicts in the state due to its availability and price. Since crystal methamphetamine is not produced in the state, interdiction presents a unique challenge to law enforcement officials. To combat the epidemic, the following recommendations are made:

- Continue interdiction operations on our interstate system.
- Focus enforcement efforts on mid to high level dealers to eliminate large quantity smuggling into the state.
- Conduct routine postal inspections and interdictions at airports and delivery points/warehouses.

Finally, in order to combat the epidemic, the following recommendations are made:

- Training for law enforcement on how to recognize indicators of Methamphetamine production, the use of NPLeX, trafficking methods, and other investigative considerations such as the use of Bitcoin® or other virtual currency, cell phone investigations, and communication via social media platforms.

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- Training for retail employees to include how to properly utilize NPLEx. For pharmacies, training employees in suspicious behaviors, precursor chemicals used in the production of methamphetamine, and how to recognize patterns regarding the purchase/theft of precursor chemicals.
- Training for postal service employees to recognize indicators of suspicious packages to include suspicious and/or known origins/destinations and packaging methods.
- Public relations campaign targeting identification of precursor chemicals, clandestine lab identification, identifying suspicious persons/behaviors, and invaluable information on methamphetamine-related issues and the prevalence of the problem.

Methamphetamine abuse is a serious problem across the nation and is particularly prevalent in the West and Midwest, including Michigan. Police officials, the public health sector, policymakers, and the state Legislature will continue to face challenges as the methamphetamine epidemic, especially crystal methamphetamine, continues to intensify. It is important to not only continue to devote resources towards the eradication of methamphetamine, but to increase efforts whenever possible, to include increased efforts/cooperation between law enforcement, prosecutors, and the general public.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-368-1978-7-72>

<sup>2</sup> <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-Act-262-of-2006>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/meth/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-333-7340a>

<sup>5</sup> <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-722-626>

<sup>6</sup> <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-Act-276-of-2014>

<sup>7</sup> <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-Act-368-of-1978>