

SANDAG

CJBRIEF

Research findings from
the Criminal Justice
Clearinghouse

2025 Methamphetamine Use by San Diego County Arrestees

Data from the SANDAG Substance Use Monitoring program

October 2026

Free Language Assistance | Ayuda gratuita con el idioma | Librang Tulong sa Wika

Hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí | 免费语言协助 | 免費語言協助 | مساعدة لغوية مجانية | 무료 언어 지원 | کمک زبان رایگان

無料の言語支援 | Бесплатная языковая помощь | Assistência linguística gratuita | मुफ्त भाषा सहायता

Assistance linguistique gratuite | ជំនួយភាសាឥតគិតថ្លៃ | ఉచిత భాషా సహాయం | ການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອດ້ານພາສາຟຣີ

Kaalmada Luqadda ee Bilaashka ah | Безкоштовна мовна допомога

[SANDAG.org/LanguageAssistance](https://www.sandag.org/LanguageAssistance) | 619.699.1900



Study Background

This SANDAG CJ Brief, *2025 Methamphetamine Use by San Diego County Arrestees*, is part of a series of reports highlighting findings from the Substance Use Monitoring (SUM) program—formerly known as the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program. As part of SUM, adults and juveniles booked into local jails are approached within 48 hours of their booking to participate in interviews regarding potential substance use and other high-risk behaviors. Because the number of juveniles booked into local jails has declined over the years, youth on probation were also interviewed at the San Diego Achievement Centers to ensure a representative sample.

Acknowledgements

This effort would not be possible without funding from the SANDAG Criminal Justice Clearinghouse and the generous support from the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency and Behavioral Health Services. Their support—as well as the cooperation of the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, Probation Department, and the San Diego Achievement Centers—is gratefully acknowledged. To learn more about the SUM program and to access other current reports, visit [SANDAG.org/cj](https://sandag.org/cj).

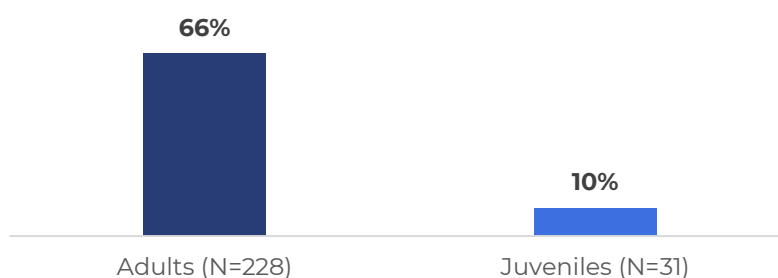
Introduction

Since 1987, as part of the Substance Use Monitoring (SUM) program, SANDAG has conducted confidential interviews with randomly selected adults and juveniles booked into San Diego County jails to gather data on drug use and involvement in other risky or illegal behaviors. These interviews are voluntary and conducted within 48 hours of an individual's booking. In 2025, 258 adults completed an interview and provided a valid urine sample for analysis. An additional 31 juveniles were interviewed.¹

Self-Reported Meth Use

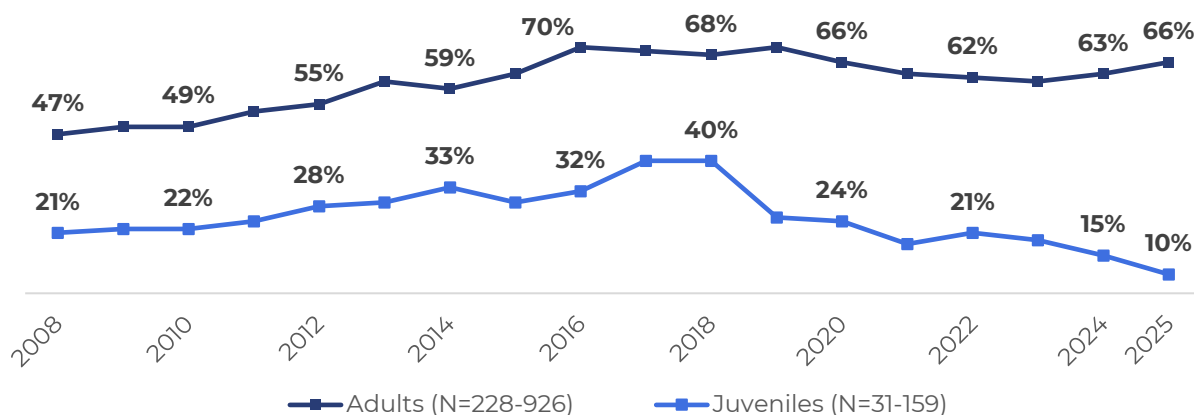
Historically, the proportion of juveniles reporting meth use has been considerably lower than that of adults. In 2025, 66% of interviewed adults reported ever using methamphetamine (meth), while three juveniles (10% of those interviewed) reported ever using it (Figure 1). Long-term SUM trends show that since 2011, at least half of all adults interviewed every year have self-reported ever using meth (Figure 2). This proportion increased steadily over time, peaking at 70% in both 2016 and 2019, before decreasing in recent years.

Figure 1: Self-Reported Meth Use Among Adults and Juveniles (2025)



Source: SANDAG, 2025

Figure 2: Self-Reported Meth Use Rates Among Adults and Juveniles (2008-2025)



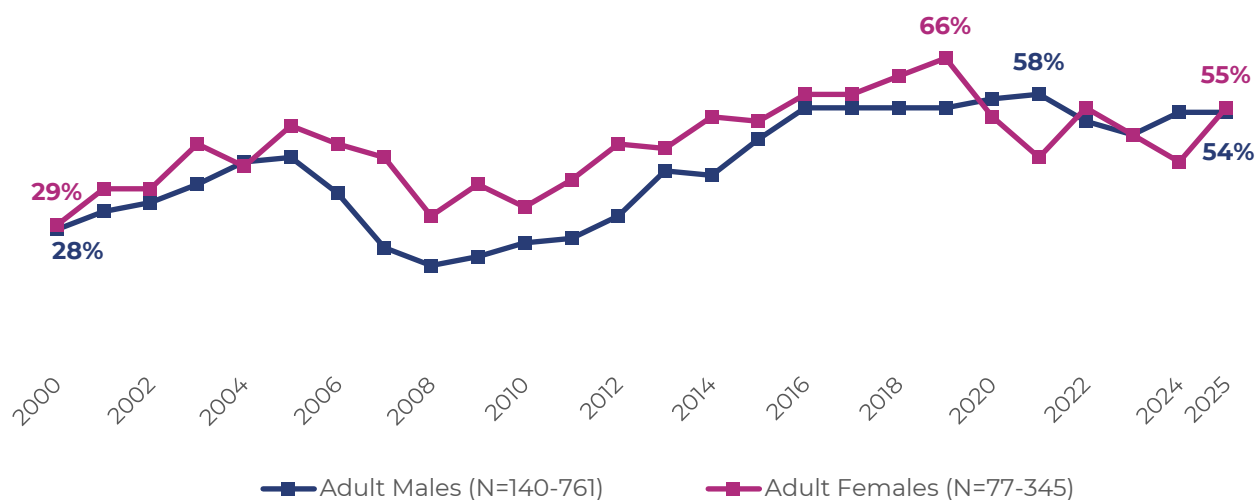
Source: SANDAG, 2025

¹ Adults were interviewed at the Vista Detention Facility, the San Diego Central Jail, and the Las Colinas Detention and Reentry Facility. Juveniles were interviewed at the Youth Transition Center (YTC) and at several San Diego Achievement Centers around the county.

Positive Drug Tests

An important component of the SUM project involves voluntary drug testing. Since 2015, roughly one in two respondents have tested positive for meth overall. Recent years show a clear departure from the long-standing pattern of higher positive rates among females. In 2025, both males and females tested positive at nearly identical rates, with just over one-half testing positive (Figure 3). Juveniles were excluded from this year-over-year comparison due to small sample size.

Figure 3: Percentage of Positive Tests for Meth Among Interviewed Adults, by Gender (2000-2025)



Source: SANDAG, 2025

Meth Addendum Findings

Meth has consistently been one of the most commonly used illicit drugs among individuals booked into San Diego County jails. Consequently, those who report using it within the past 30 days are invited to complete an additional survey addendum. The addendum is designed to gather more detailed information about meth use patterns, behaviors, and related experiences. Of the 171 adults and 3 juveniles who reported past meth use, 125 adults and zero juveniles indicated they had used it within the past 30 days specifically. The following sections are thus based on the responses of 124 adults who completed the addendum, summarizing the information they shared during their interviews.²

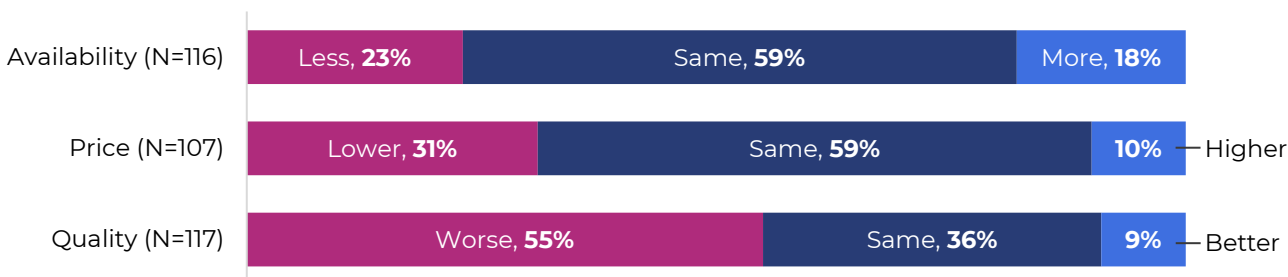
Respondent Perceptions of Meth's Market Dynamics

Understanding how people who use meth perceive the availability, price, and quality of meth can offer insights into consumer behavior and help inform efforts to reduce related harms. Among those who responded to the addendum, the majority (59%) reported perceiving meth to be just as available as it was in the year prior, while 23% said it was less available, and 18%

² The 2025 sample consisted of 72% males and 28% females. The racial/ethnic composition was 41% Hispanic, 38% White, 16% Black or African American, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2% Other. These distributions remain consistent to previous years.

perceived it as more available (Figure 4). In terms of costs, nearly one in three (31%) reported the price of meth being lower than the previous year, but the majority of respondents said it was the same. Over half (55%) noted that the quality of meth had worsened since 2024.

Figure 4: Respondent Perceptions of Meth Availability, Pricing, and Quality in 2025 Compared to the Year Prior



Source: SANDAG, 2025

Meth Purchasing and Usage Patterns

Despite efforts to decrease meth use and its availability, the Drug Enforcement Administration reports that meth continues to be available with high purity and potency in the United States.³ To further probe the availability of meth, respondents were asked a series of questions to describe how they typically get the drug, the frequency of their daily and monthly usage, and their typical consumption methods.

“It’s dirty and they are putting different things into it. It gives you different reactions.”

- 60-year-old male

Purchasing Patterns

Nearly one-third (32%) of respondents reported having a primary source or dealer from whom they typically purchase meth. When their primary source is unavailable, more than half (53%) said they typically buy from someone else.

Usage Patterns and Consumption Methods

To better understand the intensity and regularity of meth use among participants, addendum questions examined both monthly and daily usage patterns. When asked about their longest consecutive period of use in the past 30 days, participants reported a mean average of 18 days in a row (range 1 to 30) (Figure 6).

On days when meth was used, respondents reported using it an average of five times a day. Notably, nearly one-fourth (23%) indicated using it 10 or more times daily (not shown). Respondents were also asked how much meth they use. Among the 73 adults who provided specific quantities in measurable units, the average (mean) consumption reported was 1.7 grams per day.

³ Drug Enforcement Administration (May 2025). 2025 National Drug Threat Assessment. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Available at <https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025NationalDrugThreatAssessment.pdf>.

Figure 6: Average Meth Use Frequency and Quantity Among Respondents



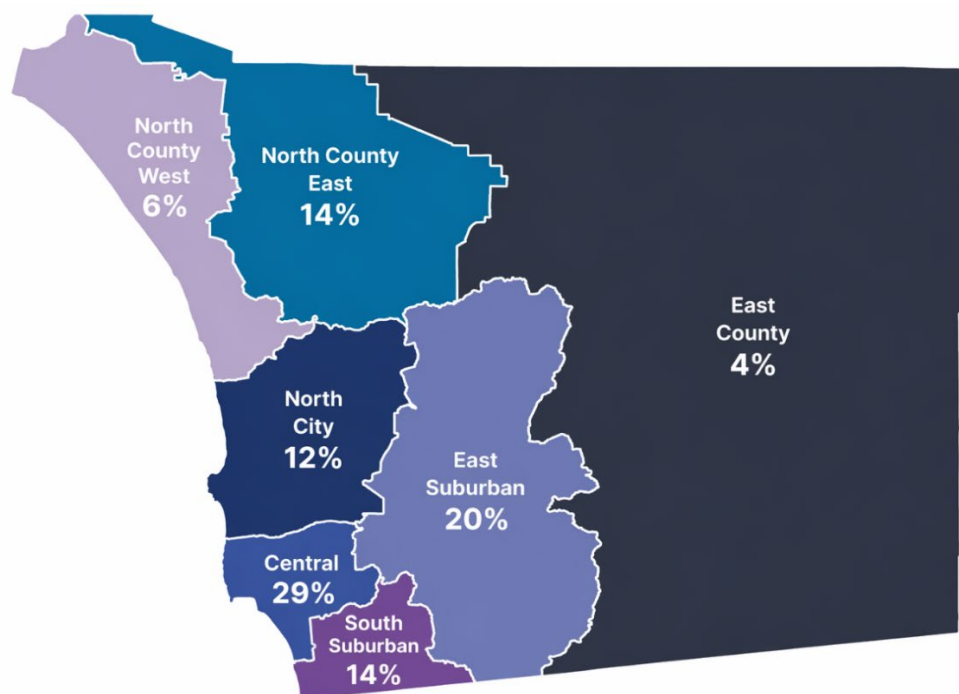
Source: SANDAG, 2025

Regarding methods of consumption, the majority of participants (87%) reported smoking meth (alone, not mixed) as their primary method. When asked about their second most common method used in the past 12 months, the most frequently reported were snorting injecting and snorting (not shown).

Meth Purchases Across San Diego County

In 2025, most arrestees reported buying meth in either the central (29%) or east suburban (20%) major statistical areas (MSA) in San Diego county (Figure 5).⁴ While central San Diego remains the single highest-volume area, compared to previous years, the rate of respondents who report purchasing from the central area of the county has decreased and dispersed into surrounding suburban and northern subregions.

Figure 5: Meth Purchasing Patterns Across San Diego County's MSAs in 2025



Source: SANDAG, 2025

⁴ There are seven MSAs in the San Diego region that describe different geographical areas of the County. To view these MSAs on a map, visit: <https://sdgis.sandag.org/>.

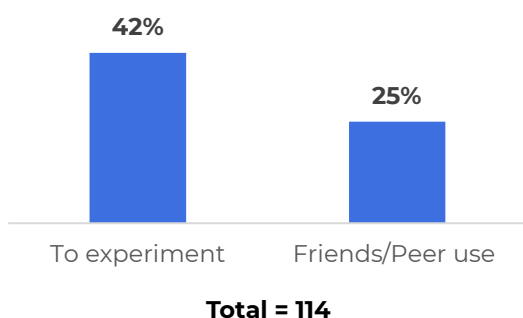
Motivations for Meth Use

While initial motivations for meth use were most frequently rooted in curiosity and social influence, current use is primarily driven by addiction and as a coping mechanism to escape life challenges. When asked why they first began using meth, over two-fifths of respondents (42%) cited experimentation and 25% attributed their initiation to friend or peer influence (Figure 7). In contrast, the most commonly reported reasons for current use were addiction (32%) and as a means to escape problems (31%) (Figure 8). Some respondents cited mental health challenges, such as depression.

**“When you’re high,
you have no feelings.
It’s like you’re numb.”**

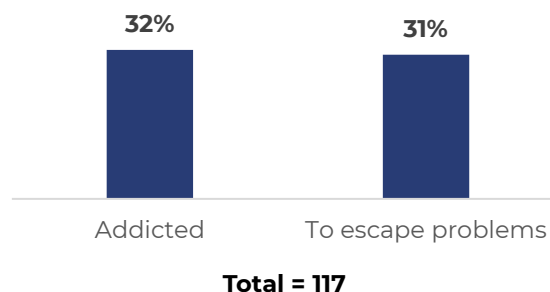
- 23-year-old female

Figure 7: Top Two Reasons Respondents Began to Use Meth



Source: SANDAG, 2025

Figure 8: Top Two Reasons Respondents Currently Use Meth



Source: SANDAG, 2025

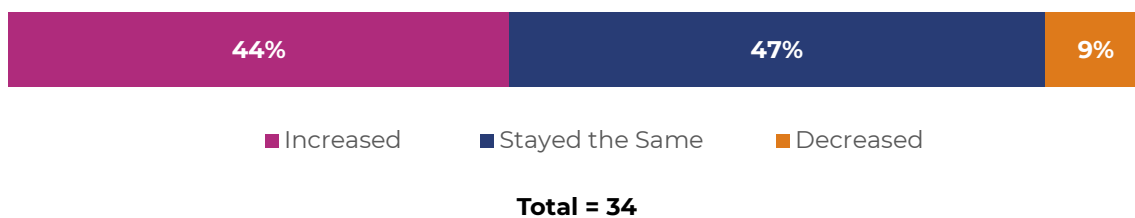
Demand for Meth

More than one in four (28%) respondents reported having sold meth or acted as a middleman within the last year, indicating that many users are not only consumers but are also active participants in the distribution of meth. Among those 34 individuals, 44% said the demand for meth had increased in 2025 compared to the previous year (Figure 9). However, a similar proportion indicated that the demand had stayed the same (47%). Only a few people perceived the demand to have decreased.

**“The quality is bad, so
more is needed to get
high.”**

- 39-year-old male

Figure 9: Perceptions of Meth Demand According to Respondents who Engaged in Distribution



Source: SANDAG, 2025