

Executive Summary

The IDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly inject illicit drugs, recruited via advertisements in needle syringe programs and other harm reduction services, as well as via peer referral, across each capital city of Australia. The results are not representative of all people who inject drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2024 from June-July. Since 2020, interviews were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission; all interviews prior to 2020 were conducted face-to-face. This methodological change should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020-2024 samples relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The 2024 IDRS sample (N=884) was mostly similar to the sample in 2023 and in previous years. Participants predominantly identified as male (69%) with a median age of 47 years, both stable from 2023. In 2024, most participants reported being unemployed at the time of the interview (89%; 86% in 2023), although the median weekly income significantly increased (\$424; \$400 in 2023; $p=0.006$). Drug of choice remained stable, with 42% nominating methamphetamine (45% in 2023) and 39% nominating heroin (41% in 2023) as their drug of choice. Most participants continued to nominate methamphetamine as the drug injected most often in the past month (59%; 56% in 2023).

Heroin

In 2024, 51% of the sample reported recent heroin use, stable relative to 2023 (56%). Median frequency of use also remained stable

at a median of 90 days (i.e., every second day) in the past six months (90 days in 2023). Among participants who had recently used heroin, 53% reported using white/off-white powder (59% in 2023; $p=0.015$). Price, perceived purity and perceived availability remained stable, with 39% reporting 'medium' purity (35% in 2023) and 91% reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment (91% in 2023).

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has been gradually increasing since 2010, although has been relatively stable from 2021 onwards. In 2024, 82% reported recent use, stable from 2023 (81%). Crystal continued to be the most common form of methamphetamine used by participants (81%; 80% in 2023). Fewer participants reported consuming methamphetamine powder (8%; 10% in 2023) and base (5%; 5% in 2023). Among those who reported recent use, participants reported using methamphetamine crystal on average three times per week in the six months preceding the interview (72 median days; 72 days in 2023). The reported median price for one point of powder and crystal remained stable at \$50, respectively. Perceived purity for powder and crystal remained stable, albeit mixed. Perceived availability also remained stable, with 74% reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment of powder, and 95% reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment of crystal.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine and frequency of use has generally decreased amongst the sample since the commencement of monitoring (peak of 35% in 2001), although remained stable in 2024 relative to 2023. In 2024, 17% of participants

reported recent use on a median of 2 days. The median price for one gram of cocaine remained stable at \$300 (\$350 in 2023). Perceived purity and availability of cocaine also remained stable, with 50% of participants reporting 'high' purity (36% in 2023), and 67% reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment (68% in 2023).

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

At least two thirds of the IDRS sample have reported recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products since monitoring commenced. In 2024, 69% reported recent non-prescribed use (69% in 2023). Frequency of non-prescribed cannabis use remained stable at a median of 180 days (180 days in 2023), with 55% of those who had recently used cannabis reporting daily use (51% in 2023). There were no significant changes in relation to the perceived purity or availability of bush and hydroponic cannabis in 2024, relative to 2023. However, a significant decrease was observed for the price of one ounce of bush (\$180; \$250 in 2023; $p=0.039$).

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Non-prescribed use of all forms of pharmaceutical opioids has either remained stable or declined since monitoring of each opioid first commenced. In 2024, non-prescribed use of all pharmaceutical opioids remained stable relative to 2023, with morphine and oxycodone the most commonly used non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids (10%, respectively). However, significant increases were observed in frequency of use for non-prescribed methadone syrup (12 days; 4 days in 2023; $p=0.041$) and non-prescribed buprenorphine-suboxone (7 days; 5 days in 2023; $p=0.008$).

Other Drugs

Use of any NPS has fluctuated between 5% and 12% since monitoring commenced in 2013, with 5% reporting recent use in 2024 (7% in 2023). Benzodiazepines remained the most common non-prescribed pharmaceutical drug reported by participants in 2024 (25%; 28% in 2023), followed by pregabalin (13%; 16% in 2023). Significant decreases were observed in participants' recent use of alcohol (51%; 57% in 2023; $p=0.020$) and non-prescribed e-cigarettes (27%; 34% in 2023; $p=0.005$), though frequency of use for both substances remained stable. Recent use of tobacco remained high yet stable (87%; 88% in 2023), with 53% reporting illicit tobacco use: both were used on a median of 180 days. Use of all other monitored drugs remained stable.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

In 2024, 63% of the sample reported using two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes) on the day preceding interview.

Three fifths (61%) of the national IDRS sample had binged on one or more drugs for 48 hours or more in the six months preceding interview.

Injecting behaviours and equipment access

In 2024, 5% of participants reported receptive sharing of a needle or syringe (5% in 2023) and 9% reported distributive sharing in the past month (7% in 2023). One third (35%) reported re-using their own needles in the past month, stable relative to 2023 (33%), and 15% reported sharing other equipment, a significant decrease relative to 2023 (21%; $p=0.002$).

Twenty-nine per cent reported having an injection-related problem in the past month (26% in 2023), most commonly any infection/abscess (13%; 10% in 2023) and any nerve damage (12%; 10% in 2023).

Overdose, naloxone and drug checking

In 2024, one fifth (21%) of the sample reported any past 12-month non-fatal overdose, stable relative to 2023 (18%), most commonly from heroin (11%; 9% in 2023).

Awareness of take-home naloxone remained stable in 2024 (80%; 80% in 2023), as did past year access (46%; 44% in 2023).

In 2024, 11% of participants reported that they or someone else had tested the contents and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year (9% in 2023).

Dependence, drug treatment and HCV

In 2024, 36% of male participants obtained an AUDIT-C score of ≥ 4 , and 35% of female participants obtained a score of ≥ 3 , indicative of hazardous alcohol use.

Half (49%) of those who reported recent methamphetamine use obtained an SDS score of ≥ 4 , while 59% of participants reporting recent opioid use obtained a score of ≥ 5 , indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Almost two fifths (37%) of the sample reported that they were in any drug treatment for their substance use in 2024 (39% in 2023), with the most common treatment being methadone (19%).

In 2024, 53% of participants reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year, stable relative to 2023 (52%). Four per cent reported having a current

HCV infection (7% in 2023) and 6% reported that they had received HCV treatment in the past year (8% in 2023; $p=0.039$). Almost one third (30%) of the sample reported having had a test for human immunodeficiency virus in the past six months, stable relative to 2023 (33%).

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Forty-four per cent of the sample reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks and one quarter (23%) reported recently having a sexual health check-up.

Self-reported mental health problems remained stable in 2024 (53%), although remained at the highest per cent reported since monitoring commenced. Three fifths (59%) reported high/very high psychological distress in 2024 (55% in 2023).

Most participants (84%) reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview in 2024 (89% in 2023; $p=0.010$).

Driving, contact with police and modes of purchasing drugs

Seventy-seven per cent of those who had recently driven reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the past six months (70% in 2023) and 9% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol (8% in 2023).

One third (32%) of participants reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest, stable relative to 2023 (36%). In 2024, the most popular means of arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview was face-to-face (85%; 79% in 2023; $p=0.004$).
