

Executive Summary

The Melbourne Victoria (VIC) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants, recruited via social media and word-of mouth in Melbourne, VIC. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2024 from April-June. Interviews from 2020 onwards were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, to reduce the 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 EDRS sample (N=100) recruited from Melbourne was similar to the sample in 2023 and in previous years. Gender remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with 48% identifying as female (42% in 2023), and participants had a median age of 25 years. The per cent of respondents that reported being a current student (39%; 31% in 2023) or holding a tertiary qualification (60%; 71% in 2023) remained stable. There was a significant change in respondents employment status ($p<0.001$), with fewer reporting fulltime work (23%; 51% in 2023) and more reporting part time/casual work (56%; 32% in 2023). Accommodation status changed significantly relative to 2023 ($p=0.012$), with half of the sample (50%) living in a rental house/flat (69% in 2023) and a further 36% residing with their parents/at their family home (19% in 2023) at the time of interview. The median weekly income significantly decreased to a median of \$600

in 2024 (IQR=392–1029; \$1200 in 2023; IQR=700–1737; $p<0.001$). There was a significant change in drug of choice between 2023 and 2024 ($p=0.026$), with more participants nominating ketamine (20%; 13% in 2023) and cocaine (19%; 14% in 2023) as their drug of choice. Drug used most often in the month preceding interview changed significantly in 2024 ($p=0.012$), with fewer participants nominating ecstasy (15%; 27% in 2023) and alcohol (6%; 18% in 2023) and more nominating cannabis (31%; 22% in 2023) and cocaine (18%; 11% in 2023).

Non-Prescribed Ecstasy

Recent use of any non-prescribed ecstasy in the six months prior to interview remained stable in 2024 relative to 2023 (95%; 99% in 2023). Pills (65%) and capsules (64%) remained the most commonly used forms of non-prescribed ecstasy. Frequency of use remained stable for all four forms of non-prescribed ecstasy. The perceived availability of non-prescribed ecstasy capsules significantly changed between 2023 and 2024 ($p=0.008$), with more participants (55%) reporting that capsules were 'very easy' to obtain (40% in 2023) and a corresponding decrease in those reporting 'difficult' obtainment ($n\leq 5$; 16% in 2023). The perceived availability of non-prescribed ecstasy pills, crystal and powder remained stable in 2024, as did the perceived purity of all forms of non-prescribed ecstasy. In 2024, the median reported price of non-prescribed ecstasy pills (\$30; IQR=25–35; \$38 in 2023; IQR=30–40; $p=0.031$), capsules (\$25; IQR=20–30; \$30 in 2023; IQR=25–30; $p=0.006$), and crystal (\$200; IQR=150–250; \$250 in 2023; IQR=200–250; $p=0.041$) decreased significantly relative to 2023.

Methamphetamine

Twenty-nine per cent of the Melbourne sample reported recent use of any methamphetamine, stable compared to 2023 (29%). Frequency of use also remained stable, with participants reporting a median of 6 days in 2024 (2 days in 2023). One fifth (20%) reported recent use of methamphetamine powder, while 12% reported recent use of methamphetamine crystal. The perceived price, purity and availability of methamphetamine remained stable between 2024 and 2023.

Non-Prescribed Pharmaceutical Stimulants

The percentage of participants reporting any recent non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulant (e.g., dexamphetamine, methylphenidate, modafinil) use has increased since the commencement of monitoring, from 9% in 2007, peaking at 66% in 2022, declining to 60% in 2024 (47% in 2023). Recent use of Modafinil significantly decreased in 2024 ($n \leq 5$; 28% in 2023; $p=0.009$).

Cocaine

The percentages of participants reporting recent use of cocaine remained stable at 80% in 2024 (90% in 2023). Frequency of use of cocaine in the six months prior to interview increased from 5 days in 2023 to 8 days in 2024 ($p=0.045$). Fifteen percent of those who had recently used cocaine reported weekly or more frequent use. Perceived purity and perceived availability for cocaine remained stable between 2023 and 2024.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Seventy-two percent of the sample reported any recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products, stable compared to 2023 (67%). In 2024, 26% of the Melbourne sample reported daily use of cannabis, a significant increase from 2023 ($n \leq 5$; $p < 0.001$). The perceived price of hydroponic cannabis was \$245 (IQR=210-258) an ounce in 2024 ($n \leq 5$ in 2023).

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of non-prescribed ketamine remained stable at 80% in 2024, although frequency of use in the previous six months significantly increased from a median of six days in 2023 to 10 days in 2024 ($p=0.021$). Recent use of LSD decreased significantly from 55% in 2023 to 38% in 2024 ($p=0.026$). The median frequency of use of LSD remained low at 3 days in 2024. Ten per cent of participants reported recent use of DMT in 2024 and frequency of use remained low at 2 days.

One quarter (25%) of the sample reported recent use of any NPS (including plant-based NPS) in 2024. Of recently used NPS, any 2C substance was the most frequently reported (14%).

Other Drugs

Recent use of all other drugs remained stable between 2023 and 2024. There was a significant increase in the median days of use of tobacco, increasing from 14 days (IQR=5–100) in 2023 to 55 days (IQR=15–180) in 2024 ($p=0.007$). Use of illicit smoked and non-smoked tobacco products was captured for the first time in EDRS, with use

reported by 31% of participants. Recent use of nicotine pouches was reported by 17% of the sample, with a median frequency of use of 3 days (IQR=1–5).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

Most participants (85%) reported concurrent use of two or more drugs on the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes). Of those who responded, 29% reported using stimulants or related drugs for 48 hours or more continuously without sleep in the 6 months preceding interview (19% in 2023).

Dependence, injecting and overdose

Three quarters (77%) of participants obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT, indicative of hazardous use.

In 2024, 23% of those who reported recent ecstasy use obtained an SDS score of 3 or more, a statically significant increase from 9% in 2023 ($p=0.018$), whilst 25% of participants reporting recent methamphetamine use obtained a score of 4 or more, indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Past year non-fatal stimulant overdose (15%; 14% in 2023) and non-fatal depressant overdose (29%; 18% in 2023) remained stable in 2024 relative to 2023.

Past month injecting drug use remained low in 2024 ($n\leq 5$).

Drug checking and naloxone awareness

Forty-four per cent of participants reported ever having tested the contents of their illicit drugs in Australia, with 30% reporting doing so in the past year, a significant decrease from 51% in 2023 ($p=0.004$).

Participants most commonly reported using colorimetric or reagent test kits (79%).

In 2024, 76% reported that they had ever heard of naloxone, a significant increase relative to 2023 (60%; $p=0.025$), of which 92% were able to correctly identify the purpose of naloxone (93% in 2023). There was a significant increase in the number of participants that reported obtaining naloxone in the past year (15%; $n\leq 5$ in 2023; $p=0.038$).

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Four fifths (80%) of the sample reported engaging in some form of sexual activity in the four weeks prior to interview, of which 75% reported use of alcohol/drugs before or during sex. In 2024, the per cent (55%) of participants reporting ever having a HIV test declined significantly relative to 2023 (70%; $p=0.033$), with one fifth (22%) of the sample reporting being tested for HIV in the six months preceding interview. Thirty-six per cent reported having a sexual health check-up in the six months prior to interview.

Mental health remained stable relative to 2023, with 63% reporting experiencing a mental health problem in the six months preceding interview (52% in 2023), with depression (70%) and anxiety (70%) most commonly reported. One quarter (24%) of the sample reported 'very high' psychological distress.

Twenty-eight per cent of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview, and 31% of the sample reported experiencing stigma in any setting in the six months preceding

interview. There was a significant increase in participants who reported experiencing stigma in non-health settings relative to 2023 (17%; 6% in 2023; $p=0.015$).

Current drug treatment engagement remained low (7%).

Driving, contact with police and modes of purchasing drugs

Amongst those who had recently driven, 16% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol and 49% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the six months prior to interview (most commonly cannabis (38%), a significant increase from 30% in 2023 ($p=0.021$).

Fifty-two per cent of the sample reported 'any' crime in the past month, a significant increase from 29% in 2023 ($p=0.001$). Property crime was the most common form of criminal activity reported and significantly increased from 23% in 2023 to 37% in 2024 ($p=0.045$). Reports of drug dealing also increased significantly, from

15% in 2023 to 29% in 2024 ($p=0.028$). Few ($n\leq 5$) participants reported having been arrested in the 12 months preceding interview, and 7% reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest.

Social networking applications were the most common method in which participants arranged the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview (77%; 82% in 2023). In 2024, there were significant increases in the per cent of participants reporting purchasing illicit or non-prescribed drugs through text messaging (42%; 26% in 2023; $p=0.028$) or phone call (24%; 11% in 2023; $p=0.023$). The majority (80%) of participants reported obtaining illicit drugs from a friend/relative/partner/colleague in 2024, although there was a significant increase in the per cent of participants who obtained illicit or non-prescribed drugs from an unknown dealer/vendor (42%; 23% in 2023; $p=0.007$).