

Executive Summary

The Sydney New South Wales (NSW) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants, recruited via social media, advertisements on websites and via word-of-mouth in Sydney, NSW. 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

In 2024, the NSW EDRS sample (n=100) was similar to the 2023 sample, however, there were some important differences. Similar to 2023, the 2024 Sydney sample predominantly comprised of young (median age 27 years) males (66%). Current accommodation status remained stable, with almost half (49%) reporting living in a rental house/flat, and the median weekly income was \$900 (\$1058 in 2023). However, a significant change was observed in participants' employment status ($p=0.007$), with more participants reporting being unemployed at the time of the interview (24%; 8% in 2023). Additionally, drug of choice significantly changed ($p=0.014$), with more participants nominating ecstasy (28%; 22% in 2023) and cannabis (20%; 16% in 2023) as their drugs of choice in 2024.

Non-Prescribed Ecstasy

Recent use of any non-prescribed ecstasy remained high and stable in 2024 (96%; 99% in 2023), with frequency of use also remaining stable at a median of 7 days (8 days in 2023). Capsules (66%) remained the most common form of ecstasy consumed in the six months preceding interview, followed by pills (57%), crystal (53%), and powder (29%). The price, perceived purity and perceived availability of non-prescribed ecstasy pills, capsules, crystal and powder largely remained stable in 2024, relative to 2023. There was, however, a significant change in the perceived availability of pills between 2023 and 2024 ($p=0.029$), with more participants reporting pills to be 'very easy' (31%; 25% in 2023) and 'easy' (52%; 37% in 2023) to obtain in 2024.

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has been declining since monitoring commenced. In 2024, one quarter (26%) of the sample reported recent use, stable relative to 2023 (21%). The largest percentage of participants reported using methamphetamine crystal (17%), followed by powder (10%). Frequency of crystal and powder use, as well as perceived purity and availability, remained stable between 2023 and 2024.

Non-Prescribed Pharmaceutical Stimulants

The per cent of participants reporting any recent non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulant (e.g., dexamphetamine, methylphenidate, modafinil) use gradually increased to 44% in 2016 and has remained relatively stable since. In 2024, 46% of the Sydney sample reported recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants,

stable relative to 2023 (41%). Among those who reported recent use, significantly fewer participants reported using modafinil in 2024 ($n \leq 5$) compared to 2023 (28%; $p=0.030$). There was a significant change in the perceived availability of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants between 2023 and 2024 ($p=0.009$), with more participants perceiving non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants to be 'difficult' (33%; $n \leq 5$ in 2023) to obtain in 2024.

Cocaine

A gradual increase in recent cocaine use was observed between 2013 and 2021, stabilising thereafter. In 2024, the majority (87%) of the sample reported recent cocaine use (86% in 2023). Participants reported using cocaine on a median of four days in the six months preceding interview. Consistent with previous years, the price per gram of cocaine remained stable at \$300. Perceived purity and availability remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with 38% perceiving purity to be 'high' (25% in 2023) and 89% perceiving that cocaine was 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain (84% in 2023).

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Almost three quarters (74%) of the sample reported recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products in 2024 (66% in 2023). The median frequency of use remained stable at 24 days (12 days in 2023). While the median amount of grams (1 gram) and joints (1 joint) used on the last occasion of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related product use remained stable in 2024, the median amount of cones increased from 1 cone in 2023 to 3 cones in 2024 ($p=0.023$). The per cent reporting

recent hydroponic cannabis use significantly increased (78%; 51% in 2023; $p=0.004$), while recent use of bush cannabis significantly decreased in 2024 (27%; 53% in 2023; $p=0.007$). The price, perceived availability and perceived potency of hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable in 2024, relative to 2023.

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of non-prescribed ketamine (61%), LSD (43%) and DMT ($n \leq 5$) remained stable between 2023 and 2024. Frequency of use for all three substances remained low in 2024, at a median of three days or less in the preceding six months. The price, perceived availability and perceived purity of ketamine and LSD remained stable in 2024, relative to 2023.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

In 2024, 16% of the sample reported recent use of any NPS (including plant-based NPS) and 15% reported recent use of any NPS (excluding plant-based NPS), both stable relative to 2023. Any 2C substance was the most commonly used NPS in 2024 (8%; 6% in 2023).

Other Drugs

Recent use of pills with 'unknown contents' significantly increased from few ($n \leq 5$) participants reporting recent use in 2023 to one tenth (10%) of the Sydney sample in 2024 ($p=0.018$). The per cent reporting recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids (7%), non-prescribed benzodiazepines (22%), non-prescribed mushrooms/psilocybin (40%), GHB/GBL/1,4-BD (15%) and nitrous oxide (42%) remained stable in 2024, relative to 2023. Two thirds (67%) of the Sydney sample reported recent non-prescribed e-

cigarette use in 2024 and 63% reported tobacco use, with 22% reporting smoked or non-smoked illicit tobacco product use. One fifth (20%) of the Sydney sample reported recently using nicotine pouches.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, three quarters (78%) of the sample reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes), with stimulants and depressants the most common combination (22%).

Twenty nine per cent of participants reported using stimulants or related drugs for 48 hours or more continuously without sleep in the six months preceding interview.

Dependence, overdose and injecting

The mean AUDIT score decreased significantly from 13.5 in 2023 to 11.9 in 2024 ($p<0.001$), although the per cent scoring ≥ 8 , indicative of hazardous alcohol use, remained stable (70%; 77% in 2023).

Eight per cent of those who reported recent ecstasy use obtained an SDS score of ≥ 3 , while 35% of participants reporting recent methamphetamine use obtained a score of ≥ 4 , indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Past year non-fatal stimulant and depressant overdose remained stable in 2024 (9% and 21%, respectively).

Few ($n\leq 5$) participants reported past month injecting drug use in 2024.

Drug checking and naloxone awareness

One quarter (24%) of participants reported that they or someone else had tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year.

In 2024, 66% of the sample reported that they had ever heard of naloxone, a significant increase from 51% in 2023 ($p=0.048$).

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Sixty eight per cent of the Sydney sample reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 76% reported using alcohol and/or other drugs prior to or while engaging in sexual activity.

Almost half (47%) of the Sydney sample self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months, of which anxiety and depression (69%, respectively) were the most commonly reported problems. Seventeen per cent reported a score of ≥ 30 on the K10, indicating very high psychological distress.

Twenty nine per cent of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview, most commonly from a peer based harm reduction service (11%) and a GP (7%). Current drug treatment engagement remained low ($n\leq 5$ in 2024).

One fifth (21%) of the sample reported experiencing stigma because of their illicit drug use in any health/non-health care setting in the six months preceding interview (24% in 2023).

Driving, contact with police and modes of purchasing drugs

Among recent drivers, 22% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 46% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the past six months.

Eight per cent of participants reported past year arrest, while 19% reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest (e.g., stopped and searched/questioned).

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 (66%), followed by social networking or messaging applications (64%). Most participants continued to report obtaining illicit drugs from a friend/relative/partner/colleague (84%).