

Executive Summary

The IDRS sample comprises a sentinel group of people aged 18 years or older who injected illicit drugs ≥ 6 days in the preceding six months and resided in greater Darwin, Northern Territory. Participants were recruited via advertisements in needle and syringe programs and other harm reduction services, as well as via peer referral. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population.

Data were collected between June and July 2024. 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 IDRS sample recruited from Darwin, Northern Territory (NT) in 2024 (N=70) was consistent with the Darwin profile in previous years, whereby three-fifths (61%) were male, with a mean age of 49 years. The majority (86%) of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview, and most (94%) had received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview. The median income per week was \$450.

In 2024, three fifths (59%) of the sample reported that methamphetamine was their drug of choice, and 86% reported that methamphetamine was the drug they had injected most often in the past month, the highest per cent observed since monitoring commenced. Four fifths (79%) of the sample reported using methamphetamine crystal on a weekly or more frequent basis.

Heroin

Recent use of heroin has declined substantially since monitoring commenced, from 64% of the sample in 2000 to few participants ($n \leq 5$) reporting recent use in 2024.

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has trended upwards since 2014, with 87% reporting recent use in 2024. This was mostly driven by a continued increase in methamphetamine crystal use (87% in 2024) – the form most commonly used since 2014. Recent use of methamphetamine powder and base remained low in 2024. The median price for one point of methamphetamine crystal was \$100 in 2024. Among those who commented, two fifths (42%) perceived methamphetamine crystal to be of 'medium' purity and 88% perceived it to be 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine remained relatively low, with 23% or fewer participants reporting recent use since monitoring commenced in 2000. In 2024, 14% of the sample reported recent use on a median of one day in the six months preceding interview. In 2024, few participants ($n \leq 5$) commented on the price, perceived purity, and perceived availability of cocaine.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid related products gradually declined between 2000 (84%) and 2017 (58%) and has remained relatively stable since. In 2024, 69% of the sample reported recent use, of which three quarters (77%) reported daily use. Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (96%). Among those who commented, all participants perceived

hydroponic cannabis as 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain, and four fifths (80%) perceived it to be of 'medium' or 'high' purity (40%, respectively). Consistent with previous years, participants reported a median of \$30 for one gram of hydroponic cannabis.

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent use of all non-prescribed opioids has gradually declined over the course of monitoring. Fourteen per cent of participants reported recently using non-prescribed morphine and 11% reported recently using non-prescribed buprenorphine-naloxone. Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported use of other non-prescribed opioids in 2024.

Other Drugs

No participants reported the recent use of any NPS and gabapentin, while few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported recent use of non-prescribed benzodiazepines, antipsychotics and pregabalin. Nine per cent of participants reported recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants on a median of one day in the six months preceding interview.

Half (53%) of the sample reported recent use of alcohol, and the majority (89%) reported recent use of tobacco. Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported recently using illicit tobacco. Eleven per cent reported recent use of non-prescribed e-cigarettes. Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD in 2024.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

In 2024, 61% of the sample reported using two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes) on the day preceding interview.

Three fifths (59%) of the 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, few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported receptive or distributive sharing of a needle in the past month. One fifth (19%) reported re-using their own needles in the past month. Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported having difficulty accessing needles and syringes and filters in the past month.

Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported experiencing injection-related problems in the past month.

Overdose, naloxone and drug checking

Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported any past 12-month non-fatal overdose.

Two fifths (39%) reported lifetime awareness of take-home naloxone and one tenth (10%) reported obtaining naloxone in the past year.

In 2024, no participants reported that they or someone else had tested the contents and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year.

Dependence, drug treatment and HCV

In 2024, 33% 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.

One quarter (26%) of those who reported recent methamphetamine use obtained an SDS score of ≥ 4 , while few participants ($n \leq 5$) reporting recent opioid use obtained a score of ≥ 5 , indicating possible dependence on these substances.

One tenth (11%) of the sample reported that they were in any drug treatment for their substance use in 2024.

Three fifths (58%) of participants reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year. No participants reported having a current HCV infection. One fifth (20%) of the sample reported having had

a test for human immunodeficiency virus in the past six months.

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Half (50%) of the sample reported engaging in sexual activity in the month preceding interview and 16% reported recently having a sexual health check-up.

Thirty-seven per cent of the sample self-reported experiencing a mental health problem, with the most commonly reported problems being depression (67%) and anxiety (63%). One tenth (10%) reported high/very high psychological distress in 2024.

Thirty per cent reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview.

Driving, contact with police and modes of purchasing drugs

Three quarters (78%) of those who had recently driven reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the past six months, though few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol.

One third (36%) of participants reported engaging in 'any' crime in the month preceding interview. Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported having been arrested in the past year or having a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest.

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 (94%).