

Executive Summary

The IDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people aged 18 years or older who injected illicit drugs ≥ 6 days in the preceding six months and resided in Hobart, Tasmania (TAS). 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 in 2024 from June-July. Interviews from 2020 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=102) recruited from Hobart, Tasmanian, was mostly similar to the sample in 2023 and previous years. Gender proportions remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with 67% identifying as male (70% in 2023), with a median age of 45 years (45 years in 2023). Two thirds (66%) held post-school qualifications including trade/technical and university (67% in 2023). Eighty-eight per cent of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview (89% in 2023), and the vast majority (97%) had received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview (97% in 2023). Accommodation remained stable relative to 2023, with 64% residing in their own home (including renting) (59% in 2023). Seventeen per cent of participants reported having no fixed address (15% in 2023), with 8% reported residing with their parents/at their family home at the time of interview ($n \leq 5$ in 2023) and fewer participants ($n \leq 5$) residing in a boarding

house/hostel (12% in 2023). The median income per week remained stable at \$448 in 2024 (\$420 in 2023).

Participant drug of choice remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with half (52%) of the participants nominating methamphetamine as their drug of choice in 2024 (50% in 2023), followed by cannabis (12%; $n \leq 5$ in 2023) and heroin (11%; 14% in 2023). Methamphetamine was also the drug injected most often in the past month (77%; 77% in 2023), followed by morphine (9%; $n \leq 5$ in 2023). Three quarters (76%) of the sample reported weekly or more frequent use of any methamphetamine (71% in 2023), followed by non-prescribed cannabis (68%; 59% in 2023).

Heroin

The per cent reporting recent heroin use has remained relatively stable and low since the commencement of monitoring, with 12% of the Hobart sample reporting recent use in 2024, stable relative to 2023 (11%). Frequency of use remained stable at a median of three days in 2024 (5 days in 2023), with few participants ($n \leq 5$) reporting weekly or more frequent use in 2023 and 2024. All participants reported injecting heroin as the route of administration in 2023 and 2024. The price, perceived purity and availability remained stable between 2023 and 2024.

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has trended upwards over the past few years with almost nine in ten participants reporting recent use since 2021. In 2024, 91% of participants reported recent use of any methamphetamine (88% in 2023), the highest percentage reporting recent use since monitoring commenced. This mostly comprised of crystal methamphetamine use (89%; 85% in 2023), the

most commonly used form since 2014. Thirteen per cent of the sample reported recent use of powder (14% in 2023) and few participants ($n \leq 5$) recent use of base in both 2023 and 2024.

The frequency of use of any methamphetamine was trending to an increase from 2021 (median of 48 days) to a median of 73 days in 2024 (72 days in 2023). The majority of participants (84%) reported weekly or more frequent use in 2024 (81% in 2023), with one fifth (19%) reporting daily use (26% in 2023). There were significant increases in the frequency of use of methamphetamine powder with participants reporting use on a median of 49 days in 2024 (10 days in 2023; $p=0.016$), with 67% reporting weekly or more frequent use ($n \leq 5$ in 2023; $p=0.024$). There were significant decreases in the quantity of use for methamphetamine crystal. Participants reported using a median of 0.10 grams of crystal on a 'typical' day (0.20 grams in 2023; $p=0.035$) and the median maximum amount used per day was 0.30 grams (0.40 grams in 2023; $p=0.017$).

Perceived purity of crystal and powder methamphetamine remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with 33% reporting purity to be 'fluctuating' for powder ($n \leq 5$ in 2023) and 31% reporting purity as 'high' for crystal (36% in 2023). Perceived availability also remained stable, with 52% ($n \leq 5$ in 2023) and 82% (80% in 2023) reporting powder and crystal as being 'very easy' to obtain, respectively.

Cocaine

In 2024, recent use of cocaine remained stable relative to 2023 (18%; 15% in 2023), although this was the highest percentage reporting recent use since monitoring commenced. Frequency of use also remained stable at a median of one day (3 days in 2023). The median amount used in a 'typical' day was 0.40 grams, stable relative to 0.10 grams in 2023.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

The per cent of participants reporting recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products, while overall slowly declining since the early 2000s, remained stable between 2023 and 2024 (74%; 73% in 2023). Two thirds (67%) of participants who had recently used any non-prescribed cannabis reported daily use, stable relative to 2023 (60%). Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (92%; 88% in 2023), followed by bush cannabis (49%; 54% in 2023). Eight per cent of participants reporting using hashish and edibles in the six months preceding interview, with few participants ($n \leq 5$) reporting using hash oil and/or CBD extract and/or THC extract. In 2024, smoking remained the most common route of administration (80%; 83% in 2023), followed by inhaling/vaping (31%; 15% in 2023). The largest per cent of the sample reported that the perceived potency of both hydroponic and bush cannabis was 'high' (65% and 43% of those who responded, respectively) and 'very easy' to obtain (77% and 45% of those who responded, respectively), stable relative to 2023.

In 2024, almost one tenth (8%) of participants reported recent use of prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products, stable relative to 2023 ($n \leq 5$).

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent non-prescribed use of pharmaceutical opioids such as morphine, oxycodone and methadone has generally declined over the past 10 years of monitoring. After an increase in recent use in 2023, there was a significant decrease in use of non-prescribed buprenorphine tablets in 2024, with 8% reporting recent use (20% in 2023; $p=0.034$). There was a significant decrease in the per cent

reporting recent use of non-prescribed fentanyl in 2024 ($n \leq 5$; 11% in 2023; $p=0.007$). Recent use of non-prescribed methadone (10%), buprenorphine-naloxone (10%), morphine (26%), oxycodone (21%), codeine ($n \leq 5$) and tramadol (8%) remained low and stable compared to reports in 2023.

Other Drugs

Seven per cent of participants reported recent use of an NPS in 2024, stable relative to 2023 ($n \leq 5$). Almost one fifth (18%) reported recent use of any non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants (18% in 2023), and 6% reported recent use of non-prescribed antipsychotics (12% in 2023). In 2024, use of any non-prescribed benzodiazepines (27%; 36% in 2023), pregabalin (20%; 17% in 2023) and GHB/GBL/1,4-BD (11%; 12% in 2023) remained stable.

The majority (93%) of the sample reported recent tobacco use (91% in 2023), with almost one fifth (18%) of participants reporting recent use of illicit tobacco (not asked prior to 2024). Recent use of alcohol (54%; 61% in 2023) and non-prescribed e-cigarettes (19%; 15% in 2023) remained stable. Seven per cent reported recent use of nicotine pouches (not asked prior to 2024). Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported recent use of gabapentin, kava and non-prescribed steroids in 2023 and 2024.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

In 2024, almost two thirds (65%) of the Hobart sample reported use of two or more drugs on the day preceding interview (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes). One quarter (25%) of participants reported concurrent use of cannabis and stimulants, whilst almost one tenth (9%) reported concurrent use of cannabis and opioids.

Seventy per cent of participants reported having binged (used any stimulants or related drugs for 48 hours or more continuously without sleep) on one or more drugs in the preceding six months, stable relative to 2023 (72%).

Injecting behaviours, equipment access and harms

In 2024, 6% reported receptive sharing and 9% reported distributive sharing of a needle or syringe in the past month ($n \leq 5$ and 9% in 2023, respectively). One quarter (25%) of the sample reported that they had reused their own needles in the past month (36% in 2023).

Almost one third (30%) reported experiencing injection-related injuries or diseases in the past month (21% in 2023), most commonly an infection/abscess (14%; $n \leq 5$ in 2023).

Overdose, naloxone and drug checking

One fifth (22%) reported overdosing on any drug in the preceding year, stable relative to 2023 (27%). Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported a non-fatal opioid overdose in 2024, a significant decrease from 14% in 2023 ($p=0.001$). Thirteen per cent reported a non-fatal stimulant overdose (11% in 2023), and 12% reported a non-fatal overdose from another drug ($n \leq 5$ in 2023).

In 2024, three quarters (75%) the Hobart sample reported awareness of naloxone, stable relative to 79% in 2023. Sixty-eight per cent of the sample reported awareness of naloxone take-home programs (68% in 2023), with half (49%) reporting having ever accessed naloxone (41% in 2023) and one third (32%) having done so in the past year (32% in 2023). Half (51%) had been trained in naloxone administration in their lifetime (38% in 2023), with four fifths (80%) having been taught how to administer naloxone at an NSP.

One fifth (22%) of participants reported that they or someone else had ever tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year (17% in 2023), with 18% having done so in the past year (11% in 2023). The majority (81%) reported testing their illicit drugs using testing strips (e.g., BTNX fentanyl strips or other immunoassay testing strips).

Dependence, treatment and Hepatitis C

Forty-five per cent of participants scored five or above on the opioid Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS), a significant increase from 21% in 2023 ($p=0.046$), indicating possible dependence in relation to opioid use. Almost two thirds (64%) scored four or above on the methamphetamine SDS scale, stable relative to 2023 (59%), indicating possible dependence in relation to methamphetamine use.

One quarter (24%) of participants reported receiving any drug treatment in 2024, stable relative to 2023 (21%).

Thirty-five per cent of the sample reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test (50% in 2023) and 28% reported receiving an RNA test (28% in 2023) in the past year. Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported having a current HCV infection.

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Thirty-six per cent of the Hobart sample reported engaging in some form of sexual activity with another person in the past four weeks (48% in 2023). Three fifths (60%) reported having ever had a sexual health check (59% in 2023), with one fifth (19%) having done so in the past 6 months (12% in 2023).

Three fifths (60%) self-reported mental health problems, stable relative to 66% in 2023. The most commonly reported problem was anxiety (66%), followed by depression (59%), post-

traumatic stress disorder (29%), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (28%) and schizophrenia (22%).

The K10 score remained stable between 2023 and 2024 ($p=0.182$), with one third (34%) of Hobart sample having a score of 30 or more (35% in 2023), indicative of 'very high' psychological distress.

Four fifths (80%) of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview (85% in 2023).

Driving

Of those who had driven recently ($n=38$), 14% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 66% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug, both stable relative to 2023 ($n\leq 5$ and 74%, respectively).

Criminal activity and modes of purchasing illicit drugs

Forty-four per cent of participants reported engaging in 'any' crime in the past month in 2024 (39% in 2023), with 31% having been arrested in the past year (38% in 2023), and 42% reporting a lifetime prison history (55% in 2023).

One quarter (24%) of participants reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest, a significant decrease relative to 2023 (44%; $p=0.013$).

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 (84%), a significant increase from 70% in 2023 ($p=0.039$).