

Executive Summary

The IDRS sample is a sentinel group of people aged 18 years or older who injected illicit drugs ≥ 6 days in the preceding six months and resided in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW). 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 June 2025. 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 2020-2025 samples, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

In 2025, the Sydney IDRS sample (N=157) predominantly comprised male participants (66%; 73% in 2024), with a mean age of 48 years (48 years in 2024). Consistent with previous years, the majority of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview (93%; 93% in 2024) and had received a government pension, allowance or benefit in the month preceding interview (97%; 98% in 2024). There was, however, a significant increase in median weekly income, from \$390 in 2024 to \$425 in 2025 ($p=0.014$). Current accommodation also significantly changed in 2025, relative to 2024 ($p=0.005$), with more participants living in a private house/flat (76%; 74% in 2024) and parents'/family home (7%; $n \leq 5$ in 2024). Half (51%) of the sample nominated heroin as their drug of choice (49% in 2024) and 51% nominated methamphetamine as the drug injected most often in the past month (53% in 2024), both stable relative to 2024.

Heroin

In 2025, 69% of the Sydney sample reported recent (i.e., past six month) use of heroin (73% in 2024). Among those who reported recent use, half (52%) reported using heroin daily (43% in 2024). The median price per cap and gram of heroin was \$50 and \$350, respectively, stable relative to 2024 (\$50 and \$400, respectively). The perceived purity and availability of heroin also remained stable, relative to 2024, with the largest per cent reporting it to be of 'high' purity (39%; 35% in 2024) and 'very easy' (60%; 50% in 2024) to obtain.

Methamphetamine

Three quarters (78%) of the sample reported recent use of any methamphetamine in 2025, stable from 83% in 2024. Crystal continued to be the most common form of methamphetamine used by participants (77%), followed by powder (5%) and base (4%). Participants who had recently used crystal reported use on a median of 90 days, the highest frequency of use observed since monitoring commenced, although stable relative to 2024 (median of 72 days). The median price per point of crystal remained stable in 2025 (\$50; \$50 in 2024), as did the price per gram (\$200; \$300 in 2024). The perceived purity and availability of crystal remained stable between 2024 and 2025, with the vast majority reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment (94%; 92% in 2024).

Cocaine

One quarter (25%) of the sample reported recent use of cocaine, stable relative to 2024 (29%). Participants who had recently used cocaine did so infrequently, on a median of three days in the six months preceding interview (4 days in 2024). The price, perceived

purity and perceived availability of cocaine remained stable in 2025, relative to 2024.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Seventy-one per cent of the sample reported recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products in 2025, stable relative to 2024 (68%). Among those who reported recent use in 2025, half (52%) reported daily use (61% in 2024) and almost all (95%) reported using hydroponic cannabis (95% in 2024). In 2025, the median price per gram of non-prescribed hydroponic and bush cannabis was \$20, respectively (\$20 in 2024, respectively). The perceived purity and availability of both hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable between 2024 and 2025. Almost three fifths (58%) of participants reported that both forms were 'very easy' to obtain. Equal percentages (40%) rated the potency of bush cannabis as 'medium' or 'high' (55% and 20% in 2024, respectively), while nearly three-fifths (58%) reported that the potency of hydroponic cannabis was 'high' (70% in 2024).

Pharmaceutical Opioids

The most commonly used non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioid in 2025 was oxycodone (12%; 9% in 2024), followed by methadone (10%; 12% in 2024). Equal percentages (6%) reported recent non-prescribed use of buprenorphine tablets, morphine and fentanyl in 2025 ($n \leq 5$; 9% and 7% in 2024, respectively), and 5% reported recent use of buprenorphine-naloxone (8% in 2024). Recent use of all non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids remained stable in 2025 relative to 2024.

Other Drugs

Recent use of any new psychoactive substances (NPS) was reported by four per cent of participants (5% in 2024). Almost one fifth (17%) of the Sydney sample reported recent

use of any non-prescribed benzodiazepines, a significant decrease relative to 2024 (31%; $p=0.005$). One quarter (27%) of the sample reported recent use of illicit e-cigarettes (31% in 2024), on a median of 120 days in the six months preceding interview (108 days in 2024). The majority (93%) of the sample reported recent tobacco use (91% in 2024), with 82% reporting the use of smoked or non-smoked illicit tobacco products, a significant increase relative to 2024 (64%; $p<0.001$). Fifteen per cent of the sample reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD, stable relative to 2024 (16%).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

Almost two thirds (64%) of the sample reported using two or more drugs on the day preceding interview (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes).

Three fifths (62%) of the Sydney IDRS sample had binged on one or more drugs for 48 hours or more in the six months preceding interview, stable from 2024 (68%).

Injecting behaviours, equipment access and harms

In 2025, 5% of participants reported receptive sharing and 8% reported distributive sharing in the past month, stable from 2024 (5% and 12%, respectively). Almost two fifths (37%) reported that they had re-used their own needles in the past month (34% in 2024), and 9% reported difficulty accessing needles in the past month (11% in 2024). A significant decrease was observed in participants reporting they had obtained needles and syringes from the medically supervised injecting clinic (6%; 21% in 2024; $p<0.001$). One third (35%) of participants reported experiencing an injection-related problem in the past month, with a significant increase in reports of thrombosis (10%; $n \leq 5$ in 2024; $p=0.001$) –

mostly comprising blood clots near the surface of the skin (9%; $n \leq 5$ in 2024; $p=0.003$).

Overdose, naloxone and drug checking

Almost one fifth (18%) of the sample reported experiencing a non-fatal overdose in the 12 months preceding interview (17% in 2024). Eleven per cent reported a non-fatal opioid overdose, and 5% reported a non-fatal stimulant overdose.

The majority (86%) of the sample reported awareness of the take-home naloxone program, stable relative to 2024 (85%). Two thirds (63%) reported that they had obtained naloxone in the past year, also stable from 2024 (60%).

Fourteen per cent of participants reported that they or someone else had tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the last year (12% in 2024).

Dependence, treatment and Hepatitis C

Fifty-five per cent of those who reported recent methamphetamine use obtained an SDS score of ≥ 4 , while two thirds (66%) of participants reporting recent opioid use obtained a score of ≥ 5 , indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Forty-six per cent of the sample reported being in some form of drug treatment at the time of interview (46% in 2024), most commonly methadone (29; 27% in 2024). One tenth (11%) of the sample reported being unable to access treatment in 2025, of which 69% reported that they had tried to access treatment for methamphetamine use, a significant increase from 2024 (27%; $p=0.032$).

In 2025, three fifths (60%) of participants reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year (59% in 2024), and 56% had received an PCR or RNA test (54% in 2024). Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported a current HCV infection ($n \leq 5$ in 2024),

and 4% reported receiving HCV treatment in the year prior to interview (6% in 2024).

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Almost half (47%) of the Sydney sample reported past month sexual activity, and 27% reported a sexual health check in the preceding six months, both stable from 2024 (41% and 31%, respectively).

Half (52%) of the sample self-reported recently experiencing a mental health problem (52% in 2024), among which the most commonly reported problems were depression (70%; 64% in 2024) and anxiety (59%; 59% in 2024).

The majority (89%) of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug (AOD) support in 2025 (94% in 2024), with the most common service accessed being a needle and syringe program (83%; 83% in 2024). There was a significant increase in those accessing a general practitioner for AOD support in 2025 (46%; 30% in 2024; $p=0.003$).

Driving, contact with police and modes of purchasing illicit drugs

Among those who had driven in the last six months, 71% of participants reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug (78% in 2024).

In 2025, two fifths (39%) of the sample reported engaging in 'any' crime in the past month (47% in 2024), and 14% were the victim of a crime involving violence (14% in 2024). One fifth (21%) reported past year arrest, and 45% reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest.

In 2025, the most popular means of arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview was face-to-face (81%; 86% in 2024).