Executive Summary

The IDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly inject illicit drugs, recruited via advertisements in needle syringe programs and other harm reduction services, as well as via peer referral, across each capital city of Australia. The results are not representative of all people who inject drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2026 from May-July. Interviews from 2020 onwards were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone; all interviews prior to 2020 were conducted face-to-face. This methodological change should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020-2026 samples relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The 2026 IDRS sample (N=902) was mostly similar to the sample in 2025 and in previous years. Participants predominantly identified as male (63%) with a median age of 47 years, both stable from 2025. In 2026, most participants reported being unemployed at the time of the interview (89%; 88% in 2025). However, the median weekly income significantly increased from $465 in 2025 to $500 in 2026 ($p<0.001$). Drug of choice remained stable, with 44% nominating methamphetamine (44% in 2025) and 41% nominating heroin (42% in 2025) as their drug of choice. Most participants continued to nominate methamphetamine as the drug injected most often in the past month (57%; 57% in 2025).

Heroin

In 2026, half (51%) of the sample reported recent heroin use, stable relative to 2025 (54%). However, frequency of use significantly increased, from a median of 120 days in the past six months in 2025 to a median of 180 days in 2026 ($p=0.011$). The median price for one point of heroin in 2026 was $50 (IQR=50-80; $50 in 2025; IQR=50-90; $p=0.041$). Perceived purity and perceived availability remained stable, with 33% reporting 'medium' purity (33% in 2025) and 95% reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment (93% in 2025).

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine gradually increased between 2010 and 2021, however has remained relatively stable since. In 2026, 81% of the sample reported recent use on a median of 90 days, stable from 2025 (82%; median 80 days). Crystal continued to be the most commonly used form of methamphetamine (79%; 79% in 2025), with use of methamphetamine powder (6%; 8% in 2025) and methamphetamine base (1%; 3% in 2025) remaining low and stable. The reported median price for one point of crystal was $50, stable from 2025. Perceived purity and perceived availability of methamphetamine crystal remained stable, with 31% reporting 'medium' purity (34% in 2025) and 96% reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment (96% in 2025).

Cocaine

In 2026, 18% of participants reported recent cocaine use on a median of three days, stable relative to 2025 (19%; median 2 days). The median price for one gram of cocaine remained stable at $350 ($300 in 2025). Perceived purity of cocaine also remained stable, with 49% of participants reporting 'high' purity (36% in 2025). However, perceived availability significantly changed in 2026, relative to 2025 ($p=0.014$), with more participants perceiving

availability to be 'easy' or 'very easy' (79%; 62% in 2025).

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products has gradually declined over time. In 2026, 61% of participants reported recent non-prescribed use, the lowest per cent observed over the past 20 years, although stable relative to 2025 (65% in 2025). Forty-five per cent of those who had recently used non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products reported daily use (50% in 2025). Perceived purity and perceived availability of bush and hydroponic cannabis remained stable in 2026, relative to 2025. The median price per gram of hydro and bush cannabis also remained stable at $20, respectively.

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Overall, non-prescribed use of most forms of pharmaceutical opioids has either declined or remained stable over the past two decades. In 2026, oxycodone, methadone and morphine were the most commonly used non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids (8%, 7% and 7%, respectively), with significant decreases observed in recent use of non-prescribed buprenorphine-naloxone (4%; 6% in 2025; p=0.034), non-prescribed buprenorphine tablet (2%; 4% in 2025; p=0.003), and non-prescribed morphine (7%; 9% in 2025; p=0.047).

Other Drugs

Use of any NPS has gradually declined since monitoring commenced in 2013, with 4% reporting recent use in 2026 (6% in 2025). Benzodiazepines remained the most common non-prescribed pharmaceutical drug reported by participants in 2026 (21%; 23% in 2025), followed by pregabalin (14%; 16% in 2025). Recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants significantly decreased in 2026 (5%; 8% in 2025; p=0.021). Recent use of tobacco remained high yet stable (86%; 87% in 2025), however use of illicit tobacco increased significantly (70%; 63% in 2025; p=0.009). Illicit e-cigarettes were used by one quarter (28%) of the sample in 2026, stable relative to 2025 (25%), with participants reporting use on a median of 90 days in the six months preceding interview. Use of all other monitored drugs remained stable.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

In 2026, 63% of the sample reported using two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes) on the day preceding interview.

Three fifths (60%) 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 2026, 5% of participants reported receptive sharing of a needle or syringe (5% in 2025) and 8% reported distributive sharing (8% in 2025) in the past month. One-third (33%) of participants reported re-using their own needles in the past month, stable relative to 2025 (31%), and one fifth (20%) reported sharing other equipment (19% in 2025).

Twenty-eight per cent of the sample reported having an injection-related problem in the past month (30% in 2025), most commonly any infection/abscess (12%; 14% in 2025) and any nerve damage (9%; 12% in 2025).

Overdose, naloxone and drug checking

In 2026, one fifth (19%) of the sample reported any past 12-month non-fatal overdose, stable relative to 2025 (19%), most commonly from heroin (10%; 10% in 2025).

Awareness of take-home naloxone remained stable in 2026 (79%) relative to 2025 (80%), as did past year access (56%; 55% in 2025).

In 2026, 12% of participants reported that they or someone else had tested the contents and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year (15% in 2025).

Dependence, drug treatment and HCV

In 2026, 34% of male participants obtained an AUDIT-C score of ≥4, and 33% of female participants obtained a score of ≥3, indicative of hazardous alcohol use.

Forty-seven per cent of those who reported recent methamphetamine use obtained an SDS score of ≥4, a significant decrease from 54% in 2025 (p=0.014), while 66% of participants reporting recent opioid use obtained a score of ≥5, a significant increase from 59% in 2025 (p=0.030), indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Thirty-seven per cent of the sample reported that they were in any drug treatment for their substance use at the time of interview (38% in 2025), with the most common treatment being methadone (21%).

In 2026, 55% of participants reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year (51% in 2025), and 43% had received an PCR or RNA test (39% in 2025). Three per cent reported having a current HCV infection (4% in 2025) and 6% reported that they had received HCV treatment in the past year (5% in 2025). Almost one third (31%) of the sample reported having had a test for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in the past six months, stable relative to 2025 (30%), while the proportion reporting lifetime testing increased significantly (84%; 79%; p=0.030).

Sexual activity, mental health, disability and health service access

In 2026, 45% of the sample reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks and 24% reported having a sexual health check-up in the past six months.

Self-reported mental health problems remained stable in 2026 (53%) relative to 2025 (55%). Three fifths (63%) reported high/very high psychological distress (62% in 2025). Half (53%) self-identified as a person living with a disability (52% in 2025).

Most participants (87%) reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview in 2026 (90% in 2025).

Driving, contact with police and modes of purchasing drugs

Seventy-seven per cent of those who had recently driven reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the past six months (77% in 2025) and 8% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol (9% in 2025).

One third (33%) of participants reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest, stable relative to 2025 (29%).

In 2026, 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 relative to 2025 (79%; p=0.019).