

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 in June 2022. Interviews in 2020 and 2021 were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission. This methodological change should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020-2021 samples, relative to other years.**

Sample Characteristics

The IDRS sample recruited from Darwin, Northern Territory (NT) in 2022 ($N=70$) was consistent with the Darwin profile in previous years, whereby three-fifths (61%) were male, with a mean age of 47 years. The majority (86%) of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview, and most (96%) had received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview. The median income per week remained stable relative to 2021, with participants reporting \$384 in 2021 and \$425 in 2022 ($p=0.052$). Participants' nominated drug of choice was stable between 2021 and 2022 ($p=0.185$), as was the drug injected most often in the past month ($p=0.561$). In 2022, 54% of the sample reported that methamphetamine was their drug of choice (57% in 2021), and almost three-quarters (73%) reported that methamphetamine was the drug they had injected most often in the past month (63% in 2021). Weekly or more frequent use of heroin (0%; 0% in 2021), methamphetamine (60%; 61% in 2021), non-prescribed morphine (17%; 27% in 2021) and cannabis (60%; 49% in 2021) remained stable between 2021 and 2022.

Heroin

As in 2021, few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported recent use of heroin, therefore, these data are suppressed.

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has trended upwards since 2014, with four-fifths of participants (80%) reporting recent use in 2022. This was mostly driven by a continued increase in crystal methamphetamine use (80% in 2022) – the form most commonly used since 2014. Recent use of powder and base methamphetamine remained low in 2022 ($n \leq 5$ in 2021, respectively). The median price for one point of crystal methamphetamine increased significantly from \$100 in 2021 to \$120 in 2022 ($p < 0.001$). No changes were observed in the perceived purity or perceived availability of crystal methamphetamine between 2021 and 2022, with 45% of participants in 2022 reporting that the purity of crystal was 'medium (39% in 2021)', and 53% reporting that it was 'easy' to obtain (58% in 2021).

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine remained low and stable among the Darwin sample in 2022 (12%; $n \leq 5$ in 2021). Few participants ($n \leq 5$) commented on patterns of consumption and price, perceived purity, and perceived availability of cocaine, therefore, these data are suppressed.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid Related Products

Recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid related products has remained fairly stable since 2010, with 70% reporting recent use in 2022. Fifty-five per cent of participants who had recently used non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid products reported daily use, stable relative to 2021 (55%). Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (100%), although there was a significant increase in the proportion who reported using bush cannabis (13%; 0% in 2021; $p=0.009$). No participants reported using hashish, hash oil, CBD extract

or THC extract in the six months preceding interview. Hydroponic cannabis was largely reported as being 'easy' to obtain in 2022 (53% of those who commented), and of 'high' or 'medium' purity (39% of those who commented, respectively), stable from 2021. Participants reported a median of \$30 for one gram of hydroponic cannabis, stable since 2006.

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent use of non-prescribed methadone ($n \leq 5$; 10% in 2021), morphine (27%; 36% in 2021) and oxycodone ($n \leq 5$; $n \leq 5$ in 2021) have generally declined over the period of monitoring, although remained stable in 2022, relative to 2021. Recent use of non-prescribed fentanyl ($n \leq 5$; $n \leq 5$ in 2021) and buprenorphine-naloxone ($n \leq 5$; $n \leq 5$ in 2021) has fluctuated over the past 5-15 years of monitoring, although remained stable between 2021 and 2022.

Other Drugs

Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported recent use of NPS, non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants, non-prescribed antipsychotics, and non-prescribed benzodiazepines in 2022. Pregabalin use remained low and stable at 11% (6% in 2021). Recent use of tobacco (90%; 91% in 2021), alcohol (47%; 50% in 2021) and non-prescribed e-cigarettes ($n \leq 5$; $n \leq 5$ in 2021) remained stable in 2022, relative to 2021. No participants reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD in 2022 (0% in 2021).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

In 2022, 49% of the Darwin sample reported using two or more drugs on the day preceding interview. No participants reported experiencing a non-fatal overdose in the previous 12 months. In 2022, 54% of the sample had heard of naloxone, and one-third (34%) had heard of naloxone take-home

programs. Few participants ($n \leq 5$) had ever been trained in naloxone administration, a decrease from 13% in 2021 ($p=0.025$). Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported receptive or distributive sharing of a needle or syringe in the past month in both 2021 and 2022, whilst 10% of participants reported sharing other equipment in the past month, stable relative to 2021 ($n \leq 5$). Twenty per cent of the sample reported that they had re-used their own needles in the past month, stable from 14% in 2021. Sixteen per cent of participants reported experiencing injection-related problems in the past month, a significant increase from 2021 ($n \leq 5$; $p=0.002$). One-tenth (10%) were currently in any drug treatment, stable relative to 2021 (11%). Forty per cent reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year, and almost two fifths (38%) of the sample had received an RNA test in the past year. Few ($n \leq 5$) reported having a current HCV infection. Self-reported mental health problems remained stable in 2022 (22%; 21% in 2021), with anxiety (47%) and depression (47%) remaining the most common problems. Seventy-two per cent of those who had driven recently reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit drug in the last six months. Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported that they or someone else had ever tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year. Thirty per cent of participants reported engaging in 'any' crime in the past month in 2022, with property crime (17%) and drug dealing (16%) being the most common crimes reported. In 2022, 71% of the sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the 12 months prior to interview, with 30% testing positive to the virus. Half of the sample (52%) were 'not at all' concerned about contracting COVID-19. Ninety-three per cent had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by the time of interview (median 3 doses).

