

Executive Summary

The Brisbane/Gold Coast Queensland (QLD) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited via social media, advertisements on websites and via word-of mouth in Brisbane/Gold Coast, QLD. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2022 from April-June. Interviews in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone or videoconference, to reduce the 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 2020-2022 samples, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The EDRS sample (N=102) recruited from Brisbane/Gold Coast, was very similar to the sample in 2021 and in previous years. Whilst we observed a significant difference in employment status compared to 2021 ($p=0.026$), the sample continued to predominantly comprise males (53%) with a median age of 23, the majority of whom held tertiary qualifications (59% completed post-school qualifications) and most of whom were living in a rental house/flat (65%) at the time of interview. In 2022, ecstasy was the most commonly reported drug of choice (27%; 26% in 2021). There was a significant change in the drug used most often in the past month ($p=0.002$). Specifically, although it remained the most commonly reported drug used most in the last month, there was a decline in the per cent of participants who nominated cannabis as the substance used most often in the preceding month (34%; 47% in 2021). Finally, cocaine consumption reached its highest point since monitoring began.

Ecstasy

In 2022, the majority of participants (93%) reported use of any form of ecstasy in the six months prior to interview, remaining stable from 92% in 2021 ($p=0.776$). The price of ecstasy

capsules significantly changed between 2021 and 2022 ($p=0.006$), increasing from \$20 to \$25. The perceived availability of ecstasy capsules significantly changed ($p=0.008$), whereby more participants reported that it was 'difficult' to obtain (29%; 20% in 2021). A significant change was also observed in the availability of ecstasy crystal ($p=0.012$), with more participants reporting that it was 'very difficult' to obtain (24%, $n\leq 5$ in 2021), and fewer reporting it as 'easy' to obtain (22%; 40% in 2021).

Methamphetamine

Fifteen per cent of participants reported recent use of any methamphetamine, a significant decrease from 30% in 2021 ($p=0.026$). Recent use of crystal methamphetamine (ice) also decreased significantly, with 6% reporting recent use compared with 16% in 2021 ($p=0.044$). All of the participants who had used crystal had recently smoked this form, remaining stable with 2021 (92%).

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine remained stable at 80% (73% in 2021; $p=0.269$). Sixteen percent of those who had recently used cocaine reported weekly or more frequent use. Of those who reported recent use of cocaine ($n=82$), all (100%) reported snorting as their chosen route of administration, remaining stable from 2021 (96%; $p=0.152$). The price of cocaine per gram remained stable in 2022, at \$350, compared to \$350 in 2021 ($p=0.751$). Perceived purity ($p=0.196$) and perceived availability ($p=0.444$) of cocaine also remained stable in 2022.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid Related Products

Around three-in-four participants (76%) reported recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid related products compared to 89% in 2021 ($p=0.050$). Of these, few ($n\leq 5$) reported daily use, a significant decrease from 2021 (26%; $p=0.002$). The perceived potency of non-prescribed bush cannabis changed significantly since 2021 ($p=0.024$), with fewer reporting it to be 'high' or 'medium' (28% and 41% respectively in 2022, vs 39% and 58% respectively in 2021).

Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Whilst recent use of ketamine and LSD remained stable in 2022 (51% and 53%, respectively), recent use of DMT decreased significantly, from 26% in 2021 to 12% in 2022 ($p=0.020$). There was a significant decline in the median number of days of use for LSD from three in 2021 to two in 2022 ($p=0.033$). Frequency of use for ketamine and DMT remained low and stable in 2022. The perceived availability of LSD and ketamine remained stable from 2021, with over half reporting both as 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, has fluctuated over time, with 13% reporting recent use in 2022, stable from 2021 (15%). A similar percentage was observed for any NPS use, excluding plant-based NPS (8%; 14% in 2021). These are the lowest rates of use since monitoring of NPS first commenced in 2010.

Other Drugs

Alcohol and tobacco use remained stable in 2022, with 98% reporting recent use of alcohol (95% in 2021; $p=0.237$) and 68% reporting recent tobacco use (72% in 2021; $p=0.617$). Likewise, recent use of e-cigarettes remained stable at 66% (55% in 2021, $p=0.167$); however, frequency of use increased significantly in 2022 ($p=0.009$), with participants reporting a median of 90 days' use in the six months prior to the interview, compared with 24 days in 2021.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 82% of the Brisbane/Gold Coast sample in 2022 reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (including alcohol, tobacco and e-cigarettes). Seventy-six per cent of participants obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT (73% in 2021; $p=0.598$), indicative of hazardous use, with a significantly higher mean score in 2022 of 13.1 (12.6 in 2021, $p<0.001$). Whilst those who had experienced a past year non-fatal stimulant overdose remained stable in 2022 (19%; 21% in 2021; $p=0.845$) there was a significant increase in those experiencing a past year non-fatal

alcohol overdose (34%; 19% in 2021; $p=0.042$). Reported past month injecting drug use remained low ($n\leq 5$), as did drug treatment engagement ($n\leq 5$). The majority of the sample (88%) reported engaging in some form of sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 28% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner. Almost one-third (30%) reported having a HIV test in the past six months, and 45% reported having a sexual health check-up in the six months prior to interview. Mental health remained stable amongst the sample, with 75% reporting experiencing a mental health problem in the six months preceding interview, with anxiety (70%) and depression (70%) most commonly reported. Of those who reported driving in the past six months before interview, 29% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 55% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug. Fifty-two per cent of the Brisbane/Gold Coast sample reported any crime in the past month (38% in 2021, $p=0.095$), with property crime (34%) and drug dealing (23%) remaining the two main forms of criminal activity in 2022. Ten per cent of the sample reported a drug-related encounter with police without arrest in the past twelve months.

Social networking applications (85%) overtook face-to-face (73%) as the most popular means for participants to arrange the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview (61%, $p<0.001$ and 68%, $p=0.503$, respectively, in 2021). Face-to-face remained the primary method (96%; 92% in 2021; $p=0.324$) of obtaining illicit drugs in 2022.

The majority (92%) of the sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 within the past 12 months, with 63% of participants having been diagnosed with COVID-19. One-third (34%) reported any concern about contracting COVID-19, and most (81%) reported that they had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the time of interview.