

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 Adelaide, South Australia. 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, 2023. 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 2020-2023 samples relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The IDRS sample recruited from Adelaide, South Australia (SA) in 2023 (N=102) was consistent with the Adelaide profile in previous years, whereby two thirds (66%) were male, with a median age of 48 years. Eighty-four per cent of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview, and most (90%) had received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview. Current accommodation significantly changed ($p=0.023$), with more participants reporting no fixed address (18%; 11% in 2022) and fewer ($n \leq 5$) participants reporting residing in a boarding house/hostel (14% in 2022). Participants typically nominated methamphetamine as their drug of choice in 2023 (74%), followed by heroin (20%; 26% in 2022). Methamphetamine was also the drug injected most often in the past month (80%; 75% in 2022), followed by heroin (18%; 23% in 2022). Weekly or more frequent use of methamphetamine crystal significantly increased in 2023 (80%), relative to 2022 (67%; $p=0.041$).

Heroin

One fifth (22%) of the Adelaide sample reported recent use in 2023, a significant decrease from 35% in 2022 ($p=0.046$). Frequency of use increased from a median of 67 days in 2022 to a median of 96 days in 2023 ($p=0.040$). Perceived purity and availability remained stable between 2022 and 2023, with two fifths (42%) perceiving purity to be 'low' (31% in 2022) and 76% perceiving that heroin was 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain (84% in 2022).

Methamphetamine

Notwithstanding a decline in 2020, recent use of any methamphetamine has remained relatively stable since 2019, with nine in ten participants (91%) reporting recent use in 2023 (90% in 2022). This mostly comprised crystal methamphetamine use (88%), the most commonly used form since 2010. Almost one quarter of the sample (23%) reported recent use of powder and 13% reported recent use of base (31% and 10% in 2022, respectively). Perceived purity of crystal and powder methamphetamine remained stable between 2022 and 2023, with 37% reporting purity as 'medium' for powder (28% in 2022) and 38% reporting purity as 'low' for crystal (29% in 2022). Perceived availability also remained stable, with 54% (49% in 2022) and 73% (60% in 2022) reporting powder and crystal as being 'very easy' to obtain, respectively.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine remained stable at 12% (10% in 2022). Frequency of use remained low and stable at a median of three days (5 days in 2022).

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products has remained

fairly stable since 2014, with 71% reporting recent non-prescribed use in 2023 (72% in 2022). Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (81%; 87% in 2022), followed by bush cannabis (57%; 60% in 2022). No participants reported using CBD extract in 2023, a significant decrease from 9% in 2022 ($p=0.028$) and few ($n\leq 5$) participants reported using THC extract in 2023, also a significant decrease from 11% in 2022 ($p=0.033$). Both hydroponic and bush cannabis were reported as being 'very easy' to obtain in 2023 (57% and 61% of those who commented, respectively).

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent non-prescribed use of pharmaceutical opioids has generally remained stable or declined over the past 5-15 years of monitoring. In 2023, recent non-prescribed use of methadone ($n\leq 5$), buprenorphine tablet ($n\leq 5$), buprenorphine-naloxone (8%), morphine (8%), oxycodone (6%), fentanyl ($n\leq 5$) and codeine ($n\leq 5$) remained low and stable.

Other Drugs

Few ($n\leq 5$) participants reported recent use of NPS, unisom and non-prescribed antipsychotics in 2023 (18% in 2022). Recent non-prescribed benzodiazepine use was reported by 15% of participants in 2023. Non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulant and pregabalin use remained low and stable at 7% and 11%, respectively, in 2023 ($n\leq 5$ and 9% in 2022, respectively). Recent use of alcohol (60%; 69% in 2022) and tobacco (85%; 91% in 2022) remained stable in 2023, as did recent use of non-prescribed e-cigarettes (20%; 14% in 2022). However, frequency of use of non-prescribed e-cigarettes significantly increased, from a median of seven days in 2022 to a median of 45 days in 2023 ($p=0.029$). Almost one fifth (19%) reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD in 2023, a significant increase from 6% in 2022 ($p=0.007$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

- In 2023, 53% of the sample reported using two or more drugs on the day preceding interview (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes).
- Eight per cent reported overdosing on any drug in the preceding year, a significant decrease from 18% in 2022 ($p=0.039$). Few ($n\leq 5$) participants reported a non-fatal opioid or stimulant overdose.
- In 2023, almost half (48%) the Adelaide sample reported awareness of naloxone, a significant decrease from 64% in 2022 ($p=0.027$). Almost one third (31%) of the sample reported awareness of naloxone take-home programs (32% in 2022), with 11% having been trained in naloxone administration in their lifetime (15% in 2022). Ten per cent of the Adelaide sample reported having ever accessed naloxone, a significant decline from 21% in 2022 ($p=0.037$).
- In 2023, 6% reported receptive sharing and 7% reported distributive sharing of a needle or syringe in the past month ($n\leq 5$ in 2022, respectively). One quarter (27%) of the sample reported that they had re-used their own needles in the past month (24% in 2022).
- Twenty-nine per cent reported experiencing injection-related problems in the past month (25% in 2022), most commonly a dirty hit (14%).
- Almost one fifth (17%) of participants reported receiving any drug treatment in 2023, stable relative to 2022 (25%).
- Fifty-six per cent scored five or above on the opioid SDS scale and 51% scored four or above on the methamphetamine SDS scale, both indicating possible dependence in relation to opioid and methamphetamine use.
- Two fifths (40%) of the sample reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV)

antibody test (48% in 2022) and 29% reported receiving an RNA test (29% in 2022) in the past year. Seven per cent reported having a current HCV infection.

- Self-reported mental health problems remained stable in 2023 (38%; 39% in 2022), with depression being the most commonly reported problem (59%), followed by anxiety (51%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (27%).
- The K10 score remained stable between 2022 and 2023 ($p=0.802$), with one quarter (25%) of IDRS participants having a score of 30 or more (31% in 2022).
- Four fifths (80%) of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview (82% in 2022).
- Thirty-seven per cent of the sample reported experiencing stigma related to their illicit drug use in any setting in the six months preceding interview.
- In 2023, 78% of the Adelaide sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the past 12 months (86% in 2022), with one quarter (27%) of participants reporting a positive COVID-19 test in the 12 months preceding interview. Two thirds (66%) reported that they had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose (77% in 2022).
- Of those who had driven recently ($n=31$), 19% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 78% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug, both stable relative to 2022 ($n=5$ and 60%, respectively).
- Thirteen per cent reported that they or someone else had ever tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year (8% in 2022).
- Twenty-nine per cent of participants reported engaging in 'any' crime in the past month in 2023 (29% in 2022), with 19% having been arrested in the past year (14%

in 2022), and 49% reporting a lifetime prison history (59% in 2022).

- One tenth (11%) reported being the victim of a violence crime in the month preceding interview (14% in 2022).