

Executive Summary

The Hobart Tasmania (TAS) 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 Hobart, TAS. 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 May-July. Interviews in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, 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 TAS EDRS sample (N=72) recruited from Hobart, Tasmania, was demographically very similar to the sample in 2021 and in previous years; the sample comprised predominantly young males (48%), most of whom held tertiary qualifications (60% completed post-school qualifications) and most of whom were living in a rental house/flat (56%) or residing with their parents/at their family home (17%) at the time of interview. Drug of choice remained stable in 2022, with one fifth (22%) nominating ecstasy as the drug of choice, followed by cannabis (19%). The drug used most often in the last month significantly changed ($p=0.002$), with cannabis and cocaine the drugs used most often in the preceding month (38% and 19%, respectively) in 2022.

Ecstasy

The ecstasy market has diversified over the past few years, with the per cent reporting any recent (i.e., past six month) use of any ecstasy pills declining and the per cent reporting recent use of other forms of ecstasy increasing since 2014. In 2022, there was a significant decrease in the recent use of ecstasy crystal, from 66% in 2021 to 47% in 2022 ($p=0.022$), which was counter to the trend of increasing use of ecstasy crystal since 2014. Median days of any ecstasy significantly decreased in 2022 from ten days in 2021 to seven days ($p=0.002$). There was a significant change in the

perceived availability of capsules between 2021 and 2022 ($p=0.006$), with fewer participants reporting that capsules were 'easy' to obtain, and more participants reporting that capsules were 'difficult' to obtain. There was a significant change in the route of administration of ecstasy capsules, with fewer participants who reported snorting capsule contents (16%; 38% in 2021; $p=0.030$).

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has been declining amongst the Hobart sample since the commencement of monitoring, however the per cent reporting any recent use remained stable at 39% in 2022 (31% in 2021). Participants reported using methamphetamine less than monthly on average, with a median of four days of any methamphetamine use in the preceding six months. Perceived price, purity and availability of all methamphetamine forms remained stable between 2021 and 2022.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has generally increased over the years of monitoring. In 2022, 78% reported recent use, stable from 84% in 2021. Frequency of use remained stable at six days in the previous six months (5 days in 2021). The quantity used in a 'typical' session and a maximum session significantly increased to 0.50 grams and 1.00 gram, respectively (0.30 grams and 0.50 grams in 2021). Perceived price, purity and availability of cocaine remained stable between 2021 and 2022.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid Related Products

At least three in five participants have reported recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid related products each year since monitoring commenced. Eighty-one per cent of participants reported recent use in 2022, stable from 75% in 2021. Participants who had recently used non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid related products reported use on a median of 54 days in the preceding six months (55 days in 2021), with 67% reporting weekly or more frequent use (63% in 2021) and 28% reporting daily use (28% in 2021). One ounce of bush cannabis significantly increased in price to a median of \$250 (\$210 in 2021;

$p=0.013$), and availability of hydroponic cannabis significantly changed between 2021 and 2022 ($p=0.035$), with more participants reporting it was 'very easy' to obtain (56%; 41% in 2021).

Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of ketamine, LSD and DMT remained stable in 2022 relative to 2021. In 2022, 38%, 57% and 10% reported any recent use, respectively. The median price remained stable at \$250 per gram of ketamine and \$25 per tab of LSD. Frequency of use for all three substances remained low and stable in 2022.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, has remained low over time. Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported recent use in 2022; therefore, further details are suppressed (stable from 11% in 2021). A similar percentage was observed for any NPS use, excluding plant-based NPS ($n\leq 5$; 10% in 2021). These are the lowest percentages of use since monitoring of NPS first commenced in 2010.

Other Drugs

Almost all participants (94%) reported recent alcohol consumption, of which three-quarters (75%) reported drinking on a weekly or more frequent basis. Tobacco remained common, with 79% reporting recent use and 39% reporting daily use. Fifty-six per cent reported recent use of non-prescribed e-cigarettes, stable relative to 2021 (50%). Hallucinogenic mushrooms remain commonly but infrequently used among EDRS participants, with 51% reporting recent use with a median of four days of use in the preceding six months. One-quarter (26%) reported recent use of nitrous oxide in 2022, relatively stable from 41% in 2021, and at a median frequency of three days. One-quarter (26%) reported recent use of any substance with unknown contents, stable from 28% in 2021. Thirty-five per cent of participants reported recent use of amyl nitrite, stable from 46% in 2021.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 86% of the sample reported concurrent use of more than one drug (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes). One-third (34%) reported

that they or someone else had tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year. Almost four-fifths (79%) of the sample obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT, indicative of hazardous alcohol use. The mean AUDIT score significantly increased from 13.5 in 2021 to 13.6 in 2022. Almost one-quarter (24%) reported a non-fatal stimulant overdose (10% in 2021; $p=0.052$), and 28% reported a non-fatal depressant overdose (including alcohol) in the past year. The per cent reporting recent injecting drug use remained low, as did the number currently in drug treatment ($n\leq 5$, respectively). The majority of the sample (79%) reported engaging in any sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner (16% in 2021). Three in five participants (63%) self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months, the most common problems being anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (71%, 69% and 24% of those who reported having experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months, respectively). One-quarter (27%) of recent drivers reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol and 40% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug. Any criminal activity in the month preceding interview was stable at 39% in 2022 (32% in 2021). Interestingly, two-fifths (42%) of participants reported obtainment of illicit drugs from an unknown dealer/vender, a significant increase compared to 22% in 2021 ($p=0.011$). Almost two-fifths (38%) of the sample reported obtaining illicit drugs through someone who had purchased them on the surface or darknet in the last 12 months, stable compared to 2021. Sixty-one per cent of the sample reported having been diagnosed with COVID-19 (no participants in 2020 and 2021). Eighty-six per cent reported that they had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose and the median number of doses received was three. Thirty-six per cent reported some level of concern about contracting COVID-19.