

Executive Summary

The IDRS sample is a sentinel group of people aged 18 years or older who injected illicit drugs at least once monthly in the preceding six months and resided in Hobart, Tasmania. Participants were recruited via advertisements in needle 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 2022 from June-July. Interviews in 2020, 2021 and 2022 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 2020-2022 samples, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The IDRS sample recruited from Hobart, Tasmania (TAS) in 2022 (N=102) was consistent with the Hobart profile in previous years, whereby almost two-thirds (69%) were male, with a mean age of 43 years. The majority (85%) of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview, and most (93%) had received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview. The median income per week was stable at \$418 in 2022. The drug of choice nominated by half of the sample was methamphetamine (53%; 44% in 2021). The drug injected most often in the past month was methamphetamine (73%; 64% in 2021). In 2022, half (53%) of the sample reported that methamphetamine was their drug of choice (44% in 2021), and almost three-quarters (73%) reported that methamphetamine was the drug they had injected most often in the past month (64% in 2021). Weekly or more frequent use of any methamphetamine was reported by almost two-thirds (67%) of the Hobart sample (61% in 2021).

Heroin

Recent (i.e., past six month) use of heroin has significantly increased from 11% in 2021 to 22% in 2022. Almost one-third (36%) of those who had recently used heroin reported weekly or more frequent use in 2022 (33% in 2021). The price of a point of heroin was reported to be \$100 in 2022,

stable from \$85 in 2021. Perceived purity and availability remained stable between 2021 and 2022.

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has trended upwards over the past few years, with almost nine in ten participants (86%) reporting recent use in 2022. This was mostly driven by a continued increase in crystal methamphetamine use (84% in 2022) – the most commonly used form since 2014. The frequency of use of any methamphetamine was trending to an increase from 2021 (median of 48 days) to a median of 72 days in 2022. There was a significant increase in daily use of methamphetamine powder, with 29% of recent consumers reporting daily use in 2022. The median price for one point of crystal significantly increased, from \$50 in 2021 to \$100 in 2022 ($p<0.001$). There was a significant change in the perceived purity of crystal methamphetamine between 2021 and 2022, with more participants perceiving crystal methamphetamine as 'medium' purity in 2022 (40%; 30% in 2021) and fewer participants reporting 'high' purity (23%; 40% in 2021).

Cocaine

Fourteen per cent of the Hobart sample had recently consumed cocaine, stable from 16% in 2021. No participants reported using cocaine weekly or more frequently in 2022.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid Related Products

The proportion of participants reporting recent non-prescribed cannabis use and/or cannabinoid related products has been slowly declining since the early 2000s to 70% in 2022 (67% in 2021). Almost half (51%) of participants who had recently used non-prescribed cannabis reported daily use, stable relative to 2021 (58%; $p=0.495$). Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (84%), followed by bush cannabis (56%) and hashish (9%). Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported using hash oil and/or non-prescribed pharmaceutical CBD oil and/or THC extract in the six months preceding interview. Both hydroponic and bush cannabis

were reported as being 'very easy' to obtain in 2022 (59% and 50% of those who commented, respectively), stable from 2021.

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent non-prescribed use of pharmaceutical opioids such as morphine, oxycodone and methadone has declined over the past 10 years of monitoring. In 2022, 27% of the sample reported recent use of non-prescribed morphine, which was a significant decrease from 44% in 2021. Frequency of use was stable at a median of 24 days in the previous six months (11 days in 2021). Nineteen per cent reported recent use of non-prescribed oxycodone, with a median frequency of eight days. One-fifth (22%) reported using non-prescribed methadone, which was a significant decrease relative to 2021 (37%; $p=0.025$). Recent use of non-prescribed buprenorphine tablet, buprenorphine-naloxone, fentanyl, codeine, tramadol and tapentadol all remained stable in 2021.

Other Drugs

Seven per cent of the Hobart sample reported recent use of NPS in 2022. Sixteen per cent reported recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants and six per cent reported recent use of non-prescribed antipsychotics in 2022. Recent non-prescribed benzodiazepine use was reported by 35% of participants in 2022 (41% in 2021). Pregabalin use remained low and stable at 14% (23% in 2021). Recent use of alcohol (64%; 60% in 2021), tobacco (93%; 86% in 2021) and non-prescribed e-cigarettes (15%; 7% in 2021) remained stable in 2022. Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD in 2021 and 2022.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

In 2022, half (50%) of the sample reported using two or more drugs on the day preceding interview, most commonly cannabis (50%), stimulants (33%) and opioids (30%).

Twelve per cent of participants reported experiencing a non-fatal overdose on any drug in the 12 months preceding interview. Fifty-eight per cent of participants reported that they were aware

of the free take-home naloxone programs in 2022, with two-thirds (68%) reporting having ever accessed naloxone.

Almost one-quarter (22%) of the sample reported experiencing injection-related problems in the past month, most commonly nerve damage (12%) and infection/abscess (9%). One-third (34%) reported re-using their own needle in the past month, stable from 38% in 2021. One-quarter (25%) of the sample reported being in drug treatment at the time of interview, stable from 29% reporting current treatment in 2021, with the most common being buprenorphine-naloxone treatment (11%) followed by methadone treatment (9%).

Thirty-eight per cent of the sample (74% of those who had recently driven a vehicle) reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the last six months.

Self-reported past six-month mental health problems remained stable (51%; 64% in 2021), as did past month criminal activity (38%; 38% in 2021).

Almost half (47%) reported that they had received a Hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year, 36% had received an RNA test and small numbers ($n\leq 5$) reported having a current HCV infection.

Thirteen per cent of participants reported that they or someone else had ever tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia.

In 2022, 85% of the Hobart sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the past 12 months, with almost one-third (32%) reporting having been diagnosed with the virus. The majority (60%) of participants were 'not at all' worried about contracting COVID-19 (noting that most interviews took place before the second wave of COVID-19). At the time of interview, 87% reported that they had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, with a median 2 doses.