

Executive Summary

The EDRS sample is a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited via social media, advertisement on websites and word-of-mouth in the capital cities of Australia. 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-July. Interviews in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone and videoconference, 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

In 2022, the national EDRS sample (n=700) differed in some ways to the sample in 2021. Specifically, there was a significant change in gender identity, with fewer participants identifying as male (56%; 63% in 2021; $p=0.015$), as well as an increase in median age (25 years; 24 years in 2021; $p=0.024$). Three-fifths of the sample held tertiary qualifications (61%) and lived in a rental house/flat at the time of interview (59%). The current median weekly income significantly increased, from \$600 in 2021 to \$700 in 2022 ($p<0.001$). Cannabis and ecstasy continued to be the main drugs of choice nominated by participants, and cannabis and alcohol were the drugs used most often in the past month. Weekly or more frequent cocaine use significantly increased from 5% in 2021 to 9% in 2022 ($p=0.015$).

Ecstasy

Recent use of any ecstasy significantly decreased in 2022 (88%; 95% in 2021; $p<0.001$), reaching the lowest percentage since monitoring began. Ecstasy capsules remained the most commonly used form of ecstasy, although recent use declined significantly in 2022 (56%; 70% in 2021; $p<0.001$), as did recent use of ecstasy crystal (43%; 53% in 2021; $p=0.001$). Significant

increases were observed in the median price for one gram of crystal (\$250; \$200 in 2021; $p=0.002$) and one gram of powder (\$245; \$200 in 2021; $p=0.007$). Significant changes were observed in the perceived availability for all forms of ecstasy, with more participants nominating availability as 'difficult' or 'very difficult' in 2022.

Methamphetamine

Whilst recent methamphetamine use has been declining over time, a significant increase was observed in 2022 (31%) relative to 2021 (26%; $p=0.030$). This was mostly driven by an increase in recent powder use (16%; 12% in 2021; $p=0.024$), although crystal remained the most commonly used form of methamphetamine (18%) for the second year running. Frequency of use remained stable for both powder and crystal, as did the price and perceived purity. There was a significant change in the perceived availability of crystal, however ($p=0.005$), with more participants reporting that it was 'very easy' to obtain in 2022.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine remained stable in 2022 (79%; 80% in 2021), however weekly or more frequent use increased (11%; 7% in 2021; $p=0.009$). The vast majority of participants who had recently consumed cocaine reported using powder cocaine (95%), with fewer participants reporting use of rock cocaine (9%). The price, perceived purity and perceived availability of cocaine remained stable between 2021 and 2022.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid Related Products

Approximately four in five participants have reported recent use of non-prescribed cannabis each year since monitoring began. There was, however, a significant decline in 2022 (79%) relative to 2021 (84%; $p=0.026$), which was mostly driven by a decrease in the percentage of participants reporting recent use of outdoor grown 'bush' (58%; 67% in 2021; $p=0.001$). Frequency of use, however, remained stable. The price, perceived purity

and perceived availability of hydroponic cannabis remained mostly stable in 2022, though there were significant changes in the perceived potency ($p=0.041$) and availability ($p=0.043$) of 'bush' cannabis. Specifically, in 2022, more participants reported 'bush' cannabis to be of 'low' or 'fluctuating' purity and that it was 'easy' to obtain.

Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of ketamine and DMT remained stable in 2022, though recent use of LSD significantly decreased (46%; 53% in 2021; $p=0.003$). Frequency of use for all three substances remained low and stable. Price and perceived purity remained stable for both ketamine and LSD in 2022, though there was a significant change in the perceived availability of ketamine ($p=0.022$), with more participants reporting ketamine to be 'easy' to obtain in 2022 relative to 2021.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, significantly declined from 16% in 2021 to 11% in 2022 ($p=0.029$). Mescaline and any 2C substance were the most commonly used NPS in 2022 (3%, respectively), although the latter declined relative to 2021 (6%; $p=0.032$).

Other Drugs

Recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants significantly increased in 2022 (52%; 46% in 2021; $p=0.014$), as did the per cent reporting any non-prescribed e-cigarette use (65%; 58% in 2021; $p=0.007$). Median days of non-prescribed e-cigarette use also increased, from 30 days in 2021 to 72 days in 2022 ($p<0.001$). Whilst recent use of hallucinogenic mushrooms remained stable, frequency of use significantly increased, from 2 days in 2021 to 3 days in 2022 ($p=0.012$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 81% of participants reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes). One-third (32%) of participants reported that they or someone else had tested the content and/or purity of their

illicit drugs in Australia in the past year, most commonly using a colorimetric or reagent test kit (88%). Three-quarters (74%) of participants obtained an AUDIT score of eight or more, indicative of hazardous alcohol use. Reported past year non-fatal stimulant overdose remained stable in 2022 (15%), whilst past year non-fatal depressant overdose (mostly comprising alcohol) significantly increased (24%; 19% in 2021; $p=0.012$). Reported past month injecting drug use remained low (2%), as did current drug treatment engagement (5%). Almost four-fifths of the sample (78%) reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 22% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner. Three-fifths (62%) of the sample self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months. Among recent drivers, one-quarter (27%) reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 51% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug. One in ten participants reported being the victim of a crime involving violence in 2022, a significant increase from 6% in 2021 ($p=0.003$). Social networking applications remained the most popular means by which participants arranged the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the past 12 months (73%; 71% in 2021), however significantly more participants reported obtaining illicit drugs from an unknown dealer/vendor in 2022 (37%; 30% in 2021; $p=0.005$).

The majority (95%) of the sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2, with almost two-thirds (64%) reporting having been diagnosed with the virus. At the time of interview, 90% reported that they had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, with participants reporting a median of three vaccine doses. One-third (33%) of participants reported some level of concern about contracting COVID-19, and two-fifths (42%) reported that they would be concerned about their health if they were to contract COVID-19.