

## Executive Summary

The NSW EDRS sample comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited via social media, advertisement on websites and via word-of-mouth in Sydney, NSW. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2020 from May-June, subsequent to COVID-19 restrictions on travel and gatherings in Australia. Interviews were also delivered via phone/videoconference rather than face-to-face. This should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020 sample relative to previous years.**

## Sample Characteristics

The NSW EDRS sample (N=103) were predominantly young (median age 21) males, currently studying for either a university or trade qualification. This sample was younger and more likely to be students than the 2019 sample. In 2020, cannabis was the drug of choice (35%) among the sample, followed by ecstasy (18%) and alcohol (15%). Cannabis and alcohol were the drugs used most often in the preceding month (44% and 21%, respectively).

## COVID-19 Impact

*This brief section was included to summarise data collected specifically related to COVID-19 and associated restrictions; subsequent sections reflect standard annual reporting.* Eighteen per cent of the sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2, though no participants had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Since the beginning of March 2020, nearly all participants (94%) had practiced social distancing and 76% had practiced home isolation. Cannabis was reported by 34% of participants as the drug most used in February 2020 (before COVID-19 restrictions) and had risen to 44% in the month prior to interview. By contrast, ecstasy was reported by 23% as the drug most used in February, and 10% in the month prior to interview. Overall, participants reported a

perceived decrease in use of a number of drugs since March, including ecstasy/MDMA (63%), amyl nitrite (74%), methamphetamine (47%) and cocaine (43%). The primary reasons for a decrease in use of these drugs comprised 'fewer opportunities to be with people or to go out'. An increase in cannabis use was reported by two-fifths of consumers (42%), mainly cited as due to 'boredom/less things to occupy time', 'more time to use the drug' and 'greater anxiety/depression with COVID-19'. Most participants reported drug availability as stable, although methamphetamine powder and MDMA pills were most commonly cited as drugs which had decreased in availability (55% and 44%, respectively). Nearly half (45%) of the participants rated their mental health in the past four weeks as 'being worse' compared to February, 28% reported 'similar' and 27% reported their mental health as 'better'. One-in-ten (12%) participants reportedly sought information on how to reduce the risk of acquiring COVID-19 or avoiding impacts of restrictions on drug acquisition and use. Almost three-quarters (72%) of participants reported engaging in various harm reduction behaviours to reduce the risk of acquiring COVID-19 or impacts of COVID-19 restrictions while using or obtaining drugs.

## Ecstasy

Weekly or more frequent use of any ecstasy had been declining in recent years, though increased in 2020 (21%; 12% in 2019). Capsules have been the main form used in the past three years, followed by crystal and the pill form (88%, 47%, and 41%, respectively, in 2020), with a recent decline in the use of the crystal form (68% in 2019). Recent consumers reported a median of two capsules in a 'typical' session and three in a 'maximum' session. Reported price of capsules and pills was \$25 and \$20, respectively (the latter representing a decrease relative to previous years), and 88% of those who commented reported capsules to be easy or very easy to obtain.

## Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has been declining amongst the NSW sample since the commencement of monitoring (17% in 2020). The per cent reporting use of powder and crystal methamphetamine has converged in recent years, with 9% and 10% reporting any recent use in the 2020 sample.

## Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has been increasing amongst the NSW sample, with the largest per cent reporting any recent use recorded in recent years (84% in 2020; 83% in 2019). Most consumers reported infrequent use of cocaine (7% weekly or more). The median price has remained stable (\$300 per gram).

## Cannabis

At least three in four participants have reported any recent use of cannabis each year since monitoring began (88% in 2020). A majority (68%) reported weekly or more frequent use, a significant increase from 2019 (46%). Smoking remained the main route of administration. Reports of price, perceived potency and perceived availability were relatively stable.

## Ketamine and LSD

Recent use of ketamine has increased since monitoring began, with use of ketamine peaking in 2019 at 68%, then declining to 53% in 2020. The per cent reporting any recent use of LSD peaked in 2017 and 2018 and since declined somewhat (48% and 44% in 2019 and 2020, respectively). Frequency of use remained low in 2020 at three days for both ketamine and LSD.

## New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

In the NSW sample, 33% reported recent use of at least one form of NPS (27% in 2019). DMT was the most common recently used NPS (18%).

## Other Drugs

Reported recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants remained stable at 40% between 2019 and 2020, as did the per cent reporting any recent non-prescribed benzodiazepine use (45%; 52% in 2019) and any recent amyl nitrite use (56%; 57% in 2019). The per cent reporting any recent use of nitrous oxide peaked in 2018 (75%) and decreased to 67% in 2020; frequency of use has remained infrequent. Alcohol and tobacco use were common in the sample, and 38% of recent tobacco consumers reported daily use. Half (50%) reported recent use of e-cigarettes, stable from 2019 (50%), with 37% reporting doing so for smoking cessation purposes.

## Drug-Related Harms and Associated Behaviours

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of the sample obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT, indicative of hazardous alcohol use. Twenty per cent reported a non-fatal stimulant overdose, and 30% reported a non-fatal depressant overdose in the past year, predominantly occurring following alcohol use. The per cent reporting lifetime injecting drug use remained low (10%), as did the number currently in drug treatment. Over half the sample (52%) self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months, and 60% of these had seen a mental health professional in that period. Self-report of any criminal activity remained stable at 39% (43% in 2019). Drug dealing remained the main form of self-reported criminal activity in 2020. The majority of participants (68%) reported purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs over social networking applications, whereas fewer participants reported face-to-face obtainment of illicit drugs on any occasion in the 12 months preceding interview (61% in 2020; 82% in 2019). In 2020, there was an increase in those receiving illicit drugs via a collection point in the past 12 months compared with 2019 (22%; 8% in 2019).

