

Executive Summary

The Canberra, Australian Capital Territory (ACT) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants, recruited via social media and word-of mouth in Canberra, ACT. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2024 from April-July. Interviews from 2020 onwards 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 2020-2024 samples, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The 2024 EDRS sample (N=100) recruited from Canberra, ACT, was similar to the sample in 2023 and in previous years. Gender remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with 55% identifying as male in 2024, and participants had a median age of 22 years. Participants reported a mean of 12 years of school in 2024 (range: 9-12), 45% were current students, and 76% had some form of employment. Current accommodation remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with most participants reporting living in a rented house/flat (55%). There was a significant change in participants drug of choice in 2024 relative to 2023 ($p=0.039$). Specifically, there was an increase in participants nominating cannabis as their drug of choice and a decrease in those reporting alcohol. There was also a significant change in drug used most often in the past month in 2024 relative to 2023 ($p=0.022$), with more participants reporting cannabis as the drug used most often in the past month and fewer reporting alcohol.

Non-Prescribed Ecstasy

Recent use of any non-prescribed ecstasy remained stable in 2024 (90%), relative to 2023, as did frequency of use (6 days). Capsules (52%) remained the most commonly used form of non-prescribed ecstasy, followed by crystal (37%), powder (28%) and pills (25%). The price of all forms of non-prescribed ecstasy remained stable between 2023 and 2024. There was a significant change in the perceived purity of capsules in 2024 ($p=0.010$) relative to 2023, with more participants reporting 'high' purity. There was also a significant change in the perceived availability of pills ($p=0.019$), with more participants reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' availability in 2024, relative to 2023.

Methamphetamine

Use of any methamphetamine has historically been declining. In 2024, 21% reported recent use of any methamphetamine, stable relative to 2023. Frequency of use of any methamphetamine also remained stable at a median of five days. There was no change in the price, perceived purity or perceived availability of methamphetamine powder or crystal in 2024, relative to 2023.

Non-Prescribed Pharmaceutical Stimulants

In 2024, 56% of the sample reported recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants, the highest percentage since monitoring commenced, although stable relative to 2023. Frequency of use also remained stable at a median of eight days. The majority (87%) of those who had recently used non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants reported using dexamfetamine. Price and perceived availability remained stable in 2024 relative to 2023.

Cocaine

In 2024, 81% of the sample reported recent use of cocaine on a median of six days, stable relative to 2023. The majority of participants who had recently used cocaine reported using powder cocaine (96%). The median price for a gram of cocaine has remained stable since 2006 at \$300. The perceived purity and perceived availability of cocaine remained stable between 2023 and 2024.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

At least three in four participants have reported any recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products each year since monitoring commenced. In 2024, 80% of the sample reported recent use on a median of 72 days, stable from 2023. Among those who reported recent use, the most commonly used forms of non-prescribed cannabis were hydroponic (59%) and bush (58%) cannabis. There were no significant changes in the price, perceived purity or perceived availability of hydroponic or bush cannabis in 2024, relative to 2023.

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

In 2024, recent use of non-prescribed ketamine (46%), LSD (37%) and DMT (10%) remained stable relative to 2023. Median frequency of use remained low for all three substances, ranging between two and five days in the six months preceding interview. The price, perceived purity and perceived availability of ketamine and LSD remained stable between 2023 and 2024, although the median price for one tab of LSD in 2024 (\$30) was the highest price observed since monitoring commenced.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

In 2024, 20% of the sample reported recent use of at least one form of NPS (including plant-based NPS), and 16% reported recent use of at least one form of NPS (excluding plant-based NPS), both stable relative to 2023. There were no significant differences in the use of specific NPS in 2024 relative to 2023, although, for the first time, dissociatives were the most commonly used NPS class (7%).

Other Drugs

Recent use of non-prescribed hallucinogenic mushrooms/psilocybin (56%), nitrous oxide (52%), amyl nitrite (42%) and GHB/GBL/1,4-BD (7%) remained stable in 2024, relative to 2023. Significantly more participants reported using Kava in 2024 (11%) relative to 2023 ($n \leq 5$; $p=0.049$). Recent use of alcohol (91%) and tobacco (82%) remained high and stable, although median days of tobacco use increased from 48 days in 2023 to 173 days in 2024 ($p=0.005$). In 2024, 72% of the sample reported recent use of non-prescribed e-cigarettes, the highest per cent since monitoring commenced, although stable relative to 2023.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

In 2024, 79% of participants reported using two or more drugs concurrently (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes) during their last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use.

One fifth (19%) of participants reported using stimulants or related drugs for 48 hours or more continuously without sleep in the six months preceding interview.

Dependence, overdose and injecting

There was a significant increase in the mean AUDIT score in 2024 relative to 2023 (13.5 versus 12.2; $p < 0.001$), although the per cent obtaining an AUDIT score of ≥ 8 , indicative of hazardous alcohol use, remained stable (70%).

In 2024, 16% of those who reported recent ecstasy use obtained an SDS score of 3 or more, whilst 24% of participants reporting recent methamphetamine use obtained a score of 4 or more, indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Two fifths (37%) experienced a non-fatal depressant overdose (including alcohol) in the 12 months prior to interview, a significant increase relative to 2023 (15%; $p < 0.001$). Sixteen per cent of the sample reported a non-fatal stimulant overdose in the last 12 months, stable relative to 2023.

Few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported past month injecting drug use.

Drug checking and naloxone awareness

Significantly fewer participants reported having tested the contents of their illicit drugs in the 12 months preceding interview in 2024 (36%) relative to 2023 (53%; $p = 0.025$).

The majority (71%) of participants reported that they had heard about naloxone, of which 93% were able to correctly identify the purpose of naloxone.

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Three quarters (76%) of the sample reported engaging in some form of sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 82% reported using alcohol and/or other drugs prior to or while engaging in sexual activity. Four fifths (80%) of the sample reported having a sexual health check-up in their lifetime, a significant increase from 66% in 2023 ($p = 0.038$).

In 2024, 65% reported experiencing a mental health problem in the six months preceding interview, with depression (71%) and anxiety (66%) most commonly reported problems. Twenty-nine per cent of the sample reported a score of ≥ 30 on the K10, indicating very high psychological distress.

One third (33%) of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview, most commonly from a general practitioner (GP) (16%). One tenth (8%) of the sample reported current drug treatment engagement.

Thirty per cent of the sample reported experiencing stigma because of their illicit drug use in any health/non-health care setting in the six months preceding interview.

Driving, contact with police and modes of purchasing drugs

Among those who had recently driven, two fifths (40%) reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, stable relative to 2023, and 60% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug, a significant increase relative to 2023 (41%; $p = 0.023$).

Two fifths (41%) of the sample reported 'any' crime in the past month. Eight per cent of participants reported having been arrested in the 12 months preceding interview and 17% reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest.

In 2024, the most popular means of participants arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview was face-to-face (80%), followed by social networking or messaging applications (77%). Most participants continued to report obtaining illicit drugs from a friend/relative/partner/colleague (86%).