

Executive Summary

The EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants, recruited via social media and word-of-mouth across each capital city 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 2024 from April-July. Interviews from 2020 onwards were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone and videoconference, to reduce 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

In 2024, the national EDRS sample (n=740) differed in some ways to the sample in 2023. Whilst median age (23 years) and gender identity (55% male) remained stable, a significant change was observed in participants' employment status ($p=0.011$), current median weekly income (\$700; \$808 in 2023; $p=0.002$), and current accommodation ($p=0.007$). Drug of choice significantly changed ($p<0.001$), with more participants nominating cannabis (25%; 20% in 2023) and ecstasy (27%; 24% in 2023) as their drugs of choice in 2024. The drugs used most often in the month preceding interview also significantly changed in 2024 ($p<0.001$), with more participants reporting cannabis (33%; 29% in 2023) and fewer reporting alcohol (13%; 22% in 2023) as the drugs used most often.

Non-Prescribed Ecstasy

Recent use of any non-prescribed ecstasy remained stable in 2024 (92%; 95% in 2023), as did frequency of use (8 days; 7 days in 2023). Capsules remained the most commonly used

form of non-prescribed ecstasy in 2024 (59%), followed by crystal (48%), pills (43%) and powder (30%). The median price for one gram of non-prescribed ecstasy crystal significantly decreased (\$220; \$250 in 2023; $p=0.007$), while the median price for one pill and capsule remained stable (\$30 and \$25, respectively). Perceived purity significantly changed for non-prescribed ecstasy capsules ($p=0.010$), whereby more participants perceived purity to be 'high' (36%; 29% in 2023). Significant changes were also observed in the perceived availability of all four forms of non-prescribed ecstasy. Specifically, more participants nominated availability as 'easy' or 'very easy' in 2024, with estimates similar to those observed previously in 2020 and earlier.

Methamphetamine

Recent methamphetamine use among this sample has been declining over time, with one quarter (25%) reporting recent use in 2024, a significant decrease from 30% in 2023 ($p=0.037$). Whilst crystal remained the most commonly used form of methamphetamine, a significant decrease in recent use was observed (16%; 22% in 2023; $p=0.010$). Conversely, frequency of crystal significantly increased in 2024 to a median of 42 days (20 days in 2023; $p=0.008$). Recent use and frequency of use remained stable for methamphetamine powder and base. The price, perceived purity and perceived availability remained stable for both methamphetamine powder and crystal between 2023 and 2024, with the largest per cent of participants nominating 'high' purity, and most reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' obtainment.

Non-Prescribed Pharmaceutical Stimulants

Past six month use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants steadily increased between 2007 (17%) and 2022 (52%), before declining in 2023 (47%) and then increasing again in 2024 (54%; $p=0.010$). Whilst most participants reported swallowing as a route of administration in 2024 (94%), significantly more participants reported snorting (26%; 20% in 2023; $p=0.045$). The price of a 5mg tablet significantly decreased in 2024, from \$6 in 2023 to \$5 ($p=0.029$), although perceived availability remained stable.

Cocaine

Past six month cocaine use remained stable but high in 2024 (80%; 81% in 2023). The vast majority of participants who had recently consumed cocaine reported using powder cocaine (95%). Price and perceived availability of cocaine remained stable between 2023 and 2024, however perceived purity significantly changed ($p=0.012$), with more participants reporting cocaine to be of 'high' purity (26%; 21% in 2023), and fewer reporting it to be of 'low' purity (26%; 36% in 2023).

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products remained stable in 2024 (75%) relative to 2023 (74%), as did frequency of use (median of 48 days in 2024). Hydroponic cannabis was the most used form of non-prescribed cannabis in 2024 (69%; 63% in 2023; $p=0.037$), followed by bush cannabis (53%; 51% in 2023). The price, perceived purity and perceived availability of hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable in 2024 relative to 2023. As in previous years, most perceived availability of hydroponic and bush cannabis to be 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain.

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of non-prescribed ketamine (53%; 49% in 2023), LSD (36%; 41% in 2023) and DMT (10%; 13% in 2023) remained stable in 2024. Median frequency of use remained low for all three substances, ranging between two and four days in the six months preceding interview. The median price for an LSD tab remained stable at \$25, while the median price for a gram of non-prescribed ketamine significantly decreased (\$200; \$250 in 2023; $p=0.040$). Perceived purity and availability for both non-prescribed ketamine and LSD remained stable between 2023 and 2024.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Recent use of any NPS (including plant-based NPS) significantly increased in 2024, from 12% in 2023 to 16% ($p=0.022$). Phenethylamines remained the most commonly used NPS class in 2024 (6%); this mostly comprised use of any 2C substance (5%). In 2024, there were significant increases in participants reporting use of 2-Fluorodeschloroketamine (2-FDCK) (1%; 0% in 2023; $p=0.038$) and 'other drugs that mimic the effects of ecstasy' (2%; 0% in 2023; $p<0.001$).

Other Drugs

Recent use of kava (7%; 4% in 2023; $p=0.011$), and any substance with 'unknown contents' (20%; 13% in 2023; $p<0.001$) significantly increased in 2024. Recent use of tobacco also significantly increased in 2024 (72%; 64% in 2023; $p<0.001$), as did median frequency of use (90 days; 50 days in 2023; $p=0.028$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 82% of participants reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes).

Nearly one third (30%) 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

Three quarters (76%) of participants obtained an AUDIT score of ≥ 8 , indicative of hazardous alcohol use. Sixteen per cent of those who reported recent ecstasy use obtained an SDS score of ≥ 3 , while 41% of participants reporting recent methamphetamine use obtained a score of ≥ 4 , indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Past year non-fatal stimulant overdose remained stable in 2024 (19%), however, past year non-fatal depressant overdose increased (28%; 22% in 2023; $p=0.014$).

Past month injecting drug use was low (1%).

Drug checking and naloxone awareness

One quarter (27%) 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, a significant decrease from 38% in 2023 ($p<0.001$).

In 2024, 63% of the sample reported that they had ever heard of naloxone, a significant increase from 57% in 2023 ($p=0.015$).

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Almost four fifths (78%) of the sample reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four

weeks, of which 81% reported using alcohol and/or other drugs prior to or while engaging in sexual activity.

Almost three fifths (58%) of the sample self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months. Twenty-two per cent reported a score of ≥ 30 on the K10, indicating very high psychological distress.

Almost one third (30%) of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the past six months preceding interview. Current drug treatment engagement remained low (6%).

One quarter (28%) 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 recent drivers, 29% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 50% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the past six months, a significant increase relative to 2023 (44%; $p=0.037$).

Seven per cent of participants reported past year arrest, while 14% reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest (e.g., stopped and searched/questioned).

In 2024, the most popular means of arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview was face-to-face (74%), followed by social networking or messaging applications (70%). Most participants continued to report obtaining illicit drugs from a friend/relative/partner/colleague (84%), although this increased relative to 2023 (79%; $p=0.032$).