

Executive Summary

The Brisbane/Gold Coast, Queensland (QLD) 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 Brisbane/Gold Coast, QLD. 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-June. 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 EDRS sample (N=101) recruited from Brisbane/Gold Coast was similar to the sample in 2023 and in previous years. Gender remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with 62% identifying as male (59% in 2023), and participants had a median age of 23 years (26 years in 2023). Forty-four per cent of participants reported being current students in 2024 (36% in 2023), though most participants held tertiary qualifications (59%). One quarter (24%) of the sample reported full-time employment (35% in 2023) and 44% reported part time/casual employment (35% in 2023). Drug of choice and drug used most often remained stable between 2023 and 2024, with one quarter (28%) nominating cannabis as their drug of choice (21% in 2023), and two fifths (42%) nominating cannabis as the drug used most often in the month preceding interview (31% in 2023).

Non-Prescribed Ecstasy

Recent use of any non-prescribed ecstasy in the six months prior to interview remained stable in

2024, relative to 2023 (92%; 95% in 2023). Capsules (63%) and crystal (54%) remained the most commonly used forms of non-prescribed ecstasy. There were significant changes in the perceived purity ($p=0.033$) and availability of ecstasy capsules ($p=0.012$), with one third reporting purity as 'high' (36%, 16% in 2023), and almost half reporting capsules as 'very easy' to obtain (46%; 32% in 2023). The perceived purity and availability of ecstasy crystal also significantly changed between 2023 and 2024 ($p=0.022$ and $p=0.005$, respectively), with 54% reporting that crystal was 'high' in purity (25% in 2023) and two fifths (41%) reporting that crystal was 'easy' to obtain (47% in 2023).

Methamphetamine

Since monitoring commenced, recent use of any methamphetamine declined until 2022, followed by a significant increase in 2023. In 2024, 18% of participants reported recent use, remaining stable relative to 2023 (27%). Forty-four per cent of those who had recently used methamphetamine reported weekly or more frequent use (46% in 2023). Of participants who had used methamphetamine in the six months preceding interview in 2024, almost three quarters (72%) had used methamphetamine crystal (82% in 2023). Forty-four per cent of participants reported use of methamphetamine powder (18% in 2023), whereas no participants reported use of base. Market characteristics for methamphetamine powder and crystal remained stable in 2024, relative to 2023.

Non-Prescribed Pharmaceutical Stimulants

The per cent of participants reporting any recent non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulant (e.g., dexamphetamine, methylphenidate, modafinil) use has steadily increased since the commencement of monitoring, from 12% in 2007 to 61% in 2024

(41% in 2023; $p=0.005$), signifying the highest percentage of use since monitoring commenced. Frequency of use remained stable, as did the price and perceived availability of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has increased over the years of monitoring. After a significant increase in 2023, recent use remained stable at 87% in 2024 (95% in 2023). Fourteen per cent of those who had recently used cocaine reported weekly or more frequent use (6% in 2023). Perceived availability of cocaine significantly changed in 2024 ($p=0.009$), with 37% reporting it was 'easy' to obtain, compared to 57% in 2023.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

Eight in ten participants (81%) reported any recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products in 2024 (75% in 2023). The majority of those who had recently used non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products reported use of outdoor grown 'bush' cannabis (72%), a significant increase from 2023 (43%; $p<0.001$). The use of commercially prepared edibles also significantly increased (21%; $n\leq 5$ in 2023; $p=0.003$). Market characteristics of non-prescribed hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable between 2023 and 2024.

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of non-prescribed ketamine was reported by half the sample (52%), a significant increase from 2023 (35%; $p=0.017$). Recent use of LSD (42%; 42% in 2023) and DMT (15%; 16% in 2023) remained stable, as did frequency of use. Market characteristics of

non-prescribed ketamine and LSD remained stable between 2023 and 2024.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant based NPS, has fluctuated over time, with 18% reporting recent use in 2024, stable from 2023 (13%). Also stable was the reported use of any NPS, excluding plant-based NPS (16%; 10% in 2023). Recent use of any phenethylamines was the most common NPS used, though remained low in 2024, at 6% (6% in 2023).

Other Drugs

Participants who had recently used non-prescribed benzodiazepines (26%) reported a median of five days of use in 2024, stable from 10 days of use in 2023. Eight per cent reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD in the six months prior to interview (15% in 2023). Two thirds (64%) had used non-prescribed e-cigarettes in the six months preceding interview (71% in 2023). Two fifths (42%) of participants who had recently used non-prescribed e-cigarettes reported daily use, stable from 46% reporting daily use in 2023.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

Polysubstance use and bingeing

Almost four fifths (86%; $n=87$) of the Brisbane/Gold Coast sample reported concurrent use of two or more drugs on the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes).

Two fifths (38%) of participants reported using stimulants or related drugs for 48 hours or more continuously without sleep in the six months preceding interview (35% in 2023).

Dependence, overdose and injecting

In 2024, the mean AUDIT total score was 13.6%, a significant change from 13.3% in 2023 ($p<0.001$). Eighty per cent of participants

obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT, indicative of hazardous use.

In 2024, 12% of those who reported recent ecstasy use obtained an SDS score of ≥ 3 , whilst 39% of participants reporting recent methamphetamine use obtained a score of ≥ 4 , indicating possible dependence on these substances.

Past year non-fatal stimulant overdose (20%; 17% in 2023) and non-fatal depressant overdose (28%; 31% in 2023) remained stable in 2024, relative to 2023.

Reported past month injecting drug use remained low ($n \leq 5$).

Drug checking and naloxone awareness

Twenty-four per cent 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, stable from 24% in 2023.

In 2024, three fifths (61%) reported that they had ever heard of naloxone, stable from 58% in 2023, of which 87% were able to correctly identify the purpose of naloxone (84% in 2023).

Sexual activity, mental health and health service access

Eighty per cent of the sample reported engaging in some form of sexual activity in the past four weeks, (87% in 2023), of which 79% reported using alcohol and/or other drugs prior to or while engaging in sexual activity. Almost one quarter (24%) reported having a test for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in the six months prior to interview (23% in 2023), whilst 54% had done so in their lifetime, stable from 61% in 2023.

Mental health remained stable in 2024, with 53% reporting experiencing a mental health problem in the six months preceding interview

(68% in 2023; $p=0.034$), with anxiety (77%) and depression (63%) most commonly reported. Seventeen per cent of the sample reported a score of ≥ 30 on the K10, indicating very high psychological distress. One quarter (27%) of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the past six months, most commonly from a GP (10%; 11% in 2023). Current drug treatment engagement remained low ($n \leq 5$).

Nineteen 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

Amongst those who had recently driven, one quarter (27%) reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol and half (52%) reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the prior six months.

Forty-one per cent of the sample reported 'any' crime in the past month. Property crime was the main form of criminal activity reported in 2024 at 27% (19% in 2023), followed by drug dealing at 22% (30% in 2023). Seventeen per cent reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest, stable from 17% in 2023.

Social networking applications were the most common way in which participants arranged the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview, with three quarters (75%) reporting this method (72% in 2023), followed by face to face (72%) (68% in 2023). The majority (85%) of participants reported obtaining illicit drugs from a friend/relative/partner/colleague in 2024, stable from 2023 (76%).