

Intro



People who inject drugs are an **ageing population**, with research indicating a **decline** in the number of new people who have started injecting drugs. Further, there have been **substantial shifts** in drug markets, with **methamphetamine overtaking heroin** as the drug of choice among samples of people who inject drugs. This could suggest that there have also been shifts in the drugs that people first inject, although this is likely to be **influenced by length of injecting history**. That is, **newer initiates** may be **more likely to report first injecting methamphetamine**, while those with **longer injecting histories** may be **more likely to report first injecting heroin**. At present, this remains largely unexplored.

Aims



The **aims** of this study are to investigate **potential shifts in drug first injected** within this population, and whether this varies depending on the **length of injecting history**.

Methods



Interviews were conducted with **people who regularly inject illicit drugs**, recruited from capital cities across Australia as part of the **Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)** between 2000 – 2024. Each year approximately 800 people who inject illicit drugs participates and are recruited in June/July through health services and word-of-mouth. **To be eligible**, participants must have been at least **18 years of age**, have **lived in a capital city** for 10 months out of 12 months preceding the interview and to have **injected illicit drugs at least six times** in the last six months. Since 2000, participants have been asked about their **age** and **age at first injection** (which will be used to calculate length of injecting history), as well as the **drug they first injected**.

Acknowledgements & information



The **Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)**, falling within the **Drug Trends program** of work, was supported by funding from the **Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care** under the Drug and Alcohol Program. We would like to **thank all the participants** who were interviewed for the IDRS in the present and in previous years. For more information, please email: j.uporova@unsw.edu.au

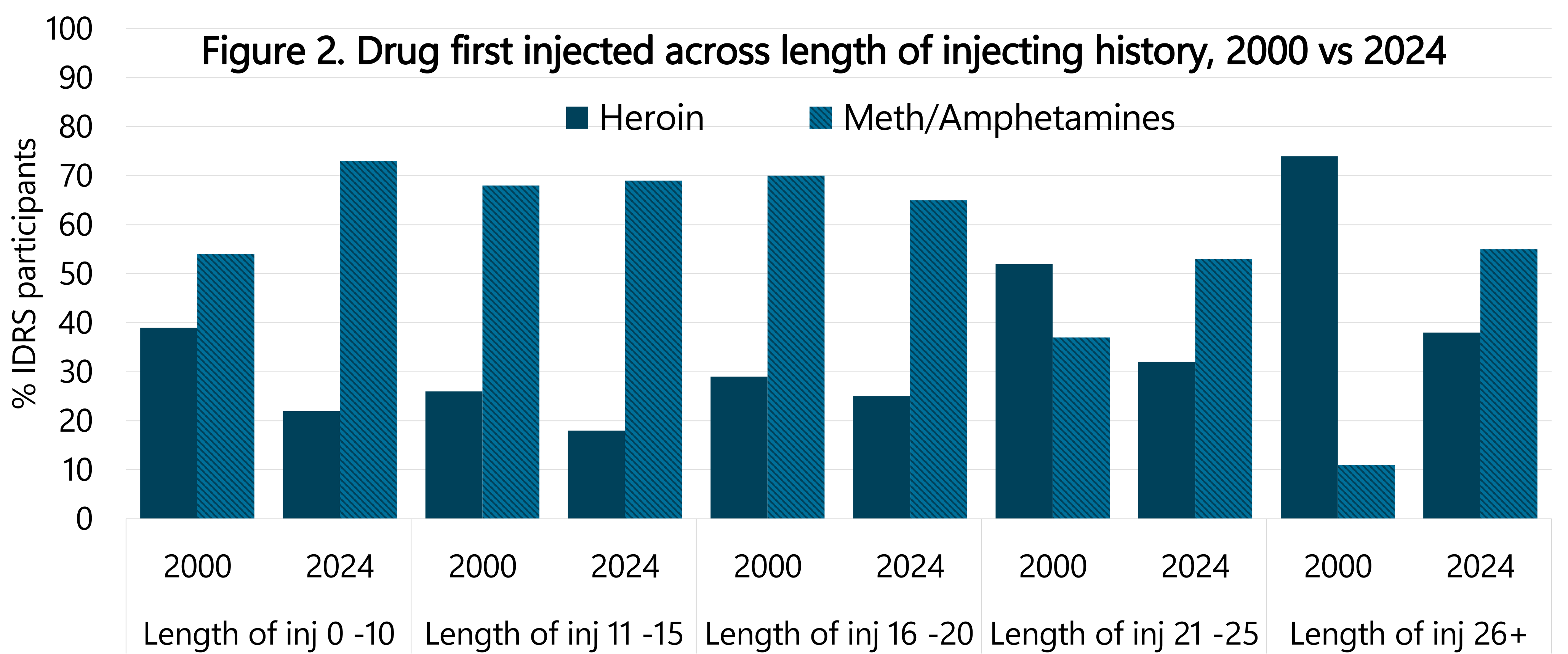
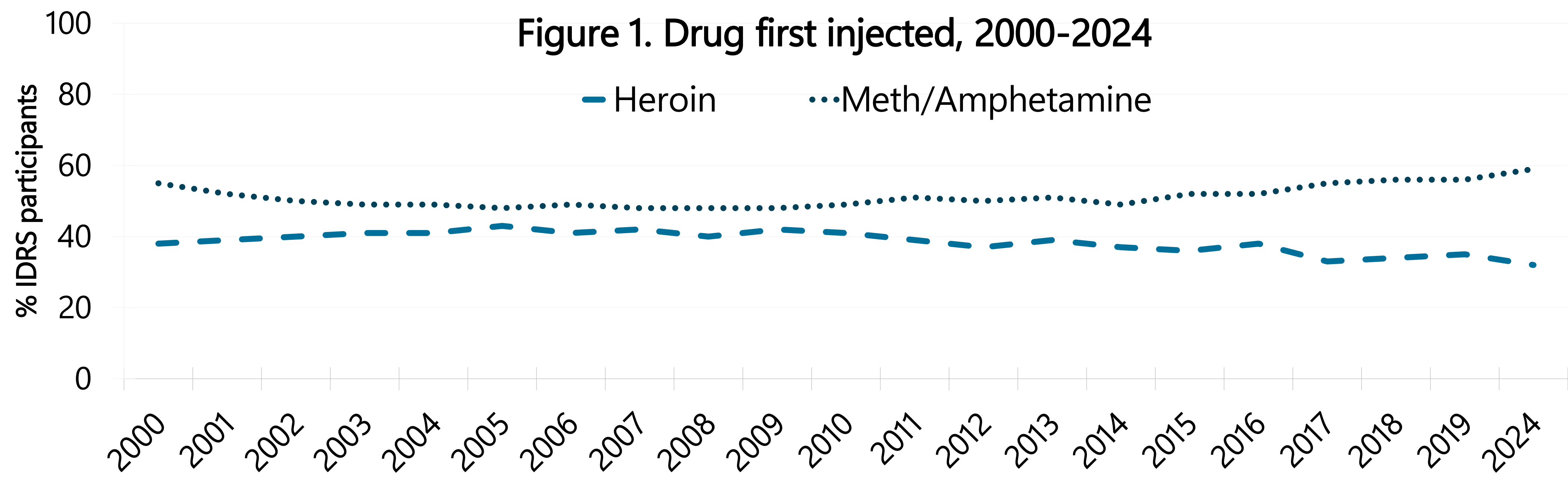
Results

The Difference is Research



Since 2000, the median age for **first injection** has been 18, except for 2001, 2002, and 2006, when it was 17.

The median duration of injecting in 2000 was **8 years** versus **27 years** in 2024. This reflects the ageing nature of the IDRS sample (i.e., median age of 28 in 2000 versus 47 in 2024).



The majority of participants reported that meth/amphetamine was the drug first injected in each year from 2000-2024 (figure 1).

This varies slightly depending on length of injecting history, although these variations have become less pronounced over time (figure 2).

Specifically, in 2000, meth/amphetamine was predominantly reported as the first drug injected among those who had been injecting ≤20 years, while heroin was the predominant first drug injected among those who had been injecting for 21+ years.

In 2024, the majority of participants reported that meth/amphetamine was the first drug injected regardless of length of injecting history.

Implications & conclusions

Research shows that the **initial experience** with injecting can **strongly influence** future **injecting practices** and **risk-taking behaviors**. Therefore, gaining insights into a person's first injecting experience is essential. Notably, the majority of participants reported that meth/amphetamine was the first drug injected each year from 2000 to 2024. This differed by length of injecting history in 2000, however by 2024, it was the leading choice for first-time injectors, regardless of length of injecting history. This trend supports existing evidence of **increased meth/amphetamine use** over the past couple of decades, and suggests that meth/amphetamine treatment and harm reduction efforts should be focused both on those who have recently initiated injecting drug use, as well as those with longer injecting histories.