

Population ageing and apparent decline in initiation of injecting drug use in Australia

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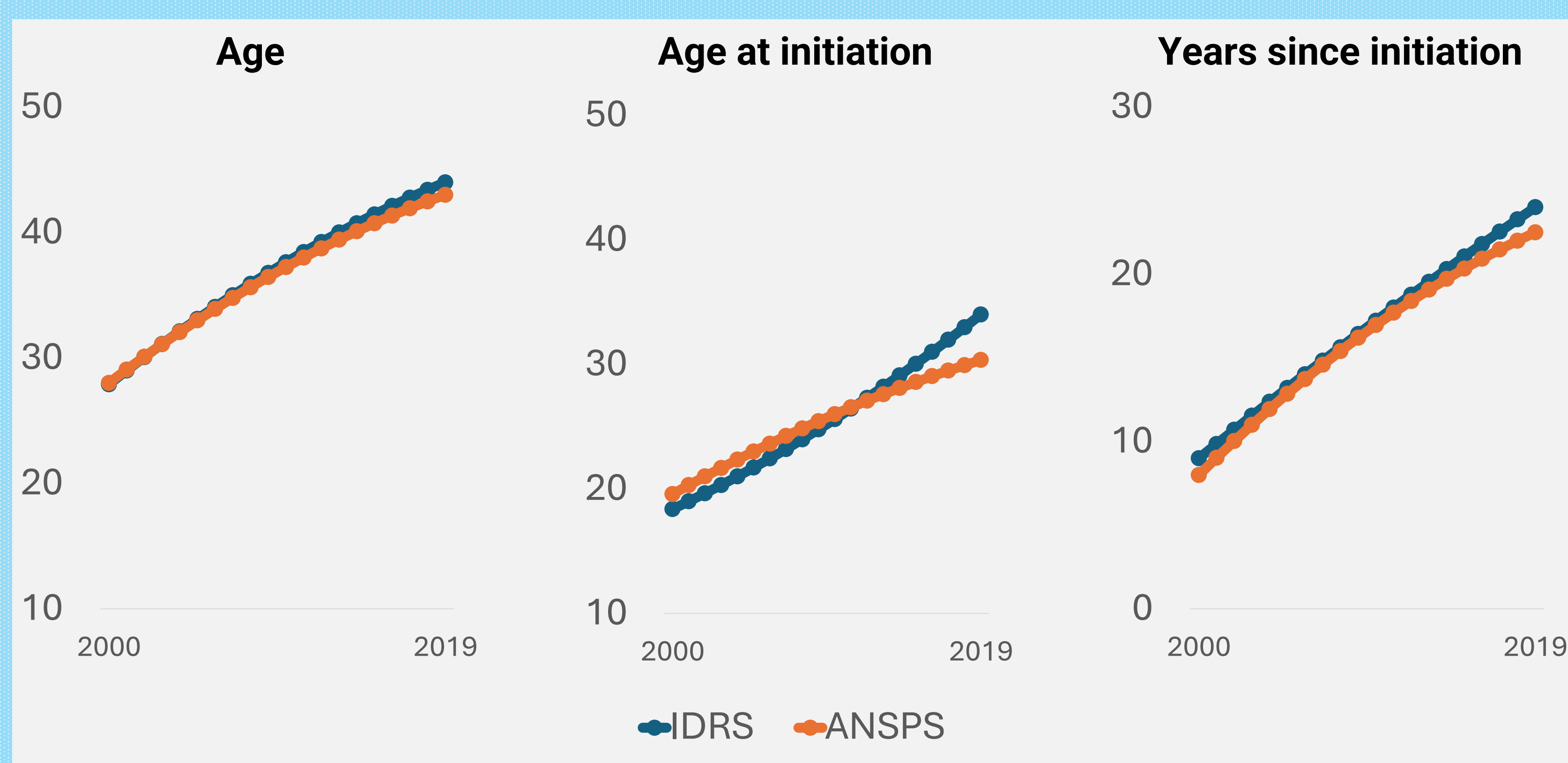
Objective

Among people who inject drugs in Australia, we examined temporal trends of **age**, **age at injecting drug use initiation**, **duration of injecting drug use**, and **year of injecting drug use initiation**. Based on Australian population size estimates of people who inject drugs, we **modelled the number of people injecting drugs for the first time** each year.

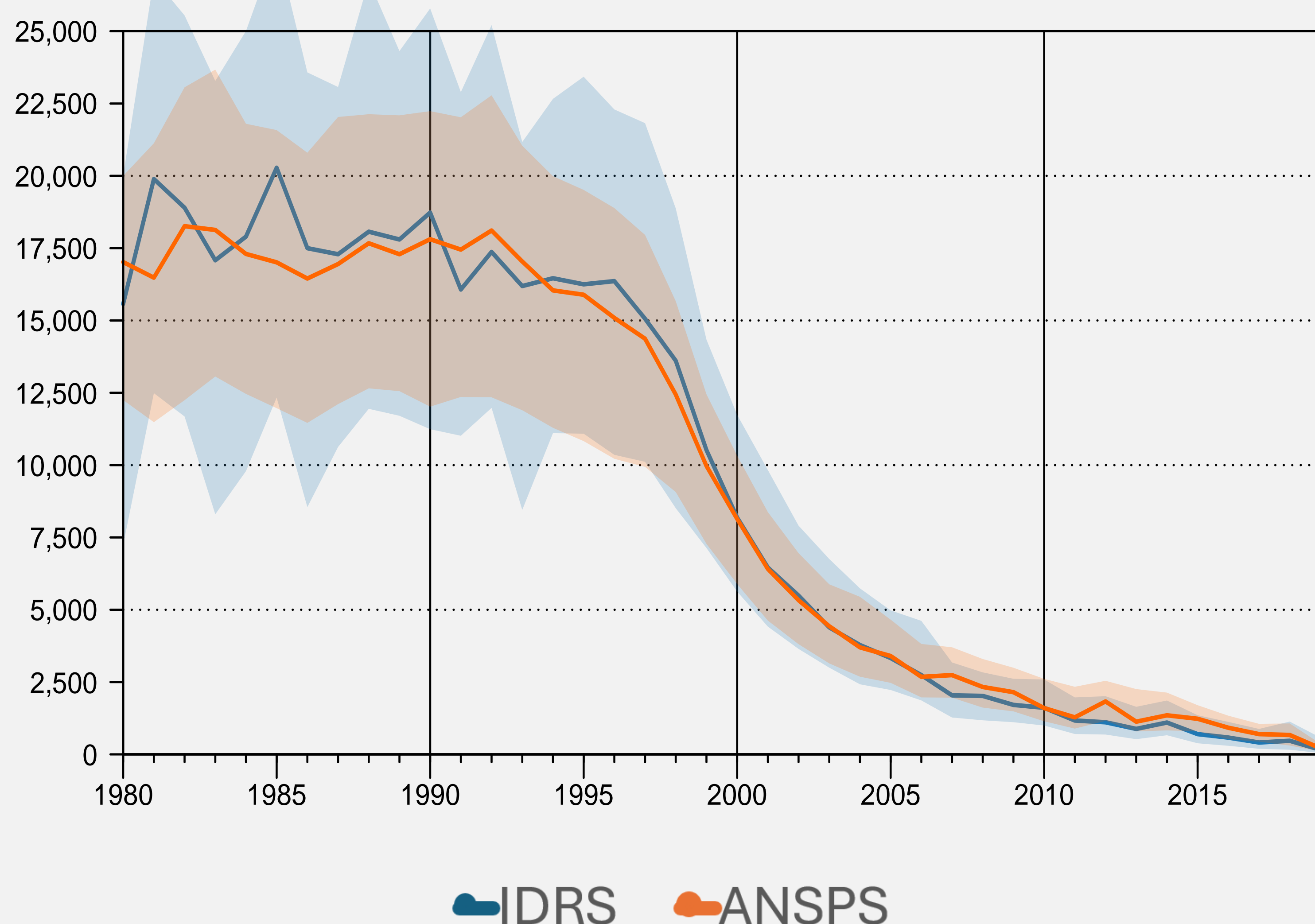
Data source

Twenty years (2000-2019) of repeat cross-sectional data from two national surveys with people who inject drugs in Australia – the **Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)** and the **Australian National Syringe Program Survey (ANSPS)**.

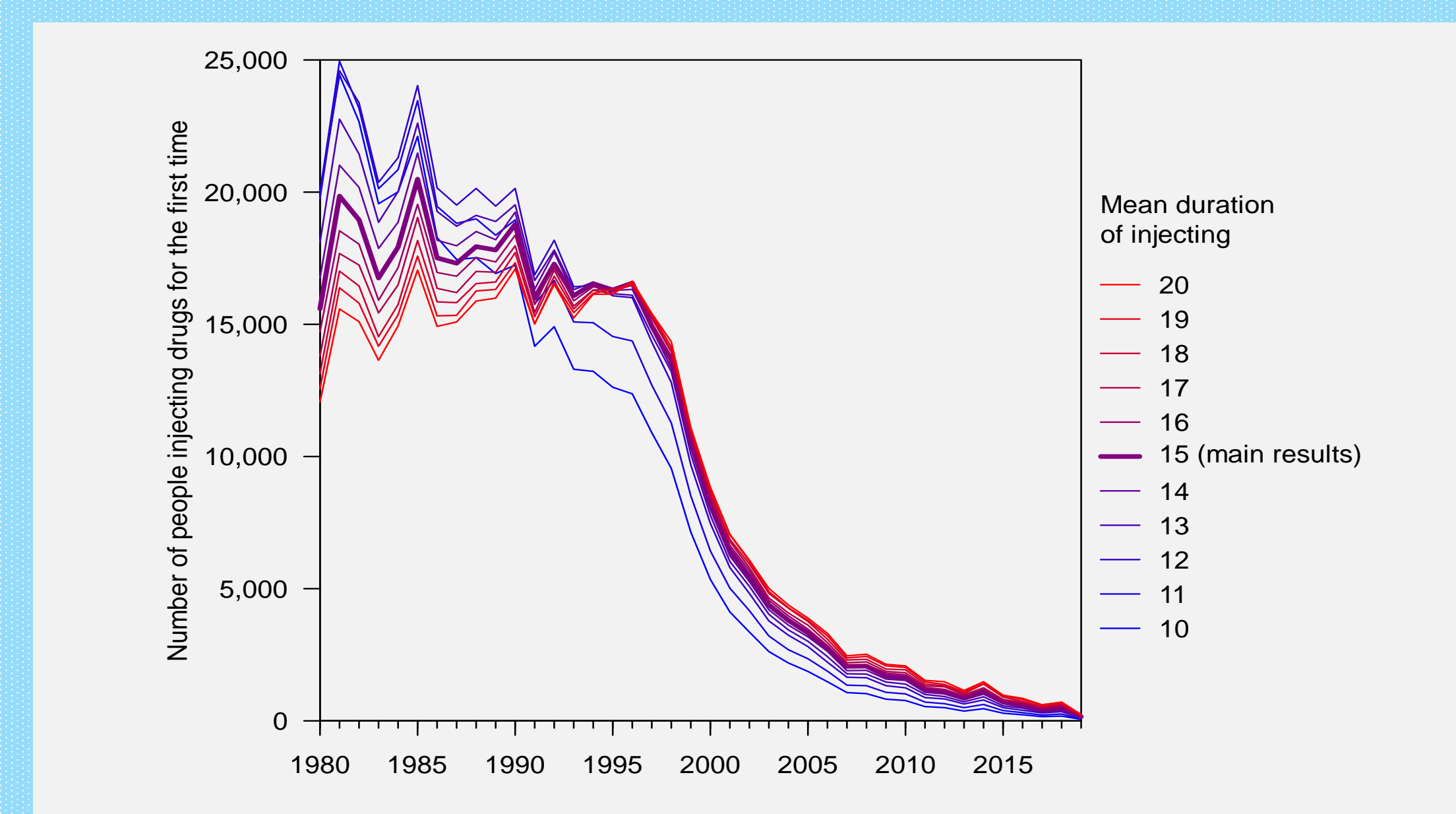
- The **median age** of IDRS and ANSP participants has **increased** over the survey period (left)
- The **age at injecting drug use initiation** has **increased** with calendar time (middle)
- **Time since injecting drug use initiation** has **increased** over the survey period (right)



Modelled number of people injecting drugs for the first time in Australia



There was a **sharp decline** in the **number of people injecting drugs for the first time** in the **mid 1990s**.



The **peak in initiating injecting drug use** prior to this decline was **sensitive to model assumptions**, ranging from the early 1980s to the early 1990s.

Implications

1. People who inject drugs in Australia are an **ageing population**.
2. It appears this is driven by a **sharp decline in the number of injecting drugs for the first time in the mid 1990s**, and a **cohort of people who began injecting in the 1980s or 90s and continue to inject**.
3. Increasing age and injecting drug use duration have **implications for health service delivery**, as they may be accompanied by an **increase in chronic health conditions** and **injecting-related injuries and diseases**.

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