

Executive Summary

The Adelaide South Australia (SA) 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 Adelaide, SA. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population.

Data were collected in 2023 from April-May. 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 2020-2023 samples, relative to previous years.

Sample Characteristics

The EDRS sample (N=101) recruited from Adelaide was similar to the sample in 2022 and in previous years. Gender remained stable between 2022 and 2023, with half (52%) identifying as male (50% in 2022), and participants had a median age of 26 years. Significantly fewer participants reported being current students in 2023 (29%; 44% in 2022; $p=0.033$), though most participants held tertiary qualifications (62%). One-quarter (27%) of the sample reported full-time employment and 37% reported part time/casual employment. Accommodation remained stable relative to 2022, with over half the sample (52%; 50% in 2022) living in a rental house/flat or residing with their parents/at their family home (32%; 28% in 2022) at the time of interview. Drug of choice and drug used most often remained stable between 2022 and 2023, with one-quarter (26%) nominating cannabis as their drug of choice (31% in 2022), and one quarter (26%) nominating alcohol as the drug used most often in the month preceding interview (33% in 2022).

Ecstasy

Recent use of any ecstasy in the six months prior to interview remained stable in 2023, relative to 2022 (84%; 74% in 2022; $p=0.092$). Capsules (53%) and pills (52%) remained the most commonly used forms of ecstasy, although recent use of ecstasy crystal increased significantly from 22% in 2022 to 39% in 2023 ($p=0.017$). Frequency of use remained stable for all four forms of ecstasy. The perceived availability of ecstasy crystal significantly changed between 2022 and 2023 ($p=0.022$), with almost two-fifths (38%) reporting that crystal was 'very easy' to obtain, an increase from 32% in 2022 and no participants reporting that crystal was 'very difficult' to obtain, a decrease from 20% reporting so in 2022. The perceived availability of ecstasy pills, capsules and powder remained stable in 2023, relative to 2022, as did the perceived purity of all forms of ecstasy.

Methamphetamine

Forty-six per cent of the Adelaide sample reported recent use of any methamphetamine, stable compared to 2022 (36%). Frequency of use also remained stable, with participants reporting a median of 24 days in 2023 (14 days in 2022). Whilst availability remained stable between 2022 and 2023 for both powder and crystal, the perceived purity of methamphetamine crystal changed significantly ($p<0.001$), with 56% reporting 'medium' purity in 2023, an increase from 10% in 2022.

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 15% in 2007 to 42% in 2023

(41% in 2022), signifying the second highest percentage of use since monitoring commenced.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has increased over the years of monitoring, with the second largest per cent reporting any recent use in 2023 (77%). Twelve per cent of those who had recently used cocaine reported weekly or more frequent use. Perceived purity and perceived availability for cocaine largely remained stable between 2022 and 2023.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

At least seven in ten participants have reported any recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products each year since 2003 (noting some changes in question wording over time). In 2023, 70% of the Adelaide sample reported recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products, the lowest percentage since monitoring commenced, albeit stable from 2022 (75%). The majority of those who had recently used non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products reported use of outdoor grown 'bush' cannabis (65%), with a decline in those reporting recent use of hydroponic cannabis (60%; 78% in 2022; $p=0.038$). Market characteristics of non-prescribed hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable between 2022 and 2023.

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of non-prescribed ketamine (37%; 29% in 2022), LSD (33%; 30% in 2022) and DMT (12%; 6% in 2022) remained stable in 2023, relative to 2022, as did frequency of use. Whilst market characteristics of ketamine and LSD remained stable between 2022 and 2023, the median price for one tab of LSD was the

highest median price for the second year running at \$25 per tab.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, has fluctuated over time, with 10% reporting recent use in 2023, stable from 2022 (12%). A similar percentage was observed for any NPS use, excluding plant-based NPS (9%; 7% in 2022). In 2023, the lowest percentages of use were observed since monitoring of NPS first commenced in 2010, with few participants ($n\leq 5$) reporting use of any individual NPS, with the exception of any 2C substance (7%; $n\leq 5$ in 2022).

Other Drugs

Participants who had recently used non-prescribed other benzodiazepines (25%) reported a median of nine days of use in 2023, a significant increase from four days of use in 2022 ($p=0.007$). One fifth (20%) of the Adelaide sample reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD in the six months prior to interview, a significant increase from 7% in 2022 ($p=0.009$), and the highest percentage reporting recent use since the commencement of monitoring. Two thirds (67%) of the Adelaide sample had used non-prescribed e-cigarettes in the six months preceding interview (62% in 2022), also the highest percentage observed since the commencement of monitoring. A median frequency of 180 days of non-prescribed e-cigarette use was reported in the six months prior to interview in 2023, a significant increase from 75 days in 2022 ($p=0.013$). Further, 51% of participants who had recently used non-prescribed e-cigarettes reported daily use, also a significant increase from 19% reporting daily use in 2022 ($p<0.001$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

- Almost four fifths (79%; n=80) of the Adelaide sample reported concurrent use of two or more drugs on the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes).
- Thirty-six 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, a significant increase from 22% in 2022 ($p=0.032$).
- Sixty per cent of participants obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT, indicative of hazardous use.
- Past year non-fatal stimulant overdose (17%; 16% in 2022) and non-fatal depressant overdose (23%; 23% in 2022) remained stable in 2023, relative to 2022.
- In 2023, almost three fifths (57%) reported that they had ever heard of naloxone, a significant increase relative to 2022 (36%; $p=0.001$), of which 91% were able to correctly identify the purpose of naloxone (92% in 2022).
- Reported past month injecting drug use remained low ($n \leq 5$), as did current drug treatment engagement (6%).
- In 2023, 18% of those who reported recent ecstasy use obtained an SDS score of 3 or more, whilst 52% of participants reporting recent methamphetamine use obtained a score of 4 or more, indicating possible dependence on these substances.
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of the sample reported engaging in some form of sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 22% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner. One-fifth (22%) of the sample reported having a HIV test in the six months preceding interview, and 35% reported having a sexual health check-up in the six months prior to interview.
- Mental health remained stable relative to 2022, with 67% (61% in 2022) reporting experiencing a mental health problem in the six months preceding interview, with depression (64%) and anxiety (62%) most commonly reported.
- One quarter (27%) of the sample reported very high psychological distress.
- One third (34%) of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview, and 29% of the sample reported experiencing stigma in any setting in the six months preceding interview.
- In 2023, 79% had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the past 12 months, with one third (35%) of participants testing positive to COVID-19 in the 12 months preceding interview.
- Amongst those who had recently driven, one third (32%) reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol and 49% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the prior six months.
- Thirty-six per cent of the sample reported 'any' crime in the past month. Drug dealing was the main form of criminal activity reported in 2023 and significantly increased, from 15% in 2022 to 27% ($p=0.046$). Eleven per cent of the sample reported having been arrested in the 12 months preceding interview, and 22% reported a drug-related encounter with police which did not result in charge or arrest.
- Face-to-face was the most common way in which participants arranged the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview, which significantly increased from 72% in 2022 to 85% in 2023 ($p=0.031$). The majority (88%) of participants reported obtaining illicit drugs from a friend/relative/partner/colleague in 2023, stable from 2022 (89%).