

Executive Summary

The South Australia (SA) IDRS sample is a sentinel group of people aged 18 years or older who injected illicit drugs at least once monthly in the preceding six months and resided in Adelaide, South Australia. Participants were recruited via advertisements in needle syringe programs and other harm reduction services, as well as via peer referral. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2020 from June-August: subsequent to COVID-19 restrictions on travel and gatherings in Australia. Interviews were delivered via phone rather than face-to-face. This should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020 sample, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The IDRS sample recruited from Adelaide, South Australia (SA) was consistent with the SA profile in previous years, whereby half (50%) the sample was male, with a mean age of 46 years. The majority (89%) of the sample was unemployed at the time of interview, a significant increase from 2019, and most of the sample (97%) received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview. Half (50%) the sample reported that methamphetamine was their drug of choice, and almost two-thirds (64%) reported that methamphetamine was the drug they had injected most often in the past month, a decrease relative to 2019 (81%). On the other hand, heroin as participants' drug of choice increased from 16% in 2019 to 37%. Heroin being the drug injected most often in the past month also increased in 2020 (32%; 16% in 2019).

COVID-19 Impact

This brief section was included to summarise data collected specifically related to COVID-19 and associated restrictions; subsequent sections reflect standard annual reporting. Seven per cent of the sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2, though no participants had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Since the

beginning of March 2020, most participants (90%) had practiced social distancing and 83% had undergone home isolation. Almost one-third (31%) of participants reported injecting drugs at a different frequency in the past month as compared to February 2020; of these participants, 74% reported reduced frequency of injection. Nevertheless, methamphetamine was reported by 61% of participants as the drug most injected in February 2020 (before COVID-19 restrictions), and by 64% in the month prior to interview. Nearly half of participants reported a perceived decrease in the use of heroin since March (49%), with 52% of these participants citing 'decreased availability' as the primary reason. Smaller numbers reported an increase in methamphetamine (32%) and alcohol (22%), mainly cited as due to 'boredom/less things to occupy time'. Most participants reported that crystal methamphetamine and heroin had increased in price since the beginning of March 2020 (92% and 83%, respectively). Furthermore, crystal methamphetamine and heroin were most commonly reported to have decreased in perceived purity (55% and 72%, respectively), and were also the drugs most commonly cited as having decreased in availability (49% and 70%, respectively). Over one-third (35%) of participants rated their mental health in the past four weeks as 'being worse' compared to February, and 54% reported 'similar'. Of those on opioid agonist treatment since March 2020 (n=31), 32% reported an increase in take-away doses, whilst 23% reported a decrease in their dose of medication. Whilst the majority of participants reported 'no change' when commenting on changes related to their injecting practices since March 2020, 13% reported an increase in re-using their own needles. Over one-quarter (26%) of participants reportedly sought information on how to reduce the risk of acquiring COVID-19 or avoiding impacts of restrictions on drug acquisition and use. The majority (85%) of participants reported engaging in various harm reduction behaviours

to reduce the risk of acquiring COVID-19 or impacts of COVID-19 restrictions while using or obtaining drugs.

Heroin

Recent (i.e., past six month) use of heroin has decreased amongst the SA sample since monitoring began, however, the percentage reporting recent use increased significantly, from 28% in 2019 to 47% in 2020. Seventy-two per cent of recent consumers reported weekly or more frequent use of heroin in 2020. The reported median price of heroin was \$100 for one cap, a significant increase from \$50 in 2019. Significantly less participants (21%) perceived heroin as being 'very easy' to obtain in 2020 (57% in 2019).

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has trended upwards over the past few years, with eight in ten participants (81%) reporting recent use in 2020. This was mostly driven by a continued increase in use of crystal methamphetamine (80%) – the most commonly used form since 2010. Notably, however, an increase in the use of base was observed from 2018 to 2020 (8% to 28%). Significantly more participants (42%) perceived purity of crystal methamphetamine to be 'low' in 2020, compared to 20% reporting 'low' purity in 2019. One-third (33%) perceived crystal to be 'very easy' to obtain in 2020, significantly less so than 78% in 2019.

Cocaine

Fourteen per cent of the SA sample had recently consumed cocaine, stable from 16% in 2019, on a median of one day (IQR=1-3), significantly less frequently than four days (IQR=2-6) in 2019.

Cannabis

Recent use of cannabis has remained fairly stable since 2014, with 67% reporting recent use in 2020. Over two-fifths (41%) of recent consumers reported using cannabis daily, a significant decrease relative to 2019 (59%). Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (83%), followed by bush cannabis (45%). Almost two-thirds (64%) of recent consumers perceived hydroponic

cannabis to be 'easy' to obtain, significantly more so than 39% reporting so in 2019.

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent non-prescribed use of pharmaceutical opioids such as morphine and oxycodone has declined over the past 5-15 years of monitoring, generally remaining low and stable in 2020.

Other Drugs

Low numbers (6%) reported recent NPS use. Non-prescribed benzodiazepine use was reported by 28% of participants in 2020 (18% in 2019). Alcohol and tobacco use have remained consistently high over the period of monitoring, with 65% and 90% reporting recent use of alcohol and tobacco, respectively, in 2020. Twelve per cent of recent alcohol consumers and 89% of recent tobacco consumers reported daily use.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Associated Behaviours

One-quarter (25%) of participants reported experiencing a non-fatal overdose in the 12 months preceding interview on any drug, with 13% reporting a past year non-fatal heroin overdose and 12% reporting a past year overdose including a stimulant(s) drug. Almost two-fifths (39%) of participants reported that they were aware of the take-home naloxone programs in 2020, significantly more so than 22% in 2019. Almost one-fifth (17%) of the SA sample reported having ever accessed naloxone. Over half the sample (54%) reported re-using their own needle in the past month, stable from 43% in 2019. Almost two-fifths (38%) of the sample reported being in drug treatment at the time of interview, a significant increase from 19% reporting current treatment in 2019. Self-reported past six month mental health problems remained stable (41%; 45% in 2019), as did past month criminal activity (41%; 39% in 2019).