

Executive summary

Sample characteristics

The IDRS sample in 2019 (N=902) predominantly identified as male (68%) with a mean age of 44, consistent with the national profile in previous years. Nearly half of the participants (44%) reported that their drug of choice was heroin. Methamphetamine and heroin were the drugs injected most often in the past month (42% and 40%, respectively).

Heroin

Recent (i.e., past six month) use of heroin remained stable in 2019 (55%) compared to 2018 (54%), although there was large jurisdictional variation (e.g., <5% of participants in the NT sample versus 85% in the VIC sample). Median frequency of use in 2019 was 90 days in the past six months. Consistent with 2018, 88% reported heroin to be 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain.

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has fluctuated over the years. In 2019, three in four participants (78%) reported recent use. This was driven by the use of crystal methamphetamine (76%), with 23% and 9% reporting recent use of powder and base forms, respectively. A lower median price was observed for one gram of crystal methamphetamine relative to the previous few years. Crystal methamphetamine was perceived to be easier to obtain than base or power methamphetamine.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine and frequency of use has generally decreased amongst the national sample since the beginning of monitoring (35% in 2001, 13% in 2019).

Cannabis

Recent use of cannabis remained largely stable in 2019, though a small decline in use has been observed since monitoring began in 2000, with three in four participants (74%)

reporting recent use in 2019. Nearly half of consumers (46%) reported using cannabis daily.

Pharmaceutical opioids

Non-prescribed use of most forms of pharmaceutical opioids has remained stable or significantly declined since monitoring of each opioid first began. In 2019, morphine was the most common pharmaceutical opioid used in a non-prescribed context (18%), with non-prescribed morphine use highest in the NT sample (40%). One in ten participants reported recent non-prescribed fentanyl use (9%) and non-prescribed codeine use (9%) in 2019.

New psychoactive substances (NPS) and other drugs

Use of NPS has remained low and stable over the period of monitoring, with one in ten participants (11%) reporting recent use. Use of 'new' drugs that mimic the effects of opioids were reported by 2% of all participants. Two in five participants (18%) reported recent non-prescribed pregabalin use, one in three (32%) non-prescribed benzodiazepine use and one in ten (9%) non-prescribed antipsychotic use.

Drug-related harms and other risks

One in five participants (21%) reported using a combination of opioids, benzodiazepines, and/or stimulants the day prior to interview. One in five participants (21%) reported overdosing on any drug in the preceding year, most commonly heroin. Nearly one in three (30%) had been trained in naloxone administration and 4% of the sample had been resuscitated with naloxone by somebody trained through the take-home naloxone program. In 2019, there was an increase of those reporting to have re-used their own needles (44%). Nearly half (46%) had completed a sexual health check-up in the past year. Self-reported mental health problems and criminal activity remained relatively high and stable (47% and 45%, respectively).
