

Victorian Drug Trends 2018

**Patterns of drug use
in the Victorian
Ecstasy and Related
Drug Reporting
System (EDRS)
Interviews**





Patterns of drug use in the Victorian Ecstasy and Related Drug Reporting System (EDRS) Interviews

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Please note that as with all statistical reports there is the potential for minor revisions to data in this report over its life. Please refer to the online version at [Drug Trends](#).

Please contact the Victorian Drug Trends team (paul.dietze@burnet.edu.au or cristal.hall@burnet.edu.au) or the research team at NDARC (drugtrends@unsw.edu.au) with any queries regarding this publication.

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Preface: Introduction and methods

The [Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System \(EDRS\)](#) is an ongoing illicit drug monitoring system which has been conducted in all states and territories of Australia since 2003, and forms part of the [Drug Trends](#) program of research at the [National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre \(NDARC\)](#). The EDRS provides a coordinated approach to monitoring the use, market features, and harms of ecstasy and related drugs. These drugs include those routinely used in the context of entertainment venues and other recreational locations including nightclubs, dance parties, pubs and music festivals, such as ecstasy, methamphetamine, cocaine, new psychoactive substances, ketamine and GHB.

The EDRS monitors emerging trends, providing data in a timely manner, rather than describing issues in extensive detail. It does this by studying a range of data sources, including data from annual surveys with people who use stimulant drugs (primarily ecstasy) regularly. This report focuses on the key findings from the annual survey component of the EDRS conducted in Melbourne, as an indication of trends in Victoria.

Methods

Full details of the [methods for the annual interviews](#) are available for download. In brief, participants are recruited primarily through a range of sources including paid Facebook advertising and snowballing. Participants need to: i) be at least 18 years of age, ii) have used ecstasy or psychostimulants on at least six occasions during the preceding six months; and iii) have been a resident of Melbourne in the preceding 12 months. Interviews took place in convenient public locations or at the Burnet Institute. Participants provide informed consent and are then administered a structured questionnaire by trained interviewers. Participants are then reimbursed \$40 for their time and expenses incurred. A total of 100 participants were interviewed between April–July 2018.

Sample characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the EDRS participants recruited in 2018 in Victoria were comparable to those of previous years (Table 1). The sample was predominantly heterosexual (74%) and well educated (32% with tertiary qualifications). More males (57%) were recruited than females (41%); 2% gave their gender as 'other'. The mean age was 23 years, 24% reported being employed full-time and the sample reported a median weekly income of \$400.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the EDRS interview sample, 2013-2018

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	N=100	N=100	N=100	N=100	N=100	N=100
Mean age (years)	26	25	24	24	21	23
Male gender (%)	63	69	59	47	57	57
Heterosexual (%)	85	89	84	85	79	74
Tertiary qualifications (%)	59	50	49	50	42	32
Employed full-time (%)	31	17	14	16	16	24
Unemployed (%)	16	14	16	14	17	14
Current drug treatment (%)	4	1	3	2	1	2

Additional Outputs

There are a range of other outputs from the EDRS triangulating key findings from the annual survey and other data sources, including [jurisdictional reports](#), [bulletins](#), and other resources available via the [Drug Trends webpage](#). This includes results from [Illicit Drug Reporting System \(IDRS\)](#), which focuses more so on the use of illicit drugs, including intravenous drug use.

Please contact the Victorian-based research team with any queries; to request additional analyses using these data; or to discuss the possibility of including items in future interviews: paul.dietze@burnet.edu.au or cristal.hall@burnet.edu.au.

Drug use history and patterns of current drug use

In 2018, participants from Melbourne were asked about recent (used in the last six months) use of a broad range of drug types, including alcohol and tobacco (Appendix 1). The drugs most likely to be reported as having been used recently were alcohol (98%), benzodiazepines (99%), cannabis (83%), ecstasy pills (76%) and capsules (86%), tobacco (78%) and nitrous oxide (69%).

Almost half (48%) of the 2018 EDRS sample (up, non-significantly, from 38% in 2017) reported recent use of synthetic analogues known as 'research chemicals', such as mephedrone and dimethyl tryptamine (DMT), or other synthetic drugs, such as 2C-B or benzylpiperazines (BZP), and synthetic cannabinoids (e.g., Kronik and K2). Data on these new psychoactive substances (NPS) were first collected in the 2010 EDRS. The remainder of this Summary Report covers the main drug classes that the 2018 EDRS sample reported using.

Ecstasy use

Ninety-five per cent of 2018 EDRS participants reported lifetime use of ecstasy capsules, 93% reported lifetime use of ecstasy pills, 74% MDMA crystals, and 68% MDMA powder.

Eighty-six per cent reported using ecstasy capsules in the previous six months, 76% pills, 57% crystal, and 45% powder.

Eighty-five per cent of recent users (previous six months) had swallowed ecstasy capsules in the previous six months, and 16% had snorted them.

Seventy-six per cent of recent users had swallowed ecstasy pills; 14% had snorted them, and 2% had shelved them.

Forty-one per cent of recent users had swallowed ecstasy MDMA crystals; 28% had snorted them, and 2% had smoked them.

Thirty-seven per cent of recent users had snorted ecstasy powder; 15% had swallowed it, and 1% had smoked it.

Ecstasy prices

EDRS participants reported paying a median of \$20 (IQR \$20-\$25) the last time they purchased an ecstasy pill. For ecstasy capsules, the median price was also \$20 (IQR \$20-\$25).

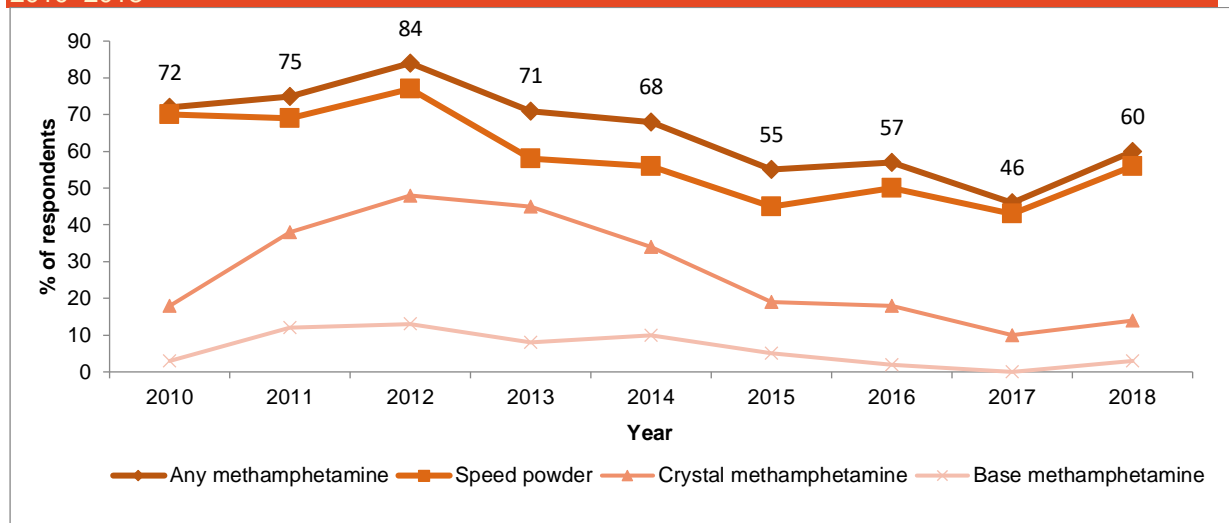
EDRS participants last paid a median of \$180 (IQR \$122.50-\$200) for ecstasy rock. Median price for ecstasy powder was \$22.50 per gram (IQR \$20-\$25).

Methamphetamine use

Seventy-nine per cent of 2018 EDRS participants reported lifetime use of some form of methamphetamine. Seventy-six per cent reported use of methamphetamine powder, 27% crystal, and 12% base.

Sixty per cent of 2018 EDRS participants reported use of one or more forms of methamphetamine (speed powder, base or crystal) in the previous six months. Recent use increased significantly between 2017 and 2018 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Recent use of any methamphetamine, speed powder, crystal and base methamphetamine, 2010–2018



Powder methamphetamine (speed)

Reports of recent use of methamphetamine powder (speed) increased non-significantly (56% in 2018 vs. 43% in 2017). The median quantity used during a typical episode of use was 0.25 gram (range 0.1–1 gram) (Table 2).

Table 2: Patterns of methamphetamine use among EDRS participants, 2013–2018

Methamphetamine powder	2013 (n=100)	2014 (n=100)	2015 (n=100)	2016 (n=100)	2017 (n=100)	2018 (n=100)
Ever used (%)	86	89	78	85	70	76
Used preceding 6 months (%)	58	56	45	50	43	56
Median days used last 6 months* (range)	4 (1-80)	4 (1-180)	2 (1-40)	3 (1-50)	3 (1-180)	3 (1-120)
Median quantities used* (grams)	0.5 (0.05-3.5)** n=43	0.4 (0.1-2) n=11	0.2 (0.025-1) n=39	0.2 (0.05-0.5) n=26	0.35 (0.1-14) n=9	0.25 (0.1–1) n=60

* Among those who reported using speed powder in the previous six months

Powder methamphetamine prices

EDRS participants reported paying a median of \$200 (IQR \$180–\$212.50) the last time they purchased a gram of methamphetamine powder (speed), and a median of \$25 (IQR \$25–\$43.75) the last time they purchased a point.

Crystal methamphetamine (ice)

In 2018, the percentage of the EDRS sample from Melbourne reporting recent crystal methamphetamine (ice) was largely the same as found in 2017 (14% vs 10% in 2017) (Table 3). Median days of use in the last six months increased from the 2017 level, but remains below the 15 days recorded in 2016.

Table 3: Patterns of crystal methamphetamine use among EDRS participants, 2013–2018

Crystal methamphetamine	2013 (n=100)	2014 (n=100)	2015 (n=100)	2016 (n=100)	2017 (n=100)	2018 (n=100)
Ever used (%)	62	42	33	30	18	27
Used last six months (%)	45	34	19	18	10	14
Median days used last 6 months* (range)	10 (1-170) n=45	8 (1-120) n=34	10 (1-96) n=19	15 (1-120) n=18	2.5 (1-100) n=10	8 (2-100) n=14

* Among those who used crystal methamphetamine in the last 6 months

Crystal methamphetamine prices

EDRS participants reported paying a median of \$300 (IQR \$205–\$345) the last time they purchased a gram of crystal methamphetamine (ice), and a median of \$30 (IQR \$25–\$50) the last time they purchased a point.

Cocaine use

Ninety-four per cent of 2018 EDRS participants reported ever using cocaine.

A significantly higher percentage of participants reported having used cocaine in the preceding six months in 2018 (83%) than in 2017 (53%) ($p < 0.001$) (Table 4). In 2018, EDRS participants reported using cocaine on a median of four days (range 1-48), and used a median of half a gram (5 points, range 0.2–5 grams) during a typical episode of use.

Table 4: Patterns of cocaine use among EDRS participants, 2013–2018

Cocaine	2013 (n=100)	2014 (n=100)	2015 (n=100)	2016 (n=100)	2017 (n=100)	2018 (n=100)
Ever used %	78	84	71	81	70	94
Used last six months %	46	58	46	56	53	83
Median days used last 6 months* (range)	2 (1-26)	3 (1-36)	2.5 (1-30)	2 (1-34)	3 (1-20)	4 (1-48)
Median quantities used (grams)*	0.5	1	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.5
Typical (range)	(0.05-3) n=33	(0.03-1.5) n=23	(0.05-1) n=34	(0.1-1) n=17	(0.1-2) n=11	(0.2-5) n=23

* Among those who used cocaine in the last six months

Cocaine prices

EDRS participants reported paying a median of \$300 (IQR \$300–\$350) the last time they purchased a gram of cocaine.

Ketamine use

Ninety-five per cent of 2018 EDRS participants reported ever using ketamine.

In 2018 the majority (89%) of the EDRS sample reported use of ketamine in the preceding six months (Table 5). Similar to 2017, recent ketamine users reported a median of 6 days use over the past six months, using a median of 0.3 grams (range 0.1–2 grams). Almost all (99%) recent ketamine users reported snorting it, with swallowing (6%), smoking (2%) and shelving (1%) also reported.

Table 5: Patterns of ketamine use among EDRS participants, 2013–2018

Ketamine	2013 (n=100)	2014 (n=100)	2015 (n=100)	2016 (n=100)	2017 (n=100)	2018 (n=100)
Ever used (%)	76	82	73	84	83	95
Used last 6 months (%)	46	63	50	72	80	89
Median days used last 6 months* (range)	4 (1-48)	3 (1-70)	4 (1-35)	5 (1-72)	5 (1-60)	6 (1-96)

* Among those who used ketamine in the last 6 months

Ketamine prices

EDRS participants reported paying a median of \$200 (IQR \$170–\$200) the last time they purchased a gram of ketamine.

GHB use

Thirty-one per cent of 2018 EDRS participants reported ever using GHB.

Recent use of GHB was reported by 14% of respondents interviewed in 2018, comparable to reported rates of use in 2017 and 2016. Respondents reported recent GHB use on a median of three days (range 1–48 days) in the preceding six months, and five days in 2017 (Table 6).

Table 6: Patterns of GHB use among EDRS participants, 2013–2018

GHB	2013 (n=100)	2014 (n=100)	2015 (n=100)	2016 (n=100)	2017 (n=100)	2018 (n=100)
Ever used (%)	30	34	23	26	17	31
Used last six months (%)	14	13	9	14	15	14
Median days (range) used last 6 months*	2 (1-180)	10 (1-40)	3 (1-25)	4.5 (1-50)	5 (1-100)	3 (2-5)

* Among those who used GHB in the last six months

GHB prices

EDRS participants paid a median of \$3 (IQR \$2.25–\$3.38) the last time they purchased a millilitre of GHB.

Cannabis use

Ninety-seven per cent of 2018 EDRS participants reported ever using cannabis.

Cannabis use remains common among EDRS participants, with 93% of the 2018 sample reporting use within the last six months (Table 7). Respondents reported using cannabis on a median of 24 days in the last six months. In 2018, the percentage of the sample reporting daily cannabis consumption in the preceding six months fell back to the level of 2016 (10% vs 9%), down from a higher figure of 21% in 2017.

Most recent cannabis users reported smoking it (93%), while 11% reported swallowing and 10% reported inhaling or vaporising it. Those who were able to quantify the amount used the last time they smoked cannabis in grams (n=6) reported using a median of 2.5 grams (range 1–5 grams).

Table 2: Patterns of cannabis use among EDRS participants, 2013–2018

Cannabis	2013 (n=100)	2014 (n=100)	2015 (n=100)	2016 (n=100)	2017 (n=100)	2018 (n=100)
Ever used %	100	100	98	100	98	97
Used last six months %	87	81	90	86	88	93
Median days (range) used last 6 months*	50 (1-180)	24 (1-180)	65 (1-180)	22 (1-180)	30 (1-180)	24 (1-180)

* Among those who used cannabis in the last six months

Cannabis prices

Ten EDRS participants paid a median of \$15 (IQR \$15–\$17.75) the last time they purchased a gram of hydro cannabis, and six participants paid a median of \$275 (IQR \$246.25–\$305) the last time they purchased an ounce.

Other drug use

Benzodiazepines

Participants reported using a range of other drugs. The most notable change was in relation to non-prescribed benzodiazepine use in the preceding six months, reported by 99% of participants in 2018, significantly more than the 47% for both licit and illicit use recorded in 2017 ($p < 0.001$). Recent users reported use on a median of five days (1–100 days) during the preceding six months.

New Psychoactive Substances

Forty-eight per cent of participants reported NPS use in the past six months, but only infrequently across the different types of NPS. The most commonly reported NPS used in the previous six months were DMT (n=29), 2C-B (n=8) and methoxetamine (n=6).

Psilocybin (magic mushrooms)

In 2017, 38% of the sample reported using Psilocybin or magic mushrooms in the preceding six months (vs 36% in 2017). The median number of days used in the preceding six months halved (1 day, range 1-5 days vs. 2 days, range 1–24 days in 2017).

MDA (3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine)

In 2018, methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA) use in the preceding six months was identical to 2017 (16%). MDA use remained infrequent, occurring on a median of two days in the preceding six months (range 1–35 days).

Nitrous oxide

In 2018 the proportion of EDRS participants in Melbourne reporting recent use was 69% (vs. 73% in 2016).

Amyl nitrite

In 2018, the proportion of EDRS participants who reported use of amyl nitrite in the last six months was about the same as in 2017 (46% and 44% respectively). Amyl nitrite was used infrequently, with respondents reporting using on a median of four days (range 1–90 days) in the preceding six months.

Pharmaceutical stimulants

Recent illicit use of any pharmaceutical stimulants (e.g. dexamphetamine; methylphenidate or Ritalin) was reported by 37% of participants in 2018, lower than the figure in 2017 (48%). Use was infrequent, with a median of five days of use in the preceding six months (range 1–72 days).

Heroin

Reported use of heroin was similar in 2018 (3%) and 2017 (2%). The median frequency of use was two days in the preceding six months (range 1–2 days).

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Research Team

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), UNSW Australia, coordinated the EDRS. The following researchers and research institutions contributed to EDRS 2018:

- Ms Rachel Sutherland, Ms Antonia Karlsson, Ms Julia Uporova, Ms Daisy Gibbs, Professor Louisa Degenhardt, Professor Michael Farrell, Professor Alison Ritter and Dr Amy Peacock, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales;
- Ms Amy Kirwan and Professor Paul Dietze, Burnet Institute Victoria;
- Ms Ellie Bucher and Associate Professor Raimondo Bruno, School of Medicine, University of Tasmania;
- Ms Jodie Grigg and Professor Simon Lenton, National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Western Australia; and
- Dr Caroline Salom and Professor Rosa Alati, School of Public Health, The University of Queensland.

We would like to thank past and present members of the research team.

Participants

We would like to thank all the participants who were interviewed for the EDRS participant survey component of the present and previous years of the EDRS.

Contributors

We thank all the individuals who assisted with the collection and input of data at a jurisdictional and national level.

Appendix 1: Recent (and lifetime pre-2018) drug use of EDRS participants, 2013–2018

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)
Alcohol						
Ever used (%)	100	100	100	100	100	99
Used last 6 months (%)	93	99	96	97	96	98
Cannabis						
Ever used (%)	100	100	98	100	98	97
Used last 6 months (%)	87	81	90	86	88	83
Tobacco						
Ever used (%)	92	98	96	95	95	88
Used last 6 months (%)	82	83	87	88	86	78
Ecstasy pill						
Ever used (%)	97	100	98	98	96	93
Used last 6 months (%)	86	90	84	91	83	76
Ecstasy capsule						
Ever used (%)	85	83	90	93	94	95
Used last 6 months (%)	67	66	76	84	90	86
Ecstasy powder						
Ever used (%)	72	61	66	53	52	68
Used last 6 months (%)	51	43	46	27	34	45
Ecstasy crystal*						
Ever used (%)	58	80	59	73	52	74
Used last 6 months (%)	49	64	54	59	43	57
Methamphetamine powder (speed)						
Ever used (%)	86	89	78	85	70	76
Used last 6 months (%)	58	56	45	50	43	56
Methamphetamine base (base)						
Ever used (%)	30	31	22	21	14	12
Used last 6 months (%)	8	10	5	2	0	3
Crystal methamphetamine (ice/crystal)						
Ever used (%)	62	42	33	30	18	27
Used last 6 months (%)	45	34	19	18	10	14
Pharmaceutical stimulants (licit & illicit)						
Ever used (%)	65	65	54	55	46	40
Used last 6 months (%)	30	32	33	34	26	37 [†]
Cocaine						
Ever used (%)	78	84	71	81	70	94

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)	(N=100)
Used last 6 months (%)	46	58	46	56	53	53
LSD						
Ever used %	88	77	85	70	72	85
Used last 6 months %	52	49	46	52	52	-
MDA						
Ever used (%)	31	33	35	30	29	26
Used last 6 months (%)	13	21	20	12	16	16
Ketamine						
Ever used %	76	82	73	84	83	95
Used last 6 months %	46	63	50	72	80	-
GHB						
Ever used (%)	30	34	23	26	17	31
Used last 6 months (%)	14	13	9	14	15	14
Amyl nitrite						
Ever used (%)	69	71	67	60	61	61
Used last 6 months (%)	23	34	28	36	44	42
Nitrous oxide						
Ever used (%)	72	70	79	78	80	87
Used last 6 months (%)	48	53	53	62	73	69
Psilocybin mushrooms						
Ever used (%)	85	78	81	70	66	75
Used last 6 months (%)	38	25	40	29	36	38
Heroin						
Ever used (%)	25	15	11	15	7	6
Used last 6 months (%)	10	6	5	7	2	3
Benzodiazepines (illicit & licit)						
Ever used (%)	80	72	59	66	60	23
Used last 6 months (%)	53	59	34	52	47	99 [†]
Other opioids (illicit & licit)						
Ever used (%)	41	60	42	46	36	-
Used last 6 months (%)	21	27	24	28	21	-
Antidepressants (illicit & licit)						
Ever used (%)	35	26	23	7**	3	0
Used last 6 months (%)	10	7	8	1**	1	0

Source: EDRS participant interviews

* Ecstasy crystal questions introduced in 2013; **Licit antidepressants not inc. in 2016 & 2017; † non-prescribed only