

Executive Summary

The Western Australia (WA) EDRS sample is a sentinel group of people aged 18 years and over who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited via social media, advertisements on websites and via word-of-mouth in Perth, WA. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2021 from May-July. Interviews were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, due to COVID-19 restrictions being imposed throughout the data collection period. This methodological change, which also impacted interview modality in 2020, should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020 and 2021 sample, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The WA EDRS sample (N=100) recruited from Perth were predominantly young (median=22, IQR=19-26), male (64%), well-educated (54% holding post-school qualification(s)) and living with their parents/at their family home (46%) or in a rented house (46%). The sample was slightly older in 2021 compared to 2020 ($p=0.008$), reflective of the age criterion change from ≥ 16 years old to ≥ 18 years old in 2021. Ecstasy and cannabis continued to be the drugs of choice (27% and 22%, respectively).

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. Almost two-fifths (37%) of the WA sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2, though no participants had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Six per cent of the sample had received at least one-dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the time of interview, and the majority (79%) reported that they were 'not at all' worried about contracting COVID-19.

Ecstasy

While recent (past 6 month) use of ecstasy capsules significantly decreased in 2021 (67%;

83% in 2020; $p=0.014$), they remained the most popular form, followed closely by crystal (63%; 61% in 2020). Meanwhile, there was a non-significant increase in reported use of traditional pressed pills in 2021 (37%; 25% in 2020), breaking a steady declining trend since 2015. The median days of any ecstasy use significantly declined from 12 days in 2020 to 6 days in 2021 ($p<0.001$). A significant difference was also observed in the perceived availability and purity of crystal and capsule forms of ecstasy, with more participants reporting access as 'difficult' and purity as 'low' in 2021. Finally, while price has been steadily declining in recent years, the median price of various forms of ecstasy significantly increased in 2021, specifically, pills (\$25; \$20 in 2020; $p=0.011$), capsules (\$28; \$20 in 2020; $p<0.001$) and crystal (per gram) (\$250; \$125 in 2020; $p<0.001$)

Methamphetamine

While recent (past six month) use of methamphetamine has declined among the WA sample since the commencement of monitoring in 2003, it has remained stable in recent years (12% in 2020; 13% in 2021). In recent years, crystal has been the main form of methamphetamine reportedly used. While a significant increase was observed in the frequency of recent crystal methamphetamine use ($p=0.013$) in 2021, very few participants (≤ 5) reported weekly or more frequent use. Very few ($n<10$) were able to comment on market trends for crystal methamphetamine.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has increased since monitoring began, and this trend continued in 2021 (59% in 2021; 48% in 2020). While the increase in the proportion reporting recent use was not significant, there was a significant increase in the frequency of cocaine use in the preceding six months (median of 5 days in 2021; 3 days in 2020; $p=0.008$). However, very few (≤ 5) reported weekly or more frequent use. Consistent with previous years, most participants perceived cocaine as 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain and perceptions of purity remained mixed. However, the price

significantly increased to \$400 in 2021 (\$350 in 2020; $p=0.001$).

Cannabis

Each year since monitoring began, at least three-in-four participants have reported recent use of cannabis. In 2021, 82% reported recent use (87% in 2020), and among these, 21% reported daily use. In 2021, a significant increase was observed in the percentage reporting swallowing and inhaling/vaporising (48% and 20%, respectively). Consistent with past years, most (88%) reported that hydroponic cannabis was 'easy' or 'very easy' to access. While the price per gram of hydroponic cannabis remained stable at \$25, the price per ounce significantly increased to \$400 (\$350 in 2020; $p=0.012$).

Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Although no significant differences were observed between 2020 and 2021, WA observed the highest percentage of participants reporting recent ketamine, LSD and DMT use since data collection began. In 2021, 41% reported ketamine use in the preceding six months (31% in 2020), 55% reported LSD use (43% in 2020) and 27% reported DMT use (20% in 2020). However, frequency of recent use remained low for all three drugs (median of 2 days). The price per tab of LSD remained stable at \$25, and while not significant, less reported access of LSD as 'difficult'. A small (but increasing) proportion have been able to comment on market trends of ketamine. Thus, results for ketamine should be interpreted with caution. Data on market trends for DMT was not collected.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

NPS use among the WA sample has fluctuated over time. One-tenth (10%) of participants reported recent use of any NPS (including plant-based NPS) in 2021, stable from 2020 (9%).

Other Drugs

In 2021, recent use of hallucinogenic mushrooms significantly increased (47%; 23% in 2020; $p=0.001$), although frequency of recent use remained low (2 days median use). Recent pharmaceutical stimulant use

remained stable (77%; 66% in 2020); as did frequency of recent use (median of 10 days; 6 days in 2020). Meanwhile, the proportion reporting recent use of nitrous oxide significantly declined (45%; 62% in 2020; $p=0.021$), while amyl nitrite remained stable (21%; 33% in 2020). Recent tobacco use remained stable (72%; 77% in 2020), but e-cigarette use significantly increased (55%; 31% in 2020; $p=0.001$). Benzodiazepine, codeine and other pharmaceutical opioid use remained stable between 2020 and 2021 (37%; 36% in 2020; 18%; 19% in 2020; and 9%; 6% in 2020, respectively).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Associated Behaviours

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 82% of the WA sample in 2021 reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (including alcohol, tobacco and prescription medicines). Three-quarters (77%) of the sample obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT, indicative of hazardous alcohol use. Sixteen per cent reported a non-fatal stimulant overdose, and 17% reported a non-fatal depressant overdose in the past year. The per cent reporting injecting drug use remained low, as did the number currently in drug treatment. The majority of the sample (86%) reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 10% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner. Two-thirds of the sample (66%) self-reported experiencing a mental health problem in the preceding six months, a significant increase from 49% in 2020 ($p=0.026$), most commonly depression and anxiety. Almost one-third (31%) reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol (in the preceding six months) and two-fifths (44%) reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug. About two-fifths (38%) reported some form of recent crime, with drug dealing and property crime most common. The majority of participants (97%) reported receiving their illicit drugs face-to-face on any occasion in the preceding 12 months, whilst 10% reported receiving them in the post.