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Key findings

- Heroin remained the most commonly reported drug of choice for injecting drug user (IDU) participants, and reports of use have remained stable since 2006. There remain large jurisdictional differences in markets (price, purity and availability) and use patterns of heroin.
- Use of any form of methamphetamine (speed, base and ice/crystal) varied across the jurisdictions. Nationally, frequency of use among users of any form of methamphetamine (speed, base and/or ice/crystal), including the proportion of daily users, remained stable. Again, as with the majority of drugs investigated by the IDRS, jurisdictional variations were seen in both prevalence and frequency of use. Methamphetamine remained readily available to this group and reports on price and perceived purity varied by jurisdiction.
- NSW remained the only jurisdiction where sizeable numbers of participants reported recent cocaine use and were able to provide information on price, purity and availability. Use of cocaine in Sydney, NSW was stable, while the frequency of use was higher. In other jurisdictions it remained low and sporadic.
- The cannabis market (price, perceived potency and availability) remained stable. The use of cannabis by participants remained common and frequency of use among users remained high, usually daily or near-daily.
- Extra-medical use and injection of pharmaceutical preparations continued to occur, with jurisdictional differences in patterns of use observed.

An overview of the 2009 IDRS: the Injecting Drug User survey preliminary findings

Introduction

The preliminary key findings of the 2009 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) injecting drug user (IDU) surveys are presented in this bulletin. The IDRS monitors emerging trends in the use, price, purity and availability of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. In addition to a survey of regular injecting drug users (IDU), the annual data collection also includes a survey of key experts (KE) who are professionals in the field of illicit drugs and the analysis of existing indicator data on drug-related issues. This is the ninth year that all three components of the IDRS were conducted in every state and territory in Australia.

This bulletin contains a summary of the main preliminary findings from the IDU survey component of the 2009 national IDRS, in which 881 participants were recruited (NSW n=152; VIC n=150; QLD n=80; NT n=99; ACT, TAS, WA and SA, n=100 each).

Regular injecting drug users (aka people who inject drugs, or PWID) were recruited as they are considered a sentinel group able to provide information on a range of illicit drug trends and related issues. The information from the IDU survey is therefore not representative of illicit drug use in the general population, and is not representative of other illicit drug users (e.g. in other geographical areas, occasional users, etc), but it is indicative of emerging trends that may warrant further monitoring and/or investigation.

Drug trends in this publication are cited by state/territory, although they represent trends in the capital city of each jurisdiction. Further details, including key expert and indicator data, will be published in the national and jurisdictional IDRS *Drug Trends* annual reports, which will be available through NDARC in early 2010. Previous years' findings are available in national and jurisdictional reports on the NDARC website, www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au (click on 'Drug Trends').

Notes on interpretation: 'Prevalence' data in this bulletin refer to the proportion of participants who had used the drug on at least one occasion in the last six months. 'Frequency' data refer to the number of days on which those participants had recently used the drug. 'Recent' refers to the six months preceding interview. Furthermore, due to rounding of percentages, some columns may not add to 100%.

National Overview

Heroin

Heroin remained the most commonly reported drug of choice for IDU participants (52%). In 2009, over half (64%) of the national sample reported use in the preceding six months on a median of 72 days (i.e. around three times a week). Daily use was reported among 15% of the national sample. Compared to 2008, a larger proportion of participants reported recent heroin use (i.e. on one occasion or more in the preceding six months) across several jurisdictions, most noticeably in NSW, SA, WA and TAS while the ACT and VIC reported a drop in recent heroin use and the NT and QLD remained stable. Recent use was most commonly reported in NSW, VIC and the ACT. While recent heroin use in TAS remained low (12%). The frequency of heroin use was highest in NSW, WA and QLD, while the other states reported lower levels of frequency. The price of a gram or cap of heroin remained relatively stable across jurisdictions except in SA and the NT where the price was higher (note small numbers reporting). The price of a cap of heroin was around \$50. Heroin per gram was cheapest in the NT, VIC, NSW and the ACT. Availability appeared to be relatively stable in all jurisdictions. Purity varied with the majority of jurisdictions reporting purity as either 'low' or 'medium'.

Methamphetamine

The IDRS distinguishes between the three main forms of methamphetamine – methamphetamine powder ('speed'); methamphetamine base ('base'); and crystalline methamphetamine ('crystal' or 'ice'). It also collects use data on liquid methamphetamine; however as use remains low, further details are not reported here. In 2009, 21% participants nominated methamphetamine as their drug of choice, a figure which has remained stable over the past several years. Nationally, the recent use of speed powder remained stable, while the recent use of base was higher and the recent use of ice was lower than in 2008. However, the recent use of each form varied among jurisdictions. Nationally, the frequency of use of any form of methamphetamine (by users) was stable in 2009 (18 days in 2008, 20 days in 2009). Each form was reported on a median of 12 days or less each. The proportion of all participants who reported daily methamphetamine use was stable at 3% nationally (5% in 2008). Prices for speed powder, base and ice/crystal varied across jurisdictions. Overall, the three main forms of methamphetamine were generally considered 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain, with a third also reporting ice/crystal as 'difficult' to obtain. Of the three forms, ice/crystal was reported to be of 'high' purity, base as 'medium' and speed powder was commonly reported to be 'low'.

Cocaine

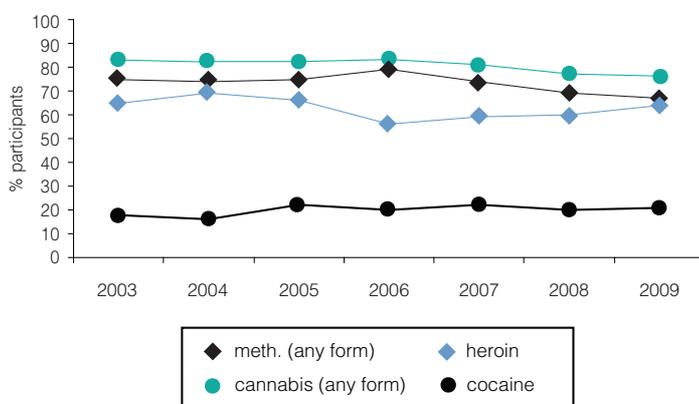
Similar to previous years (2003-2008), the prevalence of cocaine use in the six months preceding interview remained at 24% or less in all jurisdictions except NSW where it was higher (61%). The frequency of cocaine use among those who had recently used was higher in NSW (median days of use in 2009 = 20, from 12 days in 2008), while remaining low and sporadic in all other jurisdictions. The price of a cap of cocaine remained stable at \$50 in NSW, which remained the only jurisdiction where sufficient numbers (i.e. >10 people) were able to comment.

Cannabis

As in previous years of the IDRS, cannabis use among this group was common in all jurisdictions. Frequency of cannabis use tended to be daily or near-daily. Cannabis remained readily available in all jurisdictions. The price per gram varied by type (hydroponic or bush cannabis) and by jurisdiction. Hydroponically grown cannabis continued to dominate the market. The use of bush (outdoor grown) cannabis was also noted in all jurisdictions. The potency of hydroponic cannabis continued to be rated as 'high' and bush cannabis as 'medium'.

For more detailed information on the price, purity/potency, availability and prevalence of use by this group in each jurisdiction please see 'Jurisdictional Overviews' section.

Figure 1: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, Australia, 2003-2009



Pharmaceuticals

Morphine remained the most commonly injected pharmaceutical opioid among the national sample. Reports of this behaviour remained highest in the NT and TAS, the jurisdictions where heroin has traditionally been the least available. Morphine and oxycodone injection remained stable over the last two years, from 47% in 2008 to 42% in 2009 (morphine) and 27% in 2008 to 29% in 2009 (oxycodone). These figures varied by jurisdiction, and may be influenced by the availability, price and purity of these drugs relative to heroin. Frequency of use, as with all extra-medical use of opioid medication, remained sporadic.

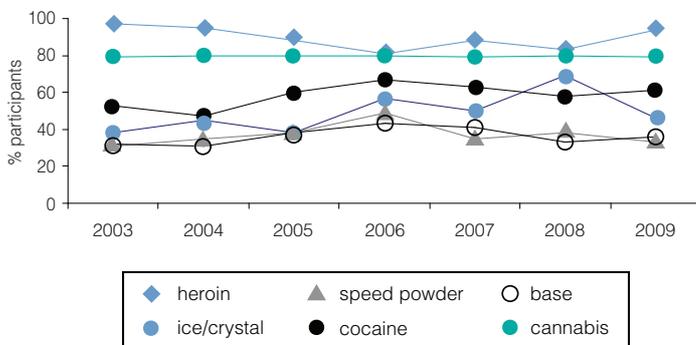
Use of benzodiazepines (typically by swallowing) remained common among this sample at 67% (result includes benzodiazepines used as prescribed). By contrast, benzodiazepine injection was relatively uncommon, a behaviour reported by 8% of the national sample (11% in 2008). This was most often reported in TAS (25%, 36% in 2008) and the NT (22%, 26% in 2008). Frequency of benzodiazepine injection among those who had injected was lower nationally from 11.5 days in 2008 to 5 days in 2009.

Jurisdictional Overviews

New South Wales (Sydney)

Use

Figure 2: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, NSW, 2003-2009



Price

Table 1: Median prices, NSW, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$300	\$320
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$200	\$120*
Base (gram)	\$200*	\$150*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$350	\$350*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$50	\$50
Cocaine (gram)	\$300	\$350
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$20	\$20
Bush (gram)	\$20	\$20
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$320
Bush (ounce)	\$200*	\$229

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; $n < 10$)

Availability and Purity/Potency

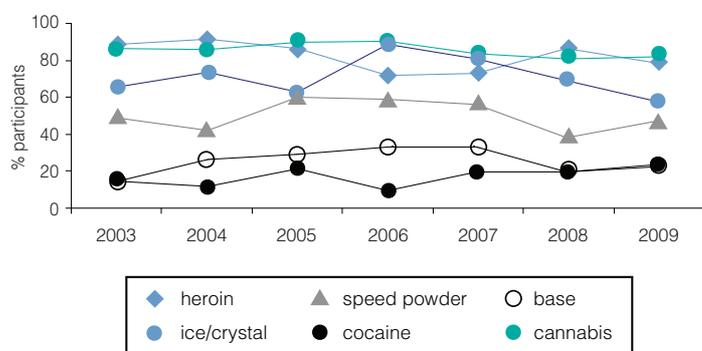
Table 2: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, NSW, 2009

	Heroin (%)	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%)	Cannabis (%)	
		Speed powder	Base	Ice/crystal		Hydro	Bush
Availability	n=143	n=48	n=43	n=62	n=85	n=110	n=56
Very easy	59	44	35	40	38	58	43
Easy	33	42	42	21	47	37	32
Difficult	8	13	16	32	13	5	20
Very difficult	0	2	7	7	2	0	5
Purity/potency	n=140	n=45	n=42	n=64	n=82	n=111	n=58
Low	41	29	24	28	18	3	26
Medium	40	42	50	27	40	31	59
High	6	9	24	28	29	61	14
Fluctuates	13	20	2	17	12	5	2

Australian Capital Territory (Canberra)

Use

Figure 3: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, ACT, 2003-2009



Price

Table 3: Median prices, ACT, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50*	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$300	\$320
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$40*	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$200*	\$250
Base (gram)	[no purchases reported]	\$275*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$450*	\$450*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$70	\$50*
Cocaine (gram)	\$310*	\$250*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$20	\$20
Bush (gram)	\$20	\$20
Hydro (ounce)	\$295	\$300
Bush (ounce)	\$200*	\$250

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

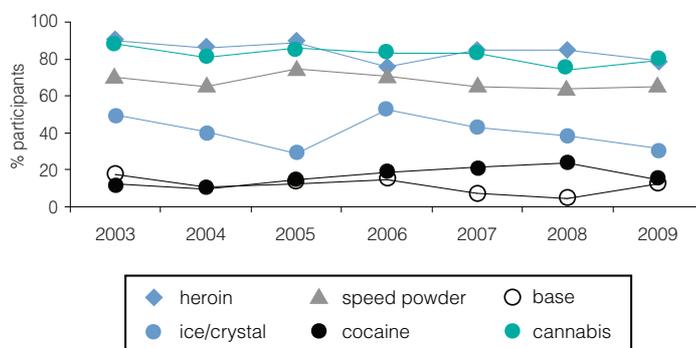
Table 4: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, ACT, 2009

	Heroin (%) n=70	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%) n=9	Cannabis (%)	
		Speed powder n=46	Base n=21	Ice/crystal n=45		Hydro n=72	Bush n=59
Availability							
Very easy	51	41	43	36	22	42	29
Easy	39	30	33	29	33	44	44
Difficult	9	22	19	27	44	11	20
Very difficult	1	7	5	9	0	3	7
Purity/potency							
Low	47	57	52	54	0	3	15
Medium	37	27	24	19	63	42	64
High	6	7	19	21	25	54	15
Fluctuates	10	9	5	7	13	1	7

Victoria (Melbourne)

Use

Figure 4: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, VIC, 2003-2009



Price

Table 5: Median prices, VIC, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$47.50	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$300	\$310
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$40	\$50
Base (point)	[no purchases reported]	\$50*
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50*
Speed powder (gram)	\$200	\$200
Base (gram)	\$200*	\$200*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$370*	\$380*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	\$100	\$50*
Cocaine (gram)	[no purchases reported]	\$325*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$20	\$20
Bush (gram)	\$20	\$20
Hydro (ounce)	\$250	\$250
Bush (ounce)	\$200*	\$225

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

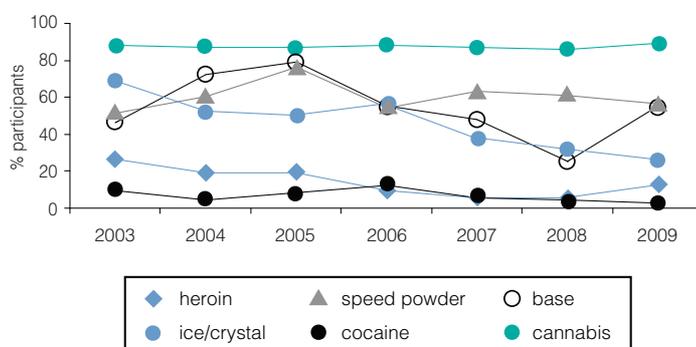
Table 6: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, VIC, 2009

Availability	Heroin (%) n=104	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%) n=8	Cannabis (%)	
		Speed powder n=75	Base n=8	Ice/crystal n=21		Hydro n=84	Bush n=32
Very easy	53	48	75	38	13	66	32
Easy	38	37	25	38	63	27	36
Difficult	6	13	0	14	25	7	29
Very difficult	3	1	0	10	0	0	3
Purity/potency	n=102	n=77	n=8	n=21	n=8	n=84	n=32
Low	43	55	0	19	13	2	16
Medium	30	14	50	33	25	31	53
High	12	17	25	29	50	58	25
Fluctuates	15	14	25	19	13	8	6

Tasmania (Hobart)

Use

Figure 5: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, TAS, 2003-2009



Price

Table 7: Median prices, TAS, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50*	[no purchases reported]
Heroin (gram)	[no purchases reported]	\$450*
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$300*	\$300*
Base (gram)	\$300*	\$300*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$300*	\$300*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	[no purchases reported]	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	\$350*	[no purchases reported]
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$25	\$25
Bush (gram)	\$25*	\$25
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$300
Bush (ounce)	\$200	\$200

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

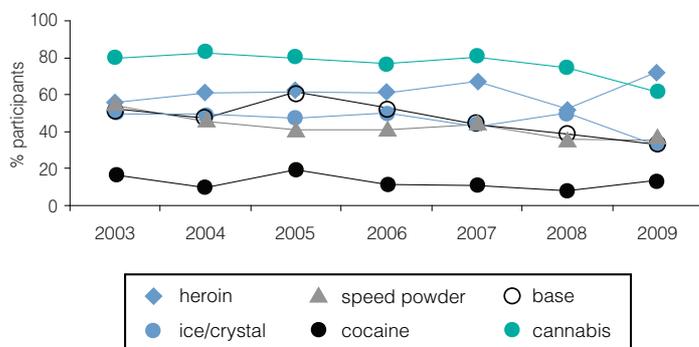
Table 8: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, TAS, 2009

Availability	Heroin (%) n=3	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%) n=0	Cannabis (%)	
		Speed powder n=58	Base n=49	Ice/crystal n=24		Hydro n=75	Bush n=71
Very easy	33	26	18	4	0	47	47
Easy	0	62	55	33	0	45	38
Difficult	0	12	25	46	0	8	16
Very difficult	67	0	2	17	0	0	0
Purity/potency	n=3	n=58	n=53	n=24	n=0	n=74	n=74
Low	0	64	40	17	0	3	15
Medium	67	24	26	38	0	27	60
High	33	2	26	33	0	66	24
Fluctuates	0	10	8	13	0	4	1

South Australia (Adelaide)

Use

Figure 6: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, SA, 2003-2009



Price

Table 9: Median prices, SA, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$100	\$100
Heroin (gram)	\$250*	\$400*
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50*	\$50
Base (point)	\$50	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$50*	\$425*
Base (gram)	[no purchases reported]	\$425*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$350*	\$600*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	[no purchases reported]	\$250*
Cocaine (gram)	\$225*	\$700*
Cannabis		
Hydro (approx. 2.5g)	\$17.50*	[no purchases reported]
Bush (approx. 2.5g)	[no purchases reported]	[no purchases reported]
Hydro (ounce)	\$210	\$225
Bush (ounce)	\$190*	\$200*

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

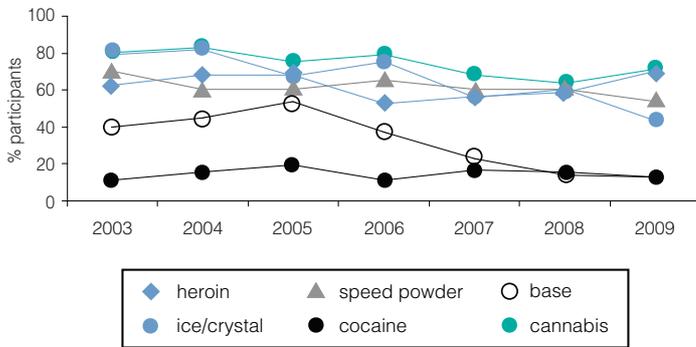
Table 10: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, SA, 2009

Availability	Heroin (%) n=66	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%) n=3	Cannabis (%)	
		Speed powder n=25	Base n=28	Ice/crystal n=22		Hydro n=37	Bush n=19
Very easy	50	36	36	46	100	32	37
Easy	44	48	25	23	0	46	21
Difficult	6	16	32	18	0	16	42
Very difficult	0	0	7	14	0	5	0
Purity/potency	n=65	n=25	n=27	n=22	n=3	n=37	n=18
Low	29	40	33	18	0	3	17
Medium	49	44	30	23	0	24	56
High	14	16	26	36	100	65	28
Fluctuates	8	0	11	23	0	8	0

Western Australia (Perth)

Use

Figure 7: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, WA, 2003-2009



Price

Table 11: Median prices, WA, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$100*	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$600*	\$575
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50*	[no purchases reported]
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$350*	\$400
Base (gram)	\$425*	[no purchases reported]
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$400*	\$400
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	[no purchases reported]	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	[no purchases reported]	\$450*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$25*	\$25
Bush (gram)	\$27.50*	\$25*
Hydro (ounce)	\$350*	\$350
Bush (ounce)	\$200*	\$290

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

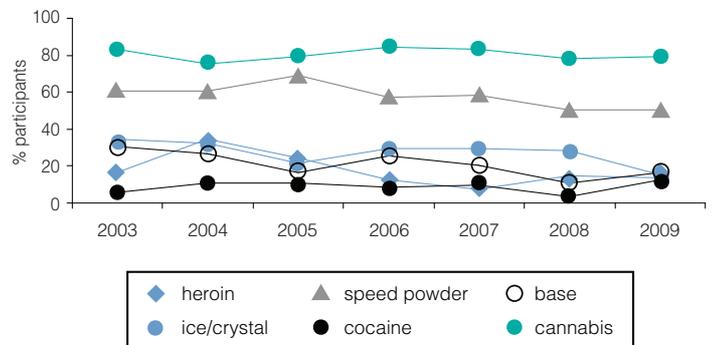
Table 12: Perceptions of current availability of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, WA, 2009

Availability	Heroin (%)	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%)	Cannabis (%)	
	n=60	Speed powder n=42	Base n=1	Ice/crystal n=23	n=2	Hydro n=44	Bush n=22
Very easy	45	24	100	30	0	27	18
Easy	42	55	0	65	100	61	64
Difficult	13	21	0	4	0	9	18
Very difficult	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Purity/potency	n=59	n=42	n=1	n=22	n=1	n=42	n=22
Low	29	33	0	32	0	0	9
Medium	39	21	0	32	100	21	55
High	14	26	100	32	0	69	32
Fluctuates	19	19	0	5	0	10	5

Northern Territory (Darwin)

Use

Figure 8: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, NT, 2003-2009



Price

Table 13: Median prices, NT, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$100*	\$80*
Heroin (gram)	\$400*	\$300*
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$60	\$50
Base (point)	\$100*	\$75*
Ice/crystal (point)	\$125*	\$100*
Speed powder (gram)	\$300	\$350
Base (gram)	\$400*	\$400*
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$1200*	\$800*
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	[no purchases reported]	\$80*
Cocaine (gram)	[no purchases reported]	\$250*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$30	\$30
Bush (gram)	\$30*	\$30*
Hydro (ounce)	\$350	\$400
Bush (ounce)	\$250	\$175^A

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

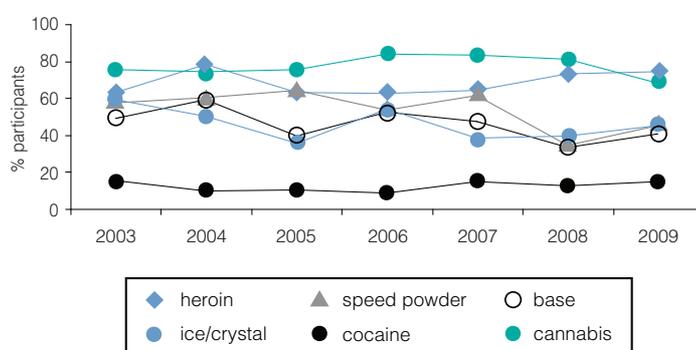
Table 14: Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, NT, 2009

Availability	Heroin (%) n=6	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%) n=5	Cannabis (%)	
		Speed powder n=31	Base n=7	Ice/crystal n=13		Hydro n=71	Bush n=26
Very easy	0	16	29	8	20	30	27
Easy	67	65	43	62	40	54	23
Difficult	33	16	14	31	40	17	50
Very difficult	0	3	14	0	0	0	0
Purity/potency	n=6	n=32	n=7	n=13	n=5	n=71	n=29
Low	17	41	29	15	20	14	35
Medium	50	21	43	15	60	31	28
High	17	25	14	54	20	38	21
Fluctuates	17	13	14	15	0	17	17

Queensland (Brisbane)

Use

Figure 9: Prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and cannabis by participants in the six months preceding interview, QLD, 2003-2009



Price

Table 15: Median prices, QLD, 2008-2009

	2008	2009
Heroin		
Heroin (cap)	\$50	\$50
Heroin (gram)	\$400	\$400
Methamphetamine		
Speed powder (point)	\$50	\$50
Base (point)	\$50*	\$50
Ice/crystal (point)	\$50	\$50
Speed powder (gram)	\$200	\$200
Base (gram)	\$200	\$200
Ice/crystal (gram)	\$275	\$320
Cocaine		
Cocaine (cap)	[no purchases reported]	[no purchases reported]
Cocaine (gram)	\$450*	\$350*
Cannabis		
Hydro (gram)	\$25	\$25
Bush (gram)	\$20	\$20
Hydro (ounce)	\$300	\$300
Bush (ounce)	\$220	\$280

* Interpret with caution (small numbers commenting; n<10)

Availability and Purity/Potency

Table 16: Perceptions of current availability of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, QLD, 2009

Availability	Heroin (%) n=60	Methamphetamine (%)			Cocaine (%) n=4	Cannabis (%)	
		Speed powder n=43	Base n=31	Ice/crystal n=32		Hydro n=36	Bush n=34
Very easy	53	51	39	25	25	64	56
Easy	28	23	42	31	25	28	24
Difficult	13	21	16	28	50	6	15
Very difficult	5	5	3	16	0	3	6
Purity/potency	n=58	n=40	n=28	n=32	n=4	n=36	n=34
Low	45	45	21	16	0	6	15
Medium	22	20	32	25	50	33	35
High	9	10	25	44	50	58	41
Fluctuates	24	25	21	16	0	3	9

Conclusions

- Heroin remained the drug of choice among IDU in 2009'. Nationally, reports of recent heroin use remained stable, however the frequency of use was higher (from a median of 49 days in 2008 to 72 days in 2009). Recent use remained most common in NSW, VIC and the ACT. Price, purity and availability varied among the jurisdictions.
- IDU participants continued to use all three forms of methamphetamine, with the prevalence of use of each form varying by jurisdiction. Nationally, the recent use of speed powder remained stable, while recent base was higher and recent ice use was lower than in 2008. Frequency of use remained stable nationally and varied among the jurisdictions. The proportion of daily users remained stable at around 3% of all participants nationally.
- NSW continued to be the only jurisdiction where a large proportion of participants reported recent cocaine use. The proportion reporting the recent use of cocaine in NSW remained stable, while the frequency of use was higher.
- The cannabis market (price, potency and availability) remained stable. The use of cannabis remained common among the majority of participants, with daily or near-daily use often reported.
- The injection of pharmaceutical opioids is more commonly reported in jurisdictions where heroin has traditionally been difficult to obtain. Nationally, morphine remained the most commonly reported opioid injected by this group. Morphine and oxycodone injection remained at similar levels over the past two years. This may be related, at least

in part, to varying quality of heroin. The frequency of this behaviour was lower in 2009 and occurred on a typically infrequent basis. Benzodiazepine use (but not typically injection) was common.

Participating researchers and research centres

Dr Lucy Burns, Natasha Sindicich, Jennifer Stafford, Joanne Cassar and Benjamin Phillips, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (National, NSW & ACT)

Danielle Horyniak and A/Prof. Paul Dietze, Macfarlane Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health. (VIC)

Barbara de Graaff and Dr Raimondo Bruno, University of Tasmania (TAS)

Robyn Vial, Dr Nancy White, and A/Prof. Robert Ali, Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia (SA)

Candice Rainsford and A/Prof. Simon Lenton, National Drug Research Institute (WA)

Chris Moon and Tania Davidson, Department of Health and Community Services (NT)

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These reports are available in full on the NDARC website, www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au (click on 'Drug Trends').