

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 2021 from June-July. Interviews in 2020 and 2021 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 should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020 and 2021 sample relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The IDRS sample recruited from Adelaide, South Australia (SA) in 2021 (N=101) was consistent with the SA profile in previous years, whereby almost three-fifths (57%) were male, with a mean age of 45 years. The majority (88%) of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview, and most (96%) had received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview. The median income per week significantly decreased, from \$475 in 2020 to \$315 in 2021 ($p<0.001$). The drug of choice nominated by participants significantly changed between 2020 and 2021 ($p=0.004$), as did the drug injected most often in the past month ($p=0.014$). In 2021, almost three-quarters (74%) of the sample reported that methamphetamine was their drug of choice (50% in 2020), and four-fifths (81%) reported that methamphetamine was the drug they had injected most often in the past month, an increase relative to 2020 (64%). Weekly or more frequent use of heroin significantly decreased in 2021 (10%), relative to 2020 (34%; $p<0.001$).

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. In

2021, 45% of the SA sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the past 12 months, although no participants had been diagnosed with the virus. The majority (72%) of participants were 'not at all' worried about contracting COVID-19 (noting that most interviews took place before the second wave of COVID-19). Few participants ($n\leq 5$) had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by the time of interview.

Heroin

Recent (i.e., past six month) use of heroin has decreased amongst the SA sample since monitoring began, with 23% reporting recent use in 2021, a significant decrease from 47% in 2020 ($p=0.001$). Forty-five per cent of those who had recently used heroin reported weekly or more frequent use in 2021 (72% in 2020; $p=0.058$). Perceived purity and availability remained stable between 2020 and 2021, with one-third (33%) of respondents perceiving purity to be 'low' in 2021 (64% in 2020), and three-fifths (61%) perceiving that heroin was 'easy' to obtain (40% in 2020).

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has trended upwards over the past few years, with almost nine-in-ten participants (88%) reporting recent use in 2021. This was mostly driven by a continued increase in crystal methamphetamine use (83% in 2021) – the most commonly used form since 2010. Notably, recent use of base methamphetamine decreased significantly, from 28% in 2020 to very few participants ($n\leq 5$) reporting recent use in 2021. The median price for one point of crystal significantly decreased, from \$75 in 2020 to \$50 in 2021 ($p<0.001$). There was a significant change in the perceived availability of crystal methamphetamine between 2020 and 2021, with more participants perceiving crystal methamphetamine as being 'very easy' to obtain in 2021 (57%; 33% in 2020).

Cocaine

Sixteen per cent of the SA sample had recently consumed cocaine, stable from 14% in 2020 ($p=0.866$). No participants reported using cocaine weekly or more frequently in 2021.

Cannabis

Recent use of cannabis has remained fairly stable since 2014, with 67% reporting recent use in 2021. Three-fifths (60%) of participants who had recently used cannabis reported daily use, a significant increase relative to 2020 (41%; $p=0.046$). Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (82%), followed by bush cannabis (61%). Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported using hashish, hash oil and/or non-prescribed pharmaceutical CBD oil in the six months preceding interview. Both hydroponic and bush cannabis were reported as being 'very easy' to obtain in 2021 (55% and 50% of those who commented, respectively), stable from 2020.

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent non-prescribed use of pharmaceutical opioids, including methadone (7%; 9% in 2020), buprenorphine ($n\leq 5$; $n\leq 5$ in 2020), buprenorphine-naloxone (10%; 11% in 2020), morphine (8%; 11% in 2020), oxycodone (9%; 11% in 2020) and fentanyl (6%; 10% in 2020) has declined over the past 5-15 years of monitoring, generally remaining low and stable in 2021.

Other Drugs

Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported recent use of NPS, pharmaceutical stimulants and antipsychotics in 2021. Recent non-prescribed benzodiazepine use was reported by 18% of participants in 2021 (28% in 2020). Pregabalin use remained low and stable at 7% (6% in 2020). Recent use of tobacco (92%; 90% in 2020) and e-cigarettes (13%; 8% in 2020) remained stable in 2021, while significantly fewer participants reported using alcohol in 2021 (47%; 65% in 2020; $p=0.013$). Furthermore, almost one-tenth (9%) of participants reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD in 2021, a significant decrease from 23% in 2020 ($p=0.011$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Associated Behaviours

In 2021, the majority (96%) of the SA sample reporting using one or more drugs on the day preceding interview. Fourteen per cent reported overdosing on any drug in the preceding year. Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported a non-fatal overdose following heroin use, a significant decrease from 2020 (13%;

$p=0.029$). Seventeen per cent had ever been trained in naloxone administration, a significant increase from 2020 ($n\leq 5$; $p=0.005$), and 17% of the sample reported that they had ever resuscitated someone using naloxone at least once in their lifetime, stable from 14% in 2020 ($p=0.536$). In 2021, $n\leq 5$ of participants reported receptive sharing of a needle or syringe and 7% reported distributive sharing in the past month. Almost two-fifths (39%) of the sample reported that they had re-used their own needles in the past month, a significant decrease from 54% in 2020 ($p=0.048$). Twenty-nine per cent reported experiencing injection-related problems in the past month, most commonly nerve damage (13%). Almost one-quarter of the sample were currently in any drug treatment (24%), a decrease relative to 2020 (38%; $p=0.047$). Thirty-seven per cent reported that they had received a hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year, an increase relative to 2020 (23%; $p=0.046$). Over one-quarter (27%) of the sample had received an RNA test in the past year and one-tenth (10%) reported having a current HCV infection. Self-reported mental health problems remained stable in 2021 (49%; 41% in 2020; $p=0.365$), although there was a significant increase in the proportion of these participants who reported that they had seen a mental health professional in the past six months (63%; 39% in 2020 ($p=0.047$)). Almost one-quarter (23%) of the sample reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit drug in the last six months. Seven per cent of participants reported that they or someone else had ever tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia. Thirty per cent of participants reported engaging in 'any' crime in the past month in 2021, stable from 41% in 2020 ($p=0.143$).