

Northern Territory IDRS results 2013



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Introduction

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) is primarily concerned with monitoring the use and markets of four main drug classes: heroin and other opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. It also monitors diverted pharmaceuticals and other issues related to drug use, such as injection-related health problems and crime. The IDRS has been conducted in the Northern Territory since 2000.

Aim

The IDRS aims to:

- monitor the price, purity, availability and patterns of use of heroin and other opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis;
- identify emerging trends in illicit drug markets that require further investigation.

Method

The IDRS involves the collection and analysis of three sources of data:

- interviews with regular injecting drug users (IDU);
- semi-structured interviews with experts who work with drug users, such as treatment personnel and law enforcement personnel;
- existing databases on drug-related issues such as customs data, overdose data, and seizure data.

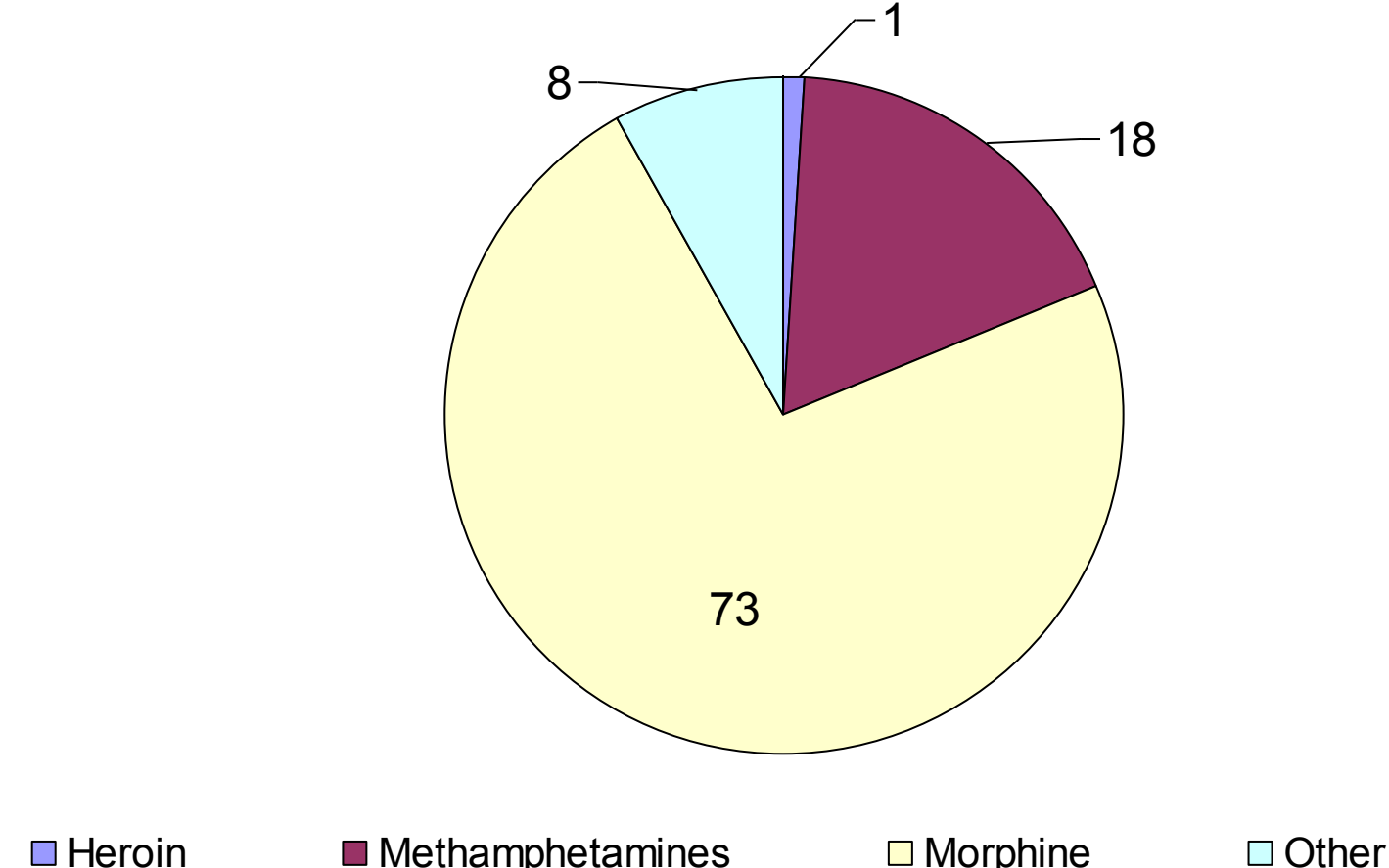
The IDRS methodology looks for corroboration in the three data sources in order to minimise the weaknesses inherent in each one and to ensure that only valid emerging trends are documented.

Results: Sample characteristics

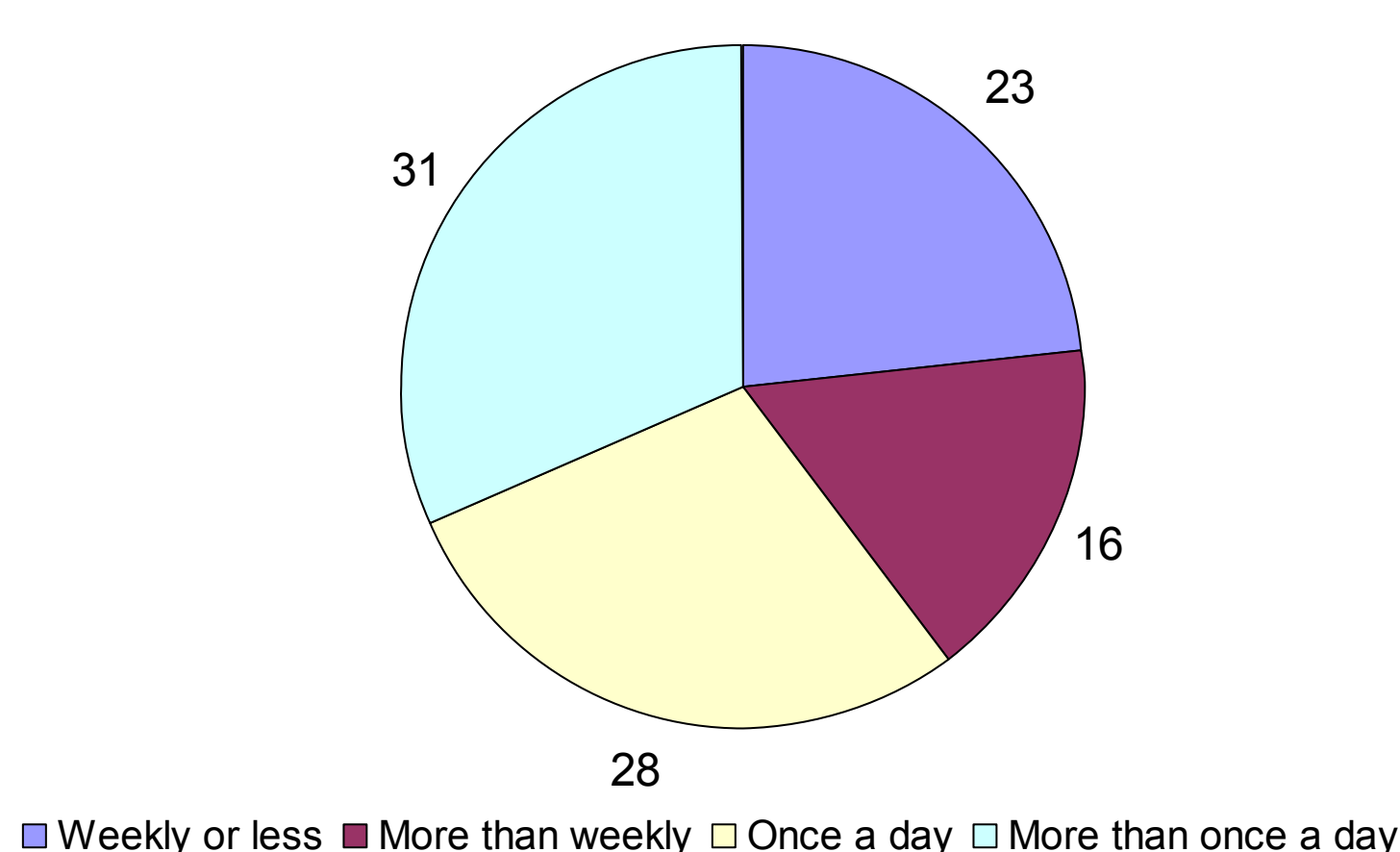
Selected demographics, %



Drugs injected most often in last month (% n=91)



Frequency of injecting in last month (% n=91)



Results: Market characteristics

Heroin

Use: Seventeen per cent of the IDU sample in 2013 had recently used heroin on a median of 3 days.

White powder and rock were the most often forms used in the last six months.

Morphine

Use: Eighty per cent of the IDU sample had recently used morphine, reporting a median use of 105 days. Seventy-seven per cent of recent morphine users had mainly used MS Contin and twenty per cent had mainly used Kapanol.

Price: 100mg MS Contin was the most commonly purchased amount for a median of \$80. 100mg of Kapanol also cost a median of \$80.

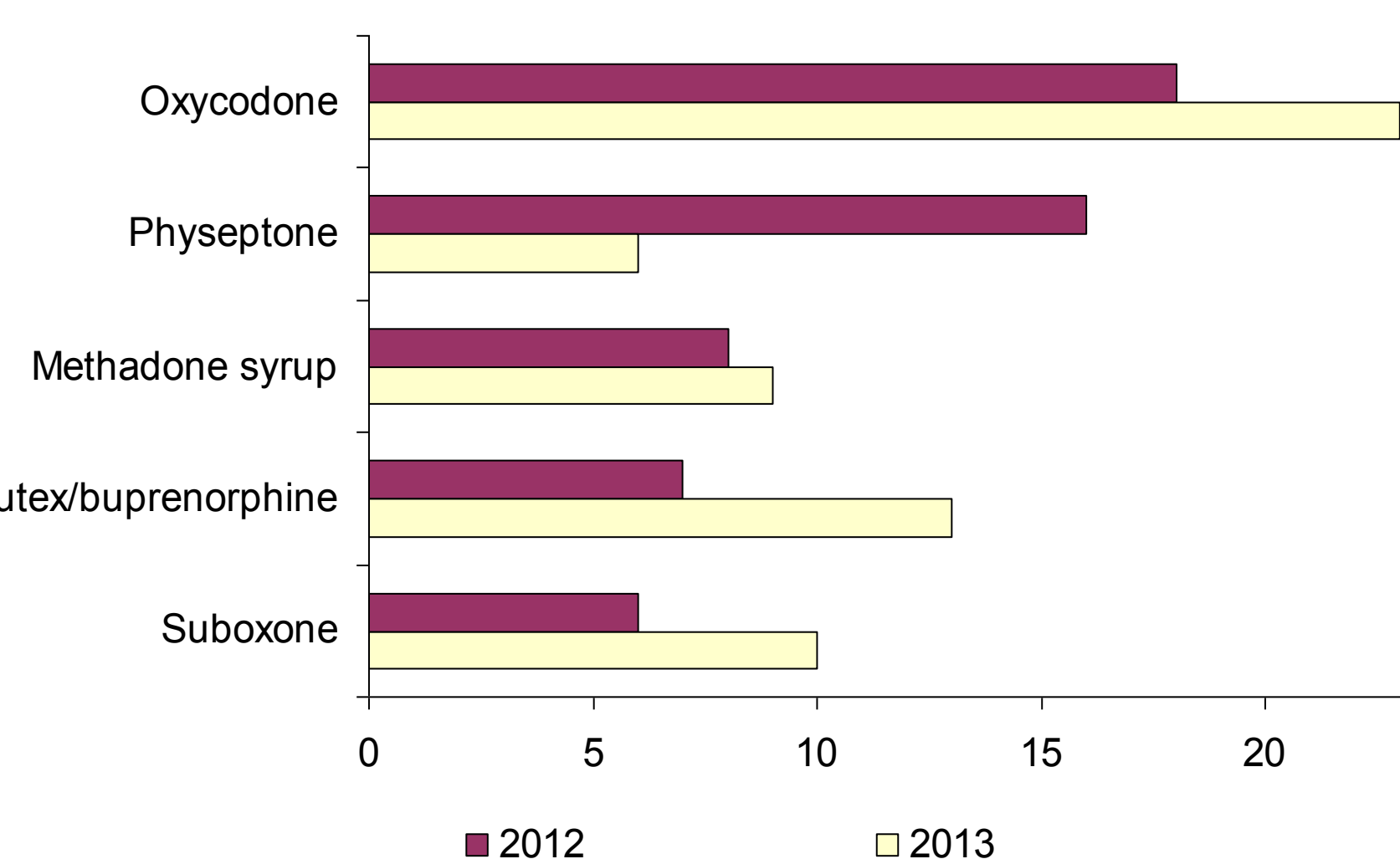
These prices were reported to be stable (70%) or increasing (16%).

Availability: Morphine was reported to be easy or very easy to obtain by 54% of recent users.

Other pharmaceutical opioids

Recent injection of illicit opioids increased with the exception of Physeptone.

Recent injection of illicit opioids, 2012 - 2013 (%)



Cannabis

Use: Eighty per cent of IDU had recently used cannabis, reporting a median of daily use.

Price: Hydroponic cannabis was reported to cost a median of \$30 a gram, identical to 2012, and \$450 an ounce.

Potency: Eighty-six per cent of those able to comment rated the potency of cannabis medium to high.

Availability: Eighty-nine per cent of those able to comment said that cannabis was currently easy or very easy to obtain.

Methamphetamines

Use: Forty-three per cent of respondents had recently used some form of methamphetamine: 31% speed powder, 7% base and 30% crystal.

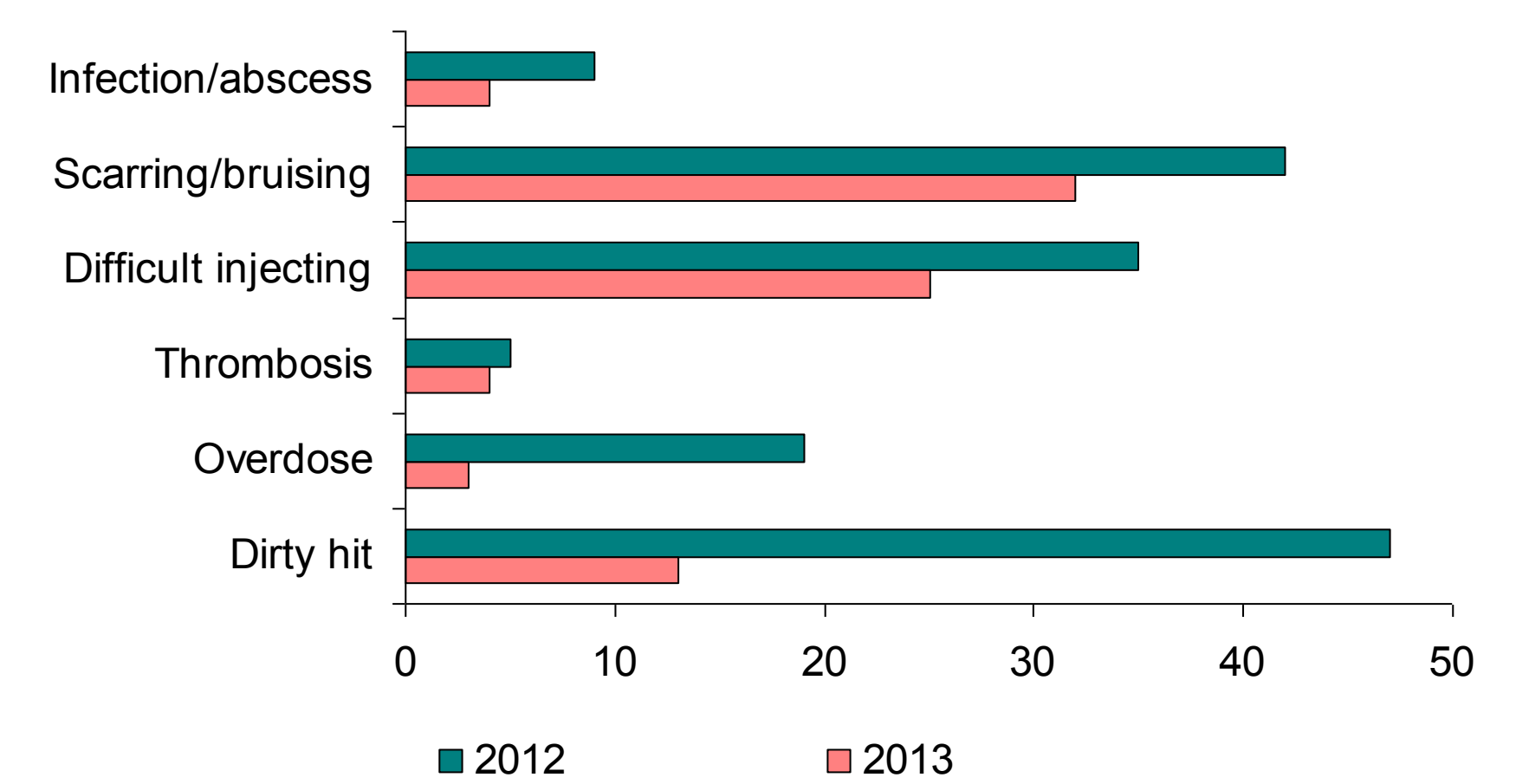
Price: Speed powder was reported to cost a median of \$100 a point and crystal methamphetamine cost a median of \$140 a point.

Purity: The purity of speed powder was rated as medium (43%) and a small number of respondents rated crystal purity as high (46%).

Availability: Speed powder was rated as easy (33%) or very easy (48%) to obtain, as was crystal: 48% easy and 42% very easy as easy (54%).

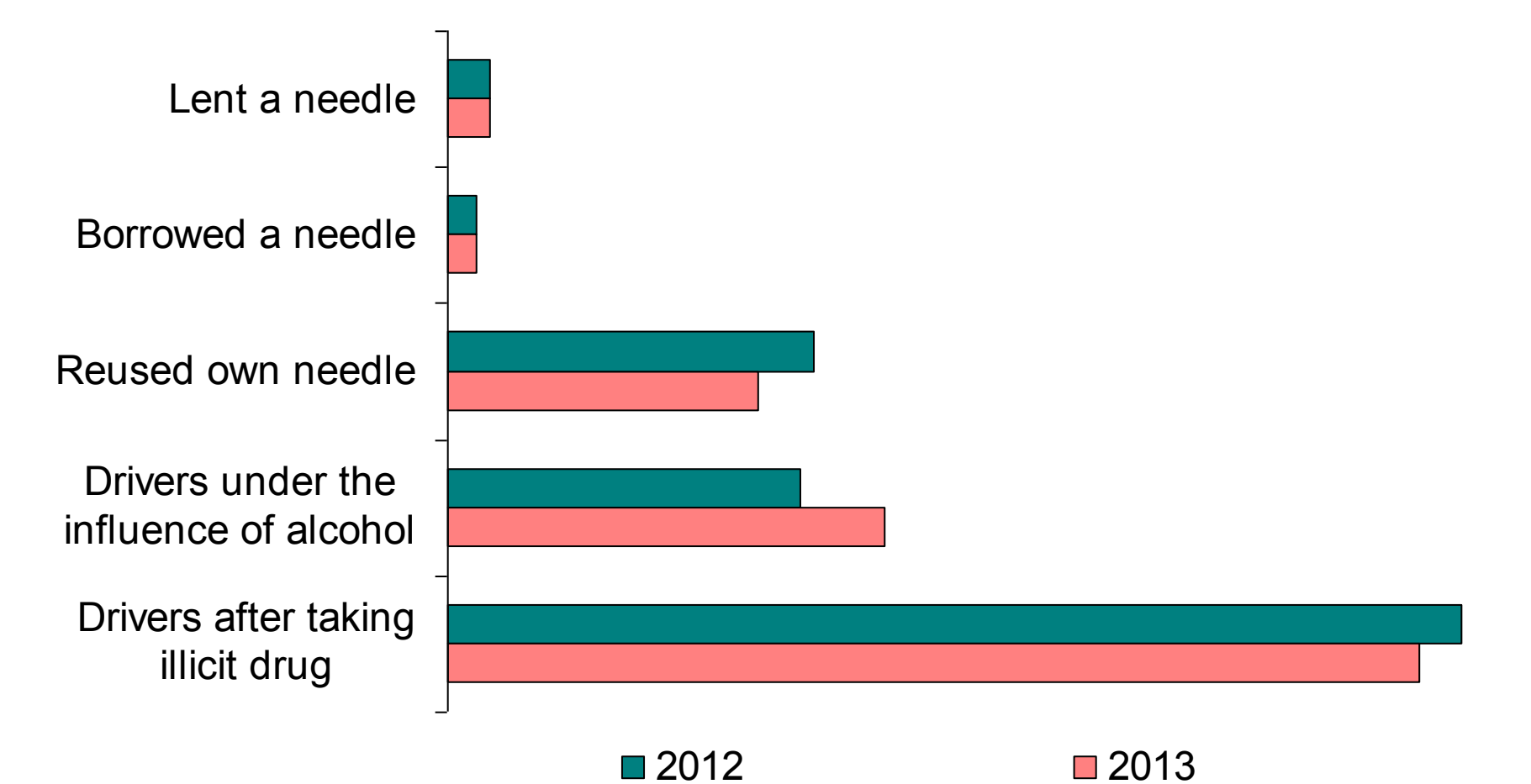
Drug related health and risk

Injection related issues in last month, 2012 - 2013 (%)



The number of respondents reporting an injection-related problem within a month of interview declined from 71% in 2012 to 49% this year. Morphine (55%) was the main drug involved in dirty hits.

Selected risk behaviours, 2012 - 2013 (%)

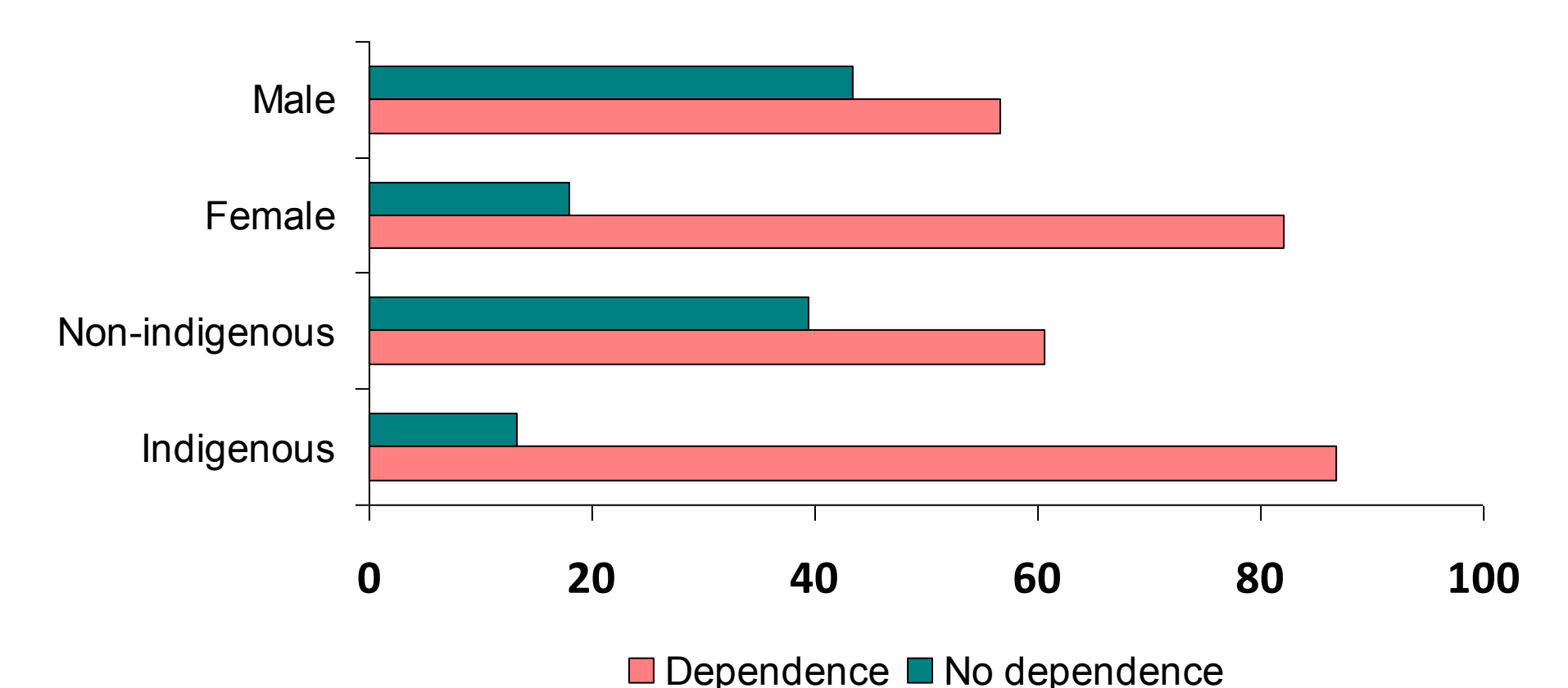


Needle sharing risk behaviours among the IDU sample this year are similar to 2012. Driving under the influence of alcohol or an illicit drug both declined.

Opioid Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS)

81 participants responded to the opioid SDS. 65.4% (n=53) reported a total score of ≥ 5 , indicating dependence.

SDS score ≥ 5 by gender and ATSI (%) 2013



Conclusion

The Northern Territory illicit drug market is characterised by relatively high levels of use of morphine and other pharmaceutical opioids and relatively low levels of use and availability of heroin and cocaine. This year's results are consistent with this pattern.

Oxycodone and physeptone are reported as the commonly injected other opioids. Overall methamphetamine use has declined slightly, although recent use of the powder form increased.

This year's sample reported an increase in injection-related problems, particularly a dirty hit.

Women were significantly more likely than men to report a total SDS score of ≥ 5 (indicating dependence) and indigenous respondents were more likely to report an SDS score of ≥ 5 than non-indigenous respondents, although this difference is not statistically significant.

Acknowledgements

The IDRS is funded by the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvement Grants Fund.

