

Executive Summary

The Brisbane/Gold Coast (QLD) 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 Brisbane/Gold Coast, Queensland. Participants were recruited via advertisements in needle and 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 drug use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2022 from May-July. Interviews in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission. This methodological change should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020-2022 samples, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

Despite a significant increase in the proportion of males in the sample (69% in 2022; 53% in 2021, $p=0.025$), the IDRS sample recruited from Brisbane/Gold Coast, Queensland (QLD) in 2022 (N=100) was largely consistent with the participant profile in previous years. Participants had a mean age of 45 years, the majority (85%) of the sample were unemployed at the time of interview, and most (89%) had received a government pension/allowance or benefit in the month prior to interview. The median income per week significantly increased, from \$356 in 2021 to \$450 in 2022 ($p=0.010$). The drug of choice nominated by participants remained stable between 2021 and 2022, as did the drug injected most often in the past month. In 2022, 46% of the sample reported that methamphetamine was their drug of choice (51% in 2021; $p=0.164$), and 53% reported that crystal methamphetamine was the drug they had injected most often in the past month (55% in 2021, $p=0.402$).

Heroin

Recent (i.e., past six month) use of heroin has fluctuated amongst the Brisbane/Gold Coast sample since monitoring began, with 51% reporting recent use in 2022, stable from 2021. Two-thirds (67%) of those who had recently used heroin reported weekly or more frequent

use in 2022 (72% in 2021). Perceived purity and availability remained stable between 2021 and 2022, with one-third (33%) of respondents perceiving purity to be medium in 2022 (26% in 2021), and three-fifths (58%) perceiving that heroin was 'easy' to obtain (51% in 2021).

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has trended upwards over the past few years, with 70% of participants reporting recent use in 2022. This was mostly driven by a continued increase in crystal methamphetamine use (70% in 2022) – the most commonly used form since 2010. The median price for one point of crystal significantly decreased, from \$70 in 2021 to \$50 in 2022 ($p=0.021$). There was also a significant change in the perceived availability of crystal methamphetamine between 2021 and 2022, with more participants perceiving crystal methamphetamine as being 'very easy' to obtain in 2022 (54%; 32% in 2021, $p=0.031$).

Cocaine

Seventeen per cent of the Brisbane/Gold Coast sample had recently consumed cocaine, stable from 12% in 2021 ($p=0.327$). Small numbers ($n\leq 5$) of participants reported using cocaine weekly or more frequently in 2022. The perceived availability of cocaine changed significantly between 2021 and 2022 ($p=0.045$).

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid Related Products

Recent use of non-prescribed cannabis has remained fairly stable since 2014, with 64% reporting recent use in 2022. Two fifths (41%) of participants who had recently used cannabis reported daily use (31% in 2021; $p=0.281$). Hydroponic cannabis remained the form most commonly used (94%), followed by bush cannabis (40%). Few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported using hashish, hash oil and/or non-prescribed pharmaceutical CBD oil in the six months preceding interview. Hydroponic cannabis was reported as being 'very easy' to obtain in 2022 (48% of those who commented), while bush cannabis was reported as 'easy'

(56%) to obtain; both were stable from 2021 (46% and 38%, respectively).

Pharmaceutical Opioids

Recent non-prescribed use of most pharmaceutical opioids examined remained stable in 2022 relative to 2021. These included methadone (10%; 13% in 2021), buprenorphine tablet (15%; 20% in 2021), buprenorphine-naloxone (10%; 11% in 2021), morphine (19%; 18% in 2021), oxycodone (11%; 10% in 2021) and fentanyl ($n \leq 5$ in 2022 and 2021). There was a significant increase in any recent use of codeine (17%; 7% in 2021, $p=0.031$), as well as a significant increase in recent non-prescribed use of codeine (10%; $n \leq 5$ in 2021, $p=0.049$).

Other Drugs

Recent use of NPS, pharmaceutical stimulants and antipsychotics remained low and stable. Recent non-prescribed benzodiazepine use was reported by 21% of participants in 2022 (26% in 2021). Non-prescribed pregabalin use remained stable at 19% (22% in 2021). Recent use of tobacco (86%; 89% in 2021) and non-prescribed e-cigarettes (27%; 19% in 2021) remained stable in 2022. Recent use of alcohol remained stable (52%; 54% in 2021).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

In 2022, the majority (95%) of the Brisbane/Gold Coast sample reported using one or more drugs on the day preceding interview. Sixteen per cent reported overdosing on any drug in the preceding year, with 10% reporting a non-fatal overdose following heroin use. Thirty-three per cent of the sample had ever been trained in naloxone administration, and 23% reported that they had resuscitated someone using naloxone at least once in their lifetime, stable from 22% in 2021. In 2022, few participants ($n \leq 5$) reported receptive sharing of a needle or syringe (10% in 2021, $p=0.191$), and 9% reported distributive sharing in the past month, a significant reduction from 2021 (22%, $p=0.019$). Thirty-one per cent of the sample reported that they had injected someone else after injecting themselves, a significant decrease from 48% in 2021 ($p=0.022$). Thirty-four per cent reported experiencing injection-related problems in the

past month, most commonly nerve damage (14%), although there was a decrease in reported injection-related nerve damage amongst participants (27% in 2021, $p=0.038$). Almost half of the sample were currently in any drug treatment (48%), stable from 2021 (45%; $p=0.673$).

Forty-one per cent reported that they had received a Hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody test in the past year. One-third (34%) of the sample had received a Hepatitis C RNA test in the past year and twelve per cent reported having a current HCV infection. Self-reported mental health problems remained stable in 2022 (56%; 61% in 2021; $p=0.559$). Amongst participants who reported driving in the past six months ($n=48$), 79% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit drug in the last six months.

Twenty-three per cent of participants reported that they or someone else had ever tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia. Forty-one per cent of participants reported engaging in 'any' crime in the past month in 2022, stable from 45% in 2021 ($p=0.667$). In 2022, 70% of the Brisbane/Gold Coast sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the past 12 months, and 27% had been diagnosed with the virus. The majority (73%) of participants were 'not at all' worried about contracting COVID-19. Seventy-one per cent had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by the time of interview.