

Executive Summary

The Hobart Tasmania (TAS) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants recruited via social media and word-of-mouth in Hobart, TAS. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2023 from April-July. Interviews from 2020 were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission; all interviews prior to 2020 were conducted face-to-face. This methodological change should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020-2023 samples relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The EDRS sample (N=65) recruited from Hobart, Tasmania, in 2023 was similar to the sample in 2022 and in previous years. Gender remained stable between 2022 and 2023, with 55% identifying as male (48% in 2022), and participants had a median age of 26 years (26 years in 2022). Most participants held tertiary qualifications (65%; 60% in 2022), with one quarter (26%) reporting full-time employment (28% in 2022) and 43% reporting part time/casual employment (38% in 2022). Accommodation remained stable relative to 2022, with half the sample (49%; 56% in 2022) living in a rental house/flat or residing with their parents/at their family home (25%; 17% in 2022) at the time of interview. Drug of choice and drug used most often remained stable between 2022 and 2023, with one quarter (25%) nominating ecstasy as their drug of choice (22% in 2022), and cannabis was reported as the drug used most often in the month preceding interview (34%; 38% in 2022).

Ecstasy

The ecstasy market has diversified over previous years, with the per cent reporting any recent use (i.e., past six months) of ecstasy pills

declining and the per cent reporting recent use of other forms of ecstasy increasing since 2014. However, in the past few years, there has been a decline of ecstasy use in most forms. Notwithstanding that general trend, recent use of ecstasy pills (48%), capsules (46%), crystal (55%) and powder (26%) all remained stable from 2022. Frequency of use and price of all four forms also remained stable. There were significant increases in the perceived purity of ecstasy pills ($p=0.001$), capsules ($p=0.045$) and crystal ($p=0.042$). One third perceived the purity of pills and capsules as 'high' (33% and 31%, respectively), with 55% perceiving the purity of crystal to be 'high.' There were also significant increases in the perceived availability of ecstasy pills ($p=0.013$), capsules ($p=0.001$) and crystal ($p=0.005$), whereby ecstasy pills (45%), capsules (44%) and crystal (43%) were reported as being 'very easy' to obtain. No significant market changes were reported for ecstasy powder in 2023.

Methamphetamine

Recent use of any methamphetamine has been declining amongst the Hobart sample since the commencement of monitoring, however the per cent reporting any recent use has remained stable since 2020. Two fifths (40%) of the sample reported recent use of any methamphetamine in 2023, stable relative to 39% in 2022. Recent use of all methamphetamine forms remained stable between 2022 and 2023. There was, however, a significant increase in the frequency of use of methamphetamine crystal ($p=0.024$), with participants reporting use on a median of 24 days (4 days in 2022; $p=0.024$). Frequency of use remained stable for methamphetamine powder and base. Perceived price, purity and availability of all methamphetamine forms remained stable between 2022 and 2023.

Non-Prescribed Pharmaceutical Stimulants

The per cent of participants reporting any recent non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulant (e.g., dexamphetamine, methylphenidate, modafinil) use has generally increased since the commencement of monitoring. In 2023, one third (34%) of participants reported recent use, stable from 2022 (40%).

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has increased over the years of monitoring. In 2023, three quarters (75%) reported recent use, stable from 78% in 2022. Powder cocaine remained the most commonly reported form used (96%; 100% in 2022), with snorting remaining the most common route of administration (96%; 96% in 2022). Perceived price, purity and availability of cocaine remained stable between 2022 and 2023.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid-Related Products

At least three in four participants have reported any recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products each year since 2003 (noting some changes in question wording over time). Seventy-eight per cent of participants reported non-prescribed recent use in 2023, stable relative to 2022 (81%). Frequency of use amongst those who had recently used cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products in the preceding six months significantly decreased to a median of 25 days in 2023 (54 days in 2022; $p=0.039$). Weekly or more frequent use was reported by 52% (67% in 2022), with daily use reported by 14% (28% in 2022). Hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable as the most commonly consumed forms of cannabis (64% and 68%, respectively), with smoking remaining the most common route of administration (92%; 90% in 2022). Perceived price, purity and availability of

hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable between 2022 and 2023.

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of non-prescribed ketamine (51%; 38% in 2022) and DMT (10%; 10% in 2022) remained stable in 2023, as did frequency of use. Thirty-eight per cent of participants reported recent use of LSD in 2023, a significant decrease from 57% in 2022 ($p=0.042$). Frequency of LSD use also significantly decreased to a median of two days (3 days in 2022; $p=0.045$). Perceived price, purity and availability of non-prescribed ketamine, LSD and DMT remained stable between 2022 and 2023.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, has remained low in recent years, with few participants ($n\leq 5$) reporting recent use in 2022 and 2023. These are the lowest percentages of use since monitoring of NPS first commenced in 2010, with few participants ($n\leq 5$) reporting use of any individual NPS.

Other Drugs

Recent use of other non-prescribed pharmaceutical drugs remained relatively stable from 2022 to 2023. Recent use of non-prescribed codeine (18%; 15% in 2022) and any non-prescribed benzodiazepines (32%; 36% in 2022) remained stable, as did the frequency of use. Two fifths (40%) of the sample reported recent use of hallucinogenic mushrooms in the six months prior to the interview, with the frequency of use significantly decreasing to a median of three days (4 days in 2022; $p=0.040$). Eleven per cent reported recent use of GHB/GBL/1,4-BD, a significant increase from 2022, whereby no participants reported recent use ($p=0.005$). Fifty-four per cent reported recent use of non-prescribed e-cigarettes (56% in 2022), with

frequency of use significantly increasing to a median of 60 days (24 days in 2022; $p=0.011$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

- On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 74% of participants reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes).
- One quarter (27%) of participants reported that they or someone else had tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year.
- Almost four fifths (78%) of participants obtained an AUDIT score of eight or more, indicative of hazardous alcohol use.
- Past year non-fatal stimulant overdose remained stable in 2023 (23%; 24% in 2022), as did past year non-fatal depressant overdose (23%; 28% in 2022).
- In 2023, 64% of the sample reported that they had ever heard of naloxone, a significant increase from 38% in 2022 ($p=0.007$).
- Reported past month injecting drug use remained low ($n\leq 5$), as did current drug treatment engagement (11%).
- In 2023, few participants ($n\leq 5$) who reported recent ecstasy use obtained an SDS score of ≥ 3 , while 27% of participants reporting recent methamphetamine use obtained a score of ≥ 4 , indicating possible dependence on these substances.
- Four fifths (81%) of the sample reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 32% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner, a significant increase from 2022 ($n\leq 5$; $p=0.019$).
- Fifty-four per cent of the sample self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months, with anxiety (68%) and depression (53%) most commonly reported.
- Seventeen per cent of the sample reported a score of 30 or more on the K10, indicating very high psychological distress.
- Sixteen per cent of participants reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview, a significant decrease from 2022 (32%; $p=0.033$).
- Twenty-eight per cent of the sample reported experiencing stigma because of their illicit drug use in any health/non-health care setting in the six months preceding interview.
- In 2023, 85% had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the past 12 months, with 46% of participants testing positive to COVID-19 in the 12 months preceding interview.
- Amongst recent drivers, one quarter (26%) reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 40% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the past six months.
- Thirty per cent of the sample reported 'any' crime in the month preceding interview, with property crime (19%) and selling drugs for cash profit (16%) remaining the two main forms of criminal activity in 2023.
- Face-to-face contact was the most popular means of participants arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview (73%; 73% in 2022), followed by social networking applications (51%; 67% in 2022).