

Executive Summary

The Perth Western Australia (WA) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited via social media, advertisements on websites and via word-of-mouth in Perth, WA. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2022 from May-June. All interviews were conducted via telephone to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in 2022 (as per 2020), while a hybrid approach was employed in 2021 (involving both face-to-face and telephone interviews); all interviews prior to 2020 were conducted face-to-face. These methodological changes should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020-2022 samples, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The EDRS sample (N=100) recruited from Perth, WA, was similar to the sample in 2021 and in previous years. Whilst fewer participants reported studying in 2022 (37%; 59% in 2021; $p=0.003$) and the median weekly income increased to \$800 (\$600 in 2021; $p=0.012$), the sample continued to comprise predominantly males (71%), many with tertiary qualifications (50%) and most of whom were living in a rental house/flat or residing with their parents/at their family home (52% and 32%, respectively) at the time of interview. Ecstasy, alcohol and cannabis continued to be the three most commonly reported drugs of choice (20%, 21% and 35%, respectively). However, there was a significant change in the drug used most often in the past month ($p=0.016$). Specifically, the per cent nominating alcohol decreased (26%; 44% in 2021), while the per cent nominating cannabis slightly increased (37%; 32% in 2021).

Ecstasy

The vast majority reported recent (past 6 month) use of ecstasy (any form: 96%), consistent with 2021 and earlier years. Crystal and capsule forms continued to be the most commonly reported forms used (60% and 57% respectively). Meanwhile, there was a

significant increase in the per cent reporting recent use of powder ecstasy (32%; 17% in 2021; $p=0.020$), and a significant decrease in recent use of pressed pills (21%; 37% in 2021; $p=0.021$). Frequency of recent use (in any form) remained stable, but the per cent reporting weekly or more frequent use significantly increased (10%; ≤ 5 participants in 2021; $p=0.018$). No significant differences were observed in perceived availability or purity of ecstasy pills, capsules or crystal. However, the perceived purity and availability of powder ecstasy significantly changed between 2021 and 2022 ($p=0.009$ and $p=0.032$, respectively), with more participants perceiving the purity of powder as being 'low' (33%; 17% in 2021) and 'difficult' to access (63%; 17% in 2021). Finally, for the second consecutive year, the median price per ecstasy capsule increased (\$30; \$28 in 2021; $p=0.009$), as did the price per gram of crystal (\$300; \$250 in 2021; $p=0.001$).

Methamphetamine

While recent (past six month) use of methamphetamine has declined among the Perth sample since the commencement of monitoring in 2003, it has remained stable in recent years (14% in 2022). In recent years, crystal has been the main form of methamphetamine reportedly used. Frequency of methamphetamine crystal use remained low and stable, and few participants ($n\leq 5$) reported weekly or more frequent use. Market changes for methamphetamine remained stable in 2022 relative to 2021.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has increased since monitoring began, and this trend continued in 2022 (66%; 59% in 2021). However, relative to 2021, there was a significant decrease in the frequency of cocaine use in the preceding six months (median of 2 days; 5 days in 2021; $p=0.001$) and few ($n\leq 5$) participants reported weekly or more frequent use. Market changes for cocaine remained stable in 2022 relative to 2021.

Cannabis and/or Cannabinoid Related Products

Each year since monitoring began, at least three in four participants have reported any recent use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid related products. In 2022, 84% reported recent use and among these, 25% reported daily use. When asked about forms used, there was a significant decline in the per cent reporting hydroponic cannabis (64%; 82% in 2021; $p=0.020$), making bush cannabis equally as popular in 2022 (also 64%). Market changes for hydroponic and bush cannabis remained stable in 2022, relative to 2021.

Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Whilst recent use of ketamine, LSD and DMT remained stable (39%, 54% and 29%, respectively), there has been an upward trend in self-reported use of these substances in recent years. However, frequency of recent use has remained low and stable for all three substances. In 2022, the price per tab of LSD increased (\$30; \$25 in 2021; $p=0.009$). However, perceived purity and availability remained stable for ketamine and LSD. No market trend data for DMT was collected.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, has fluctuated over time, with 13% reporting recent use in 2022, stable from 10% in 2021. Similar results were observed for any NPS use, excluding plant-based NPS (13%; 9% in 2021).

Other Drugs

Reported use of most other drugs remained stable relative to 2021. However, there were significant increases in the per cent reporting recent use of amyl nitrite (40%; 21% in 2021; $p=0.006$), nitrous oxide (70%; 45% in 2021; $p=0.001$), and non-prescribed e-cigarettes (81%; 55% in 2021; $p<0.001$). Whilst frequency of use remained low for amyl nitrite and nitrous oxide, frequency of recent use for non-prescribed e-cigarettes increased from a median of 24 days to a median of 90 days (i.e., every second day, $p=0.012$). Lastly, the upward trend in reported recent use of pharmaceutical stimulants continued into 2022 (81%).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 87% of the Perth sample in 2022 reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes), most commonly alcohol (81%). Almost half the sample (48%) reported that they or someone else had tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year. Most of the sample (82%) obtained an AUDIT score of eight or more, indicative of hazardous alcohol use in the past 12 months. Reported past year non-fatal stimulant overdose remained stable in 2022 (21%), whilst past year non-fatal depressant overdose (mostly comprising alcohol) significantly increased (31%; 17% in 2021; $p=0.023$). Three-quarters (76%) reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 12% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner. Almost three-fifths (57%) self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months. Among recent drivers, 35% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, while 55% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug. Around two-fifths (43%) reported 'any' crime in the past month, with drug dealing most common (32%). Twelve per cent reported being the victim of a crime involving violence in 2022, a significant increase relative to 2021 ($n\leq 5$; $p=0.029$). Face-to-face remained the most popular means of arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the past 12 months (74%; 90% in 2021; $p=0.007$), although social networking applications were almost equally as popular in 2022 (73%). Significantly more participants reported obtaining illicit drugs from an unknown dealer/vendor in 2022 (43%; 29% in 2021; $p=0.044$). The majority (95%) of the sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2, with 52% reporting having been diagnosed with the virus. At the time of interview, 95% reported that they had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, with participants reporting a median of three vaccine doses.