

Executive Summary

The Perth Western Australia (WA) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants recruited via social media 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 2023 from April-June. Interviews from 2020 onwards 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 Perth EDRS sample (N=100) was similar to the sample in 2022 and in previous years. However, gender significantly changed between 2022 and 2023 ($p=0.043$), with three fifths identifying as male in 2023 (59%; 71% in 2022). The median age was also slightly higher in 2023 (23 years; 21 years in 2022; $p=0.024$). Other sample characteristics remained stable between 2022 and 2023. Approximately half held tertiary qualifications (53%), while almost one third reported being current students (31%). Two fifths (39%) reported full-time employment, while a similar percentage (42%) reported part-time/casual employment. Approximately half of the sample (46%) reported living in a rental house/flat, while 36% reported residing in their parents/family home at the time of interview. Cannabis and ecstasy were the most commonly reported drugs of choice (27% and 26%, respectively), while cannabis and alcohol were the drugs reportedly used most often in the month preceding interview (36% and 30%, respectively). Weekly or more frequent use of

methamphetamine significantly increased, from $n\leq 5$ in 2022 to 12% in 2023 ($p=0.029$).

Ecstasy

The vast majority reported recent (past 6 month) use of ecstasy (any form: 98%), consistent with 2022 and earlier years. Capsule and crystal forms remained the most commonly reported forms used (59% and 57%, respectively). While the frequency of days used any ecstasy in the past six months significantly increased to seven days in 2023 (5 days in 2022; $p=0.044$), this remains lower than what has been observed historically (pre-COVID-19 pandemic market disruptions). Frequency of use for individual forms of ecstasy remained stable. There were significant changes in the perceived availability of ecstasy pills, capsules and powder in 2023 relative to 2022 ($p=0.003$; $p<0.001$; $p=0.045$, respectively), with increases in the per cent reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' access across all three forms. There were also significant changes in perceived purity of ecstasy capsules and crystals in 2023 relative to 2022 ($p<0.001$; $p=0.033$, respectively), with increases in the per cent reporting 'medium' and 'high' purity and decreases in reports of 'low' and 'fluctuating' purity.

Methamphetamine

Twenty-nine per cent of the Perth sample reported recent use of any methamphetamine, representing a significant increase relative to 14% in 2022 ($p=0.018$) and levels not observed in the Perth EDRS sample since 2014. Crystal remained the main form of methamphetamine reportedly used in 2023, with a significant increase from 11% in 2022 to 28% in 2023 ($p=0.005$). Methamphetamine crystal was used on a median of 11 days, stable from three days in 2022, and 39% reported weekly or more frequent use ($n\leq 5$ in 2022). A significant change was observed in perceived availability of methamphetamine crystal ($p=0.014$), with 100% reporting access as 'easy' or 'very easy'

(86% in 2022). The median price per point of methamphetamine crystal also significantly declined from \$125 in 2022 to \$60 in 2023 ($p=0.046$). Overall, the median price of methamphetamine crystal seems to have halved, and the percentage of the sample reporting recent use has more than doubled.

Non-Prescribed Pharmaceutical Stimulants

The per cent of Perth participants reporting any recent use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants (e.g., dexamphetamine, methylphenidate, modafinil) has increased since the commencement of monitoring, from 43% in 2007 to 68% in 2023 (81% in 2022; $p=0.053$). Non-prescribed pharmaceutical stimulants were used on a median of nine days in 2023, stable from 10 days in 2022. Dexamphetamine remained the most commonly reported form used (96%; 94% in 2022), followed by lisdexamfetamine (37%; 31% in 2022). Reported use of Ritalin significantly declined in 2023 (13%; 28% in 2022; $p=0.033$).

Cocaine

Self-reported recent use of cocaine has increased over the years of monitoring (beginning at 17% in 2003) but remained stable between 2022 and 2023 (66% and 62%, respectively). Cocaine was used on median of three days in the preceding six months (stable from two days in 2022) and few ($n \leq 5$) participants reported weekly or more frequent use. Perceived availability of cocaine significantly changed between 2022 and 2023 ($p=0.040$), with 76% reporting 'easy' or 'very easy' access in 2023 (62% in 2022).

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). In 2023, 85% reported

recent use (84% in 2022), and among these, 31% reported daily use (25% in 2022). When asked about forms in 2023, 76% reported hydroponic use (64% in 2022) and 33% reported bush cannabis use, a significant decrease from 64% in 2022 ($p < 0.001$). A gram of hydroponic cannabis increased to a median of \$28 in 2023 (\$25 in 2022; $p=0.040$). There was also significant change in perceived bush potency between 2022 and 2023 ($p=0.023$), with a greater per cent reporting 'high' purity (47%; 9% in 2022).

Non-Prescribed Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of non-prescribed ketamine remained stable in 2023 (36%, 39% in 2022), but frequency of use significantly increased to a median of three days in the past six months (one day in 2022; $p=0.006$). Recent use of LSD was reported by 36% of the sample in 2023, a significant decline from 54% in 2022 ($p=0.016$). Frequency of LSD use remained low and stable (median of two days). Recent DMT use remained stable at 26% (29% in 2022), as did frequency of DMT use. Perceived availability of ketamine significantly changed ($p=0.002$), with more reporting access as 'easy' or 'very easy' in 2023 (71%; 26% in 2022).

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, has fluctuated over time among the Perth sample, peaking at 45% in 2013 and declining to 7% in 2023, marking the lowest per cent observed in the Perth sample since monitoring commenced, although stable relative to 2022 (13%; $p=0.243$). Similar results were observed for any NPS use, excluding plant-based NPS (6%; 13% in 2022; $p=0.151$).

Other Drugs

Reported use of most other drugs remained stable in 2023, relative to 2022. However, there were significant declines in the percentage reporting recent use of nitrous oxide (50%; 70% in 2022; $p=0.008$) and amyl nitrite (17%; 40% in

2022; $p=0.001$) in 2023, although frequency of use for both remained stable. There was also a significant decline in the percentage reporting recent use of e-cigarettes (62%; 81% in 2022; $p=0.005$), but the frequency of recent use increased to a median of 180 days (i.e., daily use; 90 days in 2022; $p=0.003$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Behaviours

- On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 70% of the Perth sample reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (excluding tobacco and e-cigarettes), most commonly ecstasy (57%).
- In 2023, 43% reported that they or someone else had tested the content and/or purity of their illicit drugs in Australia in the past year (stable from 48% in 2022).
- Almost three quarters (72%) obtained an AUDIT score of eight or more, indicative of hazardous alcohol use in the past 12 months (stable from 82% in 2022).
- One tenth (11%) reported past year non-fatal stimulant overdose in 2023, stable relative to 2022 (21%; $p=0.084$), whilst one fifth (20%) reported past year non-fatal depressant overdose (mostly comprising alcohol) (31% in 2022; $p=0.079$).
- In 2023, 61% of the sample reported that they had ever heard of naloxone (44% in 2022; $p=0.024$), of which 89% were able to correctly identify the purpose of naloxone (90% in 2022).
- Reported past month injecting drug use remained low ($n \leq 5$), as did drug treatment engagement ($n \leq 5$).
- The median ecstasy SDS score was zero (IQR=0–2), and the median methamphetamine SDS score was one (IQR=0–7), indicating that the majority of respondents reported no or few symptoms of dependence in relation to ecstasy and methamphetamine use.
- In 2023, approximately three quarters (77%) reported engaging in sexual activity in the past four weeks (76% in 2022), of which 37% reported penetrative sex without a condom

where they did not know the HIV status of their partner (12% in 2022; $p < 0.001$).

- Mental health remained stable relative to 2022, with 57% self-reporting a mental health problem in the six months preceding interview (57% in 2022).
- One fifth (21%) of the Perth sample reported very high psychological distress (14% in 2022).
- Almost one quarter (23%) of the sample reported accessing any health service for alcohol and/or drug support in the six months preceding interview, and one quarter (24%) of the sample reported experiencing stigma in any health/non health setting in the six months preceding interview.
- In 2023, the vast majority of the sample (99%) had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in their lifetime, with three fifths (60%) of participants testing positive to COVID-19 in the 12 months preceding interview.
- Amongst those who had recently driven, 45% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, while 62% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the prior six months (stable relative to 2022).
- Thirty per cent of the sample reported 'any' crime in the past month (43% in 2022; $p=0.082$), with drug dealing (23%) and property crime (10%) remaining the two main forms of criminal activity in 2023.
- Face-to-face and social networking applications were the most popular means of participants arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview (77% and 75%, respectively).