



Emerging trends in drug use, harms, and markets: Findings from Drug Trends 2019

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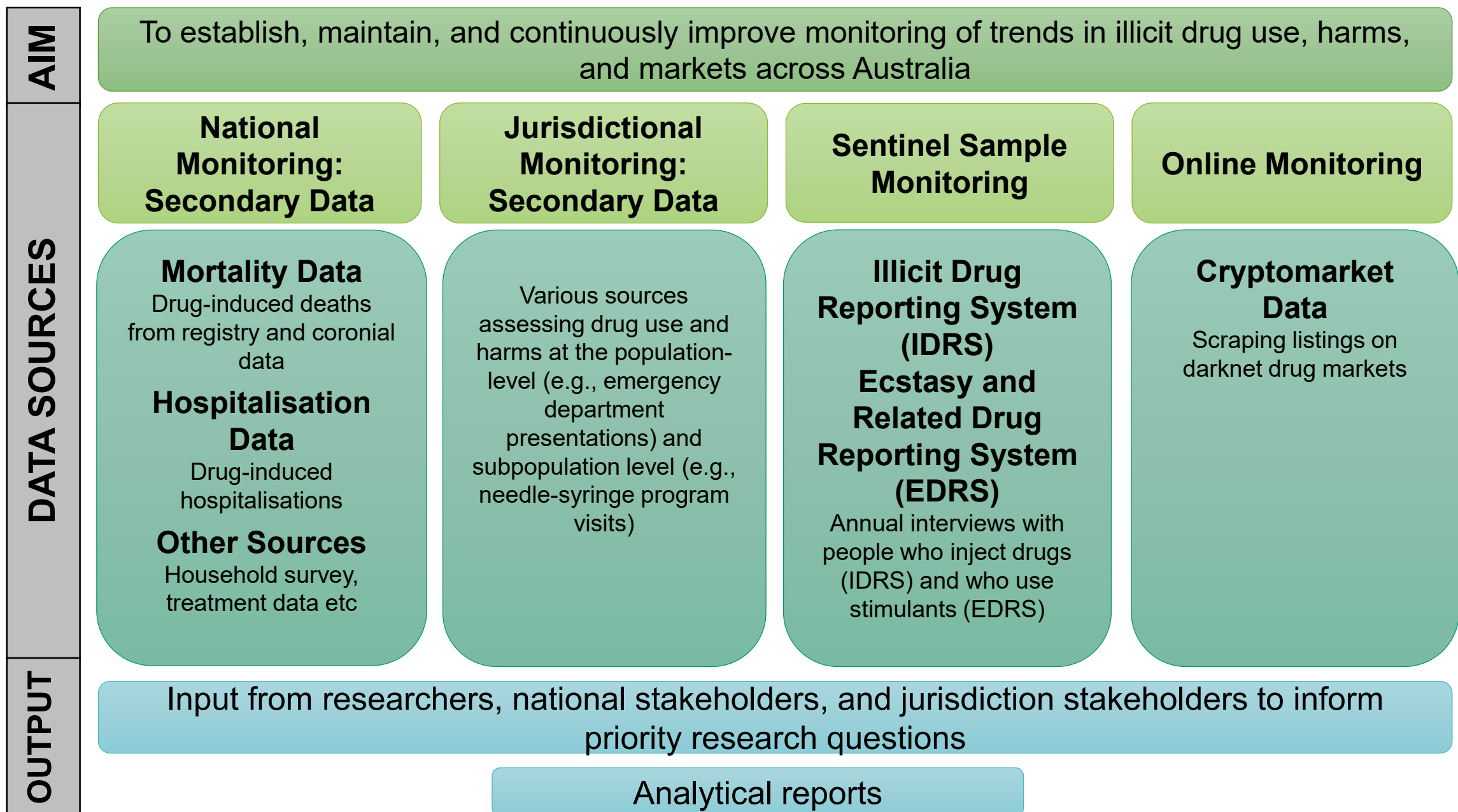
Drug Trends Team:

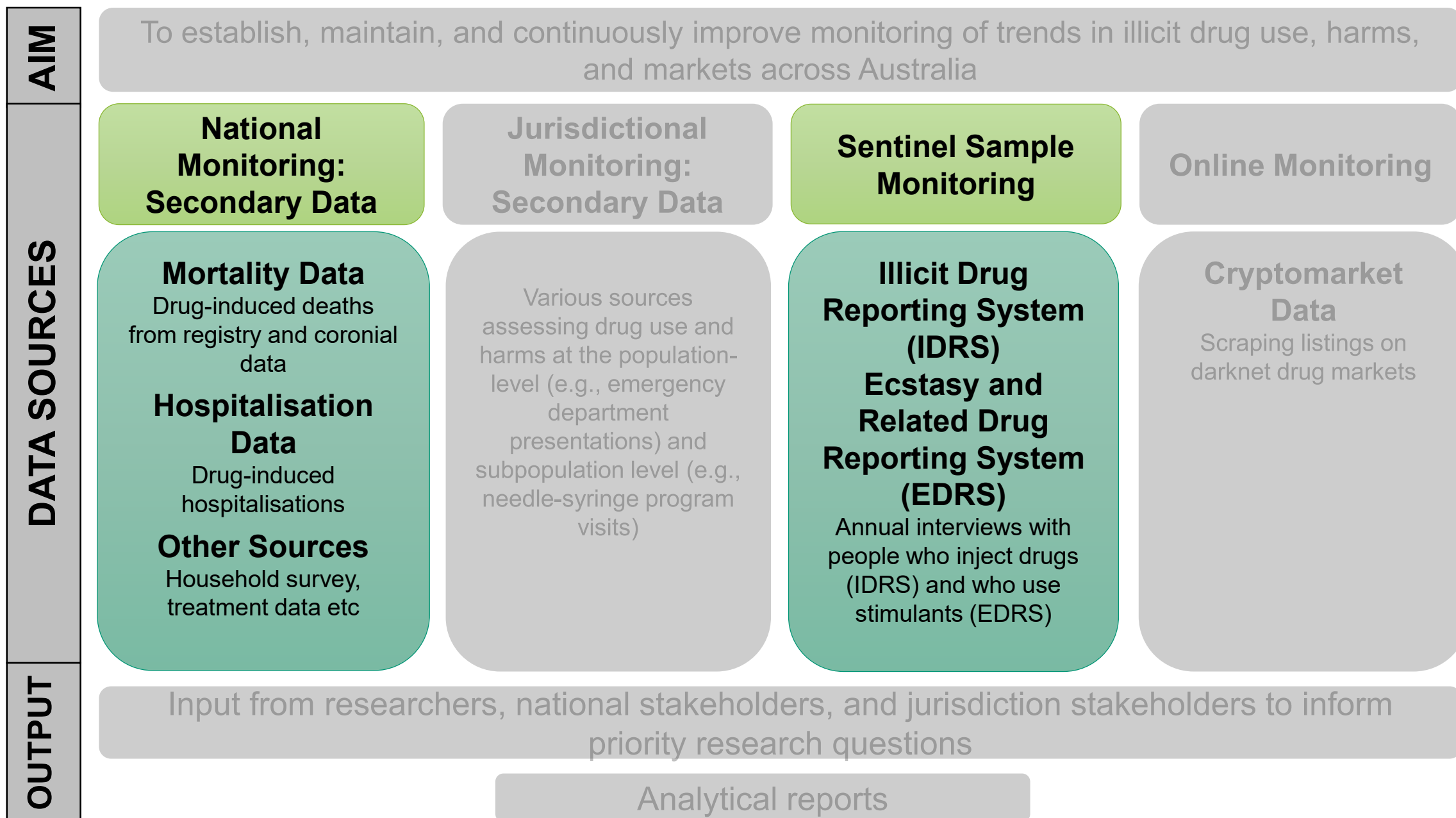
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IDRS and EDRS interview samples, 2019

	IDRS (N=902)	EDRS (N=797)
Eligibility criteria:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who regularly inject illicit drugs residing in capital cities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who regularly use ecstasy or other stimulants residing in capital cities
Interviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May-July 2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> April-July 2019
Demographics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly male (68%) and middle-aged (median 43 years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly male (60%) and young (median 22 years old)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majority unemployed (88%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majority studying (45%) and/or employed (73%)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homelessness/unstable housing high (9%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few homeless or in unstable housing (1%)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History of incarceration high (62%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History of incarceration lower (5%)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two in five (41%) currently in drug treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few in drug treatment (6%)

Key Caveats

Findings do not represent drug use in the general population, nor trends in regional/remote areas

People report what they think the substance was (no objective data on actual contents)

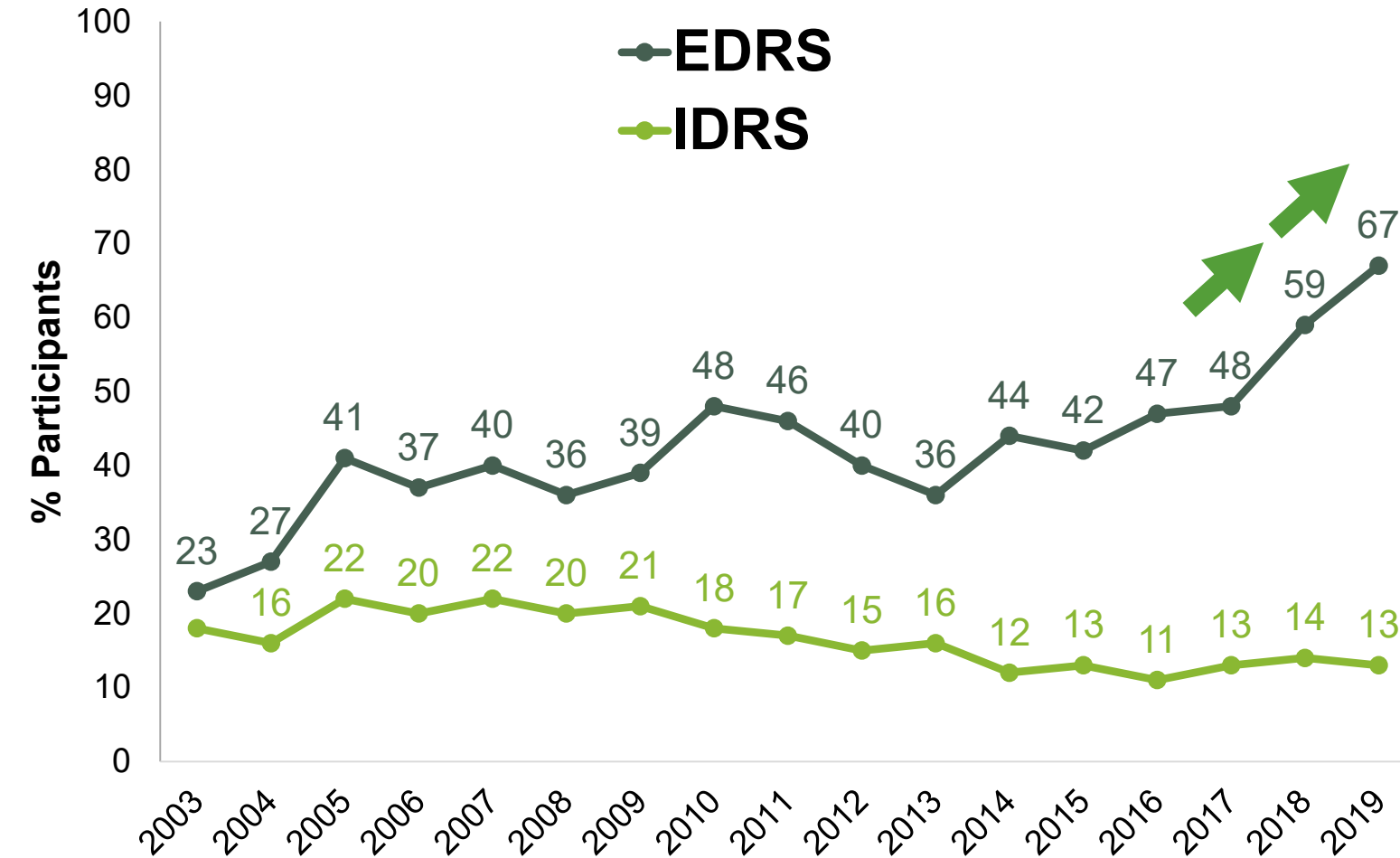
Need to be interpreted in context of other data sources

**TOP 10
'DRUG
TRENDS'
OF 2019**



Cocaine

Past six month cocaine use in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS) and who inject drugs (IDRS)



7%

of cocaine consumers in EDRS
reported **weekly or more
frequent use**
(7% in 2018)

\$300

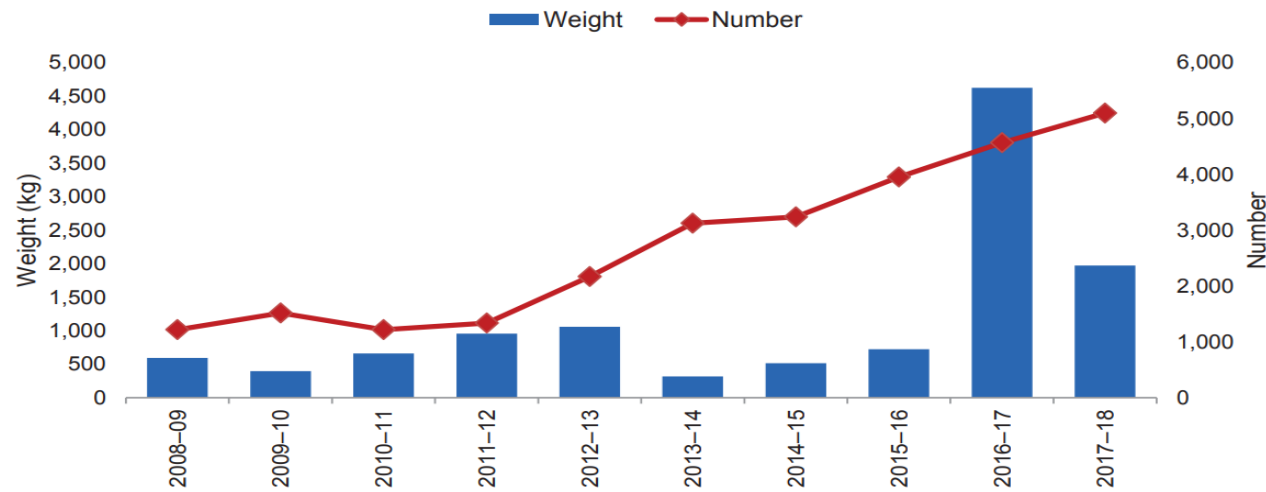
Median price per gram of cocaine
since 2006

70%

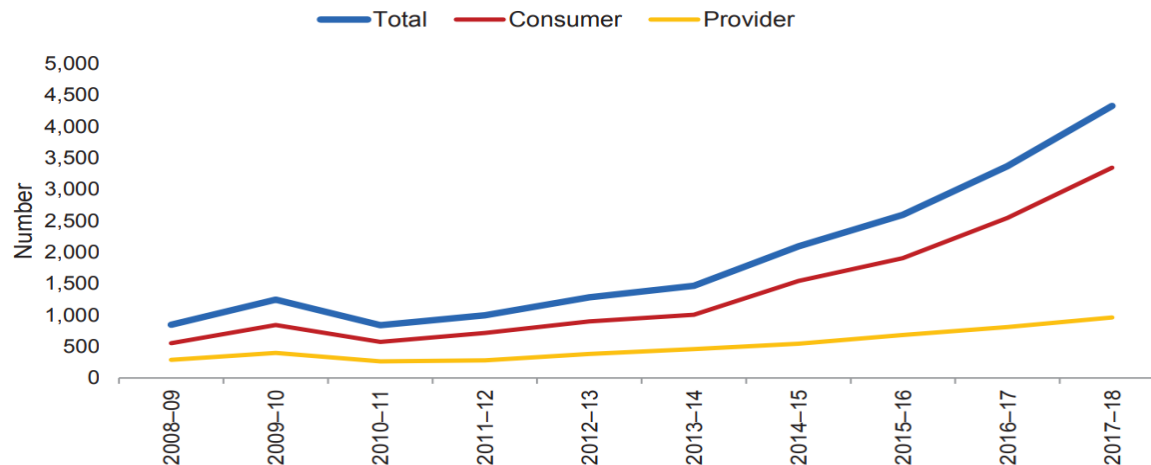
of cocaine consumers in EDRS
said cocaine was '**easy**' or '**very
easy**' to obtain
(62% in 2018)

Other indicators of cocaine use, markets and harms

National cocaine seizures, by number and weight, 2008–09 to 2017–18



Number of national cocaine arrests, 2008–09 to 2017–18



1.7%

Of drug-related hospital separations in 2017/18 – a small but increasing trend from 2010-11
(*Drug Trends, 2019*)

1.3%

Of closed drug treatment episodes in 2017/18 where cocaine/MDMA was cited as principal drug of concern
(*AIHW, 2019*)

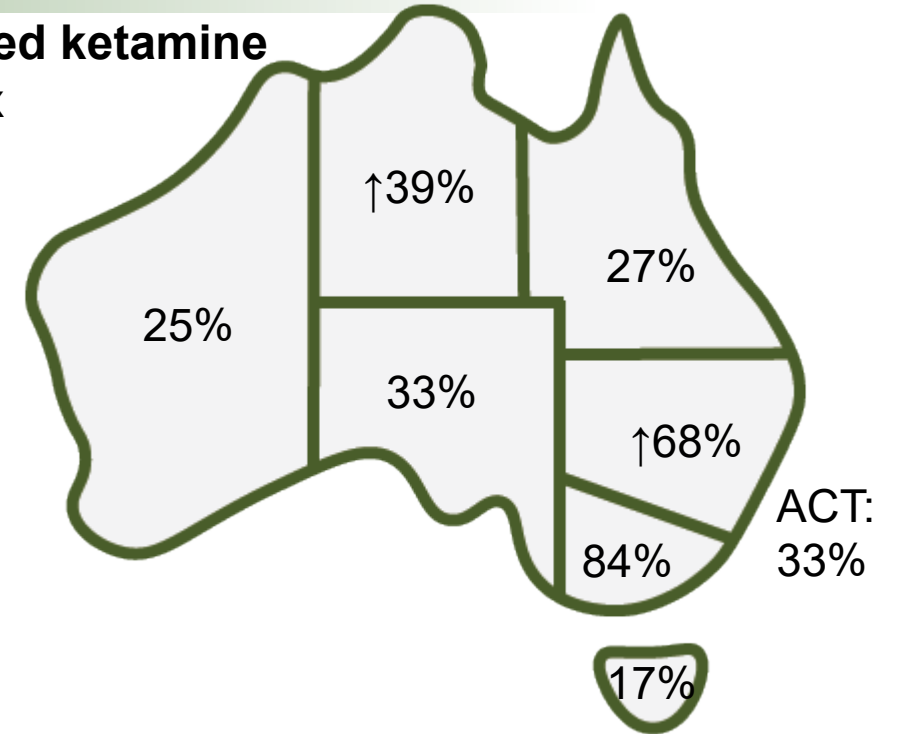
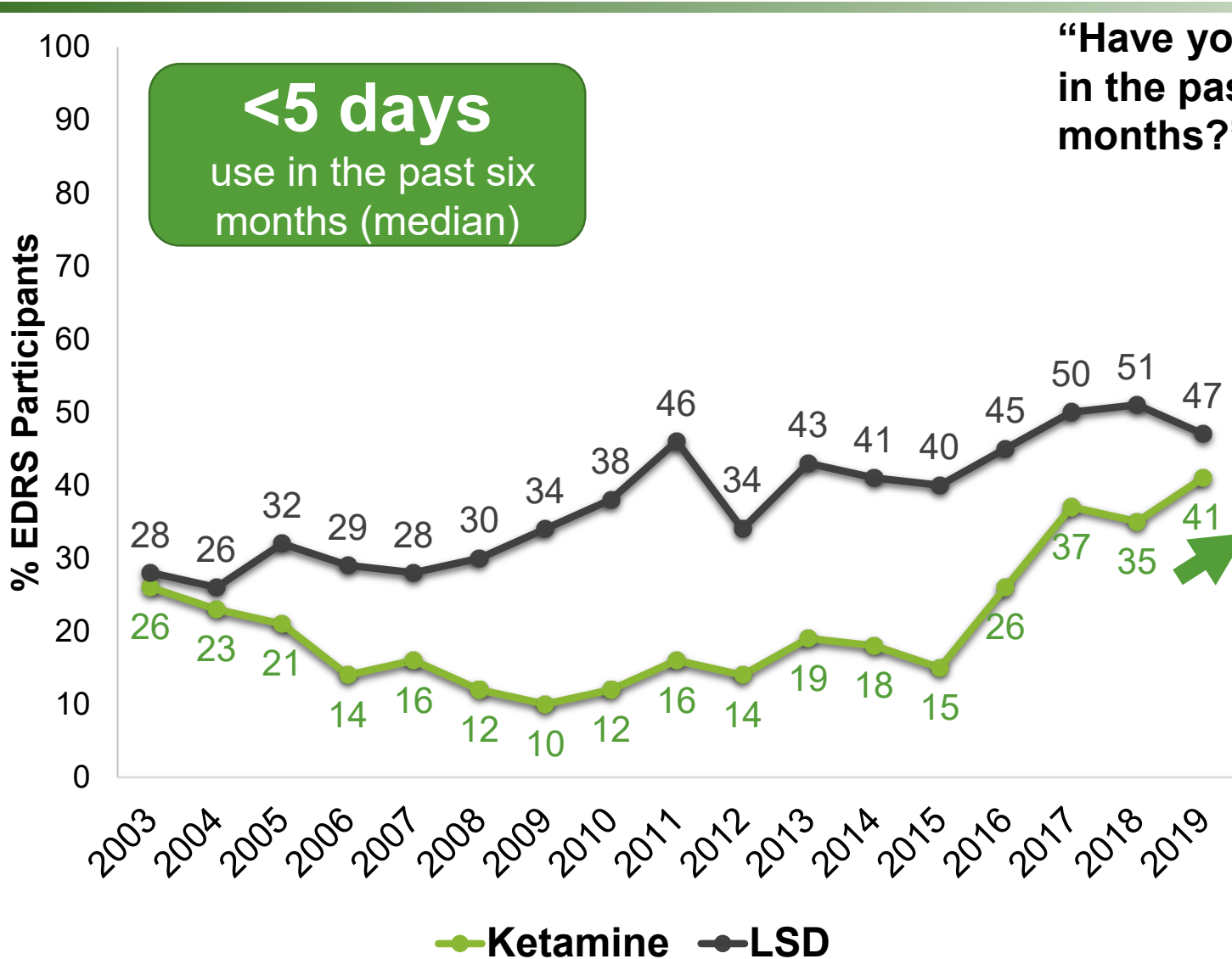
41

drug-induced deaths involved cocaine in 2017
(*Chrzanowska et al., 2019*)



Ketamine

Past six month hallucinogen use in the sample who use ecstasy



Harm reduction

- Avoid alcohol
- Avoid driving
- Safe setting
- Urinary tract issues

<https://www.dancewizensw.org.au/resources/ketamine>

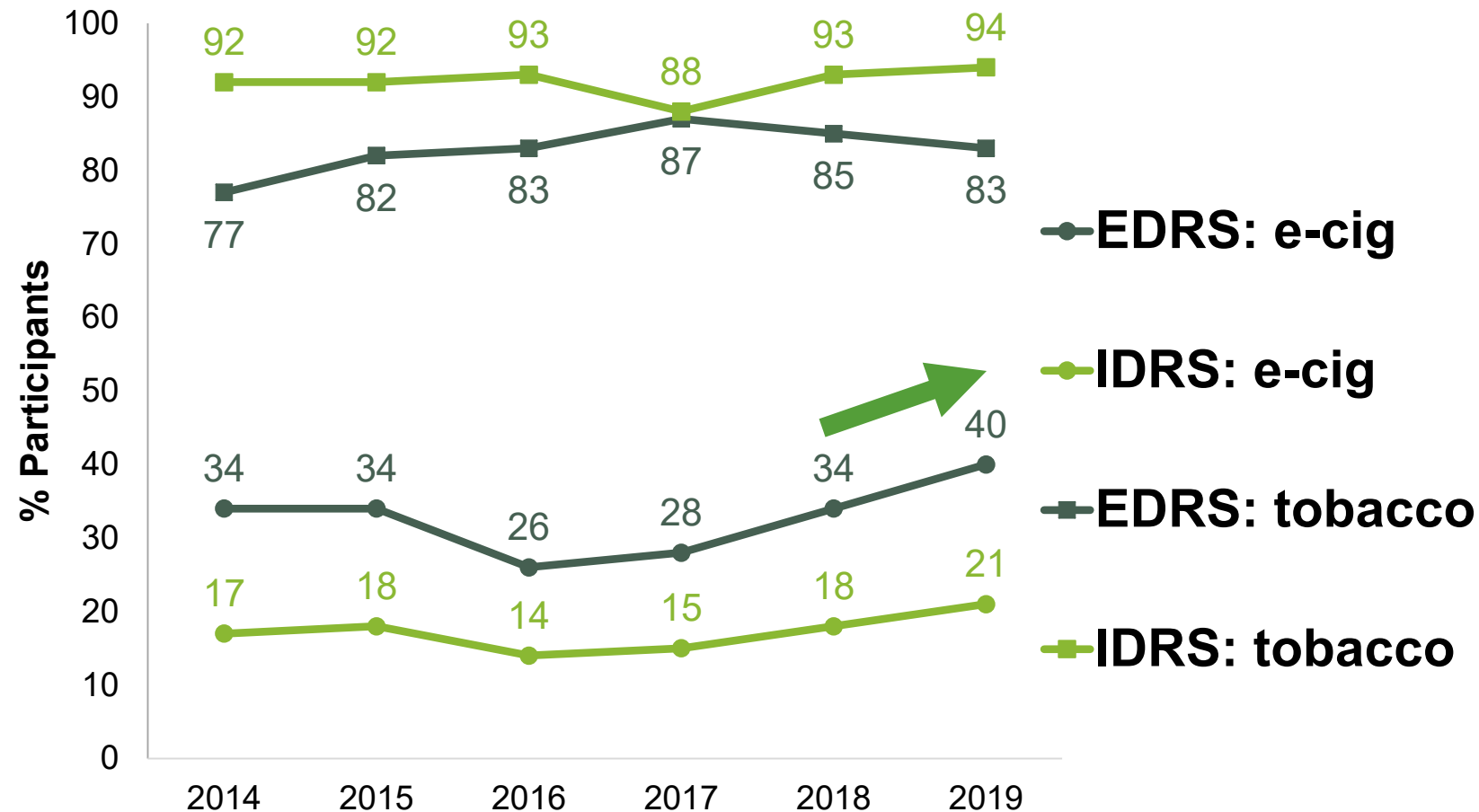
<https://www.drugsand.me/en/drugs/ketamine/>



E-Cigarettes

Past six month e-cigarette use in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS) and who inject drugs (IDRS)

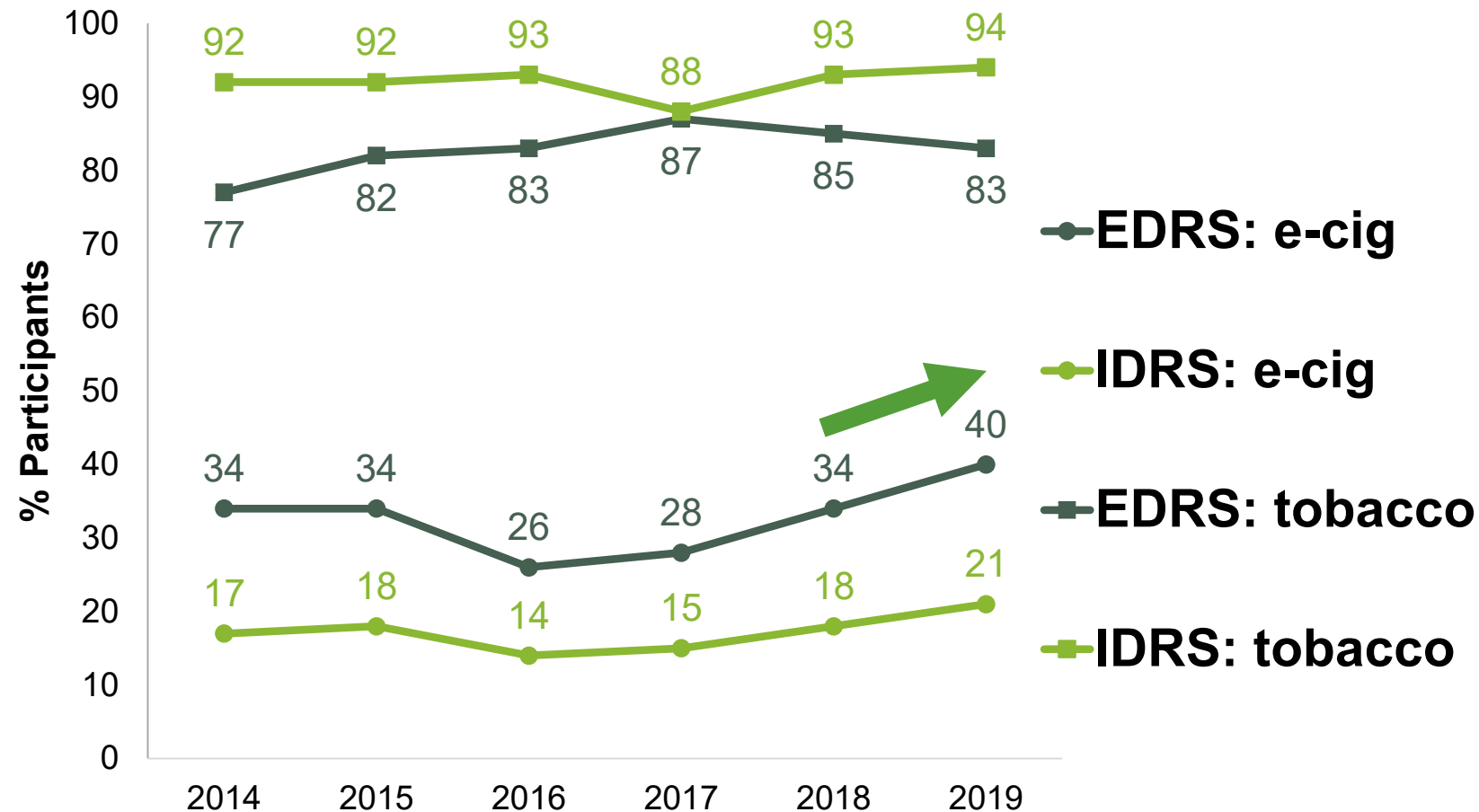
Updated October 11, 2019 at 1:00 PM ET



What we know

- As of October 8, 2019, 1,299* lung injury cases associated with the use of e-cigarette, or vaping, products have been reported to CDC from 49 states, the District of Columbia, and 1 U.S. territory.
- Twenty-six deaths have been confirmed in 21 states.
- All patients have reported a history of using e-cigarette, or vaping, products.
- Most patients report a history of using tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)-containing products. The latest national and state findings suggest products containing THC, particularly those obtained off the street or from other informal sources (e.g. friends, family members, illicit dealers), are linked to most of the cases and play a major role in the outbreak.
- Therefore, CDC recommends that you should not use e-cigarette, or vaping, products that contain THC.
- Exclusive use of nicotine containing products has been reported by some patients with lung injury cases, and many patients with lung injury report combined use of THC- and nicotine-containing products. Therefore, the possibility that nicotine-containing products play a role in this outbreak cannot be excluded.
- At present, CDC continues to recommend that people consider refraining from using e-cigarette, or vaping, products that contain nicotine.

Past six month e-cigarette use in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS) and who inject drugs (IDRS)



Median 10 days

of e-cigarette use in the past six months in the EDRS sample
(5 days 2018, 167 days tobacco)

EDRS:

16% nicotine and cannabis

69% nicotine

3% cannabis

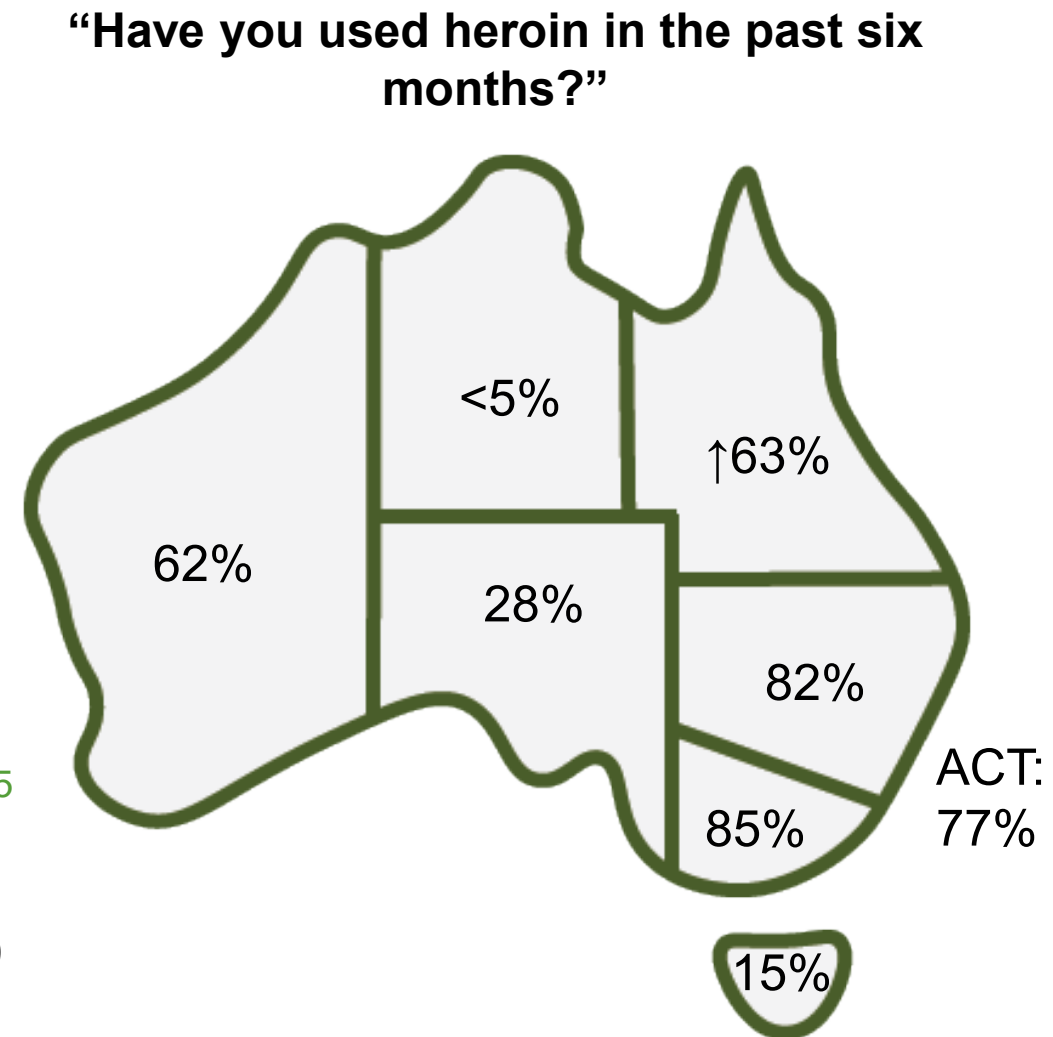
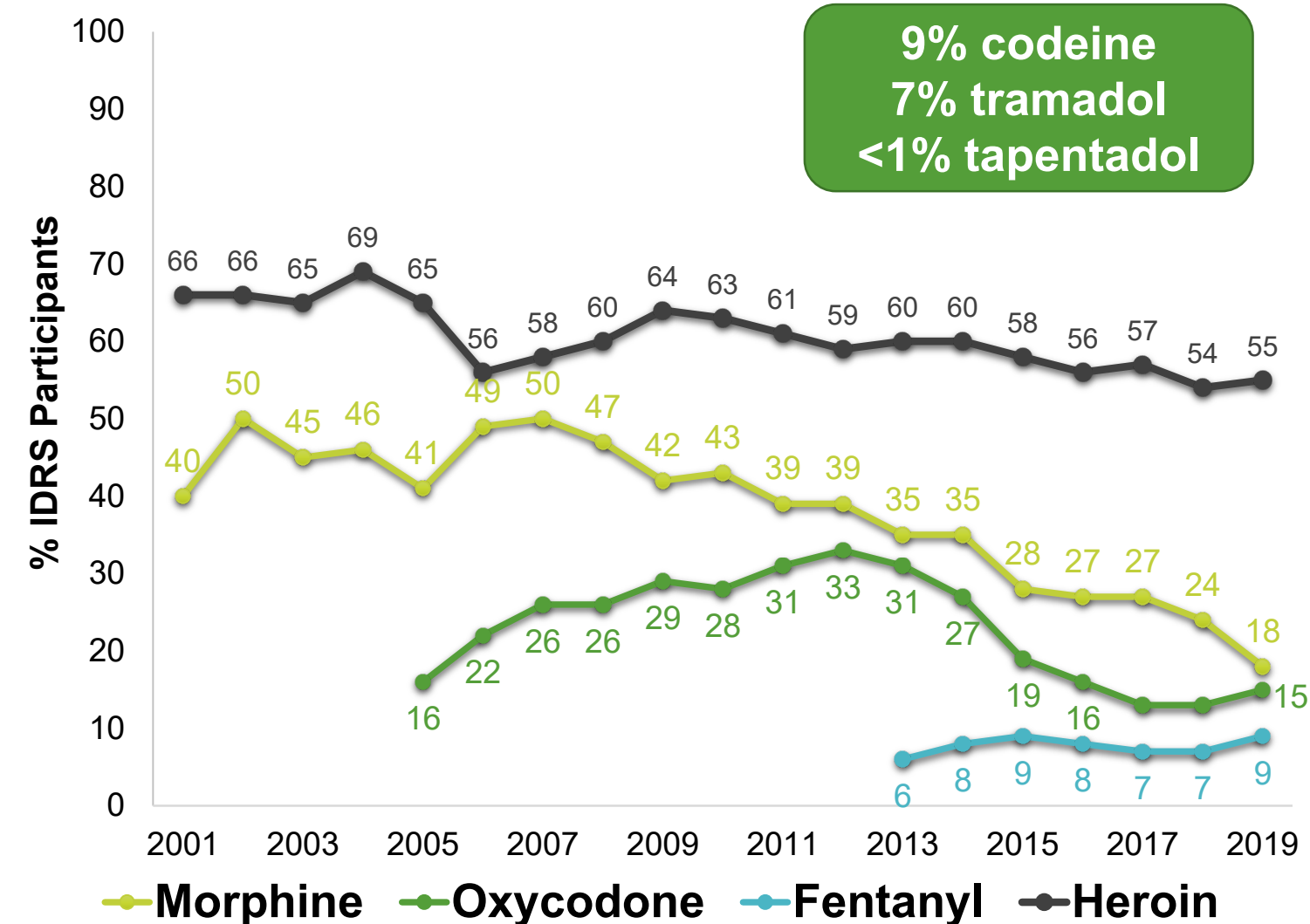
11% neither

IDRS sample who use e-cigarettes more likely to report use as a smoking cessation tool than EDRS sample
(Sutherland et al., 2016)

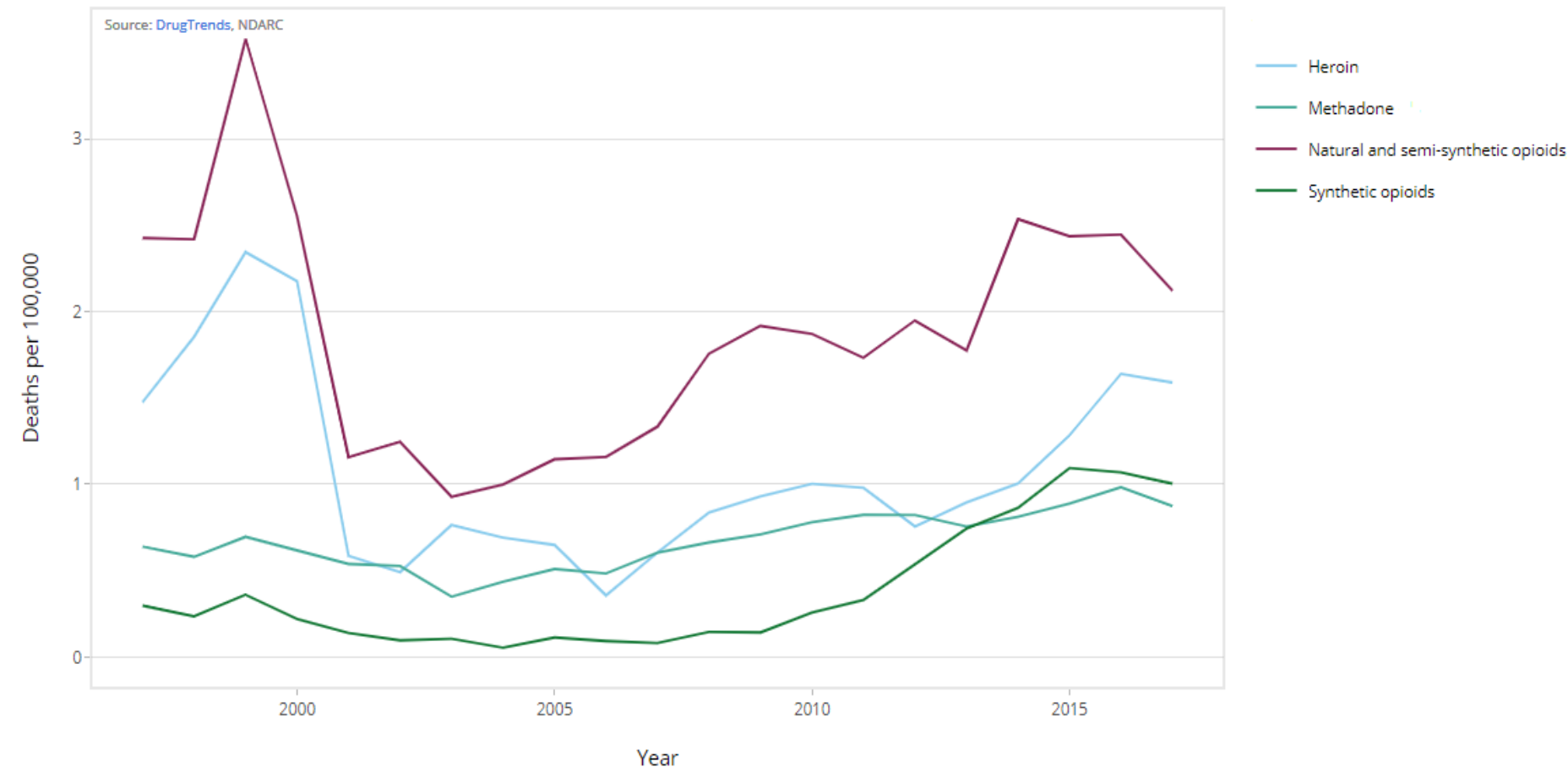


Opioids

Past six month use of illicit/non-prescribed opioids in the sample who inject drugs (IDRS)



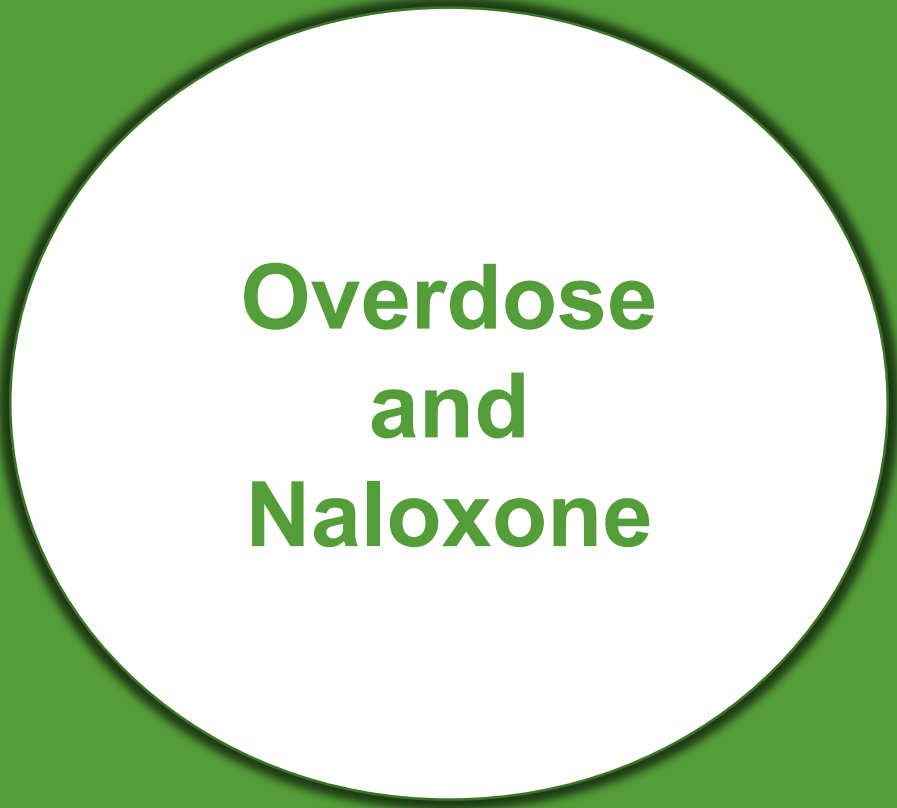
Opioid-induced deaths in Australia, 1997-2017



2018 findings to be released November 2019

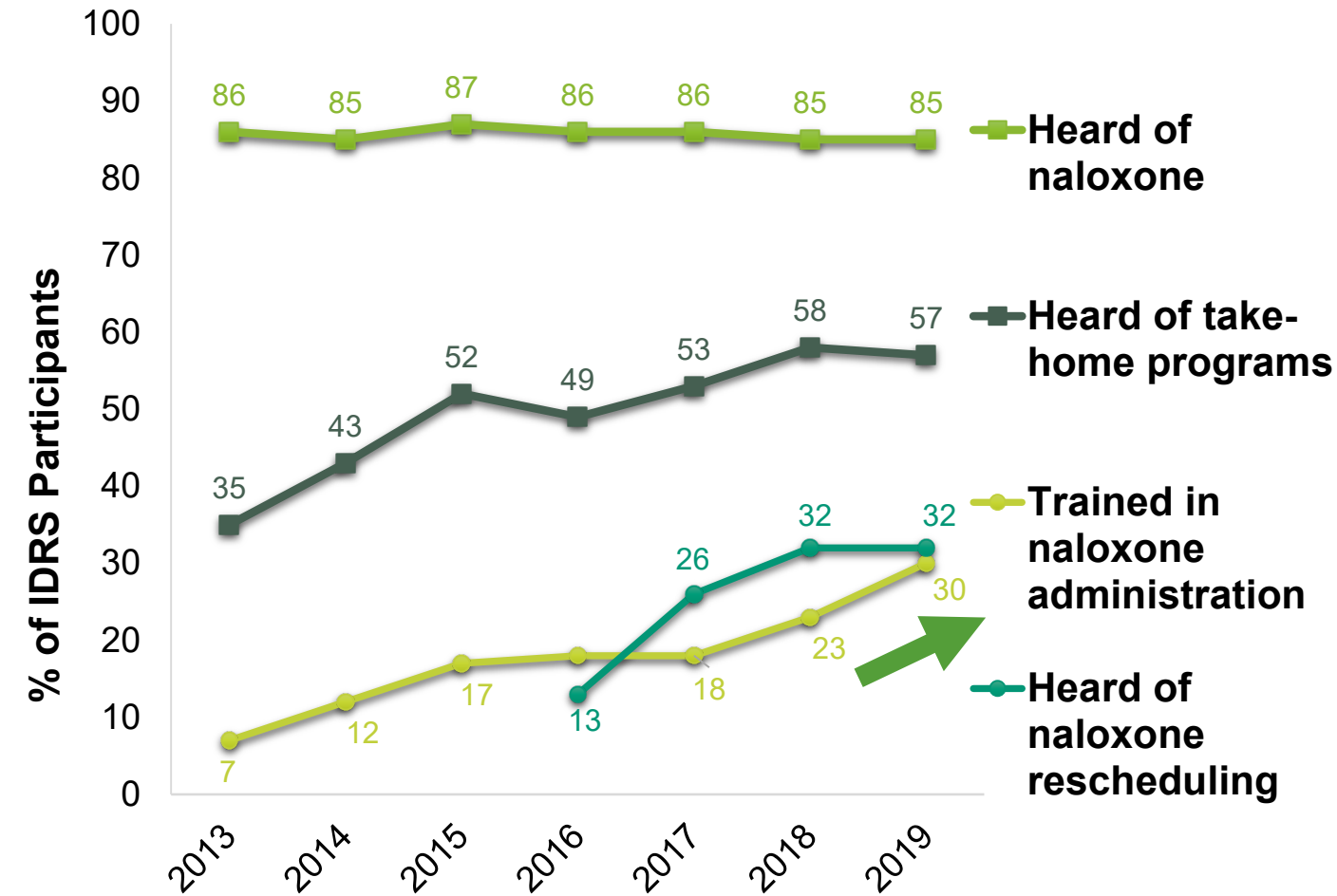
Drugs deemed contributory in opioid-induced deaths in 2017 (n=1153):

- 56% benzodiazepines
- 32% antidepressants
- 19% antipsychotics
- 16% alcohol
- 7% pregabalin

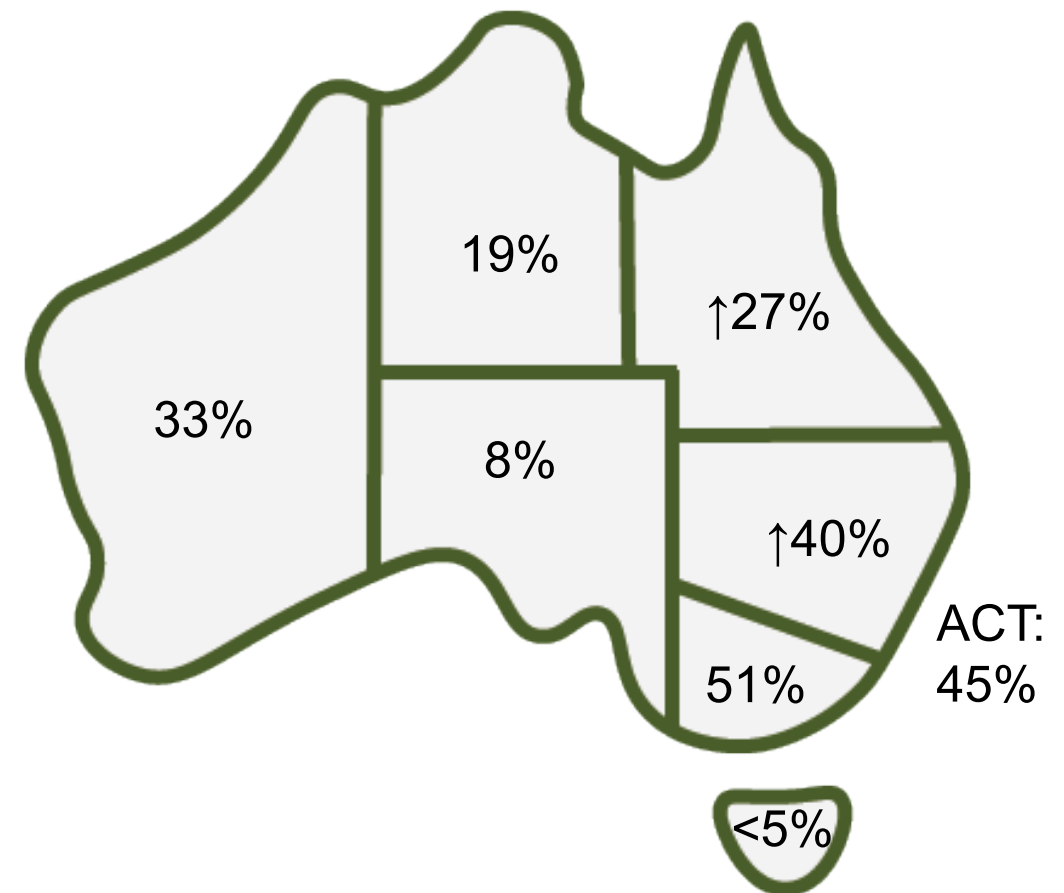


Overdose and Naloxone

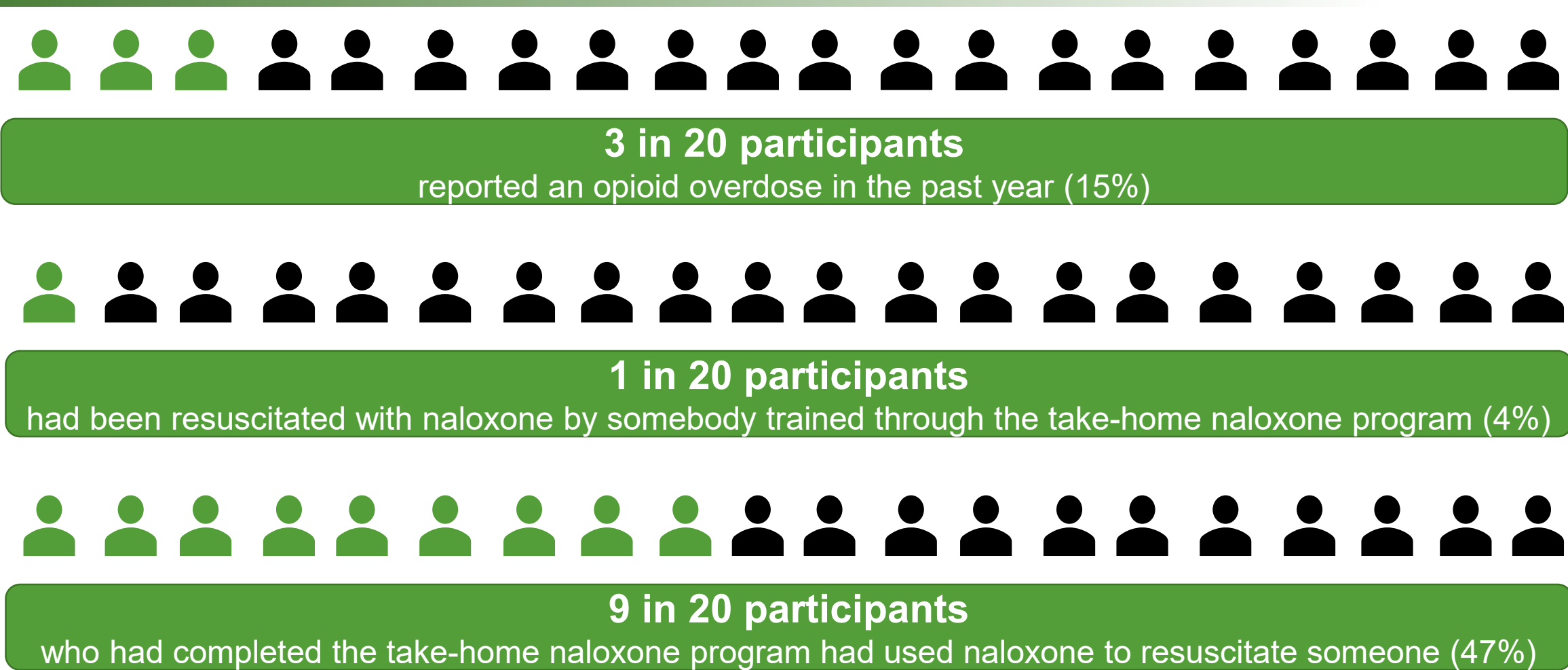
Naloxone knowledge and training in the sample who inject drugs (IDRS)



“Have you been trained in naloxone administration?”



Overdose and naloxone use in the sample who inject drugs (IDRS)





**Service
Engagement**

Service engagement in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS) and who inject drugs (IDRS)

Sample who inject drugs

41%
Currently in drug treatment

31%
**Had seen a mental health professional
in the past 12 months**
47% of the total sample reported a mental health
problem

46%
**Had a sexual health check in the past
12 months**
19% of those who had penetrative sex reported
penetrative sex without a barrier where they did
not know the HIV/STI status of their partner

Sample who use ecstasy

6%
Currently in drug treatment

33%
**Had seen a mental health professional
in the past 12 months**
57% of the total sample reported a mental health
problem

57%
**Had a sexual health check in the past
12 months**
35% of those who had penetrative sex reported
sex without a barrier where they did not know the
HIV/STI status of their partner



Modes of Purchasing

Modes of purchasing in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS)

“In what ways did you arrange the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the past 12 months?”

82%
Face-to-face

10%
Darknet market

73%
Social networking sites

5%
Surface web market

“How have you received illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the past 12 months?”

98%
Face-to-face

12%
Post

10%
Collection point

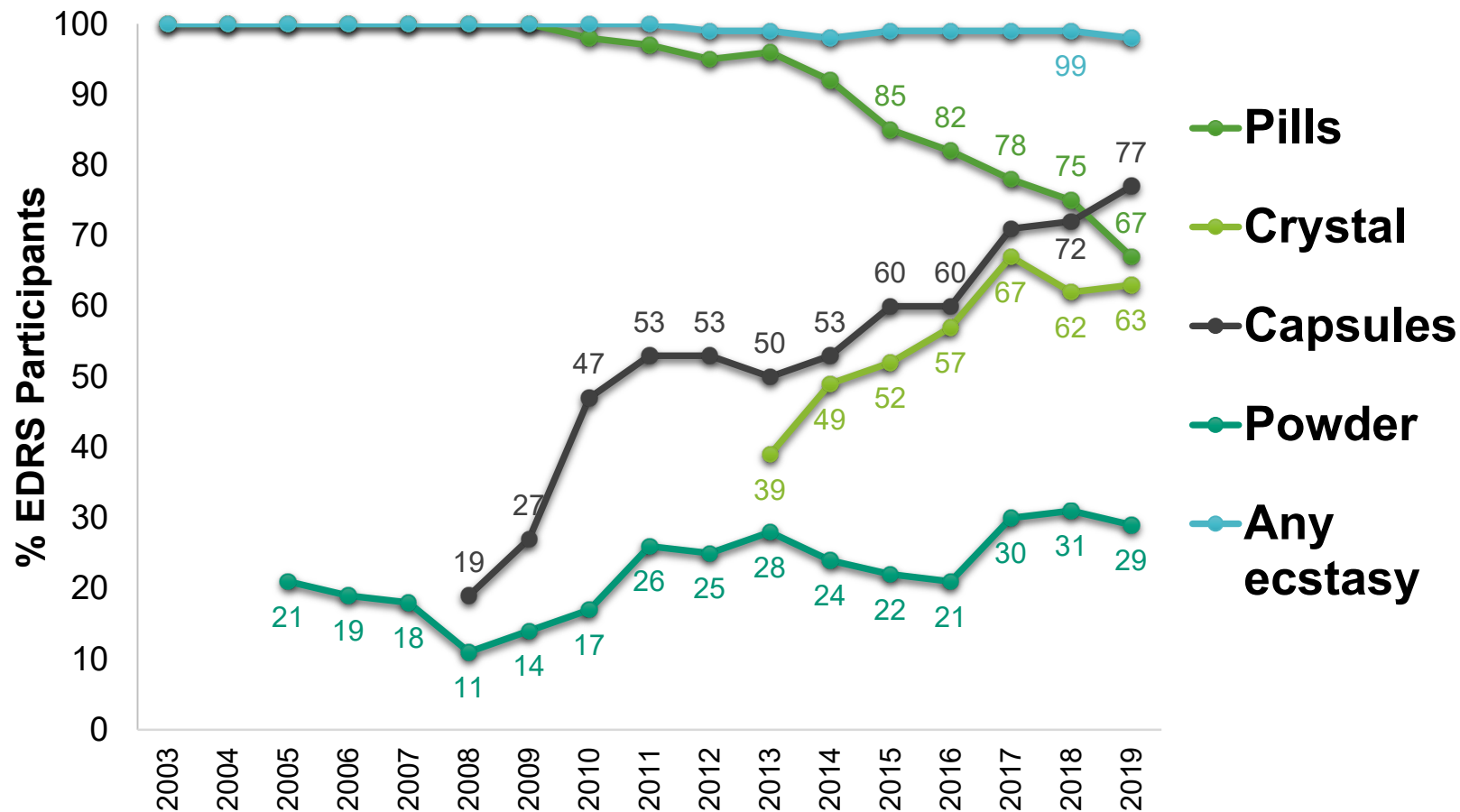
“In the last 12 months, did you purchase drugs on the surface or darknet that you then supplied to others?”

60%
supplied to others



Ecstasy

Ecstasy use in the past six months



Capsules

↑ days of use (median 8 days)
 ↓ median price (\$20)
 ↑ perceived availability (92% easy/very easy)

Median **pills** in a **typical** session

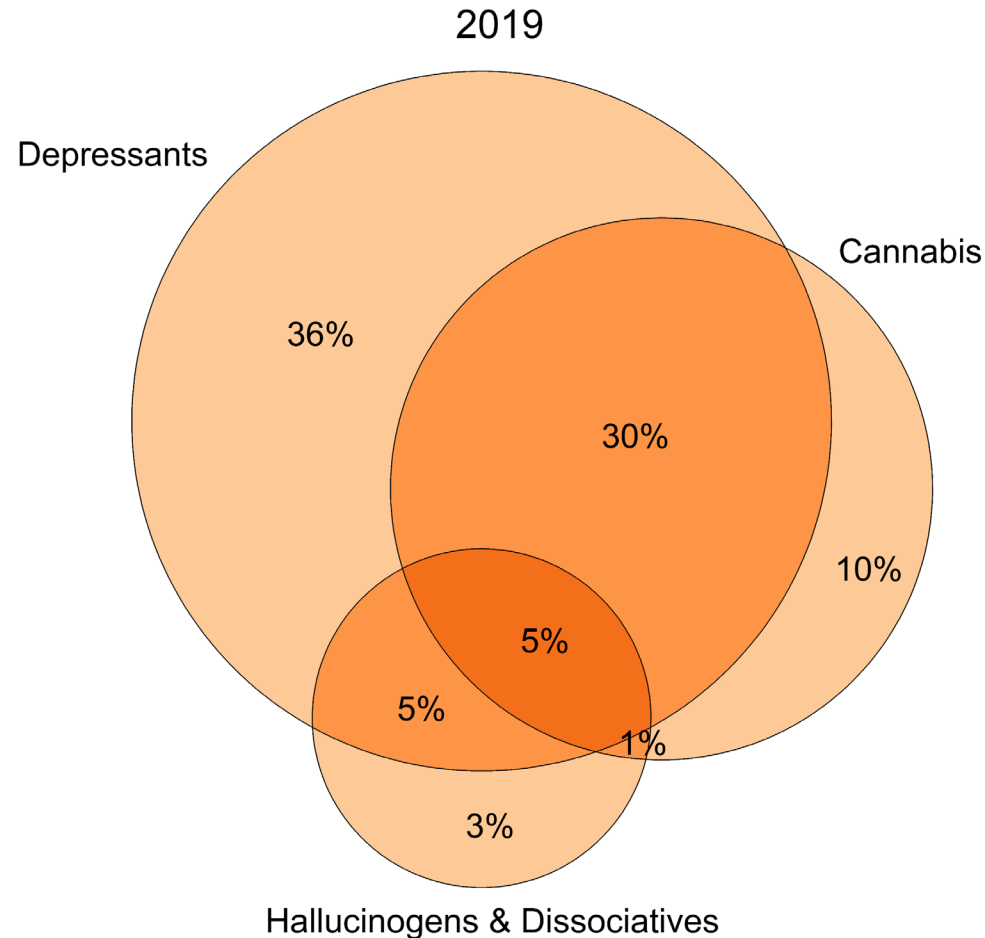
Median **capsules** in a **typical** session

Median **pills** in a **maximum** session

Median **capsules** in a **maximum** session

Polysubstance use and other behaviours in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS)

“What other drugs did you use on your last occasion of stimulant use?”



87%

used various strategies to minimise harms last time they used ecstasy or related drugs

Last time they used ecstasy or a related drug:

- 26% searched the drug online
- 27% searched online for info about drug interactions
- 22% used vitamin supplements
- 61% obtained information from others who had used the same batch
- 17% used a test dose
- 61% spread out doses



Music Festivals

Music festivals and drug use in the sample who use ecstasy



7 in 10 EDRS participants

had attended an Australian music festival in the last year (68%)



93%

Had used an illicit drug at their last music festival (83% alcohol)



5%

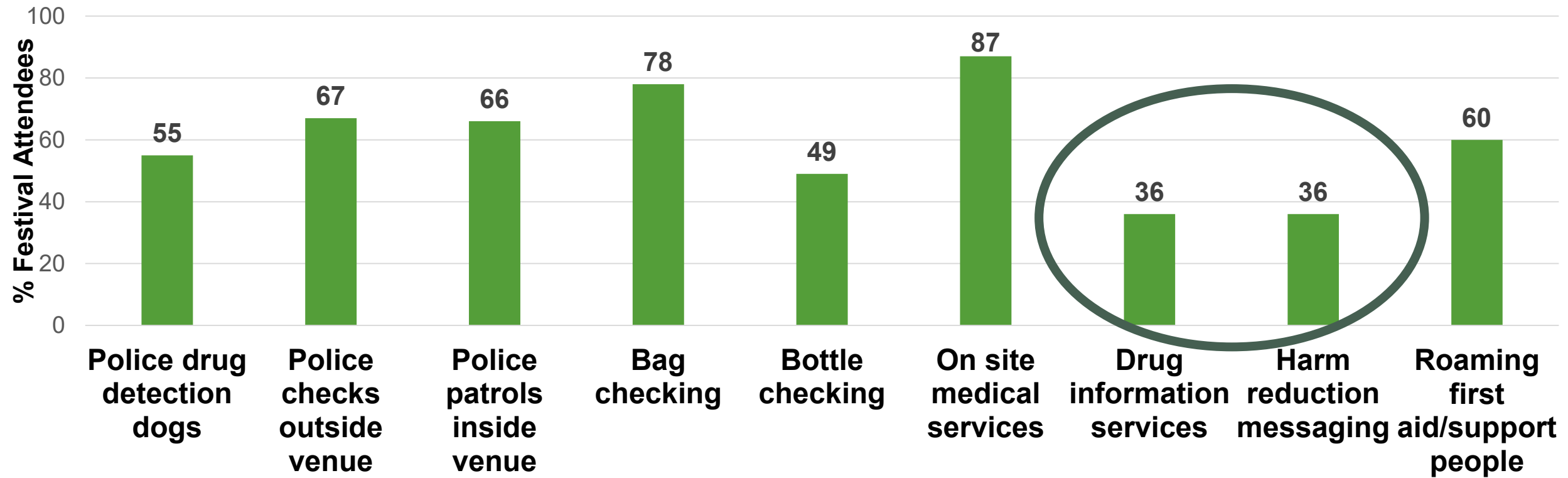
Thought they needed medical help following illicit drug use last time

2%

Sought medical help

Awareness of health and policing initiatives at festivals in the sample who use ecstasy

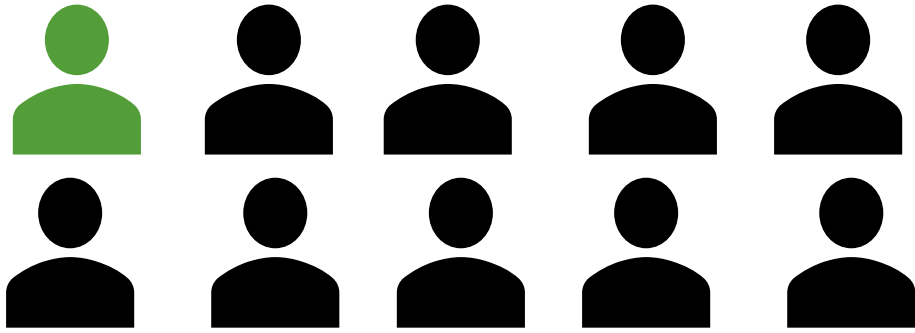
“To the best of your knowledge, were the following in place at the last festival you attended?” (N=598)





**Drug
Checking
(‘pill-testing’)**

Drug checking in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS) and who inject drugs (IDRS)

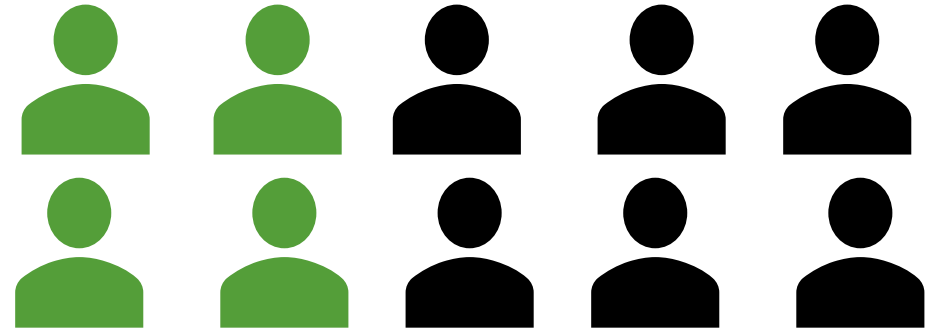


1 in 10 IDRS participants
had ever tested their drugs (11%;
6% in the past year)



71%

Personal testing kit last time



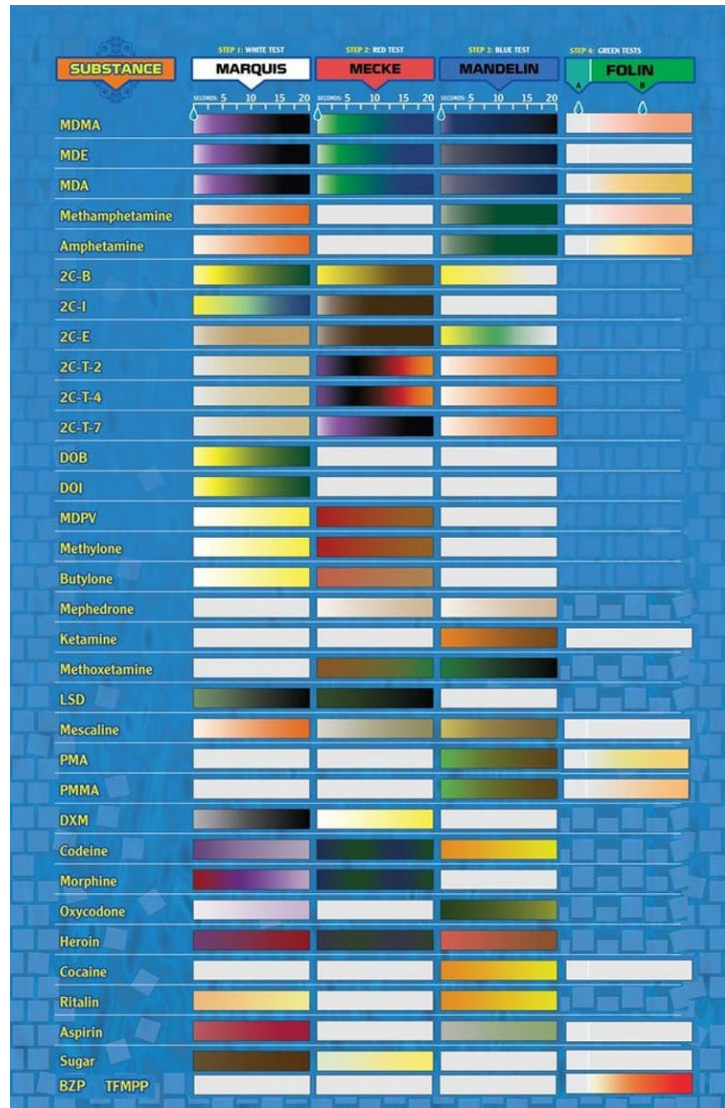
4 in 10 EDRS participants
had ever tested their drugs (45%;
36% in the past year)



87%

Personal testing kit last time

Drug checking in the sample who use ecstasy (EDRS)



	Expected but did not detect MDMA (n=13)*	Expected and detected MDMA (n=134)
Used the tested drug	46% (6)	95% (127)
Did not use the tested drug	31% (4)	3% (4)
Reported results to peers/forums	54% (7)	31% (42)
Still have the drug and plan to use in future	15% (2)	8% (11)

To consider:

- Qualitative information = people want information
 - Low cost
- Low tech expertise
- Can legally purchase

However:

- Detecting adulterants / dose
- Subjective interpretation
- Harm reduction advice from drug checking services

Note. Participants could endorse multiple responses. *small number

New reports



AUSTRALIAN DRUG TRENDS 2019

Key Findings from the National Ecstasy and related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) Interviews

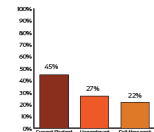
2019 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS



In 2019, 797 people from all Australian capital cities participated in EDRS interviews.



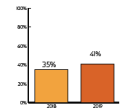
The median age in 2019 was 22 (IQR = 19 - 26), and 60% identified as male.



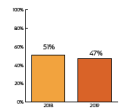
In the 2019 sample, 45% were unemployed, 27% were employed, and 22% were employed full time. Participants were recruited on the basis that they had consumed ecstasy or other illicit stimulants at least monthly in the past 6 months.

- ✓ Ecstasy
- ✓ Cocaine
- ✓ Other stimulants

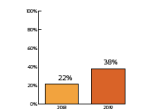
OTHER DRUGS



Past 6 month use of any ketamine increased from 35% in 2018 to 47% in the 2019 EDRS sample.



Past 6 month use of any LSD was stable at 47% in the 2019 EDRS sample (51% in 2018).



Past 6 month use of any amyl nitrite increased from 22% in 2018 to 38% in the 2019 EDRS sample.



Past 6 month use of any nitrous oxide (pumps) was stable at 53% in the 2019 EDRS sample (50% in 2018).

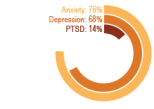
DRUG TREATMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH



Of the 2019 EDRS sample 6% reported that they were currently receiving drug treatment.



Over half of the national sample (57%) self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the previous 6 months.



Of those who commented, the most common self-reported mental health concern was anxiety (70%), followed by depression (68%), and PTSD (14%).



Of those self-reporting a mental health problem, 58% reported seeing a mental health professional in the previous 6 months (24% of the entire sample).

MODES OF PURCHASING



In 2019, 82% of the EDRS sample reported buying drugs face to face in the previous 12 months.



In 2019, 73% of the EDRS sample reported buying drugs off social networking applications in the previous 12 months.



In 2019, 10% of the EDRS sample reported buying drugs off the darknet in the previous 12 months.



Of those who had purchased drugs via surface net or dark net, 18% had done so once, 18% twice, 26% 3-5 times, and 37% 6 or more times in the previous 12 months.



AUSTRALIAN DRUG TRENDS 2019

Key Findings from the National Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) Interviews

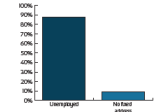
2019 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS



In 2019, 982 people from all Australian capital cities participated in IDRS interviews.



The mean age in 2019 was 43 (range = 18 - 72), and 68% identified as male.

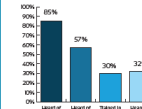


In the 2019 sample, 80% were unemployed and 9% had no fixed address.

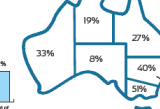
- ✓ Injected heroin
- ✓ Injected methamphetamine
- ✓ Injected other

Participants were recruited on the basis that they had injected drugs at least monthly in the previous 6 months.

NALOXONE



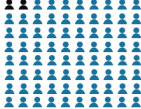
IDRS participant's knowledge of the take home naloxone programme, nationally.



People that have been trained in naloxone administration, by jurisdiction.

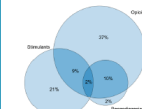


Of those who had completed naloxone training, 47% had used naloxone to resuscitate someone who had overdosed.



In the IDRS sample, 4% said they had been resuscitated with naloxone by someone who had been trained through the take home program.

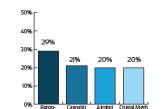
OTHER HARMS AND HELP SEEKING



In the 2019 IDRS sample, 81% had used opioids, stimulants and/or benzodiazepines on the day before interview.



In the 2019 sample, non-fatal overdose in the previous 12 months remained stable (21%, 20% in 2018).



Of people who had overdosed on heroin in the previous 12 months (12% of total sample), substances most often involved in most recent overdose.

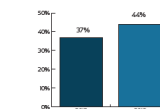


Two fifths of the sample (41%) reported that they were currently in drug treatment.

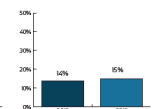
INJECTING RELATED RISKS AND HARMS



In 2019, 8% of the IDRS sample reported receptive needle sharing, and 11% reported distributive needle sharing.



In 2019 there was a significant increase in the number of people who re-used their own needles (44% vs 37% in 2018).



The percentage reporting last injecting in a public place remained stable in 2019.



In 2019, almost half (45%) of the national sample reported having an injection-related health issue in the month preceding interview.

New bulletins



Drug checking ('pill testing') and behavioural responses among a sample of Australians who regularly use drugs

Amy Peacock, Daisy Gibbs, Monica Barratt, Raimondo Bruno, Rachel Sutherland, Robert Page, Julia Uporova, Caroline Salom, Penny Hill, Paul Dietze, Simon Lenton, Louisa Degenhardt & Nadine Ezard

The issue

People who use illicit drugs engage in harm reduction strategies based on perceived substance contents^[1]. With the exception of a drug checking service at a Canberra music festival^[2], personal testing kits (e.g., reagent tests) comprise the only local option for Australians who use illicit drugs to obtain objective information about these substances. Data collected in 2005 from people who used ecstasy showed that 22% had used testing kits on substances acquired as ecstasy^[1]. There has been no recent update of these data nor study of drug checking among Australians who inject drugs.

What our work found

For the **Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS)** and the **Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)**, interviews were conducted with people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants (EDRS; N=797) and people who regularly inject drugs (IDRS; N=902) recruited from Australian capital cities in April-July and May-July 2019, respectively. There were 792 EDRS participants and 883 IDRS participants who responded to items on drug checking, showing:

- More than four in ten EDRS participants (45%) and one in ten IDRS participants (11%) had ever tested their drugs.
- One in three EDRS participants (36%) and one in twenty IDRS participants (6%) had tested their drugs in the last year.
- Most EDRS and IDRS participants who had tested their drugs in the last year had used a personal testing kit last time.

Drug checking experience among people who regularly use illicit drugs	EDRS % (n)	IDRS % (n)
Experience of drug checking in the total sample:	N=792	N=883
No	55% (435)	89% (784)
Yes, but not in the past year	9% (73)	6% (50)
Yes, in the past year	36% (284)	6% (49)
Type of test used last time among those who had tested drugs in the past year:	N=284	N=49
Personal testing kit or strip (e.g., colorimetric/reagent test or immunoassay strip)	87% (248)	71% (35)
Face-to-face testing service (e.g., festival pill-testing service)	4% (11)	4% (2)
Postal/online testing service	1% (3)	2% (1)
Other/Don't know/Refused to answer	8% (22)	22% (11)

- Of EDRS participants who had last used a personal testing kit (n=248), most (84%, n=208) had tested a substance they had purchased as 'ecstasy/MDMA'.
- We asked 153 of these people who had last used a personal testing kit for 'ecstasy/MDMA' whether the result indicated MDMA: 88% (n=134) said MDMA was detected, 8% (n=13) said no MDMA was detected, and 4% (n=6) said 'don't know'.

EDRS participants who tested ecstasy/MDMA with a personal testing kit and asked about what they did in response:	Not detected ^a % (n)	Detected % (n)
Used the tested drug	46% (6)	95% (127)
Did not use the tested drug	31% (4)	3% (4)
Reported results of tested drugs to peers/friends or on forums	54% (7)	31% (42)
Still have the drug and plan to use in the future	15% (2)	8% (11)

Note: Participants could endorse multiple responses (but could not endorse both 'used the tested drug' and 'did not use tested drug'). ^aSmall numbers: treat with caution.

Implications

Nearly half of the sample who regularly used ecstasy and other illicit stimulants had tested their illicit drugs; fewer people who injected drugs reported this behaviour. Most people who had used a personal testing kit on a substance acquired as 'ecstasy/MDMA' identified MDMA and then used the substance. This finding reinforces previous research showing that people who use illicit drugs want information about the contents of their substance^[1-3]. However, these tests typically only identify the presence or absence of a drug: they do not identify all substances within the tested drug, nor the dose. This information is critical to inform behaviours to reduce harms from, for example, high-dose MDMA or from adulterants. Behaviour may differ with more sophisticated testing, and with parallel provision of harm reduction information (as provided with most drug checking services^[3]).

References:

1. Johnston, J., et al. (2006). A survey of regular ecstasy users' knowledge and practices around determining pill content and purity. *Int. J. Drug Policy*, 17, 464-472.
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3. Barratt, M.J., et al. (2018). Pill testing or drug checking in Australia: Acceptability of service design features. *Drug Alcohol Review*, 226-236.
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Crystal methamphetamine use, routes of administration and use of commercial ball pipes among people who inject drugs in Australia

Antonia Karlsson, Nadine Ezard, Caroline Salom, Paul Dietze, Simon Lenton, Raimondo Bruno, Louisa Degenhardt & Amy Peacock

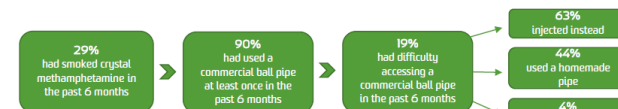
The issue

- Increases in crystal methamphetamine use have been associated with a rise in methamphetamine-related harms when taken by injecting or smoking^[1].
- It is an offence in most parts of Australia to possess any implement for using methamphetamine (e.g. a pipe) other than a needle and syringe^[2].
- Research has revealed that smoking is an increasingly favoured route of administration^[3], but information about smoking practices and equipment use is lacking.
- The use of homemade pipes can result in various harms including cuts, burns, blisters and open sores inside the mouth of those who smoke crystal methamphetamine^[4].

What our work found

We conducted interviews with people who regularly inject drugs (IDRS; N=902) recruited from Australian capital cities in May-July 2019 for the **Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)**.

- Three in four participants (76%) had used crystal methamphetamine in the past 6 months.
- Over one-quarter (29%) had smoked crystal methamphetamine in the past 6 months.
- Most IDRS participants who had smoked crystal methamphetamine had used a ball pipe (90%).
- One in five (19%) participants who smoked crystal methamphetamine had difficulties obtaining a commercial ball pipe in the past 6 months.
- Three in five (63%) of those who had difficulties accessing a pipe had injected instead, and more than two in five (44%) had used a homemade pipe (e.g., foil, lightbulb).



Implications

- Difficulties accessing commercial ball pipes lead to greater frequency of injection and use of homemade pipes among this sample.
- Legislative changes banning commercial ball pipes also create a barrier to provision of safer smoking equipment and for health education for those who smoke crystal methamphetamine.
- Safe smoking kits have been in other countries as a way of engaging this population^[4], and may be a way of facilitating safer smoking and greater health service engagement in Australia.

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Illicit drug use and awareness of health and policing initiatives at Australian music festivals among people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants

Daisy Gibbs, Caitlin Hughes, Monica Barratt, Nadine Ezard, Raimondo Bruno, Rachel Sutherland, Jodie Grigg, Caroline Salom, Penny Hill, Paul Dietze, Simon Lenton, Louisa Degenhardt & Amy Peacock

The issue

There is significant concern about patron safety at music festivals, and particularly related to illicit drug use and associated harms^[1]. People who attend music festivals are more likely to report illicit drug use than the general population, and festivals may be higher risk environments for experience of drug-related harms^[2]. Various strategies have been implemented with the aim of maximising patron safety, including increased policing and health efforts^[2], however there has been limited research exploring patron awareness of these initiatives.

What our work found

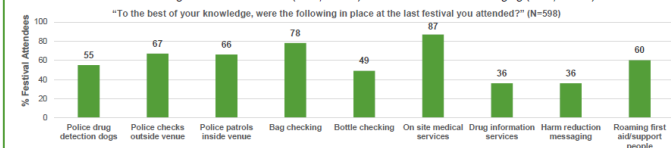
As part of the **Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS)**, we interviewed 796 people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited from capital cities in April-July 2019 about their experiences at Australian music festivals.

- Seven in ten (68%, n=538) of EDRS participants had attended an Australian music festival in the last year.
- Nearly all (97%, n=524) of those who had attended a festival had used any alcohol or drugs, and most (93%, n=498) had used illicit drugs (e.g., MDMA, cocaine, cannabis).
- Of the 498 people who had used illicit drugs at their last festival, one in twenty (5%, n=24) thought they needed medical help following their illicit use drug use, and 2% (n=10) sought medical help.

EDRS sample who attended a festival in the past year: "What substances did you use at the last festival?"	National (N=538)	NSW (N=42)	ACT (N=77)	VIC (N=69)	TAS (N=56)	SA (N=52)	WA (N=71)	NT (N=72)	QLD (N=59)
Any alcohol and/or other drug %	97	99	94	99	98	92	100	100	97
Any alcohol %	83	82	82	77	96	75	82	92	81
Any illicit drug %	93	90	88	97	91	85	97	99	91
Ecstasy/MDMA %	83	78	84	84	80	77	94	83	83
Cannabis %	41	34	36	45	63	23	34	40	58
Ketamine %	21	39	12	59	-	-	-	17	20
LSD %	21	27	14	35	23	14	16	15	24
Cocaine %	20	17	16	38	18	21	13	15	27

Note: - small number suppressed. Use may have occurred immediately prior to or during the festival. Findings reported by jurisdiction of residence.

- Of those who attended a festival, most were aware of on-site medical services at their last festival (87%, n=468).
- Most were aware of bag checking (78%, n=419) and police patrols inside (66%, n=356) and outside (67%, n=359) venues.
- One-third were aware of drug information services (36%, n=183) and harm reduction messaging (36%, n=192).



Implications

Most EDRS participants who had attended a festival were aware of on-site medical services and of policing/security strategies like bag checking and patrolling police. A smaller proportion were aware of drug information and harm reduction services at festivals. Music festivals represent a unique setting to engage with people who may not otherwise come into contact with services offering harm reduction information and other health education. There is an opportunity to increase access to, and awareness of, these services at festivals.

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Other findings

Breakout session: Drug Trends and Emerging Drugs of Concern

- **Rachel Sutherland:** Pregabalin use among people who inject drugs
- **Daisy Gibbs:** Illicit drug use in prisons by people who inject drugs
- **Anant Mathur:** Recent trends in illicit drugs available on darknet marketplaces

Posters:

- **Daisy Gibbs:** HCV cascade of care among people who inject drugs
- **Toni Karlsson:** Crystal methamphetamine and use of commercial ball pipes
- **Julia Uporova:** Driving after using alcohol and drugs and roadside testing
- **Agata Chrzanowska:** Trends in drug-related hospitalisations in Australia, 1999-2018
- **Jared Brown:** Alkyl nitrites – a rush on poppers

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