

## Chris Moon Northern Territory Department of Health

### Introduction

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) is primarily concerned with monitoring the use and markets of four main drug classes: heroin and other opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. It also monitors diverted pharmaceuticals and other issues related to drug use, such as injection-related health problems and crime. The IDRS has been conducted in the Northern Territory since 2000.

### Aim

The IDRS aims to:

- monitor the price, purity, availability and patterns of use of heroin and other opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis;
- identify emerging trends in illicit drug markets that require further investigation.

### Method

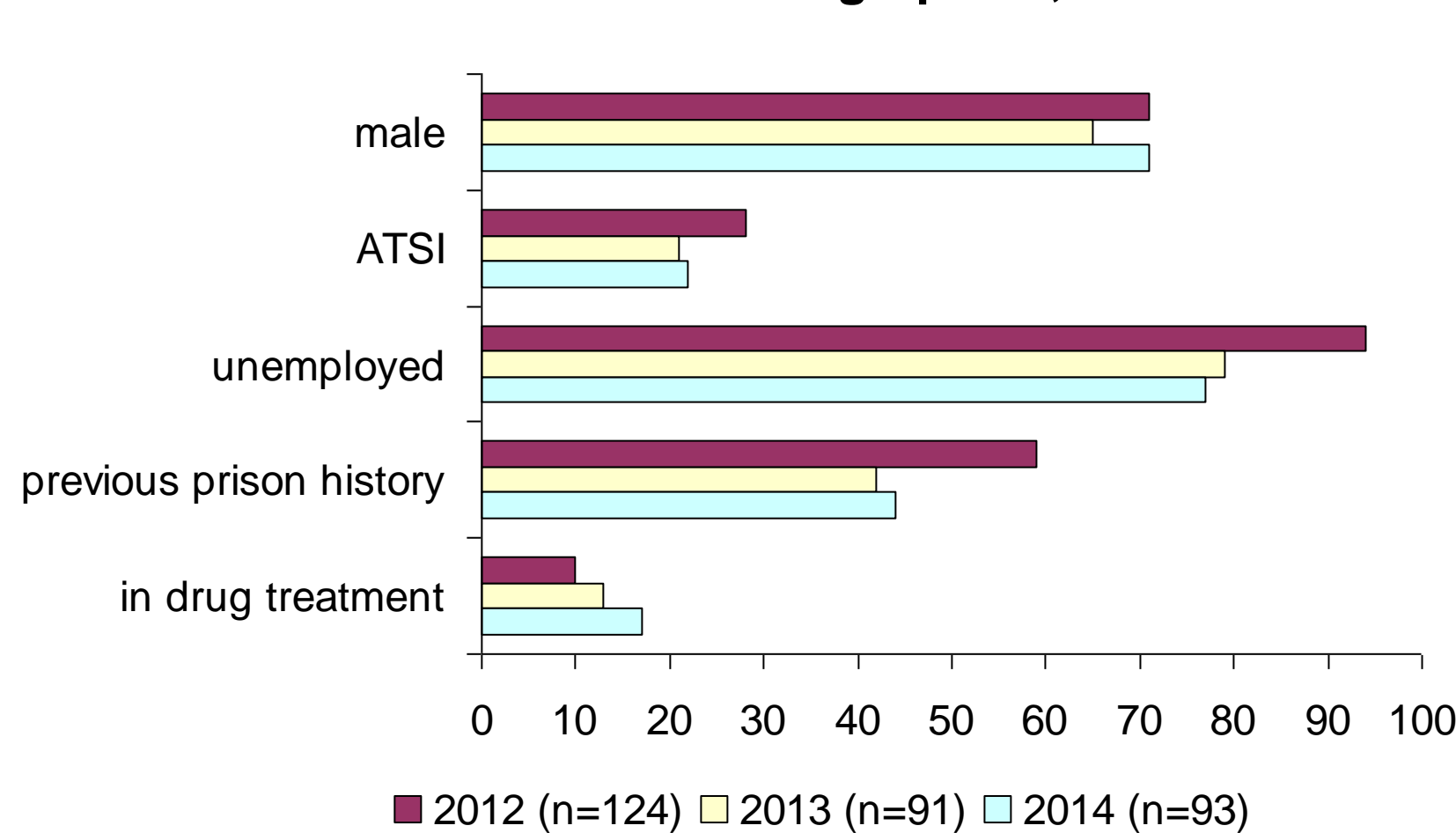
The IDRS involves the collection and analysis of three sources of data:

- interviews with regular injecting drug users (IDU);
- semi-structured interviews with experts who work with drug users, such as treatment personnel and law enforcement personnel;
- existing databases on drug-related issues such as customs data, overdose data, and seizure data.

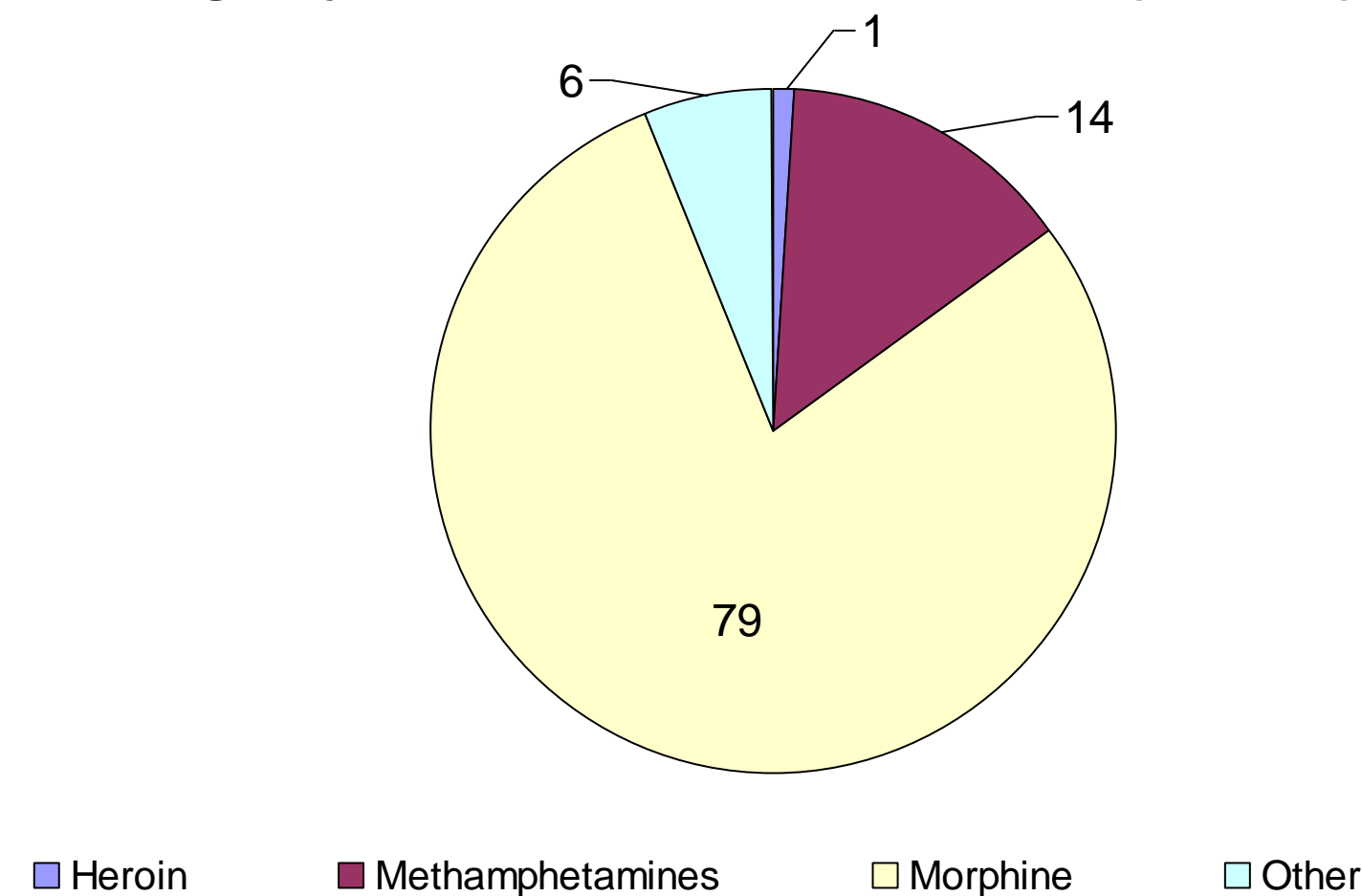
The IDRS methodology looks for corroboration in the three data sources in order to minimise the weaknesses inherent in each one and to ensure that only valid emerging trends are documented.

### Sample characteristics

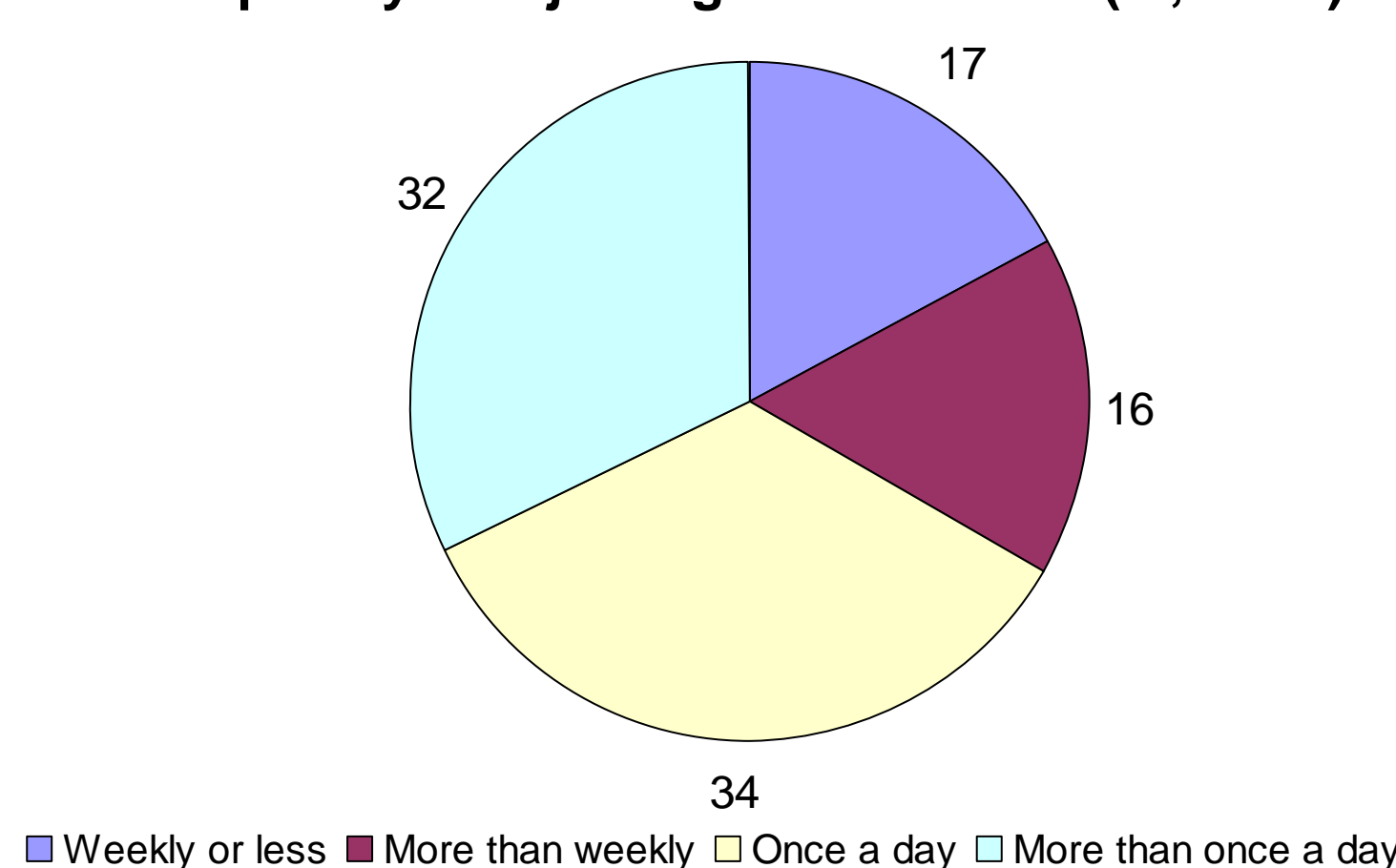
Selected demographics, %



Drugs injected most often in last month (% n=93)



Frequency of injecting in last month (% n=93)



### Market characteristics

#### Heroin

**Use:** Seven percent of the IDU sample in 14 had recently used heroin on a median of 11 days.

White powder or rock was the form used most often in the last six months.

#### Morphine

**Use:** Eighty-five percent of the IDU sample had recently used morphine, reporting a median use of 180 days. Seventy-seven percent of recent morphine users had mainly used MS Contin and twenty-two percent had mainly used Kapanol.

**Price:** 100mg MS Contin was the most commonly purchased amount for a median of \$80. 100mg of Kapanol also cost a median of \$80.

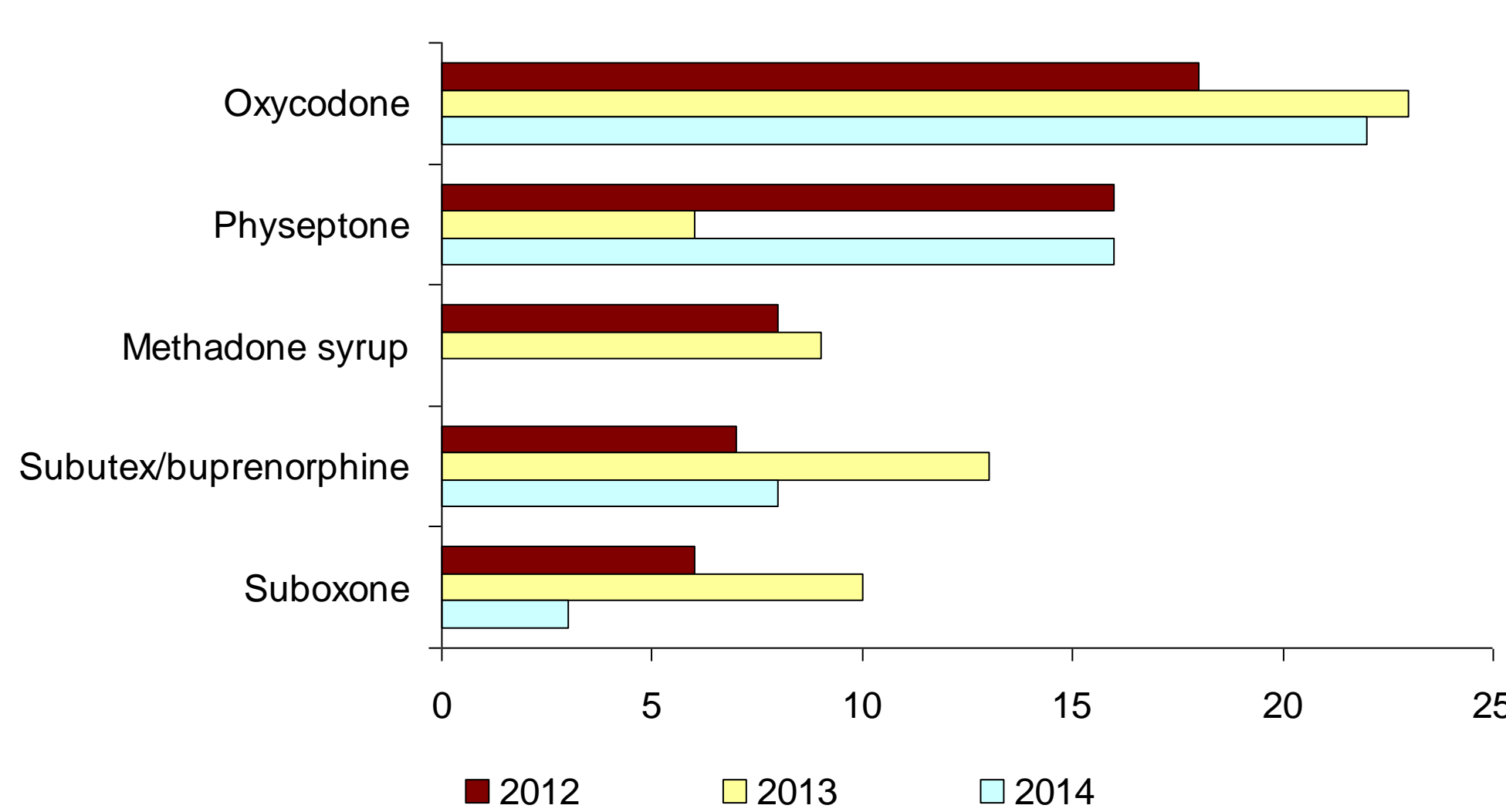
These prices were reported to be stable (73%) or increasing (22%).

**Availability:** Morphine was reported to be easy or very easy to obtain by 69% of recent users.

#### Other pharmaceutical opioids

Recent injection of illicit opioids declined with the exception of Physeptone.

Recent injection of illicit opioids, 2012 - 2014 (%)



#### Cannabis

**Use:** Sixty-two percent of IDU had recently used cannabis on a median of seventy-two days.

**Price:** Hydroponic cannabis was reported to cost a median of \$30 a gram, identical to 2013, and \$450 an ounce.

**Potency:** Seventy-eight percent of those able to comment rated the potency of cannabis medium to high.

**Availability:** Ninety-four percent of those able to comment said that cannabis was currently easy or very easy to obtain.

#### Methamphetamines

**Use:** Thirty-seven percent of respondents had recently used some form of methamphetamine: 16% speed powder, 4% base and 26% crystal. These proportions are lower than those found in 2013.

**Price:** Speed powder was reported to cost a median of \$100 a point and crystal methamphetamine cost a median of \$150 a point.

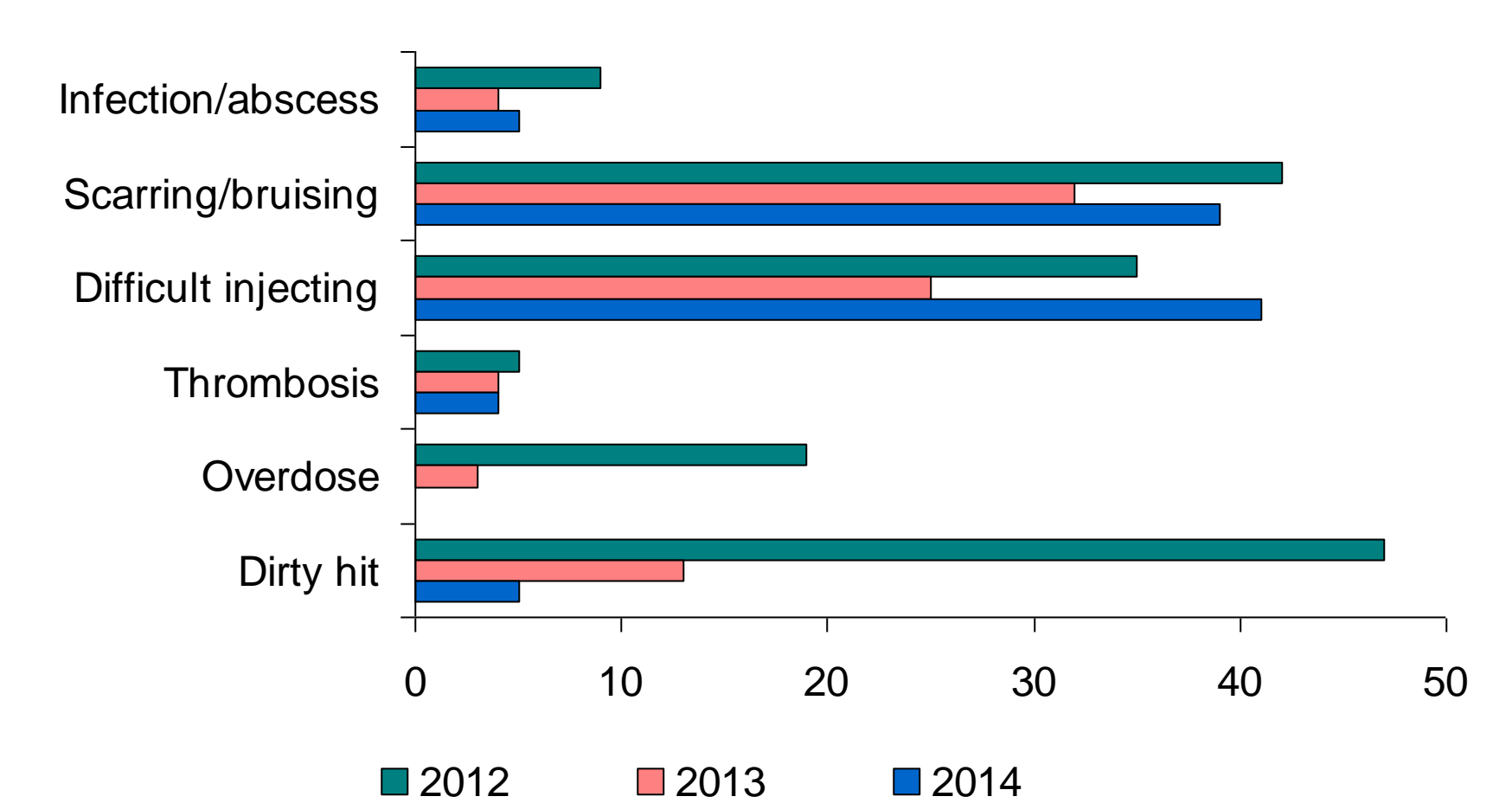
**Purity:** Respondents were divided on the current purity of methamphetamines. Thirty-five percent of those able to comment reported that ice was of medium purity and 20% that it was high.

**Availability:** Speed powder was rated as easy or very easy (67%) to obtain, as was crystal: 87% easy or very easy.

### Drug related health, risk & crime

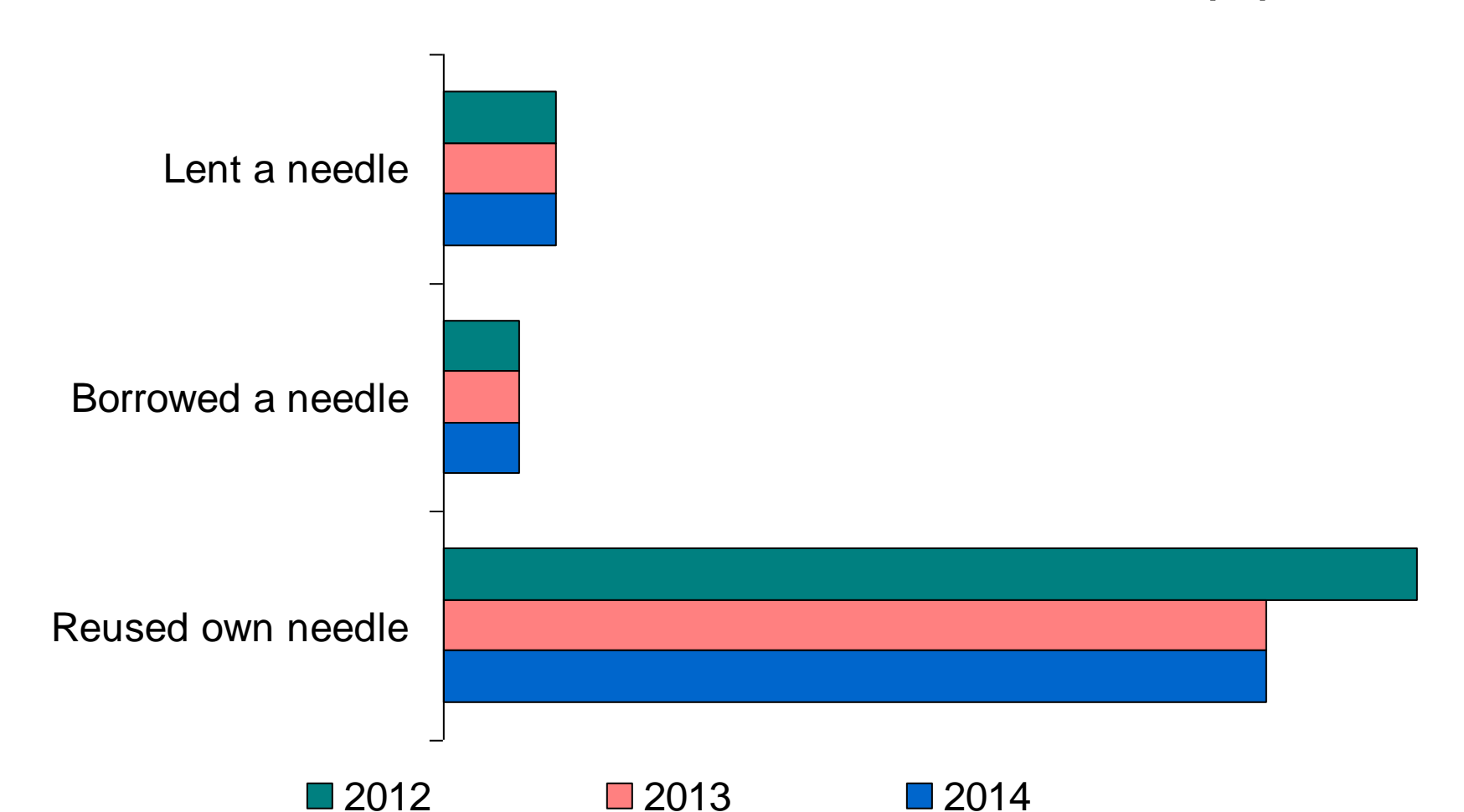
The number of respondents reporting an injection-related problem within a month of interview increased from 49% in 2013 to 57% this year.

Injection related issues in last month, 2012 - 2014 (%)



Needle sharing risk behaviours among the IDU sample this year are similar to 2013.

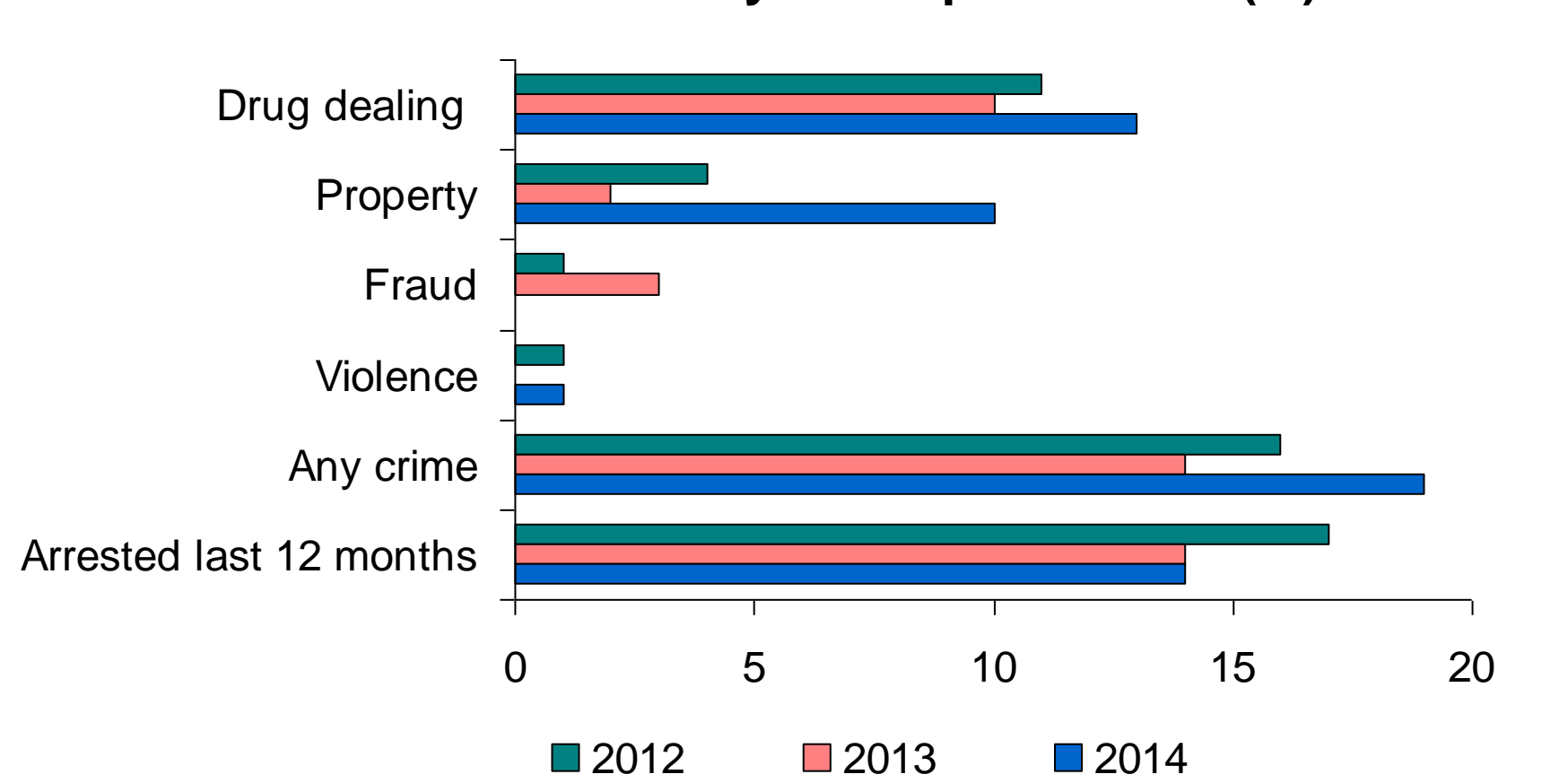
Selected risk behaviours, 2012 - 2014 (%)



### Criminal activity

Self reported criminal activity was higher in selected categories than was the case in 2013.

Criminal activity in the past month (%)



### Conclusion

The Northern Territory Illicit Drug market is characterised by the relatively high levels of use of morphine and other pharmaceutical opioids and the relative low levels of use and poor availability of heroin and cocaine. This year's results are consistent with this pattern.

Oxycodone and Physeptone are reported as the commonly injected other opioids.

Self-reported methamphetamine use among the IDRS sample has declined, while key expert opinion is that the availability of crystal methamphetamine has increased substantially.

### Acknowledgements

The IDRS is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.