NEW SOUTH WALES DRUG TRENDS 202

Key Findings from the New South Wales Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) Interviews

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Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIVL	Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League
AOD	Alcohol and other drugs
AUDIT-C	Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Concise
BTNX	BTNX Inc
CBD	Cannabidiol
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019

SD	Standard deviation
SDS	Severity of Dependence Scale
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAS	Tasmania
TGA	Therapeutic Goods Administration
THC	Tetrahydrocannabinol
UNSW	University of New South Wales
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WHO	World Health Organisation

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The IDRS sample is a sentinel group of people aged 18 years or older who injected illicit drugs –6 days in the preceding six months and resided in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW). Participants were recruited via advertisements in needle and syringe programs and other harm reduction services, as well as via peer referral. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. Data were collected in June, 2024. Interviews from 2020-2022 were delivered face-to-

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methodology , however, telephone interviews were conducted when required (i.e., in accordance with government directives) or when requested by participants. Consent was collected verbally for all participants.

2024 IDRS Sample

Between 1 June 12 July 2024, a total of 8 84 participants were recruited across capital cities nationally, with 150 participants interviewed in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW). The Sydney IDRS interviews were conducted between 3-

Interpretation of Findings

Caveats to interpretation of findings are discussed more completely in

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample, nationally , 2024, and Sydney, NSW, 2020-2024

	Sydney, NSW					National
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024
	(N=155)	(N=150)	(N=152)	(N=153)	(N=150)	(N=884)

Note. ^Includes trade/technical and university qualifications. For historical numbers, please refer to the data tables. Statistical significance for 2023 versus 2024 presented in table; *p<0.050; **p<0.010; ***p<0.001. Please refer to Table 1 for a guide to tables/figure notes.

Figure

white/off-white rock heroin (59% in 2023; p=0.903). Two fifths (42%) reported using brown/beige powder (46% in 2023), and

Price, Perceived Purity and Perceived Availability

Price

In 2024, the median price per gram of heroin was $400 (IQR=203-500; n=12), stable relative to 2023 ($330; IQR=250-488; n=10) (Figure 5). The median price per cap and point (0.10 of a gram) was $50

3

0HWKDPSKHWDPLQH

Figure 8: Past six month use of any methamphetamine and of methamphetamine powder, base, and crystal,

crystal on a median of 72 days (IQR=24-180; n=123) in the six months preceding interview. Along with 2022

Perceived Purity: The perceived purity of methamphetamine crystal remained stable between 2023 and 2024 (p=0.182). Among those who commented in 2024 (n=121), almost equal percentages perceived purity to be ¶PHGLXP· (38%; 39% in 2023) or ¶KLJK· (36%; 24% in 2023). A further 15% perceived it to be RI ¶RRZ·(25% in 2023) (Figure 13).

Perceived Availability: The perceived availability of methamphetamine crystal remained stable between 2023 and 2024 (p=0.751). Of those who were able to comment in 2024 (n=121), the largest per cent reported methamphetamine crystal WR EH ¶HDV\· (61%; 55% in 2023) to obtain, with a further 31% reporting ¶HDV\· to obtain (37% in 2023). Seven per cent perceived it to be ¶GLIILFXOW· WR REWDLQ (Figure 16).

Figure 10: Median price of methamphetamine powder per point and gram, Sydney, NSW, 2002-2024

4

&RFDLQH

Participants were asked about their recent (past six month) use of various forms of cocaine, including SRZGHU DQG FUDFN FRFDLQH &RFDLQH K\GURFKORULGH D VDOW GHULYHG IURP FRFDLQH DYDLODEOH LQ $XVWUDOLD ¶&UDFN FRFDLQH¶ UHIHUV WR FRFDLQH K\GURFKORULGH UHPRYHG ZKLFK LV SDUWLFXODUO\ QRW DYDLODEOH LQ $XVWUDOLD ¶&UDFN infrequently encountered in Australia.

Patterns of Consumption

Recent Use (past 6 months)

Recent use of cocaine peaked in 2001 with 84% of the Sydney sample reporting recent use. Despite some fluctuation, an overall downward trend has been observed since 2006, although this has stabilised in more recent years. In 2024, 29% of participants reported recent cocaine use, stable relative to 2023 (23%; p=0.294) (Figure 16).

Frequency of Use

In 2024, participants reported consuming cocaine on a median of four days (IQR=2-14; n=

Figure 16:

Price, Perceived Purity and Perceived Availability

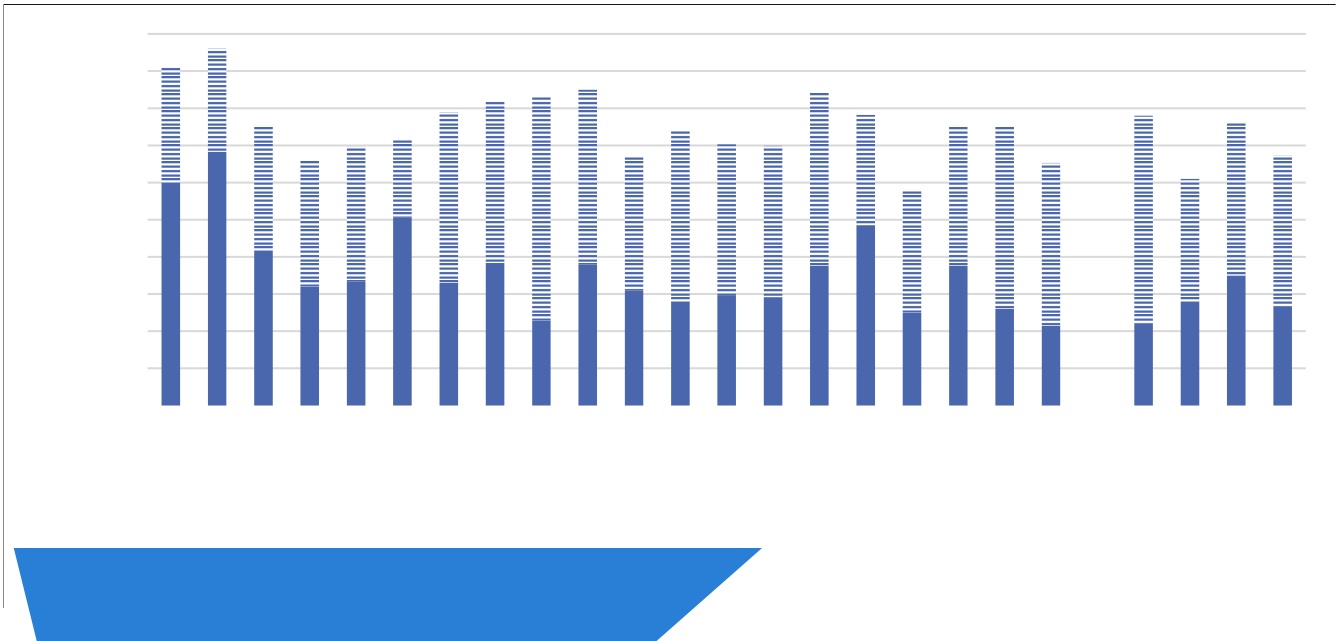
Price

The median price for one gram of cocaine has fluctuated between $200 in 2000-2003 and $400 in 2014-2015. In 2024, the median price for one gram of cocaine was $325 (IQR=300-400; n=12), stable ren 1 404tiilab

Figure 18: Current perceived purity of cocaine, Sydney, NSW, 2000-2024

Note. 'DWD ODEHOV VXSSUHVVHG IRU DOO VWDFNHG EDU FKDUWV Z LWK GDWD QRW SURYLGHG Z LWK KLVWRULFDO QXPEHUV, please refer to the data tables. Statistical significance for 2023 versus 2024 presented in figure, p<0.050; **p<0.010; ***p<0.001. Please refer to Table 1 for a guide to tables/figure notes.

Figure 19: Current perceived availability of cocaine, Sydney, NSW, 2000-2024



Note. Data labels suppressed for all stacked bar FKDUWV Z LWK GDWD QRW SURYLGHG Z LWK KLVWRULFDO QXPEHUV, please refer to the data tables. Statistical significance for 2023 versus 2024 presented in figure, p<0.050; **p<0.010; ***p<0.001. Please refer to Table 1 for a guide to tables/figure notes.

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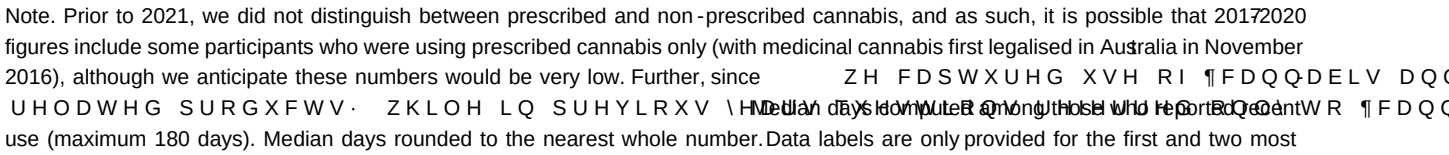
Figure 20: Past six-month use and frequency of use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products, Sydney, NSW, 2000-2024



Note. Prior to 2021, we did not distinguish between prescribed and non-prescribed cannabis, and as such, it is possible that 2017-2020 figures include some participants who were using prescribed cannabis only (with medicinal cannabis first legalised in Australia in November 2016), although we anticipate these numbers would be very low. Further, since the capture of frequency of use among those who reported recent use (maximum 180 days). Median days rounded to the nearest whole number. Data labels are only provided for the first and two most recent data points.

Price, Perceived Potency and Perceived Availability

Hydroponic Cannabis

Price: The price of hydroponic cannabis per gram has remained stable at $20 since monitoring commenced in 2003 ($20 in 2024; IQR=20-20; n=33; $20 in 2023; IQR=20-20; n=33; p

Figure 24:

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3 K D U P D F H 2 X W U H D F K

Methadone

Any Recent Use (past 6 months) : Despite some fluctuation, the per cent reporting recent use of any (prescribed or non-prescribed) methadone

Buprenorphine - Naloxone

Any Recent Use (past 6 months) : The per cent of the Sydney sample reporting recent use of prescribed or non-prescribed buprenorphine-naloxone has fluctuated considerably since monitoring commenced in 2006. In 2024, 10% of the sample reported any recent use of buprenorphine-naloxone (11% in 2023; p=0.848

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2WKHU'UXJV

Participants were asked about their recent (past six month) use of various other drugs, including use of new psychoactive substances, non-prescribed use (i.e., use of a medicine obtained from a prescription in VRPHRQH HO, VH via another person or via another source such as online) of other pharmaceutical drugs, and use of licit substances (e.g., alcohol, tobacco).

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

NPS are often defined as substances which do not fall under international drug control, but which may pose a public health threat. However, there is no universally accepted definition, and in practicality the term has come to include drugs which have previously not been well-established in recreational drug markets. Questions regarding NPS were included in the IDRS survey since 2021.

Recent use of any NPS was reported by 5% of the Sydney sample in 2024 (6% in 2023; p=0.796) (Table 4). The numbers endorsing use of NPS categories were low (n •5). Please refer to the

1RQ3UHVFULEHG 3KDUPDFHXWLFDOV

Benzodiazepines

From 2019 to 2023, participants were asked about their use of non-prescribed alprazolam and non-SUHVFULEHG XVH RI ¶RWKHU· EHQ]RGLD]HSLQHV H J GLD]HSDP combined, and as such, participants were asked about non-prescribed use of any benzodiazepines.

Recent Use (past 6 months): Recent non-prescribed use of any benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium, Diazepam, Xanax, Kalma)remained relatively stable between 2007-2014, before a gradual decline was observed from 2014-2022. In 2024, almost one third (31%) of the sample reported recent use of any non-prescribed benzodiazepines, stable relative to 2023 (33%; p=0.715) (Figure 31).

Frequency of Use: Of those who had recently used non-prescribed benzodiazepines and commented (n=46), participants reported a median of 18 days (IQR=4-48

/LFLW DQG 2WKHU 'UXJV

Alcohol

Recent Use (past 6 months): Recent use of alcohol remained relatively stable between 2009-2018, before a gradual decline was observed from 2018-2020, stabilising again thereafter. In 2024, 46% of the sample reported recent alcohol use, stable relative to 2023 (42% in 2023; p=0.496) (Figure 32).

Frequency of Use: Participants who had recently consumed alcohol and commented (n=69) reported use on a median of 24 days (IQR=6-96) in the six months preceding interview, equivalent to once a week (22 days in 2023,IQR=6-96; n=64; p=0.708). Seventeen per cent ofparticipants who had recently used alcohol reported daily use (23% in 2023;p=0.396).

Contents and Forms Used: Among those who had recently used non-prescribed e-cigarettes and responded (n=40), 88% reported using e-cigarettes that contained nicotine (72% in 2023; p=0.118). Among participants who had recently used e-cigarettes and responded in 2024 (n=46), participants most commonly reported using disposable devices (91%), followed by re-fillable devices (17%)

Sevenper cent of the total sample reported vaping substances other than nicotine/vape juice. Among those who vaped substances other than nicotine/vape juice and commented (n=10), the most commonly vaped substance was cannabis (60%).

Reasons for Use: Of those who reported any (i.e., prescribed or non-prescribed) e-cigarette use in the last six months and responded (n=46), half (52%) reported using e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation tool (57% in 2023; p=0.690).

Nicotine Pouches

Recent Use (past 6 months):) H Z S D U W L F L Sepoqed Vecen Use of nicotine pouches in 2024

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' U X J H O D W H U G P V 2 Q K H U K D Y L R X U V

Polysubstance Use

Figure 37: Past 12

Equipment Access, and Injecting Behaviours

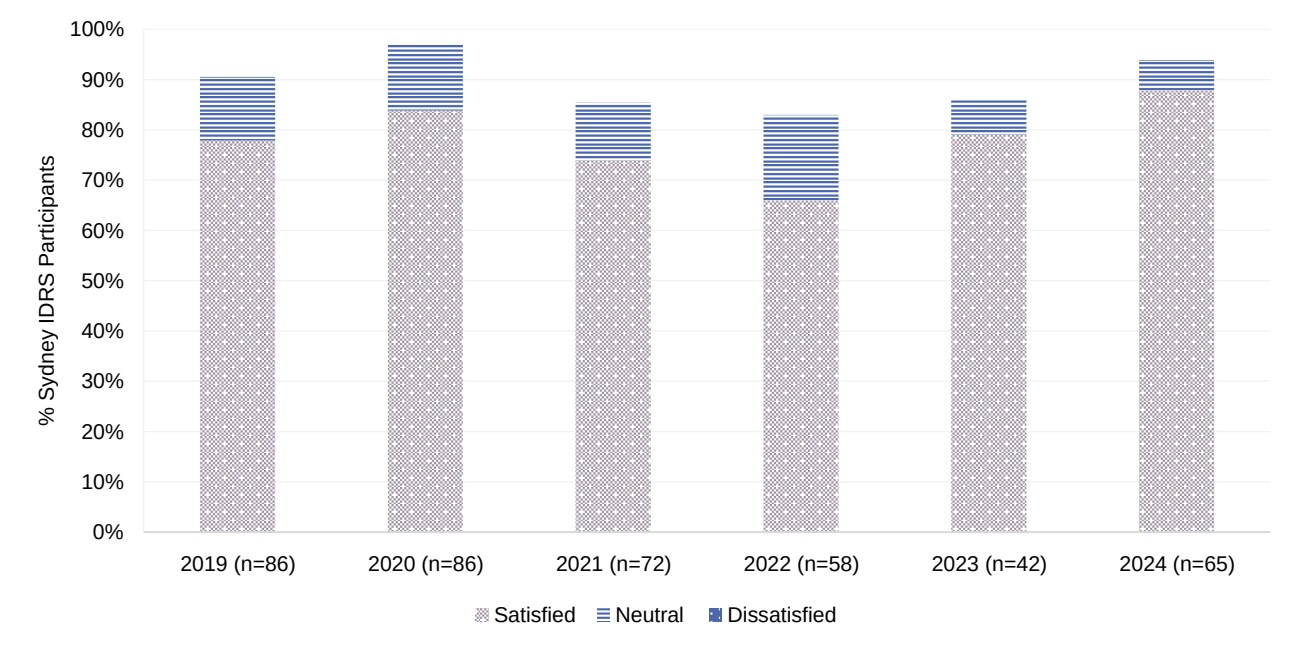
Equipment Access

In 2024, participants reported obtaining a median of 100 new needle and syringes in the past month (IQR=28-200; 100 in 2023; IQR=30-200; p=0.830), having a median of 10 ¶ V W R U H G D 1 = 1 0 ; 10 , 4 5 in 2023; IQR=1-65; p=0.978) and providing a median of eight to others (IQR=

Self-Reported Injection-Related Injuries and Diseases

In 2024, 29% of the Sydney sample reported having an injection-related health issue in the month preceding the interview, stable relative to 2023 (24%; p=0.360) (Table 9). The most common injection-related health issues

Figure 39: Treatment satisfaction amongst those who reported current treatment, Sydney, NSW 2019-2024



Note. For historical numbers, please refer to the data tables. Statistical significance for 2023 versus 2024 presented in figure; *p<0.050; **p<0.010; ***p<0.001. Please refer to Table 1 for a guide to tables/figure notes .

Sexual Health Behaviours

In 2024, two fifths (41%) of the Sydney sample reported some form of sexual activity in the past four weeks, a significant decrease from three fifths (60%) of the Sydney sample in 2023 (p=0.002). Given

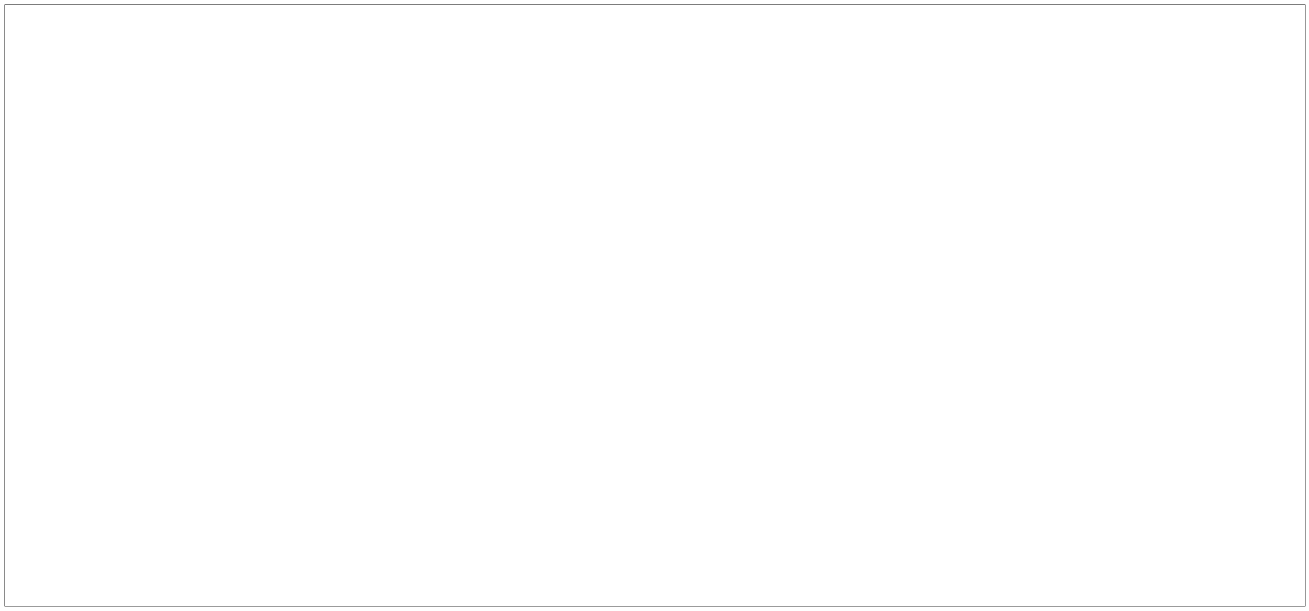
Mental Health and Psychological Distress (K10)

In 2024, 52% of the Sydney sample self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months, stable relative to 2023 (52% in 2023) (Figure 40). Among those who had experienced a mental health problem, the most commonly reported problems were depression (64%; 65% in 2023; p=0.896), followed by anxiety (59%; 52% in 2023; p=0.435) and post-

Driving

Almost one quarter (23%) of the Sydney sample reported driving a car, motorcycle or other vehicle in the six months preceding the interview (29% in 2023; p=0.344). Of those who had driven within the

Figure 46: Victim of crime involving violence in the past month, Sydney, NSW 2019-2024



Note. Questions regarding being the victim of a crime involving violence were first asked in 2019. Data labels are only provided for the first and most recent years of monitoring. For a full description of the sample, please refer to the data tables. For exact numbers, please refer to the data tables. Statistical significance for 2023 versus 2024 presented in figure; *p<0.050; **p<0.010; ***p<0.001. Please refer to Table 1 for a guide to tables/figure notes .

Modes of Purchasing Illicit or Non-Prescribed Drugs

,Q LQWHUYLHZLQJ DQG UHSRUWLQJ ¶RQOLQH VRXUFHV· ZHUH GH

Purchasing Approaches

In 2024, the most popular means of arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview was face-to-face (86%; 80; p=0.173), followed by phone call (48%; 54% in 2023; p=0.304). It is important to re-iterate that this refers to people arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs. This captures participants who messaged friends or known dealers on Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, for example, to organise the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs, which may have then been picked up in person.

Table 15: Purchasing approaches in the past 12 months, Sydney, NSW, 2023-2024

	2023	2024
% Purchasing approaches in the last 12 months^ #	N=150	N= 147
Face-to-face	80	[redacted]
Surface web	0	0
Darknet market	-	-
Social networking or messaging applications`	8	12
Text messaging	32	29