



## Key findings from the 2012 IDRS: a survey of people who inject drugs

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### KEY FINDINGS

- Heroin remained the most commonly reported drug of choice for participants who inject drugs.
- Recent heroin use and frequency remained stable. The availability of heroin was 'very easy' and purity 'low'.
- Recent use of speed remained stable, while base decreased and ice/crystal increased. All forms were considered 'very easy' or 'easy' to obtain. Ice/crystal was reported as 'high' in purity, while base was 'high/medium' and speed was 'low/medium'.
- NSW remained the only jurisdiction where sizeable numbers of participants were able to comment on cocaine. Recent use and frequency of cocaine in NSW was stable. Price remained stable. Availability was reported as 'easy' and purity as 'medium'.
- The cannabis market remained stable. Recent use remained common and frequency of use high, usually daily or near-daily. Hydroponic cannabis dominated the market.
- Extra-medical use and injection of pharmaceutical preparations continued to occur, with jurisdictional differences in patterns observed.
- Sharing of injecting equipment was common. Nearly half of the participants re-used their own needles in the last month.
- Nearly half of the national sample self-reported a mental health problem in the last six months. Mainly depression, followed by anxiety.
- Nearly half of the national sample reported driving in the last six months. Over three-quarters drove after taking an illicit drug.
- Over one-third of the national sample reported a criminal activity in the last month, mainly drug dealing or property crime. Around one-third had been arrested in the last year.

### INTRODUCTION

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) monitors emerging trends in the use, price, purity and availability of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. In addition to a survey of people who inject drugs (PWID), the annual data collection also includes a survey of key experts (KE) who are professionals in the field of illicit drugs and the analysis of existing indicator data on drug-related issues. This is the thirteenth year that all three components of the IDRS were conducted in every state and territory in Australia.

The key findings of the 2012 IDRS participant (PWID) surveys are presented in this bulletin. Regular PWID were recruited as they are considered a sentinel group able to provide information on a range of illicit drug trends and related issues. The information from the PWID survey is therefore not representative of illicit drug use in the general population, and is not representative of other illicit drug users (e.g. in other geographical areas, occasional users, etc), but it is indicative of emerging trends that may warrant further monitoring and/or investigation.

#### Notes on interpretation:

- 'Recent' refers to the six months preceding interview
- 'Frequency' data refers to the number of days on which those participants had recently used the drug (maximum days = 180)
- ↑Significant increase ( $p > 0.05$ ) from previous year (2011) compared with current year (2012)
- ↓Significant decrease ( $p < 0.05$ ) from previous year (2011) compared with current year (2012)

### NATIONAL OVERVIEW

#### Demographics

In 2012, a total of 924 participants were interviewed for the IDRS survey. The mean age of the sample was 39 years, ranging from 17-71 years. Around two-thirds of the sample was male. The majority were unemployed, with a mean

income of \$386 per week. Nearly half of the sample reported being in current treatment (mainly methadone maintenance). Around half of the participants reported a prison history (Table 1). Unemployment increased significantly from 79% in 2011 to 84% in 2012.

### Drug use patterns

Among the national sample the mean age of first injecting was 20 years (range 8-70 years). The main drug of choice and drug injected most often in the last month was heroin followed by methamphetamines and morphine. These results are similar to the 2011 IDRS (Table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the national sample, by jurisdiction, 2011-2012**

	National	
	2011 (N=868)	2012 (N=924)
Mean age (years)	38	39
Male (%)	66	66
Unemployed (%)	79	84↑
Mean income/ week (\$)	N=831 \$414	N=904 \$386
Prison history (%)	55	54
Currently in drug treatment (%)	49	44
Mean age first injected (years)	18	20
<b>Drug of choice (%)</b>		
Heroin	53	54
Speed	10	13
Base	1	1
Ice/crystal	9	7
Any methamphetamine#	20	21
Morphine	9	11
Oxycodone	2	2
Methadone	2	2
Cocaine	2	3
Cannabis	7	5
<b>Drug injected most often in last month (%)</b>		
Heroin	42	42
Speed	12	14
Base	2	1
Ice/crystal	11	10
Any methamphetamine#	26	25
Morphine	16	16
Oxycodone	2	4
Methadone	5	5
Cocaine	1	1

Source: IDRS IDU participant interviews  
# includes speed powder, base, ice/crystal and liquid methamphetamine

### Recent use

#### Heroin

In 2012, around two-thirds (60%) of the national sample reported use in the preceding six months on a median of 72 days (i.e. around three times a week, Figure 1 and Table 2). Daily use was reported by 28% of recent

heroin users. No change in recent use and frequency was found between 2011 and 2012.

#### Methamphetamine

Nationally, the recent use of speed powder (40%) remained stable, while the recent use of base (18%) significantly decreased and the recent use of ice/crystal (54%) significantly increased between 2011 and 2012 ( $p < 0.05$ ; Figure 1 and Table 2). The recent use of each form varied among jurisdictions. Nationally, the frequency of use of any form of methamphetamine (by users) remained stable (19 days in 2011, 22 days in 2012). Each methamphetamine form was reported on a median of 12 days or less in the last six months. The proportion of all participants who reported daily methamphetamine use (among those recently used) was stable at 6% nationally (5% in 2011).

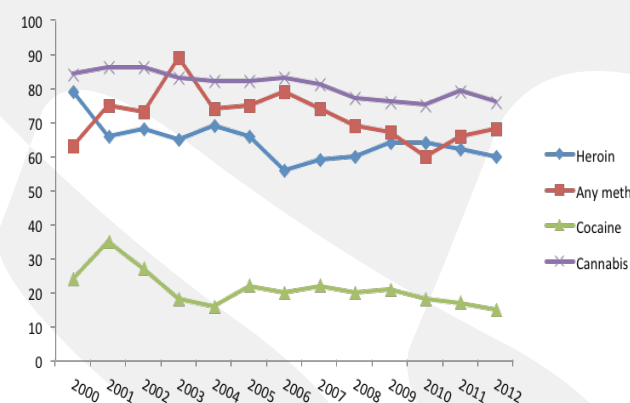
#### Cocaine

The prevalence of cocaine use in the six months preceding interview was 16% or less in all jurisdictions except NSW where it was higher (44%). Nationally recent cocaine use (15%) was stable between 2011 and 2012 (Figure 1 and Table 2). The frequency of cocaine use was also stable (3 days nationally, 7 days in NSW) and remained low and sporadic in all other jurisdictions.

#### Cannabis

As in previous years of the IDRS, recent cannabis use (76%) among this group was common nationally (Figure 1 and Table 2). Frequency of cannabis use tended to be daily or near-daily. Cannabis remained readily available in all jurisdictions.

**Figure 1: Recent use of heroin, any methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis, nationally, 2000-2012**



Source: IDRS Injecting drug user interviews

**Table 2: Recent use of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, nationally, 2011-2012**

	National	
	2011 (N=868)	2012 (N=924)
<b>Recent use (%)</b>		
Heroin	62	60
Speed	44	40
Base	21	18↓
Ice	45	54↑
<i>Any Methamphetamine</i> <sup>#</sup>	66	68
Cocaine	17	15
Cannabis	79	76
<b>Median days of use<sup>^</sup></b>		
Heroin	72	72
Speed	10	10
Base	6	6
Ice	10	12
<i>Any Methamphetamine</i> <sup>#</sup>	19	22
Cocaine	5	3
Cannabis	180	160

Source: IDRS IDU participant interviews

<sup>#</sup>includes speed powder, base, ice/crystal and liquid methamphetamine

<sup>^</sup> among those who had used; maximum number of days, i.e. daily use = 180

### Pharmaceuticals

Morphine remained the most commonly injected pharmaceutical opioid among the national sample (40% nationally). Reports of this behaviour remained highest in the NT (77%) and TAS (66%), the jurisdictions where heroin has traditionally been the least available. Morphine and oxycodone injection remained stable over the last two years, from 41% in 2011 to 40% in 2012 (morphine) and 31% in 2011 to 33% in 2012 (oxycodone). Frequency of use, as with all extra-medical use of opioid medication, remained sporadic.

Use of benzodiazepines (typically by swallowing) remained common among this sample at 64% (result includes benzodiazepines used as prescribed). By contrast, benzodiazepine injection was relatively uncommon, a behaviour reported by 7% of the national sample (10% in 2011). This was most often reported in TAS (26% in 2012, 23% in 2011) and the NT (11% in 2012, 22% in 2012).

### Price, purity and availability

#### Heroin

The price of heroin varied among the jurisdictions ranging from \$125 to \$600 for a gram and \$50 to \$110 for a cap. Nationally, the availability of heroin was reported as 'very easy' to obtain in the last six months. Purity varied with the majority of jurisdictions reporting purity as 'low' (Table 3).

#### Methamphetamine

Prices for speed powder, base and ice/crystal varied across jurisdictions. Overall, nationally, the three main forms of methamphetamine were generally considered 'very easy' or 'easy' to obtain. Of the three forms, ice/crystal was reported to be of 'high' purity, base as high' or 'medium' and speed powder was commonly reported to be 'low' (Table 3).

#### Cocaine

The price of a cap of cocaine remained stable at \$50 in NSW, which remained the only jurisdiction where sufficient numbers (i.e. >10 people) were able to comment. Nationally, the availability of cocaine was reported as 'easy' to obtain and the purity as 'medium' or 'low' (Table 3).

**Table 3: Recent use and Perceptions of current availability and purity/potency of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis by participants who commented, nationally, 2012**

%	Heroin	Methamphetamine			Cocaine	Cannabis	
		Speed powder	Base	Ice/crystal		Hydro	Bush
<b>Availability</b>	<b>N=519</b>	<b>N=295</b>	<b>N=114</b>	<b>N=376</b>	<b>N=80</b>	<b>N=536</b>	<b>N=230</b>
Very easy	51	45	35	46	20	52	35
Easy	36	44	44	38	45	40	46
Difficult	11	11	18	14	25	8	17
Very difficult	2	<1	4	2	10	0	2
<b>Purity</b>	<b>N=504</b>	<b>N=288</b>	<b>N=112</b>	<b>N=365</b>	<b>N=74</b>	<b>N=527</b>	<b>N=224</b>
High	13	22	31	42	23	59	20
Medium	34	29	30	30	49	29	52
Low	40	31	23	13	22	3	24
Fluctuates	13	18	15	15	7	9	4

Source: IDRS IDU participant interviews

## Cannabis

The price per gram varied by type (hydroponic or bush cannabis) and by jurisdiction. Hydroponically grown cannabis continued to dominate the market. Nationally, the availability of hydroponic cannabis was reported as 'very easy' to obtain, while bush cannabis was reported as 'easy'. The use of bush (outdoor grown) cannabis was also noted in all jurisdictions. The potency of hydroponic cannabis continued to be rated as 'high' and bush cannabis as 'medium' (Table 3).

## Injecting risk behaviours

Among the national sample, similar proportions to the 2011 IDRS reported lending a needle in the last month. However, those who reported borrowing a needle in the last month significantly decreased between 2011 and 2012 ( $p < 0.05$ , Table 4). Twenty-five percent of participants reported sharing injecting equipment (excluding needles). The main equipment shared were spoons and tourniquets (79% and 37% respectively among those who reported sharing other equipment). Nearly half of the national sample reported re-using their own needle in the last month. The proportion of participants re-using their own injecting equipment remained stable (58% in 2011 and 62% in 2012). Among those who re-used their own injecting equipment the majority reported re-using spoons (88%), followed by tourniquets (43%). The arm was reported as the last site of injection (78%; Table 4).

**Table 4: Injecting risk behaviour in last month, 2011-2012**

	National	
	2011 (N=868)	2012 (N=924)
<b>Borrowed a needle</b>	11	7↓
<b>Lent a needle</b>	16	14
<b>Shared other injecting equipment**</b>	25	25
<b>Re-used own needle</b>	49	47
<b>Re-used own injecting equipment</b>	58	62
Spoons	84	88
Filters	13	11
Tourniquets	40	43
Water	17	13
Swabs	4	4
Other	4	6
<b>Last site of injection</b>		
Arm	76	78
Leg	4	3
Hand	12	11
Foot	2	2
Groin	2	2
Neck	3	3
Other	1	1

Source: IDRS Injecting drug user interviews  
 \* includes spoons, water, tourniquets and filters

## Self-reported mental health

Nearly half of the national sample self-reported a mental health problem in the last six months. The most common self-reported mental health problem was depression, followed by anxiety. Of those with a self-reported mental health problem, over half reported attending a health professional for their mental health problem, a significant decrease from 2011 ( $p < 0.05$ ; Table 5).

**Table 5: Self reported mental health problems experienced in the preceding six months, 2011-2012**

	National	
	2011 (N=868)	2012 (N=924)
<b>Self reported mental health problem (%)</b>	48	43
<b>Self-reported problem# (%)</b>	N=411	N=393
Depression	66	70
Anxiety	45	52
Manic-depression/Bipolar	16	12
Schizophrenia	16	11
Panic	9	12
Paranoia	6	9
Drug induced psychosis	7	7
<b>Attended health professional for mental health problem#</b>	71	58↓

Source: IDRS Injecting drug user interviews  
 # among those who reported a mental health issue

## Driving risk behaviours

Nearly half of the national sample reported driving a vehicle in the last six months. Of those who reported recently driving, around one-fifth drove while under the influence of alcohol and over three-quarters reported driving while under the influence of an illicit drug. The main drugs reported were cannabis and heroin (Table 6).

## Criminal activity

Thirty-seven percent of the national sample reported a criminal activity in the last month. The most common criminal activity reported was drug dealing and property crime. Percentages reporting property crime and violence significantly decreased in 2012 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Over one-third of the sample had been arrested in the last 12 months (Table 7).

**Table 6: Driving risk behaviours among people who inject drugs in the last six months, nationally, 2011-2012**

	National	
	2011 (N=868)	2012 (N=924)
Driven in the last six months (%)	46 (N=395)	44 (N=409)
Driven under the influence of alcohol last six months* (%)	18	20
Driven after taking an illicit drug in the last six months* (%)	79	77
<b>Drugs used last time in the last six months<sup>^</sup></b>	N=312	N=313
Heroin	39	39
Methadone	8	11
Morphine	16	17
Oxycodone	3	5
Speed	10	10
Base	3	3
Ice	12	10
Benzodiazepines	10	5
Cannabis	30	28
<b>Drugs used last time in the last six months<sup>^</sup></b>	N=312	N=313
Heroin	39	39
Methadone	8	11
Buprenorphine	2	1
Bup-naloxone	2	3
Morphine	16	17
Oxycodone	3	5
Speed	10	10
Base	3	3
Ice	12	10
Benzodiazepines	10	5
Cannabis	30	28

Source: IDRS Injecting drug user interviews

\* Of those who had driven a vehicle in the last six months

<sup>^</sup> Of those that had driven after taking an illicit drug

**Table 7: Proportion of IDU that reported criminal activity, 2011-2012**

	National	
	2011 (N=868)	2012 (N=924)
<b>Crime in the last month (%)</b>		
Drug dealing	25	24
Property	22	18↓
Fraud	3	3
Violence	6	3↓
<b>Any crime</b>	39	37
<b>Arrested last 12 months (%)</b>	36	33

Source: IDRS Injecting drug user interviews

## More information

For more detailed information on the prevalence of use, price, purity/potency and availability by this group, including key expert and indicator data in each jurisdiction please refer to the national and jurisdictional IDRS *Drug Trends* annual reports, which will be available through NDARC in early 2013. Previous years' reports are available on the NDARC website, [www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au](http://www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au) (click on 'Drug Trends').

## Participating researchers and research centres

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