

# Key findings from the 'Australians' Drug Use:

# Adapting to Pandemic Threats' (ADAPT) Study

#### **BACKGROUND**

#### What are the aims of the ADAPT Study?

**WAVE 1 BULLETIN** 

The Australians' Drug Use: Adapting to Pandemic Threats (ADAPT) Study is exploring the short and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the experiences of Australians who use illicit drugs. Findings will be used to ensure drug-related issues during COVID-19 are better understood and more accurately represented, so as to better inform drug treatment and harm reduction in Australia.

#### What does the ADAPT Study involve?

Australians who regularly (i.e. at least once a month) used illicit drugs in 2019 were invited to complete an online survey initially and followup surveys in 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 12 months, 2 years and 3 years. Participants could opt to complete the Wave 1 survey only.

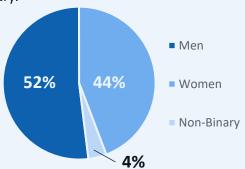
#### What have we found so far?

The information below outlines findings from the 702 eligible participants who completed the Wave 1 survey from 29 April to 15 June 2020.

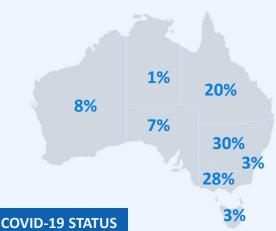
#### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

The ADAPT sample mostly comprised young, well-educated (62% completed tertiary/university qualification) capital city dwellers, although notably one-quarter (25%) of participants reported living in regional/rural/remote areas.

Participants ranged in age from 18-67, with a median age of 25 years. Similar proportions of men and women took part, with 4% of participants identifying as nonbinary.



#### Participants were recruited from:



Most participants (86%) reported that they had not experienced any COVID-19 symptoms, nor been tested, at the time of interview. 10% had been tested, with no participants reporting that they had positive (<1% tested awaiting results).

10% of the sample were tested for COVID-19

**JUNE 2020** 

Citation: Sutherland, R., Baillie, G., Memedovic, S., Hammoud, M., Barratt, M., Bruno, R., Dietze, P., Ezard, N., Salom, C., Degenhardt, L., Hughes, C. & Peacock, A. (2020). Key findings from the 'Australians' Drug Use: Adapting to Pandemic Threats (ADAPT)' Study. ADAPT Bulletin no. 1. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney.













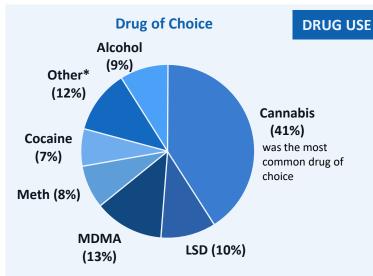






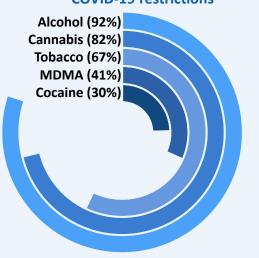


Australians' Drug use: Adapting to Pandemic Threats



\*Other includes ketamine (4%), heroin (3%), pharmaceutical opioids (3%), other (2%), benzodiazepines (1%), GHB (<1%), opioid agonist treatment (OAT) medication (<1%)

## Most commonly used drugs post COVID-19 restrictions\*



\*i.e since March 2020

#### Participant Reports of Changes in their Drug Use Pre and Post COVID-19 Restrictions



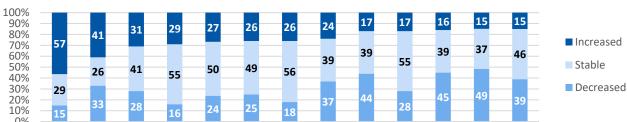
Cannabis and alcohol use had most commonly increased since the beginning of March (i.e., since COVID-19 restrictions) as compared to before.



MDMA, cocaine and ketamine use had most commonly decreased since the beginning of March (i.e., since COVID-19 restrictions) as compared to before .



Use of pharmaceutical opioids, GHB, benzodiazepines, e-cigarettes & LSD had most commonly remained stable since the beginning of March.



10% 15 16 24 23 18 20 18 20 16 24 25 18 25





















Australians' Drug use: Adapting to Pandemic Threats

#### **DRUG USE BEHAVIOURS**



Most participants continued to receive their drugs in person (76% in Feb 2020 vs 66% past month).



There was a small increase in the proportion of participants who had their illicit drugs delivered to them (36% Feb 2020 vs 41% past month).



There was a small increase in those who did not obtain illicit drugs post March 2020 (4% in Feb 2020 vs 10% in past month).



8% reported injecting any drug since the beginning of March 2020 (10% past year, 16% lifetime)

#### HARM REDUCTION (HR) BEHAVIOURS

In response to COVID-19 restrictions (i.e., since March 2020, n=685):

**25**%

Stocked up on illicit drugs



11%

drug

16%

Wiped down drug packages with soap/sanitizer



**12%** 

Stocked up on prescribed medications



36%



24%

Prepared Avoided sharing drug use themselves equipment



Note: 10% reported engaging in other HR behaviours, and 30% reported engaging in none of the listed HR behaviours.

#### DRUG-RELATED HARMS

4% reported an overdose since the beginning of March 2020 (13% past year, 31% lifetime)

#### TREATMENT ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT

#### **Drug Treatment since March 2020**

Treatment engagement was low. Of those who answered (n=593):

4%

3%

Had accessed drug treatment in the past four weeks

Tried but were unable to access drug treatment

### **Mental health services since March 2020**

Of those who answered (n=577):

**37**%

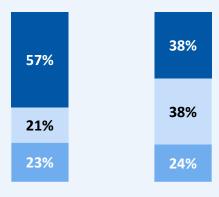
Had accessed help for mental health reasons in the past four weeks

8%

Tried but were unable to access mental health services

#### **CHANGES IN HEALTH RATINGS**

Participants' mental health and physical health ratings in the past month vs February 2020 (pre COVID-19 restrictions)



Mental health (n=592)

Physical health (n=567)

■ Better ■ Stable ■ Worse

























#### **SUMMARY**

- The ADAPT sample comprised mostly young, well-educated capital city dwellers. Being a convenience sample, findings from the ADAPT study cannot be considered representative of all people that use drugs.
- Cannabis and alcohol use had most commonly increased relative to before March 2020, while use of MDMA, cocaine and ketamine had most commonly decreased.
- Participants reported engaging in a range of behaviours to reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 and/or minimise impact of COVID-19 restrictions since March 2020, including washing hands before handling drugs/money and avoiding sharing drug equipment.
- More than half of participants reported poorer mental health in the past four weeks relative
  to before March 2020, with almost two-fifths reporting that they had accessed help for
  mental health reasons in the past four weeks.
- A small proportion of the sample reported that they had tried but been unable to access drug treatment and/or mental health services post March 2020.
- It is critical to continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on different populations who use drugs (e.g., through the <a href="SuperMIX">SuperMIX</a> and <a href="IDRS">IDRS</a> interviews with people who regularly inject drugs).
- Findings from future surveys of the ADAPT sample will be reported on in future outputs.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- The participants who contributed their valuable time to share their experiences.
- The Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) for their support and advice in developing the project.
- All those who gave advice and shared information about the project.
- The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre and the Australian Government Department of Health for funding support.

#### FOR UPDATES ON FUTURE OUTPUTS

- Email adaptstudy@unsw.edu.au
- Check out our website at www.adaptstudy.org.au

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