

ADHD symptomology and associated drug use among a sample of people who regularly use illicit drugs in Australia

Rebecca Hewson¹, Catherine Daly¹, Kieren Lilly¹, Tayla Barber¹ & Caroline Salom^{1,2}

¹Institute for Social Science Research, UQ

²National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney

Acknowledgement of Country

- The University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.
- We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.
- We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

*The Brisbane River pattern from A Guidance Through Time
by Casey Coolwell and Kyra Mancktelow.*



ADHD in ~3-8% of adults (general population)

- Poor health, social outcomes, multiple disadvantages
- Prescribed stimulants as treatment
- Under/late diagnosis

Research questions

- How widespread are **symptoms** of ADHD among people who regularly use drugs?
- How many people have received **diagnoses**?
- What **substances** are people using to address their symptoms?

Data sources

- National EDRS (n=740) and IDRS (n=884) interviews 2024
- QLD EDRS (n=101) and IDRS (n=104) interviews 2025

DRUG TRENDS

Ecstasy &
Related Drugs
Reporting
System



Illicit Drugs
Reporting
System



Annual interviews with people recruited from all Australian capital cities who regularly **use illicit stimulants (EDRS) or inject drugs (IDRS)**

- ▶ **Regular** information about Australia's drug markets & trends in drug related harms
- ▶ Enhanced **evidence** base for development of policy responses & interventions
- ▶ A **timely** warning system for issues that require further monitoring

Symptoms are common

Diagnoses are less common

Treatment less so again

Self medication is common

| | EDRS | | IDRS | |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| | 2025 QLD % | 2024 National % | 2025 QLD % | 2024 National % |
| ASRS >threshold | 58.4 | 55 | 57.7 | 46.1 |
| Diagnosis | 28.7 | 21.6 | 22.1 | 17.1 |
| Prescribed meds | 15.8 | 12.3 | 4.8 | 4.8 |
| Nil | 62.4 | 59.6 | 68.3 | 69.8 |
| Pharma stims | 20.8 | 22.7 | 3.9 | 2.2 |
| Methamphetamine | 4.0 | 5 | 26.9 | 18 |
| Cannabis | 14.9 | 14.2 | 5.8 | 8 |

Higher ASRS scores associated with:

- Younger age (EDRS, IDRS)
- Cis-women, trans, gender diverse identity (EDRS), cis-men (IDRS)
- Non-hetero sexual identity (IDRS)
- Living with disability (EDRS)
- Crime (EDRS)

Concerns:

- * Medication shortages
- * Contaminants in unregulated drug markets
- * Tailored supports required in therapeutic and custodial systems



Thankyou

c.salom@uq.edu.au