

# Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT)

Local Court alcohol  
and drug treatment  
program for adults

[www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au)



NSW Health

# Completion Matters?

Results from the evaluation of health outcomes for people completing the MERIT program vs. not completing the MERIT program

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This artwork symbolises a healing journey that is filled with reflection, hope and renewal.

Round meeting places represent our Country and communities.

Lines throughout the artwork depict flowing water which is vital to our health and wellbeing.

Calm yellow, blue and pink colours reflect the beautiful and peaceful nature of our ancestors. Browns symbolise Country and our connection to it.

“Our shared ground: Pathway of healing and connection”



By Lakkari Pitt - a proud Gamilaroi Ularoi yinarr from Walgett

# Magistrates' Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) overview



- Commenced in 2000 in NSW Local Courts
- 12-week, pre-plea, voluntary diversion program
- Participation in AOD treatment while legal matters are deferred
- MERIT provides AOD counselling and case management
- Referral to specialist AOD treatment:
  - Residential rehabilitation
  - Withdrawal management
  - Opioid agonist treatment
- Referral to additional services: health, social services, etc.
- Delivered in partnership with NSW Health, Department of Communities and Justice, Police, Legal Aid and Aboriginal Legal Service.

# Aims of the current evaluation

MERIT completion



Health outcomes



Demographic characteristics



Drug use and treatment



Health service use



Justice factors



Emergency  
department  
presentation

Hospital  
admission

Ambulance  
callouts

6 months

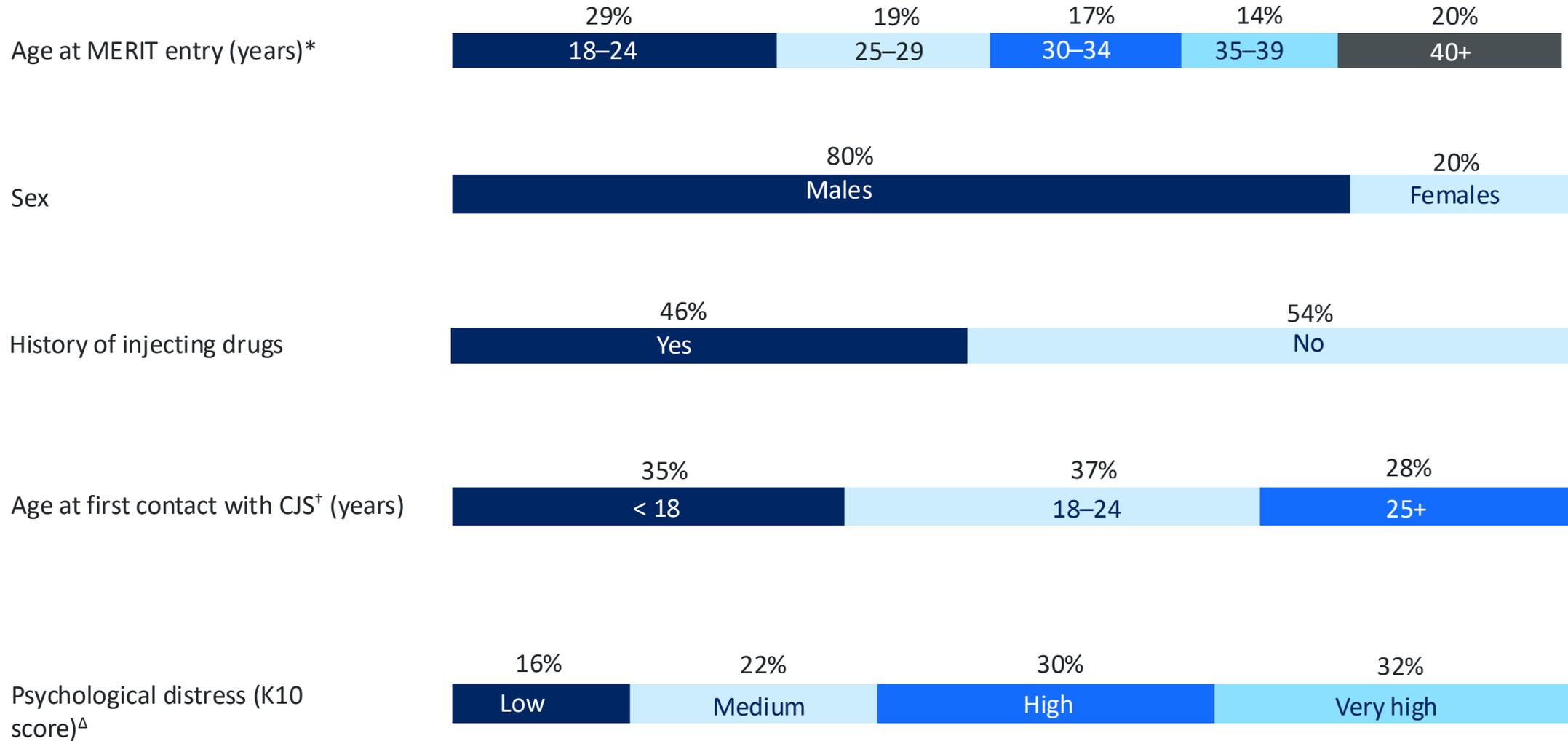
12 months

24 months



Aim: Is MERIT completion associated with hospital admission, emergency department presentation, or ambulance callout at 6-, 12-, and 24-month post acceptance into the MERIT program?

# MERIT Cohort (N = 16,312)

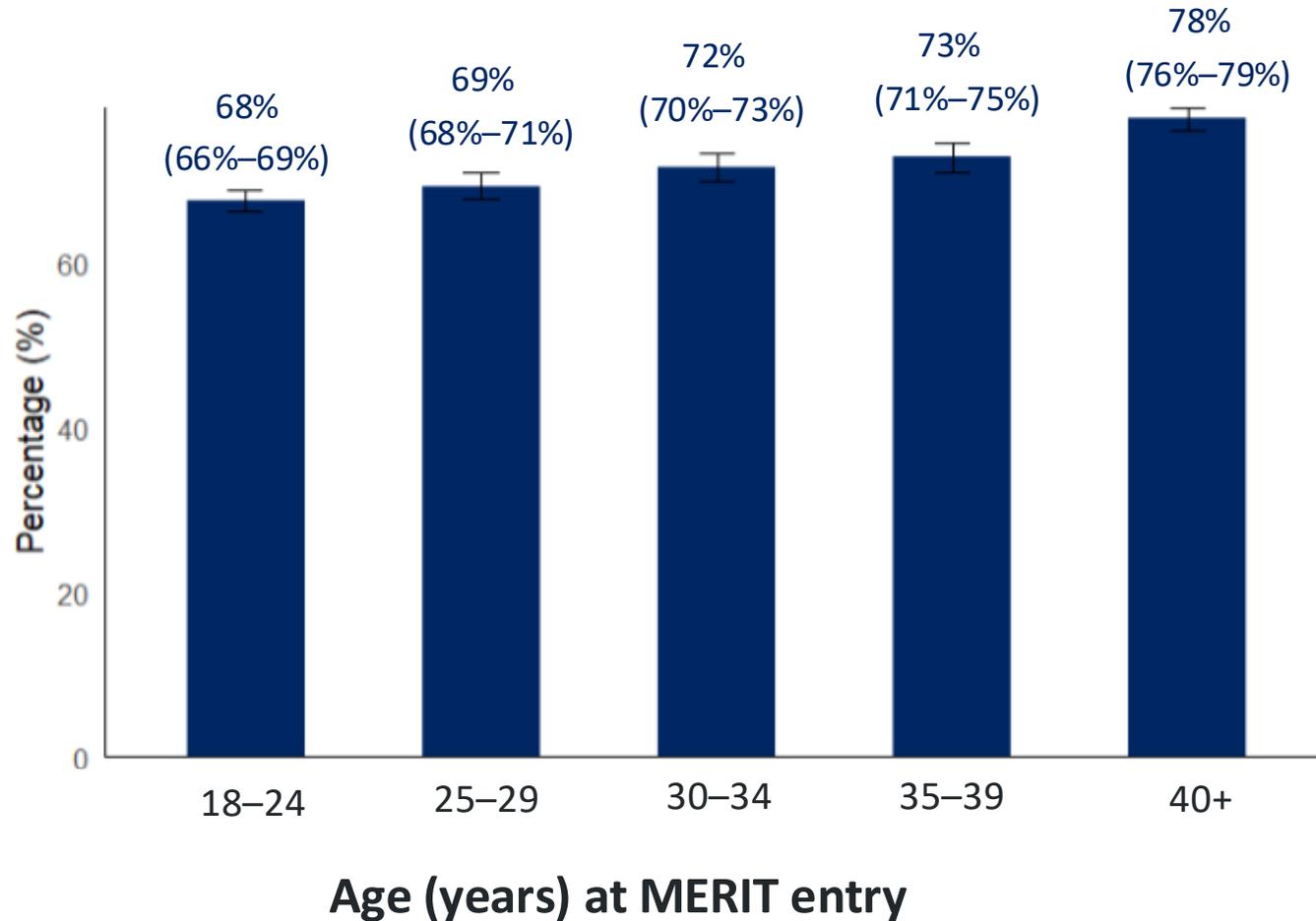


\* Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

† Criminal Justice System

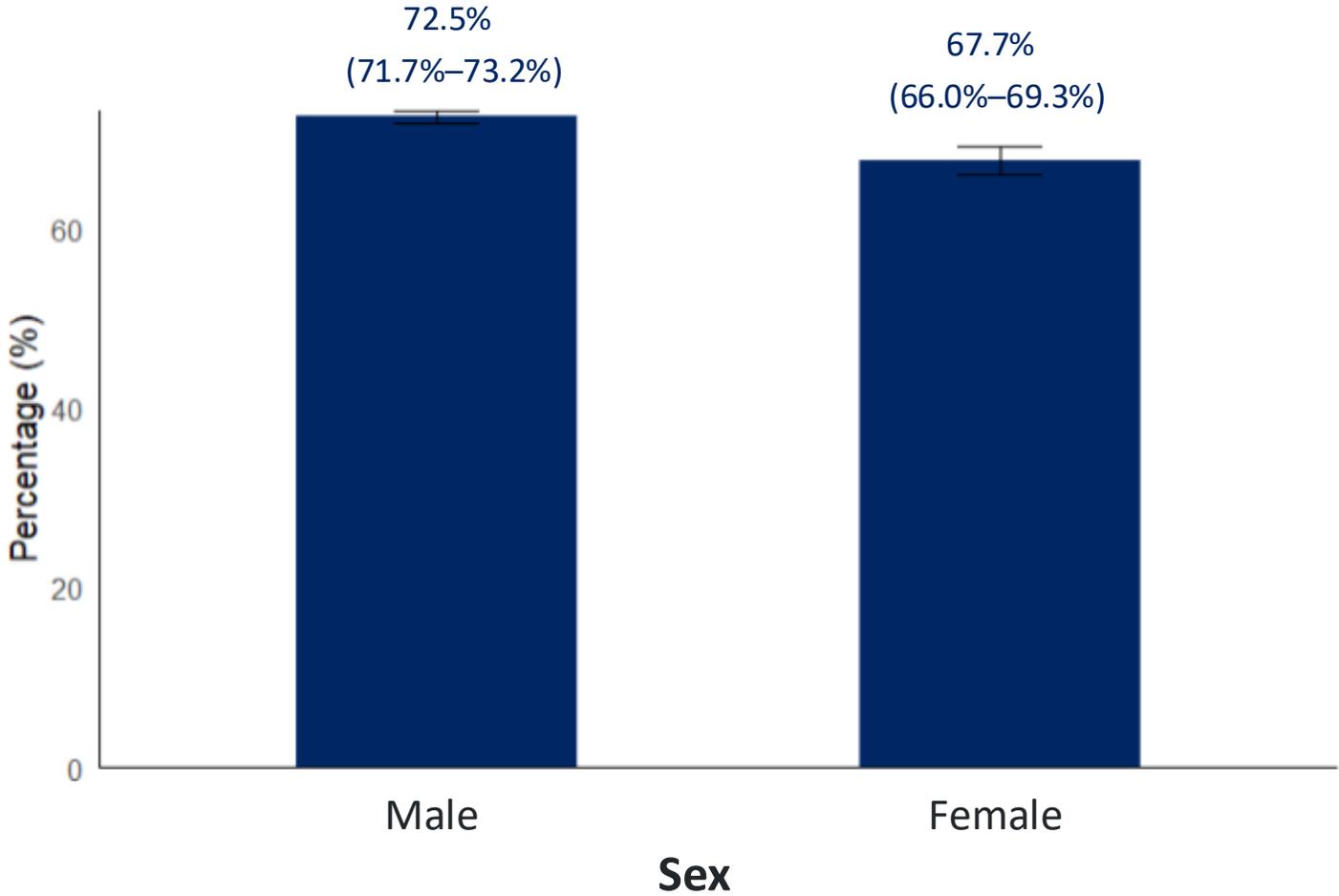
Δ At MERIT entry

# MERIT completion rates by age at MERIT entry (N=16,312)



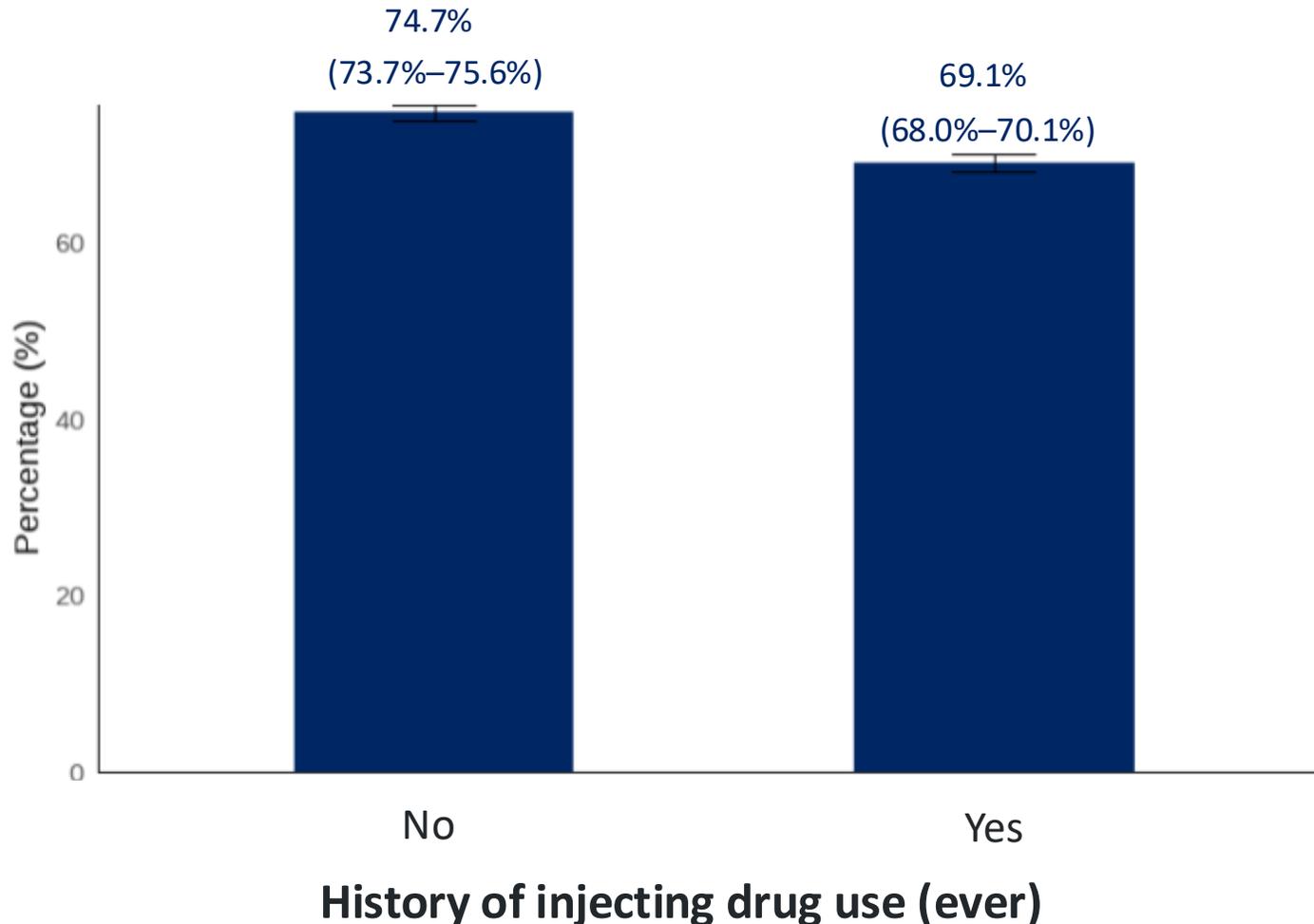
MERIT completion rate increases with increasing age

# MERIT completion rates by sex (N=16,312)



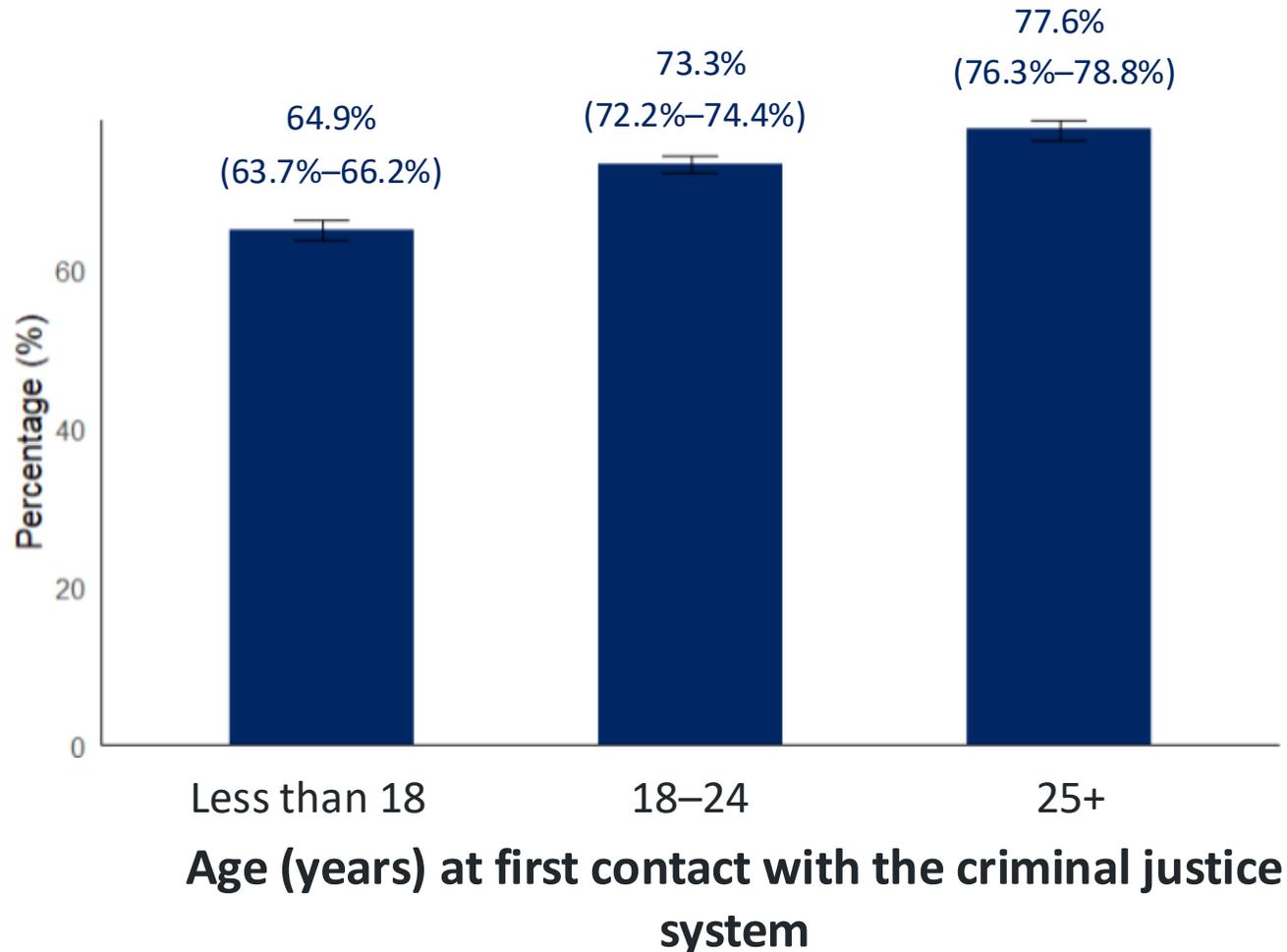
Men are more likely to complete MERIT compared to women

# MERIT completion rates by history of injecting drug use (N=16,312)



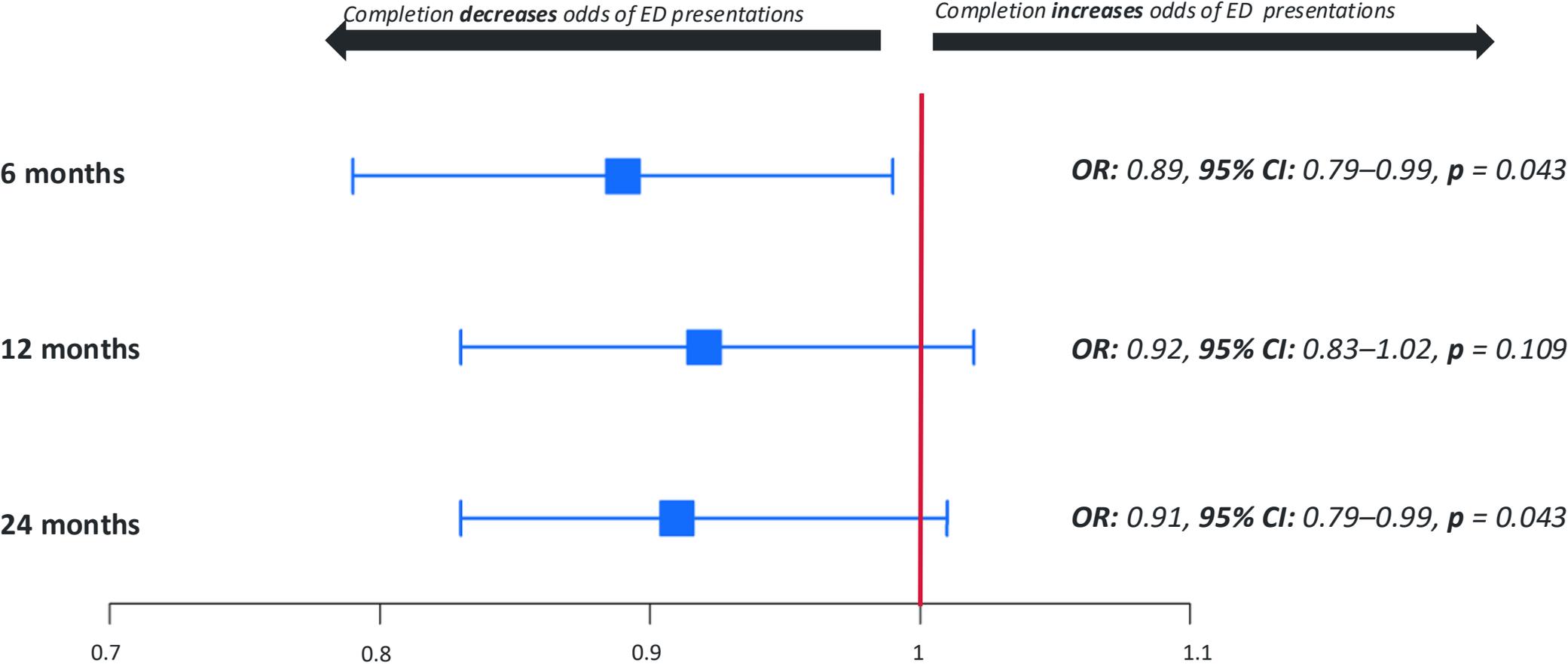
People with no history of injecting drug use are more likely to complete MERIT compared with people with a history of injecting drug use

# MERIT completion rates by age of first contact with criminal justice system ( $N=16,312$ )



MERIT completion rates are highest among individuals whose first contact with the criminal justice system occurred after the age of 25 years

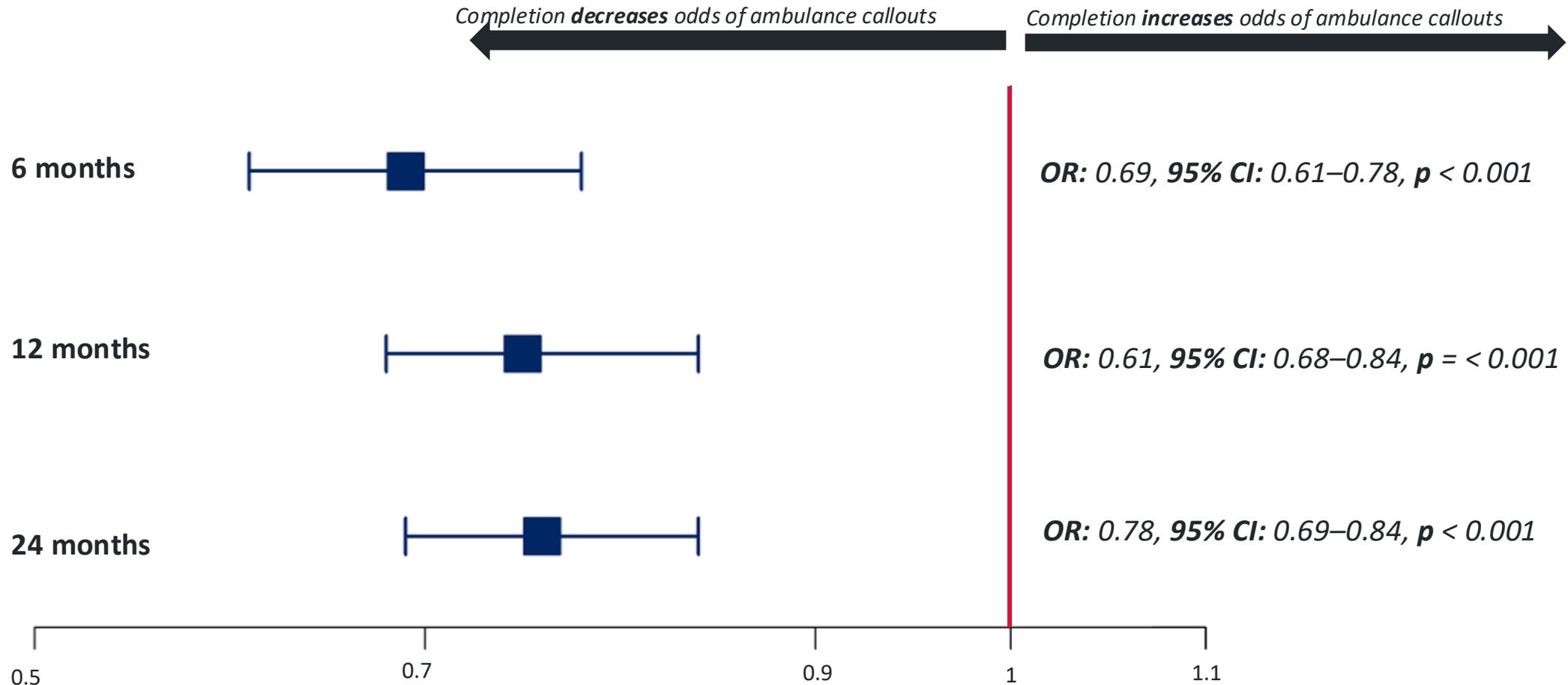
# Outcome: Unplanned Emergency department presentation



**Adjusted odds ratio of MERIT completion for unplanned ED presentation**

MERIT completion has little impact on ED presentation at 6-, 12- and 24-months post MERIT acceptance

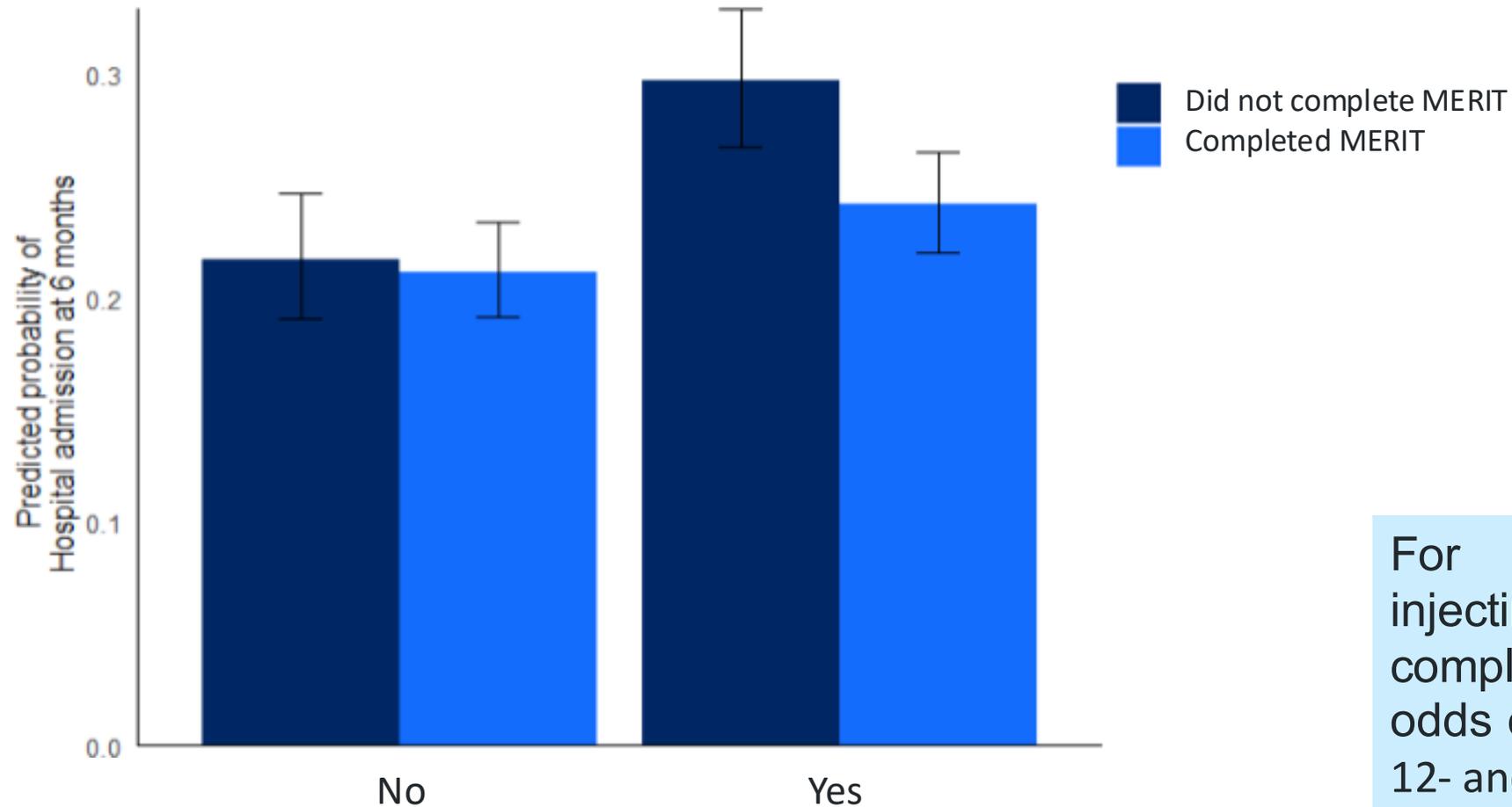
# Outcome: Ambulance callouts



**Adjusted odds ratio of MERIT completion for unplanned ED presentation**

MERIT completion significantly reduces ambulance callouts at 6-, 12- and 24-months post acceptance into MERIT.

# Outcome: Hospital admission



For people with history of injecting drug use, MERIT completion significantly reduces odds of hospital admission at 6-, 12- and 24-months post acceptance into MERIT

**Predicted probability of hospital admission by history of injecting drug use and MERIT completion**

# Recommendations

- **Continue monitoring MERIT program completion rates**, especially as the MERIT expands to more Local Courts.
- **Encourage collaboration within the intersectoral MERIT teams** to promote client retention within AOD services.
- **Implement targeted treatment and support services** provision within the MERIT program model of care for at-risk and priority populations.

# Acknowledgements



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# Thank you

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