



# ADAPT STUDY

Australians' Drug use: Adapting to Pandemic Threats

WAVE 1 BULLETIN

JUNE 2020

## Key findings from the 'Australians' Drug Use: Adapting to Pandemic Threats' (ADAPT) Study

### BACKGROUND

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

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 follow-up 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.

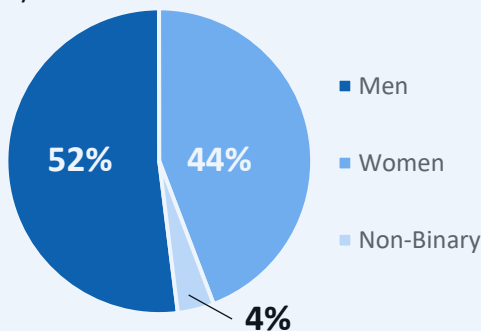
#### What have we found so far?

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

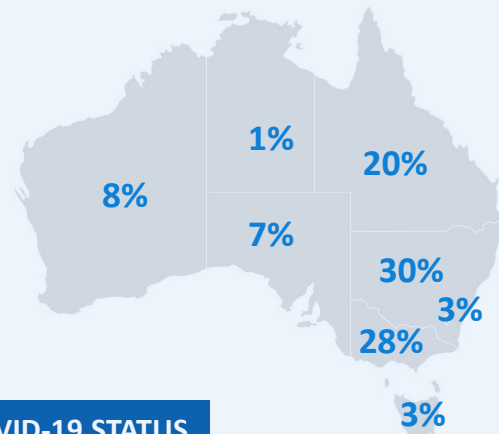
### DEMOGRAPHICS

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 non-binary.



### Participants were recruited from:



### COVID-19 STATUS

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 tested positive (<1% **awaiting results**).

**10%**  
of the sample  
were tested for  
COVID-19

**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.

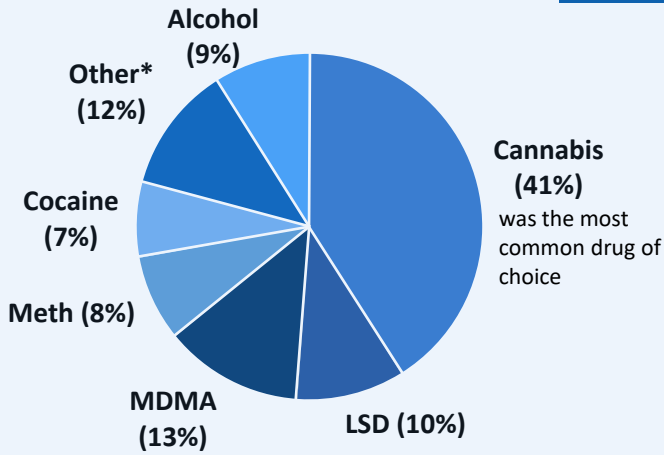


# ADAPT STUDY

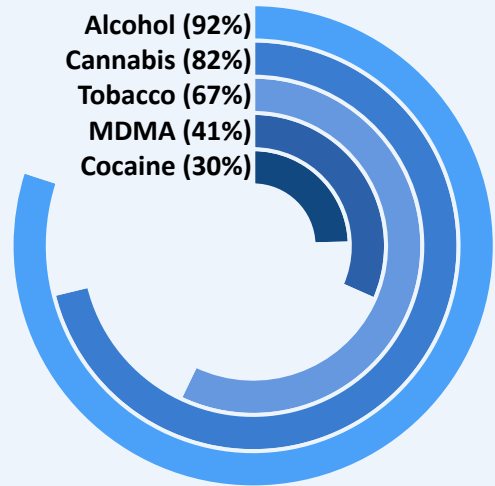
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## DRUG USE

### Drug of Choice



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



\*i.e since March 2020

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

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



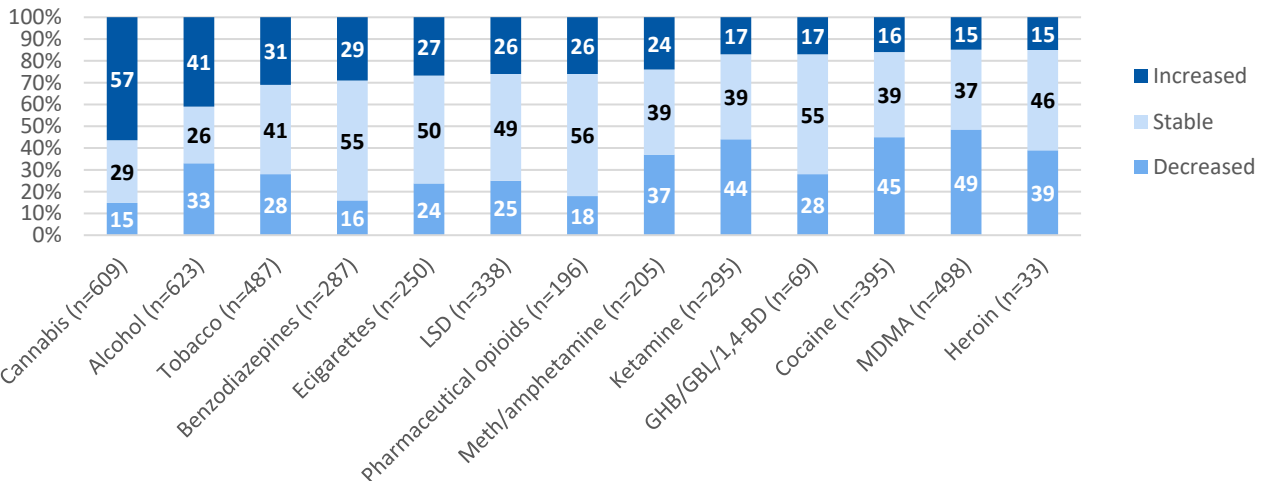
**Cannabis** and **alcohol** use had most commonly **increased** since the beginning of March (i.e., since COVID-19 restrictions) as compared to before.



**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.





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## 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



**16%**

Wiped down drug packages with soap/sanitizer



**12%**

Stocked up on prescribed medications



**11%**

Prepared drug themselves



**36%**

Washed hands before handling drugs/money



**24%**

Avoided sharing drug use 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%**

Had accessed drug treatment in the past four weeks

**3%**

Tried but were unable to access drug treatment

### Mental health services since March 2020

Of those who answered (n=577):

**37%**

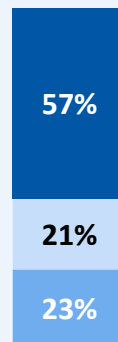
Had accessed help for mental health reasons in the past four weeks

**8%**

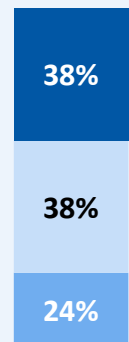
Tried but were unable to access mental health services

## 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



UNSW SYDNEY



Kirby Institute





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## 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 [SuperMIX](#) and [IDRS](#) 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](mailto:adaptstudy@unsw.edu.au)
- Check out our website at [www.adaptstudy.org.au](http://www.adaptstudy.org.au)
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