

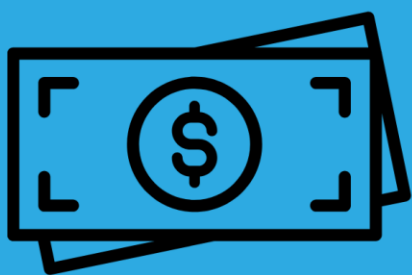
Previous-day drug expenditure among a sample of people who inject drugs, 2024

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Key Findings



Median previous-day drug expenditure among those who reported any expenditure was **\$100** and the **mean** was **\$168**.



Male gender, more frequent injecting use, and any type of needle sharing in the past month were all associated with increased previous-day drug expenditure.



In 2024, the national IDRS sample included 884 participants. Annual interviews were conducted with people aged 18 or older residing in capital city areas of Australia who injected illicit or non-prescribed drugs \geq six days in the preceding six months.

Introduction



People who inject drugs often report using a variety of substances, many of which are costly. However, individuals recruited into surveys are typically unemployed, with limited financial resources. For example, 89% of participants in the 2024 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) reported being unemployed at the time of interview, with a median weekly income of \$424 (1). This level of income leaves little room for discretionary spending and may compromise the ability to obtain basic life necessities such as food, clothing and appropriate housing. Despite this, there remains limited understanding of drug expenditure among people who inject drugs in Australia, including whether higher expenditure is linked with poorer outcomes.

This bulletin, therefore, aims to examine previous-day drug expenditure amongst a sample of people who regularly inject drugs, using data from the 2024 IDRS.

Methods

Data were collected as part of the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS). Annual interviews are conducted with people aged 18 or older residing in capital city areas of Australia who have injected illicit or non-prescribed drugs \geq six days in the preceding six months.

In 2024, 884 participants were recruited from capital cities in each jurisdiction, with a target of 150 participants in Melbourne and Sydney, and 100 in the remaining cities. These interviews were conducted predominately via face-to-face surveys, with some conducted via telephone in some instances following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please refer to the [IDRS Background and Methods](#) document for further details.

Previous-day illicit drug expenditure (hereafter drug expenditure) was captured with the question 'how much did you spend on illicit/non-prescribed drugs yesterday?'. Responses were captured in \$AUD. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the amount spent on drugs on the day prior to survey participation, amongst those who reported $>$ \$0 expenditure. Potential demographic and drug use correlates that may be related to drug expenditure were analysed amongst those who reported $>$ \$0 expenditure using a multivariable linear regression.

For information regarding the characteristics of the national IDRS sample in 2024, please refer to the [National 2024 IDRS report](#).

Results

Previous day drug expenditure

Of those who responded ($n=874$), 59% ($n=519$) of participants reported any drug expenditure on the day prior to participation in the survey. Among those reporting drug expenditure, the median expenditure was \$100 (IQR=\$50-\$200) and the mean was \$168 (SD=\$54-\$282).

Correlates of previous day drug expenditure

Table 1 shows the results of a multivariable linear regression analysis of associations between previous-day drug expenditure and key exposure variables. After adjustment for all of the variables included in the model, male gender, more frequent injecting use, and any type of needle sharing in the month prior to interview were all associated with increased expenditure.

Table 1: Multivariable relationships of selected variables with previous-day drug expenditure, 2024

	coefficient	95% CI	p
Age (continuous)	-1.29	-3.37-0.79	0.223
Sex			
Female	(ref)		
Male	49.28	5.59-92.97	0.027
Another term	-140.01	-592.05-312.03	0.540
City			
Sydney	(ref)		
Canberra	-11.11	-83.82-61.61	0.764
Melbourne	-2.73	-67.28-61.82	0.934
Hobart	-19.48	-95.66-56.70	0.616
Adelaide	-30.17	-106.12-45.79	0.436
Perth	-32.88	-105.75-40.00	0.376
Darwin	-20.82	-117.99-76.34	0.674
Brisbane & Gold Coast	19.87	-60.63-100.38	0.628
Education Level			
Education ≥ year 10	(ref)		
Education ≤ year 9	-33.70	-79.02-11.62	0.145
Housing			
Unstable housing*	(ref)		
Stable housing	2.54	-44.22-49.30	0.915
Injecting Frequency			
Less than weekly	(ref)		
Weekly or more often	67.55	7.39-127.70	0.028
Preferred drug of choice			
Other drug	(ref)		
Heroin	-7.49	-55.86-40.88	0.761
Drug Treatment			
Not on treatment	(ref)		
Currently on treatment	-19.12	-65.87-27.63	0.422
Past 12-month drug overdose			
No overdose	(ref)		
Overdose	38.82	-9.67-87.30	0.116
Any past-month needle sharing			
No needle sharing	(ref)		1
Needle sharing	98.52	38.06-158.98	<0.001

Note. *unstable accommodation includes people without accommodation (rough sleeping or squatting (including sleeping in car), people living in temporary or crisis accommodation (shelter/refuge, drug treatment residence), people living in inadequate or insecure accommodation (boarding house/hostel, couch surfing (home of friends or family)). Significant findings ($p < 0.05$) bolded.

Discussion

Participants in the IDRS survey of people who inject illicit drugs report spending substantial amounts on drugs on the day prior to the 2024 survey, particularly in comparison to the reported weekly median income of the sample (\$424) (1). Our results suggest that participants who report engaging in riskier injecting behaviours such as needle sharing and greater injecting frequency report higher drug expenditure. Males also reported greater drug expenditure compared to females, although no association was found with other demographic and drug-use variables. Overall, the amount of drug expenditure reported by the sample suggests that participants will have only limited funds available for basic life necessities let alone discretionary spending.

References

1. Sutherland R, Karlsson A, Uporova J, et al. Australian Drug Trends 2024: Key Findings from the National Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) Interviews. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney; 2024.

Funding and Copyright

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Recommended Citation

Wilson J., Sumner, M., Lloyd, Z., Petrovic, B., Higgs, P & Dietze P. Previous-day drug expenditure among a sample of people who inject drugs, 2024. Drug Trends Bulletin Series. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney; 2025. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/31195>

Acknowledgements

- The participants who were interviewed for the IDRS in the present and in previous years.
- The agencies that assisted with recruitment and interviewing.
- The IDRS is funded by the Australian Government of Health, Disability and Ageing under the Drug and Alcohol Program.

Participating Researchers and Research Centres



- Dr Rachel Sutherland, Antonia Karlsson, Julia Uporova, Olivia Price, Cate King, Udesha Chandrasena, Professor Louisa Degenhardt, Professor Michael Farrell and Associate Professor Amy Peacock, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales, New South Wales;
- Joanna Wilson, Rebekka Petrovic, Zachary Lloyd, Mila Sumner and Paul Dietze, Burnet, Victoria;
- Sophie Radke and Associate Professor Raimondo Bruno, School of Psychology, University of Tasmania, Tasmania;

- Dr Sophie Haywood and Professor Simon Lenton, National Drug Research Institute and enAble Institute, Curtin University, Western Australia; and
- Catherine Daly, Dr Jennifer Juckel, Dr Natalie Thomas and Associate Professor Caroline Salom, Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland, Queensland.