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Author:
Uporova, Julia; Peacock, Amy; Sutherland, Rachel

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Prescribed cannabis and driving behaviours among two samples of people who regularly use illicit drugs, 2025

Julia Uporova, Amy Peacock and Rachel Sutherland

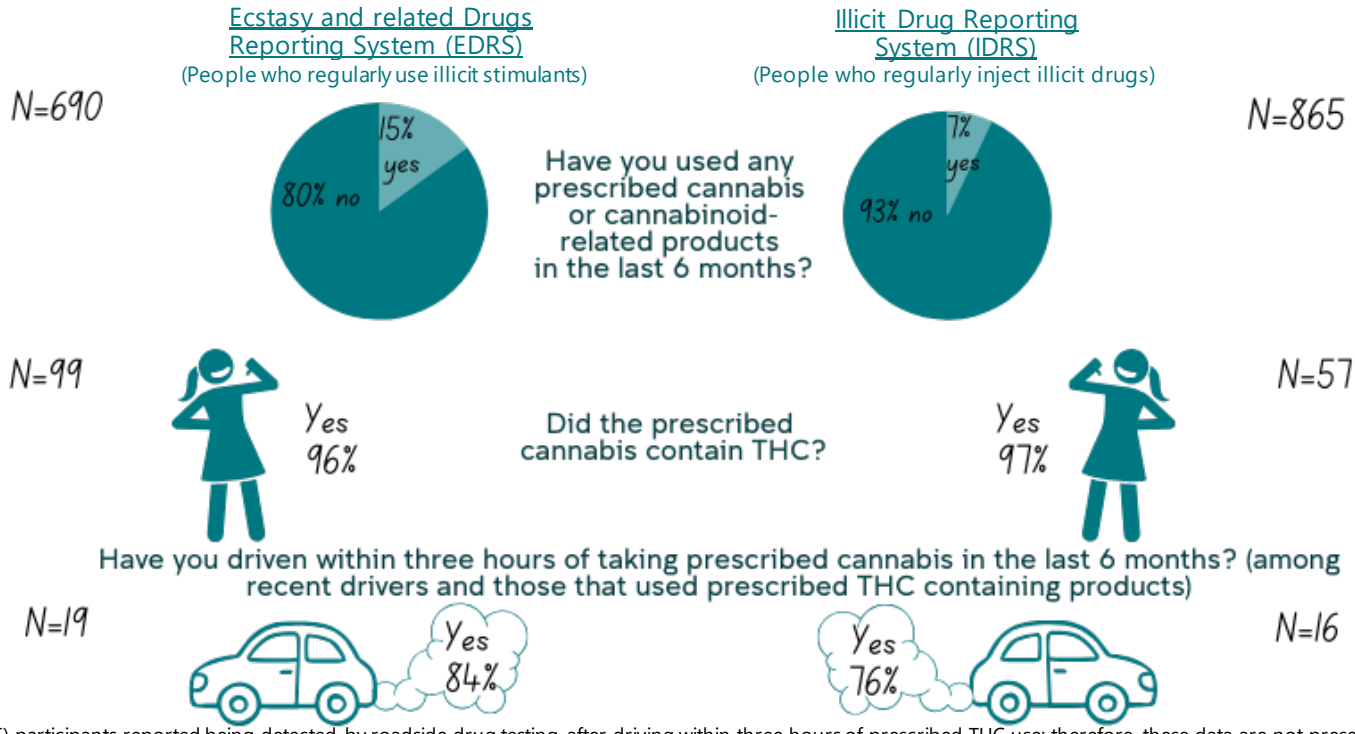
This report was prepared by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney

For further information: drugtrends@unsw.edu.au

Introduction

In Australia, medicinal cannabis has been legally available via prescription since 2016 (1). Yet, in most states and territories, any detectable amount of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive component of cannabis, in a driver's blood or oral fluids is illegal, even with a valid prescription and in the absence of perceived impairment. An exception applies in Tasmania, where a limited legal defence may be available if the driver holds a valid prescription and is not impaired (2). This regulatory approach differs from that applied to other impairing medications, such as morphine and methadone, and appears to reflect the historical classification of cannabis as a prohibited drug with no recognised medical use (2). Despite this unique regulatory context, there is limited evidence on the driving behaviours of people prescribed THC-containing cannabis products. This bulletin examines this practice among two national samples of people who regularly use illicit drugs, recruited from all capital cities in Australia.

Results



Note. Few (n<5) participants reported being detected by roadside drug testing after driving within three hours of prescribed THC use; therefore, these data are not presented.

Discussion

Although prescribed cannabis use was relatively uncommon in these two samples of people who regularly use drugs, most participants who had used THC-containing products reported driving within three hours of consumption. Few participants (n<5) reported being detected by roadside drug testing after such use but nevertheless remain at risk of positive roadside drug tests and criminal sanctions. However, these findings are not representative of all people who are prescribed cannabis. In a study of 806 Australian medical cannabis patients, 35% of drivers reported 'typically' driving within three hours of consuming cannabis in the past month (4). Taken together, these results add to calls for a review of the regulatory framework governing prescribed medicinal cannabis and driving in Australia, particularly given the differential treatment of medicinal-cannabis patients compared with those taking other psychoactive medicines (2).

References

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