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CJBULLETIN

Research findings from
the Criminal Justice
Clearinghouse

2023 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region

September 2024

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Highlights

Nearly three in four interviewees booked into local jails tested positive for at least one illicit substance

Seventy-four percent (74%) of adults interviewed in 2023 tested positive for at least one illicit substance and just under one-third (32%) tested positive for multiple.

Marijuana remains the most frequently used substance

Similar to previous years, marijuana was the most frequently tried (91%) substance, and the substance most individuals (55%) reported trying first. Marijuana was also considered the easiest to access, with 97% of those who had it in their possession in the last 30 days describing it as “very easy” or “easy” to get.

One in two tested positive for methamphetamine

In 2023, one in two (49%) individuals tested positive for meth, with males and females testing positive at the same rate.

Over two in five reported using prescription drugs without a prescription

Forty-four percent (44%) of individuals reported they have used prescription drugs without a prescription, with the most common being tranquilizers (i.e., benzodiazepines), fentanyl, and codeine.

Nearly one in three believe drugs they used contained fentanyl

While about one in five (19%) individuals reported misusing fentanyl (using without a valid prescription), nearly one in three (32%) reported believing that drugs they used had fentanyl in it due to their reaction.

Background

This CJ Bulletin, 2023 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region, is one publication in a series that highlights findings from data collected as part of the San Diego County Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program. This bulletin includes information pertaining to lifetime and recent self-reported drug use, perceived risk and availability of different drugs, characteristics of the population interviewed, and how these factors may be related to drug use.

Since 2004, when federal funding for the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program was suspended, San Diego has been the only site to continue this project uninterrupted. With funding from the SANDAG Criminal Justice Clearinghouse, these data have been reported on an annual basis, providing useful information to policy makers, law enforcement, prevention, and treatment professionals regarding drug use trends and involvement in other risky or illegal behavior over time. In 2023, this data collection effort also had the generous support of the San Diego County Human Services Agency, Behavioral Health Services, and the San Diego-Imperial High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). Their support, as well as the cooperation of the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, is gratefully acknowledged.

As part of this project, adults booked into local jails are approached (using a random sampling method) within 48 hours of their booking into jail. If the individual is available and willing to participate in a confidential interview, they are asked a series of questions related to their drug use history and provide a urine sample for drug testing. In 2023, 202 males were interviewed at the Vista and Central Jails and 99 females at Las Colinas. Of these 301 adults, 291 (97%) completed the interview and provided a valid urine sample for analysis.

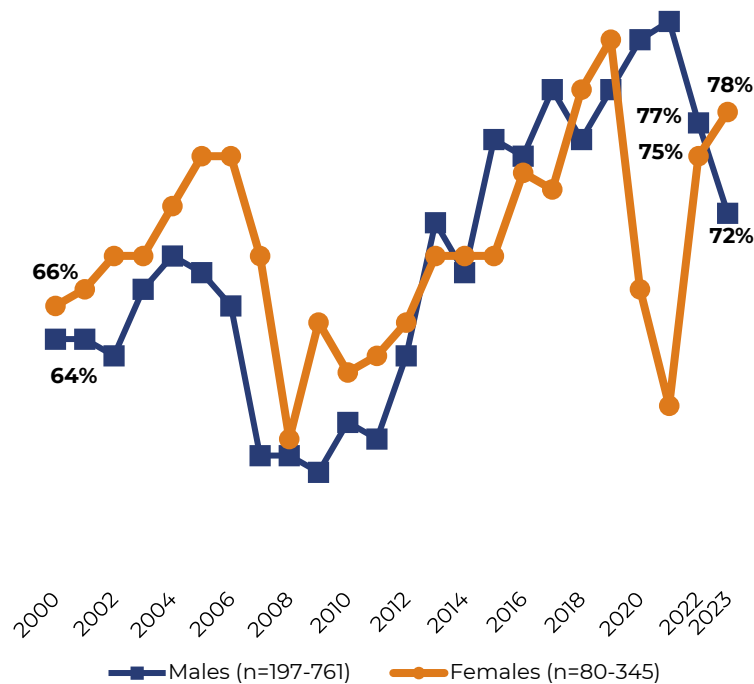
What information is collected through these interviews?

- Positive rates for any drugs *(page 4)*
- Positive rates for multiple drugs *(page 5)*
- Positive rates for marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine, and opiates over time *(page 6)*
- Characteristics of drug use by drug type *(page 8)*
- Drug market dynamics *(page 10)*
- Prescription drug use *(page 13)*
- Fentanyl use in the region *(page 15)*
- Binge drinking *(page 18)*
- Tobacco and vaping use *(page 19)*
- Risk factors to recidivate *(page 20)*
- Possible effects of substance use on the community *(page 26)*

How many adults booked into local jails have ever tried illicit substances?

In 2023, nearly three-fourths (74%) of adults included in the study tested positive for at least one illicit substance, including marijuana, methamphetamine (meth), cocaine, opiates, and PCP.¹ This translates to 72% of adult males and 78% of adult females (Figure 1). The 2023 male positive rate represents the second consecutive decrease from a 24-year high (83% in 2021), and the lowest in nine years. Conversely, the 2023 female positive rate of 78% represents the second increase in a row and the third highest in 24 years. Since 2021, the rates of males and females testing positive for any drug have shown a noticeable inverse relationship.

Figure 1: Percentage of adult males and females positive for a drug in 2023



Note: Prior to 2013 and since 2015, the percentage of positive was based on marijuana, meth, cocaine, opiates, and PCP. In 2013 and 2014, the PCP test was replaced with a test for alcohol.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

What were the characteristics of the adults interviewed?

Of the 291 individuals with completed interviews and urine samples, 197 (68%) were male and 94 (32%) were female. Forty-five percent (45%) identified as Hispanic/Latino(a), 30% White, 20% Black/African American, and 5% "other." One percent (1%) of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Eighteen percent (18%) of those interviewed were under the age of 25, 48% between 25 and 39, and 34% 40 and older. The mean age was 36.1 (range 18 to 72). Seven out of ten (70%) were single; 18% divorced, separated, or widowed; and 12% married.

Over two-fifths (41%) were booked for a violent offense as the most serious charge, 27% for a property offense, 17% for a drug offense, and 15% for an "other" offense (any offense that falls outside of the main three categorizations). Twenty-nine percent (29%) reported living in the Central Major Statistical Area of the County, 18% in East Suburban, 17% in South Suburban, 12% in North County East, 8% in North City, 7% in North County West, and 4% in East County and out of the County, respectively.

¹The drug test panel continues to include marijuana even though California voters approved Proposition 64 on November 8, 2016. Marijuana will continue to be tested while it remains illegal federally and because changes in use pre- and post-legalization among this population is expected to continue to be an issue of interest.

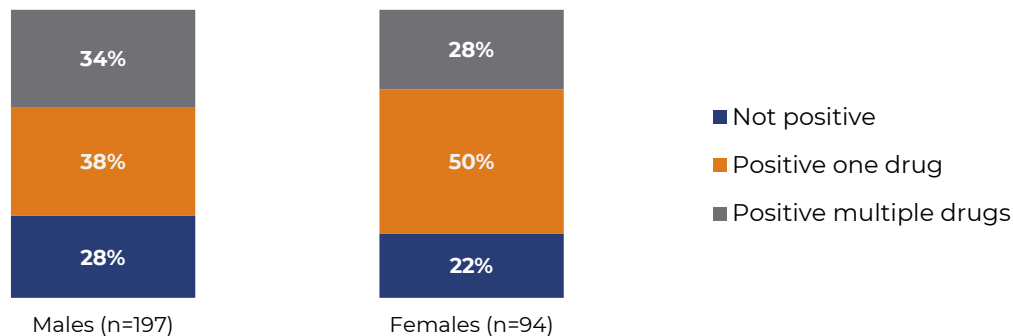
How many adults booked into local jails are polydrug² users?

As seen in Figure 2, around one in three individuals (34% of males and 28% of females) tested positive for multiple drugs in 2023. Of those positive for multiple drugs, 81% tested positive for two and 19% for three drugs. Of those who tested positive for multiple drugs, 95% tested positive for meth, 87% for marijuana, 21% opiates, 11% cocaine/crack, and 1% PCP.

How many individuals tested positive for just marijuana?

More than half (55%) of those who tested positive for marijuana also tested positive for additional substances, including meth, opiates, crack/cocaine, or some other combination.

Figure 2: Percentage of positive tests for multiple drugs by gender

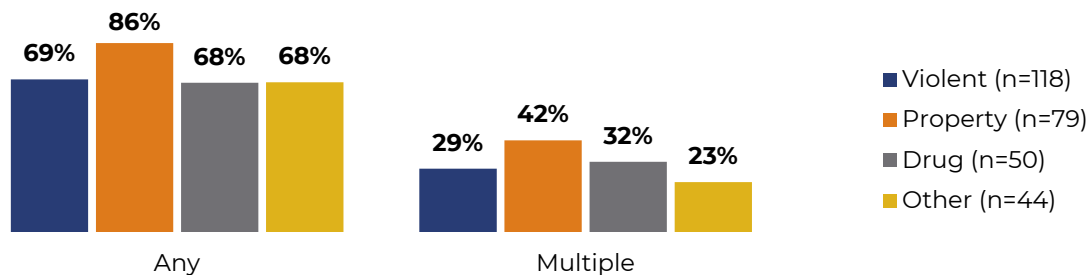


Source: SANDAG, 2023

How does testing positive vary by the individual's highest booking charge?

Regardless of offense type, at least 68% of individuals tested positive for any drug in 2023 and at least 23% tested positive for multiple (Figure 3). While there was no statistical significance, it is notable that those with a property offense as their highest charge tested positive at a higher rate for any and multiple drugs.

Figure 3: Positive test for any or multiple drugs by highest charge



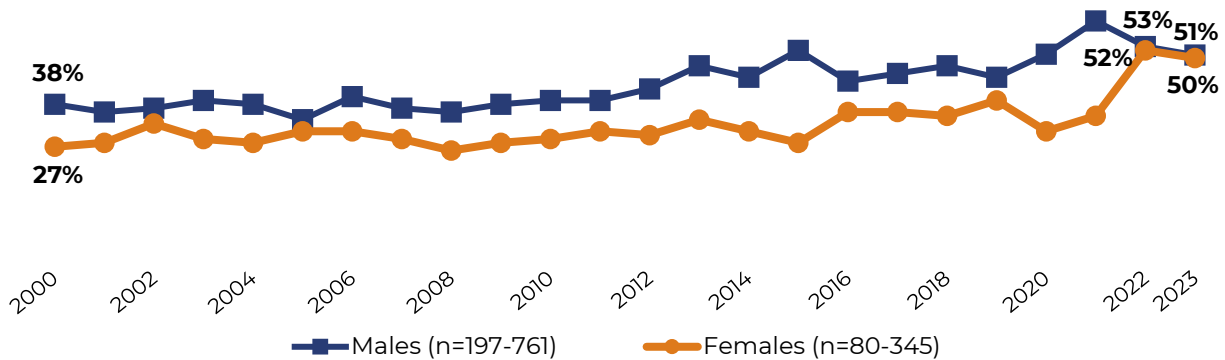
Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

² Polydrug use refers to the use of two or more psychoactive drugs in combination to achieve a particular effect.

How have positive rates by drug type changed over time?

The percentage of males positive for **marijuana**³ (51%) saw its second consecutive decrease in 2023 (Figure 4). Positive rates for females decreased to 50%, down from the 23-year high of 52% in 2022. Consistent with historical patterns, there were significant differences by age, with individuals under 25 more likely to test positive (67%) than those between the ages of 25 and 39 (54%), and those 40 and older (37%). There were also consistent differences by race/ethnicity, with 62% of Black/African American individuals testing positive, compared to 50% of Hispanic/Latino(a) individuals and 47% of White individuals.

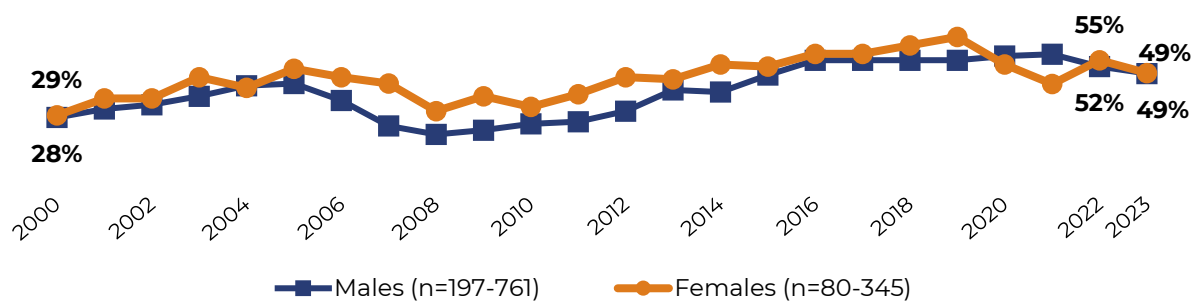
Figure 4: Percentage of positive tests for marijuana by gender



Source: SANDAG, 2023

For **meth**, the percentage of males that tested positive in 2023 also saw its second consecutive decrease to 49% (Figure 5). For the first time since this study started tracking meth use, the female rate was exactly the same as the male rate (49%), both reflecting a decrease from 2022. Similar to marijuana, meth positive rates varied significantly by an individual's age, though the trend is opposite of the one seen amongst marijuana users. For meth, older individuals (40 years and older) were more likely to test positive (62%) than those between 25 and 39 (44%) and those under 25 (35%). The variation in meth positive rate was also significant according to the individual's race/ethnicity, with White individuals more likely to test positive (61%), followed by Hispanic/Latino(a) individuals (48%) and Black/African American individuals (29%).

Figure 5: Percentage of positive tests for methamphetamine by gender

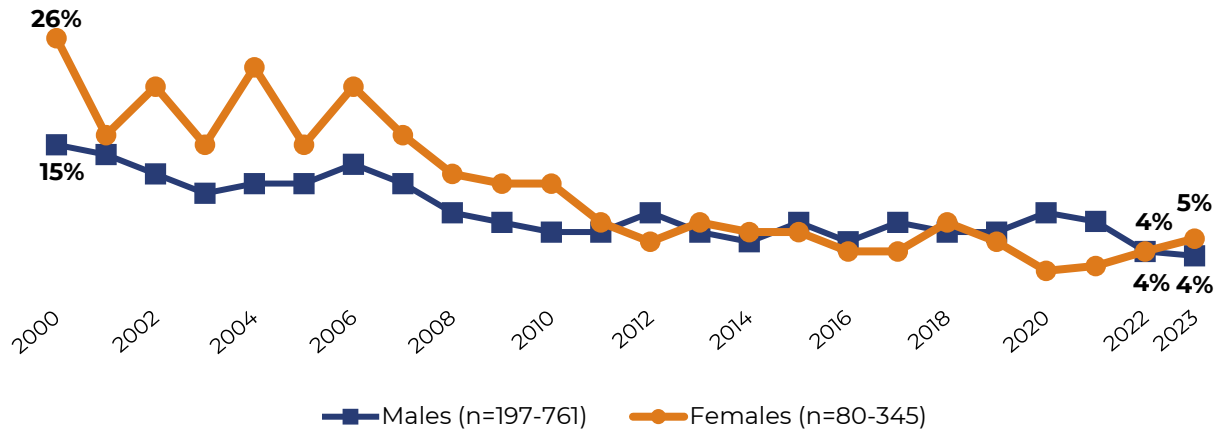


Source: SANDAG, 2023

³ The term "marijuana" is increasingly being replaced due to its negative connotations. Although this study and its survey instruments have traditionally used "marijuana," future research and instruments will be revised to adopt a more neutral and scientifically precise terminology.

The percentage of males positive for **cocaine** in 2023 (4%) was consistent with last year's numbers. Conversely, the trend continued increasing for the third year in a row for females, from 2% in 2020 to 5% in 2023 (Figure 6). There were no significant differences in recent cocaine use by an individual's gender, age, or ethnicity/race.

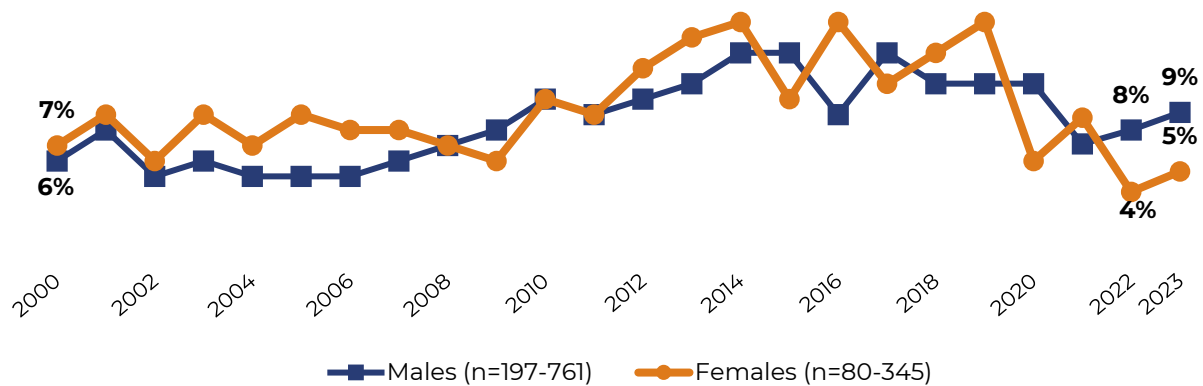
Figure 6: Percentage of positive tests for cocaine by gender



Source: SANDAG, 2023

For **opiates**,⁴ the percentage of males that were positive increased for the second consecutive year to 9% in 2023. There was also a small increase of 1% for females (to 5%) in 2023 (Figure 7). There were no significant differences in the percent positive for opiates by gender, age, or ethnicity/race.

Figure 7: Percentage of positive tests for opiates by gender



Source: SANDAG, 2023

In addition, no females and only one male tested positive for **PCP** in 2023 (not shown).

⁴ A positive opiate drug test could indicate use of opiates other than heroin, including morphine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, and codeine. A limitation of this test is that it currently does not capture any other synthetic opioids.

Takeaway

Regardless of the reason behind their booking, substance use is an issue for many adults booked into local jails, with the majority testing positive for at least one drug. Notably, individuals with a property offense as their highest charge tested positive at a higher rate for any and multiple drugs. Among polydrug users, meth and marijuana were used more than any other drug combination. While positive rates for opiates and cocaine remained consistent with last year's findings, positive rates for meth and marijuana decreased for both males and females.

How do characteristics of drug use vary by drug type?

Among all interviewed individuals:

- **Marijuana** was the substance most commonly tried (91%) and the substance most frequently tried first (55%). Marijuana was tried at the earliest age (14.8), approximately four years earlier than any other drug. It was also the second most frequently used substance in the past 30 days, at an average of 17.8 days (Table 1).
- **Meth** was tried by almost two-thirds (61%) and used more often than any other drug in the last 30 days and 12 months (average of 19.7 days out of the past 30 days and 73% in the past 12 months) (Table 1).
- **Cocaine** was tried by over half (56%) and at the second youngest average age (19.2), following marijuana. Cocaine was the second least likely substance used in the past 12 months with around one in four (22%) reporting usage. Of those who used cocaine in the last 30 days, it was used an average of 7.4 days (Table 1).
- **Heroin** was tried by 27%, about one-fourth (23%) of whom had used it in the past 12 months. Heroin had the oldest average age of first use at 23.0. Of those who reported using heroin in the past 30 days, it was used an average of 13.0 days (Table 1).
- **Crack** was tried by 29% and was the least commonly used substance in the last 12 months (21%). Those who used it in the past 30 days did so about every one in three days on average (9.4) (Table 1).

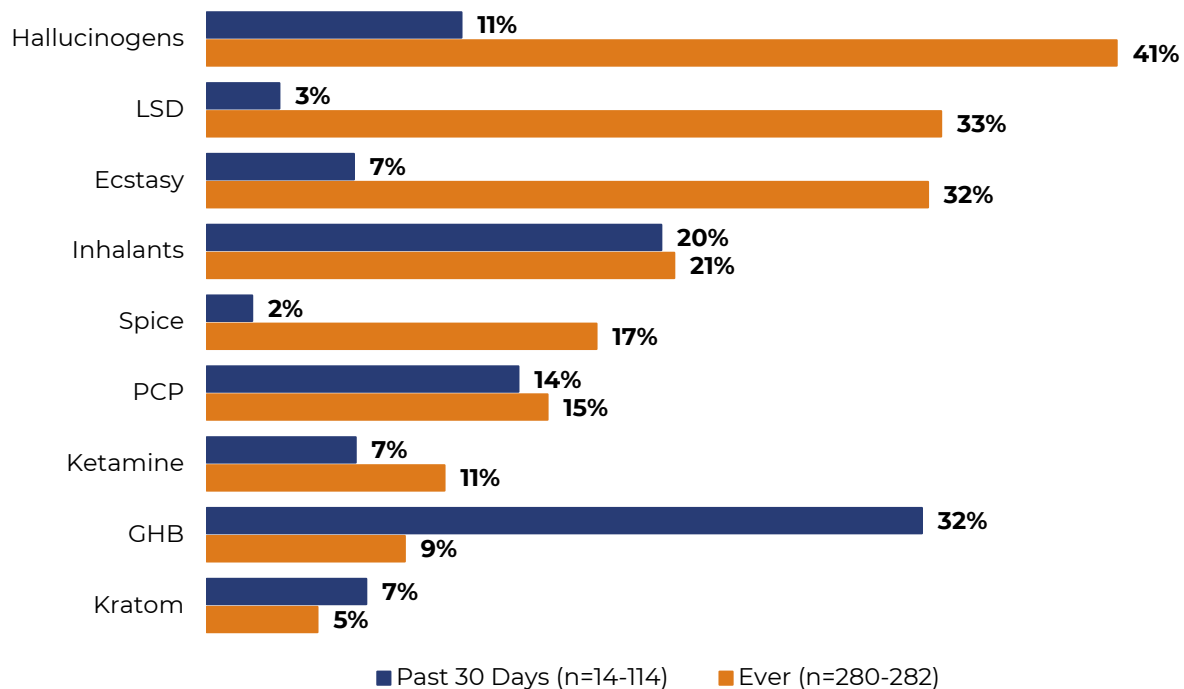
Table 1: Self-reported drug use history varies by drug

Drug Type	What percentage have ever tried?	What was the average age at first use?	Of those who have tried it, how many used in the last 12 months?	Of those who have used in the past 30 days, how many days did they use on average?
Marijuana	91%	14.8	72%	17.8
Meth	61%	20.6	73%	19.7
Cocaine	56%	19.2	22%	7.4
Heroin	27%	23.0	23%	13.0
Crack	29%	22.5	21%	9.4

Source: SANDAG, 2023

In addition to these five drugs, over three-fifths (61%) of individuals reported having ever tried at least one of nine other illicit substances, including hallucinogens (41%), LSD (33%), ecstasy (32%), inhalants (21%), spice (17%), PCP (15%), ketamine (11%), GHB (9%), and kratom (5%).⁵ Notably, when those who had ever used an illegal substance were asked if they had used it in the past 30 days, GHB users were most likely to respond affirmatively (32%), followed by inhalant (20%) and PCP (14%) users (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of those who ever used an illegal substance and in the last 30 days



Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

Takeaway

Among adults booked into local jails, drug use histories and current use patterns vary by drug. Meth and marijuana were used most recently, with the highest rates of use in the past 12 months and the last 30 days. Among other illicit drugs, respondents most commonly reported having ever used hallucinogens, LSD, and ecstasy, but GHB was the substance most likely to have been used in the past 30 days.

⁵ Kratom is a tropical tree native to Southeast Asia with leaves that contain compounds with psychotropic effects.

How do drug market dynamics vary for each drug type, according to adults booked into local jails?

Respondents were asked a standard set of questions regarding drugs they may have obtained, including what they traded to get it (cash and/or non-cash means), how easy it was to get, and if they got it in the same area in which they lived.

As Table 2 shows:

- Marijuana was most likely to be reported as “very easy” to obtain (68%) among the five drugs in 2023. Crack followed with 50% reporting it was “very easy” to obtain.
- Aside from crack and cocaine, at least two-thirds (66%) of respondents were able to obtain their drug of choice in the major statistical area (MSA) in which they lived.⁶ The range was 50% of those obtaining crack to 89% of those obtaining heroin.
- Regardless of the drug, respondents reported obtaining the substance through cash and non-cash means. Meth was the substance obtained most frequently through non-cash means.

Table 2: Illicit drug availability varies by type⁷

Category	Marijuana	Meth	Heroin	Cocaine	Crack
Very easy to obtain	68%	47%	30%	29%	50%
Got in same MSA where they live	70%	66%	89%	63%	50%
Got with cash	69%	67%	90%	57%	80%
Got with non-cash ways	50%	62%	10%	48%	40%

Source: SANDAG 2023

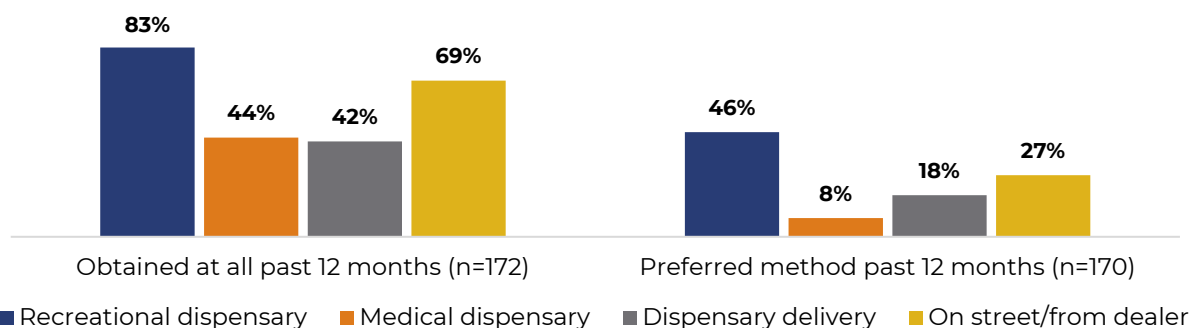
Additional questions have been added over the years regarding marijuana, including how individuals obtain the substance.

- About one-fourth (26%) of respondents disclosed obtaining marijuana just one way. Of those, half (50%) obtained it from a recreational/business dispensary, 36% from the streets, and 14% from a medical dispensary.
- Nearly three-fourths (74%) of respondents reported they obtained marijuana in two or more ways. Of those, most (95%) reported obtaining it from a recreational/business dispensary, 80% from the streets, and 56% reported delivery from a dispensary.
- As Figure 9 shows, the **two most common** ways to obtain marijuana over the past 12 months (regardless of how many methods were used) were from a recreational/business dispensary (83%) and the street (69%). When asked their **preferred** method, 46% said a recreational/business dispensary, followed by 27% saying on the street.

⁶ There are seven MSAs in the San Diego region that describe different geographical areas of the County. To view these MSAs on a map, visit: <https://sdgis.sandag.org/>

⁷ As noted in footnote 1, despite being legal in California, marijuana continues to be classified as illicit due to its illegal status at the federal level.

Figure 9: Methods of obtaining marijuana in the past 12 months



Note: Cases with missing information not included. Percentages based on multiple responses.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

- When asked the reasons behind their preferred method, the most frequent response for recreational/business and medical dispensaries was better quality; for dispensary delivery, it was convenience. Those who preferred buying it on the street most often noted it being easier and not requiring any tax (Figure 10).

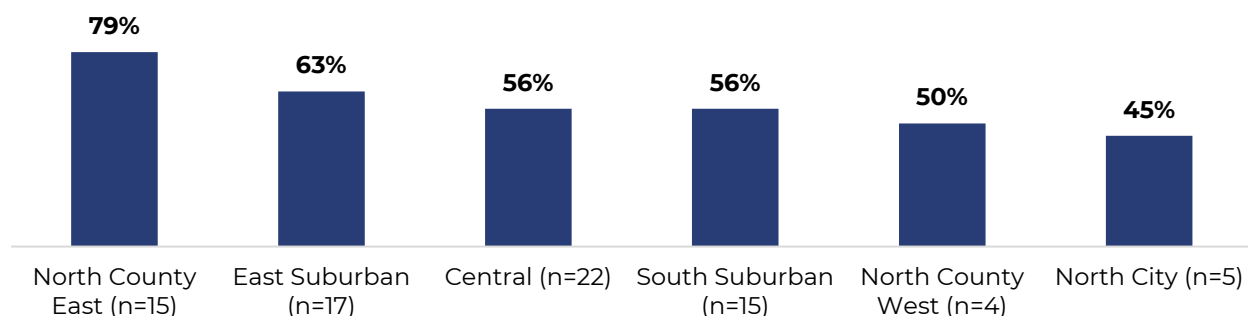
Figure 10: Top 3 reasons for preferring different means of obtaining marijuana

Recreational/business Dispensary	Medical Dispensary	Dispensary Delivery	On Street/ from Dealer
Better quality 38%	Better quality 64%	Convenient 81%	Easier 37%
Safer 34%	Convenient 36%	Easier 35%	No tax 24%
More choices 24%	Safer 36%	Better quality 13%	Convenient 20%

Source: SANDAG, 2023

- Residents across San Diego County generally reported obtaining marijuana at a recreational/business or medical dispensary in the MSA where they lived, ranging from 45% to 79% (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Percentage of residents who obtained marijuana at a recreational/business dispensary in the same MSA in which they live



Note: East County not shown due to zero responses. Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

- Three in ten (30%) respondents reported ever having had a medical marijuana card, only 16% of whom still did. When asked the medical condition they got the card for, the most common response included physical pain (33%), anxiety (31%), to help them sleep (24%), and depression (11%) (not shown).

To better understand personal acquisition habits of meth and heroin, respondents were asked a series of questions about the quantities of meth and heroin purchased for their own individual use. During their most recent purchase, respondents obtained an average (median) amount of 3.0 grams of meth and 3.5 grams of heroin (Figure 12).

Figure 12: How much meth and heroin did individuals get for their own use the last time they obtained it?

Meth	Heroin
Median amount obtained: 3.0 grams	Median amount obtained: 3.5 grams
Most common amounts obtained (25%): 1.0 gram	Most common amounts obtained (40%): 3.5 gram
Most obtained (52%): 3.0 grams or less	Most obtained (80%): 3.5 grams or less

Source: SANDAG, 2023

Cross-Border Drug Trends

One in ten (10%) respondents reported traveling to Mexico for drugs. When these individuals described what they obtained, 32% said meth, 29% pharmaceuticals, 21% marijuana, 14% fentanyl, 14% heroin, 4% cocaine, and 4% crack (not shown).

In addition, 13% reported they had ever been approached to transport, smuggle, conceal, or participate in bringing drugs over the U.S./Mexico border. Of those who had been approached, almost half (49%) reported they had crossed the border to obtain drugs. When asked why they brought drugs over the U.S./Mexico border, 57% said they did so for their own personal use, 39% reported someone paid them to do so, and 21% were going to sell it themselves.

Takeaway

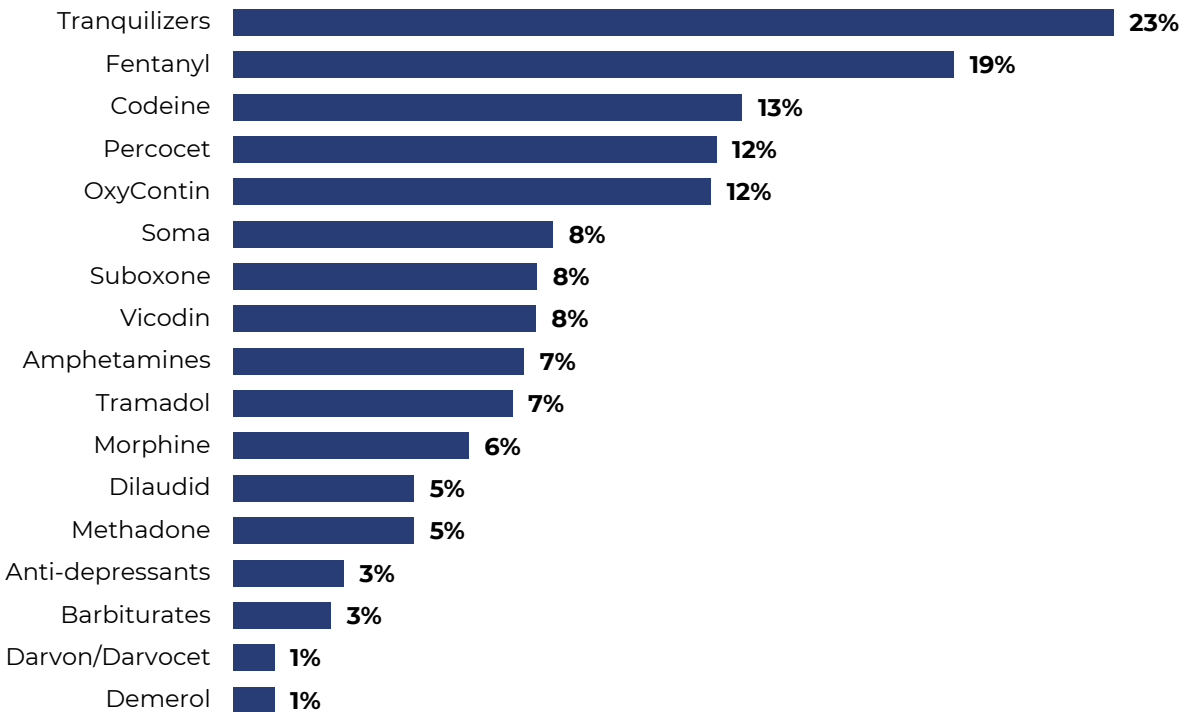
In 2023, consistent with use data, adults booked into local jails reported marijuana was the easiest drug to obtain in the region, followed by crack. Respondents most often reported they had obtained marijuana from a recreational/business dispensary and the street in the past 12 months. Cocaine was the substance with the lowest percentage of respondents describing it as "very easy" to obtain. While they were often able to obtain drugs where they lived, one in ten (10%) reported traveling to Mexico to buy drugs.

What do we know about respondents' use of prescription drugs?

Within the series of questions related to prescription drug use, individuals are asked to specify if they have used a prescription drug with a prescription (legally), without a prescription (illegally), or both. Figure 13 presents the percentage of respondents who reported any illegal use. In 2023, 44% reported they had ever misused (i.e., not prescribed) prescription drugs, with the most common drugs misused being tranquilizers (i.e., benzodiazepines), fentanyl, codeine and Percocet. Of those who had ever misused a prescription drug, the four most common drugs misused in the past 30 days included fentanyl (47%), amphetamines (11%), tranquilizers (10%), and soma (9%) (not shown).

44%
of all respondents
reported ever misusing
prescription drugs

Figure 13: Most commonly misused prescription drugs

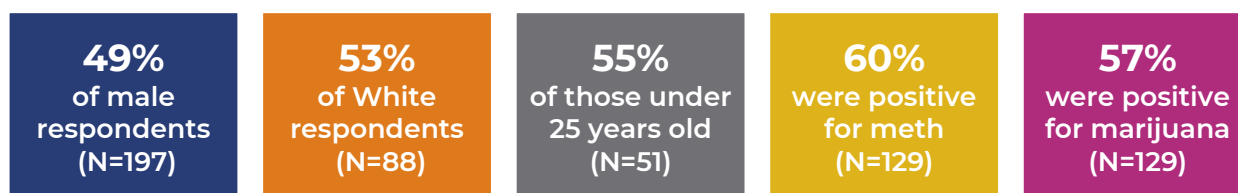


Total = 277-283

*Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023*

Further analyses revealed that males were more likely than females to report the misuse of prescription drugs (49% versus 34%) (Figure 14). Users were also more likely to be White (53%) compared to other ethnic groups (46% Hispanic/Latino(a) and 31% Black/African-American). Additionally, individuals who used prescription drugs were significantly more likely to test positive for marijuana (57% versus 45%) and meth (60% versus 40%).

Figure 14: Key findings and characteristics related to prescription drug misuse

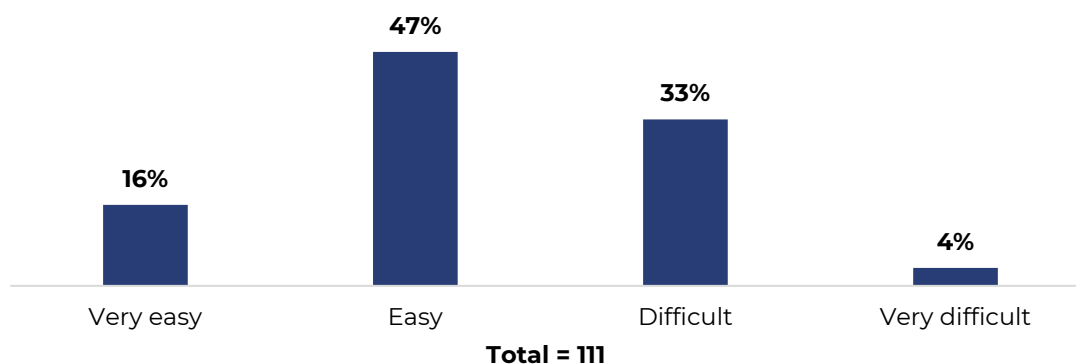


Source: SANDAG, 2023

Over one in three (35%) heroin users said they were dependent on prescription opiates before they began using it. Most (81%) said they began to use heroin as a substitute for prescription opiates. When asked which opiates they were addicted to, 57% said Percocet, 52% OxyContin, 26% Vicodin, 13% morphine, 9% Dilaudid, 9% fentanyl, 4% methadone, and 4% Demerol. When asked why they switched from prescription drugs to heroin, the most common answer was that heroin was easier and cheaper to get (40%). One-fourth (25%) also said it gave them a “better high.”

When asked how difficult it was to obtain prescription drugs illegally, just over three-fifths (63%) said it was “very easy” or “easy” (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Perceived ease of obtaining prescription drugs without a prescription



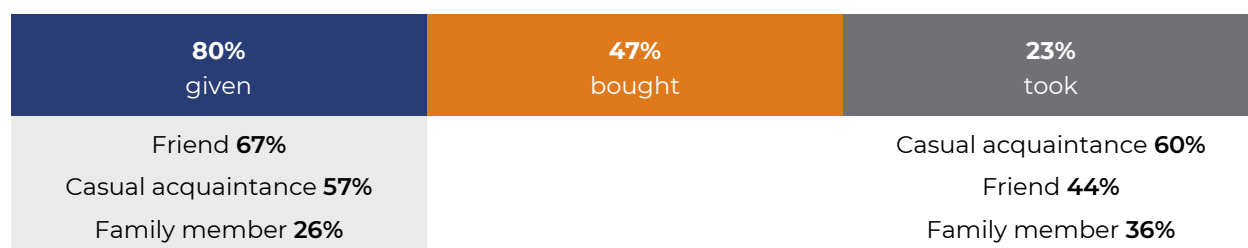
Note: Cases with missing information not included.

Source: SANDAG, 2023

The most frequently reported methods for obtaining prescription drugs illegally included being given it (most often from a friend), buying it from someone illegally, or taking it from someone (most often a casual acquaintance) (Figure 16). When those who had purchased prescription drugs from someone were asked if they ever suspected the pills they bought were counterfeit, nearly half (46%) of respondents said they had. Additionally, one in ten (10%) respondents said they had ever “doctor shopped,” half (55%) of whom were successful in doing so.⁸

⁸ “Doctor shopping” is the practice of attempting to persuade a doctor(s) to prescribe a drug that is not actually needed for a mental or medical condition.

Figure 16: Most common ways to get prescription drugs illegally (top 3 sources)



Source: SANDAG, 2023

What does fentanyl use look like among this population?

Given the widespread concern over the high overdose and fatality risk that fentanyl carries, there has been an effort over the last few years to further understand the patterns, characteristics and motivations of fentanyl use within San Diego County. In 2023, about one in five (21%) respondents reported ever trying fentanyl, with 19% reporting illegally using it (without a valid prescription) (Figure 13).

Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid typically used in medical settings for severe pain mitigation. Illicit fentanyl use has become increasingly common and fatal as individuals seek out a “stronger high.” Most often, fentanyl is mixed with other drugs including heroin, meth and cocaine.

Rates of fentanyl overdose and methods of use

In 2023, nearly one in five (19%) of all interviewed individuals reported some kind of drug overdose. Of those, almost half (43%) reported ever overdosing on fentanyl specifically, and nearly three-fourths (72%) of those had naloxone administered to them. Compared to respondents that did not report prior use of fentanyl, those that did report use were more likely to be White (41% compared to 27%) and less likely to be Black (12% compared to 22%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Demographics and characteristics of fentanyl users vs. non-fentanyl users

Characteristics	Respondents who reported fentanyl use	Respondents who did not report fentanyl use
Hispanic	46% (N=59)	45% (N=227)
Black	12% (N=59)	22% (N=227)
White	41% (N=59)	27% (N=227)
Current or prior experience with homelessness	83% (N=59)	56% (N=227)
Drug use led to psychotic episode	37% (N=57)	11% (N=209)
Previous arrest	93% (N=59)	74% (N=226)
Drug use led to crime to support habit	56% (N=59)	26% (N=203)
Previous drug overdose	52% (N=56)	11% (N=217)
Received substance use treatment	57% (N=56)	28% (N=217)

Source: SANDAG, 2023

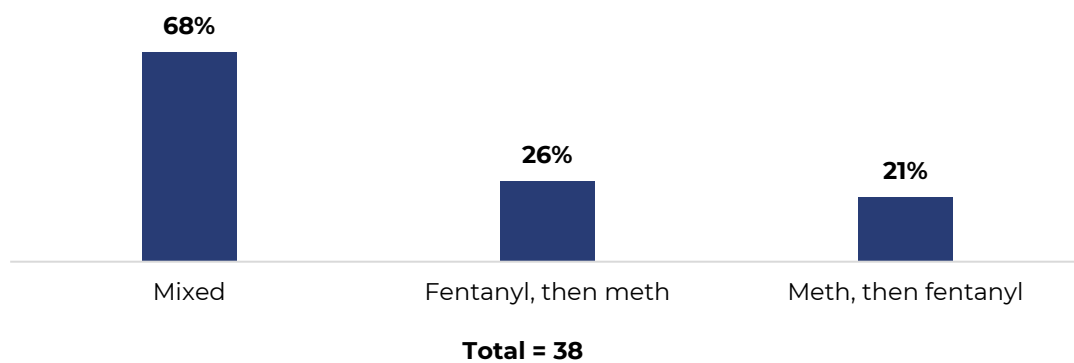
A new series of questions for those that reported using fentanyl revealed that forms of fentanyl administration include powder (63%), illicit pills (55%), combined with another drug

(19%), injection (11%), and liquid (i.e., nasal spray, eye drops) (9%). When asked about their preferred method, most (59%) users said powder and over two-fifths (41%) said pills. Of the 29 individuals who reported using powder fentanyl, over four in five (83%) reported using it in the past 12 months, with most preferring to smoke it (93%) rather than ingest it (7%).

Fentanyl and meth

Considering fentanyl is commonly used in conjunction with other drugs, respondents were asked a series of questions about their history of purchasing and using meth with fentanyl. About one in five (21%) who reported using meth disclosed intentionally seeking meth with fentanyl in it. The same percentage (21%) reported knowingly using fentanyl-laced meth. To gain more insight into how these two substances are used, individuals reported their methods of consumption; most (68%) used both substances simultaneously (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Reported method of meth and fentanyl consumption



Note: Cases with missing information not included. Percentages based on multiple responses. Source: SANDAG, 2023

Test strips and unintentional consumption

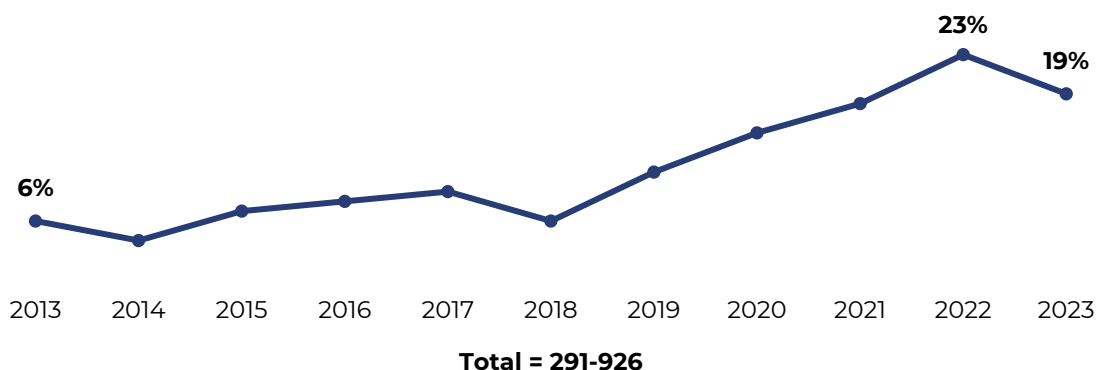
To gauge their precautionary behaviors toward using fentanyl, respondents were asked about their use of fentanyl test strips. About one in ten (13%) of all individuals interviewed said they had used test strips before. Of those that hadn't but *would* use test strips if available, the most common reasons were to avoid fentanyl exposure (39%) and prevent death (30%). Still, almost one in three (32%) respondents reported thinking that drugs they ever used contained fentanyl in it even if they were not told it did, due to their reaction.

One in three (32%) believe they have **unintentionally** consumed fentanyl due to their reaction to a drug

Rates of fentanyl misuse

Respondents specified if they had ever used fentanyl with a prescription (legally), without a prescription (illegally), or both. As noted in Figure 13, nearly one in five (19%) respondents reported the illegal use of fentanyl, making it the second most commonly misused prescription drug following tranquilizers (25%). The 4% decrease from 2022 to 2023 marked the first decline since 2018 (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Illegal use of fentanyl over the years (2013-2023)



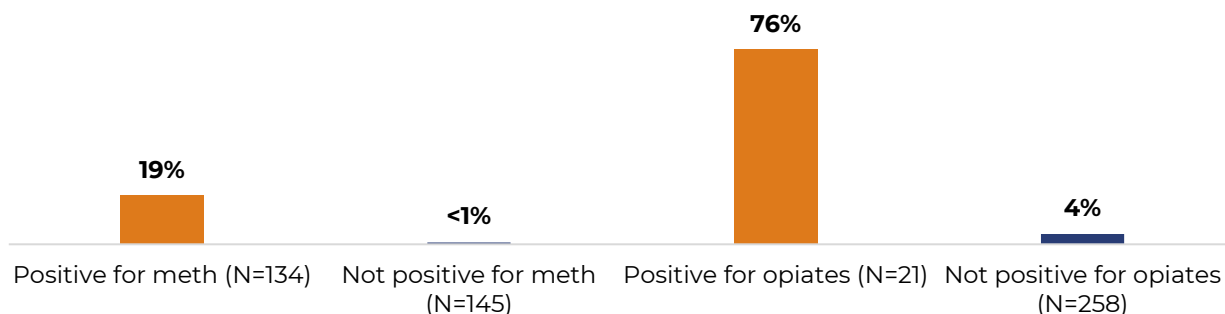
Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

Motivations and deterrents for purchasing fentanyl

Despite the increase of illegal fentanyl use over the years, most (91%) respondents said they would not purchase it—but there were differences among those interviewed. Specifically, individuals between 25 and 39 years of age said they would purchase it at a higher rate than those under 25 (12% versus 4%). Those positive for opiates and meth were significantly more likely to say they would purchase it (76% and 19%, respectively), compared to those who were not positive for opiates or meth (4% and <1%, respectively) (Figure 19).

When asked why they would buy fentanyl, about half (52%) said opiates were their drug of choice, 36% were interested in a stronger high, and 12% said it helps with pain or sleeping. On the contrary, most of those that said they would not buy it cited its dangerous/deadly nature (75%).

Figure 19: Percentage willing to purchase a drug containing fentanyl



Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

Counterfeit oxycodone pills (M30s or “blues”)

Given the increased presence of fentanyl-laced counterfeit oxycodone pills (referred to as M30s, blues, or M-boxes), and their link to the nationwide overdose crisis,⁹ individuals responded to a new set of questions related to the use of these pills.

Findings revealed that:

- More than one in ten (13%) reported ever consuming blues, and of these, more than two in five (44%) reported use in the past 12 months.
- The majority of users said they prefer to smoke (79%) than to orally consume them (21%).
- While only 12% of users reported overdosing from blues, over four in five (82%) reported believing blues they consumed were laced with fentanyl.
- Of those who ever consumed both powder fentanyl and blues, most (78%) said they prefer to use powder fentanyl, most frequently citing reasons such as stronger potency (67%) and better quality (22%).

Takeaway

In addition to using illicit drugs, many adults booked into local jails have a history of misusing prescription drugs—particularly tranquilizers and fentanyl. Notably, fentanyl was the most frequently used substance in the past 30 days by those who had misused prescription drugs. Its increasing availability is evident when comparing the percentage of respondents who reported ever trying fentanyl in 2023 to previous years. Additionally, individuals who tested positive for meth and opiates were significantly more likely to say they would buy fentanyl in the future and those interested in purchasing fentanyl reported their motivation to be achieving a stronger high. Around one in three of all respondents thought that drugs they used contained fentanyl.

What do we know about respondents' use of alcohol?

The majority of respondents (84%) reported at least one prior binge-drinking episode (defined as five drinks or more for males and four drinks or more for females) and one in three (33%) reported drinking any alcohol in the 24 hours prior to their arrest.

Additional analyses revealed that:

- Almost three-fifths (59%) of respondents reported binge drinking in the last 12 months, and of those, 38% reported binge drinking in the last 30 days.
- The average number of days respondents reported binge drinking in the last 30 days was 8.6 days.

⁹ Daniulaityte, Raminta et al. 2022. “They Say It’s Fentanyl, but They Honestly Look like Perc 30s’: Initiation and Use of Counterfeit Fentanyl Pills.” *Harm Reduction Journal* 19 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-022-00634-4>.

Figure 20: Male and female respondents' alcohol use history

Male (n=63-162)	Female (n=31-77)
84% ever binge drank	83% ever binge drank
17.9 average age first binged	17.7 average age first binged
39% binge drank past 30 days	35% binge drank past 30 days
33% self-report drinking any alcohol in the past 24 hours	34% self-report drinking any alcohol in the past 24 hours
6.2 average number of drinks in 24 hours before arrest	3.8 average number of drinks in 24 hours before arrest

*Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023*

Takeaway

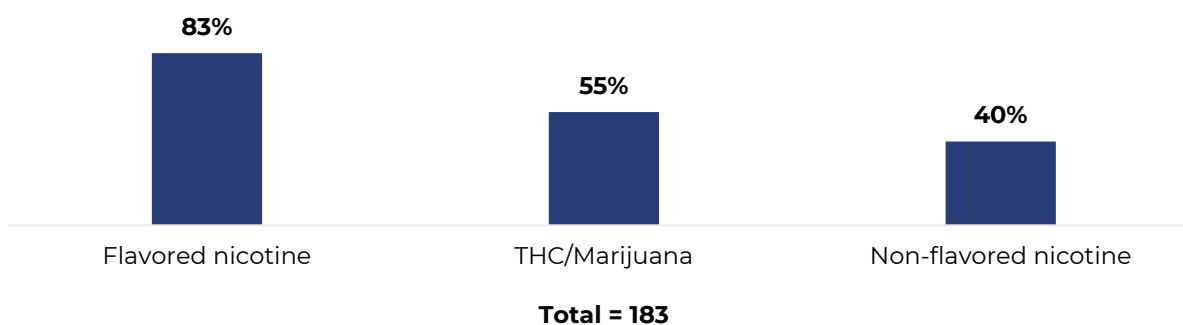
Alcohol continues to be consumed by most adults booked into local jails, with more than four in five reporting ever binge drinking. Notably, one-third (33%) of all adults drank alcohol within 24 hours of their arrest.

What do we know about respondents' use of vapes and tobacco?

Given the growing popularity of e-cigarettes and vapes over the last several years, respondents answered a series of questions regarding their vaping history, the types of products ever vaped, and the frequency in which they use vaping products, if any.

- Overall, 54% reported currently using tobacco products and 10% reported tobacco being the first substance they ever used.
- Females were more likely to report currently using tobacco (62%) compared to males (51%). There were no significant differences in tobacco use by race/ethnicity or age.
- Two-thirds (67%) reported ever vaping. Those under the age of 25 were significantly more likely to report doing so (82%) than those between the ages of 25 and 39 (68%) and those 40 and over (57%). There were no significant differences in reported vaping history by gender or race/ethnicity.
- Almost two-thirds (65%) of those who had ever vaped said they had done so in the last 30 days, and of those, the average number of days vaped was 15.9 (range 1 to 30).
- When asked what they had vaped, the most common answer was flavored nicotine (83%), followed by THC/marijuana (55%), and non-flavored nicotine (40%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Types of substances respondents have vaped



*Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023*

Takeaway

Over half of respondents reported ever using tobacco products, with females most likely to report doing so (over three in five). While vaping has remained popular among adults booked into local jails, as over two-thirds reported ever vaping, it is significantly more common among young adults under the age of 25. Flavored nicotine remains the substance most commonly vaped.

What other underlying factors or needs can shed light on the risk of recidivism?

Substance misuse and criminal conduct can co-exist with various personal, social and structural risk factors. While not all crimes are committed under the influence of drugs, substance misuse¹⁰ and use disorders are prevalent issues for many adults booked into local jails, as evidenced by the three in four individuals that tested positive for at least one substance in 2023. The following section describes some of these risk factors and needs:

Prior arrests and incarcerations

- Just under four in five respondents (78%) reported having a previous arrest, with a median number of 5.0 prior arrests.
- On average, males were 20.9 years old at the time of their first arrest as an adult, compared to 24.0 for females. When asked what their first arrest as an adult was for, 29% said for a drug-related crime, 24% said a property crime, 23% a violent crime, 23% some other type of offense, and 6% a weapons offense.¹¹
- Forty-three percent (43%) reported being arrested as a juvenile, including 46% of males and 35% of females. When asked what their first arrest as a juvenile was for, 41% said a property crime, 32% a violent crime, 12% a drug-related crime, 12% a status offense,¹² 5% some other type of offense, and 3% a weapons offense.

¹⁰ Substance misuse can involve both legally and illicitly manufactured substances.

¹¹ Percentages based on multiple responses.

¹² A status offense is one that only a juvenile can be arrested for (e.g., curfew violation).

- Around three in every four respondents (74%) reported previously serving time in jail and 26% in prison. Males were more likely than females to report serving time in prison (34% versus 11%).

Exchanging sex/pimping/pandering

- Fifteen percent (15%) of respondents reported they had ever been approached by someone to pimp/prostitute them, including 34% of females and 6% of males.
- Less than one in ten (8%) of those interviewed said they had ever exchanged sex for money, drugs, or other things. Of those 23 respondents who had, 14 were female and nine were male.
- Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the females who responded that they have exchanged sexual favors also said that they had ever had a pimp. Three of the four females who ever had a pimp, reported their pimp had given them drugs.
- When asked the first age they exchanged sex for something else, the mean was 24.4 years (range 12 to 48).
- More than one in four (27%) of those who reported ever exchanging sex for something said they had done so in the last 30 days. Of these individuals, 50% said they would be interested in getting help to stop.
- Only 2% of respondents reported being involved in pimping or pandering activities (4 males and 1 female). Three of those five individuals said they had given drugs to the person/people they were pimping.

Gang Involvement

- About one in four (24%) respondents reported some type of gang involvement. Males were more likely to report a history of gang involvement, compared to females (30% versus 13%).
- When asked how old they were when they started hanging out with the gang, the mean was 15.6 years (range 5 to 46).
- Of the 69 individuals who reported any type of gang involvement, 64% said they had this contact within the past five years. When asked their current status with the gang, 27% said they used to hang out but no longer do, 27% were current members, 23% said they currently hang out but were never a member, and 14% said that they used to be a member but no longer are.
- When those individuals who ended their affiliation with a gang were asked why they had done so, the most common reason was they wanted to avoid/get out of the criminal justice system (81%).

Risks across different contexts

Criminal involvement

78% prior arrests

74% prior jail bookings

43% arrested as a juvenile

33% have sold drugs

33% carried a gun while committing a crime

32% committed a crime to support drug habit

Exchanging sex/pimping/pandering

8% history of exchanging sex and/or sexual favors for money, drugs, or other things

15% approached for pimping/pandering

Gang involvement

24% history of gang involvement

On average, involvement began at 15.6 years of age

- Those who reported a previous gang affiliation were significantly more likely to report having been arrested as a juvenile (69% versus 34%) and having been involved in drug distribution (54% versus 27%).
- Respondents with gang relations were also more likely to test positive for meth (64% versus 44%), marijuana (57% versus 48%), and opiates (16% versus 6%) than those without.

Community supervision

- Of those who had served time in prison, 74% said they also had been on parole, 16% of whom still were.
- Around three in four (74%) of those with a prior arrest reported they had previously been on probation and 54% reported currently being on probation.
- Twenty-eight percent (28%) of those who had ever been in custody reported receiving reentry services (16% while incarcerated and 22% in the community). When asked about their biggest need upon reentry after incarceration, the most common answers included housing (31%), employment (23%), and help with substance use (19%).

Involvement in drug distribution

- One in three (33%) respondents reported being involved in selling drugs and of those, 47% said they had done so in the past 12 months. Males (38%) were more likely to report ever being involved in distributing drugs, compared to females (23%).

Crime to support drug use

- Just under one in three (32%) respondents reported they have committed a crime to support a drug habit, but this percentage was even higher for those who said they had previously been convicted of a felony (46% versus 21% of those who had not been). Of those who admitted committing a crime to support a drug habit, 94% said they committed a property crime.
- When individuals reported what drug habit they were supporting when committing the crime, the most common was meth (51%), followed by fentanyl (20%), and marijuana (15%).
- Individuals who reported committing a crime to support their drug habit, as well as those who were involved in selling drugs, were significantly more likely to report having ever carried a firearm (42% of those who were supporting their habit and 53% of those who had sold drugs), compared to those who said they had not (30% and 24%, respectively).

Firearms

- Respondents were asked to report if they had ever possessed a firearm, with possession being defined as owning, using, carrying, borrowing, sharing, or holding a firearm for someone else. One in three (33%) reported they had, with males being significantly more likely to have reported doing so than females (40% versus 18%).
- When asked how easy it was to obtain the firearm, 29% said “very easy”, 50% “easy”, 15% “difficult”, and 5% “very difficult.”
- When asked how they obtained it, 68% bought it, 23% received it as a gift, 6% inherited it, 5% said they were holding the firearm for someone, 5% stole it, 5% some other way (e.g., found it), and 4% traded it for it.
- Of the 86 individuals who have possessed a firearm, 15% reported ever buying a ghost gun. Almost three-fourths (70%) of those who reported buying one said it was “very easy” or “easy” to acquire the parts to build it.

- One-third (33%) of those who have possessed a firearm said they had carried a firearm when committing a crime.

Proposition 47

- In 2014, California voters passed Proposition 47 (Prop 47) which reduced certain property and drug-related felonies to misdemeanors. In 2023, 14% of respondents said they had heard of Prop 47, including 18% of those ever convicted of a felony and 16% of those who had not had a prior felony conviction.
- Of those who had ever heard of it, 17% said that they or their attorney had petitioned to have a prior offense reduced.
- When asked if they would complete programs such as drug treatment if it was not mandated (due to legislative changes), 63% said they would not.

Mental health issues

- Around one in three (34%) respondents reported they had ever been diagnosed with a mental or psychiatric disorder and 28% reported they had previously stayed at least overnight for mental health treatment at a hospital or other facility. Females were more likely to say they had been diagnosed (40%), compared to males (31%).
- Of those who had ever been admitted to a mental health or psychiatric facility for at least an overnight stay, the mean number of stays was 3.8 (range 1 to 30) and the mean age for the first stay was 24.6 (range 8 to 55).
- Almost three out of five (59%) respondents who had been admitted to a mental health facility said they had been under the influence of alcohol or other drugs at the time they were admitted, supporting the need for dual diagnosis treatment options.
- Almost nine in ten (88%) of those who had been diagnosed had also been prescribed medication for the disorder. However, only 39% said they were currently prescribed the medication and of those, 42% said they were not taking them.
- Respondents were asked if they had ever taken a drug that led to a psychotic episode. Almost one in five (17%) responded affirmatively, with meth most frequently cited as leading to this occurrence (76%).
- Just over one-fourth (28%) of respondents reported being diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), with 67% of those being prescribed medication. Of those with a prescription for ADD or ADHD, 47% reported using another drug (most often marijuana) as a substitute for their ADD or ADHD medication.
- Almost one in four (23%) respondents reported they had ever attempted suicide and 31% said they had seriously thought about it. Those who reported a mental health diagnosis were significantly more likely to say they had attempted suicide (43% versus 14% without a diagnosis).

Education, employment, and insurance

- Almost one in five (17%) of those interviewed did not have a high school degree or equivalent.
- Forty-one percent (41%) were employed (full-time or part-time) at the time of their arrest.
- Seven percent (7%) reported previously serving in the military. Almost nine out of ten (88%) of these individuals said they were discharged and 12% were active duty.

- Twenty one percent (21%) of respondents said they currently did not have health insurance.

Homelessness

- Almost two-thirds (62%) of those interviewed reported ever being homeless and 27% described themselves as being homeless in the past 30 days.
- The average age individuals first became homeless was 27.0 (range 1 to 56), and when asked how many times they had ever been homeless, 46% said once, 9% twice, 18% three times, and 26% four or more times.
- The most common reasons that led to homelessness were money issues (27%), drug use/addiction (24%), loss of job (21%), and loss of family (21%).
- The majority (84%) said they had first become homeless while living in San Diego County, as opposed to somewhere else.
- When those who reported any homelessness in the past 12 months were asked in what part of the county they most often stayed, 37% said the Central MSA, 20% East Suburban, 13% South Suburban, 12% North County East, 10% North County West, 5% East County, and 2% North City.
- Individuals with a previous arrest were asked where they spent their first night after their last release from jail. The second most common answer after their own home (35%) was on the street (22%).
- About one in four (23%) of those that reported being homeless in the past 12 months said they had stayed in a shelter during that timeframe. When asked why they had *not* stayed in a shelter, 22% said because of restrictions and rules at the shelter, 20% concerns for safety, 20% wait lists, 12% because they have family, friends, or a pet that is not allowed to stay there, and 43% provided an “other” answer (that included personal preference, have someplace else to stay, personal pride, and do not know how to).
- When asked what they thought their housing status would be 12 months from now (if they had described themselves as primarily homeless in the past 30 days), 53% said they would be in a house, mobile home, or apartment; 32% said they would still be homeless; and 15% said they would have some other type of living situation (e.g., residential hotel, shelter, or jail).

Mental Health

34% mental health diagnosis

42% not taking medication for mental health issues as prescribed

28% admitted overnight to a mental health facility

31% seriously considered suicide

23% previously attempted suicide

Education, employment, and insurance

59% not currently employed

21% no health insurance

17% no high school degree

Homelessness

62% ever homeless

22% spent first night after jail release on the streets

Average age first became homeless was **27**

Foster Care

16% prior foster care system involvement

Drug Treatment

34% received drug treatment previously

Children

58% have children

31% prior Child Welfare Services contact

Foster care involvement

- Overall, 16% of respondents reported they had been in the foster care system as a child and over one-third (35%) of these individuals reported aging out of the system.

Drug treatment needs

- Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents said they had received drug treatment in the past and 73% of these said the most recent time was successful. Those who did not successfully complete the program most frequently attributed it to wanting to start using again (38%).
- The mean number of prior treatment admissions was 2.5 (range 1 to 15).
- When asked what type of treatment they had most recently completed, 46% said inpatient, 26% outpatient, 24% detox, and 2% other.
- For 59% of those who had received treatment before, the most recent program was court-ordered (as opposed to voluntary).
- There was no statistically significant difference between success rates from court-ordered treatment (69%) compared to voluntary treatment (79%).
- Four in ten (40%) reported feeling like they could benefit from any type of drug treatment at the time of interview.
- About one in five (18%) reported they had sought drug treatment but found it unavailable.
- Over one in five (22%) disclosed being aware of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). Of those, about one in three (35%) said they had received MAT before.
- A new question asked respondents about their use of naltrexone/vivitrol (medication treatment for opiate and alcohol dependence). Only three individuals (1%) reported using it, but none reported using it within the last 30 days.

Dependent children

- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents reported having children. Females were significantly more likely (69%) to report having children compared to males (53%).
- One in four (25%) reported they currently live with a child (whether their own or not). Females were significantly more likely to report living with a child compared to males (36% versus 20%).
- Thirty-one percent (31%) reported prior Child Welfare System (CWS) contact and 34% of these individuals said their case was still open.

Unreported victimization

- Just under one in three (31%) reported they had previously been the victim of a crime they did not report to the police.
- When asked to describe what type of crime they were a victim of, the most common responses were assault (43%), robbery (29%), sexual assault (23%), domestic violence (20%), and some type of larceny/theft (8%).
- When asked why they did not report the crime to police, the most common reasons included having a negative view of law enforcement (23%), being scared (23%), not thinking it would help (17%), knowing the person who had committed the crime (17%), and thinking it would be risky (10%).

Takeaway

Many individuals booked into local jails have prior justice system involvement and have experienced homelessness, mental health issues, and other social, behavioral, and financial challenges. Continuing efforts to gather this information is crucial to further understanding how underlying risk factors may impact one's likelihood of struggling with substance use.

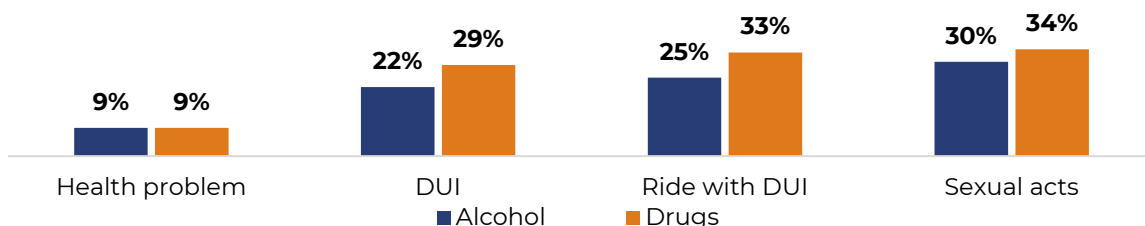
What are possible ways other risk-taking behaviors can indirectly affect others in the community?

Criminal and other risky behaviors of individuals with substance use issues can affect others in the community. Some instances where risk-taking behaviors may affect the community include being on the road with an impaired driver in another vehicle or potentially coming in contact with a used syringe.

Risky behaviors related to alcohol and drug use

Overall, 37% of respondents reported they had ever been arrested for driving under the influence (DUI). While most (63%) reported they had been arrested just once for a DUI, nearly one in five (18%) did so three or more times. When asked what they had consumed when they drove under the influence most recently, 72% said alcohol, 9% drugs, and 18% both alcohol and drugs. Of those that reported drugs, 40% said marijuana, 24% meth, 12% heroin, 8% fentanyl, and 12% some other type of drug (e.g., prescription). Respondents were more likely to report that drug use, rather than alcohol, preceded certain risky behaviors (with the exception of health problems) in the past 12 months (Figure 22). About one in four (26%) of respondents reported they have gone to the emergency room for an alcohol/drug-related issue.

Figure 22: Reported rates of substance use before risky behaviors in the past 12 months



Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

Within the last 12 months...

- 40% rode with a driver under the influence
- 38% drove under the influence
- 32% missed work because of being under the influence
- 14% have injected drugs, and of those, 14% shared needles and/or works
- 16% had health problems related to their substance use

Overdoses and the use of naloxone

Nearly one in five (19%) of all individuals interviewed reported a previous drug overdose. Notably, over half (55%) of those reported they had been administered naloxone, a medication designed to rapidly reverse an opioid overdose. A series of questions regarding naloxone revealed the following:

- About one-fourth (26%) received it once, 22% twice, and about half (52%) received it three or more times.
- The most common administrators of naloxone included friends (54%), emergency medical services or EMS (36%), family (21%), law enforcement (11%), and healthcare providers (4%).
- More often than not, EMS (70%) and law enforcement (67%) talked to them about getting treatment for their addiction after they administered naloxone.
- Around three in five (63%) reported knowing where to obtain naloxone.
- Nearly half (45%) of those with a prior overdose reported having administered naloxone to someone else. Of those, the average was 6.5 times (range 1 to 20).

Takeaway

When combined with underlying needs, the risk-taking behaviors of those with a history of substance use may have direct impacts on the communities in the San Diego region. It is important to address these underlying needs and risk factors in hopes of reducing the likelihood of engagement in potentially harmful behaviors.