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# Social supply of cannabis in Australia

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# Glossary

**Cannabis**
In this study cannabis refers to the parts of the cannabis plant that are used as a psychoactive substance. Cannabis does not refer to synthetic cannabinoid products like Kronic or K2.

**Social supply**
Where individuals provide cannabis for little or no monetary gain to friends and acquaintances.

**Obtaining/scoring**
An occasion when participants purchase cannabis, grow cannabis or are given cannabis so that it becomes their property, as opposed to simply sharing with someone at a social gathering (eg someone shouting them a cone or sharing a joint).

**Giving**
Providing cannabis to others without any expectation of immediate compensation or exchange.

**Swapping**
Providing cannabis products in exchange for other cannabis products of approximately similar monetary value (eg home growers may swap cannabis to try different strains or batches, or for different drugs like ecstasy).

**Brokering**
Buying cannabis for others without making a profit; that is, supplying cannabis for the same price as originally purchased.

**Selling**
Providing cannabis to others in exchange for money, or for goods or drugs of a greater monetary value. Sellers may variously make only enough profit to cover their own supply, enough profit to cover own supply and a little extra, or a significant profit.

**Cannabis supplier**
Someone who gives, swaps, brokers or sells cannabis to others. A cannabis supplier may not necessarily consider themselves to be a dealer.

**Intent to supply**
Under Australian law, an individual may be charged with intent to supply if they are found in possession of a specified amount of cannabis, even if there is no other evidence that they are a supplier.

**Oceanian**
This ethnic group classification includes Australian peoples, New Zealand peoples, Melanesians, Papuans, Micronesians and Polynesians (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005).

**Open house**
A house that sells cannabis that is open to anyone: you do not need to call beforehand, you just show up. Typically only small quantities are sold; for example, one gram sticks (see definition below). Most commonly referred to among the Perth sample.

**Hydro**
Hydroponic or hydro refers to cannabis that is the product of plants grown under artificial lighting in a non-soil medium suspended in a nutrient rich solution.

**Bush**
Bush refers to non-hydroponic cannabis—that is, plants usually grown under natural sunlight, in soil, often outdoors.

**Stick**

In the late 1960s and 1970s in Australia and New Zealand, a common form of cannabis was 'Budda sticks' which were said to originate from Thailand and consisted of a few high-potency heads wrapped around the stem of the plant or a bamboo skewer with a fine thread. Some claimed these were dipped in opium. In current usage, the term stick refers to a collection of cannabis heads sometimes wrapped together like a stick in aluminium foil; this is also referred to as a 'foil'. More generally, a stick can also refer to a small bag of cannabis, typically weighing around one gram and costing approximately $20 to $25.

**Spotting**

Spotting (also known as 'hot knives') refers to a method of smoking cannabis. In this method, small pieces of cannabis are rolled to form the 'spot'. Generally, the tips of two knife blades are heated, the spot is compressed between the two blades and the subsequent smoke is inhaled through the nose or mouth.

**Nangs**

Nangs (also known as 'whippets') are bulbs of nitrous oxide used to dispense whipped cream from a canister. Nitrous oxide is used because, unlike the carbon dioxide bulbs used for soda water, it does not make the cream go sour. When inhaled, the nitrous from the bulbs produces a mild euphoria.

# Executive summary

## Rationale and aims

- Australian retail markets for most illicit drugs, including cannabis, are based significantly upon friendships and occur in closed settings. This has been described as 'lounge room', as opposed to 'street', dealing (Nicholas 2008).
- Similar observations have been made in other countries, and in the UK the term social supply was coined to describe this aspect of the drug market where a supplier who is not considered to be a 'drug dealer proper' brokers, facilitates or sells drugs, for little or no financial gain, to friends and acquaintances (Hough et al. 2003).
- Research providing a better understanding of this dominant aspect of the drug market has the potential to inform drug legislation and how drug offences are dealt with across the criminal justice system.
- There are also the clear potential benefits of law enforcement developing better insight into how this type of market operates.
- The cannabis market affords researchers a good opportunity to access a sizeable number of both consumers and suppliers in a closed drug market characterised by low-level, not-for-profit social supply.
- The aims of the project were: to provide a detailed account of the ways in which young adults gain access to cannabis in a social supply market; to explore the impact of supply routes on different aspects of young people's lives, including access to other drugs, contact with police, schooling, and relationships with family and friends; to examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and access to cannabis; to explain young people's notions of drug dealing and social supply and how they relate to buying patterns and behaviour; to examine the extent, nature and impact of the involvement of police with cases where young people have been found to be selling cannabis; and to outline young people's understanding of the cannabis supply legislation.

## Method

The project recruited cannabis users aged between 18 and 30 years of age at each of three project sites. Eighty participants were recruited in both Perth and Melbourne and forty in Armidale in northern New South Wales.

Participants must have used cannabis at least monthly in the three months prior to interview and/or have brokered access to or sold cannabis within the six months prior to interview. Participants were reimbursed $40 for attending the interview.

The interviews were conducted by trained researchers and took one to two hours to complete. The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative components. The longer qualitative parts of the interviews were digitally recorded for transcription and analysis.

## Results

### *Demographics*

- The average age of sample group participants was 22 years and 71 percent were male. Only one percent identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.

- The participants were generally well educated for their age, with 61 percent of the sample having completed a tertiary qualification. Some 55 percent cited employment as their main income source, 26 percent pension or allowances, 12 percent family and only four percent said the sale of drugs was their main income stream. Some 54 percent lived in rental accommodation and 32 percent in a parent's home.

## Experiences of cannabis use

- Forty percent of the sample were daily cannabis users, and 41 percent were using more than weekly but not daily. The most commonly reported form of cannabis used was hydroponic or hydro (72%), followed by bush (63%), with only nine percent reporting hash or resin use as most common.
- Overall, the results showed cannabis use to be an important and embedded aspect of the lives of most of these participants. Participants primarily reported using cannabis to relax or have fun, yet 62 percent of the sample group scored as cannabis-dependent on a standardised scale.
- On average, participants spent $50 per week on cannabis for personal use, for an average of five grams. The main sources of funding for their cannabis use was wages (61%) or benefits (16%), with only six percent nominating the sale of cannabis as their main source of funding for their own personal use.

## Obtaining cannabis

- For the purposes of the study, scoring or obtaining cannabis was defined as an occasion when participants purchased it, grew it or were given it so that it became their property, as opposed to simply sharing cannabis with someone at a social gathering (eg someone shouting them a cone or sharing a joint). Overall, participants obtained cannabis from a median of three different people.
- The most commonly reported main supplier was 'direct from a seller or grower' (35%), 'from a friend who sells' (31%) and then 'a friend [who] gets it from a seller' (21%).
- Participants often described their cannabis supplier as a friend. Roughly three-fifths reported this relationship as a friendship first; two-fifths reported it was actually a supply relationship first. Less than one-quarter of the sample (18%) described their relationship with their main supplier as strictly business.
- Participants reported obtaining cannabis from their main supplier for a median of one year.
- The participants' qualitative accounts of what happened the last time they scored or obtained cannabis provided rich descriptions of their relationships and the process of obtaining cannabis for these young users.
- Overall, transactions between friends tended to be more informal and often occurred in relaxed social settings, whereas transactions with dealers tended to be strictly business, although it was common for even these transactions to be described as friendly.
- Descriptions of transactions where friends sold cannabis often focused on the informal social nature of the transaction. It was very common for participants to hang out afterwards, sometimes for several hours. Descriptions of transactions frequently involved cannabis use in conjunction with supply.
- Almost all participants reported that cannabis was either very easy (56%) or easy (36%) to obtain. The median amount obtained in a typical transaction was 3.5 grams (ie one-eighth of an ounce) and the median amount paid per transaction was $50 (interquartile range=$30–$100). These are typical amounts for what is commonly referred to as a '50 bag'.
- No significant differences were found in the main way participants obtained their cannabis based on key variables including their demographic characteristics, access to other drugs, or history of apprehension by police.

## Supplying cannabis

- Almost the entire sample (94%) reported supplying cannabis at some point in their lifetime, whether by giving, brokering, swapping or selling.

- The median age at which participants reported first supplying cannabis was 17 years old (interquartile range=16–18 years).
- Reported reasons for starting to supply cannabis included to help friends who couldn't obtain it themselves (71%), to cover some or all of their own use (23%), to make money (13%) or to get a better deal (bulk buying, 6%).
- Those who currently supplied said they did so only to friends or family (55%) or to friends or family and their friends (32%), and a smaller proportion reported that they supplied to friends or family and their friends and occasionally to strangers (26%). Only five percent reported that their current involvement in supply would be best described as 'I supply to anyone willing to buy, including strangers'.
- Among current suppliers, 57 percent said they supplied cannabis for the same price as originally purchased (brokering); some 21 percent reported 'I give cannabis away— I never broker or sell'; and some said they sold for profit that covered their own use (12%) or a little bit extra (6%). Only three percent reported that their current involvement in supply could be best described as supplying cannabis for an amount that covered their own use plus significant profit.
- Some 83 percent of those who reported that they had ever supplied cannabis had also done so in the past six months, and 64 percent had done so the past month. Recent suppliers reported supplying for a median of two years.
- The median number of people participants reported currently supplying cannabis to was four (interquartile range=3–8 people).
- The most commonly reported way recent suppliers reported arranging transactions was 'people phone me and I arrange to meet them' (71%), followed by 'people come to my house' (56%) and then 'people phone me and I drop [it] at their house' (41%). Also common was acting as an intermediary (39%).
- The overwhelming majority of participants who supplied cannabis did not identify as drug dealers, largely because they supplied only to friends, did not consider cannabis to be a drug and did not supply regularly. Of those who did view themselves as dealers, the most common reason for doing so was that they dealt drugs by definition or considered that making a profit meant they were dealers.
- Participants who had supplied cannabis in the past month said the median amount of cannabis supplied in a typical week was three grams (interquartile range=1–7 grams) and the median amount that cannabis was sold for in a typical week was $45 (interquartile range=$19– $100).
- The majority of people who brokered or sold cannabis did not report being chiefly concerned with making a profit. Many participants who brokered for others did not charge an additional amount over and above the cost price. Similarly, many who sold cannabis would sell it at market value, and some even gave their friends a good deal to their own disadvantage.

## *Police contact relating to cannabis*

- Some 26 percent of the sample reported they had been found in possession of cannabis by the police at some point in their lifetime. The median number of times this had occurred was once (range=1–6 times).
- Only 17 percent of those who were found in possession of cannabis by the police reported that they were charged with a possession offence last time they were apprehended. Some 54 percent reported that being apprehended by police made no difference to their life, whereas 46 percent reported a negative impact on their life (eg in relation to employment, relationships, travel etc). Only 13 percent reported an actual change or reduction in their cannabis use as a result of being apprehended by police.
- Only one participant reported that they had been arrested for supplying cannabis at some point in their lifetime.

## *Understanding of cannabis and the law*

- Almost the entire sample (94%) reported that they carried cannabis on their person. The median amount typically carried was two grams (interquartile range=1–3 grams) and the median maximum amount carried was 14 grams—that is, half an ounce (interquartile range=3–28 grams).
- These amounts were well under the deemed supply limits for cannabis under Western Australian law (100 grams), Victorian law (250 grams), and New South Wales law (300 grams).
- There was no evidence that participants were unwittingly putting themselves at risk of a deemed supply charge. The median amounts of cannabis participants thought would attract a deemed supply charge were well below the specified deeming amounts.

# Implications

- The overwhelming experience of most participants in this study of the cannabis market, whether they were involved in obtaining or supplying cannabis, could be captured by the broad notion of social supply.
- The findings of the current study reinforce the view that social supply markets possess a number of attributes that make them a challenge for drug law enforcement; there was little in the data of use to those looking for suggestions for improvements in detecting and apprehending people engaged in drug supply in a social supply market.
- Participants described a closed market characterised by high levels of trust between consumers and suppliers already known to each other at the level of adjacent pairs or small group networks, and typically selling in private. Deals made in public places were usually the result of prearranged buys.
- Consumers and their supply contacts were mindful of policing threats and employed strategies to reduce the risk of being detected by police.
- The social supply markets described by participants in this study appear to be less harmful than more open, street-based drug markets. This raises questions about whether increasing the detection of participants in social supply markets should be a major focus of policing efforts.
- With regards to definitions of social supply and ‘true dealing’, it seems that for many of these cannabis suppliers the profit motive, and the scale of that profit, was more central to their notion of dealer than sale to non-friends. Over a third of participants defined a drug dealer as someone who made a financial profit from the sale of drugs.
- Although most people who engaged in supply understood that their activities would be regarded as such in law, most did not consider themselves to be a dealer and many had ways of thinking about their own cannabis supply activities which reinforced their belief that they were not true dealers.
- There may be some benefit in considering a targeted public education campaign on how low-level social supply is considered by and dealt with in law.
- In other countries consideration has been given to whether and how low-level social supply offences should be dealt with in law. Given there appeared to be few differences between participants in this study who were engaged in cannabis consumption versus cannabis supply, and noting the high level of dependence in this sample, there may be some merit in considering the expansion of current Australian drug diversion options to encompass the low-level supply of cannabis and other drugs.

# 1 Introduction

Drawing upon evidence from the national drug surveillance systems, Nicholas (2008) concluded that Australian retail markets for most illicit drugs, including cannabis, are based significantly upon friendships and occur in closed settings, which he described as 'lounge room' as opposed to 'street' dealing. Similar observations have been made in other countries, and in the UK the term social supply was coined by Hough and colleagues (2003) and further developed by others (eg Coomber & Turnbull 2007; Duffy, Schaefer, Coomber, O'Connell, & Turnbull 2006) to describe this aspect of the drug market where a supplier—not considered to be a 'drug dealer proper'—brokers, facilitates or sells drugs, for little or no gain, to friends and acquaintances.

Research on social supply in an Australian context is important because a sound understanding of this dominant aspect of the drug market has the potential to inform drug legislation and how drug offences are dealt with across the criminal justice system. This, in turn, will likely have an impact on the individuals apprehended and charged with offences and their families. For example, it is important to understand whether young drug users in this country are, perhaps unwittingly, putting themselves at risk of a serious drug supply charge by engaging in activities which are seen by them as simply part of the social exchange between themselves and their peers. There are also the clear potential benefits of law enforcement developing better insights into this type of market and how it operates. Such an understanding not only has the capacity to improve the policing of such markets, but also to inform decisions made about resource allocation, regarding relative merits of targeting social supply versus higher value dealer/trafficker drug suppliers, in a way which could enhance policing impacts on drug-related harm at the community level.

## 1.1 Why study social supply among cannabis users?

Cannabis remains the most widely used illicit drug in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011) and worldwide (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2014) and is responsible for the vast majority of illicit drug apprehensions made by Australian law enforcement (Australian Crime Commission 2014). Due to the size and nature of the cannabis market in this country (McDonald & Macgregor 2012), cannabis provides a good opportunity to study the processes of closed drug markets, which are frequently characterised by transactions within intimate social networks where motivations for involvement are broader than simple profit. The cannabis market—unlike other smaller and less accessible closed drug markets for drugs like methamphetamine—affords researchers a good opportunity to access a sizeable number of both consumers and suppliers in a closed drug market characterised by low-level, not-for-profit social supply.

From a community perspective, it has previously been shown that receiving a criminal charge for a minor cannabis possession or use offence can have a devastating impact on the individual in terms of future employment prospects, further attention from and involvement in the criminal justice system, accommodation, relationships and travel opportunities (Lenton 2000, 2003, 2005; Lenton & Heale 2000; Lenton, Humeniuk, Heale & Christie 2000). Clearly, the consequences of a more serious drug supply conviction have the capacity for even greater impacts on the individual.

## 1.2 Social supply background

### *1.2.1 UK research*

Much of the research on social supply has originated in the UK, where Coomber (Coomber & Moyle 2014) has noted the increasing importance of the social supply of illicit drugs. According to Coomber and colleagues (Coomber & Turnbull 2007; Duffy et al. 2006; Duffy, Schaefer, Coomber, O'Connell & Turnbull 2007), much

social supply that takes place between young people can be understood as part of everyday social network activities that involve brokering, sharing and facilitating access to a range of cultural goods such as cigarettes, music, clothes and group behaviours, and involvement is often as much, if not more, about connecting and gaining social capital as it is about drug use per se.

Writing on the UK scene, Parker, Williams and Aldridge noted:

> The key to easy accessibility near the point of consumption is not primarily a product of aggressive drug-dealing. Most young people…obtain their drugs through social networks and friends-of-friends chains (Parker et al., 2001) connected to small dealers. Because most recreational drug users are otherwise fairly law-abiding, 'sorting' each other acts as a filter or social device which allows them to obtain drugs without venturing into the world of dodgy dealers and so risk apprehension or trouble. (Parker, Williams & Aldridge 2002: 944).

Again in the UK, research carried out by Coomber and Turnbull (2007) strongly suggested that the social supply of cannabis among young people, and indeed most exchange among them, was insulated from drug markets proper and that criminalising them garnered little general support.

Duffy and colleagues (Duffy et al. 2007) defined a seller as a young person who sold cannabis for money or other goods, noting that, while some primarily sold for financial profit, others sold to fund their own use. They used the term broker for a person who, primarily for altruistic reasons, helped friends or acquaintances gain access to cannabis—from passing on the details of a seller to actually buying cannabis on the person's behalf. Brokering does not result in financial gain, but the broker may receive a small amount of cannabis for their efforts.

It is the case, however, that young social suppliers who would not normally be understood to be drug dealers continue to be prosecuted as such in the UK and internationally, although there have been recommendations to the contrary. For example, in 2002 the UK House of Commons Home Affairs Committee recommended the creation of a new offence of supply for gain so that the distinction between social supply and dealing could be clearly reflected in the available penalties (Home Affairs Committee (UK) 2002a; Home Affairs Commmittee (UK) 2002b).

Hough et al (2003) described small-scale domestic cultivation of cannabis as a kind of cultivation that ought to be treated as possession rather than supply, and counselled against making sharp distinctions between cannabis users and cannabis sellers.

### *1.2.2 Definitions and critiques of the social supply concept*

Coomber and Moyle (2014) note there have been a number of different definitions of social supply, including:

- '…the non-commercial (or non-profitmaking) distribution of cannabis to non-strangers' (Hough et al. 2003: 36);
- '…sharing with friends or buying on their behalf' (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts (UK) 2007: 277);
- '…predominantly…supplying friends, where profit is not the primary motive' (Potter 2009: 58); and
- where '…the supply was in small quantities; the offender was also using the drugs; the supply was to friends or acquaintances; the offending was not motivated by profit' (New Zealand Law Commission 2010: 209), although a subsequent report noted that all of these criteria had been challenged by submitters (New Zealand Law Commission 2011).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is debate about whether the term social supply should be limited to non-profit-making supply or supply to non-strangers. For example, Potter critiques Hough's (2003) definition of social supply because it involves supply between non-strangers and is non-commercial. On the first count, he argues that making non-strangers the benchmark is 'too vague to be useful' as 'nearly all drug use is embedded in social networks, and it is through interconnecting and overlapping networks that people meet

each other…Sometimes it is friends of friends who are the important link…[W]hat constitutes friendship is problematic' (Potter, 2009: 61). Secondly, he notes that:

> …there is no consistency in the recognition that social supply needs to incorporate a not-for-profit element and even if there were it would be difficult to be clear what was meant by "profit" in the first place. Profit, strictly speaking, would mean being better off after the drug transaction than before. But saving money on your own drug expenditure leaves you better off, even if there is no cash-in-hand at the end of it (Potter 2009: 63).

As can be seen above, Potter distinguished between social suppliers and other suppliers on the basis of intent or motive. Thus:

> …those dealers who are motivated by a desire for profit, and those that make some profit but are driven by other factors may be seen as social suppliers… In this sense, we may consider social supply as supply that would happen even if profit were not to be made, but that may entail some profit if the option is there (Potter 2009: 63).

Potter (2009) noted that in a general legal sense there is no difference between one form of supply and another, and it is this rigidity that has been at the heart of the discussion about social supply. However, in remarking on the problems of social supply as a legal concept and reflecting on the UK debate about whether drug dealing and social supply should be distinguished in law, he observed that—notwithstanding problems with the application of discretion—it may be preferable to keep the law clear; that is, to maintain the ability of law enforcement agencies and the police to apply discretion, rather than try to define social supply in law (pp 66–67).

> It is hoped that the use of such discretion will be informed by the scientific discussion. Whether we hope to improve decision making, to clarify laws, or merely to further our knowledge, we should strive to improve our understanding of different patterns of drug supply and respond to them accordingly (Potter 2009: 68).

He argued that future research should:

> …inquire more deeply into the nature of relationships between users and their suppliers, and into the economic element of such supply. The idea of getting drugs from friends who aren't real dealers, but do get their own drugs for free, needs to be probed. When users report getting drugs from friends, we need to ask what constitutes a friend? Which came first, the friendship or the drug-supply relationship? When users report getting drugs through friends-of-friends, does this relationship really differ from buying drugs in a closed market? How (and why) is the friend, or the friend-of-the-friend connected to real dealers when the user isn't?
>
> We also need to consider the financial aspect. Is the supplier making any money? If they are getting free drugs, how many free drugs are they getting? Can non-financial considerations be translated into financial terms? Does the nature of the financial arrangement evolve over time? Finally, future research cannot just accept the users' claims that they don't get drugs from dealers. With the notable exception of home-grown cannabis, all drugs, ultimately, come from real dealers (Potter 2009: 71–72).

### *1.2.3 A new conceptualisation: Minimally commercial supply*

Coomber and Moyle (2014) argue that in 2012, following consideration of an important submission from the UK drug reform charity Release, the Sentencing Council for England and Wales attempted to reflect these different experiences of drug supply involvement by offering guidance in the form of a sentencing matrix which considered the offender's role in the supply as either 'lesser', 'significant' or 'leading' and the quantity of the substance ranging from Category 4 (least serious) to Category 1 (most serious; p 157).

However, Coomber and Moyle critiqued the matrix, noting that such measures of harm are inherently problematic—particularly when, as in this case, culpability is assumed to be related to weight thresholds—and that limiting the definition of social supply to the absence of financial gain fails to recognise the complexity

of the real world, where many social suppliers may have a clear element of gain (through taxing, mark-up, or economies of bulk purchase) which could accrue over time and, in a no-gain framework, could see many people issued with a commercial dealer charge (Coomber & Moyle 2014: 160–161).

They have thus proposed the concept of minimally commercial supply to more accurately describe the real-life circumstances of the majority of drug-supply transactions, and describe the 'activity of addicted user-dealers that sell to other addicted users to support their own drug use, but make minimal profit from the exercise' (Coomber & Moyle 2014: 159). This concept explicitly accommodates the real-life circumstances of most supply transactions where addicted user-dealers of heroin or other substances—who might be unemployed and/or on benefits and using small profits from drug sales to provide a reliable income stream to fund their addiction—could be seen as engaging in activities which seem to be closer to social supply than 'drug dealing proper' (Coomber & Moyle 2014). The primary concern of the authors was that, under the 2012 sentencing council guidelines, social or minimally commercial suppliers of Class A drugs—supply of which attracts a mandatory custodial sentence—were not seen as having mitigating circumstances.

While conceding that operationalising 'minimal gain' could be difficult, they observe that nearly all drug supply, other than simple brokering, entails some profit. Yet they argue that if this profit neither meaningfully nor in an ongoing way contributes to an overall improved and more varied lifestyle for the supplier (other than in a minimal way), and is not the motivation for the activity, other than for a drug user needing money to access their own drug supply, then there could be some flexibility in the actual amount of minimal gain—which is defined according to its relationship to the supplier's lifestyle and motivation.

Although Coomber and Moyle's stated motivation for defining minimally commercial supply is to, firstly, more accurately describe the real-life circumstances of the majority of drug supply transactions and, secondly, to include the supply activities of addicted user-dealers of Class A drugs, who supply to other addicted users to support their habit but only make limited profit themselves, the core concept here is the recognition that much social supply involves some gain to the supplier. This could range from reputational gain, such as kudos and prestige, to tangible monetary gain from taxing drugs, mark-up or the economies of bulk purchase.

Clearly, then, under the Coomber and Moyle proposal—even allowing that cannabis user-dealers may or may not themselves be cannabis dependent (Hides, Dawe, Young, & Kavanagh 2007; Perkonigg et al. 2008) and using sales to support their dependence—their supply, if not contributing to a substantially more improved lifestyle and not primarily motivated by profit, could be more accurately described as minimally commercial supply than as drug dealing.

Coomber and Moyle envisage the separate offence of minimally commercial supply, sensitive to real-world supply activities and graded according to motivation, harm and intent—similar to the distinction between murder and manslaughter. Moreover they suggest that, while some ambiguity would need to be considered in sentencing, future research could potentially delineate the different aspects of minimally commercial supply and this could inform guidelines covering different roles in social supply behaviour—for example, 'brokers', 'non-profit motivated sellers', 'nominated group buyers' and 'user-dealers' (Coomber & Moyle 2014 p. 163).

### *1.2.4 Australian situation*

In Australia, the penalties applying to different cannabis supply offences are determined by the quantity of harvested cannabis plant material and plants held, and differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. For example, thresholds for trafficable offences range from 50 grams in the Northern Territory to 500 grams in Queensland (Hughes 2010).

Although there have been legislative and regulatory changes in Australia over the last 25 years addressing penalties for possession, use and cultivation (Room, Fischer, Hall, Lenton & Reuter 2010), none of these have specifically addressed issues of social supply.

With regards to Australian research on cannabis use and supply, an in-depth qualitative and quantitative study of Western Australian regular cannabis users previously found that, at their most recent cannabis supply, only

35 percent said they obtained their cannabis from a dealer, while the remaining 65 percent reported that they obtained it from a friend or family member (Chanteloup, Lenton, Barratt & Fetherston 2005). Some 36 percent of participants said that they had often or always shared or split deals with others in the past six months. Of 39 people who had grown cannabis in the previous six months, 50 percent (n=19) said that they gave away some of the cannabis to others for free and 8.9 percent (n=3) said that most of the cannabis they grew over that period was given away to others (Chanteloup et al. 2005).

In other work on drug supply, Lenton and Davidson (1999) described three types of drug supply patterns among a sample of people attending raves and dance parties in Perth in the late 1990s: distribution, clearing and dealing. Most prevalent of these was distribution, described by 24 percent of participants, which involved purchasing and passing on drugs to less well-connected friends and/or facilitating a group purchase. The distributor usually made no cash profit on the transaction, although they may have received cheaper or free drugs, and all of those to whom the distributor passed on the drugs were friends of the distributor. The level of social capital the distributor gained by being involved in this activity was noteworthy. The next most commonly described pattern of supply activity was clearance, mentioned by 18 percent of participants. This involved selling small amounts of drugs that were 'excess stock' of the supplier. This activity was carried out predominately as a favour to a primary supplier. The drugs were usually sold on to other friends or more casual acquaintances, but never to strangers. Those involved in clearance may have derived a small profit from the transaction; however, the acquisition of social capital was also an important motivation for this pattern of supply. The least prevalent pattern of drug supply, dealing—described by only six percent of participants—involved supply that was predominantly motivated by profit. Friendship links were not particularly relevant here, in what was more of a simple, often anonymous, supply-demand transaction. These authors noted that:

> The transactions described were characterised by their co-operative nature where, at different points in the supply chain, the same person might take on roles of both purchaser and supplier, to the mutual benefit of both the individual and those to whom they had scored from or dealt to (Lenton & Davidson 1999: 160).

A report commissioned by the National Drug Law Enforcement Fund (NDLERF) discussed the impact of social networks and not-for-profit drug dealing in Australia (Nicholas 2008). Drawing on evidence from the national drug surveillance systems, as previously noted, Nicholas concluded that Australian retail markets for most illicit drugs, including cannabis, are based significantly upon friendships and occur in closed settings. Nicholas saw three main implications of this. First, it raised questions as to whether drug sellers understood the seriousness of their actions in law; second, there was a perceived dichotomy between people who scored their drugs from 'friends' versus those who bought from 'dealers'; and third, it showed the extent to which scoring drugs from 'friends' as opposed to seedier 'dealers' allowed drug users to maintain their own sense of respectability, responsibility and security, as they maintained their distance from the criminal elements of the illicit drug supply trade. Nicholas argued that, if validated by future research, these potential market dynamics could provide a lever for disrupting drug supply by changing the way those selling drugs to their friends perceive the seriousness of their actions. The report also canvassed potential harms that could result from the disruption of social supply networks by police such as increased activity in open markets, an effect associated with higher levels of criminality and violence and reduced public amenity. Nicholas called for more research into these practices, citing the importance of gaining a more nuanced understanding of low-level drug market structures in Australia.

Most recently, a study comparing Australian and US detainees who used cannabis found that the Australian group were more likely to receive cannabis without paying for it, and about 62 percent scored their cannabis from someone they had regular contact with. It was noted that 'these data point to a more socially dynamic cannabis market in Australia, where a considerable quantity of cannabis is shared or traded informally between family and friends' (McDonald & Macgregor 2012: 8). This confirms the importance of the cannabis social supply market in Australia.

An earlier study also funded by NDLERF, the Ecstasy Market Indicator study (Fowler, Kinner & Krenske 2007), described aspects of social supply in the Queensland ecstasy market. Salient points included that:

- ecstasy consumers who also supplied the drug were in many respects no different from those users who did not supply in terms of gender, age, drug use or prison history. However, they were twice as likely to have a university degree, were less likely to be unemployed and had higher incomes (p 124–125);
- contrary to expectations, there was no evidence that consumers had progressed to dealing after a period of time in the ecstasy market, and suppliers were not necessarily at the heavy end of the using continuum (p 125–126);
- indeed, suppliers were no more likely than other regular ecstasy users to be known to police as dealers and were less likely than other users to have had recent contact with police (p126);
- although most reported supplying only to friends and acquaintances, more than a third reported receiving a monetary profit from their supply activity. Yet both key informant and user reports indicated that these small-scale dealers mostly seemed to make only small profits, and the authors noted that supply did not seem to be driven by a profit motive (p 126);
- for the market participants, the distinction between consumer and supplier was generally made in terms of the level of profit, the number of transactions and the amount of time and effort put into dealing (p 129);
- the transition from social supply to dealing proper was usually opportunistic and motivated by a desire to fund drug use and obtain profit. The authors noted that there were intrinsic barriers to moving from user-dealer to mid-level distribution, including establishing trust and a reputation that enabled them to obtain credit in order to access larger quantities of the drug, limits imposed by the presence of organised crime groups at that level of the market and so on. Where progression from social supply to dealing proper did occur, this usually involved higher-level suppliers grooming lower level dealers for promotion and mediating their transition to larger scale dealing rather than well-educated, middle-class user-dealers pushing their way up the supply chain (p 130);
- while only five percent of participants first obtained ecstasy from a known dealer, at the time of the survey 62 percent bought it from a known dealer. This pattern suggests that consumers develop and establish relationships with dealers over their using careers (p 132);
- with regard to what is called brokering or joint purchase, only about a third of participants said they usually obtained ecstasy only for themselves, whereas almost two-thirds reported that they usually scored ecstasy for themselves and others. Joint purchasing was seen as having two advantages for buyers: a reduced price due to bulk purchase, and a diminished risk of apprehension by police as a result of reducing the number of transactions. For suppliers there were also benefits in terms of selling larger quantities more efficiently, increased profit margins and reduced risk of detection by law enforcement (p 133–134); and
- most ecstasy transactions were made in private with known and trusted suppliers. While some transactions were concluded in public sites, these were often pre-arranged in private. This transaction pattern may differ from those understood by law enforcement, whose perception of more open drug market transactions may be because they are more able to infiltrate open public drug markets (at venues, for example; p 134–135).

## 1.3 Rationale, aims and objectives

The aims of the project were to:

- provide a detailed account of the ways in which young adults gain access to cannabis in a social supply market;
- explore the impact of supply routes on different aspects of young people's lives, including access to other drugs, contact with police, schooling and relationships with family and friends;
- examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and access to cannabis;
- explain young people's notions of drug dealing and social supply and how they relate to buying patterns and behaviour;
- examine the extent, nature and impact of the involvement of police with cases where young people have been found to be selling cannabis; and
- outline young people's understanding of the cannabis supply legislation.

## 1.4 Funding and ethics

This project was supported by a grant from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing through the NDLERF.

The project was approved by Human Research Ethics Committees at both Curtin University (HR 172/2011) and the University of New England (HE12-155).

# 2 Method

## 2.1 Data collection

The project recruited a total sample of 200 cannabis users in each of the three project sites. Eighty participants were recruited in Perth and Melbourne and 40 in Armidale, in the New England region of rural New South Wales. These sites were chosen because the project's chief investigators (CIs) had good contacts in them and they provided a range of contexts, comprising a mid-sized Australian capital city (2011 Perth population: 1.73 million), a larger capital city (2011 Melbourne population: 3.99 million) and a large regional centre (2011 Armidale population: 23,578). Although the plan was to recruit 80 participants at each site, this proved difficult at the Armidale site despite our team's best efforts. The main contributing factors appeared to be a considerably smaller population to recruit from and, related to this, concerns from potentially eligible participants about maintaining anonymity while participating in a project focusing on illegal behaviour in a relatively small community. As a consequence, the decision was made to limit the Armidale sample group to 40. As such, 20 percent of the sample group came from a rural area. The inclusion of Armidale assisted in capturing some of the geographic diversity of Australia, in a country where a third of the population lives outside metropolitan centres.

## 2.2 Recruitment and screening

The regular cannabis users were recruited through advertising in the local free entertainment press; online advertising; via flyers placed at smoking paraphernalia shops, gaming stores, university and technical college campuses and music stores; and by word of mouth, including snowballing, where those interviewed passed on information about the study to their peers and networks, including via their online networks. In Armidale, in an effort to improve recruitment, stories about the project were also run in the local media. Potential participants were screened at the time of initial telephone or online contact according to the following prerequisites: they were required to be aged between 18 and 30 years, and to have either used cannabis at least monthly in the three months prior to interview, or to have brokered access to or sold cannabis within the six months prior to interview, or both. An additional screening question was added partway through the study to ensure that participants had been residents of their respective cities or town for a reasonable period of time to be able to comment on the local marketplace, after it became clear that some participants in Melbourne and Perth had only been living there for a short time; six such individuals were dropped from the final sample. A second screening was conducted at the time of interview using the same set of questions. Participants were interviewed at various locations including cafes or bars, food courts, public spaces such as parks and museum foyers and the offices of the research investigators—notably, the National Drug Research Institute in Perth and the University of New England in Armidale. The breakdown of study site by recruitment method is provided in Table 1.

| Table 1: Recruitment source | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source (%) | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) |
| Snowballing | 31 | 59 | 63 | 49 |
| Street press | 39 | 28 | 0 | 27 |
| Poster/flyer | 25 | 8 | 38 | 21 |
| University website | 4 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Don't know | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 2.3 Procedures

Participants were provided with an information sheet which was also read aloud to them to address any concerns about literacy. This sheet outlined the study, addressed confidentiality issues, explained their rights in the research process and identified which parts of the interview would be audio recorded. Participants were reimbursed $40 for attending the interview and advised that they could refuse to answer any question and/or terminate the interview at any time. Verbal consent to be interviewed and confirmation of their understanding of the above information was recorded as digital audio.

The interviews were conducted by trained researchers and took one to two hours to complete. The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative components. The longer qualitative parts were digitally recorded for later transcription and analysis.

## 2.4 Ethical issues

Participants' contact details (home or mobile phone number) were kept securely in locked filing cabinets and were not able to be linked with the participants' data. These details were destroyed immediately after the interview was conducted. All data were identified with a numerical code. The interviews were conducted by trained research officers under the supervision of the CIs, who were closely involved in all stages of the project. All interview materials, transcripts and completed questionnaires were kept securely at the offices of the project CIs, where they will be stored for not less than five years.

There was no evidence that the interviews gave rise to any distress in the participants. However, interviewers always carried information on appropriate drug treatment referral information and strategies for reducing drug-related harm.

Public spaces which allowed for relatively private discussion were the preferred site for interviews. Such places included secluded parts of coffee shops, food courts and, in the case of the Melbourne site, the foyer of the Melbourne Museum. It has been found, over many studies with drug users, that these kinds of places are ideal interview settings. Often drug users are happier to discuss their drug use on neutral ground like this rather than at treatment agencies, where issues of confidentiality are more of a problem (eg discussing recent drug use in an abstinence-focused agency), or at home, where parents, partners or other housemates may be present.

Due to the sensitivities arising from the collection of data about illicit drug use, participants were not asked to sign a written consent form. Rather, verbal consent to participate in the study was obtained prior to interview and recorded on the digital audio recorder to provide a record of the agreement. Participants could refuse to answer any questions they chose to, and could leave the interview at any time without consequence. The reimbursement of $40 was provided prior to the commencement of the interview to reduce its possible influence on the voluntary nature of the consent provided.

The reimbursement was deemed modest and not tantamount to coercing participation or impairing the

voluntary nature of participants' consent as described in the NHMRC's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. This viewpoint is also supported by Festinger et al (2005).

## 2.5 Data analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (IBM Corporation, 2013) and STATA (StataCorp, 2013). Qualitative information was transcribed by Pacific Transcription and analysed using NVivo 10 (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012).

The tests of significance used to compare study sites were t-tests, ANOVA and Chi Squared. For 2x2 analyses, the continuity correction for Chi Square results is reported. A cut-off of p=<0.05 was used to determine significance.

# 3 Demographics

As described above, interviews were conducted with a total of 200 regular cannabis users. Eighty participants were recruited from the Perth and Melbourne sites and 40 participants were recruited from the Armidale site. Participants were asked a range of demographic questions including age, gender, ethnicity, accommodation, education and employment. Table 2 presents a complete breakdown of demographic characteristics by site.

## 3.1 Age, gender and background

The average age of the sample (which was limited by the recruitment procedure to participants aged 18 to 30) was 22 years (median=22) and almost three-quarters (71%) were male. Only one percent (n=2) of the sample identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and both participants were from the Armidale site. When asked about their ethnic origin, the majority of the sample (60%, n=120) described an ethnicity fitting within the Oceanian classification; and this was followed by north-west European—that is, British, Irish, western European or northern European (27%). There were no significant demographic differences between sites in terms of age and gender.

## 3.2 Family and living arrangements

The majority of the sample (87%, n=174) reported that they had never been married.

Approximately half of the sample (54%, n=108) reported living in a private rental home, and one-third (32%, n=64) reported living in a parent's or the family home. Where participants reported living with other people, they most commonly reported living in the same household as parents (29%, n=58), siblings or other family members (25%, n=50), friends (27%, n=54), housemates (22%, n=44), or a spouse or partner (19%, n=38). There were some significant differences across sites in terms of living arrangements. As evident in Table 2, almost half (45%, n=36) of the Perth participants reported living in a parent's or the family home, compared with just eight percent (n=3) in Armidale. Likewise, approximately two-fifths (41%, n=33) of Perth participants reported living with their parents, compared with just five percent (n=2) in Armidale. A small sample (18%, n=7) of Armidale participants reported living in student housing.

## 3.3 Education and employment

Three-quarters of the sample (75%, n=150) reported completing year 12 at school and almost the entire sample (98%, n=196) reported completing year 10. Three-fifths of the sample (61%, n=121) also reported completing a trade certificate or other educational qualification since finishing school. The most commonly reported qualifications included non-trade certificates (41%, n=50), followed by bachelor degrees (21%, n=25), trade certificates (19%, n=23) and associate diplomas (11%, n=13). Levels of employment were varied, with approximately two-fifths of participants (42%, n=83) reporting that they were a full-time student, two-fifths (43%, n=85) reporting part-time or casual employment and approximately one-fifth (22%, n=44) reporting they were on allowances or benefits. The most commonly reported main form of income was a wage (55%, n=109), followed by allowances or benefits (26%, n=52). Only four percent of the sample (n=7) reported that their main form of income was from the sale of drugs. The average weekly income was $510 (median=$385, interquartile range=$231–700). The only significant differences between sites for education and employment were related to allowances and benefits, with a greater proportion of Armidale participants reporting this as their main source of income. This may reflect Armidale's status as a regional educational centre, supporting both a TAFE and a university.

| Table 2: Demographic characteristics (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demographic | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
| Mean age (range years) | 22 (18–30) | 23 (18–30) | 23 (18–30) | 22 (18–30) | 0.605 |
| **Gender—male** | 74 | 66 | 73 | 71 | 0.555 |
| **Aboriginal or TSI** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | ** |
| **Ethnic origin** | | | | | 0.815 |
| Oceanian | 56 | 63 | 63 | 60 | |
| North-West European | 30 | 26 | 23 | 27 | |
| Southern or Eastern European | 9 | 5 | 5 | 7 | |
| Other | 5 | 6 | 10 | 7 | |
| **Marital status** | | | | | 0.814# |
| Never married | 88 | 85 | 90 | 87 | |
| Married/de facto | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | |
| Divorced | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | |
| Separated | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Accommodation** | | | | | 0.001# |
| Private rented home | 44 | 56 | 68 | 54 | |
| Live in parent's/family home | 45 | 31 | 8 | 32 | |
| Student housing | 1 | 0 | 18 | 5 | |
| Live in other relatives home | 3 | 1 | 5 | 3 | |
| Live in friend's home | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | |
| Own home | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | |
| Homeless/NFA | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | |
| State housing | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| Hostel/temporary | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| Squat | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| Other | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | |
| **Living arrangements*** | | | | | |
| My parents | 41 | 29 | 5 | 29 | 0.000 |
| My friends | 23 | 30 | 30 | 27 | 0.504 |
| My siblings/other family | 35 | 24 | 5 | 25 | 0.001 |
| My housemates | 16 | 30 | 18 | 22 | 0.082 |
| My spouse/partner | 16 | 18 | 28 | 19 | 0.303 |
| Other students | 0 | 1 | 18 | 5 | 0.000 |
| No one, lives alone | 1 | 1 | 13 | 4 | 0.002 |
| My children | 4 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0.317 |
| My grandparents | 3 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 0.168 |
| Other | 10 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 0.074 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Highest year of school education (median)** | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 0.190 |
| **School education level** | | | | | 0.367# |
| Completed below Year 10 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | |
| Completed to Year 10 | 18 | 8 | 15 | 13 | |
| Completed to Year 11 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | |
| Completed to Year 12 | 70 | 81 | 73 | 75 | |
| **Tertiary qualifications** | | | | | 0.065 |
| No | 56 | 30 | 50 | 40 | |
| Yes | 44 | 70 | 50 | 61 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

**Due to small n values in most cells, it was not possible to statistically test this difference

# Due to small n values the significance statistic was calculated based on collapsed cells

# 4 Experiences of cannabis use

## 4.1 First experiences with cannabis

Participants were asked about their first experiences with cannabis, including the age at which they first used cannabis, who first introduced or exposed them to cannabis, and descriptions of their first experiences of cannabis use. Findings in relation to first experiences with cannabis are presented in Table 3.

### *4.1.1 Age at first use*

The average age at which participants reported their first use of cannabis was 15 years (median=15, range=10 or less–23 years). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to age of first cannabis use.

### *4.1.2 Introduction to cannabis*

The vast majority of participants reported that they were first introduced to cannabis by a friend (71%, n=141); the next most commonly reported introduction was by a brother or sister (7%, n=14). No participants reported being introduced to cannabis by someone who sold drugs. The only significant difference between sites was that there appeared to be a greater proportion of participants from the Perth site reporting 'no one introduced me'. This indicates that, rather than having another person introduce or expose them to cannabis, they sought it out themselves.

### *4.1.3 Qualitative responses around first experience*

Participants were asked to describe their first experiences of cannabis use, including why they first decided to use cannabis, where they first used and who they were with at the time. An exploration of open-ended responses found that the greatest proportion of first experiences were described as opportunistic or spontaneous in nature (54%, n=107), whereas the remainder (44%, n=87) were described as a planned experience. A small proportion (3%, n=6) described an experience the nature of which was unclear. Of those who described an opportunistic first experience, many reported that they had previously thought about and researched using and therefore did not hesitate when the opportunity arose, while smaller proportions said they felt peer pressure from others or had been drinking alcohol at the time and therefore believed their inhibitions were lowered. One of the most typical scenarios reported involved joints or bongs being passed around at parties or social gatherings. The most commonly reported reasons for first using cannabis were: that it was offered free of charge; that others were doing it; curiosity; a desire to be part of a certain social circle; and peer pressure.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of participant responses that described an opportunistic or spontaneous first experience with cannabis:

> I was at a party and a friend gave me a smoke of his joint. Had been thinking about it previously, but it was opportunistic. [P26, male, 20yrs]

> Friend in high school, his dad grew weed in their backyard and he (the dad) rolled us a joint. Me and two other friends from school smoked it at his house. [M67, male, 23yrs]

> It was at an 18th party with friends. Some of them invited me to have some, they were smoking a bong. I was drunk and there were about 20 other people smoking [A15, male, 20yrs]

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses of participants who described a planned first experience with cannabis:

> A friend and I had been curious about using for a while as other friends we know use. We did some research and decided to give it a try. We purchased a stick off another friend and went to a park and smoked it. [P10, male, 18yrs]

> My mum was away for a weekend, my friend was already trying it out, being a teenager and the novelty of a free house, my friend came over and brought the weed and we smoked a bong. It was interesting, but didn't really know what was going on. I got really stoned. [M46, male, 19yrs]

> A close friend and I decided (we discussed it in maths class at school) we would purchase some cannabis and both try it for the first time. We smoked it through a pipe in the toilets downtown before a Blue Light disco (that we were attending). [A40, male, 30yrs]

**Table 3: First experiences with cannabis (%)**

| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean age of first use (range years) | 15 (10 or less–20) | 15 (11–23) | 16 (12–21) | 15 (10 or less–23) | 0.165 |
| **First introduction to cannabis*** | | | | | |
| Friend | 69 | 68 | 80 | 71 | 0.333 |
| Brother or sister | 8 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 0.438 |
| No one introduced me | 11 | 4 | 0 | 6 | 0.028 |
| Parent(s) | 1 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 0.211 |
| Partner | 3 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 0.176 |
| Friend's older sibling | 6 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 0.415 |
| Other close family member | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0.599 |
| Friend of friend | 0 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0.102 |
| Other | 11 | 11 | 3 | 10 | 0.241 |

* Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

## 4.2 Patterns of use

Different patterns of cannabis use were considered, covering areas such as frequency of use, duration of use, changes in patterns of use, forms of cannabis usually used and methods of use. Table 4 presents a complete breakdown of findings related to patterns of cannabis use.

### *4.2.1 Most recent cannabis use*

When asked about the most recent occasion of cannabis use, the most commonly reported response was yesterday (38%, n=76), followed by today (24%, n=48). The vast majority of participants (88%, n=175) had used cannabis within the past week and almost all participants (99.5%, n=199) had used it within the past month. There was a significant difference between sites in relation to last use.

### 4.2.2 Frequency of use

Two-fifths of participants (40%, n=80) reported using cannabis on a daily basis; this was followed by four to six times per week (21%, n=41) and two to three times per week (20%, n=39). There did not appear to be any significant differences between sites in relation to frequency of cannabis use.

### 4.2.3 Duration of use in this way

When asked how long they had been using cannabis in the same way, two-thirds of participants (66%, n=131) reported they had been using in this way for more than one year, and this was followed by having used in the same way for the last seven to 12 months (16%, n=31). There was a significant difference between sites in relation to duration of use, with a greater proportion of participants from Melbourne reporting that they had been using cannabis in the same way for less than six months compared with the Perth sample, who were more likely to report having used in the same way for over 12 months.

### 4.2.4 Changes in use

Almost all participants (95%, n=190) reported that the amount of cannabis they used had changed over time. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to changes in usage. Those who reported a change in their usage (95%, n=190) were asked to describe how their usage had changed and why. An exploration of open-ended responses found that changes in cannabis use could be broadly recoded into three categories: increased use (42%, n=79), decreased use (12%, n=22) and fluctuating use (47%, n=88). Of those who reported that their use had fluctuated over time, the majority believed this was due to changes in life circumstances like family, social life, education or work, such that they did not have the financial capacity, the contacts or the time to continue to support their use. Many participants also reported taking breaks from cannabis when they felt their use was too high and/or negatively impacting them. Some participants also reported experiencing an increase in their tolerance to cannabis over time, which led them to take breaks in an attempt to lower the amount they used. Those who reported an increase in their cannabis use over time attributed this to increased access, increased financial capacity, increased comfort with the drug, increased stress or life pressures, the influence of social circles or increases in tolerance. Those who reported a decrease in use most commonly spoke of negative psychological and behavioural impacts such as depression, paranoia and lack of motivation, financial pressures, increased life responsibilities or concerns about dependence.

### 4.2.5 Forms of cannabis used

The most commonly reported form of cannabis typically used by participants was hydro (72%, n=144), followed closely by bush (63%, n=125). Only a small proportion of participants (9%, n=17) reported the use of resin or hash cannabis. A small proportion (6%, n=12) reported that they did not know what form of cannabis they had been using. There were significant differences between sites in relation to the forms of cannabis typically used. As evident in Table 4, while hydro was the most commonly reported form of cannabis used in both Perth (88%, n=70) and Melbourne (69%, n=55), bush was by far the most commonly reported form used in Armidale (88%, n=35).

#### Knowledge of skunk

The majority of participants (84%, n=167) reported that they had heard of skunk; however, understanding and descriptions of skunk as a form of cannabis varied. An exploration of open-ended responses found that descriptions of skunk could be broadly recoded into 19 categories. The three most commonly reported descriptions of skunk involved it being of high strength (38%, n=63), of a certain strain (24%, n=40) and grown

hydroponically (14%, n=23). Other common descriptions included that it is: only found in certain places in the world (13%, n=21); chemically based or synthetic cannabis (8%, n=14); a slang term (8%, n=14); poor quality cannabis (8%, n=13); of a certain THC/CBD content (7%, n=12); and potent-smelling (7%, n=11). Some participants also associated skunk with more negative effects (4%, n=6) and mental health effects (3%, n=5). In addition, of those who had heard of skunk, almost a quarter (23%, n=37) indicated that they were not sure what it was or how to describe it. There was also a significant difference between sites in relation to knowledge of skunk, with a smaller proportion of Armidale participants reporting that they had heard of it. Overall, the variety in responses indicated uncertainty around skunk as a form of cannabis.

### 4.2.6 Methods of use

The most commonly reported method for using cannabis was to smoke it in a joint (84%, n=167), followed closely by smoking it in a bong (77%, n=154). Other commonly reported methods included eating it—for example, in baked goods (35%, n=70), smoking it in a pipe (32%, n=63) and inhaling it using a vaporiser (22%, n=43). The most common other methods reported included 'spotting' it (3%, n=5) and smoking it in a blunt (1%, n=2). Individuals also reported using cannabis by swallowing it in a capsule and smoking it in a shisha. There were significant differences in methods of cannabis use between sites, with a greater proportion of participants from Armidale reporting smoking it in a pipe, smoking it in a bong, smoking it in a chillum or eating it.

**Table 4: Patterns of cannabis use (%)**

| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Last use** | | | | | **0.035** |
| Today | 23 | 24 | 28 | 24 | |
| Yesterday | 28 | 50 | 35 | 38 | |
| In the last 3–4 days | 16 | 10 | 18 | 14 | |
| In the last 5–7 days | 15 | 8 | 8 | 11 | |
| In the last 2–4 weeks | 19 | 6 | 10 | 12 | |
| In the last 2–3 months | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | |
| Stopped | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Frequency of use** | | | | | **0.087** |
| Every day | 39 | 39 | 45 | 40 | |
| 4–6 times per week | 15 | 29 | 15 | 21 | |
| 2–3 times per week | 20 | 21 | 14 | 20 | |
| Once per week | 11 | 6 | 8 | 9 | |
| Once per fortnight | 5 | 3 | 8 | 5 | |
| Once per month | 10 | 0 | 10 | 6 | |
| Less than once per month | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Duration of use in this way**** | | | | | **0.003** |
| The past 6 months | 8 | 31 | 15 | 19 | |
| The past 7–12 months | 15 | 14 | 21 | 16 | |
| More than 12 months | 78 | 55 | 64 | 66 | |
| **Has usage changed over time** | | | | | **0.398** |
| Yes | 94 | 98 | 93 | 95 | |
| No | 6 | 3 | 7 | 5 | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Types of cannabis used*** | | | | | |
| Bush | 53 | 60 | 88 | 63 | 0.001 |
| Hydro | 88 | 69 | 48 | 72 | 0.000 |
| Resin (hash) | 11 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 0.509 |
| Other | 1 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 0.211 |
| Don't know | 6 | 9 | 0 | 6 | 0.075 |
| **Heard of skunk** | | | | | **0.000** |
| Yes | 86 | 93 | 63 | 84 | |
| No | 14 | 8 | 38 | 16 | |
| **Methods of use*** | | | | | |
| Smoke in a joint | 77 | 91 | 83 | 84 | 0.037 |
| Smoke in a bong | 79 | 65 | 98 | 77 | 0.000 |
| Eat it (eg in baked goods) | 16 | 41 | 60 | 35 | 0.000 |
| Smoke in a pipe | 23 | 30 | 53 | 32 | 0.004 |
| Inhale using a vaporiser | 23 | 20 | 23 | 22 | 0.915 |
| Smoke in a bucket | 20 | 15 | 30 | 20 | 0.153 |
| Smoke in a chillum | 0 | 6 | 15 | 6 | 0.003 |
| Drink it (eg in tea) | 4 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 0.674 |
| Other | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 1.000 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

* Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

**Categories were collapsed to avoid violating the chi-square assumption of small cell counts

## 4.3 Reasons for using

To examine motives for wanting to obtain cannabis, participants were asked why they use it. The three most commonly reported reasons for using cannabis were to relax (60%, n=118), for fun (48%, n= 94) and to be sociable (35%, n=68). Other common reasons included 'to help me sleep' (16%, n=31), 'to help calm me down' (14%, n=27) and boredom (11%, n=22). There was also a large proportion reporting 'other' responses (61%, n=121). The most commonly reported other reasons for using cannabis could be broadly recoded as to enhance creativity (10%, n=20) and for medicinal purposes (9%, n=17), including for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (1%, n=1), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) (1%, n=1), anxiety (5%, n=10), depression (2%, n=4), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (1%, n=2), twitches (1%, n=1) and as an appetite suppressant (2%, n=3). Less commonly reported other reasons for using cannabis included use as an outlet or coping mechanism (5%, n=10), as a substitute for alcohol (4%, n=8), due to dependence or habit (3%, n=5), due to introspection, for spiritual reasons (each 2%, n=3), due to an enjoyment of cannabis subculture, as a substitute for cigarettes, as a comedown, and to change thought processes (each 1%, n=1) . There were no significant differences between sites in relation to reasons for using cannabis. A breakdown of findings related to reasons for the use of cannabis is presented in Table 5.

### *4.3.1 Qualitative responses for reasons for using*

To gain a more detailed view of their reasons for using cannabis, participants were asked to explain why they used it. The following excerpts are from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who reported using cannabis to relax:

At the end of a long day I don't want to have a glass of wine, it doesn't relax me. Cannabis is my glass of wine, it helps relax and wind down mind and body. [P01, male, 23yrs]

If I am tense, it would make me feel relieved. I don't worry about problems. [A05, male, 20yrs]

Most people drink, but instead I'd rather smoke. It's relaxing and makes me feel warm and happy and makes me think of more funny things. [M53, female, 19yrs]

The following are excerpts from the responses of those who reported using cannabis for fun:

When you are high everything is funny and all your senses are exacerbated. It is also relaxing. [A19, female, 19yrs]

It heightens good feelings. You think differently, it makes everything more fun and makes you less self-conscious. [P04, male, 23yrs]

The following excerpts are from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who reported using cannabis to be sociable:

I enjoy it. Socially it lowers inhibitions and makes it easier. It also slows down mental processes so worries aren't as big. [A26, male, 26yrs]

I have made friends with the spirit of cannabis. It puts me in a creative head space, saved me from anxiety and addiction. I enjoy the ritual of it, sharing with friends. Brings on the laughs—that's what life's about. [M64, female, 30yrs]

**Table 5: Reasons for using cannabis (%)***

| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| To relax | 68 | 55 | 51 | 60 | 0.100 |
| For fun | 45 | 54 | 21 | 48 | 0.389 |
| To be sociable | 31 | 42 | 26 | 35 | 0.166 |
| Bored | 11 | 10 | 0 | 11 | 0.915 |
| To help calm me down | 15 | 15 | 13 | 14 | 0.463 |
| To help me sleep | 21 | 14 | 0 | 16 | 0.125 |
| For medicinal purposes** | 14 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 0.074 |
| To enhance creativity** | 11 | 12 | 5 | 10 | 0.499 |
| Other | 36 | 23 | 38 | 31 | 0.132 |

* Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

**Frequently occurring 'other' responses which were recoded

## 4.4 Levels of dependence

The Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS) is a five-item scale that has been reported to be a reliable and valid screening instrument for dependence and a measure of dependence severity in adults and adolescents across several substance classes (Martin, Copeland, Gates & Gilmour 2006). The participant is asked to consider each item in relation to their cannabis use over the past year.

Well over half the sample group (62%, n=122) had a score exceeding three, indicating dependence in adults. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to levels of dependence as measured by the SDS. Table 6 presents a breakdown of SDS scores by site.

| Table 6: Severity of dependence scores (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth (n=78) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (n=40) | Total (n=198) | Sig |
| **Did you think your use of cannabis was out of control?** | | | | | **0.307** |
| Never/almost never | 49 | 55 | 45 | 51 | |
| Sometimes | 43 | 28 | 38 | 35 | |
| Often | 5 | 11 | 15 | 10 | |
| Always/nearly always | 4 | 6 | 3 | 5 | |
| **Did the prospect of missing a smoke make you anxious or worried?** | | | | | **0.604** |
| Never/almost never | 53 | 64 | 50 | 57 | |
| Sometimes | 30 | 28 | 33 | 29 | |
| Often | 12 | 5 | 13 | 9 | |
| Always/nearly always | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 | |
| **Did you worry about your use of cannabis?** | | | | | **0.563** |
| Never/almost never | 42 | 38 | 48 | 42 | |
| Sometimes | 46 | 46 | 30 | 43 | |
| Often | 8 | 11 | 18 | 11 | |
| Always/nearly always | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | |
| **Did you wish you could stop?** | | | | | **0.486** |
| Never/almost never | 65 | 71 | 55 | 66 | |
| Sometimes | 24 | 23 | 33 | 25 | |
| Often | 5 | 5 | 10 | 6 | |
| Always/nearly always | 5 | 1 | 3 | 3 | |
| **How difficult would you find it to stop, or go without cannabis?** | | | | | **0.181** |
| Not difficult | 53 | 70 | 63 | 62 | |
| Quite difficult | 28 | 21 | 28 | 25 | |
| Very difficult | 19 | 8 | 10 | 13 | |
| Impossible | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Score exceeding 3 (indicating dependence in adults)** | 67 | 58 | 60 | 62 | **0.482** |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

Note: Participants were asked to consider each item in relation to their cannabis use over the past year

## 4.5 Social elements of use

To understand the social supply of cannabis, it is important to understand the nature of social elements involved in the use of cannabis. Participants were asked a range of questions related to the social elements of cannabis use, including who they typically used cannabis with, their preferred situations for using, the proportion of their friends who also used, the importance of cannabis use as a part of their social life and the involvement of their family and other household members in cannabis use. Table 7 presents a complete breakdown of findings related to social elements of cannabis use.

### 4.5.1 Who cannabis is normally used with

Almost the entire sample (95%, n=190) reported that they normally used cannabis with friends; however, more than half (57%, n=114) reported that they also used cannabis alone. Participants also commonly reported using cannabis with a partner (32%, n=63), friends of friends (24%, n=48), strangers (19%, n=37) and siblings (15%, n=30). Those people most commonly reported as 'other' included housemates (3%, n=6), the user's dealer, workmates and the parents of friends (each 2%, n=3). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to who cannabis is normally used with.

### 4.5.2 Preferred situations to use cannabis

Participants were asked to explain their preferred situation for using cannabis. An exploration of open-ended responses found that the majority of those who commented on who they preferred to use cannabis with (90%, n=162) preferred using cannabis with friends (78%, n=127), rather than alone (14%, n=22).

Further exploration of open-ended responses found that the majority of those who commented on their preferred setting (89%, n=177) preferred using cannabis in a relaxed setting (71%, n=126) and in a private setting (71%, n=125). Other commonly reported preferences could be recoded into the categories 'while listening to/watching music/multimedia' (23%, n=40)', 'while outdoors' (13%, n=23) and 'while engaging in a creative activity' (9%, n=16).

The following excerpts are from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who, when questioned about their preferred situation for cannabis use, answered that they preferred to use alone:

> Alone because I feel completely relaxed. If I need to have a smoke to help me relax I can do that best by myself. [A33, male, 21yrs]
>
> Alone or with a small amount of people who are close friends. I get social anxiety and it can introvert me otherwise. [P02, male, 18yrs]
>
> At home alone watching a movie because it's most useful in this context (e.g., most relaxing, cures boredom). [P29, male, 27yrs]
>
> At home. I don't feel social when I smoke weed. I just want to be comfortable. I don't see it as a social drug, like drinking is.[M45, female, 20yrs]
>
> On my own to unwind at the end of the day. [M44, female, 20yrs]

The following excerpts are from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who, when questioned about their preferred situation for cannabis use, answered that they preferred to use with friends:

> Relaxing in my house or a friend's house with a small group of friends because we're all on the same wavelength as each other, can communicate more openly and freely as we're more comfortable with each other and in that environment. [M26, female, 22yrs]
>
> Just with a few close friends at a casual gathering. Prefer a more chilled, relaxing environment with people I'm comfortable around. [P10, male, 18yrs]
>
> Few friends at home listening to music/movies/talking about life. Relaxed and casual. Not a party person—I prefer to talk about deeper things. There's more quality in an intimate setting. [P78, male, 22yrs]
>
> Socially at a party or with friends—it's fun to sit down and smoke a joint and talk rubbish with mates. I don't drink so smoking is the same as drinking for me. [M51, male, 26yrs]
>
> With friends. It's a social activity. I enjoy hanging out with my friend, I enjoy weed and combine them and it's even more fun. [M73, female, 19yrs]

> With friends. I like laughing together about stuff. I feel like you get a better high when others are high – gets you on the same level. [M79, male, 28yrs]
>
> I smoke regularly with friends. After the pub, at a party, on a road trip. Mainly social activities. It is cheaper and more fun smoking with others, it's a bonding thing. [A08, male, 21yrs]
>
> I prefer with close friends because it is relaxed and comfortable—there is no anxiety. I can feel awkward smoking around strangers. Smoking alone is also good for me. I'm shy, which may be a factor. [A27, female, 18yrs]

Overall, it appeared that participants preferred using cannabis with a small group of friends in a private and relaxed setting. Participants commonly reported that they prefer this type of setting because they like to feel comfortable, secure and safe while using cannabis to avoid triggering any adverse negative effects.

### 4.5.3 Proportion of friends who use cannabis

When asked what proportion of their friends used cannabis, the most commonly reported response was most of them (46%, n=92), followed by about half of them (35%, n=69), a few of them (15%, n=60) and all of them (5%, n=2). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the proportion of participants' friends who used cannabis.

### 4.5.4 Cannabis use as part of social life

When asked whether using cannabis was an important part of their social life the sample was divided, with half (50%, n=100) reporting that it was important and half (50%, n=100) reporting that it was not. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to cannabis use as part of social life.

Participants who reported that cannabis was an important part of their social life were asked to describe in what way it was important. An exploration of open-ended responses found that the majority of responses could be broadly recoded into four categories: 'a bonding experience/brings us together' (37%, n=35), 'a social thing/way of socialising' (39%, n=28), 'a social habit' (23%, n=22) and 'a reason for catching up' (16%, n=15).

The following excerpts are from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who believed using cannabis acted as a bonding experience:

> It's not an essential component, but it is a part of it. We use it just as you would you use alcohol in a social context, it enhances interaction and acts as a social lubricant. [P01, male, 23yrs]
>
> It's a way of connecting with friends in a social setting. It's a bonding experience. [P06, male, 18yrs]
>
> It puts everyone in the same mindset/frame. It's a social way to relax and wind down together. It's a fun way of being with mates and not going out, getting in fights, etc. [P56, male, 22yrs]
>
> Some friends I wouldn't make an effort to see if we weren't smoking. If I stopped, I would probably halve my social circle. [M23, male, 19yrs]
>
> It's a prominent part in some regards, but not important. None of us drink. So I guess it's important to some degree. [M64, female, 30yrs]
>
> With certain people, we'd still hang out if we didn't smoke, but there is a smoking culture, we hang out and smoke and help each other out with getting it. I'm used to weed being around. [M75, female, 22yrs]
>
> It was just something to do. We would just be talking and someone would chop up. It also breaks down barriers. We would talk about taboo subjects, it's just fun. [A22, male, 22yrs]
>
> In the same way drinking alcohol would be to many people, that is, something a group of people collectively like to do. Because cannabis is illegal—this makes a group of cannabis users more close-knit. [A31, female, 21yrs]

You call up your friend or friends and offer them weed. For smokers this is just a routine thing. To smoke cannabis together is just like people drinking (together)—it is the norm of a social platform. [A39, male, 25yrs]

### 4.5.5 Family members and cannabis use

Two-thirds of the sample (67%, n=133) reported that a member of their family or household also used cannabis. The most commonly reported family or household members reported to use cannabis were siblings (60%, n=80), followed by housemates (32%, n=42), parents (29%, n=39) and partners (19%, n=25). There were significant differences between sites, with a greater proportion of Melbourne and Armidale participants reporting that a family or household member used cannabis; however, this significant difference could be a reflection of differences in living arrangements between sites, with a greater proportion of Perth participants living in the family home with parents and a greater proportion of Melbourne and Armidale participants living in private rental accommodation with friends or housemates.

**Table 7: Social elements of cannabis use (%)**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Who cannabis is usually used with*** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | |
| Alone | 54 | 63 | 53 | 57 | 0.435 |
| Friends | 93 | 98 | 95 | 95 | 0.349 |
| Partner | 31 | 36 | 23 | 32 | 0.310 |
| Sibling | 15 | 19 | 8 | 15 | 0.266 |
| Friends of friends | 24 | 28 | 18 | 24 | 0.480 |
| Strangers | 19 | 20 | 15 | 19 | 0.799 |
| Other family members | 4 | 11 | 10 | 8 | 0.189 |
| Other | 5 | 15 | 3 | 9 | 0.024 |
| **Preferred situation to use cannabis**** | **(n=67)** | **(n=59)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=162)** | |
| Alone | 87 | 76 | 67 | 78 | |
| With friends | 10 | 19 | 11 | 14 | |
| Alone or with friends | 3 | 7 | 19 | 8 | |
| With partner | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **Proportion of friends who use cannabis** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.081#** |
| All | 9 | 11 | 5 | 9 | |
| Most | 46 | 53 | 33 | 46 | |
| About half | 33 | 30 | 48 | 35 | |
| A few | 11 | 6 | 15 | 10 | |
| None | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Is using cannabis an important part of social life** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.207** |
| Yes | 54 | 53 | 38 | 50 | |
| No | 46 | 48 | 63 | 50 | |

| How using cannabis is important in social life** | (n=40) | (n=41) | (n=15) | (n=96) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not essential | 18 | 22 | 0 | 17 | |
| Way of socialising | 45 | 24 | 0 | 29 | |
| Social habit | 15 | 17 | 60 | 23 | |
| Social lubricant | 18 | 12 | 7 | 14 | |
| Enhances interaction | 10 | 15 | 20 | 14 | |
| Bonds/brings together | 43 | 27 | 47 | 37 | |
| Replacement for alcohol | 8 | 17 | 13 | 13 | |
| Alleviates social anxiety | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | |
| Reason for catching up | 20 | 15 | 7 | 16 | |
| Alleviates boredom | 13 | 7 | 7 | 9 | |
| Enjoy counter culture/belonging | 5 | 5 | 7 | 5 | |
| **Do other members of household or family use cannabis?** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.006** |
| Yes | 54 | 78 | 70 | 67 | |
| No | 46 | 23 | 30 | 33 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

**These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses; therefore, statistical significance testing was not appropriate

# Due to small numbers the significance statistic was calculated based on collapsed categories

## 4.6 Money spent on cannabis

Financial factors surrounding participants' use of cannabis were considered, including how much they spent on cannabis for personal use in a typical week and how they got the money to fund their cannabis use. Table 8 presents a breakdown of findings related to funding cannabis use.

### *4.6.1 Weekly spending on cannabis*

#### CAVEAT

Questions which required participants to provide amounts of cannabis were often answered with measurements other than grams. Typical amounts of cannabis reported included sticks (see glossary), 25 bags and 50 bags. To analyse this data, responses were standardised into grams based on examination of relevant recent Australian surveys—specifically the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) and Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS; Fetherston & Lenton 2014; Grigg & Lenton 2014)—and discussions on relevant internet drug forums such as OzStoners.com. While there appeared to be some variation in market rates both between and within sites, the range appeared to be consistent between sites; therefore, a single set of weights was used for standardisation across sites. Thus a stick equals one gram, a 25 bag equals two grams and a 50 bag equals three grams.

Across the sample, the average amount spent on cannabis per week for personal use was $50 (median=$30) for an average of five grams (median=2.75 grams). There appeared to be significant differences in spending between sites, with participants in Perth and Armidale spending more per week on cannabis than those in Melbourne; however, the median amount used per week did not significantly differ.

## 4.6.2 Funding cannabis use

Participants were asked to rank how they obtained the money to buy cannabis. The majority of participants (61%, n=118) reported that the main source of funding for their cannabis use was wages, and this was followed by allowances or benefits (16%, n=30). Very few participants reported that the main way they funded their cannabis use was by selling cannabis (6%, n=11). There were a variety of other sources of funding reported (13%, n=24), the most common being 'N/A', indicating they did not pay for their cannabis—that is, that it was given to them free of charge or they grew their own. Other main funding sources reported included savings, cash work, a partner's wages, selling other drugs, the exchange of other services, an insurance payout and busking. One-third of participants (33%, n=65) reported a second source of funding for their cannabis use. When looking at the second funding source, selling cannabis appeared to be the most commonly reported (29%, n=19). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to funding use; however, when reanalysing the second funding source based on the response 'selling cannabis' and collapsing other responses into 'other', there appeared to be a significant difference between sites. As evident in Table 8, a greater proportion of Perth and Melbourne participants reported selling cannabis to fund their own cannabis use.

**Table 8: Funding cannabis use**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Median amount spent on personal use weekly ($)** | **(n=78) 41** | **(n=79) 25** | **(N=40) 45** | **(n=197) 30** | **0.020** |
| **Median value of personal use weekly ($)** | **(n=78) 50** | **(n=79) 25** | **(N=40) 50** | **(n=197) 35** | **0.008** |
| **Median amount for personal use weekly (grams)** | **(n=72) 2.5** | **(n=77) 2.25** | **(n=39) 3.5** | **(N=n=188) 2.75** | **0.002** |
| **How do you get the money to buy cannabis—main source (%)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.360** |
| Wages | 66 | 62 | 47 | 61 | |
| Allowance/benefit | 10 | 14 | 29 | 16 | |
| Parental allowance | 6 | 4 | 8 | 6 | |
| Selling cannabis | 6 | 5 | 5 | 6 | |
| Other | 11 | 14 | 11 | 12 | |
| **How do you get the money to buy cannabis—second source (%)** | **(n=24)** | **(n=28)** | **(n=13)** | **(n=65)** | **0.247** |
| Selling cannabis | 46 | 29 | 0 | 29 | |
| Wages | 17 | 25 | 23 | 22 | |
| Allowance/benefit | 13 | 21 | 31 | 20 | |
| Cash work | 9 | 7 | 15 | 9 | |
| Savings | 13 | 4 | 8 | 7 | |
| Other | 4 | 14 | 23 | 12 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100 percent

## 4.7 Other drug use

Participants were asked about their use of drugs other than cannabis and alcohol including lifetime other drug use, recent other drug use, last occasion of other drug use and frequency of other drug use. Findings related to other drug use are presented in Table 9 and Table 10.

### *4.7.1 Lifetime other drug use*

Almost the entire sample (95%, n=189) reported lifetime use of other drugs. As evident in Table 9, there were high rates of lifetime use across a range of different drugs for all sites. The most commonly reported other drug used was ecstasy or MDMA (92%, n=174), followed by LSD (79%, n=150) and magic mushrooms (77%, n=147). Other drugs commonly reported included speed (72%, n=138), pharmaceutical stimulants (67%, n=128), and cocaine (61%, n=115). A range of new psychoactive substances (NPS) were also reported, the most common being synthetic cannabis (64%, n=122), followed by DMT (41%, N=77) and 2C-x family drugs (16%, n=30).

Some significant differences were found between sites in relation to lifetime use of other drugs, with Melbourne typically having higher rates of use across a range of drugs.

**Table 9: Lifetime drug use (%)**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Used other drugs illicitly** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.239** |
| Yes | 92 | 99 | 93 | 95 | |
| No | 8 | 1 | 7 | 5 | |
| **Drugs used ever*** | **(n=73)** | **(n=79)** | **(n=38)** | **(n=190)** | |
| Solvents | 11 | 6 | 13 | 10 | 0.488 |
| Ecstasy/MDMA | 88 | 98 | 87 | 92 | 0.006 |
| Speed | 56 | 87 | 74 | 73 | 0.000 |
| Crystal meth | 48 | 44 | 26 | 42 | 0.096 |
| Cocaine | 60 | 63 | 55 | 61 | 0.489 |
| GHB | 11 | 18 | 16 | 15 | 0.385 |
| Ketamine | 27 | 65 | 24 | 42 | 0.000 |
| LSD | 74 | 86 | 74 | 79 | 0.027 |
| Magic mushrooms | 67 | 95 | 61 | 77 | 0.000 |
| Amyl nitrate/poppers | 26 | 63 | 37 | 44 | 0.000 |
| Benzodiazepines | 45 | 63 | 26 | 49 | 0.000 |
| Nitrous oxide/nangs | 43 | 70 | 32 | 52 | 0.000 |
| Heroin | 14 | 9 | 18 | 13 | 0.374 |
| Methadone | 7 | 8 | 13 | 8 | 0.482 |
| Buprenorphine | 7 | 3 | 11 | 6 | 0.222 |
| Other opioids | 26 | 47 | 32 | 36 | 0.009 |
| Pharmaceutical stimulants | 75 | 66 | 55 | 67 | 0.211 |
| Synthetic cannabis | 78 | 53 | 61 | 64 | 0.046 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DMT | 41 | 48 | 24 | 41 | 0.029 |
| Salvia | 3 | 19 | 0 | 9 | 0.000 |
| DXM | 6 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 0.677 |
| Mephedrone | 4 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 0.255 |
| 2C-x | 12 | 19 | 16 | 16 | 0.414 |
| Peyote | 1 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 0.040 |
| Methylone | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 0.709 |
| LSA | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.220 |
| Mescaline | 3 | 14 | 5 | 8 | 0.021 |
| Other NPS | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 0.968 |

Note: Descriptions of new psychoactive substances included in this table (eg mephedrone and 2C-x) can be found in the 2014 national EDRS report (Sindicich and Burns, 2014)

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

## *4.7.2 Recent other drug use*

### Use of other drugs in the past 12 months

Almost the entire sample (90%, n=179) reported the use of other drugs in the past 12 months. There was a significant difference between sites, with a greater proportion of Melbourne participants (96%, n=77) reporting the use of other drugs in the past 12 months.

As evident in Table 10, the most commonly reported other drug used was again ecstasy or MDMA (77%, n=137), followed by LSD (53%, n=95) and magic mushrooms (51%, n=91). Other drugs that were also commonly reported included speed (44%, n=79), pharmaceutical stimulants (40%, n=71), synthetic cannabis (37%, n=67), benzodiazepines (36%, n=64) and nitrous oxide or nangs (34%, n=60).

Significant differences were found between sites in relation to the use of other drugs in the past 12 months, with Melbourne again typically having higher rates of use across a range of drugs.

### Use of other drugs in the past 3 months

The majority of the sample group (77%, n=154) reported the use of other drugs in the past three months. Again, there was a significant difference between sites, with a greater proportion of Melbourne participants (89%, n=71) reporting the use of other drugs in the past three months.

The most commonly reported other drug used was again ecstasy or MDMA (57%, n=87), followed by magic mushrooms (31%, n=47) and LSD (30%, n=46). Other drugs that were also commonly reported included pharmaceutical stimulants (29%, n=45), benzodiazepines (27%, n=42), speed (24%, n=37) and nitrous oxide or nangs (21%, n=32). Significant differences were again found between sites in relation to the use of some drugs in the past three months. As evident in Table 10, Melbourne participants again tended to have higher rates of use across a range of drugs.

| Table 10: Recent drug use (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Used other drugs in past 12 months** | **(n=69)** | **(n=77)** | **(n=33)** | **(n=179)** | **0.032** |
| Yes | 86 | 96 | 83 | 90 | |
| No | 14 | 4 | 17 | 10 | |
| **Drugs used in past 12 months*** | **(n=69)** | **(n=77)** | **(n=33)** | **(n=179)** | |
| Solvents | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0.826 |
| Ecstasy | 62 | 91 | 73 | 77 | 0.000 |
| Speed | 25 | 62 | 42 | 44 | 0.000 |
| Crystal meth | 33 | 26 | 12 | 26 | 0.068 |
| Cocaine | 30 | 38 | 15 | 31 | 0.022 |
| GHB | 1 | 12 | 0 | 6 | 0.013 |
| Ketamine | 13 | 39 | 0 | 22 | 0.000 |
| LSD | 42 | 65 | 49 | 53 | 0.002 |
| Magic mushrooms | 39 | 66 | 39 | 51 | 0.000 |
| Amyl nitrate/poppers | 6 | 26 | 18 | 17 | 0.002 |
| Benzodiazepines | 38 | 47 | 6 | 36 | 0.000 |
| Nitrous oxide/nangs | 23 | 51 | 15 | 34 | 0.000 |
| Heroin | 7 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 0.769 |
| Methadone | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0.413 |
| Buprenorphine | 6 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 0.127 |
| Other opioids | 17 | 26 | 27 | 23 | 0.276 |
| Pharmaceutical stimulants | 46 | 40 | 24 | 40 | 0.072 |
| Synthetic cannabis | 41 | 33 | 42 | 37 | 0.859 |
| **Used other drugs in past 3 months** | **(n=69)** | **(n=77)** | **(n=33)** | **(n=179)** | **0.011** |
| Yes | 70 | 89 | 68 | 77 | |
| No | 30 | 11 | 32 | 23 | |
| **Drugs used in past 3 months*** | **(n=56)** | **(n=71)** | **(n=27)** | **(n=154)** | |
| Solvents | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.471 |
| Ecstasy | 43 | 75 | 37 | 57 | 0.000 |
| Speed | 9 | 35 | 26 | 24 | 0.045 |
| Crystal meth | 25 | 11 | 4 | 15 | 0.202 |
| Cocaine | 14 | 20 | 11 | 16 | 0.021 |
| GHB | 0 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 0.000 |
| Ketamine | 4 | 27 | 0 | 14 | 0.001 |
| LSD | 20 | 41 | 22 | 30 | 0.002 |
| Magic mushrooms | 20 | 42 | 22 | 31 | 0.124 |
| Benzodiazepines | 34 | 30 | 7 | 27 | 0.020 |
| Nitrous oxide/nangs | 14 | 31 | 7 | 21 | 0.001 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Heroin | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.102 |
| Methadone | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0.134 |
| Buprenorphine | 5 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 0.166 |
| Other opioids | 16 | 10 | 22 | 14 | 0.585 |
| Pharmaceutical stimulants | 43 | 24 | 15 | 29 | 0.044 |
| Synthetic cannabis | 21 | 14 | 19 | 18 | 0.879 |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

# 5 Obtaining cannabis

Participants were asked a range of questions related to how they gained access to cannabis including who they obtained it from, how and where transactions took place, their ease of access, what forms and quantities of cannabis they obtained and what the social elements of obtaining cannabis were.

## 5.1 Who cannabis was obtained from

Participants reported obtaining cannabis through a median of three (interquartile range=2–5) different sources. When asked to nominate all the sources they obtained cannabis from, the most commonly reported was a friend who gets it from a seller (brokered; 70%, n=140), followed closely by a friend who sells (58%, n=116) and then direct from a seller or grower (58%, n=116). For the purpose of the study, 'a friend who sells' implies the person cannabis was obtained from was primarily considered a friend rather than a supplier, whereas buying direct from a seller or grower implies a relationship primarily for the purpose of supply. It is important to note that the distinction between these two response options may not have been clear to all participants, which could have resulted in over- or under-representation in either response option. The most common 'other' responses included an exchange of services with a friend and a gift from a parent (each 2%, n=3). There were some significant differences between sites in relation to where cannabis was obtained as evident in Table 11, a greater proportion of participants from Melbourne and Armidale reported obtaining cannabis from a friend who sells or direct from the seller or grower.

Participants were also asked to rank the sources they most commonly obtained cannabis from. The three most commonly reported were: direct from a seller or grower (35%, n=70), from a friend who sells (31%, n=61) and from a friend who gets it from a seller (brokered) (21%, n=42). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to where participants most commonly obtained cannabis. Table 11 presents a complete breakdown of findings related to who cannabis was obtained from.

**Table 11: Who cannabis was obtained from (%)**

| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Median number of suppliers (Interquartile range)** | **3 (2–4)** | **4 (2–5)** | **3 (3–5)** | **3 (2–5)** | **0.033** |
| **All suppliers*** | | | | | |
| Direct from seller or grower | 46 | 65 | 68 | 58 | 0.022 |
| A friend gets it from a seller (brokered) | 61 | 75 | 78 | 70 | 0.085 |
| From a friend who sells | 53 | 74 | 68 | 64 | 0.017 |
| Grow my own | 5 | 14 | 15 | 11 | 0.014 |
| Strangers (open market) | 34 | 25 | 20 | 28 | 0.229 |
| Sibling | 3 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 0.074 |
| Other relative (eg, cousin) | 3 | 8 | 15 | 7 | 0.040 |
| I don't buy it- gift from partner | 8 | 16 | 5 | 11 | 0.088 |
| I don't buy it- gift from friend | 30 | 50 | 30 | 38 | 0.017 |
| Other | 4 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 0.769 |
| **Main supplier** | | | | | |
| Direct from seller or grower | 24 | 38 | 53 | 35 | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A friend gets it from a seller (brokered) | 28 | 15 | 18 | 21 | 0.068 |
| From a friend who sells | 33 | 35 | 20 | 31 | |
| Grow my own | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | |
| Strangers (open market) | 8 | 0 | 0 | 3 | |
| Sibling | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | |
| Other relative (eg, cousin) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| I don't buy it- gift from partner | 1 | 3 | 0 | 2 | |
| I don't buy it- gift from friend | 4 | 4 | 8 | 5 | |
| Other | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

### 5.1.1 First contact with main cannabis supplier

Participants were asked to explain how they first came in contact with the main person they obtained cannabis from, including whether friendship, supply or another reason for contact came first. An exploration of open-ended responses found that approximately three-fifths (58%, n=116) reported they were friends before cannabis supply commenced and approximately two-fifths (39%, n=78) reported that they came in contact for the purpose of cannabis supply. A small proportion (3%, n=6) reported an alternative reason for first contact; for example, some participants reported that they primarily obtained cannabis through a family member, some obtained it through online marketplaces such as Silk Road, and others reported they did not have a supplier as they grew their own cannabis. It is important to note that this question did not ask about the nature of the participant's relationship with their supplier at the time of the interview—that is, whether a friendship had developed or whether it remained strictly a supply relationship; rather, it focused on how they first came in contact.

When comparing the participants' relationship with their main supplier with how they first came into contact (ie, whether they were already friends or first came in contact for supply), results were unsurprising. For those who obtained direct from a seller, the majority (73%, n=51) first came in contact with them for the purpose of supply; for those who obtained cannabis from a friend who got it from a seller (brokered supply), the majority (88%, n=37) were friends before supply; and for those who obtained from a friend who sold cannabis, the majority (75%, n=56) were, again, friends before supply. Overall this suggests that, for about three quarters or more of the cases, those main suppliers who were currently viewed as friends were initially viewed as friends, and those who were currently viewed as dealers were initially viewed as dealers.

Further exploration of open-ended responses found that the three most commonly reported ways participants first came in contact with their main supplier could be broadly recoded into the following categories: via their social network or friends of friends (45%, n=89), at school (16%, n=32), and via an intermediary link-up with a dealer through a friend (12%, n=24). To a lesser extent, participants spoke of coming into contact with their supplier by meeting at a club, gig or event (9%, n=17), at work (8%, n=15), by word of mouth (5%, n=10) and at uni or TAFE (3%, n=5). There were also a small amount of 'other' responses, including 'N/A', indicating the question was not applicable because the user grew their own cannabis, obtained it online or obtained it from family. A breakdown of findings related to first contact with suppliers is presented in Table 12.

Comparing the initial relationship with the main supplier —that is, whether they were friend or supplier—with how the user first came into contact with them revealed that, of those who were friends first, the most common first contact was though their social network or friends of friends (49%, n=57), followed by at school (27%, n=31), at work (10%, n=12), out at a club, gig or event (10%, n=11), and at uni or TAFE (3%, n=1). Of those whose relationship was initially one of supply, the most common first contact was also though their social network or a friend of a friend (41%, n=32); however, this was followed by a link-up through an intermediary (31%, n=24), through word of mouth (13%, n=10), at a meeting out at a club, gig or event (8%, n=6) and at work (2%, n=3).

| Table 12: First contact with main cannabis supplier (%) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) |
| **First relationship type*** | | | | |
| Friends first | 58 | 58 | 60 | 58 |
| Supply first | 41 | 38 | 38 | 39 |
| Family | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| **How first came into contact*** | | | | |
| Social network/friends of friends | 43 | 48 | 43 | 45 |
| Intermediary link up | 6 | 16 | 15 | 12 |
| School | 20 | 10 | 20 | 16 |
| Met out | 5 | 11 | 10 | 9 |
| Work | 15 | 3 | 3 | 8 |
| Word of mouth | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Uni/TAFE | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Other | 3 | 6 | 3 | 4 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses; therefore, statistical significance testing was not appropriate

## *5.1.2 Relationship with main cannabis supplier*

Participants reported obtaining cannabis from their main supplier for a median of 52 weeks, or one year. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to how long participants had been obtaining cannabis from their supplier.

Participants were asked to explain how well they knew their main cannabis supplier, including what the nature of their relationship was. An exploration of open-ended responses revealed that the majority of participants (65%, n=129) reported they were either close friends (34%, n=66) or friends (32%, n=63) with their main supplier. Less than one-quarter of the sample (18%, n=36) reported that their relationship with their main supplier was strictly business. Further exploration of the responses found that one-quarter of the sample (25%, n=50) reported that, since obtaining cannabis from their supplier, a friendship had either evolved or strengthened.

| Table 13: Relationship to main cannabis supplier (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Median number of weeks of supply** | **(N=80) 52** | **(N=80) 52** | **(N=40) 52** | **(N=200) 52** | **0.479** |
| **(Interquartile range)** | **(24–130)** | **(22–104)** | **(24–104)** | **(24–104)** | |
| **Nature of relationship*** | **(N=80)** | **(n=79)** | **(N=40)** | **(n=199)** | |
| Friends | 30 | 30 | 40 | 32 | |
| Close friends | 41 | 27 | 33 | 34 | |
| NA | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | |
| Family | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| Acquaintance | 10 | 25 | 3 | 15 | |
| Strictly business | 18 | 17 | 23 | 18 | |

*These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses; therefore, statistical significance testing was not appropriate

## *5.1.3 Description of main cannabis supplier*

The median age of participants' main cannabis supplier was 25 years (interquartile range=21–28 years). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the age of suppliers.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the age of the participant and the age of the supplier. There was a positive correlation between the two variables, r=0.248, n=200, *p*=0.002, indicating that increases in participant age were correlated with increases in supplier age. Overall, the median age difference between participants and their main supplier was two years. As evident in Table 14, suppliers tended to be older than participants; however, this did not appear to be the case for older participants (eg 29 and 30 year olds). It is, however, important to note that there were small sample sizes for ages 24–30 years old; these findings should therefore be interpreted with caution.

| Table 14: Age of participant and average age of main supplier | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age of participant | Median age of main supplier | Median difference in age | n |
| 18 | 21 | 3 | 19 |
| 19 | 24 | 4.5 | 20 |
| 20 | 24 | 3.5 | 30 |
| 21 | 23 | 2 | 14 |
| 22 | 24 | 2 | 14 |
| 23 | 23 | 0 | 11 |
| 24 | 26 | 2 | 9 |
| 25 | 25 | 0 | 8 |
| 26 | 29 | 2.5 | 8 |
| 27 | 27 | 0 | 6 |
| 28 | 29 | 1 | 9 |
| 29 | 26 | -3 | 4 |
| 30 | 28 | -2 | 7 |

Note: Only those participants who were able to provide their supplier's exact age, rather than an estimated age range, were included in the sample

Participants were asked to describe their main supplier in terms of cannabis supply—for example, who they supplied to, why they supplied and what they gained from supplying. An exploration of open-ended responses found that, of those who commented on who they supply to (72%, n=144), responses could be recoded into the following three categories: they sold only to friends (53%, n=76), they sold to friends and friends of friends (31%, n=45) and they sold to anyone willing (16%, n=23). For those who commented on why their supplier supplied (66%, n=132), the responses could be recoded as: they sold to make profit (52%, n=69), they sold to cover some or all of their own use (30%, n=40) and they only brokered supply (17%, n=23). When comparing who their supplier supplied cannabis to with why they supplied, it was found that those who sold to friends only were most commonly selling to cover their own use (41%, n=22), followed closely by brokering supply only (37%, n=20) and then by selling for profit (22%, n=12). Those who sold to friends and friends of friends were most commonly reported to be selling for profit (63%, n=17), followed by brokering only (37%, n=10). Unsurprisingly, those who sold to anyone willing were most commonly reported to be selling for profit (90%, n=17), followed by brokering only (11%, n=2). It is important to note that, while participants described their supplier to the best of their knowledge, they may not have been completely aware of the exact nature of the supplier's behaviours or level of involvement in the market.

Less than one-third of the sample (29%, n=57) commented on what type of profit their main supplier made and the majority of these participants (74%, n=42) were from the Perth site. An exploration of responses found that they could be recoded as covering some or all of their own use (35%, n=20), followed closely by making a small profit (33%, n=19) and then making a significant profit (32%, n=18).

The majority of the sample (73%, n=145) reported that their main cannabis supplier did not grow their own cannabis. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to whether the main supplier grew their own cannabis.

| Table 15: Description of main cannabis supplier (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Median age** | **(N=80) 25** | **(N=80) 25** | **(N=40) 26** | **(N=200) 25** | **0.428** |
| **(Interquartile range)** | **(21–28)** | **(22–28)** | **(22–30)** | **(21–28)** | |
| **Who they supply to*** | **(n=68)** | **(n=55)** | **(n=21)** | **(n=144)** | |
| Sells only to friends | 53 | 38 | 91 | 53 | |
| Sells to friends and friends of friends | 25 | 49 | 10 | 31 | |
| Sells to anyone | 24 | 13 | 0 | 16 | |
| **Why they supply*** | **(n=62)** | **(n=38)** | **(n=32)** | **(n=132)** | |
| Only brokers | 19 | 8 | 25 | 17 | |
| Sells to cover own use | 36 | 29 | 22 | 30 | |
| Sells to make profit | 45 | 63 | 53 | 52 | |
| **Supplier's profit*** | **(n=42)** | **(n=9)** | **(n=6)** | **(n=57)** | |
| Covers some or all of use | 43 | 22 | 0 | 35 | |
| Makes small profit | 19 | 78 | 67 | 33 | |
| Makes significant profit | 38 | 0 | 33 | 32 | |
| **Grows cannabis** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.561** |
| Yes | 13 | 18 | 13 | 15 | |
| No | 79 | 68 | 70 | 73 | |
| Don't know | 9 | 15 | 18 | 13 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses; therefore, statistical significance testing was not appropriate

## *5.1.4 Main cannabis supplier and other drugs*

Approximately two-fifths of the sample (42%, n=84) reported that their main cannabis supplier also sold or brokered access to other drugs. There was, however, a significant difference in this regard between sites, with a greater proportion of participants from Melbourne reporting that their main supplier also sold or brokered access to other drugs. The three most commonly reported other drugs brokered or sold were ecstasy or MDMA (58%, n=49), LSD (35%, n=29) and magic mushrooms (29%, n=24). This finding is consistent with findings related to the other drugs most commonly reported used (see Table 10). There were some significant differences between sites in relation to the other types of drugs available from main cannabis suppliers.

To gain a greater understanding of the suppliers' involvement with other drugs, participants were also asked whether their main cannabis supplier had offered to supply them with other drugs and whether they had asked to be supplied with other drugs. The majority (78%, n=66) reported that their supplier had offered them other drugs and at least half (47%, n=39) reported that they had asked their supplier for other drugs. It is important to note that these questions did not specify a time scale—that is, whether they had ever bought other drugs from them or whether they had bought other drugs from them last time; it is therefore possible there was some ambiguity in the way the question was asked and interpreted. Given the limitations of these questions, no further analyses were conducted, and findings should be interpreted with caution. A complete breakdown of these findings is presented in Table 16.

| Table 16: Cannabis supplier and other drugs (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Sells and brokers access to other drugs** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | |
| Yes | 36 | 55 | 28 | 42 | 0.043 |
| No | 60 | 39 | 65 | 53 | |
| Don't know | 4 | 6 | 8 | 6 | |
| **Other drugs available*** | **(n=29)** | **(n=44)** | **(n=11)** | **(n=84)** | |
| Solvents | 7 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 0.171 |
| Ecstasy/MDMA | 62 | 50 | 82 | 58 | 0.141 |
| Speed | 10 | 18 | 46 | 19 | 0.040 |
| Crystal meth | 28 | 11 | 0 | 16 | 0.054 |
| Cocaine | 21 | 14 | 9 | 16 | 0.589 |
| GHB | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.383 |
| Ketamine | 14 | 7 | 0 | 8 | 0.322 |
| LSD | 38 | 34 | 27 | 35 | 0.815 |
| Magic mushrooms | 38 | 25 | 18 | 29 | 0.350 |
| Amyl/poppers | 3 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 0.188 |
| Benzodiazepines | 7 | 16 | 9 | 12 | 0.484 |
| Nitrous oxide | 3 | 0 | 18 | 4 | 0.015 |
| Heroin | 10 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 0.396 |
| Methadone | 3 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 0.552 |
| Buprenorphine | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.383 |
| Other opioids | 7 | 0 | 18 | 5 | 0.032 |
| Pharmaceutical stimulants | 10 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 0.863 |
| Synthetic cannabis | 7 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 0.171 |
| Other | 28 | 9 | 9 | 16 | 0.084 |
| **Offered to supply other drugs** | **(n=29)** | **(n=44)** | **(n=11)** | **(n=84)** | |
| Yes, but did not buy | 52 | 39 | 64 | 46 | 0.258 |
| Yes, and I did buy | 14 | 30 | 27 | 24 | 0.290 |
| No, did not offer | 14 | 28 | 9 | 20 | 0.230 |
| Yes, no other information** | 21 | 2 | 0 | 8 | 0.012 |
| **Asked to supply other drugs** | **(n=29)** | **(n=44)** | **(n=11)** | **(n=84)** | |
| Yes, and I did buy them | 45 | 25 | 64 | 37 | 0.033 |
| Yes, but they could not get them for me | 3 | 16 | 0 | 10 | 0.106 |
| No, I did not ask | 28 | 39 | 36 | 35 | 0.618 |
| Not asked** | 24 | 18 | 0 | 18 | 0.204 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

**Earlier version of the questionnaire

## 5.1.5 Qualitative responses for most recent cannabis supplier

Participants were asked to describe in their own words what happened the last time they scored or obtained cannabis including details about who they obtained it from—for example, what their current relationship was and how they first came into contact.

### Most recent cannabis supplier

An exploration of qualitative data found that approximately three-quarters of the sample (74%) obtained cannabis from someone within their social network the last time they obtained it (eg a friend or acquaintance); around one-quarter (24%) obtained it from outside their social network (eg from a dealer or an open house) and a small number (2%) had grown their own cannabis. Of those who obtained it from within their social network, approximately three-quarters (78%) obtained it through a friend, followed by through a friend of a friend (16%); small numbers obtained it from family members, acquaintances or partners. Further exploration found that, of those who obtained cannabis from friends, approximately one-third (35%) described a situation where they obtained it from a friend who sold, and a similar proportion (30%) obtained it from a friend who brokered cannabis to them. Participants also described situations where friends gave cannabis away for free (8%) or exchanged cannabis for other goods and services (5%). Of those who obtained it from outside their social network, the vast majority (78%) obtained cannabis from a dealer, and smaller proportions from an open house (13%) or a stranger (9%). For the purpose of the analysis, a dealer was defined as a person who was known to sell cannabis, whereas a stranger was someone the participant had obtained cannabis from but knew nothing about—that is, they may not have been a regular cannabis supplier. A typical example of obtaining cannabis from a stranger involved opportunistic encounters with people at music festivals and events.

There appeared to be some differences between sites in relation to most recent cannabis suppliers, with Perth participants more likely to obtain it from a friend who brokered to them, whereas Melbourne participants were more likely to obtain it from a friend who sold to them. The phenomenon of the open house was almost exclusively reported by Perth participants (see 5.2.3, *Qualitative accounts of last time cannabis was obtained*, for detailed descriptions of open houses). While there were only a small number who reported obtaining cannabis from an open house last time they obtained it, approximately two-fifths (38%) of Perth participants discussed open houses as a backup method, or last resort, of obtaining cannabis when they were unable to source through their preferred means. In addition, open houses appeared to be common knowledge among cannabis users in Perth. In Melbourne and Armidale, there were a few descriptions of obtaining cannabis from houses which appeared to loosely fit the description of an open house; however, participants did not describe them as open houses, indicating that they are unlikely to be a common or well-known in those locations.

### First contact with most recent cannabis supplier

Further exploration of qualitative data found that even where participants described their supplier as a friend, they may have first come into contact for the purpose of supply rather than for social purposes. Consistent with the findings in Table 12, *First contact with main supplier*, approximately three-fifths (58%) reported being friends before cannabis supply commenced and two-fifths (42%) reported that a friendship evolved from the supply relationship.

#### *Distinguishing whether friendship or supply came first*

Interestingly, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish whether friendship or supply came first; these often occurred simultaneously as the parties learned of their shared interests. This meant that the line between friendship and supply was sometimes blurred. This transcript provides an example:

> I think it came at the same time because my friend that introduced me to that friend was getting it through him. So we met him and then—just hit it off straight away because we're both interested in the same stuff

and so we're always just talking shit about the same kind of—like film aspects and performing aspects and creative stuff. So I'd say that it was a combination of the two. I don't know if I'd be able to say that we'd be as close friends if we didn't have this thing in common, which is cannabis, I guess. [P37, female, 21yrs]

*What is your relationship to them?*

Well mostly, they are friends of friends, who I've become friends with through them. They just happen to sell weed as well. Yeah.

*Okay. So they were friends before the supply relationship?*

Kind of at the same—because it's like—there's one person and every Friday, for some reason, he always parties a lot. He also sells weed. So I would go to the party and I'd be like, oh yeah, I need to buy weed, and they're like, oh yeah. The guy who's having the party, he sells weed. I went, oh cool. It was really convenient.

*…Anything else you'd like to tell us about how you obtain?*

I like some of my dealers, I've actually become friends with them, through buying off them. Some people—I've got one friend and his room is in a garage at the side of his house. You can just go there whenever and he's like a really, really nice person. You can buy off him and he has a scale set up next to his bed. He'll weigh it out and put it in a bag for you. You can chop up there and have a few cones there, if you want, and then—he's usually watching *Family Guy* or some show and his other friends are there. He's really nice. [P58, female, 18yrs]

### *Friends before supply*

The following are excerpts from the interviews of those who described having a friendship before supply commenced:

Well I went to school with him so I've known him for years. He's a tradie, he's about 23 years old and he started off as well just using a bit and then met other people who offered him the opportunity to make a bit more money and so he took up on it and he's been selling it for probably two years. [A03, female, 20yrs]

We went to high school together and we're like pretty close friends. We used to smoke a lot together. She is way more into weed than I am and she just buys bigger amounts than I do now. Yeah. [P58, female, 18yrs]

Friendship came first, yeah. I've known him since I started high school, which would have been year 8 so 2008 and yeah the year he started dealing on the regular in 2011 so I'd known him for all that time and he always gave me good sized bags and that so I just bought and made him my main dealer because he's actually really nice and reliable. [P81, male, 18yrs]

We became friends first when we were around 15 or something, and we were in a big friendship group and he was selling weed then and occasionally Ritalin and some other prescription pills. They're his prescription pills, he's got ADD. I don't know. He finished high school. I don't think he's been studying since, but he's been working. He's a nice guy, he doesn't like violence and the only reason that he started dealing again is because it's really nice weed. [M39, female, 19yrs]

The individual that I dealt with on the last occasion I've known for approximately four or five years. I met him in a social setting without the presence of any marijuana. But shortly, you know, the topics of conversation steer into certain areas and you realise that the other individual may be interested in similar things. Of course, you choose a private setting and ask him whether he can help you out in a business type way, you know, and provide you with marijuana and things like that.

Yeah, so rarely do I ever go and seek someone for the purpose of obtaining marijuana directly. I can't say I haven't done it in the past when I have wanted it and have had no friends available, but it's a very rare

thing to actually approach someone for that purpose. It usually comes, to me at least, through friends and that happens to be something they also do, a shared interest, if you like. [P82, male, 24yrs]

### *Friendship evolved from supply*

The following are excerpts from the responses of those who described a friendship evolving from a supply relationship:

I met him through a friend of mine. I met him for the purposes of buying dope, but we've actually become good friends outside of our business relationship. Yeah, because at first it was just a business kind of thing. You just go in, buy your dope, and get out. But we have la lot of stuff in common outside of smoking pot, like favourite movies, favourite music or favourite video games. It became more of an actual friendship than a business relationship. [P07, female, 23yrs]

He was just a friend of a friend and then we just met him out one night at a party and we started talking to him and he mentioned the fact that he does occasionally sell weed and then over time we just got to know him better and better and he has just become like a close friend but a drug dealer at the same time. [P57, male, 18yrs]

He started off as a friend's dealer, who I met because I needed a new hook-up after my old dealer got out of the game. Yeah, over time, we just became friends from sitting around and chatting, which is always a bit nicer than not being friends with your dealer. [M75, female, 22yrs]

I actually didn't know him before I bought weed off him. Because of that just from chance—I'm a pretty chatty person so every time I saw him I'd just have a chat. Now I just enjoy it. If I do go buy any off him I will stay and have a joint with him or something. So I guess we smoke together as well. [M52, female, 19yrs]

## Descriptions of suppliers

Participants were asked to provide more information about their most recent supplier without providing any personal or identifying details.

### *Friends who gave cannabis away*

Descriptions of friends who gave cannabis away most commonly involved friends who grew their own cannabis with the intention of being able to share or supply it to their friends for free. Participants reported that friends would sometimes give them a small amount of cannabis when they (the participant) had run out, to keep them going until they were able to source it again themselves. It was rare for large amounts of cannabis to be given away by friends.

The following are excerpts from participants' descriptions of friends who gave cannabis away:

The last time I obtained cannabis, I was given it by a friend. He had a large amount and he told me that I could just have some. So he gave me about an ounce. [A26, male, 26yrs]

A friend of mine had been growing it in his house and he had more than he needed and I think part of the reason to grow it was to share the wealth and that's how I got it…They're a normal workaday person who happens to like smoking cannabis and decided to give it a go or I think has done it several times in their life and this just happened to be one attempt…They're not a dealer or a propagator. Just for himself and his friends. [M02, male, 26yrs]

So people who know me know that that will bring me happiness and it is that kind of thing. If you've got it, you share it. So it's not like I'm ever fiending, but when people—the people I know, when they've got some, 'say here man have a bud, take it home with you'. That's how it sort of comes to me. People don't give me a pound or whatever, they give me a couple—a little bud for a couple of joints or something. That seems to be an ongoing thing that I've had in my life for as long as I've been smoking. [M36, male, 30yrs]

Well like he does like gardening and permaculture stuff and things like that already and I know that he'd just been growing some in his back yard and this is the season where it's all been budding. So that's how I like assumed and someone mentioned it to me, that he had a bit and he was just giving it away to his friends. [M26, female, 22yrs]

### *Friends who brokered*

The most common descriptions of friends who brokered cannabis involved friends who would pick up extra when obtaining their own supply, friends who were heavy smokers who bought in bulk and were willing to broker small amounts, and friends who had access to cannabis when their friends did not, and therefore took on the role of accessing it for everyone.

The following are excerpts from participants' descriptions of friends who brokered cannabis:

Well my friend—he knows the people, I don't really deal in the buying side of things, but he knows the people, so he says how much we want to get, asks for the money and we just give it to him. Yeah he buys it and he does it all.

*Without giving any personal details, can you tell us more about this mate that gets it for you?*

Yeah he's probably the heaviest smoker of the lot of us, so he knows how to—I don't really know how do that side of things, but he does. So it's handy having someone like him around, just because if we want to then it's always accessible through him. I don't know how to describe it, but I think he's smoked for quite a few years, whereas I've only really started since I've been with him this year, yeah.

*Yep. Would you say he's easy to get access to if you want cannabis?*

Yeah, definitely. He's one of my best friends, so yeah. I'm with him every day, so yeah.

*Yep. You mentioned that it's usually a few of you, is it always other people are involved?*

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's usually our close group of friends, but there are sometimes other people who this guy makes a bit of money from because other people in college and stuff want some or whatever, so they go to this guy. Whereas we, because we're all mates, we just put in together and yeah, it just works out like that, just between our close group. [A25, male, 20yrs].

Oh, well my friend and I will be talking and then my friend will say oh, I have some and I'll either say, can I buy some off you? Or they just give it to me and vice versa, yeah.

*Okay, so this—how do they work out prices if they're going to sell some to you from their stash?*

Usually they'll just sell it to me for whatever they bought it for, or give it to me for free, or just like roughly work it out like oh, that cost me $20.00, that's half of it, or it looks like half, just make it 10. So there's no science to it or anything [laughs]. [M34, male, 20yrs]

He buys for his own use and every now and again we find ourselves out, can't get any and then he helps us out. He's not—he doesn't sell at all or to a wide range of people.

*So he sort of just helps out his friends?*

Totally, yeah. [M40, female, 21yrs]

I bought through a friend, who's a far more frequent and heavy user than myself, a colleague from work. I gave him—I only bought a half ounce. I gave him $180. He gave me the weed the next week. [P08, male, 20yrs]

He's a long-time friend from high school days. We didn't go to the same high school, but we lived in the same area. Yeah, no he's just always been—he seems—even just to look at him you go, oh scum rat, but he's the kindest man I've ever really known. He's always taken care of me. He was always a few years above me and especially when I was coming out and stuff like that he'd always defend me. So he was a really kind of cool guy. So yeah, we still know each other and hang out.

*Okay, so does he sort of charge you what the supplier would charge him? Or do you think he charges you more?*

No, not really, I think it's about the same. For them to drive there and stuff like that, I've got to expect to chuck in $10 for fuel or whatever. So that's understandable. So usually it's around $80, but to get it directly from the dealer is $70. But again he lives in the middle of nowhere. So to get there it's worth the $10. [M62, male, 23yrs]

### *Friends who sold*

A variety of descriptions were given of friends who sold, ranging from friends who sold to cover some or all of their own supply (ie so they could smoke for free), friends who sold to make some extra cash, and friends who sold cannabis as their full-time job (ie it was their main form of income). It was common for participants to describe friends who bought in large amounts, such as ounces, so they could act as the source of cannabis for their close group of friends or people within their social network. It appeared to be common for someone to take on the role of supplier to fill a demand within their friendship group or network.

The following are excerpts from participants' descriptions of friends who sold cannabis:

Pretty much how our little circle works is he'll get the big supply, I guess, or an ounce or whatever, and then he breaks it up into little 50s. So he pretty much just gets to smoke heaps of free weed. We buy all our weed off him and he smokes heaps of free weed. So when we go round there, normally we'll all sit around and have a cone or whatever and just chill out. The amount of free weed that he gets, there's no way he's going to smoke it all by himself, so we all just go round there, hang out, whatever. [P37, female, 28yrs]

He's straight up…He's a fairly regular user as well, he's getting larger amounts—so say a pound or two pounds—and he's selling it at $350. I don't know, but from what I've experienced in people buying pounds and stuff in the past—he would be making about $20 or $30 on each ounce. So that's not a massive mark-up considering the size of what he's doing. If you were to sell any other drug you'd have a much smaller amount and have a much higher profit margin. He does it to help and mainly to supply his need as well. I don't know his source, but it's a friend of his, obviously, so he's helping out two sides. I'd say he's a middle-man. [P23, male, 19yrs]

He's my age. He was a university student. He's now joining the army. But yeah just a lot like me, just an easy going guy. He wasn't selling at the time to make money, he was selling just because he had a habit as well and he would buy an ounce or he'd buy two or three ounces at a time for I think it was like $700 or $650. He would make the money back but that was all he was making back and he would keep a half for himself. So again he wasn't trying to make money, it was just an easy option for him to always have weed on hand. [A22, male, 22yrs]

He smokes a lot, so he smokes maybe seven to eight joints a day. I think he started selling to fund his own habit. I'm not sure to what extent he's a dealer, but I know that he always has a lot on him. He doesn't really talk about it in that sense, but he's always asked if I want anything and I know a few other people from work have bought from him as well. I know that he's made money before on nights out from dealing. I don't know to what extent it happens, I think it's him and his mates do it- I know he smokes a lot. Originally I thought he buys in bulk to get it cheaper for himself and then sells it at street price to fund his own habit, but I'm not sure if that is the case or not. I still think it's more of a sells to people he knows, not like it's his job because he's my manager so he earns good money anyway. I think it's more to fund his own habit, not for his main income. [M80, female, 26yrs]

We're very good friends, so it's very relaxed. He knows I'm good for it, so it's fine...

They're a very good friend of mine. I've known them for many years. Smoking cannabis together is something we've always done, when we hang out—as well as hanging out without it, obviously. We're very, very close. We consider ourselves to be practically family.

*Okay. Is he easy to access, in terms of obtaining cannabis from him?*

Yeah. He either has plants that he has grown himself or has a contact. I know that, amongst our circle of friends, I'm not the only person who he supplies to. He's our kind of little mini-hub for a lot of us. [M81, female, 26yrs]

Yeah, he's just a mate we met through high school—or in high school. We all sort of started hanging out then, a big group of us, like close mates I usually hang out with, and I've just been friends with him ever since. He started doing a little bit on the side, just I think to make some extra cash, so it's kind of convenient at the same time that we get some. But we always try and make sure we don't think of him as like a dealer, he's always just our really close mate. [M60, male, 21yrs]

I think he said something like I might be getting some ounces soon, I'll have bags and stuff so just keep me up and whatever. So I think he ended up getting ounces from another family member or something like that. He'd bring them down. He'd get them and then divide them up into however many bags it takes to pay for the ounce and then just smoke the rest, like smoke the profits sort of thing.

*So he'd just be covering a bit of his own use sort of thing?*

Yeah, all of his own use. If you flog an ounce in a day, you've got that much left, that's like a week's worth.

*So he'd be making a profit to cover his own use?*

He would be he didn't sell more than he had to. He's the type of guy that if he had heaps he'd sell you some, but then if you hung out afterwards, there's no way that he'd let you smoke some of the weed that he just sold you, he'd chop his own for you. So he was very generous and an inviting host; that you would expect. If you go to a mate's house and they give you a beer, it's the same sort of thing. Generous and definitely not for profit, just for smoke, like free smoke so you don't have to pay to smoke weed.

*Anything else you'd like to add?*

That these people aren't criminals. I mean, I don't know, it depends how you define crime. Obviously tax free dollars is a pain or a thorn in any government's side, even though the level that we're at isn't on the scale that is affecting anything...But a couple of ranks up there are the big growths. We just enjoy smoking it really and we just try and minimise the cost because everyone's pretty broke. Most of my friends are either students or apprenticeships. There are a few that have full time work and it's not an issue for them, but for most of us we have to try and el-cheapo.

*So you're really at the very bottom of the supply chain?*

Fully, there's no money being made. There's no profit…People would grow ounces and ounces and ounces and ounces to flog them off and we just smoke it. They're not smoking it, they're selling it. We're the users. [P56, male, 22yrs]

She only sells cannabis to my knowledge, yes…I'm pretty sure that it's only people are vouched for. I'm not positive of that. She's not on a street corner or anything. She's quite professional, yes, not really taking any risks…she's not being silly. She's not flashing it about as a drug dealer or anything, probably a little bit. Yes, she's a professional. She sells weed. [M28, male, 30yrs]

## *Friends of friends*

The following are excerpts from participants' descriptions of friends of friends who supplied cannabis:

Probably late twenties because he studies, he's doing—he's a really smart guy, some sort of engineering or psychology something, some double degree major thing. I don't know him really well, I've only been going to him for a few months. He's just a nice guy; he lives with a few house mates, a bunch of geeky fellows.

*Does he grow his own or do you…*

No, he—know for a fact he picks it up somewhere south of the river. He'll probably buy a large amount like a few ounces or something. Then he just has a network of people that come to him. Obviously the people that come to him are just friends or friends of friends or friends of friends of friends. I don't think he would deal to people that he didn't feel comfortable with or arrogant people like that, just cool people. [M18, male, 24yrs]

### *Dealers*

A variety of different types of dealers were described; again, these included people who sold cannabis to cover their own use, people who sold it to get a bit of extra cash and people who sold cannabis as a full-time job (ie it was their main source of income).

The following excerpts are examples of descriptions provided for dealers:

They don't seem to make their main goal, this activity. They don't keep an overly large amount. The guy works at other jobs. It's kind of just showing up in the afternoon, hanging out there for a bit because he's just finished work and he always wants to have a chat and things. I think he does it more as a social thing because he seems to be the kind of person that doesn't overly have friends and stuff, works a nine to five job and kind of it seems to be selling is more of a social activity for him than actually making money. [A16, male, 18yrs]

He's probably about young 20s or something like that. Probably he'd be like 22, 23 or something like that. He works a full-time job, I know that type of thing. He just does this part-time to make a bit of extra cash. [M21, female, 18yrs]

Yeah, well like there's a series of us in a larger scale network and basically you have your main supplier who gets it across the border for an extremely low price. Well basically it's sold in Adelaide for $3,000 a pound and then one, it's driven to Perth. You can sell that same pound for between $5,000 and $6,000 and it's just breaking those pounds down and selling ounces out of that pound wholesale or breaking it down even further to say half ounces, say 14 grams or bags of seven grams; three and a half grams for $50. They're ranging from one point five to two point five grams for $25 and obviously $10 a gram for friends. Yeah, it's very easy to get what you want if there's no middle man if you are the broker and there's no one else. You can just go straight to that main supplier, otherwise you'll be paying a lot more on the street because it'll go through someone like me and then two other people below me before you get those little bags. [P74, male, 21yrs]

### *Open houses*

Almost all participants who reported obtaining cannabis from an open house described the people living there as most commonly being of a particular minority ethnic background. They often described large families of all ages living in such houses, and there were also reports of networks between houses—that is, if one open house was 'dry', the participant would be directed to another open house where they could obtain cannabis instead.

The following are excerpts from participants' descriptions of open houses. Minority ethnic backgrounds are not identified in this report or elsewhere, to avoid the potential for stereotyping or stigmatisation.

There might be a family playing cards in there or something, and you walk in and say hello…They're friendly, I don't usually have any fear going there or anything, any stress of anything.

*Okay. And you mentioned the open houses are [minority ethnic background 1]?*

Yes, most of them are. There's a couple of them with [minority ethnic background 2] and [minority ethnic background 3] as well, in like probably a couple of suburbs over, a bit too far for me to ride on the bike. I'm not driving anymore, so yes, it's probably easier just in my area, predominately [minority ethnic background 1].

*Okay. Would you say your relationship with them is just strictly business?*

Yes, strictly business. In the shopping centre, I wouldn't recognise them, they wouldn't recognise me, kind of deal, you know. We just walk by, or we might just, you know, if we do, we click, we go, oh, g'day, you know, or just like passing by, you might nod your head at them, something like that, but yes, they're sweet as. It's like McDonalds. It's as easy as McDonalds, to be honest. As quick as you can get a soft serve, I can get you a stick in the same time.

*So it's a quick, easy process?*

Absolutely, yes, you're not waiting around talking. What I've noticed is like the dudes like the white dudes, the Aussie dudes, they get on the meth and they're all paranoid to hell, and they're like, no, man, come in and sit here for like half an hour; otherwise it looks like you're coming and going, and the neighbours are suss. They're just tweakers, you know, they're just so paranoid about their own shadow that they're just scared—they try and keep you there forever. I don't go there now, though. There are some good business operators predominately in that industry. I'd say the [minority ethnic group 1] are good at it. They give me what I want, no hassles, and a smile.

*Sounds like they're pretty laid back?*

They are. They're sweet as. They've got their own little network. If they don't have it, they're like, yes, I can take you around to this house or this house or this house, and there might be a $5 charge on that, so you might pay $30 instead of $25, but yes, the service is there.

*Okay. So it's not like they see the others as competition?*

Not at all, no. They all work the network. I think they buy in probably pounds and split it between the families. They're upscale. They're organised. Yes, to everyone's amazement, they're very well run. [P16, male, 28yrs].

There are open houses around. I'm sure you've heard about them. You don't have to know them, you just go and knock on the door and if they have it, they give it to you, and if they don't have it, you just walk away. [P07, female, 23yrs]

## 5.2 How cannabis transactions took place

A variety of questions were asked about the nature of cannabis transactions, including how they were arranged, where they took place and why. Findings related to how cannabis transactions took place are presented in Table 17and Table 18.

### *5.2.1 How transactions were arranged*

As evident in Table 17, participants reported a variety of ways of arranging cannabis transactions, the most common being to phone and then visit the seller's house (73%, n=145) and having a friend buy it for them (68%, n=136). The response option 'friend buys for me' involved situations where a friend obtained cannabis on their behalf—for example, brokering situations. It is important to note that for the response option 'phone and go visit seller's house', the relationship to the seller was not defined; the seller could have been either a friend or a dealer. Given that no distinction was made, it is possible there could be some ambiguity in the interpretation of response options for this question; however, findings indicate that transactions were most commonly arranged by phoning and visiting the supplier's house and having a friend obtain cannabis on their behalf. There were some significant differences between sites in relation to how transactions were arranged, with phoning and visiting the seller's house being the most commonly reported arrangement for the Melbourne and Armidale sites, whereas having a friend buy for the participant was the most common arrangement for Perth.

| Table 17: How transactions were arranged (%)* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
| Phone seller and arrange place to meet | 41 | 73 | 55 | 57 | 0.000 |
| Phone and go visit seller's house | 58 | 84 | 80 | 73 | 0.000 |
| Buy from strangers off the street | 4 | 13 | 15 | 10 | 0.070 |
| Go round to seller's house | 48 | 50 | 43 | 48 | 0.740 |
| Seller drops off at my house | 29 | 63 | 58 | 48 | 0.000 |
| Buy it at school | 1 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 0.372 |
| Family member buys for me | 1 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 0.094 |
| Friend buys for me | 74 | 66 | 60 | 68 | 0.286 |
| Grow it myself | 5 | 9 | 13 | 8 | 0.343 |
| Buy online and arrives in the post | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0.916 |
| I buy in lots of different ways | 9 | 18 | 18 | 14 | 0.217 |
| Don't buy | 11 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 0.975 |
| Other | 6 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 0.166 |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

## *5.2.2 Where transactions took place*

### Typical transaction locations

Participants were asked where they typically met to obtain their cannabis. As evident in Table 18, transactions took place in a variety of locations, but the most commonly reported locations were houses, specifically the seller's house (51%, n=102), their own house (27%, n=54) and a friend's house (26%, n=51). More than a quarter (28%, n=56) also reported that they met at an agreed public location, such as a car park, street, park or beach, to obtain their cannabis, indicating that not all transactions took place in private locations. It is important to note that these findings were recoded from open-ended responses, and it is possible that those who said they bought from a seller's house were reporting they bought from the house of a friend who sells.

When asked why they met at these locations, the most commonly reported reasons could be recoded into the categories 'easy/convenient' (51%, n=100), followed by 'convenient for the seller' (29%, n=57). Many participants also reported that there was less risk of police contact (25%, n=49) and that it was private, discreet or subtle (22%, n=44). Another commonly reported reason was that they were catching up socially anyway, indicating that, rather than making formal arrangements for obtaining cannabis, the transaction took place at a social event.

There were some significant differences between sites, including a greater proportion of participants from Perth reporting that transactions took place at an open house and that they were catching up socially anyway. A greater proportion of Armidale participants reported that transactions typically took place in dorm rooms, likely reflecting the high student population in this area.

### Last transaction location

Exploration of qualitative accounts describing the last time participants obtained cannabis found that approximately one-third (35%) of transactions took place at the house of a friend who was supplying the cannabis, followed by 21 percent at the buyer's house (ie home delivery), at the dealer's house (17%) and at an agreed public location (6%). Small proportions reported that their last transaction took place in a car, at a

private party or at an open house. Even smaller proportions reported that the transaction occurred at a pub, nightclub or festival. Overall, consistent with the results for typical transaction locations, it appears the majority of transactions took place in private house settings rather than public locations.

**Table 18: Where transactions took place (%)***

| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Typical transaction locations**** | | | | |
| Open house | 11 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Grow my own | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Private house | 18 | 10 | 0 | 11 |
| Own house | 9 | 39 | 40 | 27 |
| Sellers house | 31 | 60 | 75 | 51 |
| Friend's house | 33 | 20 | 23 | 26 |
| Dorm rooms | 0 | 0 | 8 | 2 |
| Social situations | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Work | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Backpackers | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Agreed public location | 19 | 39 | 25 | 28 |
| Pub | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Cafe | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| **Why**** | | | | |
| Easy/convenient | 48 | 51 | 55 | 51 |
| Private/discreet | 23 | 18 | 30 | 22 |
| Less risk of police contact | 24 | 24 | 28 | 25 |
| Convenient for seller | 31 | 26 | 30 | 29 |
| Convenient for buyer | 0 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Just how it works | 14 | 9 | 0 | 9 |
| Catching up socially anyway | 28 | 13 | 10 | 18 |
| Doesn't matter | 0 | 5 | 0 | 2 |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

**These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses; therefore, statistical significance testing was not appropriate

## 5.2.3 Qualitative accounts of the last time cannabis was obtained

Participants were asked to describe in their own words what happened last time they scored or obtained cannabis, including a description of the event—for example, how it was arranged.

An exploration of qualitative data found that transactions were arranged and carried out in a variety of ways. The most commonly reported methods for arranging transactions appeared to be via telephone or text messaging, followed by meeting face-to-face in a social context. There were also reports of arrangements being made via Facebook, Skype and mobile phone communication apps.

## Protocols and coding

There were often reports of specific protocols and coding that needed to be considered when arranging transactions to obtain cannabis. Participants rarely reported directly arranging transactions via the phone or in text messages; rather, they tended to use vague or indirect language that prompted face-to-face communication. The reason for using coded or indirect language was most commonly related to concerns around legality and the risk of being recorded or of having phone records requested by police. There also seemed to be a strong sense of the need to show respect for the supplier by adhering to their supply protocols.

### *Coding*

The following quotes contain examples of coding described by participants:

> By phone, preferably text. Again if it was a close mate I could call him. I wouldn't say it over the phone, but he would know what I was implying. Again just come over or something like that. I'll be like do you have a couple of CDs that I can borrow? He'll be like yeah man just pop over. Or like can I borrow that DVD that you have? Just certain codes. [A22, male, 19yrs]

> You try not to use too much obvious language. This is more for the benefit of the people that supply and distribute, because they tend to be a little bit paranoid. Although it takes court orders and legal proceedings for their phones to be tapped, they tend to play on the cautious side, for obvious reasons, because you know, but that's just the way they do it. So their rules, so you do what they ask and then they help you out. [P82, male, 24yrs]

> *Can you give me an example of how you might arrange it?*

> Call them…or there are programs—not with iPhones, but with Androids, called Tor Browser. I don't know if you've heard of Silk Road before…If you use the Tor Browser there's something called Orbot which is an anonymous encryption service and anyone that I want to do anything with, as in like a bigger amount, I tell them to message me through that. Also, the phone I use as well isn't actually—I don't sign my phones up so they don't know whose sim card it is. I would sign up anyway because I don't like the laws that stand about privacy and things, especially with America and what's come out recently with that Snowden guy.

> *So usually you do it either directly from a call or…*

> Payphones as well. Payphones are always good because at the end of the day it's not really too much to call. [M59, female, 19yrs]

> Every time I want to buy drugs over the phone, obviously even though chances are no one's going to tap into it, everyone's a little bit paranoid about that stuff anyway so people like to talk in code. Instead of asking direct, maybe one time you might be like, hey can I come round and grab some salad, salad being marijuana because it's green. Or can I come around and grab some green? Some people don't even like mentioning it. I would just say, hey can I come round, do you mind if I pop round? And he knows what that means straight away. [M18, male, 24yrs]

> We definitely don't mention cannabis because—I don't know, laws are getting tighter, from memory, they're pretty gnarly and we're all normal people, believe it or not…so we say things like bags, have you got any bags, just like bags of weed. That's not that conspicuous or just like—the classic one was back in the day, because we were all young and this was all going on, everyone was really paranoid, especially with your folks going through your phones and things like that—our little thing was games.

> Have you got a game? Yeah, I've got Halo, come over and we'll play Halo, whatever, that sort of thing. That's the only code that we used to use. Now we just say, have you got any bags? Do you know where any green is? You know, fifties, I don't know, yeah.

> *So not totally code but just…*

> Not totally code but not blatant like have you got any marijuana for sale that I can purchase. [P56, male, 22yrs]

### *Protocols*

Various protocols were also followed during transactions, which were again based on concerns about legality and aimed at minimising the risk of police contact.

The following excerpts contain examples of protocols described by participants:

> So yeah it's—dangerous isn't the right word but there's a certain protocol you have to follow. Like just an example with that guy I was telling you about who was into all the heavier stuff. I wasn't allowed to bring anybody with me. I had to call him up beforehand. I had to have—well I obviously had to have cash. There wasn't allowed to be anybody in the car waiting for me. As I went to the door he would have a look and if somebody was in the car he just wouldn't open the door. They wouldn't let you in certain parts of the house. You walk in, close the door, you stand pretty much at the door. They go away, they get it, you give them the money, you say thank you, hooroo, whatever and you leave. [A22, male, 22yrs]

> Yeah, we'll call him and just ask him if he's available to hang out. Yes and either yeah or no or give me a call in a couple of days, I'm pretty booked up at the moment. If he is available to hang out, then usually my husband will just drive down and yeah. But you've kind of got to stay there for an hour or so and actually hang out with him too…It just looks dodgy rocking up and bailing two minutes later. [P51, female, 23yrs]

> …it's usually public areas. Always public areas. Red Rooster, common one I've used, in the middle of McDonald's, go and buy a Happy Meal, it's a matter of switching Happy Meals in and then switching again. [P12, male, 18yrs]

> So basically, we met in the street and he has his way of doing it. It will always be concealed, so it will be in an old cigarette packet or, you know—you then—when you go and hug the guy you slip the money into his pocket, so it doesn't really look like there's a transaction happening. [M65, female, 22yrs]

> Yes I'll usually, just in case there's people around and being discreet, I'll usually put the money inside a packet of gum or an old ciggie packet or something. He's quite creative with how he masks his stuff. Sometimes he'll be carrying a bag of bread and hand you a bag of bread, which is great because you get this big bag of bread. [M31, female, 21yrs]

> Not surprisingly, many participants reported that protocols and coding are more commonly encountered when people are dealing in other drugs besides cannabis. There were also reports of increased coding and protocols among people who dealt in hydro, as opposed to bush, cannabis. For example:

> It's pretty hush-hush. Everyone is paranoid these days. You've got to actually see them in person to ask them what you want. That's if they're the sort of person that does other things. If they just deal choof they're not like that, they're usually pretty laid back, but I do know people that deal other things and they're real paranoid. You have to get a hold of them.

> *So they don't want anything said over the phone?*

> No, nothing said over the phone and if possible nothing over the phone at all. They don't want any contact with you. You just have to go to where they are, find them. It's like we're still living 20 years ago with the dealers. We can't use our phones. We can't—you just have to go to their houses and find them. [M06, female, 19yrs]

> I've found it interesting though that those that are dealing with hydro usually have more of an energy of secrecy and whatever about it. Those that are dealing with bush are usually more chilled out about the whole thing. But yeah, I've had both extremes of someone coming to the house being all relaxed and whatever, and then people who have got specific codes and stuff and you have to go to a specific place and meet up and it sort of feels more like a drug deal, you know what I mean? [M66, male, 26yrs]

## Transactions according to supplier

This section provides descriptions of transactions according to who the supplier was—for example, a friend or a dealer—and what the nature of the supply was, that is, whether cannabis was sold, brokered or swapped.

Overall, transactions that occurred between friends tended to be more informal and often took place in relaxed social settings. The expression 'killing two birds with one stone' was used on several occasions, suggesting that the interaction involved both social interaction and obtaining the cannabis, although the relative importance of these functions probably varied between people and occasions. Transactions with dealers or at open houses tended to be quicker and more formal, and often involved more protocols. The expression 'strictly business' was frequently used in descriptions of these transactions.

### *Friends who gave cannabis away*

It is important to again note that a distinction was made between sharing cannabis and giving it away. For the purposes of the study, giving cannabis away was defined as where a participant was given cannabis that became their property—indicating that they took it away with them, as opposed to sharing it on the spot by being shouted a cone or sharing a joint at a party.

As previously discussed, transactions where friends gave cannabis away often involved friends who grew their own cannabis with the intention of being able to share it with or supply it to their friends for free. Participants also reported occasions when, having run out of cannabis, a friend would give them small amounts to keep them going until they were able to source more.

The following are excerpts describing participants' transactions with friends who gave cannabis away:

> Okay, it was last night and I went to a friend's house that has been growing a plant. He gave me about $50 worth for free as a gift. [P26, female 22yrs]

> After a night at a nightclub, I dare call it, me and the boys were hanging out nearby after the venue closed, just shooting the breeze. One gentleman produced a bag with intention to roll a joint. I said oi, chop us out a nugget, and he did. [M41, male, 28yrs]

### *Friends who brokered cannabis*

A few different types of brokering transactions were described. Typical scenarios involved a friend who had access to a supplier the participant did not personally know; the friend would therefore obtain cannabis on the participant's behalf. This often involved the participant going with them to the place of transaction, but waiting in the car and not handling the sale—that is, their friend did not act as an intermediary. When participants were asked why they did not go direct to the supplier, typical responses included that the supplier only wanted to supply to trusted friends, that they did not like having their number handed out, and that there needed to be a formal introduction. It was also common for participants to prefer having their friend act as middleman; they were more comfortable being a step removed and only dealing with their friend.

The following is an excerpt from a participant's description of a transaction with a friend who brokered cannabis in this way:

> Basically, I spoke to my friend because he knows a drug dealer. So he picks up if I ever need any, or like I go with him. Yeah, I usually go with him. So I asked him if he was free on this Thursday or something. He said yep. So we just—we went together to the house. I gave him some money. He went in, came back out with a quarter. Yeah, that was it. [M42, male, 22yrs]

Another typical brokering scenario involved buying cannabis in groups, where at least one other person chipped in some money, and one person handled the transaction and later divided the cannabis and brokered it to their friends. Sometimes the money was obtained from the other parties upfront and at other times it was obtained afterwards. Sometimes it seemed one member of the group had a relationship with the supplier and would therefore take on the broker role; in other cases the broker role was taken by different people depending on their particular circumstances at the time.

The following are examples provided by participants of transactions involving friends who brokered cannabis in this way:

> Generally it alternates between the three of us, whoever's got money at the time will get a lot and then subdivide it off to the others…The most common method would be usually when a friend has got a large quantity and either myself of someone else will put up for an ounce or something and then we'll split it up. It's usually done through friends and pooling our money or whoever's got money at the time. [P19, male, 27yrs]

> Usually we just rely on somebody going home to their hometown because obviously you have a lot of connections where you grew up. Because we've only been here for a few years so we don't really know many people actually in Armidale. So if someone's going home for holidays or something like that, then they'll check with everyone what everyone's doing, get money or arrange for the payment and stuff and sort it out and bring it back when they can or when they're willing to I guess. [A10, female, 20yrs]

There were also situations where a friend picked up extra for the participant and brokered it to them later, and situations where friends brokered small amounts of their own supply.

The following excerpts give examples of transactions with friends who brokered cannabis in this way:

> The one friend that I normally get it off, pretty much all his housemates smoke—and they smoke quite a bit more than me I'd say. Hence they would buy in bulk, so it's always tended to be cheaper and more convenient to just get him to get a bit extra for me…I normally go to his place—I guess catching up would be the primary thing and getting some weed as well maybe, but he's one of my best friends so it would never be like just going to get weed. [M11, male, 23yrs]

> Well, I was talking to a friend on Facebook and he was like, I'm meeting up with my dealer in half hour, do you want anything? So I said yeah sure. [A19, female, 19yrs]

> I asked a mate—yeah I knew a mate that was already getting some and I just asked him…Yeah and this friend gets it off another friend…Like I always know the people that they're getting it off anyway, but they're in regular contact with them so it's easier just for them to get it off them for me. [P09, male, 20yrs]

### *Friends who sold cannabis*

As previously noted, descriptions of transactions with friends who sold cannabis often focused on the informal social nature of the transaction. It was very common for participants to hang out afterwards. Sometimes it was just for a quick tea or coffee and sometimes it was for several hours to watch movies, play video games or eat dinner. Participants often smoked cannabis with the supplier when picking it up. This was referred to by participants as 'killing two birds with one stone'.

The following excerpts describe transactions involving friends who sold cannabis:

> You'd go in and you'd sit and you'd socialise. In my circle of people you wouldn't go in, get it and go. It's not acceptable. It's almost like an insult, so you'd rock up, you'd spend a bit of time with that person, obviously. Let them know that you're not just there for that, because they are your friend. Then at some stage you let them initiate it and say, would you like some, or is that why you're here, you know; give them the opportunity to bring it up. You'd go from there, obviously. It's more of a relationship you've had before with a friend, so it's a lot different to going in and just buying something.

> *How long would you generally stay there?*

> I would spend probably a number of hours there, or sometimes even a day and a night, because I won't just go there to obtain; I'd go there and maybe sit around and watch some TV or we'd go to the movies, or even go to the pub or something, ironically, with the boys. So we'd be at home doing our thing privately and then take the boys to the pub, so that they're all happy. It's a female thing, actually, a lot of girls smoke. [P40, female, 28yrs]

> I call my guy up who's also my bro; meet up with him and pay money, you know, pay money, receive goods and that's it. Maybe I might chill out with him for a while and sample the product together. I don't know; it's very much a social thing. Like, it's not like a business where you just pay money and receive product. Like, you use it with him, like, he owes you some, so next time you see him he gives you a good

deal, like, to pay back the stuff that he took from you before, or vice versa and so on and so forth. [P39, male, 27yrs]

…there's three situations that typically occur: we'll go see him, he'll come see us, or there's the situation which I've already mentioned. But almost always it will be already because of some sort of social situation where I'm killing two birds with one stone. [M76, male, 25yrs]

Well, we caught the tram to the suburb that she lives in, went to the house and pushed the button. She let us in. We would have talked about some mutual friends, no doubt. I can't remember the topics of conversation…I would have been there about 20 minutes probably.

*So you were there primarily—even though this person's a friend of yours, you were there primarily just to pick up?*

Yes, this particular situation is a bit less—yes, it's more informal than the usual, in my experience, to be dealing with drug dealers because it is an actual friend, not just somebody that we knew through drug dealing and have become what you maybe call a friend. She's an actual friend so it's pretty casual, yes. [M28, male, 30yrs]

### *Friends who exchanged cannabis for goods or services*

There were also cases where participants described exchanging cannabis for goods or services. The following are excerpts from participants' descriptions of transactions involving dealers:

A friend got it for me. I'd been working with this friend for the previous two weeks, assisting her with study and work auditions and she hasn't got a lot of money, but it's common knowledge that she is a heavy drug user. So I said, well you can reimburse me by coming over, bringing a stick or two and we'll have a session and we did. It was a lot of fun. [P69, male, 25yrs]

The last time that I obtained cannabis I knew a friend had some and we didn't have any at home and we had some Xanax and that's what he wanted, so we went around and swapped the 10 Xanax for 25 dollars' worth of cannabis. [P49, male, 25yrs]

Yeah, I got the stuff off him, which actually was free because I have an arrangement with him, where I check his mail for him, at a PO box, because he's real paranoid and he doesn't want to be seen collecting it. So he just gives me a quarter a week to just get everything out of his PO box. That's on top of what I buy, I didn't purchase anything on that occasion. That was just me going around to do that. The last time I purchased, it was the same thing—cup of tea, casual chat, and then I would have purchased an ounce. Yeah. [M69, male, 25yrs]

Oh with me and my mate, yeah, like he basically pays everybody to do all his housework in [exchange for] drugs. [M15, male, 21yrs]

### *Dealers*

As previously mentioned, transactions involving dealers or open houses tended to be quicker, more formal and involve more coding and protocols, with many participants describing these as strictly business. However, it was also common for these relationships to be described as friendly, with people reporting remaining with their dealer for a chat or a cup of tea afterward.

The following are from descriptions of transactions involving dealers:

The last time I did this was on Sunday. I drove to a quiet street at around 2 pm in the daytime, it was on a Sunday at 2 pm and parked my car on the side, called the person up, told them how much I wanted. They told me where to park, so I went to move my car, waited on the street. A person came up, knocked on my window, opened my door, exchanged money for drugs and then I drove off. I drove around the corner, and then I moved the drugs into my boot, and then I drove away, and that's it. [A02, male 23yrs]

Well our regular dealer lives just around the corner from us. So we came home from uni, got all excited because we like to go and score and we walked around the corner and we knocked on the door. I won't

use his name, but our dealer greeted us, we came in. Usually we just hung in the front room, which is what we do. His house always smells really nice, nothing like pot, and it's like air freshener. He goes away and he comes back, well last time he gave us the stick, we gave him 20 bucks. He was really friendly and we went home and smoked it. [A27, female, 18yrs]

I text message and ask if he's around and he text messages back and says yeah come over and I go over to his house and we hang out for a little while and you know, talk about what's been going on in our lives and it's a pretty friendly relationship. I don't really like dealing with people that are purely drug dealers. So I just like dealing with people that are friends more than they are a dealer basically. [M01, male, 30yrs]

I contacted someone that I haven't contacted before, but who my friends usually see and I went over to their house and it was very fast and to the point. There was no chit-chat, it was pretty much in and get out, which is a bit unusual. It's usually more social. [M04, male, 20yrs]

Yes. Oh well first of all I sent a text message to the person that I—one of the people that I get it from. He responded with a phone call telling me what time he could come over. I was like yes that's great and I went down the road and got some money out. A couple of hours after the text message at the time he said he'd turn up, he turned up at my house and sold me some pot. Yes that was about it. He hung around and had a cuppa. Yes that's about it. [M31, female, 27yrs]

I sent an SMS to my dealer who within a minute sent an SMS back saying it's okay to come by. Drive over there, knock on the door, go into the house, give him the money, get the marijuana, leave and go home. That's it…Yeah, I ring the doorbell, he comes to the door, I go inside, we go to a room in the back, I say how much I want, he gives it to me, and I pay him. We usually just say hello, how you doing? Good, okay, thank you, good bye and then I leave. It's all very quick. [P29, male, 27yrs]

My partner just messaged the guy that we normally get it off. Then just wait on a response from a message. He doesn't live too far from us so as soon as message we can go within the next five minutes or so. We just drove up to where he lives and we meet him a little bit around from his house. Never been near his house, I don't know exactly where he lives but yeah, he meets us around the corner from his house. Just hand over the cash, he just shows up, taps on the window of the car and hand him the cash. He hands it over and that's it pretty much it. Just drive home to the house with it, it's not a far distance. [P64, female, 24yrs]

I was sitting at a friend's house and we decided we wanted to get some weed, because it was starting to rain and the weather was pretty bad. So we made a few phone calls to a few different people that we knew. Both of us know a couple of people who either do sell or have connections and yeah, after about 10 minutes we jumped in the car to go get some. We went to the house and this person is a lot different to other people. A lot of other people are just all about the money. They will just be like in and out. Where this guy, he is a chilled guy. He likes to sit down and have a cone with you and watch a bit of the footy and have a talk. So we went in there and had a cone and had a bit of a talk, watched the—I think it was Port Adelaide and Eagles game. That was really nice. It was just good to have a chat with the dude and stuff. It's nice when it's not just about business. It's about the social aspect, like just the whole point of really smoking is about. [P57, male, 18yrs]

### *Open houses*

As noted earlier in this document, open houses tended to be almost exclusively reported by Perth participants. While there were protocols reported, they tended to be very casual and relaxed. The key themes that emerged around open houses were: that they were not discriminatory, with anyone welcome to go to them; the lack of any prior or formal arrangements—that is, participants would 'rock up' to them; the quick nature of transactions, which were never longer than a few minutes; and the consistency of supply, with very few reports of having to wait. In addition, while open houses were reported to offer a consistent supply, they also generally dealt in very small quantities such as sticks, which typically weigh around one gram and cost $25 to $30. Open houses were often described as well-organised networks of minority ethnic group families who typically dealt exclusively in cannabis. The existence of open houses appeared to be common knowledge

among Perth cannabis users, and it was not uncommon for participants to report that they could access several within a short walking distance from their home.

The following are examples of open house transactions described by participants:

> Basically there's like a series of houses that I know are open house, and if I feel lazy, I'll just ride my bike there and buy a 25er…Anyone can go there. Anyone off the street can go there.
>
> *Can you tell me how easy they are to access?*
>
> If you're dressed a little bit too sharply, though, they might not answer the door. They might think you're a detective, but yes, if you dress like casual, knock on the door, and some of them have even got a gate, so if the gate is closed, they've got nothing. If the gate's open, they've got something.
>
> *Okay, so it's like the signal?*
>
> Yes. One of them's even got a cockatoo which talks. It will swear at you and say piss off if they don't have any, and it will say g'day mate if they do…Yes, that spun me out, because I was standing at the door and it's like, g'day mate. I was talking to this cocky, and then they came out and they're like, yes, here you go, and then like another time I went there, it's like, no, piss off. I've gone and they're arguing inside, carrying on and you hear swearing and that, and the gate's closed, I'm like, okay, so I guess they don't have any that day. They were like, sorry, we're out. [P16, male, 28yrs]
>
> Yeah. I walked down the street, about 200 metres to the local dealer's house, and walked in the door. Asked them for $50 worth and they went and got it for me and then I walked home.
>
> *Okay. Who is the local dealer? Is it an open house?*
>
> Yeah. Yeah and there's a few around where I live, but that's the closest one…Yep, just rock up.
>
> *Okay. Can you tell me what happens when you actually arrive at the house?*
>
> It's a [minority ethnic group] household and there are generally a lot of people around at one time. So you walk in and just make eye contact with someone and they point you in the right direction of where this guy's at. Yeah, but that's pretty much how it goes with round my area.
>
> *Yeah. So you don't knock on the door?*
>
> If there was no one out the front, you'd knock and then, yeah, sometimes the door is open, so you just walk in. But yeah, they're pretty relaxed about it.
>
> *Okay. So there are a few people around?*
>
> Yeah, there are generally a lot of people there. There are a few kids around and you just look for someone you see. You go, selling? Then they just point you to whoever's got it.
>
> *Okay. Then once you've actually made the transaction, what happens from there?*
>
> Walk home. Just, goodbye, see you later.
>
> *Okay. How long are you generally there?*
>
> Normally one or two minutes…Yeah. It's the closest shop to my house, including legal and illegal shops. That's the way I look at it. [Laughs] So it's pretty convenient. [P43, male, 20yrs]
>
> *What actually happens when you get to the house? Can you just tell me the process?*
>
> He knocks on the door and someone will either yell out yes or no. If it's a yes, it's just done through a hole in the fly screen. Yeah, business savvy. [P46, female, 28yrs]
>
> I got on a bike and rode to the stick house, which is pretty close to my house… It's where people can go in and buy their weed.

*Okay. So is this an open house?*

Yeah, open house.

*Okay. So you rode your bike down there. Can you tell me what happens when you get there, what the process is?*

I just knock on the door and they say hey how are you, and I just say one or however many I want.

*How long do you generally stay there?*

Oh two minutes max, like not even that, 30 seconds. [P18, female, 18yrs]

While the term 'open house' was not actually articulated by Melbourne and Armidale participants, there were descriptions of transactions with similar characteristics to those of Perth open houses. For example:

Okay. So where I usually get it from, there's a dealer in a government flat building in Canberra and there's always—there's always one, it changes which apartment, but people just seem to know. So I'd been there a few times and I asked him if I could get half an ounce the next time we came and he said no worries. So I just went up there and went to the wrong door at first…that was embarrassing. Then I just gave him the cash and drove off.

*Okay, so you said it was at a building, a government flat but how did you arrange to get there first, like do you text, phone call?*

Oh you just rock up…As long as it's a reasonable hour, they seem to just—you knock on the door, you don't have to say anything and they've got a scary dog. [A04, male, 21yrs]

No. It was really easy for us for a while. There was this house and you'd literally just go up to it, knock on the door and give the money and they'd give you—they'd just give you it in [a] little grammy bag. That was really easy; you didn't have to call anyone. [M83, female, 20yrs]

There is one house—we call it a vending machine…Literally they'll sell to anyone. I don't even know who these people are. You just walk up to their door and they've got a little hole in the door, tell them how much you want, put money in the door and they [laughs] come back five minutes later and push a bag through the hole. [M84, male, 21yrs]

### *Strangers*

For the purpose of the analysis, a stranger was defined as someone the participant had obtained cannabis from but knew nothing about—that is, the participant did not know whether they were a regular cannabis supplier. This was distinct from a dealer, which was defined as a person who was known to sell cannabis. Obtaining cannabis from strangers typically involved opportunistic encounters with people at music festivals and events.

The following excerpts describe transactions involving strangers:

Some random gave me some weed at a music festival. Yeah just because that's what you do I suppose. I don't know. Stuff like that. Then I went back to their place afterwards, he gave me more and I gave it to a bunch of people.

*So how did that happen?*

I don't know…I was probably just dribbling shit to him and he just went you're funny, here have a toke. Yeah people just assume that if you're easy to get along with they go oh yeah, you want a toke and just assume that you smoke.

*So that opportunistically happens to you from time to time?*

Yeah because I'm sociable and stuff. Like if you're the right type people go hey you want to have some cones? It's the body language I suppose and stuff. I don't know.

I think people just think that I'll be a funny cunt when I'm stoned and go cool, let's get him stoned and see what happens. It's good.

So he had weed at the festival?

Yeah, yeah, and heaps at his house. Then he was like here; take as much as you want.

*Okay. How much did he give you?*

I don't know, like a couple of handfuls. [P14, male, 29yrs]

I was at a festival and someone was walking around saying that they had some and if we'd like to—if my friends and I would like to buy it, so yeah, I bought some, only about two grams though.

*Can you explain a little bit more on how the interaction came about?*

Well, we were sitting just in our little camping area and he sort of came up and started talking to us and just mentioned that they had some. [M53, male, 19yrs]

## *Online purchasing*

While no participants reported obtaining cannabis online last time they obtained it, there were five participants who reported online purchasing as another way in which they accessed cannabis.

The following excerpts give examples of online purchases:

*Can you tell me about other ways you get cannabis?*

The internet.

*Okay. Can you explain a bit more about that, so how do you arrange it and that sort of thing?*

You go to the Silk Road and put some money into Bitcoins—ah yeah, you get the money transferred into Bitcoins, go onto the website, search for someone that sells the cannabis in your area, to your area. Basically put your order in like it's eBay, transfer the money—the Bitcoins over. Once you've got the product and it just gets mailed to the address you put in, you give to the seller.

*Okay and so when you buy from Silk Road, how much cannabis would you buy?*

At once, would be an ounce at a time.

*An ounce at a time and how much would you pay for that?*

Anywhere between $100 and $350.

*How long would you have to wait before you go it?*

Depending on where the seller is located, it could be anywhere from two days to three weeks. [A18, male, 24yrs]

We mostly get our gear off the internet, so it just arrives in the post and we wait for the postman...It's a lot more difficult than it sounds, there's a lot of internet stuff that goes on, changes in exchange rates and stuff, it makes a big difference.

*Okay, so it's an international purchase?*

Usually not, we tend to use Australian businesses, rather than international but yeah.

*Okay, so the method you've described is—you get a better deal than more traditional methods?*

Yeah, you get a better deal with traditional dudes, but using the internet is more reliable.

*How is it more reliable?*

You can like track your packages as they come through the mail, through like GPS and stuff, so you know exactly what day the postman is going to arrive with your stuff. You've already paid for it, if you don't like the stuff, you can go and lay a comment on their page. [A35, male, 26yrs]

*You also mentioned online; can you just tell me a little bit more about that?*

Well, obviously the Silk Road, the anonymous marketplace, has gotten a lot of notoriety of late. I've seen the stories in the media, and it was pretty easy to work out how to use that. I can't say there's a booming trade in Australia, the domestic suppliers. Often they're scammers who you want to try and avoid, and often the prices are just exorbitant. I do more window-shopping than actual purchasing most of the time. But I certainly have bought cannabis from Silk Road on several occasions and been successful in getting it delivered, yes.

*Okay. What types of quantities are you obtaining?*

I try to buy, I'd say, between seven to 14 grams most of the time; that's what my budget allows. If I can afford a whole ounce, I'll get that.

*How much does that cost you, an ounce?*

It's roughly the same as street prices, sometimes cheaper, sometimes more. If you're buying, say, seven grams, it might be around $100, anywhere up to $170 per seven grams, whereas on the street that might cost you $250. Half an ounce, so 14 grams, would be around $250, something like that, and a full ounce might be anywhere from $300 to $400, or sometimes more than $400, depending on what they're marketing it as. It's just like any other business. I think there's different qualities, and the more premium types fetch a higher price.

*Sure. How long does that take you from ordering it to supply?*

It's definitely a lengthier process than in real life, unfortunately, because you've got to go to the bank, deposit cash and buy the digital coins, the Bitcoins or whatever coins, the currency that it is. That can take a day or two in itself, and then you've got to wait for people to respond to your orders online, which sometimes they take their sweet time and they, you know, should be quicker, but they're not. So it can take up to a week, sometimes, and then if mail is delayed, or if they don't use express post, it's just normal regular mail, I've waited as long as two weeks for something to come in the mail. So yes, unfortunately it is a lengthy process.

*Are you purchasing it from inside Australia?*

Yes, I try to order domestically. I don't want to import things through Customs. It lowers your risk of detection significantly, I'd say. Almost everything I've ordered domestically has arrived as stated.

*Are there any pros of going through the Silk Road?*

There's a lot of pros. I think it's much more of a fluid marketplace. Obviously you have more options, so you naturally have more competition, I think, online. You have people, and you can compare the prices very easily. Anonymity is great, not having to drive anywhere. You just get things in your mail, so it's straight to your door. What other pros are there? Sometimes it's cheaper, especially if you buy in bulk. There are more bulk products available, I'd say. So that's another pro. [P60, male, 25yrs]

I have used Silk Road to get cannabis a few times but it's way more expensive there especially because the Australian domestic market on Silk Road is really expensive for what it is. It's like $200 for a quarter ounce of some average fibre and $300 for a half ounce of some strain name weed and it's really heavy on the wallet and I can walk around the corner and get it so what's the point of waiting two days for it to come in the post? I have used it when I've wanted a special type of weed, but I normally just keep all my weed stuff for in real life and that.

*So Silk Road isn't ideal for purchasing weed?*

Yeah, it's kind of a definite last resort. If all my dealers were out for two weeks I'd probably turn to Silk Road to get weed, but I don't use it often for that. [P81, male, 18yrs]

## 5.2.4 Qualitative accounts of growing cannabis

Only a very small number of participants (n=4) reported that they last obtained cannabis by growing it themselves; however, fifteen participants discussed growing it at some point in their lifetime. These discussions included descriptions of the processes involved in growing and some of the perceived positives and negatives associated with growing, based on current and past experiences.

### Processes

Participants who described growing cannabis often reported a lot of self-education around cannabis cultivation; many could explain the processes involved in great detail. There were descriptions of both bush and hydroponic cannabis setups.

#### *Bush*

Growing bush cannabis often involved small-scale setups in a participant's back garden vegetable patch or in pots; there were also reports of larger-scale setups on large country properties and in national parks.

The process of growing bush cannabis was described by some participants:

> When I was younger, like 14 to 16, I helped grow it with my mum's partner. I'm growing a little plant at the moment on our balcony, which I know is really silly, but it's in among our tomato plants and so you can't really tell. I won't let it get too big; I'll just let it go to maybe get the tips of it. So I do have experience growing it also, but I don't grow it large scale these days.
>
> *Can you explain a bit more about the process of growing?*
>
> Well I was taught, like I said by my mum's partner, you know you get the seeds off the male plants, then you plant them and you grow them. We had them in the bush, we had a big bush block and we'd grow them down there and go down and water them regularly. You've always got to get the male plants out, you've got to be really careful, and you've got to watch for the male plants and pull them out straight away because they'll go seedy and wreck all the other plants. We regularly pull the tips off, you know to stimulate more of the heads, get the heads to grow. It's always really nice to smoke that fresh—well after you dry it out of course. Then you harvest them and you pull off all the buds and yeah you've got a fair bit, so you smoke all your buds and then you've got a whole heap of leaf to see you through until next season. [A27, female, 18yrs]
>
> Yes well we got an ounce once and it had lots of seeds in it so for a laugh we just thought we would all just chuck it in the backyard type of thing. Just literally scattered it. Didn't bury it or anything like that. Then within a couple of weeks we started noticing sprouts. So we dug them up out of the ground, put them in pots and now they're full-grown plants.
>
> *Do you use from them?*
>
> We have. We had three of them. One was just like really shit and was tall and stringy type of thing. So we just chopped that down and we dried it out and we smoked from it and got us really high. We've got two other ones that are really good. Just medium-size ones that are coming along nicely.
>
> *Can you tell us about the process of growing?*
>
> Yes. Well our process of growing is just a complete slack. It reiterates the fact that marijuana is just a weed and it just grows like that. Because we just threw it in the garden. Didn't even bury it in the soil. Started sprouting and we just put it in pots. There was about five of us that used to live in the house. We all just would like water it throughout the day. That's it. Apply some basic nutrients that we had around the house for it and then they just shot up and grew. Now they're budding and everything, so yes, it takes no time or no effort. No lights or anything. They're just out the backyard. Just natural sunlight, and a bit of water.

*Do you have them hidden or are they just sort of…*

No. not as much as we should. Yes they're just kind of open there. We like to look at them. [M21, male, 19yrs]

Okay. So I grew it myself. We planted it around about September last year and just yeah, kept our eyes on it and looked after it until it was ready to go. Yeah, just read up on the internet how to grow it properly, how to look after it, how to optimise its growth and make it as good as possible without using any chemicals or artificial conditions. So yeah.

*So you were saying that—how did you obtain—did you grow it from seed or seedling?*

Yeah it was grown from seed. The seed I was given from one of my friend's dads who has been growing his own pot for a few years. Yeah he just had a massively excessive bulk of seeds and so my friend gave me a couple of those and yeah I just grew them from there.

*Okay. So you were growing them you were saying at home with your housemates?*

Yeah. One of my housemates was helping out quite a bit. He was looking after them while I went away. So for three months he was looking after them in their initial growth stages and then when I came back they were pretty unkempt. So I did a bit of trimming and like pinning them down and looking after them in different ways to give them that little bit more attention. So yeah, it was me and one other housemate doing the bulk of the work. The other housemates didn't really do so much.

*So you've kind of already sort of touched a little bit on the growing process. You were saying—do you grow it outdoors, indoors?*

Yes I grew it outdoors. Yeah in our vegetable patch. [M74, female, 26yrs]

Well, when I can, I grow at my parent's property, which is out of Melbourne, obviously. We've got a bit of land. Because I was away last year, we didn't plant any last year but I will be planting more when the time is right, probably in October. Yeah. I've often had plants. When I lived in the ACT, I had plants as well and it's—you're allowed to there. So that's what first got me into growing actually, was knowing that I was allowed to do it there.

*Okay. So you were saying that you grow, occasionally, at your parent's property. So is that like outdoors? What's the situation?*

Yeah, it would be outdoors. For example, the last time we did a grow out there, it was quite a few plants. It was between 12 and 15 plants. The seeds had been conserved by me, from particularly good batches of weed that I'd had. We harvested them all at once and that's still going. It's still out there. That's my mum's supply that she's got now. [M81, female, 26yrs]

Personally myself I've got six plants growing at the moment and just for that it doesn't cost much to grow them. There's always—they're in a bush setup but I've got two at a mates house in a hydro set up and all that's costing each month is probably 40 bucks a month and we've been doing them - growing massive type trees pretty much and that's been going for six months and when that goes that's going to put out—there's two of them and it's expected to put out 20/25 ozs so 25 ozs for the cost of being like $160 in total is what that really comes out to me. So it's not expensive to grow…It's probably within the last six months I started to take it seriously and started to grow them myself. Before it was just helping people set up and, you know, helping with that because I guess I've got a lot of friends who have wanted to be growing in that time but don't have the knowledge of how to set it up or what different fertiliser to use on what cycles to put the plants on. So that's where I come in.

*Okay, so you're a sort of knowledge source?*

Yeah, pretty much to a degree. It's a great thing…I guess I just saw the opportunity and I've always–the hardest part I guess of the plant cycle is you can either go two ways. You can germinate a seed and then grow the seed to a full plant and it will either go male or female. If a plant goes male you have to kill it straight away because it will turn all the female plants male and then the male plants don't put any buds

out. All they do is just drop seeds. It just gets annoying—or the other way is called—it's like splice, would pretty much be the way, it's where you just cut down the stem of the plant and cut a clipping off the plant and you put it in. It's a type of vinegar and then you just plant that into the soil and it grows its own roots, but I just saw the opportunity to do it myself. I've always helped mates germinating seeds and I designed this little box myself ages ago which gets plants from the seed germination to probably about eight weeks into the life to about that size and so I decided I was just going to use it because I've got—had hundreds upon hundreds of seeds at home so I thought why not.

*Yeah, so some of it is at your house and some of it is at other people's house?*

Yeah, I've got—well, at the moment I've got four seedlings at home but they are only ridiculously tiny. They've only started up within two weeks, the last two weeks, but then I've got five plants over in a mate's house at the moment and they're in his back yard, just in big pots pretty much.

*Why at your friend's house?*

Because I don't think mum and dad would be happy with me having plants in the back yard. I wish. But I guess at a mate's house you've got that comfort of knowing they're safe there. I do have plants out in bush growths which are just in the middle of nowhere like national parks, that type of thing and it's brilliant in that sense. The only problem is all the bugs will get to them and animals—like every animal loves them—kangaroos love to eat it. Like insanely. You go up to your plants and there will be a kangaroo passed out under a tree nearby sleeping and it's like, you know, you've been touching my plants. So the problem about that is you lose all the leaf and the plant goes through so much trauma that it takes such a long time for it to grow. [P12, male, 18yrs]

### *Hydro*

Below are some examples of participants' descriptions of the process of growing hydro cannabis:

My house was on the second storey, it was like a little two bedroom unit and my friend lived in one bedroom, I lived in the other one. I set up a 1.5 by 1.5 square metre tent, two metres high and I had metal halide globes. I had 12 plants in there and in my cupboard I had a propagation area so I could go from seed to flower and then the minute that flowering and drying was done I could start with the plants already going. So they were already started at 12 weeks, so it was a constant supply, it was three ounces every three months which is a lot, yeah. [M35, male, 23yrs]

For hydroponic growing, you need a light that's suitable for growing. I use DWC which is deep water culture. So your bucket with your nutrient solution. Put the seed in some rock wool, turn the lights on. For vegetable state needs to be on for 18 hours a day and then once you get into flowering then you switch it to 12 hours a day. Then it usually lasts about eight till 14 weeks in flower, usually around eight to 10. Then when it's done chop the buds off, dry them and yeah, put them in jars and cure them.

*Sounds like you've done quite a bit of research on this process. So is this a setup you have at home?*

Yes…I've only done single plants in my hydro set up… A lot of it has to do with genetics. So what I do is I buy my seeds online. There's a company in the UK that sells them and that way you know the strains and the maximum potency and stuff. I've had about 50 percent success rate of getting through customs. If you start with good genetics and you research it, you know what you're doing it's fairly easy.

*So it comes down to the preparation?*

Yeah. I researched on the internet for probably six months before I actually started growing. [P73, male, 22yrs]

## Positives

Participants discussed a variety of positives associated with growing cannabis. The most common positives included covering their own cannabis use expenses; having a constant cannabis supply; avoiding the black

market, dealers and the criminal side of cannabis supply; having control over the quality of the cannabis—that is, using no additional chemicals or adulterants; an enjoyment of the process, gardening or botany; the easy nature of growing; and being able to help friends out by sharing or by supplying them with cannabis. Less commonly reported positives included being able to control the strain and type of high produced by the plant (eg indica vs sativa), being able to control the taste through various refining processes and learning patience and self-control in the context of smoking.

Participants provided examples of positives associated with growing their own cannabis:

> Just from a health and money perspective. I don't have to pay for it, and I know what goes into it. That's probably the most important thing for me. I'm pretty health conscious so I found myself looking what goes into my food, so I thought I should really think about what goes into other things I consume, so just thought I'd grow my own.
>
> *Do you grow just for personal use?*
>
> I guess so, yeah, but you always end up with enough to help other people out. Whether that's for financial or just a trade of something, or just to help someone out, it always varies.
>
> *How easy would you say it is for you to grow your own cannabis?*
>
> Extremely easy, you can do it easily outdoors or indoors, there's not really that many restrictions. I mean legally yes, but in terms of actually doing it, it's very easy to do. [A06, male, 29yrs]
>
> I don't like hydroponic marijuana. So I don't like anything that's got artificial chemicals in it. I don't like buying pot from people that I don't know. You never know what's in it; you never know how it has been treated. For a number of reasons I don't like buying pot. So yeah, there's obviously also the economical factor. It's a lot cheaper to grow it yourself, you get a better product, and it saves me and all my friends from having to buy pot. Pretty much the house—everyone who is living in my house doesn't have to buy pot anymore and it also means that I've got that little bit more for myself if I do want to sell it to make a little bit of money or I've got it to give to friends. [M51, male, 26yrs]
>
> I enjoy it. It's not even just so much a thing, I grow vegetables as well, I grow heaps of vegetables so it's not like it's some drug thing, like it's just—I don't know, it just saves me money and it's nice to know that you're smoking your own thing as well. Again, it saves you completely from having to take it outside your own environment, like that's your house, that's your land, you do your thing, you're not taking it anywhere else, you're not involving anyone else. There's absolutely nothing else. It's just kept in the four walls and that's it and that's what I like about it. [M59, female, 19yrs]
>
> It was never to supplement income. If I'm giving it away, I'm giving it away. I'm not selling it. It was just for personal use and for my mum to use. If a friend asks and I have a lot, if they are lucky and they come around right after harvest time, they can often leave with a big present. Often the leaves would be used to make a butter. Whenever I cook butter, that's often something that's distributed amongst a lot of people—that the cooking will be—that's not a personal use thing. That's a group use thing that the leaves go into. Yeah…It's nice to take a plate of brownies to a party or something like that. [M81, female, 26yrs]
>
> I guess the other benefit is you can control it. You know what fertilisers are going in it; you know what strain it's going to be. You can actually control it to whatever type of high you want pretty much. If you get a sativa you know you're going to get a head based high, you get indica it's going to be more of a relaxing body-based high. So you can make your own strains, pretty much. Yeah, you've just got that comfortability of doing anything you want. [P12, male, 18yrs]
>
> Not paying for it [was a positive]…because I wasn't selling it to anybody, it was just for me. I shared it with my friends as well.
>
> *Was it difficult to grow?*
>
> No. That's why they call it the weed, it grows really quickly. Just keep water up on it, it'll be fine…Yeah. I'm quite interested in botany as well. I do love the structure of the plant and everything, the way it grows. I find it quite amazing. So yeah, I would like to grow another one at one point. [P30, male, 20yrs]

Yeah. I've always been into gardening, so it's just a part of it really. The thing about that is, I grow a crop of tomatoes and I'll save myself $20. I grow that and I'll make myself $500. So you can understand why people do that. [P43, male, 20yrs]

A sense of pride. It's always nice to smoke your own home grown. It's fun, it's a hobby, I think. It sounds ridiculous and impractical, but I think if I didn't smoke it I'd probably still grow it. Because I just enjoy it and I think it's fun. Don't have to deal with a dealer who might offer you other things. I'm happy with just using cannabis. I've never had any desire to try any other drug…There is a little bit more risk like that, but if you're sort of careful about not telling anyone and stuff like that, I think it's a better way to go. Plus I flush out the chemicals properly so I know there's no artificial chemicals left in the plant and I know it's not laced with anything. I've had friends that have bought weed and they reckon that it's been laced with speed.

*So you can control the quality…*

Yeah, exactly. It's definitely better than anything you can buy from a dealer I reckon.

*Just one thing you mentioned is that you don't have to go to a dealer. What are the benefits in that?*

Sometimes you don't know who you're dealing with. I mean a lot of the people that I've bought off have been friends. I know people have had to go to—what are they called? Open houses—where it's just like a house where they sell drugs and stuff and that's always fairly dodgy. I've definitely saved more growing it myself because the set up that I've spent has already paid for what I got out of it—yeah, what I've got out of it, sorry, paid for the set up. Yeah, you just know what you're getting. [P73, male, 22yrs]

## Negatives

Participants also discussed a variety of negatives associated with growing cannabis. The most common involved concerns around legality and criminal risk, difficulties with the processes involved—such as finding a suitable location or the plants turning male—the time and effort involved in growing, and the cost of set-up. Another less commonly reported negative was the inability to produce enough to provide a constant supply of cannabis for personal use.

The following are examples from participants' descriptions of the negatives associated with growing their own cannabis:

Growing is always risky, you've got to find a good spot in the bush, it's got to be isolated, it's got to be well watered, it's got to be covered, yet there's still got to be sunlight. You risk getting busted, you risk getting ripped off. So yeah it'd be nice to be able to grow it, but buying is far more convenient and safer and easy. [A27, female, 18yrs]

Yeah, it was pretty easy actually. A little bit stressful at some times though and, yeah, just my friend would leave the front door open or something and I'd get a little bit worried. So just little things like that. But I guess that's just all part and parcel with being careful with it and making sure you don't get caught. [M35, male, 23yrs]

So this year we had five in the ground. Two of them turned male so we pulled those out and we were left with three females. Last year we had I think eight plants and five of them turned male quite early on. Then we put the other three in the ground and then one of them turned male really late. [M51, male, 26yrs]

Essentially, any way I do it myself I'm going to always have to buy because, as I said, it takes three months, generally, for your plants to bud up, but that's going from—that would go from a clone which is like a splice off another plant. When you do it from germination it goes about five months. My plants at the moment, the majority of them are all bush plants, which means it revolves around the moon cycle and pretty much Australia's weather cycle. [P12, male, 18yrs]

Yes, there's definitely negatives associated with growing. You assume more of the risk. Your potential for litigation increases. It affects the people around you. It's certainly affected my relationships with people

that I've lived with. It's caused big problems there. You've got to factor in things like power and that can be hard to calculate. It sometimes can be expensive to run the operation. You've also got to source all the equipment; you've got to find seeds. So there's a lot of things actually involved in getting growing going. Then you've got to deal with, like, pests and all sorts of issues, just like any other agricultural crop. You've really got to educate yourself very well on how to do it. There's a lot of self-education involved in growing as well. [P60, male, 25yrs]

Then the cons are there's more risk. If you do get caught usually you get—well if you're growing it, you usually harvest more than the legal amount to carry or the decriminalized amount to carry. [P73, male, 22yrs]

## 5.2.6 Qualitative responses for preferred methods of obtaining cannabis

As previously noted, the median number of people cannabis was obtained from was three, indicating that participants generally had more than one method of obtaining cannabis. Exploration of qualitative data found that over a quarter of the sample (n=77) discussed their preferred methods of obtaining. It appeared that most participants based their preferences around the following factors: price and quantity; quality; type of cannabis; ease of access; comfort with or trust in the supplier; whether the supplier also supplied other drugs; and social elements—many participants preferred to obtain cannabis through friends. Some also spoke about a preference to buy in groups with friends, to get a better deal by buying in bulk and reduce the frequency of buying. Perth participants often spoke of open houses as being a last resort or least preferred option, mainly because they tended to have the highest market rate.

The following excerpts discuss participants' preferences:

### Prefer to buy bush cannabis

I don't really mind. As long as the person's nice and they have bush and they're not paranoid and weird about it—so it doesn't make you feel paranoid and weird. And it's just an easy exchange and it doesn't feel shady or anything.

*So bush—getting bush is important to you?*

Oh yep…Well it's the same reason I only like to eat organic vegetables and just like to look after my body. I feel like anything from nature and from Mother Earth is good for you because we're organic beings as well. So anything that is organic is all right for your body. And anything that's kind of been manipulated or doesn't see sunlight—that's another important reason. I don't like the idea of a plant not seeing sun. A lot of hydroponic plants are obviously grown under hydroponic lamps so it just seems detached from nature. You can tell when you're smoking those. And I think people—that's why people do go a bit crazy when they smoke hydro for a long time—because they're disconnected. [M64, female, 30yrs]

Yeah, I just mean natural stuff so not stuff that has been altered, GM'd, or grown under, you know, things that are going to make it more potent or just more unnatural. Just as natural as possible basically. [M66, male, 26yrs]

### Prefer supply through friends

Oh, just through friends, I suppose. Through someone that you know. No one wants to turn up to some dero's house and have to deal with someone that they don't know, don't feel comfortable with and don't know the background of. Especially because it is illegal. Nobody wants to expose themselves to risk, or an amount of risk they don't understand—a level of risk they're not aware of. [A26, male, 26yrs].

Probably exchanging friends' hands because again it entangles the whole kind of social aspect of just smoking with a small group of friends. [A29, female, 20yrs]

It's what's convenient for both of us because they're friends as well. I don't really have a dealer. I have friends who deal. I like it like that. [M28, male, 30yrs]

I always prefer it from a friend and I always prefer bush and usually prefer to know where it's been growing… I can't remember the last time I ever brought it off a stranger, because it's important to know the history. [M56, male, 25yrs]

*Is there a reason why you prefer to go through a friend instead of directly?*

I just—in the past have had some bad experiences with dealers. Sometimes they're just not the nicest of people and I don't want to deal with that…once I went to this dealer's house and it was just—it was really sad and disgusting. He had food everywhere, garbage piled up. It was this little apartment, four cats; the place stunk to high heaven. He's like oh, have a seat—what on the pizza boxes? No, I'm out of here; I'm never coming back here again. So yeah, obviously I've had to—yeah, it's like another one was this ex-bikey dude who was always cracking the shits and stuff like that. So I don't have time for that. I just—if you want to be friendly and stuff, awesome, I'll have a chat, but I don't come there for stress. [M62, male, 23yrs]

I prefer going through friends because I know them, it's a lot easier to arrange. If I say, oh man I can't be bothered going to the city, can we meet up another time, it's fine. I don't really have much of an obligation, it's much more casual. It's more of a social thing. I don't see my friend just to buy weed. Buying weed's a part of hanging out with them. I go have coffee, go and see a movie, do something else.

*So it fits more actually into your lifestyle…*

Exactly, it's not so much of a business thing. [P65, male, 18yrs]

Usually just through friends. I have a lot of friends who buy it in large quantities and then sell it because it means that they get money and they also get to help us out, and it's more trustworthy that way…I just know that a lot of dealers in general can be a bit dodgy, they can rip you off, they can give you bad product, or product that's not what they say it is, so when you're buying from your friends you kind of have that trust going. [P68, female, 18yrs]

Yeah, I don't like them (open houses). It's so dodgy and there's always that—you don't know what's going to happen when they open the door or whatever. Usually it's [ethnic minority group] people or something like that so they're stingy as well and you can only get 25s. It's just not worth it, not worth the stress.

*So it's just a bit more risky, you don't know what you're going to get and you don't know what to expect?*

Yeah, you don't know what the quality is going to be either and you don't know what they've mixed it with or whatever or how they've grown it. I just prefer to go through someone close, otherwise it's just not worth using it. [P37, female, 21yrs]

I'm not going through anyone else, but like a friend.

*Why do you prefer going direct to a friend, opposed to having to go through other people?*

So then you don't have to get involved with the law.

*Okay, so you're minimizing that element of risk?*

Yeah, by 100 per cent, yeah.

*Any other reasons why you prefer to go through your friends?*

Yeah, if I'm going to give my money I'm going to give someone that I think deserves—someone I know, rather than someone who's probably flogging Meth out as well to do a gig. So yeah, you know what—yeah. I'd rather give my friends money than a complete stranger. [P75, male, 21yrs]

## Prefer to buy with friends (group buying)

I guess there's a few people I know who generally can get some. I don't know if any of them I would consider dealers, though. They just sort of—I don't know. I guess it's a grey area, which the whole study

is about. It's just generally through friends. There's maybe about two or three people that I know that I would ask in various orders of preferences.

*How does it work with them? Is there one main person that you would choose out of those friends?*

Yeah. Say for the actual supply options there's generally, I guess, it's just they've got a reputation, so there's one guy who's really good and he's really honest and then the dodgier people or whatever are just going to skim more out and charge more for worse weed and stuff like that. But quite often I'll just try and pool with a couple of friends, which really isn't hard, because that guy who lives a block from me, he's in a share house and they all smoke and so we try and buy an ounce between a few people, because if you buy any smaller than that it's just absurd and you end up dealing with things like the open house.

*So you try and reduce the [number of times] that you have to go through the process?*

Yeah. I really hate the process. I really, really dislike the process.

*So your preference is to go in with other people and buy a larger quantity?*

Yeah, even though that's quite risky now and I know they changed the laws so now it's above half an ounce, I think, is a criminal record, so you're essentially forced to buy an ounce, and below an ounce it's quite hard. You just pretty much go down to 50. Occasionally you can get half or quarters, but it's not too regular for people I know, at least. [P48, male, 30yrs]

### Prefer to buy for quality

Well I do have multiple—a few people that I'll ring in a certain order to go by their quality of weed, going down the ladder so to speak or down the pyramid from the better and well-priced stuff to the more expensive and smaller deals down the bottom. So yeah, or home delivery, stuff like that which will put them up on top, which makes life easy for me because I'm sick of going around. [A37, male, 30yrs]

Yeah. It's quantity, plus the stuff is like, he's got names, he's got different tastes, he takes care of it in terms of keeping the customers happy, you know what I mean? He always—he's the type to just—once you're part of his database, he doesn't want to delete you. So, I'm happy with that. [P25, male, 21yrs]

Yeah, whoever's got the best stuff. If they've all got good stuff then I do have a preferred one, the one that's closest to my house and the one that I'm the most friendly with. [P29, male, 27yrs]

### Prefer to buy from supplier who only deals cannabis

Solely cannabis. I won't get it from anyone that sells any other drug. I mean, the dealer that I have for cannabis, the main one that I have, I've got a lot of trust in her. She's a very logical woman. [P34, female, 19yrs]

Like I prefer to go see someone who's not like a dealer dealer who's selling to a lot of different people, because I find that those people—and I think it's to do with the fact that they smoke hydroponic—get a bit paranoid and a bit overwhelmed because you know what they're doing is considered to be very illegal. So it gets very tense and the whole interaction becomes really tense, but if I've—the best suppliers that I've had in the past are people who just know someone who has like a crop that can get a lot of access to it of natural stuff. They're usually just chilled out stoners themselves and you just go over there and get it off them. Like that environment is a lot more comfortable I think than if it was with someone who's selling hydroponic or selling a myriad of other things. [M26, female, 22yrs]

## 5.3 Patterns of obtaining cannabis

Patterns of obtaining cannabis were considered, including how easy it was to access and the type and amount of cannabis typically obtained. Table 19 presents a breakdown of findings related to patterns of obtaining cannabis.

## 5.3.1 Ease of access

Almost all participants reported that cannabis was either very easy (56%, n=112) or easy (36%, n=71) to obtain. Only one participant reported that cannabis was very difficult to obtain. There were no significant differences between sites with regard to the perceived availability of cannabis.

### Seasonal changes

An exploration of the qualitative data found that several participants spoke about seasonal changes impacting the availability of cannabis. The most common seasonal observation was that cannabis was more difficult to obtain around Christmas, in summer, whereas it is typically very easy to obtain in winter. When asked about the reasons for this seasonal difference, most believed it was due to the impact of temperature changes on the growing process. Interestingly, most of those who spoke about seasonal changes were from the Perth site. The following quotes are from the responses of those who spoke about seasonal changes:

> At certain seasons there's more available and then I could get it within a day, other times it might need to be organised, there might be less around, he might have to go further abroad to obtain it. Then it might take a few days.
>
> *…What times of the year is it in season?*
>
> Oh, well it's normally, in the area I'm from, it's normally only really bad around the Christmas point, December/January sort of thing. Most of the rest of the year we have a pretty steady supply.
>
> *Okay, so around Christmas, January can take a few days?*
>
> Or sometimes it can be hard for anyone to find anything at all. Sometimes you could wait weeks to sort of hear about anything around. [A39, male, 25yrs]
>
> *Do you ever have to wait to get it?*
>
> Yes, a lot of times. A lot of times you could go up to months without it, yes…It's typically usually always around Christmas to about mid-February, March, and then, I'm not sure what happens—I think a lot of the temperature, because a lot of stuff is grown outside Australia, I think; I'm not sure. I think it's just at Christmas there's nothing around, and there's really not a heavy supply in Perth to begin with. [P40, female, 28yrs]
>
> It depends what time of year. If it's summer, it's hard to get, because it's hot the plants die, so it's harder to get. Yeah. Winter is really easy. [P06, male, 18yrs]

## 5.3.2 Type of cannabis obtained

When looking at the sample as a whole, the most commonly reported form of cannabis typically obtained was hydro (70%, n=140); however, there were significant differences between sites. Consistent with findings related to what type of cannabis participants typically use (see Table 4), hydro was the type of cannabis most typically obtained by participants in Perth (83%, n=66) and Melbourne (73%, n=58), whereas bush cannabis was most commonly reported in Armidale (79%, n=31).

## 5.3.3 Quantities of cannabis most commonly obtained

Looking at the sample as a whole (100%, n=200), the median amount of cannabis obtained in a typical transaction was 3.5 grams (ie one-eighth of an ounce) and the median amount paid per transaction was $50 (see the caveat in Section 4.6.3, *Weekly spending on cannabis*). Looking at individual sites, the median amount typically obtained by Perth participants was three grams and the median amount paid was $50. The median amount obtained by Melbourne and Armidale participants was seven grams, or a quarter of an ounce, and the median amount paid was $73 by Melbourne participants and $80 by Armidale participants.

| Table 19: Patterns of obtaining cannabis | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Ease of access (%)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.600** |
| Very easy | 53 | 63 | 50 | 56 | |
| Fairly easy | 39 | 31 | 38 | 36 | |
| Fairly hard | 8 | 6 | 13 | 8 | |
| Very hard | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Type of cannabis obtained (%)*** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | |
| Bush | 28 | 43 | 78 | 44 | 0.000 |
| Hydro | 83 | 73 | 40 | 70 | 0.000 |
| Resin (hash) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.471 |
| I don't buy it | 3 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 0.074 |
| I don't know | 6 | 8 | 0 | 6 | 0.220 |
| **Median amount normally obtained (grams)** | **(n=75) 3** | **(n=76) 7** | **(n=39) 7** | **(n=190) 3.5** | **0.547** |
| **(Interquartile range)** | **(1–10)** | **(2–10)** | **(3–14)** | **(2–14)** | |
| **Median amount normally obtained ($)** | **(n=75) 50** | **(n=72) 73** | **(n=35) 80** | **(n=182) 50** | **0.528** |
| **(Interquartile range)** | **(25–75)** | **(31–98)** | **(50–140)** | **(30–100)** | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*Multiple responses were allowed, so totals may exceed 100%

## 5.4 Social elements of obtaining cannabis

In order to understand the social supply of cannabis, it is important to understand the social elements related to obtaining it. Participants were asked a variety of questions relating to the social aspects of obtaining cannabis, including their experiences of buying it with friends and their reasons for doing so, as well as their experiences of sharing cannabis with friends and the reasons they did so.

### *5.4.1 Buying cannabis with friends (group buys)*

Participants were asked whether they had ever bought cannabis with friends—that is, whether they had contributed a certain amount of money with at least one other friend to obtain a certain amount of cannabis. Almost the entire sample (93%, n=186) reported buying cannabis with friends at some point in their life; half the sample (50%, n=100) reported buying cannabis with friends within the previous month and almost one-third (30%, n=60) reported buying cannabis with friends in the past week. When asked how often they bought with friends, responses were mixed, but approximately half (54%, n=108) indicated they bought with friends at least some of the time. The median number of times cannabis had been bought with friends in the past six months was six times, or on a monthly basis (interquartile range=1–18 times).

When asked whether they preferred to obtain cannabis with friends, rather than by themselves, opinions were mixed. Two-fifths (40%, n=75) reported that they preferred to buy cannabis with friends, and roughly the same proportion (38%, n=71) reported that they preferred to buy it by themselves. The remaining one-fifth (22%, n=40) had no preference. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to a preference for buying cannabis with friends; however, there was a significant difference between sites in relation to the amount of times this had occurred in the past six months. A complete breakdown of findings related to buying

cannabis with friends is presented in Table 20.

Participants were also asked to explain why they preferred to buy cannabis either with friends or by themselves. An exploration of the open-ended responses of those who preferred to buy with friends found the most commonly reported reasons for this preference could be broadly recoded as follows: that it was cheaper (64%, n=47); for social reasons (32%, n=24); that it was easier (22%, n=16); that it was safer (20%, n=15); and that it was fairer (5%, n=4). Those who preferred buying with friends because it was cheaper typically bought in bulk and therefore got a better deal. Those who found buying with friends more social had a preference for buying as a social process, rather than an individual one. Where participants found group buying easier, this involved one person obtaining cannabis from a supplier rather than everyone having to obtain it themselves. Those who reported that group buying was safer found a greater sense of security in not accessing cannabis alone, and those who reported that it was fairer reported that each member of the group had their own supply or contributed to the group's supply, so that no one member of the group was left to cover costs or forced to share their supply with the others. Two individuals reported that they preferred to buy with friends because it provided increased variety and selection; that is, the group had access to a variety of sources which allowed them to select their preferred supplier—the one with the best quality cannabis, the cheapest deal et cetera. The below excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who preferred to buy cannabis with friends:

> Because you get a better deal. We can organise to go with whoever's contact/supplier has the best quality/availability/etc. Better value all round. [P01, male, 23yrs]
>
> The majority of my supply comes through friends, particularly since I'm moving away from use more now. It's more of a social process, than an individual process. [P09, male, 2yrs]
>
> Less problems arguing over the price and getting ripped off, etc. Don't like when too many are involved as concerns about privacy. [P44, female, 25yrs]
>
> It's a greater cost to have to fork out if purchased a whole ounce by self. It's easier to ration if have a half ounce as well, but still get the cost benefit. [P52, male, 20yrs]
>
> So I know my friends will have their own supply. It's cheaper. Don't need to buy as frequently. [P54, male, 20yrs]
>
> It's a social thing, hanging out with friends. Don't get into smoking on my own these days—just get tired. [M07, male, 18yrs]
>
> Cheaper. If I buy all myself I rarely get money for it and they'll use mine, so I prefer to chip in at time of purchase. [M23, male, 19yrs]
>
> Just prefer to do it with a friend. Sometimes they go with you and you feel more secure. Plus makes more sense instead of doing two trips to the same house. [M26, female, 22yrs]
>
> I have to pay less. Illegality of it feels more comfortable doing it with friends. [M47, male, 18yrs]
>
> Easier, more funds available, more contacts available. It's always going to be a group effort or decision. [M66, male, 26yrs]
>
> Easier if somebody else takes care of obtaining the cannabis. If I bought it myself, I might use more cannabis. As it is now (with me never purchasing it on my own)—it is good at the current level (the quantity of cannabis I use). [A40, male, 30yrs]

An exploration of the open-ended responses of those who preferred to buy individually found that the most commonly reported reasons for this preference were that it was less hassle (56%, n=36) and fairer (36%, n=23), that they wanted their own supply (23%, n=15), and for privacy reasons (19%, n=12). The responses describing this as being less hassle typically described not having to coordinate finances, transactions and division arrangements with friends. Responses describing this preference as fairer said it eliminated any hassles or disagreements in the division of the cannabis between friends. Those who described wanting their own supply were participants who wanted to own their own cannabis without the need to share with others,

or for whom it did not make sense to buy with friends because they preferred to use by themselves. Those participants who preferred to buy individually due to a preference for privacy did not want to involve too many people in the supply process, in order to minimise risks around legality. The below excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who preferred to buy cannabis alone:

> Some people smoke more than their share and this makes it unfair. It doesn't get divided evenly. [P02, male, 18yrs]

> Less problems arguing over the price getting ripped off, etc. Don't like when too many are involved as concerns about privacy. [P39, male, 27yrs]

> To keep track of it better. It's easier as you know what you're smoking. There's no shared responsibility (e.g., who's going to keep the rest). [P64, female, 24yrs]

> Saves the hassle of having to deal with others. Don't want to be dealing with friends and finances—causes problems and issues between mates. [M29, male, 28yrs]

> Because I'm smoking on my own and prefer to buy on my own. But if I'm smoking with others, then prefer that others contribute. [M61, female, 19yrs]

> Less hassle and time discussing how much, like going to dinner with someone and trying to split the bill afterwards. It's just a bit difficult. [M68, male, 21yrs]

> It's cost effective to buy on my own—gives me control over how much I have and use—and stressed me out to have communal stash, possessive over the weed and how much is smoked. [M75, female, 22yrs]

> This is the way it's done. It is less suspicious. I do not like to chip in with others (to collectively purchase cannabis) any more. People I hang out with all have their own (cannabis for personal use). [A37, male, 30yrs]

**Table 20: Buying cannabis with friends (group buys; %)**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bought cannabis with friends ever** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.003** |
| Yes | 86 | 100 | 93 | 93 | |
| No | 14 | 0 | 7 | 7 | |
| **Last time bought cannabis with friends** | **(n=69)** | **(N=80)** | **(n=37)** | **(n=186)** | **0.360** |
| In the last couple of days | 6 | 18 | 16 | 13 | |
| In the last 3–7 days | 17 | 23 | 16 | 19 | |
| In the last 2–4 weeks | 20 | 24 | 19 | 22 | |
| In the last 2–3 months | 16 | 10 | 24 | 15 | |
| In the last 4–6 months | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 | |
| In the last 7–12 months | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | |
| Over a year ago | 23 | 15 | 14 | 18 | |
| **How often buy cannabis with friends** | **(n=69)** | **(N=80)** | **(n=37)** | **(n=186)** | **0.053** |
| All the time | 7 | 9 | 19 | 10 | |
| Most of the time | 17 | 24 | 13 | 19 | |
| Some of the time | 19 | 34 | 35 | 29 | |
| Every now and then | 15 | 10 | 14 | 12 | |
| Hardly ever | 42 | 24 | 19 | 30 | |
| **Median number of times bought with friends in past six months** | **(n=69)** **3** | **(N=80)** **9** | **(n=37)** **10** | **(n=186)** **6** | **0.028** |

| Prefer to buy with friends | (n=69) | (N=80) | (n=37) | (n=186) | 0.847 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 36 | 41 | 46 | 40 | |
| No | 41 | 36 | 38 | 38 | |
| No preference | 23 | 23 | 16 | 22 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

### Qualitative accounts of buying cannabis with friends

Consistent with the quantitative findings shown in Table 20, exploration of qualitative data found that participants frequently spoke about buying cannabis with friends or in groups. This typically involved a number of people chipping in for the supply and, once purchased, the cannabis would be divided up among them. Alternatively, there were also cases where it acted as a communal stash for housemates or groups of friends to share (ie there was no measured division of the supply). A commonly reported scenario for buying cannabis with friends involved people contributing to buy a communal supply for a special event, such as a camping trip or music event.

The following excerpts are from participants' responses describing occasions when cannabis was bought with friends:

> I was going on a holiday down south with five friends so we were all going to be smoking together on the trip, therefore we planned to get some to take down. We all put in different amounts of money and got different amounts. [P06, male, 18yrs]
>
> *So can you just describe the process when you get it through a friend, how it works?*
>
> I would send them a text asking if I can come around. They generally just go no if they don't have anything. I guess I would ask a couple of people, figure out an ounce for $350 or something like that and just figure out a way of getting enough money together or people who want to spend that amount of money, and then go grab it and then have to go back to someone's house, divvy it up.
>
> *Okay. So how many people generally go in on an ounce?*
>
> Four or so. There's generally two or three people who are buying a decent amount and then there's a couple of people who're broke or whatever and just want a bit. [P48, male, 30yrs]
>
> Yeah, a lot of the main sourcing is done through groups of friends and that, so we might be picking up for our household but then another household of friends might be also be looking for some and so we'll do a combined thing. Yeah, and if we can't get a hold of some going to another friend's house that does already have some and it's just a lot of community sharing around and stuff like that. [M66, male, 26yrs]
>
> It was for a lot of people. It was a communal half-ounce sort of thing. So I was the lead person that was getting it. Then I broke it up about three of four times, sort of thing. Some for my roommates, then some of my old roommates and stuff like that. So I just broke it up. [M21, male, 19yrs]

## *5.4.2 Sharing cannabis with friends*

Participants were asked whether they had ever shared cannabis with friends by giving some away, or being given some for free at a social gathering. All participants (100%, n=200) reported sharing cannabis with friends at some point in their life and almost all participants (93%, n=186) reported sharing cannabis with friends within the past month. When asked how often they shared, approximately half of the sample reported that they shared with friends most of the time (49%, n=97). The median amount of times cannabis had been shared with friends in the past month was eight times or approximately twice per week (interquartile range=3–20 times). There was a significant difference between sites in relation to sharing cannabis with friends with Perth participants sharing the least, on a median of six occasions in the past month (or 1–2 times per week), and Melbourne participants sharing the most, on a median of 10 occasions ( or 2–3 times per

week). A complete breakdown of findings related to sharing cannabis with friends is presented in Table 21.

Participants were also asked to explain why they shared cannabis with friends. An exploration of open-ended responses found that the majority could be broadly recoded as: it being 'cannabis culture' (36%, n=65); to shout a friend (27%, n=48); for social etiquette reasons (19%, n=34); to enhance social cohesion or bonding (16%, n=29); because it was a social drug or behaviour—for example, sharing joints or passing the bong around (16%, n=28); and for 'karma' (15%, n=27). Other common reasons included so that they were not stoned alone and no one was left out (each 9%, n=16); to expose others to cannabis or share the experience (5%, n=9); because it was cheap; to return the favour (each 5%, n=8); and because it was a social faux pas not to (4%, n=7). Less common reasons included 'can empathise' (3%, n=5), to meet new people (2%, n=4) and because it doesn't cause harm (2%, n=3). There were also individuals who reported they shared for communist or political motivations, because they do not believe in selling, because they lived in a 'freegan' house and to get positive praise.

The below excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of participants' descriptions of why they share cannabis:

> That's how it should be—you don't go to a party and say don't touch my drinks. There's a sharing culture. [P14, male, 29yrs]

> You wouldn't ask a friend to pay for every beer or coffee you give them. It's called being a good host, it's social etiquette, we all do it for each other. We keep it fun, it's not about the money. [P23, male, 22yrs]

> Cos it's fun. We could all roll our own, but passing it around you get a break between smokes/a break between puffs. [M69, male, 25yrs]

> It's good social thing and everyone forms a circle and everyone talks. Forces people to be social, otherwise they're off doing their own thing. [M83, female, 20yrs]

> Smoking by yourself is not as good. You don't want to be the only stoner in the room. [A15, male, 20yrs]

> Good will, what goes around comes around. [A08, male, 21yrs]

> Social drug, go to a party, bunch of people make a circle, share weed. I've actually met a lot of people through stoner circles. [M84, male, 21yrs]

**Table 21: Sharing cannabis with friends (%)**

| | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Shared cannabis with friends ever** | | | | | **N/A** |
| Yes | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| No | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| **Last time shared cannabis with friends** | | | | | **0.165** |
| In the last couple of days | 35 | 59 | 50 | 48 | |
| In the last 3–7 days | 34 | 25 | 23 | 28 | |
| In the last 2–4 weeks | 23 | 13 | 18 | 18 | |
| In the last 2–3 months | 8 | 3 | 8 | 6 | |
| In the last 4–6 months | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| Over a year ago | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | |
| **How often shared cannabis with friends** | | | | | **0.392** |
| All the time | 14 | 16 | 20 | 16 | |
| Most of the time | 43 | 56 | 45 | 49 | |
| Some of the time | 30 | 24 | 23 | 26 | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Every now and then | 9 | 3 | 10 | 7 | |
| Hardly ever | 5 | 1 | 3 | 3 | |
| **Median number of times shared with friends in past month** | **6** | **10** | **7** | **8** | **0.004** |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 5.4 How participants mainly obtained cannabis and other aspects of their lives

One of the aims of the current project was to explore how supply routes affected different aspects of young people's lives including their access to other drugs, contact with police, schooling and relationships with family and friends.

To explore this we investigated the relationships between the main way participants obtained their cannabis and other aspects of their lives, such as their demographic characteristics. For the purpose of these analyses the sample was divided into three groups, based on the main way they reported obtaining their cannabis. The majority of the sample (97%, n=194) were recoded from quantitative data into the following three groups: those who bought direct from a seller or stranger, those who obtained cannabis through gift or sale from a friend or family member (each 39%, n=76), and those who obtained it through a broker (22%, n=42). Those who reported they grew their own cannabis as their main supply were excluded from the analysis due to extremely small cell sizes.

### *5.5.1 How participants mainly obtained cannabis and their demographics*

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to explore the relationship between age and the main way the participant obtained their cannabis. The analyses failed to find a significant effect between participant age and supply routes for the three groups at the $p<0.05$ level, $F(12, 181)=0.934$, $p=0.514$. In addition, when the age variable was expressed as a categorical variable, no significant differences were found. There were also no significant differences between supply routes and gender, ethnicity, income, qualifications, marital status, housing situation or who participants lived with.

### *5.5.2 How participants mainly obtained cannabis and drug use variables*

When comparing the main supply routes with the frequency of cannabis use no significant difference was found, indicating that those who use cannabis daily did not appear to have significantly different ways of obtaining it than those who used less regularly (eg monthly). Furthermore, when comparing main supply routes with access to other drugs, no significant differences were found. This indicates that those who reported mainly obtaining cannabis direct from a seller or stranger (eg through a dealer or an open house) were no more likely to have access to other drugs through this supply route than those who reported obtaining it via a gift or sale from a friend or family member or through brokering. When comparing the main supply routes with reports of police contact relating to cannabis, again, no significant difference was found. This indicated that those participants who reported mainly obtaining cannabis direct from a seller or stranger were no more likely to have been apprehended by the police than those who reported obtaining via a gift or sale from a friend or family member or through brokering.

### 5.5.3 Overall comments: how main supply routes related to other aspects of participants' lives

Overall, no significant differences were found between the main way participants obtained their cannabis and certain key variables including their demographic characteristics, access to other drugs, or history of having been apprehended by police. While it is possible that there may be significant relationships between other indicators of the cannabis supply route and aspects of these young people's lives, to the extent possible in this study there was no indication that how people obtained their cannabis had a major impact on, or relationship with, other aspects of their lives.

# 6 Supplying cannabis

Participants were asked a range of questions related to their involvement in the supply of cannabis, including in giving, brokering, swapping or selling it. For the purpose of the study, selling was defined as exchanging cannabis for goods or money; brokering was defined as buying cannabis for others without making a profit; and giving was defined as supplying cannabis to another person so that it ceased to be their property and became the recipient's property. This was not to be confused with sharing, where cannabis may have given some away for free at a social gathering by shouting someone a cone or sharing a joint. It is important to note that, while sharing cannabis was excluded from the current study's definition of cannabis supply, this does not imply that sharing cannabis is excluded from a legal definition of cannabis supply: that is, it is understood that sharing a joint with someone, for example, would most likely be regarded in law as cannabis supply.

The next section is broken down into questions asked of all participants who had ever supplied cannabis (Section 6.2, *Ever supplied cannabis*) and questions asked of only those participants who had also supplied cannabis recently (Section 6.3, *Recent suppliers*). For the purposes of the study, participants needed to have supplied cannabis on at least one occasion within the past six months to be considered a recent supplier.

## 6.1 Participants who had ever supplied cannabis

As evident in Table 22, almost the entire sample (94%, n=188) reported supplying cannabis to another person at some point in their lifetime, whether by giving, brokering, swapping or selling it. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the proportion of participants who had ever supplied.

### *6.1.1 Age at first supply*

The median age at which participants reported first supplying cannabis was 17 years old (interquartile range=16–18 years). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to age at first supply.

Exploration of qualitative data revealed that there was not a great deal of variation in attitudes towards supplying across the age groups. The most significant difference was that older participants were more likely to supply for no gain and share or gift cannabis, and were also more likely to discuss morals, ethics and cannabis culture. There were several cases of participants reporting that their attitudes towards cannabis had changed since they were younger and that they had grown more casual in their approach towards cannabis use and supply.

### *6.1.2 Gender and supply*

There was a marked difference in attitudes towards supplying between female and male participants. In general, males were much more likely to take risks. For example, males more frequently supplied cannabis to friends of friends or strangers, were more likely to supply it for major profit, supplied it in larger quantities and more frequently delivered it to the buyer's house or supplied it in a public place.

In contrast, the majority of females only supplied cannabis to close friends and there were no instances of women supplying to strangers. Females were also more likely to refer people directly to suppliers rather than be suppliers themselves. Females more frequently supplied cannabis for no personal gain and were more likely to continue supplying even if they made no profit. The majority of females considered any financial gain to be profit, while the majority of males defined profit as significant financial gain.

There were no significant gender differences in attitudes towards sharing, pricing, method of payment, reasons for continuing to supply or changes in attitudes towards supplying over time.

### 6.1.3 Location and supply

There were obvious differences in attitudes towards supplying across the three sites. There was a strong contrast in attitudes between Melbourne and Perth participants. Participants from Melbourne presented as more relaxed and open about cannabis use and supply, while participants from Perth were more guarded and considered the supply of cannabis to be risky. Armidale sat between these two poles but tended to be based more on local networks, given the much smaller population.

Armidale was more close-knit. There was more sharing and the price of cannabis was clearly influenced by the supplier's relationship to the buyer. Participants from Armidale were most likely to supply to close friends or friends only and there was very little dealing in public locations, which is not surprising given that there is less opportunity for anonymity in a much smaller city.

Participants from Melbourne were much more casual. Suppliers were much more likely to provide 'on tick' (ie on credit), to arrange supply by telephone, to deliver cannabis or to gift cannabis for no personal benefit. They were the group most likely to supply cannabis by approaching others and offering it to them. Melbourne had the least number of participants who defined drug dealers in a negative way.

By contrast, Perth had a higher level of aversion to supply, evident in various expressions of suspicion and paranoia. The supply of cannabis was seemingly more risky. There were several references to bikies running the scene, and cannabis was most expensive in Perth. As a result, attitudes towards cannabis tended to be more guarded—Perth had the highest instance of suppliers who dealt to friends only, and Perth suppliers were least likely to supply by offer. Perth participants were much less likely to share or refer others to suppliers, or to supply cannabis for no gain.

### 6.1.4 Qualitative responses—reasons for commencing supply

Participants were asked to describe why they first started supplying cannabis or helping other people access it. An exploration of open-ended responses found that the most commonly reported reason for commencing the supply of cannabis could be broadly recoded as helping friends who could not obtain it themselves (71%, n=132). Following helping friends out, the next most commonly reported reasons involved financial incentive, and could be recoded as: to cover some or all of the participants' own use (23%, n=43), to make money (13%, n=24) and to get a better deal—that is, with others chipping in for a bulk buy at a better price (6%, n=11). Other commonly reported reasons for starting to supply cannabis included empathising with not being able to obtain cannabis, 'good weed karma' (12%, n=22) and returning a favour (6%, n=12). There were also a variety of other reasons reported (34%, n=63), including that the participant had an excess, to share the experience (each 3%, n=9), that there was a demand for it (2%, n=8), so friends had their own supply and to enable buying in bulk (each 2%, n=6). There were also participants who reported they started supplying to enhance their social status, share good quality weed and take turns sourcing it (each 2%, n=5). There were also small numbers who reported an 'unspoken weed culture' of helping people (1%, n=4). Explanations for starting to supply cannabis frequently involved more than one reason. Findings related to reasons for starting to supply cannabis are presented in Table 22.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who started supplying cannabis to help friends who couldn't obtain it themselves:

> We understand each other and if one person is in need we help them out. If any of us has access and others don't, we will all help each other. [P09, male, 20yrs]

> I appreciate helping someone who enjoys cannabis and can't get it, and we all smoke it together. [A10, female, 20yrs]

> In the position to and didn't see any problem with it. If I had some and they wanted it and I didn't, it made sense! Intention is to help out a friend who wouldn't be able to get it otherwise. [M55, female, 20yrs]

> Because my friends couldn't access it and I had stock at hand. I was just doing them a favour. [M44, female, 20yrs]

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who started supplying cannabis so they could cover some or all of their own use:

> I had some money saved so I thought I could buy an ounce with a friend and then break down and sell to cover my own use. [P31, male, 26yrs]

> At first to cover my own use. Now there's not enough money in it without selling in bulk. Doesn't cover my use. [M06, female, 19yrs]

> Natural progression. I had it and others didn't. Funding my own use was the motivator and making good coin. [M02, male, 26yrs]

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who started supplying cannabis so they could make money:

> I saw a lucrative market—an opportunity to make money. I was at a private school so there was a demand for it. [P16, male, 28yrs]

> Profit—when I brought an ounce as a once off, had a friend who had pounds and would give it to us on tick. And also to help them out and save them time. [M54, male, 20yrs]

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of the responses of participants who started supplying cannabis to get a better deal:

> Works out for me and helping out a friend, the more you buy the cheaper. It's mutually beneficial. [M75, female, 22yrs]

> I have a vested interest to get it. Chipping in means you get more for your money. Buying in bulk is better for everyone. [M66, male, 26yrs]

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses of participants who started supplying cannabis due to empathising with not being able to obtain cannabis:

> I understood how difficult it can be when you cannot obtain any cannabis yourself, so I started doing it to help people, to be nice to people. [A28, female, 22yrs]

> I know what it's like to try and find, it can be tedious at times. [P03, male, 22yrs]

> Because I've been in the other boat and I like to help people out. [M06, female, 19yrs]

| Table 22: Ever supplied cannabis (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Ever supplied cannabis** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.203** |
| Yes | 93 | 98 | 90 | 94 | |
| No | 8 | 3 | 10 | 6 | |
| **Median age of first supply** | **(N=80)**<br>**17** | **(N=80)**<br>**17** | **(N=80)**<br>**17** | **(N=80)**<br>**17** | **0.695** |
| **(Interquartile range)** | **(16–19)** | **(16–18)** | **(16–19)** | **(16–18)** | |
| **Reasons for starting to supply*** | **(n=73)** | **(n=78)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=187)** | |
| To help friend/s | 64 | 74 | 75 | 71 | |
| So I could cover my use | 29 | 19 | 19 | 23 | |
| So I could make money | 14 | 13 | 11 | 13 | |
| Empathise with position | 6 | 14 | 19 | 12 | |
| 'Good weed karma' | 12 | 9 | 17 | 12 | |
| To get a better deal | 6 | 5 | 8 | 6 | |
| Return the favour | 7 | 4 | 11 | 6 | |
| Other | 49 | 28 | 14 | 34 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%* Includes giving, brokering, swapping and selling

*These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses; therefore, statistical significance testing was not appropriate; percentages may add up to more than 100%

### *6.1.5 Who participants have previously supplied to, currently supply to and would supply to*

Participants who reported supplying cannabis at some point in their lifetime (94%, n=188) were asked which single statement best described who they had previously supplied to, who they currently supplied to and who they would supply to if the opportunity presented itself. Of those who had supplied, the majority (65%, n=122) reported that the best statement to describe their previous supply was 'I supplied cannabis only to friends/family' or 'I supplied cannabis only to friends/family and their friends'. Only a small proportion (13%, n=24) reported that they would supply to anyone willing to buy, including strangers. Similarly, when asked who they currently supplied to, the majority of those who currently supplied (87%, n=139) reported that they supplied only to friends and/or family, or friends and family and their friends. Only four percent (n=7) reported that their current involvement in supply would be best described as 'I supply to anyone willing to buy, including strangers'. Finally, when asked who they would supply to, if the opportunity presented itself, the majority (64%, n=117) once more indicated that they would supply only to friends and/or family, or friends and family and their friends. Again, only a small proportion (13%, n=24) reported that in future they would supply to 'anyone willing to buy, including strangers'. Overall, the vast majority (87%, n=139) of those who currently supplied only supplied within their social networks.

There were no significant differences between sites in relation to who participants currently supplied to, but there were some significant differences between sites in relation to who participants had previously supplied to and who they would be willing to supply to if the opportunity presented itself. A breakdown of findings related to who cannabis was supplied to is presented Table 23.

| Table 23: Who participants have previously supplied to, currently supply to and would supply to (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Best description of who they supply to | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Who they have previously supplied to** | **(n=74)** | **(n=78)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=188)** | **0.003** |
| I supply cannabis only to friends or family | 34 | 22 | 39 | 30 | |
| I supply cannabis only to friends/family and their friends | 34 | 37 | 33 | 35 | |
| I supply cannabis to friends/family and their friends/ occasionally to strangers | 11 | 33 | 22 | 22 | |
| I supply cannabis to anyone willing to buy, including strangers | 22 | 8 | 6 | 13 | |
| **Who they currently supply to** | **(n=72)** | **(n=77)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=185)** | **0.120** |
| None | 21 | 7 | 17 | 14 | |
| I supply cannabis only to friends or family | 51 | 49 | 36 | 48 | |
| I supply cannabis only to friends/family and their friends | 19 | 31 | 36 | 28 | |
| I supply cannabis to friends/family and their friends/ occasionally to strangers | 4 | 10 | 6 | 7 | |
| I supply cannabis to anyone willing to buy, including strangers | 4 | 3 | 6 | 4 | |
| **Who they would supply to if the opportunity presented itself** | **(n=74)** | **(n=78)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=188)** | **0.000** |
| None | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | |
| I would supply cannabis only to friends or family | 34 | 13 | 28 | 24 | |
| I would supply cannabis only to friends/family and their friends | 37 | 39 | 42 | 38 | |
| I would supply cannabis to friends/family and their friends/occasionally to strangers | 7 | 40 | 19 | 23 | |
| I would supply cannabis to anyone willing to buy, including strangers | 20 | 8 | 8 | 13 | |
| **Currently supplies only within social network** | **90** | **86** | **86** | **87** | **0.386** |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## *6.1.6 Nature of cannabis supply*

Participants who reported supplying cannabis at some point in their lifetime (94%, n=188) were also asked what statement best described the nature of their supply activity in the past and currently, and what they would consider being involved in. This was couched in terms of gifting, brokering, covering the costs of personal use, for small-scale profit or for significant profit. Of those who had supplied previously, the greatest proportion (41%, n=77) reported that the statement that best described the nature of their previous involvement in cannabis supply was 'I supply for the same price as originally purchased (brokering)', followed by 'I supply for profit that covers some or all of my use' (21%, n=39) and then 'I supply for profit that covers my use plus a little extra' (19%, n=35). Only 16% (n=30) reported that the statement best describing their involvement in cannabis supply ever was 'I supply for profit that covers my use plus significant profit'. Similarly, when asked about the nature of their current supply activity, the greatest proportion of those who did currently supply (57%, n=90) reported that they supplied cannabis for the same price as originally purchased (brokering), followed by supplying for profit that covered some or all of their use (12%, n=19). Only

five participants (3%) reported that their current involvement in supply could be best described as supplying cannabis for profit that covered their use plus a significant profit. When asked about the nature of supply activities they would consider pursuing if the opportunity presented itself, the greatest proportion (37%, n=67) again reported that they would supply cannabis for the same price as it was originally purchased (brokering). Less than a quarter (22%, n=40) reported that they would supply for a profit that covered their own use plus a significant profit. No significant differences were found between sites in relation to the nature of their involvement in cannabis supply. A breakdown of findings related to relationship levels in supply is presented in Table 24.

**Table 24: Nature of cannabis supply (%)**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Nature of cannabis supply activity ever engaged in** | **(n=74)** | **(n=77)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=187)** | **0.039** |
| I give cannabis away—I never broker or sell | 1 | 1 | 11 | 3 | |
| I supply cannabis for the same price as originally purchased (brokering) | 45 | 37 | 41 | 41 | |
| I sell cannabis for profit that covers some or all of my use | 18 | 26 | 17 | 21 | |
| I sell cannabis for profit that covers my use plus a little extra | 16 | 24 | 11 | 19 | |
| I sell cannabis for profit that covers my use plus significant profit | 20 | 10 | 20 | 16 | |
| **Nature of cannabis supply activity currently engaged in** | **(n=73)** | **(n=77)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=186)** | **0.209** |
| None | 23 | 8 | 17 | 16 | |
| I give cannabis away—I never broker or sell | 18 | 18 | 17 | 18 | |
| I supply cannabis for the same price as originally purchased (brokering) | 41 | 53 | 53 | 48 | |
| I sell cannabis for profit that covers some or all of my use | 12 | 10 | 6 | 10 | |
| I sell cannabis for profit that covers my use plus a little extra | 3 | 9 | 3 | 5 | |
| I sell cannabis for profit that covers my use plus significant profit | 3 | 1 | 6 | 3 | |
| **Nature of cannabis supply activity would consider engaging in** | **(n=73)** | **(n=76)** | **(n=36)** | **(n=185)** | **0.160** |
| None | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| I would give cannabis away—I would never broker or sell | 8 | 3 | 8 | 6 | |
| I would supply cannabis for the same price as originally purchased (brokering) | 44 | 30 | 33 | 36 | |
| I would sell cannabis for profit that covers some or all of my use | 16 | 22 | 25 | 21 | |
| I would sell cannabis for profit that covers my use plus a little extra | 10 | 22 | 8 | 15 | |
| I would sell cannabis for profit that covers my use plus significant profit | 19 | 22 | 25 | 22 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 6.1.7 Ever supplied self-grown cannabis

Of those who had ever supplied cannabis (n=188), approximately one-quarter (26%, n=49) reported that they had supplied cannabis they had grown themselves at some point in their lifetime (Table 25). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the proportion of participants who had supplied cannabis they had grown themselves.

**Table 25: Ever supplied self-grown cannabis (%)**

| | Perth (n=74) | Melbourne (n=78) | Armidale (n=36) | Total (n=188) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ever sold or given cannabis they had grown themselves** | | | | | **0.127** |
| Yes | 19 | 33 | 25 | 26 | |
| No | 81 | 67 | 75 | 74 | |

### Reasons for supplying self-grown cannabis

Participants were asked to expand on their experience with supplying cannabis they had grown themselves. An exploration of open-ended responses found that, of those participants who had grown cannabis themselves (26%, n=49), approximately three-quarters (76%, n=37) mentioned at least one positive associated with supplying in this way. The most commonly reported positive could be broadly recoded as financial benefit (54%, n=20), whether that be from reducing the cost of the participant's personal supply of cannabis or increased profit from supplying cannabis to others. The second most commonly reported positive could be recoded as being able to supply cannabis to friends (46%, n=17), whether through giving cannabis away, selling it, brokering it or swapping it. Some participants reported that they had friends they did not want sourcing their own supply, whether because the friend was uncomfortable associating themselves with the criminal elements involved in cannabis supply, because they knew their friend could only access a low quality product or because they enjoyed being able to bring pleasure to their friend. Other commonly reported positives could be broadly recoded into the categories of quality control and enjoyment of the process and/or botany (each 25%, n=9).

The following excerpts are from interviewer transcriptions of positives reported by participants who supplied cannabis they had grown themselves:

> The benefit was I had control over what fertilisers I used, could do proper flush and it resulted in a better product. [P02, male, 18yrs]
>
> Positives were less adulterants, better quality control, and a financial benefit. [P11, male, 21yrs]
>
> I grew one plant. It wasn't difficult. It costs nothing to do. I enjoy the process of watching it grow. The only negative is the risk. [P30, male, 20yrs]
>
> I grew because I was interested in botany, it felt safer. I grew from a seed to a plant. [M60, male, 21yrs]
>
> I like it because I know what strain I am growing and what chemicals go into it. It is also interesting and cost effective. [A26, male, 22yrs]
>
> Grew to support my habit by producing my own supply and making money. An advantage was that I always had a supply. [P27, female, 22yrs]
>
> Just gave it away; pride, want people to smoke what I grew. [M31, female, 27yrs]

Further exploration of responses found that, of those who had supplied cannabis they had grown themselves (n=49), approximately half (47%, n=23) reported at least one negative. The most commonly reported negatives could be broadly recoded into the categories of time and effort (52%, n=12) and criminal risk (48%, n=11). Other negatives associated with supplying cannabis in this way involved the cost of set-up and the risk of female plants turning male (each 13%, n=3).

The following excerpts are from interviewer transcriptions of negatives reported by participants who supplied cannabis they had grown themselves:

> It started as a hobby, but it was too much hassle and worry so it wasn't worth it. There was no instant gratification. [P19, male, 27yrs]

> Growing is hard when it matures. It's a 3-month process so it takes responsibility. [P25, male, 21yrs]

> Was stressful and got mites so packed it. Four to six plants. [M76, male, 25yrs]

> The disadvantages were that it was time consuming and it turned male so I mixed it and sold it. [P27, female, 22yrs]

> I stopped ages ago—it was too risky. I'm too smart to sell—it's not worth the risk, but I thought I would try it. [P14, male, 29yrs]

Table 26 presents a complete breakdown of findings related to the positives and negatives of supplying self-grown cannabis.

**Table 26: Reasons for supplying self-grown cannabis (%)**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Positives*** | **(n=13)** | **(n=16)** | **(n=8)** | **(n=37)** |
| Financial benefit | 54 | 38 | 88 | 54 |
| No contact with dealers | 0 | 0 | 13 | 3 |
| Quality control/less chemicals | 23 | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Constant supply | 25 | 6 | 0 | 11 |
| Able to supply friends | 31 | 63 | 38 | 46 |
| Enjoy process/botany | 17 | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| **Negatives*** | **(n=9)** | **(n=13)** | **(n=1)** | **(n=23)** |
| Cost of set up | 11 | 15 | 0 | 13 |
| Effort/time | 44 | 62 | 0 | 52 |
| Turning male | 11 | 8 | 100 | 13 |
| Criminal risk | 67 | 39 | 0 | 48 |

*These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses, therefore statistical significance testing was not appropriate; percentages may not add up to 100%

## 6.2 Participants who had recently supplied cannabis

As evident in Table 27, the majority (83%, n=156) of those who reported that they had ever supplied cannabis had also supplied cannabis recently (ie in the past 6 months) and approximately two-thirds (64%, n=120) reported that they had supplied cannabis very recently (ie within the past month). There were some significant differences between sites in relation to recent supply, with a greater proportion of Melbourne participants reporting recent and very recent supply.

### *6.2.1 Duration of cannabis supply*

For those who reported recent cannabis supply (83%, n=156), the median number of months they had been supplying was 24, or two years (interquartile range=12–48 months). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the duration of supply.

| Table 27: Participants who recently supplied cannabis (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth (n=74) | Melbourne (n=78) | Armidale (n=36) | Total (n=188) | Sig |
| **Last occasion of cannabis supply** | | | | | **0.002** |
| Today | 3 | 4 | 6 | 4 | |
| Yesterday | 10 | 17 | 19 | 14 | |
| In the last 3–4 days | 5 | 17 | 19 | 13 | |
| In the last 5–7 days | 10 | 17 | 6 | 12 | |
| In the last 2–4 weeks | 19 | 28 | 11 | 21 | |
| In the last 2–3 months | 22 | 10 | 11 | 15 | |
| In the last 4–6 months | 4 | 3 | 11 | 5 | |
| More than 6 months ago | 28 | 5 | 17 | 17 | |
| **Recent supplier (within past 6 months)** | **70** | **95** | **83** | **83** | **0.000** |
| **Very recent supplier (within past month)** | **46** | **82** | **61** | **64** | **0.000** |
| **Median months supplying*** | **24** | **24** | **24** | **24** | **0.992** |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*For recent suppliers

## 6.2.2 Who cannabis was supplied to

Participants who reported the recent supply of cannabis were asked a range of questions related to who they supplied cannabis to (Table 28). Participants reported currently supplying cannabis to a median of four people (interquartile range=3–8 people); however, the median number of people they reported ever supplying to was much higher, at 25 (interquartile range=10–50 people). The majority of participants (77%, n=120) reported that they mainly sold within their social network to friends. No participants reported that they mainly sold to strangers. When asked the ages of the people they supply, the majority reported they were mostly either the same age (42%, n=65) or a mixture of ages (53%, n=83). Only two percent (n=3) reported that they mainly sold to people younger than them. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to who cannabis was supplied to.

| Table 28: Who cannabis was supplied to (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
| **Median number of people currently supplied to** | **(n=51) 5** | **(n=70) 4** | **(n=30) 5** | **(n=151) 4** | **0.569** |
| **(Interquartile range)** | **(3–8)** | **(3–8)** | **(2–9)** | **(3–8)** | |
| **Median number of people ever supplied to** | **(n=52) 23** | **(n=70) 28** | **(n=29) 20** | **(n=151) 25** | **0.976** |
| **(Interquartile range)** | **(10–50)** | **(10–50)** | **(10–50)** | **(10–50)** | |
| **Mainly supplied to** | **(n=52)** | **(n=74)** | **(n=30)** | **(n=156)** | **0.460** |
| Friends | 85 | 72 | 77 | 77 | |
| Friends of friends | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | |
| Family | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| Strangers | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| Mixture | 12 | 26 | 20 | 20 | |

| Age of people supplied to | (n=52) | (n=74) | (n=30) | (n=156) | 0.549 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Younger | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | |
| Older | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | |
| Same age | 52 | 34 | 43 | 42 | |
| Mixture | 44 | 61 | 50 | 53 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 6.2.3 How supply transactions took place

Participants who reported the recent supply of cannabis were asked a range of questions related to how their cannabis transactions took place, including how they were arranged, where they took place and the forms of payment received.

### How supply transactions were arranged

The most commonly reported way supply transactions were arranged was 'people phone me and I arrange to meet them' (71%, n=111), followed by 'people come to my house' (56%, n=88) and then 'people phone me and I drop [it] at their house' (41%, n=64). Another commonly reported way of arranging supply transactions was by acting as an intermediary (39%, n=60). This involved the participant acting as an intermediary by arranging an introduction between a buyer and a seller but not handling the sale. A number of other ways of arranging transactions were reported (34%, n=53) which could mostly be recoded as transactions that took place during social gatherings (21%, n=32), transactions organised via Facebook (5%, n=7), transactions where a buyer drove the participant to the seller and the participant handled the sale (4%, n=6) and transactions that took place at work (2%, n=3).

There were some significant differences between sites in relation to the way that supply transactions took place. A greater proportion of Melbourne and Armidale participants reported arranging transactions where people come to their house and transactions where they acted as an intermediary. It is, however, important to note that the response option 'acting as intermediary' was added to the interview questionnaire at the end of data collection for the Perth site but at the beginning of data collection for the Melbourne and Armidale sites. It is therefore possible that the proportion of Perth participants reporting supply via acting as an intermediary could be underrepresented.

A greater proportion of Perth participants reported other ways of arranging transactions. The most common 'other' response reported for Perth participants was for transactions that took place during social gatherings (27%, n=14) indicating that, rather than arranging a formal transaction, they instead carried out the transaction during normal social interaction—for example, at a party or social gathering. Another common 'other' response was that the buyer drove the participant to the seller and the participant handled the sale (12%, n=6), as distinct from the participant acting as an intermediary. Table 29 presents a breakdown of findings related to how supply transactions were arranged.

**Table 29: How supply transactions were arranged (%)***

| | Perth (n=52) | Melbourne (n=74) | Armidale (n=30) | Total (n=156) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| People phone me and I arrange to meet them | 65 | 74 | 73 | 71 | 0.529 |
| People come to my house | 31 | 69 | 70 | 56 | 0.000 |
| People phone me and I drop it at their house | 33 | 45 | 47 | 41 | 0.320 |
| Sell to people on the street | 4 | 7 | 10 | 6 | 0.541 |
| Other | 50 | 30 | 17 | 34 | 0.005 |
| Acting as intermediate | 8 | 60 | 40 | 39 | 0.000 |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

## Forms of payment for cannabis

Participants were asked about different forms of payment they received when they supplied cannabis. The most commonly reported way people paid for cannabis was by cash (94%, n=147); the next most common response was 'people do not pay me—I give it away' (40%, n=63). Other common forms of payment included drugs (33%, n=51), other goods and services (25%, n=39) and bank transfers (22%, n=35). Approximately two-fifths of participants who supplied cannabis (37%, n=24) reported that they provided drugs on credit—that is, 'on tick' or with promise of payment. There were some significant differences between sites in relation to payment forms, with a greater proportion of Melbourne and Armidale participants reporting that they supplied cannabis in exchange for drugs. It is important to note that drugs could here denote cannabis, or other drugs such as ecstasy, LSD or magic mushrooms. There were also reports of participants exchanging different strains of cannabis—for example, indica or sativa—so they could enjoy different effects. There appeared to be a greater proportion of Melbourne participants receiving bank transfers as a form of payment.

Participants were also asked to rank the forms of payment in order of most commonly received. The vast majority reported that the main form of payment they received was cash (88%, n=138). A small proportion reported that people 'did not pay them—they gave cannabis away' (8%, n=12). Payment in drugs was very rarely reported (3%, n=4) as the main form of payment for cannabis. Findings related to payment in supply transactions are presented in Table 30.

**Table 30: Payment in supply transactions (%)**

| | Perth (n=52) | Melbourne (n=74) | Armidale (n=30) | Total (n=156) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Different payment forms*** | | | | | |
| Cash | 92 | 95 | 97 | 94 | 0.705 |
| Bank transfer | 15 | 31 | 13 | 22 | 0.048 |
| Stolen goods | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0.801 |
| Drugs | 14 | 46 | 33 | 33 | 0.001 |
| Other goods/services | 19 | 28 | 27 | 25 | 0.492 |
| People do not pay me—I give it away | 44 | 41 | 33 | 40 | 0.625 |
| **Main payment form** | | | | | **0.449** |
| Cash | 89 | 85 | 97 | 88 | |
| Drugs | 0 | 4 | 5 | 3 | |
| People do not pay me—I give it away | 10 | 10 | 0 | 8 | |
| Other goods and services | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Gives credit (drugs on tic or promise of payment)** | | | | | **0.150** |
| Yes | 39 | 28 | 53 | 37 | |
| No | 62 | 71 | 47 | 63 | |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

## *6.2.4 Qualitative accounts of reasons for continuing to supply cannabis*

Over a third of participants continued to sell or broker to help friends (38%), and a quarter continued to sell or broker to help fellow cannabis users (25%). There was considerable overlap between these two categories; however, some suppliers saw this as friendship-based, while for others this was based on an understanding of cannabis use and a knowledge of what it was like to be without it. A number of people also continued to sell or broker because it encouraged reciprocation. A small number of people continue to supply out of habit,

to cover the costs of their personal use or for occasional financial gain, whether modest or significant. The following quotes illustrate how participants began supplying cannabis to help friends who could not obtain it themselves:

> As long as I'm going to buy some and as long as some of my friends are not able to do that when I'm able to do that, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't help them. Obviously because I know that they really would do the same for me. That's it. If it's not convenient for both parties, we wouldn't do it. That's the only explanation I can give, because there's no harm and there's no hassle in doing this.

> I continue to do it because—I don't know—I like to help people out with smoking, and I really love weed I suppose. I don't mind helping people out with it…I guess it's a thing where we mutually understand each other's smoking habits. We get where each other's at with it and it is an everyday thing. Because I know, for them, if they're without weed for a while, they'll be in hell as well. It's just better to help them. [M75, female, 22yrs]

Reciprocity was often emphasised by participants:

> Basically I just like people to—if I don't have weed it would be really cool if someone could help me out and then I repay them so I do the exact same thing when they don't have any. [P54, male, 19yrs]

The following quote is from the response of a participant who started supplying cannabis to cover some or all of his own use:

> It makes it a lot easier to be able to smoke cannabis because you're able to have that little bit extra to buy and not have to dig into your own money. It's just sort of a self-working cycle, it's just a circle that goes around. So you buy lots, you sell a bit, you've got some left over and then you buy lots, you sell a bit, you've got some left over and then you don't have to buy it yourself and you don't have to waste your own money. [A13, male, 18yrs]

The following quote is an example of a participant who started supplying cannabis so they could make money:

> I needed the money actually. It's a small amount that it was, like I said earlier, the difference between barely scraping to pay rent, and actually being able to have pizza. Little things like that. Being able to go out for a drink and not just sit at home with cleanskins. Not having to [be] guilty about running the heater. I'm living well below the poverty line. When I was a taxi driver I was making less money than I am now on Austudy. So studying post-grad has somehow made me richer, which few people can say that. [M69, male, 25yrs]

Qualitative data indicated that reasons for supplying cannabis shift over time. While many people indicated there had been no change in their reasons for supplying, quite a few participants felt that growing older and maturing had changed their reasons for supplying. Several people admitted that they thought it was a cool thing to do when they were younger—that they may have supplied for the sake of image or to make money then, but had since grown out of such reasons. The following quotes illustrate the shifting context of supplying cannabis:

> Originally when I first started doing it, it was for profit when I was much younger in my teen years and that. It was for—to cover my own personal use and to make money and basically just the kind of cool factor I guess, way back when. But these days I'm over all that, and I pretty much just do it to help mates out. [A13, male, 18yrs]

> Maybe when I was still at high school or just fresh out of high school, maybe had more of a mentality to make a bit more profit. Back in Perth and when I was younger I would deal to friends of friends or friends of friends of friends and you don't really care about that. Being younger you just want to have money at the time and it's easy and there's a big market for it. I guess these days there's more at risk and I don't want to get caught with it. I don't want to face penalties or criminal records because that's—it's not really worth it. [M18, male, 24yrs]

A small number of people stopped dealing altogether because it was not profitable enough, it was too risky, or they had been caught by the police:

> …after high school, that was the only dalliance with that. It just seemed pointless. The margins are so slim. You'd have to buy in such a large amount and sell in really small amounts to make any profit. [P48, male, 30yrs]

> I just don't need the risks and the stress. It's not really my thing anymore. I don't want to do that, really. [P50, male, 24yrs]

A quarter of participants claimed they would no longer supply cannabis if they knew they would not profit financially from it. Reasons included that it was not worth the risk, that it would result in financial loss, or that they were selfish or not a nice person. Although a similar number of participants stated they might still supply, many emphasised that they would supply cannabis for a friend, but not a stranger. Of the 62 participants who were asked if they would still supply cannabis without profit, only nine replied that they would not.

> Yeah, absolutely. I just wouldn't supply to as many people. [A13, male, 18yrs]

> I wouldn't care. If I was helping a mate, I'm more than happy. But for a random person, no, it's not my problem. [A14, male, 18yrs]

> Yes, because I'm not making any money off it anyway, it's just because I want to smoke it and my friends want to smoke it so I would still buy it even if I wasn't making any profit or anything and sell it to my friends anyway. [A33, male, 21yrs]

> Yeah, they would have to be friends. I wouldn't do it for strangers for nothing. If I just got a small bud in the end, that'll be enough. [A17, male, 27yrs]

> Yeah again, because I want people to smoke. If people enjoy smoking they should be allowed to smoke and they should be able to get weed as freely as they want. It shouldn't be a mission-and-[a]-half to get weed for everybody. [M59, female, 19yrs]

> If it required no extra effort on my part then yes…I don't mind because I'll either go around to his house and we'll hang for hours and the fact that I'm delivering weed is purely incidental, or he'll come over to mine. So under those circumstances I wouldn't mind just going to brokerage. I'd bring it with me when I went around to friends' places. They'd give me the money, they'd take their share, that'd be fine. I obviously would only do it for my absolute closest friends who I see every week anyway. [M69, male, 25yrs]

> Just because I really like the social interaction that comes of it. It's a nice ritual. Most of the time to be honest when someone comes to me being okay, can you get me some weed I don't even expect to make a profit off it. So it's always surprising when they hand me a note and I'm like are you serious? It's kind of weird. But yeah, I don't know, I don't really have much to say other than [that]. [M70, female, 23yrs]

> Well, I'd supply it to my friends just because we have a good time together. To other people, I'm not sure. It just depends on risk and effort versus how that affects me socially and how that affects other people and that sort of stuff. [M73, female, 19yrs]

> It depends really who it was for though. So if it's a close mate that I've known for quite some time and I know that they've got very little money or something, I would sort of give it to them at cost price. It depends how much they're getting. If I'm getting a half ounce and they want to get a quarter of it, I'd split the cost of $175 with them but if they were only buying—they only wanted one gram out of that, I'd just be like, oh yes, just give me $20, $25. So if you look at that one gram, I'm making a little bit of profit out of that but in the grand scheme of things it's not really offsetting it at all. [P52, male, 20yrs]

Participants' reasons for discontinuing supply included that it was not worth the risk, that it would result in financial loss, or that they were selfish or not a nice person:

No. Yeah no there's no incentive for me then. Like the incentive for when I was selling was to get marijuana. So if I wasn't getting marijuana well then I wouldn't do it. Because the money is good but it's not worth what happens if you get caught. [A22, male, 22yrs]

Not really. You've got to make a little bit, otherwise what's the point in making all the effort in doing the job, you know? [M77, male, 28yrs]

No. I wouldn't. I would just smoke it all. I would keep it to myself. I'd be like, fuck the world! [P25, male, 21yrs]

Yeah and it is an illegal activity so like I said, I wouldn't do it for nothing because I'm running the risk of going to the dealer's house, purchasing the drugs and then driving with the drugs in my car. So yeah, I wouldn't do it for nothing. [P29, male, 27yrs]

No I wouldn't. Well on a very small scale I probably would, to friends. Not on the scale that I'm running at the moment. [P02, male 18yrs]

## *6.2.5 Perceptions of drug dealing*

### Identifying as a dealer

Qualitative data indicated that the overwhelming majority (78%) of participants who had supplied cannabis in the last six months did not identify as drug dealers, while some (20%) did consider themselves to be dealers. Responses to this question were often interesting. Some were taken aback by what they perceived as the accusation that they were drug dealers. Others said they had never previously reflected on their status, and a small number of participants were uncertain as to whether they would consider themselves dealers. Participants seemed to make a mental distinction between brokering or sharing and what they perceived as the more serious crime of dealing. One participant changed her response from 'no' to 'yes' while considering the question:

Because I supply drugs to people for money. Sometimes to make—most of the time to make a profit. So, yeah, it's drug dealing. [A31, female, 21yrs]

A quarter of participants did not consider themselves to be dealers because they were not making a profit; however, profit was variously defined. Some participants considered profit to be any gain, monetary or otherwise. Over a quarter of participants felt that profit had to exceed expenses, while one in five participants only considered significant financial gain to be profit.

Well, profit doesn't necessarily have to be money or product. I mean, profit could just be changing somebody's—a few people's lives for the better. That's a gain in itself, isn't it? [A31, female, 21yrs]

Profit is any sort of gain over the covering cost—even if it's a dollar, even if it's $100, it's still there. [P66, male, 18yrs]

My definition of profit would be more than just breaking even at the end of the ounce. It would be having more money than you need sort of thing, that's your life, that's what you do, you just sell drugs. [P54, male, 20yrs]

In terms of defining their own supply activities, some participants did not consider themselves dealers because they supplied only to friends, did not consider cannabis to be a drug or did not supply regularly. Of those who did consider themselves dealers, the most common reason for identifying as such was that they dealt drugs by definition, or considered that making a profit meant they were dealers:

I guess you can mount an argument from either side. In my opinion, on a purely personal basis, dealing implies that you are making a profit, whereas I'm not making a profit. In the eyes of the law it probably is dealing, but I don't personally consider it—like I say, you can mount an argument from either side and it really comes more [to] semantics, but I don't see it as dealing. [M27, male, 20yrs]

I'm not making any profit and I've only done it a few times and only to people that I'm very close friends with, whereas—I don't know, that doesn't really fit what I think of as a dealer anyway. [P36, male, 24yrs]

Marijuana isn't a drug. It's a plant. It's been made illegal by the government. Heroin is a drug. Alcohol is a drug. Antibiotics are a drug. Caffeine is a drug [laughs]. [A31, female, 21yrs]

No, I don't really think of it [cannabis] that way. I suppose people might want to do that and I'd play semantics with them and say that well, I don't know. I suppose it is when I think about it, wow. [M13, male, 23yrs]

**Table 31: Identifying as a dealer (%)**

| | Perth (n=57) | Melbourne (n=78) | Armidale (n=34) | Total (n=169) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Identifies as a dealer** | | | | |
| Yes | 28 | 17 | 12 | 20 |
| No | 70 | 78 | 88 | 78 |
| Don't know | 2 | 5 | 0 | 3 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## Descriptions of a dealer

Over a third of participants defined a drug dealer as someone who made a financial profit from the sale of drugs. One in six participants also defined dealers professionally, as people who sold cannabis in large quantities and/or supplied it as their primary source of income. A small number of responses thought that dealers were people who supplied cannabis to people other than friends:

I'd see them [dealers] more as having kind of clients, rather than friends. Certainly, when I've bought off dealers in the past, it's like a situation—don't go in the house. You knock on the door. Maybe there's a special word you use on the phone. There's all this stuff. It's like a whole charade. [M81, female, 26yrs]

I see dealing as kind of your main thing. Like if you're a dealer you're always on call; you're not always on call but you've pretty much always got to answer your phone and buy larger amounts. You either grow it yourself or you know—you're higher up in the chain and you'd have a lot of profit. That would be your main motive I see as a dealer is to make money. [M71, male, 22yrs]

…[a drug dealer is] someone who makes an income off it, a living off it…someone who does it for their livelihood, gets a massive quantity and separates it all up and distributes it, earns a profit off it. [P04, male, 23yrs]

Over a quarter of participants defined drug dealers in a negative fashion, as someone dodgy, criminal, untrustworthy, or likely to deceive them:

Violent criminal, probably gang-associated, doing it mainly for profit, selling dodgy drugs as not what they are, misleading people, giving people skint amounts of weed or whatever, those are what I consider to be a drug dealer. [P81, male, 18yrs]

Somebody who has no morals, no compassion and no thought or care for anybody else's safety, health, family, any problems. A drug dealer is somebody who sells things that are known to be harmful and very destructive to people and does it without a care, completely for their own profit, or because they're addicted themselves and they need it to feed their addiction. That's what a drug dealer is. [A31, female, 21yrs]

Some participants thought selling cannabis did not qualify as dealing and that a dealer was someone who sold hard drugs. A significant number of people felt very strongly that cannabis should not be classed in the same category as hard drugs such as crystal meth, speed and heroin, and rejected outright the suggestion that supplying cannabis could be classified as drug dealing:

When you think of a drug dealer you think of the person with the meth lab in their house, sitting around smoking crack, all that sort of stuff. People who smoke marijuana aren't like that. It's weird for a plant to be counted on the same level as things like cocaine, LSD, all that sort of stuff because what it does to people and the way that it affects people is completely different to the way that other drugs do. All the drug dealers that I've met to do with cannabis have been relatively upright, nice, clean, happy people. [A16, male, 18yrs]

There are some really bad people out there that seriously deal drugs and hurt people and sell really horrible substances. I just think it's ridiculous and naive to compare selling maybe a gram of cannabis to selling large quantities of horrible drugs and substances. [M44, female, 20yrs]

## 6.2.6 Profit from cannabis supply

Participants who had supplied cannabis in the past month (n=120) were asked about the quantities supplied and profit made, including the average amount supplied per week in grams and dollars, and the average amount earned per week in grams and/or dollars. A small proportion (13%, n=16) of those who had supplied in the past month were unable to complete this section. The most commonly reported reason for participants being unable to comment was that supplying cannabis, in their experience, was not a regular behaviour; rather, it was something they did infrequently to help a friend out. A breakdown of findings related to profit from cannabis supply is presented in Table 32.

### Amounts sold

For those who were able to comment (n=99), the median amount of cannabis supplied in a typical week was three grams (interquartile range=1–7 grams) (see Caveat, Section 4.6.3 *Weekly spending on cannabis*). The median amount made from the sale of cannabis in a typical week was $45 (interquartile range=$19– $100). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to amounts sold.

In terms of demand, qualitative accounts revealed that irregular smokers were more likely to source small amounts of cannabis. Possessing larger amounts was seen as a greater risk, and some suppliers preferred to supply only small amounts for higher profits. Group brokering, where several people chipped in, was quite common and favoured for its convenience and cost. Small, unweighed amounts of cannabis were often given away without payment.

Well usually we don't ever usually get much more over an ounce because obviously there's a risk involved in driving and all of that stuff. [A10, female, 20yrs]

Bought an ounce of cannabis, I sold half of it to my dad and then the rest of it I sold in small amounts, $25 worth until I got most of my money back and what was left over was basically just for ourselves to have. [P49, male, 25yrs]

Just left him a bit. Probably left him half a gram or a gram—something like that. I think he offered to give me some money for it. But I had had two or three of these beers that night. So I just didn't worry about it and I just left it for him, and that was it.

Yeah, and obviously with us and with my friend buying some, when she gave him the money he obviously had some money as well so he could buy more off this guy and so everyone did get more because of that bulk buy, more for less price. [M48, male, 22yrs]

### Amounts earned

Participants were asked how much they earned per week for supplying cannabis, including both earnings in the form of cash profit and earnings in the form of cannabis. Earnings in the form of cannabis were made when a supplier purchased a certain amount of cannabis and then sold off a smaller portion of this to a buyer

for more than they had originally purchased it for. The profit from this sale either covered the supplier's portion of cannabis and some extra, covered the supplier's portion of cannabis, or covered some of the supplier's portion of cannabis.

The median weekly cash profit earnings of suppliers was $0 (mean=$36, range=$0–$800). The median weekly earnings of suppliers in the form of cannabis was approximately two grams (range=0.5–7 grams) (see Caveat, Section 4.6.3 *Weekly spending on cannabis*). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to weekly earnings from supplying cannabis.

The majority of those who brokered or sold did not appear to be chiefly concerned with making profit. Many participants who brokered for others did not charge; they passed on the cannabis at cost price. Similarly, many who sold cannabis would sell it at market value, and some even gave their friends a good deal to their own disadvantage. The going market value of cannabis was common knowledge although, as noted above, market value differed across the three locations.

The relationship between the supplier and those supplied to was a major factor in determining pricing. Over a quarter of participants suggested that friends received preferential treatment, while only a handful said that they charged the same price regardless of relationship:

> I find I wouldn't make profit unless it was—I didn't know the person directly. If it was his friend was like hey, if his friend asked him to get some and then he asked me I'd—I might make a small amount of profit. I generally feel bad about that and if it's friends that I know I'm not in it for profit, I just want to help then out. [M18, male, 24yrs]

> I essentially am not actually doing anything, I'm just helping someone out, from the kindness of my heart to help them achieve what they want and so I don't feel like I deserve any extra money for doing that. If I wasn't okay with doing that, then I wouldn't be doing it. If I had to go really far out of my way, I would straight up ask them for a bit extra for driving far or catching a bus for three hours, in which case they'd be perfectly fine about that. But as long as you're upfront and I wouldn't look at that as making a profit it would just be reimbursed for your personal expenses. [P70, male, 21yrs]

Not all participants agreed that pricing should vary dependant on relationship:

> That's a tough one. The safest thing to do is just go everyone the same price, because if you start to go friend's rates, then it's the friends buying to sell or buying for their friends. It's tough. So, you usually just go same price for everyone. I just go $70 just so it's—I just prefer people who pay less. Some people charge $90 or pay $90 and I'd rather just do it cheaper for people. [M56, male, 25yrs]

A small number of people charged extra to cover expenses associated with supply, such as petrol or public transport fares. The quality and quantity of cannabis supplied were also determining factors in costing.

**Table 32: Amounts sold and amounts earned**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Median amount sold per week (grams) | (n=29)<br>3 | (n=54)<br>3.5 | (n=21)<br>2.5 | (n=104)<br>3 | 0.242 |
| Median amount sold per week ($) | (n=30)<br>75 | (n=52)<br>36 | (n=17)<br>38 | (n=99)<br>45 | 0.732 |
| Median amount earned from supplying drugs in average week (grams) | (n=11)<br>2 | (n=5)<br>3 | (n=0)<br>- | (n=16)<br>2.25 | 0.403 |
| Median amount earned from supplying drugs in average week ($) | (n=31)<br>0 | (n=54)<br>0 | (n=21)<br>0 | (n=106)<br>0 | 0.693 |
| (range) | (0–800) | (0–625) | (0–500) | (0–800) | |

## 6.2.7 Supply of other drugs

As evident in Table 33, approximately one-third of recent cannabis suppliers (32%, n=50) reported that they also supplied other drugs in addition to cannabis. There were significant differences between sites, with the majority of those participants reporting the supply of other drugs coming from the Melbourne site (70%, n=35) while no participants from the Armidale site reported this (0%, n=0).

### Types of other drugs supplied

Consistent with the findings on most commonly reported other drugs used and obtained (Table 10 and Table 16), the other drug most commonly supplied was ecstasy (74%, n=37), followed by LSD (48%, n=24) and magic mushrooms (32%, n=16). The supply of a number of NPS was also reported, including DMT (11%, n=6) and NBOMe (6%, n=3). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the types of other drugs that were supplied.

### Profit from supply of other drugs

Of those participants who reported supplying drugs other than cannabis (n=50), the majority (92%, n=46) commented on the amount of profit they earned per week. Approximately two-thirds (65%, n=30) reported they did not make any monetary gain at all ($0), suggesting that the majority of those who supplied other drugs were brokering, or selling for the same price as originally purchased, to help their friends get access. Sixteen participants reported monetary gain from the supply of other drugs, and the majority of these were from the Melbourne site (81%, n=13). The median amount of profit earned per week from the sale of other drugs was $21 (interquartile range=$9–$119).

**Table 33: Supply of other drugs (%)**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Supplies other drugs*** | **(n=52)** | **(n=74)** | **(n=30)** | **(n=156)** | **0.000** |
| Yes | 29 | 47 | 0 | 32 | |
| No | 71 | 53 | 100 | 68 | |
| **Other drugs they supply***** | **(n=15)** | **(n=35)** | **(n=0)** | **(n=50)** | |
| Ecstasy/MDMA | 80 | 71 | - | 74 | 0.398 |
| Speed | 0 | 9 | - | 9 | 0.334 |
| Crystal meth | 20 | 6 | - | 6 | 0.152 |
| Cocaine | 0 | 3 | - | 3 | 0.700 |
| Ketamine | 13 | 17 | - | 17 | 0.549 |
| LSD | 40 | 51 | - | 51 | 0.334 |
| Magic mushrooms | 33 | 31 | - | 31 | 0.572 |
| Benzodiazepines | 20 | 9 | - | 9 | 0.245 |
| Nitrous oxide/nangs | 0 | 6 | - | 6 | 0.486 |
| Pharmaceutical stimulants | 27 | 6 | - | 6 | 0.058 |
| DMT | 13 | 11 | - | 12 | 0.591 |
| NBOMe | 7 | 6 | - | 4 | 0.514 |
| 2C-B | 0 | 3 | - | 2 | 0.700 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Methylone | 7 | 0 | - | 2 | 0.300 |
| **Only brokers other drugs** | **(n=14)** | **(n=32)** | **(n=0)** | **(n=46)** | **0.179** |
| | **79** | **59** | **-** | **65** | |
| **Median amount earned from supplying drugs in average week** ($)** | **(n=3)** | **(n=13)** | **(n=0)** | **(n=16)** | **0.004** |
| | **500** | **16** | **-** | **21** | |

*Includes selling and brokering

**For those who reported earning a profit

***Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

# 7 Police contact relating to cannabis

Participants were asked about their history of police contact relating to cannabis, including whether they had ever been found in possession of cannabis by the police and whether they had ever been arrested for supplying cannabis.

## 7.1 Police contact for possession

Approximately one-quarter of the sample (26%, n=52) reported that they had been found in possession of cannabis by the police at some point in their lifetime (Table 34). Of these, the median amount of times this had occurred was once (range=1–6 times). Three-fifths (60%, n=27) reported that they were over 18 years of age last time they were apprehended. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to police contact for cannabis possession.

**Table 34: Police contact for cannabis possession (%)**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ever been found in possession** | **(n=79)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(n=199)** | **0.182** |
| Yes | 24 | 23 | 38 | 26 | |
| No | 76 | 78 | 63 | 74 | |
| **Median amount of times** | **(n=19)** | **(n=18)** | **(n=15)** | **(n=52)** | **0.121** |
| | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | |
| **(range)** | **(1–3)** | **(1–6)** | **(1–3)** | **(1–6)** | |
| **Over 18 years old last time apprehended*** | **(n=16)** | **(n=16)** | **(n=13)** | **(n=45)** | |
| | **56** | **69** | **54** | **60** | **0.667** |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*Drawn from qualitative data

### *7.1.1 Legal outcomes*

Participants who had been found in possession of cannabis (26%, n=52) were asked what the legal outcome was last time they were apprehended. Almost half the sample (48%, n=25) reported that they were dealt with informally, indicating that they were let off without any formal criminal proceedings. The next most commonly reported legal outcomes included receiving a formal caution (25%, n=13), being arrested (17%, n=19), appearing in court and receiving a fine (each 15%, n=8). Less than one-fifth (17%, n=9) of those who were found in possession of cannabis by the police reported that they were charged with a possession offence last time they were apprehended. Participants also reported a variety of other outcomes, including that their cannabis was confiscated, that they never received the letter in the mail, that their house was raided, that they received counselling and that they went through a diversion program.

There were some significant differences between sites in relation to legal outcomes for cannabis possession, with a greater proportion of Melbourne and Armidale participants reporting that they received a formal caution, but a greater proportion of Perth participants reporting that they received a fine, were asked to attend an education session, were charged with a possession offence or appeared in court. Overall, it appeared that Perth participants were more likely to encounter criminal proceedings and formal charges, whereas Melbourne and Armidale participants were more likely to receive cautions. It is important to note that participants did not provide information on the amount of cannabis they were found in possession of; it is therefore possible that the legal outcomes reported accurately reflect jurisdictional laws at each site, rather than differences in police behaviours. A breakdown of findings related to the legal outcomes participants experienced when found in possession of cannabis is presented in Table 35.

| Table 35: Legal outcomes of apprehension for cannabis possession (%)* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth (n=19) | Melbourne (n=18) | Armidale (n=15) | Total (n=52) | Sig |
| Dealt with informally | 42 | 50 | 53 | 48 | 0.793 |
| Arrested | 26 | 17 | 7 | 17 | 0.322 |
| Reprimanded | 5 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 0.984 |
| Given a final warning | 11 | 0 | 13 | 8 | 0.303 |
| Received a formal caution | 5 | 33 | 40 | 25 | 0.040 |
| Received an infringement notice | 16 | 11 | 0 | 10 | 0.290 |
| Received a fine | 37 | 6 | 0 | 15 | 0.005 |
| Asked to attend education session | 26 | 6 | 0 | 12 | 0.036 |
| Charged with possession office | 37 | 6 | 7 | 17 | 0.018 |
| Charged with supply offence | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.413 |
| Appeared in court | 32 | 6 | 7 | 15 | 0.049 |
| Criminal conviction recorded | 11 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0.164 |
| Other | 42 | 33 | 20 | 33 | 0.183 |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

## *7.1.2 Impact on life*

Participants were also asked what impact, if any, being found in possession of cannabis had on their life (Table 36). Overall, approximately half (46%, n=24) reported a negative impact on their life and half (54%, n=28) reported that it made no difference. The most commonly reported negative was that it created problems associated with being known to police (25%, n=13), with some participants reporting ongoing police scrutiny. Smaller proportions reported that it created relationship difficulties (19%, n=10) and employment difficulties (10%, n=5). A variety of other impacts on participants' lives were reported; a range of these responses were related to developing negative perceptions of police and the current legal system around the use of cannabis. Unsurprisingly, of those participants who were charged with a possession offence (17%, n=9), the majority (67%, n=6) reported it had negatively impacted them. The two most commonly reported negative impacts of a possession charge were employment difficulties and relationship difficulties (each 44%, n=4), followed by problems associated with being known to the police (33%, n=3). Some other life impacts reported included involuntary admission to a psychiatric ward due to high suicide risk, problems enrolling in study and ongoing difficulties across many areas of life. It is important to note that, due to the small sample size of those charged with a possession offence, these findings should be interpreted with caution. There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the impacts of being found in possession of cannabis on participants' lives.

| Table 36: Impact on life of apprehension for cannabis possession (%)* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth (n=19) | Melbourne (n=18) | Armidale (n=15) | Total (n=52) | Sig |
| Employment difficulties | 21 | 0 | 7 | 10 | 0.085 |
| Relationship difficulties | 16 | 17 | 27 | 19 | 0.686 |
| Accommodation difficulties | 16 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 0.516 |
| Overseas travel difficulties | 5 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 0.564 |
| Problems associated with being known to police | 42 | 17 | 13 | 25 | 0.094 |
| Don't know/not sure | 0 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 0.284 |
| Made no difference | 37 | 72 | 47 | 54 | 0.097 |
| Other | 21 | 22 | 33 | 25 | 0.837 |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

### *7.1.3 Impact on cannabis use*

Similar to the findings on impact on life, approximately half of those who were found in possession of cannabis (52%, n=27) reported that it made no difference to their cannabis use; the remaining half (48%, n=25) reported that it impacted the way they use cannabis (Table 37). Very few participants (13%, n=8) reported an actual change or reduction in their cannabis use; rather, the most commonly reported impact was that participants were more careful about where and how they use cannabis (44%, n=23). For those participants who were charged with a possession offence (17%, n=9), the majority (78%, n=7) reported an impact on their use. Again, the two most commonly reported impacts were that the participant was more careful about where and how they used and that they stopped for a while (each 44%, n=4). Only two participants who were charged with a possession offence reported using less (33%, n=3). It is important to note that, due to the small sample size of those charged with a possession offence, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Overall, it appeared that for most participants being found in possession of cannabis did not significantly impact their cannabis use; if anything, it made them more cautious so as to avoid detection and further police contact.

| Table 37: Impact on use of apprehension for cannabis possession (%)* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perth (n=19) | Melbourne (n=18) | Armidale (n=15) | Total (n=52) | Sig |
| Made no difference | 47 | 56 | 53 | 52 | 0.876 |
| Used less | 11 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0.425 |
| Reduced consumption initially | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.413 |
| More careful about where/how used | 47 | 44 | 40 | 44 | 0.912 |
| Stopped for a while | 11 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 0.838 |
| Gave up completely | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Other | 5 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 0.655 |

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%

## 7.2 Police contact for supply

Only one participant reported being arrested for supplying cannabis at some point in their lifetime. This participant was from Perth and reported that they had only been arrested once. Given the extremely small sample size (n=1), findings for this section should be interpreted with caution.

### *7.2.1 Legal outcomes*

In terms of the legal outcome, the participant reported that they were arrested, received a fine and a supply charge, and ultimately given a spent conviction.

### *7.2.2 Impact on life*

The participant reported that being arrested for supply impacted upon their life in variety of areas; they experienced employment difficulties, relationship difficulties, difficulties travelling overseas and problems associated with being known to police.

### *7.2.3 Impact on cannabis use*

When asked about the impact the arrest had on their cannabis use, the participant reported that they initially reduced consumption, were more careful of where and how they used and stopped for a while.

# 8 Understanding of cannabis and the law

Participants were asked a range of questions related to cannabis and the law in Australia, including what their current understanding of possession and supply laws was, and their attitudes and opinions toward current cannabis laws.

## 8.1 Understanding of the law

In order to investigate their understanding of current cannabis laws in Australia, participants were asked what amounts of cannabis they carried on them and what type of charge they would expect to receive if found in possession of those amounts.

### *8.1.1 Carrying cannabis on the person*

As evident in Table 38, almost the entire sample (94%, n=187) reported carrying cannabis on their person. The median amount typically carried was two grams (interquartile range=1–3 grams) and the median maximum amount carried was 14 grams, or half an ounce (interquartile range=3–28 grams). There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the amounts of cannabis typically carried.

No participants reported typically carrying an amount above that which would deem them, within their jurisdiction, to be in possession with intent to supply. However, one participant from Perth and three participants from Melbourne and Armidale reported carrying a maximum amount above that threshold.

**Table 38: Amount carried on person**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Carry cannabis on person (%)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=80)** | **(N=40)** | **(N=200)** | **0.167** |
| Yes | 98 | 91 | 90 | 94 | |
| No | 3 | 9 | 10 | 7 | |
| **Median grams carried on person** | **(n=77)** | **(n=72)** | **(n=15)** | **(n=164)** | **0.110** |
| Typical | 1.5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| (Interquartile range) | (1–3) | (1–3) | (1–7) | (1–3) | |
| **Median grams carried on person** | **(n=78)** | **(n=73)** | **(n=35)** | **(n=186)** | **0.346** |
| Maximum | 7 | 28 | 14 | 14 | |
| (Interquartile range) | (3–28) | (7–28) | (3–28) | (3–28) | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

When asked what they thought they would be charged with if found in possession of the amounts they carried on their person, participants' expectations were varied. This analysis was based on the most commonly reported amounts carried.

#### Expectations of charges for typical amounts carried

The most commonly reported amounts typically carried were recoded into categories of less than one gram, one to two grams (a stick or a $25 bag), 2.5–3.5 grams (a $50 bag), and 28 grams (an ounce). It is important

to note that, due to some small cell sizes, these findings should be interpreted with caution. A breakdown of findings around participants' expectations of charges for typical amounts carried is presented in Table 39.

### *Expected charge for carrying less than one gram*

There appeared to be differences between sites in relation to participants' expectations of what they would be charged with if caught carrying less than one gram of cannabis. All participants (100%, n=9) from Perth believed they would be charged with possession, whereas the majority (75%, n=5) of participants from Melbourne and all participants from Armidale (100%, N=1) believed they would not be charged.

### *Expected charge for carrying one to two grams (a stick or $25 bag)*

There also appeared to be differences between sites in relation to participants' expectations of what they would be charged with for carrying one to two grams of cannabis. The majority of Perth participants (93%, n=41) believed they would be charged with possession, whereas the majority of participants in Melbourne (55%, n=21) and Armidale (67%, n=4) believed they would not be charged.

### *Expected charge for carrying 2.5–3.5 grams (a $50 bag)*

Of those participants who reported typically carrying 2.5–3.5 grams on their person, the majority (80%, n=26) believed they would be charged with possession.

### *Expected charge for carrying 28 grams (an ounce)*

Only a very small number of participants reported typically carrying an ounce of cannabis on them (n=7) and the majority (71%, n=5) believed they would be charged with possession.

**Table 39: Expected charges for typical amounts carried**

| (%) | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Expectation of charge for <1 gram** | **(n=9)** | **(n=8)** | **(n=1)** | **(n=18)** |
| No charge | 0 | 75 | 100 | 40 |
| Possession | 100 | 25 | 0 | 61 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Expectation of charge for 1–2 grams (a stick or $25 bag)** | **(n=44)** | **(n=38)** | **(n=6)** | **(n=88)** |
| No charge | 7 | 55 | 67 | 32 |
| Possession | 93 | 45 | 33 | 68 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Expectation of charge for 2.5–3.5 grams (a $50 bag)** | **(n=15)** | **(n=16)** | **(n=1)** | **(n=32)** |
| No charge | 0 | 31 | 0 | 16 |
| Possession | 93 | 69 | 100 | 81 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 7 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| **Expectation of charge for 28 grams (an ounce)** | **(n=3)** | **(n=2)** | **(n=2)** | **(n=7)** |
| No charge | 0 | 0 | 50 | 14 |
| Possession | 0 | 50 | 0 | 14 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 100 | 50 | 50 | 71 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## Expectations of charges for maximum amounts carried

The most commonly reported maximum amounts carried were recoded into the categories less than one gram, one to two grams (a stick or $25 bag), 2.5–3.5 grams (a $50 bag), seven grams (a quarter of an ounce), 14 grams (half an ounce), 28 grams (an ounce) and more than 28 grams (more than an ounce). Again, it is important to note that, due to some small cell sizes, these findings should be interpreted with caution. A breakdown of findings related to expected charges for typical amounts carried is presented in Table 40.

### *Expected charge for carrying one to two grams (a stick or $25 bag)*

Of those participants who reported carrying a maximum of one to two grams on their person, the majority (71%, n=12) believed they would be charged with possession.

### *Expected charge for carrying 2.5–3.5 grams (a $50 bag)*

Of those participants who reported carrying a maximum of 2.5–3.5 grams on their person, the majority of participants (83%, n=30) again believed they would be charged with possession.

### *Expected charge for carrying seven grams (a quarter of an ounce)*

Of those participants who reported carrying a maximum of seven grams on their person, approximately two-thirds (63%, n=5) believed they would be charged with possession and approximately one-third (32%, n=6) believed they would be charged with possession with intent to supply.

### *Expected charge for carrying 28 grams (an ounce)*

Of those participants who reported carrying a maximum of an ounce on their person, approximately two-thirds (68%, n=30) believed they would be charged with possession with intent to supply, and approximately one-third (32%, n=14) believed they would be charged with possession.

### *Expected charge for carrying more than 28 grams (more than an ounce)*

Of those who reported carrying a maximum greater than an ounce on their person, the majority (81%, n=17) believed they would be charged with possession with intent to supply.

**Table 40: Expected charges for maximum amounts carried**

| (%) | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Expectation of charge for 1–2 grams (a stick or $25 bag)** | **(n=9)** | **(n=3)** | **(n=5)** | **(n=17)** |
| No charge | 0 | 33 | 60 | 24 |
| Possession | 89 | 67 | 40 | 71 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 11 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| **Expectation of charge for 2.5–3.5 grams (a $50 bag)** | **(n=22)** | **(n=4)** | **(n=4)** | **(n=30)** |
| No charge | 0 | 25 | 25 | 7 |
| Possession | 91 | 75 | 50 | 83 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 9 | 0 | 25 | 10 |
| **Expectation of charge for 7 grams (quarter of an ounce)** | **(n=7)** | **(n=9)** | **(n=3)** | **(n=19)** |
| No charge | 0 | 9 | 33 | 5 |
| Possession | 43 | 78 | 67 | 63 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 57 | 22 | 0 | 32 |

| Expectation of charge for 14 grams (half an ounce) | (n=4) | (n=6) | (n=1) | (n=11) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No charge | 0 | 17 | 0 | 9 |
| Possession | 75 | 67 | 100 | 73 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 25 | 17 | 0 | 18 |
| **Expectation of charge for 28 grams (an ounce)** | **(n=23)** | **(n=13)** | **(n=8)** | **(n=44)** |
| No charge | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Possession | 22 | 54 | 25 | 32 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 78 | 46 | 75 | 68 |
| **Expectation of charge for >28 grams (more than an ounce)** | **(n=3)** | **(n=13)** | **(n=5)** | **(n=21)** |
| No charge | 0 | 8 | 0 | 5 |
| Possession | 0 | 23 | 0 | 14 |
| Possession with intent to supply | 100 | 69 | 100 | 81 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## *8.1.2 Understanding of possession with intent to supply*

Under Australian law, someone found in possession of a specified amount of cannabis can be charged with intent to supply. Participants were asked how much cannabis they thought would attract a charge of possession with intent to supply in their jurisdiction. There were significant differences between sites in relation to the amounts believed to attract a supply charge. This is unsurprising, and likely reflects perceived jurisdictional differences in law. A breakdown of findings by site is presented in Table 41.

### Western Australia

Under Western Australian law, if a person is found in possession of more than 100 grams of cannabis, they will be deemed to be in possession with intent to supply (Hughes, Ritter, Cowdery & Phillips 2014). When Perth participants were asked what amount of cannabis they believed would attract a charge of possession with intent to supply, only one participant correctly identified this amount; the remaining Perth sample nominated an amount under the 100 gram threshold. The median amount participants believed would attract a supply charge at the Perth site was 10 grams (interquartile range=5–12 grams). The greatest proportion (30%, n=24) answered 10 grams, followed by 28 grams (or an ounce) and 14 grams or half an ounce (each 8%, n=6). Some participants (15%, n=12) were unable to comment on what amount they believed would attract a supply charge, indicating that the vast majority of Perth participants were unaware of current jurisdictional laws applicable to cannabis.

### Melbourne

Under Victorian law, if a person is found in possession of more than 250 grams of cannabis they will be deemed to be in possession with intent to supply (Hughes et al. 2014). As at the Perth site, when participants were asked what amount of cannabis they believed would attract a charge of possession with intent to supply, only one participant correctly identified this amount; the remaining Melbourne sample nominated an amount under the 250 gram threshold. The median amount participants believed would attract a supply charge at the Melbourne site was 21 grams (interquartile range=7–28 grams). The greatest proportion (30%, n=24) answered 28 grams (one ounce), followed by seven grams or a quarter of an ounce (25%, n=12) and three grams (13%, n=10). Again, some participants (8%, n=6) were unable to comment on what amount they believed would attract a supply charge. This indicates that the vast majority of Melbourne participants were also unaware of the current jurisdictional laws applicable to cannabis.

## Armidale

Under New South Wales law, if a person is found in possession of more than 300 grams of cannabis they will be deemed to be in possession with intent to supply (Hughes et al. 2014). When participants were asked what amount of cannabis they believed would attract a charge of possession with intent to supply, no participants were able to correctly identify this amount; two participants nominated an amount above the 300 gram threshold and the remaining Armidale sample nominated an amount under the threshold. The median amount believed to attract a supply charge for the Armidale site was 15 grams (interquartile range=7–28 grams). The greatest proportion (25%, n=10) answered 15 grams, followed by 28 grams or one ounce (8%, n=6) and seven grams or a quarter of an ounce (13%, n=5). Two participants (5%) were unable to comment on what amount they believe attracted a supply charge. As with the other study sites, Armidale participants appeared to be unaware of the current jurisdictional laws applicable to cannabis.

**Table 41: Understanding of amounts attracting a possession with intent to supply charge**

| | Perth (n=68) | Melbourne (n=74) | Armidale (n=38) | Total (n=180) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Median amount (grams) believed to currently attract supply charge (interquartile range)** | **10 (5–12)** | **21 (7–28)** | **15 (7–28)** | **10 (8–28)** | **0.000** |

Participants were also asked how much cannabis they believe should attract the charge of possession with intent to supply, if an amount had to specified (Table 42). The greatest proportion (39%, n=67) reported that they believed 28 grams should be the threshold amount for a supply charge, 30% (n=51) nominated an amount greater than 28 grams (eg that 2 ounces should be the threshold) and 31% (n=53) reported an amount lower than 28 grams (eg that 7 grams should be the threshold). A small proportion (15%, n=29) of participants did not comment as they did not believe there should be any amount specified in law.

Participants were also asked to explain why they believed their nominated amount should attract a supply charge. An exploration of open-ended responses of those who nominated an ounce as the appropriate amount found that the most commonly reported reasons for this could be recoded as: it was a reasonable amount for personal use (66%, n=42); that above this, they were likely to be selling (45%, n=29); and that this amount avoided frequent purchases (17%, n=11). In general, other responses involved considering individual tolerances, whether a profit was being made and whether that profit was significant enough to warrant a charge, and the possibility that a person could be sharing the amount they were found in possession of with friends.

**Table 42: Amounts participants believe should attract a possession with intent to supply charge**

| | Perth | Melbourne | Armidale | Total | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Median amount (grams) that should attract supply charge** | **(n=77) 28** | **(n=59) 28** | **(n=35) 28** | **(n=171) 28** | **0.118** |
| **(interquartile range)** | **(14–28)** | **(15–168)** | **(14–50)** | **(14–56)** | |
| **Participants (%) who believe nominated amount should attract supply charge** | **(n=77)** | **(n=59)** | **(n=35)** | **(n=171)** | **0.171** |
| An amount less than 28 grams | 31 | 29 | 34 | 31 | |
| 28 grams | 47 | 31 | 37 | 39 | |
| An amount greater than 28 grams | 22 | 41 | 29 | 30 | |
| **Why an ounce or more should attract a supply charge (%)*** | **(n=34)** | **(n=18)** | **(n=12)** | **(n=64)** | |
| Reasonable amount for personal use | 79 | 50 | 50 | 66 | |
| Above this likely selling | 38 | 61 | 42 | 45 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avoid frequency of purchases | 29 | 0 | 8 | 17 |
| Maximum discount/get better deal | 24 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| Should account for different tolerances | 9 | 6 | 25 | 11 |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

*Multiple responses were allowed so totals may exceed 100%. These findings were recoded from open-ended qualitative responses; statistical significance testing was therefore not appropriate

## 8.2 Attitudes toward legalisation of illicit drugs

Participants were asked to comment on their level of support for the legalisation of cannabis and a number of other illicit drugs including heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and ecstasy. As evident below, support seemed to vary significantly between drugs, predominantly according to the perceived potential for harm.

### *8.2.1 Cannabis*

As evident in Table 43, the vast majority of participants (90%, n=180) reported that they either strongly supported or supported the legalisation of cannabis. Only one participant reported that they strongly opposed legalisation. There were no significant differences between sites in attitudes toward the legalisation of cannabis.

The most commonly reported reasons for supporting the legalisation of cannabis could be broadly recoded as: it is not harmful; it is less harmful than alcohol; and legalising it would remove the criminal element and harms arising from its illicit status. There were also several responses citing medicinal benefits, support for personal choice and freedom, that it is a natural drug and that it is a social drug. To a lesser extent, participants spoke of agricultural and/or environmental benefits, government benefits and/or tax, and evidence from other countries supporting legalisation. Many participants also spoke about the potential benefits of diverting tax revenue into harm reduction strategies such as education and treatment. Some participants believed legalisation would lead to reduced stigma, misinformation and fear of criminalisation, which could lead to a greater number of cannabis users seeking help from treatment services. Those who spoke about cannabis and harm often emphasised the lack of acute harms arising from cannabis use—for example, the low risk of overdose—particularly in comparison to other legal, prescribed or illicit drugs.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the views of participants who reported they would support cannabis legalisation:

> It's already widely used so legalisation would help reduce the criminal element and stop people going to prison for addiction. You don't see violent cannabis users, unlike alcohol users. The law is inconsistent. [P17, male, 24yrs]

> Cannabis—causes very little to no negative effects for most people. It's not physically addictive. Causes less damage than alcohol. It has medicinal benefits (e.g., PTSD, insomnia, pain, glaucoma). Hemp is a great natural product. It will reduce demonisation. [P29, male, 27yrs]

> Cannabis is not harmful and should be safe for people to partake in their homes, that is relatively harmless to the wider community. People don't get stoned and king hit people. It does more good than harm. Being illegal is more harmful than good. Medical Marijuana saved California and [its] biggest industry. Cancer patients, people suffering from dementia—it works. [M22, male, 29yrs]

> It's not detrimental to health or wellbeing (except in certain circumstances, some people it doesn't work well with. Some people are predisposed to psychosis, which is a risk with any drug). Good for people, encourages clear thinking, relaxation, creativity and the plant itself is useful— aside from it being a recreational drug. [M26, female, 22yrs]

> Cannabis is already given (legally) to some people around the world for medicine. I feel it does less damage to your body than alcohol. It is no cure for cancer but research shows it is natural remedy for pain relief and nausea relief for chemotherapy patents. Governments could subsidise cannabis and save money from policing it and earn money from it and pump up the economy. [A38, male, 23yrs]

The most commonly reported reasons for opposing the legalisation of cannabis could be broadly recoded into the following categories: it would become more expensive, the participant did not want government control, it could increase the uptake of use, it could be harmful or negatively affect some people and that it would not benefit the participant. Those who spoke about the implications of government control expressed concerns about access to cannabis being controlled by commercial corporations, where it would become a source of mass profit and more expensive for consumers. Other participants expressed concerns about Australian society not being mature enough to handle legalisation, which could result in an increase in abuse of the drug and consequent harms. Some participants reported that cannabis can negatively impact some individuals, and expressed particular concern around psychological harm—that it could trigger pre-disposed disorders, anxiety, paranoia, and so on. Those who believed legalisation would not benefit them either benefited from its current illicit status (eg via selling), or already found cannabis easily accessible and believed legalisation would only negatively impact its availability and cost for them. There were also participants who did not support the legalisation of cannabis, but supported its regulation for medicinal purposes.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the views of participants who reported they would oppose the legalisation of cannabis:

> Some people can't use without a psychological impact (e.g., anxiety). The law doesn't personally impact me either way—I can obtain regardless. [P56, male, 22yrs]

> Cannabis due to its psychoactive effects is a medicine—a very active herb compared to other herbs. It is very strong so should be regulated rather than fully legal. If legal and people allowed to profit from this, chemical additives would be a major concern. Habitual usage, like addiction, is a major problem. There would be massive benefits if doctors, etc. could prescribe cannabis—it should be a prescription drug. [A30, male, 23yrs]

> I don't support legalisation, because I don't want the government's grubby hands on it. Like booze, pharmaceuticals—mass companies, profiting, don't like the thought of it being a part of the consumer corporation. I don't think it's for everyone, like alcohol isn't. Not enough education around safe use. I do strongly support it being decriminalised. Without history of education of a generation, legalising it would be irresponsible. Education should happen regardless because people will continue to use. [M64, female, 30yrs]

> I support it being decriminalised but shouldn't be legal because we shouldn't support people becoming pot heads. It does have side effects. It should be restricted because some people can't control their use. [M77, male, 28yrs]

> Cannabis legalisation would be detrimental to Australian society. We're not mature enough. The illegality is what makes it cool. Just look at alcohol harms and road fatalities [for evidence of a lack of maturity]! [M68, male, 21yrs]

| Table 43: Attitudes towards cannabis legalisation | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (%) | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
| Strongly support | 71 | 71 | 65 | 70 | 0.569 |
| Support | 23 | 13 | 28 | 20 | |
| Neither support nor oppose | 4 | 8 | 3 | 5 | |
| Oppose | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | |
| Strongly oppose | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| Don't know enough to say | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 8.2.2 Heroin

Table 44 presents findings for attitudes towards heroin legalisation. The vast majority of participants (80%, n=160) reported that they would either oppose or strongly oppose the legalisation of heroin. No participants reported that they would strongly support legalisation. There were no significant differences between sites in attitudes towards the legalisation of heroin.

The most commonly reported reasons for supporting the legalisation of heroin could be broadly recoded as support for personal choice and freedom, and a belief that legalisation would reduce harms such as overdose and crime. Several participants supported legalisation generally as they believed drug use should be treated as a public health issue, rather than a criminal one. Some participants also supported legalising heroin only for dependent users under strict medical supervision.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the views of participants who reported they would support heroin legalisation:

> Ideologically I'd support it but wouldn't encourage it. It needs to be treated as a health issue. Prohibition doesn't work, but use can't be encouraged. [M67, male, 23yrs]

> Freedom to do as you please with your body. Social and health issues could be dealt with more effectively if regulated. As a health problem not a legal problem. People are going to use those drugs no matter what so better to be treated as a health issue. Legalisation can regulate trade and regulate quality. [M78, male, 24yrs]

> People should be able to make informed decisions and not allowing this is infringing on a free society. The decision shouldn't be in the hands of a few people. Supports personal choice, freedom, personal responsibility and accountability. [P07, female, 23yrs]

> It's more harmful because it's illegal (eg issues with overdosing, crime, etc). [P19, male, 27yrs]

The most commonly reported reasons for opposing the legalisation of heroin could be broadly recoded as follows: that it is highly addictive, that it destroys and consumes lives, that it is harmful to the individual and that it is harmful to society, for example, through crime.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the views of participants who reported they would oppose heroin legalisation:

> I oppose legalising heroin, methamphetamine and ecstasy because their effects are highly varied, as are people (and their individual reactions to the substances). Cannot control the health risks of these drugs—there are too many of these for any of these drugs to be condoned as being legal. [A39, male, 25yrs]

> Heroin is horrible for you—once you've used it, it becomes a part of you, and you can die from withdrawal. Becomes your first priority—bud is not like this. When your body becomes reliant on a

substance that's when it's bad—should be abolished altogether, not made legal! Who has ever heard of a successful heroin addict? [M32, female, 20yrs]

Too much potential for it to go wrong, addiction potential, always chasing the high, would support government regulation to remove the criminal element and safety risk. [P12, male, 18yrs]

Addictive nature, no benefits, it's not a social drug. [P16, male, 28yrs]

**Table 44: Attitudes towards heroin legalisation**

| (%) | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly support | 13 | 11 | 0 | 10 | 0.180 |
| Support | 13 | 11 | 5 | 11 | |
| Neither support nor oppose | 10 | 14 | 15 | 13 | |
| Oppose | 11 | 13 | 25 | 15 | |
| Strongly oppose | 48 | 48 | 55 | 49 | |
| Don't know enough to say | 6 | 4 | 0 | 4 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 8.2.3 Methamphetamine

Table 45 presents findings around attitudes towards the legalisation of methamphetamine. The majority of participants (70%, n=160) reported they would either oppose or strongly oppose the legalisation of methamphetamine, but a small proportion (17%, n=33) reported they would either support or strongly support it. There were no significant differences between sites in attitudes towards the legalisation of methamphetamine.

The most commonly reported reasons for supporting the legalisation of methamphetamine could be broadly recoded as support for personal choice and freedom, and that legalisation would reduce harms.

These following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the views of participants who reported they would support methamphetamine legalisation:

Ultimately the only person you're harming from the use of drugs is yourself. It would become a public health issue, opposed to a criminal issue with punitive actions. By removing illicit status we could remove many of the associated harms. In a perfect libertarian society everything becomes legal and a public health issue. [P38, male, 28yrs]

It's silly to make a distinction between legal and illegal drugs. Should be a regulated market and avoid the black market which can cause harm to society. But I don't think it needs a justification—it's about civil liberties. Complex issue. Should be treated as a health issue rather than a criminal issue. [M76, male, 25yrs]

The most commonly reported reasons for opposing the legalisation of methamphetamine could be broadly recoded into the following categories: its addictive nature; it causes psychological harm; it causes physical harm; it destroys or consumes lives; and it is harmful to society by increasing violence and crime. Many participants had strong attitudes towards methamphetamine, with several reporting having seen firsthand the devastating impact it can have on people.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the attitudes of participants who opposed methamphetamine legalisation:

The physical and psychological harms are massive, you're constantly coming down, experience paranoia, impacts personality, physically addictive, you're never satisfied, you can't eat, sleep or function, it consumes your life—it's a scary drug that ruins lives. [P34, female, 19yrs]

Because it's a 'hard' drug, it's highly addictive and has many negative health effects. [P06, male, 18yrs]

It has a psychological impact on users—people lose touch of reality—high risk of psychosis. [P16, male, 28yrs]

No therapeutic benefits, quiet addictive and catalyst anti-social behaviour. Exacerbates social inequalities that already exist. Greater good is to discourage its use. [M70, female, 23yrs]

I am most strongly opposed to legalising ice (methamphetamine) rather than the other chemical drugs because it is the worst in terms of its impact on society. Methamphetamine makes people go crazy and violent and people on this drug can come and kill you, whereas heroin just makes people dull. [A27, female, 18yrs]

**Table 45: Attitudes towards methamphetamine legalisation**

| (%) | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly support | 8 | 8 | 0 | 6 | 0.381 |
| Support | 11 | 13 | 5 | 11 | |
| Neither support nor oppose | 9 | 13 | 10 | 11 | |
| Oppose | 18 | 13 | 28 | 18 | |
| Strongly oppose | 50 | 51 | 58 | 52 | |
| Don't know enough to say | 5 | 4 | 0 | 4 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 8.2.4 Cocaine

As evident in Table 46, views on the legalisation of cocaine divided participants more than those on cannabis, heroin and methamphetamine. Approximately half the sample (49%, n=79) reported they would either oppose or strongly oppose it; approximately one-quarter (23%, n=46) reported they would either support or strongly support it; and the remainder (28%, n=56) reported that they neither supported nor opposed it, or did not know enough to say. There were no significant differences between sites in attitudes toward the legalisation of cocaine.

The most commonly reported reasons for supporting the legalisation of cocaine could be broadly recoded into the following categories: it is a recreational drug; it is less harmful than some other drugs and it is a fun drug. Overall, it appeared that cocaine was perceived as a softer illicit drug than heroin and methamphetamine. Participants' attitudes generally were not as strong toward cocaine, with many uncertain of their opinion and taking neutral stances.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the views of participants who supported cocaine legalisation:

Personal experience suggests recreational drug. Would support if regulated and pharmaceutically controlled. Would remove contact with criminal element (supply and law). [P79, female, 18yrs]

In moderation, but how do you track people's use? It's addictive. I don't know. [M72, female, 19yrs]

It's good, but it's a rich person's drug. Don't support daily use, but who am I to say you can't use it? But [it] can kill you, not for me to say. I'm neutral. [M40, female, 21yrs]

The most commonly reported reasons for opposing the legalisation of cocaine could be broadly recoded as: its potential for abuse and/or increased uptake if legalised, its potential to cause acute harms such as cardiac stress and seizures, and its addictive nature.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate the views of participants who opposed cocaine legalisation:

> I'm not aware of any benefits of use. It's short-acting and causes cardiac stress. [M45, female, 20yrs]

> It's addictive and messes people up. We're lucky that it's expensive here. Coca leaf on its own, I reckon that could be great if you could buy it—use instead of coffee. [M74, female, 26yrs]

> Heroin and cocaine are not as bad as ice (methamphetamine) and ecstasy because they are naturally derived, yet I still would not want to see heroin and cocaine on the streets. [A31, female, 21yrs]

**Table 46: Attitudes towards cocaine legalisation**

| (%) | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly support | 10 | 10 | 0 | 8 | 0.212 |
| Support | 14 | 16 | 15 | 15 | |
| Neither support nor oppose | 14 | 25 | 28 | 21 | |
| Oppose | 19 | 9 | 25 | 16 | |
| Strongly oppose | 35 | 33 | 30 | 33 | |
| Don't know enough to say | 8 | 8 | 3 | 7 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

## 8.2.5 Ecstasy

Table 47 presents findings for attitudes towards ecstasy legalisation. As with cocaine, views on the legalisation of ecstasy divided the sample; however, unlike attitudes to cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine, attitudes toward ecstasy appeared to be more favourable. The greatest proportion of the sample (43%, n=86) reported they would either support or strongly support the legalisation of ecstasy. There were no significant differences between sites in attitudes toward the legalisation of ecstasy.

The most commonly reported reasons for supporting the legalisation of ecstasy could be broadly recoded into the following categories: it is not addictive, it is a recreational or fun drug, pure MDMA is not harmful, regulation would remove risks around impurity, and it has a potential therapeutic benefit—for example, in treating PTSD. Many participants reported that they would support the legalisation of ecstasy if it was regulated, as they believed most of the harms of ecstasy arise from issues surrounding its notorious impurity. Overall, ecstasy was perceived as a drug that was not particularly harmful and one that could be used safely if regulated.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses that illustrate views of participants who reported they would support ecstasy legalisation:

> It's a love drug, you don't get haters. It has adulterants, but if you used responsibly isn't too harmful. Would support regulation as well to control purity. [P27, female, 22yrs]

> MDMA in pure form is not a threat, potential to be productive in terms of society. Ecstasy, support if it was made by chemists not by criminals, Great thing if regulated and produced properly. [M25, male, 22yrs]

> I know studies have shown that it's good for depression and PTSD, if it's pure, all people do is hug each other. Not many negative side effects. If legal would allow for control of purity. Should be regulated a bit more than weed should. Because some people can react differently than others. Dose control more complicated than cannabis. [M70, female, 23yrs]

The most commonly reported reasons for opposing the legalisation of ecstasy could be broadly recoded as: its potential for causing psychological harm (eg serotonin depletion and comedowns); users do not know what is in it; it is not natural; and it has unknown long-term effects. Unsurprisingly, many of those who opposed

ecstasy legalisation did so as they had concerns about harms from adulterants or impurity, which suggests they may not oppose legalisation under regulated conditions.

The following excerpts are taken from interviewer transcriptions of responses of participants who reported that they would oppose ecstasy legalisation:

> It's bad for the brain and body. There are many adulterants and unknown long-term effects. [P29, male, 27yrs]

> I think it fries people's brains. If it becomes more than recreational, I don't think that it would be productive for society. [M52, female, 19yrs]

> It's dangerous; you don't know what's in it. It can cause negative reactions. [A03, female, 20yrs]

**Table47: Attitudes towards ecstasy legalisation**

| (%) | Perth (N=80) | Melbourne (N=80) | Armidale (N=40) | Total (N=200) | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly support | 23 | 25 | 5 | 20 | 0.158 |
| Support | 23 | 25 | 20 | 23 | |
| Neither support nor oppose | 15 | 20 | 25 | 19 | |
| Oppose | 21 | 11 | 20 | 17 | |
| Strongly oppose | 16 | 16 | 30 | 19 | |
| Don't know enough to say | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | |

Note: Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, totals may not add up to 100%

# 9 Participant comments

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to provide final comments. Some of these were digitally recorded and transcribed, others were summarised by the interviewer. The quotes below are examples of participants' comments:

> Penalties for minor drug offences should be changed to fines. A criminal record doesn't deter from further cannabis activities, it just makes life more difficult in other ways. It's a cruel way of punishing people for bad choices. The punishment does not fit the crime. I would encourage a larger fine. Persecuting you doesn't teach you right and wrong. I would accept a reasonable punishment, not an ongoing unjustified one. [M15, male, 21yrs]

> I think the public health argument is a very valid one, which reflects my own experience (re problematic use) and criminalisation is likely to make people less inclined to seek help. [M19, male, 26yrs]

> …I think the fact that it's illegal is wrong because it means that normal people, which is most cannabis users that aren't like reckless idiots that haven't got jobs, they're mostly normal people that you just don't know about, have to involve themselves in the criminal aspect and deal with these fucking idiots that deal a lot of other stuff as well, that has a lot of violence associated with it. So instead of having the whole illegality thing, they should take it out and moderate it so people don't have to involve themselves in it. Because a family man that just wants to smoke shouldn't have to go and see some hard-arse bikie. Yeah, it's just—I don't know. [M59, female, 19yrs]

> I strongly support this type of research. It supports pushing social views and education on drugs. Drug use shouldn't be demonised and scare tactics shouldn't be used. Young people should receive informed education to make own decision. This interview was comprehensive and there should be various drug specific interviews. [P52, male, 20yrs]

> Believe that current cannabis laws are ridiculous. Understand that government is trying to fight to beat cannabis use/harm, but are going about it the wrong way. People aren't going to stop; they're just going to go about it in more extreme ways. It's pushing things further underground and putting unnecessary stigma on pot smokers. There needs to be a big push on education around use and effects. For many, cannabis is like their glass of wine—it's not fair to be categorised negatively. [P53, male, 19yrs]

> I think the criminal supplier thing, it being that illicit thing, just creates way too many problems. It just uses up so much of my time trying to find—trying to source it and then having to go travel to wherever the hell I've got to go. I've got to maintain relationships with people that I wouldn't bother with. I definitely wouldn't bother with some of them. It just kind of makes me feel bad, I feel like I'm using these people and just being a manipulative wanker. The inconvenience of it is ridiculous. I think it's milder than alcohol. It certainly is to me. I don't really like alcohol at all, but I can walk almost—there's a bottle-o 200 metres from me, and maybe if I walked an extra 500 metres there's another one.

> People buy booze all over the place. It's almost encouraged. I would say it is actually encouraged, and I really find it ludicrous that pot is this thing that's treated the same as heroin and stuff, which again, I don't think should be like this either. I think the supply chain is—it's just baffling to me that this is the way that people think that they should deal with it, especially now when it's at least been apparent to me that there's been studies and stuff where it's been pretty obvious that sweeping it under the rug doesn't work for so long. At least 10 years where I've known about it, but then prohibition was what, the 20s or something, and that sort of seems like a good test case.

> The Netherlands as well, I think they do it. I don't know. I just don't know why it's treated this way. It seems really boneheaded to me. It just seems to appeal to people who've got no idea and no connection to any of the situation because they're so removed it just looks really different. They think that drug addicts are likely to break into your house and be these crazed murderers or whatever, which is kind of

true, but I think that's a result—the government, I think, is forcing these things to happen. It artificially inflates the price of things, makes the quality variable and quite often with other drugs it's not even what it says it is. I think the supply chain is bad, so that's why I really wanted to help in any way with this. I think it would be good if it's changed or addressed in some way. [P48, male, 30yrs]

Well, I mean it's like one of the worst things about the whole illegal thing is that it puts me in a situation where I have to feel unsafe when I meet new people like this and it sucks, I don't want to be put in that situation where I want something and I have to feel unsafe to get it…I mean it sucks having to go park in a dodgy car park and wait for somebody. It sucks and it doesn't feel great, you know, that's why I lock all my doors and stuff like that, but you've got to do what you've got to do, I suppose. [P78, male, 22yrs]

Australia has the highest rates of cannabis use and we are basing our laws on opinion, not fact. We have a black and white solution for a grey situation. It's not fair to prohibit a drug with medicinal benefits. [P26, male, 22yrs]

# 10 Summary and conclusions

Despite the difficulties with recruitment at the Armidale site, the sampling and recruitment methods employed successfully accessed a young group of 200 Australian cannabis users across different city and rural community samples.

## 10.1 Demographics

These cannabis users were of comparable age. Almost three-quarters (71%) were male, with 60 percent being of Australian or New Zealand background and 27 percent of north-west European origin. Some 87 percent had never been married. More than half (54%) lived in rental accommodation and a third (32%) in a parent's home. Perth participants were more likely (41%) than Armidale participants (5%) to live with a parent. As in previous studies of social supply, cannabis users in this study were well educated for their age, with 61 percent of this sample having completed a tertiary qualification. Although there were differences across the study sites with regard to sources of income—there was a higher proportion of welfare recipients at the Armidale site—overall, 55 percent cited employment as their main income stream and only four percent said that the sale of drugs was their main income stream.

## 10.2 Experiences of cannabis use

There were few differences across study sites with regards to participants' history of cannabis use. Most commenced use at about 15 years of age. Two-fifths (40%) of the sample were daily cannabis users and a similar proportion (41%) were using more than weekly, but not daily. Almost half (47%) reported that their use had fluctuated over time, mainly due to changes in life circumstances—for example, in their family, social life, education or work—and concerns around the negative impacts of increased tolerance and use. The most commonly used form of cannabis was hydro (72%), followed by bush (63%), with only nine percent reporting hash or resin as the most commonly used form. It is notable that in Armidale, the only rural site, bush cannabis was the main form of cannabis, used by 88 percent of that sample. Knowledge of the meaning of the term skunk—a term commonly used in the UK, but rarely in Australia—was, as expected, varied across the three samples, with the three most prevalent understandings being that it was cannabis of high strength (38%), a certain strain of cannabis (24%) or cannabis that was grown hydroponically (14%). Consistent with other research, this suggests skunk is a term which should be avoided in the Australian context.

The most commonly reported method for using cannabis was to smoke it in a joint (84%), followed closely by smoking it in a bong (77%) or a pipe (32%); participants also ate it, for example in baked goods (35%), or inhaled it using a vaporiser (22%). While there were differences between sites which may warrant further study, some of these may reflect different understandings of terminology. Of interest is the significant minority who reported vaporiser use, a method which has gained increasing popularity among cannabis users in recent years. Vaporisers are designed to release the active cannabinoids such as THC by heating, but not burning, the cannabis, and thus avoid the adverse effects of smoking.

Reasons given by these participants for using cannabis were no different to those given in other studies of cannabis users in Australia, namely to relax (60%), to have fun (48%), to be sociable (35%), to aid sleep (16%), to calm down (14%) and to alleviate boredom (11%, n=22). It was of interest that well over half the sample (62%) scored as cannabis dependent on the standardised Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS). Unsurprisingly, almost the entire sample (95%) preferred to use cannabis with friends, but some 57 percent also used alone. Overall, half the sample (50%) regarded cannabis use an important part of their social life and two-thirds (67%) said that other members of their family or household also used the drug. Participants gave a range of reasons for using the drug in social and solitary situations. Taken together, these results show cannabis to be an important and embedded aspect of the lives of most of these participants.

Across the sample as a whole, participants' weekly spend on cannabis for personal use was on average $50 (median=$30) for an average of five grams (median=2.75 grams) of cannabis. Participants could nominate up to two sources of funding to pay for their personal use. Among the first sources identified, the most frequently nominated were wages (61%) or benefits (16%), with only six percent funding their cannabis consumption through the sale of cannabis. However, a larger minority (29%) did report that monetary or other gains made from the supply of cannabis was used to supplement these other methods of funding their own cannabis use.

Again, almost the entire sample (95%) reported at least some illicit use of other drugs in their lifetime, most (90%) reported having done so in the past 12 months and three quarters (77%) in the past three months. The most commonly used other drugs were ecstasy, LSD and magic mushrooms. There were differences in other drug use across sites, with Melbourne participants more likely to have used other drugs in the past 12 and three months.

## 10.3 Obtaining cannabis

### *10.3.1 The nature of the relationship*

Overall, participants mostly obtained their cannabis from a median of three different people. The most frequently reported was from a friend who got it from a seller (ie brokered, 70%), followed closely by a friend who sold (58%) and then direct from a seller or grower (58%). To clarify, for the purpose of the study, a friend who sells implies that the person cannabis was obtained from was primarily considered a friend rather than a supplier, whereas direct from a seller or grower implies that the relationship was primarily for the purpose of supply.

When asked to rank their most common suppliers, the most common response was direct from a seller or grower (35%), from a friend who sells (31%) and from a friend who got it from a seller (brokered, 21%). Together these results suggest that in this sample, although most participants had obtained cannabis via brokering at some point, scoring direct from a seller or grower—that is, from a dealer—or from a friend who sold was how most scores occurred, rather than through brokering. Analysis of open-ended responses found that although participants often described their cannabis supplier as a friend, whether they first came into contact as friends or for the purpose of supply varied, with roughly three-fifths reporting a friendship first, and two-fifths reporting a supply relationship first.

Participants reported having obtained cannabis from their main supplier for a median of 52 weeks, and two thirds (65%) reported they were either close friends, or friends, with their main supplier. Less than one-fifth of the sample (18%) reported that the relationship with their main supplier was strictly business. Although there were differences between the sites, overall, coding of open-ended descriptions of their main supplier provided by 72 percent of the sample found that 53 percent said their main supplier sold only to friends, 31 percent said they sold to both friends and friends of friends, and 16 percent said they sold cannabis to anyone willing to buy.

These results go to the heart of one of the key aspects of the social supply literature. The extent to which social supply occurs among friends, acquaintances and non-strangers is one element common to most definitions of the term (Hough et al. 2003; New Zealand Law Commission 2010; Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts 2007). Furthermore, it addresses two of the critiques offered by Potter (2009), namely: what constitutes a friend, and which came first, the friendship or the drug-supply relationship?

In terms of motive—another aspect of the social supply definitions—of the 66 percent of participants who commented on why they thought their supplier supplied, the responses could be recoded as: they sold to make a profit (52%), they sold to cover some or all of their own use (30%) and they only brokered (17%). Of the 57 percent of the sample who commented on the profit their supplier made—most of whom were from the Perth site—responses were coded as: those who said their supplier covered some or all of the supplier's own use (35%), those whose supplier made a small profit (33%) and those whose supplier made a significant

profit (32%). The majority of the sample (73%) reported that the main person they obtained cannabis from did not grow their own cannabis.

### 10.3.2 The transaction

Approximately two-fifths of the sample (42%) reported that their main cannabis supplier also sold or brokered access to other drugs, with a greater proportion of participants from Melbourne (55%) reporting this than those at the other two sites. The three most commonly reported other drugs that were brokered or sold were ecstasy or MDMA (58%), LSD (35%) and magic mushrooms (29%). Although participants were asked whether they were offered or had asked for other drugs, there appeared to be some ambiguity in how these questions were asked and answered, and for this reason these results are unreliable.

The responses of the participants that addressed the last time they scored provide rich descriptions of the process of, and relationships around, obtaining cannabis. Some described friends giving them cannabis (as a reminder, for this study giving was defined not simply as sharing or using cannabis together, but rather where the cannabis given to the participant became their property). This usually involved friends who grew cannabis with the intention of giving it away to their friends. While it was rare for large amounts of cannabis to be given away, participants did report situations where, having run out of cannabis, friends would give them a small amount to keep them going until they could obtain more. In such situations there was clearly no tangible or monetary profit; rather, this was part of a social exchange. In some gifting situations, the supplier was someone who often had better access to a source of cannabis and apparently gave it away with little expectation of receiving a similar amount in return. In other accounts, where the giver and receiver seemed to have a more equal relationship—usually as cannabis consumers—one person might give a small amount to a friend in need, with an understanding that the favour would be returned if and when the tables were turned. The most common descriptions of friends who brokered cannabis involved friends who would pick up extra when obtaining their own supply; friends who were heavy smokers, who bought in bulk and were willing to broker small amounts; and friends who had access to cannabis when their friends did not.

Participants provided a variety of descriptions of friends who sold, ranging from friends who sold to cover some or all of their own use so they could smoke for free, friends who sold to make some extra cash, and friends who sold cannabis as their full-time job (ie it was their main form of income). This latter group would not, by most definitions, qualify as social suppliers because their profit was large rather than small and profit-making was their motive. More commonly, participants described friends who bought in large amounts (eg ounces) so they could act as a source of cannabis for their close friends or social network.

A variety of different types of dealers were described. Again, dealers were distinguished from friends who sold because the relationship was primarily one of cannabis supply. Dealers included people who sold cannabis to cover their own use, people who sold to get a bit of extra cash, and people who sold cannabis as their full-time job—that is, it was their main form of income. Open houses were primarily reported in Perth, although similar arrangements were described at the other sites. They often involved minority ethnic group families who typically dealt exclusively in the sale of cannabis. Open houses were characterised as: non-discriminatory (ie anyone could go to them); not requiring any prior or formal arrangements; having consistent supply; and generally involving very small deals such as sticks.

Although there were differences between study sites, and it was not possible to determine whether the seller was a friend or a dealer, overall the main methods of arranging transactions were: to phone and then visit the seller's house (73%); through a friend who bought for the participant (68%); by phoning the seller and arranging a place to meet (57%); by going to the seller's house (48%); and by the seller dropping off at the participant's house (48%). Participant reports of buying cannabis from strangers off the street (10%) and growing their own cannabis (8%) were far less common. Typical transactions took place in a variety of locations, most commonly houses, with half reporting the seller's house (51%), the participant's own house (27%) and a friend's house (26%). More than a quarter of participants (28%) reported meeting at an agreed public location such as a car park, street, park or beach, indicating that not all transactions took place in

private locations. When asked why they met at those locations, the most commonly reported reasons could be recoded as: because it was easy and convenient (51%), because it was convenient for the seller (29%), because there was less risk of police contact (25%) and because it was private, discreet or subtle (22%). Another commonly reported reason was that the participant and supplier were catching up socially anyway.

Participants' qualitative accounts of the last time they scored or obtained cannabis indicate that transactions were arranged and carried out in a variety of ways. Most commonly they were arranged via telephone or text messaging, followed by face-to-face meetings in a social context. There were also reports of arrangements being made via Facebook, Skype and other mobile phone communication apps. There were often reports of specific protocols and coding that needed to be adhered to when arranging transactions. Participants rarely reported directly arranging transactions via phone or text message; rather, they tended to use vague or indirect language to prompt face-to-face communication. Reasons for using coded or indirect language were most commonly related to concerns around legality and the risk of being recorded or having phone records requested by police.

There also seemed to be a strong sense of the need to show the supplier respect by adhering to their supply protocols, which were again based around concerns about legality and aimed at minimising the risk of police contact. Protocols and coding were more commonly encountered when people were also dealing in drugs other than cannabis, and more often used in relation to hydro than bush.

Analysis of transactions according to whether the supplier was a friend or a dealer, and whether cannabis was sold, brokered or swapped, provides useful comparisons which go to core aspects of the social supply concept. In general, as noted earlier, supply by friends tended to occur in informal social settings. Participants appeared to view the social element of the transaction as being as important as obtaining cannabis. Transactions with dealers or open houses tended to be quicker and more formal, and often involved more protocols. Participants frequently described these transactions as strictly business.

A few different types of brokering transactions were described. One typical scenario involved situations where a friend had access to a supplier the participant did not personally know; the friend would therefore obtain the cannabis on the participant's behalf. This often involved the participant going with them, but waiting in the car and not handling the sale—that is, the friend did not act as an intermediary. When participants were asked why they did not go directly to the supplier, typical responses included that the supplier only wanted to supply to trusted friends, that they did not like having their number handed out, and that there needed to be a formal introduction. It was also common for participants to prefer having their friend act as the middleman; they were more comfortable being a step removed and only dealing with their friend.

Participants reported another common brokering scenario involving buying in groups, where at least one other person contributed money; one person from the group handled the transaction and later divided the cannabis and brokered it to their friends. The money was sometimes obtained from the group up front and at other times it was obtained afterwards. There were also situations where a friend picked up extra for their friend and brokered it to them later, and situations where friends sold a small amount of their own supply for the same price they originally purchased it. Sometimes only one member of the group had a relationship with the supplier, and therefore usually took on the broker role; in other cases the broker role was taken by different people depending on the particular circumstances at the time.

It has been noted earlier in this document that participants who described transactions with friends who sold cannabis often focused on the informal social nature of the transaction, with participants spending time together socially, afterwards, for up to several hours. Descriptions of transactions frequently involved smoking cannabis with the supplier while picking it up. There were also cases where participants described exchanging cannabis for goods or services. Although transactions involving dealers or open houses tended to be described as strictly business, quicker and more formal, it was also common for these relationships to be described as friendly.

For the purpose of the analysis, a stranger was defined as someone a participant had obtained cannabis from but knew nothing about; that is, it was unknown whether they were a regular cannabis supplier. A stranger is distinct from a dealer, which is defined as a person known to sell cannabis. Obtaining cannabis from strangers

typically involved opportunistic encounters with people at events or music festivals. While no participants reported obtaining cannabis online last time they obtained it, five participants reported accessing cannabis by purchasing it online at some point in their lifetime.

A very small number of participants (n=4) reported that they last obtained cannabis by growing it themselves; however, 15 participants discussed growing cannabis at some point in their lifetime.

As previously noted, participants typically obtained cannabis by more than one method. Over a quarter of the sample discussed their preferred methods of obtaining it. It appeared that most participants based their preferences around the following factors: price and/or quantity; quality; type of cannabis (eg bush or hydro); ease of access, comfort with or trust in the supplier; whether the supplier also supplied other drugs; and social elements—many preferred to obtain cannabis through friends. Some participants also spoke of a preference for buying in groups with friends to get a better deal by buying in bulk and reducing the frequency of transactions. Perth participants often spoke of open houses acting as a last resort or least preferred option, mainly because they tended to have the highest market rate.

Almost all participants reported that cannabis was either very easy (56%) or easy (36%) to obtain. Consistent with typical use findings, the most commonly reported form of cannabis typically obtained at the Perth (83%) and Melbourne (73%) sites was hydro, whereas for Armidale it was bush cannabis (79%). The median amount obtained in a typical transaction was 3.5 grams (one-eighth of an ounce) and the median amount paid per transaction was $50 (interquartile range=$30–$100). There were differences in typical amounts obtained and spent across the three study sites. In Perth the median was three grams for $50. For Melbourne and Armidale the median amount was seven grams (a quarter of an ounce) for a median price of $73 in Melbourne and $80 in Armidale.

As described above, almost all participants (93%) reported making group buys at some point in their life; half the sample (50%) had done so within the past month and about one-third (30%) in the past week. As a median, participants made group cannabis purchases on a monthly basis. Preferences for this form of access were mixed, with two-fifths preferring group buys and the same proportion preferring to buy individually. The remainder had no preference. Those who preferred group buys saw it as cheaper (64%), more social (32%), easier (22%), safer (20%) and fairer (5%). Those who preferred to buy by themselves found it to be less hassle (56%) and fairer (36%), saying they wanted their own supply (23%) and preferred privacy (19%). Some group buys were considered a communal stash for housemates or groups of friends to share. In these cases there was no measured division of the supply. Another common scenario was when friends put in and bought a communal supply for a special event such as a music festival or trip. Almost all participants (93%) reported sharing cannabis with friends within the past month, that is having given some away or been given some for free at a social gathering with friends.

### *10.3.3 How participants mainly obtained cannabis and different aspects of their lives*

No significant differences were found overall between the main way participants obtained their cannabis and key variables including their demographic characteristics, access to other drugs, or history of having been apprehended by police. While it is possible there may be some significant relationships between other indicators of cannabis supply route and aspects of these young people's lives, to the extent that was possible in this study, nothing was found to suggest that how people obtained their cannabis had a major impact on, or relationship with, other aspects of their lives.

## 10.4 Supplying cannabis

Participants were asked a range of questions related to their involvement in the supply of cannabis. Almost the entire sample reported supplying cannabis to another person at some point in their lifetime, whether by giving,

brokering, swapping or selling it. The median age at which participants reported first supplying cannabis was 17 years old (interquartile range=16–18 years). In general, males were far more likely to take risks in supplying cannabis. By contrast, the majority of females only supplied cannabis to close friends, and there were no instances of females supplying to strangers. Females were also more likely to refer people directly to suppliers rather than supply themselves. Females more frequently supplied cannabis for no personal gain and were more likely to continue supplying even if they made no profit. The majority of females considered any financial gain to be profit, while the majority of males only defined profit as substantial financial gain. There were no significant gender differences in attitudes towards sharing, pricing, method of payment, reasons for continuing to supply, or changes in attitudes towards supplying over time.

Attitudes towards supplying differed across the three sites, with a strong contrast in attitudes between Melbourne and Perth participants. Participants from Melbourne presented as more relaxed and open about cannabis use and supply, while participants from Perth were more guarded and considered the supply of cannabis to be risky. Armidale sat between these two poles and tended to be based more on local networks, given the much smaller population.

Reported reasons for commencing the supply of cannabis could be broadly recoded into the following categories: to help friends who could not obtain it themselves (71%); to cover some or all personal use (23%); to make money (13%); and to get a better deal (6%).

Of those who currently supplied, 55 percent said they currently supplied only to friends and/or family, 32 percent to friends and/or family and their friends; and only eight percent supplied to friends and/or family and their friends and occasionally to strangers. Only four percent reported that their current involvement in supply would be best described as 'I supply to anyone willing to buy, including strangers'. Similarly, when asked about the nature of their current supply activity, 57 percent said they supplied cannabis for the same price as originally purchased—that is, they brokered it; some 21 percent said they gave cannabis away and never brokered or sold, and some said they sold for profit that covered their own use (12%) or a little bit extra (6%). Only three percent said their current involvement in supply could best be described as 'I supply cannabis for profit that covers my use plus significant profit'.

Of those who had ever supplied cannabis, some 26 percent reported supplying cannabis they had grown themselves at some point in their lifetime. Seventy-five percent described some positive aspect to this activity. The most common positive reasons could be coded as financial benefit (54%) and being able to supply to friends (46%), whether by giving cannabis away or selling, brokering or swapping it. Other commonly reported reasons included quality control (25%) and enjoyment of the process and/or botany (25%). Approximately half (47%) reported at least one negative, most commonly time and effort (52%), criminal risk (48%), the cost of set-up (13%) and the risk of female plants turning male (13%).

Some 83 percent of those who reported supplying cannabis at some point had also done so in the past six months, and 64 percent had done so in the past month. The median length of time recent (past 6 months) suppliers had been supplying for was two years (interquartile range=12–48 months). The median number of people participants reported currently supplying cannabis to was four (interquartile range=3–8 people); however, the median number of people they reported ever supplying to was much higher, with a median of 25 people (interquartile range=10–50 people). The majority of participants (77%) said they currently mainly sold within their social network to friends and none stated that they mainly sold to strangers. The majority reported that the people they supplied to were mostly the same age (42%) or a mixture of ages (53%), with only two percent stating that they mainly sold to people younger than them.

Recent suppliers most commonly reported that transactions were arranged by people phoning them and arranging to meet them (71%), followed by people coming to their house (56%) and people phoning them and the supplier dropping it at their house (41%). Acting as an intermediary (39%), where the participant arranged an introduction between a buyer and seller but did not handle the sale, was also common. Other responses included descriptions of transactions that took place during social gatherings (21%), transactions that were organised via Facebook (5%), transactions where a buyer drove the participant to the seller and the participant handled the sale (4%) and transactions at work (2%). There were some significant differences

between sites, with Melbourne and Armidale participants more likely to describe transactions where people came to their house. Recent suppliers most commonly reported that people paid for cannabis with cash (94%), followed by reporting that people did not pay them, they just gave it away (40%). Other forms of payment included drugs (33%), other goods and services (25%) and bank transfers (22%). Approximately two-fifths (37%) reported that they provided drugs on credit—that is, 'on tick' or with promise of payment. However, the main form of payment was cash (88%), followed by giving cannabis away (8%) and swapping it for other drugs (3%). This varied little across sites.

The main reason suppliers reported for continuing to sell or broker cannabis was to help friends or fellow cannabis users. There was considerable overlap between these two categories; however, some suppliers saw this as friendship-based, while for others it was based on an understanding of cannabis use and a knowledge of what it was like to be without it. A number of participants also continued to supply because it encouraged reciprocation. A small number of participants continued to supply out of habit, to cover the costs of their personal use, or for occasional financial gain, whether modest or significant. Several participants admitted thinking it was a cool thing to do when they were younger—they may have supplied for the sake of image, or to make money, but had since grown out of such reasons.

A quarter of participants claimed they would no longer supply cannabis if they knew they would no longer profit financially from it. Reasons included that it was not worth the risk, that it would result in financial loss, or that they were selfish or 'not a nice person'. This noted, a similar number of participants stated that they might still supply; yet many emphasised they would supply cannabis for a friend but not a stranger.

Qualitative data indicated that the overwhelming majority of participants (78%) who had supplied cannabis in the last six months did not identify as drug dealers, although twenty percent did. There were a number of interesting responses to this question. Some participants were taken aback by what they perceived as the accusation that they were drug dealers, while others said they had not previously reflected on their status. A small number of participants were uncertain as to whether they would consider themselves dealers. In terms of defining their own supply activities, some participants did not consider themselves dealers because they supplied only to friends, did not consider cannabis to be a drug or did not supply regularly. Most of those who did consider themselves dealers, said they did so because they dealt drugs by definition, or because they were making profit from drug supply.

For many of these cannabis suppliers, it was the profit motive and the scale of that profit which defined a dealer, rather than whether they sold to people other than friends. Over a third of participants defined a drug dealer as someone who made a financial profit from the sale of drugs. One in six participants also defined dealers professionally, as people who sold cannabis in large quantities and/or supplied it as their primary source of income. A small number of participants described dealers as those who supplied cannabis to people other than friends, and over a quarter of participants defined drug dealers negatively, as dodgy, criminal, untrustworthy, or likely to deceive them.

Some participants thought that a dealer was someone who sold hard drugs and that selling cannabis did not qualify as dealing. A significant number of respondents felt very strongly that cannabis should not be classed in the same category as 'hard drugs' such as crystal meth, speed and heroin, and rejected outright the suggestion that supplying cannabis could be classified as drug dealing.

When participants who had supplied cannabis in the past month (n=120) were asked about quantities they supplied and the profit they made, all but 16—most of whom were infrequent suppliers—were able to comment. The median amount of cannabis supplied in a typical week was three grams (interquartile range=1–7 grams) and the median amount cannabis was sold for in a typical week was $45 (interquartile range=$19–$100).

Unsurprisingly, people who smoked cannabis less often tended to score smaller amounts of the drug. Possessing larger amounts was seen as more risky, and some suppliers preferred to supply only small amounts because they made a larger profit per gram. Group buys (brokering), were quite common, and favoured for convenience and low cost. Where cannabis was given away for free, this was usually small unweighed amounts.

The majority of participants who brokered and sold cannabis reported that profit was not their motive. Many participants who brokered for others did not charge, but rather passed on the cannabis at cost price. Similarly, many who sold cannabis would sell it at market value, even giving their friends a good deal to their own disadvantage. The going market value was common knowledge, although, as noted above, market value differed across the three locations. The relationship between the supplier and those supplied to was a major factor in determining pricing. More than a quarter of participants suggested friends received preferential treatment. A handful of participants said they charged the same price regardless of relationship.

Approximately one-third (32%) of those who had supplied cannabis in the past six months said they also supplied other drugs in addition to cannabis. There were significant differences between sites, with the supply of other drugs more commonly reported by the Melbourne sample (70%) and not mentioned at all by Armidale participants. The most commonly supplied other drug was ecstasy (74%), again followed by LSD (48%) and magic mushrooms (32%). It appeared that the majority of those who supplied other drugs were brokering to help their friends get access, with 65 percent reporting they made no monetary gain from the sale of other drugs.

## 10.5 Police contact relating to cannabis

Some 26 percent of the sample reported having been found in possession of cannabis by the police at some point in their lifetime. The median number of times this occurred was once (range=1–6 times). Almost half the sample reported that they were dealt with informally, indicating that they were let off without any formal criminal proceedings. This is probably a greater number than one would expect, given current police procedures in relation to a range of diversion and other formal options for dealing with minor cannabis offences; however, the current data does not allow much clarification of how this came about. One possibility explored was that a large proportion of participants may have been juveniles at the time of their last offence and thus excluded from diversion options in some states, but the data did not support this explanation. Beyond this, one can imagine there are likely to be operational reasons—such as workload, the person being charged for other concurrent offences or other factors—why police may exercise discretion in not pursuing a formal action against a person apprehended for a minor cannabis offence.

Other legal outcomes of a possession-related police contact included receiving a formal caution (25%), being arrested (17%), appearing in court (15%) and receiving a fine (15%). Only 17 percent of those found in possession of cannabis by the police reported that they were charged with a possession offence last time they were apprehended. Just over half (54%) reported that being apprehended by police made no difference to their life, whereas just under half (46%) reported a negative impact on their life such as problems associated with being known to police (25%), relationship difficulties (19%) and employment difficulties (10%). With regard to the impact of police contact on participants' cannabis use, 52 percent said it made no difference, while 48 percent reported that it impacted the way they use cannabis; 92 percent of these reported that this made them more careful about where and how they use. Only 13 percent reported an actual change or reduction in their cannabis use as a result of being apprehended by police. Overall, these findings on the impact of police contact on cannabis use are very similar to those found in previous research (Lenton et al. 2000).

Only one participant reported being arrested for supplying cannabis at some point in their lifetime. This participant from Perth was arrested and received a fine and supply charge, but ultimately was given a spent conviction.

## 10.6 Understanding of cannabis and the law

Almost the entire sample (94%) reported carrying cannabis on their person. The median amount typically carried was two grams (interquartile range=1–3 grams) and the median amount for the maximum carried was 14 grams or half an ounce (interquartile range=3–28 grams).There were no significant differences between sites in relation to the amounts of cannabis typically carried. These amounts were well under the deemed

supply limits for cannabis under Western Australian (100 grams), Victorian (250 grams) and New South Wales (300 grams) law. There was no evidence that participants were unwittingly putting themselves at risk of a deemed supply charge. For example, the median amount of cannabis participants thought would attract a deemed supply charge was 10 grams in WA (interquartile range=5–12 grams), 21 grams in Melbourne (interquartile range=7–28 grams) and 15 grams in Armidale (interquartile range 7–28 grams). These amounts were well below the specified deeming amounts.

Participants were asked to comment on their level of support for the legalisation of cannabis and other illicit drugs, including heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and ecstasy. The vast majority of participants (90%) reported that they either supported or strongly supported the legalisation of cannabis. Eighty percent reported that they would either oppose, or strongly oppose, the legalisation of heroin. Some 70 percent reported that they would either oppose or strongly oppose the legalisation of methamphetamine, whereas support for and opposition to the legalisation of cocaine and ecstasy was more evenly divided.

## 10.7 Implications for understanding social supply

The overwhelming experience of the cannabis market of most participants in this study, whether they were involved in obtaining or supplying cannabis, could be captured by the broad notion of social supply where a supplier, who is not considered to be a 'drug dealer proper', brokers, facilitates or sells drugs for little or no gain to friends and acquaintances. Importantly, almost the entire sample reported supplying cannabis to another person at some point in their lifetime, whether by giving cannabis away or brokering, swapping or selling it.

Most people obtained cannabis from someone they knew. Participants' beliefs as to whether a friendship or a drug supply relationship came first varied. In roughly three-fifths of cases, participants mainly scored from someone who was already a friend; two-fifths first had contact with that person for the purpose of obtaining cannabis.

Even though most participants had obtained cannabis through brokering, obtaining it direct from a seller or grower, or from a friend who sold, was how most scores occurred.

In terms of another aspect of the social supply definition—motive—half of the responses of those participants who commented on why they thought their supplier supplied could be recoded as they thought their suppliers was selling to make a profit; roughly one-third thought their supplier was selling to cover some or all of their own use; and one-sixth responded that their supplier only brokered.

Current suppliers mostly sold to family and friends (55%), but some also sold to friends of friends (32%) and a smaller percentage sold mainly to these two groups, but also occasionally to strangers (26%). Only five percent sold to anyone willing to buy. Further, while 78 percent of these suppliers appeared to make no profit from their supply, 20 percent did make a small profit and three percent a large profit. These findings bear on Coomber and Moyle's (2014) concept of minimally commercial supply, in that a minority of these transactions did involve making some small profit.

## 10.8 Self versus legal definitions of drug-dealing activity

Although most people who engaged in supply understood that their activities would be regarded as such in law, most did not consider themselves to be a dealer. Some recoiled at the thought and others had never really thought about it or were uncertain. Many had ways of thinking about their own cannabis supply activities which reinforced their belief that they were not 'true dealers'.

With regard to definitions of social supply and dealing in the literature it seems that, for many of these cannabis suppliers, the profit motive and the scale of that profit were more central to their notion of dealer than sale to non-friends. Over a third of participants defined a drug dealer as someone who made a financial profit from the sale of drugs.

## 10.9 Implications for policing

This study offers more questions than answers in terms of how the policing of these social supply markets could be enhanced.

### What are the opportunities for policing social supply markets?

The findings of this study reinforce Nicholas' (2008) statement that social supply or 'lounge room' drug markets possess a number of attributes that make them a challenge for drug law enforcement.

With the exception of open houses—a rare phenomenon—participants in this study described a closed market characterised by high levels of trust among consumers and suppliers, who were already known to each other at the level of adjacent pairs or small group networks and typically sold in private. Deals made in public places were usually the result of pre-arranged buys. These findings were consistent with other similar studies of cannabis and ecstasy markets in the UK (Coomber & Turnbull 2007; Duffy et al. 2006) and Australia (Chanteloup et al. 2005; Fowler et al. 2007).

Consumers and their supply contacts were mindful of policing threats and employed strategies to minimise risk such as the use of code in electronic communication, and the use of protocols, including preferences and routines for face-to-face contact and drug transactions. While some buyers reported the use of social media to arrange deals, which could provide an opportunity for police detection of drug transactions through security shortcomings and searchable records, one wonders whether such policing efforts would be efficient given the size and number of social media connections in which these often coded communications occur. Although current or emerging technological tools could improve police powers of detection of crimes in social media transactions, the study found at least one consumer and their supply contacts using unregistered sim cards and encryption software in phone and messaging applications to maintain their anonymity; this has been seen elsewhere in online drug discussion (Barratt 2011). It is hard to know the extent to which this practice will become more widespread in future, although online drug discussion suggests the use of widely available and easy-to-use encryption and anonymising software among more experienced, IT savvy market participants (Barratt, Lenton & Allen 2013). Overall, there was little in the data for those looking for suggestions for improvements for detecting and apprehending people engaged in drug supply in a social supply market.

### Should social supply markets be a priority focus for drug law enforcement?

One way of thinking about social supply is that this kind of drug supply market could morally sanitise participants' views of their own behaviour as consumers and/or suppliers. A similar suggestion was raised by Nicholas (2008). Another possibility is that the social supply market is actually less harmful than a more criminalised market that might replace it, which was also noted by Nicholas (2008); however, even if it were possible to reduce the social supply market by drug law enforcement or other activity, it is not clear whether this would result in decreases in drug use or drug-related harm.

If shaping the market towards less harmful models (Sutton & James, 1996) is to be valued, the market described by the participants in this study looks to be a less harmful one. Known sellers or brokers seem to provide shielding between end consumers and the more harmful or criminal players in the market; most deals seem to take place among friends and acquaintances in private, largely closed networks; and participants describing their involvement in these cannabis transactions reported few, if any, incidences of violence, threats of violence or standover tactics.

### Are there opportunities for the education of participants in the cannabis social supply market?

For many cannabis suppliers it was apparent that there was often a disconnect between the way they viewed themselves and how the law viewed their drug supply activity. When posed the question, most participants

acknowledged that what they were doing did constitute cannabis supply in legal terms, but many did not seem to regularly engage with the reality and potential implications of this nor to see themselves as dealers. Rather, because they saw their cannabis supply as helping out friends, often within reciprocal relationships and involving minimal or no profit, the fact that they were potentially exposing themselves to a serious criminal charge seemed to have little impact. This may be due to participants' widespread experience of avoiding punishment (Stafford & Warr 1993) for cannabis supply—that is, many have avoided detection or punishment for supplying cannabis. There may be some benefit in considering a potentially targeted education campaign about how even low-level social supply is considered by and dealt with in law. One suggestion would be to consider a convenience (toilet door) advertising campaign, targeting venues such as pubs and nightclubs frequented by young people who might participate in the social supply market.

## Should there be consideration of how social supply offences are viewed in law?

This study found very few differences between most of the participants in the social supply market who were engaged in drug consumption versus drug supply. In the UK, in particular, there has been extensive consideration of whether such low-level drug offences should be dealt with differently in law than 'drug dealing proper' (Home Affairs Committee (UK) 2002; Hough et al. 2003). Although problems with social supply as a legal concept have been noted (New Zealand Law Commission 2011; Potter 2009), there may be some scope to guide the application of discretion, in a general sense, in the Australian context by expanding the application of diversion options (Harvey, Shakeshaft, Hetherington, Sannibale & Mattick 2007; Hughes 2007) to cases of low-level drug supply of cannabis and, potentially, other drugs. This is particularly relevant given the high rate of cannabis dependence identified within the current sample. Expanding diversion options to low-level supply offences may be worthy of further consideration.

There is not scope in the current report to consider in detail how this might work in practice. However, certain aspects of diversion options for drug possession offences currently operating in all states and territories would provide some possible way forward; if one or more Australian jurisdictions were to implement diversion for low-level supply offences this could be done through regulation, rather than legislative change. The intervention could include information on drugs and the law, especially the consequences of a further supply charge, along with an assessment of dependence and targeted intervention for those individuals assessed as such; and limiting the diversion option to those charged with their first or second low-level supply offence, consistent with the possession scheme operating in the jurisdiction, would seem appropriate. Specifying weight limits on eligibility for diversion options for supply could provide a working legal definition of low-level supply for the purpose of diversion. Any such program should be subject to evaluation to determine its viability and effectiveness in terms of the individuals apprehended, its workability from a policing point of view, its effects on other stakeholders—such as drug treatment agencies—and, potentially, the views of the wider community.

If there is interest in pursuing this option in one or more Australian jurisdictions, an advisory group could be put together to consider the merits and costs of such an idea, and a discussion document commissioned to scope how such a proposal could work in practice. Should such an advisory group be initiated, the timing of its establishment should be agreeable to all parties and mindful of other potentially competing or overlapping activities with regards to cannabis or drug law more generally.

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