



# Applying The European Web Survey on Drugs in Ireland

New opportunities to inform policy and practice

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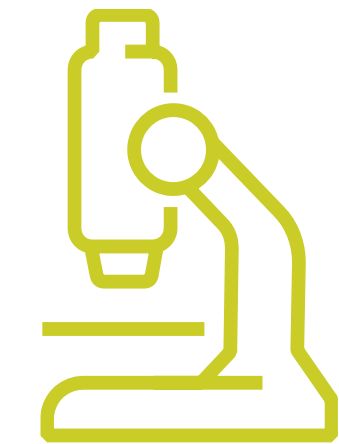
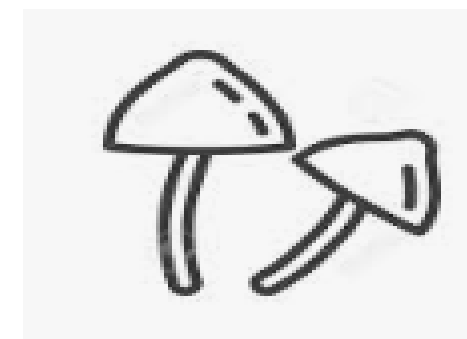


**DRUGS.ie**  
Drug and Alcohol Information and Support

**HR<sup>B</sup>** Health  
Research  
Board



# Who do we need to reach?



**New groups**  
Those not represented in treatment data  
(non dependent populations)

**Nightlife**  
People who use across social settings

**Hard to reach**  
'Hidden'

**Females and other genders**

**New psychoactive substances**  
'Psychonauts'

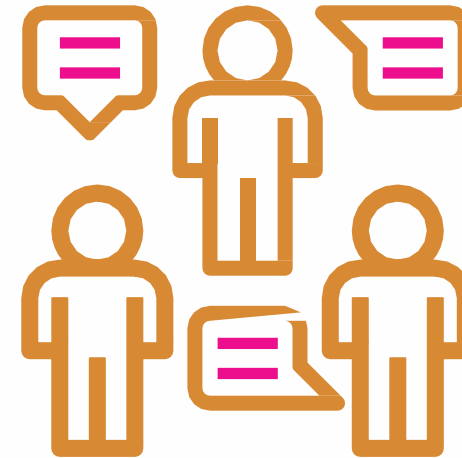
# Emerging Drug Trends and Drug Checking Working Group



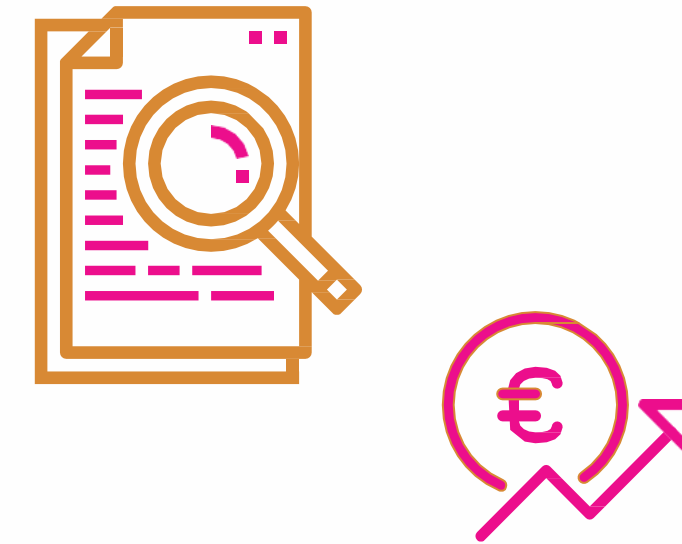
New stakeholder groups  
Working in new ways with  
new people



Risk  
communications



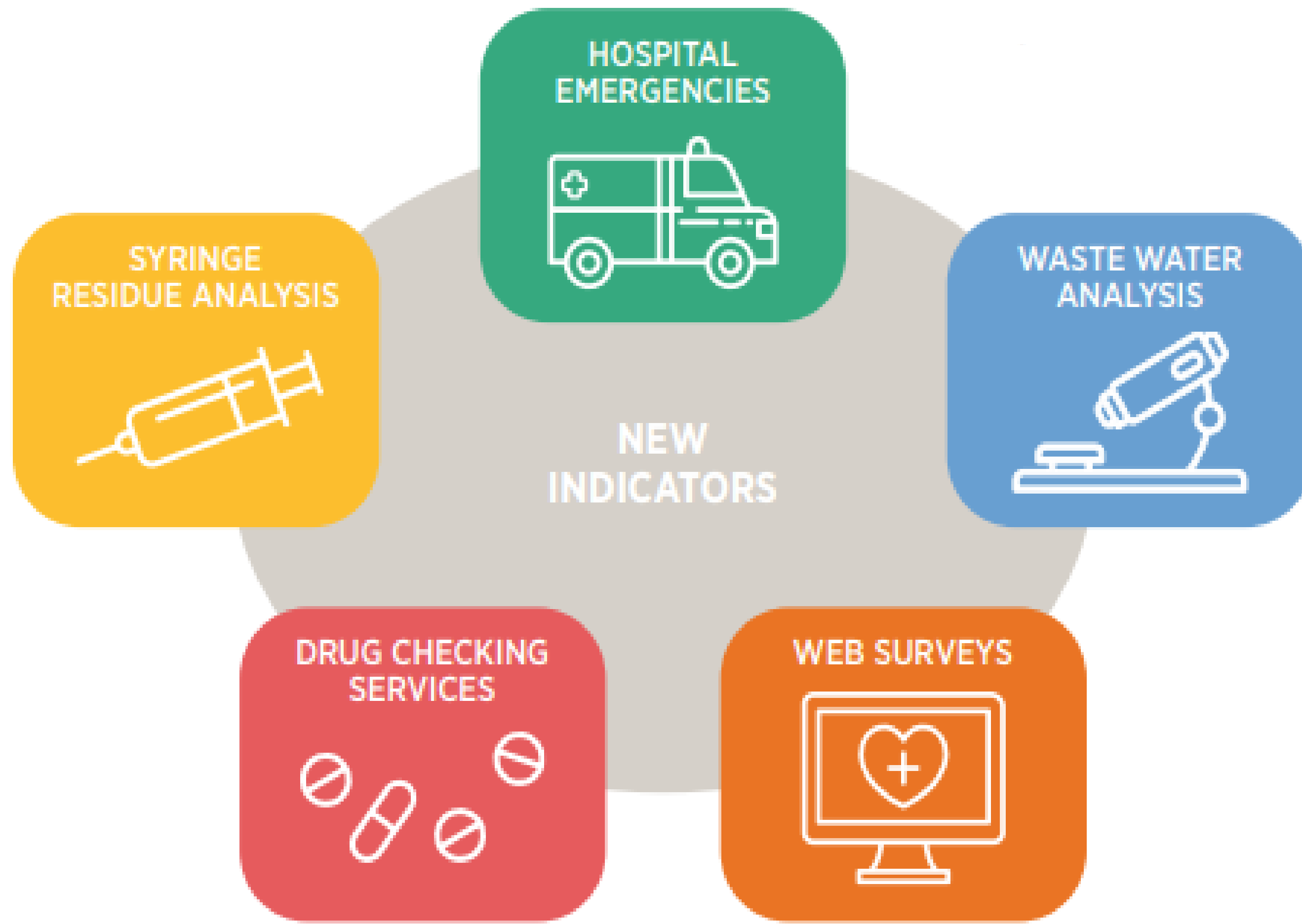
Development of a  
dedicated service



Research



Monitoring and  
pilot project



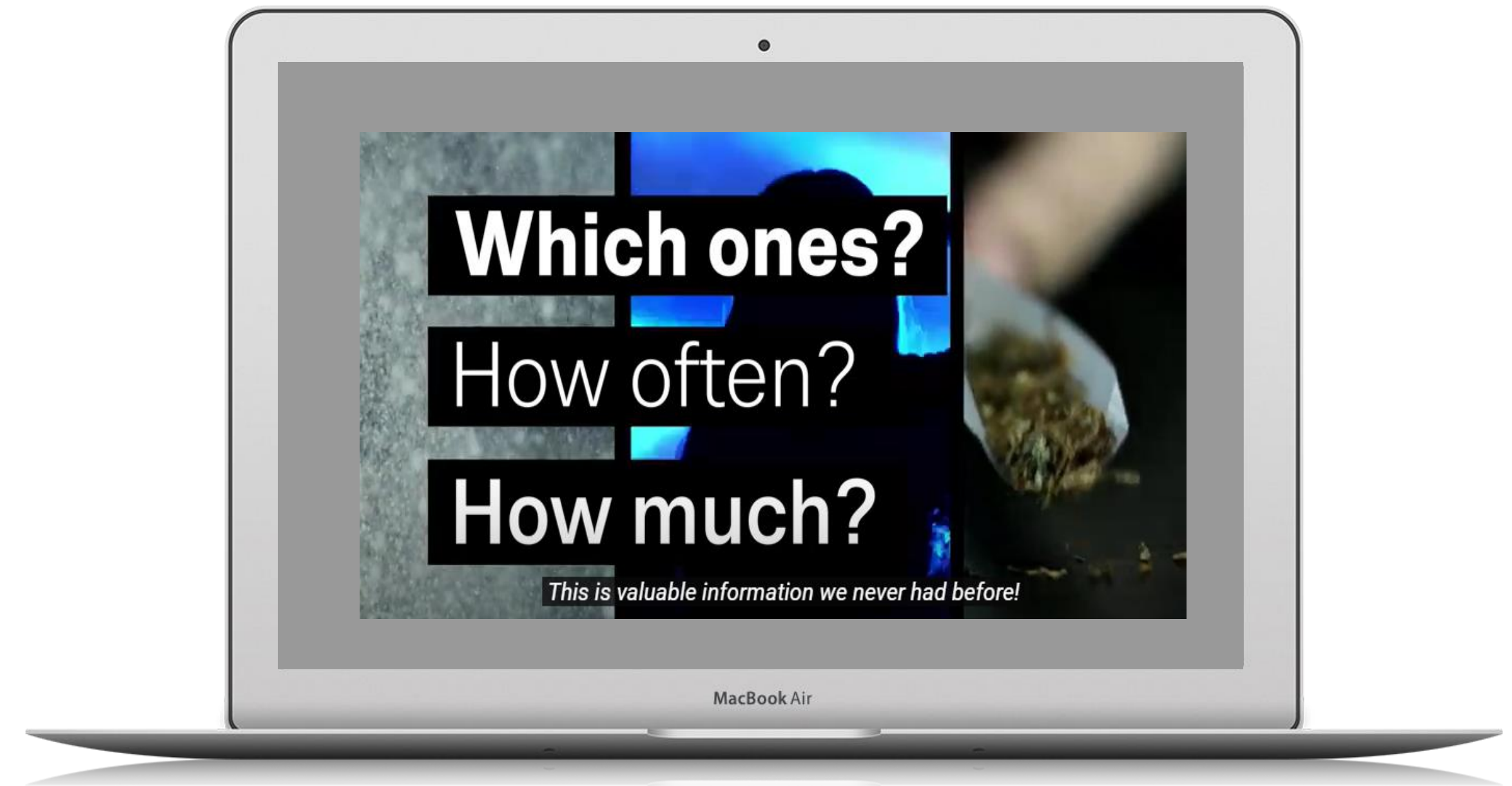
## New opportunities online

- Cost effective
- Quick
- Relatively cheap

- Large and diverse audiences
- Anonymity

- Frequency
- Amount
- Complementary

- Detailed
- Realistic
- Timely picture
- Role in EWS



\*Not without limitations

# Using web surveys to inform policy and practice in Ireland

## 'What are you taking?' 2019

- HSE and Trinity College Dublin
- Festivals (N = 1,193)
- First time we address drug checking

## EWSD Mini Survey 2020

- Fast snap shot
- Keeping use on the agenda
- Relationship with magazines
- Need for harm reduction – after lockdown

## EWSD 2021

- Health Research Board
- Pilot a large plan – proof of concept
- Nightlife closed
- Gender
- NPS
- The need to research and respond in new ways

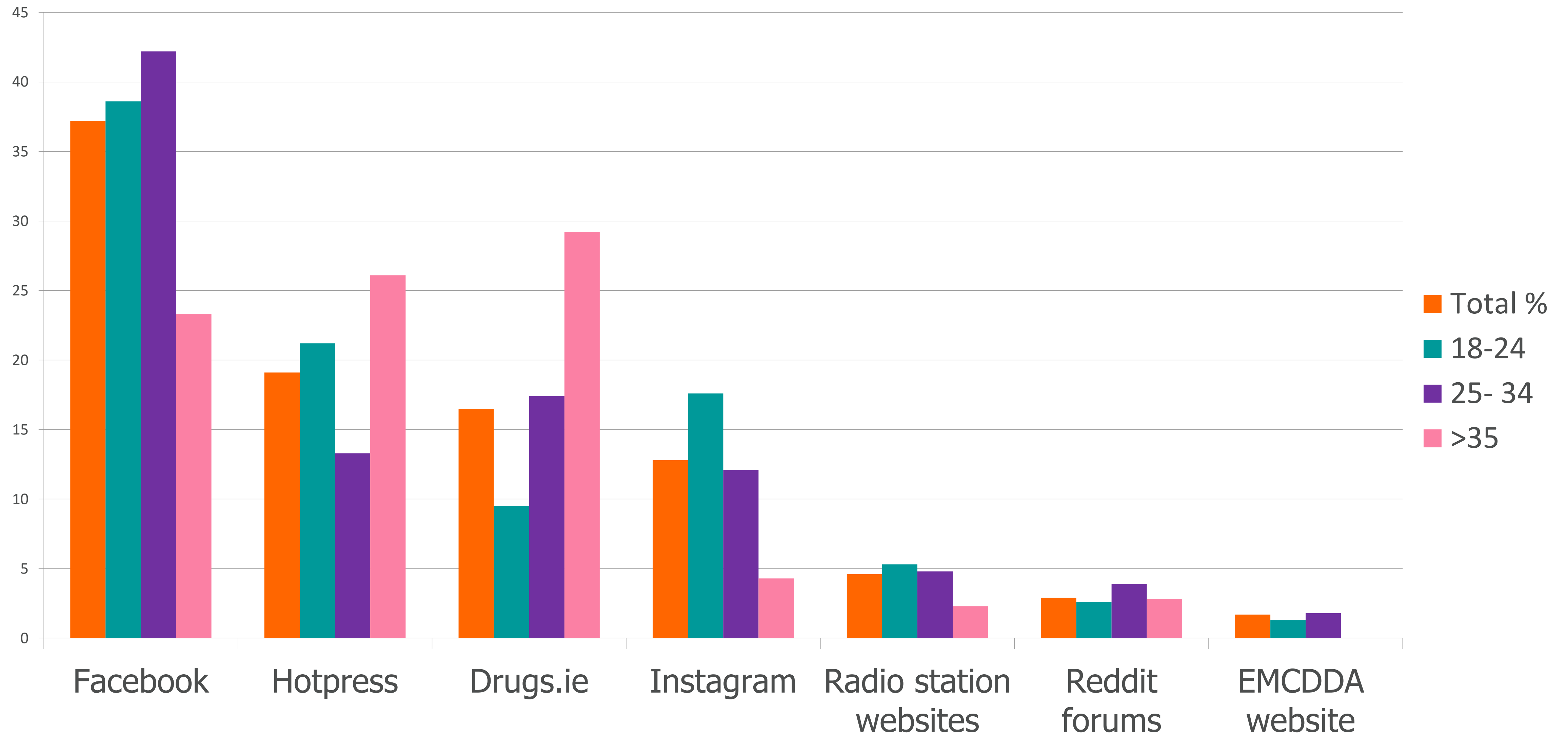
Has your drug use changed during COVID? **Your experiences can help inform harm reduction and future EU policy.**

Did you use new drugs or in new ways?  
**Help us understand the latest trends to inform #harmreduction in Ireland.**

**We want to learn about different groups in Ireland who use different types of drugs.**  
Help us improve our work and anonymously share your experiences with cannabis, cocaine, MDMA, ketamine, mushrooms and more here in our survey



# Irish Recruitment Channels: Age





# European Web Survey on Drugs 2021

The findings confirm a new landscape of substance user profiles in Ireland

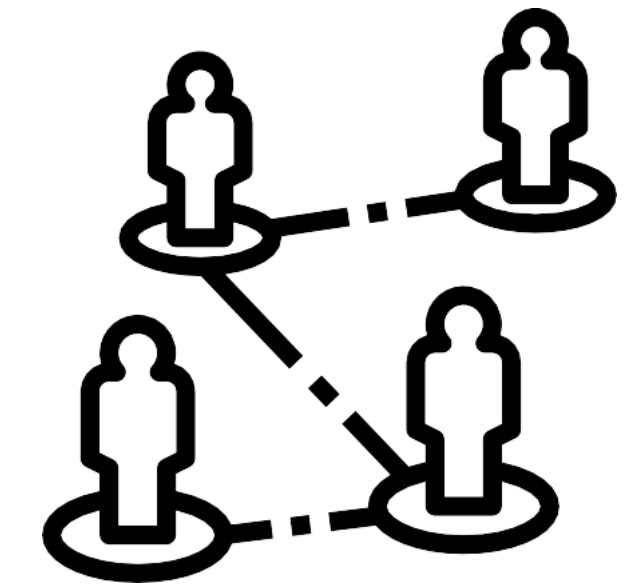
- 3.5% received treatment in the last year
- 2% currently in treatment



- After tax monthly earnings
- 29% <1,000
- 16% >3,000



- 63% employed
- 26% current student
- 81% attended or completed third level
- 7% unemployed

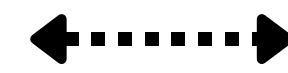


- 66% Males
- 33% Females
- 0.2% Other
- 1.1% Prefer not to say
- 44% aged 18-24
- 37% aged 25-34
- 48% live in City
- 90% identify as Irish

# Main Takeaways EWSD 21

## Polydrug users

- 36% one drug
- 20% two drugs
- 44% used 3 or more



Cannabis  
Cocaine  
MDMA  
Ketamine



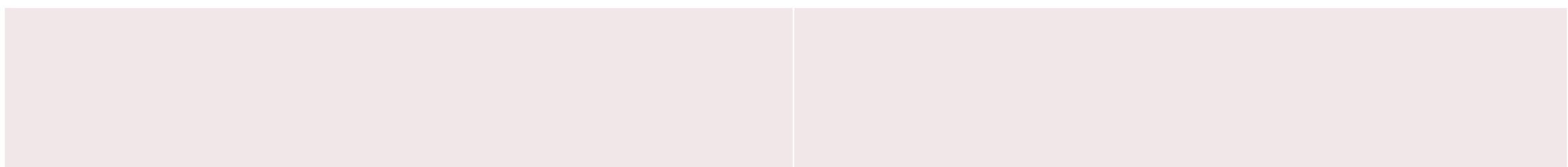
| Drug            | Last year | Last month |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Cannabis        | 91.2      | 69.5       |
| Cocaine         | 48.5      | 22.9       |
| Ecstasy         | 30.8      | 6.2        |
| Ketamine        | 23.8      | 7.1        |
| Mushrooms       | 22.1      | 4.9        |
| LSD             | 18.8      | 4.4        |
| NPS             | 14.3      | 5.8        |
| Amphetamines    | 10.8      | 3.0        |
| Methamphetamine | 3.9       | 1.1        |
| GHB             | 2.1       | 0.7        |
| Heroin          | 1.1       | 0.6        |



# Comparison:

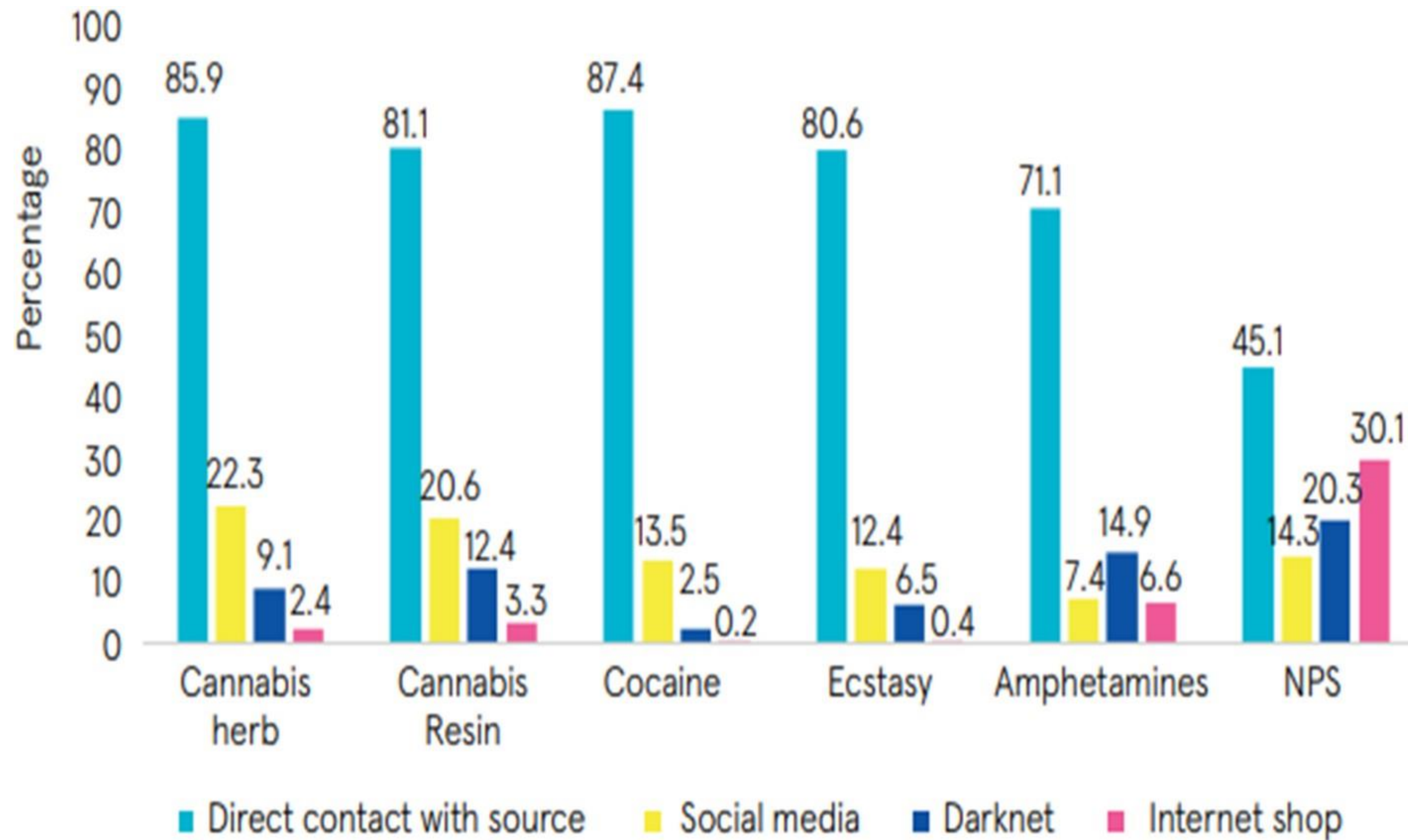
## National Drug and Alcohol Survey and EWSD

| <b>NVDAS (Last year use)</b> |      | <b>EWSD</b> |      |
|------------------------------|------|-------------|------|
| Male                         | 67.7 | Male        | 66.8 |
| Female                       | 32.3 | Female      | 33.2 |



| <b>Last year use</b>                  | <b>NVDAS</b> | <b>EWSD</b> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Cannabis                              | 79.7         | 91.2        |
| Cocaine                               | 25           | 48.5        |
| Ecstasy                               | 30.1         | 30.8        |
| <b>Last month use</b>                 | <b>55.7</b>  | <b>79.3</b> |
| <b>Number of drugs used last year</b> | <b>NVDAS</b> | <b>EWSD</b> |
| 1                                     | 58           | 35.38       |
| 2                                     | 17.27        | 19.76       |
| 3+                                    | 25           | 44.42       |

# Sources Identified in the EWSD 21



# New Psychoactive Substances

- Reliance on seizure data and anecdotal information on NPS
- No engagement with NPS user groups
- EWSD results – numerically low but significant locally
- Substances we assume are adulterants
- Psychedelics
- Drugs not yet detected in the context of Ireland – 4F-MPH (Fluro-Methylphenidate), 5-MAB, 4-HO-MiPT
- 18–24-year-olds were most likely to report that they had used more of each drug as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

# Irish modules: Nitrous Oxide

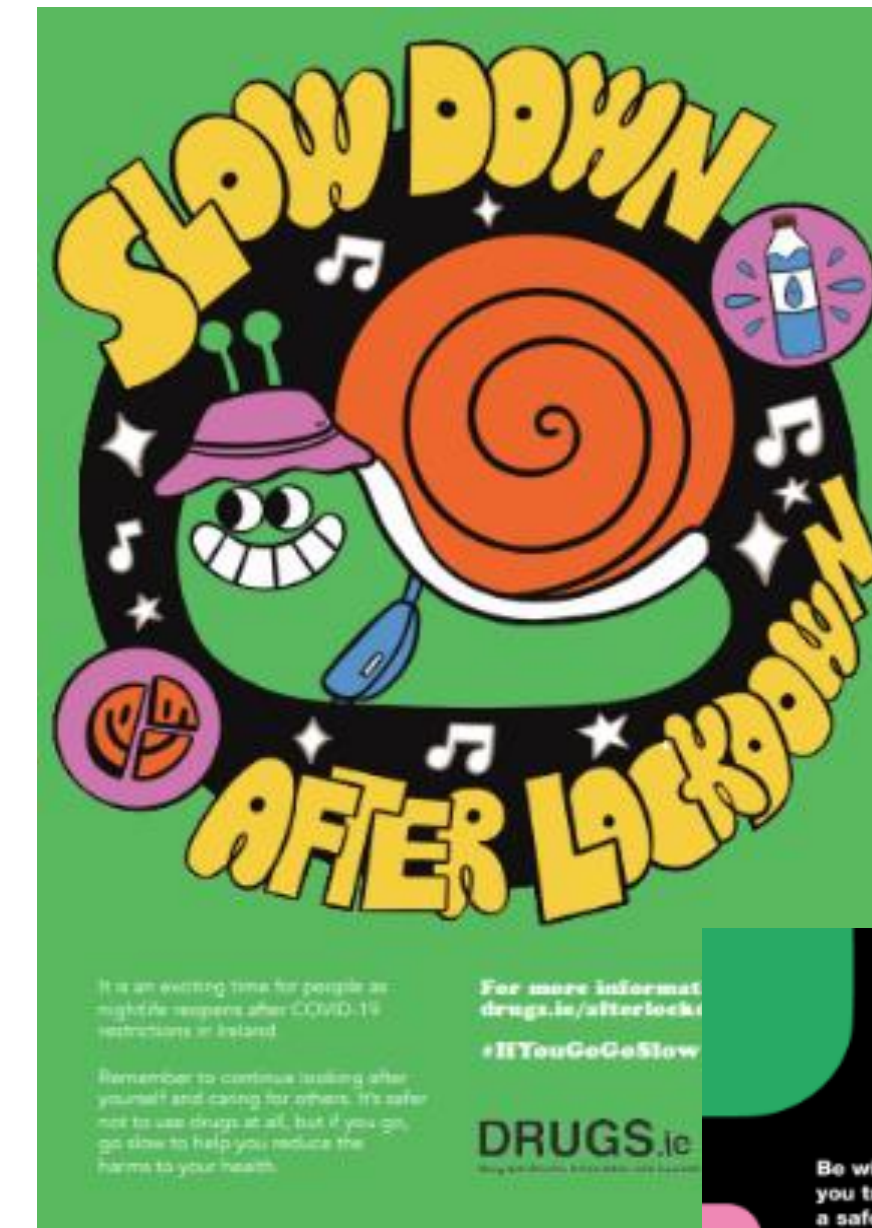
- 23% of respondents had ever used nitrous oxide
- 39% of respondents stated that they had first used nitrous oxide in the last year and 32% had first used it 1–2 years ago
- 71% first use in Ireland/28% first used it as a tourist in Europe
- 11% inhale directly from the canister
- 25.6% 2-3 canisters
- 26.3% more than 10 canisters

# Irish modules: Mushrooms

- The question regarding most recent use of magic mushrooms was answered by 4,401 Irish EWSD respondents /module completed by 814
- 5% reported last month use and a further 17% had used magic mushrooms in the last year.
- In total, 52% of respondents had ever used mushrooms.
- Respondents aged 25–34 years were most likely to have used in the last year (24%).
- Males were more likely than females to report last year use (23% versus 17%).
- Wild foraging (52%), followed by sharing them or getting them for free (31%)
- Males were more likely than females to source magic mushrooms through wild foraging (55% versus 43%), while females were more likely than males to share them or get them for free (36% versus 29%).
- Older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to home-grow magic mushrooms or use online stores, while younger respondents were more likely to use a dealer or the darknet.

# Informing harm reduction

- **EWSD Mini survey** – slow down after lockdown campaign
- **Ketamine** – new materials /venues QR code
- **MDMA powder** – targeted harm reduction
- **Psychedelics** – further review/harm reduction developments
- **Vulnerabilities** – drugs for free
- **Nitrous oxide** – further review on quantities / how to reduce the volume of use per session?
- **Successful collaboration** – future value & improvements





# Utilising the survey data to influence 'back of house' drug checking

- Structure: Moving from anecdotal feedback
- Data for stakeholder negotiations: Providing the best overview of the current landscape – mainstream nature of use
- Communicating important and current shifts – powder MDMA, ketamine and psychedelics
- Reaching the hard to reach: NPS users
- Relationship building – public engagement 'tell us'



# Additional feedback

- Policy – mainly relating to cannabis
- COVID changes/alcohol
- Gratitude – relationship /stigma reduction in the long term?
- Prescribed amphetamines
- Psychedelics

# Future considerations

- What type questions can be used to help reduce harms?
- What type of questions can influence policy?
- Gender and sexuality?
- Settings/nightlife/vulnerability?
- Role in informing early warning mechanisms in Ireland?
- How can web surveys be used to compliment analysis?