

Recent declines in MDMA availability in many regions

Chris Wilkins, Marta Rychert, Jose S. Romeo, Robin van der Sanden & Thomas Graydon-Guy

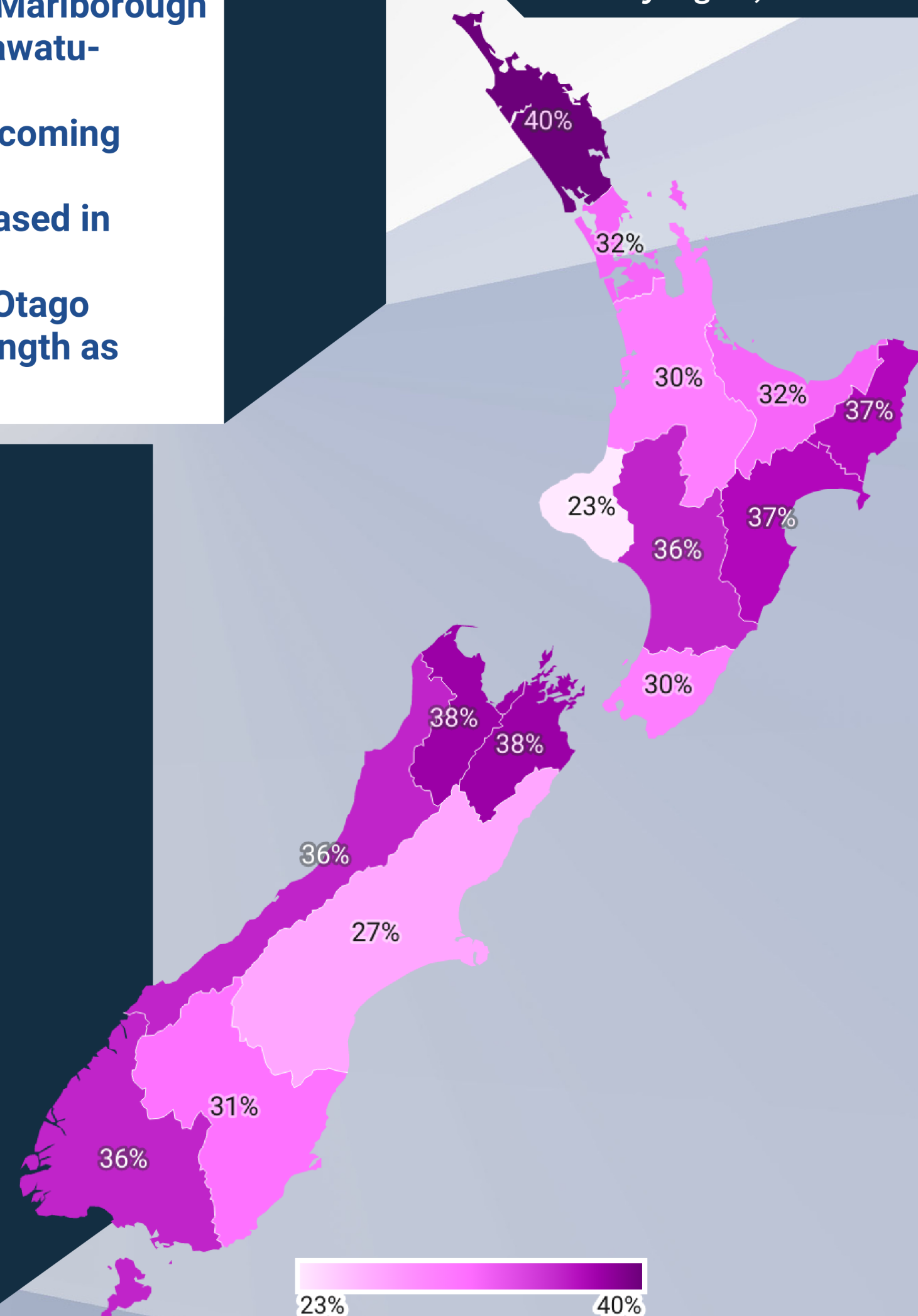
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Key findings

- MDMA availability has previously been increasing but declined sharply in 2022/23
- Low availability was reported in Northland, Tasman/Nelson/Marlborough and Gisborne/Hawke's Bay, Southland/West Coast and Manawatu-Wanganui
- A higher percentage of respondents reported MDMA was becoming "more difficult" to obtain compared to previous years
- Average prices for a pressed pill and a gram of MDMA increased in 2022/23
- Highest prices per gram were reported in Bay of Plenty and Otago
- The proportion of respondents reporting current MDMA strength as "low" also increased in 2022/23 compared to 2020

% respondents reporting MDMA is "difficult" to obtain by region, 2022-23

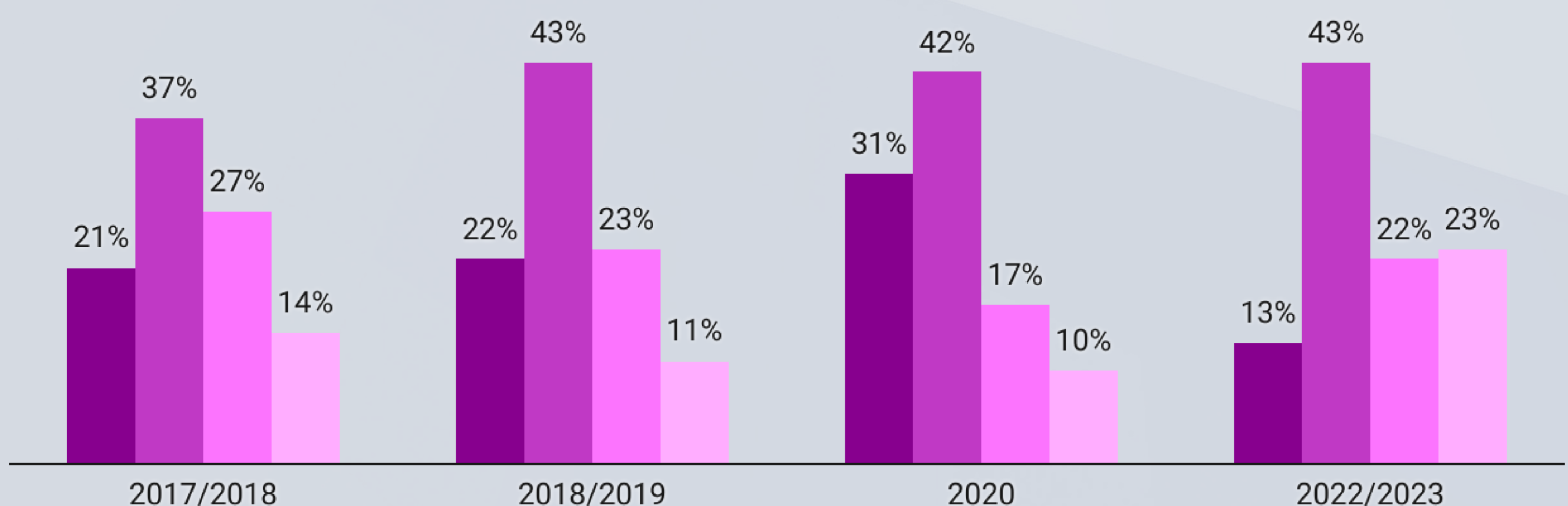


Methods

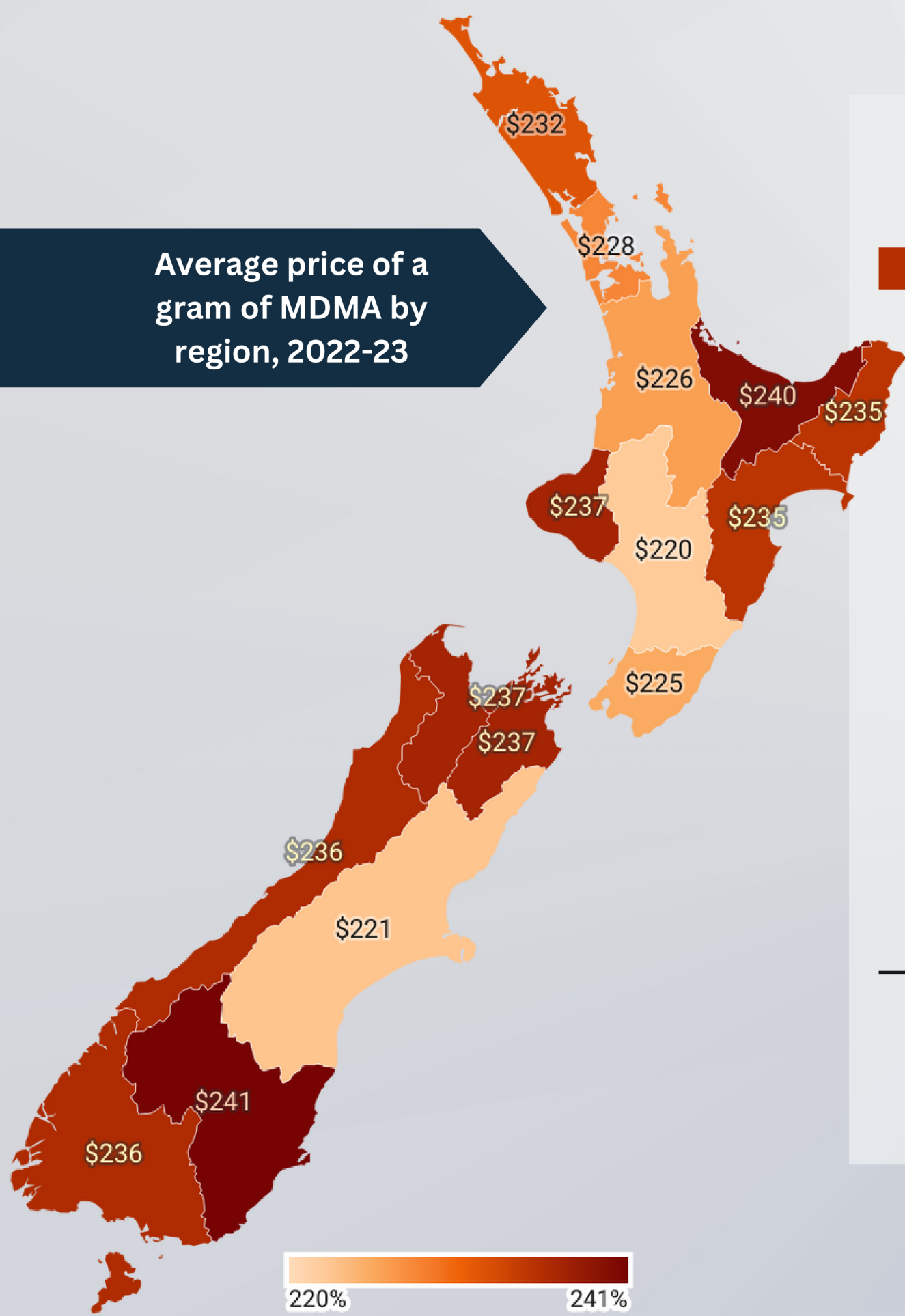
The New Zealand Drug Trends Survey (NZDTS) is an anonymous online convenience survey designed to provide an annual snapshot of drug market trends in Aotearoa New Zealand. It surveys a very large number of people with recent experience and knowledge of drug use and drug markets across the country (i.e., key experts). The NZDTS is promoted via a targeted Facebook advertising campaign over a period of several months. Completed surveys are audited based on the extent and quality of completion. The 2022/23 survey ran from August 2022 to February 2023 and achieved a final sample of 13,026. While the NZDTS is not intended to be a representative survey, it has a sample that broadly represents the demographic profile and regional population distribution of NZ (see Bulletin 6 for details). However, related to the aims of the survey, the NZDTS sample reports much higher levels of drug use (see Bulletin 7) and is younger than the general population. For more details on methods see, Wilkins et al. (2020) Determinants of the retail price of illegal drugs in New Zealand. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 79, 1-10.

Perceptions of changes to MDMA availability reported by NZDTS respondents over time, 2017-23

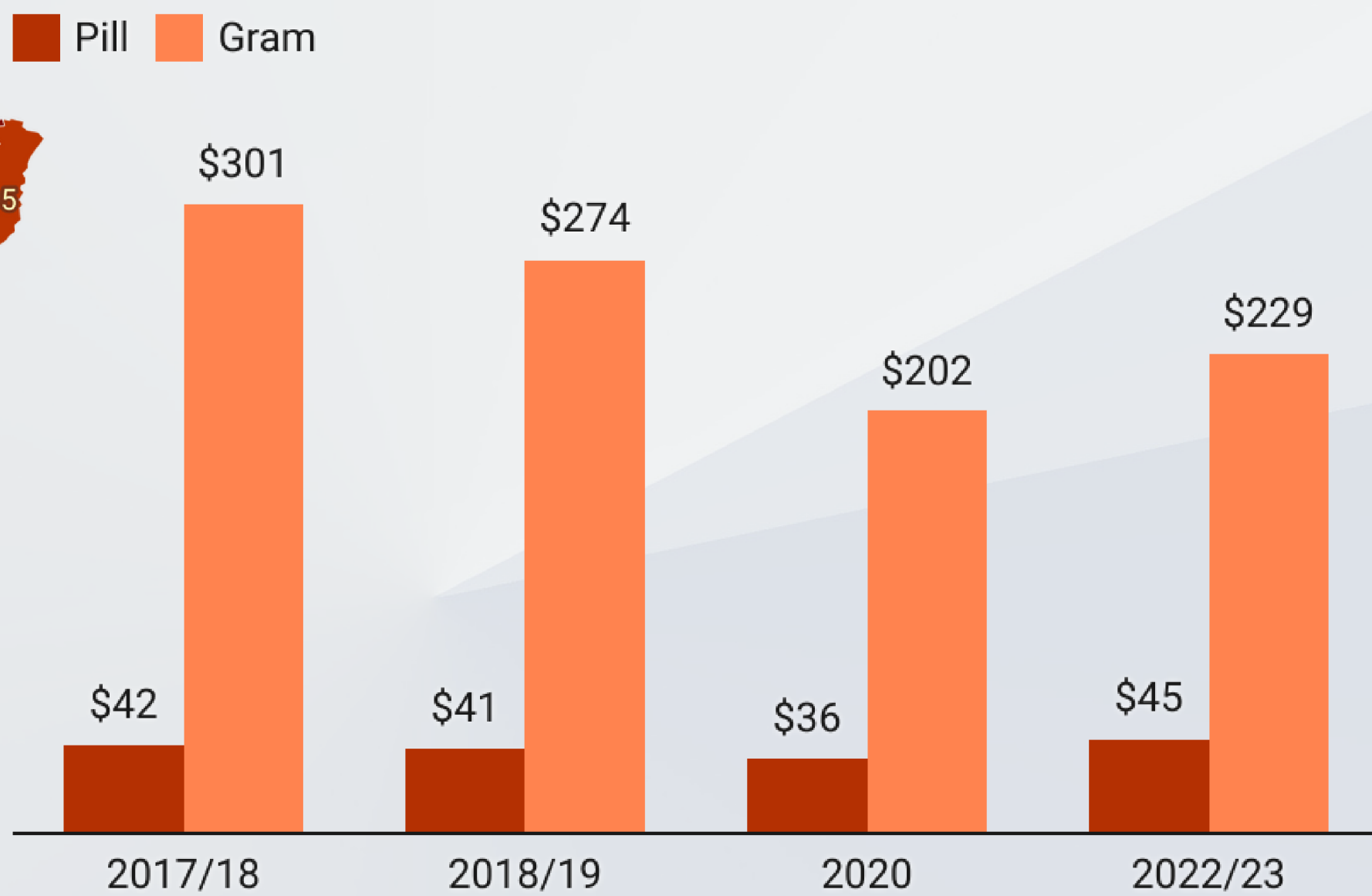
■ Easier ■ Stable ■ Fluctuates ■ More difficult



Average price of a gram of MDMA by region, 2022-23

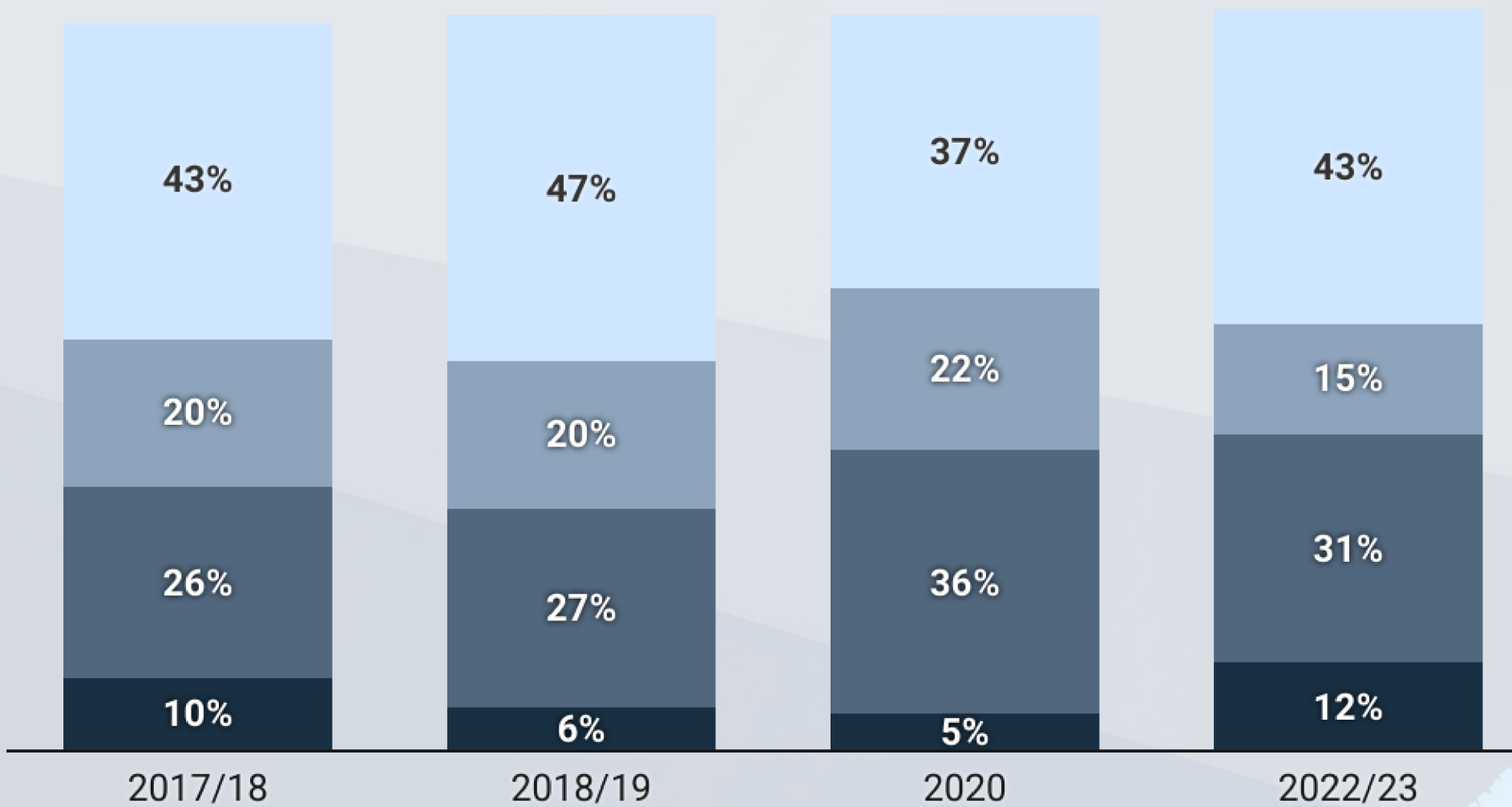


Average price of MDMA over time, 2017-23

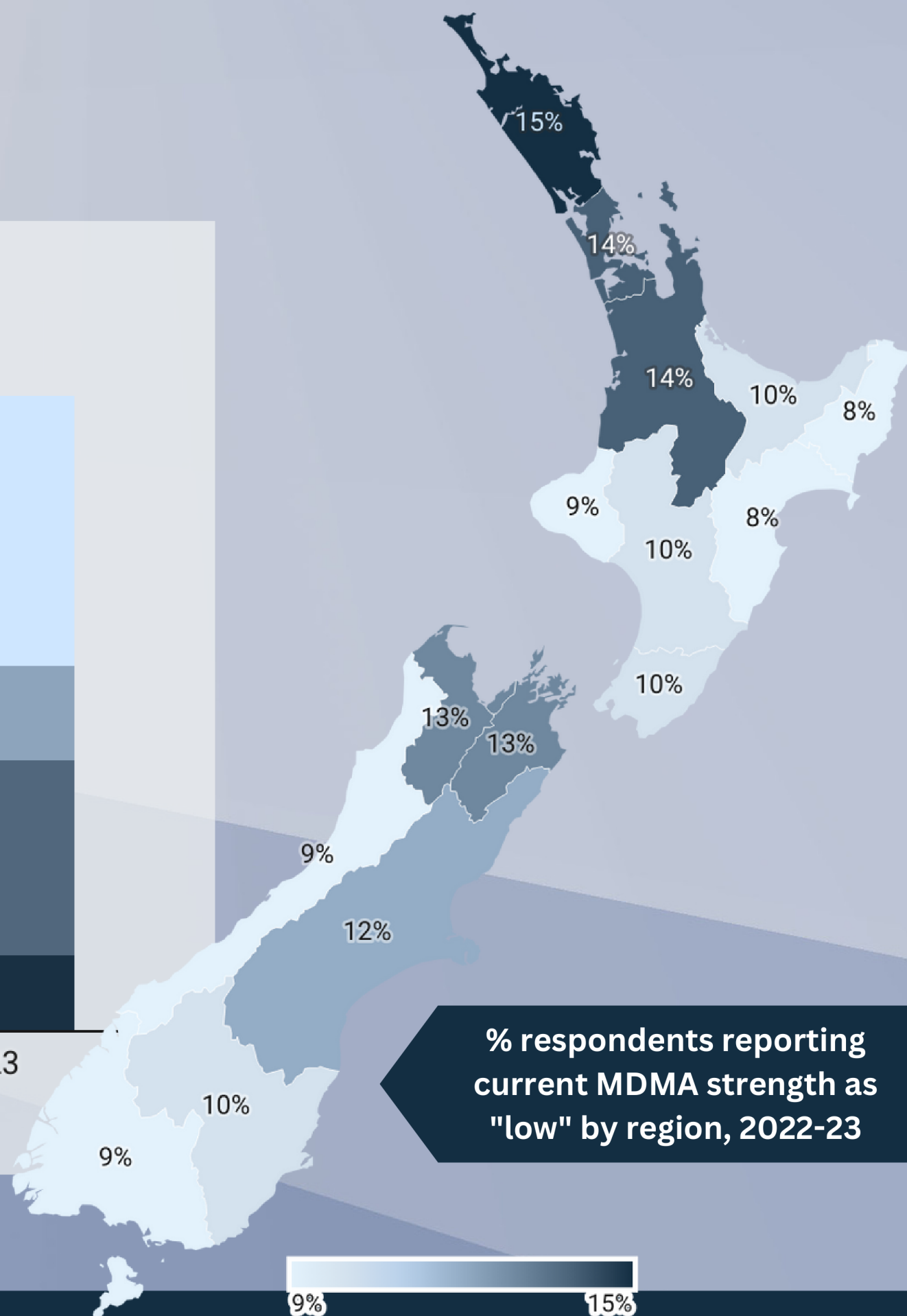


Perceptions of MDMA strength over time, 2017-23

Low Medium High Fluctuating



% respondents reporting current MDMA strength as "low" by region, 2022-23



Discussion

International reports suggest that MDMA/ecstasy manufacture and trafficking was heavily disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on international supply chains. These disruptions may have a longer term impact on smaller, geographically isolated drug markets such as New Zealand given our reliance on imported MDMA from manufacturing hubs in Europe, North America, and Asia. Isolation and small market size may also mean that local MDMA supply recovers more slowly compared to other countries, leading to local declines in availability and quality. Wastewater testing revealed a spike in MDMA use in the second quarter of 2022 followed by a sharp decline in the third quarter, with levels remaining low in the four quarter of 2022. High Alert has also reported increasing detections of cathinones in user-supplied samples thought to be MDMA suggesting a disruption in MDMA supply.