

The Daily Telegraph

The changing face of cocaine use

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It used to be seen as the drug of choice for the rich, but demand for cocaine is now across the board — “you do not have to live anywhere special, you don’t have to work anywhere special, it has changed that way”.

THE Australian face of cocaine use has changed.

Where it was once just each state’s rich broker or lawyer, now users are just as likely be the local tradie, university student or the supermarket shelf stacker, police have found.

Even cocaine use by detainees in police custody is on the rise, with authorities last year reporting the self-reported use by detainees rising above that of heroin smuggled into our jails for the fourth year in a row.

[Kingpin's secret empire: The Aussie drug lord no one can catch](#)
[Cocaine myth busted: The painful truth facing all users](#)

According to the Australian Crime Intelligence Commission’s profiling of cocaine, the drug is now being detected in record numbers, with the proportion of 14-year-olds or older reporting having used cocaine in their lifetime rising to its highest level.



Cocaine seizures are now in tonnes rather than kilos as traffickers feed the growing demand. File picture

The number of national cocaine arrests had increased more than 270 per cent over the past decade to 2016, with seizures rising 234 per cent over that period.

International mail accounted for the greatest amount of cocaine trafficked with detections last year numbering almost 3000 — a 55 per cent increase on the previous year — with the average weight increasing 78 per cent to more than 650kgs. [Much of the cocaine came from Colombia](#) but was being mailed as parcel consignments via the United States, the UK, Spain and Canada. Large haul cargo ship and air seizures were also up.

INCREASED DEMAND

Last year two men from Mexico alleged to be key organisers from a Mexican crime cartel were arrested over a 300kg of cocaine, worth more than \$100 million, in air cargo sent to Melbourne; the bust was assisted by the Australian Federal Police's

newly opened bureau in Mexico. In March this year a Sydney businessman was arrested in Serbia in connection with 1.28 tonnes of cocaine shipped to Sydney.



Cocaine use is now “across the board”, says Peter McErlain. Picture: Gary Ramage

Sydney and Melbourne accounted for the majority of cocaine seizures and suspected use.

One of the country’s most senior police officers on the frontline of street level cocaine NSW Police Drug and Firearms Squad Commander, Detective Superintendent Peter McErlain said without a doubt the drug face use had changed.

“It has changed, it’s not the (Sydney) Eastern Suburbs beautiful people type stuff, it is right across the board now,” he told News Corp Australia.

“You do not have to live anywhere special, you don’t have to work anywhere special, it has changed that way. The seizures are up in the tonnes now and if you think 10 or 15 years ago a kilo of coke seizure was something to be really proud off and it was a great seizure off the streets but you are talking tonnes today, there is a lot more around and there is no class or demographic involved anymore, it is right across the board. The demand is the issue, it’s right across the board.”

The officer said [he was alarmed by the drug franchises run by ordinary people in the community selling the product](#), both in cities and regionally.

The drug has also become cheaper, with lower-quality versions of the drug cut with other materials available on the market.



Josh Rosenthal works with cocaine addicts at rehab centre, The Cabin. Picture: Tim Hunter

Canberra reported the highest illicit drug arrests related to cocaine, the highest proportion of any state or territory.

‘PRESTIGE ADDICTION’

Those seeking help for cocaine addiction at The Cabin, a rehab facility in Sydney are blue-collar workers, looking to save marriages, break gambling habits, or to end the practice of bingeing with escorts.

Yet Josh Rosenthal, senior counsellor at the centre, says they hold the same misapprehensions as the wealthy set.

“With cocaine, people expect different treatment,” he says. “They might sit in the room with someone on heroin or ice and think they’re not that bad. But we treat addictions as addictions.”

The self-deception that there is a certain “prestige” associated with coke needs to be broken down in the addict, says Mr Rosenthal. That is part of the treatment, but it is also becomes evident when they look around and see who is participating in group therapy.

More and more, these days, it’s ordinary blokes. “They’re working to use coke, so they’re spending all their money,” says Mr Rosenthal.

Originally published as [The new face of cocaine use](#)

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