

LIVE 33

Police Association Statement
“Our members, who police the immediate precinct around the Richmond North facility, have emphatically told us that it’s directly responsible for a spike in a whole raft of crimes in the area, including theft, burglaries and drug use in vehicles.”
“For the government to ignore the serious concerns of those who have endured this experience by doubling down, not only to continue operating the Richmond North facility, but also establishing a second facility in the heart of the CBD without any consultation, is disappointing in the extreme, bordering on irresponsible.”

The Police Association
UPHOLDING OUR RIGHTS SINCE 1917

Wayne Gatt

VICTORIA: DRUGS CAPITAL OF AUSTRALIA



SUMMARY

Summary and synopsis of current media reports on drug use in Victoria and its impact on the national context.

Research Officer – D. Steenholdt

The Herald Sun reported on 30 September 2020 that Victoria is the illicit drugs capital of Australia.

(Source: Herald Sun, website 30/9/20, 5:39 pm - Brianna Travers - <https://metros.smedia.com.au/heraldsun/PrintArticle.aspx?doc=NCHRS%2F2020%2F09%2F30&entity=ar01004&mode=text>)

This statement was based on the information contained in the Australian Criminal Investigation Commission's (ACIC) recently released Illicit Drug Data Report 2018-19. In order to assist in creating a safer Australia that is better informed and capable of responding to crime, the ACIC makes this report and a range of other unclassified intelligence reports available to the public.

According to the report, across Australia more than 26.6 tonnes of illicit drugs — with the street value of roughly \$3.5billion — were seized by authorities over the 2018-19 (12-month) period and drug seizures over the past decade had increased 77 per cent, despite the population only growing 13 per cent.

The latest Crime Statistics Agency data in the year to March 2020 reveals Melbourne's CBD as having the state's most drug dealing and trafficking offences at 164, Yarra (Richmond, 125) came in second, while Wangaratta (116), came in third.

The Crime Statistics Agency data also reveals Melbourne's CBD as having the state's most drug dealing and trafficking offences at 164, Yarra (Richmond, 125) came in second, while Wangaratta (116), came in third.

(Source: Crime Statistics Agency Victoria <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/>)

The ACIC's annual snapshot of the nation's drug trade also shows how Victoria stands out:

In their investigations, based on this data and other information, the Herald Sun – Leader reported Victoria's biggest nightclub district is awash with drug dealers and users and that Victorian drug dealers are brazenly using Instagram to ply their trade, even offering users free drop off or pick up of illicit substances. Dealers use of social media Instagram has become the online platform of choice to procure illegal drugs, with dealers turning their homes into mail-order operations and setting up one-stop shops on the social media site.

Surprisingly, many of the busted dealers were not major crime figures or linked to crime cartels, but rather suburban opportunists using Instagram to find customers and Australia Post to receive and deliver. John Coyne, a former Australian Federal Police officer and now head of strategic policing and law enforcement at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said 10 years ago law enforcement agencies were worried about the dark web for the movement of drugs and weapons, but most people couldn't find it to use it. Instead, he said, social media was easy to access and very much in the mainstream, with Instagram alone having a billion users worldwide.

A Victoria Police spokesman said that while drug use in the Victorian community continued to be a significant concern for police, both in rural and metropolitan areas, an increase in the detection of offences such as drug use and possession was actually considered a positive result.

“With more police in the community than ever before, Victoria Police has the resources to detect criminal offences such as drug use and possession, which may have previously gone undetected and this is reflected in the statistics,” the spokesman said.

“It is also important to remember the postcodes attached to each offence are where the offence is detected and not where the offender resides, while a number of postcodes with higher numbers of drug-related offences also have a significant number of licensed premises.”

(Herald Sun, Leader 30 Sept 2020, Suzan Delabasic: Victorian drug dealers: Council areas with most dealing crime <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/victorian-drug-dealers-council-areas-with-most-dealing-crime/news-story/119434d233e3ee314dca5e6e89ea7540>

And

Herald Sun, Leader 30 Sept 2020, Suzan Delabasic, Victoria's illegal drug hotspots: Dealers using Instagram to sell illicit substances.

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/truecrimeaustralia/crimeinfocus/victorias-illegal-drug-hot-spots-dealers-using-instagram-to-sell/news-story/26647f3aa4a2954335e52bf3cab0bcf1>)

HEROIN seizures skyrocketed in Victoria year-on-year by 122 per cent (ACIC 2018-19) with more than 3184kg of the addictive drug confiscated; Within Victoria, the inner city suburb of Richmond, home to Victoria’s most controversial injecting room – has been revealed as a hotspot for heroin dealers and users. Crime Statistics Agency data for the year to March 2020 reveals Richmond as having the state’s most heroin drug dealing and trafficking offences at 80, Melbourne (38) came in second, while Abbotsford (31), came in third. The crime-riddled suburb of Richmond also took the top spot the previous year with 121 offences, St Albans (58) and Melbourne’s CBD (5).

The Herald Sun reported (07 August 2020) that furious residents had complained for months about the controversial North Richmond supervised injecting room and that despite the strict COVID19 pandemic Stage 4 restrictions and night time curfew applying to the Greater Melbourne Metropolitan area, [drug users were seen injecting](#) in the streets at all hours and were failing to wear masks or abide by social distancing measures. And on 12 February 2020, [nearby traders also called for the injecting to be shut down](#), saying it attracted more dealers and users, making the neighbourhood a virtual no-go zone for visitors, diners and shoppers.

In July 2020, a plan to build the [state’s second safe injecting room near the Queen Victoria Market](#) was rejected by the City of Melbourne who said community distress about the project was rising (Herald Sun 22 July 2020 & The Age 21 July 2020).

In Greater Dandenong, frustrated business owners on McCrae St regularly film the confronting scenes occurring daily outside their stores. One disturbing video [showed a man huddled in a laneway](#) next to the shops injecting drugs (Herald Sun 27 July 2019).

A spokesman for the Victoria Police was reported by the Herald Sun (30 September 2020) as saying that police were committed to the pillars of drug harm minimisation – those being **prevention, treatment, reducing harm and reducing supply:**

“Victoria Police has zero tolerance for drug traffickers, especially those who prey on the vulnerable. In order to drive down the harm caused by drugs in our communities.”

“This includes work on a localised level with Divisional Response Units and Crime Investigation Units, right up to the state and international level with Victoria Police’s Drug Taskforce and the Melbourne-based Joint Organised Crime Task Force (JOCTF) led by the AFP and including Victoria Police, Australian Border Force and the Australian Crime Intelligence Commission.”

(Source: <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/melbourne-city/victorian-heroin-dealers-suburbs-with-most-dealing-of-drug-revealed/news-story/f1aede4c099c95ef7dad8139e6ba17e3>)

DETECTIVES busted 91 clandestine laboratories in Victoria (ACIC 2018-19);

Indeed, as recently as 4 September 2020 the AFP reported four Melbourne men were arrested and around 100 kilograms of a methamphetamine analogue seized, after a multi-agency law enforcement operation in Melbourne.

(Source: AFP News & Media: <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/four-arrested-100-kilograms-liquid-meth-seized-and-discovery-large>)

In July 2020, three drug labs were raided and dismantled by police in Victoria and Tasmania with 8 arrests made (Wellington Times 2 July 2020).

<https://www.wellingtontimes.com.au/story/6816235/police-bust-drug-syndicate-in-vic-and-tas/?cs=9676>

CLOSE to half of CANNABIS seized nationally comes from Victoria;

CANNABIS detections at the border are up 666 per cent over the past decade (ACIC 2018-19);

The latest Crime Statistics Agency data in the year to March 2020 reveals Cranbourne as having the most drug dealing and trafficking offences at 18, Werribee (17) came in second, while Mildura (17), came in third. The regional town of Hamilton took the top spot the previous year at (24), Melbourne’s CBD (23) and Cranbourne at (22).

In August 2020, [a pair of cannabis crop cutters were jailed after making a desperate dash](#) when police came knocking at their Narre Warren drug den. Vietnamese nationals Toan Vu, 23 and Son Pham, 29, pleaded guilty in the County Court on August 19 after close to 200 cannabis plants were uncovered on Wood Rd on 12 August 2019. Officers found more than 135kg of cannabis made up of plants, cuttings and dried substance spread across six rooms as well as lamps, water pumps, electrical transformers and an electrical bypass controlled by timing devices.

A police spokesman told the Leader Newspaper that police were committed to the pillars of drug harm minimisation – those being prevention, treatment, reducing harm and reducing supply.

“Victoria Police has zero tolerance for drug traffickers, especially those who prey on the vulnerable. In order to drive down the harm caused by drugs in our communities.

“This includes work on a localised level with Divisional Response Units and Crime Investigation Units, right up to the state and international level with Victoria Police’s Drug Taskforce and the Melbourne-based Joint Organised Crime Task Force (JOCTF) led by the AFP and including Victoria Police, Australian Border Force and the Australian Crime Intelligence Commission.”

He said coronavirus restrictions had also meant police were more readily able to identify suspicious or illegal activity in the community, leading to detections of drug related offending on Victoria's streets and at the Victorian borders.

(Source: 30 Sept 2020 Herald Sun, Leader, South East: Victorian cannabis dealers: Suburbs with most dealing and use revealed <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/south-east/victorian-cannabis-dealers-suburbs-with-most-dealing-and-use-revealed/news-story/878fc80178a19eb087cfe0ba4325db0d>)

COCAINE seizures and arrests in Victoria are at record levels(ACIC 2018-19);

The inner city suburb of Richmond – home to Victoria's most controversial injecting room – has been revealed as a hotspot for heroin dealers and users.

The latest Crime Statistics Agency data in the year from March 2019 to March 2020 reveals Richmond as having the state's most heroin drug dealing and trafficking offences at 80, Melbourne CBD (38) came in second, while Abbotsford (31), came in third.

It comes as furious residents have complained for months about the controversial North Richmond supervised injecting room.

In August 2020 the Leader newspaper reported claims that, [drug users were seen injecting](#) in the streets at all hours and were failing to wear masks or abide by social distancing measures.

In February 2020, [nearby traders also called for the injecting to be shut down](#), saying it attracted more dealers and users, making the neighbourhood a virtual no-go zone for visitors, diners and shoppers.

Richmond also took the top spot for most heroin drug dealing and trafficking offences the previous year with 121 offences, followed by St Albans (58) and Melbourne's CBD (5).

Data also obtained by Leader revealed Richmond as having the most heroin users with drug use and possession offences 125, St Albans (70) and Melbourne's CBD (67).

Melbourne University alcohol and drug policy expert Associate Professor John Fitzgerald told the Leader newspaper that injecting rooms had played a very important role in "saving lives". Assoc Prof Fitzgerald said that:

"We need to think carefully and thoughtfully on the next stage and we've got an opportunity to do some really good work," He said dealers had adapted to peddling drugs in the pandemic.

"Just as we're adapting, so are the drug markets under COVID-19 and this is occurring all around the world, don't think for an instance that the drug market has gone asleep."

A Victoria Police spokesman told the Leader newspaper that while drug use in the Victorian community continued to be a significant concern for police, both in rural and metropolitan areas, an increase in the detection of offences such as drug use and possession was actually considered a positive result.

(Source 30 Sept 2020 Herald Sun, Leader, Melbourne City: Victorian heroin dealers: Suburbs with most dealing of drug revealed <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/melbourne-city/victorian-heroin-dealers-suburbs-with-most-dealing-of-drug-revealed/news-story/f1aede4c099c95ef7dad8139e6ba17e3>)

AMPHETAMINE (including ice and ecstasy) weight seizures has soared in Victoria year-on-year by an enormous 729 per cent! (ACIC 2018-19)

The latest Crime Statistics Agency data for March 2019 to March 2020 reveals Melbourne (St Kilda Rd district) as having the state's most ecstasy dealing and trafficking offences at 16, St Kilda (12) came in second, while Melbourne's CBD (10), came in third.

This would suggest that popular nightclub and outdoor dining precincts in Victoria are a hotspot for ecstasy dealers according to an article in the Herald Sun-Leader. (30 September 2020, Susan Delibasic, "Victorian ecstasy dealers: Suburbs with most drug deals revealed")

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/victorian-ecstasy-dealers-suburbs-with-most-drug-deals-revealed/news-story/e62a8a9e82350d826b84729842616c4d>

This report on Victorian crime statistics comes as [11 people were charged after a major drug bust](#) in the city's southeast last month. (17 August 2020, Herald Sun, Olivia Jenkins) The bust included seizing a commercial quantity of what is believed to be cocaine and methyl amphetamine, along with large amounts of GHB and cannabis. The arrests carried out by police spanned at least ten suburbs as part of Operation Brandish's ongoing investigation that has been running for almost a year into drug trafficking across the city.

The Herald Sun reported (30 September 2020) that Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission chief executive officer Michael Phelan said **the illicit drug black economy is sizeable:**

"It would appear that Australian drug markets continue to grow," Mr Phelan said. "We will continue to pursue serious and organised criminals seeking to bring these dangerous drugs to Australia and those who cultivate and manufacture them domestically."

(Source: Herald Sun, website 30/9/20, 5:39 pm - Brianna Travers -

<https://metros.smedia.com.au/heraldsun/PrintArticle.aspx?doc=NCHRS%2F2020%2F09%2F30&entity=ar01004&mode=text>)

Cannabis

Suburbs with most cannabis dealing offences (Victoria)*

Cranbourne includes Botanic Ridge, Devon Meadows	18
Werribee includes Quandong, Point Cook, Cocoroc, Werribee South	17
Mildura	17
Shepparton	16
Narre Warren includes Narre Warren South	13
Sunshine includes Sunshine West, Sunshine North, Albion	12
St Albans includes Albanvale, Kings Park, Kealba	12
Springvale	12
Warrnabool	12
Cape Bridgewater	12

Suburbs with most cannabis use and possession offences (Victoria)*

Melbourne CBD	336
Dandenong	232
Hampton Park	156
Frankston includes Frankston South	151
Werribee includes Quandong, Point Cook, Cocoroc, Werribee South	142
Mildura	138
Broadmeadows includes Dallas, Jacana	131
Shepparton	120
Cranbourne includes Botanic Ridge, Devon Meadows	113
Craigieburn includes Roxburgh Park, Mickleham, Kalkallo, Donnybrook	109

Source: Crime Statistics Agency. *March 2019 - March 2020

Heroin

Suburbs with most heroin dealing offences (Victoria)*

Richmond includes Cremorne, Burnley	80
Melbourne CBD	38
Abbotsford	31
St Albans includes Albanvale, Kings Park, Kealba	16
Maribyrnong includes Ascot Vale, Travancore	12
Braybrook	11
Keysborough	11
Dandenong includes Bangholme, Dandenong South, Dandenong North	11
Croydon includes Croydon Hills, Croydon North, Croydon South	10
Noble Park includes Noble Park North	9

Suburbs with most heroin use offences (Victoria)*

Richmond includes Cremorne, Burnley	125
St Albans includes Albanvale, Kings Park, Kealba	70
Melbourne CBD	67
Abbotsford	56
Dandenong includes Bangholme, Dandenong South, Dandenong North	34
Sunshine includes Sunshine West, Sunshine North, Albion	34
Springvale	33
Prahran includes Windsor	19
Noble Park includes Noble Park North	18
Footscray includes Seddon	18

Source: Crime Statistics Agency. *March 2019 - March 2020

Ecstasy

Suburbs with most ecstasy dealing offences (Victoria)*

Melbourne (St Kilda Rd district)	16
St Kilda includes St Kilda West	12
Melbourne CBD	10
Bendigo	10
Docklands	9
Maribyrnong includes Ascot Vale, Travancore	8
Richmond includes Cremorne, Burnley	7
Frankston includes Frankston South	7
Warrnambool	7
Mildura	7

Suburbs with most ecstasy use and possession offences (Victoria)*

Melbourne CBD	81
Kensington, Flemington	55
Melbourne (St Kilda Rd district)	35
Richmond includes Cremorne, Burnley	29
Maribyrnong includes Ascot Vale, Travancore	27
St Kilda includes St Kilda West	26
Ballarat	21
Frankston includes Frankston South	21
West Melbourne	18
Warrnambool	16

Source: Crime Statistics Agency. *March 2019 - March 2020