

Drug crimes hit a high

By Matt Crossman and Lexi Cottee

A Hume police crackdown on drugs is bearing fruit, with the number of use and possession offences up 67 per cent on last year.

Figures for the year ending March 31, released by the Crime Statistics Agency last Thursday, revealed drug use and possession offences in the municipality jumped from 462 to 773.

Drug dealing and trafficking crimes went from 97 to 149, while the figure for cultivation or manufacturing was unchanged at 63.

"We're catching them and that's great," Hume's Acting Inspector Phil Nash said.

"We have a number of operations running at the moment and have executed between 24 and 30 warrants in the Sunbury region."

Sunbury police senior sergeant Tim Douglas said considerable effort had been put into curbing the supply of drugs, including crystal methamphetamine (ice) and cannabis.

"Ice has and is a problem for us, as it is in many other towns," he said. "We've been very proactive in dealing with it."

Senior Sergeant Douglas said drugs were often a factor in other crimes, such as assaults, family violence and burglaries, but warned the state could not "arrest its way" out of the ice

problem. He said partnerships with agencies including Sunbury Community Health were crucial to getting drug users and their families the help they need.

Senior Sergeant Douglas also encouraged the community to continue to report drug crime.

Data released last week also showed Hume had the highest number of family violence incidents in the state, with 2992 reports.

Acting Inspector Nash said domestic violence rates remain a major concern.

"It's not isolated to certain demographics but right across the board," he said.

Acting Inspector Walsh said a rise in the

number of breaches of court orders, up from 1503 in 2014 to 2097 this year, was largely related to family violence orders.

The figures also revealed a three-fold increase in firearm offences in Melbourne's north-west in the past five years. In Hume, the number of weapons offences went from 643 to 765 in the space of a year.

Figures for the Macedon Ranges showed family incident reports dropped from 450 to 371, continuing a recent trend. Drug offences went up from 70 to 147 but assaults fell from 244 to 184. Burglary reports increased, while firearm offences jumped from 48 to 108.