

# Fewer ice calls, but cops alert

By Matt Crossman

Paramedics are being called to fewer ice-related incidents in Hume, despite widespread fears about the use of crystal methamphetamine.

A new report by drug and alcohol centre Turning Point reveals there were 53 call-outs for people under the influence of ice in Hume in 2013-14.

The figure was a slight improvement from 2012-13, when paramedics attended 60 cases.

Fewer than five cases were recorded in the Macedon Ranges in both years, but experts warn there is no room for complacency with a 27 per cent increase in ice-related ambulance attendances across regional Victoria.

Alcohol remains the biggest cause of ambulance call-outs in Sunbury and the Macedon Ranges.

Hume paramedics attended 384 alcohol-related calls in 2013-14, up from 375, while Macedon Ranges ambos were called to 78 call-outs – up from 77.

Sunbury Community Health child, youth and family services general manager Marcus Bosch said alcohol remained the most prevalent type of substance abuse.

He said that while the ice problem was more significant than it was four years ago, it was important that people didn't panic.

"We hope community members avoid stigmatising people who are struggling with addictions. That would only contribute to them becoming further marginalised," he said.

He said the health service's strong relationship with police was crucial, with

people often connected with counselling services because of it.

As reported by *Star Weekly*, nine people were charged after drugs including ice were seized in Sunbury and Romsey on August 13 as part of an operation designed to smash drug manufacturing and trafficking in the area.

Macedon Ranges police's Inspector Ryan Irwin said problems caused by ice spread through the community.

“ We hope that community members avoid stigmatising people ”

- Marcus Bosch

"It's not an issue we'll ever solve just by policing alone," Inspector Irwin said.

"I don't think we've seen any significant growth, but it's fairly consistent."

Inspector Irwin said an ice symposium in Woodend next month would bring together experts to discuss how to tackle the problem.

He encouraged anyone with information about drug use to contact police.

"Certainly if people are involved in distribution or trafficking we need to hear about it, because that's the level we'd like to target," he said.

"People can also contact us if it's for health issues and we can point them in the right direction."

The symposium will be at Norma Richardson Hall from 9am-1.30pm on September 11. For more details, phone 5428 2640.