



**Wednesday 26 October 2022**

## **New study finds large increase in cocaine-related deaths in Australia over the last decade**

There were 884 cocaine-related deaths in Australia between 2000 and 2021 according to a new study published by researchers at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), UNSW Sydney.

The study examined data from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) and found a large increase in cocaine-related deaths since 2012, with 398 known deaths in the last five years.

'These deaths are largely due to more widespread use of cocaine,' said lead author, Professor Shane Darke.

'We found clinically significant changes in case profiles across the study period that suggest a broadening of those who use cocaine and its associated harm.'

There was a significant increase in the proportion of cocaine-related deaths among people with no history of substance use problems.

'20 years ago, 90% of cocaine deaths had a history of substance use problems, now that figure is much lower at 50%,' said Professor Darke.

Histories of injecting drug use and recent opioid use also significantly declined.

'As cocaine use expands in a population, the focus of intervention must adapt to reflect the changing profiles of those at risk,' said Professor Darke.

Of the 884 cases examined, the most prevalent cause of death was unintentional drug toxicity (70 percent) and generally involved cardiovascular events.

'Acute and chronic heart disease is a significant factor in cocaine deaths, and users may be unaware of this, or of the risk for stroke,' said Professor Darke.

The study also found 18 percent of cocaine-related deaths involved intentional self-harm or suicide and 12 percent were traumatic incidents, predominantly involving motor vehicles.

In 93 percent of cases other drugs were involved and alcohol was present in close to half of the reported deaths.

'Alcohol intensifies the effects of cocaine making the drug more toxic, so this is a particularly dangerous combination,' said Professor Darke.

'When compared to drugs like crystal methamphetamine, cocaine sometimes has a reputation of being a safer choice.'

'Nothing could be further from the truth – cocaine causes heart attacks and stroke and sees people become highly activated, impulsive, disinhibited, and engage in risky behaviour.'

The full article is available in *Addiction*: <http://doi.org/10.1111/add.16055>

## Ends

Media contacts:

To organise an interview with Professor Shane Darke, please contact NDARC's media team on 0401 713 850 | [ndarc.media@unsw.edu.au](mailto:ndarc.media@unsw.edu.au)

For reference: When reporting on drug and alcohol issues, we encourage the consultation of the Mindframe guidelines on '[Communicating about alcohol and other drugs](#)', the '[Language Matters](#)' guide published by the NSW Users and AIDS Association, and the guidelines on "[Communicating about suicide](#)".

We also encourage inclusion of the following helpline information in all reporting:

People can access free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs by calling the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline - 1800 250 015.