MEDIA RELEASE

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Modern break-ins are quieter, faster and surprisingly easy to prevent, experts warn

Home break-ins are rising across Australia, but the way they are happening is not what most people expect. Household break-ins increased from 1.8 per cent in 2022–23 to 2.1 per cent in 2023–24, edging back toward pre-pandemic levels. Crime Stoppers Victoria data shows up to 80 per cent of burglaries involve entry through unlocked doors or windows, or attempts abandoned once a property is secured.

For Seb Plant, a locksmith at John Barnes Group, that pattern is nothing new.

“One of the biggest misconceptions Australian homeowners have is that a break-in usually means someone smashing a window or kicking in a front door,” he says. “That can happen, but in many cases, intruders are simply looking for the easiest, lowest-risk entry point.”

“It’s as simple as an unlocked front or back door, a sliding door that isn't properly secured, a window left unlocked for airflow, or a side gate that gives hidden access to the rear of the home. A lot of break-ins come down to opportunity and routine.”

The pattern is what criminologists describe as opportunistic burglary, a low-effort entry that leaves little to no trace.

One of the most common examples, Plant says, is the spare key left outside. Under the mat, beneath the pot plant, above the door frame, these are not clever hiding spots so much as familiar ones.

“Hidden only works if it’s truly unpredictable, and most common hiding spots aren’t.”

A lockbox fixed to the wall or secured to a solid point offers a more secure alternative, allowing access for family, carers, or trades without leaving a loose key exposed.

Less obvious risks can come down to how a lock functions. Snib-style locks, where the internal thumb-turn can sometimes be reached from outside depending on the door setup, are one example.

“This is why it’s important to look not just at whether a door locks, but how it locks, and what can be reached from outside,” Plant says.

The same applies to garages and internal access doors, often treated as secondary by homeowners, but rarely seen that way by someone looking for an easy way in.

Smart home security has added another layer, but not always in the homeowner’s favour. Plant says one of the most common issues he sees is people placing too much trust in the technology itself.

“Smart tech is useful, but it can create a false sense of security if homeowners don't also secure physical locks and doors, keep devices updated, and set up automations correctly. A smart lock or camera is only one layer. If the physical door, strike, hinges, or habits are weak, the system can still be bypassed in very ordinary ways.”

He regularly encounters cameras pointed at the wrong angle, poorly configured motion zones, flat batteries in sensors, and notifications switched off or sent to old devices. The system is there, but it is not doing much when it matters.

Preventing these kinds of break-ins, he says, is often less about adding more equipment and more about building consistent habits.

Plant recommends a simple “ten-minute entry check” before leaving the house or going to bed: check all external doors are locked, confirm windows are closed and secured, lock the garage and any internal access door, remove visible valuables from sight, and make sure alarms and cameras are armed and online.

“It sounds simple, but consistency beats expensive equipment that isn’t used properly,” he says.

For those considering a security upgrade, his advice is to start with the basics: strong physical locks, quality door hardware, and proper installation, then layer technology on top of that, not in place of it.

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