



## **Australian Suicide Statistics, 2004 – Key Findings**

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*On 14 March 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released the 2004 data on deaths by suicide in Australia. Auseinet has produced this summary in order to highlight some of the key findings. A copy of the ABS Suicides publication ([ABS catalogue no. 3309.0](#)) is available free of charge on the web.*

### **Cautions in interpreting suicide statistics:**

- The quality of suicide statistics are affected by a number of factors including how long it takes for Coroners to process deaths that are reported as potential suicides. The ABS notes that particular issues experienced in recent years may explain at least part of the observed decline in the number of suicide deaths. Thus extreme caution must be taken when comparing trends in the number of suicides over recent years.

### **Number of suicide deaths:**

- In 2004, there were 2,098 registered deaths from suicide.
- Males were almost 4 times more likely than females to die by suicide in 2004 (1,661 compared with 437 suicide deaths, respectively).
- The highest number of suicide deaths was observed for men aged between 30 to 34 years (221 suicide deaths), followed by men aged 40 to 44 years (208 suicide deaths) in 2004. In comparison, the number of suicide deaths for men aged 20 to 24 years was 143, and the corresponding number for men aged 25 to 29 years was 172.
- An age-standardised suicide rate allows for a more precise comparison of groups with different age structures. This suicide rate for males was 16.8 per 100,000 people in 2004, compared with 4.3 per 100,000 for females.

### **Trends in suicide deaths:**

- Although comparing the number of suicide deaths over time must be done cautiously (see notes on 'Cautions in interpreting suicide statistics'), the 2004 figure of 2,098 suicides deaths suggests a continued decline in the number of registered suicide deaths since the peak of 2,720 suicide deaths in 1997. In 2003, there were 2,213 deaths by suicide.
- This decline in the number of suicides over recent years is seen for both males and females.



### **Percentage of all deaths:**

- 1.6% of all deaths were due to suicide in 2004.
- The percentage of deaths due to suicide is much higher among some groups than others. In particular, suicide accounted for approximately 22% of all deaths for those aged 20 to 34 years in 2004, and it accounted for 27% of deaths for men aged 25 to 29 years.

### **Method of suicide:**

- Almost half (49%) of male suicide deaths in 2004 were by hanging, while 28% of male suicide deaths were due to poisoning. In contrast, hanging and poison accounted for the same percentage (40% each) of female suicide deaths.
- The number of suicide deaths by firearms and explosives has continued to decline over the past decade from 420 suicide deaths by firearms and explosives in 1994 (representing 19% of suicide deaths in that year) to 169 deaths by this method in 2004 (representing 8% of suicide deaths).

### **Differences across the states and territories:**

- Given the relatively small numbers of suicides in any one state or territory each year, a more accurate picture of differences by state and territory can be gained from pooling data over a number of years. When combined data for the years of 2000 to 2004 are examined, the highest age-standardised suicide rate is observed for the Northern Territory – their suicide rate of 23.6 per 100,000 people was twice the Australian average (of 11.6 per 100,000 people). The next highest suicide rates were observed for Tasmania (14.7 suicide deaths per 100,000 people) and Queensland (13.5 suicide deaths per 100,000 people).

### **Suicide among Aboriginal people\*:**

- In addition to the general issues surrounding the quality of suicide statistics (as noted earlier), the quality of data on deaths of Aboriginal people is also affected by issues of undercounting. Thus the number of recorded suicide deaths among Aboriginal people is likely to be, at best, a minimum count of such deaths.
- The ABS releases data on the number of deaths by suicide among Aboriginal people for the states and territories of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory in a publication called 'Causes of Death' ([ABS catalogue no. 3303.0](#)). The ABS does not publish data on suicide deaths of Aboriginal people for Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT due to both comparatively small numbers, and relatively low coverage, of Aboriginal deaths in those areas.



- The data suggest that in 2004, there were 83 registered deaths by suicide of Aboriginal people in the five states and territories considered. This number of suicides accounted for 4.2% of all deaths of Aboriginal people in 2004 in the selected states and territories. In contrast, suicide deaths in the same states and territories represented only 1.5% of deaths among non-Aboriginal people. Thus deaths by suicide account for a much higher proportion of all deaths among Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people.
- This same pattern was seen in 2003. In that year, there were 76 registered suicide deaths of Aboriginal people in the selected five states, with this number accounting for 3.9% of all deaths of Aboriginal people. The corresponding percentage for non-Aboriginal people was 1.6%.
- The difference between the proportion of deaths that was due to suicide among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people varies by state and territory. The ABS data for 2004 suggests that the biggest difference can be observed for South Australia, where 5.3% of deaths of Aboriginal people were due to suicide compared with 1.4% of deaths to non-Aboriginal people. In contrast, the smallest difference is seen for the Northern Territory; while 5.3% of deaths of Aboriginal people in that territory were due to suicide, a slightly larger percentage (6.0%) of deaths of non-Aboriginal people were due to suicide.

\* The term 'Aboriginal people' is used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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This information sheet was produced by the Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health ([www.auseinet.com](http://www.auseinet.com)) and written by Adriana Vanden Heuvel, March 2006.

More details about sources which provide statistical information about levels and trends of suicide in Australia can be found on the LIFE: National Suicide Prevention website. This site is developed and maintained by Auseinet. [www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/statistics.php](http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/statistics.php)