

Suicide claims the lives of over 2000 Australians each year. More people die by suicide than in fatal car accidents.

For every person who dies there are another 8 people who are directly affected. This means that suicide impacts the lives of over 16,000 Australians each year. The grief, confusion and anguish that comes from losing someone you love, a family member, a friend, a colleague is devastating.



This fact sheet provides information about suicide in Australia including recent suicide rates, who is most at risk and what is being done about it.

## What is Suicide?

'Suicide' refers to deaths which:

1. occur due to unnatural causes (i.e. injury, poisoning or suffocation) rather than illness;
2. are self-inflicted; and
3. are caused with the intention to die.

## What is an inquiry?

An inquiry usually takes 3-6 months and is the process by which the coroner reviews written evidence (from police reports, post mortem results etc.) and makes a finding on the nature and cause of death.

## What is an inquest?

An inquest may take 18 months or longer and takes the form of a court hearing. Witnesses are called to give evidence surrounding the death, and the Coroner then makes a finding on the nature and cause of death.

## Suicide in Australia – An Overview

- There were 2,191 deaths from Suicide registered in 2008. This has risen from 1,799 recorded in 2006.
- Over three-quarters (78%) of Suicides were males.
- In 2008, intentional self-harm was ranked as the 14th leading cause of all deaths registered in Australia in 2008.
- Males accounted for over three-quarters of all Suicide deaths in 2008, resulting in a ranking as the 10th leading cause of death for males.
- In 2008, the most frequent method of suicide was hanging, a method used in half (53%) of all Suicide deaths. Poisoning by drugs was used in 12% of Suicide deaths, followed by poisoning by other methods including by alcohol and motor vehicle exhaust (11%). Methods using firearms accounted for 7.8% of Suicide deaths. The remaining Suicide deaths included deaths from drowning, jumping from a high place, and other methods.

- For the five-year period between 2004 and 2008 (inclusive), high rates of suicide were evident in Northern Territory (22.0 per 100,000), followed by Tasmania (15.6 per 100,000) and South Australia (12.1 per 100,000). In comparison, New South Wales (8.0 per 100,000) and Victoria (9.2 per 100,000) had the lowest rates of suicide.



## Suicide in Australia – International Comparison

While it is hard to accurately compare suicide rates across countries due to different ways of recording and collecting data, generally Australia has a rate of suicide that is similar to the USA and Canada, somewhat higher than the UK and lower than New Zealand.

### Who is most at risk?

The recent suicide data suggests that the following groups may be at a higher risk of suicide:

- Men
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people
- People in rural or remote communities
- People being treated for a mental illness in a psychiatric facility or who have been recently discharged from an institution
- People who have previously attempted suicide or who self-harm
- People bereaved by suicide
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

### What is being done?

The *National Suicide Prevention Strategy* promotes suicide prevention activities across the Australian population as well as for specific at-risk groups.

The goal of the *National Suicide Prevention Strategy* is to reduce deaths by suicide across the population and among at risk groups, and reduce suicidal behaviour. To inform and support this goal, the Australian Government is working together with communities across Australia to build resilience, resourcefulness and social connectedness in people, families and communities to protect against the risk factors for suicide.

The *National Suicide Prevention Program* supports national and community based initiatives and projects that enhance the capacity of individuals and services to access information and provide support and training on suicide prevention. These projects also aim to increase the number of individuals seeking help regarding their emotional and social wellbeing and increase the identification, referral and treatment of at risk individuals by service systems and professionals.

The Salvation Army Hope For Life Program gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. Other programs funding under this strategy can be found at <http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/ProjectDetails.aspx?pfiler=all&catid=0>.

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