
8. Apparent unnatural deaths

'Apparent unnatural deaths' is an indicator of governments' objective of providing a safe, secure and humane custodial environment.

'Apparent unnatural deaths' is defined as the number of deaths, divided by the annual average prisoner population, multiplied by 100 (to give the rate per 100 prisoners), where the likely cause of death is suicide, drug overdose, accidental injury or homicide.

Zero, low or decreasing rates of apparent unnatural deaths are desirable.

The rates for this indicator should be interpreted with caution. A single incident in a jurisdiction with a relatively small prisoner population can significantly increase the rate in that jurisdiction but would have only a minor impact in jurisdictions with larger populations. A relatively high rate in a jurisdiction with a small prisoner population can represent only a very small number of deaths.

Nationally in 2023-24 the overall rate of deaths of prisoners from apparent unnatural causes was 0.06 per 100 prisoners (table 8.2a). The rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners was 0.05 and for non-Indigenous prisoners was 0.06. There were 24 deaths reported as being due to unnatural causes, 7 of whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (table 8.2b).

■ Data is comparable (subject to caveats) across jurisdictions and over time.

■ Data is complete (subject to caveats) for the current reporting period.

Select year (applies to tables 8.2a and 8.2b):

2023-24

Table 8.2a Rate of deaths from apparent unnatural causes per 100 prisoner deaths

By Indigenous status, by jurisdiction, 2023-24 (a)

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners	Non-Indigenous prisoners	All prisoners
NSW	rate	0.08	0.06	0.06
Vic	rate	-	0.08	0.06
Qld	rate	0.02	0.08	0.06
WA	rate	0.06	0.07	0.07
SA	rate	0.12	-	0.03
Tas	rate	-	-	-
ACT	rate	-	-	-
NT	rate	-	-	-
Aust	rate	0.05	0.06	0.06

Table 8.2b Number of deaths from apparent unnatural causes

By Indigenous status, by jurisdiction, 2023-24 (a)

		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners	Non-Indigenous prisoners	All prisoners
NSW	no.	3	5	8
Vic	no.	-	4	4
Qld	no.	1	5	6
WA	no.	2	3	5
SA	no.	1	-	1
Tas	no.	-	-	-
ACT	no.	-	-	-
NT	no.	-	-	-
Aust	no.	7	17	24

Source: table 8A.16 & 8A.17

np Not published. - Nil or rounded to zero.

(a) 'Non-Indigenous' includes deaths where Indigenous status was unknown.