



## Fact sheet 3

# Statistics on suicide in Australia



### **Around 2,000 Australians die by suicide every year, affecting families, friends, work places and communities.**

This fact sheet provides an overview of the available statistics on Australian suicide rates, trends and at-risk groups.

#### **Australian suicide data and statistics**

A death is classified as a suicide by a coroner based on evidence that a person died as a result of a deliberate act to cause his or her own death. If there is contrary evidence, a coroner may classify the death as having been caused by someone else (murder or manslaughter), or as accidental. If there is insufficient evidence, the coroner may not be able to reach a decision as to the cause of death.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is responsible for gathering data from each of the jurisdictions and compiling the annual publication, *Causes of Death, Australia*. Inconsistent coronial practices and incomplete data due to an increasing number of cases in which the coroner has not yet ruled (that is the cases are open at the time of publication) are affecting the quality of the data. Efforts are being made to address these issues.

#### **Rates and trends of suicide in Australia**

In 2006, 1,799 deaths by suicide were registered in Australia (ABS, 2008):

- this is an age-standardised rate of 8.7 per 100,000 people. This rate has been dropping steadily since a peak of 14.7 suicides per 100,000 people in 1997;
- males accounted for around 78% of these deaths;
- this compares with 1,668 deaths by motor vehicle accidents in the same period; and
- suicide accounted for nearly one-fifth of all deaths amongst young men aged 20 to 34.

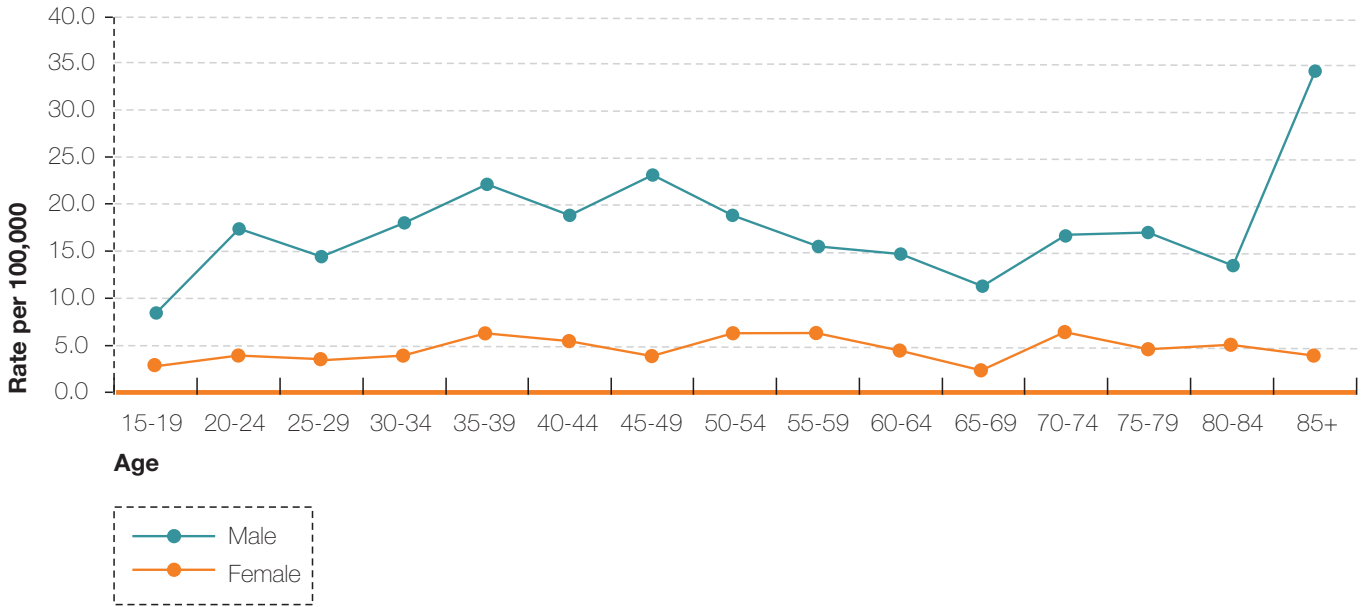
## Suicide rates by age group and gender

Suicide rates are fairly similar for females of all ages with the highest age-specific rate in the 70-74 years age group (6.1 per 100,000) and the lowest in the 65-69 years age group (3.0 per 100,000). The age-specific suicide rates for males shows significant variations between age groups, with the highest being in the 85 years and

over age group (34.5 per 100,000) and the lowest in the 15-19 years age group (8.8 per 100,000).

Figure 1 shows the suicide rate for various age groups for males and females in Australia in 2006.

FIGURE 1: Suicide rates, Australia 2006, 5 year age groups by gender.



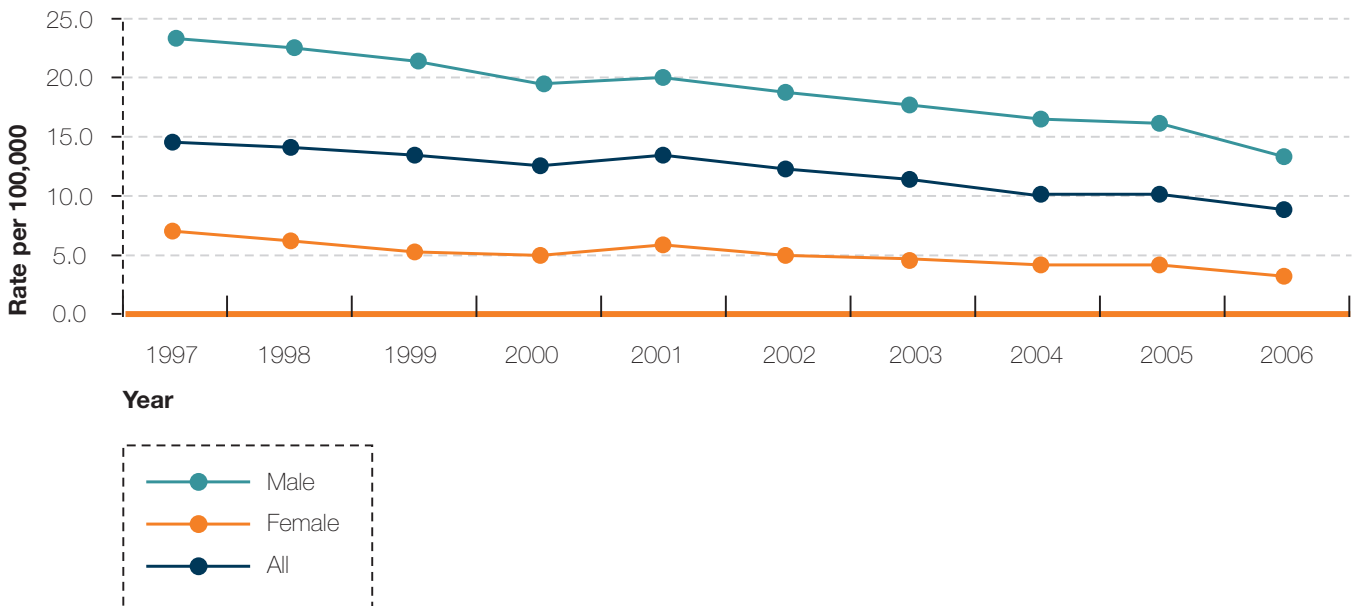
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008. Causes of Death Australia, 2006-Catalogue No. 3303.0)

## Suicide rates by gender

Recent data suggest that suicide rates in Australia have declined since the late 1990s, especially in young people. Figure 2 shows suicide rates from 1997 to 2006. Among males, suicide rates

have dropped since a high in the late 1990s, but rates among females have remained fairly constant, and are consistently around one quarter of the rate for males.

FIGURE 2: Suicide rates, 1997 to 2006.



(Source: ABS, 2008)

## Suicide rates by state/territory

The number of suicide deaths and the age-standardised rate per 100,000 population for each state and territory is shown in **Figure 3**.

It should be noted that the number of deaths can fluctuate greatly, particularly in smaller jurisdictions.

**FIGURE 3:** Suicide deaths by State/Territory, 2006.

State	Deaths			Rates (per 100,000)
	Males	Females	Persons	
New South Wales	401	103	504	7.3
Victoria	332	112	444	8.5
Queensland	278	62	340	8.3
South Australia	129	41	170	10.7
Western Australia	156	51	207	10.0
Tasmania	55	18	73	14.7
Northern Territory	26	3	29	13.0
Australian Capital Territory	21	11	32	9.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,398</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>1,799</b>	<b>8.6</b>

(Source: ABS, 2008)

## International comparison

The suicide rate in Australia is higher than some countries and lower than others. Making comparisons between countries is difficult due to the different ways of collecting data about deaths.

**Figure 4** shows data collected by the World Health Organization. It should be noted that rates of suicide in other countries are not only affected by collection procedures, but also cultural differences in how suicide is viewed.

**FIGURE 4:** Suicide rates (per 100,000) for selected countries (latest year available).

Country	Year	Suicide rate
Greece	2004	3.2
Brazil	2002	4.3
United Kingdom	2004	7.0
Italy	2002	7.1
Spain	2004	8.2
Argentina	2003	8.7
Netherlands	2004	9.3
Ireland	2005	9.7
Singapore	2003	10.1
<b>Australia</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>10.3</b>
Chile	2003	10.4
USA	2002	11.0
Norway	2004	11.5
Canada	2002	11.6

Country	Year	Suicide rate
New Zealand	2004	11.7
Germany	2004	13.0
Sweden	2002	13.2
Cuba	2004	13.5
Denmark	2001	13.6
Poland	2004	15.9
Austria	2005	16.9
Switzerland	2004	17.4
France	2004	18.0
Finland	2004	20.3
Republic of Korea	2004	23.8
Japan	2003	24.0
Hungary	2003	27.7
Russian Federation	2004	34.3

(Source: WHO 2007,  
<http://www.who.int/whosis/database/mort/table1.cfm>)

## Groups at risk of suicide

According to existing data, certain groups within the Australian community are at a higher risk of suicide. Some of these groups include:

- men
- Aboriginal and 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 engage in self-harm
- people bereaved by suicide; and
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, though within this broad population, there are substantial variations across cultures, age groups and gender.

It is important to remember that even though a person may fall into one or more of these groups, it does not mean that they will choose to take their own life. It simply means that, based on current data, people in these groups are at a higher risk of suicide than the general population.

## More information

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). *Causes of death 2006*, Cat. No. 3303.0. ABS: Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics – provides statistics on a wide range of economic and social matters, serving government, business and the general population: [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)
- Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP) – a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Suicide Prevention: [www.griffith.edu.au/health/australian-institute-suicide-research-prevention](http://www.griffith.edu.au/health/australian-institute-suicide-research-prevention)
- *Living Is For Everyone (LIFE) – A Framework for Prevention of Suicide in Australia* (2007). Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing: Canberra.
- *Living Is For Everyone (LIFE) – Research and Evidence in Suicide Prevention* (2007). Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing: Canberra.
- Mental health & well being – information on the Australian Government's role and contributions to mental health reform activities in Australia: [www.mentalhealth.gov.au](http://www.mentalhealth.gov.au)
- The Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention (WA) – suicide prevention information for professionals, researchers and community members: [www.mcsp.org.au](http://www.mcsp.org.au)
- Research Centre for Injury Studies and the National Injury Surveillance Unit – a human injury Research Centre, part of the Flinders University Faculty of Health Sciences: [www.nisu.flinders.edu.au](http://www.nisu.flinders.edu.au)
- World Health Organization 2007: WHO Mortality Database ([www.who.int/whosis/database/mort/table1.cfm](http://www.who.int/whosis/database/mort/table1.cfm)) Accessed September 2007.