

# Part I: Introduction and overview

## Chapter 1 - Introduction and overview

This section provides an overview of child deaths in Queensland for 2013–14.

### Key findings

- The deaths of 446 children and young people were registered in Queensland between 1 July 2013 and 30 June 2014, occurring at a rate of 41.0 per 100,000 children and young people aged 0–17 years.
- The rates and numbers of deaths from suicide have been relatively stable over the last five reporting periods.
- The child death rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was 2.2 times the rate for non-Indigenous children.

### Significant developments in Queensland child protection 2013–14

On 30 June 2014, the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (CCYPCG) ceased operations in preparation for the establishment of the new Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) and enactment of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (the Act) on 1 July 2014. This was in line with the recommendations made by the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry in its report *Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection*, which included 121 recommendations to reform the Queensland child protection system.

Under Part 3 (sections 25–29) of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, the QFCC has the responsibility, formerly held by the CCYPCG, for the maintenance of the Queensland Child Death Register. Under the Act, the QFCC is also required to classify, analyse and conduct research, make recommendations about laws, policies, practices and services and provide access to data contained in the Child Death Register to persons undertaking research to help reduce the likelihood of child deaths. The Act also retained the requirement that the Principal Commissioner must prepare an annual report in relation to child deaths in Queensland.

Whilst this report has been prepared by the QFCC, for the period 2013–14 to which this report relates, the research and activities referred to were all undertaken by the former CCYPCG.

### Child death and injury prevention activities

#### Child mortality data improvements

In March 2014, the CCYPCG attended the annual meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention Group (ANZCDR&PG) with the theme of building minimum national death datasets, including reviewing the outcomes of a pilot study using swimming pool drowning data. The meeting also provided an opportunity to learn about emerging issues and improvements in practice in other child death review jurisdictions, as well as a forum to promote the redeveloped Queensland Child Death Register and review of the CCYPCG child death data model.

#### Submission to improve data quality in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

The CCYPCG made a submission to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General regarding its review of the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003*, supporting current and proposed strategies aimed at improving the quality of births and deaths registration data.

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## Deaths of Queensland children and young people, 2013–14

A copy of Table 1.1 containing data since 2004 is available online at [www.qfcc.qld.gov.au](http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au)

Table 1.1: Summary of deaths of children and young people in Queensland, 2009–2014

	2009–10		2010–11		2011–12		2012–13		2013–14		Yearly average
	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Rate per 100,000
<b>All deaths</b>											
Deaths of children 0–17 years	488	46.5	465	43.8	487	45.4	448	41.1	446	41.0	43.5
<b>Cause of death</b>											
<b>Diseases and morbid conditions</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>38.3</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>34.8</b>
Explained diseases and morbid conditions	357	34.0	344	32.4	331	30.9	327	30.0	323	29.7	31.4
Unexplained diseases and morbid conditions	45	4.3	46	4.3	44	4.1	30	2.8	20	1.8	3.4
<i>SIDS and undetermined causes (infants)</i>	42	4.0	45	4.2	39	3.6	30	2.8	19	1.7	3.3
<i>Undetermined &gt; 1 year</i>	3	*	1	*	5	0.5	0	0.0	1	*	*
<b>External causes</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>8.0</b>
Transport	27	2.6	30	2.8	52	4.8	28	2.6	31	2.8	3.1
Suicide	20	1.9	22	2.1	19	1.8	22	2.0	23	2.1	2.0
Drowning	19	1.8	14	1.3	14	1.3	11	1.0	7	0.6	1.2
Other non-intentional injury-related death	11	1.0	4	0.4	21	2.0	15	1.4	8	0.7	1.1
Fatal assault and neglect	9	0.9	4	0.4	5	0.5	11	1.0	4	0.4	0.6
<b>Cause of death pending</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Sudden unexpected deaths in infancy (SUDI)</b>											
Sudden unexpected infant deaths	53	85.2	55	89.0	51	84.8	48	78.0	43	69.9	83.1
<b>Sex</b>											
Female	189 <sup>a</sup>	37.0	207	40.1	210 <sup>a</sup>	40.2	204	38.5	198 <sup>a</sup>	37.3	38.6
Male	298 <sup>a</sup>	55.3	258	47.3	276 <sup>a</sup>	50.1	244	43.7	247 <sup>a</sup>	44.2	48.1
<b>Age category</b>											
Under 1 year	329	529.2	309	500.1	293	487.1	287	466.5	298	484.4	504.0
1–4 years	48	20.3	40	16.5	60	24.6	48	19.4	45	18.1	19.7
5–9 years	28	9.9	28	9.8	35	11.9	31	10.3	39	13.0	11.0
10–14 years	28	9.6	32	11.0	36	12.3	38	12.8	21	7.1	10.6
15–17 years	55	30.8	56	31.2	63	34.9	44	24.2	43	23.6	28.9
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status</b>											
Indigenous	61	75.2	61	73.9	69	82.6	59	69.7	69	81.5	76.3
Non-Indigenous	427	44.1	404	41.2	418	42.3	389	35.7	377	37.5	40.7
<b>Known to the child protection system</b>											
Known to the child protection system	65	50.2	62	41.0	87	53.4	63	38.0	80	47.8	43.8

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2009–14)

\* Rates have not been calculated for numbers less than 4.

<sup>a</sup> Excludes the death of 1 infant whose sex was unknown in 2009–10, 1 infant of indeterminate sex in 2011–12 and 1 infant of indeterminate sex in 2013–14.

- Notes:
1. Data presented here are current in the Queensland Child Death Register as at June 2014 and thus may differ from those presented in previously published reports.
  2. Rates are based on the most up-to-date denominator data available and are calculated per 100,000 children (in the age/sex/Indigenous status) in each year.
  3. Rates for cause of death are calculated per 100,000 children aged 0–17 years in Queensland in each year, with the exception of sudden unexpected deaths in infancy, which are calculated per 100,000 infants under the age of 1 year in Queensland.
  4. The number of children known to the child protection system represents the number of children whose deaths were registered in the reporting period who were known to the Department of Communities in the 3 years prior to their death.
  5. Average annual rates have been calculated using the estimated resident population data at June 2011 (the mid-point for the period).

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## Child deaths in Queensland: Findings, 1 July 2013 – 30 June 2014

Between 1 July 2013 and 30 June 2014, the deaths of 446 children and young people were registered in Queensland. This chapter examines the causes of these deaths, sex, age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, geographical region, socio-economic status and child protection history.

Children and young people in Queensland died at a rate of 41.0 per 100,000 children and young people aged 0–17 years.<sup>1</sup>

### Cause of death

Table 1.2 (over page) broadly outlines the causes of death for the 446 children and young people whose deaths were registered in 2013–14.<sup>2</sup>

Deaths from diseases and morbid conditions (natural causes) accounted for the majority of deaths of children and young people registered in 2013–14 (76.9%), occurring at a rate of 31.5 deaths per 100,000 children and young people.

External causes of death (transport, drowning, other non-intentional injury, suicide and fatal assault and neglect) accounted for 16.4% of child deaths, and occurred at a rate of 6.7 deaths per 100,000 children and young people aged 0–17 years. This is comparable to previous reporting periods (with the exception of 2011–12, during which there were atypical higher numbers of transport and fire fatalities). As in previous years, transport incidents were the leading external cause of death, occurring at a rate of 2.8 deaths per 100,000 children and young people.

### Sex

Males comprised 55.4% of child deaths in 2013–14, with a rate of 44.2 deaths per 100,000 males aged 0–17 years. In comparison, females made up 44.4%<sup>3</sup> of deaths, representing 37.3 deaths per 100,000 females aged 0–17 years.

### Age

#### Under 1 year

Diseases and morbid conditions were the most frequent cause of death for infants under 1 year of age, accounting for 90.9% of the deaths in this age category (271 deaths).

#### 1–4 years

The leading cause of death for 1–4 year olds was diseases and morbid conditions (29 deaths), followed by other non-intentional injury-related deaths (5 deaths).

#### 5–9 years

Children aged 5–9 years died most frequently of diseases and morbid conditions (21 deaths). Transport was the second leading cause of death (12 deaths).

#### 10–14 years

Diseases and morbid conditions were the leading cause of death for young people in this age category (10 deaths). The leading external cause of death for 10–14 year-olds was transport accidents (5 deaths).

#### 15–17 years

Suicide was the leading cause of death and the leading external cause of death for young people in this age category (19 deaths). Diseases and morbid conditions were the second leading cause of death for young people aged 15–17 years (12 deaths). The number of 15–17 year-olds who died from transport incidents (10 deaths) is the equal lowest recorded (with 2009–10) since the commencement of the child death register in 2004.

1. For a summary of the population data used to calculate rates, see Appendix 1.1.

2. For a summary of the methodology for reporting causes of death, including development of the distinct research categories, see Appendix 1.1.

3. Percentages will not sum correctly due to the death of 1 infant, whose sex was indeterminate at the time of registration.

**Table 1.2: Cause of death by age category, 2013–14**

Cause of death	Under 1 year <i>n</i>	1–4 years <i>n</i>	5–9 years <i>n</i>	10–14 years <i>n</i>	15–17 years <i>n</i>	Total	Rate per 100,000
<b>Diseases and morbid conditions</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>31.5</b>
<b>Explained diseases and morbid conditions</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>29.7</b>
<b>Unexplained diseases and morbid conditions</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1.8</b>
<i>SIDS and undetermined causes (infants)</i>	19	0	0	0	0	19	1.7
<i>Undetermined &gt;1 year</i>	0	0	0	0	1	1	*
<b>External causes</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>6.7</b>
<b>Transport</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<i>Bicycle</i>	0	0	3	0	0	3	*
<i>Motorcycle</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	*
<i>Pedestrian</i>	0	4	1	1	1	7	0.6
<i>Quad bike</i>	0	0	1	2	0	3	*
<b>Suicide</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2.1</b>
<b>Drowning</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<i>Non-pool</i>	0	1	2	0	2	5	0.5
<i>Pool</i>	0	2	0	0	0	2	*
<b>Other non-intentional injury-related death</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<i>Threats to breathing</i>	0	1	1	0	0	2	*
<i>Exposure to inanimate mechanical forces</i>	0	1	1	0	0	2	*
<i>Exposure to animate mechanical forces</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1	*
<i>Exposure to forces of nature</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1	*
<i>Exposure to smoke, fire and flames</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1	*
<i>Fall</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1	*
<b>Fatal assault and neglect</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Cause of death pending</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>41.0</b>
<b>Rate per 100,000</b>	<b>484.4</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>41.0</b>	

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2013–14)

\* Rates have not been calculated for numbers less than 4.

- Notes:
1. Rates are calculated per 100,000 children and young people aged 0–17 years in Queensland.
  2. Rates for age categories are calculated per 100,000 children and young people in each age category.
  3. Although deaths that only occur within a certain age category (SIDS, suicide) are generally expressed as a rate per 100,000 children within that age category (for example, infants under 1 year or young people aged 10–17 years), all rates have been calculated per 100,000 children and young people aged 0–17 years in Queensland to enable comparison across all causes of death. Age-specific death rates are discussed in the chapters relating to each cause of death.

## Leading cause of death by age category

Table 1.3 summarises the leading causes of death in each age category by rate of death per 100,000.

**Table 1.3: Leading cause of death by age category, 2013–14<sup>4</sup>**

Rank	Under 1 year	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15–17 years
1	Perinatal conditions (235.7 per 100,000)	Congenital anomalies (2.8 per 100,000)	Transport (4.0 per 100,000)	Transport Diseases of the nervous system (1.7 per 100,000)	Suicide (10.4 per 100,000)
2	Congenital anomalies (131.7 per 100,000)	Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (2.4 per 100,000)	Neoplasms (2.7 per 100,000)	Suicide (1.3 per 100,000)	Transport (5.5 per 100,000)
3	SIDS & undetermined causes (30.9 per 100,000)	Other non-intentional injury (2.0 per 100,000)	Diseases of the nervous system (2.0 per 100,000)	*	Neoplasms (2.2 per 100,000)
4	Diseases of the nervous system (11.4 per 100,000)	Transport Diseases of the respiratory system Neoplasms (1.6 per 100,000)	*	*	*
5	Certain infectious and parasitic diseases (8.1 per 100,000)	*	*	*	*

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2013–14)

\* Causes of death are not represented in the table where rates have not been calculated (for numbers less than 4).

Note: 1. Rates for age categories are calculated per 100,000 children and young people in each age category.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

Of the 446 children and young people who died, 69 were identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The child death rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was 2.2 times the rate for non-Indigenous children; with a rate of 81.5 deaths per 100,000 Indigenous children aged 0–17 years, compared with 37.5 deaths per 100,000 for non-Indigenous children. The greatest proportion of Indigenous deaths occurred among children under 1 year (63.8%) followed by 5–9 year-olds. This is similar to patterns of death by age category for non-Indigenous children. Transport incidents were the leading external cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in 2013–14, followed by suicide.

4. Note this will differ from other cause of death comparisons within the report as this table uses ICD-10 chapter classifications for diseases and morbid conditions, rather than the broader category of deaths due to diseases and morbid conditions reported elsewhere.

**Table 1.4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths by cause of death and age category, 2013–14**

Cause of death	Under 1 year <i>n</i>	1–4 years <i>n</i>	5–9 years <i>n</i>	10–14 years <i>n</i>	15–17 years <i>n</i>	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000 Indigenous children	Rate per 100,000 non-Indigenous children
<b>Diseases and morbid conditions</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>29.4</b>
Explained diseases and morbid conditions	30	2	5	3	1	41	48.4	28.0
Unexplained diseases and morbid conditions	7	0	0	0	0	7	8.3	1.4
<i>SIDS and undetermined causes (infants)</i>	7	0	0	0	0	7	8.3	1.4
<i>Undetermined &gt;1 year</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	*
<b>External causes</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Transport	0	0	2	1	2	5	5.9	2.6
Suicide	0	0	0	2	2	4	4.7	1.9
Fatal assault and neglect	3	0	0	0	0	3	*	*
Drowning	0	1	0	0	0	1	*	0.6
Other non-intentional injury	0	0	1	0	0	1	*	0.7
<b>Cause of death pending</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>37.5</b>
<b>Rate per 100,000 (Indigenous)</b>	<b>871.8</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>81.5</b>		
<b>Rate per 100,000 (non-Indigenous)</b>	<b>449.8</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>37.5</b>		

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2013–14)

\* Rates have not been calculated for numbers less than 4.

- Notes:
1. Rates are calculated per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 years in Queensland, and per 100,000 non-Indigenous children aged 0–17 years in Queensland.
  2. Rates for age categories are calculated per 100,000 Indigenous/non-Indigenous children and young people in each age category.
  3. Although deaths that only occur within a certain age category (such as SIDS and suicide) are generally expressed as a rate per 100,000 children within that age category (for example, infants under 1 year or young people aged 10–17 years), all rates have been calculated per 100,000 children and young people aged 0–17 years in Queensland to enable comparison across all causes of death. Age-specific death rates are discussed in the chapters relating to each cause of death.

## Geographical area of usual residence (ARIA+)<sup>5</sup>

Remote areas of Queensland recorded the highest rate of child death, with 56.1 deaths per 100,000 children aged 0–17 years living in remote areas. Regional areas recorded the next highest rate of child deaths (42.5 per 100,000), followed by metropolitan areas with 36.9 deaths per 100,000 children.

Remote areas recorded the highest rate of deaths for both diseases and morbid conditions (35.5 per 100,000), and external causes (16.8 per 100,000).

5. Note that ARIA+ and SEIFA breakdowns exclude 11 children whose usual residence was outside of Queensland, 9 died from diseases and morbid conditions, 1 from external causes and 1 from a cause yet to be determined (pending test results). See Appendix 1.3 for usual place of residence data.



## Socio-economic status of usual residence (SEIFA)

Children and young people living in low to very low socio-economic areas recorded the highest rate of child deaths (49.4 per 100,000). Moderate socio-economic areas recorded a rate of 39.6 per 100,000, while high to very high socio-economic areas recorded the lowest rate of child deaths (30.7 per 100,000). This pattern was similar to the previous two reporting periods, however there has not been a consistent trend across all reporting periods.

Deaths from diseases and morbid conditions were highest in low to very low socio-economic areas (37.1 per 100,000). However, moderate socio-economic areas recorded the highest rate of death from external causes (11.3 per 100,000).

## Children known to the child protection system

Of the 446 children and young people whose deaths were registered in 2013–14, 80 were known to the child protection system. For the purpose of this report, a child is deemed to have been known to the child protection system if, within three years before the child's death, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services became aware of child protection concerns, alleged harm or alleged risk of harm to the child or took action under the *Child Protection Act 1999* in relation to the child. Table 1.5 (over page) shows the breakdown by age and cause of death for children known to the child protection system.

Of the children known to the child protection system, 52.5% died as a result of diseases and morbid conditions (42 deaths) and 35.0% as a result of external causes (28 deaths). The leading external cause of death for children known to the child protection system were suicides (10 deaths), followed by transport incidents (9 deaths).

In 2013–14, deaths of children known to the child protection system represented a rate of 47.8 deaths per 100,000, compared with 41.0 deaths per 100,000 for all Queensland children. For external causes of death, the rate of deaths for children known to the child protection system was 2.5 times the rate for all children in Queensland (16.7 and 6.7 deaths per 100,000 respectively).

**Table 1.5: Cause of death of children known to the child protection system by age category, 2013–14**

Cause of death	Under 1 year <i>n</i>	1–4 years <i>n</i>	5–9 years <i>n</i>	10–14 years <i>n</i>	15–17 years <i>n</i>	Child known <i>n</i>	Only siblings known <i>n</i>	Child or siblings known <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000 in child protection system	Rate per 100,000 all Queensland children
<b>Diseases and morbid conditions</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>31.5</b>
Explained diseases and morbid conditions	9	11	8	5	2	35	2	37	20.9	29.6
Unexplained diseases and morbid conditions	7	0	0	0	0	7	0	7	4.2	1.9
<i>SIDS and undetermined causes (infants)</i>	7	0	0	0	0	7	0	7	4.2	1.8
<i>Undetermined &gt;1 year</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	*
<b>External causes</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>6.7</b>
Transport	0	0	3	2	4	9	0	9	5.4	2.8
Suicide	0	0	0	1	9	10	1	11	6.0	2.1
Drowning	0	3	1	0	0	4	0	4	2.4	0.6
Other non-intentional injury	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	*	0.7
Fatal assault and neglect	2	0	0	1	0	3	1	4	*	0.4
<b>Cause of death pending</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>60.</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>41.0</b>

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2013–14)

\* Rates have not been calculated for numbers less than 4.

- Notes:
1. Rates of death for children known to the child protection system are based on the number of distinct children known to the Department of Communities in the 3 year period before the 2013–14 financial year.
  2. Rates have only been calculated for cases where the deceased child was known to the child protection system, not for cases where the departmental involvement was with the child's siblings only.
  3. Rates of death for all Queensland children are based on the number of children aged 0–17 years in Queensland.