



# Key findings: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality

## 2015–16 Child Death Annual Report Factsheet

In 2008 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under five by 2018, as one of six targets to address disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. The National Indigenous Reform Agreement sets out the targets and commitments made by COAG to close the gap in life expectancy, child mortality, education and employment.

The Queensland Child Death Register records 761 deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the 12 years to June 2016 (14% of all child deaths), an average of 63.4 deaths each year. During 2015–16 there were 52 deaths of Indigenous children.

Indigenous child mortality rates have decreased over the last decade, as indicated in Table 1.

Based on three-year averages, between 2007 and 2016:

- Infant mortality for Indigenous children decreased from 11.4 to 7.7 deaths per 1000 live births. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates narrowed by 38% (from 6.1 to 3.7).
- The 1–17 years mortality rate for Indigenous children decreased from 38.6 to 29.9 deaths per 100 000 children. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates narrowed by 21% (from 21.0 to 16.6).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality; however, continues to be twice the rate for non-Indigenous children as decreases in Indigenous mortality have been matched by decreases in non-Indigenous mortality.

Queensland's infant mortality rates are higher than the most recently available national averages. The national Indigenous infant mortality rate for 2014 was 5.6 per 1000 live births, while the non-Indigenous infant mortality rate was 3.2 per 1000.<sup>1</sup>

As indicated in Table 2, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented for each of the primary causes of death, with mortality rates twice (or more) the rates for non-Indigenous children.

1 AIHW (2016), *Children's Headline Indicators*

Deaths from diseases and morbid conditions are the largest contributor to child mortality overall. The mortality rate for diseases and morbid conditions for Indigenous children is twice the rate for non-Indigenous children. As is the case for non-Indigenous children, these deaths occur predominantly in newborns and infants from conditions originating in the perinatal period<sup>2</sup> or from congenital anomalies, placing a focus on prenatal care as a mechanism for prevention.

Indigenous child mortality rates were more than twice those for non-Indigenous children over the last three years for:

- Suicide deaths – the suicide mortality rate for Indigenous young people is three times that for non-Indigenous young people.
- Fatal assault and neglect – the mortality rate over the last 12 years for Indigenous children is four times that for non-Indigenous children. The most recent rate is much higher due to a single incident with multiple fatalities.
- Sudden unexpected deaths in infancy (SUDI) – the mortality rate for Indigenous infants is four times the rate for non-Indigenous infants. Detailed autopsies for all SUDI deaths generally find more than half are Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or undetermined causes. Other findings for SUDI deaths include illnesses unrecognised prior to death and sleep accidents.<sup>3</sup>

2 Diseases and conditions that originate during pregnancy or the neonatal period (first 28 days of life).

3 SIDS are sudden unexpected infant deaths, apparently occurring during sleep, where the cause remains unexplained after thorough investigation. For undetermined causes, the cause of death is unexplained but the death does not meet the criteria for SIDS.

**Table 1: Child mortality rates by Indigenous status, 2007–2016**

	3 years to June 2007	3 years to June 2010	3 years to June 2013	3 years to June 2016
	Rate	Rate	Rate	Rate
All child deaths 0–17 years	47.8	48.4	43.5	38.2
Indigenous	97.7	77.9	75.4	75.0
Non Indigenous	44.2	45.9	40.8	35.1
Infant mortality (<1 year)	5.7	5.0	4.6	4.3
Indigenous	11.4	8.0	7.5	7.7
Non-Indigenous	5.3	4.7	4.4	4.0
Mortality 1–17 years	19.0	18.9	16.8	14.6
Indigenous	38.6	32.6	28.8	29.9
Non-Indigenous	17.6	17.7	15.8	13.3

Source: Queensland Child Death Register

Infant mortality rates are per 1000 live births, other mortality rates are per 100 000 population in the age/Indigenous status group. Rates are averaged over three-year periods.

**Table 2: Child mortality rates by cause of death, three years to June 2016**

	Indigenous Rate	Non- Indigenous Rate
<b>Cause of death</b>		
Diseases and morbid conditions	51.9	27.8
Transport	6.2	1.9
Drowning	1.5	0.9
Other non-intentional injury	2.3	0.7
Suicide	5.4	1.8
Fatal assault and neglect	5.0	0.5
<i>Sudden unexpected deaths in infancy</i>	10.4	2.7

Source: Queensland Child Death Register

Rates are per 100 000 population. Rates are averaged over three-year period 2013–14 to 2015–16.

Sudden unexpected deaths in infancy (SUDI) is a category of deaths where an infant (<1 year) dies suddenly with no immediately obvious cause.

## Data for prevention activities

QFCC collects, analyses and publishes information about child deaths to help prevent future deaths and serious injuries. We work with researchers and other agencies to raise community awareness and develop prevention programs and policies, by identifying risk factors, trends and emerging safety hazards.

QFCC can provide detailed child death data to researchers and organisations, at no cost – please email [child\\_death\\_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au](mailto:child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au)

Reports on child deaths and 12-year data tables can be found at [www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/child-death-reports-and-data](http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/child-death-reports-and-data)