

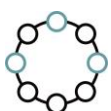


# Deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Australia

DR23-24

Prepared for The Guardian

Released December 2023



# National Coronial Information System

## National Coronial Information System

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## Acknowledgement of Country

The NCIS Unit acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

## Authorisation

This report was prepared by the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) Unit and approved by the relevant state/chief coroner(s).

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## Disclaimer

While every effort is made to ensure information is accurate, the NCIS Unit does not provide any warranty regarding the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information in this report. The NCIS Unit and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety accept no responsibility for any loss or damage that may arise from any use of or reliance on the data in this report.

## Acknowledgements

The NCIS is funded by all Australian state/territory justice departments, the New Zealand Ministry of Justice, the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the Australian Institute of Criminology and Safe Work Australia. Coronial data has been provided by each state and territory coroner's office in Australia and New Zealand. Additional codes are provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Safe Work Australia, the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registries around Australia and Health New Zealand. We gratefully acknowledge their support.



## Support services

This report contains information about coronial cases held in the NCIS. We acknowledge that this content may be distressing. If you or someone you care for is in need of assistance, [support services](#) are available.

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## OVERVIEW

This report is an update of a previous NCIS data report, *DR22-35 Deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Australia*, which received coronial approval for release in May 2023. Work undertaken as part of DR22-35 was utilised in this report. Additional data extraction and analysis was undertaken for cases not identified within the scope of DR22-35.

### Purpose

This report provides information about deaths reported to an Australian state or territory coroner. Cases were included where the deceased was experiencing homelessness at the time of their death. Cases were included where the death was notified to a coroner between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2020.

Cases were included only where the coronial investigation has concluded, and the case is closed in the National Coronial Information System (NCIS).

### Intended use of data

This report is provided for Christopher Knaus, Reporter at [The Guardian](#).

The information provided in this report is intended for use by The Guardian to inform an investigation and reporting into the scale of deaths among people experiencing homelessness in Australia.

As a result, the data will be published in the public domain.

See *Terms and conditions* for further information.

### Terms and conditions

1. This report is provided with the approval of the relevant state/chief coroner(s) for the express purpose outlined in the *Intended use of data*. Any use of the data other than outlined in the *Intended use of data* is not permitted and may constitute a breach of data use conditions.
2. Provision of this report does not constitute purchase or ownership of the requested data, and the NCIS Unit reserves the right to use the data and to provide the requested data to other parties as required, in the interests of the public dissemination of information which may be of benefit to community health and safety.

3. Acceptance of the quote for this report (NCIS reference: DR23-24) indicates that you agree to the contents of the report as stated in the quote. Additional requests following acceptance of the quote or delivery of the report may incur further charges.
4. The NCIS Unit reserves the right to suppress low figures or group statistical categories in order to ensure the data is appropriately de-identified. Any suppressed figures presented in this report, even if discernible from other figures or totals, must be presented in a suppressed format in any data outputs or dissemination derived from this report.
5. Any reproduction of this report or the data contained within it must acknowledge the NCIS as the source of the underlying data, and should be aligned with the guidelines provided by [Mindframe](#) and the [Australian Press Council](#) regarding reporting of suicide.

### About the recipient

The [Guardian](#) is a global media organisation that aims to deliver fearless, investigative journalism – giving a voice to the powerless and holding power to account.

Guardian Media Group is amongst the United Kingdom's leading media organisations. Its core business is Guardian News & Media (GNM), publisher of [theguardian.com](#), one of the world's largest English-speaking news websites.

### NCIS resources available

There are additional NCIS resources available that may be of interest:

- [Research publications and reports](#) using NCIS data are available on the NCIS website.
- [NCIS fact sheets](#) report on coronial data held in the collection. Fact sheets include statistical information on deaths reported to a coroner and cover specific topics of public interest.
- [NCIS Fatal facts](#) is a unique service providing access to coronial recommendations from across all Australian states and territories. Fatal facts is a publicly accessible online tool that enables searching for coronial recommendations by topic. Fatal facts includes cases where coronial recommendations were made, regardless of whether an inquest was held. Fatal facts is based on information available in the NCIS at the time of reporting. It is a separate tool from the NCIS database and is not intended to be representative of the contents of the NCIS.

### Stay informed

Keep up to date with news about recent research, database updates, training and more:

- Join our [mailing list](#)
- Follow us on [LinkedIn](#)
- Read the latest [NCIS news](#)
- View [system updates](#)

## METHOD

The data presented in this report was obtained by conducting a search of the NCIS.

### Case identification

Data was extracted on 27 November 2023 using the following criteria for case identification:

Field	Criteria
Date of notification	Between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2020
Jurisdiction	All Australian states and territories
Case status	Closed
Residential suburb	7 <sup>1</sup>
Residential country	Australia

### Data analysis

Previous work undertaken as part of other NCIS Unit reporting services was utilised in ascertaining the relevance of cases for this report. Cases were automatically included where prior work indicated that the deceased was experiencing homelessness at the time of their death.

A manual review was undertaken of the attached documentation (coronial findings, police narrative of circumstances or autopsy report, where available) for all remaining cases to ascertain their relevance.

Cases were only included in this report where the deceased was described as homeless, itinerant, squatting or having no fixed address.

Cases were not included where the attached documentation did not identify the living situation of the deceased or noted the usual residential address of the deceased.

Cases were not included where the deceased was an international tourist or a traveller who had no fixed abode through lifestyle choices (colloquially referred to as 'grey nomads').

No further analysis other than described was carried out for the cases included in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> '7' is coded in the *Residential suburb* field to denote that the deceased was either an overseas resident or had no fixed address

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### About the data

The NCIS is a national repository containing data on deaths reported to a coroner in Australia and New Zealand. The NCIS contains demographic information about the deceased, contextual details on the circumstances of the death, and searchable reports including the coronial finding, autopsy and toxicology report, and police summary of circumstances, where available. Not all deaths are contained in the NCIS. The collection contains data on reportable deaths only. Data collection from Australian states and territories commenced on 1 July 2000 (Queensland from 1 January 2001) and from New Zealand on 1 July 2007.

For further information about data sources and classification structures, scope, coverage and explanatory notes, refer to the [NCIS website](#)

### Comparison with other data sets

Data in this report refers only to cases contained in the NCIS. Information contained in the NCIS may not be comparable with other data sources due to differences in data collection and classification. In addition, reporting of cases from the NCIS may vary over time due to differences in methodology and changes in case data, such as increases in case closure and data availability.

### Quality assurance of closed cases

The NCIS Unit manages and performs processes to regularly monitor, review and report on data quality. Closed cases in the NCIS that meet the eligibility criteria are manually reviewed by the NCIS Unit to verify consistency and alignment with coding standards. Eligible cases are those which have a non-natural case type (or are natural deaths with specific terms in the medical cause of death). Restricted editing is applied to reviewed cases to protect them from further changes. It cannot be guaranteed that all cases included in this report have been quality assured.

The NCIS Unit does not undertake quality assurance of data integrated from supplementary data sources.

For further information about data sources, coverage and limitations, refer to the [NCIS explanatory notes](#). For further information about data quality, refer to [quality management](#)



## Definitions

**Autopsy report** – a report produced by the investigating forensic pathologist following a post mortem examination that outlines the medical cause of death

**Case status** – an NCIS field that denotes whether the case is still open, or the coronial investigation has been completed and the case is closed in the NCIS

**Case type** – an NCIS field that denotes the classification of death. *Case type (notification)* is a preliminary indication of the classification of death based on information known to investigators at the time of death notification to the coronial office. *Case type (completion)* refers to the coroner's determination at the completion of the coronial investigation. *Case type (completion)* is the field referred to when examining cases identified in this report

**Coronial finding** – a document produced by the Coroner's Office at the conclusion of the investigation into the death

**Date of notification** – an NCIS field that denotes the date on which notification of death was received by the coroner

**Death due to external cause(s)** – a value within the *Case type* field indicating that a death was primarily due to external poisoning or injury (for example, drug toxicity, drowning or blunt force injuries). These deaths are reported to a coroner according to requirements under each state or territory *Coroners Act*

**Death due to natural cause(s)** – a value within the *Case type* field indicating that a death was primarily due to a natural disease or illness (for example, cancer, infection or myocardial infarction). These deaths are reported to a coroner if the cause of death is unknown, a physician is unwilling or unable to sign a death certificate, or the reporting is mandatory under the *Coroners Act*, for example, a death in custody

**Employment status** – an NCIS field that denotes the employment status of the deceased at the time of death. This field does not reflect type of employment or previous employment status

**Incident location type** – an NCIS field that denotes the type of location where the deceased was located at the time that the incident leading to death occurred. This field does not necessarily reflect the location type where death occurred

**Indigenous origin** – an NCIS field that refers to whether a person identifies or is identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent or origin

**Intent type** – an NCIS field that denotes role of human purpose in the event resulting in death. *Intent type (notification)* is a preliminary indication of intent based on information known to investigators at the time of death notification to the coronial office. *Intent type (completion)*



refers to the coroner's determination at the completion of the coronial investigation. *Intent type (completion)* is the field referred to when examining cases identified in this report

**Intentional self-harm** – a value in the NCIS *Intent type* field that refers to a death that occurred due to purposefully self-inflicted poisoning or injury

This classification does not differentiate between instances where the deceased intended to die from those where the deceased intended only to self-harm (without regard to the consequences). It is therefore not possible to conclusively state that all intentional self-harm deaths are suicides.

**Jurisdiction of investigation** – the state, territory or country of the coroner's office in which the death was reported and investigated

**Marital status** – an NCIS field that denotes the marital status of the deceased at the time of death

**Mechanism of injury** – an NCIS field that denotes how fatal injury was sustained, for example, poisoning, drowning or vehicle incident

**National Coronial Information System (NCIS)** – an online database containing information about deaths reported to a coroner in Australia and New Zealand

**National Coronial Information System (NCIS) Unit** – the business unit that manages the NCIS. The NCIS Unit operates within the [Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety](#)

**Object or substance producing injury** – an NCIS field that denotes the object or substance producing fatal injury, for example, a pharmaceutical substance, river or vehicle

**Police summary of circumstances** – an initial free-text description produced by investigating police as to the circumstances surrounding a death, which is provided to the coroner as part of the notification of death

**Sex** – an NCIS field that refers to the physical or biological characteristics of a person at the time of death. For further information, refer to the [NCIS explanatory notes](#)

**Year of notification** – the year in which the death was notified to the coroner, based on the *Date of notification* field

For further information and definitions, refer to the [NCIS Data dictionary](#)

## Limitations

### Identification of homelessness

Relevant cases were only able to be included in this report if the attached documentation contained reference to the item or factor requested. Attached documentation in the NCIS is a subset of the information collected as part of the coronial investigation and is not a replication of the full coronial file. Reference to homelessness within coronial investigations is not standardised in terms of whether it will be noted within the documentation and the information requested may not always be available. Identification of homelessness should be considered a minimum prevalence and may be under-representative.

### Allocation of geographical boundaries

Relevant geographical boundary areas were only able to be included in this report if the case contained an address that could be geocoded. Where an exact address match is unable to be found, a street or suburb location may be the closest match available. A lack of address specificity may cause some geocoded results to be allocated to a neighbouring region. For example, when a suburb is split across two geographical boundary areas.

The relationship between the address and geographical boundaries is reliant on the MapData Services software used for the geocoding process. Boundary areas are assigned using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2016. Geographic codes record the locations of: the deceased's residence, the fatal incident and the death. Geocodes are not applied to the location of *last known alive* or *body found* codes.

For further information about geographical boundary areas, refer to the [Australian Bureau of Statistics website](#)

### Availability of attached reports

Up to four different reports may be attached for each case in the NCIS: the police summary of circumstances, autopsy and toxicology reports (where relevant procedures were conducted), and the coronial finding. The level of report attachment varies in the NCIS according to the reporting jurisdiction. Coronial findings in relation to non-inquest cases may not contain details about the circumstances surrounding death. While best efforts are made to obtain reports for all cases in the NCIS (where relevant investigations are conducted), the proportion of report attachment varies across jurisdictions. This variation has the potential to impact the accurate identification of relevant cases via review of attached reports in the NCIS.

For further information about NCIS document attachment, refer to the [NCIS operational statistics](#)

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### Only closed cases included

Only cases that are closed in the NCIS following coronial investigation are included in this report. It is possible cases of relevance may still be under coronial investigation and not included in this report.

**For further information about NCIS case closure, refer to the [NCIS operational statistics](#)**

## RESULTS

There were **627** deaths of relevance identified that were reported to an Australian state or territory coroner where the deceased was experiencing homelessness at the time of their death.

From January 2010 to December 2020, there were an average of **57 (57.0)** deaths of relevance identified per calendar year.

Dashes ( - ) indicate that no deaths were identified. To ensure the data is appropriately de-identified, figures below five are presented as '<5'.

### Statistical tables

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*Table 1. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by year of notification*

Year of notification	Frequency	Percentage
2010	30	4.8
2011	33	5.3
2012	38	6.1
2013	47	7.5
2014	49	7.8
2015	53	8.5
2016	81	12.9

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Year of notification	Frequency	Percentage
2017	83	13.2
2018	88	14.0
2019	82	13.1
2020	43	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 2. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by jurisdiction of investigation*

Jurisdiction of investigation	Frequency	Percentage
VIC	193	30.8
WA	147	23.4
NSW	100	15.9
NT	93	14.8
QLD	58	9.3
SA	22	3.5
TAS	8	1.3
ACT	6	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 3. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by sex of the deceased*

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	546	87.1
Female	81	12.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 4. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by age range of the deceased*

Age range (years)	Frequency	Percentage
<21	8	1.3
21–30	62	9.9
31–40	162	25.8
41–50	213	34.0
51–60	115	18.3
61–70	56	8.9
>70	11	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

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Table 5. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by average at death

Cohort	Average age at death (years)
Male	45.2
Female	40.1
All persons	44.5

Table 6. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by Indigenous origin of the deceased

Indigenous origin	Frequency	Percentage
Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander	399	63.6
Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander	135	21.5
Unlikely to be known	93	14.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 7. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by employment status of the deceased

Employment status	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployed	464	74.0
Employed	48	7.7
Retired / pensioner	34	5.4
Other <sup>2</sup>	5	0.8
Unlikely to be known	76	12.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 8. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by marital status of the deceased

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Never married	206	32.9
Separated	80	12.8
Married / de facto	63	10.0
Divorced	48	7.7
Widowed	8	1.3
Unlikely to be known	222	35.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>2</sup> Refers to *Employment status* codes such as *student* and *child not at school*

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Table 9. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by case type and intent type<sup>3</sup>

Case type/Intent type	Frequency	Percentage
Death due to external cause(s)	427	68.1
<i>Unintentional</i>	239	38.1
<i>Intentional self-harm</i>	130	20.7
<i>Assault</i>	24	3.8
<i>Undetermined intent</i>	21	3.3
<i>Unlikely to be known</i>	11	1.8
Death due to natural cause(s)	158	25.2
Body not recovered	<5	N/A
Unlikely to be known	39	6.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 10. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by incident location type<sup>4</sup>

Incident location type	Frequency	Percentage
Home or dwelling	177	28.2
Recreational area, cultural area, or public building	96	15.3
Countryside	85	13.6
Transport area: public highway, freeway, street or road	75	12.0
Transport area: other	62	9.9
Commercial area	51	8.1
Medical service area	24	3.8
Industrial or construction area	12	1.9
Residential institution area	7	1.1
Other <sup>5</sup>	31	4.9
Unlikely to be known	7	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>3</sup> Items in italics indicate the *Intent type* codes where the *Case type* was coded as *death due to external cause(s)*. For more information about *Case type* and *Intent type* codes, see the [NCIS Data dictionary](#)

<sup>4</sup> For more information about *Location* codes, see the [NCIS Data dictionary](#)

<sup>5</sup> Refers to *Location* codes such as *farm, school, educational area, sports and athletics area* and *other place of occurrence*



Table 11. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by incident remoteness area<sup>6</sup>

Incident remoteness area	Frequency	Percentage
Major cities	357	56.9
Inner regional	58	9.3
Outer regional	97	15.5
Remote	19	3.0
Very remote	6	1.0
Not available <sup>7</sup>	90	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 12. Deaths of people experiencing homelessness by mechanism of fatal injury<sup>8</sup> (external cause deaths only)<sup>9</sup>

Mechanism of fatal injury	Frequency	Percentage
Pharmaceutical drug toxicity	203	47.5
Asphyxiation (hanging)	74	17.3
Vehicle incident	25	5.9
Fall-related	22	5.2
Sharp force	17	4.0
Train-related	13	3.0
Asphyxiation (carbon monoxide)	12	2.8
Fire-related	9	2.1
Drowning	8	1.9
Struck, bumped or kicked by a person	8	1.9
Shot by weapon	6	1.4

<sup>6</sup> Boundary areas are assigned using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2016. Refer to the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) website for further information about geographical boundary areas

<sup>7</sup> Cases were categorised as *Not available* where there was insufficient information available to formulate a geocode (for example, where there was no street address provided) or where the result code produced via geocoding was insufficient

<sup>8</sup> Categories for mechanism of fatal injury were constructed based on a review of case information including *Mechanism of injury* and *Object or substance producing injury* fields. In all instances, the primary contributor to the death dictated categorisation. For example, death from asphyxiation caused by hanging where the deceased also had knife-related injuries would be classified as *asphyxiation (hanging)*

<sup>9</sup> Refers only to cases where the *Case type* was coded as *death due to external cause(s)*. See Table 8

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Mechanism of fatal injury	Frequency	Percentage
Other <sup>10</sup>	30	7.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>100</b>

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<sup>10</sup> Refers to other mechanisms of fatal injury such as non-pharmaceutical drug toxicity and other forms of asphyxiation