

Abstract

The following statistics (in three parts) are part of an upcoming investigation into the relationship between prisoner health and deaths in custody.

Deaths in prison custody in Australia since 1990

Figures 1 and 2 below demonstrate the limited effects on numbers of deaths in custody in the years during and following the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

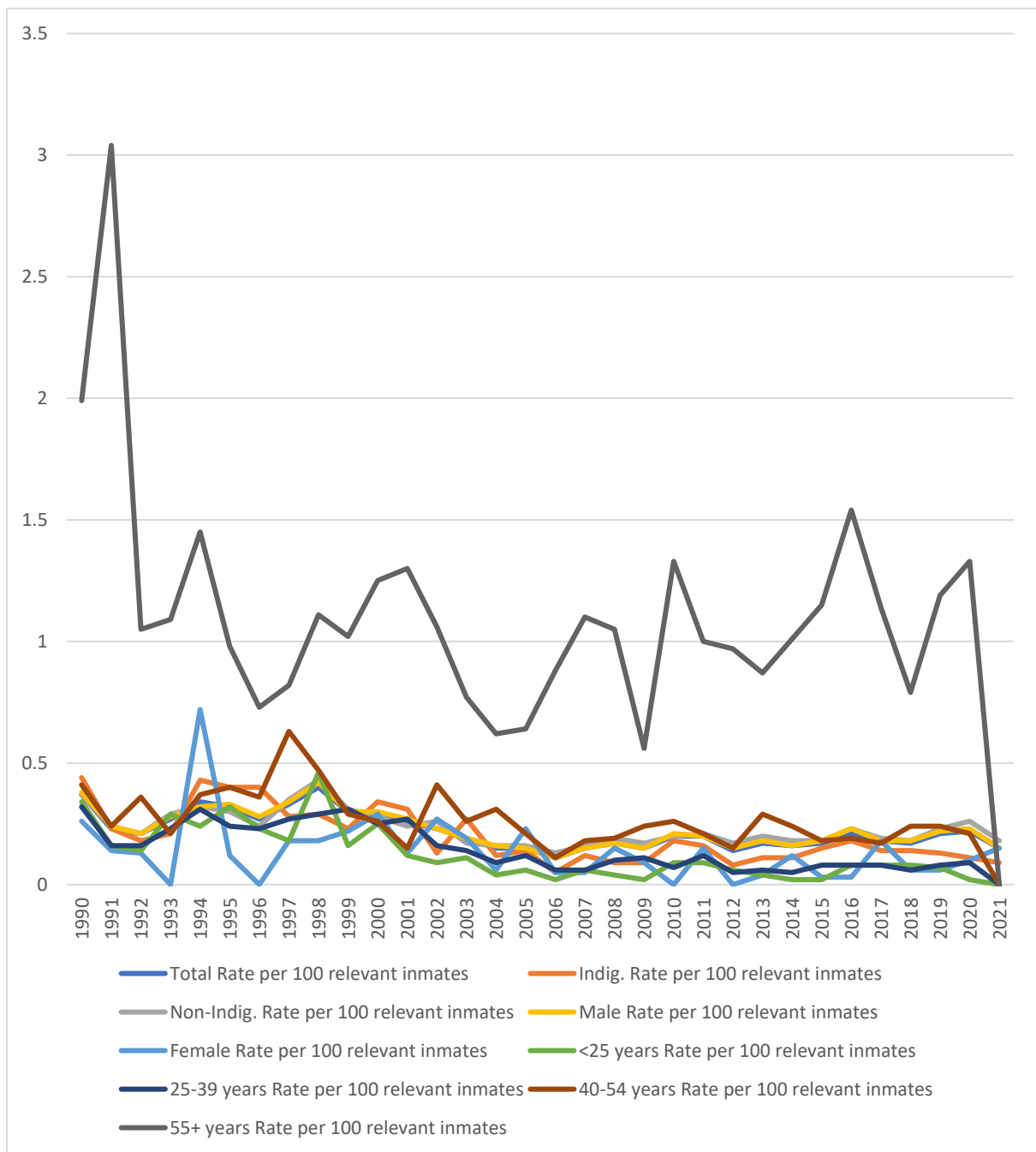
Note 1: The dip from 2019 onwards is generally attributable to the incidence of the COVID-19 epidemic (ABS 2021).

Table 1: Deaths in prison custody since 1990 (rate per 100 relevant prisoners)

	Total Rate per 100 relevant inmates	Indig. Rate per 100 relevant inmates	Non- Indig. Rate per 100 relevant inmates	Male Rate per 100 relevant inmates	Female Rate per 100 relevant inmates	<25 years Rate per 100 relevant inmates	25-39 years Rate per 100 relevant inmates	40-54 years Rate per 100 relevant inmates	55+ years Rate per 100 relevant inmates
1990	0.37	0.44	0.37	0.38	0.26	0.34	0.32	0.41	1.99
1991	0.23	0.23	0.24	0.24	0.14	0.16	0.16	0.24	3.04
1992	0.21	0.18	0.21	0.21	0.13	0.14	0.16	0.36	1.05
1993	0.27	0.21	0.29	0.28	0.00	0.29	0.23	0.21	1.09
1994	0.34	0.43	0.32	0.32	0.72	0.24	0.31	0.37	1.45
1995	0.32	0.40	0.30	0.33	0.12	0.32	0.24	0.40	0.98
1996	0.27	0.40	0.24	0.28	0.00	0.23	0.23	0.36	0.73
1997	0.33	0.28	0.35	0.34	0.18	0.18	0.27	0.63	0.82
1998	0.40	0.29	0.43	0.42	0.18	0.46	0.29	0.47	1.11
1999	0.30	0.23	0.31	0.30	0.22	0.16	0.31	0.29	1.02

2000	0.29	0.34	0.28	0.30	0.29	0.25	0.25	0.26	1.25
2001	0.26	0.31	0.24	0.27	0.13	0.12	0.27	0.15	1.30
2002	0.23	0.13	0.26	0.23	0.27	0.09	0.16	0.41	1.06
2003	0.19	0.27	0.17	0.19	0.19	0.11	0.14	0.26	0.77
2004	0.15	0.12	0.16	0.16	0.06	0.04	0.09	0.31	0.62
2005	0.15	0.14	0.16	0.15	0.23	0.06	0.12	0.21	0.64
2006	0.11	0.05	0.13	0.11	0.05	0.02	0.06	0.11	0.88
2007	0.15	0.12	0.16	0.15	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.18	1.10
2008	0.17	0.09	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.04	0.10	0.19	1.05
2009	0.15	0.09	0.17	0.15	0.09	0.02	0.11	0.24	0.56
2010	0.20	0.18	0.20	0.21	0.00	0.09	0.07	0.26	1.33
2011	0.20	0.16	0.21	0.20	0.15	0.09	0.12	0.21	1.00
2012	0.14	0.08	0.17	0.15	0.00	0.06	0.05	0.15	0.97
2013	0.17	0.11	0.20	0.18	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.29	0.87
2014	0.16	0.11	0.18	0.16	0.12	0.02	0.05	0.24	1.01
2015	0.17	0.15	0.18	0.18	0.03	0.02	0.08	0.18	1.15
2016	0.21	0.18	0.23	0.23	0.03	0.08	0.08	0.19	1.54
2017	0.18	0.14	0.19	0.18	0.18	0.08	0.08	0.17	1.14
2018	0.17	0.14	0.18	0.18	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.24	0.79
2019	0.21	0.13	0.23	0.22	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.24	1.19
2020	0.22	0.11	0.26	0.23	0.10	0.02	0.09	0.21	1.33
2021	0.15	0.09	0.18	0.15	0.15	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Figure 1: Deaths in prison custody since 1990 (rate per 100 relevant prisoners)

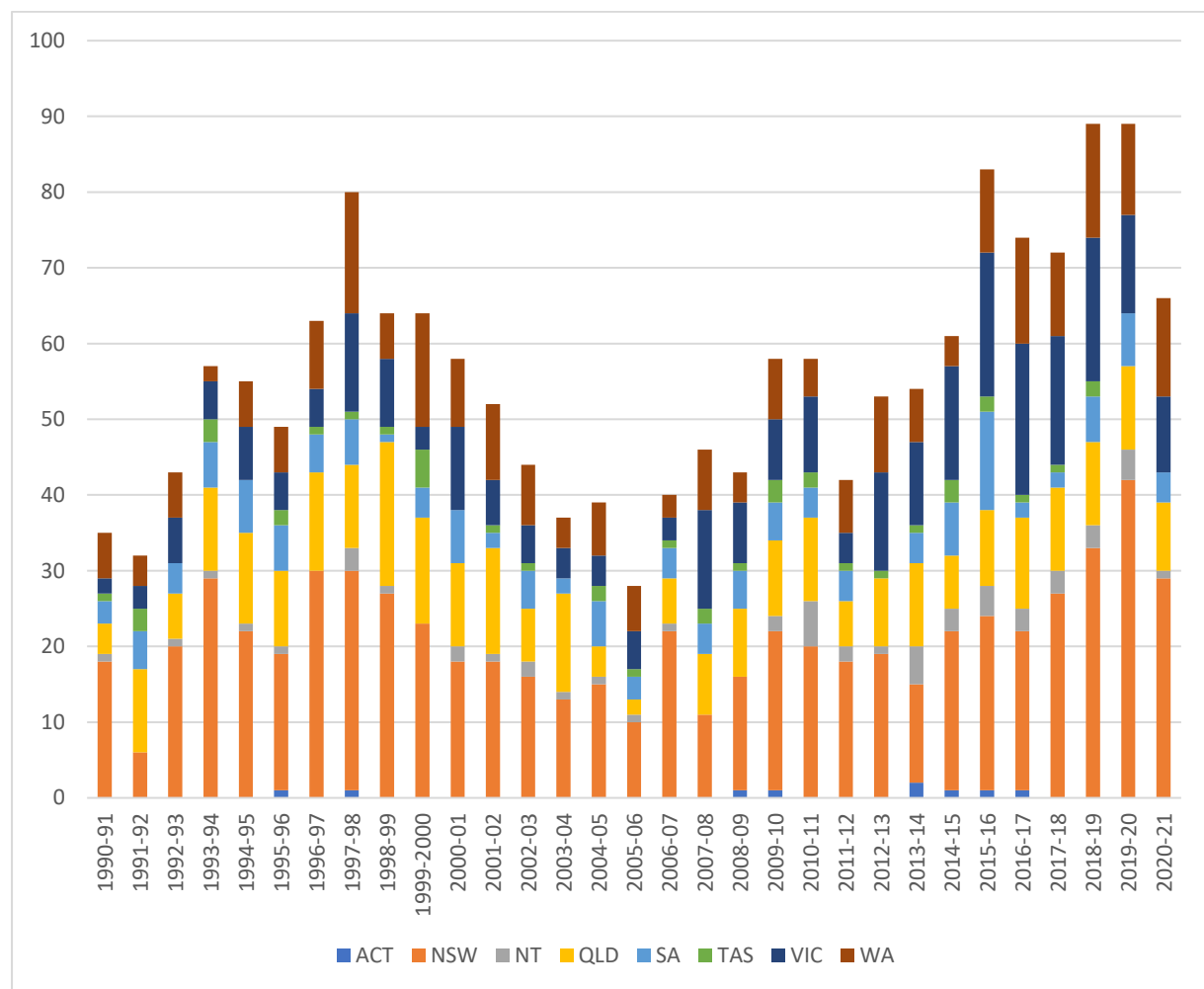


SOURCES: AIC 2021:Deaths in prison custody:Tables D5,D6,D10.

Table 2: Deaths in prison custody since 1990 (by jurisdiction)

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	AUS
1990-91	0	18	1	4	3	1	2	6	35
1991-92	0	6	0	11	5	3	3	4	32
1992-93	0	20	1	6	4	0	6	6	43
1993-94	0	29	1	11	6	3	5	2	57
1994-95	0	22	1	12	7	0	7	6	55
1995-96	1	18	1	10	6	2	5	6	49
1996-97	0	30	0	13	5	1	5	9	63
1997-98	1	29	3	11	6	1	13	16	80
1998-99	0	27	1	19	1	1	9	6	64
1999-2000	0	23	0	14	4	5	3	15	64
2000-01	0	18	2	11	7	0	11	9	58
2001-02	0	18	1	14	2	1	6	10	52
2002-03	0	16	2	7	5	1	5	8	44
2003-04	0	13	1	13	2	0	4	4	37
2004-05	0	15	1	4	6	2	4	7	39
2005-06	0	10	1	2	3	1	5	6	28
2006-07	0	22	1	6	4	1	3	3	40
2007-08	0	11	0	8	4	2	13	8	46
2008-09	1	15	0	9	5	1	8	4	43
2009-10	1	21	2	10	5	3	8	8	58
2010-11	0	20	6	11	4	2	10	5	58
2011-12	0	18	2	6	4	1	4	7	42
2012-13	0	19	1	9	0	1	13	10	53
2013-14	2	13	5	11	4	1	11	7	54
2014-15	1	21	3	7	7	3	15	4	61
2015-16	1	23	4	10	13	2	19	11	83
2016-17	1	21	3	12	2	1	20	14	74
2017-18	0	27	3	11	2	1	17	11	72
2018-19	0	33	3	11	6	2	19	15	89
2019-20	0	42	4	11	7	0	13	12	89
2020-21	0	29	1	9	4	0	10	13	66
Total	9	647	55	303	143	43	276	252	

Figure 2: The number of deaths in prison custody since 1990



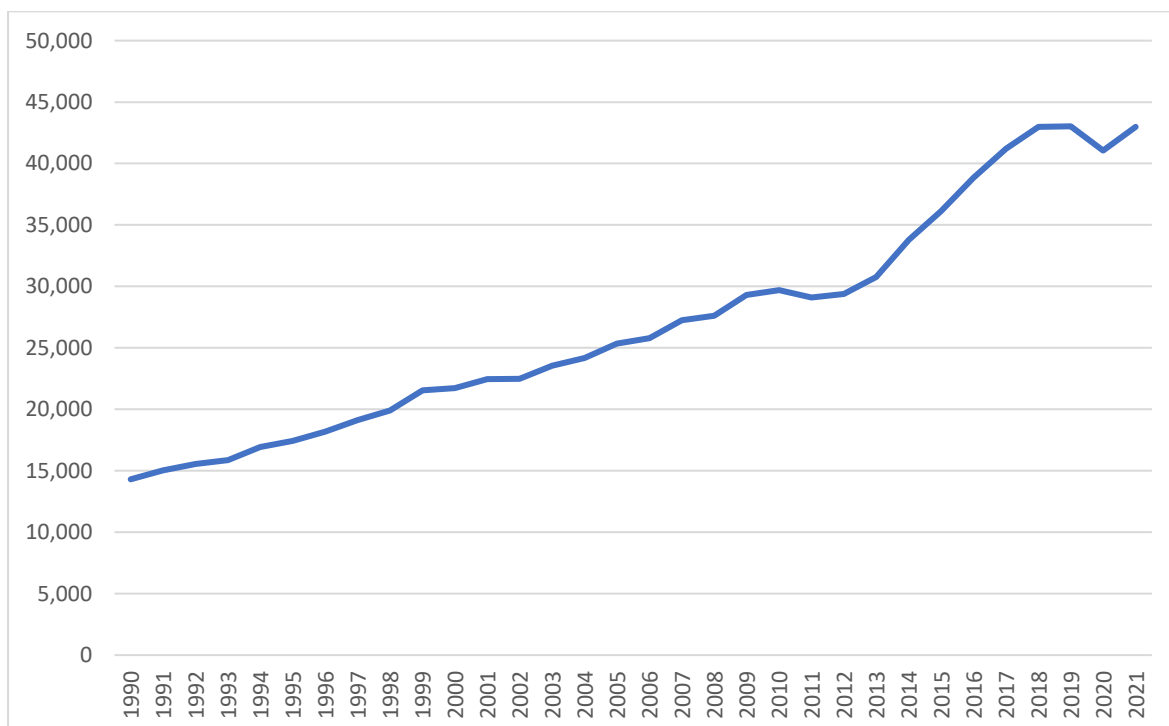
SOURCE: Doherty 2021:39-40

Figure 2 shows that for eight years the number of deaths in prisons increased rapidly in all States and Territories following the Royal commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (probably due to increasing numbers of prisoners being incarcerated – refer to Figure 3 below), but as the recommendations of the Royal Commission (such as removing ligature points from cells) were slowly implemented and gained traction, there was an equally steep decline in prison deaths in all jurisdictions that also lasted eight years. Since then, there has been a slightly more gradual rise in prison deaths (with upward pressure from increasing numbers incarcerated), with the exception of a delayed dip in 2020-21, which the ABS has attributed to the effect of COVID-19 on criminal activity and the hearing of cases (ABS 2021).

Table 3: Number of prisoners since 1990

Date	No of inmates		Date	No of inmates
1990	14,305		2006	25,797
1991	15,021		2007	27,244
1992	15,559		2008	27,619
1993	15,866		2009	29,315
1994	16,944		2010	29,700
1995	17,428		2011	29,107
1996	18,193		2012	29,380
1997	19,128		2013	30,773
1998	19,906		2014	33,789
1999	21,538		2015	36,134
2000	21,714		2016	38,845
2001	22,458		2017	41,202
2002	22,492		2018	42,974
2003	23,555		2019	43,028
2004	24,171		2020	41,060
2005	25,353		2021	42,970

Figure 3: Number of prisoners since 1990



SOURCES: ABS 2000:Table 14; 2007:Table 2; 2021:Table 2; Carcach and Grant 2007:Table 1

Apart from the dip in the graph due to COVID-19, Figure 3 reveals a very steady increase in prisoner numbers of 5,000 every seven years over three decades. This rise is one possible explanation for the underlying rise in custodial deaths as the reform phase following the Royal Commission gave way to maintaining the status quo.

Reference List

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2000) '[Prisoners in Australia](#)', Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 16 October 2022.

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AIC (Australian Institute of Criminology) (2021) '[Deaths in custody in Australia 2020-21: Deaths in prison custody](#)', Canberra, accessed 14 August 2022.

Carcach C and Grant A (1999) '[Imprisonment in Australia: Trends in prison populations & imprisonment rates 1982-1998](#)', Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, accessed 14 October 2022.

Doherty L (2021) '[Deaths in custody in Australia 2020-21](#)', Statistical Report 37, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.