

**Abstract**

The focus for the second set of statistics in this series is the number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous deaths in custody, with data for each Australian State and Territory.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that this article contains references to people who have passed away.

If this article raises any concerns for you or someone you know, please contact your local doctors' health service; Lifeline on 13 11 14; or Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 (in Australia).

If you are outside Australia, you may obtain help in your country by visiting Befrienders Worldwide at [www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org)

**Deaths in prison and police custody in Australia since 1990**

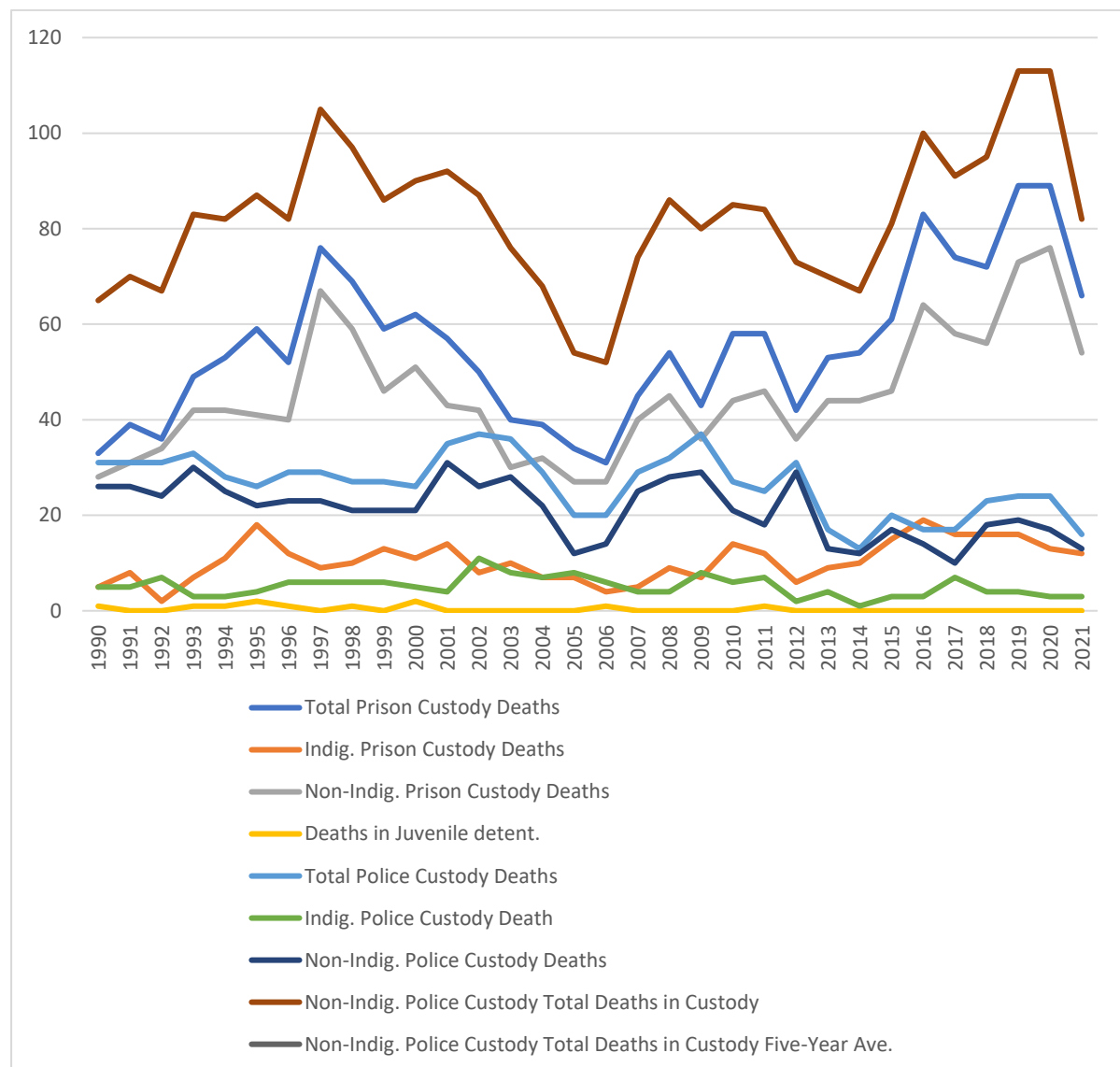
Police and correctional authorities have implemented significant reforms to endeavour to reduce custodial death rates. These measures have included removing ligature points in cells, prison vans and psychiatric hospitals; training staff using improved prisoner health and safety guidelines; and providing a variety of suicide prevention and 'R U OK?' programs (ATSIC 1996:Chapter 8; Justice Health 2015:16,28; Spittal et al. 2012:5). However, Figure 1 below demonstrates 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: The number of deaths in prison custody and police custody since 1990**

	Total Prison Custody Deaths	Indig. Prison Custody Deaths	Non-Indig. Prison Custody Deaths	Deaths in Juvenile detent.	Total Police Custody Deaths	Indig. Police Custody Death	Non-Indig. Police Custody Deaths	Total Deaths in Custody	Five-Year Ave.
1990	33	5	28	1	31	5	26	65	
1991	39	8	31	0	31	5	26	70	67.5
1992	36	2	34	0	31	7	24	67	
1993	49	7	42	1	33	3	30	83	
1994	53	11	42	1	28	3	25	82	
1995	59	18	41	2	26	4	22	87	
1996	52	12	40	1	29	6	23	82	80.2
1997	76	9	67	0	29	6	23	105	
1998	69	10	59	1	27	6	21	97	
1999	59	13	46	0	27	6	21	86	
2000	62	11	51	2	26	5	21	90	
2001	57	14	43	0	35	4	31	92	94.0
2002	50	8	42	0	37	11	26	87	
2003	40	10	30	0	36	8	28	76	
2004	39	7	32	0	29	7	22	68	
2005	34	7	27	0	20	8	12	54	
2006	31	4	27	1	20	6	14	52	67.4
2007	45	5	40	0	29	4	25	74	
2008	54	9	45	0	32	4	28	86	
2009	43	7	36	0	37	8	29	80	
2010	58	14	44	0	27	6	21	85	
2011	58	12	46	1	25	7	18	84	81.8
2012	42	6	36	0	31	2	29	73	
2013	53	9	44	0	17	4	13	70	
2014	54	10	44	0	13	1	12	67	
2015	61	15	46	0	20	3	17	81	
2016	83	19	64	0	17	3	14	100	78.2
2017	74	16	58	0	17	7	10	91	
2018	72	16	56	0	23	4	18	95	
2019	89	16	73	0	24	4	19	113	
2020	89	13	76	0	24	3	17	113	
2021	66	12	54	0	16	3	13	82	98.8

**Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.: The number of deaths in prison custody and police custody since 1990**



**SOURCES:** Joudo and Curnow 2006:Tables 2, 5; ABS 2012:Table 13.31; AIC 2021a:Deaths in custody by custodial authority:Table C1; AIC 2021b:Deaths in police custody:Tables B:5,E1-E3; AIC 2021c:Deaths in prison custody:Tables B:1,D1-D3.

Despite several temporary improvements in the number and rates of deaths in custody, and significant success in reducing the death rate for those under 40 years of age, the numbers of deaths over the past 30 years have generally plateaued or climbed, and the death rates have fallen slightly then plateaued since 2003. New solutions that address the causes of the deaths (rather than merely reacting to each new spate of deaths) are urgently required.

## Deaths in prison and police custody by state or territory

### Australian Capital Territory [ACT]

*Table 2: ACT deaths in prison and police custody (2011-21)*

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011-12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2012-13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2013-14	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
2014-15	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
2015-16	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
2016-17	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
2017-18	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
2018-19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2019-20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020-21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	2	3	1	0	1	6

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1-D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1-E3

### New South Wales [NSW]

*Table 3: NSW deaths in prison and police custody (2011-21)*

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011-12	18	1	17	11	0	11	29
2012-13	19	2	17	6	0	6	25
2013-14	13	1	12	1	0	1	14
2014-15	21	5	16	7	0	7	28
2015-16	23	2	21	6	0	6	29
2016-17	21	1	20	6	3	3	27
2017-18	27	5	22	6	1	5	33
2018-19	33	4	29	5	1	4	38
2019-20	42	5	37	6	0	6	48

2020–21	24	5	24	8	2	6	32
Total	241	31	215	62	7	55	303

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1–D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1–E3

## Northern Territory [NT]

*Table 4: NT deaths in prison and police custody (2011–21)*

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011–12	2	1	1	2	2	0	4
2012–13	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
2013–14	5	4	1	1	1	0	6
2014–15	3	3	0	2	2	0	5
2015–16	4	3	1	1	1	0	5
2016–17	3	3	0	2	1	1	5
2017–18	3	2	1	0	0	0	3
2018–19	3	3	0	0	0	0	3
2019–20	4	1	3	2	2	0	6
2020–21	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	29	21	8	10	9	1	39

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1–D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1–E3

## Queensland [QLD]

*Table 5: QLD deaths in prison and police custody (2011–21)*

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011–12	6	2	4	7	0	7	13
2012–13	9	2	7	2	0	2	11
2013–14	11	4	7	3	0	3	14
2014–15	7	3	4	5	0	5	12
2015–16	10	3	7	3	0	3	13
2016–17	12	4	8	2	0	2	14
2017–18	11	3	8	5	1	4	16

2018–19	11	2	9	5	0	5	16
2019–20	11	2	9	3	0	3	14
2020–21	9	1	8	4	1	3	13
Total	97	26	71	39	2	37	136

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1-D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1-E3

## South Australia [SA]

*Table 6: SA deaths in prison and police custody (2011-21)*

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011–12	4	0	4	3	0	3	7
2012–13	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
2013–14	4	0	4	2	0	2	6
2014–15	7	1	6	1	0	1	8
2015–16	13	3	10	3	1	2	16
2016–17	2	1	1	5	2	3	7
2017–18	2	0	2	2	1	1	4
2018–19	6	0	6	2	0	2	8
2019–20	7	1	6	0	0	0	7
2020–21	4	0	4	0	0	0	4
Total	49	6	43	19	5	14	68

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1-D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1-E3

## Tasmania [TAS]

*Table 7: TAS deaths in prison and police custody (2011-21)*

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011–12	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
2012–13	2	1	1	0	0	0	2
2013–14	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
2014–15	3	0	1	0	0	0	3
2015–16	2	0	3	1	0	1	3

2016–17	1	0	2	0	0	0	1
2017–18	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
2018–19	2	0	1	1	0	1	3
2019–20	0	0	2	1	0	1	2
2020–21	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Total	13	1	12	5	0	5	18

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1-D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1-E3

**Note:** There is an inconsistency between the data of The Guardian database and the AIC data above. The Guardian has no record of an Indigenous custodial death in the study period, whereas the AIC indicates a single Indigenous death in prison custody. The author wrote to the AIC twice requesting further information on the death, but no details were forthcoming.

## Victoria [VIC]

**Table 8: VIC deaths in prison and police custody (2011-21)**

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011–12	4	0	4	3	0	1	7
2012–13	13	1	12	2	0	3	15
2013–14	11	0	11	5	0	2	16
2014–15	15	1	14	2	0	5	17
2015–16	19	1	18	1	0	2	20
2016–17	20	2	18	0	0	1	20
2017–18	17	3	14	5	1	0	22
2018–19	19	2	17	5	0	4	24
2019–20	13	1	12	6	0	4	19
2020–21	10	1	9	3	0	6	13
Total	141	12	129	32	1	28	173

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1-D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1-E3

## Western Australia [WA]

*Table 9: WA deaths in prison and police custody (2011-21)*

Year	Deaths in Prison Custody	Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Prison Custody	Deaths in Police Custody	Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Non-Indig. Deaths in Police Custody	Total Deaths in Custody
2011–12	7	2	5	5	0	5	12
2012–13	10	2	8	6	3	3	16
2013–14	7	1	6	1	0	1	8
2014–15	4	1	3	3	1	2	7
2015–16	11	6	5	2	1	1	13
2016–17	14	5	9	2	1	1	16
2017–18	11	3	8	3	0	3	14
2018–19	15	5	10	6	3	3	21
2019–20	12	3	9	2	1	1	14
2020–21	13	5	8	0	0	0	13
Total	104	33	71	30	10	20	134

**SOURCES:** Deaths in prison custody: AIC 2021c:Tables D1-D3; deaths in police custody: AIC 2021b:Tables E1-E3

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