

NCIS FACT SHEET

Intentional self-harm deaths of emergency services personnel in Australia

197

intentional self-harm
deaths, 2001-2016

12 deaths

per year
on average

64.5%

of deaths were of
people aged 31-50 years

This fact sheet refers to deaths of persons currently or formerly employed by the police, ambulance and fire services at the time of their death. These persons are collectively referred to as **emergency services personnel**.

Emergency services personnel

There are over 105,000 emergency services personnel employed in an operational or non-operational capacity across the police, ambulance and fire services throughout Australia (1).

Emergency services personnel work to protect the safety of the community. This work involves routine exposure to stress and trauma.

Deaths due to intentional self-harm

There were 197 intentional self-harm deaths of current or former police, ambulance and fire services employees reported to a coroner across Australia from 2001 to 2016. The highest number of these deaths were reported in 2014 (n=21, 10.4%).

The highest frequencies of death for police and ambulance personnel were reported in 2013 (n=13 and n=5, respectively), with the highest frequency for fire service employees reported in 2014 (n=7).



Figure 1. Frequency of intentional self-harm deaths of emergency services personnel by year of notification

When compared by service type, 60.9% of these deaths were of police employees, 20.8% were of ambulance employees, and 18.3% were of fire service employees (Figure 2). This is reflective of the proportion of employees in each sector overall (1).

The majority (77.2%) of these deaths were of persons currently employed by the emergency services at the time of their death. Over one fifth (22.8%) were of former emergency services employees.

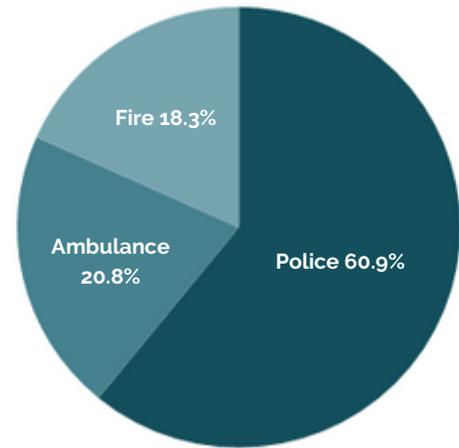


Figure 2. Proportion of intentional self-harm deaths of emergency services personnel by service type

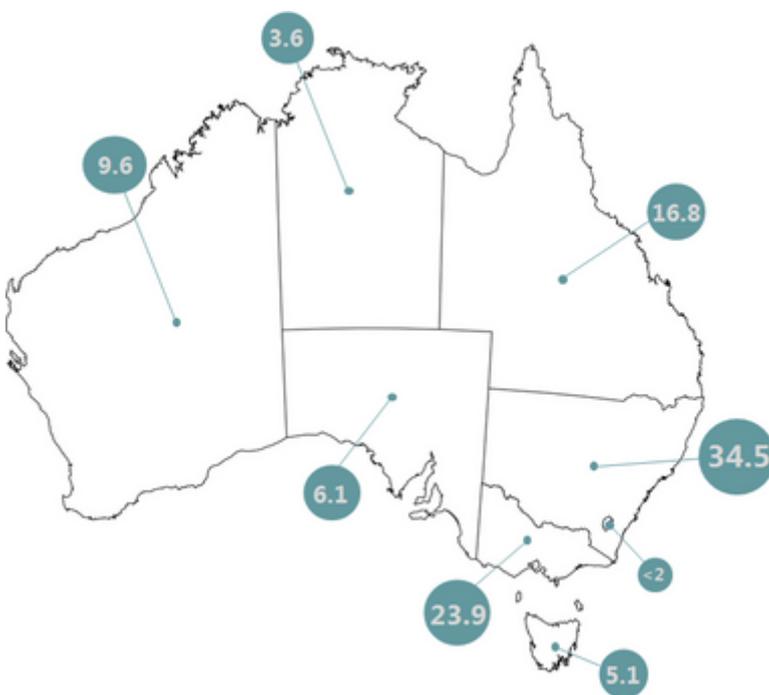
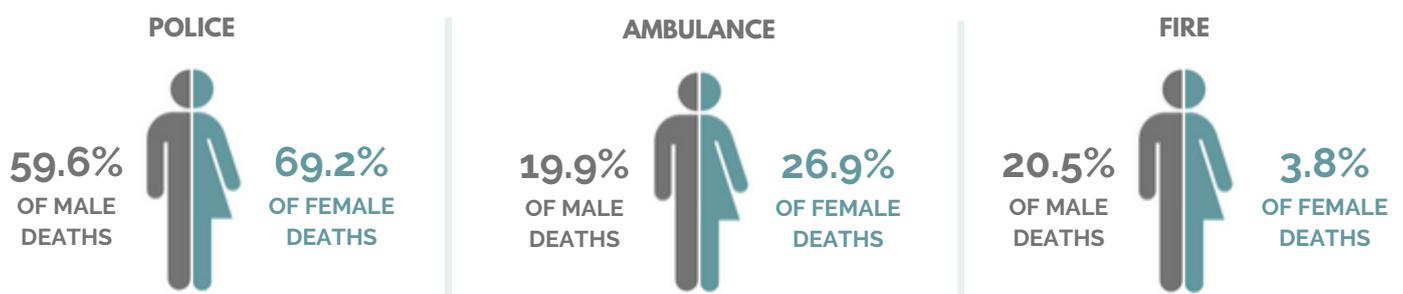


Figure 3. Proportion of intentional self-harm deaths of emergency services personnel by jurisdiction of investigation

The largest number of intentional self-harm deaths of emergency services personnel were reported in New South Wales, followed by Victoria and Queensland (Figure 3).

This is reflective of the general population in each jurisdiction (2).

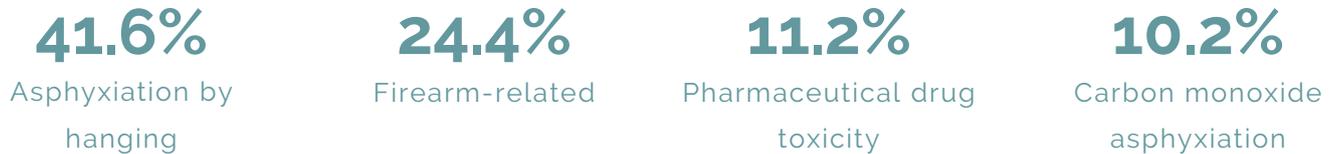
The highest frequency of intentional self-harm deaths occurred among persons aged 41-50 years (n=75, 38.1%), followed by persons aged 31-40 years (n=52, 26.4%).



The majority of deaths for both males and females were of police service employees.

Mechanism of injury

The most frequent mechanism of injury across all service types was asphyxiation by hanging:



The second most frequent mechanism of injury varied by service type:

- Police - firearm-related
- Ambulance - pharmaceutical drug toxicity
- Fire service - carbon monoxide asphyxiation

There were 38 intentional self-harm deaths of police in which the mechanism of injury was firearm-related. Of these, the majority (n=22, 57.9%) involved the use of a service firearm, while seven deaths (18.4%) involved the use of a privately owned firearm. In nine cases (23.7%) the status of the firearm was unable to be ascertained.



The majority (56.9%) of fatal incidents occurred in a home.

Mental health history

The deceased was identified as having a mental health condition in 118 of the 197 cases. Of those, the majority (67.8%) involved a formal diagnosis of a mental health condition. In 32.2% of these cases, a mental health condition was informally noted. Approximately 20% of the Australian population have reported being diagnosed with a mental health condition (3). In 9.1% of the cases identified, the deceased was noted to have previously attempted suicide. Approximately 3% of Australian adults have reported a suicide attempt in their lifetime (1).

1. Beyond Blue Ltd 2018, [Answering the Call national survey: National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services](#).

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019, [Australian Demographic Statistics, Dec 2018](#).

3. Commonwealth of Australia Senate 2019, [The people behind 000: mental health of our first responders](#).

The data presented in this fact sheet was obtained from the NCIS in May 2019. The dataset extracted contained every fatality reported to an Australian coroner between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2016 that was coded as intentional self-harm, and where the coronial investigation had concluded and the case was closed on the NCIS. Visit the NCIS website for information on [data sources and limitations](#). To request a comprehensive data report, contact the NCIS or visit www.ncis.org.au.

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