

NCIS FACT SHEET

Household maintenance-related deaths in Australia

608

deaths
2001-2018

34 deaths

per year
on average

71.4%

of deaths
due to falls

This fact sheet refers to injury deaths of people undertaking household maintenance at the time of the fatal incident. See the [NCIS Data dictionary](#) for further information about activity codes.

Household maintenance is a common activity in Australian homes, but poses significant potential risks to health and safety (1). Falls involving ladders have attracted particular attention in the death and injury prevention sector, with over 33,000 non-occupational ladder-related falls resulting in hospitalisation over a ten-year period (2).

Household maintenance-related injuries and deaths have prompted campaigns for greater safety awareness for those undertaking do-it-yourself activities.

National overview

There were 608 injury deaths of people undertaking household maintenance reported to an Australian coroner between 2001 and 2018. The highest number of these deaths were reported in 2010 (n=49, 8.1%).

The highest proportions of deaths were reported to coroners in Victoria (28.8%) and New South Wales (28.3%), followed by Queensland (17.4%), South Australia (10.5%) and Western Australia (10.4%). Fewer than five per cent of deaths were reported collectively across Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the ACT (Figure 1).

These proportions are generally consistent with Australia's population distribution.

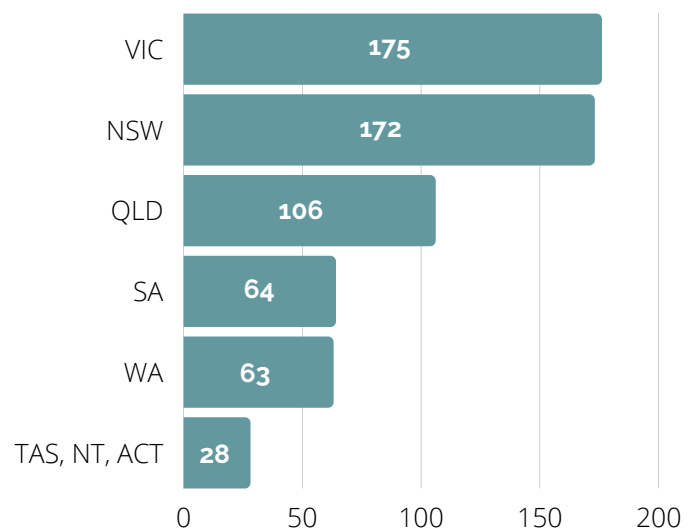


Figure 1. Frequency of household maintenance deaths by jurisdiction of investigation, 2001-2018

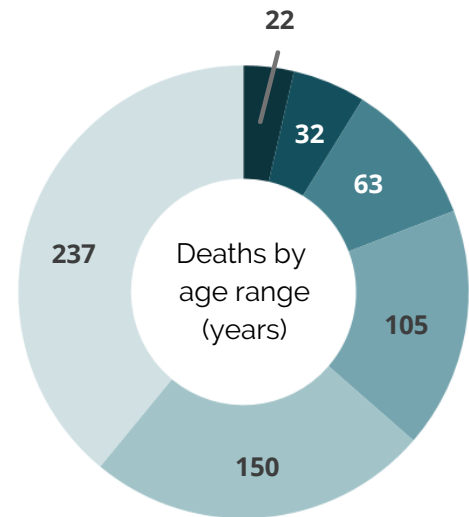
Sex, age range and employment status

Males were significantly over-represented, comprising more than nine in every ten household maintenance deaths (92.6%, n=564).



The frequency of deaths increased with age (Figure 2). Older males were at greatest risk, with males aged 75 years and over comprising more than one third of all home maintenance deaths (36.1%, n=220).

The majority of household maintenance deaths were of people who were retired or pensioners (Figure 3). Employed people constituted over one quarter of all deaths where employment status was known.



● <35 ● 35-44 ● 45-54 ● 55-64 ● 65-74 ● 75+

Figure 2. Frequency of household maintenance deaths by age range (years), 2001-2018

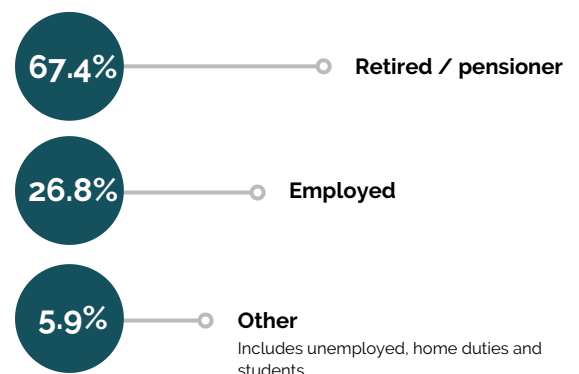


Figure 3. Proportion of household maintenance deaths by employment status (where known, n=579), 2001-2018

Activity type

The most common activity being undertaken at the time of the fatal incident was roof maintenance, followed by gutter maintenance and electrical or lighting works. Other common activities included renovations and construction, painting and decorating and pool maintenance.



Roof, gutter and pool maintenance refer to activities such as cleaning, installation and repairs

Mechanism of injury

Falls were the most common mechanism of injury for household maintenance deaths, constituting nearly three quarters of fatalities (71.4%, n=435).

The other most common mechanisms were electrocution and drowning. Activities that most frequently resulted in fatal electrocution included electrical work in roof cavities, lighting or appliance maintenance and use of power tools. The majority of drowning deaths occurred in an in-ground swimming pool (68.6%, n=24).



435
deaths

Fall-related



49
deaths

Electrocution



35
deaths

Drowning

Fall-related deaths

Fall-related deaths (n=435) most frequently involved a fall from a ladder or from a roof or balcony (Figure 4). The majority of fall-related deaths involved people aged 55 years and over (89.2%, n=387).

More than half of all fall-related deaths were due to a head injury (58.1%, n=252). A further 25.1% (n=109) were due to multiple injuries. Other injury types included spinal, chest and pelvic injuries.

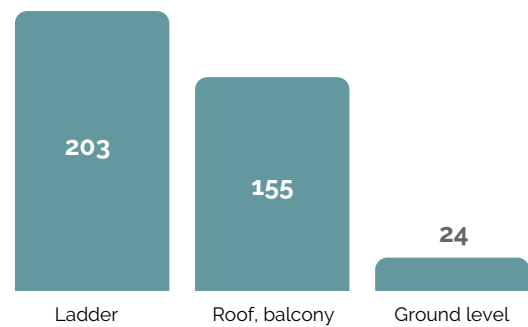


Figure 4. Frequency of fall-related household maintenance deaths by common fall type, 2001-2018

Multiple injuries refers to injuries affecting multiple areas of the body, such as the head, neck and spine

1. Driscoll TR, Mitchell RJ, Hendrie AL, et al, [Unintentional fatal injuries arising from unpaid work at home](#), *Injury Prevention* 2003; 9: 15-19
2. Vallmur K, Eley R, Watson A, [Falls from ladders in Australia: Comparing occupational and non-occupational injuries across age groups](#), *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 2016; 40, 6: 559-563

The data presented in this fact sheet was extracted from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) in May 2021. The data set extracted contained every external cause fatality that was reported to an Australian coroner from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2018 where the activity at the time of fatal incident was coded as household maintenance. Cases were included 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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