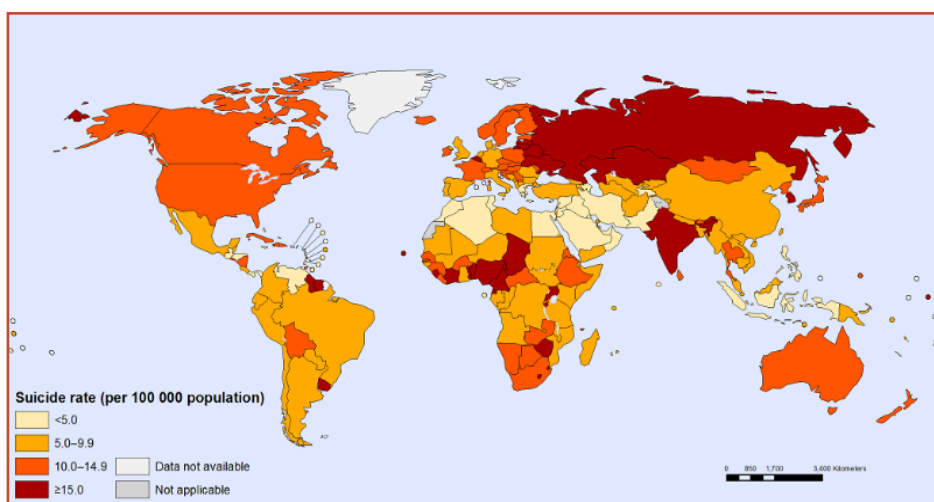


# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet 1

## A Global and National Overview of Suicide and Indigenous Suicide

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that in 2012 around 800,000 people world-wide were dying by suicide annually, and that for every death about 20 suicide attempts were being made. Further, suicide was the second leading cause of death for 15 to 29-year-olds globally. In 2016, there were an estimated 793,000 suicide deaths worldwide representing an annual global age-standardised suicide rate of 10.5 per 100,000 population.

### Age-standardised suicide rates (per 100,000 population), 2016



The WHO data confirms:

- **Suicide rates can decline**
- **Suicide is preventable**
- Government action can contribute to lower suicide rates and
- **Suicide is a public health issue**

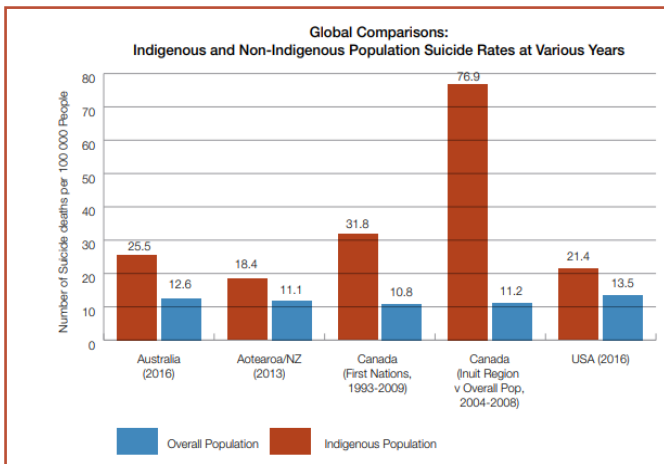
Data source: World Health Organisation; Map Production: Information Evidence and Research (IER) WHO.

*In contrast to the global trend, **Australian suicide deaths are increasing overall along with rates among specific population groups. This is an urgent issue that requires immediate attention.***

A systematic review of the global incidence of suicide among Indigenous peoples by Pollock and colleagues in 2018 found 'evidence of suicide rate parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in some contexts, while elsewhere rates were more than **20 times higher** among Indigenous peoples'<sup>3</sup>(p21).

These differences were attributed to the varying impacts of colonisation in specific locations; access of Indigenous populations to mental health and health services; and the existence of community-level action. These findings led the authors to conclude that '**suicide among Indigenous peoples is not a universal or intractable problem**'<sup>3</sup>(p22).

In 2008, the suicide rate was about 11 deaths per 100,000 population per annum, rising to 12.6 deaths per 100,000 population per annum in 2017 – an increase of 15% over a decade<sup>3</sup>.



**A Report on Global Overview of Indigenous Suicide Rates** produced by the Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSIISP) has surveyed Indigenous suicide rates in countries with a similar colonial history to Australia's, identifying elevated patterns of suicide (when compared to the non-Indigenous population) as a consistent feature<sup>2</sup>.

Table (left): Global Comparisons: Australia (ABS, 2018), Aotearoa/NZ (Ministry of Health - Manatū Hauora, 2017) Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018a; Pollock, Mulay, Valcour & Jong, 2016), USA (American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, 2016; Jiaquan et al., 2018)



GLOBAL OVERVIEW:  
INDIGENOUS SUICIDE RATES

- ◆ Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide rates are twice the general population
- ◆ Canada: First Nations peoples have suicide rates nearly three times the national average
- ◆ Circumpolar Regions: Inuit communities in Canada and Greenland experience some of the highest suicide rates in the world
- ◆ New Zealand: Māori suicide rates are over one and a half times the general population
- ◆ USA: American Indian and Alaskan Native suicide rates are over one and a half times the national average

However, it is also important to acknowledge that the rates vary between Indigenous populations and communities within Indigenous populations.

***Understanding the reasons for these differences may hold the keys to reducing suicide rates.***

A longitudinal study by Chandler and Lalonde (2008) among 197 First Nations' communities in Canada found wide variations in the suicide rates between Indigenous communities<sup>4</sup>.

Their research identified a range of protective factors in communities **experiencing little or no suicide** which translate within an Australian context to include:

- ◆ Access to culturally safe services
- ◆ Creating a sense of positive individual and community continuity
- ◆ Indigenous governance where there is local control over employment, health, education, policy and child welfare and structures that are inclusive of community members
- ◆ Self-determination in communities that have self-governance
- ◆ Where community initiatives aim to strengthen cultural practices and identity
- ◆ Working towards Indigenous ownership of, and access to traditional lands

**Note: The CBPATSIISP is working with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to verify world suicide rates for Indigenous people.**

More information about suicide prevention and additional fact sheets are available on the [CBPATSIISP](#) website.

#### References:

1. World Health Organisation (2019). [Mental Health – Suicide data.](#)
2. Dudgeon et al. (2018). [Global Overview: Indigenous Suicide Rates.](#) Perth, WA: University of Western Australia.
3. Pollock, N., Naicker, K., Loro, A., et al. (2018). [Global incidence of suicide among Indigenous peoples: a systematic review.](#) BMC Medicine 2018 16:145 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-018-1115-6>.
4. Chandler, M. J. & Lalonde, C. E. (2008). [Cultural Continuity as a Protective Factor against Suicide in First Nations Youth.](#) *Horizons - A Special Issue on Aboriginal Youth, Hope or Heartbreak: Aboriginal Youth and Canada's Future.* 10(1), 68-72.

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