

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet 3

## Suicide among Indigenous Children and Young People

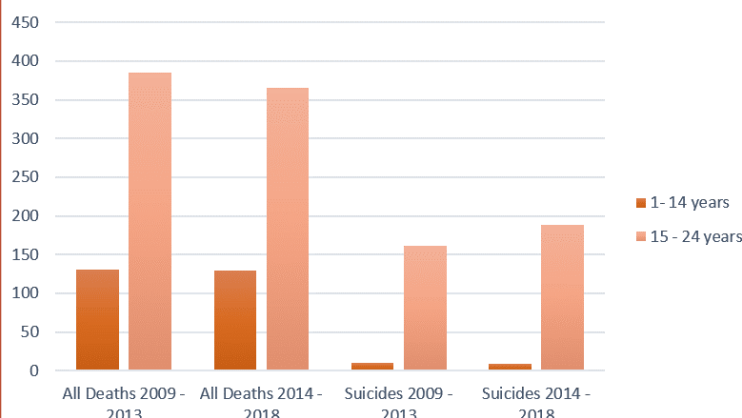
### Overview of Facts

Suicide is the leading cause of death among young Australians. About 350 young people aged 15–24 years die by suicide every year. For every youth suicide, there are 100 to 200 more attempts<sup>1</sup>.

In 2018 the suicide rates for both Indigenous males and females 15-19 years are around **four times** the rate of their non-Indigenous counterparts<sup>2</sup>.

The suicide rate for Indigenous males 20-24 years is over **three times** the rate for non-Indigenous males and for Indigenous females **four times** the rate for non-Indigenous females<sup>2</sup>.

**Indigenous Suicide Deaths**  
2009 - 2013 and 2014 - 2018<sup>2,3</sup>



**While overall deaths among Indigenous young people decreased in 2014-2018, suicides increased and remain the leading cause of death for Indigenous young people 15 to 24 years, where it accounts for 1 in 3 deaths<sup>4</sup>**

### Reasons for the high rates of suicide among Indigenous young people

The high suicide rate among Indigenous young people is due to complex, interrelated historical, political, economic, structural, social and intergenerational factors<sup>4</sup>. There is growing evidence of the link between exposure to situations that contribute to stress, psychological distress and trauma by young people and suicide or suicide attempts. Various studies have identified a range of risk factors that are significantly associated with suicide including:

- ◆ Relationship problems (either conflict with a partner or relationship breakdown/separation) and broader familial and interpersonal conflict<sup>5</sup>.
- ◆ Bereavement, depression, anxiety and issues associated with alcohol or substance use<sup>5</sup>.
- ◆ Involvement with the justice system and/or pending legal matters<sup>6</sup>.
- ◆ Grief and loss, intergenerational trauma, and racial discrimination which adversely impacts their Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB)<sup>6</sup>.
- ◆ Economic, educational and employment disadvantage<sup>7</sup>.
- ◆ Lack of access to appropriate and culturally safe support services<sup>5</sup>.
- ◆ Widespread structural and individual discrimination<sup>6</sup>.
- ◆ Loss of Elders and adult family due to early deaths or imprisonment<sup>7</sup>.

**Importantly, the WA Coroner’s 2019 findings of the Inquest into the 13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region identified intergenerationally transmitted trauma as a key reason children and young people might take their lives<sup>8</sup>.**

In identifying the causes, the Coroner could not separate wider ‘pre-existing vulnerabilities’ in the children, their families and communities from more immediate causes of death<sup>8</sup>.

**Acknowledging the complex array of risk factors associated with suicide the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project<sup>9</sup> identified the need for a comprehensive, multilayered response to reduce Indigenous suicide in children and young people.**

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| <p><b>Responding to young people challenged by suicide ideation</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer-to-peer support and networking with the goal of preventing suicide. To be effective, young people need the training and skills to recognise a person in need of help.</li> <li>• Mental health services, preferably provided by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, available 24 hrs a day, seven days a week.</li> <li>• Suicide-aware families. GPs, teachers to recognise a person in trouble and get them to help.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Providing hope and futures to young people</b></p>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hope through education and culturally meaningful employment.</li> <li>• A strong connection to their Indigenous cultures and communities can be source of hope, identity and resilience.</li> <li>• Sport and diversionary activities from alcohol and drug use and other challenges to wellbeing.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Healing communities and families</b></p>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heal communities and families to stop the transmission of trauma. This could include establishing more healing centres, funding community-led healing programs; conducting regional and/or national truth and reconciliation process – to heal wounds of the past underlying the ongoing transgenerational trauma being experienced in the present.</li> <li>• Support communities to address the social disadvantage and inequities they face which contribute to cumulative stress and trauma.</li> </ul> |

**Strategic response:** In 2019, CBPATISIP co-hosted a National Indigenous Youth Suicide Prevention Workshop with strong youth participation. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the development and implementation of a youth suicide component of a dedicated National Indigenous Suicide Prevention Strategy led by young people was required. [See Fact Sheet 8.](#)

See the [CBPATISIP](#) website for information about suicide prevention and additional fact sheets.

**References:**

1. Health Direct. (2019) Youth Suicide. <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/youth-suicide>
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3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013). [Causes of death, Australia, 2013, intentional self-harm in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people \(No. 3303.0\).](#)
4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2015). [The health and welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.](#)
5. Dudgeon, P., Calma, T., & Holland, C. (2017). [The context and causes of the suicide of Indigenous people in Australia.](#) *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing, Te Mauri, Pimatisiwin, 2(2), 5-15.*
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8. Coroner’s Court of Western Australia. (2019). [Inquest into the 13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region.](#)
9. Dudgeon, P., Milroy, J., Calma, T., Luxford, Y., Ring, I., Walker, R. ... Holland, C. (2016). [Solutions that work: What the evidence and our people tell us. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention evaluation project report.](#) Perth, WA:UWA.

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