



The Centre of Best Practice in
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Suicide Prevention

Analysis: Coroner's Court of Victoria Report into Indigenous Suicide Deaths (2020)

Suicides of Indigenous people in Victoria have increased from less than 1 per cent of all suicides in official records from 2009 and 2010 to more than 2 per cent in more recent reporting periods (2.9% in 2019), according to new analysis from the Coroners Court of Victoria.

The report, [Victorian Suicides of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#), comes after the appointment in 2019 of a Koori Family Engagement Coordinator within the Court. According to the report, the new role, "has enhanced the identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose passing's are reported to the Court, as families have increased confidence in identifying their loved ones as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people due to improved cultural appropriateness in court processes."

This raises the likelihood that Indigenous suicide deaths have been under-reported in the past; just under 1% of the Victorian population is Indigenous according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, so Indigenous suicide is currently trending about 2 to 3 times as high as the general population rate for the state. This is broadly consistent with national statistics, with Indigenous people across all age groups about **twice as likely** to take their own lives, and **four times as likely among youth**.

The report also found:

- Suicide at younger ages is a particular issue among Indigenous women, with two-thirds of all Indigenous female suicides concentrated in the 18 to 34 age range - in contrast to the broader population where women are most at risk in their late 30s to 50s. For Indigenous men suicide deaths spread more evenly from youth to late middle age.
- **Indigenous suicides were strongly linked to:**
 - **mental health issues (about 80% of deaths including both diagnosed and suspected mental illness), at a similar rate to the overall Victorian population;**
 - **Alcohol and other drugs (about double the rate of other Victorians);**
 - **Recent contact with the justice system (about double the rate of other Victorians);**
 - **Interpersonal conflict and stress, including abuse, family violence, legal issues and bullying (each about double the rate of other Victorians).**
- However financial and work-related problems were less likely to be recorded as factors (about two-thirds the rate of other Victorians).

Overall, this report demonstrates the importance of working closely with the community establish Aboriginality in suicide deaths, including in states like Victoria with a relatively smaller Indigenous population.

By improving identification in data collection, is it possible to establish with reliability numbers of Indigenous people taking their own lives, which in turn should guide policy responses - for example in culturally safe AOD treatments and diversionary approaches in the criminal justice system - and equitable suicide prevention investment based on demonstrated levels of need.