
Indigenous Deaths in Australian Custody Reach Highest Level Ever



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The number of Indigenous people dying in custody in Australia has reached its highest level since records began in 1980, according to new data from the Australian Institute of Criminology.

In the 12 months to June this year, 33 of 113 deaths in custody were Indigenous, up from 24 the previous year. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain disproportionately

represented in the criminal justice system, comprising over one-third of prisoners while making up less than four per cent of the population.

Of the 33 deaths, 26 occurred in prison custody, six in police custody, and one in youth detention.

The main causes were self-inflicted, followed by natural causes, with hanging accounting for eight deaths. New South Wales recorded the highest number of Indigenous prison deaths at nine, followed by Western Australia with six.

The rising figures come more than three decades after a landmark 1991 Royal Commission into Indigenous deaths in custody. University of Melbourne associate professor Amanda Porter described the situation as a “national crisis” requiring urgent political action, while Magistrate Teresa O’Sullivan called the trend a “profoundly distressing milestone,” urging independent scrutiny and accountability.

The average age of Indigenous deaths was 45 years, and 11 individuals were awaiting sentencing at the time of death. Since the royal commission, 600 Indigenous deaths in custody have been recorded, highlighting ongoing challenges for Indigenous communities in Australia.