

ABS death registrations collection, 2009 QS

Identifying and definitional attributes

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Data quality

Institutional environment: This collection is conducted under the Census and Statistics Act 1905. For information on the institutional environment of the ABS, including the legislative obligations of the ABS, financing and governance arrangements, and mechanisms for scrutiny of ABS operations, see [ABS Institutional Environment](#).

Timeliness: Death records are provided electronically to the ABS by individual Registrars on a monthly basis for compilation into aggregate statistics on a quarterly and annual basis.

Quarterly estimates of deaths on a preliminary basis are published five to six months after the reference period in Australian Demographic Statistics (cat. no. 3101.0), and revised 21 months after the end of each financial year. Annual estimates on a year of registration basis are published within eleven months of the end of the reference year in [Deaths, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3302.0).

One dimension of timeliness in death registrations data is the interval between the occurrence and registration of a death. As a result, a small number of deaths occurring in one year are not registered until the following year or later.

Accessibility: Deaths data is available in a variety of formats on the ABS website under the 3302.0 product family. Further information on deaths and mortality may be available on request. The ABS observes strict confidentiality protocols as required by the Census and Statistics Act (1905). This may restrict access to data at a very detailed level which is sought by some users.

Interpretability: Deaths statistics are generally straightforward and easy to interpret. It should be noted, however, that changes in numbers of deaths over time can be due a number of factors including changes in mortality and changes in the size and age/sex structure of the population. For this reason, deaths data needs to be considered in relation to the size of the relevant population(s) through the use of mortality rates.

Information of mortality rates, as well as data sources, terminology, classifications and other technical aspects associated with death statistics can be found in Deaths Australia (cat. no 3302.0) in the Explanatory Notes, Appendices and Glossary on the ABS website.

Relevance:

Death statistics are one of the components in the production of estimates of natural increase (the difference between numbers of births and deaths) used as a component of population change in the calculation of population estimates of Australia and the states and territories. The primary uses of population estimates are in the determination of seats in the House of Representatives for each State and Territory, as well as in the distribution of Australian Government funds to state, territory and local governments. Population estimates are also used for a wide range of government, business and community decisions, both directly and indirectly, by contributing to a range of other social, health and economic indicators. Death statistics are also essential in the analysis of morbidity and mortality in Australia. Trends in mortality are used in the development of assumptions of future levels of mortality for population projections.

Data refer to deaths registered during the calendar year shown, unless otherwise stated. Statistics on demographic characteristics of the deceased such as age at death, sex, place of usual residence, marital status, Indigenous status and country of birth are included.

Deaths data includes:

- any death which occurs in, or en route to Australia, including deaths of persons whose usual place of residence is overseas, and is registered with a state or territory Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Deaths data excludes:

- still births/foetal deaths (these are accounted for in perinatal death statistics published in Perinatal Deaths, Australia, cat. no. 3304.0, and previously, Causes of Death, Australia, cat. no. 3303.0); and
- deaths of Australian residents which occur outside Australia.

Accuracy:

Information on deaths is obtained from a complete enumeration of deaths registered during a specified period and are not subject to sampling error. However, deaths data sources are subject to non-sampling error which can arise from inaccuracies in collecting, recording and processing the data.

Sources of non-sample error include:

- completeness of an individual record at a given point in time;
- completeness of the dataset (eg impact of registration lags, processing lags and duplicate records);
- extent of coverage of the population (whilst all deaths are legally required to be registered, some cases may not be registered for an extended time, if at all); and
- lack of consistency in the application of questions or forms used by data providers, both through time and between different jurisdictions.

Every effort is made to minimise error by working closely with data providers, the careful design of forms, training of processing staff, and efficient data processing procedures.

Although it is considered likely that most deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) Australians are registered, a proportion of these deaths are not registered as Indigenous. Information about the deceased is supplied by a relative or other person acquainted with the deceased, or by an official of the institution where the death occurred and may differ from the self-identified Indigenous origin of the deceased. Forms are often not subject to the same best practice design principles as statistical questionnaires, and respondent and/or interviewer understanding is rarely tested. Over-precise analysis of Indigenous deaths and mortality should be avoided.

Coherence:

The international standards and recommendations for the definition and scope of deaths statistics in a vital statistics system are set out in the Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System Revision 2, published by the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD). Consistent with the UNSD recommendations, the ABS defines a death as the permanent disappearance of all evidence of life at any time after live birth has taken place. In addition, the UNSD recommends that the deaths to be counted include all deaths "occurring in every geographic area and in every population group comprising the national area". For the purposes of Australia, this includes all deaths occurring within Australia as defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) that applies at the time.

Registration of deaths is compulsory in Australia under relevant State/Territory legislation. However, each State/Territory Registrar has its own death registration form. Most data items are collected in all states and territories and therefore statistics at a national level are available for most characteristics. In some cases, different wording of questions asked on the registration form may result in different answers, which may affect final figures.

Use of the supporting documentation released with the statistics is important for assessing coherence within the dataset and when comparing the statistics with data from other sources. Changing business rules over time and/or across data sources can affect consistency and hence interpretability of statistical output.