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Bureau of Justice Statistics

Mortality in Local Jails, 2000-2014 - Statistical Tables

Summary | NCJ 250169 | December 2016

In 2014, 1,053 inmates died in local jails. This was an 8% increase from 2013 (971) and the largest number of deaths reported by the Deaths in Custody Reporting Program (DCRP) since 2008. Between 2000 and 2014, an average of 82% of jails reported zero deaths. In 2014, 80% of jails reported zero deaths and 14% reported one death.

Causes of death

Suicide was the leading cause of death in local jails, and accounted for more than a third (35%) of all deaths in 2014. The number of suicides increased 13% between 2013 (328) and 2014 (372). This was the largest number of jail suicides reported to the DCRP since its inception in 2000. From 2009 to 2014, the suicide rate increased 22%, up from 35 per 100,000 local jail inmates to 45 per 100,000 local jail inmates.

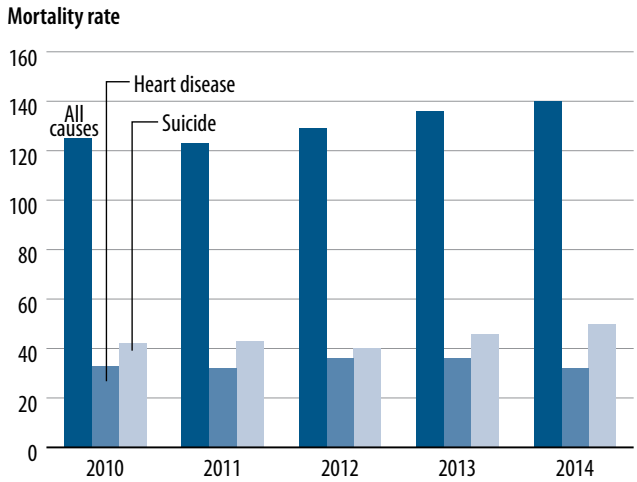
Heart disease was the second leading cause of death in 2014. Between 2000 and 2014, heart disease made up a quarter (23%) of all deaths, and non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black jail inmates died from heart disease at nearly equal rates. Respiratory deaths increased 32% between 2013 (31) and 2014 (41). Deaths due to drug-alcohol intoxication increased from 72 in 2013 to 90 deaths in 2014. Accidental deaths and deaths due to homicide were the least common causes of death, accounting for about 2% of deaths in local jails in 2014.

About the decedents

Males accounted for the majority (900 deaths) of jail inmate deaths in 2014, but the number of female deaths (152) increased 22% between 2013 and 2014. The female mortality rate (143 per 100,000 local jail inmates) and the male mortality rate (140 per 100,000 local jail inmates) were about equal in 2014.

About 4 in 10 (41%) inmates who died in 2014 were being held for a violent offense. More than a third of decedents (425 of 1,053 deaths) died within the first 7 days of admission. Inmates who died of cancer had the longest median time served (136 days) prior to death, while inmates who died from drug-alcohol intoxication served a median of 1 day prior to death.

Mortality rate per 100,000 local jail inmates, by selected causes of death, 2010–2014



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Deaths in Custody Reporting Program, 2010–2014.

Long-term trends

Jail authorities reported a total of 14,786 inmate deaths in local jails between 2000 and 2014. Suicides accounted for 31% of deaths during that period, and almost half (47%) of suicides occurred in general housing. From 2005 to 2014, the suicide rate increased 28% from 39 per 100,000 local jail inmates to 50 per 100,000 local jail inmates.

Between 2000 and 2014, more than a third (35%) of inmates were being held for a violent offense prior to death and about a quarter (24%) were being held for a public order offense. About half (49%) of inmates died in a jail medical facility between 2000 and 2014.

Inmates served a median of 19 days prior to death between 2000 and 2014. Inmates held on a homicide charge served the most number of days (129 days) of all inmates who died in local jails between 2000 and 2014. During that period, convicted jail inmates served more than 1 month (49 days) prior to death, while unconvicted inmates served fewer than two weeks (12 days) prior to death.

The full report (*Mortality in Local Jails, 2000-2014 - Statistical Tables*, NCJ 250169), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics can be found at www.bjs.gov.