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Mortality in Local Jails and State Prisons, 2000–2011 – Statistical Tables

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NUMBER OF JAIL DEATHS AT LOWEST RECORDED LEVEL DURING 2011

State prison deaths up four percent

WASHINGTON – In 2011, 885 inmates died in the custody of local jails, the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today. This is the lowest number of jail inmate deaths in the 12-year history of the BJS Deaths in Custody Reporting Program (DCRP). The 2011 jail mortality rate was 122 deaths per 100,000 inmates.

In comparison, deaths in state prisons increased during 2011 by four percent to 3,353 deaths. The mortality rate for state prisoners increased from 245 deaths per 100,000 prison inmates in 2010 to 254 per 100,000 in 2011.

Jails are operated by local authorities (such as sheriffs' offices or county and city governments) and typically hold persons unsentenced or sentenced to serve one year or less. State prisons are operated by state departments of corrections and generally hold inmates sentenced to more than a year.

Most jails (81 percent) reported zero deaths in 2011, consistent with the annual average of 82 percent of jails reporting zero deaths from 2000 to 2011. Approximately 13 percent of jails reported a single death and about six percent reported two or more deaths.

Suicide (35 percent) and heart disease (26 percent) continued to be the leading causes of death in local jails during 2011. Suicide rates in jails dropped each year between 2001 and 2006 (from 49 to 36 deaths per 100,000 inmates), before increasing every year since 2009. While the jail suicide rate increased in recent years, the overall rate declined 11 percent between 2000 and 2011.

The mortality rate for white jail inmates (204 deaths per 100,000) was more than twice the rate for black (89 per 100,000) or Hispanic (71 per 100,000) jail inmates. Male and female jail inmates died in custody at nearly equal rates in 2011, although males accounted for 87 percent of local jail deaths.

In 2011, more than a third (39 percent) of jail deaths occurred within the first week of admission to the facility. Between 2000 and 2011, about half (48 percent) of suicides and a third (32 percent) of heart disease deaths occurred during the first week of admission to jail.

The majority (89 percent) of deaths in state prisons in 2011 were natural deaths. Cancer was the single leading cause, accounting for 31 percent of state prison deaths. The cancer mortality rate increased 11 percent, from 70 deaths per 100,000 prisoners in 2010 to 78 per 100,000 in 2011.

Heart disease (25 percent) was the second leading cause of death in prison, followed by liver disease (10 percent), respiratory disease (six percent), suicide (six percent), AIDS-related deaths (two percent), homicides (two percent), and accidents (one percent).

Other findings include—

- Between 2001 and 2011, the female prisoner mortality rate fluctuated from 127 to 172 deaths per 100,000 female prisoners. In 2011, the male prisoner mortality rate was 1.6 times higher than the female prisoner mortality rate.

- White prisoners accounted for 57 percent of prison deaths in 2011 and blacks accounted for 31 percent. Males accounted for more than 96 percent of prison deaths.

- From 2010 to 2011, the mortality rate for federal prisoners remained relatively stable, decreasing two percent from 224 deaths per 100,000 federal inmates to 220 per 100,000. In 2011, 387 federal inmates died in custody.

- The AIDS-related mortality rate among state prisoners declined 22 percent from 2010 to 2011 (from six deaths per 100,000 in 2010 to four per 100,000 in 2011), and has declined 81 percent since 2001 (23 deaths per 100,000).

The report, *Mortality in Local Jails and State Prisons, 2000-2011 - Statistical Tables* (*NCJ 242186)*, was written by BJS statistician Margaret E. Noonan. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at **http://www.bjs.gov/**.

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