Bureau of Justice Statistics

Mortality in State Prisons, 2001-2014 - Statistical Tables

Summary | NCJ 250150 | December 2016

In 2014, the Deaths in Custody Reporting Program (DCRP) recorded 3,927 inmate deaths in state and federal prisons across the United States. This was a 1% increase from 3,879 deaths in 2013, and it is the highest number reported since the DCRP began collecting information on state and federal prison inmate deaths in 2001.

Federal prison deaths

The number of federal prisoner deaths in federal prisons increased 11%, from 400 deaths in 2013 to 444 deaths in 2014. The vast majority of federal prisoner deaths (88%) could be attributed to natural causes. Unnatural deaths—including suicides (4%), homicides (3%), and accidents (1%)—made up less than a tenth of all federal prison deaths.

State prison deaths

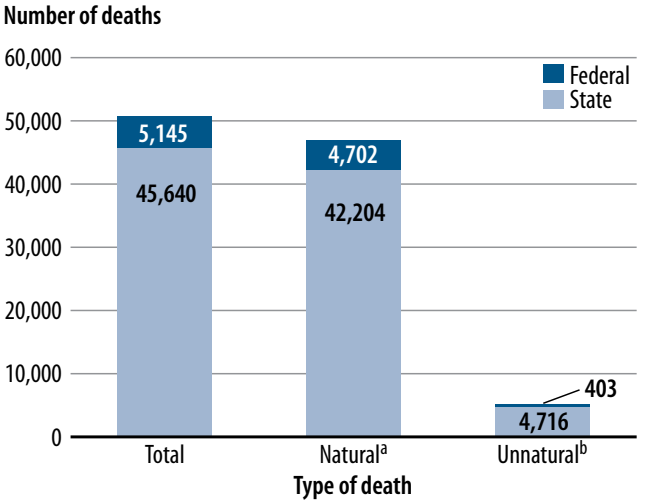
From 2013 (3,479) to 2014 (3,483), the number of deaths in state prisons was relatively stable. Deaths in state prisons declined in both California (down 13%) and Texas (down 7%) from 2013 to 2014. Together, these states accounted for a fifth of the state prison population and a fifth of state prisoner deaths in 2014.

Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) state prisoner deaths were due to illness in 2014, with more than half of those caused by either cancer (30%) or heart disease (26%). From 2013 to 2014, the number of AIDS-related deaths increased 23% and the number of deaths due to a respiratory disease increased 20%. Also up during this period was the number of suicides in state prison. Suicides increased 30% from 2013 to 2014 after a 6% decrease from 2012 to 2013. Suicides accounted for 7% of all state prison deaths in 2014—the largest percentage observed since 2001. Accidental deaths and deaths due to drug or alcohol intoxication were recorded as the cause of death in about 1% of state prison deaths in 2014.

Decedents' characteristics

More females died in state prison in 2014 (154) than in any year since 2008 (163); however, the majority (96%) of state prison inmates who died in 2014 were male. More than half (55%) of decedents were non-Hispanic white, while nearly a third (32%) were non-Hispanic black, and around a tenth (11%) were Hispanic. More than half (59%) of state prisoners who died in 2014 were age 55 or older, and about a quarter (24%) were age 45 to 54.

Number of state and federal prisoner deaths, 2001–2014



[a]Includes deaths due to illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer, liver disease, and AIDS-related deaths.

[b]Includes deaths due to external factors and causes, such as suicide, homicide, and accidental deaths.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Deaths in Custody Reporting Program, 2001–2014.

Long-term trends

There were 50,785 prisoner deaths in state and federal prisons between 2001 and 2014. The majority (45,640) of prisoner deaths occurred in state facilities. The state prisoner mortality rate (256 per 100,000 state prisoners) was 14% higher than the federal prisoner mortality rate (225 per 100,000 federal prisoners) during this period.

About half of states (27) accounted for 90% of all state prisoner deaths (45,640) from 2001 through 2014. Texas (5,804) and California (5,102) accounted for about a quarter of all deaths in state prisons during this 13-year period.

The full report (*Mortality in State Prisons, 2001-2014 - Statistical Tables*, NCJ 250150), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics can be found at www.bjs.gov.