BJS
Bureau of Justice Statistics

Mortality in Local Jails and State Prisons, 2000–2013 - Statistical Tables

Summary | NCJ 248756 | August 2015

For the third consecutive year, the number of inmate deaths in both state prisons and local jails increased. A total of 4,446 inmates died in 2013, an increase of 131 deaths since 2012. This was the highest number of deaths reported to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) Deaths in Custody Reporting Program (DCRP) since 2007. Local jails had an increase of 9 deaths, from 958 deaths in 2012 to 967 in 2013. Deaths in state prisons increased by 122 deaths during the same period—from 3,357 to 3,479.

Characteristics of jail inmates who died

The typical jail inmate who died in 2013 was male (87%), white (54%), age 35 or older (70%), and in custody for fewer than 7 days (40%) in 2013. Nearly 80% of jails reported no deaths, but 25% of all jail deaths occurred in a California or Texas facility.

Causes of death in jails

More than a third (34%) of all local jail deaths in 2013 were the result of suicide. Suicide has been the leading cause of death in jails every year since 2000, and the rate of suicide increased 12% in the past 5 years. The number of deaths caused by drug or alcohol intoxication in local jails also increased 23%, from 57 deaths in 2012 to 70 deaths in 2013. Accidental deaths and homicides were less common in jails, and each accounted for about 3% or less of jail deaths in 2013.

Prisoners who died in custody

In 2013, more than half (57%) of prisoners who died were older than age 55. Since 2001, the number of prisoners age 55 or older who died in custody increased by an average of 8% each year. Almost all of the prisoners who died were male, and more than half were white. Between 2001 and 2013, male prisoners were twice as likely as female prisoners to die of cancer, heart disease, or liver disease while in state prisons.

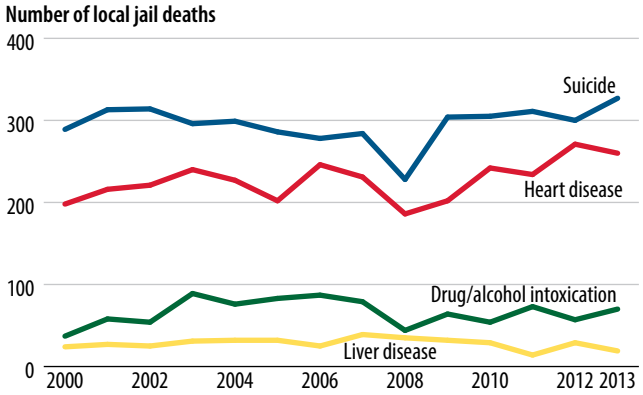
Illness-related deaths in prisons

In 2013, about 90% of deaths in state prisons were due to illness. Combined, cancer (31%) and heart disease (26%) accounted for about half of all illness-related deaths. Deaths from liver disease—the third leading cause of death in state prisons—increased 16%, from 304 deaths in 2012 to 354 deaths in 2013. This was the largest percentage change among illness deaths in prisons in 2013. Additionally, the prisoner mortality rate for drug or alcohol intoxication increased 69% between 2012 and 2013.

Prisoner mortality

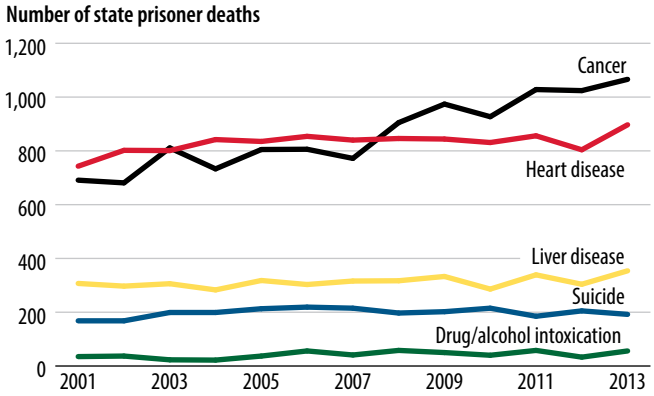
Every state department of corrections reported at least one prisoner death in 2013, and nearly a quarter of those deaths occurred in Texas and California. The prisoner death rate by state varied from 115 deaths per 100,000 prisoners to 628 deaths per 100,000. The median mortality rate for state prisons was 273 deaths per 100,000 prisoners.

Jail inmate deaths, by selected causes, 2000–2013



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Deaths in Custody Reporting Program, 2000–2013.

State prisoner deaths, by selected causes, 2000–2013



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Deaths in Custody Reporting Program, 2000–2013.

The full report (*Mortality in Local Jails and State Prisons, 2000–2013 - Statistical Tables*, NCJ 248756), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics can be found on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.