

Chapter 2

Overview of child deaths in 2006–07

Key messages

- In the 12-month period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007, 57 children and young people died who were known to the Department of Child Safety, either at the time of, or within the three years prior to their death, which is an increase of six deaths on the 2005-06 reporting period.
- The majority (72.0%) of children known to the department who died were aged between birth and four years.
- Children known to the department died at a rate of 66.2 per 100,000 compared with a rate of 44.1 per 100,000 for all children, which is a decrease on the 2005-06 reporting period.
- Diseases and/or morbid conditions accounted for 22 of the 57 deaths (38.5%).
- Twenty-three (40.3%) of the children and young people known to the department died from external causes, with 11 of those being the result of non-accidental trauma (7 fatal assault and 4 suspected suicides).
- The cause of death for 7 children and young people is pending and the cause for one death was 'undetermined'.
- Children and young people known to the department died of external causes and non-accidental trauma at a rate three times higher than for all children (26.7 per 100,000 compared with 8.8 per 100,000).

During the period from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007, the deaths of 444 children occurred¹ in Queensland. Of those, 57 (12.8%) were known to the Department of Child Safety either at the time of, or within the three years prior to, their deaths.

¹ For the purpose of this report, deaths that occurred in the period 1 July 2006 to 30 July 2007 are discussed, whereas the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian's Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people, Queensland, 2006–07* reports on deaths registered with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Cause of death

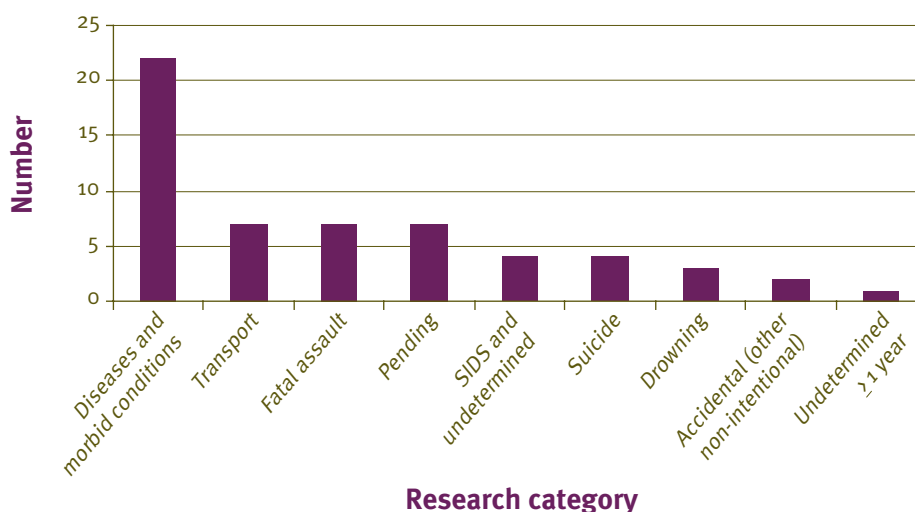
Table 2.1 Cause of death for deaths of all Queensland children that occurred in 2006–07

Cause of death ²	Under 28 days	Between 28 and 364 days	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15–17 years	Total
Diseases and morbid conditions	172	71	26	16	15	18	318
SIDS and undetermined	2	11	0	0	0	0	13
CCYPCG research categories³							
Transport	0	0	5	2	9	23	39
Fatal assault	1	2	3	0	0	4	10
Suicide	0	0	0	0	6	8	14
Drowning	0	0	13	2	1	1	17
Accidental (other non-intentional)	0	3	3	0	0	2	8
Fire	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total research categories	1	5	25	4	16	38	89
Undetermined > 1 year	0	0	2	0	0	1	3
Pending	6	11	1	0	2	1	21
Total	181	98	54	20	33	58	444

Source: Queensland Child Death Register.

Figure 2.1 shows the cause of death for the 57 children and young people known to the department who died in 2006–07.

Figure 2.1 Cause of death of the 57 children known to the department who died during 2006–07



² See Appendix 3 for definitions of the causes of death.

³ The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian has developed 'research categories' to group the causes of death in the Child Death Register to enable more meaningful analysis. In the interests of consistency, the CDCRC has adopted the use of these categories.

Diseases and/or morbid conditions accounted for 22 deaths (38.5%). This category ranges from deaths resulting from congenital abnormalities and perinatal conditions, through to deaths from cancer and infections. Infant deaths due to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and/or undetermined causes accounted for 4 deaths (7.0%).

External causes were the main cause of death of children known to the department, accounting for 23 deaths (40.3%) and included transport incidents (7 deaths), drowning (3 deaths) and accidental (2 deaths). Non-accidental traumas accounted for the remaining 11 external cause deaths; of these, 7 were fatal assault and 4 were suspected suicide.

The cause of death for 7 children and young people was pending at the time of reporting, and in one case the cause of death for a child over the age of 1 year was certified as 'undetermined'.

Rates of death of children known to the department

Rates of death for children in the child protection population who died in 2006-07 are calculated on the number of distinct children known to the department in the 3-year period prior to the 2006-07 financial year. This data was provided by the department and uses an improved methodology from that used in the *Child Death Case Review Committee Annual Report 2005-06*. Updated denominator figures for 2005-06 have been also been provided by the department.

Table 2.2 Distinct children known to the Department of Child Safety

2005-06	2006-07
70,803	86,041

Source: Department of Child Safety, Performance Management Branch, 20 July 2007.

Notes: 1. Denominator data for 2005-06 is based on the number of distinct children known to the department in the three year period prior to the 2005-06 financial year.

2. Denominator data for 2006-07 is based on the number of distinct children known to the department in the three year period prior to the 2006-07 financial year.

The denominator data represent the number of distinct children (aged 0-17 years) who have had any of the following forms of contact with the department in the preceding 3 years:

- child concern report
- notification
- investigation and assessment
- order, and/or
- placement.

Prior to 2006-07, data regarding child concern reports was not available. The inclusion of child concern reports in the 2006-07 denominator data primarily accounts for the large increase between 2005-06 and 2006-07 figures.

Table 2.3 depicts the number and rate of all causes of child deaths by age for children known to the child protection system, in comparison with all children in Queensland.

Children known to the child protection system died at a rate of 66.2 per 100,000, while for all children the rate of death was 44.1 per 100,000. Children known to the child protection system died of external causes and non-accidental trauma at a rate three times higher than that for all children (26.7 per 100,000 compared with 8.8 per 100,000). The rate of death from diseases and morbid conditions was slightly lower for children known to the department (25.6 per 100,000 compared with 31.6 per 100,000).

Table 2.3 Deaths of children known to the department, compared with all children, 2006–07⁴

Cause of death	Under 1 year	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15–17 years	Total	Rates per 100,000 known to child protection system	Rates per 100,000 for all children system
Diseases and morbid conditions	8	8	3	1	2	22	25.6	31.6
SIDS and undetermined	4	0	0	0	0	4	4.6	1.3
CCYPCG research categories								
Transport	1	3	1	1	1	7	8.1	3.9
Fatal assault	3	3	0	0	1	7	8.1	1.0
Suicide	0	0	0	3	1	4	4.6	1.4
Drowning	0	3	0	0	0	3	*	1.7
Accidental (other non-intentional)	1	1	0	0	0	2	*	0.8
Total for research categories	5	10	1	4	3	23	26.7	8.8
Undetermined ≥ 1 year	0	0	0	0	1	1	*	*
Pending	6	0	0	0	1	7	8.1	2.1
Total	23	18	4	5	7	57	66.2	44.1

Source: Queensland Child Death Register.

* Numbers less than 4 are too low to be calculated as a rate. However, these numbers have been included in the totals to provide the most accurate overall rate.

⁴ Caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the table because of the relatively small numbers involved. The numbers also differ slightly from those reported in the Commission's *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people, Queensland, 2005–06* as the CDCRC reports on deaths occurring in a financial year, whereas the Child Death Annual Report 2005–06 analyses deaths registered by the Registry of Births, Death and Marriages each financial year. Denominator population for children known to the Child Protection (CP) system was provided by the Department of Child Safety, 2007.

Table 2.4 shows the comparative rates for the previous reporting period based on the revised denominator data. In 2005–06, children known to the child protection system died at a rate of 73.4 per 100,000, while for all children the rate of death was 43.8 deaths per 100,000. Children known to the child protection system died of external causes and non-accidental trauma at a rate three times greater than that for all children (35.3 per 100,000 compared with 10.5 per 100,000). The rate of death from diseases and morbid conditions was slightly lower for children known to the child protection system (29.7 per 100,000 compared with 30.4 per 100,000).

Table 2.4 Deaths of children known to the department, compared with all children, 2005–06⁵

Cause of death	Under 1 year	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15–17 years	Total	Rates per 100,000 in child protection system ⁶	Rates per 100,000 for all children ⁷
Diseases and morbid conditions	7	5	5	3	1	21	29.7	30.4
SIDS and undetermined	5	0	0	0	0	5	7.1	2.2
CCYPCG research categories								
Transport	0	0	2	4	4	10	14.1	4.6
Fatal assault	2	2	1	0	1	6	8.5	0.8
Suicide	0	0	0	1	3	4	5.6	1.6
Drowning	2	2	0	0	0	4	5.6	2.0
Accidental (other non-intentional)	0	1	0	0	0	1	*	1.6
Total for research categories	4	5	3	5	8	25	35.3	10.5
Undetermined ≥ 1 year	0	0	1	0	0	1	*	0.2
Pending	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.5
Total	16	10	9	8	9	52	73.4	43.8

Source: Queensland Child Death Register.

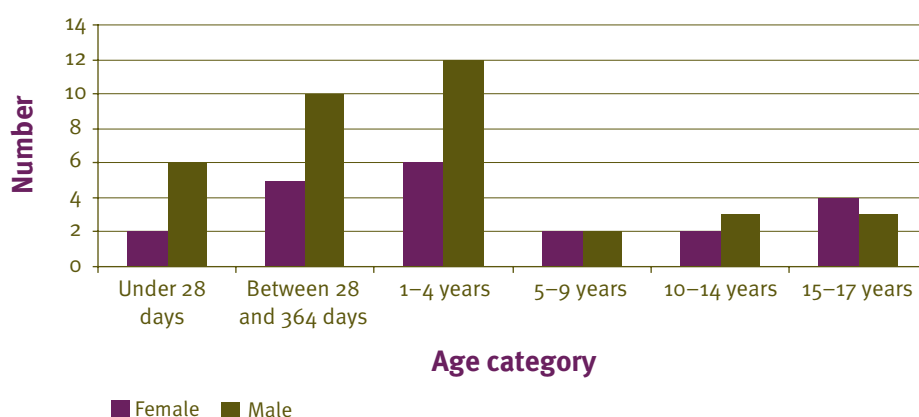
* Numbers less than 4 are too low to be calculated as a rate. However, these numbers have been included in the totals to provide the most accurate overall rate.

- 5 Caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the table because of the relatively small numbers involved. This table updates the data provided in Table 2.1 of the Child Death Case Review Committee Annual Report 2005–06 as the Department of Child Safety has provided revised denominator data for that reporting period.
- 6 Calculated on 52 deaths of children known to the department that occurred in 2005–06. At the time of reporting in 2005–06 the death of one child that had occurred had not yet been recorded in the Child Death Register, so this figure has been revised from 51 to 52.
- 7 Calculated on 441 deaths that occurred in 2005–06. These rates differ from the rates calculated in the 2005–06 Annual Report, which were based on 490 deaths that were registered in 2005–06.

Age and gender

Of the 57 children who died in 2006–07, 72% were aged between birth and 4 years. More males than females died (63.0% and 37% respectively). Figure 2.2 shows the distribution of deaths across the age brackets.

Figure 2.2 Age and gender of children known to the department who died in 2006–07



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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

Sixteen Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children died, accounting for 28.0% of deaths of children known to the department.

Geographical distribution (ARIA+)

Twenty-two of the children who died resided in major cities of Australia and 8 children resided in inner regional areas (38.6% and 14.0% respectively).

Table 2.5 Areas where children who died in 2006–07 resided

Area	Number of children
Major Cities of Australia	22
Inner Regional Australia	8
Outer Regional Australia	17
Remote Australia	2
Very Remote Australia	3
Unknown ⁸	5

⁸ Source: Queensland Child Death Register. In some circumstances, region was ‘unknown’ at the time of publication, pending update of the register (to enable geocoding by the Office of Economic and Statistical Research).