

# 1 Overview of child deaths in 2007–08

## Key messages

- The number and rate of death for children known to the child protection system increased slightly from the previous reporting period.
- Children known to the child protection system were over-represented in all external causes of death.<sup>5</sup>
- The rate of death for children known to the child protection system increased from the previous reporting period for each of the external causes of death, with the exception of drowning.
- Deaths due to non-accidental trauma (suspected suicide and fatal assault) saw increases from the previous reporting period.
- The CDCRC supports further study of the characteristics of children who lose their lives due to fatal assault, to better understand the complex risk factors and socio-demographic variables which are features of this cohort.

During the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008, the deaths of 457 children occurred<sup>6</sup> in Queensland. Of those, 63 were known to the Department of Child Safety either at the time of, or within the three years prior to, their deaths.<sup>7</sup>

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5 The Department of Child Safety noted that, by the tertiary nature of its intervention, this is to be expected.

6 For the purpose of this report, deaths that **occurred** in the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 are discussed, whereas the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian's *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people, Queensland, 2007–08* reports on deaths **registered** – that is, with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

7 The exact date of death of one child was unknown, but was determined to have occurred between 13 October 2007 (the date on which the child was last reported to have been seen alive) and 31 October 2007 (the date on which the child was found deceased).

## Cause of death

Table 1.1 shows the cause of death for all deaths of Queensland children that occurred in 2007–08.

**Table 1.1** Cause of death for all deaths of Queensland children that occurred in 2007–08

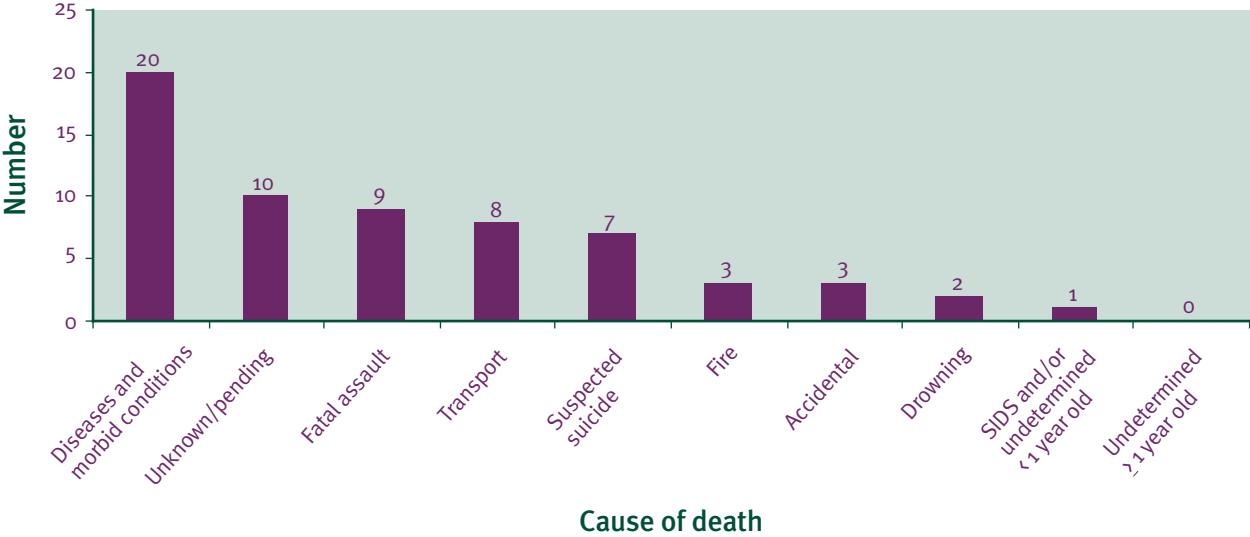
Portfolio category <sup>8</sup>	Under 28 days	Between 28 and 364 days	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15–17 years	Total
Diseases and morbid conditions	164	48	27	22	15	15	291
SIDS and undetermined	4	13	0	0	0	0	17
<b>CCYPCG research categories</b>							
Transport	0	0	8	8	8	26	50
Fatal assault	2	3	3	1	2	0	11
Suicide	0	0	0	0	0	22	22
Drowning	0	0	6	5	0	3	14
Accidental (other non-intentional)	0	3	3	0	2	2	10
Fire	0	0	3	2	0	0	5
<b>Total research categories</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Undetermined &gt; 1 year</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Pending</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>457</b>

Source: Queensland Child Death Register.

<sup>8</sup> 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 interest of consistency, the CDCRC has adopted the use of these categories.

Figure 1.1 shows the cause of death for the 63 children and young people known to the department who died in 2007–08.

**Figure 1.1** Cause of death of the 63 children known to the department who died during 2007–08<sup>9</sup>



Diseases and morbid conditions were the main cause of death of children known to the department, accounting for 20 deaths (32%). This category ranges from deaths resulting from congenital abnormalities and perinatal conditions, through to cancer and infections. Infant deaths due to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and/or undetermined causes accounted for 1 death (2%).

External causes accounted for 51% (32 deaths) of children known to the department. Half of these (16 deaths) were due to accidental causes, comprising transport incidents (8 deaths), drowning (2 deaths), fire (3 deaths) and other non-intentional accidents (3 deaths). The other 16 deaths (50%) were due to non-accidental traumas, comprising 9 fatal assaults and 7 suspected suicides.

The cause of death for 10 children and young people was pending at the time of reporting.

Given that 9 deaths were due to fatal assault, the CDCRC supports ongoing research into the complex risk profile of children who die as a result of fatal assault, with a view to identifying service options and effective models of intervention to aid prevention.<sup>10</sup>

### Rates of death of children known to the department

Table 1.2 depicts the number and rate of all causes of child deaths in 2007–08 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 69.2 per 100,000. The rate for all children was 45.4 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 (35.2 per 100,000,

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 3 for definitions of the causes of death.

<sup>10</sup> The Commission is currently undertaking a research project into fatal assault and neglect.

compared with 11.2 per 100,000). The rate of death from diseases and morbid conditions was lower for children known to the department (22.0 per 100,000, compared with 28.9 per 100,000).

**Table 1.2** Deaths of children known to the department, compared with deaths of all children, 2007–08<sup>11</sup>

Portfolio category	Under 1 year	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15–17 years	Total	Rates per 100,000 known to Child Protection (CP) system, 2007–08	Rates per 100,000 for all children, 2007–08	Rates per 100,000 known to CP system, 2006–07
<b>Diseases and morbid conditions</b>	7	4	8	0	1	20	22	28.9	25.6
<b>SIDS and undetermined</b>	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.1	1.7	4.6
<b>CCYPCG research categories</b>									
Transport	0	3	2	1	2	8	8.8	5.0	8.1
Fatal assault	4	3	0	2	0	9	9.9	1.1	8.1
Suicide	0	0	0	0	7	7	7.7	2.2	4.6
Drowning	0	0	2	0	0	2	2.2	1.4	*
Accidental (other non-intentional)	1	1	0	1	0	3	3.3	1.0	*
Fire	0	1	2	0	0	3	3.3	0.5	0
<b>Total for research categories</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>26.7</b>
<b>Undetermined ≥ 1 year</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>Pending</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>69.2</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>66.2</b>

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.

<sup>11</sup> 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 CCYPCG's *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people, Queensland, 2006–07* as the CDCRC reports on deaths **occurring** in a financial year, whereas the *Child Death Annual Report 2006–07* analyses deaths **registered** by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages each financial year. Denominator population for children known to the CP system was provided by the Department of Child Safety, 2007.

Table 1.3 shows the comparative rates for the previous reporting period. In 2006–07 children known to the child protection system died at a rate of 66.2 per 100,000, while the rate of death for all children 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 lower for children known to the child protection system (22.0 per 100,000, compared with 31.6 per 100,000).

**Table 1.3** Deaths of children known to the department, compared with deaths of all children, 2006–07<sup>12</sup>

Portfolio category	Under 1 year	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15–17 years	Total	Rates per 100,000 known to CP system 2006–07	Rates per 100,000 for all children 2006–07
<b>Diseases and morbid conditions</b>	8	8	3	1	2	22	25.6	31.6
<b>SIDS and undetermined</b>	4	0	0	0	0	4	4.6	1.3
<b>CCYPCG research categories</b>								
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
<b>Total for research categories</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>8.8</b>
<b>Undetermined ≥ 1 year</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>Pending</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>66.2</b>	<b>44.1</b>

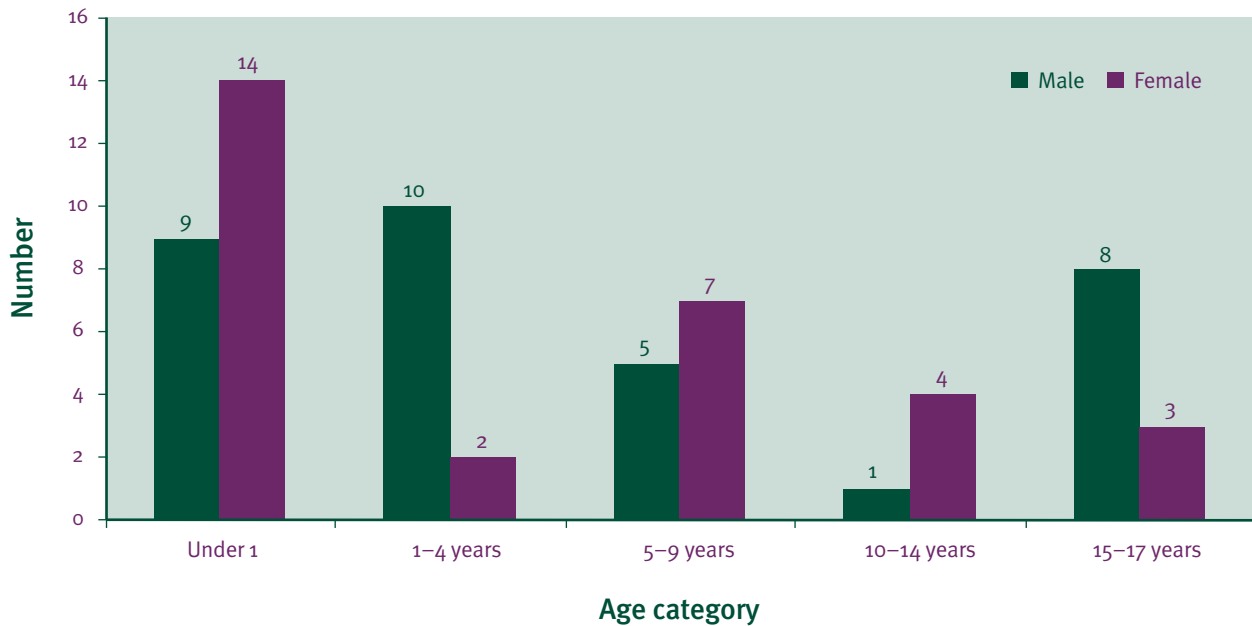
\* Numbers less than 4 are too low to be calculated as a rate. However, these numbers have been included in the totals to provide the most accurate overall rate.

12 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 2006–07* as the department has provided revised denominator data for that reporting period.

## Age and gender

Of the 63 children who died in 2007–08, 56% were aged between birth and 4 years. More males than females died (55% and 45% respectively). Figure 1.2 shows the distribution of deaths across the age brackets.

**Figure 1.2** Age and gender of children known to the department who died in 2007–08



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

Nineteen Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children died in 2007–08, accounting for 30% of deaths of children known to the department. This percentage is comparable to that in the previous reporting period (in which 28% of reviewable deaths were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children or young people).

## Geographical distribution<sup>13</sup>

Twenty-seven (43%) of the children who died resided in major cities of Australia and 14 children resided in inner regional areas of Australia (22%), while 13 children resided in outer regional areas of Australia (21%).

Table 1.4 shows the geographical area where children who died in 2007–08 resided.

**Table 1.4** Areas where children who died in 2007–08 resided

Area	Number of children
Major Cities of Australia	27
Inner Regional Australia	14
Outer Regional Australia	13
Remote Australia	0
Very Remote Australia	4
Unknown <sup>14</sup>	5

<sup>13</sup> Based on Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA).

<sup>14</sup> 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).