

Understanding hospitalisations and ambulance data in the National Suicide and Self-harm Monitoring System

The National Suicide and Self-harm Monitoring System (the System) includes data on hospitalisations for intentional self-harm and ambulance attendances for suicidal behaviours. These data provide comprehensive information on suicide and self-harm behaviours in Australia.

Self-harm and suicide are distinct and separate acts, although some people who self-harm are at an increased risk of suicide. Therefore, monitoring intentional self-harm is important to identify appropriate opportunities and targeted suicide prevention approaches.

What data are available?

Ambulance attendance, suicidal thoughts, and suicidal and self-harm behaviours. This section of the System provides users with information on suicidal and self-harm behaviours.

Data on suicidal behaviours are provided by the National Ambulance Surveillance System (NASS). For participating states, NASS collates and codes ambulance attendances for non-fatal self-harm behaviours with coding for suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts), suicide attempt, death by suicide or intentional self-injury (without suicidal intent). These data are reported in the System. Currently 5 of Australia's eight jurisdictions provide data to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) for recording in the System.

The number of attendances related to suicide is under-represented as ambulances do not attend all attempts, injuries, or deaths. Furthermore, when they do attend there may be insufficient information to determine suicidal intent at the scene.

Rates of death by suicide have not been calculated because of small numbers, which may affect the reliability of the estimates.

Intentional self-harm hospitalisations

This section provides users with information about hospital admissions following a suicide attempt or self-harm.

Intentional self-harm (deliberately injuring or hurting oneself, with or without the intention of dying) data are available in the System and sourced from the National Hospital Morbidity Database (NHMD) which provides information on patients who have been admitted to hospital after a suicide attempt and/or intentional self-harm. When data are presented by state and territory jurisdiction, this is based on a person's usual residence and not where they were admitted.

Hospitalisation data do not include presentations to hospital emergency departments relating to suicide attempts or intentional self-harm without suicidal thoughts. This is due to limitations in data collection from general practitioners, mental health services or the current national emergency department data collection system.

Data considerations

Intentional self-harm hospitalisations data include information from all states and territories, and can be filtered for age, gender, and numbers or rates. Data related to method of self-harm are also available to inform current trends and whether policy is needed to restrict access to certain means. Please always consider [Mindframe guidelines](#) when communicating about these statistics.



Limitations of data available

While ambulance and hospitalisations data provide additional information about the extent of suicidal behaviours in Australia, they do not provide the complete picture. The full extent of non-fatal suicidal and self-harming behaviours in the community are not known. For example, these data do not capture:

- Those who do not receive medical treatment for non-fatal suicidal and self-harming behaviours, or suicidal thoughts
- People who present to emergency departments with suicidal thoughts following an attempt or self-harm related injuries but are not admitted to hospital
- Those who contact other emergency services, such as the police
- Those who seek support from non-clinical services such as safe havens
- Those who seek support from a general practitioner or other mental health professionals such as a psychologist.

Where can I find out more information?



For more detailed information and to explore the ambulance and hospitalisations data in the National Suicide and Self-harm Monitoring System, visit:

aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/ambulance-attendances

aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/intentional-self-harm-hospitalisations