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## Suicide in the Northern Territory, 1981–2002

**Mary-Anne L Measey, Shu Qin Li, Robert Parker and Zhiqiang Wang**

### Abstract

#### Objective:

To examine trends in suicide in the Northern Territory between 1981 and 2002, and demographic and other characteristics of people completing suicide in the Top End region in 2000–2002.

#### Design:

Retrospective descriptive analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics death registration data and data from the NT Coroner's Office.

#### Setting and participants:

All residents of the NT who completed suicide between 1981 and 2002.

#### Main outcome measures:

Changes in the age-adjusted and age- and sex-specific rates of suicide in Indigenous and non-Indigenous NT residents over time; prior diagnosis of mental illness and use of alcohol or other drugs by those completing suicide.

#### Results:

The age-adjusted suicide rate in the NT increased significantly between 1981 and 2002 ( $P < 0.001$ ). Over this period, the rates among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous male populations increased by 800% ( $P < 0.05$ ) and 30% ( $P > 0.05$ ), respectively. Indigenous males aged under 45 years and non-Indigenous males aged 65 years and over were most at risk. In the Top End, a history of diagnosed mental illness was present in 49% of suicide cases, and misuse of alcohol or other drugs around the time of death was associated with 72% of suicide cases.

#### Conclusion:

Our study highlights the rising rate of suicide in the NT and suggests that suicide prevention initiatives need to specifically target Indigenous and non-Indigenous males in the age groups most at risk.