

# Mental health of children and young people in Australia

Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and can contribute to their community. Poor mental health can impact on the potential of young people to live fulfilling and productive lives.<sup>(1)</sup>

## Mental health

Half of all the mental health conditions we experience at some point in our lives will have started by age 14.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Over 75%**  
of mental health problems occur before the age of 25.<sup>(1)</sup>

**1 in 7 children**  
and young people aged 4 - 17 years experience a mental health condition in any given year.<sup>(1)</sup>

**19.9%**  
of all young people aged 11 - 17 years experience high or very high levels of psychological distress.<sup>(1)</sup>

## Self-harm

**1 in 10**  
young people aged 12 - 17 years have engaged in self-harm.<sup>(2)</sup>

**1 in 13**  
will seriously consider a suicide attempt, and one in 40 will attempt suicide.<sup>(2)</sup>

In 2017-18, there were **1,100** hospitalisations for intentional self-harm for children aged 10 - 14 — a rate of 76 per 100,000 children. The rate for girls was 7 times as high as that for boys.<sup>(1)</sup>

**More than 40** NSW children and teenagers rushed to hospital for self-harm every day. This is **31%** rise on the same time in 2020 and up 47% compared with 2019.<sup>(6)</sup>

(1) AIHW – Australia's Youth – Mental illness 2021

(2) AIHW Suicide and Self harm monitoring 2021

(3) Australian Bureau of Statistics - Causes of Death 2019

(4) AIHW - The health impact of suicide and self-inflicted injuries in Australia, 2019

(5) AIHW – COVID-19 and the impact on young people 2021

(6) NSW Ombudsman Biannual Report 2021

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## Suicide

Suicide is the leading cause of death for young Australians aged 15-24.<sup>(2)</sup>

In 2019, suicide accounted for two in five deaths among people aged 15-17 years. This represents an increase of **25%** for both age groups over the last decade.<sup>(2)</sup>

Suicide remains the leading cause of death of children between 5 - 17 years, with **96 deaths** occurring in this age group.

For every youth suicide, there are  
**100 to 200**  
more attempts.<sup>(2)</sup>

In 2019, based on ABS Causes of Death data:

**461**

deaths due to suicide among young people aged 15-24.

In children aged 14 and below deaths by suicide represented 12% of all deaths in this age group.<sup>(3)</sup>

**31%**

of all deaths in young people aged 15-17 and 39% of all deaths in those aged 18-24—up from 25% of all deaths in 2010 — were due to suicide.

**99**

deaths by suicide occurred among children and adolescents (aged 5-17) with the majority occurring in those aged 15-17 (74%).

## Impact of child abuse

In 2019, child abuse and neglect during childhood was the leading risk factor contributing to the burden of suicide and self-inflicted injuries in both males and females.



Child abuse was associated with

**33%**

of total suicide burden in females and

**24%**

in males aged 5 and over.<sup>(4)</sup>

## Impact of COVID-19

1 in 4 young people reported experiencing psychological distress in 2020 (an increase from 1 in 7 in 2017). This rise is likely to have some association with the spread of COVID-19, in view of the larger negative impacts of COVID-19 for that group, such as job losses and financial stress.<sup>(5)</sup>

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