

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Budget Estimates 2012

Question: BET 1333-1334

Topic: Suicide Prevention

Hansard Page: Written

Senator WRIGHT asked:

1333. Is it true that the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other public agencies which collect health data records and track suicide occurrences and attempted suicides do not record or track such information in relation to people under 15 years of age?
1334. Why is this the case, and has consideration been given to changing this circumstance so that such information can be recorded and tracked in relation to those under 15 years of age?

Answer:

The ABS does record suicide deaths for people under 15 years of age, and these deaths are included in the total numbers of suicides. However, they are not published separately in tables which disaggregate suicide deaths by age groups. At unit record level, age at death and underlying cause are recorded for all deaths.

The number of child suicides registered each year is low in relative terms. As such, confidentiality is an issue in releasing these data. Suicide amongst children is an extremely sensitive issue for families, and there is continuing discussion around the capacity for young people to be fully aware of the outcomes of their actions. There is also a concern that difficulties faced by coroners in determining suicidal intent amongst children may lead to the number of deaths being underestimated. For these reasons the ABS does not currently include detailed information about suicides for people under 15 years of age in the commentary included in the relevant ABS publication or in the accompanying detailed tables.

The ABS has recently been asked to review the decision not to publish these data. A discussion paper on this issue will be compiled by the ABS in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and expert advice will be sought from the National Committee for Standardised Reporting on Suicide.