

Road Safety and Indigenous Australians: a statistical summary

A report prepared by the Road Safety Branch, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, for the 4th Indigenous Road Safety Forum in Cairns, 29–31 October 2008

This report provides statistical information about transport-related deaths and serious injuries among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. Identification of Indigenous status is most reliable in these four jurisdictions, which are inhabited by 60 per cent of the Australia's Indigenous population.

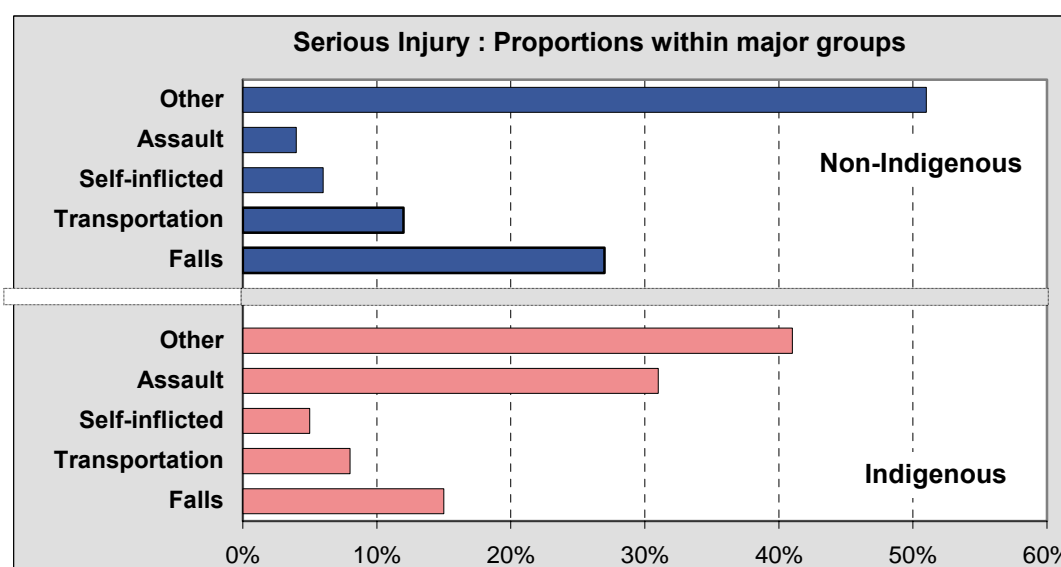
The statistics in this report are derived from two main data sources:

- The Fatal Road Crash Database maintained by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government: the statistics presented here are for the five-year period 2000 to 2004.
- The National Hospital Morbidity Database maintained by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW): the statistics presented here are for the five-year period 2001–2002 to 2005–2006¹.

1. Overview

Figures 1 and 2 below show the proportions of serious injuries and deaths attributed to external² causes, by major causal categories. The 'other' categories in these charts mainly include complications from medical care and unclassified unintentional injury.

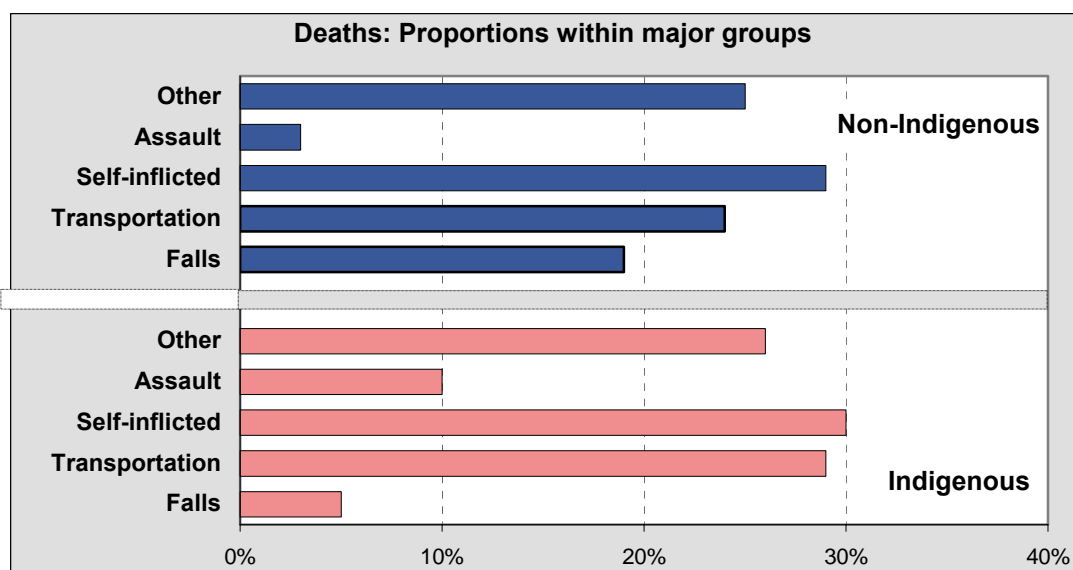
Figure 1



¹ Statistics are taken from the 2008 AIHW report: *Injury of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to transport, 2001–02 to 2005–06*

² An 'external' cause of death or serious injury relates to cases where the underlying cause is determined to be one of a group of causes external to the body (for example suicide, transport accidents, falls, poisoning etc). See ABS 3303.0.

Figure 2



As shown in these charts, transportation accidents account for 20–30 per cent of externally caused deaths, and around 10 per cent of serious injuries. Suicide is the leading cause of all externally caused deaths.

Approximately 95 per cent of the deaths and serious injuries from transportation accidents result from *land* transport accidents; and of these, 90 per cent involve road crashes.

Table 1 and 2 analyse the road crash component in more detail, with counts and population based rates provided for each of the major road user categories.

Table 1. Deaths from road crashes by category of road user: counts and population rates*

	Non-Indigenous		Indigenous	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
Car occupant	1,917	5.5	177	15.1
Motorcyclist	449	1.3	7	0.5
Cyclist	72	0.2	5	0.2
Pedestrian	323	0.9	99	9.2
Total	2,761	7.9	288	25.0

* Deaths per 100,000 population

Table 2. Serious injuries from road crashes by category of road user: counts and population rates*

	Non-Indigenous		Indigenous	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
Car occupant	24,918	71.5	1,934	147.0
Motorcyclist	11,438	32.8	223	14.5
Cyclist	6,656	19.1	308	15.9
Pedestrian	3,409	9.8	557	45.5
Total	46,421	133.2	3,022	222.9

* Serious injury cases per 100,000 population

These statistics show that the population rate of road deaths among Indigenous people is three times higher than the corresponding rate among non-Indigenous people.

For serious injuries, the Indigenous rate is about 1.7 times higher than the non-Indigenous rate.

Within specific road user categories:

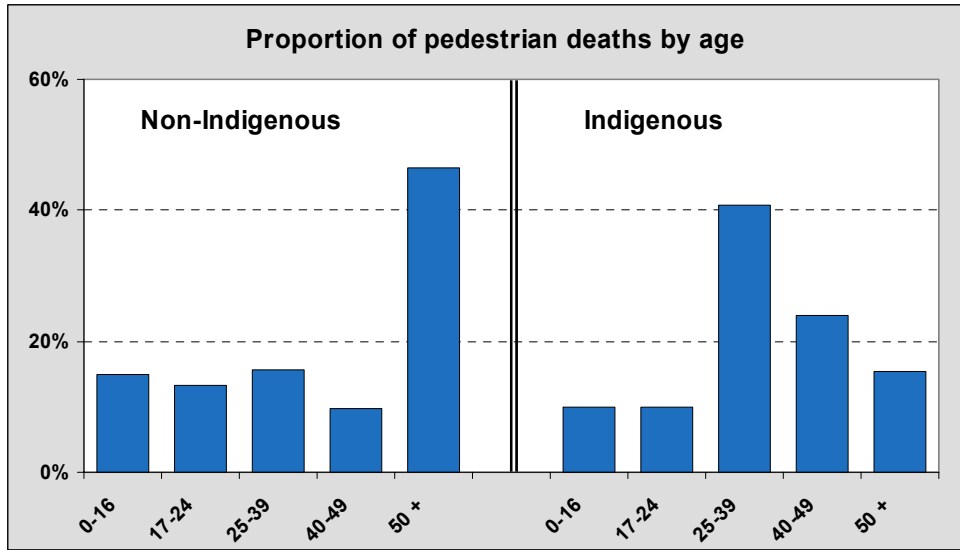
- Car occupants make up a majority of deaths and serious injuries among both population groups.
- In the Indigenous population, pedestrians account for a substantial proportion of deaths (34 per cent) and serious injuries (18 per cent).
- Pedestrian casualty rates in the Indigenous population are much higher than in the non-Indigenous population: 10 times higher for deaths and nearly five times higher for serious injuries.
- Motorcycle casualties, on the other hand, are more common among non-Indigenous people: with a population rate about 2½ times greater than for Indigenous people.

2. Road deaths among pedestrians

As indicated above, the incidence of pedestrian deaths among Indigenous Australians is particularly high compared with the non-Indigenous rate. The following charts provide additional information about fatally injured pedestrians and the circumstances of their deaths.

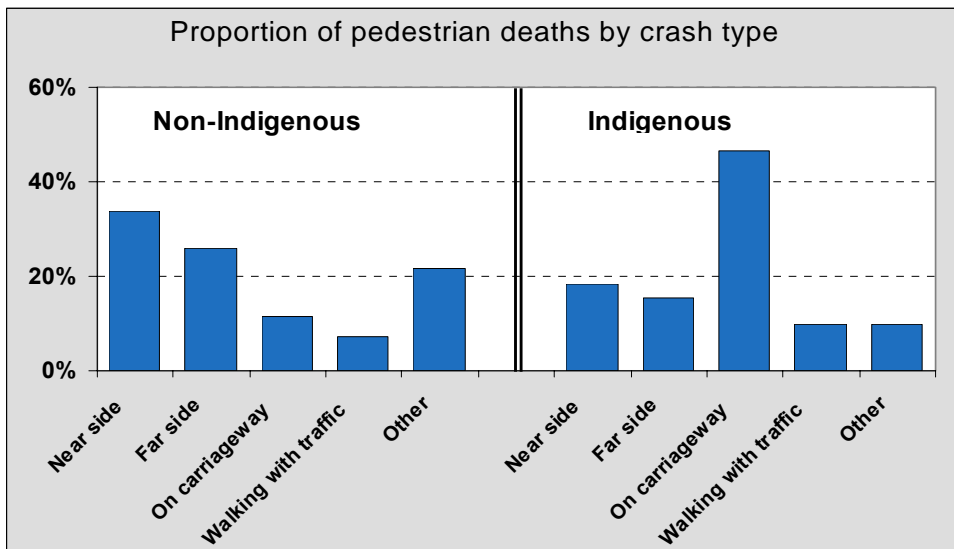
Figure 3 shows the age distributions of killed pedestrians among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In summary, the chart shows that Indigenous deaths peak within a much younger age group (25-39 years) than non-Indigenous deaths, which clearly peak in the older years (50+).

Figure 3



The distribution of crash types involving a pedestrian fatality varies considerably between the two population groups. The death of an Indigenous person is more likely to involve the person standing, lying or playing on the carriageway (termed *on carriageway* in Figure 4 below).

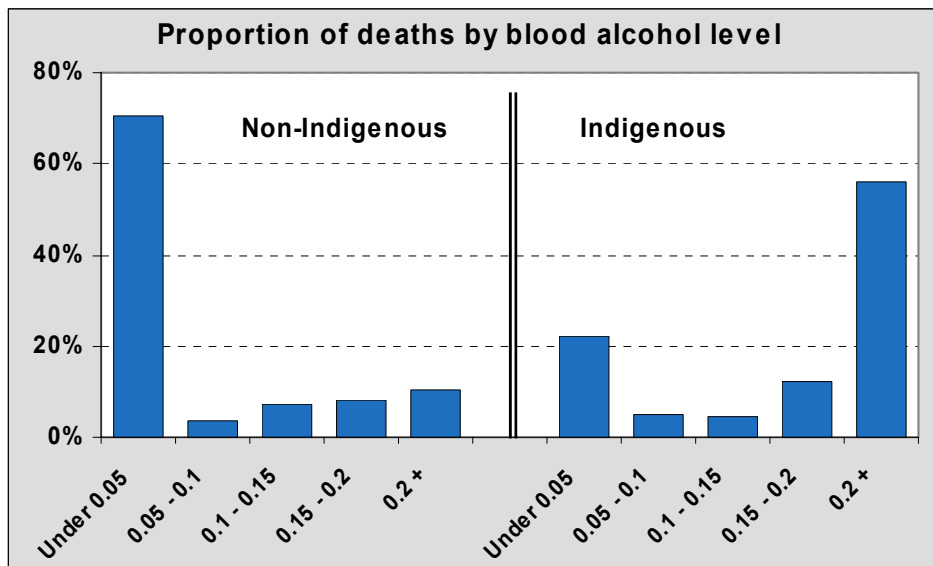
Figure 4



3. Alcohol impairment

The risk of death or serious injury increases dramatically when a road user is intoxicated with alcohol. The following Figure shows the levels of blood alcohol concentration (BAC) among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people killed in road crashes. The vast majority of killed Indigenous road users have elevated BAC levels (above the legal driving limit) and almost 60 per cent could be classified as heavily intoxicated (with a BAC equal to or greater than 0.2 gm/100 mL).

Figure 5

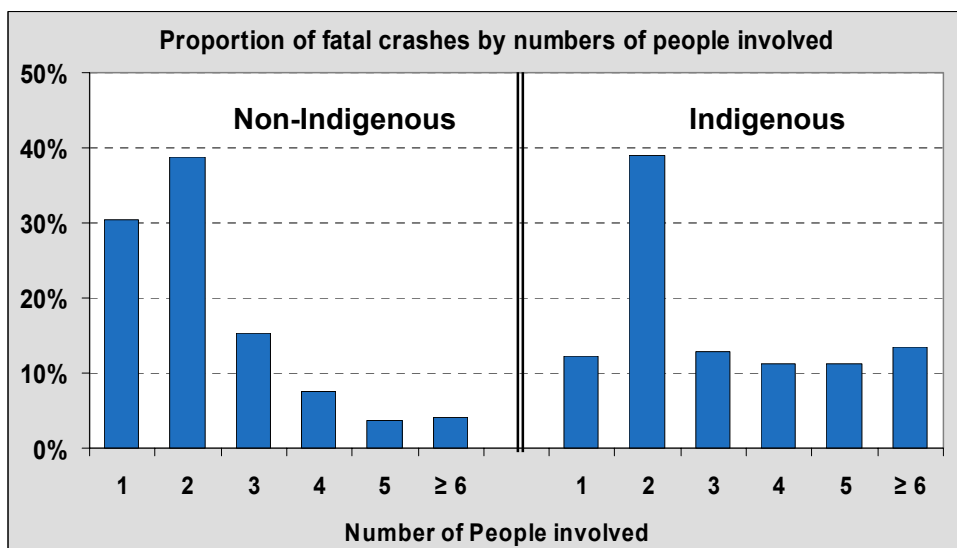


Note: analysis excludes cases where BAC was unknown.

4. Numbers of involved persons

Figure 6 shows the distribution of fatal crashes according to the number of people involved in the crash. This includes all people, killed or not, though the majority of people involved are vehicle occupants. Crashes resulting in the death of an Indigenous person tend to involve more people than crashes resulting in a non-Indigenous death.

Figure 6



5. Restraint use

There appear to be substantial differences in seatbelt usage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous vehicle occupants. The statistics presented in Table 3 show that two-thirds of fatally injured Indigenous occupants are not wearing a seatbelt, compared with one third of non-Indigenous occupants.

Table 3. Seatbelt use for killed occupants

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Wearing	14 %	67 %
Not wearing	86 %	33 %

Note: analysis excludes cases where seatbelt usage was unknown.