



Mortality in the Northern Territory 1981-2004

Introduction

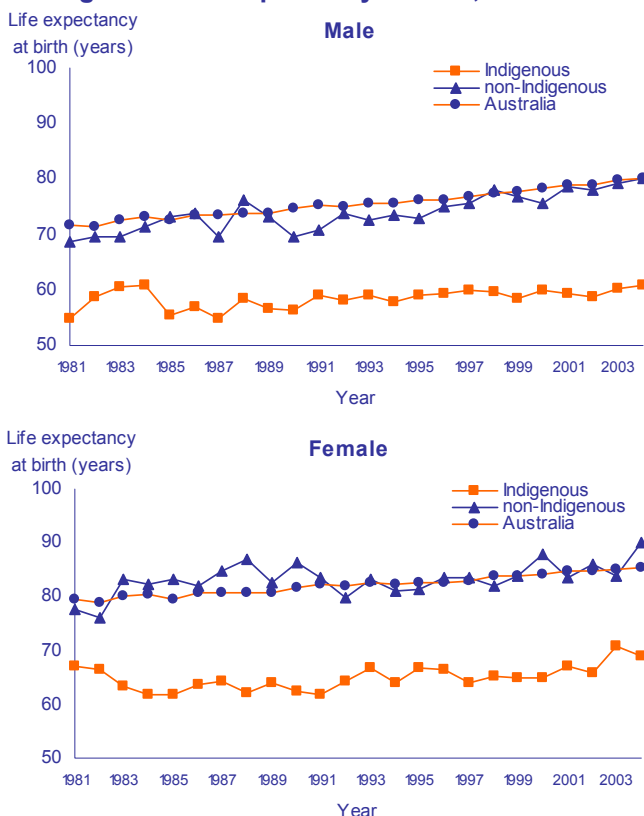
Information on mortality is a key measure of the health of populations. This Fact Sheet updates selected mortality indicators for the Northern Territory by adding data from 2004 to previously published information.^{1,2}

The analysis uses a compilation of annual Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) death datasets, and includes all deaths in Australia of NT residents, by year of death.³ Population estimates are based on ABS data from the 1996 and 2001 censuses.⁴

What is the life expectancy for Territorians ?

Life expectancy at birth is calculated from the age-specific death rates in a population at a specified time. Figure 1 highlights long-term trends in life expectancy by calendar year. Five-year aggregated data is presented in Table 1, and is a more stable estimate of life expectancy.

Figure 1: Life expectancy at birth, 1981-2004



- The most significant recent change in life expectancy was the improvement for NT Indigenous females. Life expectancy increased from 65.0 years to 68.2 years between 1996-2000 and the four-year period of 2001-2004. The recent result was also higher than the previously reported estimate of 67.9 years for the three years from 2001 to 2003.²
- There was little change in life expectancy for NT Indigenous males, which was 59.7 years for 2001-2004.
- For the NT non-Indigenous population there was a substantial improvement for males, from 76.1 to 79.0 years for 1996-2000 and 2001-2004 respectively. There was also an increase for females, up from 84.0 to 85.5 years between the same two periods. The life expectancy for the NT non-Indigenous population is similar to the general Australian population.

Table 1: Life expectancy at birth by five-year periods, 1981-2004

Years	NT Indigenous	NT non-Indigenous	Australia
	Male		
1981-1985	57.9	70.4	72.3
1986-1990	56.2	71.8	73.8
1991-1995	58.6	72.7	75.6
1996-2000	59.4	76.1	77.3
2001-2004	59.7	79.0	79.5
Female			
1981-1985	63.5	80.2	79.7
1986-1990	63.2	84.4	80.9
1991-1995	64.4	81.8	82.3
1996-2000	65.0	84.0	83.5
2001-2004	68.2	85.5	85.1

What are the main causes of death for Territorians?

- During 2001-2004, cardiovascular disease remained the leading cause of death for both NT Indigenous males and females.
- Injury was previously reported as the leading cause of death for NT non-Indigenous males.¹ During 2001-2004, this was replaced by cancer, with cardiovascular disease a close second. Injury-related deaths fell to third position.
- Cancer was previously reported as the leading cause of death for NT non-Indigenous females.¹ During the period 2001-2004 cardiovascular disease deaths were marginally more frequent than cancer deaths.



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How do we close the gap?

A recent study has highlighted the contributions of different age groups to the life expectancy gap between NT Indigenous and the general Australian population.⁵ The results are presented in Table 2. For the period of 2000-2004 there was 17.7 years difference between life expectancy for NT Indigenous males and all Australian males. Less than one year of this gap was a result of infant mortality while by contrast more than three years of the gap was contributed by mortality differentials in each of the ten-year age groups between 35 and 64. The pattern is similar for females.

The results highlight the potential for significant gains through improvement in outcomes from preventable chronic diseases, which are the dominant cause of mortality for these age groups.

Table 2: Age-specific contributions to life expectancy increase if NT Indigenous mortality, 2000-2004, declined to the level of total Australian mortality, 2000-2004.⁵

Age group	Males	Females	Total
0	0.9	0.8	0.9
1-14	0.3	0.5	0.4
15-24	1.5	0.7	1.1
25-34	2.6	1.3	2.0
35-44	3.8	2.9	3.4
45-54	3.3	2.7	3.1
55-64	3.2	3.3	3.3
65+	2.2	3.1	2.6
Total increase	17.7	15.2	16.6

Has infant mortality changed in the Territory?

- The NT Indigenous infant mortality rate halved between 1986 and 2004, from 32.0 in 1986-1990 to 16.3 in the four-year period 2001-2004 (Figure 2 and Table 3).
- Improvements have been made in both NT Indigenous neonatal mortality rates, falling from 18.1 in 1986-1990 to 9.5 in 2001-2004, and post-neonatal mortality reducing from 14.0 to 6.8 between the same periods.
- The neonatal mortality rate is a general indicator of the quality of pregnancy related services, while post-neonatal mortality rates are substantially associated with the living conditions of infants.
- The NT non-Indigenous infant mortality rate remains marginally above the national rates, and for the period 2001-2004 was 5.9 compared with the national rate of 4.9.

Figure 2: Infant mortality, 1986-2004

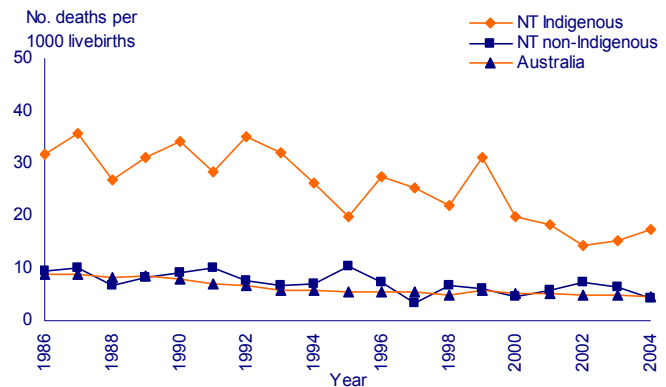


Table 3: Infant, neonatal and post-neonatal mortality, 1986-2004

	NT Indigenous	NT non-Indigenous	Australia
Infant mortality			
1986-1990	32.0	8.7	8.4
1991-1995	28.3	8.4	6.2
1996-2000	25.0	5.6	5.4
2001-2004	16.3	5.9	4.9
Neonatal mortality			
1986-1990	18.1	5.7	5.1
1991-1995	16.0	6.3	4.0
1996-2000	15.1	4.1	3.6
2001-2004	9.5	3.8	3.4
Post neonatal mortality			
1986-1990	14.0	3.0	3.4
1991-1995	12.3	2.1	2.2
1996-2000	9.9	1.4	1.8
2001-2004	6.8	2.1	1.5

Note: death rates are expressed as number of deaths per 1000 livebirths.

References

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3. Australian Bureau of Statistics death registration data 1981-2004.
4. NT resident population estimated by age, sex, Indigenous status (2004, unpublished), NT Government: <http://internal.health.nt.gov.au/healthplan/epi/epi.htm>
5. Wilson T, Condon JR, Barnes T, Northern Territory Indigenous life expectancy improvements, 1967-2004. *Aust N Z J Public Health*; 31(2): 184-8. (Reproduced with permission of the editors).

Information compiled by:
Emily Fearnley and Shu Qin Li

Enquiries to:
Director, Health Gains Planning
Department of Health and Community Services
PO Box 40596, Casuarina NT 0811



Health Gains Planning

Casuarina NT 0811
Email: nthealth.gains@nt.gov.au

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