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# Youth detention population in Australia

2015

## Summary

This bulletin examines the numbers and rates of young people aged 10 and over who were in youth detention in Australia due to their involvement or alleged involvement in crime. It focuses on trends over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2011 to the June quarter 2015.

## Fewer than 900 young people in detention on an average night

There were 885 young people in youth detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015. Just over half (55%) were unsentenced—that is, they were awaiting the outcome of their court matter or sentencing—and the remainder were serving a sentence.

Most young people (81%) in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 were aged 10–17. This equates to 3.2 young people aged 10–17 per 10,000 in the Australian population, or about 1 in every 3,150 young people. The other detainees were aged 18 or older.

## Numbers and rates in detention have decreased

The number of young people in detention on an average night decreased from a high of 1,027 in the June quarter 2011 to 885 in the June quarter 2015.

The rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night decreased from 3.6 per 10,000 to 3.2 per 10,000 over the 4-year period.

Over the most recent year, numbers and rates in detention remained relatively stable. There were between 848 and 922 young people (of all ages) in detention on an average night each quarter. Among those aged 10–17, the rate ranged between 2.9 and 3.3 per 10,000.

## Sentenced detention rate has decreased

The decrease in the rate of young people in detention on an average night was mainly due to a decrease in the rate of young people in sentenced detention. While the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention remained relatively stable (ranging between 1.7 and 2.2 per 10,000 each quarter), the rate in sentenced detention decreased from 1.5 per 10,000 in the June quarter 2011 to 1.2 per 10,000 in the most recent quarter. The rate was highest in the September quarter 2011 (1.6 per 10,000).

## Just over half of those in detention are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Just over half (54%) of all young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Over the 4-year period, the level of over-representation of Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in detention increased from 19 to 26 times the rate of non-Indigenous young people. This was due to a decrease in the rate of non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in detention, while the Indigenous rate showed no clear trend.

## Trends vary between the states and territories

There were different trends in the youth detention population between the states and territories. Over the 4-year period, the rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention increased in Queensland and the Northern Territory, showed no clear trend in Victoria, and decreased in the remaining states and territories.

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## 1 Introduction

This bulletin is part of an annual series that looks at recent trends in the numbers and rates of young people in secure detention facilities in Australia due to their involvement or alleged involvement in crime.

This bulletin and accompanying supplementary tables (those with a prefix 'S') are available from [www.aihw.gov.au/publications/youth-justice/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/youth-justice/).

More information about the youth justice system is available from [www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/).

### Youth detention in Australia

In Australia, young people who are charged with or proven guilty of criminal offences may be supervised by state and territory youth justice agencies, either in the community or in detention.

Youth justice is the responsibility of state and territory governments. Variations in the numbers and rates of young people under supervision can reflect differences in youth justice legislation, policy and practice. This includes differences in police practices, the range of legal orders available and the options for diversion.

More information about youth justice systems, policies and programs in the states and territories is available from [www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/states-territories/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/states-territories/).

### *Principles of youth detention*

Two main principles upon which the Australian youth justice system is based, and which are incorporated in state and territory legislation, are that young people should be detained:

- only as a last resort (with the exception of Queensland which revised its legislation in March 2014 to remove this principle)
- for the shortest appropriate period (Chrzanowski & Wallis 2011).

This is consistent with international guidelines, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (United Nations 1985, 1989).

Diverting young people from further involvement in the system is fundamental to applying these principles and may take various forms, including police warnings, referral to services such as drug and alcohol treatment, bail supervision for those at risk of remand, and youth justice conferencing. Alternatives to detention include transfer to specialist courts or programs, and supervised or unsupervised community orders.

Most young people under supervision in Australia are therefore supervised in the community. Just 16% of those under supervision on an average day in 2013–14 were in detention (AIHW 2015). However, about 2 in every 5 young people (42%) who were supervised during 2013–14 were in detention at some time during the year.

### *Age limits*

In Australia, young people may be charged with a criminal offence if they are aged 10 or older. The upper age limit in the youth justice system is 17 in all states and territories except in Queensland, where the age limit is 16. (This refers to the age at which the offence was committed or allegedly committed.)

Separate justice systems operate for young people and for adults, each under specific legislation. Those aged 18 or older (17 or older in Queensland) are dealt with under the criminal legislation relating to adults.

Despite this, in 2013–14, about 14% of young people under supervision on an average day were aged 18 or older (AIHW 2015). Reasons for this include the following:

- They were apprehended for an offence that was committed or allegedly committed when they were aged 17 or younger.
- Young people may continue to be supervised by the youth justice system once they turn 18 (or they may be transferred to the adult correctional system).
- In some states and territories, youth justice agencies may supervise some young people aged 18 or older due to their vulnerability or immaturity.
- Young people in Victoria aged 18–20 appearing in courts other than the Children’s Court may be sentenced to detention in a youth facility rather than an adult prison if assessed as suitable and the court deems this appropriate. (This is known as the ‘dual track’ sentencing system).

In this bulletin, the term ‘young people’ is used to refer to individuals aged 10 and over who are under supervision by a youth justice agency as a result of having committed or allegedly committed offences. Numbers of young people in detention relate to young people of all ages unless otherwise specified.

Population rates allow for the comparison of different groups while taking into account different population sizes. In this bulletin, rates are calculated only for young people aged 10–17 because of the differences in age limits among the states and territories. More information about the calculation of age is in ‘Technical notes’.

### *Sentenced and unsentenced detention*

Young people may be detained in secure detention facilities while they are *unsentenced*—that is, while awaiting the outcome of their court matter, or while awaiting sentencing after being found or pleading guilty. They may also be in *sentenced* detention when they have been proven guilty in court and have received a legal order to serve a period of detention. Whether a young person is unsentenced or sentenced is known as their ‘legal status’.

Most young people in unsentenced detention have been remanded in custody by a court until their next court appearance. In 2013–14, 97% of young people in unsentenced detention on an average day were on remand (excluding young people in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, where standard data were not available)

(AIHW 2015). The remainder were in police-referred detention—that is, they were detained before their first court appearance (which is possible in most states and territories).

In this bulletin, young people who are both sentenced and unsentenced at the same time are counted as sentenced.

## Youth detention data

This bulletin examines the number of young people in detention on an average night in each quarter over the 4-year period from June 2011 to June 2015. Each quarter covers 3 months of the year and is identified by reference to the last month in the quarter. For example, the March quarter includes January, February and March.

Analyses are based on data from the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set (JJ NMDS), on non-standard data provided by Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and on additional data on the number of young people in detention at midnight at the end of each month. For more information, see ‘Technical notes’.

### *Trends in the detention population*

The number of young people in detention on an average night is relatively small, and the amount of random variation from quarter to quarter is more noticeable when numbers are small. This might affect the appearance and interpretation of trends, which should therefore be interpreted with caution, particularly where they relate to small populations. In recognition of this, percentage changes are not calculated for populations of fewer than 100 young people.

In this bulletin, comparisons are made between the June quarter in 2015 and the June quarter 1 year earlier (2014) and 4 years earlier (2011). The same quarters are compared across years to minimise the effect of seasonal variation. Previous analyses have indicated that there appears to be some seasonal variation in the numbers of young people in sentenced and unsentenced detention each year, but this has not been fully investigated or explained. The bulletin aims to highlight the overall or net change over the 1-year and 4-year periods, although there might be fluctuations over quarters.

More detailed information about the population in each quarter is available in the supplementary tables at [www.aihw.gov.au/publications/youth-justice/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/youth-justice/).

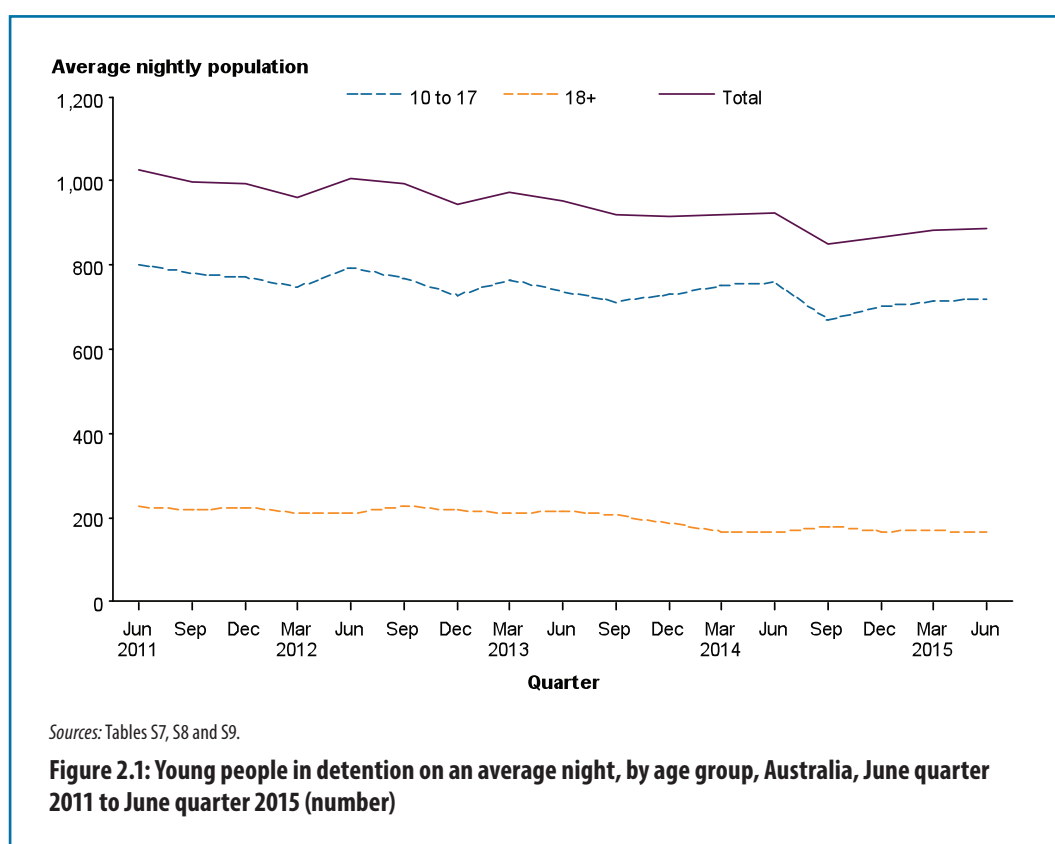
## 2 Trends in detention

### Numbers

On an average night in the June quarter 2015, there were 885 young people in youth detention in Australia due to their involvement, or alleged involvement, in crime (Figure 2.1). The number of young people in detention on an average night decreased over the 4-year period from a high of 1,027 in the June quarter 2011.

Over the most recent year (June quarter 2014 to June quarter 2015), the number of young people in detention on an average night remained relatively stable, ranging between 848 and 922 each quarter.

Almost one-fifth (19%) of young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter were aged 18 and older; most (720 or 81%) were aged 10–17 (Figure 2.1 and tables S7, S8 and S9). The proportion of those in detention who were aged 10–17 was similar (77–82%) in each quarter over the 4-year period.



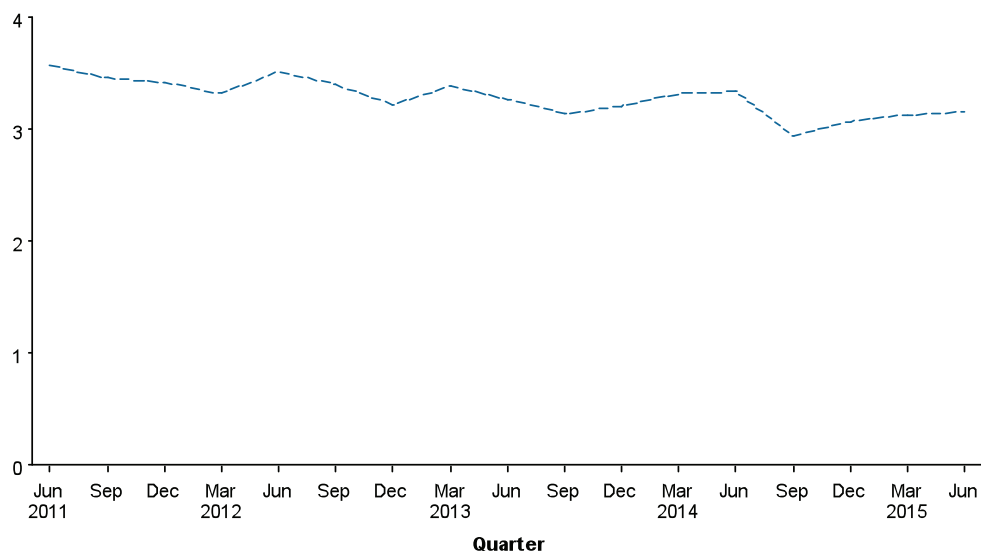
Nine in ten (799 or 90%) young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 were male (Table S7). The vast majority (90–93%) of those in detention in all quarters throughout the 4-year period were male.

## Rates

The rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 was 3.2 per 10,000 (or about 1 in every 3,150 young people) (Figure 2.2). This was a decrease from the rate in the June quarter 4 years earlier (3.6 per 10,000).

Over the most recent year, the rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention was between 2.9 and 3.3 per 10,000 each quarter.

Number per 10,000



Source: Table S10.

**Figure 2.2: Young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night, Australia, June quarter 2011 to June quarter 2015 (rate)**

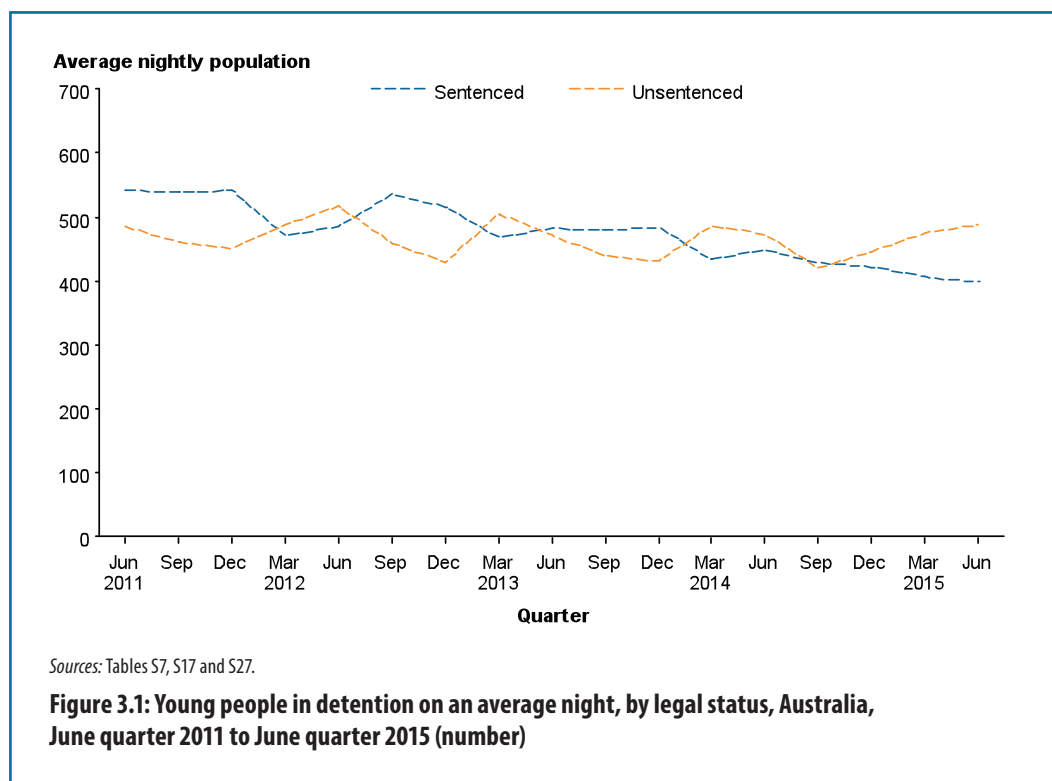
### 3 Trends in sentenced and unsentenced detention

#### Numbers

Just over half (488 young people or 55%) of those in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 were unsentenced and the remainder (398 or 45%) were serving a sentence (Figure 3.1).

Over the 4-year period, similar numbers of young people were in unsentenced (420 to 517 young people) and in sentenced detention (398 to 542) on an average night each quarter. Numbers in unsentenced detention tended to be higher in the March and June quarters, while numbers in sentenced detention tended to be higher in the September and December quarters. The reasons for this seasonal variation are not well understood.

In the June quarter 2015, about 93% of those in unsentenced detention on an average night were aged 10–17, compared with 66% of those in sentenced detention (tables S17, S18, S27 and S28). This difference occurred throughout the 4-year period: each quarter, 92–96% of those in unsentenced detention were aged 10–17, along with 60–69% of those in sentenced detention.



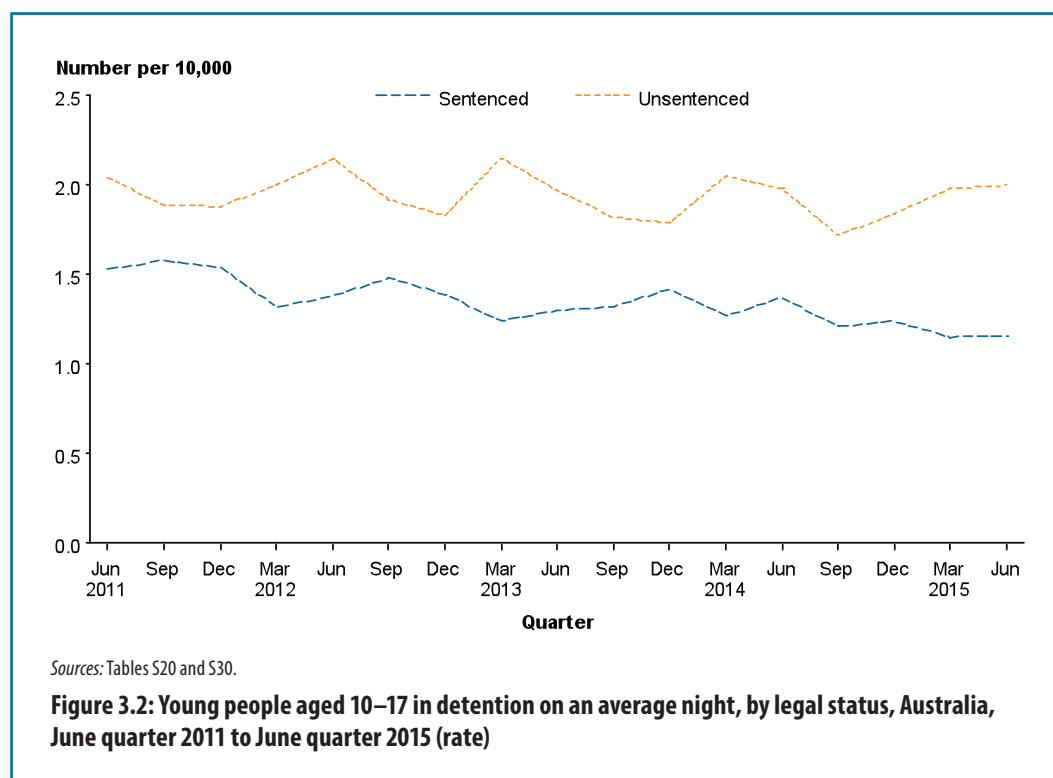
There is a higher proportion of young people aged 18 and over in sentenced detention, relative to those aged 10–17. There are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that some young people may continue serving a sentence in a youth facility once they turn 18. It is also driven by different policies and practices in the states and territories. Most notably, a low proportion of young people aged 10–17 in sentenced detention in Victoria (17–36% in each quarter; tables S27 and S28) is in part due to the ‘dual track’ sentencing system operating in that state, which results in a relatively large population of young people aged 18 and over in sentenced detention (see section 1 for more details about age limits in the youth justice system).

In the June quarter 2015, most young people in both unsentenced and sentenced detention were male (87% and 94%, respectively) (tables S17 and S27). These proportions were relatively stable over the 4-year period.

## Rates

Nationally, in each quarter over the 4-year period to the June quarter 2015, the rate of young people in unsentenced detention remained between 1.7 and 2.2 per 10,000 aged 10–17 (2.0 per 10,000 in the June quarter 2015) (Figure 3.2). Over the most recent year, the rate in each quarter was between 1.7 and 2.0 per 10,000.

In sentenced detention, the rate was 1.2 young people aged 10–17 per 10,000 on an average night in the June quarter 2015, which was a decrease from 1.5 per 10,000 in the June quarter 4 years earlier. The rate was highest in the September quarter 2011 (1.6 per 10,000). The rate of young people in sentenced detention was about 1.2–1.4 per 10,000 in each quarter over the most recent year.

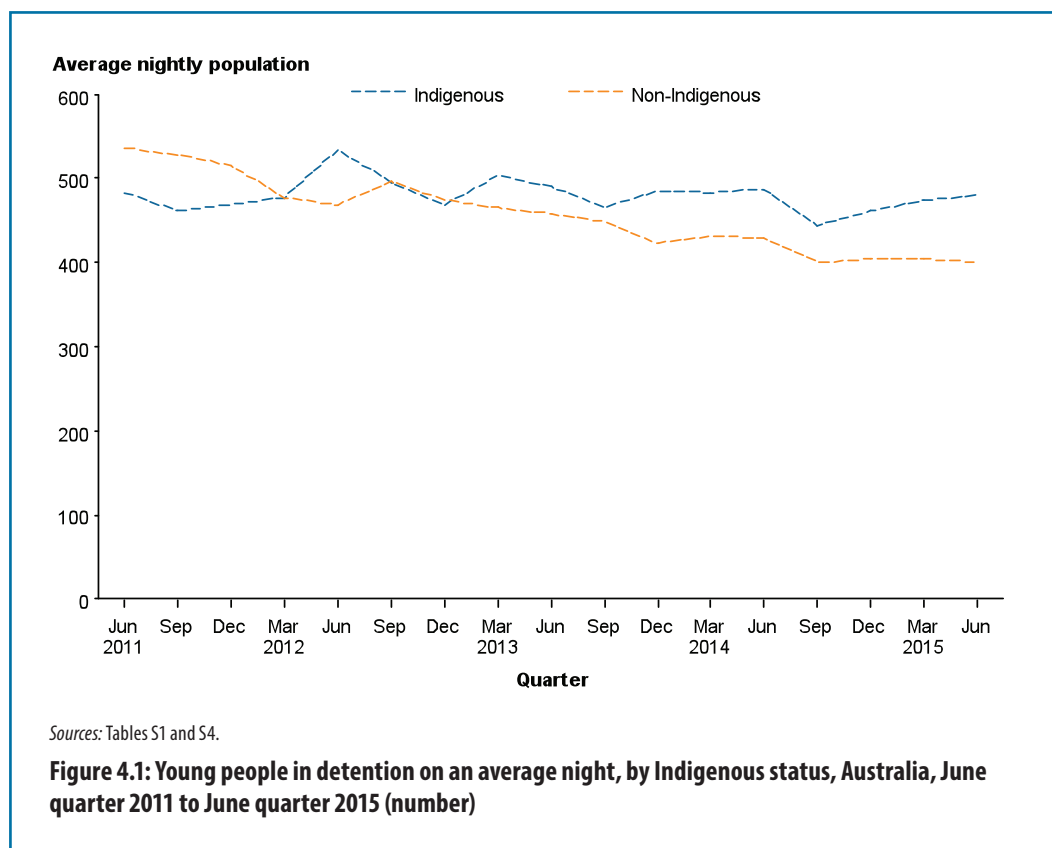


## 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

### Numbers

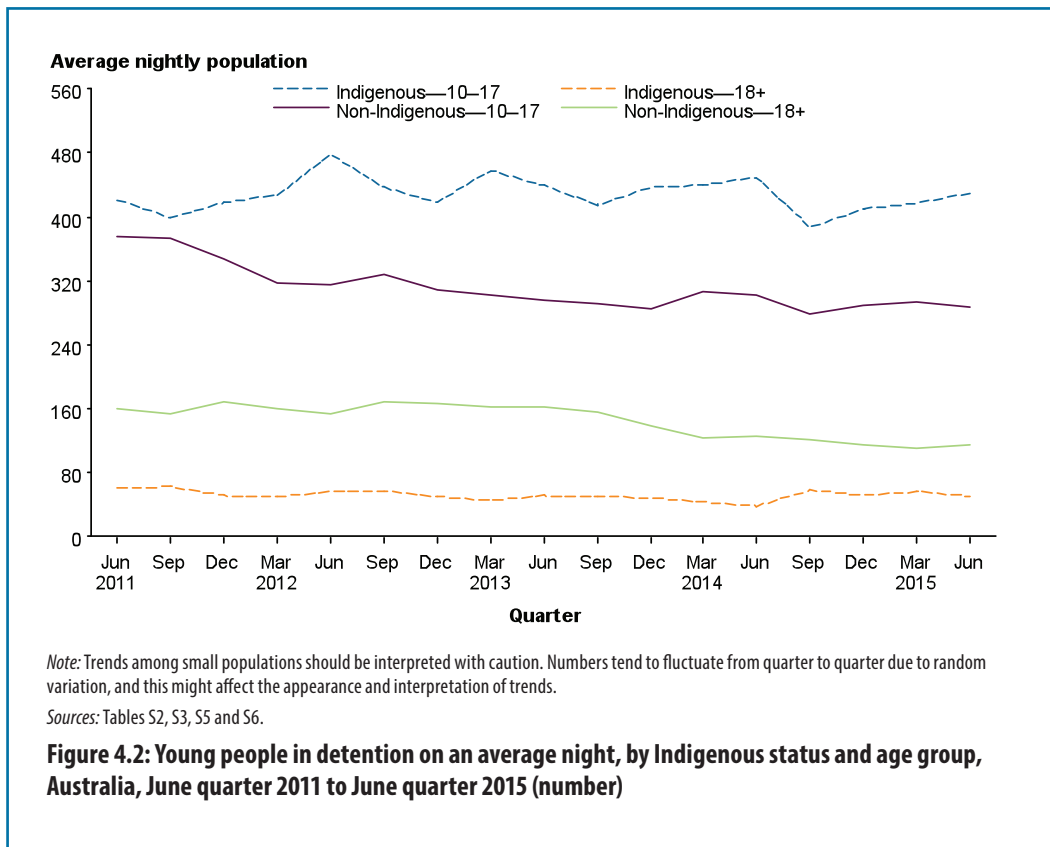
In the June quarter 2015, just over half (480 young people or 54%) of all those in detention on an average night were Indigenous (Figure 4.1).

Over the 4-year period, the number of Indigenous young people in detention fluctuated between 444 and 534 each quarter, while the number of non-Indigenous young people decreased from 536 in the June quarter 2011 to 400 in the June quarter 2015. Indigenous young people outnumbered non-Indigenous young people in detention in every quarter from March 2013 onwards.



Throughout the 4-year period, Indigenous young people aged 10–17 were the largest group in detention (Figure 4.2). Compared with non-Indigenous young people, a higher proportion of Indigenous young people in detention were aged 10–17: in the June quarter 2015, 90% of Indigenous young people in detention were aged 10–17, compared with 72% of non-Indigenous young people (tables S1, S2, S4 and S5).

About 9 in 10 (89%) Indigenous young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 were male (Table S1). This proportion remained stable over the 4-year period (89–92% each quarter), and was similar to the proportion of non-Indigenous young people in detention who were male (90–94% each quarter; 92% in the June quarter 2015) (Table S4).



Over the 4-year period, Indigenous young people made up a higher proportion of those in unsentenced detention (50–60% each quarter) than they did in sentenced detention (43–51% each quarter) (tables S11, S17, S21 and S27). In the June quarter 2015, 58% of those in unsentenced detention and 49% of those in sentenced detention on an average night were Indigenous.

## Rates

Indigenous over-representation in the youth justice system can be expressed as a rate ratio, which is the rate of Indigenous young people relative to the rate of non-Indigenous young people (see ‘Technical notes’ for more details).

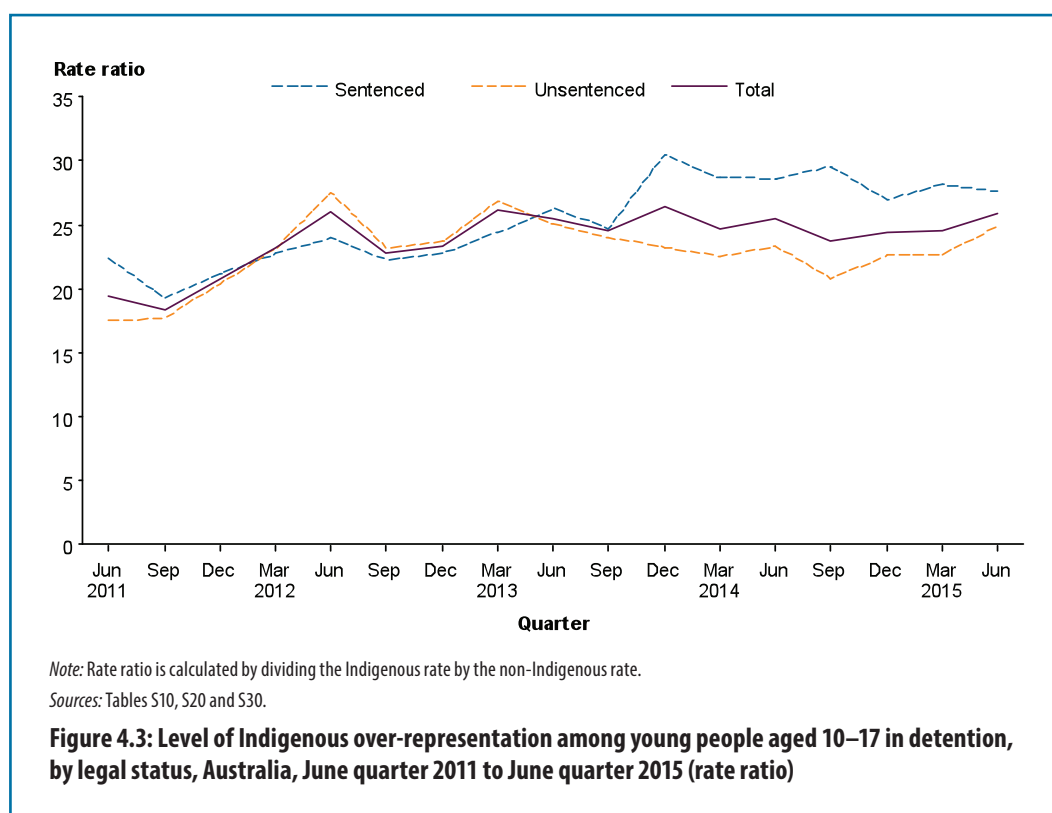
There were 1.3 per 10,000 non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015, compared with 34 per 10,000 Indigenous young people (Table S10).

The rate ratio shows that Indigenous young people aged 10–17 were 26 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people to be in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 (Figure 4.3). This was an increase from 19 times as likely in the June quarter 2011.

This increase occurred mainly from the beginning of 2012, and was due to a drop in the rate of non-Indigenous young people in detention (Table S10). While the rate of Indigenous young people showed no clear trend over the 4-year period, fluctuating between 31 and 39 per 10,000 aged 10–17 each quarter, the rate of non-Indigenous young people decreased from 1.8 to 1.3 per 10,000.

This increase in the rate ratio was greatest in sentenced detention, where it increased from a low of 19 times the non-Indigenous rate, in the September quarter 2011, to a high of 31 times in the December quarter 2013; it was 28 times the non-Indigenous rate in the most recent quarter (Figure 4.3). This increase was due to a proportionally greater decrease in the non-Indigenous rate compared with the decrease in the Indigenous rate (Table S30).

In unsentenced detention, the rate ratio increased from 17 times the non-Indigenous rate in the June quarter 2011 to 28 times the rate in the June quarter 2012, after which it remained at about 21–27 times the non-Indigenous rate (25 times in the most recent quarter) (Figure 4.3). The increase in the rate ratio between the June quarter 2011 and the June quarter 2012 was due to both an overall increase in the Indigenous rate and a decrease in the non-Indigenous rate (Table S20).



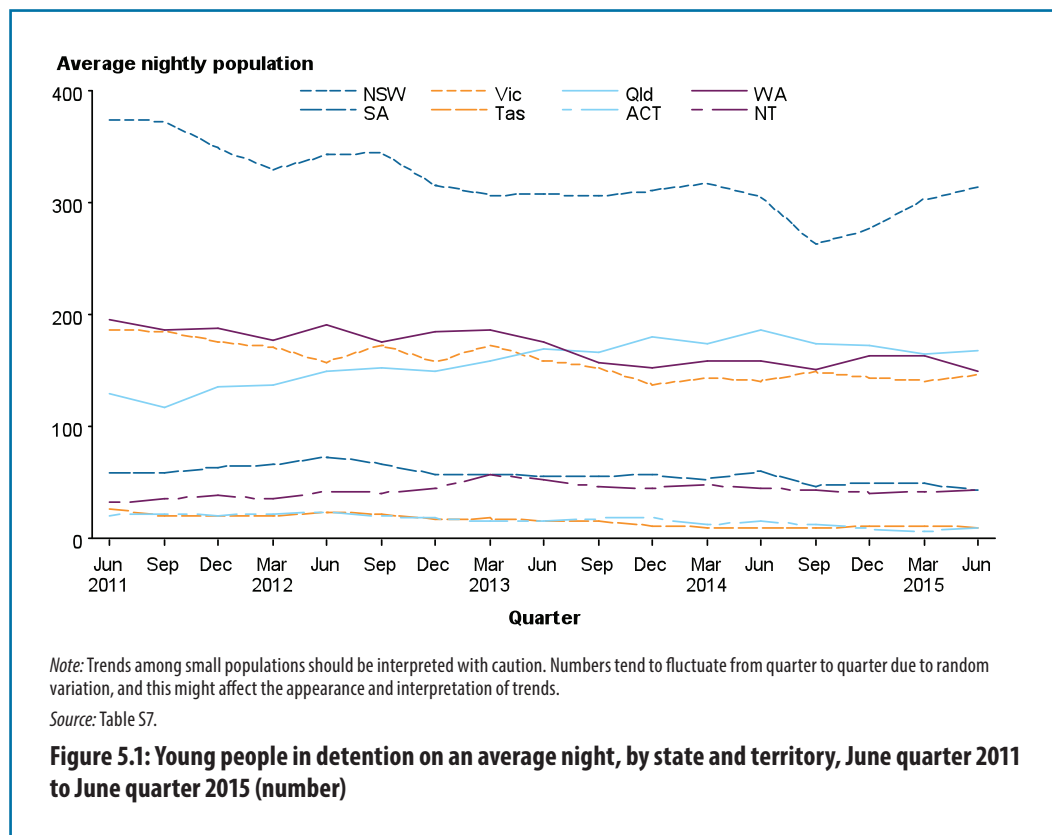
## 5 State and territory trends

### Numbers

New South Wales had the largest number of young people in detention throughout the 4-year period, followed by Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland (Figure 5.1).

Over the period, there were decreases in the detention population in all states and territories except Queensland and the Northern Territory, where the number of young people in detention on an average night increased. In Queensland, the number in detention increased from 130 in the June quarter 2011 to 168 in the June quarter 2015. In the Northern Territory there was an overall increase from 32 to 44, peaking at 57 in the March quarter 2013 before falling in subsequent quarters.

Over the most recent year, the number of young people in detention on an average night in Queensland decreased slightly (down from 187 in the June quarter 2014), and there were no clear trends in the other states and territories.

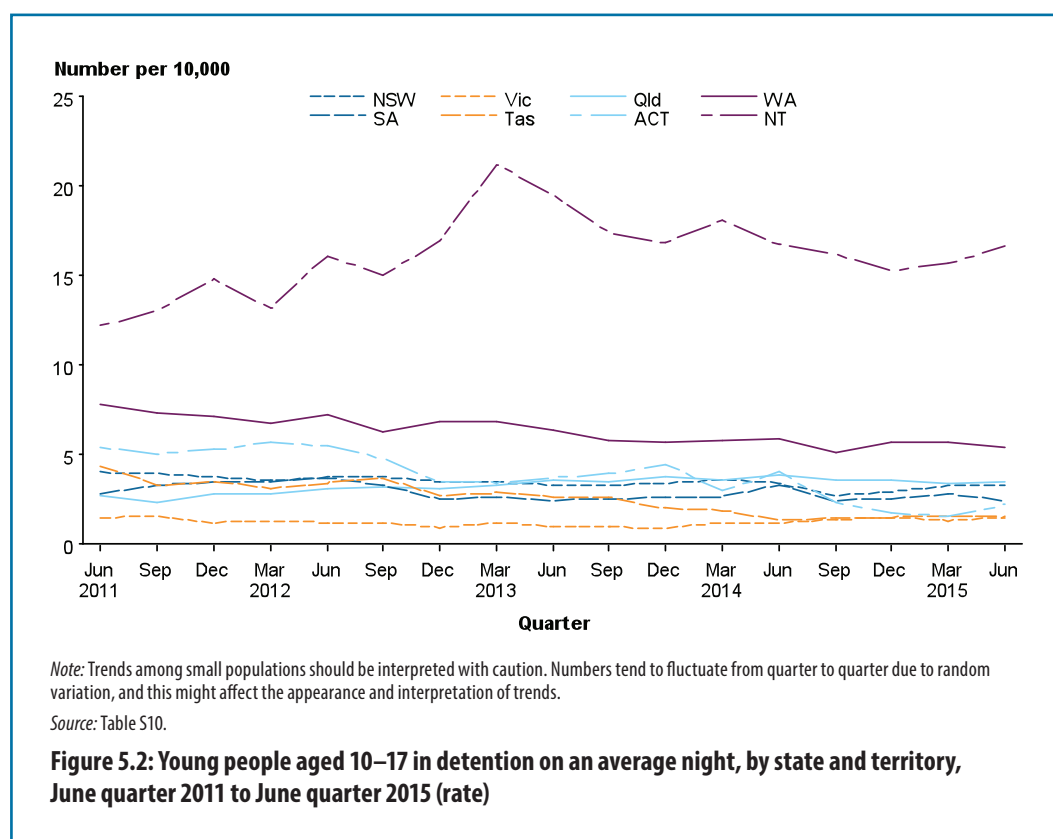


## Rates

On an average night in the June quarter 2015, the rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention ranged from 1.5 per 10,000 in Tasmania and Victoria to almost 17 per 10,000 in the Northern Territory (Figure 5.2 and Table 5.1).

Victoria consistently had the lowest rate on an average night (except for the most recent quarter), while the Northern Territory and Western Australia had the highest. However, it should be noted that rates of detention fluctuated from quarter to quarter throughout the 4-year period, particularly among the smaller jurisdictions (Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory), due to the small numbers in detention.

Over the 4 years, the rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night decreased in most states and territories, but increased in Queensland and the Northern Territory. In the Northern Territory, the rate peaked in the March quarter 2013, before dropping back slightly. In Victoria, the rate decreased between the June quarter 2011 and the December quarter 2013, before returning in the June quarter 2015 to a level similar to the June quarter 2011.



**Table 5.1: Young people in detention on an average night, by state and territory, June quarter 2011, 2014 and 2015 (number and rate)**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
<b>Number</b>									
<b>Sentenced detention</b>									
June quarter 2011	182	146	44	100	27	13	11	18	542
June quarter 2014	159	98	52	83	29	7	6	15	449
June quarter 2015	168	81	27	90	13	5	2	12	398
<b>Unsentenced detention</b>									
June quarter 2011	193	41	86	95	32	14	9	14	485
June quarter 2014	147	43	135	76	31	3	9	30	473
June quarter 2015	145	65	141	61	29	6	8	33	488
<b>Total detention</b>									
June quarter 2011	375	187	130	196	59	27	21	32	1,027
June quarter 2014	306	141	187	159	60	9	16	45	922
June quarter 2015	314	146	168	150	43	10	10	44	885
<b>Rate (number per 10,000)</b>									
<b>Sentenced detention</b>									
June quarter 2011	1.60	0.73	0.93	3.92	0.93	1.76	2.72	6.74	1.53
June quarter 2014	1.61	0.44	1.04	2.90	1.41	1.00	1.55	5.62	1.37
June quarter 2015	1.57	0.38	0.55	3.05	0.67	n.p.	n.p.	4.39	1.16
<b>Unsentenced detention</b>									
June quarter 2011	2.41	0.74	1.76	3.93	1.90	2.59	2.69	5.47	2.04
June quarter 2014	1.80	0.76	2.79	2.94	1.89	n.p.	2.48	11.11	1.98
June quarter 2015	1.71	1.13	2.89	2.33	1.75	n.p.	1.82	12.29	2.00
<b>Total detention</b>									
June quarter 2011	4.01	1.47	2.69	7.84	2.83	4.35	5.41	12.20	3.57
June quarter 2014	3.40	1.20	3.83	5.84	3.30	1.32	4.03	16.73	3.34
June quarter 2015	3.28	1.51	3.44	5.37	2.42	1.50	2.21	16.68	3.16

*Notes*

1. Numbers might not add up to total due to rounding.
2. Rates are for young people aged 10–17. Numbers include young people aged 18 or older, who are under youth justice supervision for reasons considered appropriate by youth justice agencies. For numbers of young people aged 10–17 only, refer to the supplementary tables.
3. Trends among small populations should be interpreted with caution. Numbers tend to fluctuate from quarter to quarter due to random variation, and this might affect the appearance and interpretation of trends.
4. Rates are calculated from the unrounded average nightly populations, and are not published when there were fewer than 5 young people in the numerator. There might be instances when a numerator is presented as 5 and the rate is not calculated due to rounding. (See 'Technical notes: rates'.)

Sources: Tables S7, S10, S17, S20, S27 and S30.

## Sentenced and unsentenced detention

Throughout the 4-year period, the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention was lowest in Victoria (between 0.4 and 1.1 per 10,000) and highest in the Northern Territory (between 5.5 and 14 per 10,000) (Table S20).

While the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention on an average night remained reasonably stable at 1.7–2.2 per 10,000 over the 4-year period at the national level, there were differences in trends between the states and territories.

Between the June quarter 2011 and the June quarter 2015, there were overall increases in the rates of young people in unsentenced detention in Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory, and decreases in New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia (Table 5.2). Trends could not reliably be determined in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, due to small numbers.

In sentenced detention, rates were also consistently lowest over the 4-year period in Victoria (between 0.4 and 1.0 per 10,000) and highest in the Northern Territory (between 3.9 and 7.8 per 10,000) (Table S30).

A decrease in the rate of young people aged 10–17 in sentenced detention on an average night at a national level was seen in Victoria and Western Australia (Table 5.1). Trends could not be reliably determined in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory due to small numbers, and rates were stable or showed no clear trend among the other states and territories.

**Table 5.2: Rates of young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night, by legal status, summary of 4-year trends, June quarter 2011 to June quarter 2015**

	Unsentenced	Sentenced	Total in detention
New South Wales	↓	↔	↓
Victoria	↑	↓	↔
Queensland	↑	↔	↑
Western Australia	↓	↓	↓
South Australia	↓	↔	↓
Tasmania	n.p.	n.p.	↓
Australian Capital Territory	n.p.	n.p.	↓
Northern Territory	↑	↔	↑
<b>Australia</b>	↔	↓	↓

### Notes

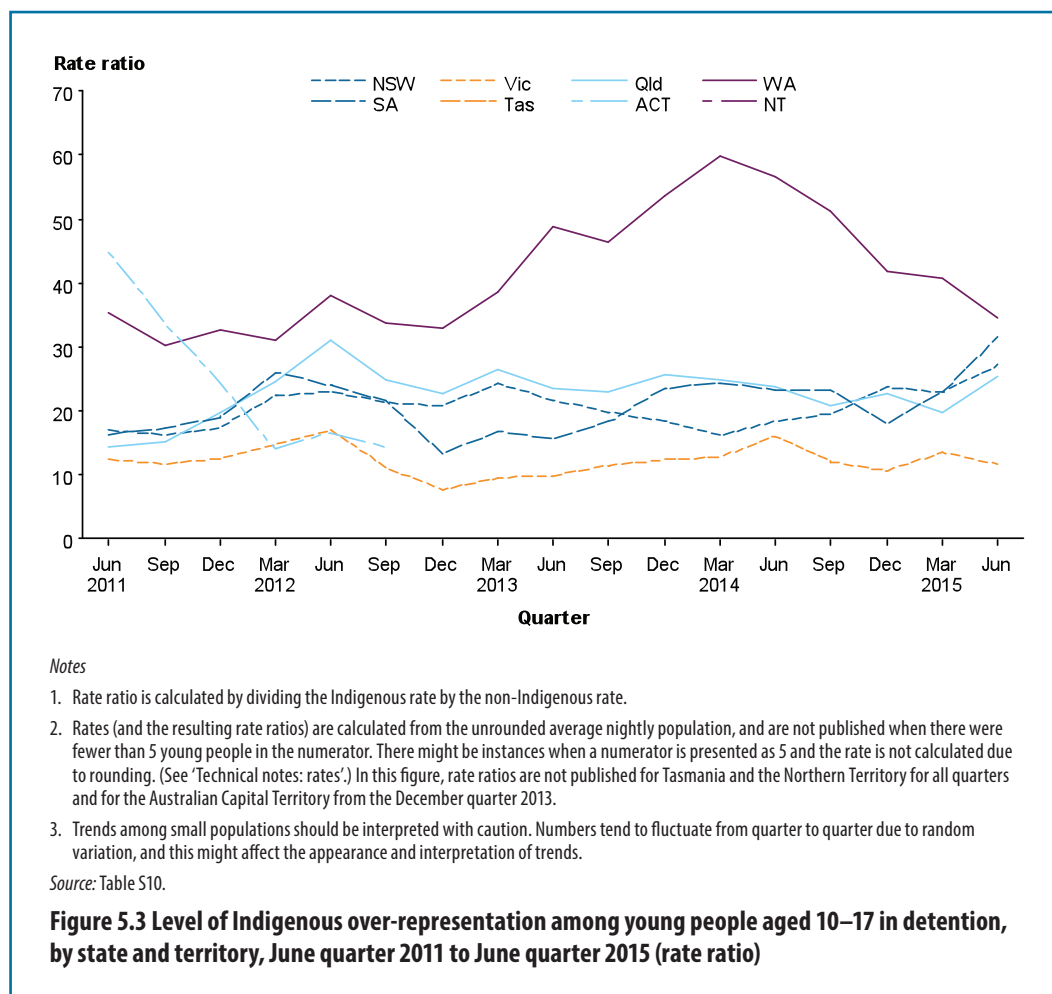
- ↑ increase; ↓ decrease; ↔ no clear trend or stable; n.p. not publishable due to small numbers.
- Trends among small populations should be interpreted with caution. Numbers tend to fluctuate from quarter to quarter due to random variation, and this might affect the appearance and interpretation of trends.

Sources: Tables S10, S20 and S30.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Among the states and territories, the rate of Indigenous young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2015 ranged from 15 per 10,000 in Victoria to 59 per 10,000 in Western Australia (a comparison which does not include Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, due to small numbers) (Table S10).

In the June quarter 2015, among the states and territories for which it could be calculated, the rate ratio ranged from 12 times the non-Indigenous rate in Victoria to 35 times in Western Australia (Figure 5.3; see 'Technical notes' for more information). The rate ratio was lowest in Victoria and highest in Western Australia in most quarters throughout the 4-year period. In Western Australia, the rate for Indigenous young people peaked at 60 times the non-Indigenous rate in the March quarter 2014, before dropping back to 35 times in the most recent quarter.



### Technical notes

#### Youth detention data sources

This bulletin was compiled using 2 data sources. Data for 2014–15 were provided by each state and territory on the number of young people in detention at midnight at the end of each month between July 2014 and June 2015. These data were used to supplement the 2013–14 JJ NMDS, which contains data up to and including 30 June 2014 for all states except Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

JJ NMDS data were not provided by Western Australia and the Northern Territory for the period from 1 April 2011 to the 30 June 2014. Therefore, non-standard data for Western Australia and the Northern Territory were used for this period instead. As neither JJ NMDS data nor non-standard data were available for the Northern Territory for the period 1 April 2011 to 30 June 2011 (the June quarter 2011), data on the number of young people in detention at midnight at the end of each month were used.

Comparisons between JJ NMDS and non-standard data in this bulletin should be made with caution due to potential differences in data format, specifications, definitions and/or quality.

A data quality statement for the JJ NMDS 2013–14 is available at <<http://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/601986>>.

In addition to this bulletin, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare also publishes the annual *Youth justice in Australia series*, which provides comprehensive information on young people under youth justice supervision. (For the most recent bulletin and accompanying fact sheets, see <[www.aihw.gov.au/publications/youth-justice/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/youth-justice/)>). The *Youth detention population in Australia 2015* bulletin presents more recent data on trends in the detention population than the *Youth justice in Australia series*.

The presentation of data in this bulletin is slightly different from the presentation in *Youth justice in Australia*. First, this bulletin presents the average nightly population for each quarter, while *Youth justice in Australia* presents the average daily population for each year. This is due to the availability of end-of-month data (available only on a nightly basis), as well as the focus on changes at a more detailed quarterly level provided by this bulletin. Second, young people who are concurrently unsentenced and sentenced are classified as sentenced in this bulletin, but are counted separately as both unsentenced and sentenced in *Youth justice in Australia* (although they are only counted once in the total detention population in both bulletins).

#### Methods and technical notes

Key information about the methods used in this bulletin are provided below. For more detailed information about the JJ NMDS, including details about the data and methods used in reporting, see <[www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/data-quality/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/data-quality/)>.

## **Age**

In this bulletin, numbers of young people in detention include all age groups unless otherwise specified. Population rates include young people aged 10–17 only (see Rates below).

For data extracted from the JJ NMDS, and non-standard data provided by Western Australia and the Northern Territory, age is calculated at the start of the relevant quarter unless the period of detention began within the quarter, in which case age is calculated as at the start of the detention period.

Where a young person was in more than one type of detention (both unsentenced and sentenced), their age can vary across tables because age is calculated in light of the type of detention concerned. This means that for a particular age group, the total number of young people in detention might not be the sum of the number of young people in sentenced and unsentenced detention.

For end-of-month data, age is calculated as at the end of the relevant month.

## **Average nightly population**

For data extracted from the JJ NMDS, and for non-standard data for Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the average nightly population is calculated by adding the duration (in nights) of each period of detention that falls within the quarter, and dividing the summed duration by 91, which is the average number of nights in a quarter.

Where no JJ NMDS data were available for the relevant quarter (which occurred for the September quarter 2014 to June quarter 2015 for all states and territories, and the June quarter 2011 for the Northern Territory), the nightly averages were calculated by averaging end-of-month data provided by the states and territories. Average nightly numbers in these instances were therefore calculated using data from only 3 nights in a quarter. There may be differences between these data and the nightly averages based on JJ NMDS data, which are calculated based on every night in the quarter.

## **Indigenous status**

Information on Indigenous status has been collected since the implementation of the JJ NMDS. Nationally, the proportion of young people with 'not stated' Indigenous status ranged from 0.2% to 1.0% each quarter between the June quarter 2010 and the June quarter 2013. This proportion was low (3% or less each quarter) in all states and territories. However, information on the proportion of Indigenous young people who are correctly reported as Indigenous is not available.

Changes in the collection and recording of Indigenous status can affect rates of Indigenous identification over time. There are some differences in the ways states and territories collect information about Indigenous status. Not all jurisdictions use the national standard question and standard codes for recording Indigenous status, as recommended by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. However, some jurisdictions have

taken steps to improve their data collection forms and information systems in recent years. See *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification in community services data collections: an updated data quality report* (AIHW 2012) for more information.

### **Legal status**

Young people who are both sentenced and unsentenced at the same time (that is, serving multiple or concurrent supervision orders) are classified as sentenced in this bulletin.

The JJ NMDS includes periods of detention with 'other' legal status; those periods are not included in this bulletin. In 2013–14, there were no young people in detention during the year with a legal status of 'other'.

### **Rates**

Population rates allow for the comparison of different groups while taking into account different population sizes. Because there are differences between the states and territories in the extent to which young people aged 18 or older can be detained in youth justice facilities, rates are restricted to those aged 10–17. Crude rates are presented in this bulletin.

The number of young people in detention on an average night during a quarter is rounded to the nearest person. The rate is calculated using the number on an average day before rounding. Rates are presented in the text of this bulletin to one decimal place for rates less than 10, and to the nearest whole number for rates greater than 10. Rates are presented to two decimal places in the tables. As a result, rates calculated by using the average nightly population rounded to whole numbers might differ slightly from the rates presented in this bulletin.

Due to a lack of statistical reliability, rates are not calculated where there are fewer than 5 young people in the numerator. In some instances, the number of young people might be presented as 5, but the rate might not be calculated due to rounding (for example, if there are 4.7 young people in detention on an average night, this will appear as 5 in the table, but the rate will not be calculated). However, these young people contribute to overall state and national rates. The calculation of rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people excludes young people with unknown Indigenous status.

Population data used in the calculation of rates are provided in supplementary Table S31.

### **Rate ratios**

Rates for different groups can be compared using a rate ratio, which is the ratio of two rates. In this bulletin, rate ratios are used to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates, and to provide a measure of the level of Indigenous overrepresentation. Rate ratios are calculated by dividing the Indigenous rate by the non-Indigenous rate.

Rate ratios should be interpreted with caution where there are small denominators, rare events and rates that converge while declining.

Due to a lack of statistical reliability, rate ratios in this bulletin are not calculated where one or both of the rates have fewer than 5 young people in the numerator. However, these young people contribute to overall state and national rate ratios.

### ***Rounding***

The average nightly population is rounded to whole numbers. Components might not sum to the given totals due to this rounding.

Rate ratios were calculated using rates rounded to two decimal places. Proportions were calculated using average nightly numbers rounded to whole numbers. Numbers and rates displayed in figures are rounded, as presented in the supplementary tables.

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- Community Services Directorate, Australian Capital Territory
- Department of Correctional Services, Northern Territory.

## Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
JJ NMDS	Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

## Symbols

—	nil or rounded to zero
n.p.	not published due to small numbers, confidentiality or other concerns about the quality of the data
↑	increase
↓	decrease
↔	no clear trend or stable

## References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2012. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification in community services data collections: an updated data quality report. Cat. no. IHW 80. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2015. Youth justice in Australia 2013–14. AIHW bulletin no. 127. Cat. no. AUS 188. Canberra: AIHW.

Chrzanowski A & Wallis R 2011. Understanding the youth justice system. In: Stewart A, Allard T & Dennison S (eds). Evidence based policy and practice in youth justice. Annandale: The Federation Press, 7–27.

United Nations 1985. United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice ('The Beijing Rules'). Viewed 2 August 2013, <<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/beijingrules.pdf>>.

United Nations 1989. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Viewed 2 August 2013, <<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>>.

## Related publications

More information about young people under youth justice supervision in Australia is available from the AIHW website at <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/>>.


The bulletin can be downloaded free of charge from <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice-publications/>>.

The following AIHW publications may also be of interest:

- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2014. Pathways through youth justice supervision. Juvenile justice series 15. Cat. no. JUV 40. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2015. Pathways through youth justice supervision: further analyses. Juvenile justice series no. 19. Cat. no. JUV 75. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2015. Using the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set to measure returns to sentenced youth justice supervision: stage 2. Juvenile justice series no. 17. Cat. no. JUV 54. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2015. Young people returning to sentenced youth justice supervision 2015. Juvenile justice series no. 18. Cat. no. JUV 63. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2015. Youth justice in Australia 2013–14. AIHW bulletin no. 127. Cat. no. AUS 188. Canberra: AIHW.

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