

20 August 2014 – **Embargoed until midday**

### **Chief Coroner releases provisional annual suicide figures**

Chief Coroner Judge Neil MacLean today released the provisional annual suicide figures for the year ending 30 June 2014.

The total for the year was 529, which is the lowest number by two since the annual coronial figures were first produced for the 2007/08 year. There were 12 fewer suicides compared to last year, and 29 fewer than the 2010/11 year, which was the highest annual number recorded in the last seven years.

The previous lowest total was recorded for 2008/09 with 531 recorded suicide deaths.

It is also the first time the provisional suicide rate per 100,000 people is less than 12, with a rate of 11.73 recorded.

Judge MacLean said, while it is encouraging to see a slight drop in numbers, the overall rate is still stubbornly high and disappointingly consistent.

“This year’s numbers have moved in the right direction but not by much. In spite of this, it’s important we focus on the positives and there are some we can take from the statistics.”

Youth suicide numbers (those aged under 24 years) are significantly down from last year with 110 suicides compared with 144. We’ve also seen the lowest number of suicides in the 15 to 19-year-old cohort in the last seven years with 46, which is down 17 on last year and 34 the year before.

“The drop in teen suicide is good news. These are the some of the toughest and most tragic cases coroners deal with,” Judge MacLean said.

“I am aware that a lot of effort both nationally and at community grassroots level has gone into responding to the challenges posed by youth suicide, and I’d like to think the drop is a result of this.

“This includes the development of a co-operative interagency arrangement whereby Coronial Service staff send a notice in near real-time through a secure link to the Ministry of Health of any suspected suicide. This triggers a prompt and informed response, particularly when it involves a youth suicide.

“It may be this, coupled with an extensive growing awareness and interest amongst local communities seeking information and guidance about the phenomenon of suicide, that is starting to bring the youth suicide numbers down. But only time will tell,” Judge MacLean said.

Another key observation from this year’s statistics is the rise in suicides among older people. The number of suicides recorded in over-60 year olds went up from 75 in 2012-13 to 97 in 2013-14.

“The rise in older people taking their own lives is something I highlighted last year, and this trend has continued, particularly for the above-80-year-old age cohort.”

**Other observations of the 2013-14 statistics show:**

- Prior to 2012/13 the average male to female suicide ratio was about 3 to 1, while in the last two years it has been about 2.5 to 1.
- The lowest number of suicides in the 35 to 39-year-old age cohort since records began in 2007, with 35 suicides (the annual average over the past seven years is 47).
- Maori suicide has remained steady with 108 recorded in the last year compared with 105 in 2012/13. This comes after a sharp increase in 2011/12 when 132 Maori suicides were recorded. About one in every five people who commit suicide is Maori.
- Suicides in Christchurch city have remained steady with 69 recorded in the last year, up one from 2012/13. Prior to the February 2011 earthquake, the Christchurch suicide rate oscillated between 69 and 90 a year since 2007.

This year the statistics do not include a breakdown by coronial region. Coroners are increasingly investigating cases from outside their geographical areas, meaning these figures are somewhat misleading if trying to gauge suicides by region. Instead, regional figures based on district health board areas are used for the first time. These figures have been backdated to 2007/08 and record the area where the suicidal act occurred.

Since 2007/08 eight people included in the provisional statistics have committed suicide overseas. These have been recorded in the provisional statistics because Coroners have taken custody of the body when returned to New Zealand and have determined cause of death. Our Coronial system does not have jurisdiction over deaths that occur outside of New Zealand, and in which a body is not repatriated.

ENDS

**Note:** The information provided relates to provisional suicide figures and will slightly differ from the Ministry of Health figures. They include active cases before Coroners where intent has yet to be established therefore may eventually be found not to be suicides. In addition Ministry of Health figures are recorded by calendar year.