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Chief Coroner releases provisional annual suicide figures for the 2014/15 year

Chief Coroner Judge Deborah Marshall has today released the annual provisional suicide statistics, which show 564 people died by suicide in the 2014/15 year.

This is the highest number since the provisional statistics were first recorded for the 2007/08 year, although the suicide rate – the number of suicides per 100,000 population – is below the 2010/11 and 2011/12 years.

This year's figures show an increase of 35 suicide deaths from last year, which was the lowest total on record, and six more than 2010/11, which was the previous highest total.

Judge Marshall said it was disappointing the drop in suicides observed last year had not continued.

"Yet again we are seeing a total suicide figure sitting in the mid-500 range. Our provisional suicide figures go back eight years and in that time there has been a variation of 35 suicide deaths.

"Over the last eight years I believe we've seen a shift in society's preparedness to have a more open conversation about suicide, but we are not seeing any movement in what is an unfortunate static annual figure."

Judge Marshall acknowledged the greater effort being put into suicide prevention, including the Ministry of Health's recently launched suicide prevention toolkit for District Health Boards and the trial Suicide Mortality Review Committee.

"I am in my first year as Chief Coroner and in that time I have been approached by many researchers and organisations that want to participate in changing our appalling rate of suicide.

"Suicide prevention is not the job any single agency or group, but involves all New Zealanders. Greater co-ordination of efforts may be the key," Judge Marshall said.

"The aim of making these annual figures public is to give an up-to-date overview of what is a very important social issue.

The 2014/15 annual provisional suicide statistics show:

- A rise in the number of male suicides from 385 last year, to 428, which is the highest number of male suicides since these statistics began in 2007. However, by rate (18.96 per 100,000) it is the third highest since 2007.
- A drop in the number of female suicides from 144 last year to 136, which is the second lowest figure behind 134 (2007/08).
- The age cohort with the highest number of suicides was the 20-24-year-old group, with 61 deaths, followed by the 40-44-year-old group with 58 deaths.

- Male suicides made up 75.8 per cent of the total suicides for the year. This 3 to 1, male to female suicide rate has been observed for most of the last eight years, apart from the previous two years, where the ratio was about 2.5 to 1.
- The Maori suicide total (130 deaths) and rate (21.74 per 100,000) are the highest since the provisional statistics were first recorded for the 2007/08 year. Male Maori continue to be disproportionately represented in the provisional suicide statistics with 93 deaths last year.

The role of a Coroner

Judge Marshall said a Coroner's role is to complete a thorough and timely investigation into each case of suspected suicide to try and shed light on what factors prompted it.

“Coroners may also be in a position to make specific recommendations and comments arising from the facts of a particular case.

“By looking at background information from every case we can help form a bigger picture around the common aspects, such as recent relationship issues, drug or alcohol abuse and economic hardship.”

Judge Marshall said this information helped inform other agencies working in suicide research and prevention.

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.