

Clearer picture

The Australian Institute of Criminology is set to deliver the AFP its most comprehensive look at missing persons since 2008.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) is set to deliver the AFP the first comprehensive look at missing persons in Australia in eight years – with the impending release of the Missing Persons in Australia report due out in April 2017.

In the lead-up to the release, the AFP National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC) – who commissioned the report – received a comprehensive AIC ‘Statistical Bulletin’, outlining important highlights from data gathered to date.

Released in November 2016, the Bulletin coincided with the AFP-chaired Police Consultative Group on Missing Persons forum, comprising heads of state and territory missing persons units.

The NMPCC plays a critical role in Australia, managing the national register of missing persons and, on behalf of all state and territory police, profiling long-term missing person cases across the nation.

It also drives national coordination of state and territory police missing persons units and raises awareness of the significant issues and impacts surrounding missing persons in Australia.

While AIC researchers have noted that the statistics in the November bulletin are not exhaustive, they provide details on emerging trends about the number of Australians reported missing, their reasons for going missing, how long they remain missing, and how many of those reported are then later found.

Among the findings were that 58 per cent of those missing during 2008-2015 were children aged 0-12 years and young people aged 13-17 years. The latter group was reported missing at a rate 6.5 times the national average.

However, 97 per cent or more of those reported missing are located – and almost all of these are found alive. Even so, around 60 per cent or more of reported missing are located within 48 hours. Fifteen to 19 per cent remain missing for up to a month or more.

While the majority of missing persons’ research reports age, gender and ethnicity, the final report will provide a more complete picture of the circumstances and consequences surrounding people going missing.

Once published, Missing Persons in Australia will add to the findings, further exploring stranger and parental child abduction, Australians missing overseas, and links between missing persons and domestic violence.

Vulnerable groups at risk of going missing will also be explored, and for the first time there will be statistics on Indigenous Australians.

Supported by the missing persons sector and families and friends of missing persons, the report will mark the first time such research has focused on the issue at a national level.

The last research undertaken of this kind was in 2008, using data from 2004-2006.

The findings will incorporate literature from Australia, the UK, US and Canada – and consider the legislative, procedural and social changes that may impact on missing persons – including access to personal information and the role of social media.

As data recording practices are enhanced in police agencies, report researchers say that in future, information will be gathered to provide a clearer picture of what leads to a person that go missing – and what can be done to reduce incidence and minimise the consequences.



Major new trends

Missing Persons Statistical Bulletin

305,268 missing persons' reports were recorded by state and territory police.

Rates of reported missing persons increased in Victoria (from 125 to 169 per 100,000) and decreased in Tasmania (37 to 26 per 100,000).

Age & sex

Males comprised 53 per cent of those reported missing and females 47 per cent.

58 per cent of those reported missing during 2008-15 were children aged 0-12 years and young people aged 13-17 years. The latter group was reported missing at a rate six times or more of that for other age groups.

Almost 60 per cent of 13-17 year olds reported missing are female in the Northern Territory and Queensland, .

Half or more of missing persons' reports in NSW, Queensland and the ACT related to people who had gone missing more than once.

Indigenous Australians

Figures show that the proportion of Indigenous persons reported missing was highest in the Northern Territory at 59 per cent and lowest in Victoria at 5 per cent.

Investigation outcomes

97 percent or more of the reported missing are located. Of those who are located, almost all are found alive.

Approximately 60 per cent or more of reported missing are located within 48 hours. Fifteen to 19 per cent remain missing for up to a month or more.


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Missing persons in Australia, 2008-2015

Samantha Bricknell and Lauren Renshaw

Abstract | Between 2008 and 2015 over 305,000 people were reported missing in Australia, an average of 38,159 reports each year. Youths aged 13-17 years were most likely to go missing; half of all people reported missing between 2008 and 2015 were in this age group and less than 10 percent were children.

More than sixty percent of those who go missing return or are found within 48 hours. Ninety-eight percent are ultimately located, most alive.

Collecting data on the circumstances of those who go missing will assist in developing a national picture of vulnerable population groups and predicting outcomes for these groups.

In Australia, a missing person is defined as 'anyone who is reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown and there are serious concerns for their safety and welfare' (NMPCC 2015). State and territory police are the primary agencies for responding to missing persons reports. Other government and non-government agencies involved in tracing missing persons or assisting families of missing persons, and which often work in collaboration with the police, include the Salvation Army Family Tracing Service, Australian Red Cross Tracing Service and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The most recent published estimate of the number of missing persons in Australia was approximately 35,000 people for the period 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2006 (or 170 per 100,000 people in the general population; James, Anderson & Pitt 2008). This estimate took into account incidents reported to local police and two non-government search agencies that provided data at the time.

This report, commissioned by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC), updates national, state and territory statistics on missing persons. These data will help inform police and those working in the sector identify the characteristics of and outcomes for those reported missing in Australia.

The work of the AFP National Missing Persons Coordination Centre flows into many organisations – including with the Daniel Morcombe Foundation.