

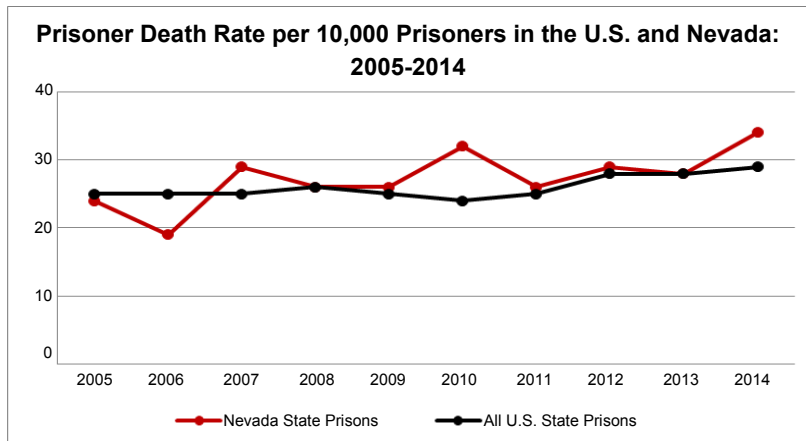
## Examining Prisoner Deaths in Nevada State Prisons

By Linsey Belisle

Every year, the Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC) is responsible for approximately 14,000 incarcerated adults (NDOC, 2019). While national trends in prisoner deaths have been studied, less is known about prisoner deaths in Nevada. This report provides general information regarding prisoner deaths in Nevada state prisons.

### Key Stats

1

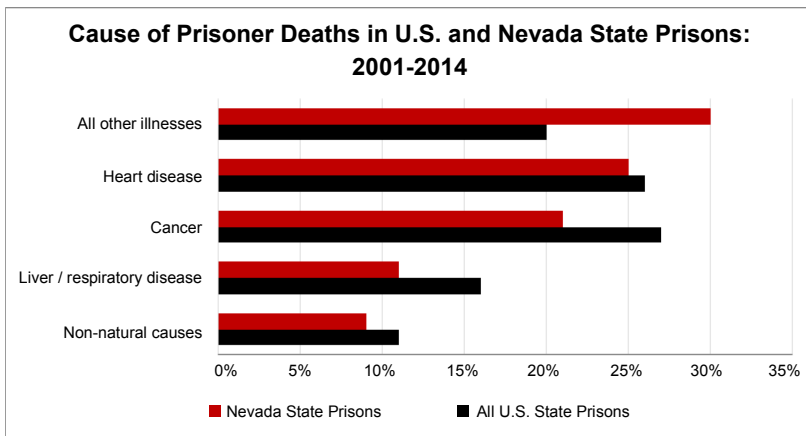


Source: Noonan, 2016

**In 2005-2014, Nevada's prisoner mortality rate was generally higher than national averages.**

From 2005-2014, the average annual prisoner death rate in Nevada prisons was 28 deaths per every 10,000 prisoners. In comparison, the average annual prisoner death rate for all U.S. state prisons was 26 prisoner deaths per every 10,000 prisoners, which is about 7% lower than Nevada's average prisoner death rate (Noonan, 2016).

2

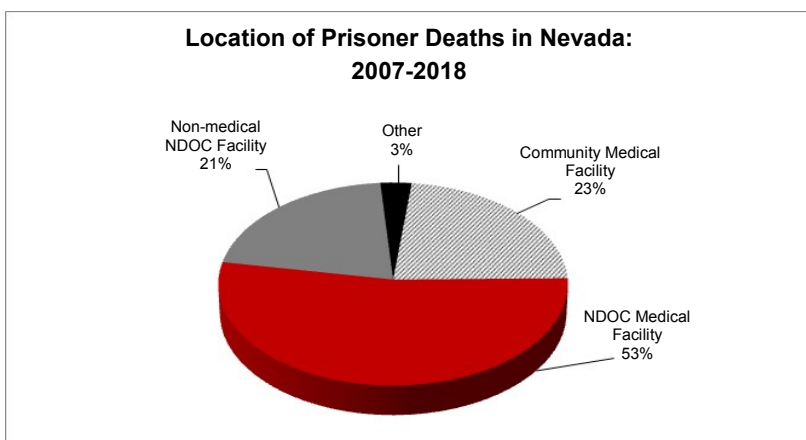


Source: Noonan, 2016

**In Nevada state prisons, the most common cause of death was related to medical illnesses.**

From 2001-2014, the leading causes of prisoner deaths in all U.S. state prisons were cancer (27%) and heart disease (26%). In Nevada state prisons, heart disease (25%) and other illnesses (30%) were the most common causes of death. About 7% of prisoner deaths in Nevada were ruled as suicides, representing the most common non-natural cause of death for prisoners in the state (Noonan, 2016).

3



Source: Nevada Department of Corrections, 2019

**Over half of Nevada's prisoner deaths occurred in NDOC medical facilities.**

From 2007-2018, 53% of the prisoner deaths occurred in a NDOC medical facility and 23% died in a community medical facility. Twenty-one percent died in a non-medical NDOC facility and the remaining 3% died in a location that did not fit into the previous categories such as out of state or community confinement (NDOC, 2019).

## Prisoner Deaths in Nevada and U.S. State Prisons

From 2005-2014, Nevada's prisoner death rate was approximately 7% higher than the average prisoner death rate for all U.S. state prisons. From 2001-2014, the leading cause of prisoner deaths for all U.S. state prisons was cancer (27%). In Nevada prisons, all other illnesses (30%) were the most common cause of death. The other illnesses category includes cerebrovascular disease, AIDS-related illnesses, and other less common or unspecified illnesses (Noonan, 2016). The data do not specify the exact make-up of the other illness category, therefore, some caution should be used when interpreting these numbers. Of the non-natural deaths, suicides accounted for 7% of deaths in Nevada prisons and 6% of deaths in all U.S. state prisons. Other non-natural causes of death for Nevada prisoners were homicide (2%), accidents (<1%), and drug/alcohol intoxication (<1%) (Noonan, 2016).

## Characteristics of Prisoner Deaths in Nevada

NDOC (2019) reported 506 prisoner deaths between 2007-2018. Of these prisoner deaths, 97% were male, 66% were Caucasian, 19% were Black, and were 10% Hispanic. The average age of death for Nevada prisoners was 58. Over half (54%) died between 50-70 years old, 23% were between 30-49 years old, and 17% over the age of 70. Deaths under the age of 30 years old were the least common age range (4%).

NDOC (2019) reported that 53% of the deaths occurred in some type of NDOC medical facility (i.e. infirmary, hospice, medical center). The second most common location of death was in a community medical facility (23%), followed by death in a non-medical NDOC facility (21%). A small percentage of Nevada prisoner deaths (3%) occurred in locations such as out of state confinement, community confinement, or during an escape attempt.

## Data Sources and Limitations

This report relied on two data sources, the Mortality in Correctional Institutions Program (MIC) (Noonan, 2016) and NDOC Inmate Mortality Statistics (NDOC, 2019). The main data limitations are (1) the data sources report on different



different time periods and (2) the MIC relies on correctional facilities to report deaths, which could result in inaccurate or inconsistent reporting. Due to these limitations, some caution should be used when interpreting these findings.

## Implications and Conclusion

Nevada state prisons have historically had a slightly higher prisoner mortality rate when compared to national averages (Noonan, 2016). Examining prisoner deaths in Nevada state prisons provides some context to how the NDOC can reduce mortality rates. Because the most common non-natural cause of death in Nevada state prisons was suicide. Implementing and/or improving suicide prevention programs, staff training, and mental health/medical treatment could likely reduce suicidal deaths in Nevada state prisons.

The leading cause of death for Nevada prisoners was medical illnesses, and just over half the deaths occurred in a NDOC medical facility. Improving the quality and access to health care in Nevada prisons may help reduce inmate deaths and should be a consideration for future correctional reform.

**For references in this Stat Sheet, see the CCJP website: [www.unlv.edu/CCJP](http://www.unlv.edu/CCJP)**

*Stat Sheets* are produced by the Center for Crime and Justice Policy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The Center is housed in the Department of Criminal Justice, which is located in the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs. *Stat Sheets* provide summaries of various criminal justice system practices in Nevada and other states.