

Youth detention population in Australia 2024

Web report | Last updated: 13 Dec 2024 | Topic: [Youth justice](#)

About

This report presents information on the youth detention population in Australia from June 2020 to June 2024. Among the 845 young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024, most were male (90%), aged 14–17 (81%) and First Nations (60%). Over the 4-year period, the number of young people in detention fluctuated across quarters, though rose overall from 791 in the June quarter 2020.

Cat. no: JUV 144

Findings from this report:

- [On an average night in the June quarter 2024, 845 young people were in detention](#)
- [6 in 10 \(60%\) young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024 were First Nations people](#)
- [Most \(81%\) young people in detention were aged 14–17, the remainder were aged 10–13 \(5%\) or 18 and over \(15%\)](#)
- [On an average night in the June quarter 2024, 9 in 10 \(90%\) young people in detention were male](#)



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Summary

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The number of young people in detention

On an average night in the June quarter 2024, 845 young Australians aged 10 and over were in detention because of their involvement, or alleged involvement, in criminal activity. The number of young people in detention has increased, up from 791 in the June quarter 2020, although it is worth noting that detention numbers were lower during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those young people in detention, most are male, aged between 14 and 17 and are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) young people.

Impact of COVID-19 on youth detention data

Measures put in place as part of government responses to COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 (including travel bans/restrictions, lockdowns limiting non-urgent face-to-face work, remote learning for students and quarantine requirements) may have affected youth detention processes during 2019–20 to 2021–22. The long-term impact of COVID-19 on youth detention processes is still unknown. Comparisons made between the June quarter 2024 and 4 years earlier may be impacted by lower numbers and rates of young people in detention during June quarter 2020.

This report examines trends over the most recent 4-year period (June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024). The data in this report does not include the period just prior to the onset of COVID-19 (December quarter 2019 and earlier), but in the 2023 edition of this report there were 941 young people in detention in the June quarter 2019. This indicates that although the number of young people in detention has increased over this latest 4-year period (from 791 to 845), the number of young people in detention in June quarter 2024 remains below pre-COVID levels.

This report is part of an annual series and analyses the numbers and rates of young people aged 10 and over who were in youth detention in Australia. It focuses on trends over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024. This report includes the impact of changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Both jurisdictions raised the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years old (from 10) during 2023.

A better understanding of the characteristics and seasonal trends of young people in detention can help support staff, case workers and policy makers to get the best outcomes for these young people. The data may have important policy implications for the age of criminal responsibility among young people.

All data presented in this report are available through the supplementary tables on [Data](#).

For more information see [Youth detention data](#) and [Raising the age of criminal responsibility](#).

There were 845 young people in detention in Australia on an average night in the June quarter 2024 (Figure 1). Of these, 9 in 10 (90%) were male and 3 in 5 (60%) were First Nations young people.

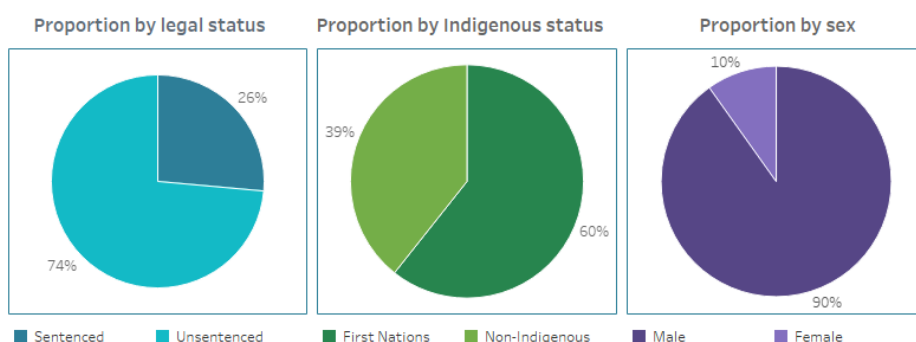
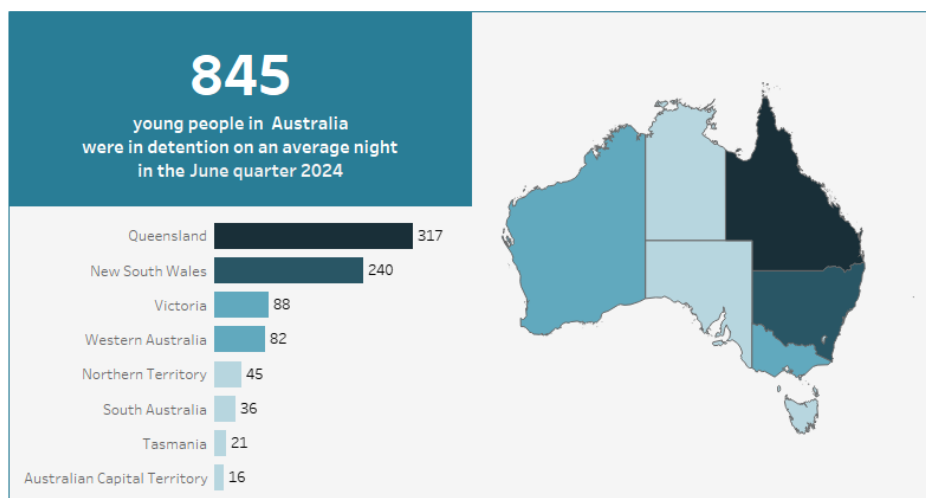
For more information see [Trends in detention – The number of young people in detention](#).

Figure 1: Number of young people in detention on an average night in Australia

See following for extended description of Figure 1

Select Quarter:
June quarter 2024

Select State/Territory:
Australia



Source: AIHW 2024. Youth detention population in Australia 2024
<https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Notes

1. These data are not comparable to those published in previous editions of Youth detention population in Australia. Previous editions contained differences in data formats, specifications, definitions and/or quality across jurisdictions. Further details are provided under [Technical notes](#).
2. A small number of young people are reported as having unknown Indigenous status, so some proportions will not sum to 100%.
3. Average day numbers and proportions may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
4. 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.
5. The legal status pie chart for June quarter 2024 excludes Northern Territory data as data for young people in detention by legal status were not available.

Source: AIHW 2024. *Youth detention population in Australia 2024*

<https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Extended description for Figure 1

There were 784 young people in detention in Australia on an average night in the June quarter 2023, lower than both the June quarter 2020 and June quarter 2024.

Queensland had the most young people in detention in the June quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024, while New South Wales had the most young people in detention in June quarter 2020.

The Australian Capital Territory had the fewest young people in detention in the June quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024, while Tasmania had the fewest young people in detention in June quarter 2020.

Of young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- 74% were unsentenced and 26% were sentenced

- 60% were First Nations and 39% were non-Indigenous
 - 90% were male and 10% were female.
-

The proportion of young people who experienced unsentenced detention

About 3 in 4 (74%) young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024 were unsentenced – that is, they were awaiting their initial court appearance or sentencing. The remainder were serving a sentence. (This proportion was calculated using the Australia total excluding the Northern Territory, as data for legal status were unavailable in the Northern Territory from September quarter 2023 to June quarter 2024).

For more information see [Trends in sentenced and unsentenced detention](#).

Legal status of young people in detention

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

This report looks at trends in the numbers and rates of young people in secure detention facilities in Australia due to their involvement or alleged involvement in crime.

Young people might be in detention while they are:

- unsentenced – that is, awaiting their initial court appearance, or awaiting sentencing after being found or pleading guilty
- sentenced – when they have been found 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'.

First Nations young people in detention

First Nations young people in detention

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) uses 'First Nations people' to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this report.

Of the 845 young people in detention on an average night aged 10 and over in the June quarter 2024, 3 in 5 (60%, or 509) were First Nations young people. Of the 722 young people aged 10–17 in detention during this period, about 2 in 3 (65%, or 471) were First Nations young people, yet First Nations young people made up just 6.6% of the Australian population aged 10–17.

The rate of First Nations young people aged 10–17 in detention increased between the June quarter 2020 and the June quarter 2024 (20 to 27 per 10,000). First Nations young people were 27 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people to be in detention in the June quarter 2024 (compared with 15 times as likely in the June quarter 2020).

First Nations people have a long history of over-representation in the youth and adult justice systems in Australia. This over-representation reflects a history of trauma, cultural dispossession, and forced displacement and assimilation that have affected them, their parents, families and communities (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2011; Johnston 1991).

For more information see [First Nations young people](#).

References

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (2011) *Doing time – time for doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system* - external site opens in new window, Canberra: Australian Government.

Johnston E (1991) *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: national reports, volumes 1–5*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Young people aged 10–13 in detention

Young people aged 10–13 in detention

A very small number of young people aged 10–13 were in detention. This number has increased – from 31 in the June quarter 2020 to 38 in the June quarter 2024.

The rate of young people aged 10–13 in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024 was 0.3 per 10,000. For First Nations young people aged 10–13 the rate was 3.7 per 10,000 and for young non-Indigenous Australians the rate was 0.1 per 10,000.

Of First Nations young people in detention, 6.2% were aged 10–13. The proportion of non-Indigenous young people in detention aged 10–13 was lower (2.0%).

For more information see [Trends in detention](#) and [The age of First Nations young people in detention](#).



Trends of young people in detention

Over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024, the number of young people in detention on an average night increased from 791 to 845. In the June quarter 2024, the rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night was 2.7 per 10,000. This rate was marginally higher than in the June quarter 2020 and the June quarter 2023 (2.6 per 10,000).

For more information see [Trends in the number of young people in detention](#).



Trends of young people in sentenced and unsentenced detention

Northern Territory youth detention population data by legal status were not available between September quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024. This section therefore uses the Australia total excluding the Northern Territory.

From the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024, the proportion of those in unsentenced detention increased from 64% to 74% while the proportion of those in sentenced detention decreased from 36% to 26%.

In the June quarter 2024, there were 2.0 per 10,000 young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention on an average night, and 0.6 per 10,000 in sentenced detention.

The rate of young people in unsentenced detention fluctuated over time. It was lowest in the September quarter 2020 (1.7 per 10,000), and highest in the June quarter 2022 (2.1 per 10,000).

The rate of young people aged 10–17 in sentenced detention changed slightly over time. It was lowest in the March quarter 2022 (0.4 per 10,000) and highest in the June quarter 2020 (0.6 per 10,000).

For more information see [Trends in sentenced and unsentenced detention](#).

Patterns of youth detention in each state and territory

In this report, rates are usually calculated for young people aged 10–17. In 2023, the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. This means that 10 and 11-year-olds cannot be held criminally responsible for their conduct in these jurisdictions during 2023–24 (September quarter 2023 to June quarter 2024).

To account for the increased age of criminal responsibility in these jurisdictions, the rates for the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17 (instead of 10–17) as 10 and 11-year-olds are absent from both the number (numerator) and population (denominator) used to calculate rates. The rates for Australia in 2023–24 will use the sum of the 12–17 population for the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory and the 10–17 population for all other jurisdictions. All rates prior to 2023–24 will use the 10–17 population for all jurisdictions and Australia.

Note that care should be taken when comparing 2023–24 rates with prior quarters for the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory. As the exclusion of 10 and 11-year-olds for these jurisdictions in 2023–24 has reduced the total in-scope population (denominator) by about 25%, rates will appear higher than in prior quarters.

For ease of interpretation, this report will refer to rates for young people aged 10–17, even when the rates are for the 12–17 population (Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory in 2023–24).

For more information see [Technical notes – Rates](#).

Over the 4-year reporting period, the Northern Territory consistently had the highest rate of young people in detention on an average night each quarter (6.6 to 25 per 10,000 aged 10–17) (Figure 2). This rate was at its peak in the September quarter 2023 (25 per 10,000) and lowest in the June quarter 2020 (6.6 per 10,000). This rate increase is consistent with increases in the number of young people in detention (numerator) and decreases in the total in-scope population (denominator), as per the increased age of criminal responsibility in the Northern Territory from 10 to 12 years old in 2023–24. These rates are not comparable with those prior to 2023–24 for the Northern Territory, which include all young people aged 10–17 in the denominator.

In this period, there were declines in the rate of young people in detention on an average night in Victoria and Western Australia. Rates of young people in detention on an average night increased in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory (Figure 2).

In South Australia, rates fluctuated over the 4-year period and showed no clear trend. Trends in detention in the Australian Capital Territory could not be reliably determined due to small numbers (Figure 2).

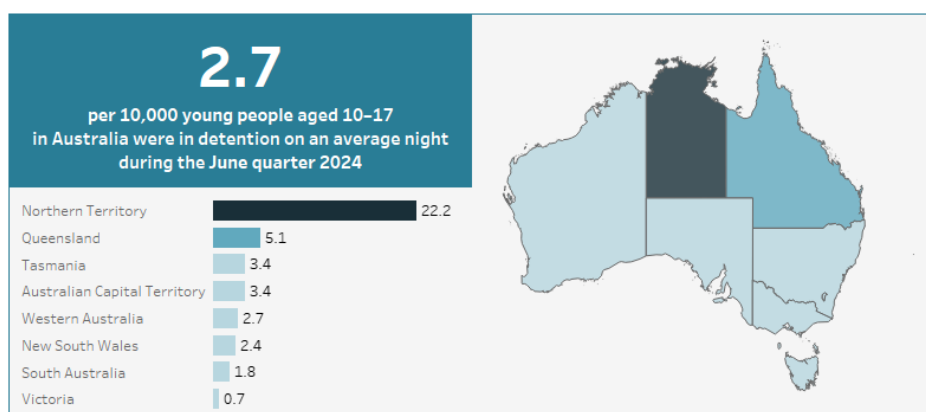
For more information see [State and territory trends](#).

Figure 2: Rates of young people in detention on an average night in Australia

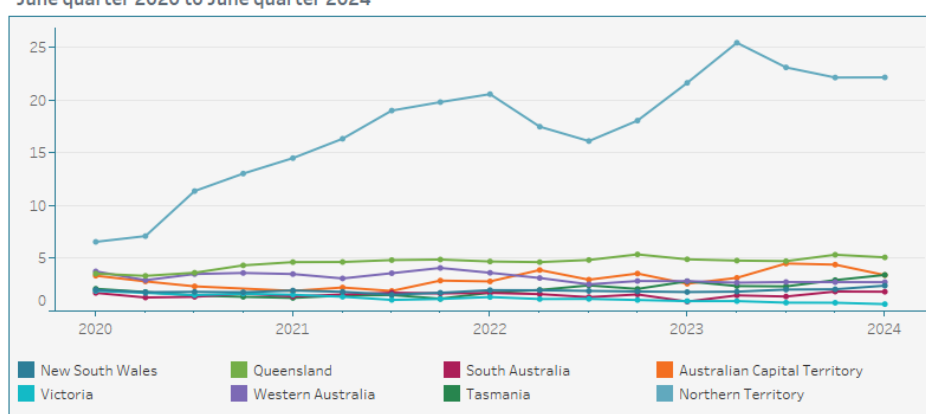
See the following extended description.

Select Quarter:
June quarter 2024

Select State/Territory:
Australia



June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024



Source: AIHW 2024. Youth detention population in Australia 2024
<https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Notes

1. These data are not comparable to those published in previous editions of Youth detention population in Australia. Previous editions contained differences in data formats, specifications, definitions and/or quality across jurisdictions. Further details are provided under [Technical notes](#).
2. 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.
3. Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
4. Rates are not published where there were fewer than 5 young people.
5. In August 2023, the Northern Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Northern Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17.
6. In November 2023, the Australian Capital Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Australian Capital Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17.

Source: AIHW 2024. Youth detention population in Australia 2024

<https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Extended description for Figure 2

The rate of young people in detention on an average night varied considerably across jurisdictions between June quarter 2020 and June quarter 2024. Over this 4-year period, most jurisdictions had a rate (per 10,000) of under 5 young people in detention on an average night. The exceptions were the Northern Territory and Queensland. Between September quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024, Victoria had the lowest rate of young people in detention of all jurisdictions.

Trends in detention

On this page:

- [Key findings](#)
- [The number of young people in detention](#)
- [Trends in the number of young people in detention](#)

Key findings

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- there were 845 young people in youth detention in Australia
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention was 2.7 per 10,000
- most (683 or 81%) young people in detention were aged 14–17
- 9 in 10 (762 or 90%) young people in detention on an average night were male.

On an average night over the 4-year period from June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024:

- the number of those young people aged 10 and over increased from 791 to 845
- the rate of those aged 10–17 increased marginally from 2.6 to 2.7 per 10,000.

The number of young people in detention

On an average night in the June quarter 2024, there were 845 young people in youth detention in Australia due to their involvement, or alleged involvement, in crime.

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- most (722 or 85%) young people in detention were aged 10–17. Of these, 38 were aged 10–13 and 683 were aged 14–17
- the remainder (123 or 15%) were aged 18 or over (Figure 1.1).

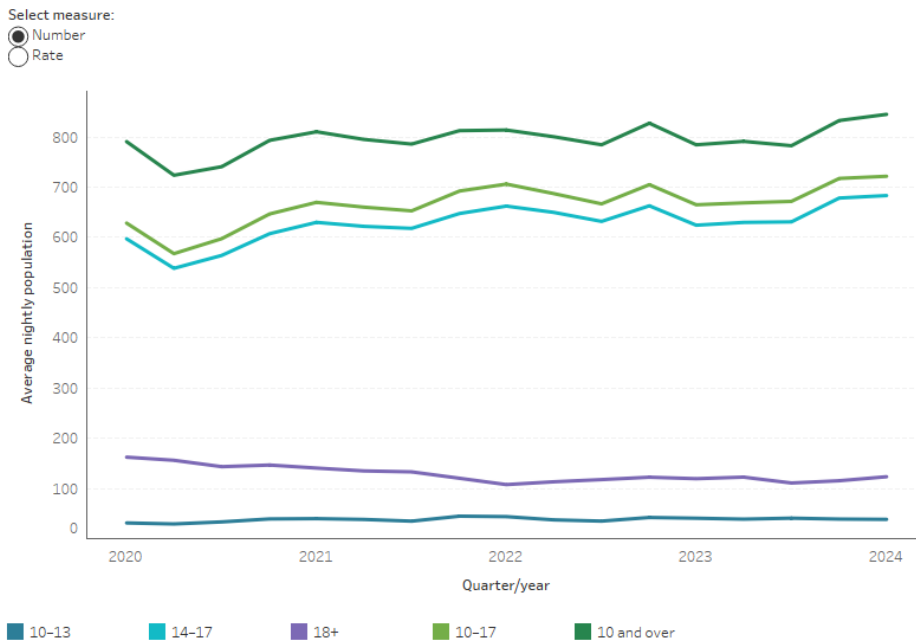
The average nightly population is rounded to whole numbers, so components might not sum to the totals due to rounding (see [Technical notes – Rounding](#)).

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention was 2.7 per 10,000, while the rate for young people aged 10–13 was 0.3, and 5.2 for those aged 14–17 (Figure 1.1)
- 9 in 10 (762 or 90%) young people in detention on an average night were male.

Figure 1.1: Young people in detention on an average night, by age group, June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024 (number and rate)

Interactive graphs show that most young people in detention were aged 10–17 and those aged 14–17 were detained at a higher rate than those aged 10–13.



<https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Notes

1. Trend data may differ from those previously published due to data revisions.
2. For data extracted from the Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set (YJ NMDS), age is calculated at the start of the relevant quarter unless the period of detention began within the quarter or the young person had a birthday, in which case age is calculated as at the start of that period or from their birthday.
3. Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
4. Rates for the 10–13 age group in 2023–24 are calculated using the sum of the 12–13 population (Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) and the 10–13 population (all remaining jurisdictions) due to these jurisdictions increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 during 2023.
5. Rates for the 10–17 age group in 2023–24 are calculated using the sum of the 12–17 population (Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) and the 10–17 population (all remaining jurisdictions) due to these jurisdictions increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 during 2023.

Source: [Supplementary tables S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S16, S17 and S18.](#)

Trends in the number of young people in detention

The number of young people in detention increased from 791 in the June quarter 2020 to 845 in the June quarter 2024. The rate of young people in detention aged 10–17 rose marginally from 2.6 to 2.7 per 10,000.

Both the number and rate of young people in detention were lowest in the September quarter 2020, with the number at 724 and the rate at 2.3 per 10,000.

The rate of young people aged 14–17 in detention followed a similar trend to those aged 10–17, although the rates were slightly higher (Figure 1.1).

For those aged 10–13, the rate of young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024 was 0.3 per 10,000. This was slightly higher than in the June quarter 2020 when the rate was 0.2 per 10,000 (Figure 1.1).

The number of young people in detention on an average night increased in all age groups from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024, except for those aged 18 or over:

- The number of those aged 10–13 in detention increased slightly over the 4-year period, from 31 to 38.
- The number of young people aged 14–17 in detention increased from 597 to 683 and was lowest in the September quarter 2020 (538). This age group drove an overall increase in the number of young people aged 10–17 in detention, from 629 to 722 over the 4-year period.
- Those aged 18 or over showed a steady decline from 162 to 123 young people over the 4-year period (Figure 1.1).

Young males were far more likely to be in detention on an average night than females. This was the case in all quarters throughout the 4-year period for males aged 10 and over (89% to 92%). However, for young people aged 10–13 there was a slightly lower proportion of males in detention on an average night (75% to 89%).





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First Nations young people

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Key findings

Key findings

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- about 2 in 3 (65%) young people aged 10–17 in detention were First Nations, while First Nations people in this age group make up 6.6% of the general population
- of First Nations young people aged 10–17, 27 per 10,000 were in detention
- First Nations young people aged 10–17 were 27 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 to be in detention.

On an average night over the 4-year period from June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024:

- the rate and number of First Nations young people aged 10–17 in detention have been increasing since the September quarter 2020
- the rate and number of non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in detention have been decreasing since the June quarter 2020.

Overview

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) uses 'First Nations people' to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this report.

First Nations young people are over-represented in the youth justice system. The over-representation of this population must be understood alongside the broader historic, political and social context of First Nations people and their experiences of colonialism. For more information see [Understanding youth detention in Australia: First Nations young people](#).

The number of First Nations young people in detention

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- there were 509 First Nations young people aged 10 and over in detention
 - First Nations young people made up 3 in 5 (60%) of all those in detention aged 10 and over (Supplementary tables S1 and S11) while non-Indigenous young people made up 39% (330) (The proportions do not sum to 100% due to a small number of young people of unknown Indigenous status)
 - 27 per 10,000 young First Nations people and 1.0 per 10,000 young non-Indigenous people aged 10–17 were in detention
 - First Nations young people aged 10–17 were 27 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 to be in detention (Supplementary table S18).
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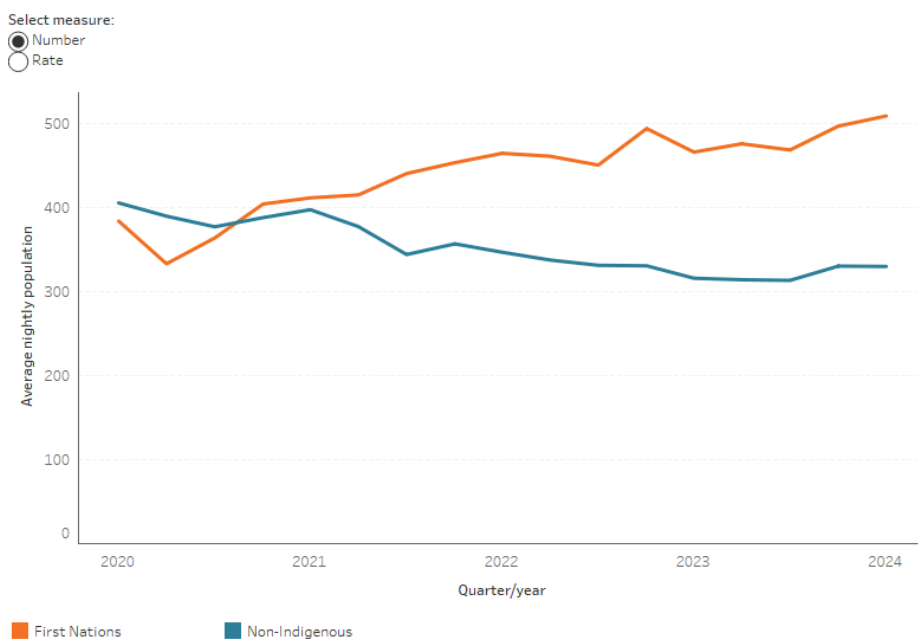
Trends in detention by Indigenous status

Between an average night in the June quarter 2020 and the June quarter 2024:

- the number of First Nations young people aged 10 and over in detention has been increasing since the September quarter 2020
- 46%–60% of young people aged 10 and over in detention were First Nations ([Supplementary tables S1 and S11](#))
- the rate of First Nations young people aged 10–17 in detention has increased overall to 27 per 10,000 in the June quarter 2024, from a low in the September quarter 2020 (17 per 10,000), and has consistently been higher than the non-Indigenous rate (Figure 2.1)
- the rate of non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in detention has remained relatively steady, ranging from 1.0 to 1.3 per 10,000 with an overall downward trend (Figure 2.1)
- First Nations young people were 27 times as likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people in June quarter 2024 compared to 15 times as likely in the June quarter 2020 ([Supplementary table S18](#)).

Figure 2.1: Young people in detention on an average night, by Indigenous status, June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024 (number and rate)

Interactive graphs show that from March quarter 2021, there were more First Nations young people in detention than non-Indigenous young people.



<https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Notes

- Includes young people with unknown sex.
- Trend data may differ from those previously published due to data revisions.
- Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
- Data for the figure presenting numbers includes young people aged 10 and over – data for the rate figure includes young people aged 10–17.
- Rates for the 10–17 age group in 2023–24 are calculated using the sum of the 12–17 population (Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) and the 10–17 population (all remaining jurisdictions) due to these jurisdictions increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 during 2023.

Source: [Supplementary tables S1, S6 and S18](#).



The age of First Nations young people in detention

First Nations young people experience detention at relatively younger ages than non-Indigenous young people, with a higher number, rate, and rate ratio for those aged 10–13 and 14–17. Conversely, fewer First Nations young people in detention were aged 18 or over (Figure 2.2).

Nationally, on an average night in the June quarter 2024, for young people aged 10–13 in detention:

- 32 in 38 (or 82%) were First Nations
- 3.7 per 10,000 were First Nations compared to 0.1 per 10,000 who were non-Indigenous ([Supplementary table S16](#)).

For young people aged 14–17 in detention:

- 440 in 683 (or 64%) were First Nations
- the rate of detention (50 per 10,000) was markedly higher for First Nations than the rate for non-Indigenous young people (1.9 per 10,000) ([Supplementary table S17](#)).

First Nations young people aged 14–17 were 26 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people to be in detention in the June quarter 2024 ([Supplementary table S17](#)).

For young people aged 18 and over in detention, 3 in 10 (37 or 30%) were First Nations.

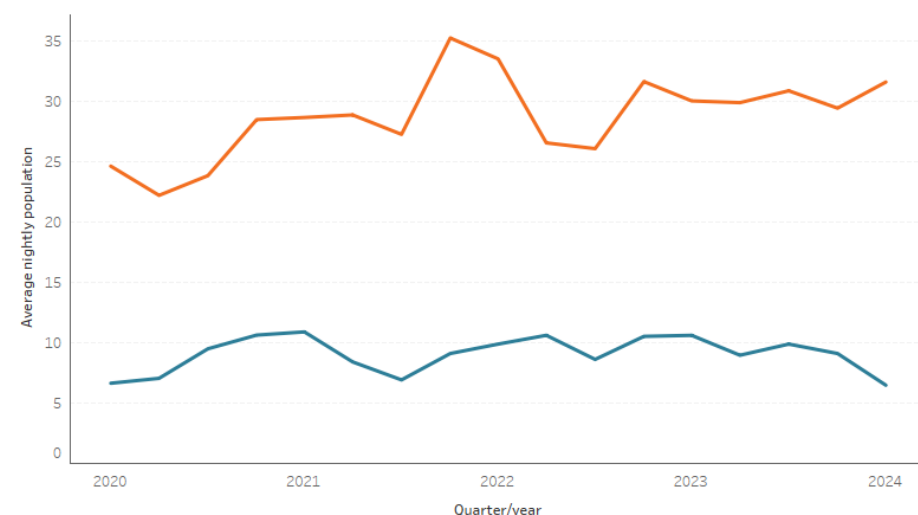
Of the 509 First Nations young people in detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- 32 (6.2%) were aged 10–13, compared to 2.0% of non-Indigenous young people ([Supplementary tables S1, S2, S6 and S7](#))
- 440 (86%) were aged 14–17, compared to 73% of non-Indigenous young people ([Supplementary tables S1, S3, S6 and S8](#))
- 37 (7.3%) were aged 18 and over, compared to 26% of non-Indigenous young people ([Supplementary tables S1, S5, S6 and S1](#)).

Figure 2.2: First Nations and non-Indigenous people in detention, by age group, June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024 (number)

Over the 4-year period, the number of young people aged 18 and over in detention decreased for both First Nations and non-Indigenous young people.

Select age group:
10–13



Indigenous status and age group
First Nations, 10–13

Non-Indigenous, 10–13

<https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Notes

1. Includes young people with unknown sex.
2. Trend data may differ from those previously published due to data revision.

Source: [Supplementary tables S2, S3, S5, S7, S8, and S10](#).

On an average night over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024:

For those aged 10–13:

- the number of First Nations young people ranged from 22 to 35, while for non-Indigenous young people the number ranged between 6 and 11 (Figure 2.2)
- the rate of First Nations young people in detention ranged between 2.5 and 4.0 per 10,000, while for non-Indigenous the rate remained at 0.1 per 10,000 ([Supplementary table S16](#)).

For those aged 14–17:

- the number of First Nations young people in detention ranged from 259 to 440, while for non-Indigenous young people the number ranged between 226 and 295 (Figure 2.2). The overall increase in First Nations young people in detention was driven by those aged 14–17
- the rate of First Nations young people in detention ranged from 32 to 50 in 10,000, while for non-Indigenous the rate was 1.8 to 2.7 in 10,000 ([Supplementary table S17](#)).

For those aged 18 and over the number of First Nations young people in detention ranged from 29 to 58. For non-Indigenous young people, the number ranged from 72 to 104 (Figure 2.2).

Females in detention by Indigenous status

On an average night in the June quarter 2024, of the 58 First Nations young people in detention who were female, the proportion who were aged:

- 10–13 was lower (19%) than the proportion of non-Indigenous young people who were female (22%)
 - 14–17 was higher (12%) than the proportion of non-Indigenous young people who were female (8.9%)
 - 18 or over was lower (1.9%) than the proportion of non-Indigenous young people who were female (3.5%)
 - proportions for young people aged 10–17 were very similar to those aged 14–17 ([Supplementary tables S4 and S9](#)).
-

Males in detention by Indigenous status

On an average night in the June quarter 2024, of the 451 First Nations young people in detention who were male, the proportion who were aged:

- 10–13 was higher (81%) than the proportion of non-Indigenous young people who were male (78%) ([Supplementary tables S2 and S7](#))
 - 14–17 was lower (88%) than the proportion of non-Indigenous young people who were male (91%) ([Supplementary tables S3 and S8](#))
 - 18 or over was higher (98%) than the proportion of non-Indigenous young people who were male (97%) ([Supplementary tables S5 and S10](#)).
-

First Nations young people in detention by legal status

Northern Territory youth detention data for legal status are unavailable between September quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024, so the Australia total excluding the Northern Territory has been used for national reporting.

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- over 3 in 4 (77% or 360) First Nations young people in detention were unsentenced – 68% of non-Indigenous young people in detention were unsentenced
- the rate of First Nations young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention was 21 per 10,000
- the rate of non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention was 0.8 per 10,000
- First Nations young people made up half (51% or 107) of all young people in sentenced detention and 61% (360) in unsentenced detention ([Supplementary tables S1, S19, S29, S36, S37 and S47](#)).

On an average night over the 4-year period (June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024), for those in unsentenced detention:

- the proportion of First Nations young people increased from 68% (248) to 77% (360) ([Supplementary tables S1 and S19](#))
- the rate of First Nations young people aged 10–17 has been increasing since the September quarter 2020. The rate was at its lowest in the September quarter 2020 at 13 per 10,000 and highest in the March quarter 2024 at 21 per 10,000 young people ([Supplementary table S36](#))
- the rate of non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 was relatively stable over time ranging from 0.8 to 1.1 per 10,000 ([Supplementary table S36](#)).

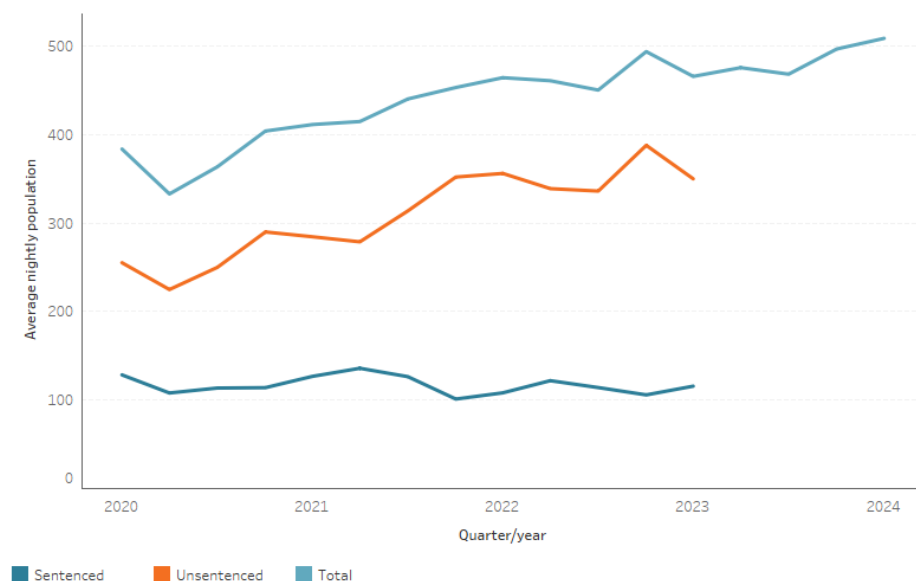
On an average night over the 4-year period (June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024), for those in sentenced detention:

- the number of First Nations young people fell by 9.7% from 119 (32%) to 107 (23%) ([Supplementary table S37](#))
- the rate of First Nations young people aged 10–17 rose from 5.2 to 5.5 per 10,000. The rate was at its lowest in the March quarter 2022 at 3.6 per 10,000 ([Supplementary table S54](#), Figure 2.3)
- the rate of non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 declined slightly from 0.3 per 10,000 in the June quarter 2020 to 0.2 per 10,000 in the June quarter 2024 ([Supplementary table S54](#), Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: First Nations young people in detention, by legal status, June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024 (number, rate and rate ratio)

The rate of First Nations young people was usually highest in March and June quarters, and lowest in September and December quarters.

Select measure:
Number - incl NT



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Notes

1. Data for the figures presenting numbers includes those young people aged 10 and over, data for the rate and rate ratio figures includes young people aged 10–17.
2. Figures presenting data excluding the Northern Territory, exclude Northern Territory data for the entire 4-year period.
3. Northern Territory data for legal status is unavailable for 2023–24.
4. Trend data may differ from those previously published due to data revisions.
5. Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
6. Rate ratio is calculated by dividing the First Nations rate by the non-Indigenous rate.
7. Rates for the 10–17 age group in 2023–24 are calculated using the sum of the 12–17 population (Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) and the 10–17 population (all remaining jurisdictions) due to these jurisdictions increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 during 2023.

Source: [Supplementary tables S18, S36, S24](#).

First Nations young people in detention by state and territory

The rates for the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory are for young people aged 10–17 between June quarter 2020 and June quarter 2023, and for young people aged 12–17 during 2023–24. This is because the minimum age of criminal responsibility was increased to 12 in these jurisdictions during 2023.

For ease of interpretation, this report will refer to rates for young people aged 10–17, even when the rates are for the 12–17 population (Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory in 2023–24).

For more information see [Technical notes – Rates](#).

On an average night in the June quarter 2024, First Nations young people aged 10–17 were more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people across all states and territories. Of the states and territories:

- the Northern Territory and Queensland had the highest rates of First Nations young people aged 10–17 in detention (46 and 42 per 10,000, respectively)
- Victoria had the lowest rate (5.8 per 10,000) of First Nations young people aged 10–17 in detention
- the rate of detention for non-Indigenous young people was highest in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (2.6 and 2.1 per 10,000).

Among the states and territories for which rate ratios could be calculated, the rate ratio for First Nations young people aged 10–17 in detention ranged from 3.5 times the non-Indigenous rate in Tasmania to 28 times in Queensland (Figure 2.4).

Rates were not calculated due to small numbers for First Nations young people aged 10–17 in the Australian Capital Territory, and for non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in the Northern Territory.

On an average night over the 4-year period (June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024) the rate of First Nations young people aged 10–17 in detention:

- increased in the Northern Territory (from 14 to 46 per 10,000), Queensland (from 29 to 42 per 10,000) and New South Wales (11 to 21 per 10,000)
- fell in Western Australia (from 36 to 25 per 10,000) and Victoria (from 9.9 to 5.8 per 10,000)
- remained steady in South Australia (at 19 per 10,000)
- the rate increase in the Northern Territory is consistent with increases in the number of young people in detention (numerator) and decreases in the total in-scope population (denominator), as per the increased age of criminal responsibility in the Northern Territory from 10 to 12 years old in 2023–24. These rates are not comparable with those prior to 2023–24 for the Northern Territory, which include all young people aged 10–17 in the denominator.

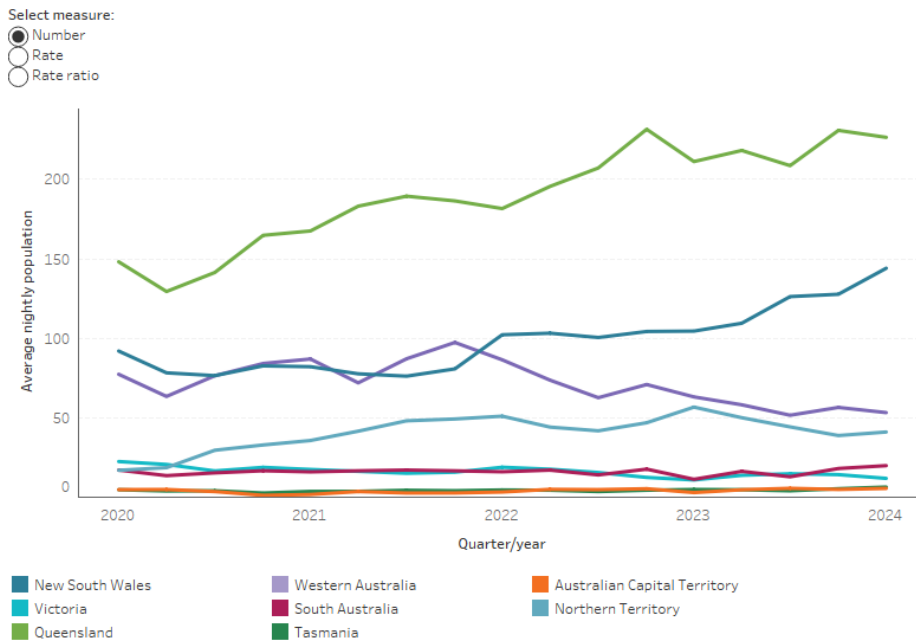
The rate of non-Indigenous young people aged 10–17 in detention:

- increased in Queensland (from 1.1 to 1.5 per 10,000) and Tasmania (1.6 to 2.6 per 10,000)
- fell in New South Wales (from 1.2 to 0.9 per 10,000), Victoria (from 1.7 to 0.5 per 10,000), Western Australia (from 1.2 to 1.0 per 10,000) and the Australian Capital Territory (from 2.2 to 2.1)
- remained steady in South Australia (at 0.8 per 10,000).

The rate ratio has been consistently lowest in Victoria, at 4–14 times the non-Indigenous rate. The rate ratio was consistently highest in Western Australia until June quarter 2023, ranging from a high of 52 times the non-Indigenous rate in June quarter 2021 to a low of 23 in December quarter 2023 (Figure 2.4). Since June quarter 2023, the highest rate ratio has alternated between Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia.

Figure 2.4: First Nations young people in detention, by state and territory, June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024 (number, rate and rate ratio)

Queensland had the highest number of young people in detention over the 4-year period.



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Notes

1. Trend data may differ from those previously published due to data revisions.
2. For data extracted from the [Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set \(YJ NMDS\)](#), age is calculated at the start of the relevant quarter unless the period of detention began within the quarter or the young person had a birthday, in which case age is calculated as at the start of that period or from their birthday.
3. Northern Territory data may be affected by legislation implemented in May 2021 which led to key changes in youth justice processes.
4. Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
5. Rates are not published where there were fewer than 5 young people.
6. 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.
7. Rate ratio is calculated by dividing the First Nations rate by the non-Indigenous rate.
8. Blank observations in the rate ratio figure are due to unpublished rates. Where there were fewer than 5 young people, rates and rate ratios are not calculated. There might be instances when a numerator is presented as 5, and the rate is not calculated due to rounding (see [Technical notes](#)).
9. Rate ratios for most quarters are not available for Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory due to small numbers.
10. In August 2023, the Northern Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Northern Territory in 2023-24 are for young people aged 12-17.
11. In November 2023, the Australian Capital Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Australian Capital Territory in 2023-24 are for young people aged 12-17.

Source: [Supplementary tables S11 and S18](#).

Trends in sentenced and unsentenced detention

On this page:

- [Key findings](#)
- [The number of young people in unsentenced detention](#)
- [The number of young people in sentenced detention](#)
- [Young people in sentenced and unsentenced detention by age group](#)
- [Young people in sentenced and unsentenced detention by sex](#)

Key findings

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- almost 3 in 4 (588 or 74%) young people in detention were unsentenced
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention was 2.0 per 10,000 and in sentenced detention 0.6 per 10,000.

On an average night from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024:

- the proportion of those in unsentenced detention increased from 64% to 74%
- the number of young people in sentenced detention fell by 24%.

Northern Territory youth detention population data by legal status were not available between September quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024. This section therefore uses the Australia total excluding the Northern Territory.

The number of young people in unsentenced detention

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- almost 3 in 4 (588 or 74%) young people in detention were unsentenced
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention was 2.0 per 10,000.

Over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024:

- the proportion of those in unsentenced detention increased from 64% (495) to 74% (588) ([Supplementary tables S11 and S29](#))
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention increased slightly from 1.9 to 2.0 per 10,000
- the rate of young people in unsentenced detention tended to be higher in the March and June quarters, and lower in the September and December quarters. The exceptions were the June quarter 2020 and June quarter 2023, when the rates were lower (Figure 3.1).

Over the one-year period from June quarter 2023 to June quarter 2024:

- the number of young people in unsentenced detention increased from 551 to 588
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention increased slightly from 1.9 to 2.0 per 10,000 (Figure 3.1).

The number of young people in sentenced detention

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- about 1 in 4 (212 or 26%) young people in detention were sentenced
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in sentenced detention was 0.6 per 10,000 (Figure 3.1).

Over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024:

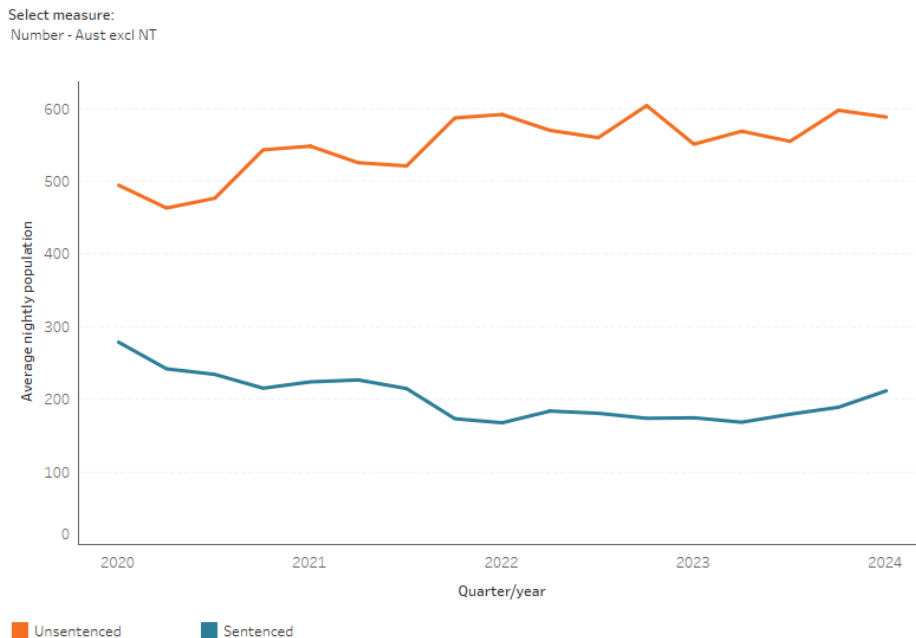
- the number of young people in sentenced detention fell by 24% from 278 to 212, with a low in the June quarter 2022 (168, or 22%) ([Supplementary tables S11 and S47](#), Figure 3.1)
- the rate of young people in sentenced detention has remained steady at 0.6 per 10,000 young people for both the June quarter 2020 and the June quarter 2024 (Figure 3.1).

Over the one-year period from the June quarter 2023 to the June quarter 2024:

- the number of young people in sentenced detention increased from 174 to 212 (Figure 3.1)
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 in sentenced detention increased from 0.4 to 0.6 per 10,000 young people ([Supplementary table S54](#), Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Young people in detention on an average night, by legal status, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2024 (number and rate)

The number of young people in unsentenced detention varied more each quarter, while the number in sentenced detention was more stable.



Notes

1. Data for the figures presenting numbers includes those young people aged 10 and over, data for the rate figures includes young people aged 10–17.
2. Figures presenting data excluding the Northern Territory, exclude Northern Territory data for the entire 4-year period.
3. Northern Territory data for legal status is unavailable for 2023–24.
4. Trend data may differ from those previously published due to data revisions.
5. Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
6. Rates for the 10–17 age group in 2023–24 are calculated using the sum of the 12–17 population (Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) and the 10–17 population (all remaining jurisdictions) due to these jurisdictions increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 during 2023.

Source: [Supplementary tables S29, S36, S47 and S54](#).

Young people in sentenced and unsentenced detention by age group

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- a higher proportion of those in unsentenced detention were aged 10–17 (91%) than in sentenced detention (68%) ([Supplementary tables S29, S32, S47 and S50](#))
- 9.4% of those in unsentenced detention were aged 18 or over compared to 32% of those in sentenced detention ([Supplementary tables S29, S33, S47 and S51](#)).

The proportion of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention was consistently higher than in sentenced detention throughout the 4-year period (from June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024):

- in unsentenced detention, 89% to 92% were aged 10–17
- in sentenced detention, 52% to 71% were aged 10–17, with a low in the March quarter 2021 and a high in the March quarter 2024 ([Supplementary tables S29, S32, S47, and S50](#)).

Additionally, in the June quarter 2024, 5.2% of young people in unsentenced detention were aged 10–13 and 0.4% in sentenced detention were aged 10–13. These proportions fluctuated over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024 for unsentenced detention (5.2% to 7.1%) and sentenced detention (0.0% to 1.1%) ([Supplementary tables S29, S30, S47, S48](#)).

One reason more young people aged 18 and over are in sentenced detention than in unsentenced detention is that some young people may continue serving a sentence in a youth facility once they turn 18. Whether they remain in youth detention or are moved to the adult justice system depends on different policies and practices in the states and territories.

For example, in Victoria, 58% to 89% of young people in sentenced detention were aged 18 or over in each quarter over the 4-year period (from June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024), compared with 29% to 48% in Australia overall. This is in part due to the 'dual track' sentencing system operating in Victoria, which results in a relatively large proportion of young people aged 18 and over in sentenced detention (for more details see [Age limits](#)).

Young people in sentenced and unsentenced detention by sex

On an average night in the June quarter 2024, comparatively more females (84%) than males (72%) were in unsentenced detention ([Supplementary tables S29 and S11](#)). This was the case in each quarter throughout the 4-year period (from June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024), with:

- 72% to 87% of females in detention unsentenced
- 63% to 78% of males in detention unsentenced.

Conversely, males (28%) were more likely than females (16%) to be in sentenced detention on an average night in the June quarter 2024 ([Supplementary tables S47 and S11](#)). These results should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of females in detention.

Over the 4-year period, the proportion of males in sentenced detention declined from 37% in the June quarter 2020 to 28% in the June quarter 2024, while the corresponding proportion of females fluctuated, with an overall decrease from 23% to 16%.

State and territory trends

On this page:

- [Key findings](#)
- [Overview](#)
- [The number of young people in detention by state and territory](#)
- [Changes in the rate of young people in detention over the 4-year period in each state and territory](#)
- [State and territory differences by legal status](#)

Key findings

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- the number of young people aged 10 and over in detention was lowest in the Australian Capital Territory (16) and highest in Queensland (317)
- the rate of young people aged 10–17 was highest in the Northern Territory (22 per 10,000) and lowest in Victoria (0.7 per 10,000).

On an average night from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024:

- the Northern Territory consistently had the highest rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention (6.6–22 per 10,000)
- the rate of young people in detention increased in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, and declined in Victoria and Western Australia. South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory remained largely steady.

Overview

The size of youth justice populations in states and territories can be affected by the population size of that state or territory, as well as by differences in state legislation, policies and practices, including the available types of supervised orders and options for diversion. For more information see [Youth Justice in Australia 2022–23 – appendices B to D](#).

In 2023, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 (from 10). This means that young people aged 10 and 11 cannot be held criminally responsible for their conduct and cannot be supervised in the youth justice system during 2023–24. For more information see [Raising the age of criminal responsibility](#).

The rates for the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory are for young people aged 10–17 between June quarter 2020 and June quarter 2023, and for young people aged 12–17 during 2023–24.

For ease of interpretation, this report will refer to rates for young people aged 10–17, even when the rates are for the 12–17 population (Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory in 2023–24). For more information see [Technical notes – Rates](#).

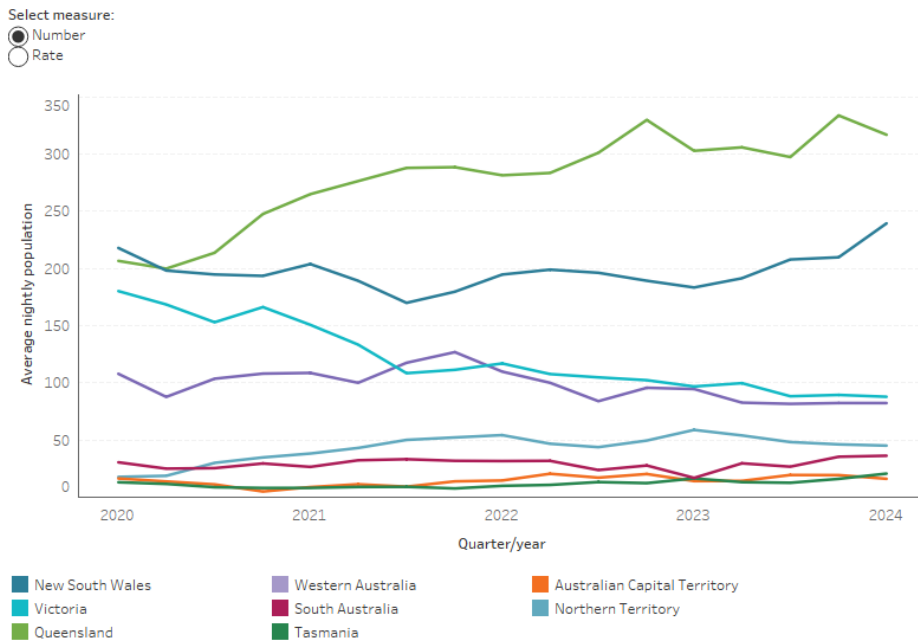
The number of young people in detention by state and territory

On an average night in the June quarter 2024:

- Queensland had the highest number of young people in detention (317), followed by New South Wales (240) and Victoria (88)
- the Northern Territory had the highest rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention (22 per 10,000), followed by Queensland (5.1 per 10,000)
- the Australian Capital Territory had the lowest number of young people aged 10 and over in detention (16), followed by Tasmania (21) and South Australia (36)
- Victoria had the lowest rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention (0.7 per 10,000), followed by South Australia (1.8 per 10,000) (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Young people in detention on an average night, by state and territory, June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024 (number and rate)

Over the 4-year period, the number of young people in detention increased in all jurisdictions except Victoria, Western Australia and the ACT.



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Notes

1. Rates are for young people aged 10–17. Numbers include young people aged 10 or over who are under youth justice supervision. For numbers of young people aged 10–17 only, refer to the supplementary tables on [Data](#).
2. Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
3. Rates are not published where there were fewer than 5 young people.
4. 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.
5. Rates are calculated from the unrounded average nightly populations and are not published when there are fewer than 5 young people in the numerator. There might be instances when a numerator is presented as 5 due to rounding, and the rate is not calculated (see [Technical notes](#)).
6. Numbers might not add up to the total due to rounding.
7. In August 2023, the Northern Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Northern Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17.
8. In November 2023, the Australian Capital Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Australian Capital Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17.

Source: [Supplementary tables S11, S18, S29, S36, S47 and S54](#).

Changes in the rate of young people in detention over the 4-year period in each state and territory

On an average night over the 4-year period from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024:

- overall, the Northern Territory had the highest rate of young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average night each quarter (6.6–22 per 10,000). The rate peaked in the September quarter 2023 after being at its lowest in the June quarter 2020. This rate increase is consistent with increases in the number of young people in detention (numerator) and decreases in the total in-scope population (denominator), as per the increased age of criminal responsibility in the Northern Territory from 10 to 12 years old in 2023–24. These rates are not comparable with those prior to 2023–24 for the Northern Territory, which include all young people aged 10–17 in the denominator
- the rate of young people in detention increased in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Northern Territory and declined in Victoria and Western Australia. Rates in South Australia fluctuated over this period and did not follow a clear trend
- the states with the highest number of young people aged 10 and over in detention were Queensland (200–334), followed by New South Wales (170–240), Victoria (88–180) and Western Australia (82–127)
- since the September quarter 2020, Queensland has had the highest number of young people in detention on an average night
- the size of the youth detention population fell in Victoria and Western Australia (Figure 4.2)
- trends in detention could not be reliably determined in the Australian Capital Territory due to small numbers.

State and territory differences by legal status

Northern Territory detention data for legal status were unavailable between September quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024. Therefore, the Northern Territory is excluded from this section.

On an average night in the June quarter 2024, the rate of young people aged 10–17:

- in unsentenced detention ranged from 0.5 per 10,000 in Victoria to 4.4 per 10,000 in Queensland
- in sentenced detention ranged from 0.2 per 10,000 in Victoria to 1.3 per 10,000 in Western Australia (among the states and territories for which data is available) (Figure 4.2).

Over the 4-year period (from June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024), the rate of young people aged 10–17 in unsentenced detention:

- increased in Queensland from a low of 3.0 per 10,000 in the September quarter 2020 to 4.9 per 10,000 in the March quarter 2023
- declined in Victoria from a high of 1.5 per 10,000 in the June quarter 2020 to 0.5 per 10,000 in the June quarter 2024.

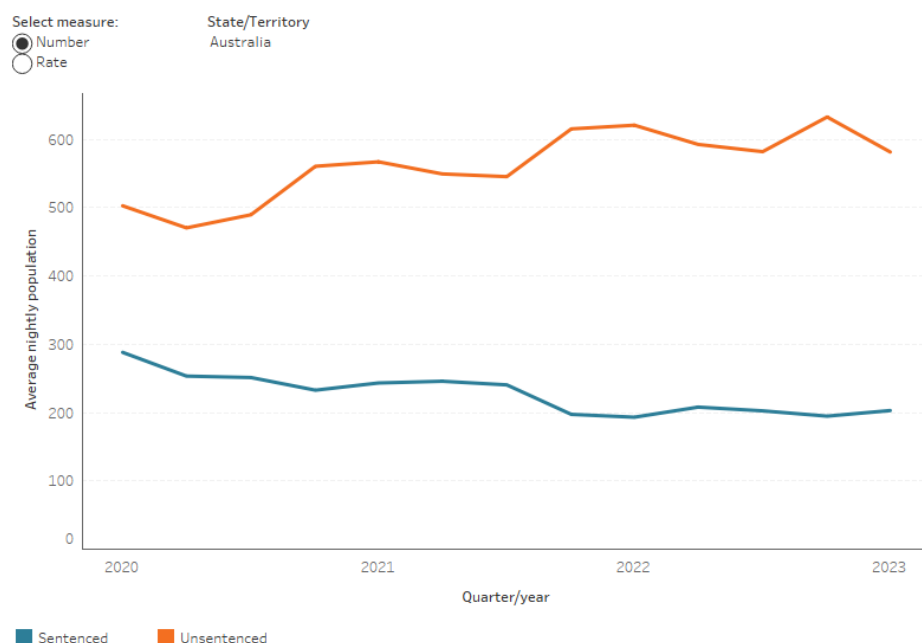
Trends in unsentenced detention could not be reliably determined in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory due to small numbers.

Over the same 4-year period, the rate of young people aged 10–17 in sentenced detention fell overall in New South Wales (0.7 to 0.4 per 10,000), Victoria (0.4 to 0.2 per 10,000) and Western Australia (1.5 to 1.3 per 10,000).

Trends in sentenced detention could not be reliably determined in South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory due to small numbers (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Young people in detention on an average night, by legal status, by state and territory, June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2024 (number and rate)

The number and rate of young people in unsentenced detention was higher than sentenced detention across jurisdictions for most of the 4-year period.



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Notes

1. Numbers might not add up to the total due to rounding.
2. Rates are for young people aged 10–17. Numbers include young people aged 10 and over who are under youth justice supervision. For numbers of young people aged 10–17 only, refer to the supplementary tables on [Data](#).
3. Rates are the number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.
4. Rates are not published where there were fewer than 5 young people.
5. 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.
6. Rates are calculated from the unrounded average nightly populations, and are not published when there are fewer than 5 young people in the numerator. There might be instances where a numerator is presented as 5 due to rounding, and the rate is not calculated (see [Technical notes](#)).
7. Rates for some quarters for Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory are suppressed due to small numbers.
8. In August 2023, the Northern Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Northern Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17.
9. In November 2023, the Australian Capital Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Australian Capital Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17.

Source: [Supplementary tables S29, S36, S47 and S54](#).

Understanding 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. Supervision may take place either in the community or in detention facilities.

Among the states and territories, variations in the numbers and rates of young people under supervision reflect differences in youth justice legislation, policy and practice. This includes differences in police practices, the types of legal orders available and the options for diversion.

This report and accompanying supplementary tables (those with a prefix of 'S') are available from [*Youth detention population in Australia 2024*](#) and [Data](#).

Principles of youth detention

The 2 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 and for the shortest appropriate period (Chrzanowski and 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 (UN 1985, 1989).

In August 2024, Queensland introduced legislation to reword and clarify youth justice principle 18 (detention as a last resort) in the *Youth Justice Act 1992*. The principle now reads:

A child should be detained in custody, where necessary, including to ensure community safety, where other non-custodial measures of prevention and intervention would not be sufficient, and for no longer than necessary to meet the purpose of detention. Diverting young people from further involvement in the justice system is crucial to applying these principles. Forms of diversion include:

- police warnings
- referral to services such as drug and alcohol treatment
- bail supervision for those at risk of remand
- youth justice conferencing.

Alternatives to detention include:

- transfer to specialist courts or programs
- supervised or unsupervised community orders.

As a result, most young people under supervision in Australia are supervised in the community.

On an average day in 2022-23, just over 4 in 5 young people under supervision were supervised in the community, and almost 1 in 5 were in detention. Of those who were under supervision, about half spent time in detention at some point during the year (AIHW 2024).

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2024) *Youth justice in Australia 2022-23*, cat. no. JUV 143, AIHW, Canberra.

Chrzanowski A and Wallis R (2011) 'Understanding the youth justice system', in: Stewart A, Allard T and Dennison S (eds), *Evidence based policy and practice in youth justice*, Annandale: The Federation Press, 7-27.

UN (United Nations) (1985) *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules)* - external site opens in new window, New York, USA: United Nations, viewed 8 September 2023.

UN (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* - external site opens in new window, New York, USA: United Nations, viewed 8 September 2023.

Age limits

In Australia, young people may be charged with a criminal offence if they are aged 10 or over (in all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory). Separate justice systems operate for young people and adults, each with specific legislation. The upper age limit in the youth justice system is 17 (at the time of the offence) in most states and territories. Those aged 18 or over are dealt with under the adult justice system.

In 2022–23, about 1 in 4 young people under supervision on an average day were aged 18 or over (AIHW 2024). Reasons for this include:

- Young people may be 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).
- Some young people aged 18 or over are supervised by youth justice agencies due to their vulnerability or immaturity (in some jurisdictions).
- Young people aged between 18 and 20 in Victoria who appear 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 June 2023, Western Australia mandated the transfer of young people who have reached the age of 18 from youth detention to adult prison. As a result of this legislation, there were only 2 young people aged 18 and over in detention on an average night in Western Australia in the June quarter 2024, compared to 13 on an average night in the June quarter 2023 ([Supplementary Table S15](#)).

In this report, the term 'young people' has been used to refer to individuals aged 10 and over who are supervised by a youth justice agency. 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 report, rates have been calculated only for young people aged 10–13, 14–17 and 10–17, as these are the key populations in most states and territories (for more information about the calculation of rates see [Technical notes](#)). For 2023–24, the 10–13 and 10–17 rates for the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory are calculated using the 12–13 and 12–17 populations due to the minimum age of criminal responsibility being raised to 12 in these jurisdictions.

For this report, the age on an average night each quarter has been calculated based on the age a young person is each night that they are in detention. If a young person changes age during a period of detention, then the average nightly number in detention will reflect this.

Average nightly data broken down by age will not be comparable to *Youth detention population in Australia* releases prior to 2020. For more information about the calculation of age, see [Technical notes](#).

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2024) *Youth justice in Australia 2022–23*, cat. no. JUV 143, AIHW, Canberra.

Raising the age of criminal responsibility

In Australia, young people are deemed to have criminal responsibility if they are aged 10 or over. Young people aged between 10 and 14 are given the presumption of *doli incapax*, meaning that they cannot be held criminally responsible unless it can be proved beyond reasonable doubt that the young person knew that their conduct was wrong (Child Rights International Network 2020).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) recently issued an update to the International Standards for the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility. In paragraph 22 of its 'General comment no. 24 (2019) on children's rights in juvenile justice', the Committee deemed the previously recommended age of criminal responsibility of 12 years to be too low.

The Committee now encourages state parties to 'take note of recent scientific findings, and to increase their minimum age to at least 14 years'.

The recommendation to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility reflects current research in child development and neuroscience which provides evidence that the capacity for abstract reasoning is not fully developed in children aged 12 and 13 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2019).

In Australia, the Meeting of Attorneys-General (MAG) reviewed Australia's age of criminal responsibility. MAG noted that the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory have committed to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and states have supported the development of proposals to raise the age, having regard to any carve-outs, timing and discussion of implementation requirements (MAG 2022). This followed on from the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (Royal Commission, Australian Government 2017), which resulted in recommendations for Australia to:

- raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12
- keep young people aged 14 and under out of detention unless they have committed a serious crime or pose a serious risk to the community.

In August 2023, the Northern Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. In August 2024, the Northern Territory committed to lowering the criminal age of responsibility back to 10.

In May 2023, the Australian Capital Territory introduced legislation to raise the criminal age of responsibility to 12 initially (this was implemented in November 2023), then to 14 within the next 2 years (which is expected to be implemented in mid-2025).

In April 2023, Victoria made an announcement to raise the criminal age of responsibility to 12 by the end of 2024, and to 14 in 2027. In August 2024, Victoria announced that they would no longer raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 but remain committed to raising the age to 12.

In June 2022, Tasmania committed to raising the age of criminal detention from 10 to 14 years old. Subsequently, in September 2023, the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings report recommended that the Government work towards increasing the minimum age of detention (including remand) to 16 years by developing alternatives to detention for children aged 14 and 15 years who are found guilty of serious violent offences and who may be a danger to themselves or the community.

References

Child Rights International Network (2020) [*Minimum ages of criminal responsibility around the world*](#) - external site opens in new window, London, UK: CRIN, viewed 8 September 2023.

MAG (Meeting of Attorneys-General) (2022) [*Council of Attorneys-General communique. Canberra: Age of Criminal Responsibility Working Group*](#) - external site opens in new window, viewed 8 September 2023.

Royal Commission, Australian Government (2017) [*Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory*](#) - external site opens in new window, Canberra: Australian Government, viewed 8 September 2023.

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) [*General comment no. 24 \(2019\) on children's rights in the child justice system*](#) - external site opens in new window, New York, USA: United Nations, viewed 8 September 2023.



First Nations young people

First Nations people (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) have a long history of over-representation in the youth and adult justice systems in Australia (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2011; Johnston 1991). It is important to understand how the past shapes the lives of First Nations Australians today: they have a long history of trauma, cultural dispossession, and forced displacement and assimilation, which affects their physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Disconnection from family and kinship systems, from Country, from spirituality and cultural practices, as well as the loss of parenting practices, are sources of trauma that can be passed from caregiver to child. First Nations people's experience of child welfare policies has historically been traumatic, with the policy of forcible removal of children leading to what is now known as the Stolen Generations.

These removal policies have long-term consequences, not just for those who were removed but also their descendants, including enduring social, physical and psychological impacts for those directly involved and their families and communities (AIHW 2018, 2019). The over-representation of First Nations children in juvenile justice systems reflects this history of trauma and the stressors that have affected their parents, families and communities.

Although only about 5.7% of people aged 10–17 in Australia are First Nations, just under two-thirds (63%) of the people aged 10–17 in detention on an average day in 2022–23 were First Nations (AIHW 2024). (Note this proportion differs from the nightly average for the June quarter 2024 as it is restricted to the 10–17 age group and is from an earlier period).

Outcome 11 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is that First Nations young people not be over-represented in the criminal justice system. The target under the National Agreement is to reduce the rate of First Nations young people (10–17 years) in detention by 30%, from 31.9 per 10,000 young people on an average day in 2018–19 to 22.3 per 10,000 young people by 2030–31 (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020).

First Nations over-representation in youth detention can be expressed as a rate ratio, which compares the rate of First Nations young people with that of non-Indigenous young people (for more details see [Technical notes – Rate ratios](#)).

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2018) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations and descendants: numbers, demographic characteristics and selected outcomes*, catalogue number IHW 195, AIHW, Australian Government.

— (2019) *Children living in households with members of the Stolen Generations*, catalogue number IHW 214, AIHW, Australian Government.

— (2024) *Youth justice in Australia 2022–23*, cat. no. JUV 143, AIHW, Canberra.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2020) *Closing the Gap report 2020* - external site opens in new window, Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, viewed 8 September 2023.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (2011) *Doing time – time for doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system* - external site opens in new window, Canberra: Australian Government.

Johnston E (1991) Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: national reports, volumes 1–5, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Sentenced and unsentenced detention

Young people might be in detention while they are:

- unsentenced – that is, awaiting their initial court appearance, or awaiting sentencing after being found or pleading guilty
- sentenced – when they have been found 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 2022–23, the vast majority (98%) of young people in unsentenced detention on an average day were on remand (AIHW 2024). 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). However, more than one-third (35%) of those who were in unsentenced detention during 2022–23 experienced police-referred detention at some time during the year (AIHW 2024).

In this report, young people who are both sentenced and unsentenced at the same time (for example, for 2 different matters) are counted as sentenced.

From 2017–18 onwards, Queensland's detention data include sentenced and unsentenced young people in detention centres and other custodial settings. In Queensland, 'other custodial settings' includes young people held in police watch houses under remand and sentenced detention, which is unique compared with other jurisdictions.

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2024) *Youth justice in Australia 2022–23*, cat. no. JUV 143, AIHW, Canberra.

Youth detention data

This report looks at the number of young people in detention on an average night in each quarter from the June quarter 2020 to the June quarter 2024. Each quarter covers 3 months of the year and is identified with reference to the last month in the quarter (for example, the March quarter comprises January, February, and March).

The states and territories provided data on the average nightly number of young people in detention each quarter between July 2023 and June 2024. These data supplement the [Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set \(YJ NMDs\)](#). For more information, see [Technical notes – Youth detention data sources](#).

In the Northern Territory, new legislation was implemented to the youth justice system on 15 May 2021 – the *Youth Justice Legislation Amendment Act (YJLAA) 2021* (the Act). The intent of the Act was to target repeat youth offenders to reduce youth crime. The Act resulted in some key changes to processes of the youth justice system. This change in legislation may have affected the number and rate of young people in detention in the Northern Territory.

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, and these should be interpreted with caution (particularly where they relate to small populations).

In this report, comparisons are made between the June quarter 2024 and the June quarter one year earlier (2023) and 4 years earlier (2020). The same quarters are compared across years to minimise the effect of seasonal variation. However, as data on legal status were not available for the Northern Territory between September quarter 2023 and June quarter 2024, sections of this report use the Australia total excluding the Northern Territory for comparison when referring to sentenced and unsentenced groups.

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 (AIHW 2024), which is yet to be fully investigated or explained.

This report aimed to summarise key trends over the one-year and 4-year periods.

For more data, including counts of young people who enter the youth justice system throughout the year, and trends over 10 years to 2022–23, see [Youth Justice in Australia 2022–23](#).

Impact of COVID-19 on youth detention data

Measures put in place as part of government responses to COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 (including travel bans/ restrictions, lockdowns limiting non-urgent face-to-face work, remote learning for students and quarantine requirements) may have affected youth detention processes during 2019–20 to 2021–22. The long-term impact of COVID-19 on youth detention processes is still unknown. Comparisons made between the June quarter 2024 and 4 years earlier may be impacted by lower numbers and rates of young people in detention during June quarter 2020.


References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2024) [Youth justice in Australia 2022–23](#), cat. no. JUV 143, AIHW, Canberra.



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Youth detention data sources

This report was compiled using 2 data sources. States and territories provided data on the average nightly population per quarter between July 2023 and June 2024. These data were used to supplement the 2022–23 Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set (YJ NMDS), which contains data up to and including 30 June 2023 for all states and territories.

This report is not comparable with [previous editions of *Youth detention population in Australia*](#). Previous editions contained differences in data formats, specifications, definitions and/or quality across jurisdictions. Comparisons between YJ NMDS and youth detention population data should be made with caution.

A data quality statement for the YJ NMDS 2022–23 is available at [Youth Justice NMDS 2022–23; Quality Statement - external site opens in new window](#).

Youth detention reports

In addition to this report, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) publishes the annual [*Youth justice in Australia* report series](#), which provides comprehensive information on young people under youth justice supervision.

The presentation of data in this report is slightly different from the presentation in *Youth justice in Australia*.

- This report presents the average nightly population for each quarter, while *Youth justice in Australia* presents the average daily population for each year. These data are reported differently because unit record data are not available for all reporting years for the youth detention population in Australia.
- Young people who are concurrently unsentenced and sentenced are classified as sentenced in this report 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 publications).

Methods

This section provides key information about the methods used in this report.

Age

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

The age on an average night each quarter is calculated based on the age a young person is each night that they are in detention. If a young person changes age during a period of detention, then the average nightly number in detention will reflect this.

For example, where a young person turns 18 during a period of detention, any nights spent in detention (sentenced or unsentenced) aged 18 will be counted only in quarterly average nightly population for the 18+ age group. Similarly, nights spent in detention before a young person has turned 18 will be counted only in the 10–17 age group.

Average nightly data broken down by age are not comparable to *Youth detention population in Australia* releases prior to 2020. For more information, see [Report editions](#).

Average nightly population

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 the number of nights in the quarter.

Indigenous status

Information on Indigenous status has been collected since the implementation of the [Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set \(YJNMDS\)](#). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) uses 'First Nations people' to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this report.

Nationally, the proportion of young people with 'not stated' Indigenous status was between 0.1% and 0.8% each quarter between the June quarter 2020 and the June quarter 2024. This proportion was low (7.1% or less each quarter) in all states and territories.

Changes in the collection and recording of Indigenous status can affect rates of First Nations 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. Some jurisdictions have taken steps to improve their data collection forms and information systems in recent years to address this issue.

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 report.

Rates

Population rates enable different groups to be compared, 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 over can be detained in youth justice facilities, rates are restricted to those aged 10–13, 14–17 and 10–17. Crude rates are presented in this report.

The number of young people in detention on an average night during a quarter is rounded to the nearest person in text. The rate is calculated using the number on an average night before rounding.

In the text of this report, rates are presented to one decimal place for rates less than 10, and to the nearest whole number for rates 10 and over. Rates are presented to 3 decimal places in the supplementary 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 report.

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). But these young people contribute to overall state and national rates. The calculation of rates for young First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians excludes young people with unknown Indigenous status.

In August 2023, the Northern Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Northern Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17 (instead of 10–17) and 12–13 (instead of 10–13).

In November 2023, the Australian Capital Territory raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. The rates for the Australian Capital Territory in 2023–24 are for young people aged 12–17 (instead of 10–17) and 12–13 (instead of 10–13).

Previously, there were slight differences between the total Australian population and the sum of states, as the Australia total included Other Territories. Due to the changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, the population for Australia was manually calculated to exclude 10- and 11-year-olds in the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory for 2023–24. As a result, the Australia total excludes Other Territories and is calculated as a sum of states for the 10–13 (12–13 for the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory), 14–17 and 10–17 (12–17 for the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory) age groups.

Population data used in the calculation of rates are provided in the [supplementary tables S55a, S55b and S55c](#).

Rate ratios

Rates for different groups can be compared using a rate ratio, which is the ratio of 2 rates.

In this report, rate ratios are used to compare First Nations and non-Indigenous rates, and to provide a measure of the level of First Nations over-representation. Rate ratios are calculated by dividing the First Nations 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 report 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 using numbers presented in the supplementary tables at 3 decimal places, so components might not sum to the totals.

Rate ratios were calculated using rates rounded to 3 decimal places. Proportions were calculated using average nightly numbers rounded to 3 decimal places. Numbers and rates displayed in figures are rounded, as presented in the supplementary tables.

Abbreviations and symbols

Table: Abbreviations

Term	Meaning
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
MAG	Meeting of Attorneys-General
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
YJ NMDS	Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set

Table: Symbols

Symbol	Description
—	nil or rounded to zero
n.p.	not publishable because of small numbers, confidentiality or other concerns about the quality of the data
n.a.	not available



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Glossary

See the [Topic: Youth Justice – glossary](#).

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Notes

Data quality statement

[Youth Justice NMDS 2022–23; Quality Statement](#) - external site opens in new window

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Data

Data tables: Youth detention population in Australia 2024

Data

Table S1 to Table S55c
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