

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Injury is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality for all age groups and is the leading cause of post-infancy death up until forty-four years of age. Each year an estimated 2,500 New South Wales residents die as a result of an injury and more than 178,000 are hospitalised, whilst many more seek treatment from medical and other health professionals outside of institutional settings. In 1999, injuries were the sixth leading cause of death and the fourth leading cause of hospitalisation in NSW. The high incidence of injury-related events makes injury prevention a public health priority.

This profile is intended to provide insight into the patterns and incidence of injury in NSW using the most up-to-date information available. The NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre (IRMRC) uses the profile as the foundation for a targeted research plan to identify areas of concern and carry out investigations into potential strategies to improve the safety of the population of NSW.

Injuries arise from a wide range of causal factors - the 'mechanism of injury' - and in this profile, analysis concentrates on six principal unintentional mechanisms of injury. These cover drowning, falls, a composite category of fire/burns, motor vehicle transport, poisoning and complications of care as well as the two intentional categories of injury - interpersonal violence and suicide. The profile presents the trends in annual death and hospitalisation rates over time, age-specific death and hospitalisation rates and information regarding subcategories for each injury mechanism, for example 'pedestrian injured by motor vehicle', or the identification of the method of injury for intentional injuries.

The injury profile shows that the leading causes of death and hospitalisation without death are the result of different mechanisms of injury and that there is significant variation in the mechanism between the sexes as well as between different age groups. Overall, suicide by whatever mechanism is the principal cause of death in NSW, whilst complications of care and falls are by far the most common cause of hospitalisation. Children under the age of five are at greater risk of drowning or near drowning, as well as hospitalisation for poisoning and fire/burn-related injuries, than any other age group. Hospitalisation rates in the young (under fifteen year olds) for fall-related injuries are also relatively high, second only to the incidence amongst those of retirement age. Those over seventy years are particularly vulnerable and have the highest death and hospitalisation rates for both falls and complications of care. Males accounted for nearly seventy-five percent of all injury-related deaths, with higher counts and rates for all types of injury-related deaths. Females, on the other hand, were hospitalised more often than males for falls and attempted suicide.

In the following four pages, the key findings relating to each of the eight injury mechanisms are presented in point form. A more detailed description and exploration of the wider circumstances for each of the mechanisms can be found in the dedicated chapters.