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Center for the Analysis of Crime Statistics

State Data Brief

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Deaths in Custody in Nevada, 2001-2006

By Brian R. Brehman,
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A large number of prisoners die each year while under the custody of the state. These deaths include prisoners who are executed under state laws and other deaths in custody from a variety of causes. Nationally, 18,550 individuals died while in the custody of a state prison between 2001 and 2006. An additional, 6,103 people died while in custody of jails in this same time period. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, for every one person that is executed, there are 66 other deaths in custody.

This state data brief examines deaths in custody in Nevada prisons and jails and compares them to national averages. This report summarizes the prevalence rates for deaths in custody, changes in these custody deaths from 2001 through 2006, the cause of these deaths, and compares custody deaths in Clark County jail to these deaths in other large jail jurisdictions across the nation.

The Prevalence of Deaths in Custody

From 2001 to 2006, a reported 18,550 inmates in the nation's prisons died from means other than execution. A total of 159 of these custody deaths occurred in a state prison in Nevada. When standardized by the size of its prison population, Nevada's average rate of custody deaths is 247 deaths per 100,000 inmates per year. This rate is near the national average (250 per 100,000 inmates) and substantially above the average death rate for states within the Western region of the nation (219 per 100,000 inmates).

Deaths in Custody over Time

Nevada's state prisons have averaged about 26 custody deaths per year from 2001 to 2006. The death rate per year has vacillated over time, with the highest rate in 2004 (280 per 100,000 inmates) and the lowest rate in 2006 (185 per 100,000 inmates). Death rates in prison custody have been far more stable across the entire country (around 250 per 100,000 inmates) and within the Western region (219 per 100,000 inmates) (Figure 1).

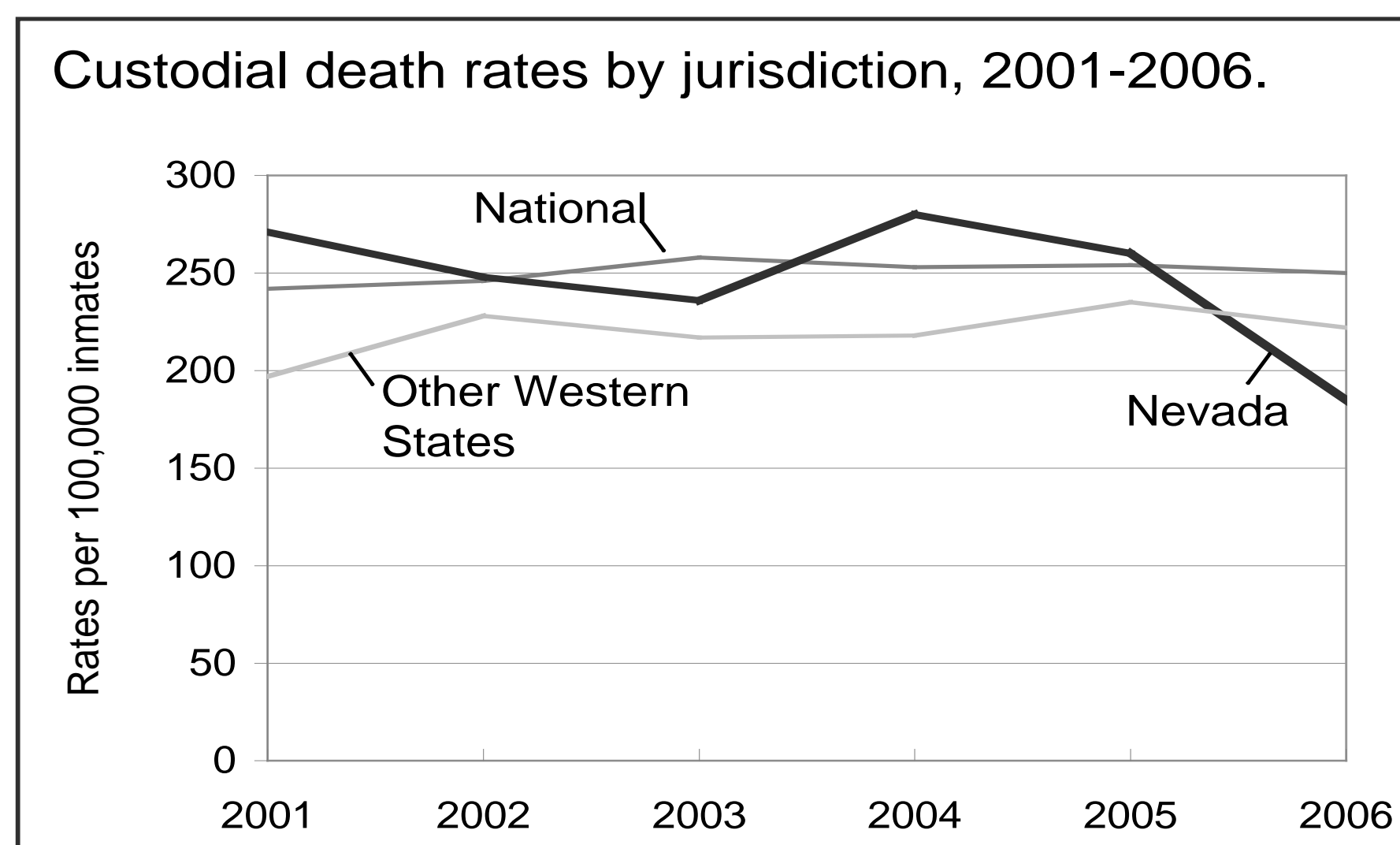


Figure 1

Causes of Deaths in Custody

The leading cause of death in Nevada prisons was death from illness. Of the 159 total deaths from 2001 to 2006, 131 (82%) were reported as being due to illness (Table 1). The rate of death from illness in Nevada is nearly identical to the national average for this cause of death (204 vs. 207 per 100,000 inmates). However, compared to the national pattern, custody deaths in Nevada are slightly higher for homicide (4% vs. 2%) and suicide (7% vs. 6%). The proportion of deaths attributed to AIDS is lower in Nevada's prisons than the national average (4% vs. 6%). Deaths from illness, AIDS, suicide, and homicide account for about 97% of all custody deaths in both Nevada and the nation.

Table 1. Types of causes of deaths in custody in the U.S. and in Nevada, 2001 through 2006.

	National	Nevada
All Causes	100.0%	100.0%
Illness	82.5%	82.6%
AIDS	6.4%	3.6%
Suicide	6.4%	7.3%
Homicide	1.6%	3.6%
Drug/Alcohol Related	1.2%	0.8%
Accident	0.8%	1.2%
Other/Unknown	1.2%	0.4%

Source: *Deaths in Custody Reporting Program*

Deaths in Clark County Jail

Clark County, Nevada is the 26th largest jail jurisdiction in the United States. It reported 37 deaths in custody between 2001 and 2006. Among the largest jail jurisdictions in the country, Clark County has the 14th highest rate of custody deaths in jail. As shown in Table 2, the jail custody death rate in this time period was highest in the District of Columbia (313 per 100,000 inmates), Baltimore City, MD (304 per 100,000 inmates) and Davidson County, TN (280 per 100,000 inmates).

Compared to other large counties in the Western region, the custody death rate for the Clark County jail (193 per 100,000 inmates) was substantially higher than some jurisdictions (i.e., Los Angeles County, CA [176 per 100,000 inmates] and Maricopa County, AZ [134 per 100,000 inmates]); but it was lower than others (i.e., Bernalillo County, NM [224 per 100,000 inmates] and Alameda County, CA [215 per 100,000 inmates]).

Highlights

- A total of 159 inmates in Nevada prisons died in custody between 2001 and 2006.
- Nevada's rate of custody deaths of 247 per 100,000 inmates is similar to the national average (250 per 100,000 inmates), but is substantially higher than the average for other Western states (219 per 100,000 inmates).
- The rate of prison custody deaths in Nevada has vacillated over time, reaching a peak in 2003 and a sharp decline in 2006.
- The major cause of death in prison custody in Nevada is illness. The death rate for illness in Nevada is similar to national trends, but rates for AIDS is slightly lower.
- Clark County has the 14th highest rate of deaths in jail per capita among all large jurisdictions. The rate of jail custody deaths in Clark County is substantially lower than other large jurisdictions like Washington, DC and Baltimore City, MD; but higher than other large counties within Western states like Los Angeles County, CA and Maricopa County, AZ.

Data Source and Limitations

The data for this report are based on the Bureau of Justice Statistics' *Deaths in Custody Reporting Program* (DCRP). The DCRP collects death in custody data from all state prison and juvenile systems as well as from all of the over 3,000 local jails in the United States. The DCRP data represent all state and local detention facilities, but deaths in Federal custody are not included within these reports. Readers of this report should also be cautious of how the causes of death are classified. Although the DCRP program attempts to maintain consistent coding of deaths across jurisdictions, there may be some differences in how states classify deaths (e.g., the category "illness" versus "AIDS-related" deaths).

State Data Brief Project

As independent research projects, faculty and graduate students in UNLV's Department of Criminal Justice write research reports on major issues in criminal justice in Nevada. These "State Data Briefs" are statistical summaries of various criminal justice system practices in Nevada over time and highlight differences between Nevada and other states. These reports cover all aspects of the criminal justice system, including trends in crime and arrests, police practices, prosecution and pretrial activities, adjudication and sentencing, and corrections. The data briefs are short in length (2-4 pages), provide several graphs and charts of statewide and national

Table 2. Average jail custody deaths by select jurisdictions, 2001 through 2006.

Jurisdiction	Average
Washington, DC	313
Baltimore City, MD	304
Davidson County, TN	280
Bernalillo, NM	224
Alameda County, CA	215
New York City, NY	218
Clark County, NV	193
Los Angeles County, CA	176
Maricopa County, AZ	134
Orange County, CA	74

Source: *Deaths in Custody Reporting Program*

patterns, and are written in an easily readable, non-technical style. They are designed to provide members of the general public, local officials, community organizations, and media outlets a concise and objective statistical profile of current criminal justice practices in Nevada that may serve as a foundation for informed discussions of future crime control policies and practices.

References

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- Bureau of Justice Statistics, Deaths in Custody Reporting Program, 2000-2006. Retrieved on April 22nd, 2009 from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/dcrp/jailsindex.htm>
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Contact Information

Questions or comments about the information contained in this report, data used to generate this report, or about other resources available related to this topic should be addressed to:

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