

Falls-related ambulance attendances for Queenslanders aged 65 years and over, 2007-08

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Key points

- During 2007-08, a total of 22,744 attendances were provided by Queensland Ambulance Service to adults aged 65 years and older who had fallen (44.5 per 1,000 population).
- The rate of attendance increased with age – the highest rate was for adults aged 85 years and over (35.7 per 1,000 population).
- On average, 1,895 fall-related attendances were made each month during 2007-08 – the highest number of falls occurred during the cooler months (May to July).
- The most common location of attendance was inside private residences (56%), followed by nursing homes (24%). The majority of attendances required treatment at the scene (97%) and most resulted in transport to hospital (81%).

Introduction

Falls are a leading cause of "000" calls, behind breathing problems and chest pain, with over 51,000 calls to Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) recorded in 2006-07.¹

This chapter provides an overview of QAS attendances for adults aged 65 years and over who had fallen during 2007-08, and provides important insights into the extent of the problem of falls.

Methodology and data capture

QAS provided Queensland Health with data extracted from the electronic Ambulance Report Form (eARF) database on 24 November 2009. These eARFs are completed by ambulance paramedics on the scene. This dataset included all eARFs where the case nature was coded as "Falls" and patients were aged 65 years and over.

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The descriptive data analyses included age and gender breakdown of patients requiring attendance; month of attendance; location of attendance; and outcomes from attendance – treatment at scene and transportation.

The age-specific rate of fall-related ambulance attendances, expressed per 1,000 population, was calculated using the estimated age and gender matched resident population in Queensland for the period considered, derived from the 2006 Census.

Data issues

The quality of the collected data is conditional to the accuracy of the documentation completed by ambulance paramedics on scene. In the event a paramedic cannot determine the exact date of birth of the patient, an estimated age is recorded.

Information about transportation includes other means of transport, including the private transportation of patients to hospital by themselves or by others, and transportation of deceased patients by an undertaker.

Results

There were a total of 22,744 attendances provided by QAS to adults aged 65 years and older who had fallen (44.5 per 1,000 population). Over 60% of attendances were for adults aged 80 years and older (13,941 attendances). The attendance rate was higher for females than males (52.1 and 35.7 per 1,000 population). The age-specific attendance rates, shown in Figure 1.1, highlights the sharp increase in attendances among older age groups, particularly among those aged 85 years and older (138.9 per 1,000 population).

Table 1: Fall-related QAS attendances by age and gender, adults 65+, 2007-08

	No. of attendances (%)		Estimated Population	Cases per 1,000 population
Age group				
65-69 years	2,230	(9.8%)	158,329	14.1
70-74 years	2,696	(11.9%)	119,974	22.5
75-79 years	3,877	(17%)	99,466	39.0
80-84 years	5,499	(24.2%)	72,648	75.7
85+ years	8,442	(37.1%)	60,775	138.9
Gender				
Male	8,473	(37.3%)	237,434	35.7
Female	14,259	(62.7%)	273,758	52.1
Missing	12	(0.1%)		
Total	22,744		511,192	44.5

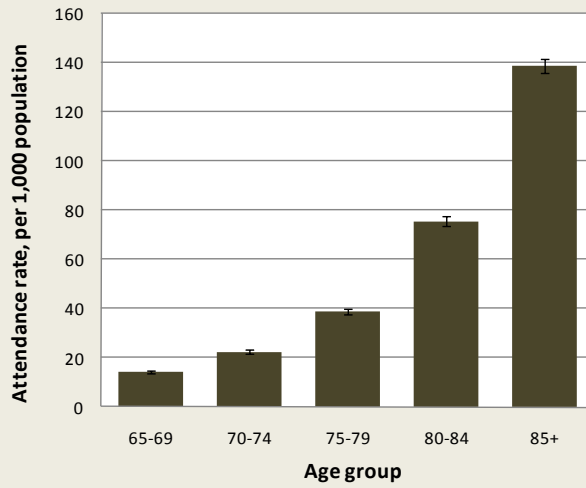


Figure 1: Rate of fall-related attendances (and 95% confidence intervals) by age, adults 65+, Queensland, 2007-08

Month of attendance

On average, 1,895 fall-related QAS attendances were made each month during 2007-08. These attendances were more likely to occur during certain months of the year, as opposed to having an even spread over the entire year ($\chi^2=174$, $p<0.01$). The lowest number of attendances occurred in the warmer months (November to February) and the highest in the cooler months (May to July).

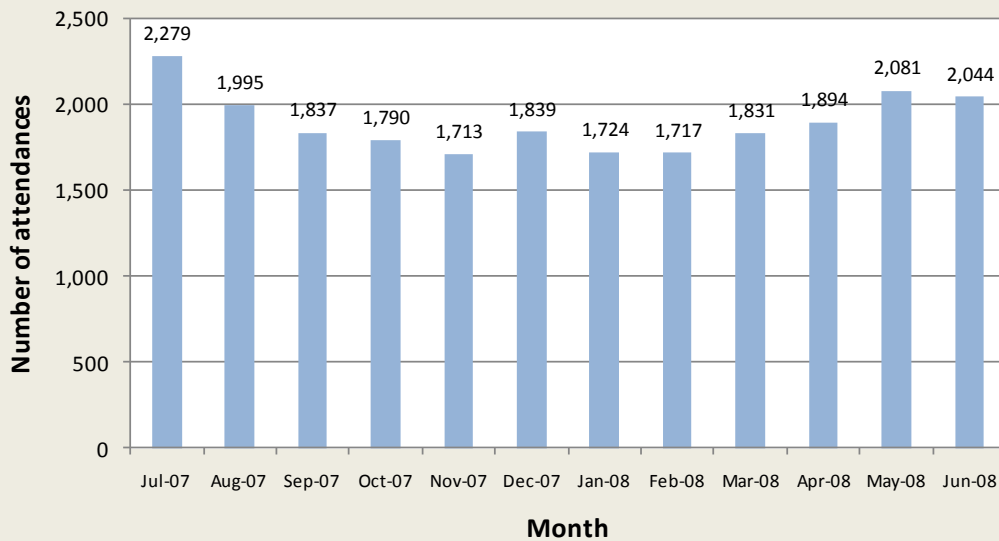


Figure 2: Number of fall-related attendances by month, adults 65+, Queensland, 2007-08

Attendance location and outcome

The majority of attendances were inside a private residence (56.3%), followed by in nursing homes (23.7%) and in public places (7.9%), as shown in Table 2-2. Around 97% were treated at the scene, and most were transported to hospital (80%).

Table 2: Location and treatment outcomes of fall-related attendances, adults 65+, 2007-08

	Number of attendances (%)	
Location of attendance:		
Private residence inside	12,812	(56.3%)
Private residence outside	1,242	(5.5%)
Nursing home	5,395	(23.7%)
Public place	1,790	(7.9%)
Street	453	(2%)
Sporting	177	(0.8%)
GP clinic	250	(1.1%)
Hospital	112	(0.5%)
Other	513	(2.3%)
Treatment at scene:		
Treated	22,085	(97.1%)
Not treated	659	(2.9%)
Transportation outcomes:		
Transported to hospital	18,311	(80.5%)
Transport not required	3,291	(14.5%)
Other	1,142	(5%)
TOTAL	22,744	

Suggested citation:

Black A and Quinn J (2010). Falls-related ambulance attendances for Queenslanders aged 65 years and over, 2007-08. Queensland Health, Brisbane.

References:

1. Queensland Ambulance Service. Audit Report. 2007.

For additional information and resources on falls prevention, please visit the Queensland Health "Stay On Your Feet®" website at:

www.health.qld.gov.au/stayonyourfeet

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