

GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

- In May 1997 the Prime Minister, with the support of the Premiers and Chief Ministers, requested that the Review give particular attention to the performance of mainstream services in relation to Indigenous Australians.
- This request was reinforced by the Council of Australian Governments at its 3 November 2000 meeting where heads of government agreed that ministerial councils will develop action plans, performance reporting strategies and benchmarks to facilitate review of the progress made in this area.
- In April 2002, COAG commissioned the Review to produce a new and separate regular report on key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. The Review began a period of consultation on the indicators for the report with the release in October 2002 of a Draft Framework for Reporting on Indigenous Disadvantage. It is expected that this Report will be released for the first time in September 2003.
- Readers should exercise caution in interpreting data on services to Indigenous people. Indigenous people are not always identified in some administrative data collections and there is variability in the likelihood of Indigenous people voluntarily identifying themselves in different situations and over time. Surveys designed to report on the whole Australian population may not include sufficient numbers of Indigenous people to provide reliable data.

Selection of results

- **School education:** the proportion of Indigenous students achieving national benchmarks in reading and numeracy were lower than for non-Indigenous students in all jurisdictions in 2000. These benchmarks represent the minimum acceptable standard without which a student will have difficulty making sufficient progress at school. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous students achieving the year 3 reading benchmark was 76.9 per cent compared with 92.5 per cent for all students (p. 3.21). For year 5 reading, 62.0 per cent of Indigenous compared with 87.4 per cent of all students achieved the benchmark (p. 3.22). The proportion of Indigenous students who achieved the numeracy benchmark was below the proportion for all students by 19.0 percentage points at year 3 and 26.8 percentage points at year 5 (p. 3.24). Results for Indigenous students for year 5 numeracy ranged from 82.2 per cent achieving the benchmark in Victoria to 37.0 per cent in the NT (p. 3.26). Learning outcomes for 15 year old Indigenous students in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy are also reported (pp. 3.23, 27). Indigenous students are, on average, less likely to stay at school through secondary education. The national apparent retention rate from the commencement of secondary school until year 10 for Indigenous students was 85.7 per cent, compared with 98.1 per cent for all students, in 2001 (p. 3.30). Apparent retention rates from year 10 to year 12 are also reported (p. 3.33).

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- **Vocational education and training:** the proportion of VET students who identified as Indigenous was higher than the proportion of Indigenous people in the general population, in all jurisdictions except Tasmania and the ACT, where the two rates were similar. The proportion of students who reported being Indigenous varied from 41.3 per cent in the NT to 0.9 per cent in Victoria (p. 4.13). The national load pass rate (defined in the chapter) for Indigenous students was 61.5 per cent relative to a load pass rate of 75.4 per cent for all students (p. 4.17). In addition, the same proportion of Indigenous graduates and all graduates (80 per cent) indicated their VET course helped or partly helped them achieve their main reason for doing the course (table 4A.32).
- **Police:** In 2001-02, the proportion of police staff who self-reported as Indigenous generally reflected the proportion of working aged Indigenous people in the general population (excluding the NT), with Indigenous police staff as a proportion of total staff ranging from 0.9 per cent in NSW and the ACT to 2.4 per cent in Queensland. In the NT, Indigenous staff accounted for 4.4 per cent of total staff compared with Indigenous representation in the working population of 14.7 per cent (p. 5.24, table 5A.35). If Indigenous people are required to identify themselves, then the accuracy of the data will partly depend on how they perceive the advantages (or disadvantages) of identification (p. 5.23). Nationally, in 2001, of the 35 deaths in police custody and custody related operations, five were Indigenous deaths (with three in SA and two in WA) (p. 5.52).
- **Corrective services:** Indigenous people were far more likely to be in prison custody in 2001-02 than non-Indigenous people. The national imprisonment rate per 100 000 Indigenous adults was 1746.3 compared with a rate of 115.5 for non-Indigenous adults (p. 7.5). Indigenous imprisonment rates were highest in WA and lowest in Tasmania. Prisoner death rates from apparent unnatural causes (p. 7.15) and community corrections offender rates (p.7.8) are also reported by Indigenous status.
- **Health Preface:** Infant mortality rates for Indigenous Australians are reported for 2000 for NSW, Queensland, WA and the NT. The Indigenous infant mortality rate was between two and four times that of the national average for all Australians in 2000. Care must be taken in interpreting these data, given the systematic under-reporting of Indigenous infant deaths and births. (p. E.20, table EA.6). The life expectancy at birth for Indigenous people was also lower than for the total population in those jurisdictions for which reliable Indigenous data are available. In 1998–2000, life expectancy at birth for all males was 76.6 years compared with 56.0 years for Indigenous males. Life expectancy at birth for all females was 82.0 years, whereas for Indigenous females, life expectancy was 62.7 years (p. E.24, table EA.9). Causes of death for Indigenous Australians in 2000 varied somewhat from those for the Australian population as a whole. External causes of death made up a higher proportion of deaths for Indigenous people (19.2 per cent for males and 10.3 per cent for females) than for all Australians (8.3 per cent for males and 4.2 per cent for females). Similarly, diabetes mellitus contributed to 5.6 per cent (males) and 11.3 per cent (females) of Indigenous deaths compared to 2.3 per cent (females) and 2.4 per cent (males) of total deaths (pp. E.21–22, tables EA.7 and EA.8). The AIHW Report, 'Expenditures on health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 1998-99', estimated that total recurrent expenditure on health services for Indigenous people was estimated at around \$1.2 billion in 1998-99 (p. E.11).

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- Public hospitals:** Data on hospital services for Indigenous people are limited by the accuracy with which Indigenous people are identified in hospital records. Indigenous status tends to be underreported although the extent of underreporting varies across States and Territories and across public and private hospitals. Descriptive data on Indigenous and non-Indigenous separations in public hospitals in 2000-01 suggest that 520 separations (including same day separations) for Indigenous patients were reported per 1000 Indigenous population — markedly higher than the corresponding figure for the total population of 195 separations in public hospitals per 1000 total population (**table 9.21, pp. 9.50–9.51**). Descriptive data are also presented for Indigenous Standardised Hospital Separation Ratios, which illustrate differences between the rates of Indigenous hospital admissions and those of the total Australian population, taking into account differences in age distributions. The data do not signal the performance of hospitals, but reflect a range of factors, such as the spectrum of public, primary care and post hospital care available; Indigenous access to these as well as hospital services, social and physical infrastructure services for Indigenous people; and differences in the complexity, incidence and prevalence of disease between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Ratios are presented for circulatory diseases, injury and poisoning, respiratory diseases and lung cancer, diabetes and selected associated ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes (**figures 9.11 and 9.12, pp. 9.51–53**).
- Health management:** Participation rates for indigenous women in breast cancer screening are reported, although differences across jurisdictions in the collection and recording of Indigenous status mean that comparisons should be made with care. In most jurisdictions, it appears that participation rates for Indigenous women aged 50–69 are lower than for all females in that age group, however this may be influenced by problems with the identification of Indigenous status (**table 11.4, p. 11.19**). There are very limited data available on specialised psychiatric care provided by hospitals to Indigenous patients. Comparisons are difficult because data on Indigenous status are incomplete and there may be differences in the use of hospital services relative to other health services by Indigenous status. The data reflect a range of factors, such as the spectrum of public, primary care and post hospital care available; Indigenous access to these as well as hospital services, social and physical infrastructure services for Indigenous people; and differences in the complexity, incidence and prevalence of disorders. In 1999-2000 Indigenous Australians were nearly twice as likely to be admitted for overnight psychiatric care compared with the rest of the population. The average length of stay for Indigenous people was, however, similar to that for the rest of the population (**table 11.6, p. 11.50**). In 2000, the suicide rate for Indigenous people was considerably higher than the rate for the total population. Care needs to be taken when interpreting these data because data for Indigenous people are incomplete and data for some States are not considered of publishable standard. Estimating the Indigenous population is difficult because the propensity for people to identify as Indigenous varies across jurisdictions and over time. In addition, Indigenous people are not always accurately identified in administrative collections, such as hospital records and birth and death registrations, due to variations in definitions, different data collection methods and failure to record Indigenous status. The 2000 Indigenous suicide rate in WA was 41.4 per 100 000 Indigenous people compared with around 13.7 per 100 000 for the total WA population. In the NT in 2000, the recorded Indigenous suicide rate was 23.3 per 100 000 Indigenous people compared with 20.1 per 100 000 people for the total population (**pp. 11.61–62**).

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- **Aged care services:** Indigenous people tend to require aged care services at a younger age than the general population. The Report therefore includes data for aged care services to Indigenous people aged 50 years and over compared with data for all people aged 70 and over. Across jurisdictions SA and the NT had the highest proportion of Indigenous people in residential aged care services per 1000 Indigenous people aged 50 years and over (p.12.23). The NT, WA and SA had the highest proportion of Community Aged Care Packages per 1000 Indigenous people aged 50 years and over (p.12.25). Descriptive data regarding Home and Community Care (HACC) services indicate that Indigenous recipients make up 3.7 per cent of all HACC recipients (table 12A.34) with more than half of Indigenous recipients aged under 70 years (p.12.27).
- **Services for people with a disability:** Nationally, the representation of Indigenous consumers in both accommodation support and day activity services was similar to the community representation of all consumers in accommodation support and day activity services, respectively, on the snapshot day in 2002 (pp. 13.30–33). Notwithstanding this national result, a higher representation of the Indigenous population than of the total population used accommodation support services in NSW, Victoria, SA and the NT. A lower representation of the Indigenous population than of the total population used accommodation support services in all other jurisdictions (pp. 13.30–31). Similarly, a higher representation of the Indigenous population than of the total population used day activity services in all jurisdictions except WA, Tasmania and the ACT (pp. 13.32–33). Employment services 2002 data for Indigenous people were not available in time for publication. These data will be available on the Review web page (www.pc.gov.au/gsp). Nationally, the representation of Indigenous consumers in employment support services was similar to the community representation of all consumers in employment support services on the snapshot day in 2001. A higher representation of the Indigenous population than of the total population used employment support services in NSW, Queensland, SA and the NT. A lower representation of the Indigenous population than of the total population used employment support services in all other jurisdictions(pp. 13.30–32).
- **Children’s services:** The proportion of Indigenous child care attendees in May 2002 ranged from 9.9 per cent in the NT (where the representation of Indigenous children in the population was 41.6 per cent) to 0.5 per cent in Victoria (where the representation in the population was 1.1 per cent). Nationally, the representation of Indigenous children among children accessing child care services was lower than this group’s overall representation in the community (1.6 per cent compared with 4.6 per cent) (pp. 14.21–14.22). Across jurisdictions, the proportion of Indigenous children attending preschools in 2001-02 was broadly similar to their representation in the community. The proportion ranged from 35.4 per cent in the NT (where the representation of Indigenous children in the community was 41.6 per cent) to 0.8 per cent in Victoria (where their representation in the community was 1.1 per cent) (figure 14.11). The proportion of Indigenous preschool attendees varied across jurisdictions, but has been relatively constant over time within jurisdictions (pp. 14.23–14.25).
- **Protection and support services:** Indigenous children were relatively highly represented in the number of children who were the subject of child protection notifications, on care and protection orders, and in out-of-home care in 2001-02. For example, the number of children

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- who were the subject of child protection notifications per 1000 children aged 0-16 years was 51.6 for Indigenous children compared with 21.1 for non-Indigenous children (p 15.7). The proportion of those Indigenous children placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle ranged from 88.3 per cent in NSW to 44.8 per cent in Tasmania at 30 June 2002 (p 15.25). Data are also reported on access to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services. Nationally, 13.3 per cent of valid requests for SAAP services which were not provided with a service, were from Indigenous groups, compared with 16.7 per cent of SAAP clients who were Indigenous. In all jurisdictions except WA, SA, and the NT, the proportion of valid requests for SAAP services which were not provided with a service, was lower for Indigenous groups than the representation of Indigenous people among clients (p. 15.49). In 2001-02, 89.2 per cent of Indigenous clients either received needed SAAP services or were referred to another agency for these services. Across jurisdictions, the proportion ranged from 98.2 per cent in the NT to 83.5 per cent in Queensland (p 15.51).
- **Housing:** Nationally, the proportion of people receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) who were Indigenous was similar to the representation of Indigenous people in the overall community. The NT had the highest proportion of Indigenous recipients (16.7 per cent, compared to 28.6 per cent community representation) and Victoria the lowest (0.6 per cent, compared to 0.5 per cent representation in the community) (pp. 16.66–16.68). Data are also available on the proportion of income spent on rent with and without CRA by Indigenous Australians. Nationally, if CRA was not payable, only 41.0 per cent of those Indigenous income units currently receiving CRA would have spent less than 30 per cent of income on rent at 30 November 2001, compared to 32.4 per cent for all recipients. Across jurisdictions, this proportion ranged from 45.3 per cent in Tasmania to 31.3 per cent in the NT. Accounting for CRA payments (thereby reducing the rent paid by the amount of the assistance), the national proportion of Indigenous income units who spent less than 30 per cent of income on rent at 30 November 2001 increases to 74.7 per cent, compared to 66.9 per cent for all recipients. Across jurisdictions, this proportion ranged from 79.5 per cent in Tasmania to 59.4 per cent in the ACT (pp. 16.71–16.72). Details of the use of public and community housing by Indigenous people are also reported. Performance reporting on State and Territory owned and managed Indigenous housing (reported last year as the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program [ARHP]), a program providing government owned housing to Indigenous Australians, is also included. For reasons explained in the chapter, it is not appropriate to make direct comparisons between the performance of public housing and State and Territory owned and managed Indigenous housing. Selected data on Indigenous community housing from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey is included this year but as explained in the chapter, these data should not be compared with those for State and Territory owned and managed Indigenous housing.

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Please do not approach other parties for comment before Thursday, 6 February 2003.

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