

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.

Selection of results

- *School education*: nationally comparable data on year 5 literacy outcomes for Indigenous students in 1999 are available. The proportion of year 5 Indigenous students who achieved the reading benchmark ranged from 72.5 per cent in NSW to 42.2 per cent in WA. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous students achieving the reading benchmark was 58.6 per cent compared with 85.6 per cent for all students (p. 75). Apparent retention rates from year 10 to year 12 for Indigenous students are also reported (p. 79).
- *Vocational education and training*: the proportion of Indigenous students was higher than the proportion of Indigenous people in the general population, in all jurisdictions except Tasmania, where the two rates were similar. The proportion of students who reported being Indigenous varied from 33.6 per cent in the NT (compared to a 24.4 per cent representation in the community) to 0.9 per cent in Victoria (compared to a 0.5 per cent representation in the community) (p. 124). The national load pass rate for Indigenous students was 60.1 per cent relative to a load pass rate of 75.4 per cent for all students (p. 125). In addition, 59.9 per cent of Indigenous TAFE institute graduates who enrolled in a VET course to obtain a better job or promotion achieved this outcome, compared to 71.8 per cent for all TAFE graduates (p. 127).
- *Health Preface*: Infant mortality rates for Indigenous Australians are reported for all jurisdictions except Tasmania and the ACT this year. The Indigenous infant mortality rate was between two and three times that of the national average for all Australians in 1999. Care must be taken in interpreting these data, given the systematic under-reporting of Indigenous infant deaths and births. (p. 165; table 5A.58). The median age at death for Indigenous people, a measure of life expectancy, was also lower than for the total population in those jurisdictions for which reliable Indigenous data are available. In 1999 in Queensland, median age at death for all males was 74.2 years compared with 48.9 years for Indigenous males. For WA and SA, all females' median age at death was 81.5 years and 82.2 years respectively, whereas for Indigenous females, the relevant ages were 55.3 years and 50.5 years respectively (table 5A.62). Indigenous Australians in 1999 experienced quite different patterns of mortality than those of the Australian population as a whole. The four major categories of

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mortality (circulatory diseases, neoplasms, respiratory diseases and external causes) accounted for between 65.9 per cent (WA) and 75.1 per cent (NSW) of deaths among Indigenous males and between 72.1 per cent (Victoria) and 55.6 per cent (WA) of deaths among Indigenous females (**p. 166; table 5A.60**). The recently released 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. This was equivalent to \$3065 per Indigenous person compared with \$2518 per non-Indigenous person; a ratio of 1.22:1 (**p.172**). Indigenous people were on average much higher users of publicly funded health services but used fewer privately funded services, such as doctors in private practice, private hospitals, dentists and other allied health professionals. Governments funded 90.8 per cent of Indigenous recurrent health costs compared with 67.5 per cent of the recurrent health care costs of non-Indigenous Australians. For public funding, the ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous expenditures per person was 1.64:1, reflecting their relatively poor health and socioeconomic status. Public expenditures on the health of Indigenous people appear to have been similar to those for non-Indigenous people in low income groups, when their relative income position is taken into account. (**p.172**).

- *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 1999-2000 suggest that 592 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 199 separations in public hospitals per 1000 total population (**table 5.12, p. 215**). Descriptive data are presented for the first time 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 six major conditions — circulatory diseases, injury and poisoning, respiratory diseases and lung cancer, diabetes, tympanoplasty associated with otitis media and mental health conditions and selected associated ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes (**figures 5.14 and 5.15, p. 216**).
- *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 7.4, p. 306**). There is a very limited amount of 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. In 1998-99, however, separations involving at least one day of specialised psychiatric care per 1000 people for Indigenous patients were relatively similar to the rates for the total population, although patient days per 1000 Indigenous people and psychiatric care days per 1000 Indigenous people appeared markedly higher (**table 7.6, p. 326**). In 1999, the suicide rate for Indigenous people was considerably higher than the rate for the total population. Care needs to be taken when

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interpreting these data because data for Indigenous people are incomplete and data for some States are not considered of publishable standard. In the NT in 1999, the Indigenous suicide rate was 30.8 per 100 000 Indigenous people compared with 16.6 per 100 000 people for the total population. In Queensland, the Indigenous suicide rate was 22.9 suicides per 100 000 Indigenous people compared with around 13.7 suicides per 100 000 for the total population. In WA, the 1999 Indigenous suicide rate was 21.4 per 100 000 Indigenous people compared with around 12.7 per 100 000 for the total WA population (p. 336).

- *Police:* for those jurisdictions that reported in 2000-01, the proportion of Indigenous police staff generally reflected the proportion of Indigenous people in the general population (excluding the NT), with Indigenous police staff as a proportion of total staff ranging from 0.7 per cent in the ACT to 2.4 per cent in Queensland. In the NT, Indigenous staff accounted for 5.4 per cent of total staff compared with Indigenous representation in the population of 24.4 per cent (p. 400). 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. 399). Nationally, in 2000, of the 25 deaths in police custody and custody related operations, five were Indigenous deaths (with two in NSW, and one each in Queensland, WA and SA) (table 8A.78).
- *Correctional services:* Indigenous people were more likely to be in prison custody in 2000-01. The national imprisonment rate per 100 000 Indigenous adults was 1727.4 compared with a rate of 115.6 for non-Indigenous prisoners in 2000-01. Indigenous imprisonment rates were highest in WA and lowest in Tasmania (p. 518). Community corrections offender rates and prisoner death rates are also reported by Indigenous status (p. 530 and 527).
- *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. Across jurisdictions the NT, WA and SA had the highest proportion of Community Aged Care Packages recipients and residents per Indigenous person aged 50 years and over (p. 654-5). Indigenous people tend to use Home and Community Care (HACC) services more than residential services.
- *Services for people with a disability:* Nationally, in 2001, the proportion of the Indigenous population who used accommodation support services and day activity services was similar to that of the general population. Nationally, in 2000, the proportion of the Indigenous population who used employment services was similar to that of the general population. Employment services 2001 data for Indigenous people were not available at the time of publication. These data will be subsequently available on the Review web page (www.pc.gov.au/service/gsp). In 2001, a higher proportion of the Indigenous population used accommodation support services than the general population in NSW, Victoria, WA, SA, the ACT and the NT (p. 713). Similarly, a higher proportion of the Indigenous population used day activity services than the general population in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, SA, the ACT and the NT, in 2001 (reported for the first time) (p. 715). In 2000, a higher proportion of the Indigenous population used employment services than the general population in NSW, Queensland, SA and the NT (p. 714).
- *Children's services:* the proportion of child care attendees from an Indigenous background in 1999 ranged from 0.6 per cent in Victoria (where their representation in the population was 0.9 per cent) to 10.4 per cent in the NT (where their representation in the community was 35.9 per cent). Overall, Indigenous representation in child care was 1.5 per cent nationally compared to representation in the community of 3.7 per cent (p. 762-763). The proportion of Indigenous children attending preschools was broadly similar to their community

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representation in 2000-01. Across jurisdictions it ranged from 0.8 per cent in Victoria (compared to 0.9 per cent community representation) to 44.6 per cent in the NT (compared to 35.9 per cent community representation) (p. 764).

- *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 2000-01. For example, the number of children who were the subject of child protection notifications per 1000 children aged 0-16 years was 44.8 for Indigenous children compared with 18.4 for non-Indigenous children (pp. 794-795). The proportion of those Indigenous children placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle ranged from 38.7 per cent in Tasmania to 86.6 per cent in NSW at 30 June 2001 (p. 811). Data are also reported on access to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services. Nationally, 13.4 per cent of valid requests for SAAP services which were not provided with a service, were from Indigenous groups, compared with 15.9 per cent of SAAP clients who were Indigenous (p. 836). In all jurisdictions except NSW, the ACT 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. 836). In 2000-01, 94.9 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 92.7 per cent in Victoria to 97.3 per cent in the NT (p. 838).
- *Housing:* nationally, the proportion of Indigenous people receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) was similar to the representation of Indigenous people in the overall community in most jurisdictions. The NT had the highest proportion of Indigenous recipients (13.2 per cent, compared to 28.3 per cent community representation) and Victoria the lowest (0.5 per cent, equivalent to representation in the community) (p. 922). For the first time this year, 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 39.9 per cent of those Indigenous income units currently receiving CRA would have spent less than 30 per cent of income on rent at 30 June 2001, compared to 30.8 per cent for all recipients. Across jurisdictions, this proportion ranged from 43.9 per cent in NSW to 31.5 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 June 2001 increases to 74.7 per cent, compared to 66.6 per cent for all recipients. Across jurisdictions, this proportion ranged from 78.7 per cent in NSW to 60.1 per cent in the NT (p. 923). Details of the use of public and community housing by Indigenous people are also reported. Performance reporting on the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP), a program providing government owned housing to Indigenous Australians, is included for the first time this year. For reasons explained in the chapter, it is not appropriate to make direct comparisons between the performance of public housing and the ARHP.

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Please do not approach other parties for comment before Wednesday 30 January 2002.

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