# 12 Outcomes for Torres Strait Islander people[[1]](#footnote-1)

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| Box 12.1 Key messages |
| * Available data suggest that, for many indicators, outcomes for Torres Strait Islander Australians are similar to those for Aboriginal Australians, including for: year 12 attainment (table 12A.1.1); post‑secondary education attainment (table 12A.1.1); home ownership (table 12A.1.2); personal income (table 12A.1.3); and self-assessed health status (table 12A.1.5).
* Labour force participation rates for people aged 18–64 years in 2011–13 were higher for Torres Strait Islander Australians (70.5 per cent) than for Aboriginal Australians (61.7 per cent) although still lower than for non-Indigenous Australians (81.6 per cent) (although participation rates for Torres Strait Islander Australians living in mainland Queensland were not statistically different to those for non-Indigenous Australians) (figure 12.1). The unemployment rates for Torres Strait Islander Australians (19.8 per cent) and Aboriginal Australians (19.1 per cent) were similar, but both were higher than the rate for non‑Indigenous Australians (3.8 per cent) (table 12A.1.4).
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## 12.1 Selected outcomes for Torres Strait Islander people

The estimated Indigenous population of Australia at 30 June 2011 was 669 900, of whom 63 717 (9.5 per cent of the Indigenous population) identified as Torres Strait Islander people. This included people who identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin (5.7 per cent of the Indigenous population) and people who identified as being both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (3.8 per cent of the Indigenous population) (ABS 2013). From the 2011 Census, around 11 per cent of Torres Strait Islander people were reported as living in the Torres Strait, while the majority (62.6 per cent) lived in Queensland (ABS 2012).

This chapter presents a selection of results for Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander Australians from the ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (AATSIHS) 2012-13, with non-Indigenous comparators from the ABS Australian Health Survey (AHS) 2011-12. AATSIHS and AHS data are presented together as covering the overall time period of 2011–13.

More extensive data from the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and the 2006 Census were presented in the 2011 and 2009 reports respectively (SCRGSP 2009, 2011). Survey and Census data are not directly comparable.

There is great diversity in Torres Strait Islander communities, their languages and traditions. There is also regional variability across Torres Strait Islander communities, including differences between those living on the islands, within Australia and in remote versus urban communities. However, Torres Strait Islander people make up a very small proportion of the Australian population (0.29 per cent), making it difficult to report reliable data from sample surveys at a disaggregated level. In this chapter, data for ‘Torres Strait Islander’ Australians include both people who identified as ‘Torres Strait Islander only’ and people who identified as ‘Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’. For comparison purposes, data for ‘Aboriginal’ Australians in this chapter have been limited to people who identified as ‘Aboriginal only’.

Subject to suitable levels of data quality, data for this chapter are disaggregated into two geographical areas that reflect the distribution of Torres Strait Islander people across Australia: Queensland (including the Torres Strait Indigenous region); and the Balance of Australia (which comprises the remainder of Australia). These disaggregations are available in the attachment tables.

### Year 12 or post-secondary education

In 2011–13:

* there was no statistically significant difference in the proportions of Torres Strait Islander adults aged 18–64 years who had completed year 12 as their highest level of education (14.5 per cent) and Aboriginal Australians (11.0 per cent) and non‑Indigenous Australians (14.8 per cent), although the rate for Aboriginal Australians was statistically significantly lower than the rate for non‑Indigenous Australians (table 12A.1.1).
* there was no statistically significant difference in the proportions of Torres Strait Islander adults aged 18–64 years who had completed post-secondary qualifications at Certificate level III or above (32.5 per cent) and Aboriginal Australians (34.1 per cent), but both were significantly lower than the proportion of non‑Indigenous Australians (58.1 per cent) (table 12A.1.1).

There was no change between 2004-05 and 2012-13 in the proportion of Torres Strait Islander adults aged 18 years and over who had completed year 12 as their highest level of education or the proportion who had completed post-secondary qualifications at Certificate level III or above (table 12A.1.1).

### Labour force status

Employment under the ABS definition includes CDEP participants on CDEP wages. Although some information is available about CDEP participation in remote areas, the disaggregation of data for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people makes employment data disaggregated by CDEP status too unreliable for general use in this section. For further information on CDEP see section 4.6 in this report. Historical data by CDEP status for 2008 and 2004-05 are available in chapter 12 in the 2011 report (SCRGSP 2011).

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| Figure 12.1 Labour force participation rates for Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians aged 18–64 years, 2011–13**a,b** |
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| Figure 12.1 Labour force participation rates for Torres Strait Islander Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians aged 18-64 years, 2011-13  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |

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| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. b The 2011–13 reference year includes data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians from the 2012‑13 AATSIHS. Data for non‑Indigenous Australians are from the 2011–13 AHS (for the period 2011‑12). |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) AATSIHS 2012-13 (core content); ABS (unpublished) AHS 2011–13 (core content); ABS (unpublished) NATSIHS 2004-05; ABS (unpublished) NHS 2004-05; table 12A.1.4. |
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In 2011–13, the labour force participation rate for all Torres Strait Islander Australians (70.5 per cent) was higher than that for Aboriginal Australians (61.7 per cent) but lower than that for of non‑Indigenous Australians (81.6 per cent), although there was no significant difference in the rate of Torres Strait Islander Australians in Queensland compared to the non-Indigenous population (figure 12.1).

There was no statistically significant difference in unemployment rates for Torres Strait Islander Australians (19.8 per cent) and Aboriginal Australians (19.1 per cent) but both were higher than for non-Indigenous Australians (3.8 per cent) (table 12A.1.4).

From 2004-05 to 2011–13, there was no change in labour force rates for Torres Strait Islander Australians and Aboriginal Australians. However, there was an increase in unemployment rates for Torres Strait Islander Australians (from 11.3 per cent in 2008 to 19.8 per cent in 2012-13) and Aboriginal Australians (from 12.7 per cent in 2004-05 to 19.1 per cent in 2012-13), though no change for non-Indigenous Australians (table 12A.1.4).

### Income

This section reports data based on individual weekly income of people aged 18 years and over. People are ranked from highest to lowest, with those with the lowest 20 per cent of incomes in quintile 1 (lowest quintile), ranging to those with the highest 20 per cent of incomes in quintile 5 (highest quintile).

In 2011–13, income distributions were similar for Torres Strait Islander adults and Aboriginal adults ( lowest quintile — 24.3 and 27.1 per cent respectively; middle three quintiles — 64.5 and 64.6 per cent respectively; and highest quintile — 11.1 and 8.3 per cent respectively). The income distribution for non‑Indigenous adults differed at the lowest and highest ends of the distribution (lowest quintile — 15.8 per cent; middle three quintiles — 62.9 per cent; and highest quintile — 21.3 per cent respectively) (table 12A.1.3).

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| Figure 12.2 Proportion of Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal and non‑Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over with individual weekly income in lowest quintile, 2004-05, 2008, 2011–13**a, b** |
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| Figure 12.2 Proportion of Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over with individual weekly income in lowest quintile, 2004-05, 2008, 2011-13   More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |

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| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. b The 2011–13 reference year includes data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians from the 2012‑13 AATSIHS. Data for non‑Indigenous Australians are from the 2011–13 AHS (for the period 2011‑12). |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) AATSIHS 2012-13 (NATSIHS content); ABS (unpublished) AHS 2011-12 (NHS content); ABS (unpublished) NATSISS 2008; ABS (unpublished) NHS 2007-08; ABS (unpublished) NATSIHS 2004-05; ABS (unpublished) NHS 2004-05; table 12A.1.3. |
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Income distributions for both Torres Strait Islander adults and Aboriginal adults changed from 2004-05 to 2012-13, with the proportion in the lowest income increasing over this time (figure 12.2).

### Home ownership

In 2011–13, the proportion of Torres Strait Islander adults living in a home owned with or without a mortgage (31.8 per cent in 2012-13) was similar to that for Aboriginal adults (30.0 per cent respectively in 2012-13) but was significantly lower than for non-Indigenous adults (71.8 per cent in 2011-12) (table 12A.1.2 and table 9A.3.2).

Between 2004-05 and 2011–13, home ownership rates did not change significantly for Torres Strait Islander adults (ranging between 30.6 and 32.6 per cent) but increased for Aboriginal adults (from 24.6 per cent to 30.0 per cent) (table 12A.1.2) and decreased for non-Indigenous adults (from 73.7 per cent to 71.8 per cent) (table 9A.3.2).

### Selected health characteristics

Data in this section are based on survey respondents self-assessed health status.

In 2011–13:

* the proportion of Torres Strait Islander adults reporting a long term health condition (84.3 per cent in 2012-13) was not statistically different to that of Aboriginal adults (87.3 per cent in 2012-13) or non-Indigenous adults (87.0 per cent in 2011-12), and for all groups there was no significant change from 2004-05 (table 12A.1.5).
* the proportion of Torres Strait Islander adults reporting high/very high levels of psychological distress (28.5 per cent in 2012-13) was not statistically different to that of Aboriginal people (29.5 per cent in 2012-13), but both rates were higher levels than that for non-Indigenous people (10.8 per cent in 2011-12) (table 12A.1.5).

## 12.2 Attachment tables

Attachment tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by an ‘A’ suffix (for example, table 12A.2 is table 2 in the attachment tables for chapter 12). The files containing the attachment tables can also be found on the Review web page (www.pc.gov.au/gsp) or can be obtained by contacting the Secretariat directly.

## 12.3 References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2012, *Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011*, Cat. no. 2075.0, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/productsbyCatalogue/4E7978922DB02C96CA257A230015F235?OpenDocument (accessed 20 May 2014).

—— (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2013, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011*, 30 August, Cat. no. 3238.0.55.001, Canberra, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001 (accessed 29 November 2013).

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2009, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, ACT.

—— (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2011, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, ACT.

1. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Reconciliation Australia, which reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)