

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have improved in a number of areas but a significant task remains – several outcomes have not improved, with some getting worse over time.



Image by Wayne Quilliam, courtesy of Reconciliation Australia and the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards and finalist Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation.

The 2014 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* (OID) report measures the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and is the most comprehensive report on Indigenous wellbeing produced in Australia. It contains accessible data for an extensive range of measures, as well as case studies of programs that have led to improved outcomes.

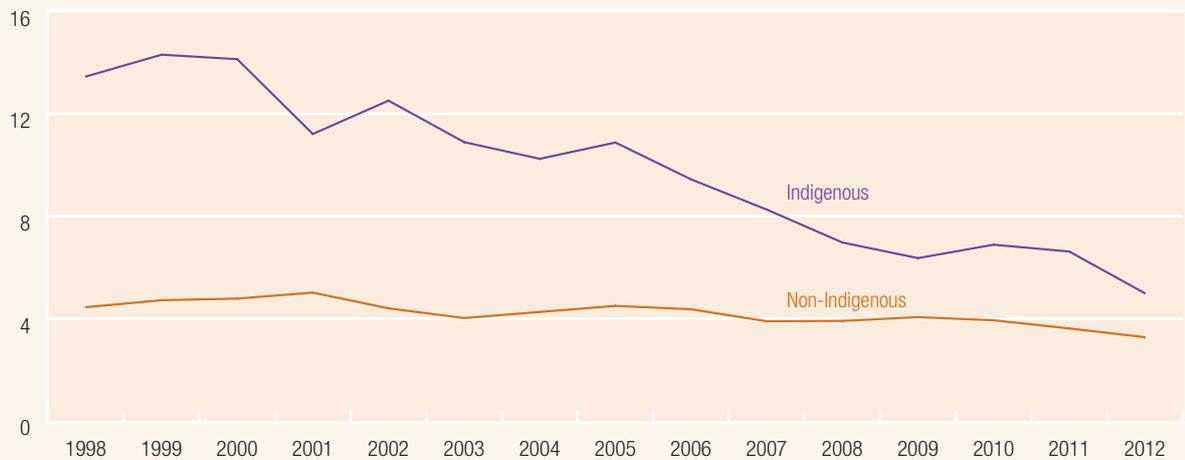
The OID report is based on evidence about the underlying causes of disadvantage, and the positive factors that contribute to wellbeing. The report's framework has two layers of measurable indicators: the first consists of the six COAG Closing the Gap targets and six headline indicators; and the second consists of strategic change indicators linked to the seven COAG building blocks.

The logic behind the framework is that improvement in the strategic change indicators will lead to improvement in the COAG targets and headline indicators over time.

Peter Harris, Chairman of the Productivity Commission and of the Steering Committee stated that 'It has been almost three years since the previous OID report. For this report we made a concerted effort to increase the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Their input contributed to significant developments, including broadening the focus from overcoming disadvantage to improving wellbeing, and the inclusion of new indicators, such as Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance, valuing Indigenous cultures and participation in decision making.'

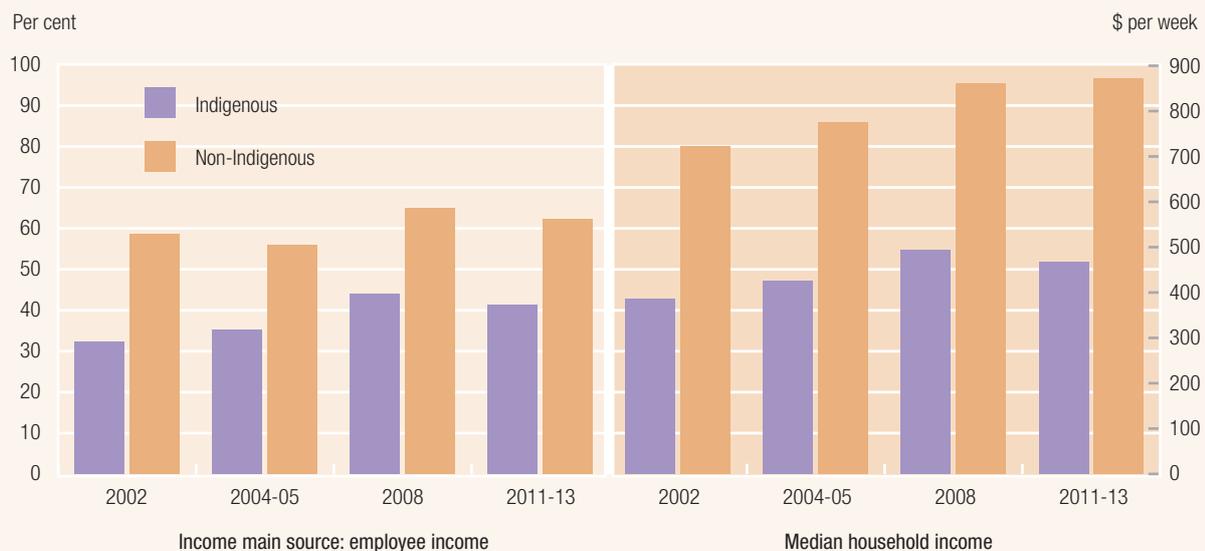
The gap in infant mortality rates has narrowed

Per 1000 live births



Data source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014, section 4.2.

Employee income as main income source has increased and household incomes have risen



Data source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014, section 4.9 and section 9.4.

What has changed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Outcomes have improved in a number of areas, including some COAG targets:

- The gap in life expectancy narrowed from 11.4 years to 10.6 years for males and from 9.6 years to 9.5 years for females from 2005-2007 to 2010-2012.
- Mortality rates for children improved significantly between 1998 and 2012, in particular for 0-1 year olds, whose mortality rates more than halved (from 14 to 5 deaths per 1000 live births). In addition, the proportion of low birthweight babies has decreased.
- The proportion of 20-24 year olds completing year 12 or above increased from 45 per cent in 2008 to 59 per cent in 2012-13.
- The proportion of 20-64 year olds with or working towards post-school qualifications increased from 26 per cent in 2002 to 43 per cent in 2012-13.
- The proportion of adults whose main income was from employment increased from 32 per cent in 2002 to 41 per cent in 2012-13, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion on income support.

However, there has been little or no change in some areas:

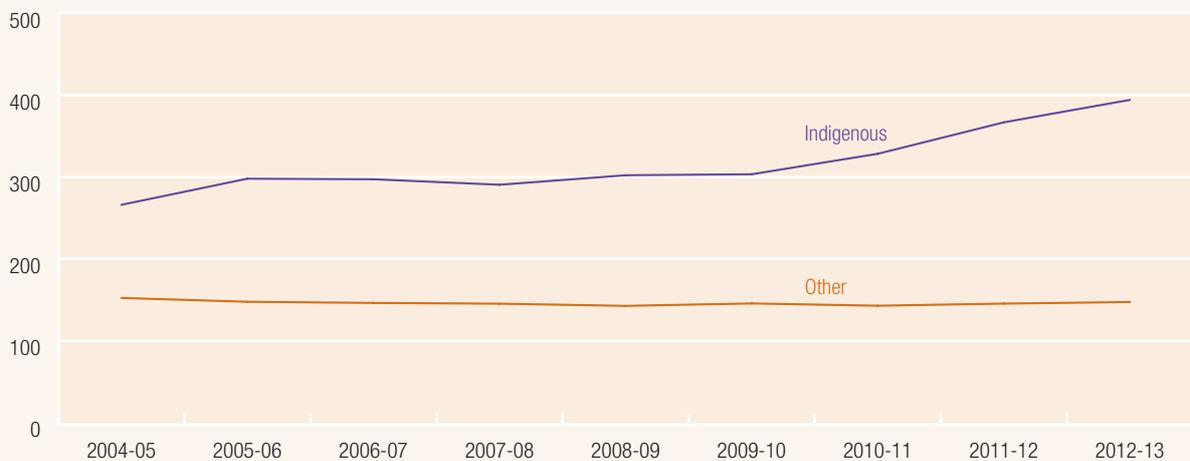
- There was virtually no change in the proportions of students achieving national minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy from 2008 to 2013.
- Relatively high rates of family and community violence were unchanged between 2002 and 2008, and there was little change in alcohol and substance use and harm over time.

Outcomes have worsened in some areas:

- The proportion of adults reporting high/very high levels of psychological distress increased from 27 per cent in 2004-05 to 30 per cent in 2012-13, and hospitalisations for intentional self-harm increased by 48 per cent over this period.
- The adult imprisonment rate increased 57 per cent between 2000 and 2013. Juvenile detention rates increased sharply between 2000-01 and 2007-08, and fluctuated since at around 24 times the rate for non-Indigenous youth.

Rates of hospitalisations from intentional self-harm have increased

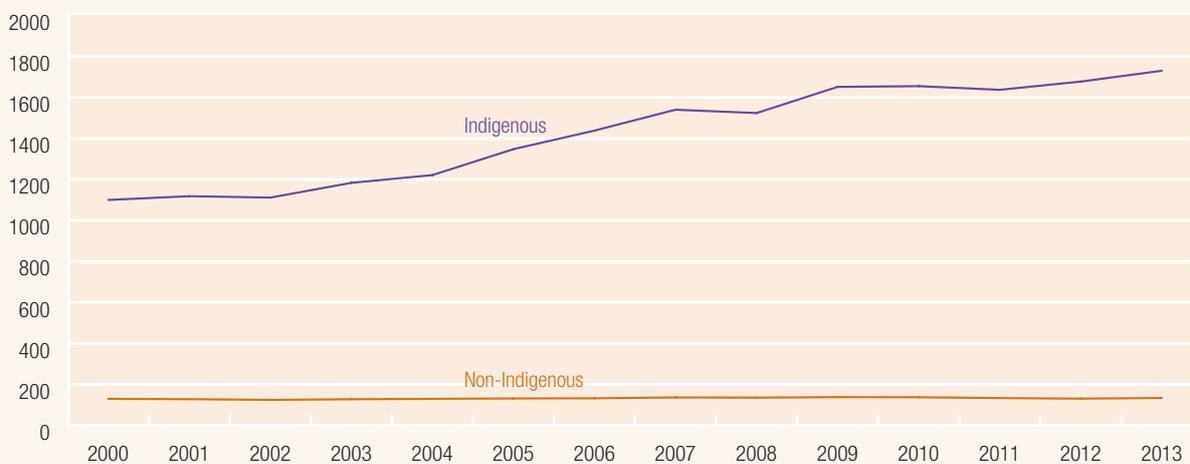
Per 100 000 population



Data source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators, 2014, section 8.8.

Rates of adult imprisonment have increased

Per 100 000 population

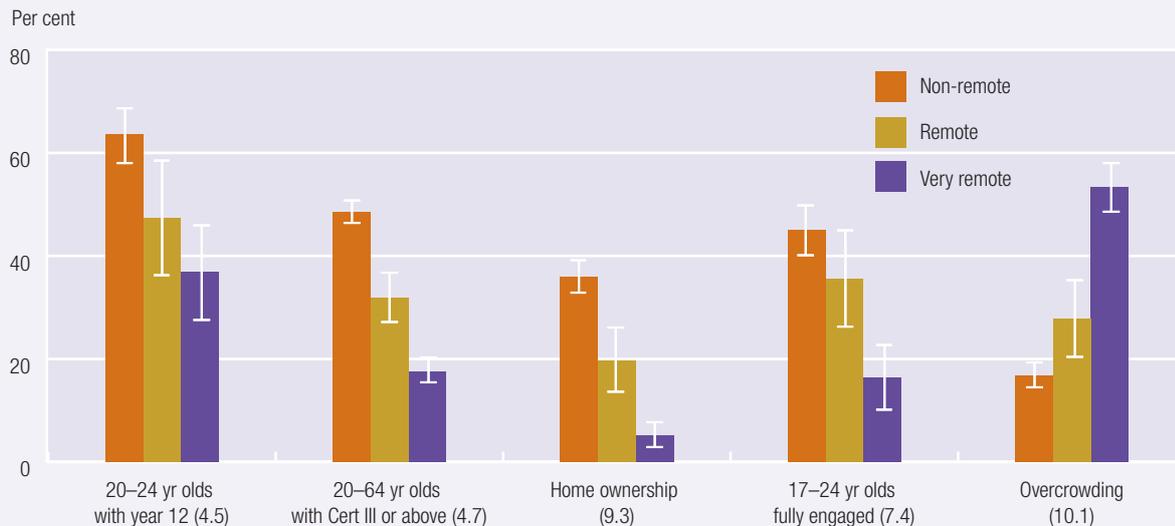


Data source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014, section 4.12.

The impact of remoteness

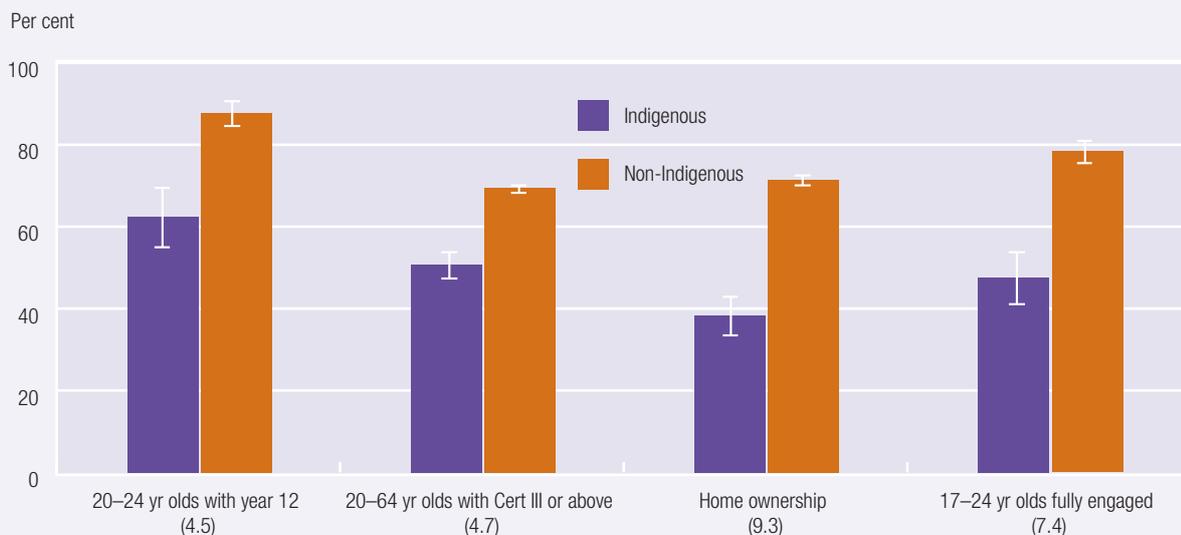
Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians lived in major cities or regional areas as at 30 June 2011 (35 per cent in major cities, 22 per cent in inner regional areas and 22 per cent in outer regional areas). However, significant proportions lived in more remote areas (8 per cent in remote areas and 14 per cent in very remote areas). Less than 2 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians lived in remote plus very remote areas. For most indicators that can be disaggregated by remoteness, outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians worsen as remoteness increases.

Selected outcomes for Indigenous people by remoteness, 2012-13



However, on average, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians experience poorer outcomes than non-Indigenous Australians wherever they live. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians living in major cities experience disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous Australians in the same setting.

Selected outcomes, major cities, 2012-13



Data source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014, section year 12 attainment – section 4.5; Cert III or above – section 4.7; Home ownership – section 9.3; Youth fully engaged – section 7.4; Overcrowding – section 10.1.

'Things that work': some examples

Not everything that matters can be captured in indicators, and some information is better presented in words, rather than numbers. In particular, community level change may not show up in State and Territory or national data. The OID report includes many case studies of actions that are making a difference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Families as First Teachers (NT) is a promising early learning and parenting support program, operating in 21 remote Indigenous communities since mid-2011. Preschool enrolments increased in half the sites surveyed and 95 per cent of parents were satisfied with the program and felt more skilled and able to support their child's learning and development.

The national **Working on Country** program provides employment and training opportunities to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in rural and remote areas to undertake work in natural resources management. In May 2012 there were over 690 rangers. A 2011 evaluation found that the rangers saw the jobs as 'real jobs' that provided better income and conditions, more interesting work and ongoing employment, than the CDEP alternative.

The **Alice Springs Domestic and Family Violence Outreach Service** provides targeted support to women experiencing domestic and family violence. A 2012-13 evaluation found that all of the 19 women interviewed reported their safety had improved. Almost half of the women who had previously used the crisis accommodation services had not used crises accommodation since receiving outreach services.

The **Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Service (NSW)** has improved health outcomes for Aboriginal mothers and babies by providing culturally appropriate maternity care, including secondary programs on mental health, drug and alcohol, and Quit for Life Smoking cessation in pregnancy. A 2012 evaluation found an increase in women receiving antenatal care before 20 weeks gestation, and a reduction in pre-term births.



Image by Wayne Quilliam, courtesy of Reconciliation Australia and the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards and finalist Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

Success factors

The following high level principles and practices have been identified as underpinning successful programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians:

- flexibility in design and delivery so that local needs and contexts can be taken into account
- community involvement and engagement in both the development and delivery of programs
- the importance of building trust and relationships
- a well-trained and well-resourced workforce, with an emphasis on retention of staff
- continuity and coordination of services.

Source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014

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> This report is produced by the Productivity Commission for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision.

> <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/recurring/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/key-indicators-2014#report>