
2 The framework

This chapter explains the structure and logic of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* report framework. As noted in chapter 1, the report aims to be more than a compilation of statistics. The report's framework is intended to help governments target their efforts to overcome Indigenous disadvantage, and to provide meaningful information to Indigenous people.

Section 2.1 describes how the key elements of the framework fit together. Section 2.2 provides feedback from consultations conducted following the release of the 2009 report, and section 2.3 describes the report's approach to reporting on 'cultural' and wellbeing issues that influence the welfare of Indigenous people.

2.1 The framework

The terms of reference for this report require it to inform governments' responses to Indigenous disadvantage, by providing information about the impact of past program and policy interventions. However, it is recognised that government activity is not the only influence on the outcomes shown in this report. There are many other influences on outcomes for Indigenous people, and it can be difficult to link specific government activities to high level outcomes.

While there are many reports on the experiences of Indigenous people, including some prepared by State and Territory governments, reports about the performance of governments often focus on specific programs or policies, and take a 'silo' approach — education is reported by departments of education, health by health departments — and tend to focus on service inputs (how budgets are spent) and outputs (the actual services delivered), rather than on the outcomes achieved.

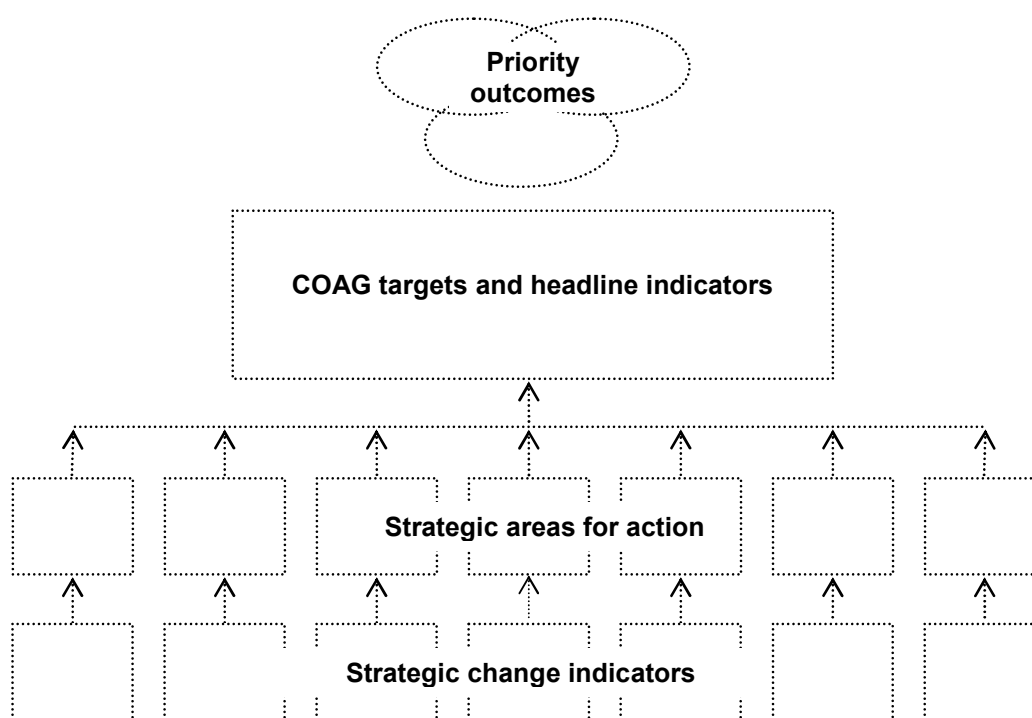
While information on inputs and outputs is valuable, this report focuses on outcomes — the impact of policies and programs on Indigenous people — and emphasises the need to assess the impact of programs and policies from a whole-of-government perspective.

The current level of Indigenous disadvantage is the result of a complex mix of historical, social and economic factors. Closing the gaps in outcomes will require the combined efforts of governments, the community and Indigenous people

themselves. Chapter 3 discusses in more detail the need for coordinated government action to address the complex interactions between different aspects of disadvantage, and chapter 13 provides some analysis of the interactions that contribute to multiple disadvantage.

The key elements of the indicator framework are shown in a simplified form in figure 2.1.1. The framework is based on the best available evidence about the root causes of disadvantage, in order to ensure that policy attention is directed to prevention, as well as responding to existing disadvantage. Each of the framework elements is discussed briefly below.

Figure 2.1.1 Framework elements



Priority outcomes

Three interlinked priority outcomes sit at the top of the framework — no single aspect of the priority outcomes can be achieved in isolation:

- safe, healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and cultural identity
- positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self-harm

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- improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities.

These outcomes reflect COAG's vision for Indigenous Australians to have the same life opportunities as other Australians. Indigenous people and their organisations have also endorsed these outcomes, in extensive consultations over several years.

It is extremely difficult to measure progress in achieving such broadly stated, aspirational outcomes, and to hold governments and service providers accountable. Therefore, the framework includes two layers of quantifiable indicators. The logic of the framework is that, over time, measurable improvement in these indicators will demonstrate progress toward the priority outcomes.

COAG targets and headline indicators

The first layer of indicators is made up of the six targets COAG has set for closing the gaps in outcomes for Indigenous people, and a further six headline indicators selected by the Steering Committee to represent significant, high level outcomes.

In December 2007 and March 2008, COAG announced six closing the gaps targets (the name of the indicator in the framework is in italics, followed by the full text of the target):

- *life expectancy* — close the life expectancy gap within a generation (COAG 2007)
- *young child mortality* — halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (COAG 2007)
- *early childhood education* — ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to quality early childhood education within five years (COAG 2011)
- *reading, writing and numeracy* — halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (COAG 2007)
- *year 12 attainment* — halve the gap for Indigenous 20-24 year olds in year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020 (COAG 2011).
- *employment* — halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (COAG 2008a)

These ambitious targets highlight specific outcomes in areas that are either significant in their own right (life expectancy and early childhood mortality) or are important preconditions or preventative factors for addressing long term

disadvantage (access to preschool, learning outcomes and school attainment, and employment).

The Steering Committee has selected six headline indicators that sit alongside the COAG targets in the first layer of indicators. These headline indicators are all important outcomes in their own right, and will require whole-of-government action over the long term before significant progress can be seen:

- post secondary education, participation and attainment
- disability and chronic disease
- household and individual income
- substantiated child abuse and neglect
- family and community violence
- imprisonment and juvenile detention.

Together, the COAG targets and headline indicators provide an overview of the state of Indigenous disadvantage, and act as proxy measures for the priority outcomes. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the evidence base supporting the selection of each indicator, the definitions of the specific measures used to report against each indicator, and the available data, including any information on recent trends.

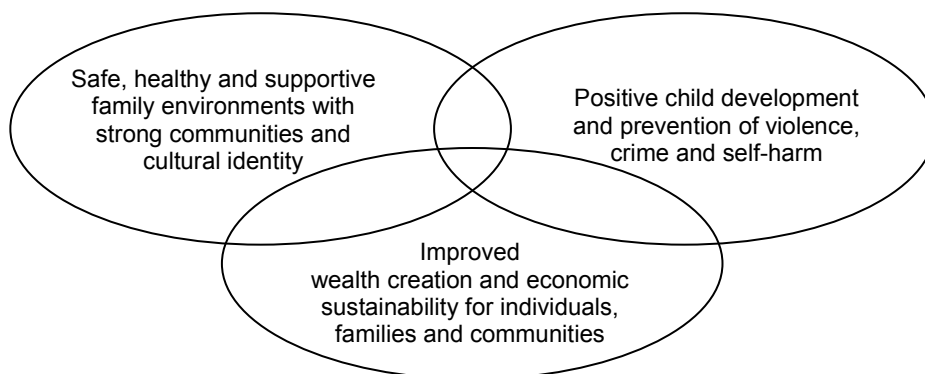
Strategic areas for action and strategic change indicators

The COAG targets and headline indicators, by their very nature, are extremely important, but their whole-of-government, long term nature can make it difficult to hold specific governments or agencies accountable for outcomes in the short to medium term. The second layer of the framework seeks to overcome this limitation by identifying ‘strategic areas for action’ — specific areas of policy where immediate action is needed if the COAG targets and headline indicator outcomes are to be achieved. Each strategic area for action has a small number of ‘strategic change indicators’ that measure short term progress.

The full strategic framework is presented in figure 2.1.2. The rationale for each strategic area for action and its associated indicators, the definitions of the specific measures used to report against each indicator, and the available data, including any information on recent trends, are presented in chapters 5 to 11.

Figure 2.1.2 **Multi-level indicator framework**

Priority outcomes



COAG targets and headline indicators

COAG targets		Headline indicators	
4.1	Life expectancy	4.7	Post secondary education — participation and attainment
4.2	Young child mortality	4.8	Disability and chronic disease
4.3	Early childhood education	4.9	Household and individual income
4.4	Reading, writing and numeracy	4.10	Substantiated child abuse and neglect
4.5	Year 12 attainment	4.11	Family and community violence
4.6	Employment	4.12	Imprisonment and juvenile detention

Strategic areas for action

Early child development	Education and training	Healthy lives	Economic participation	Home environment	Safe and supportive communities	Governance and leadership
5.1 Maternal health 5.2 Teenage birth rate 5.3 Birthweight 5.4 Early childhood hospitalisations 5.5 Injury and preventable disease 5.6 Basic skills for life and learning 5.7 Hearing impairment	6.1 School enrolment and attendance 6.2 Teacher quality 6.3 Indigenous cultural studies 6.4 Year 9 attainment 6.5 Year 10 attainment 6.6 Transition from school to work	7.1 Access to primary health care 7.2 Potentially preventable hospitalisations 7.3 Avoidable mortality 7.4 Tobacco consumption and harm 7.5 Obesity and nutrition 7.6 Tooth decay 7.7 Mental health 7.8 Suicide and self-harm	8.1 Employment by full time/part time status, sector and occupation 8.2 Indigenous owned or controlled land and business 8.3 Home ownership 8.4 Income support	9.1 Overcrowding in housing 9.2 Rates of disease associated with poor environmental health 9.3 Access to clean water and functional sewerage and electricity services	10.1 Participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities 10.2 Access to traditional lands 10.3 Alcohol consumption and harm 10.4 Drug and other substance use and harm 10.5 Juvenile diversions 10.6 Repeat offending	11.1 Case studies in governance 11.2 Governance capacity and skills 11.3 Engagement with service delivery

Note: Numbers beside indicator names refer to section numbers in the report.

Strategic areas for action

The seven strategic areas for action were chosen for their potential to have a significant and lasting impact in reducing Indigenous disadvantage. Each strategic area represents a set of related activities that evidence suggests have the potential to drive improvement in the COAG targets and headline indicators.

The strategic areas for action in this report are aligned with the seven ‘building blocks’ identified by COAG to support the reforms aimed at achieving the six COAG targets (COAG 2011). The seven strategic areas are:

- early child development (chapter 5)
- education and training (chapter 6)
- healthy lives (chapter 7)
- economic participation (chapter 8)
- home environment (chapter 9)
- safe and supportive communities (chapter 10)
- governance and leadership (chapter 11).

The strategic areas do not mirror typical government service silos. In some cases, a specific service area will logically play a major role, but in all strategic areas, more than one government agency will have to take action in order to achieve better outcomes. For example, in the area of ‘education and training’, the school system has an important role to play, but so do agencies dealing with transport, housing and health.

During consultations, many people have asked how governments’ progress in addressing the strategic areas for action would be monitored. The monitoring of specific government programs and services is beyond the scope of this report, but a summary of implementation measures being adopted by individual governments is contained in appendix 2. Data on Indigenous people’s access to a range of government services are included in the Indigenous Compendium of the Steering Committee’s annual *Report on Government Services* (SCRGSP 2011). Estimates of government expenditure on services to Indigenous people are contained in the biennial Indigenous Expenditure Report (IERSC 2010).

The first *Indigenous Expenditure Report*, released on 28 February 2011, provides, for the first time, comprehensive and comparable information on expenditure on both Indigenous specific services and the estimated Indigenous share of mainstream services by the Australian, State and Territory governments. The *Indigenous Expenditure Report* is aligned with the seven building blocks of the NIRA and the

framework used in this report, and can be used alongside this report and the COAG Reform Council reports to examine policy outcomes and expenditure against the same broad framework.

The *2010 Indigenous Expenditure Report* estimated expenditure on services related to Indigenous Australians to be \$21.9 billion in 2008-09, or about 5.3 per cent of all government expenditure. This is higher than the Indigenous representation in the population (2.5 per cent), reflecting the greater level of disadvantage of (and greater use of government services by) Indigenous Australians. The Report found that estimated expenditure per person was \$40 228 for Indigenous people, compared with \$18 351 for non-Indigenous people (a ratio of 2.2 to 1). This difference reflects the combined effect of:

- *more intensive use of services* — reflecting the greater level of disadvantage of Indigenous Australians — accounting for 53.8 per cent (\$11 762) of the difference
- *provision of Indigenous specific services* — which complement, or substitute for, mainstream services — accounting for 42.6 per cent (\$9309) of the difference
- *differences in the cost of providing mainstream services* — accounting for 3.7 per cent (\$807) of the difference (IERSC 2010).

Strategic change indicators

A small number of targeted, shorter term ‘strategic change indicators’ measure progress for each strategic area for action. These indicators make it easier to track short term progress, and improve accountability for outcomes.

Linkages across the framework mean that some indicators potentially could be placed in more than one strategic area for action (for example, alcohol consumption and harm is relevant to both the ‘Healthy lives’ and ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic areas). Indicators have been placed in the strategic area where the evidence base suggests they will have greatest effect, but their potential to influence other outcomes is emphasised in the text.

Many indicators could have been included in this report. Potential indicators were assessed against the criteria listed in box 2.1.1 before they were added to the framework. Most of the indicators in the report meet the criteria — but a few indicators are regarded as so important that they are included in the framework even though they do not meet some criteria. Similarly, most indicators are linked to outcomes — not to specific program or service outputs. However, some outputs are so closely tied to outcomes that they are included; for example, access to primary health care.

Box 2.1.1 Criteria used to select strategic change indicators

1. Relevance to priority outcomes
2. Actions in the strategic areas for action result in positive outcomes over time in the COAG targets and headline indicators
3. Supported by strong logic or empirical evidence
4. Sensitive to policy interventions and changes in policy settings
5. Meaningful to stakeholders and principally to the Indigenous community
6. Unambiguous and clear in meaning and interpretation
7. The existence, or ease, of developing supporting data sets

The first three criteria are closely related. The whole framework is geared toward achieving the priority outcomes, measured by improvement in the COAG targets and headline indicators. The report draws its strength from the evidence base or underlying theory of causality that links improvement in a strategic change indicator to progress toward the COAG targets and headline indicators, and therefore the priority outcomes. For most indicators, empirical evidence provides the basis for satisfying this criterion. For some indicators, despite limited empirical evidence, causal logic and compelling feedback from consultations meet these criteria.

The fourth and fifth criteria are also closely linked. The terms of reference for the report require it to inform Australian governments about the impact of policy programs and interventions, and to be meaningful to Indigenous people. All indicators have been endorsed by governments as relevant to policy actions, and accepted by most Indigenous people as meaningful during continuing consultations on this report (section 2.2).

The sixth criterion recognises that, to be most useful, an indicator should be clear and unambiguous. Most indicators in this report are relatively easy to understand. However, in some cases, important indicators have been included, even though they may yield ambiguous results. For example, an increase in notifications of child abuse or neglect might reflect an undesirable increase in the incidence of such behaviour but, alternatively, could reflect a desirable increase in the proportion of incidents being reported or investigated. In such cases, the report includes explanatory text that highlights the potential ambiguity.

The final criterion recognises the practical need for relevant data to report against an indicator. In many cases, the absence of directly relevant data means that proxy measures must be reported. In a few cases, important indicators have been included even though data are substantially qualified or not available for all jurisdictions. In

two cases, indicators have been included even though there are few data available (Indigenous cultural studies and governance). These indicators are considered to be so important that qualitative information using case studies has been included in the place of data. Some new indicators identified as high priorities by COAG (for example, ‘basic skills for life and learning’ and ‘teacher quality’) do not yet have data available, and data strategies are being developed.

Indicators and measures

In this report, the term ‘indicator’ refers to a broad statement of *what* outcome is to be measured. Indicators are usually described in general terms, to allow for developments in the evidence base and changing data sets over time. The term ‘measure’ refers to *how* an indicator will be measured. Data limitations mean that proxy measures must be used to report against some indicators, and sometimes multiple measures may be required to illustrate a single indicator. Information on the measures reported for each indicator is provided in each indicator section, and summarised in appendix 5 ‘Measures and data sources’.

Cross tabulating and linking data

Causal relationships are at the heart of the indicator framework in this report. Information about the relationships between different indicator outcomes can be a powerful tool for understanding how one factor influences another. Chapter 3 looks at interactions across the framework and chapter 13 examines interactions and multiple disadvantage in more detail.

However, data limitations constrain the analysis of such interactions. Cross tabulation and other sophisticated statistical analysis is only possible using unit record data, where a range of information has been collected for each individual or household. The analysis in chapter 13 is limited to data from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2008 and National Health Survey 2007-08. Similar analysis in the 2009 report was limited to data from the Census.

During consultations, government agencies advised the Steering Committee that they are starting to examine opportunities for linking data across multiple administrative data sets. Knowing the relationships between factors such as health, education, income and housing could help governments to develop more effective policies and programs. However, the practical application of data linkage may take several years, because of the technical challenges in linking data and the need to address concerns about privacy that arise when databases are linked.

National Agreements

In November 2008, COAG agreed the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), one of six new National Agreements within the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (COAG 2011). The performance of all governments in achieving the outcomes and benchmarks specified in each National Agreement is monitored and assessed by the COAG Reform Council (CRC) (COAG 2008b).

The NIRA contains 27 performance indicators, including COAG's six Closing the Gap targets. The indicator framework in this report is aligned with the NIRA and each of the 27 NIRA indicators is reflected in this report, either as an indicator in its own right or as a measure within a broader indicator. Wherever possible, definitions and data sources used for indicators in this report are consistent with those used for NIRA reporting to the CRC, although variations are necessary in some cases. The greatest variation in data sources between this report and NIRA reporting is this report's use of the ABS National Health Survey rather than the ABS Survey of Education and Work, to provide non-Indigenous comparators for education and labour force indicators. Use of the National Health Survey for this report allowed disaggregation of some indicators by remoteness areas and improved time series comparability with earlier data, which is not possible using the Survey of Education and Work.

As discussed in chapter 1, the NIRA indicators are focused primarily around the COAG targets. This report contains additional indicators and measures across the seven strategic areas for action (the NIRA's seven building blocks), reflecting its broader purpose (see figure 2.1.2). Reporting against National Agreements focuses strongly on State/Territory disaggregation, whereas this report also includes extensive disaggregation of national data by remoteness.

The National Agreements are supplemented by National Partnerships (NPs). Funding for NPs may be conditional on states and territories meeting agreed performance benchmarks. The following Indigenous National Partnerships had been agreed as at February 2011 (although not all jurisdictions are signatories to all NPs):

- National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development
- National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes
- National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation
- National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing
- National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery

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- National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory
 - National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access
 - National Partnership Agreement on an Indigenous Clearinghouse (MCFFR 2011).

Other National Partnerships, which are not Indigenous-specific, may also contribute to achieving the COAG Closing the Gap targets. Indicators and measures in this report reflect definitions and data sources used for indicators in National Partnerships and other National Agreements where they are relevant to this report, which ensures that this report remains consistent with COAG’s overall approach to performance reporting.

Things that work

The Steering Committee recognises that indicators alone cannot tell the complete story about overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. The gaps in almost all reported outcomes can appear overwhelming — yet there are many examples of successful initiatives, often at the community level, that are acting to close those gaps. These successes are often not apparent from the aggregate data in this report.

For most indicators, the Steering Committee has included a number of brief case studies of programs or services that are making a difference — ‘things that work’. These examples illustrate how things can change for the better, and provide models that other governments or communities can draw upon and adapt for their own use.

‘Things that work’ in this report were assessed against the criteria in box 2.1.2. However, formal evaluations of Indigenous programs are relatively scarce. In order to provide a range of examples to illustrate how things can change for the better, the Steering Committee included case studies of some promising programs that have not undergone rigorous evaluation.

Focused, rigorous evaluation is required to improve the effectiveness of government policies and programs. COAG has established the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (AIHW and AIFS 2011) to compile, disseminate, and promote research and program evaluation in the field of Indigenous policy. The Clearinghouse is becoming a valuable resource for policy makers and Indigenous communities, and is the source of some of the ‘things that work’ case studies in this report.

Box 2.1.2 'Things that work' criteria

'Things that work' case studies highlight programs or services that are successfully acting to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes. Case studies must:

- be relevant to a report indicator
- have measurable, up to date outcomes
- have a reasonable track record of success
- be supported by local Indigenous people who use or are affected by the case study
- be agreed for inclusion by all jurisdictions.

2.2 Consultations

Consultations with Indigenous people, government agencies and researchers have made important contributions to the ongoing development of the report. Initial consultations in 2002-03 contributed to the development of the report framework. Following the release of each report, further rounds of consultation have sought feedback on the report and ideas for improving future reports. Two reports on consultations have been produced (SCRCSSP 2003; SCRGSP 2007).

The 2009 report introduced a revised indicator framework incorporating the six COAG Closing the Gap targets and the seven building blocks of the NIRA. The revised framework was endorsed by COAG but did not have the benefit of consultation with Indigenous people and organisations or researchers. Therefore, the Steering Committee committed to consultations on the alignment following publication of the 2009 report. During 2010, the Steering Committee and its Secretariat consulted with Indigenous people and organisations, government agencies and researchers across Australia. The consultations sought feedback on the changes to the framework and suggestions for improving the report.

The consultations have provided valuable input for the 2011 report. Most participants were very supportive of the OID report and the revised framework, with very few suggestions for major changes.

A key topic of discussion at most consultation meetings was governance and leadership, which COAG identified as a separate strategic area for action in the revisions to the OID framework in 2009. The Steering Committee has worked to enhance this section of the report.

There has been continuing support for including ‘things that work’ case studies and the identification of things that work success factors, which are described in chapter 3. Consultation participants emphasised the desirability of rigorous evaluation of the case studies, and the Steering Committee has endeavoured to ensure the case studies in this report meet an appropriate standard of evaluation.

2.3 Measuring culture and wellbeing

Consultations with Indigenous people often raised two related issues:

- that the report should reflect wellbeing as well as disadvantage, and reflect the many positive aspects of Indigenous people’s lives
- that the report should reflect the central place of culture in the lives of Indigenous people. Culture is an essential component of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and can also provide individuals and communities with a degree of resilience to entrenched disadvantage.

Culture

One clear message from consultations has been that no single indicator could adequately reflect the importance of culture in the lives of Indigenous people. Just as culture pervades every aspect of the lives of Indigenous people, the cultural indicators in this report are spread across the strategic areas for action. The links across the strategic areas for action, and between these areas and the COAG targets and headline indicators, are particularly strong for many of the cultural indicators.

Cultural strength is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous wellbeing. However, Australian Indigenous cultures are very diverse, which makes it difficult to identify cultural indicators for this report. While various groups of Indigenous people may identify with broad cultural themes, it is difficult to define aspects of culture in a way that can be measured for inclusion in a largely quantitative report such as this. Acknowledging these constraints, the following cultural indicators are included in this report:

- *Indigenous cultural studies* is included in the ‘Education and training’ strategic area for action (section 6.3). Indigenous cultural studies can benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, and address the ignorance and misunderstanding that often underlie racism. In addition, culturally appropriate curriculum improves the motivation of Indigenous children to attend or remain at school. Data on Indigenous people’s experience of learning about Indigenous

culture in school or other study were available for this report for the first time from the ABS NATSISS 2008.

- *Participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities* is included in the ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic area for action (section 10.1). Art and ceremony are significant markers of a society’s spiritual and cultural strength in both western and Indigenous contexts, while there is strong anecdotal evidence that a range of sport and community activities can foster self-esteem, social interaction and the development of skills and teamwork, and can contribute to outcomes such as a reduction in juvenile crime.
- *Access to traditional lands* is included in the ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic area for action (section 10.2). Access to land may allow Indigenous people to practise and maintain their knowledge of ceremonies, rituals and history. The ‘Economic participation’ strategic area for action includes the related indicator ‘Indigenous owned or controlled land and business’ (section 8.2).
- *Case studies in governance arrangements* are included in the ‘Governance and leadership’ strategic area for action (section 11.1). Culture is an essential determinant of good governance.
- *Engagement with service delivery* is included in the ‘Governance and leadership’ strategic area for action (section 11.3). Service engagement is a broad concept that encompasses accessibility (including barriers to access) and appropriate delivery (including recognition of Indigenous cultural perspectives in designing and delivering programs).

Consultations have suggested several additional cultural indicators that are highly meaningful to Indigenous people. However, many of these indicators are in areas that Indigenous people, in consultations, regarded as the responsibility of Indigenous people themselves, not governments. Other meaningful indicators are not sensitive to government policies and programs. And very often, there are no supporting data which would allow reporting (although some interesting work is underway to develop relevant data collections). A discussion of some potential indicators follows.

Indigenous language as a potential indicator

An indicator of ‘Indigenous language’ attracted widespread support during consultations. Indigenous language is closely linked with Indigenous culture and law, and all three are linked with Indigenous wellbeing. However, there was no clear consensus about the form of a language indicator. Although language can be an important cultural signifier for many Indigenous people, according to the 2006

Census, a large proportion of Indigenous people (86 per cent) report only speaking English at home.

Loss of language and disadvantage can be linked in two main ways, through the role that language plays in the continuation of culture and promotion of resilient communities:

- Disadvantage may occur at an individual level through a reduction in the numbers of speakers, contributing to individual loss of culture and decreased wellbeing of remaining speakers. The 2006 ABS Census of Population and Housing found:
 - twelve per cent of Indigenous people in Australia reported speaking an Indigenous language at home
 - of the 52 000 people who spoke an Indigenous language at home, three quarters lived in very remote Australia, while only 3.5 per cent lived in major cities. The majority of Indigenous language speakers (56 per cent) lived in the NT.
- Disadvantage may occur at an aggregate level, with the loss of distinct languages or a reduction in the ability of a community to maintain cultural practices:
 - the 2005 National Indigenous Languages Survey report (AIATSIS and FATSIL 2005) found that, from an estimated 250 Indigenous languages before European colonisation, only around 145 languages were still spoken. The majority of these, around 110, were considered ‘severely and critically endangered’. Only around 20 languages were considered ‘strong’.

Some further information about Indigenous languages is included in the report. Use of Indigenous languages in schools is included in the indicator ‘Indigenous cultural studies’ (section 6.3). ‘Engagement with service delivery’ (section 11.3) includes information about communication between service providers and Indigenous people, and appendix 3 presents information on speakers of Indigenous languages and where Indigenous people were taught Indigenous languages, drawing on data from the Census and NATSISS.

Other potential cultural indicators

Other potential cultural indicators have been identified, but to date it has not been possible to construct indicators that meet the criteria for inclusion in the report (box 2.1.1):

- Heritage — many Indigenous people expressed the view that government had a role in ensuring that cultural heritage was protected and maintained. However, it is difficult to construct a meaningful quantitative measure of ‘heritage’. For

example, although heritage registers give legal protection to a number of sites, there is little information about sites that are not listed. There is also little information about the effectiveness of heritage listing.

- Indigenous culture and law — several Indigenous organisations emphasised the importance of official recognition of Indigenous culture by governments and the legal system. Possible indicators included ‘observance of Indigenous protocols in ceremonies’, and ‘recognition of Indigenous law and governance’. Although no data sources exist to report on these indicators, some aspects of these suggestions are reflected in the governance case studies in section 11.1.

Both of these indicators reflect outcomes that are important for the wellbeing of Indigenous people but about which there is no consensus on specific indicators. Continuing research will be undertaken on other possible cultural indicators for future reports.

Approaches to measuring Indigenous wellbeing, including cultural strength both in Australia and elsewhere are discussed in the next section on wellbeing.

Wellbeing

The original terms of reference for this report called for ‘...a regular report to COAG against key indicators of disadvantage ... that are of relevance to all governments and Indigenous stakeholders ...’. The Steering Committee has reported on disadvantage primarily by comparing outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Some consultation participants have suggested that a focus on disadvantage leads to an essentially negative, or deficit, approach. They have argued that achieving the priority outcomes requires a positive, strengths-based approach that is focused on Indigenous wellbeing. Important aspects of wellbeing include safety, relationships, sense of self, purpose, belonging to community, and participating in the economic life of the nation (UNPFII 2008; OECD 1976; Eckersley 2010; ABS 2001).

The broad term ‘wellbeing’ encompasses a number of related concepts such as social inclusion, social cohesion, natural helpers, and capabilities:

- *Social inclusion* emphasises the importance of full participation in the social and economic life of the nation — by having a job, receiving a secure and adequate income, and being closely connected to family, friends and the local community. It expands individuals’ life opportunities through education, training and employment (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2010).

-
- *Social cohesion* is about building social networks, developing community leaders and providing better education, health, housing and other vital social services in disadvantaged communities (Vinson 2007).
 - *Natural helping* refers to the range of local professional and non-professional supports (friends, family, neighbours) to which people can turn. Natural helpers are people in a community who, often without prompting, provide support to others — they help friends, family, and neighbours, but also people with whom they have no prior link. Natural helpers are often able to achieve positive outcomes in the face of adversity — they are resilient, despite facing stressful, high risk situations (Tomison and Wise 1999).
 - *Capabilities* emphasises the importance of people having a meaningful range of life choices that enable them to choose a life that they have reason to value (Sen 2001). This range of choices is enriched not only by income, but also by capabilities such as education, health and community strength (CYI 2007).

Table 2.3.1 sets out the broad elements of three wellbeing frameworks:

- social inclusion indicators developed by the Australian Social Inclusion Board
- the ABS Indigenous wellbeing framework
- the Maori wellbeing framework.

Other countries have developed frameworks and approaches to measure the wellbeing of their indigenous peoples. Canada has developed the Registered Indian Human Development Indices (Cooke 2007) and the Community Well-being Index (O’Sullivan and McHardy 2007), which are based around life expectancy, education, employment, income and housing indicators. New Zealand has developed quality of life indicators based around income, education, life expectancy, housing, language use and participation in cultural activities (Kooyela 2007) and the Māori Wellbeing Framework (table 2.3.1)

Table 2.3.1 Wellbeing framework elements

<i>Social inclusion indicators</i>	<i>ABS Indigenous wellbeing framework</i>	<i>Māori wellbeing framework</i>
Poverty and low income (income, housing tenure)	Culture, heritage and leisure (connection to land, participation in cultural activities and sports, land ownership, access to traditional lands)	Māori language (use of language)
Lack of access to the job market (participation in the labour market, employment rates, long-term unemployment)	Health (child and maternal health, disability, risk factors, social and emotional wellbeing and mental health)	Wahi Taonga ^a (identification and recognition of sites, control and access of Wahi Taonga)
Effect of the local neighborhood (fear, and actual experience of violence, neighboring, community involvement)	Education (literacy and numeracy, school to work, non-school qualifications)	Social connections (participation in community activities)
Exclusion from services (low educational attainment, year 3 and year 7 academic progress, access to services, teenage mothers)	Customary, voluntary and paid work (customary work, self employment, unemployment, paid work)	Skills (formal and non-formal education and training)
Health (life expectancy, risk of mental illness, self defined health status)	Income and economic resources (income support, home ownership)	Health (life expectancy, hospitalisations, primary health care)
	Citizenship and governance (leadership and responsibility, participation in community organisations)	Housing (homeownership, housing type preference)
		Work (labour force participation, unemployment)
		Social problems (juvenile and adult offending, use of women's refuges)

^a Wahi Taonga means sites of importance.

Source: Australian Social Inclusion Board 2009; ABS 2010; Statistics New Zealand 2002.

A comparison of the indicators in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage with those in the frameworks in table 2.3.1 shows a very broad area of overlap. Many indicators of wellbeing are the inverse of those of disadvantage (for example, all the frameworks include measures of community safety, health, education and employment outcomes). Although some aspects of wellbeing cannot be measured simply by comparing outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, over time the Steering Committee has included a number of indicators in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report that address aspects of broader Indigenous wellbeing, with limited or no comparison to non-Indigenous people:

- Indigenous cultural studies (section 6.3)
- participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities (section 10.1)
- access to traditional lands (section 10.2)
- case studies in governance (section 11.1)

-
- engagement with service delivery (section 11.3).

Other sections of the report also examine aspects of wellbeing:

- section 7.7 (mental health), while comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes, explores Indigenous mental health as part of the broader concept of social and emotional wellbeing
- chapter 13 (multiple disadvantage) explores the relationships between different aspects of disadvantage and includes cross tabulations against some broader aspects of Indigenous wellbeing, such as removal from family, core activity restriction and absence of non-school qualifications.

However, there are limits to the extent that this report can or should become an explicit ‘wellbeing’ report. A pure ‘wellbeing’ report might include additional cultural and spiritual indicators that are not appropriate for government intervention — but as a government policy report, one of the criteria for selecting the indicators in this report is sensitivity to changes in government policy settings (box 2.1.1).

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