# 5 Governance, leadership and culture

|  |
| --- |
| Strategic areas for action |
|  |
| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  |  |  | | Governance and leadership and culture |  | Early child development |  | Education and training | |  | Healthy lives | |  | Economic participation | |  | Home environment |  | Safe and supportive communities | |  | | | | |  | | | | | |  | | | | | | 5.1 Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures  5.2 Participation decision making  5.3 Engagement with services  5.4 Case studies in governance | | | | | | | | 5.5 Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance  5.6 Indigenous cultural studies  5.7 Participation in community activities  5.8 Access to traditional lands and water | | | | | | | | |  | | | | |  | | | | | |  | | | | | |
|  |
|  |

Effective governance and leadership, and recognition of culture, play essential parts in the social and economic development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and influence virtually all indicators in the framework.

Governance refers to the way the members of a group or community organise themselves to make decisions that affect themselves and others, and includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and government governance. Leadership is important to the development of a strong governance culture, and there are specific cultural aspects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.

The term ‘cultures’ used here embraces the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and peoples, each with its own distinct cultural norms, law, language and identity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures are not static, nor relegated to history, but are dynamic exchanges, which are understood through engaging in inter‑cultural dialogue, either in personal contact or through representations and signs. Culture covers many positive outcomes that are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ conception of wellbeing, which extends beyond merely overcoming disadvantage.

The following indicators are included in the ‘Governance, leadership and culture’ strategic area:

* Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures (section 5.1) — one of the principles of the Closing the Gap strategy is emphasising mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non‑Indigenous Australians, and this is also highlighted in the Australian Government’s response to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
* Participation in decision making (section 5.2) — participation in decision making is a key element in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and has been cited as an important factor in self‑determination and improving outcomes for Indigenous people. Participation in decision making is important in relation to internal participation (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance) and external participation (including government governance)
* Engagement with services (section 5.3) — ‘Engagement’ is a broad concept that encompasses both accessibility (including barriers to access) and appropriate delivery (including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspectives in designing and delivering programs)
* Case studies in governance (section 5.4) — the case studies emphasise the importance of culture as an essential determinant of good governance
* Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance (section 5.5) — for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, language is an important aspect of culture and wellbeing
* Indigenous cultural studies (section 5.6) — cultural studies can benefit both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (culturally appropriate education can contribute to good ‘mainstream’ academic outcomes) and non‑Indigenous young people (increasing knowledge can lead to shared views and increased respect)
* Participation in community activities (section 5.7) — art and ceremony are significant markers of cultural strength, and there is evidence that a range of sport and community activities can foster self‑esteem, social interaction and the development of skills and teamwork, leading to good physical and mental health and wellbeing
* Access to traditional lands and waters (section 5.8) — access to land and waters may allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to practise and maintain their knowledge of ceremonies, rituals and history. There may also be other social and economic benefits from connection to traditional country, and the ‘Economic participation’ strategic area for action includes the related indicator ‘Indigenous owned or controlled land and business’ (section 9.2).

The Steering Committee acknowledges the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. While there has been general endorsement of the cultural indicators in this report, they may not reflect the aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. In addition, it can be very difficult to define aspects of culture in a way that can be measured for inclusion in a largely quantitative report.

#### Attachment tables

Attachment tables for this chapter are identified in references throughout this chapter by an ‘A’ suffix (for example, table 5A.2.1). These tables can be found on the Review web page (www.pc.gov.au/gsp), or users can contact the Secretariat directly.

## 5.1 Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures[[1]](#footnote-1)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.1.1 Key messages |
| * Culture is a key aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing — not just knowledge and practice of culture by Indigenous Australians, but respect for that culture among the wider community. * In 2012: * four out of five general community respondents regarded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (81.4 per cent) and history (85.3 per cent) as important, and half (50.1 per cent) reported feeling personally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (tables 5A.1.2 and 5A.1.3). There was no statistically significant change in these proportions between 2008 and 2012 * while four out of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (83.8 per cent) rated their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures as ‘high’, fewer than one in three in the general Australian population did so (31.9 per cent). There was no statistically significant change in these proportions between 2008 and 2012 (table 5A.1.1). * In 2012‑13, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (83.9 per cent) reported not feeling discriminated against (due to their Indigenous status) in the previous 12 months. However, 7.2 per cent felt they had been discriminated against ‘by members of the public’ (table 5A1.8). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.1.2 Measures of valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures |
| There are five main measures for this indicator.  Four of the measures report data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the general population, aged 18 years and over, from Reconciliation Australia’s Australian Reconciliation Barometer with the most recent data for 2012 (national: Indigenous and general community[[2]](#footnote-2)).   * *Knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures* is defined as the proportion of people rating their level of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as ‘high’ |
| (continued next page) |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.1.2 (continued) |
| * *Recognition of the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make to Australia* is reported using two proxy measures: * *Pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures* is defined as the proportion of people who agree that they are personally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. * *Importance of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history* is defined as the proportion of people who agree that it is important that all Australians know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and the history of Aboriginal people in Australia. * *Level of trust* is defined as the proportion of people rating their perceptions of the level of trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the general community as ‘high’ * *Level of prejudice* is defined as the proportion of people rating their perceptions of the level of prejudice between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the general community as ‘low’.   One measure reports data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians from the ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (AATSIHS – NATSIHS component), with the most recent available data for 2012‑13 (all jurisdictions: Indigenous; remoteness).   * *Discrimination due to Indigenous status* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over who felt discriminated against due to their Indigenous status, in the previous 12 months. |
|  |
|  |

Culture is a key aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing — not just knowledge and practice of culture by Indigenous Australians, but respect for that culture among the wider community.

#### The Australian Reconciliation Barometer

The majority of data for this indicator are drawn from the Australian Reconciliation Barometer surveys, commissioned by Reconciliation Australia (RA). Surveys of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the general community were conducted in 2008, 2010 and 2012. (Data from the 2014 survey will be included in future reports.)

The Steering Committee acknowledges Reconciliation Australia’s input and advice in developing this indicator and providing data to measure progress.

### Mutual respect

Mutual respect is one of the principles of the Australian Government’s Closing the Gap strategy (FaHCSIA 2009). Reconciliation Australia explains that mutual respect:

… measures respect based on our level of understanding and pride in the cultures and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We believe that as the level of knowledge and understanding increases, more Australians will share in the pride that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel for their histories and cultures (RA 2013).

The term ‘cultures’ used here embraces the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and peoples, each with its own ‘distinct cultural norms, law, language and identity’ (AHRC 2013a). Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures are not static, nor relegated to history, but are dynamic exchanges, which are ‘understood through engaging in inter‑cultural dialogue, either in personal contact or through representations and signs’ (Langton and Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994).

#### Knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

In 2012, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (83.8 per cent) rated their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures as ‘high’, compared with fewer than one in three general community respondents (31.9 per cent). There was no statistically significant change in these proportions between 2008 and 2012 (table 5A.1.1).

#### Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions to Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians contribute in every area of public, social and community life, including the arts, media, academia, politics, sport and business. However, there are no data currently available for the Steering Committee’s preferred measure of ‘recognition of the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make to Australia’. The Reconciliation Barometer provides data for two proxy measures.

Importance of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history:

* nearly all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents considered that it was important for all Australians to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (96.1 per cent) and history (98.0 per cent), with no statistically significant change since 2008 (table 5A.1.2)
* four out of five general community respondents regarded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (81.4 per cent) and history (85.3 per cent) as important (table 5A.1.2). There was no statistically significant change in these proportions between 2008 and 2012.

Pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures:

* nearly all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents took personal pride in their culture (97.4 per cent), with a statistically significant decrease from (99.1 per cent) since 2008 (table 5A.1.3)
* half of the general community respondents (50.1 per cent) reported feeling personally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, with no statistically significant change since 2008 (5A.1.3).

### Progress on a stronger relationship

Stronger relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non‑Indigenous Australians build and sustain mutual respect, while mutual respect contributes to stronger relationships — a virtuous circle.

Reconciliation Australia explain that ‘a stronger relationship’, as measured in the Barometer:

… tracks our progress toward a stronger relationship through our perceptions of how we think the relationship is going and whether we think it is important. It also tests for high levels of trust and low levels of prejudice as these are indicators of a strong relationship (RA 2013).

Data from the Barometer are used to explore the levels of prejudice, which reflect (usually negative) *attitudes* toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. ABS survey data are used to explore the experience of discrimination, which is (usually negative) *behaviour and actions* toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

#### Trust

The Reconciliation Barometer includes information on perceptions of mutual trust of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and general community respondents aged 18 years and over. Data for 2012 show relatively low levels of trust:

* in relation to *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians trusting other Australians*
* 14.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents considered that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians had a high level of trust in other Australians, with no statistically significant change since 2008
* 11.5 per cent of general community respondents considered that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians had a high level of trust in other Australians, with little or no statistically significant change since 2008
* in relation to *other Australians trusting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*
* 4.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents considered that other Australians had a high level of trust in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, with no statistically significant change since 2008
* 13.4 per cent of general community respondents considered that other Australians had a high level of trust in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, with no statistically significant change since 2008 (figure5.1.1; table 5A.1.4).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.1.1 Perceptions of the level of trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, 2012**a,b,c,d** |
| Figure 5.1.1 Perceptions of the level of trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, 2012  More details can be found within the text surrounding the image. |
| a The surveys among Indigenous respondents involved recruitment through Indigenous networks across Australia, with an open invitation distributed by email. The sample of Indigenous people, recruited via these networks, may not be truly representative of the overall Indigenous population. The survey sample consisted of 516 Indigenous respondents aged 18 years and over in 2012. b The general community surveys were based on a sample of Australians that were selected to be representative of the Australian population in terms of age, gender and location. This sample consisted of 1012 Australians aged 18 years and over in 2012. c Respondents were asked to describe their level of trust on a scale ranging from ‘very high, fairly high, fairly low, very low and don’t know’. d Relative standard errors and 95 per cent confidence intervals for these data should be considered when interpreting these data, and are available in attachment table 5A.1.4. |
| *Source*: RA (2013) Australian Reconciliation Barometer; table 5A.1.4. |
|  |
|  |

The 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey collected data on the level of trust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over had for people in general. Nationally, 37.6 per cent of those surveyed disagreed/strongly disagreed that they generally trusted people (ABS 2010). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to respond that they did not trust people, if they had reported they experienced discrimination (46.9 per cent) compared to those who had not (34.1 per cent) (ABS 2010).

#### Prejudice

Prejudice takes the form of unfavourable opinion or attitudes toward individuals who belong to a particular group. Reconciliation Australia notes that ‘high levels of prejudice reflect low levels of understanding about one another’ (RA 2013).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.1.2 Perceptions of levels of prejudice between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, 2012**a,b,c,d** |
| Figure 5.1.2 Perceptions of levels of prejudice between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, 2012  More details can be found within the text surrounding the image. |
| a The surveys among Indigenous respondents involved recruitment through Indigenous networks across Australia, with an open invitation distributed by email. The sample of Indigenous people, recruited via these networks, may not be truly representative of the overall Indigenous population. The survey sample consisted of 516 Indigenous respondents in 2012. b The general community surveys were based on a sample of Australians that were selected to be representative of the Australian population in terms of age, gender and location. The general community sample consisted of 1012 Australians in 2012. c Respondents were asked to describe their level of prejudice on a scale ranging from ‘very high, fairly high, fairly low, very low and don’t know’.d Relative standard errors and 95 per cent confidence intervals for these data should be considered when interpreting these data, and are available in attachment table 5A.1.5. |
| *Source*: RA (2013) Australian Reconciliation Barometer; table 5A.1.5. |
|  |
|  |

The Reconciliation Barometer includes information on perceptions of prejudice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and general community respondents. Data for 2012 show that most people perceive a high level of prejudice:

* in relation to *the level of prejudice* *other* *Australians hold toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*
* 4.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents perceived that other Australians hold a ‘low’ level of prejudice toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, with no statistically significant change since 2008
* 21.6 per cent of general community respondents perceived that other Australians hold a ‘low’ level of prejudice toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, with no statistically significant change since 2008
* in relation to *the level of prejudice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians hold towards other Australians*
* 28.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents perceived that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians hold a ‘low’ level of prejudice towards other Australians, with no statistically significant change since 2008
* 18.7 per cent of general community respondents perceived that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians hold a ‘low’ level of prejudice towards other Australians, not statistically different since 2008 (figure 5.1.2; table 5A.1.5).

#### Discrimination

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC 2013b) states that racial discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation, because of their race. The Australian Government has a legal obligation to promote equality and prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, as set out under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (AHRC 2013b).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.1.3 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 18 years and over who felt discriminated against due to their Indigenous status, in the last 12 months, by remoteness, 2012‑13**a** |
| Figure 5.1.3 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 18 years and over twho felt discriminated against due to their Indigenous status, in the last 12 months, by remoteness, 2012-13   More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Proportions are presented with 95 per cent confidence intervals. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2012‑13 (2012‑13 NATSIHS component); table 5A.1.9. |
|  |
|  |

In the 2012‑13 AATSIHS, the majority (83.9 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over reported they did not feel discriminated against (due to their Indigenous status) in the last 12 months. However, 7.2 per cent felt discriminated against ‘by members of the public’ (table 5A.1.8).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over living in major cities (17.3 per cent) and outer regional areas (19.0 per cent) were more likely to report discrimination than those living in very remote areas (11.3 per cent). There were no significant differences for other areas (figure 5.1.3). Data on feelings of discrimination because of Indigenous status by State and Territory are reported in table 5A.1.8. Data on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians felt after being discriminated against and what they did are reported in tables 5A.1.6-7.

### Things that work

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.1.3 Things that work — valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures |
| **Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)** are formal reconciliation commitments undertaken by organisations, under Reconciliation Australia’s RAP program. RAPs have been adopted by small and large organisations in business, government and in the community sector to ‘turn their good intentions to real actions’ (RA 2014). The RAP Impact Measurement Report 2012 highlighted the demonstrated benefits of the program. Compared to the general community, people in RAP organisations:   * have more frequent contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples * are likely to agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a special place as the First Australians * are more likely to be proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures * are more likely to trust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples * are less prejudiced * take more action to support reconciliation (RA 2013b). |
| (continued next page) |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.1.3 (continued) |
| **National Indigenous Television (NITV)**  As noted in a Productivity Commission report into broadcasting in 2000, Indigenous radio and television help to sustain language and culture; they provide a vital channel of news and information for Indigenous people; and they have the potential to provide a means for better communication between Indigenous and other Australians (PC 2000). Established in July 2007, NITV started broadcasting free to air across Australia in 2012, with content sourced from the Indigenous production sector. The channel aims to ‘inform, entertain and educate its Indigenous and non‑Indigenous audiences’ (NITV 2014). A positive review commissioned by the then Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA 2009) resulted in continued Australian Government funding to the broadcaster. A review of Indigenous broadcasting in 2010 also supported continued funding, but made a number of recommendations to enhance the broadcasters operations (Stevens 2010). |
| Sources: Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) 2009, *Summary report on the findings of the review of National Indigenous Television (NITV)*, November, Canberra, ACT, http://www.archive.dbcde.gov.au/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0008/137078/Summary\_report\_on\_the\_findings\_of\_the\_review\_of\_National\_Indigenous\_Television\_NITV\_PDF,\_545\_KB.pdf (accessed 27 June 2014); NITV (National Indigenous Television) 2014, *About NITV*, NITV: The Campfire, http://www.nitv.org.au/about-nitv/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=67 (accessed 27 June 2014); PC (Productivity Commission) 2000, *Broadcasting: Inquiry Report*, 3 March, Report No. 11, Canberra, ACT, http://www.pc.gov.au/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0003/26598/broadcst.pdf (accessed 27 June 2014); Reconciliation Australia 2013, *Reconciliation Action Plan Impact Measurement Report 2012*, January, Canberra, ACT, http://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2012-RAP-Impact-Measurement-report.pdf (accessed 27 June 2014); Reconciliation Australia 2014, *RAP Online Hub: About*, Reconciliation Australia, http://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/about/ (accessed 27 June 2014); Stevens, N. 2011, *Review of Australian Government Investment in the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector 2010*, Canberra, ACT. |
|  |
|  |

### Future directions in data

The Steering Committee has identified ‘recognition of the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make to Australia’ as a key measure. However, there is no currently available data source for this measure.

### References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2010, *The Health and Welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, Cat. no. 4704.0, Canberra, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4704.0Oct%202010?OpenDocument (accessed 19 March 2013).

AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2013a, *Ensuring the ongoing survival of the oldest living culture in the world*, July, Paper No. 4, The Declaration Dialogue Series, Sydney, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/declaration-dialogue-series (accessed 26 June 2014).

—— (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2013b, *Equality and non-discrimination*, July, Paper No. 5, The Declaration Dialogue Series, Sydney, https://www.humanrights.  
gov.au/publications/declaration-dialogue-series (accessed 26 June 2014).

FaHCSIA (former Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) 2009, *Closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage: the challenge for Australia*, Department of Social Services: Indigenous, http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/publications-articles/closing-the-gap/closing-the-gap-on-indigenous-disadvantage-the-challenge-for-australia-2009?HTML (accessed 26 June 2014).

Langton, M. and Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994, *Valuing cultures: Recognising Indigenous Cultures as a Valued Part of Australian Heritage*, Australian Government Publishing Service.

RA (Reconciliation Australia) 2013, *Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2012: An overview*, January, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra, ACT, http://www.reconciliation.  
org.au/getfile?id=1917&file=RA\_Barometer\_Report\_2012\_Overview\_V17\_low\_res.pdf (accessed 6 February 2014).

## 5.2 Participation in decision making[[3]](#footnote-3)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.2.1 Key messages |
| * Participation in decision making is a critical component of self‑determination for all people. * In 2008, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over: * one in four (24.9 per cent) felt they were able to have a say in their community ‘all or most of the time’ on issues important to them. A further 44.7 per cent felt they could have a say some or a little of the time (table 5A.2.1) * around one in five (20 per cent) knew someone in government they felt comfortable approaching. * As at 30 June 2014, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in Australian parliaments ranged from: * over parity in the ACT Legislative Assembly (5.9 per cent representation in parliament compared with 1.4 per cent representation in the eligible population) * near parity in the NT (24.0 per cent representation in parliament compared with 25.2 per cent representation in the eligible population) * below parity in NSW, WA, Tasmania and in the Parliament of Australia (House of Representatives and the Senate) * no identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in SA * unknown in Victoria and Queensland (table 5.2.1). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.2.2 Measures of participation in decision making |
| There are two main measures for this indicator:   * *Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who wanted to participate in decision making and felt they could*. There is currently no data source available for this measure. * *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Parliament of Australia and in State and Territory parliaments* is defined as the proportion of federal, state and territory parliamentarians who have identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared to the proportion of the Australian population eligible to stand for parliament. The numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of parliament were supplied by jurisdictions. The most recent available data is for 30 June 2014 (all jurisdictions). |
| (continued next page) |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.2.2 (continued) |
| There are two proxy measures for this indicator:   * *Proportion of**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* *who felt able to have a say within their community* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who felt they were able to have a say within their community on issues that were important to them all or most of the time. * *Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who know someone in government they feel comfortable approaching* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who personally know someone in government they feel comfortable contacting.   The data source for the two proxy measures is the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), with the most recent available data for 2008 (all jurisdictions; age; remoteness). |
|  |
|  |

### Governance, self‑determination and participation in decision making

A critical element of governance is self‑determination (see section 5.4). Participation in decision making is a key exercise of self‑determination. Broadly:

* external participation includes participation in electoral politics, participation in parliamentary processes, and direct participation in the broader governance environment
* internal participation includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance, legal systems, institutions and internal decision making structures and processes (UN Expert Mechanism 2011, 2010, cited in AHRC 2012).

While there is general agreement on the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision making (Gardiner-Garden 2010), there is a lack of data with which to measure this participation. There is currently no data source available for the main measure ‘Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who wanted to participate in decision making and felt they could’.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Parliament of Australia and in State and Territory parliaments

As noted by Australia’s Social Justice Commissioner, there is ‘no substitute for direct representation’ when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the decision making processes of government in Australia (Gooda, quoted in Kennett 2012).

Parliamentary representation provides people with ‘a voice in parliament’. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parliamentarians represent what are in effect two constituencies: their electorate, as well as broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia (Deshong 2013; Lloyd 2009).

In both the recent 2013 federal election and the 2012 NT election, there were a record number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians nominated as candidates (Deshong 2013). Although the small numbers involved can fluctuate over short periods, increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates are being elected. (Caution should be used in interpreting the representation in parliament due to the small numbers involved.)

|  |
| --- |
| Table 5.2.1 Proportion of Indigenous people in parliament, relative to the proportion of Indigenous people in the population eligible to enter parliament, as at 30 June 2014**a,b,c** |
| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | NSW | VIC | Qld | WA | SA | Tas | ACT | NT | Aus Gov | | Indigenous members of parliament (no.) | 1 | – | – | 2 | – | 1 | 1 | 6 | 2 | | Indigenous members as % of all members (%) | 0.7 | – | – | 2.2 | – | 2.5 | 5.9 | 24.0 | 0.9 | | Indigenous population as % of population (%) d | 2.2 | 0.7 | 3.2 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 3.7 | 1.4 | 25.2 | 2.3 | |
| a Current as at 30 June 2014. b The numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people elected to Parliament were provided by each jurisdiction. c Indigenous members of parliament are counted in the jurisdiction of the parliament (e.g., NSW parliament counted in NSW, Parliament of Australia counted in the Australian Government). d Population is aged 18 years and over and eligible to enter parliament. |
| *Sources*: Australian and State and Territory governments (unpublished) 2014; ABS (2014) Estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026, Cat. no. 3238.0.55.001; AEC (2014) Size of the electoral roll and estimated participation rate as at 30 June 2014; table 5A.2.4. |
|  |
|  |

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Parliament of Australia

As at 30 June 2014, 0.9 per cent (2 out of 226) federal parliamentarians (House of Representatives and the Senate) self‑identified as Aboriginal, while 2.3 per cent of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was eligible to nominate to stand for election (table 5.2.1).

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the State and Territory parliaments

There have been a comparatively high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians elected to State and Territory parliaments (Lloyd 2009) (although information on the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is not available for all State and Territory parliaments). As at 30 June 2014, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in State and Territory parliaments ranged from:

* over parity in the ACT Legislative Assembly (5.9 per cent representation in parliament compared with 1.4 per cent representation in the eligible population)
* near parity in the NT (24.0 per cent representation in parliament compared with 25.2 per cent representation in the eligible population)
* below parity in NSW, WA and Tasmania
* no identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in SA
* unknown in Victoria and Queensland (table 5.2.1).

### Felt able to have a say on important issues within the community

The extent to which people feel that they have a say on important community issues is a proxy for personal autonomy — control over decisions that affect them, and a feeling that their ideas and input are valued by the community.

Nationally in 2008, one-quarter (24.9 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over felt they were able to have their say within the community on issues that were important to them all or most of time. A further 44.7 per cent felt they could have a say some or a little of the time (table 5A.2.1). (The terms ‘have a say’ and ‘issues that are important to you’ were not defined in the survey, and respondents interpreted these terms based on their personal views (ABS 2010).).

A lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians living in outer regional areas (18.1 per cent) felt they could have a say all or most of the time, compared with those living in major cities (27.6 per cent), inner regional areas (24.4 per cent) and remote and very remote areas (25.2 per cent and 29.5 per cent respectively) (table 5A.2.2).

Younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (aged 15­–34 years) felt least able to have a say all or most of the time compared to people in the older age groups (35 to 55 years and over) (figure5.2.1). MacIntyre’s (2001) exploration of the role of elders in decision making in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities may provide some context for the difference between the younger and older age groups, noting that there is ‘deep respect for the wisdom of elders, who are at the time … both teachers and guides while they are participating in collective choosing’.

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.2.1 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over that felt they had an opportunity, all or most of the time, to have a say on issues important to them, by age, 2008**a** |
| Figure 5.2.1 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over that felt they had an oppurtunity, all or most of the time, to have a say on issues important to them, by age, 2008  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; table 5A.2.3. |
|  |
|  |

Data on participation within the community on important issues are also reported by State and Territory (table 5A.2.1).

### Knowing someone in government and felt comfortable to approach

This measure provides a sense of individuals’ connection with broader government decision making structures. It is a proxy for people’s ability to draw on personal networks to access information and advice.

In 2008, one in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over (20 per cent) knew a member of local, state or federal Parliaments, with those aged 25 years and over more than three times as likely as those aged 15–24 years (26 compared to 8 per cent) to know a member of state or federal parliament (ABS 2012).

### Things that work

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.2.3 Things that work — participation in decision making |
| **Australian Electoral Commission’s electoral participation program** is aimed at empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in exercising their right to vote, to improve levels of knowledge of democratic and electoral processes and to increase enrolment. The program began in April 2010 and is funded as part of the Australian Government’s Closing the Gap initiative (AEC 2012). A 2011 evaluation found that the program’s early results were positive, that it‘has a significant role to play in addressing the barriers to participation of Indigenous people in democratic processes’ and made a number of recommendations to improve the program’s performance (Markiewicz and Patrick 2012). |
| *Sources*: AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) 2012, *50th anniversary of the Indigenous right to vote*, http://www.aec.gov.au/About\_AEC/publications/fact\_sheets/50th-anniversary.htm (accessed 17 June 2014); Markiewicz and Patrick 2012, *Final Report Evaluation IEPP Volume 1 September 2012*, http://www.aec.gov.au/about\_aec/Publications/files/iepp-volume-1.pdf (accessed 19 September 2014). |
|  |
|  |

### Future directions in data

The Steering Committee has identified as a key measure for this indicator the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who wanted to participate in decision making and felt they could. However, no currently available data source incorporates the aspect of choice in participation — some data are available on whether or not a person participated, but not on whether lack of participation was voluntary or caused by some barrier. The development and collection of data to inform this indicator would assist in measuring Australia’s progress in meeting domestic expectations and international human rights obligations.

Australia has over 560 local councils responsible for managing their region and district, yet there is little publicly available information on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Councillors. The Steering Committee would like to include information on levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in local government in future reports.

### References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2010, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey: Users’ Guide, 2008*, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/ abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4720.0Main%20Features22008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4720.0&issue=2008&num=&view= (accessed 8 July 2014).

—— (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2012, *Year Book Australia 2012: Citizenship and Governance*, 25 May, Cat no. 1301.0, Canberra, ACT, http://www.abs.gov.au /ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1301.0~2012~Main%20Features~Citizenship%20and%20governance~254 (accessed 17 June 2014).

AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2012, *Social Justice Report 2012 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Social Justice Commissioner*, 26 October, Social Justice Reports, Sydney.

Deshong, M. 2013, ‘Indigenous political aspirations and the tides of change’, *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, vol. 8, no. 7, pp. 3–6.

Gardiner-Garden, J. 2010, *Indigenous Affairs: shared goals, elusive outcomes*, Parliamentary Library (Parliament of Australia), http://www.aph.gov.au/ About\_Parliament/Parliamentary\_Departments/Parliamentary\_Library/pubs/BriefingBook43p/indigenousaffairs (accessed 17 June 2014).

Kennett, J. 2012, ‘Of the people?: Diversity in the House’, *About the House: House of Representatives Magazine*, no. 44, http://www.aph.gov.au/~/media/05%20About %20Parliament/53%20HoR/537%20About%20the%20House%20magazine/44/PDF/ATH44.pdf (accessed 17 June 2014).

Lloyd, B. 2009, *Dedicated Indigenous representation in the Australian Parliament*, Parliament of Australia, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display. w3p;query=Series%3A%22Research%20paper%20(Australia.%20Parliamentary%20Library)%20%3B%202008-09,%20no.%2023%22;rec=0 (accessed 22 May 2013).

McIntyre, P. 2001, ‘Some reflections on the role of elders in decision-making in indigenous communities’, *ADR Bulletin*, vol. 3, 9, article 2, http://epublications.bond. edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1120&context=adr (accessed 17 June 2014).

5.3 Engagement with services[[4]](#footnote-4)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.3.1 Key messages |
| * Engagement with services is critical to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Engagement covers both accessibility of services and the appropriate delivery of services. * In 2008: * Nationally, 29.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over reported that they had problems accessing one or more services in the previous 12 months, with this proportion increasing to 47.7 per cent in very remote areas (figure 5.3.1) * the service that most people had difficulty accessing was a dentist (19.5 per cent), followed by a doctor (9.5 per cent) (table 5A.3.2) * barriers to access varied by remoteness, with the most common reason in remote areas being ‘no services’ (23.7 per cent) and the most common reason in non‑remote areas being ‘waiting time/not available in time’ (14.4 per cent) (table 5A.3.3) * 3.2 per cent of people reported having difficulty understanding, or being understood by, service providers. For those whose main language was an Indigenous language this increased to 27.7 per cent (table 5A.3.5). * Between 2004‑05 and 2012‑13, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians discharging themselves against medical advice decreased slightly (from 2.6 per cent to 2.4 per cent), while the rate for non‑Indigenous Australians increased slightly (from 0.3 per cent to 0.4 per cent) (table 5A.3.6). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.3.2 Measures of engagement with services |
| There are three main measures for this indicator.   * *Accessing services* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who reported having problems accessing services. The most recent available data are from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) for 2008 (national; all jurisdictions; remoteness). Historical data are not available. * *Communication with service providers* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who reported having difficulties communicating with service providers. The most recent available data are from the 2008 NATSISS (national: sex; age groups; remoteness).   (continued next page) |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.3.2 (continued) |
| *Discharges against medical advice* is defined as the proportion of hospitalisations where patients left hospital against medical advice or discharged themselves from hospital at their own risk. Data are sourced from the AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database, with the most recent available data for 2012‑13 (all jurisdictions: remoteness; sex). These data do not provide reasons why some people choose to leave hospital against medical advice or discharge themselves at their own risk, or whether there are differences between the reasons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non‑Indigenous Australians. |
|  |
|  |

Engagement with services is critical to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea 2009). Poor access to programs and services and ineffective service delivery can compound the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (CGC 2001). Access to primary health care is covered in section 8.1.

Engagement with services is a broad concept that encompasses:

* accessibility (including barriers to access)
* appropriate delivery (including cultural perspectives in designing and delivering programs, and communicating effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients).

Effective services are a key component of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has stipulated that governments will reform service delivery systems to ensure that government investments:

* deliver effective and accessible services that are taken up by Indigenous people in urban and regional locations
* deliver culturally competent services that achieve good outcomes for Indigenous Australians
* maximise linkages between Indigenous‑specific and mainstream services
* deliver service models that respond to high levels of mobility amongst Indigenous Australians (COAG 2012).

In January 2009, the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments signed the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery, which aimed to improve coordination of remote service delivery (COAG 2009b). In his final report on progress, the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services found that the national partnership had achieved measurable improvements to services and infrastructure in all communities within the scope of the agreement, as well as improvements in relationships and human capabilities for both communities and governments. The report outlined a number of lessons for both governments and communities, which included:

* for government — have locally based and well trained staff, develop cultural competence of government and employ specific local knowledge; and that government engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be transparent, accountable and well administered
* for communities — governance and leadership must be strong and sustainable; communities should understand how to work with government, invest in planning with stakeholders in community and in government, and develop and deliver local cultural awareness programs to demonstrate how communities work (CGRIS 2014).

More information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and government governance is in section 5.4.

Examples of effective service delivery is highlighted throughout this report in ‘things that work’ case studies.

### Accessing services

Access to services can be affected by the way programs are designed, how they are presented and the cost to users (CGC 2001; Stewart, Lohoar and Higgins 2011). In remote areas, this can be exacerbated by lack of services, lack of commercial competition and difficulties caused by lack of reliable infrastructure — transport and telecommunications — to enable access to services (Altman and Ward 2002; CGC 2001; Hudson 2010; Rennie et al 2013). Failure to register births can make it difficult to obtain other forms of identification such as a driver’s licence, passport, tax file number or other proof of identification later in life, which can create further difficulties with accessing services (Orenstein 2009). Centrelink and Medicare have arrangements that assist people to obtain identification documents for access to government services (Australian Government 2010).

Telecommunications has become increasingly important in accessing services, particularly with the rise of online service provision. Telecommunications in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are complicated by geographic distance, harsh conditions and cost of infrastructure (ACMA 2008).

In 2009, the Australian, State and Territory governments signed the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access, recognising the importance of improved increased access to ‘online resources and services, principally for financial, educational, health, economic and social purposes’ as well as to e‑government services (COAG 2009a). The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households[[5]](#footnote-5) with an internet connection rose from 40 per cent in 2006 to almost two thirds (62.8 per cent) in 2011. This is compared with 77.2 per cent for ‘non‑Indigenous households’ in 2011 (ABS 2012).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.3.1 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over who had problems accessing services, by remoteness, 2008**a** |
| Figure 5.3.1 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over who had problems accessing services, by remoteness, 2008  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; (table 5A.3.3). |
|  |
|  |

In 2008, 29.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over reported they had problems accessing one or more services in the previous 12 months, with the proportion significantly higher in very remote areas (47.4 per cent) (figure 5.3.1). Nationally, the types of services most people had problems accessing were dentists (19.5 per cent) and doctors (9.5 per cent), although this differed across remote areas (table 5A.3.3).

In 2008, in total remote areas, the most common barriers people experienced were ‘no services’ (23.7 per cent), ‘not enough services’ (20.5 per cent) and ‘transport/distance’ (18.7 per cent). In total non‑remote areas the most common barriers were ‘waiting time/unavailable in time’ (14.4 per cent), ‘cost’ (9.6 per cent) and ‘not enough services’ (8.7 per cent) (figure 5.3.2).

Cultural barriers, including lack of cultural awareness on the part of service providers, racism, social inequality and social exclusion, may also lead to reduced access to services (NMHC 2012; PC 2011; Reilly et al 2008; Scrimgeour and Scrimgeour 2008; Zubrick et al 2010). In the 2008 NATSISS, 2.8 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians reported ‘services not culturally appropriate’ as a barrier for accessing selected services (figure 5.3.2).

National data, and data by State and Territory are reported in table 5A.3.2.

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.3.2 Types of barriers to accessing services for Indigenous people aged 15 years and over, by remoteness areas, 2008**a** |
| |  | | --- | | Figure 5.3.2 Types of barriers to accessing services for Indigenous people aged 15 years and over, by remoteness areas, 2008  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. | |
| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; table 5A.3.3. |
|  |
|  |

### Communication with service providers

The 2008 NATSISS asked people whose main language was an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language about communication difficulties. Of those that spoke an Indigenous language as their main language (11.5 per cent), over one-quarter (27.7 per cent) reported that they had experienced communication difficulties — similar to 2002 (table 5A.3.5).

Difficulties in communicating with service providers can create barriers to accessing available services (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2011). Effective communication is not limited to language difficulties, but extends to issues including (but not limited to) knowledge of the subject matter, emotional response, body language, and cultural and linguistic nuances. Difficulties can be compounded, as miscommunications may not always be recognised (Cass et al. 2002).

The 2002 NATSISS asked all respondents about communication problems, regardless of their main language:

* 25 per cent of those whose main language was an Indigenous language reported difficulties communicating with service providers (equivalent to 8500 people)
* 8.3 per cent of those whose main language was English reported difficulties communicating with service providers (equivalent to 20 500 people — as those whose main language was English made up 88 per cent of the Indigenous population) (table 5A.3.5).

Data on communication with service providers are also reported by sex and remoteness (table 5A.3.4), and by age (table 5A.3.5).

### Discharges against medical advice

According to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework (AHMAC 2012), this measure ‘provides indirect evidence of the extent to which hospital services are responsive to Indigenous patients’ needs’.

From 2010-11, Indigenous status in hospital separations data are considered to be of sufficient quality for reporting in all jurisdictions Prior to 2010-11, six jurisdictions (NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA and the NT) were considered to have acceptable quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification in hospitalisations data. The attachment tables for this report include data for all jurisdictions for 2010-11 to 2012-13, as well as data for the six jurisdictions for 2004-05 to 2012-13.

Between 2004‑05 and 2012‑13, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who left hospital against medical advice or discharged themselves at their own risk decreased slightly (from 2.6 per cent to 2.4 per cent), while the proportion for non‑Indigenous Australians increased slightly (from 0.3 per cent to 0.4 per cent) (table 5A.3.6).

Nationally in 2012‑13, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who left hospital against medical advice or discharged themselves at their own risk was six times higher than for non‑Indigenous Australians (2.4 per cent compared to 0.4 per cent) (table 5A.3.6).

The differences in the proportions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous Australians may reflect cost and access to healthcare, particularly for people living in remote and very remote areas. In 2012‑13, increasing remoteness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian patients’ usual area of residence was linked with increasing proportions of people leaving hospital against medical advice or discharging themselves at their own risk (1.9 per cent in major cities and regional areas compared to 3.4 per cent in remote and very remote areas) (table 5A.3.7). Non‑Indigenous patients living in remote and very remote areas were also more likely to leave hospital against medical advice or discharge themselves at their own risk (table 5A.3.7).

National data for this measure are also available by sex in table 5A.3.6.

### Things that work

The following case study provides an example of an initiative to improve service engagement.

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.3.3 Things that work – engagement with services |
| Although it has not been formally evaluated, the Steering Committee has identified the Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation’s Eye Program as a promising program worth further examination.  The **Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation’s Eye Program** (NT) commenced in 2006 in the NT (following commencement in NSW in 1999) and coordinates optometrist and eye specialist visits and runs clinics (mobile and permanent) for the people of the Tennant Creek and Barkly region in the NT (covering approximately 337 500 square kilometres and a population of around 8000).  Evidence in increasing the delivery of culturally appropriate eye care services in the region was presented in a case study at the National Rural Health Conference in 2009, which notes that prior to the program, access was limited due to perceived cost, transport, lack of eye health awareness, and lack of eye care practitioners with an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The program’s successes over 2007–2008 achieved through increased collaboration and provision of culturally appropriate services included:   * increase in the services offered from 7 days a year, to 78 days a year * increase in the number of custom made spectacles for clients from 52 per cent to 82 per cent * continuity of care, which gained respect from patients and community members (Keys and O’Hara 2009).   Osbourne et al. (2013) notes that the success of the program led to other Aboriginal controlled medical services implementing the program across the NT, with the coordinator of the program (who developed the model) recognised with an Australia Day nomination and certificate in recognition of her work on the program. |
| *Sources*: Keys, T. and O’Hara, M. 2009, ‘Providing eye care to remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory: a case study examining success factors and challenges from a collaborative approach between an NGO and AMS’, paper presented at 10th National Rural Health Conference, Cairns, http://ruralhealth.org.au/10thNRHC/10thnrhc.ruralhealth.org.au/program/index731e.html?IntCatId=4 (accessed 16 July 2014). Also cited in Osbourne, K., Baum, F. and Brown, L. 2013, *What works? A review of actions addressing the social and economic determinants of Indigenous health*, Paper no. 7 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, 2013. |
|  |
|  |

### Future directions in data

Data on the number of unregistered births are currently not available. For future editions of the report, data may be available from an Australian Research Council Linkage Project ‘Closing the gap on Indigenous birth registration’, which aims to quantify the number of births not registered from 2000 to 2009 in Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia (Freemantle 2013).

The 2008 NATSISS only asked people who spoke an Indigenous language as their main language about problems communicating with service providers. Data on communication problems amongst all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians would be beneficial, as communication problems are not limited to those whose main language is an Indigenous language. New data on accessing services and communication with service providers will be available from the 2014 NATSISS, and included in the next report.

### References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2012, *Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011*, 27 November, Cat. no. 2076.0, Canberra,http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/  
DetailsPage/2076.02011?OpenDocument (accessed 13 February 2014).

ACMA (Australian Communications and Media Authority) 2008, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities*, September, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney, http://www.acma.gov.au/~/media/Research%20and%20Consumer/Information/pdf/ Telecommunications%20in%20Remote%20Indigenous%20Communities.pdf (accessed 13 February 2014).

AHMAC (Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council) 2012, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2012 Report*, Canberra.

Altman, J.C. and Ward, S. 2002, *Competition and consumer issues for Indigenous Australians*, A report to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra.

Australian Government 2010, *Centrelink Annual Report 2009-10*, Centrelink, Canberra, ACT, http://www.humanservices.gov.au/spw/corporate/publications-and-resources  
/annual-report/resources/0910/centrelink-annual-report-0910-full-report.pdf (accessed 28 July 2014).

Cass, A., Lowell, A., Christie, M., Snelling, P.A., Flack, M., Marrnganyin, B. and Brown, I. 2002, ‘Sharing true stories: improving communication between Aboriginal patients and healthcare workers’, *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 176, no. 10, pp. 466–470.

CGC (Commonwealth Grants Commission) 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding*, Canberra.

CGRIS (Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services) 2014, *Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services: Final Biannual Report*, January, Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, Canberra, http://www.cgris.  
gov.au/userfiles/file/ogris\_9th\_report.pdf (accessed 13 February 2013).

COAG 2009a, *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Internet Access*, http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/other/closing\_the\_gap\_remote\_internet\_access/national\_partnership.pdf (accessed 14 February 2014).

—— (Council of Australian Governments) 2009b, *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery*, http://www.cgris.gov.au/userfiles/file/national\_partnership  
\_on\_remote\_service\_delivery\_with\_amended\_schedule[1].pdf (accessed 13 February 2014).

—— (Council of Australian Governments) 2012, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/health\_indigenous/indigenous-reform/national-agreement\_sept\_12.pdf (accessed 14 January 2013).

Commonwealth Ombudsman 2011, Talking in Language: Indigenous language interpreters and government communication, April, 052011, Canberra, ACT, http://www.  
ombudsman.gov.au/files/Talking\_in\_Language-Indigenous\_Interpreters\_REPORT-05-2011.pdf (accessed 8 August 2014).

Flaxman, S., Muir, K. and Oprea, I. 2009, *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No. 23, Social Policy Research Network for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/op23.pdf (accessed 17 February 2014).

Freemantle, J. 2013, *Closing the gap on Indigenous birth registrations: quantifying Indigenous exclusion*, Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, http://www.healthinfonet.  
ecu.edu.au/key-resources/programs-projects?pid=1945 (accessed 13 February 2014).

Hudson, S. 2010, *The impact of outback stores on Remote Indigenous Australians*, Issues Analysis, no. 22, 17 June, Centre for Independent Studies, St. Leonards, NSW.

NMHC (National Mental Health Commission) 2012, *A contributing life: the 2012 National Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention*, NHMC, Sydney.

Orenstein, J. 2009, ‘Being Nobody: The difficulties faced by Aboriginal Victorians in Obtaining identification’, presented at National Association of Community Legal Centres Conference, Perth WA, 18 September, http://orenstein.com.au/NACLC  
%20conf%20paper.pdf (accessed 14 February 2014).

PC (Productivity Commission) 2011, *Caring for Older Australians*, Inquiry Report, 8 August, http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/aged-care (accessed 13 February 2014).

Reilly, R.E., Doyle, J., Bretherton, D., Rowley, K.G., Harvey, J.L., Briggs, P., Charles, S., Calleja, J., Patten, R. and Atkinson, V. 2008, ‘Identifying psychosocial mediators of health amongst Indigenous Australians for the Heart Health Project’, *Ethnicity and Health*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 351–373.

Rennie, E., Crouch, A., Wright, A. and Thomas, J. 2013, ‘At home on the outstation: Barriers to home Internet in remote Indigenous communities’, *Telecommunications Policy*, vol. 37, pp. 583–593.

Scrimgeour, M. and Scrimgeour, D. 2008, *Health Care Access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Living in Urban Areas, and Related Research Issues: a Review of the literature*, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, http://www.lowitja.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/DP5\_final-pdf.pdf (accessed 13 February 2014).

Stewart, J., Lohoar, S. and Higgins, D. 2011, *Effective Practices for service delivery coordination in Indigenous communities.*, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Resource Sheet 8, Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Zubrick, S.R., Dudgeon, P., Gee, G., Glaskin, B., Kelly, K., Paradies, Y., Scrine, C. and Walker, R. 2010, ‘Social determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing’, in Purdie, N., Dudgeon, P. and Walker, R. (eds), *Working together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

## 5.4 Case studies in governance[[6]](#footnote-6)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Box 5.4.1 Key messages | |
| Research over many years has identified the following six determinants of good Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and government governance: | |
| * governing institutions * leadership * self‑determination | * capacity building * cultural match * resources. |
| The existence of these determinants contributes to the success of organisations, and leads to improved health, wellbeing and prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. | |
|  | |
|  | |

Many successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations contribute to improving the social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (ORIC 2013; RA 2006, 2013). Good government governance is particularly important to ‘drive real change on the ground’ (CGRIS 2011).

### Defining governance

What does ‘governance’ mean? A five year (2004–08) Indigenous Community Governance Project (ICGP) defined governance as:

… the evolving processes, relationships, institutions and structures by which a group of people, community or society organise themselves collectively to achieve the things that matter to them. To do this they need to make decisions about:

* their group membership and identity (who is the ‘self’ in their governance)
* who has authority within the group, and over what
* their agreed rules to ensure authority is exercised properly and decision‑makers are held accountable
* how decisions are enforced
* how they negotiate their rights and interests with others
* what arrangements will best enable them to achieve their goals (Hunt et al. 2008).

Identifying common principles or determinants that underpin governance, and encouraging the application of these determinants, are the keys to strengthening governance.

### Determinants of good governance

Drawing on the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development in the US (2010), the ICGP and broad consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, as well as governments and service providers, the Steering Committee has identified the following six determinants of good governance — relevant to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations and government itself:

* *governing institutions* — the way structures of governance are created, leaders chosen, and the extent of constituents’ confidence and support
* *leadership* — the process for which an individual influences group members to attain group or organisational goals
* *self‑determination* — for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, having the right and ability to determine their own priorities and design their own instruments of governance, within broad governing institutions
* *capacity building* — having the capabilities (such as knowledge and skills) to get things done
* *cultural match* — respecting processes within different communities to work towards a common ground between the governing structures wanted and the culture of the community
* *resources* — the economic, cultural, social and natural resources, and information technology necessary to underpin successful governance.

The determinants are inter‑dependent. No one principle in isolation will lead to good governance — all determinants are necessary for sustained success.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance

This section draws on two case studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance from the 2012 Reconciliation Australia (RA)/BHP Billiton Indigenous Governance Awards (IGAs): the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women’s Council (box 5.4.2) and the Yiriman Project (box 5.4.3). The winners of the latest round of the IGAs (now jointly managed by Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute [AIGI]), were announced on 30 October 2014, too late for inclusion in this report. Case studies drawn from the 2014 awards will be featured in future reports, with additional research from the AIGI (formerly RA) Indigenous Governance Toolkit online resource.

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.4.2 NPY Women’s Council Winner Category A: Incorporated organisations |
| The NPY Women’s Council was started in 1980, and incorporated in 1994.  The 2012 IGA report noted that ‘the organisation is a major provider of human services in the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara lands’. Amongst their accomplishments are the ban of take‑away alcohol sales at Curtin Springs roadhouse and the introduction of non‑sniffable Opal fuel in Central Australia.  Key features of the organisation include that it:   * is driven by the values and aspirations of members * is grounded in women’s law and culture * is committed to continuous innovation and improvement * has courage to take on tough issues (RA 2013). |
| *Sources*: NPY Women’s Council 2010, *Who we are and how we started: Factsheet 1,* http://www.npywc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/01-Who-We-Are-How-We-Started.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014); Reconciliation Australia 2013, *Sharing Success: Stories from the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards,* Reconciliation Australia, Canberra, ACT, http://reconciliation.org.au/iga/ wp-content/ uploads/2014/01/IGA\_2012\_Analysis\_Report\_web.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.4.3 Yiriman Project Winner Category B: Non‑incorporated projects and initiatives |
| The Yiriman Project started in 2000.  The 2012 IGA report noted that: ‘The Yiriman project takes young people and elders on trips back to country to immerse them in the stories, songs and knowledge that are their cultural heritage.’ This builds young people’s confidence and improves their self‑worth and has helped to curb the suicides, self‑harm and substance abuse in the participating communities.  Project outcomes as summarised by Taylor (2010) are:   * the healing of young people as they walk on country and look after it * the opportunity for young people to develop and assert culture, language and bush skills * meaningful employment that values and maintains culture.   The key feature of success is ‘the clarity of purpose given to the project by the elders’ and ‘strong leadership, cultural legitimacy and external administrative support’ (RA 2013). |
| *Sources*: Reconciliation Australia 2013, *Sharing Success: Stories from the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards,* Reconciliation Australia, Canberra, ACT, http://reconciliation.org.au/iga/wp-content/ uploads/2014 /01/IGA\_2012\_Analysis\_Report\_web.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014); Taylor, F. 2010, *Partnerships in the Youth Sector - Building Stories in Our Young People: The Yiriman Project*, The Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Victoria, http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/What-Works- PYS.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014). |
|  |
|  |

#### Governing institutions

Governance institutions are made up of both formal mechanisms (such as policies, rules, regulations, constitutions, legal and judicial systems) and informal ways of doing things (such as taboos, gender norms, religious beliefs, values, kinship and marriage systems) (Hunt and Smith 2006). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) analysis of the shortlisted 2012 IGA applications showed that 95 per cent of organisations held board meetings, and all organisations had their accounts audited, held annual general meetings and produced annual financial reports (if required). They also had clearly outlined and documented internal dispute resolution processes … [and] ‘all organisations outlined mechanisms and processes for resolving external complaints’ (RA 2013).

The NPY Women’s Council’s approach to service development is an example of how Aboriginal cultures intertwines with good corporate governance: it is

* Kulikatinyi (considering something over a long period of time)
* Nyakuakatinyi (looking for something as one goes along)
* Palyaalkatinyi (making something as one goes along).

RA (2013) notes that the ‘process ensures that services developed and delivered by the Women’s Council are continually reviewed and improved’.

Good corporate governance that is coupled with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values, relationships and systems of authority produces governing order and good outcomes (Hunt and Smith 2007; Hunt et al. 2008). The IGA shortlisted organisations were flexible in their approaches to dispute resolution and decision making, but were supported with clearly outlined and established processes. Approaches included ‘mediation, traditional law and cultural practices, codes of conduct and informal discussions’ for internal disputes, with external disputes primarily addressed via formal processes’ (RA 2013).

Good governing institutions do not just spontaneously arise. They are the result of often lengthy processes of developing capacity and leadership, and ongoing training and development (see ‘Capacity building’ below). Good governing institutions support ‘board and staff training and development … [and] compulsory governance training for board members’ (RA 2006).

#### Leadership

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are critical to the development of a strong governance culture. While there is a specific cultural aspect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, leadership often requires people to walk confidently and with influence in two worlds — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous leadership (AILC 2013).

RA (2013) attributes the success of the Yiriman project to the strength of the elders, who form the governance group ‘ … the elders have been very clear about why they established the project and what they want to achieve’.

Leadership needs to be nurtured and leaders require training and support to help them fulfil their responsibilities. Sustained leadership requires succession planning, so new people can take over from current leaders over time. The AIHW analysis of shortlisted applicants noted that all organisations had ‘internal development and training programs, whether for staff, board members, or young people in the community’ (RA 2013).

Drawing on the IGA examples and research by the Indigenous Community Governance Project, some lessons for developing leadership and succession planning can be identified:

* training, leadership, personal and professional development, including cultural training builds competent and highly skilled staff (RA 2006, 2013). The NPY Women’s Council offers an orientation of the organisation and the region, which ‘includes detailed cultural advice on cultural differences and Anangu culture
* board election processes adapted to cultural, social, local conditions (RA 2013)
* staggering elections and mentoring new board members
* developing potential board members and board succession planning to ensure board continuity, skill retention and organisational stability (RA 2006, 2013)
* developing the communication skills and self‑confidence of young people by providing role models, mentoring and experience to nurture future leaders (RA 2013). The NPY Women’s Council holds an annual career conference called Kungka, which is open to young women in the community. The conference provides education and employment advice, and links young participants with older women ‘who are strong in their culture and successful in their employment and education’ (Indigenous Governance Toolkit 2014).

#### Self‑determination

A critical element of governance is self‑determination. Self‑determination is a fundamental human right contained in articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (AHRC 2013). Self‑determination as a human right is also reaffirmed in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, and endorsed by the Australian Government in 2009 (AHRC 2012).

Self‑determination has also been given different definitions by different researchers (Calma 2006; Hunt and Smith 2006; Hunt et al. 2008; RA 2006) but, put simply, ‘self‑determined people are actors in their own lives instead of being acted upon by others’ (Wehmeyer 2002). An important aspect of self‑determination is ‘cultural legitimacy’ — the extent to which there is:

* culturally legitimate participation and control of decision‑making (participation in decision making is discussed in section 5.2). Cultural legitimacy was highlighted in the Yiriman Project by IGA judge Gary Banks, who noted the inclusion and ownership of the project within the community’ (RA 2013)
* community participation in community governance institutions (RA 2013). The NPY Women’s Council holds ‘bush meetings’ where directors and staff engage with communities. these are open forums for everyone, not just those who live in that particular community (Indigenous Governance Toolkit 2014).

#### Capacity building

There are two important aspects to capacity building. The ‘public management’ approach emphasises the need to develop a community’s ability to meet accountability requirements, and has strong links with the ‘governing institutions’ and ‘leadership’ determinants of good governance. The ‘community development’ approach emphasises empowering communities to take responsibility and control over their own futures, and is closely linked with the ‘self‑determination’ aspect of good governance (Gerritson 2001; Hunt and Smith 2007).

Capacity building for good governance can take many forms. Individuals, groups and organisations can build on their strengths through both formal and informal governance training, for example through governance courses run by the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre. The ‘NPY Women’s Council has an approach known locally as the ‘malparra way’. Malparra means a person who is together with a friend or companion. In the context of service delivery, this usually means two staff who are working together on a program, one of whom is an Anangu woman or man and other who is a partner staff member, employed for specific professional skills. Malparra way recognises and values the knowledge, skills and resources of the local people and assists the culturally appropriate delivery of services (Indigenous Governance Toolkit 2014).

#### Cultural match

Cultural match refers to the match between the governance structures a group wants to develop and the culture of the community that is the development target (CAEPR and RA 2004; Sullivan 2007).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians live with two systems of governance, their own and that of non‑Indigenous Australia. The Indigenous Governance toolkit (2014) describes this as ‘two‑way governance’, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians balance and negotiate dual ‘culture, laws, rules and forms of accountability’ and support bringing ‘two ways together’.

For IGA finalists, culture is the foundation of their success: it is ‘embedded in every aspect of their organisation‑from program delivery and board arrangements, to decision making and community consultation processes’ and means both being true and responsive to their community, and also being accountable ‘externally to stakeholders, funding sources, and government’ (RA 2013).

#### Resources

The ‘resources’ determinant focuses on the economic factors necessary to underpin successful governance arrangements. A contributing factor to the success of the Yiriman project is the financial and administrative support provided by the Kimberley Land Council to assist with ‘staff employment, reporting and acquittals’, while the project elders retain their autonomy (RA 2013).

Hunt et al. (2008) notes that, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community service organisations have increasingly taken on service delivery responsibilities from government, these have come with multiple, complex and costly reporting and accountability requirements. Chaney (2013) argues that these onerous approaches to service contracts often contribute to organisational failure, as resource uncertainty, particularly insecure and ad hoc funding, makes it difficult to recruit and retain staff or to build capacity.

Financial diversity can give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations a degree of independence to run programs as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want them to be run (RA 2006). Flexible funding that facilitates the development of appropriate programs at the community level, and clarity about the roles and responsibilities of both funding agencies and service providers is vital for success (Hunt 2013).

|  |
| --- |
| Table 5.4.1 Sources of income of top 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations, 2007‑08 to 2011‑12 (per cent)**a,b** |
| |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Financial year | 2007‑08 | 2008‑09 | 2009‑10 | 2010‑11 | 2011‑12 | | Government funding | 46.9 | 44.5 | 45.8 | 38.2 | 39.9 | | Self‑generated income | 38.2 | 38.8 | 39.0 | 39.6 | 39.8 | | Other income sources | 14.9 | 19.7 | 15.2 | 22.2 | 20.3 | | Philanthropic gifts | <0.1 | <0.1 | <0.1 | <0.1 | – | |
| a The top 20 corporations make up almost one third (32.9 per cent) of the total income of the top 500 corporations. b Percentages are of funding against the total income for each financial year. – Nil or rounded to zero. |
| *Source*: ORIC (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations) 2013, *The top 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations 2011-12*, Canberra, ACT, http://www.oric.gov.au/sites/default/files/ documents/11\_2013/Top500\_2013.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014). |
|  |
|  |

Data from Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) shows a cautiously positive story — nearly 40 per cent of the income of the top 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations was self‑generated from 2007‑08 to 2011‑12, with ORIC noting that ‘the highest earning corporations are slowly but steadily becoming more self‑reliant financially’ (table 5.4.1).

### Government governance

Government governance refers to governments’ engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This section examines formal arrangements for ‘high level’ engagement between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and then applies the six determinants of good governance to government itself.

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory bodies

The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (National Congress) was established in April 2010. The National Congress is an independent company limited by guarantee and registered under the Corporations Act (National Congress 2014). National Congress advocates and represents its members, but does not engage in service delivery (Calma and Dick 2011). Congress members include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, and national and local organisations, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals. The National Congress board’s co‑chairs and directors are member‑elected (National Congress 2014). The National Congress was represented on the working group that advised the Steering Committee on the production of this report.

Some jurisdictions have also established Indigenous advisory bodies to provide advice to governments on Indigenous policy issues (box 5.4.4).

|  |
| --- |
| 5.4.4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory bodies |
| The Australian Government’s Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council was established in November 2013, and is composed of both Indigenous and non‑Indigenous members. Council members were appointed jointly by the Prime Minister, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. The Council’s brief includes a focus on schooling, employment and justice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Abbott 2013).  The Australian Government’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council provides advice to the Minister for Education. The focus of the Council is on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff engaged in higher education and research. The majority of members are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and members include senior Indigenous academics, as well as representatives from business and industry. (Australian Government unpublished.) |
| (continued next page) |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.4.4 (continued) |
| In Western Australia, key advisory bodies include the WA Aboriginal Advisory Committee, the Aboriginal Lands Trust, the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee and the WA Aboriginal Education and Training Council. These bodies provide relevant advice to the portfolio ministers on matters relating to the interests and wellbeing of Aboriginal people, management of land held in trust, heritage protection and education and training. (WA Government unpublished.)  The South Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council (SAAAC) was established under a policy decision by the Premier in December 2005. The SAAAC is the peak advisory body to the State Government on Aboriginal affairs policy, programs and service delivery. (SA Government unpublished.) |
| *Source:* Abbott, T. 2013, *Membership of the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council,* Media release, 23 November, https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2013‑11-23/membership-prime-ministers-indigenous advisory-council (accessed 10 June 2014). |
|  |
|  |

#### Determinants of government governance

Good government governance, such as an improved coordination among agencies, removing duplication of services, adapting to change, a stable policy environment and effective processes, and learning from evidence drawn from past evaluations, affect the governance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Henry 2007; Howse cited in Hunt 2013; Phillips-Brown, Reddel and Gleeson 2013).

A key element for good government governance is to ensure that where evaluations are conducted, the lessons from these are made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and governments (Cobb-Clark 2013; Phillips-Brown, Reddel and Gleeson 2013).

Australian governments have made several collective commitments to improve government governance, including: commissioning this report (COAG 2002); agreeing to the ‘Service Delivery Principles for Programs and Services for Indigenous Australians’ (COAG 2012), which drew upon the ‘National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians’ (COAG 2004); and establishing a national framework for reporting expenditure on services to Indigenous Australians (IERSC 2009, 2010; SCRGSP forthcoming, 2012).

At the program level, Australian governments have committed to sharing their learning about what works to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse provides a collection of evidence‑based research on what works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage (AIHW and AIFS nd).

There is information on the use of mainstream services by Indigenous peoples (see the Indigenous Expenditure Report (SCRGSP forthcoming) and the Indigenous Compendium of the Report on Government Services (SCRGSP 2014) but very little information on the barriers to access and use of services faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (see section 5.3 on engagement with services).

There are similarities between the determinants of good government governance, the ‘things that work’ success factors in this report (see chapter 3) and the international community development principles that Hunt (2010) identified as important in the way non­‑government organisations work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They all reflect the ‘bottom‑up’ approach and the self‑determination and capacity building determinants of good governance.

The six determinants of good governance have been applied to the Cape York Welfare Reform (box 5.4.5).

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.4.5 Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) |
| The CYWR is a partnership between four communities (Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge), the Australian Government, the Queensland Government and the Cape York Group.[[7]](#footnote-7) The 2012 CYWR evaluation report covers a four year period between January 2008 and December 2011 (with some data included for 2012). The program ‘streams’ of social responsibility, education, housing and economic opportunity were assessed by independent evaluators contracted by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).  The evaluation examined both short and medium term outcomes, but noted that measuring the overarching objective of changing social norms and behaviours was difficult, and the breadth of the program streams meant that there were issues with causality and attribution.  The report presents a summary of key findings:  Overall there is clear evidence that the wellbeing of residents in the four CYWR communities has improved over the CYWR years. Crime rates are down, infrastructure and services have improved, school attendance has risen or been maintained at high levels, and people appear happier. In no major dimension have outcomes deteriorated in these communities.  Although the governance arrangements were not explicitly evaluated, some relevant observations were made in the report.   * *Governing institutions* — In 2008, a CYWR Project Board was established. The board comprises one representative from each of the partners: the Director General of the Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet; the (then) Secretary of FaHCSIA; and the Director of the Cape York Institute. Members of the board ‘had sufficient authority to be able to resolve bureaucratic impasses or other implementation barriers’. However, in mid‑2012 the board’s role changed from ‘managerial to advisory’.   (continued next page) |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.4.5 (continued) |
| * *Leadership* — Cape York leaders and elders, in partnership with government ministers, provided legitimacy and authority. However, ‘evaluation activities revealed some community concerns about the level of integration of the trial governance with existing community governance structures’. Community members noted that for CYWR to be effective, they wanted more communication, consultation and for their representative structures (for example, local councils) to be heeded. * *Self‑determination* — The CYWR included a community engagement process, to involve communities in designing and developing the proposed reforms. In late 2007, the four communities involved each gave their final agreement to participate in the program. * *Capacity building* — ‘A successful feature has been rebuilding of Indigenous authority to tackle antisocial behaviour through the local Family Responsibilities Commissioners’. CYWR projects addressing money management, parenting support and wellbeing also help build capacity. * *Cultural match* — For each of the four CYWR communities, the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) comprises a legally qualified commissioner and local commissioners. An implementation evaluation of the FRC found that: it contributes to restoring Indigenous authority by supporting local and emerging leaders in local commissioner roles; its jurisdiction is targeted appropriately; and it is engaging community members in a very complex environment (KPMG 2010). * *Resources* — the Australian government and Queensland government both committed substantial resources to CYWR (Andrews and Scullion 2013). |
| *Sources*: Andrews, K. (Minister for Social Services) and Scullion, N. (Minister for Indigenous Affairs) 2013, *Continuing income management in Cape York*, Media release, 21 November, http://kevinandrews. dss.gov.au/media-releases/27 (accessed 2 April 2014); FaHCSIA (former Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) 2012, *Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) Evaluation Report - 2012*, Australian Government: Department of Social Services, http://www. dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/publications-articles/evaluation-research/cape-york-welfare-reform-cywr-evaluation-report-2012 (accessed 1 April 2014); KPMG 2010, *Implementation Review of the Family Responsibilities Commission: Final Report September 2010*, FaHCSIA (former Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/ default/files/documents/implementation-review-of-frc-sept-2010.pdf (accessed 19 September 2014). |
|  |
|  |

### Future directions in data

There has been significant progress in examining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance since the first report in 2003. The introduction of the Indigenous Governance Awards has helped identify and highlight many examples of good practice. The Indigenous Community Governance Project by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and Reconciliation Australia has provided academic rigour to the examination of governance practices. Among governments, evaluations and studies of Indigenous reform initiatives (Dwyer et al. 2009; FaHCSIA 2012; OIPC 2006; Yu, Duncan and Gray 2008) have helped identify aspects of government governance that can assist or impede Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance. That said, there is still more to be done before future reports can include an objective measure of governance.

### References

AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2012, *Social Justice Report 2012 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Social Justice Commissioner*, 26 October, Social Justice Reports, Sydney.

—— (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2013, *Right to self determination*, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/right-self-determination (accessed 17 June 2014).

AIHW and AIFS nd, *AIHW - Closing the Gap*, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/ (accessed 6 June 2014).

AILC (Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre) 2013, *BSB41910 Certificate IV in Business (Governance)*, http://ailc.org.au/courses/bsb41910-certificate-iv-business-governance (accessed 15 August 2013).

CAEPR and RA (Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and Reconciliation Australia) 2004, *Indigenous Community Governance Project Annual Report 2004*, Canberra, ACT.

Calma, T. 2006, ‘Evaluating the external forces which exert an influence on government policy direction’, presented at Collaborative Indigenous Policy Development Conference, Brisbane.

—— and Dick, D. 2011, ‘The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples: Changing the Relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the State?’, in Maddison, S. and Brigg, M. (eds), *Unsettling the Settler State: Creativity and Resistance in Indigenous Settler-State Governance*, The Federation Press, Sydney.

CGRIS (Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services) 2011, *Six monthly report (September 2010 to March 2011)*, 31 March, Canberra, ACT.

Chaney, F. 2013, ‘The Indigenous Policy Experience: 1960 to 2012’, *Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation roundtable proceedings*, Productivity Commission, Melbourne, Victoria.

COAG (Council of Australian Governments) 2002, *Council of Australian Governments Meeting Communique - 5 April 2002*, http://archive.coag.gov.au/coag\_meeting\_ outcomes/ 2002-04-05/index.cfm (accessed 6 June 2014).

—— (Council of Australian Governments) 2004, *Council of Australian Governments Meeting Communique - 24 June 2004*, http://archive.coag.gov.au/coag\_ meeting\_outcomes/2004-06-25/index.cfm (accessed 6 June 2014).

—— (Council of Australian Governments) 2012, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/health\_indigenous/indigenous-reform/national-agreement\_sept\_12.pdf (accessed 14 January 2013).

Cobb-Clark, D.A. 2013, ‘The case for making public policy evaluations public’, *Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation roundtable proceedings*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, ACT.

Dwyer, J., O’Donnell, K., Lavoie, J., Marlina, U. and Sullivan, P. 2009, *The Overburden Report: Contracting for Indigenous Health Services*, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, Darwin, NT, http://www.flinders.edu.au/medicine/fms/sites/health\_ care\_management/documents/Overburden%20Report\_contracting%20for%20Indigenous%20Health%20Services.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

FaHCSIA (FaHCSIA (former Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)) 2012, *Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) Evaluation Report - 2012*, Australian Government: Department of Social Services, http://www.dss. gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/publications-articles/evaluation-research/cape-york-welfare-reform-cywr-evaluation-report-2012 (accessed 1 April 2014).

Gerritson, R. 2001, *Community capacity building: An ATSIC discussion paper, cited in House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, ACT.

Henry, K. 2007, ‘Creating the right incentives for Indigenous development’, presented at Cape York Institute Conference ‘Strong Foundations - Rebuilding social norms in Indigenous communities’, Cairns, 26 June.

Hunt, J. 2010, *Partnerships for Indigenous Development: International Development NGOs, Aboriginal Organisations and Communities*, Working paper no, 71/2010, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, ACT.

—— 2013, *Engagement with Indigenous communities in key sectors*, October, Resource sheet no. 23 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2013/ctgc-rs23.pdf (accessed 3 June 2013).

—— and Smith, D. 2006, *Ten key messages from the preliminary findings of the Indigenous Community Governance Project, 2005*, Working Paper no. 31, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/ files/ Publications/WP/10key.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

—— and —— 2007, *Further key insights from the Indigenous Community Governance Project, 2006*, Working paper no. 36, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/WP/Key\_Insights\_ ICGP\_2006.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

——, ——, Garling, S. and Sanders, W. 2008, *Contested Governance: Culture, Power and Institutions in Indigenous Australia*, Research Monograph 29/2008, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, ACT.

IERSC 2009, *National Framework for Reporting Expenditure on Services to Indigenous Australians: Stocktake Report, Report to the Council of Australian Governments*, February, http://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/reporting\_expenditure\_service\_ indigenous\_australians.pdf (accessed 6 June 2014).

—— (Indigenous Expenditure Report Steering Committee) 2010, *2010 Indigenous Expenditure Report 2010*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, ACT.

Indigenous Governance Toolkit (Reconciliation Australia) 2014, *Indigenous Governance Toolkit*.

National Congress (National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples) 2014, *About Us*, http://nationalcongress.com.au/about-us/ (accessed 10 June 2014).

OIPC (Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination) 2006, *A Red Tape Evaluation in Selected Indigenous Communities: A report by Morgan Disney Associates*, Canberra, ACT, http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/publications-articles/evaluation-research/a-red-tape-evaluation-in-selected-indigenous-communities-2006 (accessed 3 June 2014).

ORIC (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations) 2013, *The top 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations 2011-12*, September, Canberra, ACT, http://www.oric.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11\_2013/Top500\_2013.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

Phillips-Brown, P., Reddel, T. and Gleeson, B. 2013, ‘Learning from experience? Getting governments to listen to what evaluations are telling them’, *Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation roundtable proceedings*, Productivity Commission, Melbourne, Victoria.

RA (Reconciliation Australia) 2006, *Celebrating Indigenous Governance: Success stories of the Indigenous Governance Awards 2005*, Canberra, A.C.T., http://reconciliation. org.au/iga/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/iga\_handbook\_2005.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

—— (Reconciliation Australia) 2013, *Sharing Success: Stories from the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards*, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra, A.C.T., http://reconciliation.org.au/iga/wpcontent/uploads/2014/01/IGA\_2012\_Analysis\_Report\_web.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) forthcoming, *2014 Indigenous Expenditure Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, ACT.

—— (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2012, *2012 Indigenous Expenditure Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, ACT.

—— (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2014, *Report on Government Services 2014: Indigenous Compendium*, 17 April, Melbourne, Victoria, http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/rogs/indigenous-compendium-2014 (accessed 6 June 2014).

Sullivan, P. 2007, *Indigenous Governance: The Harvard Project, Australian Aboriginal Organisations and Cultural Subsidiarity*, March, Desert Knowledge CRC Working Paper No. 4, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, http://www.nintione.com.au/ sites/default/files/resource/ DKCRC-WP-04-Indigenous-Governance.pdf (accessed 30 June 2014).

Wehmeyer, M.L. 2002, *Self-determination and the Education of Students with Disabilities,*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education Reform, http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ ED470036.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

Yu, P., Duncan, M.E. and Gray, B. 2008, *Northern Territory Emergency Response: Report of the NTER Review Board, October 2008*, October, Australian Government, http://nterreview.gov.au/docs/report\_nter\_review/docs/Report\_NTER\_Review\_October08.pdf (accessed 3 June 2014).

2010, *The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development: Overview*, http://hpaied.org/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=3 (accessed 19 September 2014).

5.5 Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance[[8]](#footnote-8)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.5.1 Key messages |
| * Language is an important cultural signifier for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and plays a significant role in the promotion of resilient communities. * From 2005 to 2012, the number of spoken Indigenous languages decreased from 145 to 120, while the number of languages spoken by all generations decreased from 18 to 13 (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014). * From 2002 to 2008, there was no significant change in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who could speak an Indigenous language (figure 5.5.3). * In 2008, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 3 years and over: * 10.6 per cent were learning an Indigenous language, with the proportion higher for younger age groups (19.2 per cent for those aged 3–14 years, followed by 5.5–9.1 per cent of those aged 15–54 years, and 1.8 per cent for those aged 55 years and over) (figure 5.5.2) * 17.2 per cent spoke an Indigenous language, with this proportion highest in remote plus very remote areas (49.2 per cent) (table 5A.5.3). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.5.2 Measures of Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance |
| There are two main measures for this indicator.   * *Indigenous language revitalisation* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who are *learning* an Indigenous language (national; by geographic location [location as proxy for individual languages]). * *Indigenous language maintenance* is defined as the number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who are Indigenous language speakers (national; age; geographic location [location as proxy for individual languages]).   The main data source is the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), with the most recent available data for 2008. Supplementary data are available from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS), with the most recent available data collected in 2012. |
|  |
|  |

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are closely linked to culture, land and law, and all are connected to wellbeing (Dockery 2011; HoRSCoATSIA 2012). The NILS survey conducted in 2012 found that:

* 98 per cent of the 288 respondents agreed that the use of traditional languages improves the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
* 74 per cent ‘expressed a desire for traditional languages to be strong, widely spoken, used or known in communities and passed on to younger generations’
* 95 per cent agreed that it was important for their children to learn and use traditional language, and when asked why, 46 per cent said that they wanted the languages to be passed to the next generation (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014).

Language plays a significant role in the continuation of culture and promotion of resilient communities (AHRC 2010), and is an important cultural signifier for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, even for those who do not speak an Indigenous language or who are not actively engaged in language programs (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014). (Section 11.5 has additional information on community functioning).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples includes the right to:

‘ … revitalise, use develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.’ (UN 2008)

The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, and endorsed by the Australian Government in 2009 (AHRC 2012).

Projects aiming to maintain and revive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are being supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, language professionals, governments and community organisations in urban, regional and remote locations across Australia (Hobson et al. 2010; HoRSCoATSIA 2012).

Although language revitalisation and maintenance is crucial to preserving and strengthening culture, a lack of proficiency in English can create barriers to education (section 7.1 and 7.3), employment (section 4.6) and access to services (section 8.1 on primary health care). The indicator on engagement with services (section 5.3) includes information on difficulty understanding, or being understood by, service providers.

Schneirer et al. (2011), in their literature review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, state that evidence is compelling about the endangered state of traditional languages, and highlight the need to *revitalise* languages and to *maintain*, using an assessment of ‘language vitality’. The assessment of language vitality was developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, and adopted in 2003, and is composed of a number of interrelated factors (figure 5.5.1).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.5.1 Nine factors for assessing language vitality**a** |
| Figure 5.5.1 Nine factors for assessing language vitality  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Diagram reproduced from the *Endangered Languages,* 2009 – 2014 website, which summarises the UNESCO document on Language vitality and Endangerment, adopted at the International Expert Meeting on the UNESCO Programme of Safeguarding of Endangered Languages, in Paris on 10‑12 March 2003. |
| *Source*: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2003). |
|  |
|  |

The UNESCO document cautions that the factors are not prescriptive, but rather provide a guide and scales to be adapted to local contexts. Due to a lack of robust Australian data for the majority of items in the language vitality assessment, two main measures were distilled and adopted by the Steering Committee for this indicator: the *revitalisation* and *maintenance* of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.5.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language data sources |
| Two sources of data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language are used to report against this indicator: the NILS and the NATSISS. Whilst the Census provides some data on speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the question is only asked in relation to the main language spoken at home, and so does not include people whose main language is English but who also speak an Indigenous language (see appendix 3 for more information).  The **NILS2** (2012)had two components:   * the *Language Activity Survey*, which asked organisations about community‑based Australian language activities * 75 organisations responded (primarily Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander but also some universities and other non‑Indigenous bodies) * the *Language Attitude Survey*, which asked Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians about their thoughts about their languages * a total of 288 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians responded.   Due to different methodologies and survey instruments, unless otherwise noted, data from the NILS2 (collected in 2012) are not directly comparable to the NILS1 (collected in 2005).  The **NATSISS** (2008) collected information from respondents whose main language spoken at home was *not* an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language (as well as those whose main language *was* an Indigenous language). Respondents whose main language was not an Indigenous language were asked whether they spoke any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages and, if not, whether they would understand what was being said if someone were to speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language to them. All respondents were also asked whether they were currently learning any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and, if so, how they were being taught. Updated data from the 2014‑15 NATSISS will be included in the next report. |
| *Sources*: ABS 2010, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey: Users Guide*, Cat. no. 4720.0; ABS 2012, *Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011*, Cat. no. 2076.0; Marmion, D., Obata, K. and Troy, J. 2014*, Community, identity and wellbeing: the report of the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. |
|  |
|  |

The NILS2 report estimates that, in 2012, around 120 languages were spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, a reduction from the 145 languages reported in 2005 (and the estimated 250 languages before European settlement) (AIATSIS and FATSIL 2005; Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014).

### Revitalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

The 2008 NATSISS found that 10.6 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 3 years and over were learning an Indigenous language (table 5A.5.2). This proportion was higher in remote plus very remote areas (14.1 per cent) compared to non‑remote areas (9.5 per cent) (table 5A.5.3), and for WA (19.4 per cent) compared to other states and territories (table 5A.5.2).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.5.2 Proportion of Indigenous people learning an Indigenous language, by age group, 2008**a,b** |
| Figure 5.5.2 Proportion of Indigenous people learning and Indigenous language, by age group, 2008   More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a People whose main language spoken at home was an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language were not asked whether they were learning an Indigenous language. b Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; table 5A.5.1. |
|  |
|  |

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians learning an Indigenous language was higher for younger age groups, with the largest proportion aged 3–14 years (19.2 per cent) followed by those aged 15–54 years  
(5.5–9.1 per cent) and the lowest proportion for those aged 55 years and over (1.8 per cent) (figure 5.5.2). (Although it could be assumed that older people already speak an Indigenous language and therefore do not need to learn, there was no significant difference by age in the proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 25 years and over who spoke an Indigenous language (table 5A5.1)).

### Maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

Nationally in 2008, 17.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 3 years and over spoke an Indigenous language (with 10.4 per cent speaking it as their main language at home) (table 5A.5.1). People living in remote and very remote areas were more likely to speak an Indigenous language (49.2 per cent), than those living in non‑remote areas (6.7 per cent) (table 5A.5.3).

At the state and territory level, the NT had the highest proportion of Indigenous language speakers (59.0 per cent), followed by SA (23.5 per cent), WA (20.5 per cent) and Queensland (16.5 per cent) (table 5A.5.2).

The proportion of Indigenous language speakers is higher in older age groups (between 19 and 23 per cent for people aged 25 years and over) compared to younger age groups (around 13 per cent for people aged 3–24 years) (table 5A.5.1). This difference may reflect that younger people are still learning language (see figure 5.5.2).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.5.3 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over speaking an Indigenous language, by age group, 2002 and 2008**a,b,c** |
| Figure 5.5.3 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over speaking an Indigenous langauge, by age group, 2002 and 2008  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a People whose main language spoken at home was an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language were not asked whether they were learning an Indigenous language. b Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. c Data were not collected for persons under 15 years in 2002. |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008, table 5A.5.1; ABS (2004) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, Australia, 2002, table 5A.5.6. |
|  |
|  |

Comparable time series data on language speakers are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over. Nationally, from 2002 to 2008, there was no significant change in the proportion of Indigenous language speakers (21.1 per cent and 19.1 per cent respectively). Across age groups, the only significant change was a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 15–24 year olds speaking an Indigenous language (from 18.2 per cent in 2002 to 13.1 per cent in 2008) (figure 5.5.3).

The NILS2 data are heavily qualified, but indicate that in 2012:

* of the 54 languages for which responses were received, 32 were said to have full speakers in one of the age groups
* there was a wide cross‑generational decline in usage
* of the 102 responses, 15 respondents answered that people were fluent in the language for all age groups (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014).

Comparisons between the 2005 and 2012 NILS data indicate that:

* in 2005 there were around 145 languages still spoken, with around 18 languages considered strong (spoken by all age groups and being passed on to children)
* in 2012 there were around 120 languages still spoken, with around 13 languages considered strong (five fewer than in 2012) (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014).

### Future directions in data

Data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language use are limited. Consistent and comparable collection of data on learners and speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is important to enable meaningful analysis of change over time.

### References

AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2010, *Social Justice Report 2009*, Report No.1/2010, Sydney.

—— (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2012, *Social Justice Report 2012 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Social Justice Commissioner*, 26 October, Social Justice Reports, Sydney.

AIATSIS and FATSIL (Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages) 2005, *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005*, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, ACT.

Dockery, A.M. 2011, *Traditional culture and the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS*, January, Centre for Labour Market Research Discussion Paper Series, Perth, WA, http://business.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/2011.01\_ TarditionalCulture.pdf (accessed 10 January 2014).

Hobson, J., Lowe, K., Poetsch, S. and Walsh, M. 2010, ‘Introduction Re-awakening Australian languages’, *Re-Awakening Languages: Theory and Practice in the Revitalisation of Australia’s Indigenous languages*, Sydney University Press.

HoRSCoATSIA (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs) 2012, *Our Land Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*, September, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, ACT.

Marmion, D., Obata, K. and Troy, J. 2014, *Community, identity and wellbeing: the report of the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, ACT, http://www.aiatsis. gov.au/\_files/research/report\_of\_ the\_2nd\_national\_indigenous\_languages\_survey.pdf (accessed 22 July 2014).

Schnierer, E., Ellsmore, S. and Schnierer, S. 2011, *State of Indigenous cultural heritage 2011: Report prepared for the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities on behalf of the State of the Environment 2011 Committee*, December, Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities on behalf of the State of the Environment Committee, Canberra, http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/ba3942af-f815-43d9-a0f3dd26c19d83cd/ files/soe2011-supplementary-heritage-state-indigenous-cultural-heritage.pdf (accessed 29 January 2014).

UN (United Nations) 2008, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\_en.pdf (accessed 17 June 2014).

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages) 2003, *Language vitality and endangerment*, 10 March, Paris, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/language-vitality/ (accessed 20 November 2013).

5.6 Indigenous cultural studies[[9]](#footnote-9)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.6.1 Key messages |
| * Culturally appropriate education does not mean that different standards should apply to academic outcomes. Rather, cultural studies can enhance educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, as well as educate all students about Indigenous peoples and cultures. * In 2008, almost two‑thirds (65.3 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  5–24 year olds reported being taught Indigenous culture as part of their studies (table 5A.6.2). Having been taught Indigenous culture decreased as age increased, with the lowest proportion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 45 years and over (22.6 per cent) (figure 5.6.1). Data are not available to provide a comparator for non‑Indigenous people. * In 2010, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians made up a much lower proportion of teachers (primary 1.1 per cent and secondary 0.7 per cent) than students (primary 5.1 per cent and secondary 4.0 per cent) (table 5A.6.1). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.6.2 Measures of Indigenous cultural studies |
| There is no main measure for this indicator.  Information in this section includes qualitative examples of culturally inclusive curricula, and two supplementary measures:   * *Teaching Indigenous cultures* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies (national: state and territory; remoteness; age). The most recent available data are from the 2008 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). * *Indigenous employment in schools* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff. The most recent available data are from the national 2013 Staff in Australia’s Schools survey (SiAS) with supplementary administrative data collected by [then] Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations up to 2008. |
|  |
|  |

Student outcomes are influenced by many factors, including teacher quality (section 7.2), student attendance (section 7.1), school engagement (section 7.3) and the home environment (chapter 10). In addition, research shows that learning about Indigenous cultures in school and being taught by Indigenous teachers can improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ educational achievement (Rahman 2009). Where cultural perspectives are incorporated into the school curriculum and culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ performances have been found to be better than those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in other schools (Munns, O’Rourke and Bodkin-Andrews 2013; Watson et al. 2006).

A four year longitudinal study of growth in literacy and numeracy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students found the following key factors led to improved educational attainment:

* quality teaching (with appropriate professional development in strategies for working with Indigenous students and promoting understanding of cultural issues)
* developing a school culture in which Indigenous students feel included and supported to learn (incorporating the perspectives of Indigenous and other cultures in the curriculum) (Purdie et al. 2011).

Indigenous cultural studies are also important in their own right, educating all Australian students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. In 2012, the Reconciliation Australia (RA) Barometer found that 96 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample and 82 per cent of the general community sample believed it was important to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture (RA 2013).

Numerous studies have also emphasised the importance of Aboriginal studies as part of pre‑service teacher training (Craven 2012; DEEWR 2009; Mooney, Halse and Craven 2003). The 2013 Staff in Australia’s Schools (SiAS) survey included information on areas in which teachers felt they needed more professional development. Around 26 per cent of primary and secondary teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience, and around 18 per cent with more than 5 years of experience, indicated a need in the area of teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (McKenzie et al. 2014, table 6.4). The survey reported that participation in professional learning activities was amongst the lowest for the category ‘teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ for both primary and secondary teachers (McKenzie et al. 2014).

Yunkaporta (2009) found that there is little information on how to teach using Aboriginal perspectives, rather than simply teaching Aboriginal content from a western perspective. A 2009 survey of a national sample of 87 schools with Indigenous students found that, for teachers, everyday face‑to‑face engagement with the local Indigenous community was a more significant driver of reform of curriculum and teaching than a general knowledge of Indigenous cultures (Luke et al. 2012).

### Culturally inclusive curricula

An Australian curriculum, spanning subjects from foundation to year 10, has been developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and is being progressively implemented by states and territories. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is a ‘cross‑curriculum priority’ which is embedded in all learning areas. The organising ideas behind this cross‑curriculum priority are separated into country/place, culture and people (ACARA 2014). The final review report on the national curriculum was released in October 2014, accompanied by the initial Australian Government response. The review report included recommendations on the teaching of cross curriculum priorities (DoE 2014).

### Teaching Indigenous cultures

Schools exist in different contexts and have varying numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Biddle (2010) found that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attend schools where they are the minority, and advocated for all students to receive an education that acknowledges and incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

The NATSISS 2008 asked Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians of all age groups whether they had ever been taught culture in school or as part of further studies. Different responses from different age groups can provide some insight into how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has been incorporated into curricula over time. Data are not available to provide a comparator for non‑Indigenous people.

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.6.1 Proportion of Indigenous people who were taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies, by age, 2008**a,b,c,d** |
| |  | | --- | | Figure 5.6.1 Proportion of Indigenous people who were taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies, by age, 2008   More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. | |
| a Proportions for Indigenous children aged 2 to 14 years are calculated as a percentage of the number of children who usually attend school. b Proportions for persons aged 15 years and over are calculated as a percentage of the number of people who ever attended school or undertook further studies. c Responses for Indigenous children aged 2 to 14 and some Indigenous people aged 15 to 17 years were provided by an adult proxy. d Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; table 5A.6.2 |
|  |
|  |

In 2008, 65.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians between 5 and 24 years stated that they were taught Indigenous culture at school or as part of further studies (table 5A.6.2). Proportions decreased as age increased, with less than 1 in 4 people (22.6 per cent) aged 45 years and over stating that they were taught Indigenous culture at school or as part of further studies (figure 5.6.1).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.6.2 Proportion of Indigenous people who were taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies, by age, by remote and non‑remote areas, 2008 **a,b,c,d** |
| |  | | --- | | Figure 5.8.2 Proportion of Indigenous people who were taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies, by age, by remote and non-remote areas, 2008  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. | |
| a Proportions for Indigenous children aged 2 to 14 years are calculated as a percentage of the number of children who usually attend school. b Proportions for persons aged 15 years and over are calculated as a percentage of the number of people who ever attended school or undertook further studies. Proportions for persons aged 15 years and over are calculated as a percentage of the number of people who ever attended school or undertook further studies. c Responses to ‘Whether taught Indigenous culture in schools’ for Indigenous children aged 2 to 14 and some Indigenous people aged 15 to 17 years were provided by an adult proxy. d Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; table 5A.6.3. |
|  |
|  |

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over living in all remote areas of Australia were significantly more likely to have been taught Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture at school or as part of further studies (51.8 per cent) compared with people living in non‑remote areas (44.0 per cent) (table 5A.6.3). Figure 5.6.2 shows the proportions of Indigenous Australians taught Indigenous culture, by age groups and by remote and non‑remote areas.

Data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians taught Indigenous culture in schools are also reported by State and Territory in table 5A.6.2.

### Indigenous employment in schools

The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in schools act as a positive role model for students, and these staff may be ‘better positioned to understand and respond to the experiences of marginalised students’ (Purdie et al. 2011). These individuals are seen as a ‘bridge’ between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous school community (Santoro and Reid 2006).

However, Santoro and Reid (2006) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are expected to know and teach all aspects of culture in all Indigenous communities, and are often also responsible for Aboriginal education issues from curriculum to pastoral care. These high expectations, and increased workload, often leads to ‘burn out’ and stress, and they advocate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, particularly at the early stage of their careers, be provided with professional development and support.

Data from the 2013 SiAS survey found that, nationally, 1.1 per cent of primary school teachers and 0.8 per cent of secondary school teachers identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, similar to the proportions in 2010 (table 5A.6.1). The proportion of primary school leaders identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander increased from near zero in 2010 to 1.1 per cent in 2013 (McKenzie et al. 2014). Around 1 per cent of students commencing teacher education programs in 2011 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a slightly higher proportion than the average across other fields of higher education (AITSL 2013). By comparison, in 2013, 5.1 per cent of primary school students and 4.5 per cent of secondary school students were identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (table 5A.6.1).

Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) provide assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and liaise with educational bodies, government agencies and committees. Available data, for the period 2001 to 2008 indicate that, in contrast to the steady increase in Indigenous teacher numbers, the number of AIEWs has fluctuated over this period (table 5A.6.4). The data collection ceased in 2009.

AIEWs have varying levels of formal qualifications, which may affect their ability to provide educational assistance (as opposed to advice and support in relation to cultural matters).(O’Keefe, Olney and Angus 2013) note that schools that have trouble attracting teachers—particularly in rual and remote areas—often seek to ‘grow good teachers’ by supporting local people to train as non-teaching staff and then to qualify as teachers. In 2008, 50.9 per cent of AIEWs in government schools and 57,6 per cent of AIEWs in Catholic schools had completed or were studying towards formal qualifications, up from 31.3 per cent in government schools and 47.1 per cent in Catholic schools in 2001 (table 5A.6.5).

### Things that work

While government‑directed initiatives, such as culturally inclusive curricula, can influence the cultural awareness and inclusiveness of education systems, other important factors include: management structures in schools (through the school philosophy and involvement in the community), and the actions of individual teachers (via their teaching methods and attitudes to Indigenous cultures) (Munns, O’Rourke and Bodkin-Andrews 2013; O’Keefe, Olney and Angus 2013). Box 5.6.3 describes one promising program that aims to improve recognition of Aboriginal English.

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.6.3 Things that work – Indigenous cultural studies |
| Although the evaluation in 2003 is relatively dated, the Steering Committee has identified **Deadly Ways to Learn** (WA) as a promising practice worth further examination.  The initial Deadly Ways to Learn project, conducted in 14 government, independent and catholic schools in urban and rural areas in WA between 1998 and 2000, aimed to promote parity of esteem between Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English. Teachers and Australian Indigenous Education Officers (AIEOs) worked together to develop two‑way, bi dialectal teaching practices that would enhance literacy levels among Aboriginal students in the participating schools. The project resulted in a kit (two books and two videos) to support the implementation of Deadly Ways to Learn practices in Australian schools.  At the start of the project, baseline data were collected on students’ development and use of Standard Australian English. Qualitative data were also collected about teaching practices, use of AIEOs, community participation, and general school‑community contexts. Cahill and Collard (2003) found that the project led to teaching practices among all participating teachers becoming more inclusive (embracing Aboriginal meanings and Aboriginal English), with more regular discussions among teachers, AIEOs and students about culture and linguistics. They also found that students’ writing and reading scores (English as a second language) exceeded agreed targets by 50 per cent. |
| *Sources*: Cahill, R. and Collard, G. 2003, ‘Deadly Ways to Learn … a yarn about some learning we did’, *Comparative Education*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 211–219; National Curriculum Services nd, The Deadly Ways to Learn Project: Aboriginal English and bidialectal classroom practices, What Works ‑ The Work Program ‑ Improving Outcomes for Indigenous students, http://www.whatworks.edu.au/4\_2\_1.htm (accessed 29 July 2014). |
|  |
|  |

### Future directions in data

#### Indigenous culture in schools

Data on the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians taught culture in schools or as part of further studies are only available every six years from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. More frequent data are desirable, as are comparable data for the non‑Indigenous population.

#### Indigenous workforce employed in schools

Only limited data are currently available on the Indigenous workforce employed in schools:

* National data on the school workforce are available from the three yearly Staff in Australia’s Schools survey, run by Australian Council for Educational Research on behalf of the Department of Education. However, due to the small sample size, data on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce are not available below the national level.
* The initial National Teaching Workforce Dataset produced on behalf of the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Official’s Committee, collected data on the Australian teaching workforce including qualifications, registration and employment status (data on professional development was generally not available). However, Indigenous status is unknown for just under half the workforce covered by the dataset.
* The Longitudinal Teacher Education Workforce study tracked a national cohort of teacher education graduates from 2011 to 2013. However, data are not available by Indigenous status, due to the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the sample.
* Limited annual data on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers and education workers (AIEW and equivalents) were reported by individual jurisdictions for 2010, 2011, and 2012 as part of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–14 (SCSEEC 2013). If maintained, and with the addition of nationally comparable data, this collection could provide ongoing information on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce.[[10]](#footnote-10)

### References

ACARA 2014, *The Australian Curriculum v5.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures*, Australian Curriculum, www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/  
CrossCurriculumPriorities /Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-histories-and-cultures (accessed 24 January 2014).

AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) 2013, *Initial Teacher Education: Data Report*, May, Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (Education Services Australia), Melbourne, Victoria, http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/\_resources/2013\_AITSL\_ITE\_Data\_Report.pdf (accessed 17 February 2014).

Biddle, N. 2010, *A human capital approach to the educational marginalisation of Indigenous Australians*, CAEPR Working Paper 67/2010, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/ (accessed 19 January 2014).

Craven, R.G. 2012, ‘Seeding Success: getting started teaching Aboriginal Studies effectively’, in Beresford, Q., Partington, G. and Gower, G. (eds), *Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education*, Revised ed., University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, Western Australia.

DEEWR 2009, *What works. The Work Program Stepping up: What works in pre-service teacher education*, April, What works. The Work Program, National Curriculum Services and the Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Canberra, http://eprints.usq.edu.au/20413/1 /Price\_Hughes\_2009\_PV.pdf (accessed 6 February 2014).

DoE 2014, *Review of the Australian Curriculum*, Students First, http://www.studentsfirst. gov.au/review-australian-curriculum (accessed 24 January 2014).

Luke, A., Shield, P.G., Theroux, P., Tones, M. and Villegas, M. 2012, ‘Knowing and teaching in the Indigenous other: teachers’ engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures’, *Working Paper submitted on 1/09/2012 for publication in American Educational Research Journal (under review)*, http://eprints.qut.edu.au/53510/2/53510.pdf (accessed 6 February 2014).

McKenzie, P., Weldon, P., Rowley, G., Murphy, M. and McMillan, J. 2014, *Staff in Australia’s Schools 2013: Main report on the survey*, April, Australian Council for Educational Research.

Mooney, J., Halse, C. and Craven, R.G. 2003, ‘Teaching the Teachers Aboriginal Studies: Illuminating Successful Strategies’, presented at Joint conference of the 2003 New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Coldstream, Victoria, Deakin University, pp. 1–8, http://dro.deakin.edu.au/ view/DU:30034823 (accessed 4 February 2014).

Munns, G., O’Rourke, V. and Bodkin-Andrews, G. 2013, ‘Seeding Success: Schools That Work for Aboriginal Students’, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 1–11.

O’Keefe, K., Olney, H. and Angus, M. 2013, *Obstacles to success: Indigenous students in primary schools*, Australian Primary Principals Association, Kingston, ACT.

Purdie, N., Reid, K., Frigo, T., Stone, A. and Kleinhenz, E. 2011, *Literacy and numeracy learning: Lessons from the Longitudinal literacy and numeracy study for Indigenous students*, ACER Research Monograph 65, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, Victoria.

RA (Reconciliation Australia) 2013, *Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2012: An overview*, January, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra, ACT, http://www.reconciliation.org.au/ getfile?id=1917&file=RA\_Barometer\_Report\_2012\_Overview\_V17\_low\_res.pdf (accessed 6 February 2014).

Rahman, K.L. 2009, ‘Indigenous student success in secondary schooling: Factors impacting on student attendance, retention, learning and attainment in South Australia’, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

Santoro, N. and Reid, J.-A. 2006, ‘All things to all people: Indigenous teachers in the Australian teaching profession’, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 287–303.

SCSEEC (Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood) 2013, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2012 Annual Report*, Melbourne, http://scseec.edu.au/archive/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Education-Action-Plan/Action-Plan-Reports-2010-20141.aspx (accessed 28 August 2014).

Watson, P., Partington, G., Gray, J. and Mack, L. 2006, *Aboriginal Students and Numeracy*, Aboriginal Education and Training Council.

Yunkaporta, T. 2009, ‘Aboriginal pedagogies at the cultural interface’, Professional Doctorate (Research) thesis, James Cook University, Townsville, http://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/ 10974/2/01thesis.pdf (accessed 6 February 2014).

5.7 Participation in community activities[[11]](#footnote-11)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.7.1 Key messages |
| * Involvement in community activities can lead to improvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ long-term health and physical and mental wellbeing, as well as improved social cohesion in communities. * In 2008, 62.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians attended cultural events, down from 68.1 per cent in 2002 (table 5A.7.6). Whilst attendance decreased across all remoteness areas over this period, it is higher as remoteness increases. In 2008, attendance ranged from 56.4 per cent in major cities to 83.6 per cent in very remote areas (table 5A.7.7). * International research identified that the participation of Indigenous children and young people in traditional activities can lead to positive emotions, cultural identity and aspirations. In 2008, nearly two-thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 3–24 year olds participated in at least one cultural activity (table 5A.7.10). * Nationally in 2008, 57.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over had participated (including as coach, referee, administrator or player) in sporting and physical recreation activities in the previous year, an increase from 49.3 per cent in 2002 (table 5A.7.6). * Playing in, or training for, organised sport was higher for non‑Indigenous children compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (63.1 per cent compared to 51.0 per cent). This trend was observed across all remoteness areas except major cities, where there was no significant difference (figure 5.7.2). The main factors stopping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 5–14 years from playing organised sport were: don’t want to play sport (33.3 per cent); not enough time (15.9 per cent); costs too much (14.9 per cent); and organised sport unavailable (13.1 per cent) (table 5A.7.1). * Participation rates in community activities varied across jurisdictions and over time but were higher in the ACT for participation in sport and physical recreation activities (71.9 per cent) and in the NT for attendance at cultural events (79.4 per cent) (5A.7.6). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.7.2 Measures of participation in community activities |
| There are two main measures for this indicator.   * *Involvement in arts and cultural events and activities*, defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who participated/attended an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, social or cultural activity.   (continued next page) |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.7.2 (continued) |
| * *Participation in sport and recreational activities*, defined as proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who participated in sporting and physical recreation activities.   The most recent data for both measures are from the 2008 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) (all jurisdictions; age; remoteness).  Supplementary measures on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s and young people’s participation in organised sport and selected art and cultural activities are also presented. The most recent available data are from the 2008 NATSISS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the 2009 ABS Children’s Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey (CPiCLAS) for non‑Indigenous children (all jurisdictions: age; sex; remoteness). These data are comparable. |
|  |
|  |

Measuring participation in sport, arts or community group activities gives an indication of how connected an individual is to their local community, by mapping formal networks of social relations (Stone 2001).

### Involvement in arts and cultural events and activities

There is a positive association between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ involvement in cultural events and activities, as captured in the 2008 NATSISS, and a range of positive socioeconomic indicators, such as higher educational attainment, and higher probability of being employed (Dockery 2011).

In 2008, in remote areas, feeling happy was associated with participating in cultural activities – with 83 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were involved in art, craft, dance, music or story‑telling reporting they felt happy some or most of the time. Of those who attended cultural activities at least once per week, 81 per cent were happy some or most of the time, compared with 71 per cent among those who rarely or never attended cultural events (ABS 2010b). Dockery (2011) also found that participation in cultural events and activities is associated with better mental health, and to a lesser degree increased happiness.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over, attendance at cultural events in 2008 varied across states and territories, and by remoteness:

* attendance at cultural events in the NT (81.3 per cent) was significantly higher than other states and territories (table 5A.7.6)
* attendance at cultural events increased with remoteness, from 57.0 per cent in non‑remote areas to 80.5 per cent in remote areas (table 5A.7.7).

Between 2002 and 2008, attendance at cultural events decreased nationally from 68.1 per cent to 62.9 per cent (table 5A.7.6), with significant decreases in attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 and over (table 5A.7.9).

Data on attendance at cultural events are also reported by age (table 5A.7.9).

#### Children and young people’s participation in sport and cultural activities

For children and young people, participation in sport and cultural activities provides opportunities to develop physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively (The Smith Family 2013). The Youth Activity Participation Study of Western Australia found that students ‘at risk’ or from disadvantaged backgrounds benefited most from participation in extracurricular activities, whether it was sport, music, dance or drama (Annear 2010).

International literature shows that there is an association between Indigenous children’s participation in traditional activities and positive emotions, cultural identity and aspirations (Smith, Findlay and Crompton 2010). There is also a strong link between engagement in Indigenous culture and young people’s wellbeing and resilience (Wexler 2009).

In 2008, over half (50.6 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people aged 3–24 years had participated in at least one of the selected cultural activities in the previous 12 months:

* 23.7 per cent had participated in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts or crafts
* 16.0 per cent had performed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music, dance or theatre
* 10.9 per cent had written or told Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories (table 5A.7.10).

### Participation in sport and recreational activities

Participation in sport and recreational activities has the potential to widely benefit individuals and communities by contributing not only to physical fitness, but also to improved mental wellbeing and social interaction (United Nations Sport for Development and Peace 2014). Sport and recreational activities can lead to (amongst other benefits) improved community cohesion (Cunningham and Beneforti 2005), and increased validation of and connection to culture (Ware and Meredith 2013).

The recent parliamentary report on the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing acknowledged that skills learnt in sport and physical activity include ‘life skills’ such as: teamwork, problem solving, resilience building, communication and social skills and responsibility. The report concluded that sport could be a positive force in achieving Closing the Gap targets in broad areas such as health, education and employment (HoRSCoATSIA 2013).

Participation in sport and recreation is more than being a player or participant, and includes being a coach, referee and committee member. Volunteering in supporting roles gives non‑playing participants an opportunity to develop their skills, self‑esteem and purpose, and also improves community cohesion (Cunningham and Beneforti 2002; DinanThompson, Sellwood and Carless 2008).

Whilst there are positive benefits to sport and recreation, Ware and Meredith (2013) note that participation relies on interest, ability and skills, and that some sporting and recreation activities may be too expensive, and may conversely contribute to social exclusion.

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.7.1 Participation in sport and recreational activities in the previous 12 months, Indigenous people aged 3 years and over, 2002 and 2008**a,b,c** |
| Figure 5.7.1 Participation in sport and recreational activities in the previous 12 months, Indigenous people aged 3 years and over, 2002 and 2008  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Children aged 3–14 years were not included in the ABS NATSISS 2002. Responses for children aged  3–14 years in 2008 were provided by an adult proxy. b in 2002 and 2007 some responses for 15–17 year olds were provided by an adult proxy. c Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals. |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002, ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; table 5A.7.9. |
|  |
|  |

Nationally, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over participating in sporting and physical recreation activities increased from 2002 to 2008 (from 49.3 per cent to 57.4 per cent) in both remote and non‑remote areas (tables 5A.7.6‑7). Participation is significantly higher in the ACT (71.9 per cent in 2008) compared to other jurisdictions (table 5A.7.6).

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participating in sporting and recreation activities decreases as age increases. Participation includes as a coach, referee, administrator or player. In 2002, there were significant differences in participation across age groups for those aged 15 years and over. However, between 2002 and 2008 there were significant increases in the proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who participated in sporting and physical recreation activities, except for the group aged 15–24 years, for which rates are similar (figure 5.7.1).

#### Children’s participation in sport

Studies of all Australian adolescents have demonstrated an association between participation in structured sport and leisure activities and psychological wellbeing (Trainor et al. 2010) and increased school attendance (Blomfield and Barber 2010).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students surveyed by (Lonsdale et al. 2011) found that participation in sport is also linked to pride in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities. A 2009 study of urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people highlighted that many sporting and recreation activities were spoken of as points of connection with family, community and culture (Nelson 2009). Participating in organised sporting and recreational activity also reduces unsupervised leisure time, and may divert young people from inappropriate or antisocial behaviour (Ware and Meredith 2013).

In 2008, around half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 5–14 years (51.0 per cent) spent time playing or training for organised sports outside school hours, with nearly three quarters (72.7 per cent) physically active for at least one hour every day in the previous week (table 5A.7.1).

Nationally in 2008, participation in organised sport was higher for non‑Indigenous children compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (63.1 per cent compared to 51.0 per cent). This trend was observed across all remoteness areas except major cities, where there was no significant difference (figure 5.7.2).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.7.2 Children’s (aged 5–14 years) participation in organised sport in the last 12 months, 2008**a,b** |
| Figure 5.7.2 Children's (aged 5-14 years) participation in organised sport in the last 12 monhts, 2008   More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Includes participation in sports organised through a school or a club, outside school hours. b Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008, ABS (unpublished) Children’s Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities 2009; table 5A.7.2. |
|  |
|  |

In 2008, the main factors stopping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged   
5–14 years from playing organised sport were: don’t want to play sport (33.3 per cent); not enough time (15.9 per cent); costs too much (14.9 per cent); and organised sport unavailable (13.1 per cent) (table 5A.7.1). There are no comparable data for non‑Indigenous children. Data on children participating in physical activities and organised sport are also reported by State and Territory (5A.7.1), and by sex (5A.7.3).

Access to sporting facilities (including parks and reserves) may affect participation in sport and recreation (ABS 2012). Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in 2008, over 90 per cent had access to outdoor playing fields and play areas (ABS 2010a). There was reduced access to swimming pools (63.5 per cent) and indoor sporting facilities (58.9 per cent) in remote areas (ABS 2010a).

### Things that work

Whilst the research generally supports the idea that participation is valuable, the impact of participation in community activities is hard to quantify, as the benefits are generally ‘long‑term and diffuse’ (Ware and Meredith 2013).

The following case studies describe activities within organisations and communities that demonstrate the benefits of participation in sports, arts and community activities (box 5.7.3).

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.7.3 Things that work — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in sports, arts and community activities |
| The **Coonamble sports mentoring program** is targeted at both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous males in Coonamble in north‑west NSW. The program, which commenced in 2006, aims to teach life skills to 12–18 year old males through sports‑based mentoring by adults at local sporting clubs.  Although the program is small scale, and has not yet been independently evaluated, a review by the [then] Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia in 2009 found that, in the first year of the project, the 15 participants showed ‘increased social, emotional and relationship development’ and ‘skills and motivation to achieve their goals’, with 13 participants reporting improvement in their relationship skills and 10 participants reporting improvements in life skills. Reports from school coordinators in the following year stated that 14 participants either remained in school or gained employment in the following year, ‘a figure previously unheard of in this area’ (CaFCA and AIFS 2009). |
| *Source*: CAFCA and AIFS (Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia and Australian Institute of Family Studies) 2009, *Sports Mentoring Project ‑ Coonamble*, Promising Practice Profiles archive ‑ Child Family Community Australia, http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/la\_sports\_mentoring\_program.html (accessed 7 July 2014). |
|  |
|  |

### Future directions in data

New data on participation in sport and physical activity (levels of exercise undertaken for fitness, recreation and sport) will be available from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey component of the 2012‑13 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (due for release in September 2014 — too late for inclusion in this report). These new data will not be comparable to the 2008 NATSISS data currently presented in this section. Comparable times series is important for measuring change over time. Where possible comparability across ABS surveys is recommended.

Data on involvement in arts, cultural events and activities are only available every six years from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. More frequent data is desirable. Inclusion of comparable questions in the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey would increase the frequency to three‑yearly.

### References

ABS 2010a, *Access to health and community services*, Cat. no. 4704.0, The Health and Wellbeing of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Canberra, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter930Oct+2010 (accessed 17 January 2014).

—— 2010b, *The city and the bush: Indigenous wellbeing across remoteness areas*, Cat. no. 4102.0, Australian Social Trends, Canberra, http://www.abs.gov.au/ AUSSTATS  
/abs@.nsf/Lookup /4102.0Main+Features10Sep+2010 (accessed 17 January 2014).

—— 2012, *Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia*, 4177.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ Lookup/4177.0 Main+Features12011-12?OpenDocument (accessed 24 April 2014).

Annear, K. 2010, ‘Music, dance, drama: The benefits of extracurricular participation’, *Teacher*, vol. 06.

Blomfield, C. and Barber, B. 2010, ‘Australian adolescents’ extracurricular activity participation and positive development: Is the relationship mediated by peer attributes?’, *Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, vol. 10, pp. 108–122.

Cunningham, J. and Beneforti, M. 2002, *Investigating indicators for measuring the health and social impact of sport and recreation programs in Indigenous communities*, Australian Sports Commission and Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health, Darwin, Northern Territory.

—— and —— 2005, ‘Investigating indicators for measuring the health and social impact of sport and recreation programs in Australian Indigenous communities’, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 89–98.

DinanThompson, M., Sellwood, J. and Carless, F. 2008, ‘A kickstart to life: Australian Football League as a medium for promoting life skills in Cape York Indigenous communities’, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, vol. 37, pp. 152–164.

Dockery, A.M. 2011, *Traditional culture and the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS*, January, Centre for Labour Market Research Discussion Paper Series, Perth, WA, http://business.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/ 2011.01\_  
TarditionalCulture.pdf (accessed 10 January 2014).

HoRSCoATSIA 2013, *Sport - More Than Just a Game: Contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring*, Parliamentary Committee Report, June, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\_business/ committees/house\_of\_representatives\_ committees?url=atsia/sport/report.htm (accessed 17 January 2014).

Lonsdale, M., Wilkinson, J., Armstrong, S., McClay, D., Clerke, S., Cook, J., Wano, K., Simons, R., Milgate, G. and Bramich, M. 2011, *Evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program for Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*, October, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, Victoria.

Nelson, A. 2009, ‘Sport, physical activity and urban Indigenous young people’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, pp. 101–111.

Smith, K., Findlay, L. and Crompton, S. 2010, *Participation in sports and cultural activities among Aboriginal children and youth*, Cat. no. 11-008, Canadian Social Trends, Statistics Canada, pp. 49–56.

Stone, W. 2001, *Measuring social capital: Towards a theoretically informed measurement framework for researching social capital in family and community life*, February, Australian Institute of Family Studies: Research Paper No. 24.

The Smith Family 2013, *Sport, culture and the internet: Are Australian children participating?*, June, Research report.

Trainor, S., Delfabbro, P., Anderson, S. and Winefield, A. 2010, ‘Leisure activities and adolescent phychological well-being’, *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 173–186.

United Nations Sport for Development and Peace 2014, *Why Sport?*, http://www.un.org/ wcm/content/site/sport/home/sport (accessed 16 January 2014).

Ware, V.-A. and Meredith, V. 2013, *Supporting healthy communities through sports and recreation programs*, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse publication, Resource sheet no. 26, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Wexler, L. 2009, ‘The importance of identity, history, and culture in the wellbeing of Indigenous youth’, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 267–276.

5.8 Access to traditional lands and waters[[12]](#footnote-12)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.8.1 Key messages |
| * Access to traditional lands and waters gives an indication of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ connection to country and, for some, is associated with improved health outcomes. * In 2012‑13: * 62.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults identified with a clan, tribal or language group, with the proportion increasing as remoteness increased (from 55.3 per cent in major cities to 84.2 per cent in very remote areas (table 5A.8.1) * 72.3per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults recognised traditional homelands and under 1 per cent identified as not being allowed to visit homelands (table 5A.8.1) * 87.6 per cent of those in remote areas recognised homelands (and 45.4 per cent lived on homelands), while 67.8 per cent of those in non‑remote areas recognised homelands (and 18.8 per cent lived on homelands) (table 5A.8.1). There was also a significant increase in recognition in non‑remote areas between 2004‑05 to 2012‑13 (from 60.1 per cent to 67.8 per cent) (table 5A.8.1) following a decrease from 1994 to 2002. There was no significant change in remote areas from 2002 to 2012‑13 (table 5A.8.3) * for those in non‑remote areas, recognition of homelands increased with age (from 59.8 per cent of 18–24 year olds to 72.2 per cent of those aged 55 years and over) (table 5A.8.2). |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Box 5.8.2 Measures of access to traditional lands and waters |
| There is one main measure for this indicator. *Recognition and access to homelands and traditional country* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over who recognise areas as their homelands or traditional country.  A supplementary measure on the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over who identified with a clan, tribal or language group is also reported.  The most recent data for both measures are from the ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (AATSIHS) 2012‑13 (national: age; remoteness). Historical data for 2008 and 2002 are directly comparable, but historical data for 1994 (limited) and 2004‑05 are only comparable for non‑remote areas, as data were not collected in remote areas for these two surveys.  There are currently no data specifically on access to traditional waters. |
|  |
|  |

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians report that they derive physical, spiritual, emotional and cultural benefits from their connection to country (Burgess and Morrison 2007; Dockery 2011). ‘Country’ refers to a specific clan, tribal group or nation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and incorporates all the knowledge, stories and resources within a particular area, including land, air and water (Fredericks 2013). Notion of country is central to self‑identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Kingsley et al. 2013).

Bishop et al. (2012) states that, as country is intrinsically linked to self‑identity, the wellness of the people reflects the wellness of the country, while maintenance of country is important for maintenance of health (section 8.7 discusses the interaction with mental health).

The data in this section focus on recognition and access to country. The data do not show whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have control or ownership, rights to resources found on their homelands or access to particular sites that may be of cultural significance. Information on ownership and control of land is discussed in section 9.2.

The reported data are based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ own understanding of what constitutes their homelands or traditional country. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians may live on or visit Indigenous owned or controlled land but they may not consider it to be their own homelands or traditional country. Movement from traditional country may have been either voluntary or involuntary, with many people who were removed from their families (the Stolen Generations) not being able to find their families or to identify their traditional country (NMHC 2012).

### Recognition and access to homelands and traditional country

Access to traditional lands is conceptualised as a determinant of health (AHMAC 2012). Weir, Stacey and Youngetob (2011) summarised the literature on some of the positive associations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians living and accessing their traditional country, which included: positive health behaviours (increased exercise and physical activity, more nutritious diet, reduction in substance abuse) and a lesser burden on the health care system (savings in preventing disease, reduced hospital costs) as well as the overall economic benefits of a healthier population.

Morphy’s (2008) work with Aboriginal Australians from North‑East Arnhem Land suggests that traditional homelands communities, where individuals are interconnected through multiple bonds, exhibit ‘an orderly system of leadership and succession’ according to established systems of governance. The stability and longevity of these governance systems were perceived by the Aboriginal Australians in the study as protective factors against ‘social breakdown and loss of culture and the loss of many of the younger generations to drugs and alcohol’.

However, living on homelands/traditional country, particularly in remote or very remote regions of Australia, sometimes equates to reduced or restricted access to services such as health, housing and education, with people from these communities temporarily relocating to larger centres to access these services (AHRC 2010; Kerins 2010).

In 2012-13, 72.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged   
18 years and over recognised homelands/traditional country, with recognition higher in remote areas (87.6 per cent) than non-remote areas (67.8 per cent) (table 5A.8.1). There was also a significant increase in recognition in non-remote areas between 2004-05 to 2012-13 (from 60.1 per cent to 67.8 per cent) (table 5A.8.1) following a decrease between 1994 and 2004-05 (table 5A.8.3).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 5.8.1 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 18 years and over who recognise and live on homelands/traditional country, by remoteness areas, 2012‑13**a,b,c** |
| Figure 5.8.1 Proportion of Indigenous people aged 18 years and over who recognise and live on homelands/traditional country, by remoteness areas, 2012-13  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Includes respondents that did not know if they were allowed to visit homelands or not. b Includes people who refused to answer, or who provided ‘don’t know’ or ‘not stated’ responses. c Relative standard errors and 95 per cent confidence intervals should be considered when interpreting these data, and are available in table 5A.8.1. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2012‑13 (2012­13 NATSIHS component); table 5A.8.1. |
|  |
|  |

ABS survey data show that recognition of homelands/traditional country is not restricted to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who live there (figure 5.8.1). As noted in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework (AHMAC 2012), a return to country in the traditional sense is no longer an option for some Aboriginal Australians, particularly in South Eastern Australia. However, Fredericks (2013) argues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians still maintain strong connections to their country even if they live on lands that belong to other Aboriginal Australians, or if they recognise lands where large urban centres have grown in post‑settlement Australia.

In 2012‑13, 87.6 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over in remote areas recognised homelands (and 45.4 per cent lived on homelands), while 67.8 per cent of those in non‑remote areas recognised homelands (and 18.8 per cent lived on homelands) (figure 5.8.1). Less than 1 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over identified as not being allowed to visit homelands (table 5A.8.1).

Data for non‑remote areas in 2012‑13 showed recognition of homelands increasing with age (from 59.8 per cent for 18–24 year olds to 72.2 per cent for those aged 55 years and over in 2012‑13) (table 5A.8.2).

#### Traditional waters

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, water is an essential part of identity, culture and country (Birckhead et al 2011; O’Bryan 2012). The Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians recommended that there should be an acknowledgment of the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with both their traditional lands and waters (FAHCSIA 2012).

The National Water Initiative (NWI), agreed by COAG in 2004, is currently the primary vehicle in Australia for recognising the relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with water (O’Bryan 2012). Assessment of progress of the NWI is undertaken by the National Water Commission (NWC), which published a review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ involvement in water planning, in May 2014. The review found that:

… while approaches are variable across Australia, most governments have made significant advances in recognising the need to address Indigenous water issues … However, challenges remain and little progress has been observed in the allocation or licensing of water for Indigenous social, economic, spiritual or cultural purposes (NWC 2014).[[13]](#footnote-13)

### Identification with a clan, tribal or language group

Identification with a clan, tribal or language group is one aspect of connection to country (Fredericks 2013).

In 2012‑13, 62.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over identified with a clan, tribal or language group, with the proportion increasing as remoteness increased (from 55.3 per cent in major cities to 84.2 per cent in very remote areas) (table 5A.8.1).

### Future directions in data

Data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians recognising and living on their homelands or traditional country was available for remote areas for the first time in the 2012‑13 AATSIHS. Ongoing collection of these data in remote areas in future ABS Indigenous health surveys is desirable, to provide three yearly (rather than the previous six yearly) reporting.

Given the importance of connection to country to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, the collection of information on the reasons why a person does not identify with clan, tribal or language group or recognise homeland could assist in developing culturally appropriate responses.

The collection of additional information around recognition of traditional waters would complement the qualitative information formerly published in the National Water Commission assessments.

### References

AHMAC (Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council) 2012, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2012 Report*, Canberra.

AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2010, *Social Justice Report 2009*, Report No.1/2010, Sydney.

Birckhead, J., Greiner, R., Hemming, S., Rigney, D., Rigney, M., Trevorrow, G. and Trevorrow, T. 2011, *Economic and Cultural Values of Water to the Ngarrindjeri People of the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth*, August, River Consulting Pty Ltd, Townsville, Queensland.

Bishop, B., Vicary, D., Mitchell, J. and Pearson, G. 2012, ‘Aboriginal concepts of place and country and their meaning in mental health’, *The Australian Community Psychologist*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 26–42.

Burgess, P. and Morrison, J. 2007, ‘Country’, in Carson, B., Dunbar, T., Chenhall, R. and Bailie, R. (eds), *Social Determinants of Indigenous Health*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia, pp. 177–202.

Dockery, A.M. 2011, *Traditional culture and the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS*, January, Centre for Labour Market Research Discussion Paper Series, Perth, WA, http://business.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/2011.01 \_TarditionalCulture.pdf (accessed 10 January 2014).

Expert Panel (FaHCSIA (former Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)) 2012, *Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution: Report of the Expert Panel*, Canberra, http://www. recognise.org.au/final-report (accessed 14 February 2014).

Fredericks, B. 2013, ‘We don’t leave our identities at the city limits: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban localities’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, vol. 2013, no. 1, pp. 4–16.

Kerins, S. 2010, *The Future of Homelands/Outstations*, CAEPR Topical Issue no. 01/2010, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, http://caepr.anu.edu.au  
/sites/default/files/Publications/topical/Topical\_Kerins\_outstations\_0.pdf (accessed 21 February 2014).

Kingsley, J., Townsend, M., Henderson-Wilson, C. and Bolam, B. 2013, ‘Developing an Exploratory Framework Linking Australian Aboriginal Peoples’ Connection to Country and Concepts of Wellbeing’, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 10, pp. 678–698.

Morphy, F. 2008, ‘Redefining viability: Aboriginal homelands communities in north-east Arnhem Land’, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 381–396.

NMHC (National Mental Health Commission) 2012, *A contributing life: the 2012 National Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention*, NHMC, Sydney.

NWC (National Water Commission) 2014, *A review of Indigenous involvement in water planning, 2013*, April, Canberra, ACT, http://www.nwc.gov.au/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file /0010/36865/Review-of-Indigenous-Involvement-in-Water-Planning-2013.pdf (accessed 5 July 2014).

O’Bryan, K. 2012, ‘The National Water Initiative and Victoria’s legislative implementation of Indigenous water rights’, *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, vol. 7, no. 29, pp. 24–27.

Weir, J., Stacey, C. and Youngetob, K. 2011, *The Benefits Associated with Caring for Country: Literature Review*, June, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra, http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ workingoncountry/publications/pubs/benefits-cfc.pdf (accessed 21 February 2014).

1. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and Reconciliation Australia for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Reconciliation Australia advised that whilst the general community sample was selected to be representative of the general community, given the small sample size it is unlikely to have many (if any) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In ABS Census data, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household is a household where at least one person has identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and to Reconciliation Australia for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Cape York Group is the Cape York Institute, Cape York Partnerships, Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy and Djarragun College. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As at 1 July 2014, the former Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, which published the Action Plan reports, became known as the Education Council. Terms of reference for the new Council are currently being developed and are still to be considered by COAG. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and to Reconciliation Australia for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Ms Robynne Quiggin, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The NWC will cease at the end of 2014, with the triennial water reform assessment due to COAG in late 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)