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## 2 The framework

The first two sections of this chapter describe the underpinnings and the structure of the Report's framework. Knowing how the framework has been constructed is fundamental to understanding how it can assist governments; and fundamental also in making the Report meaningful to Indigenous people.

Section 2.3 provides feedback from the consultations that were conducted following the release of the 2005 Report. These consultations were generally supportive of the approach taken, although a range of suggestions were made for improving indicators. Indigenous people made many comments about the Report's approach to cultural issues. In section 2.4, the cultural indicators are explained, against the backdrop of suggestions received from Indigenous people during consultations.

### 2.1 The underpinnings

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has been clear in its direction that this Report must help inform policy development within jurisdictions. Reports about the performance of governments generally focus on the delivery of services; for example, whether they were on time and on budget. As a rule, such reports are agency focused — education is reported by departments of education, health by health departments — and so on.

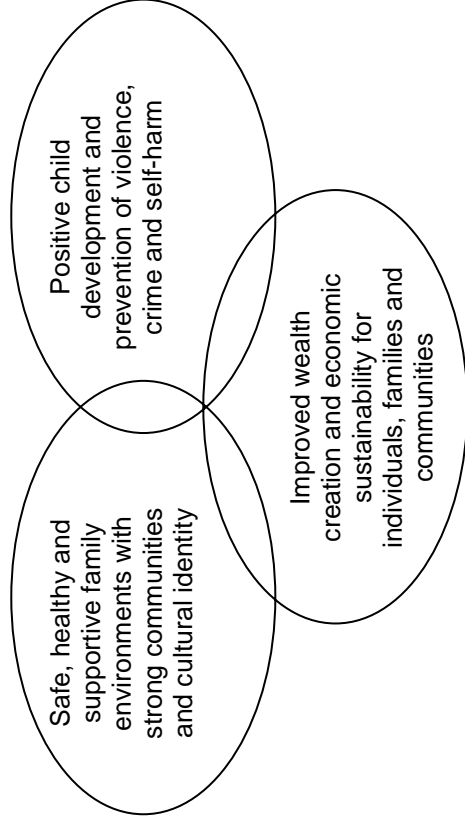
While information on the delivery of outputs is valuable, this Report does something different. The Report framework emphasises the importance of interaction — between sectors and between governments, and with Indigenous people themselves — in achieving good outcomes. Improvements in the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians will require the involvement of more than one government agency, and will need action on a whole-of-government basis.

The indicator framework is depicted in figure 2.2.1. Changes to indicators since the 2005 Report are marked in *italic*.

Figure 2.2.1 Multi-level indicator framework (changes to indicators since the 2005 Report are marked in *italic*)

**1. Priority outcomes**

Indigenous people and governments have agreed the following outcomes. These outcomes are closely linked to each other —progress in one area can assist progress in the others



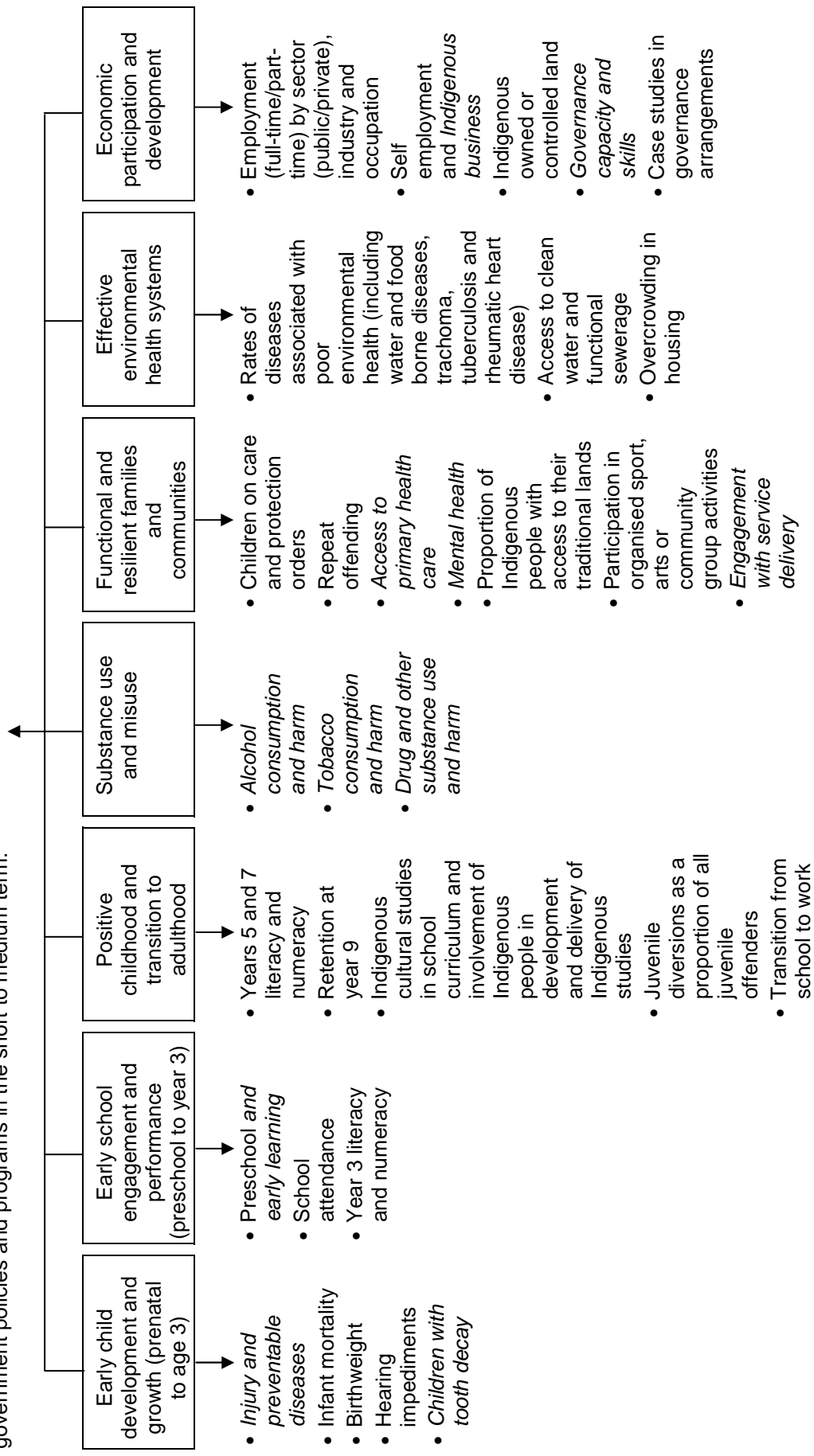
**Headline indicators**

The headline indicators measure progress in achieving the priority outcomes. They are a small set of high level indicators, which usually take some time to respond to changes in government policies.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life expectancy at birth</li> <li>• <i>Disability and chronic disease</i></li> <li>• Years 10 and 12 retention and attainment</li> <li>• Post secondary education — participation and attainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour force participation and unemployment (<i>CDEP and long term unemployment data included here</i>)</li> <li>• Household and individual income</li> <li>• Home ownership</li> <li>• Suicide and self-harm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Substantiated child abuse and neglect</i></li> <li>• Deaths from homicide and hospitalisations for assault</li> <li>• <i>Family and community violence</i></li> <li>• Imprisonment and juvenile detention rates</li> </ul>
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### 3. Strategic areas for action

Governments have agreed to focus policy attention on the following seven strategic areas. Over time, progress in these areas is expected to lead to improvement in the headline indicators and priority outcomes. Progress is measured by a series of strategic change indicators, which can be influenced by government policies and programs in the short to medium term.



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Essentially, the framework is about looking forward. A range of circumstances — historical, economic and social — have created the need for a concentration of policy on Indigenous disadvantage. The framework seeks to ensure that the circumstances which are the root cause of continuing disadvantage become the focus of policy attention.

## **2.2 The framework**

Three priority outcomes sit at the top of the framework. These outcomes are interlinked and should not be viewed in isolation. They reflect COAG’s vision for reducing disadvantage, and were widely endorsed by Indigenous people.

However, it is extremely difficult to measure progress in achieving these outcomes, particularly in the short term. Therefore, the framework incorporates two further tiers with more measurable indicators. The goal is that measured progress in these two tiers of the framework will, in time, overcome the disadvantage which prevents the priority outcomes for a large number of Indigenous people and communities.

- The first tier (the headline indicators) provides an overview of the state of Indigenous disadvantage, with twelve high level indicators, that will take some time to change. The headline indicators serve to keep a national focus on the long term challenge of reducing disadvantage, and provide proxy measures for the priority outcomes.
- The second tier (the strategic areas for action) is of more immediate relevance to policy. Governments and Indigenous people have agreed that action in the seven agreed priority areas will lead to improvements in the headline indicators over time. A series of strategic change indicators measure whether policy actions are making a difference in the strategic areas for action.

Prevention and early intervention lie at the heart of the framework. The focus is on encouraging action in the ‘strategic areas for action’ that, over time, will lead to improvements in headline outcomes. For example, it is predictable that a child who is not performing well at year 3 is less likely to progress to year 10 or 12, or to perform well at those levels. A focus by policy makers on improving the strategic change indicators of preschool and early learning, school attendance, and year 3 literacy and numeracy is necessary to improve the headline indicators of years 10 and 12 retention and attainment and, in turn, higher education and employment outcomes.

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## **Headline indicators**

The headline indicators are set out in figure 2.2.1. Following consultations, minor changes have been made to some headline indicators since the 2005 Report.

### *Disability and chronic disease*

The previous ‘Rates of disability and/or core activity restriction’ indicator has been renamed ‘Disability and chronic disease’. The broader measure of morbidity, health outcomes and disability reflects the importance of chronic disease in overall health outcomes for Indigenous people.

### *Substantiated child abuse and neglect*

The previous ‘Substantiated child protection notifications’ indicator has been renamed ‘Substantiated child abuse and neglect’ to make it more understandable to a non-specialist audience. There are currently no reliable data on the incidence of child abuse, however, and substantiated child protection notifications remain the primary source of data for the indicator.

### *Family and community violence*

The previous ‘Victim rates of crime’ indicator has been renamed ‘Family and community violence’ to draw greater attention to the domestic and community violence aspects of this indicator, which are of particular concern in some Indigenous communities.

## **Strategic areas for action**

The seven strategic areas for action were chosen for their potential to have a significant and lasting impact in reducing Indigenous disadvantage.

As noted, more than one government agency will usually have to take action in order to achieve better outcomes in each area. For example, in the area of ‘Early school engagement’, the school system has an important role to play, but so do agencies dealing with transport availability, housing arrangements and health.

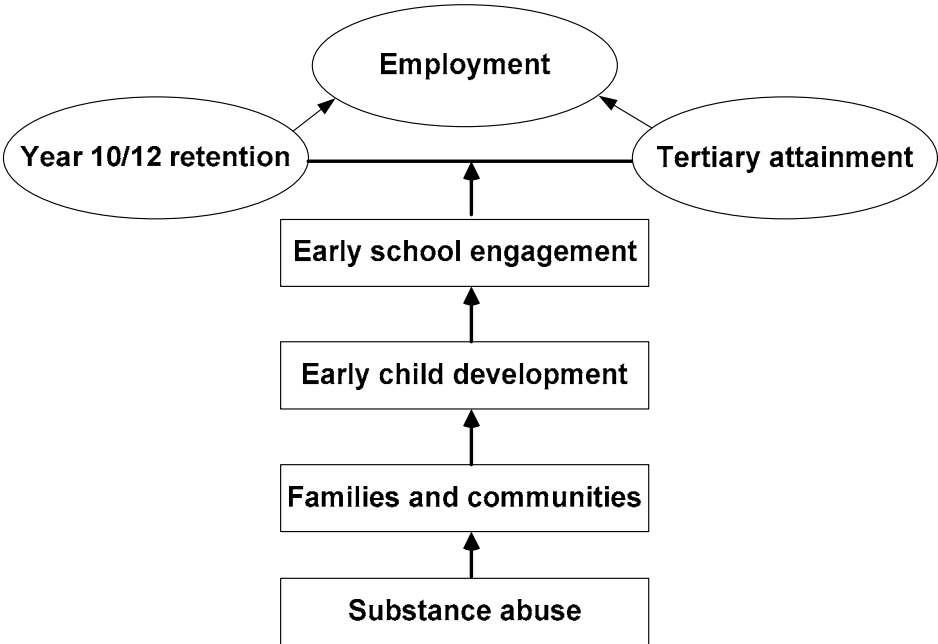
The diagrams in figures 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 illustrate the many linked factors that can affect outcomes. Different aspects of disadvantage are often interrelated, and action may be needed in several areas to make progress. In figure 2.2.2, the headline outcome of employment is influenced by years 10 and 12 retention and tertiary

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attainment, but these in turn are influenced by early school engagement and early child development. And environmental factors such as those found in the ‘substance use and misuse’ and ‘functional and resilient families and communities’ strategic areas for action affect all these outcomes. Employment and education outcomes can also be influenced by the inter-generational effects of parental income, employment and education levels.

**Figure 2.2.2 A preventive model — multiple causes**

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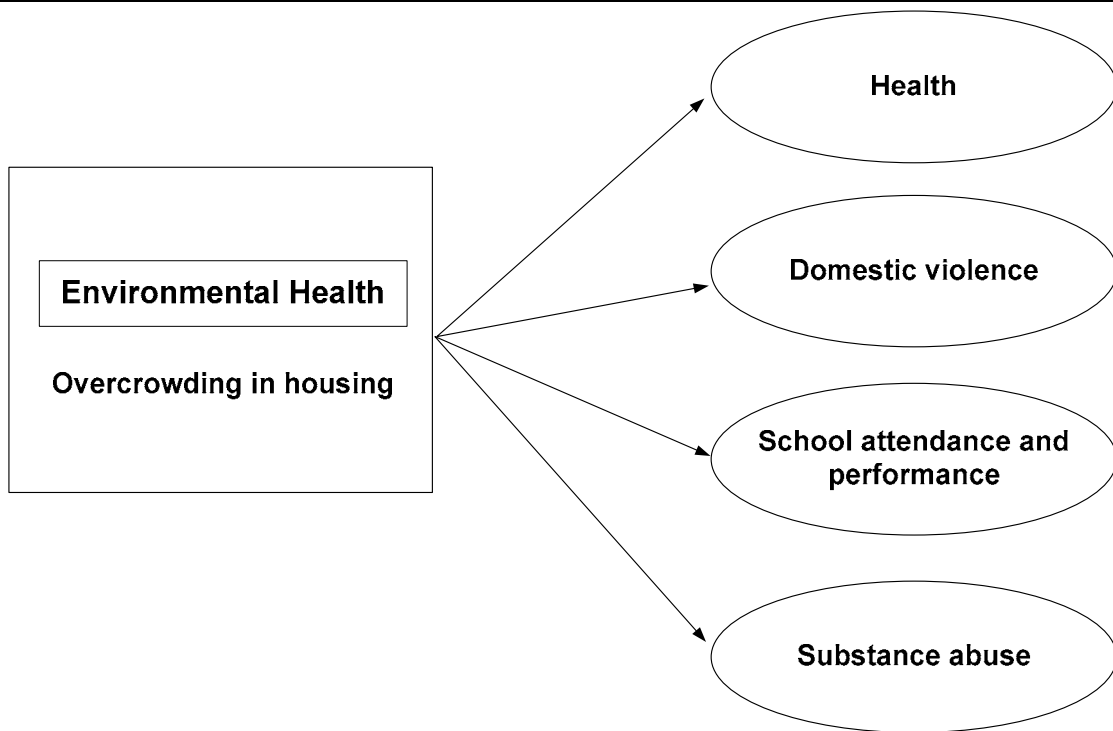
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Figure 2.2.3 shows how inter-relationships between outcomes mean that well targeted actions can lead to improvements across a whole range of indicators. Reducing overcrowding in housing can contribute to improvements in health, school attendance and performance, substance use and misuse, and even family and community violence (although other influences are also important in each of these areas).

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Figure 2.2.3 A preventive model — multiple impacts

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### Strategic change indicators

The strategic change indicators were chosen for their potential to lead to change in the headline indicators over time. Most indicators are linked to outcomes — not to specific policy actions or service outputs. However, some outputs are so closely tied to outcomes that they have been included: for example, water, sewerage, and access to primary health care. The framework is based on the understanding that individual agencies in each jurisdiction will examine their capacity to contribute to improvements in these indicators.

The following sections provide a brief rationale for each strategic area for action, and list the relevant strategic change indicators. Any changes to indicators from the 2005 Report are identified.

#### *Early child development and growth (prenatal to age 3)*

Providing a child with a good start in life can have a profound effect on his or her passage through the life cycle. Health, growth and development in the first three years play a critical role in later outcomes. Key indicators are:

- Injury and preventable diseases

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- Infant mortality
  - Birthweight
  - Hearing impediments
  - Children with tooth decay.

The previous ‘Rates of hospital admission for infectious diseases’ indicator has been renamed ‘Injury and preventable diseases’ to provide a more comprehensive picture of health outcomes for Indigenous children and to focus efforts on obtaining data on the underlying incidence of disease and injury.

The previous ‘Primary school children with dental caries’ indicator has been renamed ‘Children with tooth decay’. The words ‘tooth decay’ rather than ‘dental caries’ make the indicator more understandable to a general audience. The indicator has been moved from ‘Early school engagement and performance’ to ‘Early child development and growth’. Consultations indicated that tooth decay is more a lagged indicator of childhood development than of school engagement and performance. (That is, although decay shows up during preschool to year 3, the circumstances that led to decay generally occurred during early childhood).

#### *Early school engagement and performance (preschool to year 3)*

Early school engagement is important for establishing a foundation for educational achievement, retention in secondary schooling, opportunities in employment and minimising contact with the justice system later in life. Key indicators are:

- Preschool and early learning
- School attendance
- Year 3 literacy and numeracy.

The previous ‘Preschool and school attendance’ indicator has been split into two indicators, ‘Preschool and early learning’ and ‘School attendance’, to distinguish between distinct aspects of early school engagement and allow expanded coverage of early learning.

#### *Positive childhood and transition to adulthood*

Ongoing participation in school and vocational education encourages self-esteem and a more positive basis for achieving employment. Such participation also leads to reduced contact with the justice system. Key indicators are:

- Years 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy



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- Retention at year 9
  - Indigenous cultural studies in school curriculum and involvement of Indigenous people in development and delivery of Indigenous studies
  - Juvenile diversions as a proportion of all juvenile offenders
  - Transition from school to work.

### *Substance use and misuse*

Abuse of alcohol and other substances affects physical and mental health, family and community relationships, and can result in contact with the justice system. Key indicators are:

- Alcohol consumption and harm
- Tobacco consumption and harm
- Drug and other substance use and harm.

The indicators in this strategic area have been renamed to clarify reporting, by bringing together data for each of the three main substance types.

### *Functional and resilient families and communities*

Functional and resilient families and communities influence the physical and mental health of adults and children, and affect contact with the justice system. Problems in families and communities can lead to breaks in education, disrupted social relationships and social alienation. Key indicators are:

- Children on care and protection orders
- Repeat offending
- Access to primary health care
- Mental health
- Proportion of Indigenous people with access to their traditional lands
- Participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities
- Engagement with service delivery.

The previous indicator ‘Access to the nearest health professional’ has been renamed ‘Access to primary health care’ to provide a broader measure of access to health services.

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‘Mental health’ has been included in recognition of the significance of mental health and wellbeing in Indigenous health.

‘Engagement with service delivery’ has been included to focus attention on service accessibility for Indigenous people, for both mainstream and Indigenous specific services. Appropriate access to services is crucial to reducing Indigenous disadvantage.

### *Effective environmental health systems*

Clean water and adequate sewerage, housing and other essential infrastructure are important to physical wellbeing and the physical development and health of children and adults. Key indicators are:

- Rates of diseases associated with poor environmental health (including water and food borne diseases, trachoma, tuberculosis and rheumatic heart disease)
- Access to clean water and functional sewerage
- Overcrowding in housing.

### *Economic participation and development*

Having a job or being involved in a business activity leads to higher incomes for families and communities, with positive effects on health, education of children, etc.). It also enhances wellbeing and reduces social alienation. Well governed communities and organisations play a key role in achieving a wide range of outcomes for Indigenous people. Key indicators are:

- Employment (full-time/part-time) by sector (public/private), industry and occupation
- Self employment and Indigenous business
- Indigenous owned or controlled land
- Governance capacity and skills
- Case studies in governance arrangements.

The previous indicator ‘CDEP participation’ has been removed as a separate strategic change indicator. Data on CDEP participation are now included as a component of the headline indicator ‘Labour force participation and unemployment’. Data on CDEP participation helps readers interpret data on Indigenous labour force participation and unemployment.

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Similarly, the previous indicator ‘Long term unemployment’ has been removed as a separate strategic change indicator. Data on long term unemployment are included in the headline indicator ‘Labour force participation and unemployment’.

The previous indicator, ‘Self employment’, has been renamed ‘Self employment and Indigenous business’ to allow data and case studies on Indigenous business more generally to be reported, including self employment.

The previous indicator, ‘Accredited training in leadership, finance or management’ has been renamed ‘Governance capacity and skills’ to allow reporting of a broader range of information and better reflect the true intent of the indicator.

### **Criteria for selection of strategic change indicators**

The consultations raised numerous suggestions for strategic change indicators. All suggestions were assessed against the criteria shown in box 2.2.1. For the most part, the indicators included in the framework met most or all of the criteria. They have also been broadly accepted by Indigenous people as meaningful, and by governments as relevant to policy actions.

#### **Box 2.2.1 Criteria used to select strategic change indicators**

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

The first criterion ‘relevance to priority outcomes’ provides the focus. Without exception, all of the indicators need to demonstrate that policy action in that activity would ultimately contribute to achieving the priority outcomes.

The second criterion, ‘Sensitive to policy interventions and changes in policy settings’, requires that government policies or programs have the potential to influence the indicator. An indicator that governments could not influence would not be included in the framework.

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One of the most important criteria is the existence of an underlying theory of causality and the availability of an evidence base. Without strong evidence or logic for the selection of each strategic change indicator, the framework would lose its predictive power, and with it, much of its utility. For the most part, empirical evidence has provided the basis for satisfying this criterion. For some indicators, however, there was little empirical evidence, but the logic and feedback from consultations were considered compelling.

The existence of data sets or ease of developing them is clearly an important practical consideration. In many cases, the selected indicators are a compromise, due not only to the absence of data, but also because it is unlikely any data will become available in the foreseeable future. In some cases an indicator has been included even when the data are not available on a national basis, or are substantially qualified. These are indicators where there is some likelihood that data quality and availability will improve over time. (For more information on data, see section 2.5.)

In two cases where there were no reliable data available (Indigenous cultural studies and governance), the indicators were nevertheless considered to be so important that qualitative indicators using case studies have been included in the Report.

There is also the potential for some data to yield ambiguous results. For example, an increase in notifications of child abuse or neglect does not necessarily mean that there has been an increase in the incidence of such behaviour, because the proportion of incidents reported may change over time. Nevertheless, because of its importance, child protection has been included in the framework (see sections 3.9 and 9.1).

## **2.3 Feedback from consultations**

As mentioned in chapter 1, consultation with Indigenous people, government agencies and researchers has been an important part of the development of the indicator framework and Report. Initial consultations in 2002-03 provided a foundation for developing the framework (reported in SCRCSSP (2003)).

Following the release of the first Report in November 2003, the Chair of the Steering Committee and the Convenor of its Indigenous Working Group, commenced another round of consultations to obtain feedback on the Report and to explore how the issue of Indigenous governance should be presented in future reports.

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In 2006, following publication of the 2005 Report, the Steering Committee held a third round of consultations to review the indicator framework and seek further feedback on the Report. A detailed description of the consultation process and feedback received was published in SCRGSP (2007a). Changes made to indicators in the framework in response to the consultations are set out in section 2.2.

A wide range of suggestions were made during the 2006 consultations. However, there were some common themes:

- Most importantly, there was broad support for the existing framework — generally, Indigenous people recognised that the indicators reflected the issues that were affecting their communities and causing disadvantage.
- It was often stated that wider distribution of the Report was required to Indigenous organisations and communities and within all governments.
- It was agreed that revisions to the framework should be pursued (see section 2.2), but there was strong support for maintaining its strategic approach, and focusing on a limited number of key indicators.
- There was support for more linkages in the Report, to illustrate the connections between key outcomes.
- There was a desire for greater disaggregation of data between urban, regional and remote areas and, where possible, specific information on Torres Strait Islander people.
- The ‘things that work’ boxes were seen as being very useful. Many people felt there should be more, including for headline indicators — and some suggested inclusion of ‘things that don’t work’.
- There was strong support for identifying the ‘success factors’ behind the ‘things that work’ — particularly where they highlighted government’s interaction with Indigenous organisations and communities.
- Cultural issues were regarded as significant to the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians but there was general acceptance of the difficulty of defining specific indicators relevant for a report on overcoming disadvantage (see section 2.4 for more discussion of culture).
- There were acknowledged difficulties regarding ‘language’ as a purely cultural indicator. The diversity of views mean that further work is required to develop an appropriate indicator.
- There was a general view that improving governance remains critically important at organisational, community and governmental levels and should continue to be targeted in the Report. Participants suggested additional key

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determinants including a bottom-up approach, adequate resources and government engagement with Indigenous communities and organisations.

Reflecting the diversity within the Indigenous population, there were different perspectives on some of the indicators, particularly home ownership and those relating to land. Nevertheless, the acceptance of these indicators within the framework is widespread.

During the course of the consultations, many people asked how governments' progress in addressing the strategic areas for action would be monitored. While the processes for reform and analysis of specific programs and services is beyond the scope of this Report, a summary of implementation measures being adopted by individual governments is contained in appendix 2. Data on Indigenous people's access to a range of government services are included in the Indigenous Compendium of the Review's annual Report on Government Services (SCRGSP 2007b)

Finally, there were many examples of initiatives that were underway, often at the community level, that are producing some good results. As there is no way of reporting these on a national level (or even in most cases, on a State or Territory level), some have been included in boxes on 'things that work' throughout the Report. These examples are important, because they illustrate how things can change for the better, and provide models that other communities can draw upon and adapt for their own use.

## **2.4 Culture**

The representation of culture in the framework has been a constant topic of discussion during consultations with Indigenous people. Many comments have been made and many suggestions for new indicators have been proposed.

One of the messages that came through clearly during consultations in 2002 and 2003 was that no single indicator could adequately reflect the place of culture in the lives of Indigenous people. Culture was so important that it pervaded every aspect of the lives of Indigenous people, and where there was a breakdown in culture, (for example, loss of traditional ways or language) disadvantage was likely to be greater.

Many of the Indigenous people consulted noted the challenge of identifying indicators that could both meet the criteria (for example, data availability and responsiveness to policy action) and have relevance to a broad range of Indigenous people. A further challenge was the need to recognise the diversity of Indigenous culture across Australia.

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Suggested cultural indicators were tested against the criteria (see box 2.2.1). All were ‘meaningful to stakeholders and principally to the Indigenous community’, but many were not sensitive to ‘policy interventions and changes in policy settings’, and often there were no ‘supporting data sets or the potential to develop them’, particularly at a national level. These are essential criteria if the Report is to be an ongoing record of whether, and to what extent, government interventions are being successful.

After assessing suggestions against the criteria, the following cultural indicators were selected for reporting. Because of the pervasive importance of culture to Indigenous people, the cultural indicators are spread across the strategic areas for action, rather than being reported as a separate ‘stand-alone’ group. As emphasised across this Report, there are links across the strategic areas for action and between these areas and the headline indicators. These links are particularly strong for many of the cultural indicators.

### **Learning about culture**

Many Indigenous people said that culturally appropriate curriculum improved the motivation of Indigenous children to attend or remain at school, particularly in the early and middle years of high school. Furthermore, many people raised the scope for Indigenous cultural studies to benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, and to address the ignorance and misunderstanding that often underlie racism.

The ‘Positive childhood and transition to adulthood’ strategic area for action includes the indicator:

- **Indigenous cultural studies in school curriculum and involvement of Indigenous people in development and delivery of Indigenous studies.**

Data are limited in this area, and it is desirable that in time more information is collected. Section 7.3 includes information on:

- culturally inclusive curricula, including some selected case studies
- Indigenous employment in schools.

### **Participation in Indigenous cultural activities.**

Ideas for indicators in this area reflect the diversity of Indigenous culture. Suggestions for this indicator covered a range of activities, including festivals and cultural events; kinship, hunting, gathering and initiation; sport and recreation; art

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and ceremony. The point was made that art and ceremony are significant markers of a society's spiritual and cultural strength in both western and Indigenous contexts.

The 'Functional and resilient families and communities' strategic area for action includes the indicator:

- **Participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities.**

There is strong anecdotal evidence that these activities can foster self-esteem, social interaction, and the development of skills and teamwork, leading to outcomes such as a reduction in juvenile crime. Unfortunately, no data are available for Indigenous people under the age of 15 years.

Section 9.6 includes information on the proportion of people 15 years and over participating in sport, recreation or fitness. Case studies have been included to describe some of the activities that are taking place in various communities.

## **Land**

There has been widespread support for the inclusion of land as a cultural indicator. However, many Indigenous organisations and individuals also stressed the importance of land as an economic indicator. From a slightly different perspective, Torres Strait Islanders have commented that the sea was more culturally important to them than land, although land was important in economic terms. A number of views (sometimes conflicting) were also reflected about native title.

Although there was unanimous agreement that the recognition of the cultural significance of land needed to be included in the Report, there were no concrete suggestions as to what the indicator should be. On the other hand, there was widespread support for the inclusion of the ownership or control of land as an economic indicator.

The 'Functional and resilient families and communities' strategic area for action includes the indicator:

- **Proportion of people with access to their traditional lands.**

Section 9.5 reports information from the ABS 2004-05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) for people in non-remote areas, including:

- recognition of homelands/traditional country
- whether currently living on homelands
- whether allowed to visit homelands.



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The ‘Economic participation and development’ strategic area for action includes the related indicator ‘Indigenous owned or controlled land’ (see section 11.3).

## **Governance and culture**

Several aspects of Indigenous governance were raised during the consultations, and culture was intrinsic to all of them. Governance was seen as an issue which had the capacity to affect people at the individual, community and organisational level.

The ‘Economic participation and development’ strategic area for action includes the indicator:

- **Case studies in governance arrangements.**

In its various dimensions, culture defines how governance arrangements are arrived at and how they operate. On the basis of research and consultations with Indigenous people and organisations, some key determinants of governance have emerged as having general application. Section 11.5 examines each of the following determinants using a series of case study examples:

- governing institutions
- leadership
- self determination
- capacity building
- cultural match
- resources.

## **Other suggestions — language, heritage and law**

The 2006 consultations included discussion of three possible new cultural indicators: language; heritage; and law.

- **Language**

A language indicator attracted widespread support. Indigenous language is fundamentally linked with Indigenous culture and law, and all are intrinsically linked with Indigenous wellbeing. However, there was no clear consensus about the form of a language indicator. The new indicator of ‘engagement with service delivery’ (section 9.7), in part, addresses communication between service providers and Indigenous people but is not proposed as a cultural indicator.

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- **Heritage**

Many Indigenous people and organisations expressed the view that government had a role in ensuring that cultural heritage was protected and maintained. However, it was not possible to identify a measurable outcome indicator that met the selection criteria.

- **Indigenous culture and law**

Several Indigenous organisations emphasised the importance of official recognition of Indigenous culture by governments and the legal system. Suggested indicators included: observance of Indigenous protocols in ceremonies and recognition of Indigenous law and governance. Some aspects of these suggestions are reflected in the governance case studies in section 11.5 of the Report, but no specific indicator could be identified that met the selection criteria.

Consultation participants recognised each of these as important for the wellbeing of Indigenous people but there was no consensus on specific indicators. Consequently, this Report includes additional contextual information on culture where appropriate, and gives greater prominence to the existing cultural indicators in the Report Overview. No additional cultural indicators have been added to the 2007 Report. Continuing research will be undertaken on other possible cultural indicators for future reports.

## **2.5 Data issues**

The data in this Report are the most recent available, and generally reflect the frequency of the data collections. There are some significant data issues that readers need to be aware of when interpreting data in this Report. Appendix 4 contains more information about data limitations.

### **Sources**

The data for this Report have been drawn from three types of sources — census, survey and administrative data (see appendix 4 for more information on data limitations). Each has strengths and weaknesses:

- *Census* data: censuses take place every 5 years, with the most recent in 2006. Data for the 2006 Census will be published by the ABS from the second half of 2007 onwards. Censuses are generally rich in information and have the potential for extensive disaggregation. There is limited use of Census data in this Report but it will be a major data source for the next Report.

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- *Survey* data: surveys, such as the NATSIHS and the NHS, provide a rich source of data at higher levels of aggregation, for example, national and State and Territory data, and sometimes remoteness area disaggregations. The ABS has introduced a three yearly rolling program of Indigenous household surveys, the next being the 2008 NATSISS. These surveys are designed so that core data items are retained for each survey cycle, to enable key data comparisons over time. Data are subject to sample error, especially when disaggregated further than the survey sample was designed to allow.
  - *Administrative* data are frequent (often annual) but are prone to variations in the level of Indigenous identification across jurisdictions and over time. There may also be disparities between states and territories in the definitions used within collections, which make it difficult to compare across jurisdictions or to estimate national totals.

There has been a significant reduction in the availability of hospital data on Indigenous people for this report. Hospital data are now only available for Queensland, WA, SA and the NT. Data from NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT are considered to be of insufficient quality for analytical purposes. See appendix 4 for more discussion of hospital data quality.

## **Interpreting the data**

### *Indigenous identification*

The accuracy of data on Indigenous people depends on both their willingness, and the opportunities provided, to identify themselves as Indigenous. This can vary across data collections.

This is particularly relevant to interpreting time series data. Improvements over time in data collections (for example, the adoption or correct application of the standard ABS question on Indigenous status) will improve the level of Indigenous identification, but in some cases will also make trend analysis difficult. For example, an increase in the recorded use of a service by Indigenous people might reflect an actual increase in use, or better identification of existing service users.

This Report uses ABS estimates of the Indigenous population. These estimates are based on a set of assumptions about likely trends in Indigenous population growth. Information about these assumptions is contained in box 2.5.1. Information about the composition of the Indigenous population can be found in appendix 3.

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### Box 2.5.1 Indigenous population growth

In September 2004, the ABS released a new series of experimental Indigenous population estimates and projections (ABS catalogue number 3238.0). This publication contains experimental estimates of the Indigenous population for Australia, and states and territories for 2001; and projections from 2002 to 2009.

Based on ABS 'low series' assumptions on Indigenous fertility and mortality, which assume no further 'unexplained' growth in the Indigenous population, (that is, growth that cannot be explained by natural increase), Australia's Indigenous population is projected to increase from 459 000 in 2001 to 529 000 in 2009 (an annual average rate of 1.8 per cent). Under the ABS 'high series' assumptions, which assume that the 'unexplained' growth experienced between 1996 and 2001 continues, the Indigenous population is projected to grow to 600 000 in 2009 (or 3.4 per cent annually).

Under either set of assumptions, the Indigenous population is projected to grow much faster than the total Australian population rate of 1.2 per cent during 2001-02.

In this Report, the 2001 estimates and 'low series' projections from ABS catalogue number 3238.0 have been used where relevant as population denominators for the purpose of calculating rates and proportions.

Revised Indigenous population estimates and projections based on the 2006 Census are likely to be published by the ABS in 2007 and 2008.

*Source:* ABS (2004a) unpublished.

Care should be taken in interpreting the results for some indicators, because of differences in data collections across jurisdictions. Significant differences in definitions or data collections are noted as appropriate.

Results can also be affected by Indigenous people's willingness (or 'propensity') to access particular services. For example:

- different rates of substantiated child abuse and neglect (section 3.9) across jurisdictions or over time may be a result of different propensities to report child abuse, rather than differences in its occurrence
- different rates of hospitalisation for assault (section 3.10) across jurisdictions or over time may be a result of different propensities to present at a hospital and/or report that an injury was caused by assault.

#### *Interpreting survey data (standard errors, error bars and confidence intervals)*

The Report draws extensively on ABS survey data, including the:

- 2004-05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)

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- 2004-05 National Health Survey (NHS)
  - 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)
  - 2002 General Social Survey (GSS)
  - 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS).

The results from these and other surveys are subject to sampling error, because they are based on samples of the total population. Where survey data are shown in charts in this Report, error bars are included, showing 95 per cent confidence intervals. There is a 95 per cent chance that the true value of the data item lies within the interval shown by the error bars. If there is an overlap between confidence intervals for different data items, it cannot be stated for certain that there is a statistically significant difference between the results. The Review has tested the statistical significance of differences between survey items and only highlighted differences in the text where they are statistically significant (although it should be noted that ‘statistically significant’ differences are not necessarily material or important).

Relative standard errors (RSEs) for all survey data included in the Report are shown in the attachment tables referred to in the Report, which are available on the Review website ([www.pc.gov.au/gsp](http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp)). The 95 per cent confidence intervals shown in the error bars in the charts are equivalent to 1.96 times the RSEs above and below the estimate. See ABS (2004b) for more information about RSEs, confidence intervals and tests of statistical significance. Information on the calculation of error bars is included in the glossary.

Data on years 3, 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy also include 95 per cent confidence intervals, which are explained in sections 6.2 and 7.1.

## **Disaggregation**

Most of the indicators in this Report are expressed as rates, or as a proportion of a particular population. Estimates of numbers of people are sometimes included, but raw numbers do not show the relative disadvantage of different groups. Using rates makes it easier to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and where possible, to compare State and Territory breakdowns.

Indicator results can vary according to a range of factors, such as where people live and their age. To show these variations, some indicators are broken down by various categories — for example, by gender, remoteness and age. Such analysis will often indicate that Indigenous people are disadvantaged compared to non-Indigenous people. However, the extent of disadvantage may vary between the

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different groups of Indigenous people. Where useful, rate ratios are calculated to compare rates between different groups.

Remoteness areas used in this Report are from the ABS Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC). Some tables are disaggregated into five categories (major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote). When data quality does not support disaggregation into five categories, they are sometimes collapsed into three (major cities, regional — inner and outer regional; and remote — remote and very remote) or two categories (non-remote — major cities, inner and outer regional); and remote (remote and very remote).

The ASGC Remoteness classification identifies a location in Australia as having a particular degree of remoteness based on its distance from population centres of various sizes.

The aim of the ASGC remoteness structure is not to provide a measure of the remoteness of a particular location but to divide Australia into five broad categories of remoteness for comparative statistical purposes. The degree of remoteness of a place is determined using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA). Places with similar ARIA scores are added together to form the remoteness areas in each State and Territory. A map of Australia showing geographic areas according to each of the five remoteness categories is included in section 11.3. For more information on how ARIA and remoteness are defined see ABS (2001a, 2001b).

## **Age standardisation**

The Indigenous population has a younger age profile than the non-Indigenous population. Age standardisation, which accounts for differences in the age structures of populations, enables more realistic comparisons to be made between populations, and in this Report has been applied to relevant data on health, labour market and justice outcomes.

## **2.6 References**

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2001a, *ABS Views on Remoteness, 2001*, Cat. no. 1244.0, Canberra.
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