
2 The framework

This chapter explains the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* report framework. As noted in chapter 1, the report aims to be more than a compilation of statistics. The report is intended to provide meaningful information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and governments to assist in targeting efforts to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

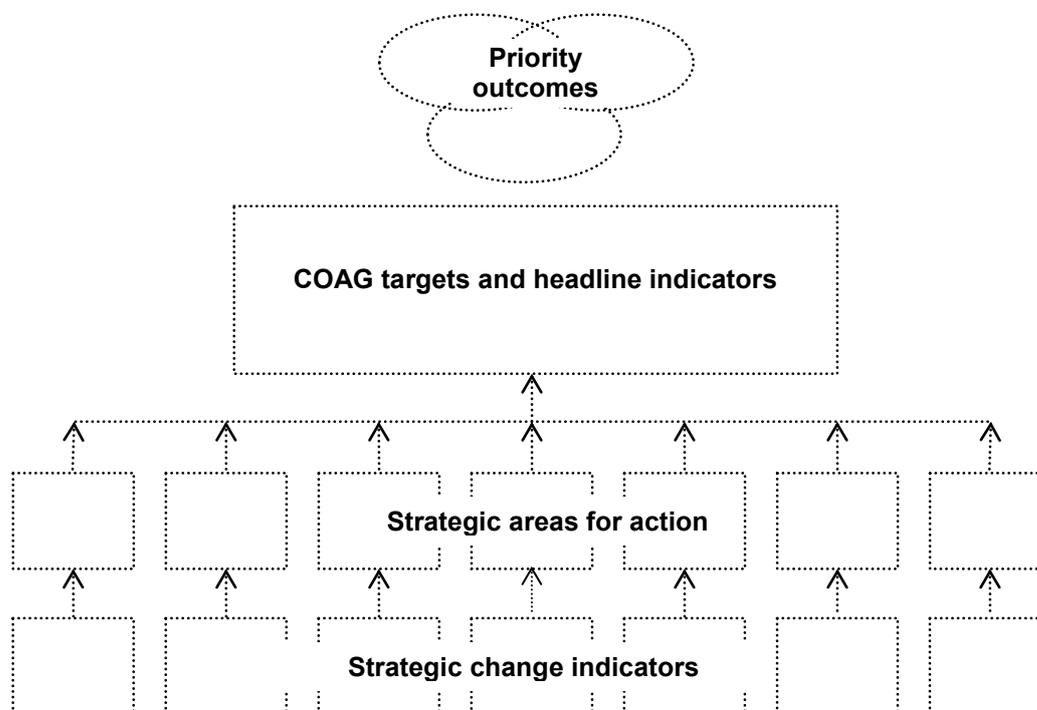
Section 2.1 describes how the key elements of the framework fit together. Section 2.2 summarises changes to the framework of indicators for this report following feedback from a review of the report in 2012, including the report's broader focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing.

2.1 The framework

While there are many reports on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, reports about the performance of governments often focus on specific programs or policies, and take a 'silo' approach — education is reported by departments of education, health by health departments — and tend to focus on service inputs (how budgets are spent) and outputs (the actual services delivered), rather than on the outcomes achieved. While information on inputs and outputs is valuable, particularly when evaluating the efficiency of a specific program or service, this report focuses on outcomes — the actual lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Information on outcomes is crucial to measure whether progress is actually being made in closing the gap, regardless of the level of inputs and outputs.

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

Figure 2.1.1 **Framework elements**



Priority outcomes

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

- safe, healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and cultural identity
- positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self-harm
- improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities.

These outcomes reflect COAG’s vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to have the same life opportunities as other Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their organisations have also expressed support for these outcomes, in extensive consultations over several years.

It is extremely difficult to measure progress in achieving such broadly stated, aspirational outcomes, and to hold governments and service providers accountable. Therefore, the framework includes two layers of quantifiable indicators. The logic of the framework is

that, over time, measurable improvement in these indicators will demonstrate progress toward the priority outcomes.

COAG targets and headline indicators

The first layer of indicators is made up of the six targets COAG has set for closing the gaps between outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians, and a further six headline indicators selected by the Steering Committee to represent significant, high level outcomes.

In October 2008, COAG announced six closing the gaps targets (the name of the indicator as presented in the OID report framework is in italics, followed by the full text of the target, and the COAG-agreed target date in square brackets):

- *life expectancy* — close the life expectancy gap within a generation [by 2031]
- *young child mortality* — halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade [by 2018]
- *early childhood education* — ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to quality early childhood education within five years [by 2013]
- *reading, writing and numeracy* — halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade [by 2018]
- *year 12 attainment* — halve the gap for Indigenous 20–24 year olds in year 12 or equivalent attainment rates [by 2020]
- *employment* — halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade [by 2018] (COAG 2008).

In May 2014 COAG agreed to a new target on student attendance, but a specific measure has not yet been determined. Student attendance data are included in this report as an indicator in the Education and training chapter (chapter 7, section 7.1).

These ambitious targets highlight specific outcomes in areas that are either significant in their own right (life expectancy and early childhood mortality) or are important preconditions or preventative factors for addressing long term disadvantage (access to preschool, learning outcomes and school attainment, and employment).

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

- post-secondary education, participation and attainment
- disability and chronic disease

-
- household and individual income
 - substantiated child abuse and neglect
 - family and community violence
 - imprisonment and juvenile detention.

Together, the COAG targets and headline indicators provide an overview of progress in overcoming the disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and act as proxy measures for the priority outcomes.

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the evidence base supporting the selection of each indicator, the definitions of the specific measures used to report against each indicator, and the available data.

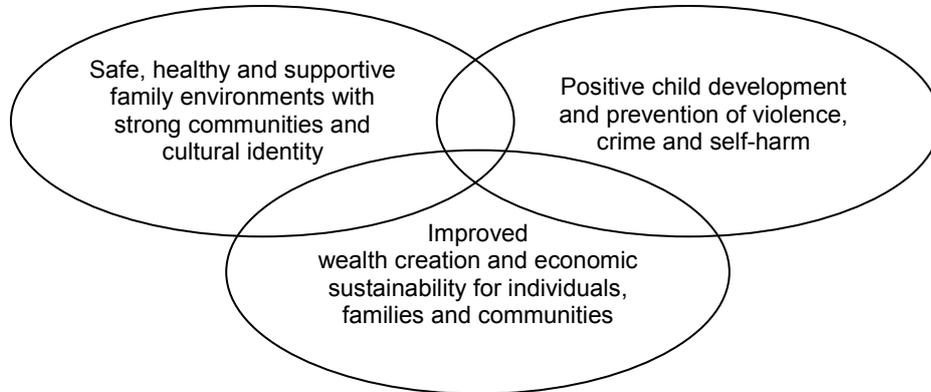
Strategic areas for action and strategic change indicators

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

The full strategic framework is presented in figure 2.1.2. Chapters 5 to 11 include the evidence base supporting the selection of each strategic area for action and its associated indicators, the definitions of the specific measures used to report against each indicator, and the available data.

Figure 2.1.2 Multi-level indicator framework

Priority outcomes



COAG targets and headline indicators

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

Strategic areas for action

Governance, 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 in 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 waters	6.1 Antenatal care 6.2 Health behaviours during pregnancy 6.3 Teenage birth rate 6.4 Birthweight 6.5 Early childhood hospitalisations 6.6 Injury and preventable disease 6.7 Ear health 6.8 Basic skills for life and learning	7.1 Year 1 to 10 attendance 7.2 Teacher quality 7.3 School engagement 7.4 Transition from school to work	8.1 Access to primary health care 8.2 Potentially preventable hospitalisations 8.3 Potentially avoidable deaths 8.4 Tobacco consumption and harm 8.5 Obesity and nutrition 8.6 Oral health 8.7 Mental health 8.8 Suicide and self-harm	9.1 Employment by full time/part time status, sector and occupation 9.2 Indigenous owned or controlled land and business 9.3 Home ownership 9.4 Income support	10.1 Overcrowding in housing 10.2 Rates of disease associated with poor environmental health 10.3 Access to clean water and functional sewerage and electricity services	11.1 Alcohol consumption and harm 11.2 Drug and other substance use and harm 11.3 Juvenile diversions 11.4 Repeat offending 11.5 Community functioning

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

Strategic areas for action

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

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

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

The strategic areas do not mirror typical government service silos. Closing the gaps in outcomes will require the combined efforts of governments, the community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians themselves. In some cases, a specific service area will logically play a major role, but in all strategic areas, more than one government agency will have to take action in order to achieve better outcomes. For example, in the area of ‘education and training’, the school system has an important role to play, but so do agencies dealing with transport, housing and health. Chapter 3 discusses in more detail the need for coordinated government action to address the complex interactions between different aspects of disadvantage, and chapter 13 provides some analysis of the interactions that contribute to multiple disadvantage.

During consultations, many people asked how governments’ progress in addressing the strategic areas for action would be monitored. The monitoring of specific government programs and services is beyond the scope of this report, but a summary of implementation measures being adopted by individual governments is contained in appendix 2. Information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ access to a range of government services is included in the Indigenous Compendium to the Steering Committee’s annual *Report on Government Services* (SCRGSP 2014b). Estimates of government expenditure on services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are contained in the biennial *Indigenous Expenditure Report* (SCRGSP forthcoming).

Strategic change indicators

A small number of targeted, shorter term ‘strategic change indicators’ measure progress for each strategic area for action. These indicators make it easier to track short term progress, and improve accountability for outcomes. (The term ‘indicator’ has a particular meaning in this report, and is distinguished from the term ‘measure — see box 2.1.1).

Box 2.1.1 Indicators and measures

In this report, the term ‘indicator’ refers to a broad statement of what outcome is to be measured. Indicators are usually described in general terms, to allow for developments in the evidence base and changing data sets over time.

In this report, the term ‘measure’ refers to how an indicator will be measured. Data limitations mean that, sometimes, proxy measures must be used to report against indicators, and multiple measures may be required to illustrate a single indicator. Information on the measures reported for each indicator is provided at the beginning of each indicator section.

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

Many indicators could have been included in this report. Potential strategic change indicators were assessed against the criteria listed in box 2.1.2 before they were added to the framework. Most of the indicators in the report meet all the criteria — but a few indicators are regarded as so important that they are included even though they do not meet some criteria.

Box 2.1.2 **Criteria used to select strategic change indicators**

1. Required by alignment with National Indigenous Reform Agreement indicators
2. Measures an outcome (rather than an input or output) or a close proxy for an outcome
3. Relevance to priority outcomes
4. Improvement in the strategic change indicator result in improvement over time in the COAG targets and headline indicators
5. Supported by strong logic or empirical evidence
6. Sensitive to policy interventions and changes in policy settings
7. Meaningful to stakeholders and principally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
8. Unambiguous and clear in meaning and interpretation
9. The existence, or ease, of developing supporting data sets.

The first criterion notes the requirement to align relevant indicators in the OID report with indicators in the NIRA. The second criterion notes the OID report's emphasis on measurable *outcomes* (impacts on individuals or communities) rather than inputs (resources spent) or outputs (services provided). In some cases, where there is strong evidence that certain inputs or outputs are closely linked to an outcome, those inputs or outputs may be included as proxy indicators of that outcome (for example, access to primary health care and quality antenatal care).

The next three criteria are closely related — the whole framework is geared toward measuring progress toward the priority outcomes. The report draws its strength from the evidence base or underlying theory of causality that links improvement in a strategic change indicator to improvement in the COAG targets and headline indicators, and therefore progress toward the priority outcomes. For most indicators, empirical evidence provides the causal link. For some indicators, despite limited empirical evidence, persuasive logic and compelling feedback from consultations provide the link.

The sixth and seventh criteria are also closely linked. The terms of reference for the report require it to inform Australian governments about the impact of policy programs and interventions, and to be meaningful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. All indicators have been formally agreed by all Australian governments, and accepted as meaningful by a broad range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals (see chapter 1 on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians).

The eighth criterion recognises that, to be most useful, an indicator should be clear and unambiguous. Most indicators in this report are relatively easy to understand, and it is intuitively obvious whether progress is being made. However, in some cases, important indicators may yield ambiguous results; for example, an increase in notifications of child abuse or neglect might reflect declining child welfare but, alternatively, might reflect an

increase in the proportion of incidents being reported, investigated and addressed. Where indicators are potentially ambiguous, the report includes explanatory text to assist interpretation.

The final criterion recognises the practical need for relevant data to report against an indicator. In some cases, proxy measures are reported and, in a few cases, important indicators have been included even though data are substantially qualified, not available for all jurisdictions or not available at all (and qualitative information is reported instead). Some of these indicators have been identified as high priorities by COAG (for example, ‘teacher quality’ and ‘school engagement’) and data strategies are being developed.

Relationships between the indicators

Causal relationships are at the heart of the indicator framework, linking strategic change indicators with the COAG targets and headline indicators, and therefore the priority outcomes. Chapter 3 looks at interactions across the framework and chapter 13 examines interactions and multiple disadvantage in more detail. More information about relationships between indicators is provided in the evidence base for each indicator.

However, much of the available information about links between indicators is at a fairly general level. More sophisticated statistical analysis is only possible where a range of information has been collected on a consistent basis for each individual or household, preferably over time. The AIHW and ABS, in partnership with states and territories, have developed national best practice guidelines for data linkage and have completed an examination of current and planned data linkage work relevant to Indigenous identification (AIHW and ABS 2012). There are also a number of linkage projects underway bringing together data from the 2011 Census with other datasets (for example, the Indigenous mortality project (ABS 2013)). At the jurisdictional level, WA has coordinated data linkage activities through a number of agencies and academia, which connects all available health and related information for the WA population. Since 1995, more than 700 projects have made use of WA linked data (see www.datalinkage-wa.org/projects).

Things that work

The Steering Committee recognises that data alone cannot tell the complete story about the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Although there are gaps in almost all reported outcomes, there are many examples of successful initiatives, often at the community level, that are acting to close those gaps. These successes are often not apparent from the aggregate data in this report.

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

Feedback from the review of the report in 2012 (covered in more detail in section 2.2) indicated that, although many readers of the report valued the ‘things that work’ case studies, there was a general desire to improve the rigour of the case studies, to ensure that highlighted programs and services really were making a difference. For this report, the Steering Committee agreed that, wherever possible, ‘things that work’ case studies will be drawn from the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse evidence based evaluations of specific programs.

The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, jointly managed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, was established by COAG to collate evidence on what works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage (AIHW and AIFS nd).¹ This report draws on a range of Clearinghouse outputs to inform the ‘things that work’:

- the Assessed collection of selected research and evaluations
- Issues Papers reviewing the findings on what works on specific topics
- Resource Sheets summarising the evidence on more narrowly defined topics and its applicability to specific policies and/or programs.

Where no relevant material has been available from the Clearinghouse, other potential ‘things that work’ case studies were assessed against the criteria in box 2.1.3. A very high threshold was applied to ensure appropriate rigour. In a few cases, the Steering Committee has included case studies of innovative reforms that appear worthwhile, but which have not been evaluated. In such cases, the Steering Committee has explicitly noted the desirability of formal evaluation.

Box 2.1.3 ‘Things that work’ criteria

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

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

The increased rigour in the selection of case studies has resulted in an overall decrease in the number included in this report. This reflects a lack of rigorously evaluated programs in

¹ Commonwealth funding for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (CTGCH) ceased in June 2014. The AIHW and AIFS have advised the Steering Committee that all resources and publications currently on the website will continue to be publicly available, but once all commissioned issues papers and resources sheets have been released, no new material will be added to the CTCGH website (see www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/).

the Indigenous policy area. As noted by participants in the Productivity Commission’s Roundtable on Indigenous policy evaluation in 2013 ‘Significant gaps exist in the Australian evidence base, due to [the] lack of mandated evaluations’ (PC 2013, page 6, summary of roundtable discussions).

2.2 Changes to the framework for this report

The OID report’s strategic framework has changed over time, responding to changes in government priorities, developments in the evidence base and feedback from consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their organisations, academics, researchers and service providers.

Following the release of the 2011 OID report, the Productivity Commission, on behalf of the Steering Committee, commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd (ACER) to review the report. The ACER review found that most users considered the report to be a useful compendium of information on the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. However, the review made a number of recommendations for changes to the report’s production and content (ACER 2012). The Steering Committee developed a set of proposed responses to the ACER review (SCRGSP 2013), which formed the basis of national consultations. Following those consultations, the Steering Committee agreed a set of final responses, which have been implemented for this report (SCRGSP 2014a).

The following sections discuss two major changes for this edition of the OID report:

- increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement in all phases of the reporting process
- a greater focus on ‘strengths-based’ reporting and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ conceptions of wellbeing.

2.2.1 Increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have been actively involved with the OID report since its inception. The report had its origins in a recommendation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 2000, and ATSIC was a member of the working group that advised the Steering Committee on the first edition of the report. Each edition of the report has benefited from consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in all states and territories, and in a range of remoteness areas. Since the 2005 report, a different Indigenous academic referee has reviewed each edition of the report and advised the Steering Committee on the appropriateness of the report’s language, presentation and content.

However, the ACER review of the report identified a need for more visible engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and the Steering Committee has introduced some significant changes for this edition of the report.

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- The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (established in 2010) was invited to join the working group that advised the Steering Committee on this report. As an independent representative body, the National Congress is an advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. (The Congress has made clear to the Steering Committee that its involvement is not a substitute for engagement with the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.)
 - The previous practice of engaging a single Indigenous academic referee has been expanded, with different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations or experts reviewing each section of the report. The name of the reviewer is noted in relevant sections of the report, and all reviewers are acknowledged on p. xi but the final content of the report remains the responsibility of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is extremely grateful to these organisations and individuals, and acknowledges the significant contributions they have made to the report.

2.2.2 Strengths-based reporting and wellbeing

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians contributed to a key development in this report — a greater focus on strengths-based reporting with a reframing from ‘overcoming disadvantage’ to ‘improving wellbeing’.

Strengths-based reporting

The original terms of reference for this report called for ‘...a regular report to COAG against key indicators of disadvantage ... that are of relevance to all governments and Indigenous stakeholders ...’. In previous editions of the report, nearly all indicators compared outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians, with a particular focus on the ‘gap’.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations that participated in the ACER review criticised this essentially negative, or deficit, approach, and called for an appropriate acknowledgment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths, as well as objective reporting on disadvantage. Strengths-based approaches have been adopted in other high profile reports, such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, which:

... adopts a strengths based approach to ensure policies and programs improve health, social and emotional wellbeing and resilience, and promote positive health behaviours. It emphasises the centrality of culture in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rights of individuals to a safe, healthy and empowered life. (Australian Government 2013, p. 4).

For this report, the Steering Committee has implemented a more strengths-based approach by:

- giving greater emphasis to previously reported strengths-based indicators (including indicators of culture), and including additional strengths-based indicators (see below)

-
- where relevant, noting positive outcomes for the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians before discussing the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians
 - expressing existing 'negative' indicators in the positive (for example, changing 'tooth decay' to 'oral health')
 - retaining the 'things that work' examples of successful programs, with increased rigour to ensure that highlighted examples really are making a difference
 - renaming the former 'Governance and Leadership' area as 'Governance, leadership and culture' (the most significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific conceptions of wellbeing were around 'culture') and making it the first strategic area, to emphasise its significance as underpinning all other outcomes
 - grouping the 'cultural' indicators together under this strategic area, to increase their prominence and allow for a discussion about the connections between culture and other outcomes.

Measuring wellbeing

Respondents to the ACER review noted a distinction between 'reducing disadvantage' and 'improving wellbeing'. The broad term 'wellbeing' encompasses a number of related concepts, and there can be specific Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing. Table 2.2.1 sets out the broad elements of three Indigenous strengths-based frameworks:

- the ABS Indigenous wellbeing framework
- the Maori wellbeing framework
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework.

There is a high degree of overlap between these frameworks and the indicators in previous OID reports — for example, all include measures of community safety, health, education and employment — and previous editions included some indicators that were specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing. However, as discussed below, the ACER review found that the report could do more to reflect other outcomes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians themselves viewed as important.

Table 2.2.1 Wellbeing framework elements

<i>ABS Indigenous wellbeing framework</i>	<i>Māori wellbeing framework</i>	<i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework</i>
Culture, heritage and leisure	Subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction; sense of control; health status; connections)	Health status and outcomes (health conditions; human function; life expectancy and wellbeing; deaths)
Family, kinship and community	Social wellbeing (whānau ^a contact; access to help; voluntary work; trust; experience of crime and discrimination)	Determinants of health (environmental factors; socioeconomic factors; community capacity; health behaviours; person-related factors)
Health	Cultural wellbeing (knowledge of cultures and ability to access in time of need; use and proficiency in language)	Health system performance (effective/appropriate/efficient; responsive; accessible; continuous; capable; sustainable)
Education, learning and skills	Economic wellbeing (material standard of living; paid work; housing problems)	
Customary, voluntary and paid work		
Income and economic resources		
Housing, infrastructure and services		
Law and Justice		
Citizenship and governance		

^a There is no common definition of Whānau, but it is described as connection to a person, either through a common ancestor or through a common purpose or goal (Tibble, A and Ussher, S 2012, *Kei te pewhea to whānau? Exploring whānau using the Māori Social Survey*, Statistics New Zealand).

Sources: ABS 2010, *Framework for Measuring Wellbeing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2010*, Cat. no. 4703.0, Canberra, ACT; Statistics New Zealand 2014, *Te Kupenga 2013 data dictionary*, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/~media/Statistics/surveys-and-methods/our-surveys/te-kupenga-data-dictionary/te-kupenga-2013-data-dictionary-pdf> (accessed 20 May 2014); AHMAC 2012, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2012*, Department of Health, Canberra.

Culture and wellbeing

Two clear messages from consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are that:

- no single indicator can adequately reflect the importance of culture in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- culture underpins many of the outcomes across the framework, and the links across the strategic areas for action, and between these areas and the COAG targets and headline indicators, are particularly strong.

In previous editions of the OID report, the cultural indicators were spread across the strategic areas for action, to reflect the way culture pervades every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. For this report, the cultural indicators have been grouped together under the ‘Governance, leadership and culture’ strategic area, to allow for a more detailed discussion of the significance of these indicators as a group. In addition, the ‘Governance, leadership and culture’ strategic area has been moved from ‘last’ to ‘first’ in the diagram, to emphasise the importance of cultural outcomes to all other outcomes in the framework.

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 such as this. Acknowledging these constraints, the Steering Committee has agreed to significantly increase the number of indicators of culture and wellbeing included in this report.

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

- *Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures* (section 5.1) (new for this report). 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 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- *Participation in decision making* (section 5.2) (new for this report). 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) (in this strategic area in previous reports). ‘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) (in this strategic area in previous reports). The case studies emphasise the importance of culture as an essential determinant of good governance
- *Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance* (section 5.5) (new for this report). For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, language is an important aspect of culture and wellbeing
- *Indigenous cultural studies* (section 5.6) (in the ‘Education and training’ strategic area in previous reports). Cultural studies can benefit both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (culturally appropriate education can contribute to good ‘mainstream’ academic outcomes) and non-Indigenous Australians (increasing knowledge can lead to shared views and increased respect)
- *Participation in community activities* (section 5.7) (in the ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic area in previous reports). 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

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- *Access to traditional lands and waters* (section 5.8) (*Access to traditional lands* in the ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic area in previous reports — the addition of access to *waters* is new for this report). 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).

Other sections of the report also examine aspects of wellbeing:

- *Mental health* (section 8.7) (in the ‘Healthy lives’ strategic area). Mental health is explored as part of the broader concept of social and emotional wellbeing
- *Indigenous owned or controlled land and business* (section 9.2) (in the ‘Economic participation’ strategic area). Ownership of land can provide cultural, social and economic benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- *Community functioning* (section 11.5) (in the ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic area is new for this report). Consultations emphasised the importance of community wellbeing to individual wellbeing. Whilst many of the individual components of the community functioning measure are reported elsewhere in the OID, drawing the components together provides an overall assessment of community functioning
- *Measuring multiple disadvantage* (chapter 13). This chapter explores the relationships between different aspects of disadvantage, including cross-tabulations against some broader aspects of wellbeing, such as removal from family, core activity restriction and absence of non-school qualifications.

Other potential culture and wellbeing indicators

Consultations suggested some other indicators that were highly meaningful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. However, some of these potential indicators were in areas that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians regarded as their own responsibility, not that of governments (for example, ‘spirituality’). For other potential indicators, there was no consensus on specific indicators or no supporting data which would allow reporting.

The Steering Committee is committed to ongoing research into other potential culture and wellbeing indicators for future reports, and welcomes suggestions of potential concepts, indicators and data sources that it should consider.

2.3 References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2013, *Death registrations to Census linkage project: Key findings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 2011-2012*, Information paper, Cat. no. 3302.0.55.005, [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3302.0.55.005 main+features22011-2012](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3302.0.55.005%20main+features22011-2012) (accessed 26 May 2014).
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