
3 Key themes and interpretation

This chapter provides some background to assist readers to interpret the data in this report, and draws together some of the report's overarching issues and themes.

- Interpreting the data in this report requires an understanding of the difficulties associated with accurately estimating the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (section 3.1), and an awareness of other issues that may affect the quality of data used for reporting (section 3.2).
- As well as an awareness of the historical context that has influenced current outcomes (chapter 1, section 1.4), it is also important to be aware of the demographic characteristics of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, which differ markedly from those of the non-Indigenous population (section 3.3).
- Although the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians live in cities or regional areas, a relatively high proportion live in remote areas, and there is a particular policy focus on improving outcomes for those living in remote areas (section 3.4).
- There are significant interactions across many of the outcomes measured in this report. Different aspects of disadvantage are often interrelated, and coordinated action by many areas of government may be needed to address the drivers of disadvantage (section 3.5).
- Not everything that matters can be captured in indicators. This report includes numerous case studies of projects and programs that are successfully addressing the disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. These 'things that work' have some common characteristics or 'success factors' (section 3.6).
- Finally, while this report focuses on Australia, it contains a small amount of information on comparisons with outcomes for indigenous peoples in other countries including the many challenges in making international comparisons (section 3.7).

3.1 Estimating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations

How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians identified?

All the information in this report is based on self-identification by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and, therefore, relies on an individual's view of their Indigenous status. A small number of administrative data collections require people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to provide proof of Indigenous descent or acceptance by an Indigenous community, but this is not necessary for most data collections. Therefore, the accuracy and reliability of the data in this report depend on the opportunities provided to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and people's willingness to do so. In some collections, Indigenous status for a relatively large proportion of people may be recorded incorrectly — either as not stated or as non-Indigenous. The ABS and the AIHW are progressing work funded under Schedule F of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) to improve the quality of Indigenous identification in Census and administrative data collections.

The level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification can vary over time and across data collections. Improvements over time in data collections (for example, the adoption or correct application of the standard ABS question on Indigenous status) will improve the accuracy of identification data but, in some cases, will also make trend analysis difficult — for example, it might be difficult to establish whether an increase in the recorded use of a service by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians reflects an actual increase in use, or improved recording of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users.

How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous populations estimated?

Estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous populations are used extensively in this report for calculating rates (for example, hospitalisations per 100 000 people) and percentages (for example, percentage of people aged 18 years and over). Using rates and percentages makes it easier to compare outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with outcomes for non-Indigenous Australians.

Estimating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

The five-yearly Census provides the basis for estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. As a proportion of the population are not counted in the Census, the ABS adjusts the Census count to derive the estimated resident Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (ABS 2012a). As explained in the section 'Interpreting data in the

report’, the Census undercount may affect analysis of outcomes measured using the Census.

For non-Census years, the ABS calculates estimates and projections of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The most recent projections were based on adjusted 2011 Census data and a set of assumptions about likely trends in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population growth (box 3.1.1).

Box 3.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population estimates and projections

On 30 April 2014, the ABS published estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population for 2001 to 2011, and projections for 2012 to 2026, for Australia and each State and Territory and by remoteness (ABS 2014). These estimates are adjusted to account for the undercount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the 2011 Census, but are not adjusted for the unexpected rise in Indigenous identification from the 2006 Census to the 2011 Census.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia as at 30 June 2011 is used as the base for the projection series. Using assumptions about future fertility, paternity, life expectancy at birth and migration, the 2014 publication provided three main sets of projections:

- series A assumes a higher amount of growth
- series B assumes a moderate amount of growth
- series C assumes a smaller amount of growth.

The ABS suggests that series B will be the most appropriate choice for most users and, in this report, series B projections have been used.

Source: ABS 2014, Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026, Cat. no. 3238.0, Canberra.

Between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses, there was a 21 per cent increase in the number of people identified as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, with almost one-third of the increase (30 per cent) not explained by the standard assumptions about the likely population trends. After each Census, the ABS produces time series estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population based on that Census count, by backcasting around this estimate. The backcast series shows what the currently identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (based on the latest Census) would have been in previous periods, based purely on demographic change. As explained in the section ‘Interpreting data in the report’, the unexplained increase in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population between the 2006 and 2011 Census affects analysis of outcomes measured using the Census. This change is dealt with in this report by using revised 2011 Census based population estimates for historical rates.

Estimating the non-Indigenous population

The ABS only publishes official non-Indigenous population data for Census years. For other years, non-Indigenous population data are derived by subtracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population data from total population data. (Based on ABS advice, this report derives the non-Indigenous population by subtracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population projections from the total estimated resident population).¹ Such figures have a degree of uncertainty and should be used with caution, particularly as the time from the base year of the projection series increases.

3.2 Interpreting data in the report

The data used in this report, like all data, have limitations. Readers should bear the following issues in mind when interpreting the data. (Appendix 3 contains more information about data limitations.)

Timeliness

The data in this report are the most recent available. Many data collections are not updated annually (particularly surveys and the Census), and some administrative data collections require significant time for processing and validation between collection and publication (creating lags in reporting annual data).

There are often trade-offs between timeliness and cost, or timeliness and respondent burden. Where outcomes are not expected to change rapidly, the benefits of more timely reporting may not outweigh the costs. However, timeliness can be crucial for data that relate to quickly moving outcomes.

Census data

The 2011 ABS Census of Population and Housing was a major data source for this report. The Census is rich in information and has the potential for extensive disaggregation (for example, by State and Territory, remoteness and age group).

Indigenous undercount

The ABS estimates that the 2011 Census did not count around 17 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (ABS 2012b). This undercount may affect analysis of outcomes measured using the Census, as it cannot be assumed that those who were not

¹ Where preliminary ERP are used, the Steering Committee follows the approach endorsed for the NIRA of using the first release preliminary ERP. These data are only revised once final ERP are available.

counted in the Census share the same characteristics as those who were. This is particularly important where the undercount is concentrated among particular groups of people, such as those in particular geographic or remoteness areas, or in particular age cohorts.

Unexplained increase in estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

Nationally, almost one third of the 21 per cent increase between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses could not be explained by standard assumptions about natural increase — births, deaths and net migration. The unexplained increase in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population may affect analysis of outcomes over time measured using Census data.

- The unexplained increase implies that some people who were counted as non-Indigenous (or whose Indigenous status was recorded as unknown) in the 2006 Census were counted as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the 2011 Census (and ABS analysis indicates this change in identification moves in both directions). It is therefore not possible to say with certainty whether changes in measured outcomes across the two Censuses are due to changes in the outcome being measured, or whether they are due to a change in the group of people whose outcomes are being measured.
- Census-based population data are often used in combination with administrative data to calculate rates or percentages. It is not known whether the unexplained increase in Indigenous identification in the Census has been matched by a similar increase in identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in administrative data.

The impact of the unexplained increase in Indigenous identification in the Census is particularly important where the increase is concentrated among particular groups of people, such as those in particular geographic or remoteness areas, or in particular age cohorts. The unexplained increase in 2011 was mainly among children and people living in the eastern states. Of the 27 800 unexplained increase:

- 94 per cent (26 100 out of 27 800) were in NSW, Victoria and Queensland
- 34 per cent (9400 out of 27 800) was attributable to children aged 5–9 years in 2011. About 10 500 more people aged 20–54 years in 2011 identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin than people aged 15–49 years in 2006. Many of these people would have been parents and completed Census forms on behalf of their children, contributing to the increase in the count of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children aged less than 15 years (ABS 2013b).²

² The distribution of the unexplained increase by remoteness area is not available.

Survey data

Surveys can provide a rich source of data, but are often only reliable at higher levels of aggregation, for example, national and State and Territory data, and sometimes remoteness area disaggregation. (The reliability of survey data at lower levels of disaggregation is limited by sampling error.)

The ABS has historically operated a three-yearly rolling program of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household surveys, the most recent being the 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). Data from this survey were released from 28 April 2016, and form an important component of this report. The next survey in the program is yet to be determined.³

Sample size limits the extent to which data can be disaggregated by different factors such as geography, age and sex, particularly for characteristics that are not widespread across the population. The sample for the NATSISS was designed to provide reliable estimates for remote and non-remote areas, by State and Territory and for Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Data from other ABS surveys (for example, the General Social Survey and the National Health Survey) are included in this report, often to provide non-Indigenous comparators for NATSISS data. Currently, most general population surveys do not contain a large enough representative sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to allow for disaggregation by Indigenous status.

Confidence intervals and relative standard errors

Results from sample surveys are subject to sampling error because they are based on samples of the total population, rather than the whole population. (Data collections that seek to include the entire population, including the Census, are not subject to sampling error.)

Where sample survey data are shown in charts in this report, error bars are included, showing 95 per cent confidence intervals⁴. This means that there is a 95 per cent chance that the true value of the measure lies within the interval shown by the error bars. This report uses standard tests of statistical significance and only highlights differences if they are statistically significant (although it should be noted that, just because a difference is 'statistically significant', that does not mean the difference is necessarily material or important).

³ The ABS is currently developing the Australian Population Survey which is intended to consolidate and integrate its previous set of household surveys (which include the three-yearly Indigenous surveys). The timing for this survey is yet to be determined (ABS 2016).

⁴ Although not sample survey data, literacy and numeracy data include 95 per cent confidence intervals (section 4.5) and mortality data include variability bands (sections 4.1 and 4.2), which account for variability in results due to non-sampling error.

Relative standard errors (RSEs) are a statistical measure of the precision of a survey statistic. RSEs for all survey data included in the report are shown in the relevant attachment tables, which are available on the website (www.pc.gov.au/oid2016).

Administrative data

A range of administrative data is used across this report. These data are collected for different reasons, including for regulatory purposes or administration of government programs. The resulting administrative records can also be used for statistical purposes. These data are constantly updated and new data may be available annually or more frequently. However, Australia's federal system means that there are often differences across states and territories in the types of services provided, or the definitions used within data collections, which make it difficult to compare results across jurisdictions or to estimate national totals. Major differences in definitions or data collections are noted in this report as appropriate.

In some instances, administrative data can offer important advantages over direct collection of data from the population concerned (particularly in reducing respondent burden). However, administrative data may not represent all of the population of interest (for example, data related to the delivery of a government service will only include people who accessed the service).

Although there is general agreement on a 'standard Indigenous status question' to ensure consistency in data collections (ABS 2014b), there can be issues with the accuracy of Indigenous identification across jurisdictions and over time. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are not always asked the question, there are situations where they may choose not to identify, and there are also some inconsistencies in the recording of Indigenous status across jurisdictions and collections. Governments have committed to improve the identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in data collections as part of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA).

Administrative data can also be affected by the availability or accessibility of services, and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' willingness (or 'propensity') to access those services. For example, different rates of substantiated child abuse and neglect across jurisdictions or over time may be the result of differential access to services or different propensities to report child abuse, rather than differences in its occurrence (see section 4.10).

Rate ratios and rate differences

For some indicators, rate differences and rate ratios are calculated to compare rates between different groups, consistent with the approach in NIRA reporting. They are most commonly used when comparing age standardised rates.

-
- A *rate ratio* compares rates, to allow statements such as ‘the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is three times the rate for non-Indigenous Australians’. For example, if the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is 30 per cent and the rate for non-Indigenous Australians is 10 per cent, the rate ratio would be three to one (or 3:1).
 - A *rate difference* highlights the difference between rates, to allow statements such as ‘the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is 20 percentage points higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians’. For example, if the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is 30 per cent and the rate for non-Indigenous Australians is 10 per cent, the rate difference is 20 percentage points.

3.3 Demographics of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

This section provides a brief introduction to some of the key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander demographics. More information is provided in appendix 2.

How many people?

At 30 June 2011, the estimated resident Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia was 670 000 people, out of a total population of 22.3 million people (approximately 3 per cent of the total Australian population, up from 2.9 per cent in 2006 using recast 2011 Census-based estimates). Within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, an estimated 606 000 people (90 per cent) were of Aboriginal origin, 38 100 people (6 per cent) were of Torres Strait Islander origin and 25 600 people (4 per cent) were of both origins (ABS 2013c). The projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population at 30 June 2016 was 745 000 (ABS 2014a), which was 3.1 per cent of the projected total population of 24.4 million (ABS 2013d)⁵.

Population distribution

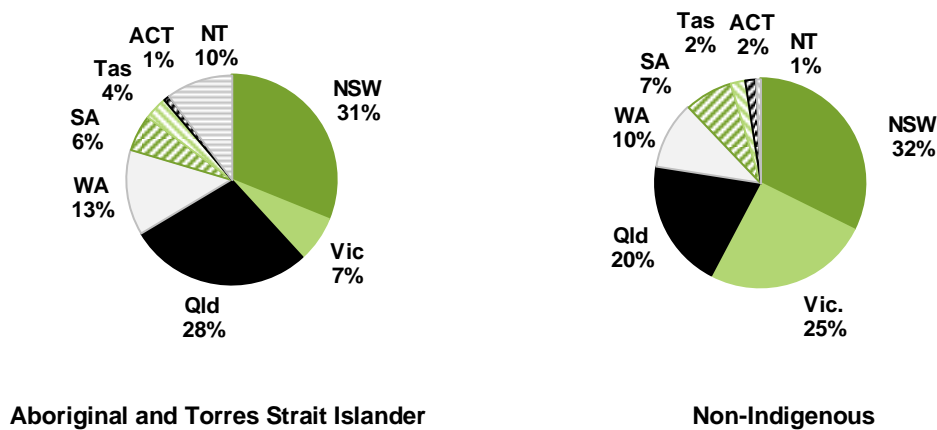
Service providers need to consider the geographic and age distribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and the requirements of different groups within that population if they are to meet people’s needs and address disadvantage. Services must also accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ relatively high rates of temporary mobility and anticipate medium to long term demographic trends.

Higher proportions of the estimated residential populations of both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (31 per cent) and the non-Indigenous Australians (32 per cent) lived in NSW than in other states and territories in 2011. Other states and

⁵ Projections for both populations based on ABS series B.

territories with significant shares of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population included Queensland (28 per cent), WA (13 per cent) and the NT (10 per cent) (figure 3.3.1).

Figure 3.3.1 Population distribution, June 2011
Proportion of national population in each State and Territory



Source: ABS 2013, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011*, Cat. no. 3238.0.55.001; ABS 2014, *Estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 2001 to 2026*, Cat. no. 3238.0. See appendix 2 for more information.

Mobility

A range of evidence suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are more mobile than non-Indigenous Australians. Rather than living permanently in a single location, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians may move between locations (including between remoteness areas) to access health, housing, employment and education services (Prout 2008) and for a range of cultural and family reasons (DEST et al. 2002). This mobility can make it difficult for governments to plan for the delivery of services, if shifting populations cause unexpected variations in the level of demand at different times in different places (Markham et al. 2013). However, Dockery (2014) states that mobility must be considered in light of its importance in maintaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity, and therefore more information is required about the reasons for temporary mobility, how it contributes to wellbeing and how it can be accommodated within models of service delivery (Dockery 2014).

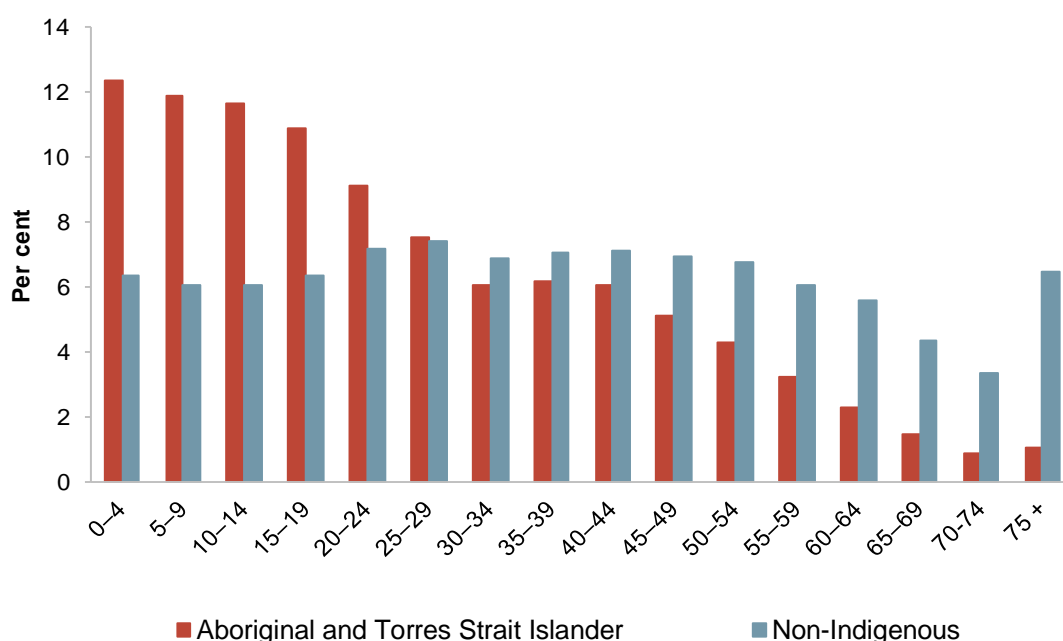
Previous analyses of Censuses found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more mobile (i.e., temporary or permanent move either within a day or overnight) than non-Indigenous Australians (Biddle and Prout 2009), though when age was controlled for, this effect was reversed (Biddle and Yap 2010). Recent analysis drawing on the Australian Census Longitudinal Database found that after controlling for a limited set of

characteristics (including age and previous patterns of mobility) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were less likely to change usual residence than non-Indigenous Australians (Biddle and Crawford 2015). This recent analysis indicates that it is not being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander that predicts mobility, but other characteristics. Biddle and Crawford (2015) found that younger people and those who did not live in a house owned or being purchased by the usual residents were more mobile than those without these characteristics, and given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are younger and more likely to live in a private rental compared to non-Indigenous Australians these are some of the factors influencing their higher rates of mobility.

Age profile of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a much younger age structure than the non-Indigenous population. In 2011, more than one-third (35.9 per cent) of the estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was aged under 15 years, compared with 18.4 per cent of the estimated non-Indigenous population. At the other end of the life course, an estimated 1.0 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was aged 75 years and over in 2011, compared with 6.5 per cent of the non-Indigenous population (figure 3.3.2).

Figure 3.3.2 Population distribution, Australia, by age, 30 June 2011^{a,b}



^a Includes other territories. ^b Estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations at 30 June 2011 are final based on the 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

Source: ABS 2013, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011*, Cat. no. 3238.0.55.001; table A.1 in appendix 2.

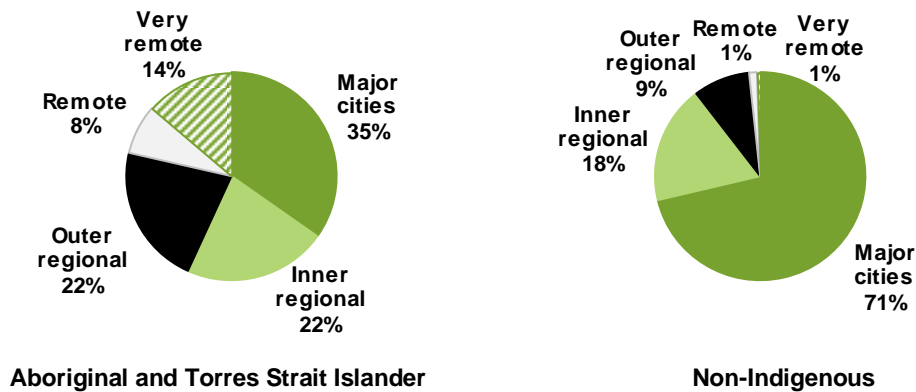
The different age structures can make it difficult to compare outcomes across the two populations, especially where outcomes are closely associated with age. Therefore, a technique called ‘age standardisation’ is used to adjust relevant data for differences in population age structures. In this report, this includes data on disability, health and justice outcomes. Data in this report have been age standardised using the direct method, as it is best suited to comparisons over time.

3.4 Remoteness

Data on the population distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians by remoteness raise two contrasting points:

- the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians live in urban areas (57 per cent in major cities or inner regional areas) (figure 3.4.1)
- although they only make up 3 per cent of the total population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make up relatively large proportions of the total population in remote (16 per cent) and very remote (45 per cent) areas (table A.2 in appendix 2).

Figure 3.4.1 Proportion of the population by remoteness area, 2011



Source: ABS 2013, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011*, Cat. no. 3238.0.55.001, Canberra. See appendix 2 for more information.

An estimated 35 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (233 000 people) lived in major cities in 2011. A further 22 per cent (148 000 people) lived in inner regional areas, and another 22 per cent (146 000 people) in outer regional areas. An estimated 22 per cent (142 000 people) lived in remote or very remote areas. In comparison, almost 90 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians (over 19 million people) lived in major cities or inner regional areas (figure 3.4.1.)

Census data show that, over time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are gradually becoming more urbanised, with a noticeable decrease in the number living in remote towns and settlements, and increasing numbers living in larger regional towns. At

the same time, the non-Indigenous population of some of these regional towns is declining, and so, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are becoming a larger proportion of the populations of those towns (Biddle and Markham 2013; Taylor and Biddle 2008).

In this report, relevant indicators are disaggregated by remoteness wherever possible (for some indicators, data are not available by remoteness or for all remoteness areas). For many indicators, remoteness data are only available at the national level, but disaggregation by remoteness at the national level can show patterns of disadvantage more clearly than disaggregation by State and Territory (but not remoteness). However, outcomes can vary across places with similar degrees of remoteness in different states and territories.

For many of the indicators in this report, average outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in major cities and regional areas are better than outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in remote and very remote areas, including for: health — life expectancy (section 4.1), health behaviours during pregnancy (section 6.2), birthweight (section 6.4), potentially preventable hospitalisations (section 8.2); education — reading, writing and numeracy (section 4.4), year 12 attainment (section 4.6), post-secondary education (section 4.8); employment — employment to population rate (section 4.7); income (section 4.10); and housing — home ownership (section 9.3) and overcrowding in housing (section 10.1).

However, it is important to note there is significant variation within location types. There are many relatively advantaged regional and remote areas and many disadvantaged urban areas (Biddle 2009, 2013). The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians do not live in remote areas, and wherever Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians live, on average, their outcomes are poorer than outcomes for non-Indigenous Australians in those same areas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in cities and large regional towns are concentrated in neighbourhoods with low socioeconomic outcomes, and tend to have poorer outcomes than non-Indigenous Australians in those same neighbourhoods (Biddle 2009, 2013; Taylor 2006).

Measuring remoteness

For most indicators in this report, remoteness is measured according to the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). The ASGS identifies a location in Australia as having a particular degree of remoteness based on its distance from population centres of various sizes. Some indicators are disaggregated into five remoteness area categories (major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote). When data quality does not support disaggregation into five categories, indicators may be collapsed for some of these categories. For more information on how remoteness is defined see ABS (2013a).

As discussed in chapter 1, the primary focus of this report is on aggregate results at the national and State and Territory level, to help ensure the underlying causes of disadvantage and foundations of wellbeing are being addressed. However, the ability to disaggregate

data into finer geographic classifications is essential for planning and coordinating the delivery of services. Some approaches include:

- the ABS Australian Indigenous Geography Structure (AIGS), which provides a geographical standard for the publication of statistics about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, with a three level hierarchy from very small Indigenous Locations up to larger Indigenous Areas and even larger Indigenous Regions (ABS 2011)
- Taylor and Biddle’s alternative geographic classification based on structural settings (that is, the types of places people live) — city areas; large regional towns; small regional towns and localities; regional rural areas; remote towns; Indigenous towns; town camps; and remote dispersed settlements (Taylor and Biddle 2008).

At present, the lower levels of the ABS AIGS and Taylor and Biddle’s structural settings approach can only be readily applied to Census data.

3.5 Interactions across the report

As noted in chapter 2, there are many interactions across the report’s framework of indicators. A number of these are noted in the discussion of relevant indicators. However, in many areas, research on the underlying causal factors linking different outcomes is still thin.

Chapter 13 of this report presents information on the associations between different aspects of wellbeing. Section 13.1 presents information on the interactions between selected proxy measures of the COAG targets (with a focus on education and employment), using 2014-15 NATSISS data. Section 13.2 presents an overview of recent work by the Productivity Commission into what works best to improve primary school outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

This section of the report looks at the potential for multiple causes to contribute to a single measured outcome, and the potential for some actions to affect multiple outcomes.

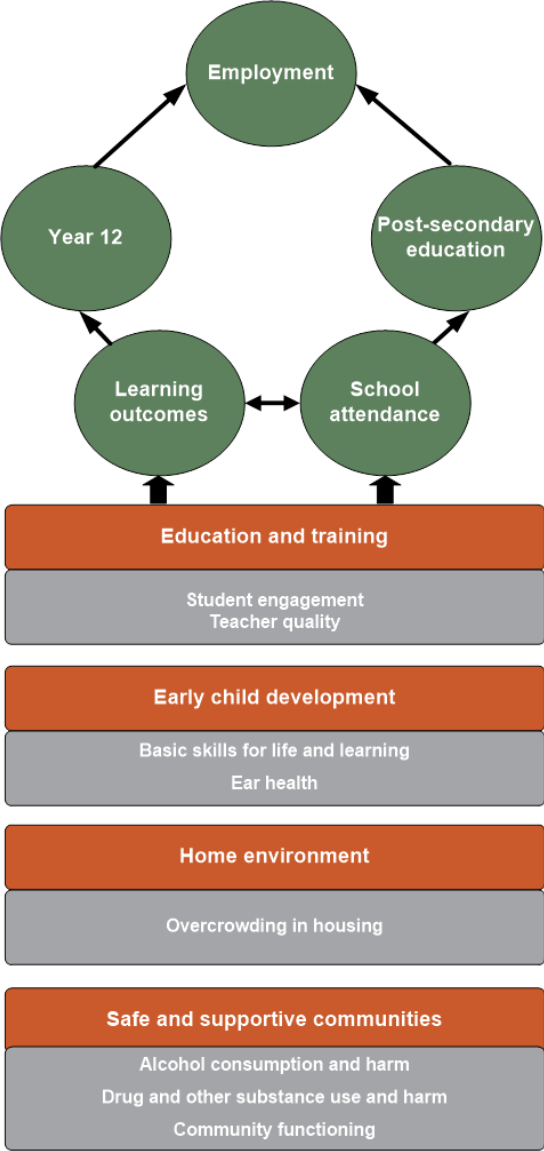
Multiple causes

Prevention and early intervention lie at the heart of the report framework. The focus is on encouraging action in the strategic areas that, over time, will lead to improvements in the COAG targets and headline outcomes, and progress toward the priority outcomes. However, in many cases, coordinated action is required across multiple areas if high level outcomes are to improve. Figures 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 illustrate just some of the many linked factors that can affect outcomes.

Figure 3.5.1 illustrates how the COAG targets of employment (section 4.7), year 12 or equivalent attainment (section 4.6), school attendance (section 4.5) and reading, writing

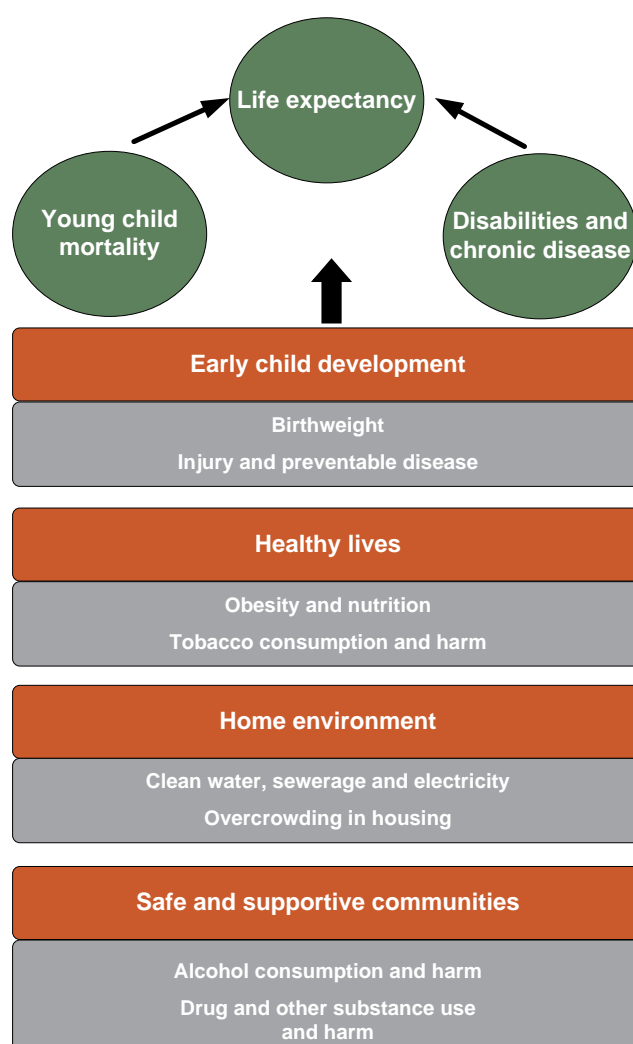
and numeracy (section 4.4), plus the headline indicator of post-secondary education (section 4.8), are influenced by outcomes across the framework. It is obvious that educational success will depend on outcomes in the ‘Education and training’ strategic area, which in turn depend on the achievement of outcomes in the ‘Early child development’ strategic area. However, social and environmental factors, such as those in the ‘Home environment’ and ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic areas affect all these outcomes. Of course, these are not the only factors at work — employment and education outcomes can also be influenced by the inter-generational effects of parental income, employment and education levels. The message from the framework is that, although educational services play an important role in achieving these COAG targets and headline indicators, many other services must also play a part.

Figure 3.5.1 Multiple causes — employment and education



In figure 3.5.2, the COAG targets of ‘Life expectancy’ (section 4.1) and Young child mortality’ (section 4.2) are clearly linked, and are closely related to the headline indicator of ‘Disability and chronic disease’ (section 4.9). In turn, these outcomes will be influenced by outcomes in the ‘Early child development’ and ‘Healthy lives’ strategic areas. But actions in these areas must be supported by actions to address outcomes in the ‘Home environment’ and ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic areas. Actions must also address other social determinants of health in the education and employment areas.

Figure 3.5.2 **Multiple causes — health**



Multiple effects

Although some high level outcomes may require actions across a range of areas, sometimes a single, well-targeted action can influence a range of outcomes. These

interactions emphasise the need for a whole-of-government approach to assessing the costs and benefits of such actions.

For example, housing typically is regarded as the responsibility of State and Territory departments of housing. But as illustrated in figure 3.5.3, reducing overcrowding can affect the COAG target of ‘Reading, writing and numeracy’ (section 4.4), and headline indicators of ‘Disability and chronic disease’ (section 4.8) and ‘Family and community violence’ (section 4.11) as well as outcomes in the ‘Education and training’, ‘Healthy lives’, ‘Home environment’ and ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic areas. Although other influences are also important in each of these areas, there is sufficient evidence for education, health and justice departments to be concerned about housing issues.

Figure 3.5.3 Multiple effects — overcrowding

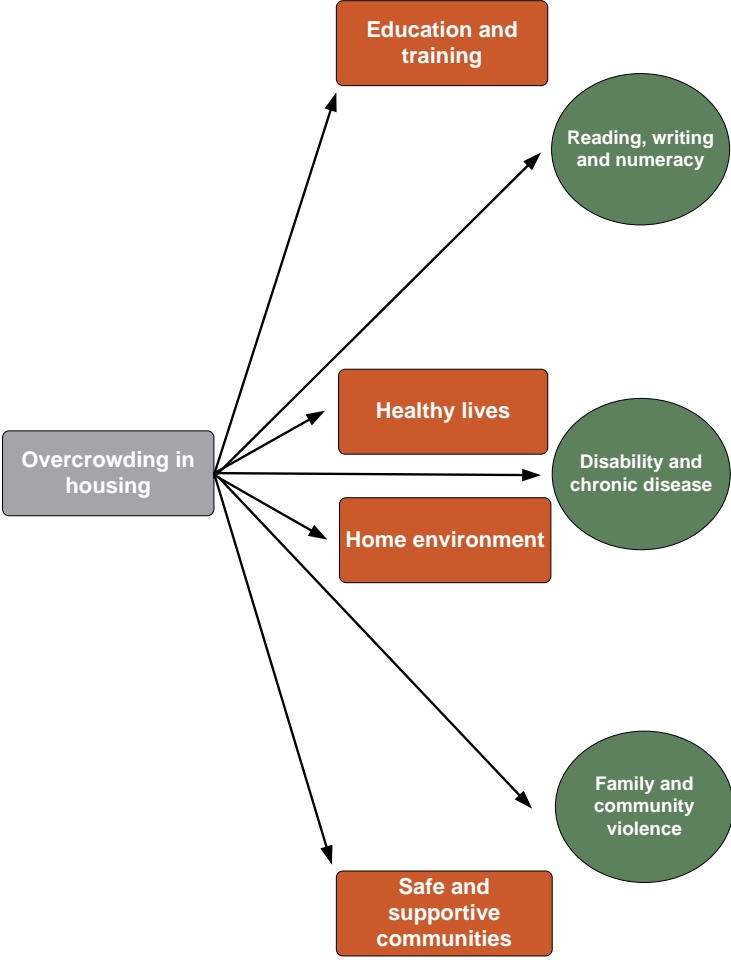
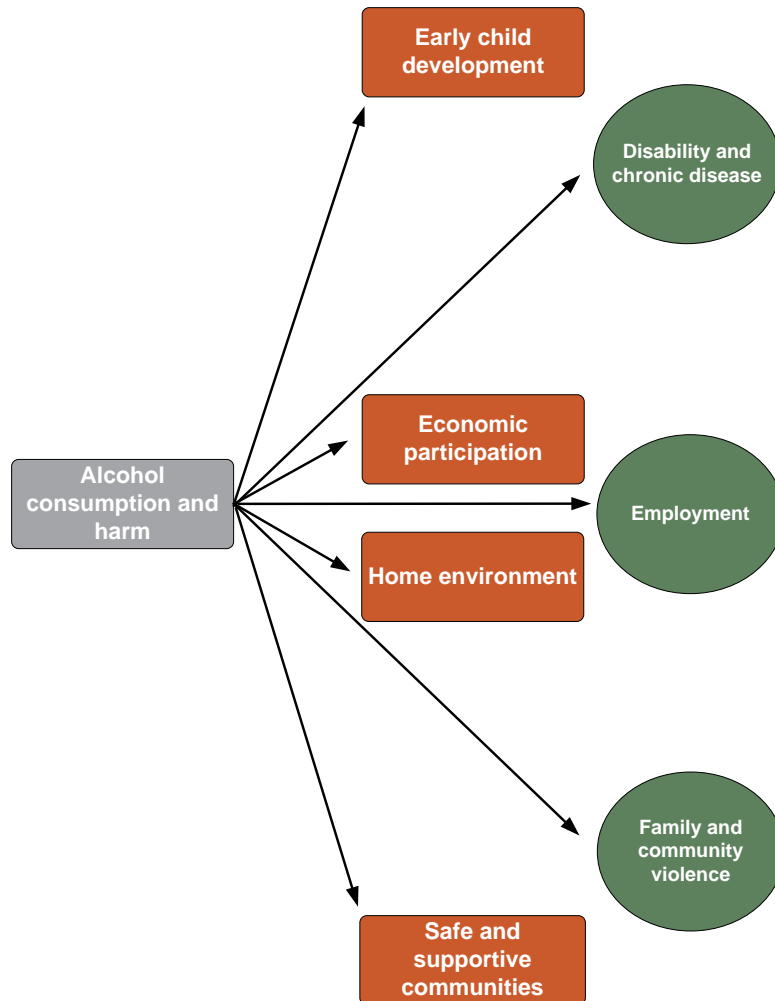


Figure 3.5.4 illustrates similar links for actions designed to address excessive alcohol consumption and associated harm. Misuse of alcohol can contribute to the COAG target of ‘Employment’ (section 4.7) and the headline indicators of ‘Disability and chronic disease’ (section 4.9) and ‘Family and community violence’ (section 4.12) and affect outcomes in

the ‘Early child development’, ‘Healthy lives’, ‘Economic participation’, and ‘Safe and supportive communities’ strategic areas, among others. Although alcohol misuse is not the only influence in these areas, a range of studies have identified the significant part this risk factor can play in a broad range of outcomes (section 11.1).

Figure 3.5.4 **Multiple effects — alcohol**



3.6 Things that work — success factors

Brief case studies of ‘thing that work’ in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have been a part of this report since 2005. Not everything that matters can be captured in indicators, and some information is better presented in words, rather than numbers. In particular, community level change may not show up in State and Territory or national data.

As noted in chapter 2, ‘Things that work’ in this report were assessed against a broad set of criteria before they were included. However, formal evaluations of programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are relatively scarce (PC 2013). In order to provide a range of examples to illustrate how things can change for the better, the Steering Committee has included case studies of some promising programs that have not undergone rigorous evaluation (noting the desirability of formal evaluation for these programs). There is an urgent need for more research and evaluation to identify successful programs and the reasons for their success (PC 2013, 2015).

The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse identified the following high level principles and practices that underpin successful programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians:

- flexibility in design and delivery so that local needs and contexts can be taken into account
- community involvement and engagement in both the development and delivery of programs
- the importance of building trust and relationships
- a well-trained and well-resourced workforce, with an emphasis on retention of staff
- continuity and coordination of services (CTGCH 2013).

These success factors are closely related to the six determinants of good governance described in chapter 5, section 5.4 (governing institutions; leadership; self-determination; capacity building; cultural match; and resources) and the success factors identified by the Steering Committee in previous reports:

- cooperative approaches between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and government — often with the non-profit and private sectors as well
- community involvement in program design and decision-making — a ‘bottom-up’ rather than ‘top-down’ approach
- good governance — at organisation, community and government levels
- ongoing government support — including human, financial and physical resources.

Cooperative approaches

Cooperation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and governments seems an obvious ingredient for successful programs. Nevertheless it does not always occur. Cooperative approaches require Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, governments, non-profit organisations and private businesses to work as partners. Hunt (2010) has explored some aspects of cooperative partnerships between non-government organisations, Aboriginal organisations and communities. Success is much more likely where each party acknowledges the value, and supports the contributions of, the other partners (Hunt 2010).

Most case studies in the report are based on cooperative approaches between governments, communities and other organisations. Examples include:

- the Aboriginal Maternity Group Practice Program in WA, under which Aboriginal Health Officers, Aboriginal grandmothers and midwives work with existing services to improve timely access to antenatal and maternity services (box 6.1.3)
- the Ngala Nanga Mai pARenT Group program in NSW, which operates in partnership with the NSW Department of Child Health to provide parenting support services to young Aboriginal parents and their children (box 6.3.3)
- the national Supply Nation program, which assists Indigenous businesses to enter into commercial relationships with large corporations and government agencies (box 9.2.4).

Cooperative approaches are closely related to the second success factor — community involvement in program design and decision making.

Community involvement

Community involvement in program design and decision-making is closely related to self-determination, one of the determinants of good Indigenous governance (see section 5.4). The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development found that self-determination led to improved outcomes for North American Indigenous people:

When [Indigenous people] make their own decisions about what development approaches to take, they consistently out-perform [non-Indigenous] decision makers. (Harvard Project nd)

The former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, considered that much of the failure of service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians was a direct result of the failure to engage and to support and build the capacity of communities:

Put simply, governments risk failure if they develop and implement policies about Indigenous issues without engaging with the intended recipients of those services. Bureaucrats and governments can have the best intentions in the world, but if their ideas have not been subject to the ‘reality test’ of the life experience of the local Indigenous peoples who are intended to benefit from this, then government efforts will fail. (Calma 2006)

Community involvement is a key factor in the success of most case studies in this report. Some specific examples of successful community involvement include:

- the Families as First Teachers program in the NT, which involves parents and families in young children’s early learning and development (box 4.3.3)
- the Yiriman project in WA, under which elders take young people on trips back to country ‘to immerse them in the stories, songs and knowledge that are their cultural heritage’ (box 8.8.3)
- the Mossman Gorge Centre in Queensland, where the local people were involved in the development of, and providing the ongoing staffing for, the Centre (box 9.1.3).

Good governance

Good governance — at organisation, community and government levels — is closely related to several of the key determinants of good Indigenous governance (see section 5.4):

- governing institutions
- leadership
- capacity building
- cultural match.

Unless organisations, communities and governments demonstrate principles of good governance, programs are likely to fail.

Good governance is essential to all successful case studies in the report. Particular examples include:

- the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre Cultural Governance Program in WA, which works in cooperation with local Aboriginal law and culture to successfully repatriate sacred objects and remains (box 5.4.6)
- the finalists and winners of the Reconciliation Australia/BHP Billiton Indigenous Governance Awards, including the Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation in central Australia (box 5.4.2) and the Marruk Project in Victoria (box 5.4.3).

Ongoing government support

Virtually all the case studies in this report rely on government support to some extent — although many organisations are seeking greater financial diversity, to provide the independence to run programs as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians want them to be run.

Resources is one of the key determinants of good governance (see section 5.4), and ongoing government support is closely related to this. Many programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are funded as short term pilots with no guaranteed continuity. Several successful programs included as ‘Things That Work’ in previous editions of this report no longer exist, because government support has been withdrawn.

In addition, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, including successful organisations with long track records, are funded through multiple, short term government contracts that increase red tape and uncertainty, and place pressure on capacity and sustainability.

3.7 International comparisons

Comparisons of outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with outcomes for indigenous peoples in other countries could help identify areas where Australia could learn from other approaches to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. However, such comparisons are not attempted in this report, due to lack of suitable current data.

The most meaningful comparisons of outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are likely to be with indigenous peoples from countries such as the United States, Canada, and New Zealand — developed countries with a history of relatively recent European colonisation, and a non-indigenous majority.

Many Latin American countries also have relatively recent European colonisation and indigenous minorities. However, most Latin American countries are less developed than Australia, have different economic, legal and social systems and typically have less developed statistical collections. In some other countries, particularly in Africa and Asia, groups of people may be identified as indigenous to specific areas where various ethnic groups have lived together for significant periods. In such cases, the distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous people can be less clear cut.

Comparability of international data

Very little internationally comparable data are available for outcomes for indigenous people. Although many countries have agreed to adopt international definitions for statistics such as life expectancy, disease codes for mortality and hospitals, international testing of learning outcomes, and labour force participation, data are often only available for each country's total population — comparable data on indigenous people are not commonly available (see Freemantle et al (2007) for example on health data).

Even where data are available, caution must be used in comparing data with other countries, due to:

- different definitions used to identify who is an indigenous person
- variations in estimation methods, data quality and scope
- different economic, social and political environments.

The United Nations prepared a comprehensive assessment of the state of the world's indigenous people (UNPFII 2009). The report is largely qualitative, and focuses on the human rights of indigenous peoples. The limited quantitative data on outcomes for indigenous people in different countries are significantly older than those available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians included in this report. Recent reporting has tended to focus on specific issues (for example, cancer incidence (Moore et al. 2015)).

3.8 References

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