

## INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

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## Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issues

### Inquiry into Closing the Gap - Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is Australia's official national statistical agency, providing statistics on a wide range of economic, social and environmental matters, covering government, business and the community. ABS is committed to assisting and encouraging informed decision making, research and discussion within governments and the community, by leading a high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service.

We are pleased to provide the Standing Committee on Social Issues with information on ABS statistical collections relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and comparative data on the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Australia and New South Wales. More comprehensive information can be accessed on our website [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au).

#### ABS Statistical Collections

Over the past decade there have been significant improvements in the range, quality and availability of statistics on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The ABS is responsible for the following statistical collections and publications which provide data on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population:

- 1) Census of Population and Housing**  
The five-yearly census remains the most comprehensive source of information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. It provides the basis for estimates of the Indigenous population and a wide range of socio-economic statistics such as housing, income, employment, education and language at all levels of geography. The range of Indigenous-specific outputs has been increasing and improving with each census since 1971 and includes Indigenous Community Profiles and a range of spreadsheet products.
- 2) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) 2004/05**  
The six-yearly National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey is the largest health survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people conducted by the ABS. The survey, which is conducted in remote and non-remote areas throughout Australia, is designed to collect a range of information from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about health related issues, including health status, risk factors and actions, and socioeconomic circumstances.

The survey aims to:

- provide broad information about the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, by remoteness, and at the national and state/territory levels;
- allow the relationships across the health status, risk factors and health related actions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be explored;
- provide comparisons over time in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- provide comparisons with results for the non-Indigenous population from the National Health Survey.

**3) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2002**

The six-yearly National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey is a multi-dimensional social survey of Australia's Indigenous population designed to enable analysis of the interrelationship of social circumstances and outcomes, including the exploration of multiple disadvantage that may be experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The survey aims to:

- Provide broad information across key areas of social concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over, including information not previously available at the national, state/territory and broad regional levels;
- Allow for inter-relationships between different areas of social concern to be explored and provide insight into the extent to which people face multiple social disadvantage;
- Provide comparisons with results for the non-Indigenous population from the General Social Survey and other surveys.
- Measure selected changes over the years between surveys.

**4) Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) 2006**

The Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey provides information on the status of housing, infrastructure, health and other services available in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia. Information collected includes:

- Details of the current housing stock, dwelling management practices and selected income and expenditure arrangements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that provide housing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
- Details of housing and related infrastructure such as water, electricity, sewerage systems, drainage and rubbish collection and disposal, as well as other facilities such as sport and health services available in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**5) The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2005**

The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is a joint venture between the ABS and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. It provides a comprehensive statistical overview, largely at the national level, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and welfare. Topics include maternal and child health, risk factors, ill health, disability and ageing, mortality, and access to, and use of, services.

**6) Estimated Resident Population Collection**

Estimated resident population (ERP) is the official measure of the population of Australia and the states and territories. Experimental estimates of the Indigenous population of Australia in census years (2001, 2006, etc) are based on census counts by place of usual residence, adjusted for:

- census net undercount (as it is known that census misses some people);
- census records with unknown Indigenous status;
- the number of Australian residents estimated to have been temporarily overseas at the time of the census;
- demographic adjustments; and
- births, deaths and overseas migration occurring between the ERP reference date of 30 June and census.

These estimates are referred to as 'experimental' as the significant volatility in Indigenous census counts and the quality of data on births, deaths and migration do not support the standard approach to population estimation.

**7) Birth and Death Registrations Collections**

Information on Indigenous births and deaths registered annually is available from the ABS Birth Registration and Death Registration collections. Registration of births and deaths is the responsibility of state and territory Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages, who provide data to the ABS for compilation into aggregate statistics.

It is not possible to summarise all the data from these collections and publications into this submission. We have instead attached copies of the following summary booklets, which highlight key findings of the data:

1. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004-05;
2. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002; and
3. The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2005.

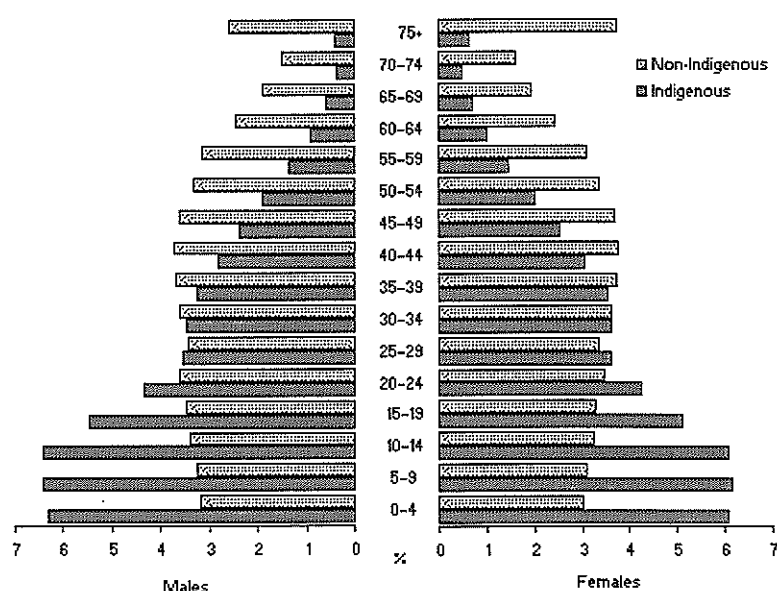
Full copies of these publications are available in hardcopy or on our website.

## Summary

### Size and age structure of the Indigenous population

The preliminary rebased experimental estimated resident Australian Indigenous population at 30 June 2006 was 517,200 people, representing 2.5% of the total population of Australia. New South Wales had the largest Indigenous population (148,200 people) of the states and territories, representing 2.2% of NSW's total population.

The Indigenous population has a young age structure, typical of many developing countries, reflecting their relatively high fertility and mortality rates. By comparison, the age structure of the total Australian population is more evenly distributed, typical of developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan and the United States of America.



The median age of the Indigenous population of both New South Wales and Australia in 2006 was 21 years, compared with 37 years for the total Australian population. For Australia, older Indigenous people (aged 65 years and over) comprised just 3% of the total Indigenous population, compared with 13% for the non-Indigenous population.

While the median age of the total population has increased since 1996, the median age for the Indigenous population has remained relatively constant (see table).

#### Australia\*

	Indigenous	Total Population
1996	20.1	34.0
2001	20.5	35.7
2006	21.1	36.6

#### New South Wales\*

	Indigenous	Total Population
1996	19.9	34.4
2001	20.1	35.9
2006	20.6	36.8

\* 1996 and 2001 data is estimated resident population, based on 2001 census. 2006 data is estimated resident population, based on 2006 census.

Other key characteristics of the Indigenous population in Australia and New South Wales are available from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. This includes information on education, income and housing (see table).

### Australia

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Estimated resident population*	517,174	20,184,314
Population growth since 2001**	12.8%	6.5%
Year 10 educational attainment***	32.0%	25.2%
Year 12 educational attainment***	22.2%	47.4%
Home ownership****	36.0%	70.7%
Median age	20	37
Individual income	\$278	\$466
Household income	\$791	\$1,027
Median rent (per week)	\$140	\$190
Median housing loan repayment (per month)	\$1,127	\$1,300
Household size	3.4	2.6

\* preliminary experimental estimated resident Australian Indigenous population at 30 June 2006, based on 2006 census

\*\* calculated using experimental estimated resident Australian Indigenous population at 30 June 2001, based on 2001 census

\*\*\* this does not include those who did not state a level of attainment

\*\*\*\* this includes those who reported they fully owned or were purchasing their own home

### New South Wales

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Estimated resident population*	148,178	6,669,004
Population growth since 2001**	9.9%	3.6%
Year 10 educational attainment***	35.4%	28.7%
Year 12 educational attainment***	21.2%	47.7%
Home ownership****	37.8%	69.5%
Median age	20	37
Individual income	\$296	\$471
Household income	\$728	\$1,031
Median rent (per week)	\$150	\$220
Median housing loan repayment (per month)	\$1,257	\$1,517
Household size	3.2	2.6

\* preliminary experimental estimated resident Australian Indigenous population at 30 June 2006, based on 2006 census

\*\* calculated using experimental estimated resident Australian Indigenous population at 30 June 2001, based on 2001 census

\*\*\* this does not include those who did not state a level of attainment

\*\*\*\* this includes those who reported they fully owned or were purchasing their own home

## Reporting of Indigenous status in ABS Birth and Death Registration collections

There are known issues with identification and reporting of Indigenous status in birth and death registration data.

ABS estimates the coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander birth registrations to be 95% across Australia, and 89% for New South Wales (*Births, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 3301.0). Further, Indigenous births are registered later on average than all births. In 2005, the average interval between the occurrence and registration of Indigenous births in New South Wales was 3.5 months, compared to 1.8 months for all births.

ABS data for the period 2002–2006 estimates the coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander death registrations across Australia to be 55% (*Deaths, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 3302.0). The implied coverage for New South Wales (45%) was lower than the national figure.

The ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mortality Data Project aims to increase the accuracy of deaths data by improving identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders during death registration. In NSW the current ABS focus for improving the quality of this data is to educate people who collect the data; including funeral directors, general practitioners, hospital staff, coroners and police officers. This involves working closely with people in these professions to identify reasons as to why the data is not accurate, to develop efficient education methods and to develop other methods to improve the data.

## Life expectancy

ABS life expectancy data are published in *Deaths, Australia* (cat. no. 3302.0). The latest figures on Indigenous life expectancy are for the period 1996–2001 while life expectancy for the total Australian population are available for 2004–2006 and earlier periods.

For New South Wales and Victoria combined, Indigenous life expectancy at birth for the period 1996–2001 was 60.0 years for males and 65.1 years for females. For New South Wales, life expectancy at birth for the total population for the period 1998–2000 was 76.4 years for males and 81.9 years for females.

## Life expectancy at birth, Australia

	Indigenous (1996–2001)	Total population (1998–2000)
Male	59.4 years	76.6 years
Female	64.8 years	82.0 years

## Life expectancy at birth, NSW

	Indigenous* (1996–2001)	Total population (1998–2000)
Male	60.0 years	76.4 years
Female	65.1 years	81.9 years

\* New South Wales and Victoria combined

The life expectancy estimates are the best that can be compiled with currently available data. However, over-precise analysis of the estimates as measures of Indigenous health should be avoided. In particular, differences between the life expectancy estimates presented above and those previously published by the ABS are in part due to improvements in methods and data quality. Differences do not necessarily represent any change over time in the life expectancy of the Indigenous population.

The method used in constructing experimental Indigenous life tables is currently under review. A new set of life tables, based on 2006 census results and Indigenous deaths for 2001–2006, is scheduled for publication in *Deaths, Australia, 2007* (cat. no. 3302.0) in November 2008.

### **Further information**

Further information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics can be accessed on our website [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) or by contacting our National Information Referral Service on 1300 135 170.

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