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Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census

Statistical Indicators 02/18

By Chris Angus

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Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census

by

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INTERPRETING INDIGENOUS CENSUS STATISTICS

Data collected by the [Australian Census of Population and Housing](#) (the Census) plays an important role in enabling all Australian governments to address Indigenous disadvantage. Unfortunately, the Census results for Indigenous status suffer from a significant undercount. According to the 2016 Census Post Enumeration Survey (PES; a household survey conducted after each Census in order to provide an independent measure of Census coverage):¹

786,689 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should have been counted in the Census, compared with 648,939 persons who were counted. This is equivalent to a net undercount of 137,750 persons, or a rate of 17.5%.²

The 2016 Indigenous undercount is similar to that reported for the 2011 Census (17.2%), and has risen over successive Censuses dating back to the 1980s.³ It is unclear exactly what has caused this high undercount, however the ABS has commented that Indigenous status is a characteristic that some people consider personal and sensitive, and consequently may not wish to divulge this information on their Census forms.⁴

Markham and Biddle have made several key points in relation to the latest findings:⁵

- The 2016 Census undercount appears to mostly result from changing enumeration methods, rather than an increased refusal to return Census forms;
- Unexplained growth within the Indigenous population accounts for around 34% of intercensal population growth, with much of this excess likely to be caused by people changing their identification;
- The unexplained growth was not spatially or demographically consistent, with much of this growth recorded in three urban areas (Sydney-Wollongong, New South Wales North and Central Coast, and Brisbane); and

¹ Note that the PES is conducted using a smaller sample size of 42,000 fully responding households across Australia. Accordingly the figures shown in the PES differ from the final Census results.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2940.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Details of Overcount and Undercount, Australia, 2016](#), 23 February 2018. Note that the PES's total Indigenous figure differs from that recorded in the 2016 Census. The latter figure of 649,171 persons is used in this paper.

³ Markham F and Biddle N, [Indigenous population change in the 2016 Census](#), ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2017, p 3.

⁴ ABS, note 2.

⁵ Markham and Biddle, note 3, p 19-20. Also see Markham F and Biddle N, [Three charts on: the changing status of Indigenous Australians](#), *The Conversation*, 5 March 2018.

- The newly identified Indigenous cohort was more likely than the existing Indigenous population to have completed Year 10 schooling or above. This may mean that recorded improvements in socio-economic outcomes do not necessarily apply across the board to all individual Indigenous Australians.⁶

In contrast to the Indigenous undercount, the 2016 Census undercount rate for the total Australian population was 1.0%, which was also a decrease from the 2011 Census undercount (1.7%).⁷ The undercount for the NSW Indigenous population has yet not been finalised, although once completed it will be available in the [following publication](#).

The problem with the size of the Indigenous undercount goes beyond not having an exact measurement of a community's population. As explained in a 2016 article on *The Conversation*, undercounts of vulnerable communities can make it harder to assess the effectiveness of government policies and properly allocate required resources.⁸ The Productivity Commission made a similar point in its *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016* report:

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.⁹

Accordingly, for the purposes of this paper, the size of the undercount means that the data presented—including any changes over time—should be viewed as indicative characteristics of the Indigenous community, rather than exact measures or comparisons.

Additionally, this publication uses Census data instead of data based on the PES. This is because the two ABS publications which use the PES release total population counts for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people broken down by only two variables: geography; and age.¹⁰

⁶ Also see Biddle N and Markham F, [Indigenous identification change between 2011 and 2016: Evidence from the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset](#), ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2018.

⁷ ABS, note 2.

⁸ Biddle N, [Forget the Census undercount, what matters is bias](#), *The Conversation*, 17 August 2016.

⁹ Productivity Commission, [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016](#), 17 November 2016, p 3.8.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2075.0 – Census of Population and Housing – Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2016](#), 31 August 2017; Australian Bureau of Statistics, [3238.0.55.001 – Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011](#), 30 August 2013. Note that the 2016 Census edition of this second publication has not yet been released.

GLOSSARY OF CENSUS TERMS¹¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	Persons who identified themselves as being of Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin
Age distribution	Percentage of the total population at each age level
Bedrooms in private dwellings	A count of the number of bedrooms in each occupied private dwelling, including caravans in caravan parks
Core activity need for assistance	People needing help or assistance in one or more of the three core activity areas of self-care, mobility and communication, because of a long-term health condition (lasting six months or more), a disability (lasting six months or more), or old age
Count of families/persons	Place of Usual Residence
Count of households and dwellings	Place of Enumeration (Location on Census night)
Couple family with children	All couple families with children under 15 years of age and/or dependent students aged 15 to 24 years. This excludes couple families with non-dependent children living at home
Couple family with no children	Includes couple families who have never had children and couple families who have no resident children
Equivalised Total Household Income	Total household income adjusted by the application of an equivalence scale to facilitate comparison of income levels between households of differing size and composition.
Family	Defined as two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household.
Group household	A household consisting of two or more unrelated people where all persons are aged 15 years and over. There are no reported couple relationships, parent-child relationships or other blood relationships in these households.
Highest year of schooling completed	The highest level of primary or secondary school a person has completed.
Highest educational attainment	The highest year of school completed and level of highest non-school qualification, regardless of field of study or the type of institution.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2901.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016](#), 23 August 2016.

Home ownership	Includes dwellings owned outright, owned with a mortgage, being purchased under a rent/buy scheme and being occupied under a life tenure scheme
Household	Defined as one or more persons, at least one of whom is at least 15 years of age, usually resident in the same private dwelling.
Household composition	Indicates whether a family is present or not and whether or not other unrelated household members are present.
Housing authority	The relevant State or Territory housing authority. For NSW, the relevant authority is Housing NSW
Income	The sum of income received from all sources, including government pensions and allowances, before any deductions such as income tax, the Medicare Levy or salary sacrificed amounts are taken out.
Industry of employment	Industry in which employed people aged 15 years and over work.
Indigenous households	Any household where at least one usual resident was identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin
Internet access	If any member of a household accesses the internet from the dwelling, from any device or internet connection type.
Labour force	Total number of employed and unemployed people
Language spoken at home	The main language other than English spoken at home, if any
Lone person households	Households with only one person usually resident
Not in the labour force	Persons who, during the week prior to Census night, were neither employed nor unemployed (e.g. retired, permanently unable to work, in jail).
Occupation	The type of job held by all employed people aged 15 years and over.
Participation rate¹²	For any group, the labour force expressed as a percentage of the civilian population aged 15 years and over in the same group.
Persons attending a tertiary education institution	Persons attending a Technical or Further Educational Institution (including TAFE colleges), University or other Tertiary Institution

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, [6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, Jan 2018](#), 15 February 2018.

Persons employed in professional occupations	Includes Managers and Professionals
Persons with highest level of school completed Year 10 or above	Persons whose highest year of school completed is Year 10, Year 11 or Year 12
Persons with highest level of school completed Year 9 or below	Persons whose highest year of school completed is Year 9 or Year 8, or they did not go to school
Persons with tertiary education qualifications	Persons whose highest educational qualification is a postgraduate degree, graduate diploma, graduate certificate, bachelor degree, advanced diploma or diploma
Persons with trade qualifications	Persons with certificate level qualifications
Public housing	Total State housing authority rentals
Same-sex couple	Two persons of the same sex who report a de facto or married partnership in the relationship question, and who are usually resident in the same household
Single parent family	All one parent families with children under 15 years of age and/or dependent students aged 15 to 24 years. This excludes one parent families with non-dependent children living at home
Tenant dwellings	Dwellings which are rented from all sources
Type of educational institute attending	Type of educational institution being attended by people who are full-time or part-time students
Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability	People who in the two weeks prior to Census night spent time providing unpaid care, help or assistance to family members or others because of a disability, a long-term health condition or problems related to old age.
Unemployed	Persons who are in the labour force and are looking for full- or part-time work.
Unemployment rate¹³	The number of unemployed persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force in the same group.

¹³ Ibid.

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ELECTORATE POPULATION USED IN CALCULATING PERCENTAGE

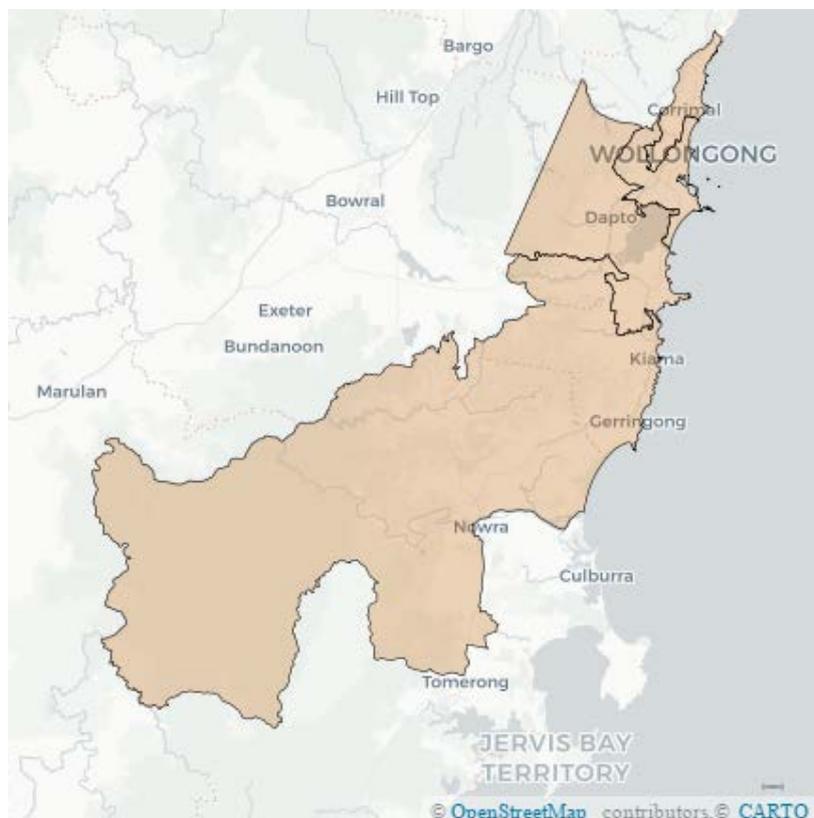
Indicator	Electorate Population
Population and ethnicity	
Total population	-
Indigenous persons	Total persons
Proportion of Indigenous people in State/Territory	Total persons
Indigenous people as proportion of State/Territory population	Total persons
Age	
Median age	Total persons
Age groups	Total persons
Sex	
Number of females	Total persons
Number of males	Total persons
Age groups by sex	Total persons
Language	
Australian Indigenous language speakers	Total persons
Proportion of Indigenous persons speaking Indigenous language	Total persons
Disability and unpaid care	
Persons requiring assistance with core activities	Total persons
Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability	Persons 15+
Family composition	
Family composition	Total families
No of persons in family	Total families
Registered marital status	Persons 15+
Same-sex couples	Total families
Household composition	
Household composition	Total occupied private dwellings
Number of bedrooms in dwelling	Total occupied private dwellings
Dwellings with an internet connection	Total occupied private dwellings
Income	
Total personal income (weekly)	Persons 15+
Equivalentised total household income (weekly)	Total occupied private dwellings
Home ownership	
Home ownership status	Total occupied private dwellings
Tenure type	Total occupied private dwellings
Education	
Type of educational institution attending	Persons attending institution
Persons with highest level of school completed	Persons 15+
Persons by educational attainment	Persons 15+

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Indicator	Electorate Population
Labour force	
Labour force status	Persons 15+
Participation rate	Persons 15+
Unemployment rate	Persons 15+
Women and men in the labour force	Persons 15+
Youth labour force status	Persons 15-24
Youth participation rate	Persons 15-24
Youth unemployment rate	Persons 15-24
Engagement in Employment, Education and Training	Persons 15-24
Industry and occupation	
Industry	Persons 15+
Occupation	Persons 15+

Greater Metropolitan Region (GMR) electorates

Cessnock, Charlestown, Gosford, Keira, Kiama, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Shellharbour, Swansea, Terrigal, The Entrance, Wallsend, Wollongong, Wyong



1. INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (abbreviated to ATSI or Indigenous throughout this paper) continue to experience worse outcomes across a range of indicators compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. According to the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, this divergence in areas such as income are an ongoing consequence of historic violence, dispossession and other forms of colonial domination faced by ATSI people.¹⁴

Various efforts have been made to rectify this situation, most notably the Prime Minister's [Closing the Gap](#) framework at the Commonwealth level and NSW Government initiatives such as the [OCHRE Plan](#), the [Premier's Priorities](#) and the [Connected Communities Strategy](#).

Addressing entrenched disadvantage is no easy feat for Australian policymakers, yet as stated by Markham and Biddle: “[k]nowledge of the size and composition of the Indigenous population is a matter of much concern to policy makers and Indigenous people”.¹⁵ Given the scale and complexity of this endeavour, it is important to emphasise that the Census can provide us with some of the most detailed and important sources of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their lives.¹⁶

This paper uses the latest 2016 Census figures to provide a snapshot of how the ATSI peoples of NSW compare with non-Indigenous residents across a range of key indicators, including population, age, education, income and employment. The paper also provides a comparative analysis of these indicators over three Censuses (2006, 2011 and 2016) for both NSW as a whole and for three regions (discussed below) for most indicators.

Results for the whole of NSW are analysed, along with three custom regions of the State that incorporate different State Electorates based on their location within NSW (see [above](#)). These geographies were selected to not only to provide an indication as to how location affects the wellbeing of the State's Indigenous peoples, but to also help NSW Members of Parliament gain greater insight into the Indigenous peoples residing in or around their electorates.

This publication complements other research that has analysed Census and other available data on ATSI peoples of NSW and Australia.¹⁷

¹⁴ Markham F and Biddle N, [Income, poverty and inequality](#), ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2017, p 1; Walter M, [Aboriginality, Poverty and Health – Exploring the Connections](#), 2007, p 81.

¹⁵ Markham and Biddle, note 3, p 1.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2076.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2016](#), 19 February 2018.

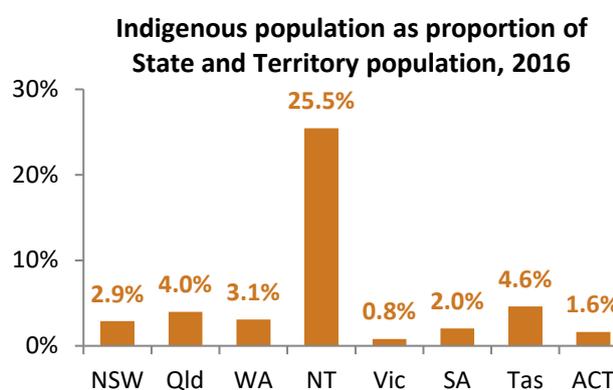
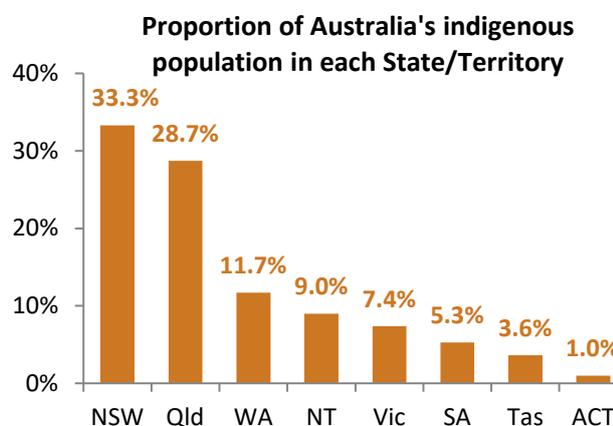
¹⁷ Aboriginal Affairs NSW, [Key data - NSW Aboriginal people](#), January 2018; Aboriginal Affairs NSW, [Community Portraits](#), n.d.; Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2071.0 - Census of Population](#)

2. POPULATION

2.1 NSW

According to the 2016 Census, 649,171 people identified themselves as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.¹⁸ While this figure suffers from a net undercount, as will the population estimates for other regions,¹⁹ it is nevertheless used as the basis for the results discussed in this paper.

Of this figure, 216,171 Indigenous people reside in NSW (see right): the largest count of all States and Territories and accounting for approximately a third of the country's Indigenous population. Around 96% of the NSW Indigenous community is of Aboriginal origin; 2.2% are Torres Strait Islanders; and 1.9% are of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.



As a proportion of total State or Territory population, Indigenous people comprise just 2.9% of the NSW population (see above right). This proportion is lower than the Northern Territory (25.5% of its population identified as Indigenous), Tasmania (4.6%), Queensland (4.0%) and Western Australia (3.1%).

Over the decade 2006 to 2016, the NSW Indigenous population increased in size by 56.1%, while the non-Indigenous population rose by 13.4%. As shown in the table below, between each Census the NSW Indigenous population increased faster than the non-Indigenous population.

NSW population, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous, 2006 to 2016				
Census	Indigenous persons		Non-Indigenous persons	
	No	Change from previous Census	No	Change from previous Census
2006	138,509	-	6,019,396	-
2011	172,625	24.6%	6,402,111	6.4%
2016	216,171	25.2%	6,826,288	6.6%

[and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016](#), 31 October 2017.

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016](#), 31 October 2017.

¹⁹ See [Interpreting Indigenous Census statistics](#) for further information on undercounts.

Australia's Indigenous population was first officially measured as 115,953 in the 1971 Census and has increased in every subsequent Census.²⁰ Following the 2011 Census, the ABS stated that the recorded population increase was larger than could be fully accounted for by demographic factors such as natural population increase. Additional factors also contributed to this increased population count, as listed below:²¹

- Improved Census coverage, resulting in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were missed in previous Censuses being counted in more recent Censuses;
- A decrease in the number of Census records with an unknown Indigenous status; and
- An increased propensity for people to identify themselves and their young children as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

2.2 Regions

Of the NSW Indigenous population, 109,442 (50.8%) live in Regional NSW. 58,442 Indigenous people live in the Sydney region (27.1% of the total State Indigenous population); and 47,432 (22.0%) reside in the Greater Metropolitan Region (GMR). Nevertheless, as shown below, Indigenous people comprise only a small proportion of these regions' total populations.

Indigenous population by NSW region			
	No Indigenous persons	NSW Indigenous population (%)	Region population (%)
Sydney	58,442	27.1%	1.4%
GMR	47,432	22.0%	4.2%
Regional NSW	109,442	50.8%	6.8%

From 2006 to 2016, the Indigenous population in these regions increased faster than the non-Indigenous population. For the Indigenous community, the GMR saw a much larger proportionate increase in population over the decade than the State average (94.1% vs 56.1% for NSW), while the non-Indigenous community in Sydney grew faster than NSW (19.1% vs 13.4%).

NSW region population change 2006 to 2016, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous				
Region	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	Increase over decade	% increase	Increase over decade	% increase
NSW	77,662	56.1%	806,892	13.4%
Sydney	20,971	56.0%	678,407	19.1%
GMR	23,001	94.1%	92,933	9.3%
Regional NSW	33,277	43.7%	34,500	2.4%

²⁰ Capuano P, [Recognising indigenous populations in the Census: a short history](#), .id [website – accessed 22 November 2017]

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2077.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Understanding the Increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Counts, 2006-2011](#), 17 September 2013.

3. AGE GROUPS

3.1 NSW

According to the ABS, the NSW Indigenous community has a median age of 22. In contrast, the non-Indigenous community's median age is 38.²² As shown below, the median ages of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in both NSW and Australia have increased since the 2006 Census.

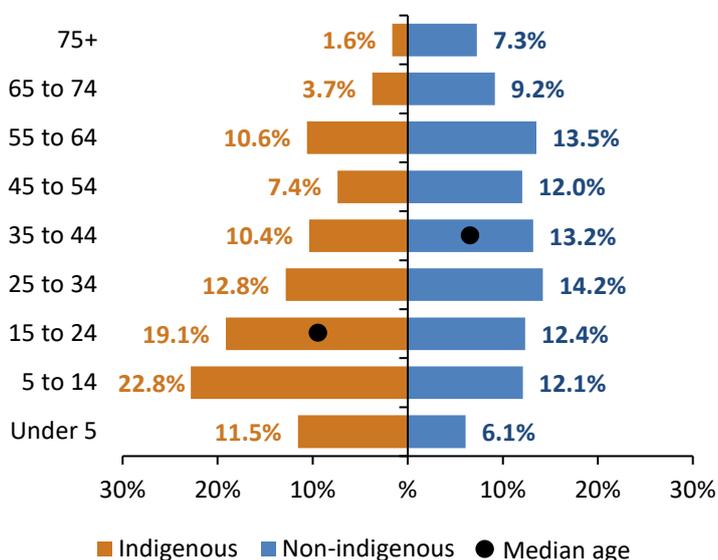
Change in Indigenous and non-Indigenous median age, 2006 to 2016				
Census	Indigenous median age		Non-Indigenous median age	
	NSW	Australia	NSW	Australia
2006	20	20	37	37
2011	21	21	38	37
2016	22	23	38	38

The NSW Indigenous community has a much younger age profile than the non-Indigenous population: 53.5% of the State's Indigenous population is under the age of 25, compared to 30.6% of the non-Indigenous community. A divergence is also apparent in the 65 and older age groups, with only 5.4% of the NSW Indigenous population aged 65 and over compared to 16.5% of non-Indigenous people.

The chart overleaf shows the change in age distribution of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities over the past three Censuses (2006, 2011 and 2016).

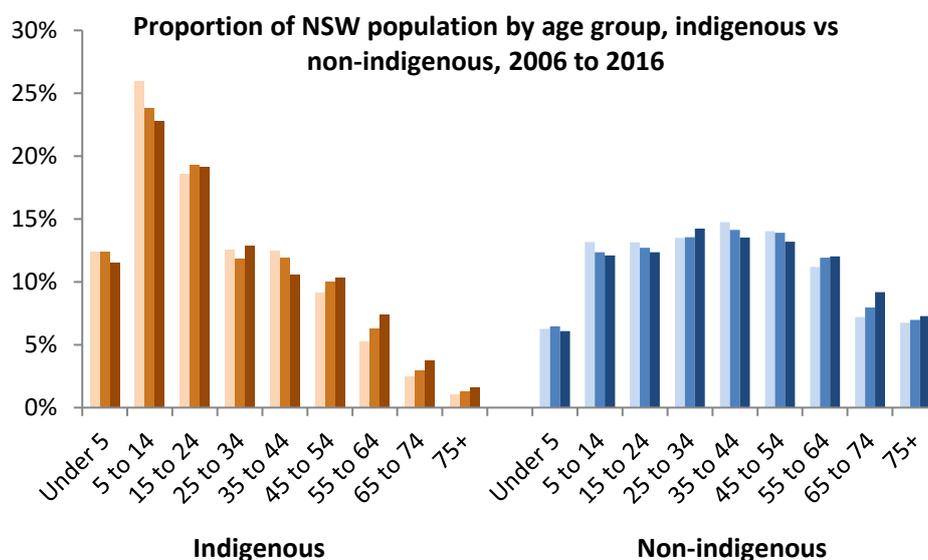
While both cohorts aged over the decade, there was been a sharper decline in the proportion of Indigenous persons aged 5 to 14 years. Despite this decline, the State's Indigenous population continues to be younger than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Proportion of NSW population by age group



²² Australian Bureau of Statistics, [2016 Census QuickStats: New South Wales](#) [website – accessed 22 November 2017]

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3.2 Regions

At the regional level, the median age of the Indigenous community is broadly in line with the NSW Indigenous median. In contrast, there was a nine year difference in non-Indigenous median age between Sydney and Regional NSW.

Median age by NSW region, 2016		
Region	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
NSW	22	38
Sydney	22	35
GMR	21	40
Regional NSW	21	44

The age distribution of Indigenous people skews younger in all three regions. In comparison to the NSW Indigenous age distribution, there are a number of differences in the age distribution of the Indigenous community:

- **Sydney:** Has a lower proportion of youth aged 14 and under, as well as a slightly lower proportion of persons aged 55 and above.
- **Greater Metropolitan Region:** Has a slightly higher proportion of young persons aged 34 and under, and a slightly lower proportion of people aged between 35 and 74 years.
- **Regional NSW:** Has lower levels of people aged between 25 and 44 years old, but a higher proportion of youth aged 14 and under and persons aged 55 and above.

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The following table summarises the differences in age distributions for each region when compared with the NSW Indigenous age distribution. Figures in blue indicate a higher proportion of a particular age group than the NSW Indigenous age distribution, while figures in red indicate a lower proportion.

Difference in Indigenous age distributions, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Age group	Distribution of NSW Indigenous population	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Under 5	11.5%	10.8%	11.7%	11.9%
5 to 14	22.8%	21.5%	23.3%	23.5%
15 to 24	19.1%	19.9%	19.8%	18.4%
25 to 34	12.8%	13.9%	13.1%	12.1%
35 to 44	10.6%	11.4%	10.3%	10.2%
45 to 54	10.4%	10.5%	10.0%	10.4%
55 to 64	7.4%	7.0%	6.9%	7.7%
65 to 74	3.7%	3.5%	3.4%	4.0%
75+	1.6%	1.5%	1.6%	1.7%

The table below compares the 2006 and 2016 Indigenous age distributions for each region, showing increases (blue) and decreases (red) by age group. The figures indicate a decline in the proportion of youth aged 14 years and below, along with an increase in Indigenous adults aged 45 years and above.

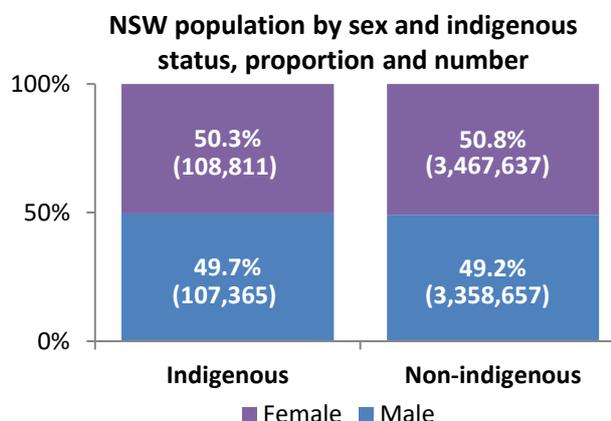
Change in Indigenous age distributions by NSW region, 2006 to 2016						
Age group	Sydney		GMR		Regional NSW	
	2006	2016	2006	2016	2006	2016
Under 5	11.7%	10.8%	12.4%	11.7%	12.8%	11.9%
5 to 14	24.0%	21.5%	26.4%	23.3%	26.9%	23.5%
15 to 24	19.0%	19.9%	19.7%	19.8%	18.0%	18.4%
25 to 34	14.2%	13.9%	11.9%	13.1%	11.9%	12.1%
35 to 44	12.9%	11.4%	12.3%	10.3%	12.3%	10.2%
45 to 54	9.2%	10.5%	8.9%	10.0%	9.2%	10.4%
55 to 64	5.3%	7.0%	4.9%	6.9%	5.3%	7.7%
65 to 74	2.4%	3.5%	2.4%	3.4%	2.5%	4.0%
75+	1.1%	1.5%	1.2%	1.6%	1.0%	1.7%

While there are some regional differences, the changes in age distribution since the 2006 Census have generally followed suit with the wider State trend of an ageing, yet still young, Indigenous population.

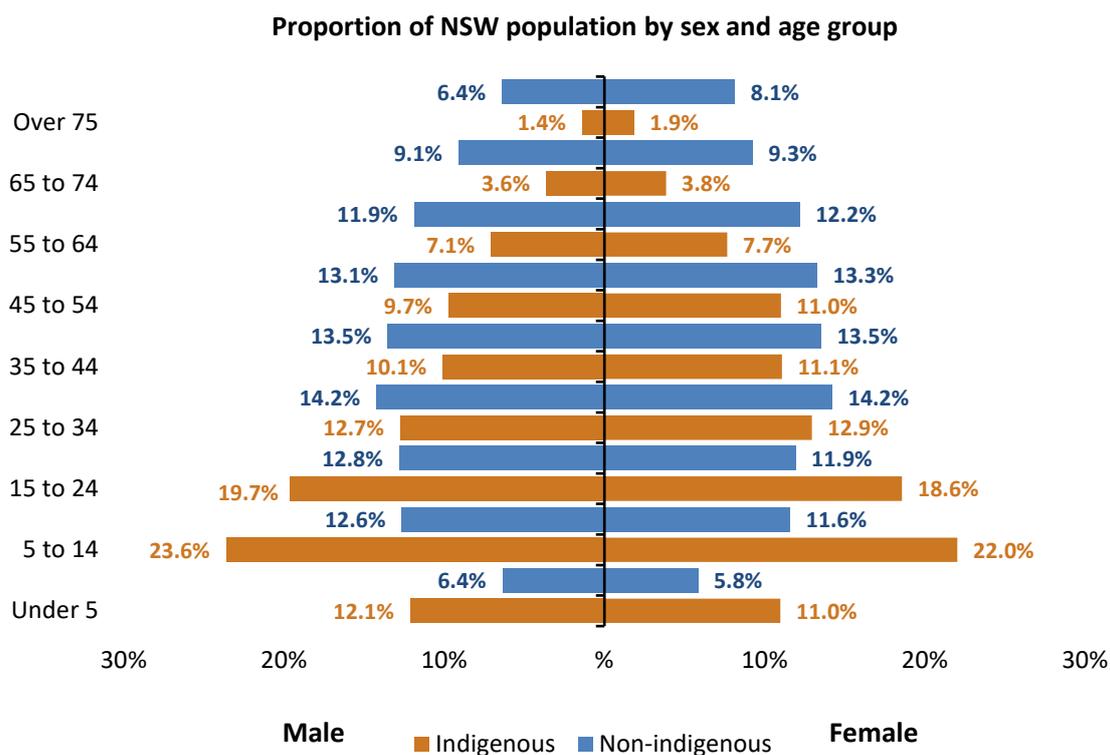
4. SEX

4.1 NSW

The 2016 Census recorded 108,811 females, and 107,365 males, of Indigenous ancestry. This means that there are slightly more Indigenous women than men (50.3% vs 49.7%), although the proportion of Indigenous women is only 0.5% lower than the proportion of non-Indigenous women (see right).



Both Indigenous men and women have younger age profiles than their non-Indigenous counterparts: similar to that of the overall NSW population. The age distributions are not identical. Compared to the female Indigenous population and the total Indigenous population, the age distribution for Indigenous males is skewed younger than females, with a greater proportion of males aged 0 to 24 years. Non-Indigenous males also tend to be younger than females, but to a lesser extent than that seen in the NSW Indigenous community.

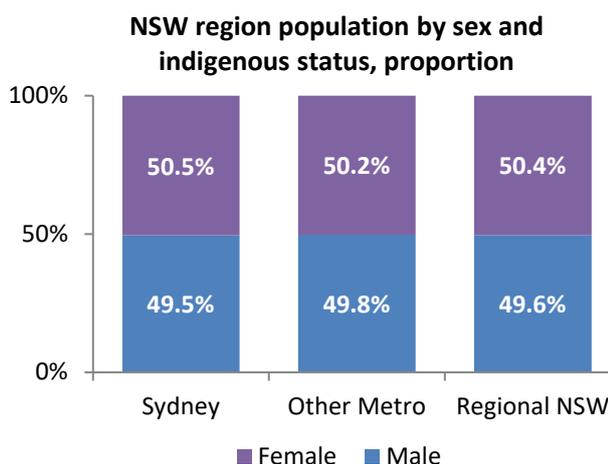


As seen in the State-wide trends, the NSW male and female Indigenous populations have both experienced significant population growth between 2006 and 2016.

Change in NSW male and female populations, 2006 to 2016				
Census	Male: change from previous Census		Female: change from previous Census	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
2006	-	-	-	-
2011	24.2%	6.4%	25.0%	6.4%
2016	26.2%	6.8%	24.3%	6.4%

4.2 Regions

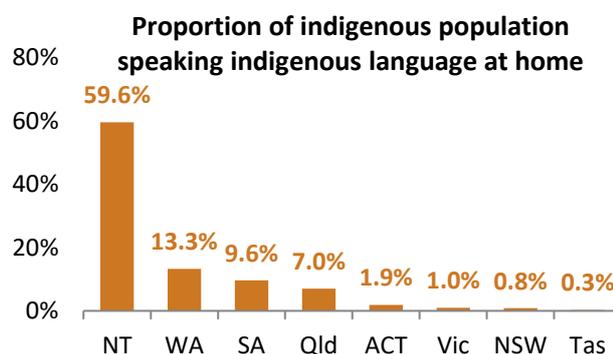
The gender breakdown for each region is similar to the NSW figures, although all three regions have a slightly higher proportion of Indigenous females compared to males. It should be noted though that these differences are very small at the regional level. For example, the 0.8% difference between Indigenous males and females in Regional NSW (see right) is equivalent to 825 people.



The age distributions for Indigenous males and females in each region are similar to the total age distribution for each region's population. Overall, the Indigenous population skews younger than their non-Indigenous regional counterparts. When comparing Indigenous males and females by region, all three regions have a higher proportion of males aged 0 to 24 years, and higher proportions of females aged 25 and over.

5. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

While NSW has the largest Indigenous population of all Australian States and Territories, it has one of the lowest proportions of Indigenous language speakers. Of the 216,171 Indigenous persons living in NSW, fewer than 1,800 speak an Indigenous language at home. This is equivalent to 0.8% of the State's Indigenous population, and is lower than all other jurisdictions except Tasmania (see right).



Nevertheless, the number of Indigenous persons who report speaking an Indigenous language at home has increased since the 2006 Census. Over the decade to 2016 this cohort of Indigenous language speakers has increased by 123%, from 803 speakers in 2006 to more than double that figure in 2016 (1,791 persons). In comparison, the total NSW Indigenous population increased by a comparatively smaller 56.1% over the course of the decade.

Change in proportion of NSW Indigenous language speakers, 2006 to 2016

Census	Proportion of Indigenous language speakers	Change from previous Census (%)
2006	0.6%	-
2011	0.7%	48.9%
2016	0.8%	49.7%

The desire to preserve Indigenous languages is reflected in the NSW Government's *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*, which was introduced in October 2017. The legislation created the Aboriginal Languages Trust, which aims to provide "a focused, coordinated and sustained effort in relation to Aboriginal language activities at local, regional and State levels."²³ In the Bill's Second Reading Speech the NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Sarah Mitchell, outlined the objectives of the legislation:

The objects of the bill are: to acknowledge that Aboriginal languages are part of the culture and identity of Aboriginal people; to establish an Aboriginal Languages Trust governed by Aboriginal people that will facilitate and support Aboriginal language activities to reawaken, nurture and grow Aboriginal languages; and to require the development of a strategic plan for the growth and development of Aboriginal languages.²⁴

Future Censuses may shed light on whether this legislation and other policies will further increase the number of Indigenous language speakers in NSW.

²³ [Aboriginal Languages Act 2017](#) (NSW) s 4-5.

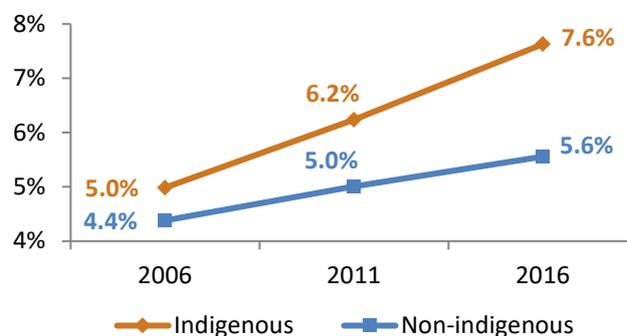
²⁴ Mitchell S, [Aboriginal Languages Bill 2017](#), *NSW Hansard*, 11 October 2017, p 8.

6. DISABILITY AND UNPAID CARE

16,491 NSW Indigenous people—or 7.6% of the State’s Indigenous population—were identified in the Census as being profoundly or severely disabled, needing assistance in order to perform core activities.²⁵

In comparison, 379,370 non-Indigenous were profoundly or severely disabled: equivalent to 5.6% of the NSW non-Indigenous population. As shown above, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people requiring assistance has increased since the 2006 Census.

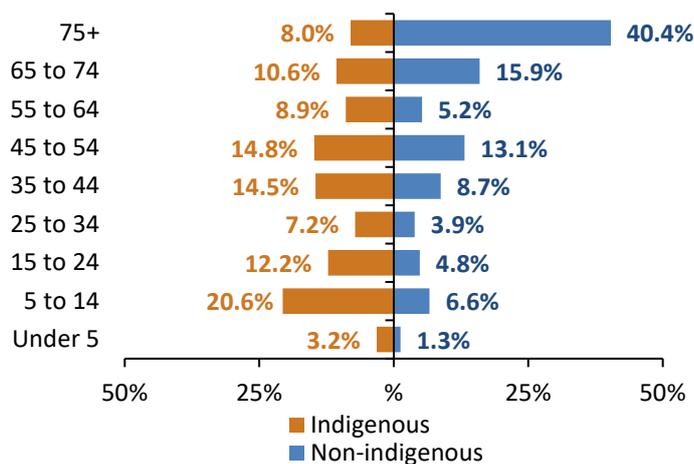
Percentage of NSW persons needing assistance with core activities, 2006-16



When these figures are broken down by age bracket (see right), over half of non-Indigenous people who are profoundly or severely disabled (56.3%) are over the age of 65 years, compared to just 18.6% of Indigenous people in need of assistance.

Indeed, a significant proportion of Indigenous people who are profoundly or severely disabled are under the age of 25 (36.0% vs 12.7% of non-Indigenous people with profound or serious disabilities).

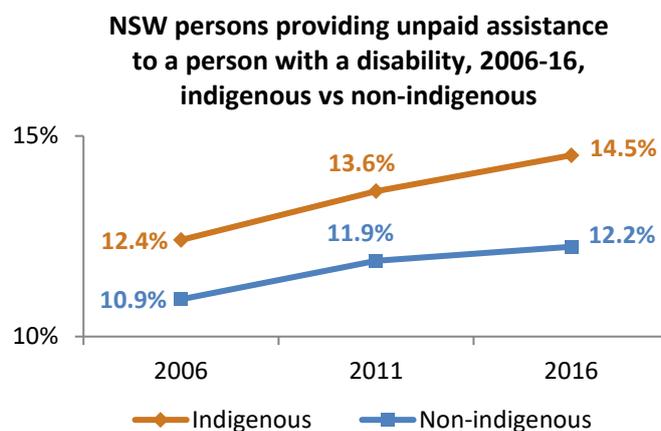
Proportion of NSW persons needing assistance with core activities, by age group



²⁵ See [Glossary](#) for definition.

There are also slight differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are classified as having provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability.²⁶ In 2016, 14.6% of Indigenous people in NSW aged 15 and over (20,602 people) provided unpaid assistance to another person with a disability, compared to 12.2% of non-Indigenous people aged 15 and over (683,409 persons).

As shown in the adjacent chart, both cohorts have seen increases in the proportion of people providing unpaid assistance to others, although the Indigenous population has seen a slightly faster increase than the non-Indigenous community.

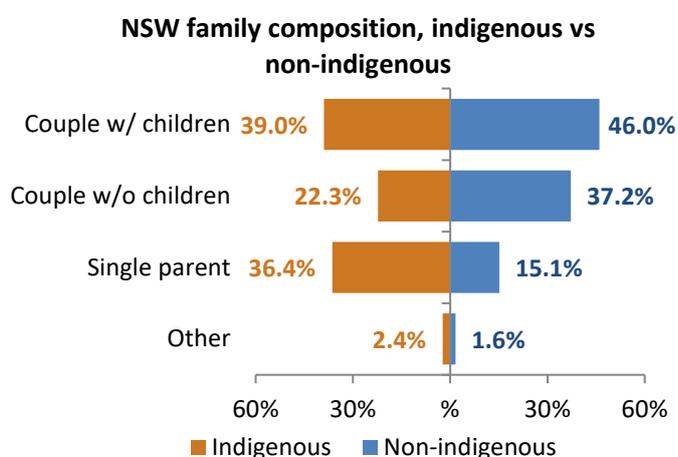


²⁶ See [Glossary](#) for definition.

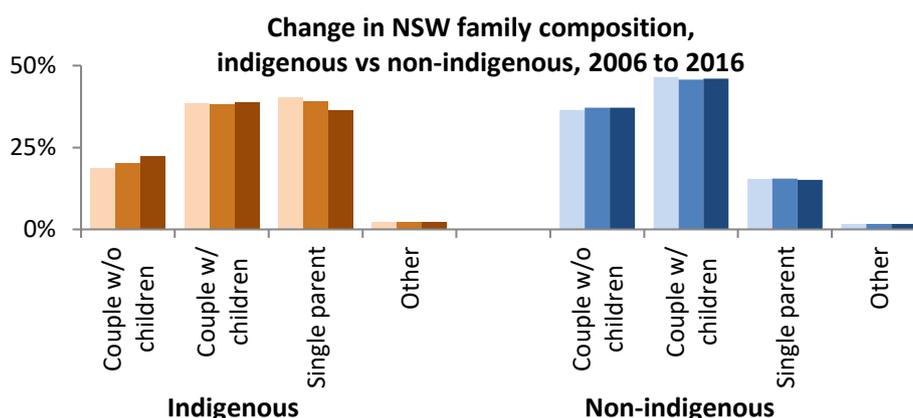
7. FAMILY COMPOSITION

7.1 NSW

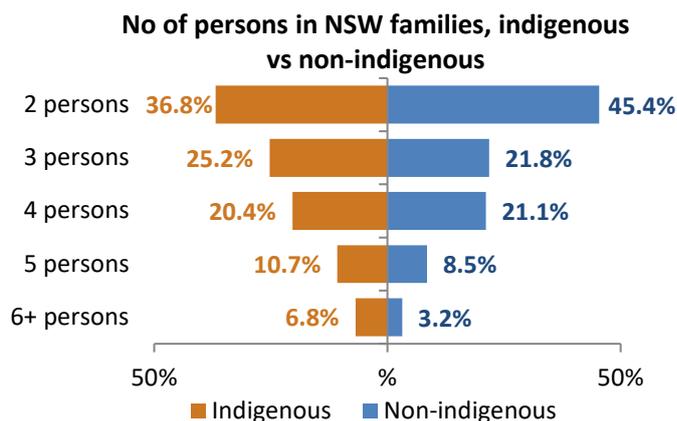
As of 2016, 61.2% (49,319 families) of NSW Indigenous families were couple families, compared to 83.2% (1.55 million families) of NSW non-Indigenous families (see right). It was also substantially more likely for an Indigenous family to be a single parent family (36.4%, or 29,328 families) compared to non-Indigenous families (15.1%, or 281,580 families).



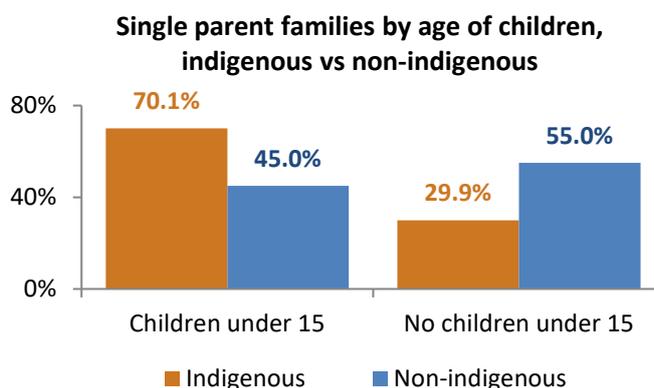
There have been changes to Indigenous family composition between the 2006 and 2016 Censuses. Over the decade, the proportion of Indigenous single parent families fell from 40.4% to 36.4%, while the proportion without children increased from 18.7% to 22.3%. The chart below compares these changes from 2006 to 2016 for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous families.



In terms of size, 36.8% of Indigenous families were comprised of two persons, compared to 45.4% of non-Indigenous families. A slightly higher proportion of Indigenous families had three persons in them (25.2% vs 21.8% for non-Indigenous families) Indigenous families were more likely than non-Indigenous families to be comprised of five or more people (see right).



Turning to single parent families, 70.1% of Indigenous single parent families had children under the age of 15, compared to 45.0% of non-Indigenous single families (see right). These results may reflect the younger age profile of the wider NSW Indigenous community.

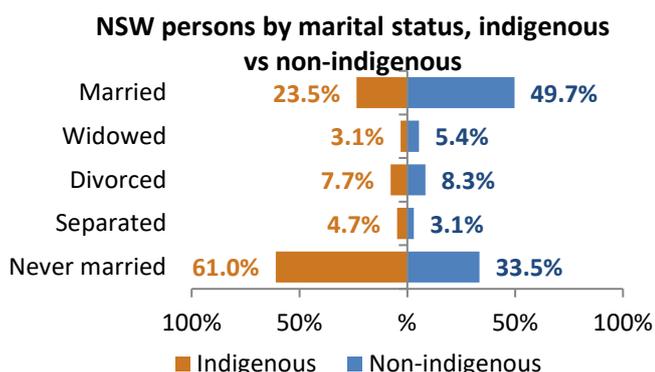


Like the non-Indigenous population, the overwhelming majority of single parents in NSW are women (see below).

NSW single parents by sex, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous		
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Male	14.0% (2,446 persons)	18.0% (52,250)
Female	86.0% (15,068)	82.0% (238,576)

Marital and same-sex status

According to the 2016 Census, Indigenous people are nearly twice as likely as non-Indigenous people to have never been married (61.0% vs 33.5%); and almost half as likely as non-Indigenous people to be married (23.5% vs 49.7%) (see right).



Both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community have approximately the same proportion of same-sex couples. The proportion of male same-sex couples was the same for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous couples, while there were a slightly larger proportion of Indigenous female same-sex couples compared to the non-Indigenous community.

NSW same-sex couples by sex, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous		
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Male	0.6% (312 persons)	0.6% (8,950 persons)
Female	0.8% (392)	0.5% (7,108)

7.2 Regions

Key differences between each region and the NSW results include the following:

- **Sydney:** Has a slightly higher proportion of couple families with children and a lower proportion of single parent families.
- **GMR:** Has the lowest regional proportion of single parent families and the highest proportion of couple families with children.
- **Regional NSW:** Has the highest level of single parent families, and the lowest proportions of couple families with and without children.

Indigenous family composition, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Family	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Couple family with no children	22.3%	22.4%	22.7%	22.0%
Couple family with children	39.0%	39.9%	41.6%	37.0%
Single parent family	36.4%	35.1%	33.7%	38.5%
Other family	2.4%	2.5%	2.0%	2.4%

Compared to NSW, Regional NSW has a slightly higher proportion of families with five or more people, while Sydney and the GMR are more likely to have smaller families.

No of persons in Indigenous families, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Family	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
2 persons	36.8%	37.2%	36.5%	36.8%
3 persons	25.2%	24.9%	25.4%	25.4%
4 persons	20.4%	20.9%	21.1%	19.7%
5 persons	10.7%	10.4%	10.7%	11.0%
6+ persons	6.8%	6.6%	6.3%	7.2%

8. HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

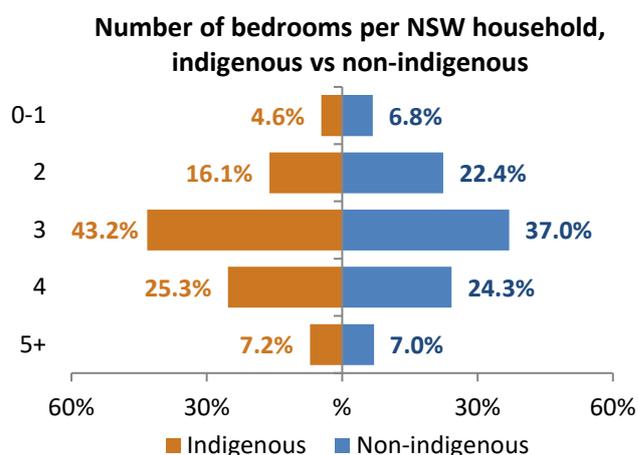
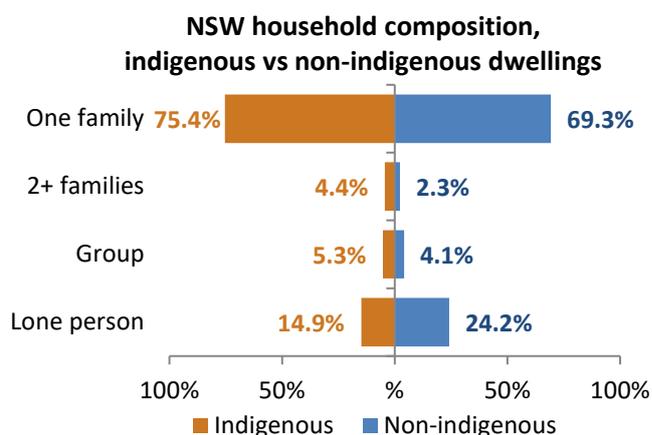
8.1 NSW

Households differ from families in that the Census defines a household as having one or more persons aged at least 15 years of age, while families are two or more persons who are related to one another.²⁷ Accordingly, household composition can differ from family composition.

Dwelling data from the 2016 Census shows that Indigenous households in NSW are more likely than non-Indigenous households to be composed of families or groups. The only category in which non-Indigenous households ranked higher than Indigenous households was lone person households, which comprised almost a quarter of all non-Indigenous households (see above right).

Indigenous households were more likely than non-Indigenous households to have dwellings with three or more bedrooms. This may be due to the younger age profile of the NSW Indigenous population, with a greater proportion of youth aged 24 years and under living with their parents at home.

Internet access²⁸ is another area of interest to policymakers, with the ABS commenting that internet access provides opportunities for Indigenous people to further their cultural, social and educational goals.²⁹ Others have argued that internet access allows Indigenous people to communicate with others and to express their identity; and acts as a medium for expressing the complex cultural codes of Indigenous society.³⁰



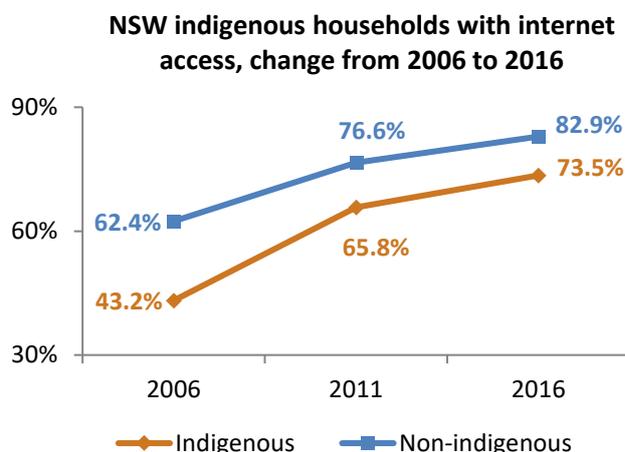
²⁷ Note that households and families are defined differently by the ABS, as explained in the [Glossary](#).

²⁸ See [Glossary](#) for definition.

²⁹ ABS, note 18.

³⁰ Montgomery H, [The internet: The benefits, the problems and legal difficulties for indigenous Australians](#), *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, 2014, 8(14), p 19.

While the vast majority of Indigenous households had internet access in 2016, this was still significantly lower than non-Indigenous households. However, since 2006 there has been an increase in internet access for Indigenous households with household access rates rising from 43.2% in 2006 to 73.5% in 2016 (see right). The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous internet access has also fallen from 19.2% in 2006 to 9.4% as at the latest Census.



8.2 Regions

The Indigenous household compositions of the regions are similar to the NSW results (see table below), albeit with a couple of differences:

- **Sydney:** Has higher levels of group households and households comprised of two or more families.³¹ It is highly probable that this is due to substantially higher house prices in the city compared to other parts of NSW. Sydney's house prices are discussed in the 2017 NSW Parliamentary Research Service paper *Demand, deposits, debt: Housing affordability in Sydney*.³²
- **GMR:** Has the highest proportion of single family households and the lowest proportion of lone person households.
- **Regional NSW:** Has the lowest proportion of group households and two or more family households, but the highest proportion of lone person households.

Indigenous household composition, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Household composition	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
One family	75.4%	73.8%	77.1%	75.5%
Two or more families	4.4%	5.4%	4.7%	3.6%
Lone person	14.9%	14.4%	12.8%	16.2%
Group	5.3%	6.4%	5.5%	4.6%

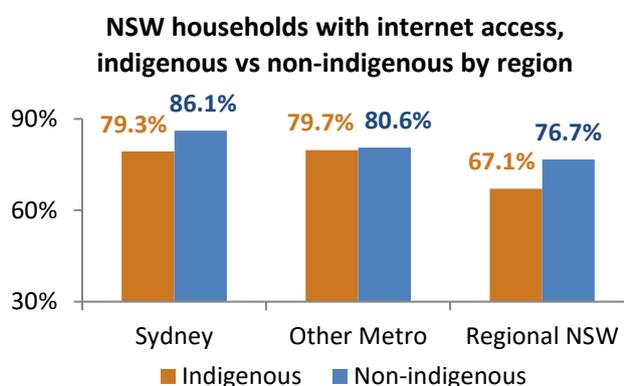
³¹ A household consisting of two or more unrelated people where all persons are aged 15 years and over. See Glossary for further information.

³² Angus C, [Demand, deposits, debt: Housing affordability in Sydney](#), NSW Parliamentary Research Service, Briefing Paper 1/2017, March 2017.

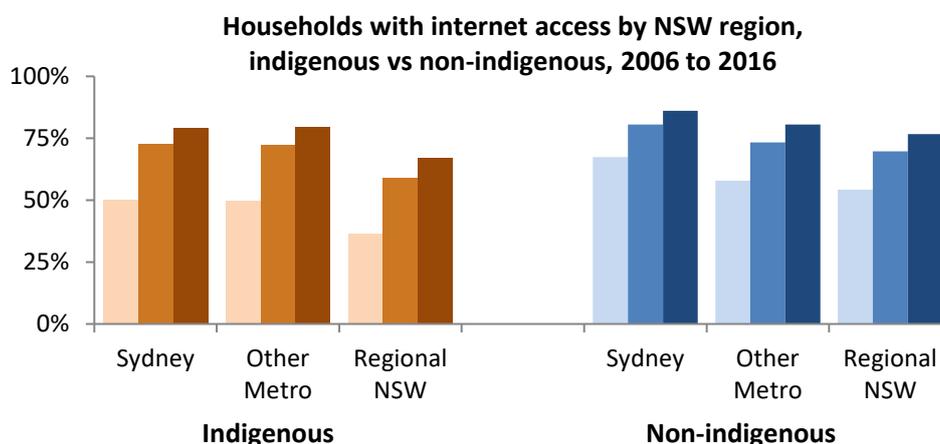
Generally though, when compared with non-Indigenous households, regional Indigenous household compositions follow the State pattern of higher levels of family and group households, and significantly lower levels of lone person households. This is also reflected in the regional results for number of bedrooms, with Indigenous households in all three regions less likely to have zero to two bedrooms and more likely to have three or more bedrooms.

Number of bedrooms in Indigenous households, NSW vs regions, 2016				
No bedrooms	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
0 or 1	4.1%	6.0%	3.9%	4.3%
2	14.8%	17.8%	15.6%	15.5%
3	42.8%	40.9%	43.8%	44.2%
4	26.4%	23.8%	26.1%	25.7%
5 or more	8.3%	8.2%	7.5%	6.4%
Not stated	3.5%	3.4%	3.2%	4.0%

Internet access varies between urban and regional NSW. As shown in the adjacent chart, internet access for Indigenous households in Regional NSW is lower than non-Indigenous households as well as Indigenous households in other regions. Indigenous homes in the GMR are almost as likely as non-Indigenous households to have internet access at their dwellings, while there is a 6.8% gap in internet connectivity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homes in Sydney.



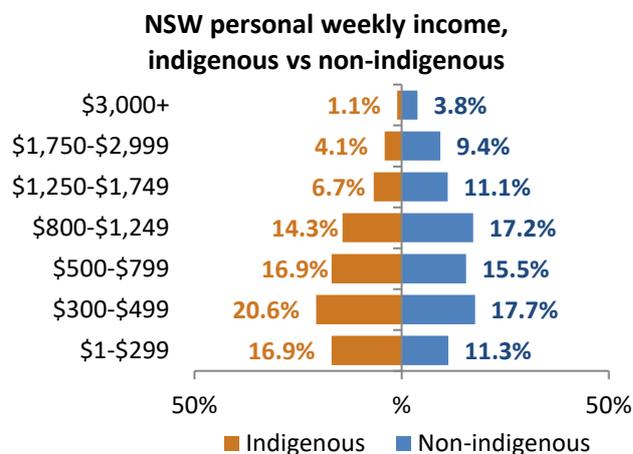
Yet these regional figures are substantially higher than those recorded in the 2006 Census, with the share of Indigenous households with internet access increasing by 30 percentage points over the decade to 2016. The share of non-Indigenous households with the internet increased by a lower average of 20 percentage points over the same period, although they started at a lower base point.



9. INCOME

9.1 NSW

The 2016 Census reveals that Indigenous people in NSW aged 15 years or older earn less weekly income than their non-Indigenous counterparts.³³ According to the Census data, 54.4% of Indigenous people earn between \$1-799 per week, compared to 44.5% of non-Indigenous persons (see right). The greatest differences can be seen in the \$1-299 weekly income bracket (16.9% of Indigenous people compared to 11.3% of non-Indigenous people), and the \$1,750-\$2,999 bracket (4.1% vs 9.4%).



While *personal* weekly income shows the income distribution of all individuals aged 15 and over, *household* weekly income provides more insight into the total weekly income individuals have access to. The reasons for this are outlined in a staff working paper from the Productivity Commission:

[U]sing households as the unit of analysis is a better guide to the financial resources that individuals have access to than their individual market income. This is because many households share income and divide paid (employment) and unpaid (such as caring for children) labour differentially among household members (for example, the labour income of the primary carer of a newly born child will often be less than the financial resources to which that person has access to).³⁴

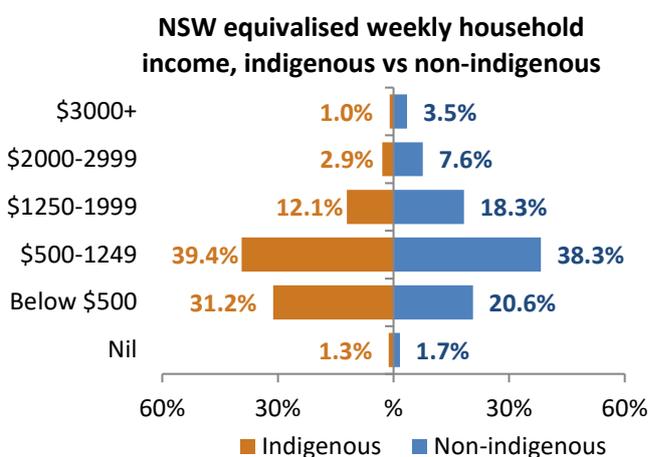
³³ See [Glossary](#) for a definition of income.

³⁴ Productivity Commission, [Trends in the Distribution of Income in Australia](#), 28 March 2013, p 17-18.

When the household is used as the unit of analysis for income, adjustments to the income of a household may be made to enable analysis of the relative wellbeing of households of different sizes and composition.³⁵ These adjustments produce an *equivalised* weekly household income³⁶, which is the preferred variable for the measurement of poverty.

According to the ABS, the NSW median equivalised weekly household income for the 2016 Census is \$891.³⁷ This figure can be used to determine the measurement of relative poverty, as a proxy for disadvantage. According to the Productivity Commission, the main threshold used by the OECD is 50 per cent of median equivalised household income;³⁸ accordingly, the poverty line for the latest Census results is \$445.50 per week.

Using equivalised weekly household income data, 32.4% of Indigenous households earn below \$500 per week, compared to 22.3% of non-Indigenous households (see right). While an exact proportion of Indigenous households subsisting on \$445.50 or less per week cannot be determined, based on these findings it seems evident that Indigenous households are more likely than non-Indigenous households to be living near or below the poverty line.



Just over seven out of ten Indigenous households (70.6%) earn under \$1,249 per week compared to 58.9% of non-Indigenous households. Non-Indigenous households were approximately 1.5 more likely as their Indigenous counterparts to be in the \$1,250-1,999 equivalised weekly income bracket; 2.6 times more likely to be in the \$2,000-\$2,999 bracket; and 3.5 times as likely to have a weekly income of \$3,000 or more.

Nevertheless, the *median* equivalised weekly household income bracket for Indigenous households rose at a faster rate than that for non-Indigenous households between 2006 and 2016. The table below shows that, when the median equivalised weekly income brackets are adjusted for inflation, Indigenous household income rose significantly over the decade.

³⁵ Productivity Commission, [Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia](#), 11 July 2013, p 33-34.

³⁶ Created by summing the personal incomes reported by all household members aged 15 years and over and applying a weighting according to the 'modified OECD' equivalence scale. See: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Equivalised Total Household Income \(HIED\)](#), 20 September 2016.

³⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [1410.0 - Data by Region, 2011-16](#), 31 March 2017.

³⁸ Productivity Commission, note 35, p 33.

Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census

Change in inflation-adjusted median equivalised weekly household income, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous, 2006 to 2016			
Census	Indigenous households	Non-Indigenous households	All NSW households ³⁹
2006	\$507-759 (\$400-599 in Census)	\$761-1013 (\$600-799 in Census)	N/A
2011	\$661-880 (\$600-799)	\$881-991 (\$800-899)	\$833 (\$756)
2016	\$650-799	\$1,000-1,249	\$891

9.2 Regions

Compared to the State figures, the Sydney region had a larger proportion of Indigenous people earning \$800 or more per week, as well as a lower proportion of people earning between \$1-799 weekly. In contrast, there were higher proportions of people in Regional NSW earning \$1-799 per week.

Weekly personal income by NSW region, Indigenous persons				
Income	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Negative or nil	10.9%	11.7%	11.7%	10.2%
\$1-\$299	16.9%	13.9%	16.8%	18.4%
\$300-\$499	20.6%	17.3%	20.2%	22.7%
\$500-\$799	16.9%	15.7%	17.5%	17.4%
\$800-\$1,249	14.3%	16.7%	15.1%	12.7%
\$1,250-\$1,749	6.7%	9.1%	7.3%	5.2%
\$1,750-\$2,999	4.1%	6.1%	4.4%	2.9%
\$3,000+	1.1%	1.7%	0.9%	0.9%

Indigenous household income was also higher in the Sydney region than other parts of the State, with a substantially lower proportion of households earning below \$500 compared to the NSW average, and the highest proportion of households earning \$1,250 and over. Regional NSW recorded the highest proportion of Indigenous households earning below \$500 in weekly income, while the GMR had the highest proportion of all regions in the \$500-1,249 weekly household income brackets.

Equivalised weekly household income by NSW region, Indigenous households				
Income	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Nil	1.3%	1.3%	1.2%	1.3%
Below \$500	31.2%	24.6%	29.2%	35.9%
\$500 to \$1,249	39.4%	38.0%	42.3%	38.8%
\$1,250 to \$1,999	12.1%	17.5%	12.9%	8.6%
\$2,000 to \$2,999	2.9%	5.2%	2.8%	1.7%
\$3,000 and over	1.0%	1.9%	0.7%	0.6%

³⁹ ABS, note 37.

10. HOME OWNERSHIP

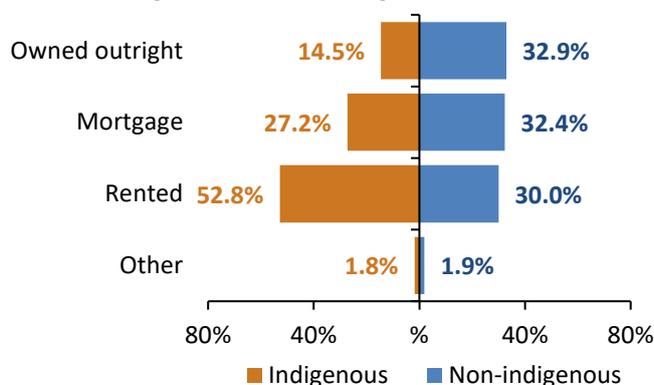
10.1 NSW

Indigenous households are less likely than non-Indigenous households to own their homes (see right). At the time of the 2016 Census, 65.3% of non-Indigenous households either owned their dwelling outright or owned it with a mortgage, compared to 41.7% of Indigenous households. 52.8% of dwellings with Indigenous households were rented, which was higher than the proportion of non-Indigenous households that rented (30.0%).

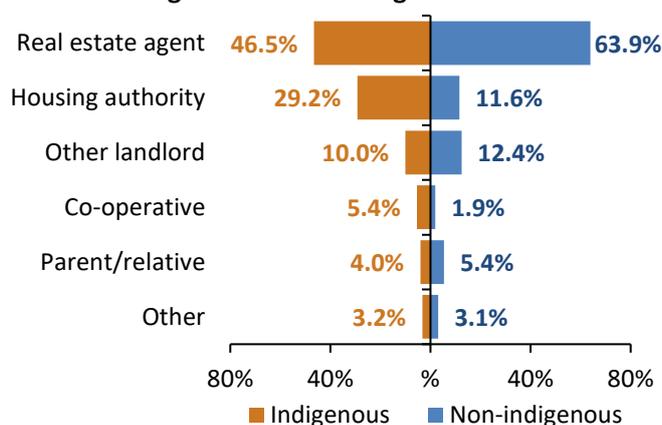
Turning to rented dwellings, 46.5% of Indigenous households rented via a real estate agent, compared to 63.9% of non-Indigenous households. Indigenous households were less likely to rent from parents or relatives than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and were over twice as likely to live in public housing or in housing managed by a co-operative⁴⁰ (see right).

Despite these differences, the decade to 2016 saw increases in the proportion of Indigenous households who owned their dwelling outright (1.3%) or with a mortgage (4.8%), with a decline in the proportion renting (-5.2%). For NSW non-Indigenous households, outright home ownership fell over the decade (-2.4%), ownership with a mortgage marginally increased (0.2%), and the proportion of dwellings being rented increased by 2.2%.

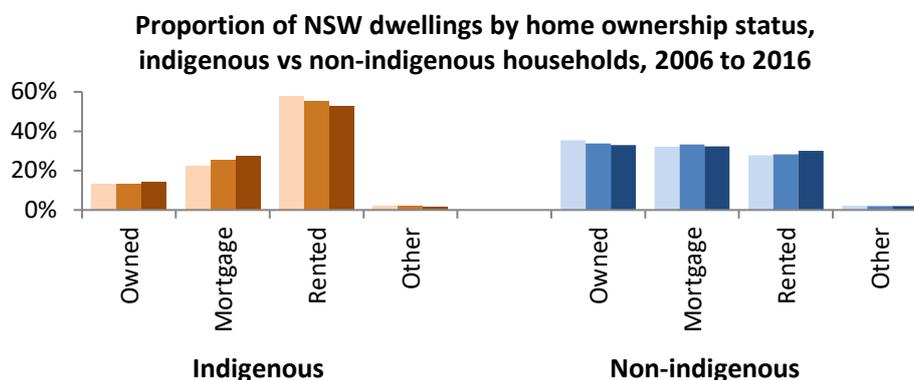
NSW dwellings by home ownership status, indigenous vs non-indigenous households



NSW dwellings by landlord type, indigenous vs non-indigenous households



⁴⁰ Note that the co-operative group includes community and church groups.



10.2 Regions

In each of the three NSW regions, the proportion of Indigenous households that owned their properties outright or with a mortgage was lower than non-Indigenous households in each region. The regional difference ranged from 22.1% (Sydney) to 28.7% (Regional NSW). In contrast, the proportion of Indigenous households that rented was higher than non-Indigenous households, the difference ranging from 21.5% for Sydney to 28.3% for Regional NSW. There are a number of specific differences between the regions in terms of home ownership status:

- **Sydney:** Has the lowest proportion of Indigenous households that own their houses outright (13.7%) or with a mortgage (26.5%), and has the State's largest proportion of Indigenous households who rent.
- **GMR:** Has the lowest proportion of Indigenous households who rent, and the highest proportion of Indigenous households with a mortgage (32.0%). This figure is close to the GMR's non-Indigenous mortgaged dwelling rate (33.4%)
- **Regional NSW:** Has a slightly higher proportion of Indigenous households who own their home outright or are renting than seen for NSW, and the lowest proportion of Indigenous households with a mortgage.

The table below summarises home ownership differences across regions.

Indigenous households by home ownership status, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Ownership status	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Owned outright	14.5%	13.7%	14.5%	15.1%
Owned with a mortgage	27.2%	26.5%	32.0%	25.2%
Rented	52.8%	54.8%	49.0%	53.4%
Other	1.8%	1.6%	1.3%	2.1%
Not stated	3.7%	3.4%	3.2%	4.2%

 Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census

With regard to tenure type, Sydney had the State's highest proportion of Indigenous households living in public housing; the GMR had the highest level of Indigenous households renting through real estate agents; and Regional NSW had a proportion of Indigenous households with co-operative housing tenure more than double the rate of the other regions.

Indigenous households by tenure type, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Tenure type	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Real estate agent	46.5%	47.4%	53.1%	42.9%
Housing authority	29.2%	36.7%	26.3%	26.1%
Other landlord	10.0%	6.6%	9.8%	12.2%
Co-operative	5.4%	3.5%	2.9%	7.8%
Parent/relative	4.0%	2.9%	4.4%	4.5%
Other	3.2%	1.8%	2.3%	4.4%
Not stated	1.5%	1.0%	1.2%	2.0%

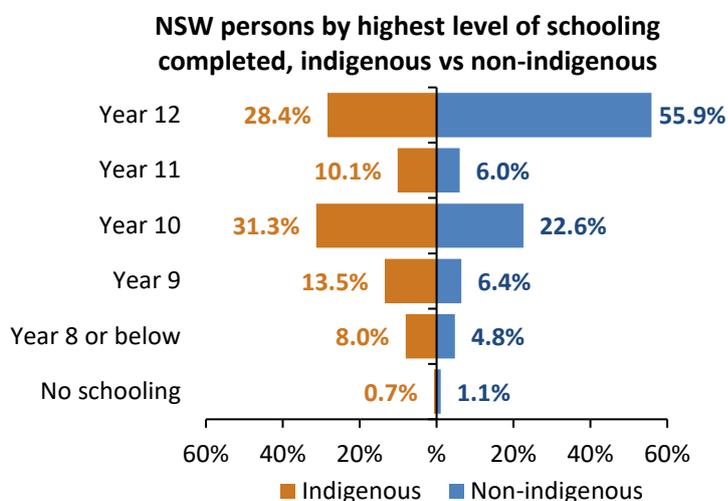
11. EDUCATION

11.1 NSW

As noted by the ABS, education is critical for overcoming disadvantage, yet a range of issues may affect Indigenous participation in education, including access to educational institutions and financial constraints.⁴¹ This is why the Commonwealth Government's *Closing the Gap* program has the (so far unsuccessful) goal of halving the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020.⁴²

In NSW, one of the 12 Premier's Priorities is to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the top two NAPLAN⁴³ bands for reading and numeracy by 30%.⁴⁴ This is to be achieved through needs-based funding and the Connected Communities Strategy, which addresses educational and social aspirations of Aboriginal children and all young people in 15 schools in 11 of the most complex and vulnerable communities in NSW.⁴⁵

Indigenous people aged 15 and over were half as likely as non-Indigenous people aged 15 and over to have completed Year 12 or equivalent schooling. 53.5% of Indigenous people had only completed Year 11 or lower, compared to 34.9% of non-Indigenous persons (see right).



⁴¹ ABS, note 18.

⁴² Commonwealth Government, [Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2018](#), February 2018, p 51, 64.

⁴³ National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy.

⁴⁴ NSW Government, [Premier's Priorities](#), 2017 [accessed 21 December 2017]

⁴⁵ NSW Department of Education, [Connected Communities](#), n.d. [accessed 21 December 2017]

Census data also indicates a divergence in the proportion of 18-24 year olds currently in tertiary education. While the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth attending TAFE is similar, Indigenous youth are over three times less likely to be at university (see right).

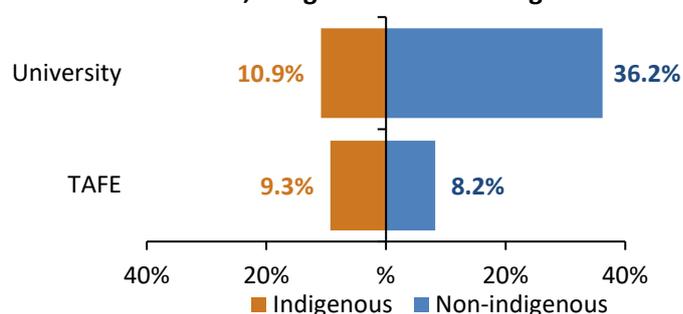
This educational disadvantage is also apparent when reviewing the Census results for level of highest educational attainment (see right). Only 6.7% of Indigenous people aged 15 and over have a Bachelor Degree or above, compared to 25.3% of non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people in NSW are also almost twice as likely as non-Indigenous NSW residents to have not progressed beyond Year 9 schooling (see right).

In comparison to other States and Territories, NSW has the third highest proportion of Indigenous people who have completed either a postgraduate degree or a bachelor's degree (the ACT and Victoria rank first and second respectively), but the second largest proportion whose highest qualifications were limited to Year 9 or below (the Northern Territory ranking first on this measure).

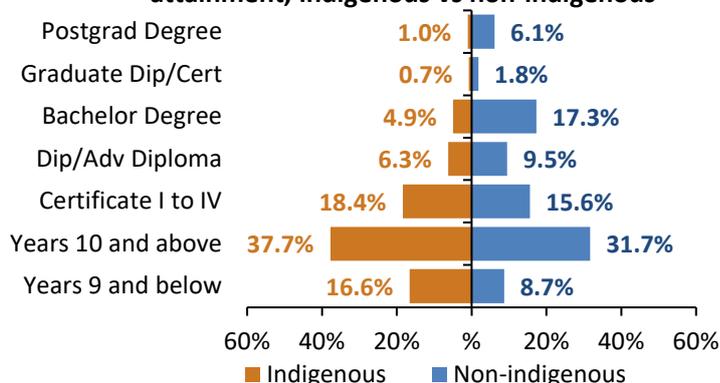
The table below shows the proportion of Indigenous persons by level of highest educational attainment for each State and Territory and Australia. Figures in blue indicate a greater proportion of Indigenous people holding a qualification than the Australian average, while figures in red indicate a lower proportion.

Indigenous persons by highest level of educational attainment, by jurisdiction				
Jurisdiction	Postgraduate	Bachelor	Years 10 and above	Year 9 or below
AUSTRALIA	0.9%	4.2%	40.1%	15.1%
NSW	1.0%	4.9%	37.7%	16.6%
Vic	1.6%	6.2%	35.2%	14.5%
Qld	0.7%	3.9%	43.6%	12.7%
SA	0.7%	3.9%	40.7%	13.6%
WA	0.5%	3.2%	44.3%	12.5%
Tas	0.8%	4.0%	42.9%	14.4%
NT	0.3%	1.7%	35.6%	22.2%
ACT	3.6%	11.3%	36.9%	9.2%

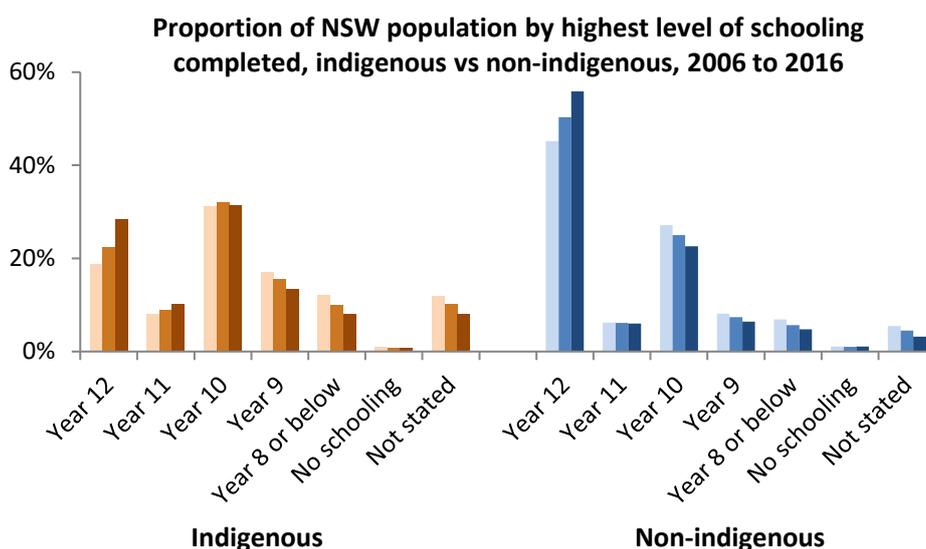
NSW youth aged 18-24 years by educational institution, indigenous vs non-indigenous



NSW persons by highest level of educational attainment, indigenous vs non-indigenous



Despite these results, since 2006 there have been marked improvements in educational attainment, with Indigenous people now entering the education system earlier and staying for longer.⁴⁶ Census data for NSW shows that over the past ten years there has been a 9.7% increase in the proportion of Indigenous people who have completed Year 12 or equivalent (similar to the 10.7% increase recorded for the State's non-Indigenous cohort), and a 2.1% increase in Indigenous people completing Year 11 or similar.



11.2 Regions

The highest level of completed schooling differs between regions. In the Sydney region, 35.7% of Indigenous people have completed Year 12 or equivalent: 7.3% higher than the State figure (28.4%). In contrast, only 23.9% of Indigenous people in Regional NSW have completed Year 12 or equivalent: 4.5% below the NSW average, and 11.7% below the Sydney figure.

The table overleaf summarises the differences in completed schooling for each region compared with NSW. Figures in blue indicate a higher proportion of a particular category than the NSW average, while figures in red are lower than average. In brief though, Indigenous people are more likely to have completed higher levels of schooling if they live in Sydney or the GMR.

⁴⁶ Biddle N and Markham F, [Census 2016: what's changed for Indigenous Australians?](#), *The Conversation*, 28 June 2017.

Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census

Difference in level of schooling completed, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Highest level of schooling completed	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Year 12	28.4%	35.7%	29.6%	23.9%
Year 11	10.1%	9.3%	10.6%	10.4%
Year 10	31.3%	29.1%	33.0%	32.0%
Year 9	13.5%	11.7%	13.4%	14.5%
Year 8 or below	8.0%	6.4%	7.0%	9.4%
No schooling	0.7%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%
Not stated	8.0%	7.1%	5.8%	9.1%

Turning to highest level of educational attainment for Indigenous people:

- Sydney's Indigenous community has a greater proportion of Bachelor degree and higher graduates than the other two regions;
- The GMR had the highest proportion of people whose top qualification was Certificate I-IV; and
- Regional NSW has the highest proportion of Indigenous people who have not progressed past Year 9.

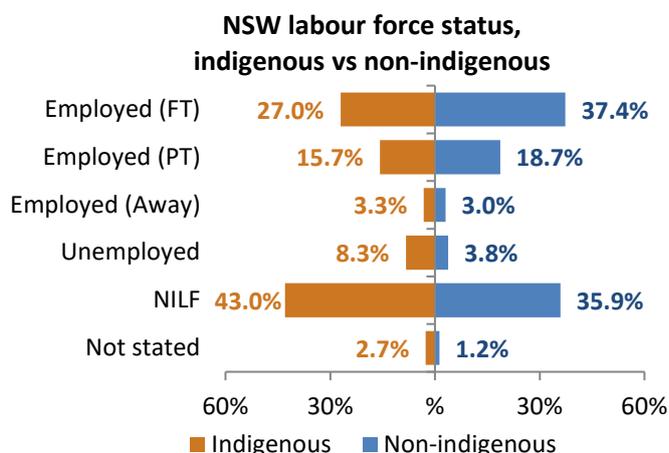
Difference in level of schooling completed, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Highest level of schooling completed	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Postgraduate	1.0%	1.9%	1.0%	0.6%
Graduate Dip/Cert	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.5%
Bachelor Degree	4.9%	7.0%	5.4%	3.6%
Dip/Adv Diploma	6.3%	7.6%	6.9%	5.3%
Certificate I-IV	18.4%	17.3%	21.4%	17.9%
Years 10 and above	37.7%	38.3%	37.6%	37.6%
Years 9 and below	16.6%	14.1%	15.2%	18.6%

12. LABOUR FORCE

12.1 NSW

The ABS notes that, in addition to providing financial independence and raising living standards, being employed can be important for participating in society and improving physical and mental health.⁴⁷ The *Closing the Gap* program has the goal of halving the gap in employment outcomes (as of 2008) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018. However, the latest report commented that, with the exception of NSW, the program is not on track to meet the 2018 target.⁴⁸

Despite the State results, Indigenous people in NSW are still less likely to be in the labour force than non-Indigenous people. Of the population aged 15 years and above, 43.0% of Indigenous people are not in the labour force⁴⁹ (NILF) compared with 35.9% of non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people aged 15 and over are also less likely to be employed than non-Indigenous people, with a higher proportion of unemployment⁵⁰ and lower proportions of both full and part-time employment (see right).



However, a key issue when interpreting Indigenous and non-Indigenous labour force statistics is the fact that the Indigenous community has a much younger age distribution than non-Indigenous.⁵¹ To try and compensate for this difference, the paper also looks at the population aged 15-64 for selected indicators in order to highlight the size of the difference between the two populations.

The following table compares the 15+ labour force cohort with a cohort aged 15-64 years for both NILF and full time employed indicators in order to assess the impact of removing a portion of the labour force which is likely to include a significant number of retirees. Once persons aged 65 and over are excluded from the non-Indigenous working population, there is a 12.0% fall in the proportion of those not in the labour force, and an 8.0% increase in the proportion working full time.

⁴⁷ ABS, note 18.

⁴⁸ Commonwealth Government, note 42, p 76-77.

⁴⁹ See [Glossary](#).

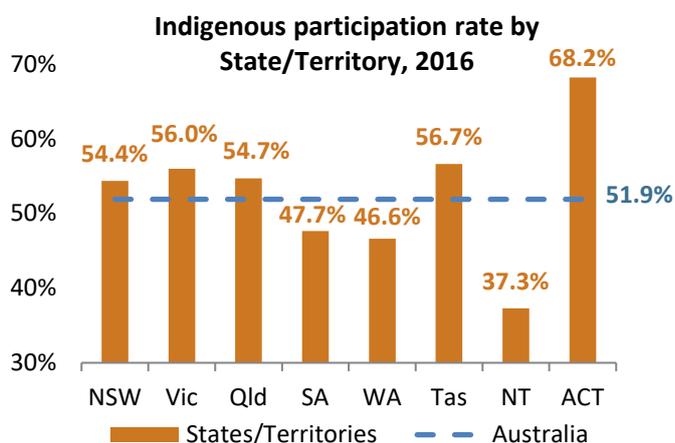
⁵⁰ Note that the proportion of unemployed in the labour is not the same as the unemployment rate. The two terms are outlined in the [Glossary](#).

⁵¹ See [Chapter 3](#) of this paper.

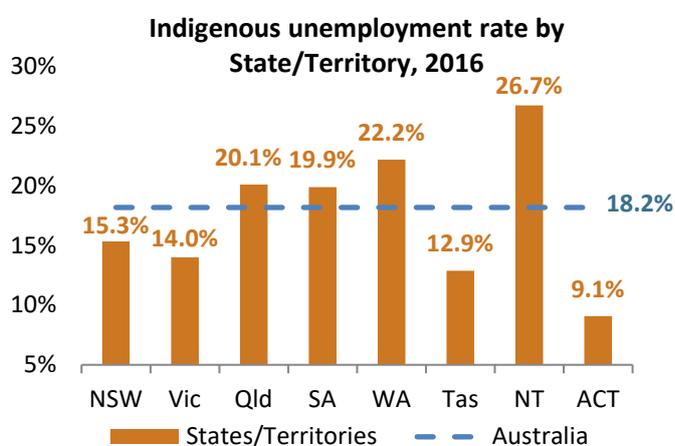
In contrast, there was only a 3.6% fall for the Indigenous cohort not in the labour force, and only a 2.0% increase in the proportion working full time. This shows that there is a greater proportion of Indigenous people in NSW who, despite being of working age, are not employed or looking for work.

Proportion of NSW NILF and unemployed, 15+ vs 15-64 cohorts, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous				
Cohort	NILF		Full-time employment	
	15+ years	15-64 years	15+ years	15-64 years
Indigenous	43.0%	39.4%	27.0%	29.0%
Non-Indigenous	35.9%	23.9%	37.4%	45.4%

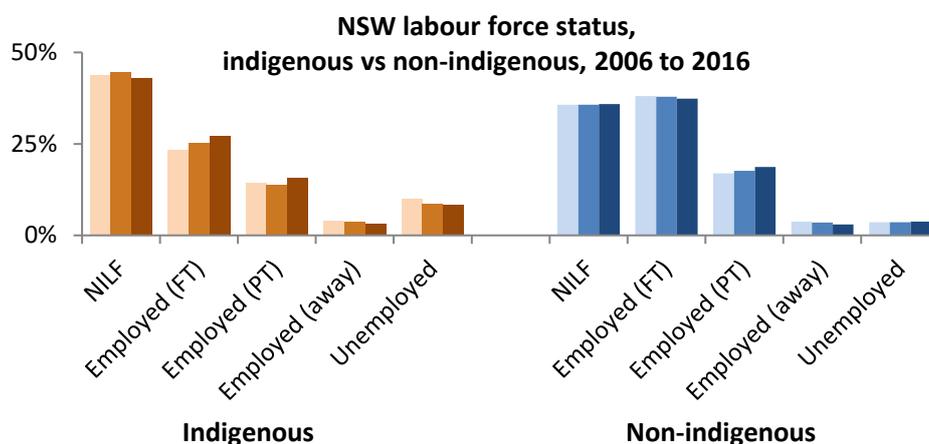
As shown in the two charts to the right, NSW has an Indigenous participation rate above the national average (54.4% vs 51.9%) and a lower unemployment rate (15.3% vs 18.2%). NSW ranks fourth of all States and Territories for both its participation and unemployment rates. With regard to unemployment, it should be noted that the three highest ranking jurisdictions—the ACT, Tasmania and Victoria—have substantially smaller Indigenous populations than NSW.



Over the decade there have been improvements in employment opportunities for Indigenous people in NSW. As illustrated in the chart overleaf, the proportion of the Indigenous population aged 15 and over in full time employment increased between 2006 and 2016 by 3.9%, and the proportion in part time employment rose by 1.4%. For non-Indigenous people, full time employment as a proportion of the total labour force *decreased* by 0.7%, although part time employment rose by 1.7% over the decade.



Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census



There have been improvements in both the participation and unemployment rates for Indigenous people in NSW. Between 2006 and 2016, the Indigenous participation rate increased by 3.2% to 54.4%, while the unemployment rate fell by 4.0%. In comparison, the non-Indigenous participation rate for NSW increased by 0.5%, while the unemployment rate increased by 0.3% (see following tables).

Furthermore, as shown in the first table, once persons aged 65 and over are excluded from the NSW working population, the participation rate for the non-Indigenous population falls dramatically for all three Censuses. By way of comparison, the Indigenous population's participation rate falls by a much smaller margin for each Census: again indicative of the younger age profile of the Indigenous population.

Change in NSW participation rate, 15+ vs 15-64 cohorts, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous 2006 to 2016				
Census	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	15+ years	15-64 years	15+ years	15-64 years
2006	51.2%	54.3%	62.3%	74.2%
2011	51.2%	54.3%	62.6%	74.2%
2016	54.4%	58.2%	62.8%	75.4%

Change in NSW unemployment rate, 15+ cohort, 2006 to 2016		
Census	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
2006	19.3%	5.7%
2011	16.9%	5.7%
2016	15.3%	6.0%

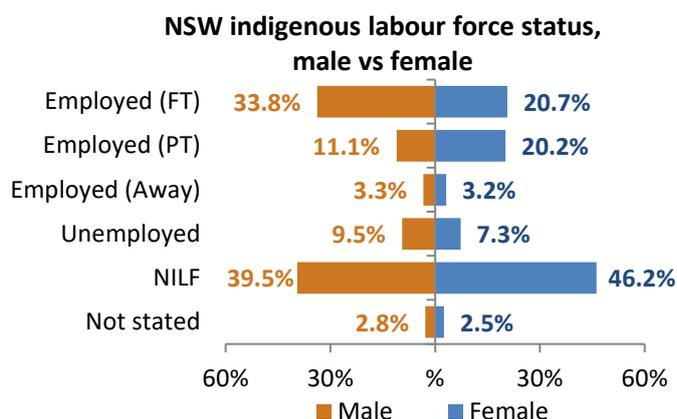
There are also differences between Indigenous men and women in the NSW labour force. Indigenous women are more likely to be outside the labour force than men (46.2% vs 39.5%) and are more likely to be in part time employment (20.2% vs 11.1%). Meanwhile, Indigenous men are significantly more likely to be employed full time, with 33.8% of this cohort working full time compared to 20.7% of Indigenous women.

The unemployment rate for Indigenous women is slightly lower than that for Indigenous men, as shown on the right.

12.2 Regions

Compared to NSW, the Sydney region hosts a strong Indigenous labour force. While the proportion of Indigenous people employed part time in the region is lower than the State Indigenous figures, Sydney boasts higher levels of full time employment, and lower levels of Indigenous people who are unemployed or are not in the labour force.

The GMR also has a higher proportion of employed Indigenous people than the NSW average (although this is predominantly part time work), but a slightly higher proportion of unemployed Indigenous people. Regional NSW has the worst labour force outcomes in the State, with lower proportions of all types of employment, a higher proportion of Indigenous people not in the labour force, and a higher proportion of unemployed.



Indigenous labour force status by NSW region				
Labour force status	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Employed full-time	27.0%	33.7%	28.4%	22.9%
Employed part-time	15.7%	15.4%	17.9%	15.1%
Employed (away from work)	3.3%	3.4%	3.3%	3.2%
Not in the labour force	43.0%	38.6%	40.0%	46.8%
Unemployed	8.3%	6.7%	8.6%	9.1%

These regional differences are also apparent when comparing participation and unemployment rates with the NSW averages. As shown in the tables overleaf, Sydney and the GMR have Indigenous participation and unemployment rates above the State average, while Regional NSW fares worse in both categories.

This regional Indigenous disadvantage is even more apparent when reviewing the non-Indigenous unemployment rate for Regional NSW (5.8%), which is lower than the NSW rate of 6.0%. In contrast, the Indigenous unemployment rate in Regional NSW is 18.1%.

Participation rates by NSW region, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous		
Census	Participation rate	
	<i>Indigenous</i>	<i>Non-Indigenous</i>
NSW	54.4%	62.8%
Sydney	59.3%	65.5%
GMR	58.2%	59.5%
Regional NSW	50.3%	58.0%

Note that—in contrast to most of the tables in this paper—lower unemployment rates are preferred. Accordingly, green is used to show regional unemployment rates lower than the NSW average, and red to show higher rates.

Unemployment rates by NSW region, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous		
Census	Unemployment rate	
	<i>Indigenous</i>	<i>Non-Indigenous</i>
NSW	15.3%	6.0%
Sydney	11.3%	5.9%
GMR	14.8%	6.8%
Regional NSW	18.1%	5.8%

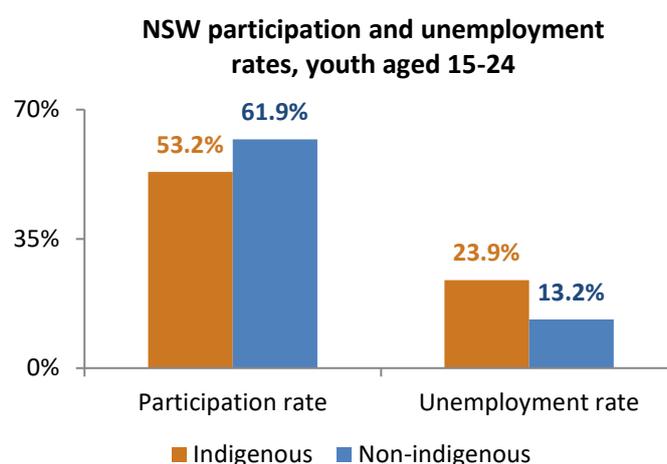
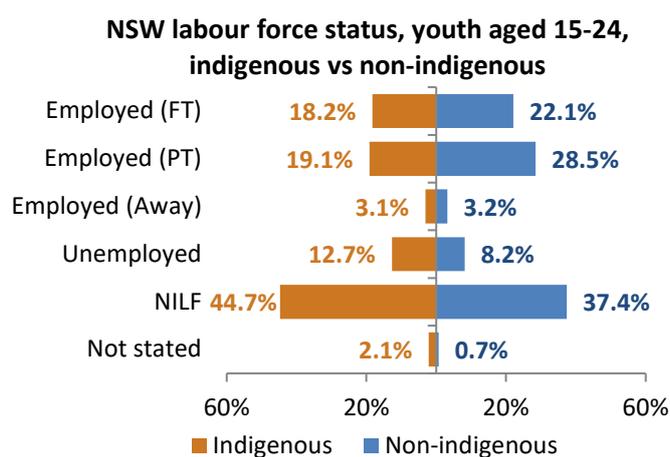
13. YOUTH LABOUR FORCE

13.1 NSW

The ABS has commented that young people's transition from school to study or full-time work can have long-term implications, with those not fully engaged in either education and/or work at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, underemployed or marginally attached to the labour force.⁵² This is arguably of particular importance for the Indigenous community, both due to its younger age profile and the entrenched disadvantage it experiences.

NSW Indigenous youth (persons aged 15 to 24) are more likely to not be in the labour force (NILF; 44.7%) than non-Indigenous youth (37.4%).⁵³ As with the labour force results for all persons aged 15 and over, Indigenous youth are more likely to be unemployed, and less likely to be in full or part-time employment.

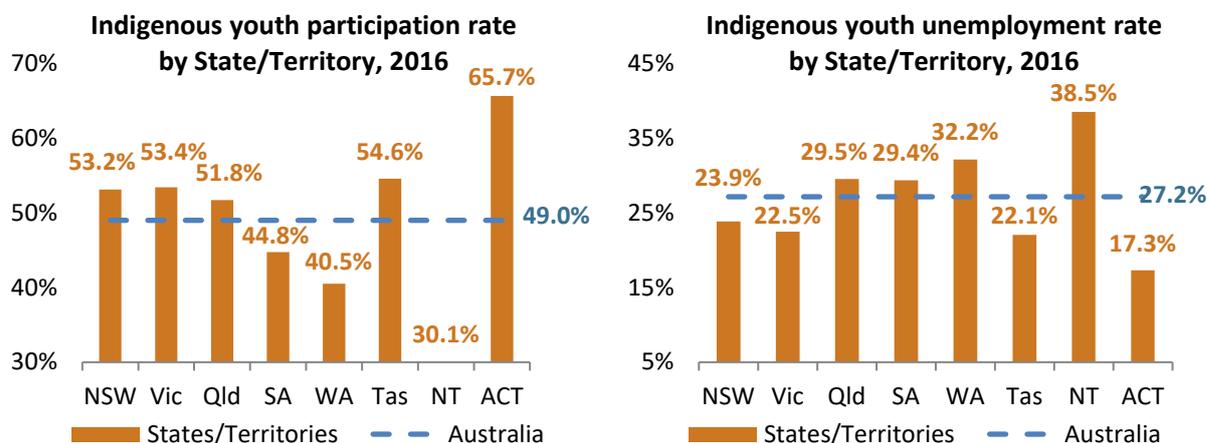
Additionally, the participation rate is lower and unemployment rate higher for Indigenous youth compared to non-Indigenous youth (see right). However, NSW Indigenous youth have higher participation levels and lower levels of unemployment than the Australian averages, as well as compared to other States with significant Indigenous populations such as Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (see overleaf).



⁵² ABS, note 18.

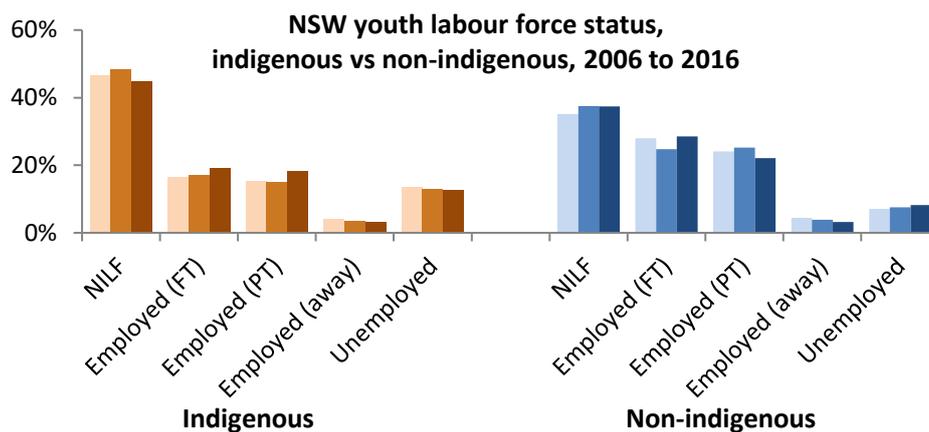
⁵³ See [Glossary](#) for the definition of NILF.

Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census



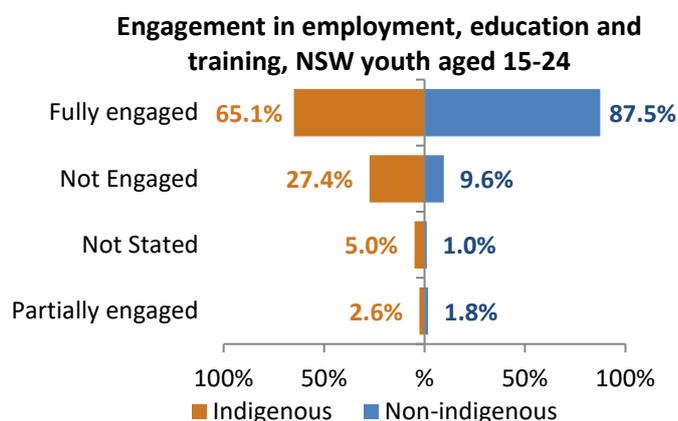
As with the total Indigenous population aged 15 and over, there were improvements in labour force outcomes for the youth Indigenous population between 2006 and 2016.

Over the decade, the proportion of Indigenous youth working full or part-time increased by 2.6% and 3.1% respectively, while the proportion of unemployed Indigenous youth and those not in the labour force fell (-0.8% and -1.8% respectively). In contrast, non-Indigenous youth have seen increases in the proportion out of work or not in the labour force.



The 2016 Census introduced a new indicator to classify persons by their level of engagement in employment, education and training. This indicator can be used to determine what proportion of Indigenous youth in NSW are fully engaged in work or study, compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

As shown in the chart on the right, only 65.1% of Indigenous youth were fully engaged in employment, education or training, while 87.5% of non-Indigenous youth in the State were fully engaged. 27.4% of Indigenous youth were classified as not engaged, compared to only 9.6% of non-Indigenous youth.



13.2 Regions

Looking at the regional data, Sydney and the GMR have higher proportions of Indigenous youth in employment than the NSW average, while Regional NSW has lower levels of youth in full and part-time work.

The Sydney region also fares better than the State average in terms of the proportion of Indigenous youth either not in the labour force or unemployed. The GMR has the lowest proportion of youth not in the labour force, but the highest proportion of unemployed, while Regional NSW is above the NSW average in both categories.

Indigenous youth labour force status by NSW region				
Labour force status	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Employed full-time	18.2%	23.1%	18.6%	15.4%
Employed part-time	19.1%	20.2%	21.5%	17.5%
Employed (away from work)	3.1%	3.2%	3.2%	3.1%
Unemployed	12.7%	10.6%	14.2%	13.1%
Not in the labour force	44.7%	41.2%	41.0%	48.5%

These regional differences are also apparent when comparing participation and unemployment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth.

As shown in the table overleaf, Sydney and the GMR have Indigenous youth participation rates greater than the State average, while Regional NSW falls below this result. Sydney has the lowest non-Indigenous youth participation rate of all three regions, although this may indicate higher numbers of youth studying in the city rather than not being engaged in employment, education or training.

 Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census

Youth participation rates by NSW region, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous		
Census	Participation rate	
	<i>Indigenous</i>	<i>Non-Indigenous</i>
NSW	53.2%	61.9%
Sydney	57.1%	59.3%
GMR	57.5%	68.4%
Regional NSW	49.1%	65.7%

Sydney also has the best Indigenous youth unemployment rate, while the GMR and Regional NSW have higher rates than the State average. There is a marked difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth unemployment in Regional NSW: while the non-Indigenous youth unemployment rate is the lowest of the three regions, the Indigenous rate is the highest.

Youth unemployment rates by NSW region, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous		
Census	Unemployment rate	
	<i>Indigenous</i>	<i>Non-Indigenous</i>
NSW	23.9%	13.2%
Sydney	18.6%	13.0%
GMR	24.7%	15.0%
Regional NSW	26.7%	12.0%

14. INDUSTRY AND OCCUPATION

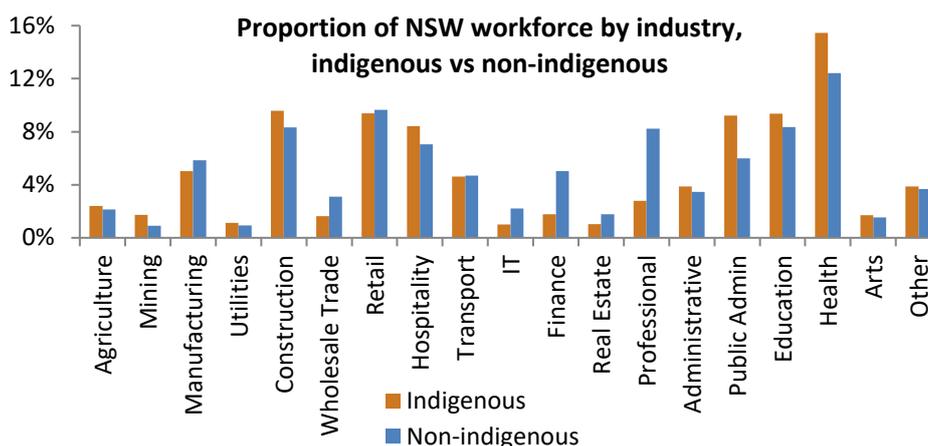
14.1 NSW

The largest employer of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers is the health care and social assistance industry: 15.5% of the Indigenous workforce and 12.4% of the non-Indigenous workforce are employed in this sector.

Top five NSW industries of employment, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous

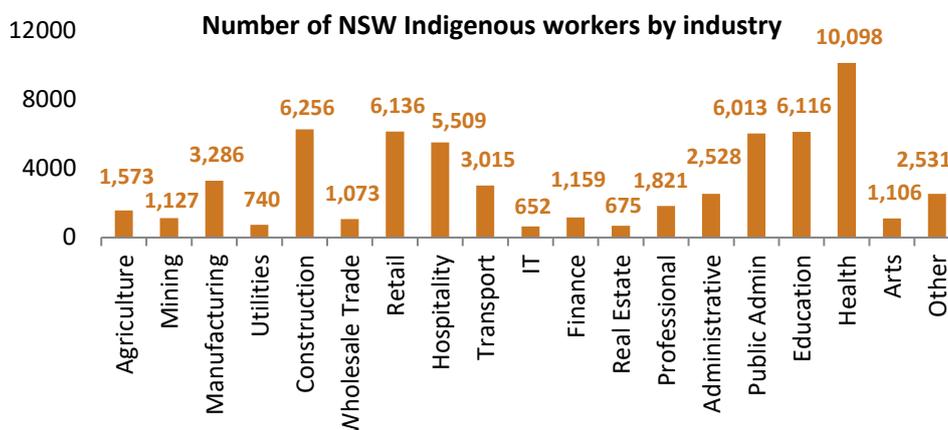
Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
1) Health Care and Social Assistance (15.5%)	1) Health Care and Social Assistance (12.4%)
2) Construction (9.6%)	2) Retail Trade (9.7%)
3) Retail Trade (9.4%)	3) Education and Training (8.3%)
4) Education and Training (9.4%)	4) Construction (8.3%)
5) Public Administration and Safety (9.2%)	5) Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (8.2%)

The professional services industry had the greatest discrepancy between Indigenous workers (2.8%) and non-Indigenous workers (8.2%), with the latter cohort three times larger proportionally than Indigenous professionals. Differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers across NSW industries are shown below.



It should be noted that, compared to the non-Indigenous workforce, the Indigenous workforce is very small in size; the chart below shows the number of Indigenous workers in each NSW industry.

Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census



Over the ten years to 2016, the industries which recorded the largest decrease in their share of the Indigenous workforce were manufacturing, wholesale trade, and public administration and safety. The decade saw proportional increases in employment in accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, and construction.

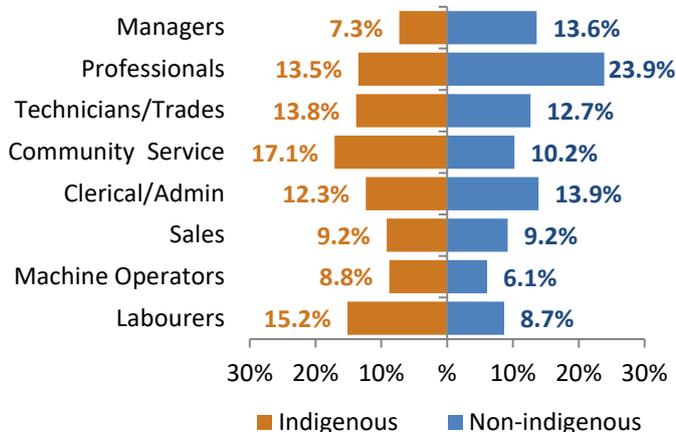
NSW industries with largest change in proportion of total employment (and change in number of persons), Indigenous vs non-Indigenous, 2006-16

Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Manufacturing (-3.2%, +393)	Manufacturing (-3.7%, -79,373)
Wholesale Trade (-1.4%, 0)	Wholesale Trade (-1.6%, -32,337)
Public Administration and Safety (-0.8%, +2,501)	Retail Trade (-1.5%, +832)
Accommodation and Food Services (+0.9%, +2,866)	Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (+0.8%, +60,250)
Health Care and Social Assistance (+1.0%, +4,999)	Construction (+1.0%, +66,435)
Construction (+2.3%, +3,687)	Health Care and Social Assistance (+2.0%, +113,091)

In terms of occupations, the data indicates that Indigenous workers are more likely to be in unskilled or lower skilled jobs than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

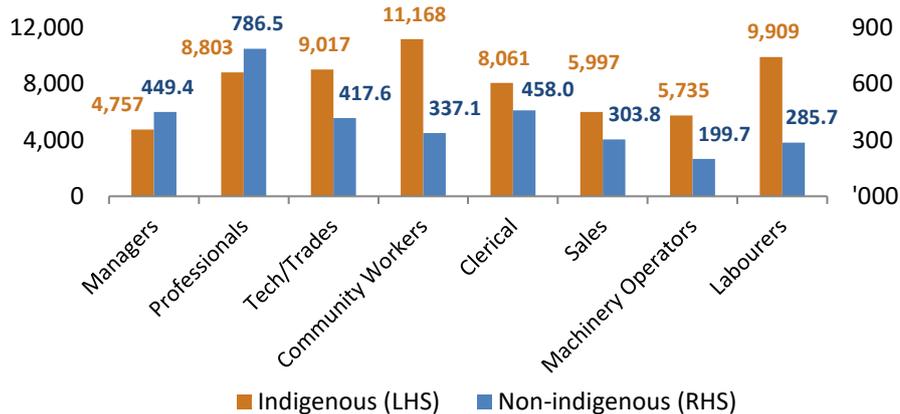
The 2016 Census reported that, proportionally, the Indigenous workforce has close to half the number of managers (7.3%, or 4,757 people) as the non-Indigenous workforce (13.6%, or 449,353 people), as well as professionals (13.5%, or 8,803 people vs 23.9%, or 786,539 people). As shown in the adjacent chart, Indigenous people in the workforce were more likely than non-Indigenous people to work as labourers, community and personal service workers, or machine operators and drivers.

Proportion of NSW workforce by occupation, indigenous vs non-indigenous



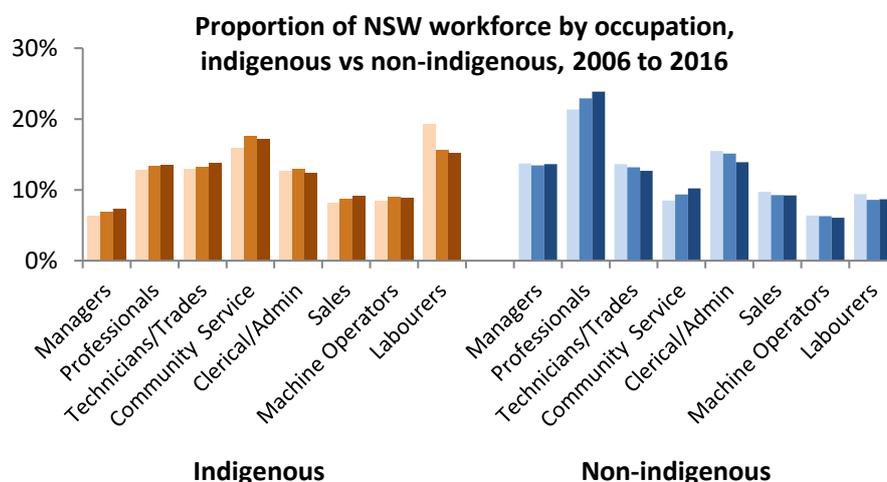
As with the industry figures, the Indigenous figures by occupation type are substantially smaller than the non-industry figures (see below).

Number of NSW persons by occupation type, indigenous vs non-indigenous



This distribution has changed slightly since 2006. The decade saw declines in the proportion of Indigenous labourers (-4.0%) and clerical and administrative workers (-0.3%), with all other occupations increasing in their share of the total, including managers (+0.9%) and professionals (+0.7%). In comparison, non-Indigenous occupations all declined in terms of their share of the total except for professionals (+2.5%) and community service workers (+1.7%).

Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census



14.2 Regions

In all three NSW regions—the GMR and Regional NSW especially—the top industry employing Indigenous workers was health care and social assistance. There were differences between the regions nonetheless, as shown below.

Top five industries of employment for Indigenous workers by NSW region		
Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
1) Health Care and Social Assistance (12.9%)	1) Health Care and Social Assistance (16.6%)	1) Health Care and Social Assistance (16.7%)
2) Public Administration (10.4%)	2) Construction (11.3%)	2) Education and Training (10.0%)
3) Construction (10.2%)	3) Retail Trade (10.1%)	3) Retail Trade (9.5%)
4) Education and Training (9.1%)	4) Accommodation and Food Services (8.9%)	4) Accommodation and Food Services (9.2%)
5) Retail Trade (8.1%)	5) Education and Training (8.6%)	5) Public Administration (9.1%)

The proportion of Indigenous workers in different occupations also varied across regions:

- **Sydney:** Has a larger proportion of managers, professionals and clerical workers compared to the NSW figures, and lower proportions of community service workers and labourers.
- **GMR:** Has the State's greatest proportion of technicians and trades workers and sales workers, but the lowest proportion of managers.
- **Regional NSW:** Has a lower proportion of professionals than NSW or the other regions, and is the only region with proportions of community service workers and labourers greater than the NSW distributions.

Indigenous NSW: Findings from the 2016 Census

Proportion of Indigenous workers by occupation, NSW vs regions, 2016				
Occupation	NSW	Proportion by NSW region		
		Sydney	GMR	Regional NSW
Managers	7.3%	8.9%	6.1%	6.8%
Professionals	13.5%	15.7%	13.9%	11.7%
Technicians/Trades	13.8%	13.2%	15.0%	13.6%
Community Service	17.1%	15.0%	16.7%	18.8%
Clerical/Admin	12.3%	15.3%	12.0%	10.5%
Sales	9.2%	8.7%	10.0%	9.1%
Machine Operators	8.8%	9.0%	8.7%	8.6%
Labourers	15.2%	11.2%	15.0%	18.1%

All regions saw increases in the proportion of Indigenous managers, professionals and community services workers in the decade to 2016, and decreases in the proportion of Indigenous labourers.

Change in proportion of Indigenous occupations by NSW region, 2006 to 2016						
Occupation	Sydney		GMR		Regional NSW	
	2006	2016	2006	2016	2006	2016
Managers	7.4%	8.9%	5.8%	6.1%	5.8%	6.8%
Professionals	14.8%	15.7%	12.7%	13.9%	11.6%	11.7%
Technicians/Trades	13.0%	13.2%	15.1%	15.0%	12.1%	13.6%
Community Service	14.5%	15.0%	15.3%	16.7%	17.2%	18.8%
Clerical/Admin	16.6%	15.3%	11.7%	12.0%	10.3%	10.5%
Sales	7.7%	8.7%	10.4%	10.0%	7.3%	9.1%
Machine Operators	9.2%	9.0%	8.6%	8.7%	7.6%	8.6%
Labourers	13.1%	11.2%	17.7%	15.0%	23.7%	18.1%

15. CONCLUSION

As the State with the largest Indigenous population, a comparison of NSW Indigenous residents with their non-Indigenous counterparts is of high interest to policymakers who wish to eliminate historic disadvantage and entrenched, intergenerational poverty. This paper has used a broad range of Census indicators to compare the total NSW Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations and review differences across regions of the State, between the States and Territories, and between Censuses.

The Census data confirms that compared to the State's non-Indigenous population, Indigenous people in NSW have a much younger age distribution, and report poorer educational, income and employment outcomes. This gap is reflected in a number of associated indicators discussed in the paper, such as the lower proportion of Indigenous people in or having completed university education; lower levels of home ownership; higher levels of public housing tenure; and higher levels of unskilled workers compared to NSW's non-Indigenous cohort.

There are a range of differences amongst the ATSI peoples across NSW. For example, the Sydney and Greater Metropolitan regions have greater levels of educational attainment; Sydney reports higher household incomes; and Regional NSW reports worse employment outcomes for both the Indigenous labour force as a whole and Indigenous youth. The geographical differences identified in this paper reveal some of the challenges facing different ATSI communities across the State, information key to enabling the development of tailored responses by policymakers.

While the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and between regions, remains significant, trends over the past three Censuses show improvements in most of the indicators explored in this paper. Indigenous peoples are now entering the education system earlier and staying for longer; the proportion of Indigenous single parent families fell over the decade to 2016; and Indigenous access to the internet has jumped markedly. Greater numbers of NSW residents now identify themselves as being of Indigenous origin; Of particular note is the increase in the number of Indigenous NSW persons who report speaking an Indigenous language at home: a crucial aspect of Indigenous culture and identity, and one which the NSW Government aims to preserve through the *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*.

Further improving these community indicators will [pose a challenge](#) for NSW and the nation more broadly, as evident by the [lack of success](#) of the *Closing the Gap* framework. Nevertheless, current and future editions of the Census will help guide policymakers to implement effective policies and programs that may enable Indigenous peoples to, in the long term, enjoy the same personal and societal outcomes as non-Indigenous Australia.