Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet



# CLOSING THE GAP

## Report 2019

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*Garma festival 2018*

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# PRIME MINISTER'S FOREWORD

PRIME MINISTER
THE HON SCOTT MORRISON MP



*I believe that the progress needed can only be accelerated through a deeper partnership with the states and territories and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Top-down does not work, only partnerships do.*

This year's Closing the Gap Report is an opportunity to reflect on a decade's efforts under an ambitious framework aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

While progress has been made over the past decade, only two of the ambitious targets are on track. It shows we need to change the way we work.

I believe that the progress needed can only be accelerated through a deeper partnership with the states and territories and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Top-down does not work, only partnerships do.

This is why, two years ago, we embarked on the Closing the Gap Refresh. Ten years of Closing the Gap implementation provides an important opportunity to reflect on what has worked and what has not. There have been shortfalls in both the implementation and leadership of the Closing the Gap agenda. In 2019, we want to try something new, to change the way we work as governments – to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

In early December 2018, a Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians made representation to me. They came to me seeking a partnership, one that shared decision making on how future policies are developed, especially at a regional or local level.

On 12 December 2018, I met with COAG First Ministers and together we agreed to form a partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. This is the partnership the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians asked for. In listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and their peak and governing bodies, I realised that for Closing the Gap to be successful, we must change the way we work and work together. This partnership provides a platform for genuine collaboration as we agree how to move forward.

Since the initiation of Closing the Gap in 2008, each successive Prime Minister has delivered a report on outcomes and efforts by the Australian Government. Each year, the Prime Minister has delivered the message that the targets are not on track. There are many reasons for this, which inform our future approach. We know that beneath this story are examples of improvement and progress – more children are staying in school for longer and achieving year 12 qualifications. This education sets them up for better employment opportunities.

This report of 2019 marks the final report against the Closing the Gap framework established in 2008 and a transition to the commitment of all Australian governments to do things differently.

As we move into this next phase, Closing the Gap will be embraced as a whole of government agenda with all governments sharing accountability for progress and extending this shared accountability to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We should not let our failure to meet targets overshadow the successful, thriving lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Australians and the great work that many in our communities have been doing to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses are growing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in meaningful jobs and doing well in our economy and the next generation of Aboriginal

*As we move into this next phase, Closing the Gap will be embraced as a whole of government agenda with all governments sharing accountability for progress and extending this shared accountability to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

and Torres Strait Islander children are accessing education from early childhood to university. We should however embrace the requirement to change, we simply will not succeed by continuing to work in the same way.

The main area of change needs to be in how governments approach implementation of policies and delivery of services. Stronger accountability can be achieved through co-designed action plans that link targets to policy action, funding decisions, and regular evaluations. This provides transparency for how we expect to achieve each target and by when.

We know that Closing the Gap is foundational to building a fairer, stronger and connected Australia. It is equally important to recognise and celebrate Australia as the home of the longest living civilisation on earth, and acknowledge that the cultures of our First Nations peoples enrich us all.

The Australian Government is committed to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a partnership which is critical to progress towards Closing the Gap.

# INTRODUCTION

# CLOSING THE GAP 2008–2018

## BACKGROUND

The journey to close the gap began in 2005, with the release of the Social Justice Report 2005, which called for Australian governments to commit to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in health and life expectancy within 25 years (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2005). Non-government agencies responded with a National Indigenous Health Equality Campaign in 2006, and launched the Close the Gap campaign in 2007.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) listened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their stakeholders. In December 2008, COAG pledged to close key gaps, and recognised that a concerted national effort was needed to address Indigenous disadvantage in key areas. Six Closing the Gap targets were introduced, contained within an overarching Commonwealth and state and territory agreement called the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. A school attendance target was added in 2014 and an expanded early childhood target was added in 2015 following the expiry of the remote early childhood education target in 2013 (unmet).

As four of the seven targets were due to expire in 2018, the Australian Government has worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and state and territory governments to develop the Closing the Gap Refresh. This is a new framework which builds on the original Closing the Gap targets and represents a continued commitment in effort and accountability from all governments for a further ten years. This report both acknowledges the future framework, while reporting progress against the original targets set in 2008.

*As four of the seven targets were due to expire in 2018, the Australian Government has worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and state and territory governments to develop the Closing the Gap Refresh.*

# PROGRESS AGAINST THE TARGETS

There are currently seven Closing the Gap targets. Two targets, early childhood education and Year 12 attainment, are on track to be met.[1]

- The target to **halve the gap in child mortality rates by 2018** is not on track. Since the target baseline (2008) Indigenous child mortality rates have declined by 10 per cent (not statistically significant) but the gap has not narrowed as the non-Indigenous rate has declined at a faster rate.
- The target to have **95 per cent of Indigenous four year olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025** is on track. In 2017, 95 per cent of Indigenous four year olds were enrolled in early childhood education.
- The target to **close the gap in school attendance by 2018** is not on track. Attendance rates for Indigenous students have not improved between 2014 and 2018 (around 82 per cent in 2018) and remain below the rate for non-Indigenous students (around 93 per cent).
- The target to **close the gap in life expectancy by 2031** is not on track. Between 2010–12 and 2015–17, Indigenous life expectancy at birth improved by 2.5 years for Indigenous males and by 1.9 years for Indigenous females (both not statistically significant), which has led to a small reduction in the gap.
- There is no new national data available for three targets and their status remains the same as for the 2018 Report.[2] The target to **halve the gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent by 2020** is on track. The target to **halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018** is not on track. The target to **halve the gap in employment by 2018** is not on track.

*1 The final data points for targets set to expire in 2018 (child mortality, school attendance, literacy and numeracy, and employment) are not available.*

*2 The 2018 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data were not available in time for inclusion in this Report.*

# PROGRESS ACROSS STATES AND TERRITORIES

Progress against the targets for each state and territory varies and is summarised in Table 1, which indicates where targets are on track. More detailed analysis of progress in each of the target areas is found in the chapters of this report.

**Table 1 Progress against the targets [a]**

| Target | NSW | VIC | QLD | SA | WA | TAS | NT | ACT | **AUS** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child mortality (2018) [b] | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| Early childhood education (2025) | ● | ● | | ● | ● | | | ● | ● |
| School attendance (2018) | | | | | | | | | |
| Life expectancy (2031) [c] | | — | | — | — | — | | — | |
| Year 12 or equivalent (2020) [d] | | | | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● |
| Reading and Numeracy (2018) [e] | | | | | | ● | | ● | |
| Employment (2018) [f] | ● | | | | | | | | |

*(a) A green dot indicates the target is on track. A dash indicates the data are either not published or there is no agreed trajectory. Remaining targets are not on track.*

*(b) Due to the small numbers involved, state and territory trajectories were not developed for the child mortality target. The national target reflects results for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory combined, which are the jurisdictions considered to have adequate levels of Indigenous identification suitable to publish.*

*(c) Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy are published every five years for New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory only. Due to the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, it is not possible to construct separate reliable life tables for these jurisdictions. However, as indicated in the table, only three jurisdictions have agreed life expectancy trajectories to support this target.*

*(d) Although New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania were below their trajectory points for 2016, New South Wales and Tasmania were very close (within 1 percentage point).*

*(e) For the purposes of this summary table, states and territories are considered to be on track if more than half of the eight National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) areas (Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 reading and numeracy) are on track in each jurisdiction.*

*(f) Progress against trajectories for the employment target was assessed using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey data, published in the 2017 report. While the 2016 Census employment data are published in this year's report, it is not the agreed data source for the trajectories.*

# FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Closing the Gap Framework established in 2008 recognised that a national effort was required to address Indigenous disadvantage. Ten years on, we know that the lives of First Australians have improved, however it is clear that more work is needed.

Targets set in 2008 were ambitious, complex and aimed at long-term, intergenerational change without all the levers to make it happen. In addition, there were weaknesses in the approach which we will address in future implementation. We have learned key lessons from the past ten years which inform the future as we commit to continue our efforts and the efforts of all Australian governments through COAG under the Closing the Gap Refresh. A number of key elements are critical to our approach in the future including:

- **Working in partnership.** We have developed partnerships at all levels to draw on the enduring wisdom and local knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This recognises genuine partnerships are required to drive sustainable, systemic change. In particular, we recognise the need to work together to address the drivers of intergenerational trauma through our focus on early childhood, and using economic participation to drive social change.
- **A strengths-based, community-led approach.** We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies to recognise and build on the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We understand we need to support initiatives led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address the priorities identified by those communities. Governments alone cannot create change, but we can commit to share responsibility and work alongside Indigenous Australians to enable change towards improved outcomes within their families and communities.

- **Working with state and territory governments.** We recognise a whole of government approach is needed to harness effort across agencies to ensure a cohesive approach to providing services for First Australians. Part of the approach under the Closing the Gap Refresh process will involve providing the leadership which ensures Commonwealth, state and territory governments have direct ownership of targets by the Commonwealth or states, specific action plans, and the oversight of the Indigenous Productivity Commissioner tracking outcomes.
- **A robust evidence base.** We know the most effective policies and programs are informed by evidence. We have established a cohesive approach to research and evaluation through the establishment of the Evaluation Framework and the Indigenous Research Exchange. This will strengthen policy decision making by providing high quality evidence, and recognises the importance of realistic targets and evaluation in directing effort to meet priorities.
- **Accountability.** A new role has been created in the Productivity Commission to develop a whole of government evaluation strategy for policies and programs that have an impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ensuring accountability from Commonwealth, state and territory governments will enable us to monitor and direct effort towards the outcomes that will deliver improved outcomes.

These lessons have informed the way forward for Closing the Gap. In 2018, COAG agreed to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda.

# MOVING FORWARD: THE CLOSING THE GAP REFRESH

In December 2018, COAG committed to ensuring that the finalisation of targets and implementation of the refreshed Closing the Gap framework occurs through a genuine, formal partnership between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and Indigenous Australians through their representatives.

COAG reinforced that the formal partnership must be based on mutual respect between parties and an acceptance that direct engagement and negotiation is the preferred pathway to productive and effective outcomes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must play an integral part in the making of the decisions that affect their lives – this is critical to closing the gap.

To this effect, COAG issued a statement outlining a draft strengths-based framework, which prioritises intergenerational change and the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across all Australian communities. The finalisation of this framework and associated draft targets will be agreed through a formal partnership.

In this statement, COAG committed to ensure that the design and implementation of the next phase of Closing the Gap is a true partnership. Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will share ownership of and responsibility for a jointly agreed framework which includes targets and ongoing monitoring of the Closing the Gap agenda. This will include an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led three yearly comprehensive evaluation of the framework and progress.

The Commonwealth, states and territories share accountability for the refreshed Closing the Gap agenda and are jointly accountable for outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. COAG committed to working together to improve outcomes in every priority area of the Closing the Gap Refresh, these include:

- Families, children and youth
- Housing
- Justice, including youth justice
- Health
- Economic development
- Culture and language
- Education
- Healing
- Eliminating racism and systemic discrimination

Meeting specific targets in these priority areas will require the collaborative efforts of the Commonwealth, states and territories, regardless of which level of government has lead responsibility. Commonwealth, state and territory actions for each target will be set out in jurisdictional action plans, and may vary between jurisdictions. COAG acknowledged that all priority areas have interdependent social, economic and health determinants that impact the achievement of outcomes and targets.

The COAG communique and COAG Statement on the Closing the Gap Refresh is included at **Appendix A**.

CHAPTER 1

# CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS CULTURE

*'Our young people are our future. Building stories in our young people, connecting to country, family and community is how we build their future. Our young people need to be strong in two worlds – culture, language and education go hand in hand.'*

*Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre*

# INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's strong connection to family, land and culture forms the foundation for social, economic, and individual wellbeing. This is integral to efforts to close the gap.

As Australians, we can all be proud to be the home of the oldest continuous civilisation on earth, extending back over 65,000 years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are of value to our community, across levels of government, businesses and the non-profit sector. These are a critical part of our national identity.

Many Australians demonstrate their commitment to celebrating and valuing Indigenous Australians' culture through participating and celebrating in NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week, and through Reconciliation Action Plans. These plans are a commitment to reconciliation and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are of value to our community, across levels of government, businesses and the non-profit sector.*

# SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS CULTURES

The Australian Government works with state and territory governments to improve respect and appreciation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and support cultural identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and social cohesion for all Australians.

Over the coming year, the Australian Government, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), has committed to working with Indigenous Australians and state and territory governments to form a partnership. This partnership will focus on Closing the Gap and is one way to make sure government policies and service delivery is informed by Indigenous Australians.

A key aspect of this respect and appreciation is engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to inform the development and delivery of services and programs. For the Australian Government, this occurs at every level including:

- **At the local level,** the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Regional Network works alongside local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, organisations and communities across Australia to develop local solutions. The Regional Network has more than 500 staff, 37 per cent of whom identify as Indigenous, located in more than 70 locations across urban, regional and remote Australia. The Department currently funds 627 Indigenous organisations a total of $2.34 billion as at January 2019. Examples of working with local Indigenous organisations and communities across Australia are outlined in each chapter under 'Local Solutions.'
- **At the regional level,** the Commonwealth has an ongoing commitment to foster local Indigenous leadership and regional governance structures to achieve better outcomes. In Empowered Communities (EC) regions, partnerships with governments and joint decision making processes are being expanded, with local communities increasingly able to guide funding decisions and strategies to address critical issues impacting their lives.
    - Building on learnings from the Inner Sydney approach, further regions have now successfully tested their own joint decision making arrangements, providing advice from local community and leaders to the government decision maker about priorities and funding.
    - During 2018, the Empowered Communities 'partnership table' process resulted in brokering cross-government collaboration on a significant early childhood learning project in the Inner Sydney EC region.
    - Following endorsement by the EC leaders from all regions and the Australian Government, a new Empowered Communities region, Ngarrindjeri in South Australia, was officially launched in October 2018, as the eighth active EC site.

- In the Cape York region, building on Empowered Communities, leaders have progressed work on a comprehensive proposal called Pama Futures, which aims to close the gap in the region by focusing on the priorities of empowerment, land and economic development. The foundation of Pama Futures is community and sub-regional governance developed by local people, so that local decisions can inform regional priorities. The government has worked in close partnership with Cape York leaders to support the development of their agenda, including through the region's first joint decision making process.

- **At the national level,** partnerships are in place to support a whole of Government approach to policy development and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In practice this means that Ministers and their departments are working with Indigenous peak bodies and communities. Examples of this include:
  - The Government continues to work in partnership with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and the Redfern Statement Alliance through the National Engagement Project to identify need and gaps in service delivery and develop practical solutions in response.
  - The Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council plays a key role in ensuring that the Government has heard and listened to Indigenous Australians in the development of policies and programs. The Council Co-Chairs meet with the Indigenous Policy Committee (IPC), where they directly provide advice to the Prime Minister and Ministers. The IPC provides a way for Ministers, departments and agencies to work closely with each other to ensure programs and services are as effective as possible. It is chaired by the Prime Minister and is attended by Ministers whose portfolio responsibilities directly impact the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.



*Ngarrindjeri community celebrated the launch of the newest Empowered Communities region – Ngarrindjeri in South Australia – at Murray Bridge on 30 October 2018. The event included local community leaders and members, leaders from other Empowered Communities regions and other guests, and was a great success. This region is the first new Empowered Communities site to be announced since the establishment of this Indigenous-led initiative, and followed the endorsement by the Empowered Communities national leadership group and Government.*

# TRANSLATING POLICY INTO ACTION

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to protect, preserve and celebrate cultures.

Australian Government investment includes support for:

- **Ensuring culturally appropriate engagement.** All Indigenous individuals and communities should be able to have their voices heard. The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) project, led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO heard directly from around 2,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls across 50 communities in 2018 on the issues and challenges that matter to them. The Australian Government provided $1.25 million to the project and continues to work closely with the Australian Human Rights Commission to respond to the recommendations and actions identified by communities.



*Participants from the Broome consultations of the the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) project, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar. The project works within a strength-based and human rights framework focussed on community led solutions and Indigenous participation. It aims to unite government, policy and law makers with the voices and lived experience of women and girls on the ground to guide better decision-making based on national and international human rights obligations.*

- **Keeping languages alive.** Language is inextricably linked to land, culture, spirituality and ancestry, and is a core component of social and emotional wellbeing. The United Nations has proclaimed 2019 a year to highlight the critical situation faced by the world's Indigenous languages. Given Australia's complex and diverse language landscape we are actively participating in the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL2019), including co-chairing the International (UNESCO) Steering Committee for organising IYIL2019. Today, only 120 of the estimated 250 original Indigenous Australian language groups are still spoken to some degree. The Australian Government invests over $20 million annually into supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to express, preserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts. In addition, $10 million is being provided over four years for community-led initiatives to protect, preserve and celebrate Indigenous languages; and $6 million each year in interpreting services.
- **Providing professional opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.** Australian Indigenous visual art is internationally recognised and sought after for its quality, innovation and cultural richness. The Australian Government invests $20 million each year to support around 80 Indigenous-owned art centres, art fairs and regional hubs, which provide professional opportunities for around 7,000 Indigenous artists and 300 Indigenous arts workers.
- **Contributing to healing and reconciliation.** The Australian Government supports the unconditional return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains from overseas collections and private holders and the safe return of Indigenous ancestral remains and secret sacred objects held in major Australian museums to their communities of origin. In 2018, eight ancestors were repatriated from two collecting institutions in Sweden. To date over 1,480 Australian Indigenous ancestors have been repatriated from overseas and over 2,500 ancestral remains and over 2,200 secret sacred objects have been returned to the custodianship of their community of origin.
- **Supporting the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector.** Indigenous media is vital to deliver locally relevant, culturally appropriate programing, often in language. This ensures communities have access to local and national news, music and cultural content across a network of 120 Indigenous radio and television broadcasting services across remote, regional and urban Australia. Approximately $21.1 million is provided every year to the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector.

- **Supporting Indigenous leaders at home and on the world stage.** Promoting the expertise of our Australian Indigenous artists, advocates, entrepreneurs and culture-makers here and overseas enables us to connect and share this cultural expertise with the world. In 2018, the Australian Government supported visits by leading Indigenous Australian women achieving excellence in their fields, across 18 countries in the Indo-Pacific, Africa and North America.
- **Looking after Country.** Being on country is intrinsically linked to the social, cultural, economic, and physical and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people. As of late 2018, Indigenous people have interest in land in approximately 51 per cent of Australia, and around a further 15 per cent is under native title claim. The Australian Government supports Indigenous rangers and traditional owners (including native title holders) to combine traditional and western knowledge to protect and manage their land, seawater and culture. In addition, the Government is working to more effectively support native titleholders, traditional owners and their communities to maximise social, cultural and economic development opportunities.
- **Supporting cultural festivals.** The Government sees cultural festivals, including cultural exchange camps and programs, culture centres and hubs, heritage trails and the preservation and archiving of community collections as integral to celebrating Indigenous culture. One of the most significant events is the annual Garma Festival. Organised by the Yothu Yindi Foundation, Garma has been instrumental in leading national conversations and debates about the rights, interests and cultural recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for 20 years. The Australian Government also invests around $1.4 million each year in community grants to celebrate NAIDOC Week. In 2018, NAIDOC Week celebrations honoured Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women for their achievements and commitment to drive positive change.
- **Investing in cultural capability and competency.** Effective policies and programs depend on a capacity to work with, and understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. The Government provides a wide range of training and development opportunities for Commonwealth employees, and in addition, the public sector supports secondments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations under the Jawun program. As part of the Cook 250 commemorations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage workers from regional areas will have opportunities to participate in professional capacity building activities at the National Museum of Australia.



*First Nations Media Australia is the national peak body for First Nations not-for-profit broadcasting, media and communications. In November 2018, First Nations Media launched indigiTUBE, a digital custodian for First Nations song, dance, language and lore. Here, Marlene Cummins entertains the crowd at the official launch.*

# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The Australian Government will continue to work across agencies, with state and territory governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their representatives, and other stakeholders to:

- continue to support and promote Indigenous leadership at home and overseas, including through continued investment in the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity program, which aims to build a generation of people who work together as a collective and distributed network of change makers to improve the wellbeing of communities, especially Indigenous communities, and make society more healthy, inclusive, and fair;
- create opportunities for all Australians to understand and appreciate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, including through the IYIL2019, NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Weeks; and
- support reconciliation through a continuing commitment to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the Constitution.

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS

In the **Flinders Ranges**, the twentieth anniversary of the first Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) in Australia, Nantawarrina, was celebrated in the small community of Nepabunna, SA.

IPAs empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to manage their country in accordance with their priorities and to develop and strengthen their governance and management capacity.

IPAs provide economic development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as employment (of rangers), tourism, research and infrastructure projects.



*Nantawarrina Rangers (left to right) Bruce Wilton, Joelwyn Johnson, Thomas Wilton, Cameron Johnson, Daniel Johnson, Ian Johnson and Julette Johnson.*



*Keane Ryan and Mathew Ederer of the Four Winds Didgeridoo Orchestra.*

Playing in the Four Winds Didgeridoo Orchestra at **the opening ceremony of the 2018 Commonwealth Games** was both daunting and an honour for two young Aboriginal men, Keane Ryan and Mathew Ederer, boarding students at Mount St Bernard College in North Queensland.

Both Keane and Mathew are self-taught and have been playing the didgeridoo since Year 9. They are now the 'elder statesmen' of a group of about ten students including didge players, drummers, guitarists and some solo singers.

'It has made us feel special that we can use our talent to promote our culture through music and dance,' Keane said. 'And we enjoy it too.'

CHAPTER 2

# INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

*'The First 1,000 Days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday offers a unique window of opportunity to shape healthier and more prosperous futures.'*

*Professor Kerry Arabena*

# INTRODUCTION

A good start in life gives our children the best chance for success and for going on to make the most of their opportunities in later life.

Healthy development across the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains of physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication, helps children thrive in the early years and provides a sound foundation for life. Access to quality early childhood learning and care is one way to ensure positive child development and successful transition to school participation.

There is also a strong and consistent association between the AEDC results and literacy and numeracy outcomes.

A child's early learning abilities can be compromised by factors such as inter-generational trauma, family stress, unstable housing, violence, low parental education and unemployment.

Giving children a good start relies on taking an integrated approach to support structured early learning environments, supporting positive parenting skills and stronger families, and maternal and child health interventions to enhance positive and healthy early child development.

Early childhood education and care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a collaborative effort across all governments. The Australian Government works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities to ensure that children are safe, resilient and thriving.

*Giving children a good start relies on taking an integrated approach to support structured early learning environments, supporting positive parenting skills and stronger families, and maternal and child health interventions to enhance positive and healthy early child development.*



*Wurli Wurlinjang's Strong Indigenous Families program aims to improve the safety of women and their families. Here, Wurli delivers open air therapeutic services to families, which aim to work towards breaking the inter-generational cycle of family and domestic violence and the removal of children from families.*

# CHILD MORTALITY

**TARGET**

***Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (by 2018)***

## KEY POINTS

- The target to halve the gap in child mortality rates by 2018 is not on track.
- Since the target baseline (2008) the Indigenous child mortality rate has declined by 10 per cent (not statistically significant) but the gap has not narrowed as the non-Indigenous rate has declined at a faster rate.
- There has been progress over the longer term. Between 1998 and 2017, there has been a 35 per cent decline in the Indigenous child mortality rate and the gap has narrowed by 29 per cent.
- Indigenous maternal and child health indicators have continued to improve, indicating potential gains in child mortality outcomes in the coming years.

## WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

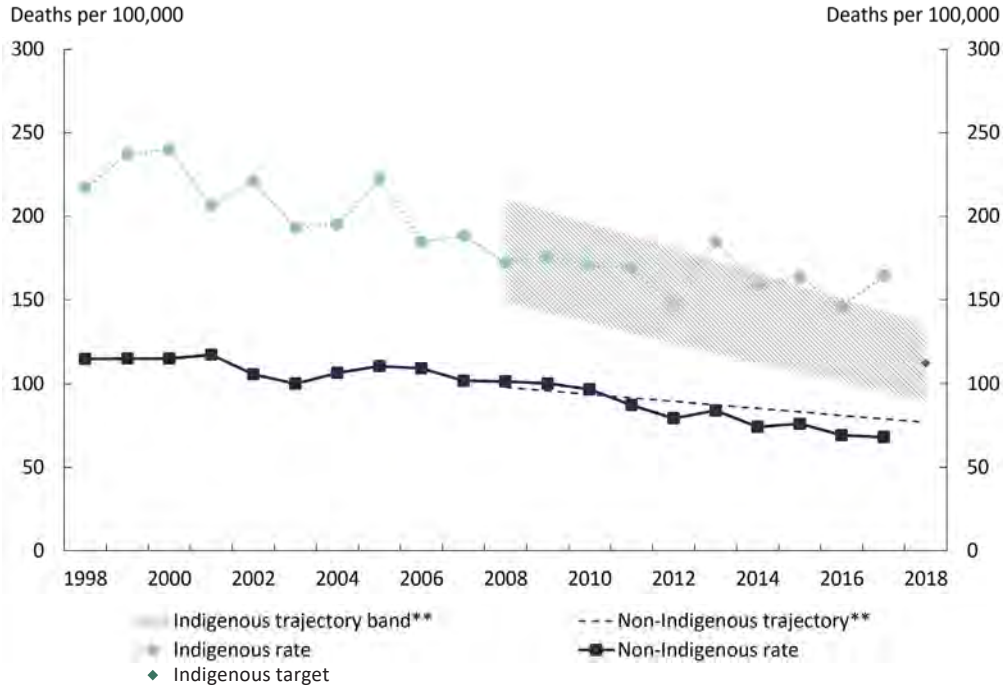
### NATIONAL

In 2017, the Indigenous child mortality rate[3] was not within the range to meet the target by 2018 and was, therefore, not on track (Figure 2.1).

*3 The child mortality rate is defined as the number of deaths among children aged 0-4 as a proportion of the total number of children in that age group, presented as a rate per 100,000.*

Progress against this target is measured using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) mortality data for 0–4 year olds.[4] In 2017, data show that 131 Indigenous children died (see Box 2.1 for details about data collection). This was equivalent to a rate of 164 deaths per 100,000, which was 2.4 times the mortality rate for non-Indigenous children (68 deaths per 100,000).

**Figure 2.1: Child mortality rates # ***




*Note:*

*# The rates for 2014 differ slightly from previous reports due to the correction of a minor processing error, and the rate for 2015 differs slightly due to final Estimated Resident Population (ERP) being incorporated into the denominator.*

** Child mortality rates are based on data for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory combined. Due to data quality issues, the average of three years of population data centred around the reporting year is used as the denominator to derive annual child mortality rates.*

*** The non-Indigenous trajectory is based on the non-Indigenous trend between 1998 and 2012, from which the Indigenous trajectory was derived.*

*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018 analysis of National Mortality Database, unpublished and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

*4 ABS Death Registrations collection is the source for the data. Data are reported for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory only, which are considered to have adequate levels of Indigenous identification suitable to publish.*

While there was still a gap of 96 deaths per 100,000 children in 2017, there has been significant[5] improvement over the long run, although at a slower rate than required to meet the target. Between 1998 and 2017, Indigenous child mortality rates declined significantly by 35 per cent[6] from 217 per 100,000 children to 164 per 100,000 children in 2017. Over the same period, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous child mortality rates also reduced significantly by 29 per cent (Figure 2.1).

However, since the 2008 target baseline, a high degree of volatility in the Indigenous child mortality rate makes it difficult to ascertain a trend (see Box 2.1 for more details). Over the last decade, the Indigenous child mortality rate declined from 172 per 100,000 in 2008 to 146 in 2012, before peaking at 185 in 2013. The rate then declined to 146 per 100,000 in 2016 before rising again to 164 per 100,000 in 2017.

Between 2008 and 2017, the Indigenous child mortality rate declined by 10 per cent (not statistically significant), but the gap has not narrowed as the non-Indigenous child mortality rate has declined by around 35 per cent (statistically significant).

*5 In this chapter, significant change denotes statistically significant change only. The word significant has not been used in any other sense.*

*6 References to per cent change in mortality rates in this chapter are derived through linear regression analysis, and statistical significance is tested at 95 per cent level of significance. For details on the specifications for the child mortality indicator used in this report, refer to the NIRA data specifications on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) METeOR website https://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/697300.*

## Box 2.1: Volatility in the Indigenous child mortality rates

Indigenous child mortality rates vary from year to year. This reflects a number of factors including natural variations in child death counts from year to year, changes in Indigenous identification in the mortality data and in the estimates of the total Indigenous child population (the denominator).

As reported previously, Queensland has recently changed its approach to Indigenous status identification for deaths data. From 2015, Queensland has included Medical Certificate of Cause of Death information to contribute to the Indigenous status identification. This administrative change has led to a subsequent increase in the number of deaths that were identified as Indigenous and a decrease in the number of deaths for which the Indigenous status was 'not stated'. In 2017, 12 per cent of child deaths registered in Queensland were identified as Indigenous using the new methods which would have otherwise been classified as 'not stated'. Since Queensland tends to have a dominant share in the total number of Indigenous child deaths (about 38 per cent of Indigenous child deaths in 2017), such changes can have a substantial impact on the total Indigenous child mortality rate.

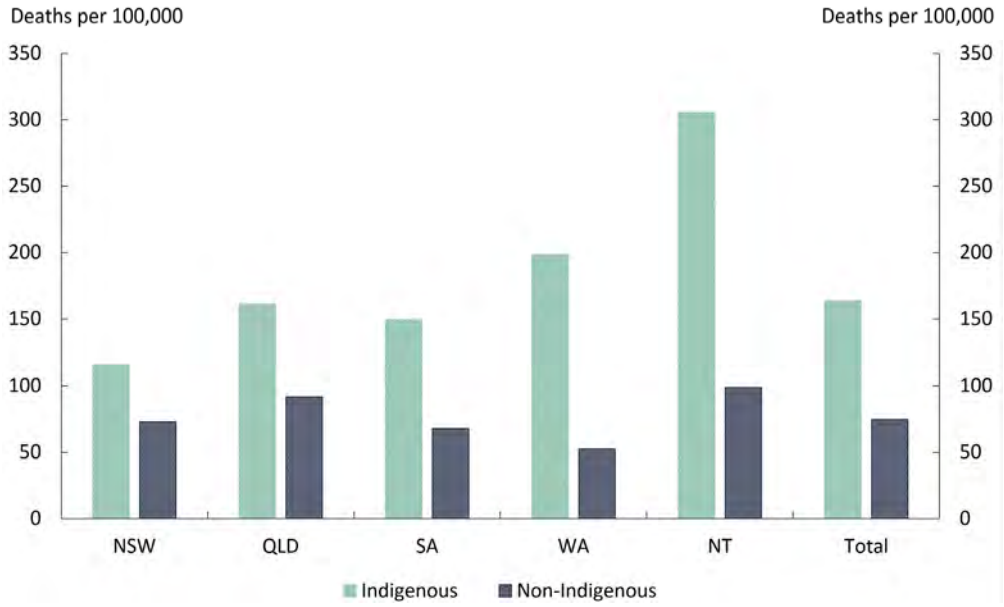
Improvements in data quality have been part of the Closing the Gap data improvement commitments and have long term benefits in terms of improved information and measurement. In the short term, such changes lead to volatility in the rates and create uncertainty around trend estimates.

This volatility affects the yearly status of the target and as such, caution is required in interpreting meaning to annual variation. To address the uncertainty, long-term data (from 1998) are provided to reveal the underlying trend. Greater context is also provided around trends acknowledging limited but nevertheless worthwhile improvements in intermediary child and maternal health outcomes which pave the way for future improvements.

## STATES AND TERRITORIES

Of the five jurisdictions with acceptable quality of Indigenous mortality data, the Northern Territory continued to have the highest Indigenous child mortality rate (305 per 100,000) over the period 2013–17[7], and New South Wales had the lowest Indigenous child mortality rate (116 per 100,000). The gap was largest in the Northern Territory (207 per 100,000) (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2: Child mortality rates by jurisdiction, 2013–17**




*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra.*

*7 Five years of data are combined for more detailed reporting of Indigenous child and infant mortality to overcome the volatility in rates associated with the small numbers involved.*

# INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MORTALITY RATES

Over the period 2013–17, 525 (84 per cent) of the 622 Indigenous child deaths were infants (less than 1 year old). The Indigenous infant mortality rate was twice the rate for non-Indigenous infants (6.3 compared with 3.1 per 1,000 live births). More than half (56 per cent) of these infant deaths were due to 'perinatal conditions' (such as birth trauma, foetal growth disorders, complications of pregnancy, and respiratory and cardiovascular disorders).[8]

The Indigenous infant mortality rate has more than halved from 13.5 per 1,000 live births in 1998 to 6.3 per 1,000 live births in 2017, and the gap has narrowed significantly (by 84 per cent) from 9.1 per 1,000 live births to 3.3 per 1,000 live births over this period. Since the 2008 baseline, the infant mortality rate has declined by 9 per cent, although not statistically significant, and there has been no significant change in the gap since 2008.

Over the period 2013–17, 16 per cent of Indigenous child deaths were early childhood deaths (1–4 year olds). About half (51 per cent) of these early childhood deaths were caused by external causes of morbidity and mortality (including transport accidents, drowning and other external causes of accidental injuries). The Indigenous early childhood mortality rate has declined by 26 per cent since 1998, but a high degree of volatility (due to very small numbers) has contributed to the change being not statistically significant.

Of all Indigenous child (0–4 year olds) deaths over the period 2013–17, 75 per cent were caused by three main causes: perinatal conditions (47 per cent), 'signs, symptoms and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings not classified elsewhere' (such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome- SIDS) (14 per cent), and congenital and chromosomal conditions (14 per cent). Perinatal conditions account for almost half (49 per cent) of the gap in Indigenous child mortality, and the three leading causes together account for about 75 per cent of the gap.

*8 The perinatal period commences at 20 completed weeks (140 days) of gestation and ends 28 completed days after birth.*

While a complex set of factors underpin the higher infant and child mortality rates for Indigenous children, a number of maternal health and pregnancy behaviours and birth outcomes seem to be closely related with the three main leading causes of Indigenous child deaths (AIHW 2018a). Perinatal conditions include disorders related to pre-term labour/birth or poor fetal growth. Pre-term babies are at higher risk of death and long-term health conditions. The risk of SIDS is higher for pre-term and/or low birthweight infants, or those exposed to maternal smoking or alcohol consumption. Congenital and chromosomal conditions are thought to be caused by a combination of genetic, environmental and behavioural factors including smoking, alcohol and drug use, poorly controlled medical conditions (such as diabetes), use of some medicines during pregnancy, and other factors. This highlights the importance of focusing on improving access to culturally appropriate maternal health and pregnancy-related care, as well as broader health and wellbeing initiatives as these help lower the risk factors for poor birth outcomes (AHMAC 2017; AIHW 2014).

A number of initiatives have been implemented to improve Indigenous child and maternal health since 2008, such as through the *New Directions: Mothers and Babies Services* program. Policies and programs take time to have measurable impacts as there is a long time lag between policy development, adoption and delivery, impact on outcomes and availability of data to measure changes in the final outcomes (AIHW 2014).

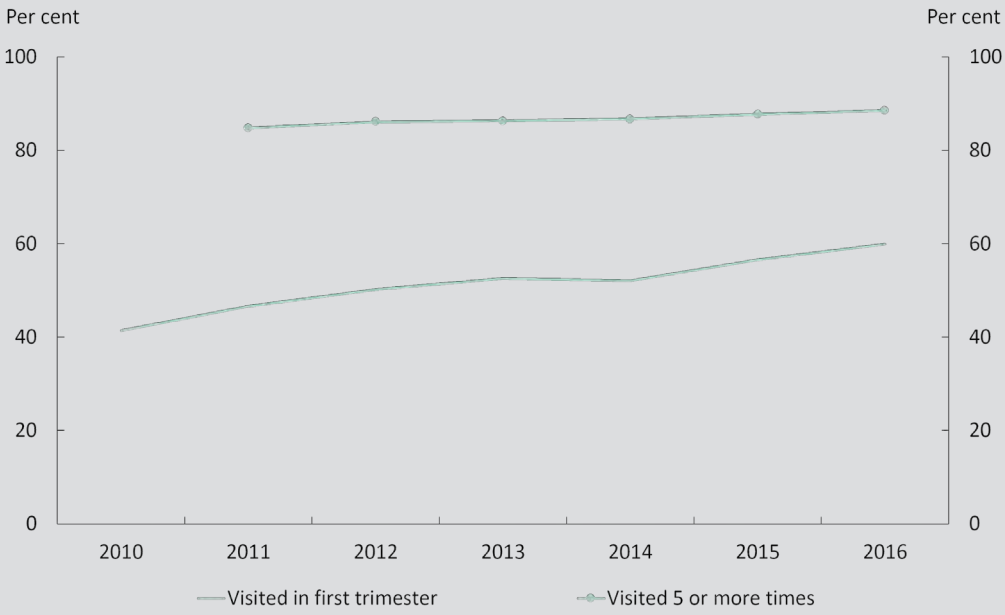
Available data suggest some of the impact of policies and programs implemented is now measurable. There have been notable improvements in child and maternal health indicators over recent years (Boxes 2.2 and 2.3). However, some substantial gaps remain between outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous mothers and babies, indicating the scope, and the need, for further improvements. Further gains will be achieved by continued focus on these intermediary factors.

## Box 2.2: Improvements in Indigenous maternal health and child birth outcomes[9]

The proportion of Indigenous mothers who attended antenatal care in the first trimester increased from 41 per cent in 2010 to 60 per cent in 2016 (Figure 2.3). For non-Indigenous mothers, there was a smaller increase over that time, from 61 per cent to 67 per cent.

For Indigenous mothers, the proportion was higher in Inner Regional areas (66 per cent), compared with Major Cities and Very Remote areas (58 per cent).

**Figure 2.3: Antenatal care use by Indigenous mothers**




*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, Australia's mothers and babies 2016 — in brief, Perinatal statistics series no. 33, Cat. No. PER 91, AIHW, Canberra.*

*9 In this box on Improvements in Indigenous maternal health and child birth outcomes, because of the differences in the age structures of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, all data are age standardised to enable comparisons. Five or more antenatal care visits and pre-existing health conditions data are based on women who gave birth at 32 weeks or more gestation (excluding unknown gestation). Trend data exclude Victoria and Western Australia. Trend data on antenatal visits in the first trimester exclude New South Wales due to a change in data collection practice introduced in 2011. Victoria started collecting smoking data in 2009.*

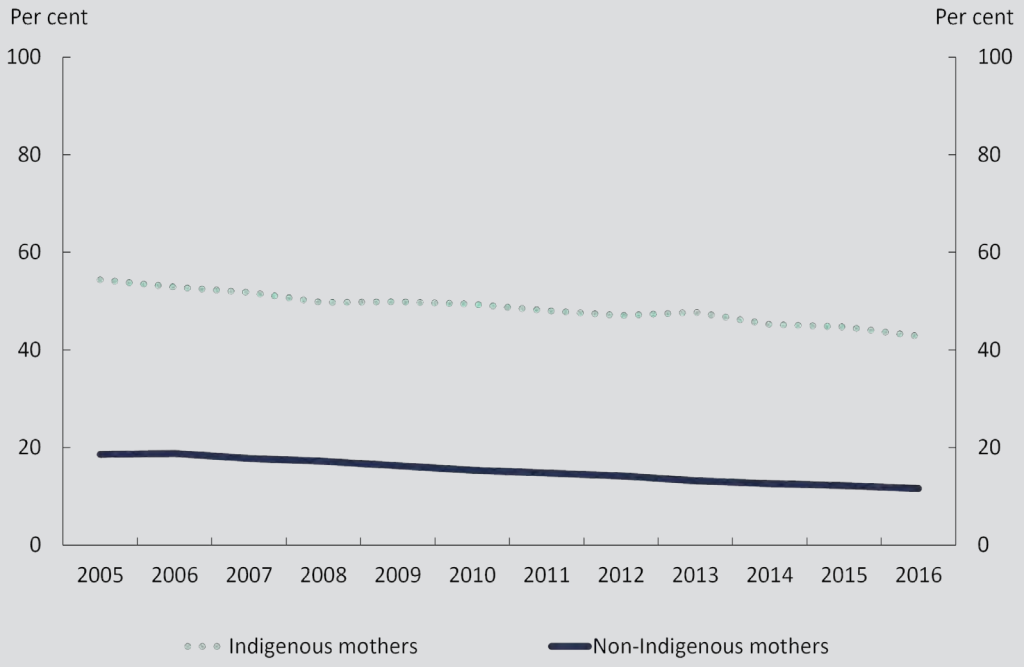
*Box 2.2 continued*

Between 2011 and 2016, the proportion of mothers attending five or more visits increased slightly for Indigenous mothers from 85 per cent to 89 per cent while remaining similar for non-Indigenous mothers, 95 per cent to 96 per cent.

The proportion of Indigenous mothers who smoked at any time during pregnancy decreased from 54 per cent in 2005 to 43 per cent in 2016. However, it is still 3.7 times that of non-Indigenous mothers which was 12 per cent in 2016 (Figure 2.4).

The rate of Indigenous mothers who were smoking 'after 20 weeks of pregnancy' has also decreased from 43 per cent in 2011 to 38 per cent in 2016.

**Figure 2.4: Maternal smoking trends**

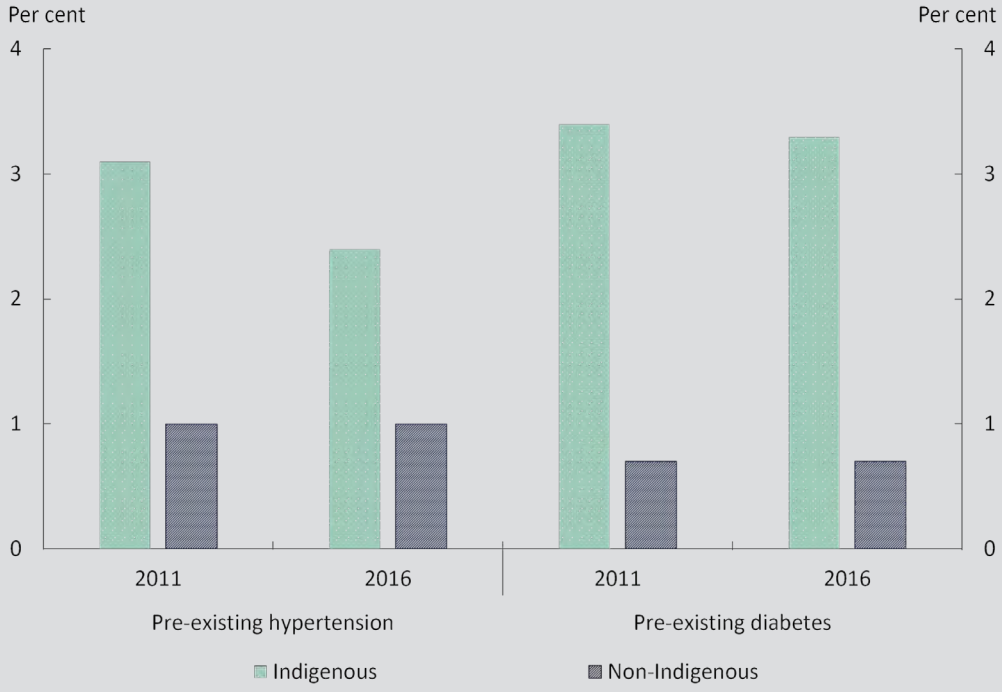



*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, Australia's mothers and babies 2016 — in brief, Perinatal statistics series no. 33, Cat. No. PER 91, AIHW, Canberra.*

*Box 2.2 continued*

There have also been slight improvements in the rates of pre-existing hypertension, from 3.1 per cent in 2011 to 2.4 per cent in 2016 (Figure 2.5). The rate of pre-existing diabetes remained similar (3.4 to 3.3 per cent) over the same period. Still, Indigenous mothers were 2.4 times as likely to have pre existing hypertension and almost five times as likely to have pre-existing diabetes compared with non Indigenous mothers (1.0 per cent with pre-existing hypertension and 0.7 per cent with pre-existing diabetes).

**Figure 2.5: Pre-existing maternal health conditions**



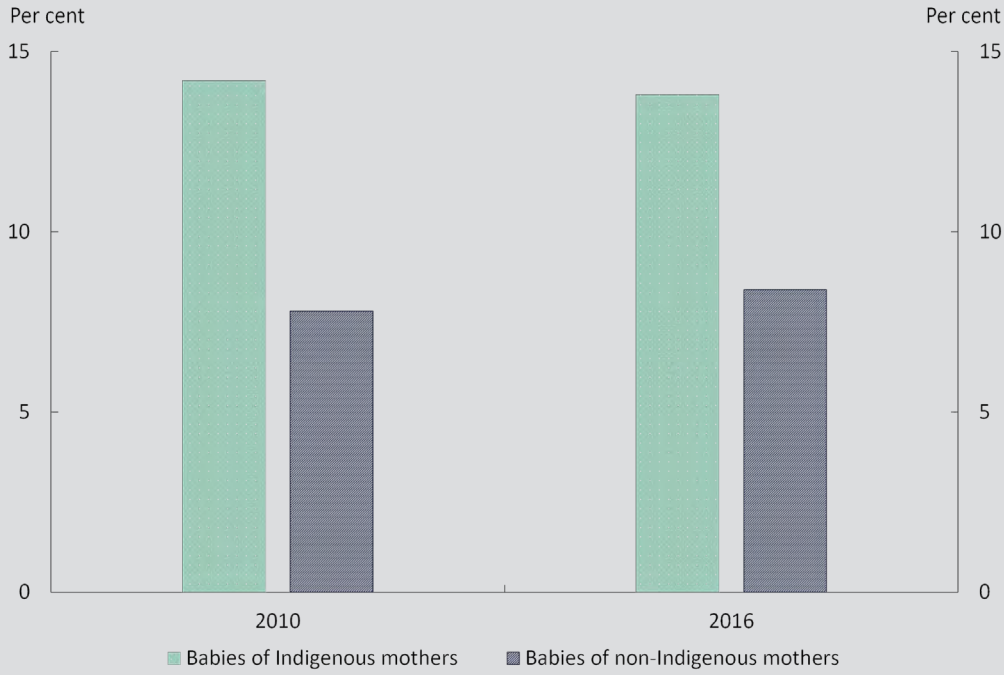

*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, Australia's mothers and babies 2016 — in brief, Perinatal statistics series no. 33, Cat. No. PER 91, AIHW, Canberra.*

*Box 2.2 continued*

Available data suggest the impact of the small improvements in these intermediate indicators of maternal health has started to appear in the form of gradual improvements in some of the child birth outcomes such as pre-term births and low birthweight.

Pre-term births (between 20 and 36 weeks of pregnancy) is associated with a higher risk of adverse birth outcomes. Between 2010 and 2016, pre-term babies born to Indigenous mothers declined slightly from 14.2 per cent to 13.8 per cent, while pre-term babies born to non-Indigenous mothers increased slightly from 7.8 per cent to 8.4 per cent (Figure 2.6).

**Figure 2.6: Pre-term babies**

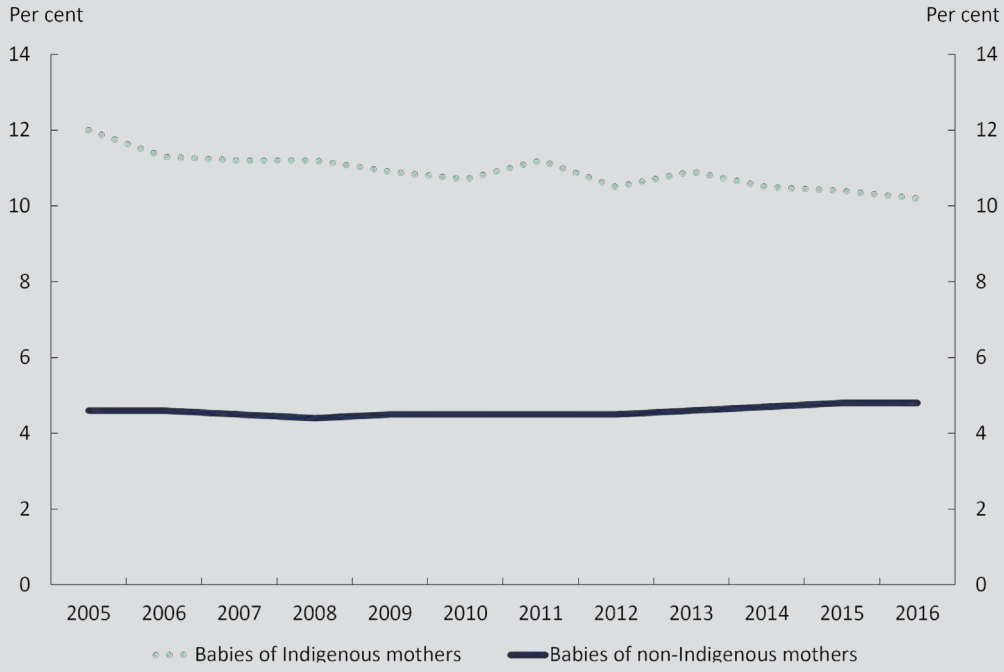



*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, Australia's mothers and babies 2016 — in brief, Perinatal statistics series no. 33, Cat. No. PER 91, AIHW, Canberra.*

*Box 2.2 continued*

There has also been a slight decrease in the proportion of low birthweight singleton (single birth) babies born to Indigenous mothers between 2005 and 2016, from 12.0 per cent to 10.2 per cent. Over the same period the proportion of low birthweight babies with non-Indigenous mothers increased slightly from 4.6 per cent to 4.8 per cent (Figure 2.7).

**Figure 2.7: Low birthweight singleton babies**



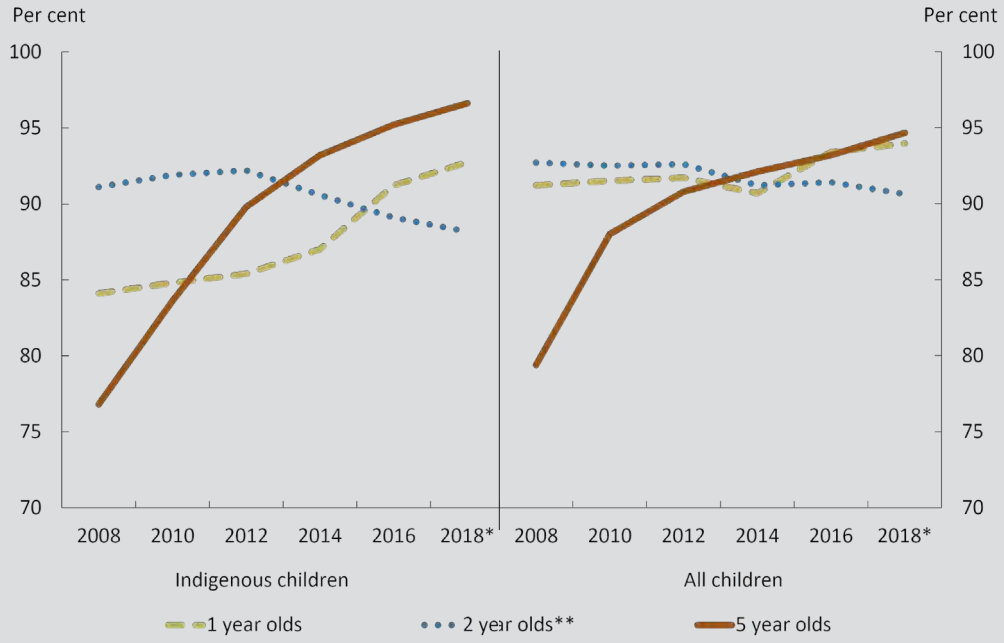

*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, Australia's mothers and babies 2016 — in brief, Perinatal statistics series no. 33, Cat. No. PER 91, AIHW, Canberra.*

## Box 2.3: Closing the child vaccination gap

Indigenous children are often found to be at higher risk of contracting diseases such as pneumococcal and influenza than non-Indigenous children and to experience worse health outcomes if infected (Hendry et al. 2018). Immunisation is a safe and effective way to reduce the incidence of morbidity and mortality due to vaccine preventable disease in the Australian community.

Over the past 10 years, Australia has continued to improve immunisation rates in all children, but most notably for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged five. In 2018, immunisation rates for this group have continued to rise and remain above the rates for all children (Figure 2.8).

### Figure 2.8: Immunisation rates




*Notes: * 2018 data are for the nine months to September 2018.*

*** There was a decline in coverage rates in December 2014 and March 2017 due to changes to the definition of full immunisation. The more antigens (immune response stimulating substances) included in the assessment, the higher the likelihood of reduced coverage rates. This usually resolves over time as the changes to the immunisation schedule become more routine.*

*Source: Department of Health 2018 analysis of Australian Immunisation Register, unpublished.*

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

**TARGET**

*95 per cent of all Indigenous four year olds enrolled in early childhood education (by 2025)*

## KEY POINTS

- The target to have 95 per cent of Indigenous four year olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025 is on track. In 2017, 95 per cent of Indigenous four year olds were enrolled in early childhood education, in line with the benchmark rate for this target.
- New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory had Indigenous enrolments in early childhood education at the benchmark rate of 95 per cent or above.
- Attendance rates for Indigenous children were lower in remote areas- particularly in Very Remote areas- up to 16 percentage points lower than the rates for Indigenous children in other areas.
- Only around two-thirds (68 per cent) of all Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education attended for 600 hours or more in a year, with rates lower for Indigenous children living in the most disadvantaged and remote areas.

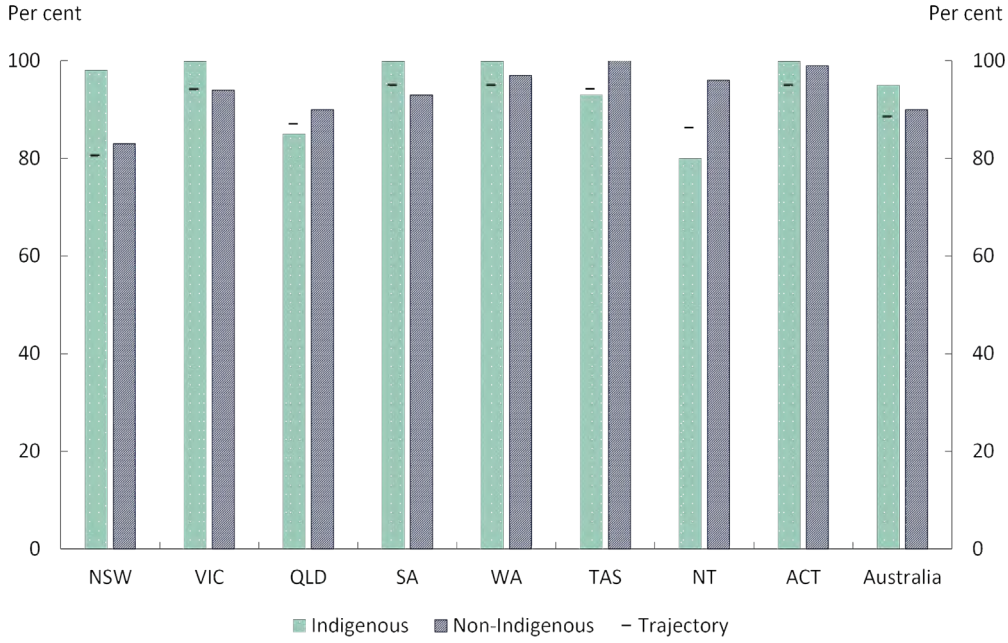
## WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

### NATIONAL

In 2017, 95 per cent of Indigenous four year olds were enrolled in early childhood education, in line with the target benchmark. It will be important to sustain this achievement over coming years.

Progress against this target is measured by the proportion of children enrolled in early childhood education in the year before they start full-time school as collected in the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (NECECC).[10] The 2017 NECECC data show there were 15,718 Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education programs (the year before full-time school) – this was 95 per cent of the estimated population (Figure 2.9).[11]

**Figure 2.9: Preschool enrolments by jurisdiction, 2017**




*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

*10 The National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection was an outcome of the 2010 National Information Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care between Commonwealth, state and territory authorities, and aims to provide nationally consistent and comparable early childhood education data.*

*11 Estimated population eligible for enrolment in the year before full-time school.*

Indigenous enrolment numbers in early childhood education programs increased from 14,667 in 2016 to 15,718 in 2017 resulting in an increase in the proportion of Indigenous children enrolled from 91 per cent in 2016 to 95 per cent in 2017. In comparison, the proportion of non-Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education programs declined slightly from 92 per cent to 90 per cent between 2016 and 2017.

The attendance rate (proportion of enrolled children attending early childhood education for at least one hour in the reference week) has remained the same between 2016 and 2017 for Indigenous (93 per cent) as well as non-Indigenous children (96 per cent).[12]

Only 68 per cent of Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education programs attended for 600 hours or more in 2017. This compares to around 78 per cent of non-Indigenous children (Box 2.4). Attendance of 600 hours or more a year is an essential element of 'universal education', a commitment of all Australian governments under the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (DET 2017).

Enrolment and attendance are precursors to deriving the benefits of a good quality early childhood education, including improving developmental outcomes in preparation for full-time schooling (Box 2.5).

## STATES AND TERRITORIES

In 2017, most of the jurisdictions had Indigenous early childhood education enrolments above the target benchmark of 95 per cent, with four (Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) achieving universal enrolments for Indigenous children, and New South Wales achieving close to universal enrolments (98 per cent). Each of these five jurisdictions had higher proportions of Indigenous than non-Indigenous enrolment in early childhood education programs (Figure 2.10).

The remaining three jurisdictions- Queensland (85 per cent), Tasmania (93 per cent) and the Northern Territory (80 per cent)- had lower proportions of Indigenous children enrolled than the national average, and lower than their respective non-Indigenous enrolment rates. From 2016 to 2017, in both Queensland and Tasmania, the number of Indigenous children enrolled increased by about 6 per cent. However, the proportion of Indigenous children enrolled (enrolled children as a proportion of the eligible population) decreased from 2016 to 2017.[13] Both jurisdictions remain within a couple

*12 The census date for the 2017 Collection is Friday 4 August 2017, with the one-week reference period spanning 31 July 2017 to 6 August 2017. Some jurisdictions may adopt a two-week reference period that includes the census week.*

*13 Single year of age estimated resident population and population projections may be subject to errors that cannot be adjusted for in the calculation of population estimates. Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have relatively small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations compared to the other jurisdictions which means year-to-year variability in single year of age populations may be more pronounced. This may result in year-to-year variability of the rate of preschool enrolment in these jurisdictions and should be used with caution.*

of percentage points of being back on track with the agreed trajectories to reach the target by 2025 (Figure 2.9). In the Northern Territory the number of Indigenous children enrolled declined by 2 per cent, and the proportion of Indigenous children enrolled also declined by around 2 percentage points between 2016 and 2017.

All jurisdictions, except the Northern Territory, had Indigenous early childhood education attendance rates (one hour or more in the reference week) of those enrolled close to the national average of 93 per cent: ranging from 90 per cent in Western Australia to the highest rate of 99 per cent in Tasmania. The Northern Territory had the lowest attendance rate (75 per cent). The non-Indigenous attendance rates were relatively similar across jurisdictions (ranging from 95 per cent in Victoria and the Northern Territory to 99 per cent in Tasmania). The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates was largest in the Northern Territory (20 percentage points), followed by Western Australia (6 percentage points) (Figure 2.10).

**Figure 2.10: Preschool attendance by jurisdiction, 2017**

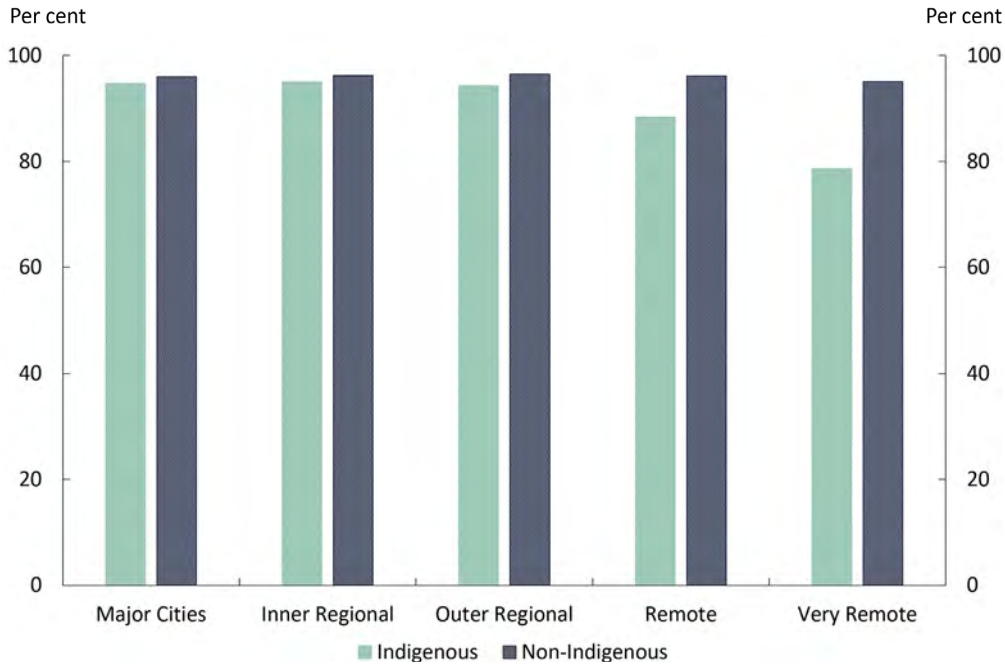



*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra.*

## REMOTENESS

In 2017, Indigenous early childhood education attendance rates (one hour or more in the reference week) tended to decrease with increasing remoteness, with 95 per cent in Major Cities and Inner Regional areas to 88 per cent in Remote and 79 per cent in Very Remote areas. However, the non-Indigenous rates remained fairly similar across regions (ranging from 95 per cent in Very Remote areas to 96 per cent in all other areas) (Figure 2.11).

**Figure 2.11: Preschool attendance by remoteness, 2017**




*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra.*

Between 2016 and 2017, Indigenous attendance rates in Remote and Very Remote areas appear to have declined while non-Indigenous rates remained similar. As a result, the gap across remoteness areas has widened, from 12 to 17 percentage points[14] in Very Remote areas and from 6 to 8 percentage points in Remote areas.

*14 Percentage point differences are based on unrounded figures.*

## Box 2.4: Hours of attending early childhood education program and service quality

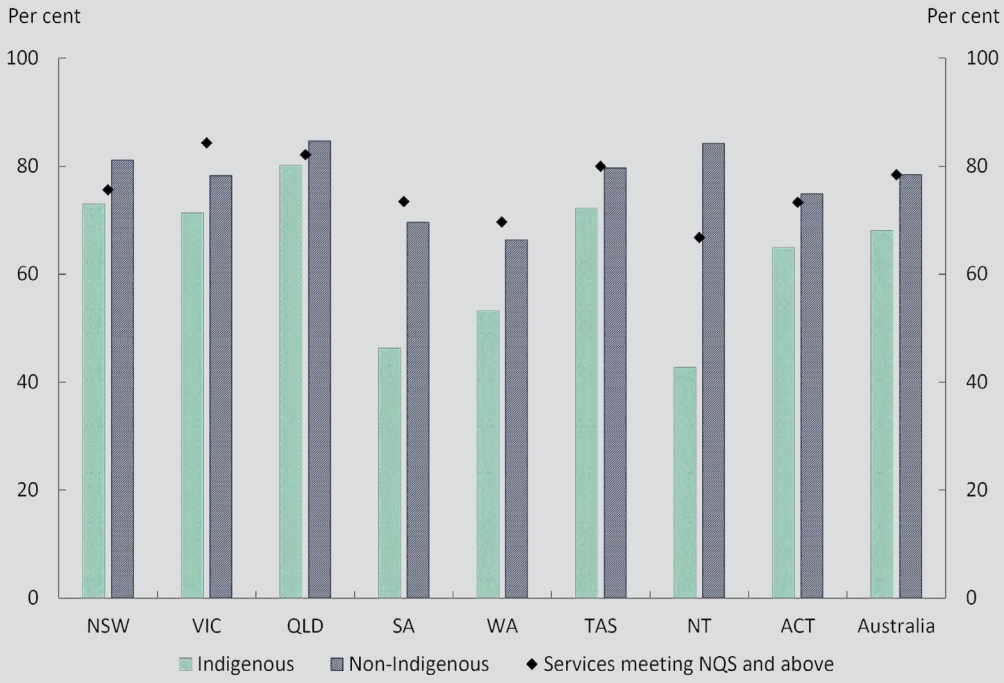
All states and territories have committed to provide universal access to quality early childhood education programs under the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. Universal access means that every child, in the year before they commence full-time schooling, has access to, and participates in: quality early childhood education program(s) delivered for at least 600 hours per year.

In 2017, almost all (97 per cent) Indigenous children enrolled in an early childhood education program were enrolled for 600 hours or more a year. However, only 68 per cent of all Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education programs attended for 600 hours or more. While this is an improvement from 2016 (65 per cent), it was still 10 percentage points below the non-Indigenous rate in 2017 (78 per cent).

In 2017, the rate of Indigenous children attending 600 hours or more varied from 80 per cent in Queensland to 46 per cent in South Australia and 43 per cent in the Northern Territory. In comparison, the non-Indigenous rates varied from 85 per cent in Queensland to 66 per cent in Western Australia (Figure 2.12).

*Box 2.4: Continued*

**Figure 2.12: Attendance rates and National Quality Standard (NQS) ratings by jurisdictions**

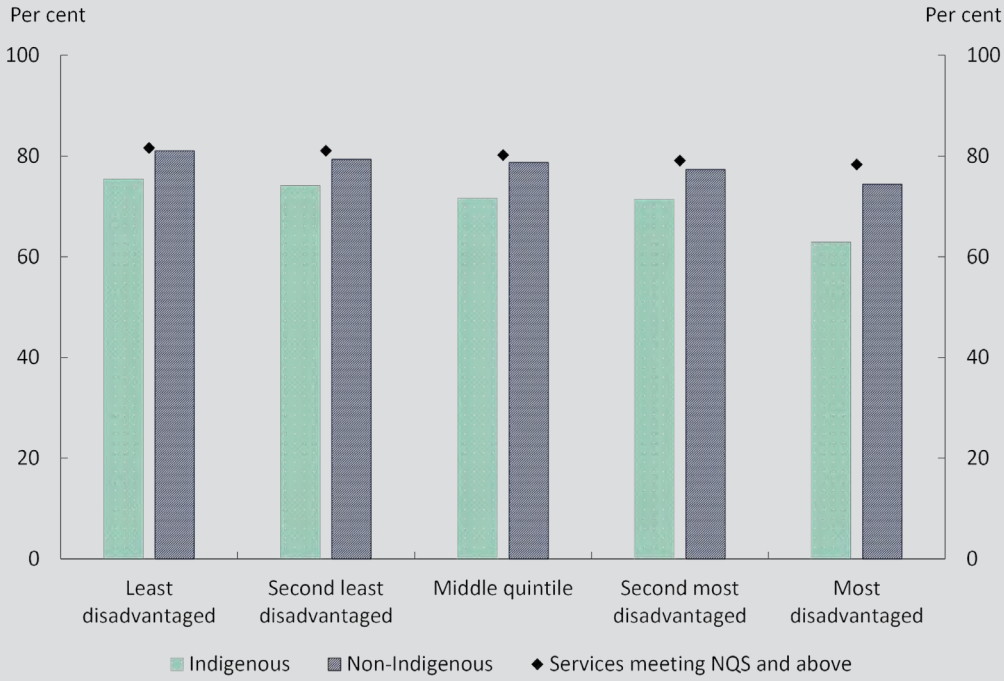



*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018d, Preschool Education, Australia, 2017, Cat. No.4240.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; and Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2018, National Quality Framework Snapshot, Q3, viewed 9 January 2019, <http://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/Snapshot/index.html>.*

*Box 2.4: Continued*

Attendance rates were also lower for children living in areas with higher levels of disadvantage (lower Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas[15] (SEIFA) quintile). For Indigenous children, the 600 hours or more attendance rate varied from 75 per cent in the least disadvantaged areas (top quintile) to 63 per cent in the most disadvantaged areas (bottom quintile) compared with the non-Indigenous rates varying from 81 per cent to 74 per cent from the least to most disadvantaged areas (Figure 2.13). Close to half (45 per cent) of all Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education lived in the most disadvantaged areas in 2017.

**Figure 2.13: Attendance rates (600 hours or more) and NQS ratings by SEIFA**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018d, Preschool Education, Australia, 2017, Cat. No.4240.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics Canberra; and Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2018, National Quality Framework Snapshot, Q3, viewed 9 January 2019, <http://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/Snapshot/index.html>.*

*15 The SEIFA index used is the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) which only includes measures of relative disadvantage.*

*Box 2.4: Continued*

Across remoteness areas, the Indigenous children attending 600 hours or more varied from 71 per cent in Major Cities and 74 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 49 per cent in Very Remote areas. In comparison, the non-Indigenous rate varied from 79 per cent in Major Cities and 77 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 69 per cent in Remote areas and 73 per cent in Very Remote areas (Figure 2.14).

**Figure 2.14 – Attendance rates (600 hours or more) and NQS ratings by remoteness**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018d, Preschool Education, Australia, 2017, Cat. No.4240.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; and Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2018, National Quality Framework Snapshot, Q3, viewed 9 January 2019, <http://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/Snapshot/index.html>.*

## *Box 2.4: Continued*

Quality of early childhood education programs is one of the key factors influencing the variation in the early childhood education attendance rates, as noted in a recent AIHW report (AIHW 2018b). In Australia, state and territory regulatory authorities undertake quality assessments against the National Quality Standard (NQS) for approved services under the National Quality Framework (NQF). Based on assessments against seven quality areas of the NQS, services are assigned one of the following as the overall rating – 'significant improvement required', 'working towards the NQS', 'meeting the NQS', 'exceeding NQS' and 'excellent'.

By 30 September 2018, 14,880 early childhood education services (94 per cent) had received a quality rating. Of these, 78 per cent were rated at 'meeting NQS' (service provides quality education and care in all seven quality areas) or above (ACECQA 2018). This means that nearly a quarter (22 per cent) of services were in need of improvement towards fully meeting the requirements of providing a quality learning environment under the NQS.

The spread of NQS ratings across locations suggests some association between the proportion of services meeting quality standards and early childhood education of 600 hours or more attendance rates.

Across jurisdictions, the proportion of services rated as 'meeting NQS or above' (Meeting NQS or Exceeding NQS or Excellent rating) varied from 84 per cent in Victoria and 82 per cent in Queensland to 73 per cent in South Australia, 70 per cent in Western Australia and 67 per cent in the Northern Territory (Figure 2.12). The most disadvantaged areas tended to have a slightly lower proportion of services rated as meeting NQS or above ratings (78 per cent in the most disadvantaged areas to 82 per cent in the least disadvantaged areas) (Figure 2.13). There was some variation in quality ratings by remoteness – with only 59 per cent of services in Very Remote areas receiving 'meeting NQS' or above ratings compared with around 80 per cent of services in other remoteness areas[16] (ACECQA 2018) (Figure 2.14).

*16 ACECQA excludes Family Day Care services from SEIFA and remoteness classifications because their operation is not specific to one location. 'Meeting NQS or above' combines services that have received an overall rating of 'meeting NQS', 'exceeding NQS' or 'excellent'.*

## Box 2.5: Starting school developmentally on track

Quality early childhood education encourages children's development. Recent evidence from the Northern Territory has linked preschool attendance to children's developmental readiness for school as measured by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (Menzies 2018). While Indigenous children had the lowest rates of preschool attendance compared with non-Indigenous children, increasing their level of preschool attendance was estimated to have a larger effect on their school readiness.

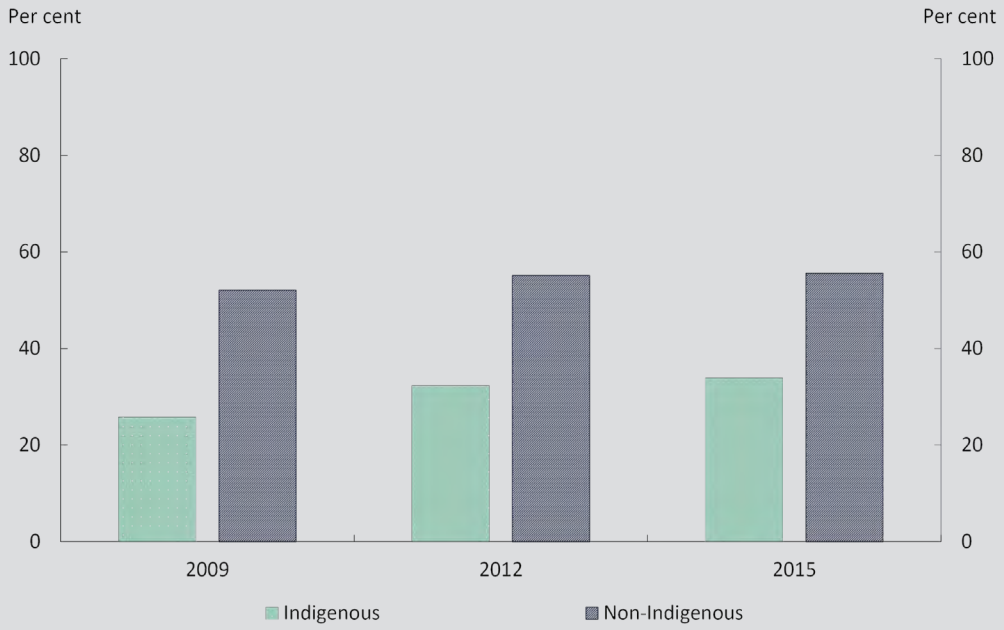
The AEDC is a triennial data collection that reports on development for children in their first year of full time schooling. It provides a 'check point' for children's physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, as well as communication skills and general knowledge. Together the five domains of early childhood development measured by the AEDC provide information about early childhood development before their first year of full-time school.

In 2015, 34 per cent of Indigenous children in their first year of full-time schooling were assessed as being on track across all five domains (Figure 2.15). This was an 8 percentage point improvement on the share of Indigenous children on track in 2009. The improvement in outcomes over this period was driven in part by an increase in the share of Indigenous children starting school on track in terms of their language and cognitive skills (increasing from 48 per cent in 2009 to 63 per cent in 2015).

This improvement in AEDC outcomes between 2009 and 2015 also coincided with an increase in preschool enrolments. For Indigenous children, less than 8 out of 10 children in the year before full time schooling were enrolled in preschool in 2011 (the first year national data are available). By 2015, preschool enrolment had increased to over 9 out of 10 Indigenous children (DET 2017).

*Box 2.5: Continued*

**Figure 2.15: Share of children starting school developmentally on track on all five domains**




*Source: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2018 analysis of Australian Early Development Census, unpublished data.*



*Minister for Indigenous Health and Ageing, Ken Wyatt and Nola Marino MP catch up with Jobe Gidgup and Lyric Gidgup at the launch of the New Directions Mothers and Babies service provided by South West Aboriginal Medical Service in Bunbury WA.*

# TRANSLATING POLICY INTO ACTION

The Australian Government invests in a range of universal and targeted programs to support early childhood development. This includes:

- **Ensuring the best start in life.** Evidence shows that early childhood is the period when the foundations are established for children to develop physically and cognitively, form secure attachments and build healthy social, emotional and communication skills. Efforts that focus on the first three years are the most likely to support positive change across the life-course. The Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program is a voluntary, evidence based and nurse-led program to provide regular home visits to mothers to provide valuable information and support. The New Directions Mothers and Babies Services provides access to antenatal care, information, assistance and monitoring.
- **Access to early childhood education (preschool).** Over $3.7 billion of funding has been made available through a series of National Partnership agreements since 2008 to support states and territories ensure that every child has access to a quality preschool education for 600 hours (15 hours a week) in the year before school.
- **Supporting families to engage with early learning and care services.** Having a clear focus on the health, safety and development of children in the first five years will not only achieve the new Closing the Gap targets, but support change in the trajectories for the next generation.
- **Access to childcare.** The Community Child Care Fund aims to increase childcare participation, particularly for children living in disadvantaged communities.
- **Integrating early childhood health, education and family support services.** The Connected Beginnings program provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families with holistic support and timely access to existing services so that children meet the learning and development milestones necessary for a positive transition to school.



*The Canteen Creek and Wutunugurra communities, 1,200km south of Darwin in the Northern Territory, were part of the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program.*

# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The Australian Government will continue to work across agencies, with state and territory governments, experts and other stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to:

- continue to address antenatal and perinatal risk factors to reduce infant mortality;
- improve preschool attendance rates to ensure that all children are participating the full 15 hours a week; and
- reinforce educational gains made in preschool by supporting parents to provide a stimulating and safe home environment and build complementary skills to enhance the healthy development of children including physical health, social and emotional abilities, language and communication.

All levels of government work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities to improve outcomes for children. A long-term focus on early childhood development can also deliver a return on investment through reduced service dependency, reduced health and justice interventions and improved education and employment participation.



*In Ntaria (Hermannsburg), the Kids Club uses play to develop critical skills that children who may have experienced trauma struggle with. Kids Club is funded as part of Stronger Communities for Children, a place based, community development program designed to ensure that communities have a real say in what services they need and how they are delivered. Communities develop their own plan to implement locally designed service responses to positively engage families in the region.*

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS

- In **Cape York**, the Apunipima Cape York Health Council Baby One program has been hugely successful, resulting in the majority of women attending five or more antenatal visits and the majority of children being immunised. Culturally appropriate care is provided in women's homes by local community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers.
- In **Mossman, Queensland**, a part time Indigenous Health Worker supports pregnant women to attend appointments such as scans, antenatal care, and diabetes education. As a result, women are making contact with the health system earlier in their pregnancy, which is associated with better birth outcomes. Last year, 63 per cent of Indigenous women had attended their first antenatal visit by week 13 of gestation. For the past two years, 100 per cent of the babies are born at a healthy birthweight, and there has been a marked decrease in smoking.
- In **Ceduna**, Ngura Yardurirn Children and Family Centre is the lead provider for the Connected Beginnings program. The collaboration with the Ceduna Koonibba Health Service Aboriginal Corporation provides tailored support to families with children aged 0-4 years to ensure health care in the early years is provided prior to commencing school.

CHAPTER 3

# EDUCATION

*'We believe that capabilities for education start with early childhood education, and then moves onto good primary schooling, successful secondary schooling and further education at university and technical trades, and then the importance of lifelong learning throughout careers.'*

*Cape York Institute*

# INTRODUCTION

A good quality education lays the foundations for success in later life. While all social indicators are important, education can be the catalyst for improving life outcomes in the long term.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments, education authorities, schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to strive for the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The Australian Government has an important role in the higher education sector, while state and territory governments have constitutional responsibility for schooling and training. In all sectors, the Australian Government plays an important supplementary role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education including:

- facilitating partnerships across sectors, across jurisdictions and with families, communities and non-government organisations;
- enhancing access to education beyond that which would be expected of state and territory governments;
- improving opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attend and thrive at school, regardless of location;
- promoting good practice and innovation;
- ensuring that gender-specific educational needs are identified and addressed; and
- funding complementary activities that support engagement, attainment and completion in school and post-school education.

Over the past ten years, significant investment has provided pathways for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access, engage with and achieve in education from primary and secondary schooling through to tertiary education.

*In all sectors, the Australian Government plays an important supplementary role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.*

Government investment includes support for:

- **Lifting student outcomes.** Through the National School Reform Agreement, the Australian Government and state and territory governments are working together to lift student outcomes across Australian schools, with a priority focus on equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This is supported by additional funding that is expected to benefit around 217,355 students.
- **Supporting girls to pursue education and careers in STEM.** This year the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), in partnership with CareerTrackers, launched an Indigenous Girls' Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Academy for high-achieving female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who aspire to pursue education and careers in STEM professions. CSIRO also offers exciting traineeships and cadetships to tertiary students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to gain real experience in a scientific environment that will kickstart their career.
- **Integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.** The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Curricula Project aims to empower all teachers to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their classroom practice. The project will provide resources centred around three themes—Astronomy, Fire and Water—showcasing the sophistication of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
- **Supporting attendance, retention and attainment through ABSTUDY.** In recognition of the 50th anniversary of ABSTUDY, the Government is investing $38.1 million over five years to better support school attendance, retention and Year 12 attainment for over 5,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.
- **Reforming remote delivery to be more flexible and tailored to community needs.** From 2019, the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) will change to have a stronger focus on engagement with communities and increasing local decision making. The strategy will work to build stronger linkages with state and territory governments and schools, broadening its focus from 'getting kids to school' to 'keeping kids in school'. Local employment will remain a key aspect of the new model and RSAS teams will support families to build on their strengths to take an active role in their children's education.



*Hermannsburg Indigenous Engagement Officer, Edward Rontji with Ntaria school kids.*

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

**TARGET**

*Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018)*

## KEY POINTS

- The target to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance is not on track.
- Attendance rates for Indigenous students have not improved between 2014 and 2018 (around 82 per cent in 2018), and remain below the rate for non-Indigenous students (around 93 per cent).
- The gap in school attendance is evident from when children start school. During primary school the attendance gap was around 8 percentage points in 2018. Attendance falls when students reach secondary school – particularly for Indigenous students – and the attendance gap widens to 14 percentage points.
- In remote areas, school attendance by Indigenous students is lower and the attendance gap is larger. In 2018, attendance rates for Indigenous students ranged from 86 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 63 per cent in Very Remote areas.

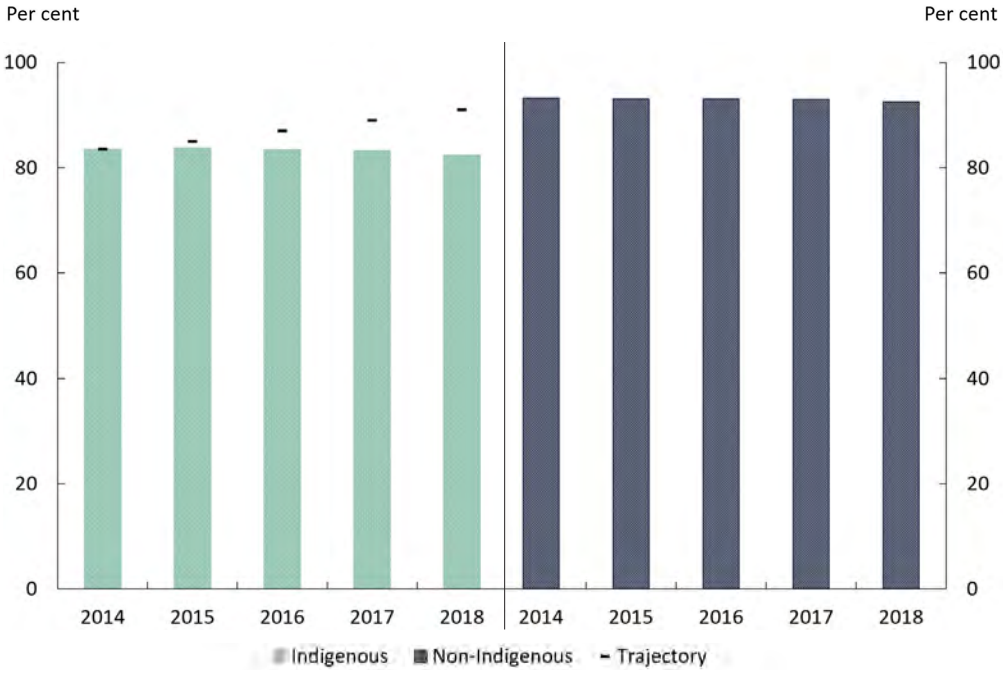
# WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

## NATIONAL

The target to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance by 2018 is not on track. Progress against this target is assessed using Semester 1 school attendance rates for Years 1–10. The final assessment of the target will be considered following the release of Semester 1 2019 attendance data. Semester 1 2019 provides a better representation of changes in school attendance throughout 2018.

Based on Semester 1 school attendance data reported by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, school attendance rates have not improved for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students between 2014 and 2018. For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, attendance rates decreased by about 1 percentage point over the period (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Student attendance rates**




*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018, ACARA National Student Attendance Data Collection, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney; and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

In 2018, the national school attendance rate was around 82 per cent for Indigenous students. This compares to an attendance rate for non-Indigenous students of around 93 per cent. With similar movement in both student populations, the gap in attendance rates has remained at around 10 percentage points over the past five years.

The gap in school attendance is evident from when children start school. Among primary school students the attendance gap was around 8 percentage points in 2018. The gap increased to around 14 percentage points for Indigenous students in secondary school (Box 3.1).

*In 2018, the national school attendance rate was around 82 per cent for Indigenous students.*

While attendance rates are slightly higher for girls than boys for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, the difference is larger for Indigenous students. In 2018, there was a 0.3 percentage point gap in attendance between non-Indigenous boys and girls. Attendance by Indigenous girls, however, was 1.3 percentage points higher than Indigenous boys. Indigenous girls also recorded slightly higher levels of consistent school attendance than Indigenous boys (Box 3.2).

## STATES AND TERRITORIES

There has been no improvement in attendance rates for Indigenous students across the states and territories. The largest change has been in the Northern Territory, where the attendance rate fell by around 5 percentage points between 2014 and 2018. Declines of around 2 percentage points or less have been observed in the attendance rate for Indigenous students in all other jurisdictions (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2: Indigenous student attendance rates by jurisdiction**



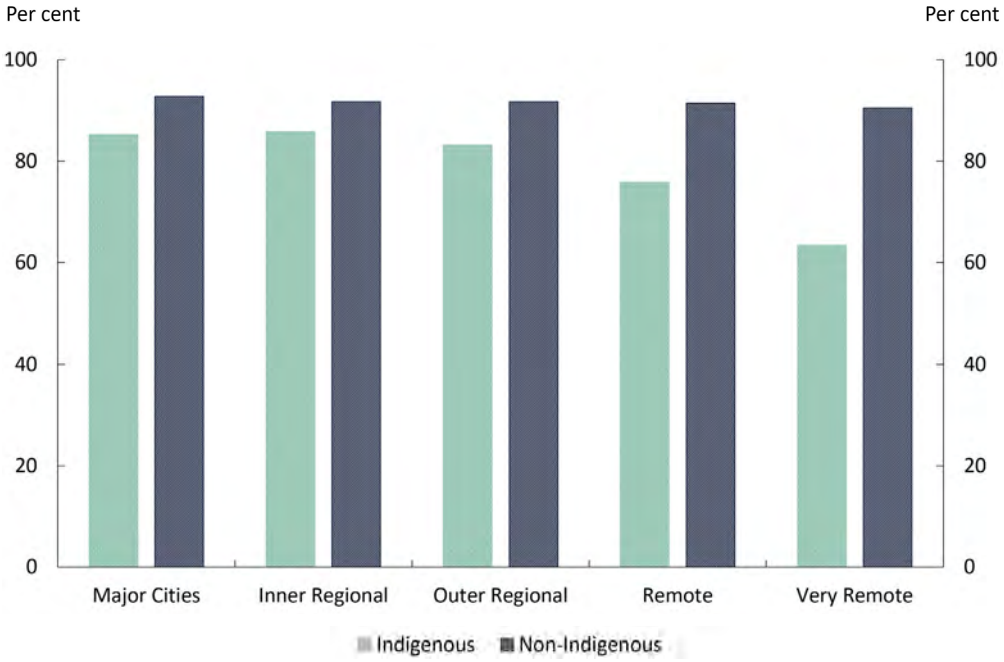

*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018, ACARA National Student Attendance Data Collection, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney.*

## REMOTENESS

School attendance rates for Indigenous students are higher in metropolitan areas, and lower in remote areas. In 2018, the attendance rate for Indigenous students ranged from 86 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 63 per cent in Very Remote areas.

While attendance rates for non-Indigenous students did not vary substantially by remoteness, attendance rates for Indigenous students decline with remoteness. The gap in attendance rates, therefore, increases with remoteness (Figure 3.3). The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates was 27 percentage points in 2018 in Very Remote areas, and narrowed to 6 percentage points in Inner Regional areas.

**Figure 3.3: Student attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1 2018**




*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018, ACARA National Student Attendance Data Collection, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney.*

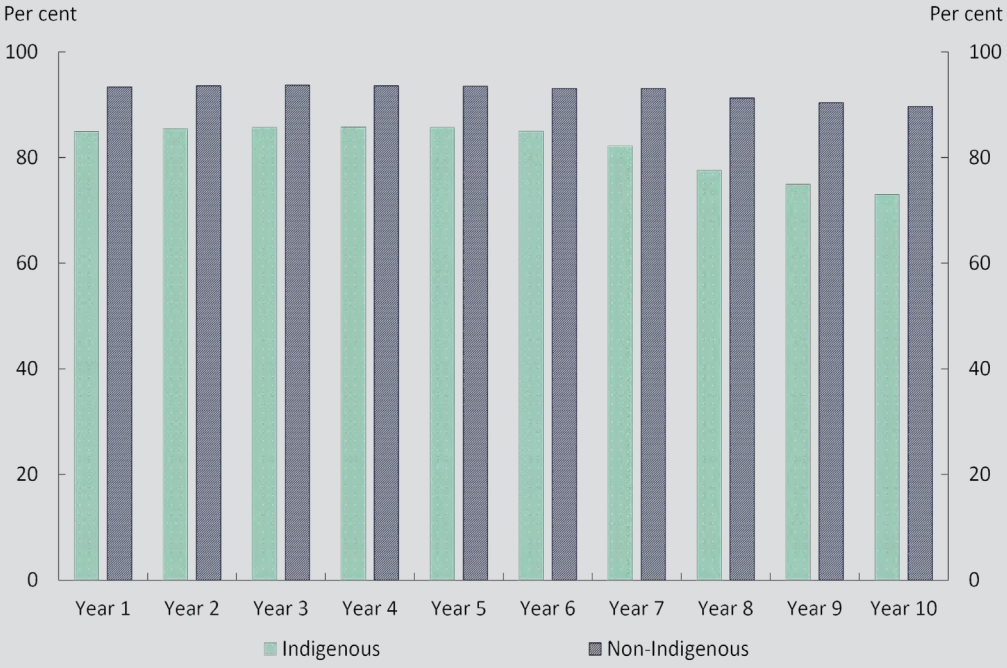
Similar to the attendance rate, the level of consistent attendance — that is, the share of students who attended school 90 per cent or more of the time — was highest in Inner Regional areas (55 per cent attending 90 per cent or more of the time) and fell off sharply in remote areas (to 21 per cent in Very Remote areas). Again, the attendance levels for non-Indigenous students showed less difference by remoteness, and as a result the gap in consistent school attendance was highest in Remote and Very Remote areas.

## Box 3.1: Attendance during secondary schooling

While Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance is stable throughout primary school (Years 1—6), attendance rates fall in secondary school (Years 7–10). The decline in attendance is larger for Indigenous students. For Indigenous students in 2018, the attendance rate in Year 10 (73 per cent) was around 12 percentage points lower than in Year 6; for non-Indigenous students the Year 10 rate (90 per cent) was around 3 percentage points lower than in Year 6 (Figure 3.4).

Over the past five years, attendance rates have not materially changed for non-Indigenous secondary students. Attendance for Indigenous secondary students, however, declined slightly from 79 per cent in 2014 to 77 per cent in 2018. This resulted in a slight increase in the attendance gap for secondary students, of less than 2 percentage points over the period.

**Figure 3.4: Student attendance rates by year level, Semester 1 2018**




*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018, ACARA National Student Attendance Data Collection, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney.*

## Box 3.2: Level of consistent attendance

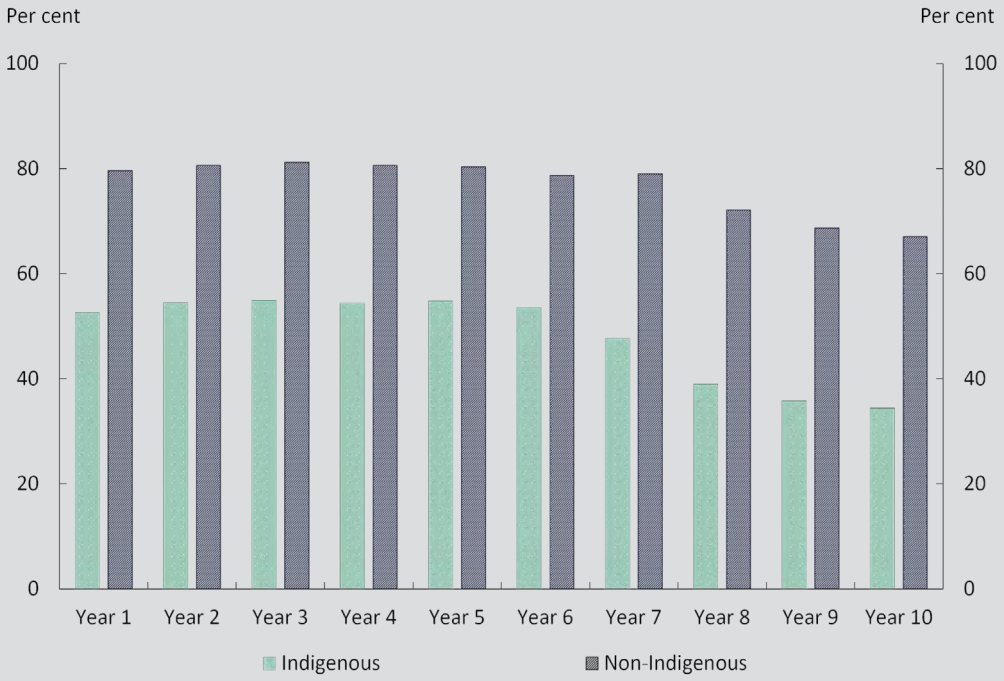
While many factors contribute to learning outcomes, poor school attendance has been linked to lower achievement in numeracy, writing and reading. Between 2008 and 2012, after taking into account student demographics and school location, NAPLAN scores for students in Western Australia were found to decline with any school absence, and continued to decline as the number of days absent increased (Hancock et al. 2013).

Around three quarters of all students attended school 90 per cent or more of the time in 2018. This means a quarter of Australian children are not attending school consistently. Levels of consistent attendance are lower again among Indigenous students – just under half (49 per cent) of Indigenous students attended school 90 per cent or more of the time, compared with 77 per cent of non-Indigenous students. This leaves a gap in the level of consistent school attendance of around 28 percentage points.

In 2018, the gap in consistent attendance was 26 percentage points for primary school students compared to 32 percentage points for secondary students (Figure 3.5).

*Box 3.2: Continued*

**Figure 3.5: Proportion of students who attended school 90 per cent or more of the time, Semester 1 2018**




*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018, ACARA National Student Attendance Data Collection, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney.*

Indigenous girls recorded slightly higher levels of consistent school attendance than Indigenous boys. The gap in the level of consistent attendance was slightly smaller for girls than boys, around 27 percentage points and 29 percentage points respectively in 2018.

In primary school, 56 per cent of Indigenous girls consistently attended school compared with 52 per cent of Indigenous boys. In secondary school, consistent school attendance dropped to 41 per cent for Indigenous girls and 38 per cent for Indigenous boys.

# LITERACY AND NUMERACY

**TARGET**

*Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018)*

## KEY POINTS

- As outlined in the 2018 Report, the target to halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading and numeracy is not on track.
- The share of Indigenous students at or above national minimum standards has improved and the gap has narrowed between 2008 and 2017. In particular, the share of Indigenous students at or above minimum standards in Years 3 and 5 reading, and Years 5 and 9 numeracy, increased by around 11–13 percentage points (statistically significant).
- Outcomes vary by state and territory, and only Year 9 numeracy is on track in all the states and territories.

# WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

## NATIONAL

As outlined in the 2018 Report, the target to halve the gap in the share of Indigenous children at or above national minimum standards in reading and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 within the decade to 2018 is not on track.[17] The 2018 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data were not available in time for inclusion in this Report.

In 2017, a disproportionate share of Indigenous children remain below the national minimum standards in reading and numeracy compared to non Indigenous students (Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7).

That said, gains have been made in reading and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children, narrowing the gap in outcomes with non-Indigenous children over the past nine years (Figure 3.8).

The shares of Indigenous students at or above national minimum standards were 11–13 percentage points higher (statistically significant) than the share in 2008 (the baseline), for reading in Years 3 and 5 and for numeracy in Years 5 and 9.[18] These four areas have shown the largest reduction in the gap from 2008–2017 (by around 10 percentage points each) (Figure 3.8). The shares of Indigenous students at or above national minimum standards in Year 7 reading and Years 3 and 7 numeracy also increased, by 1–4 percentage points each (not statistically significant).

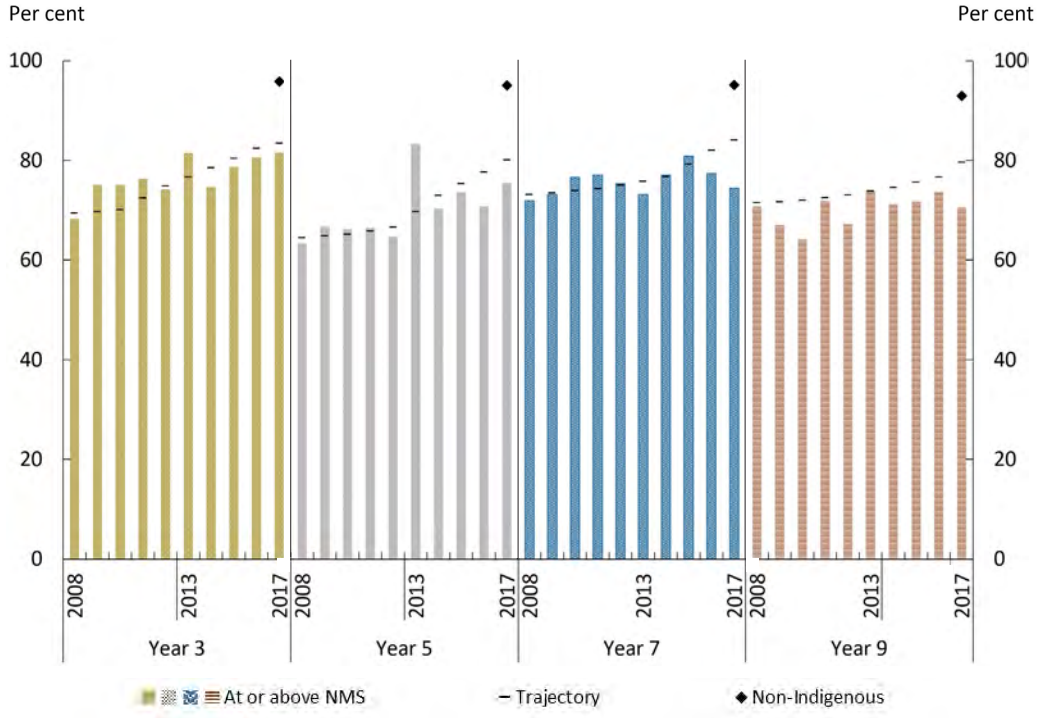
A disproportionately low share of Indigenous students participate in NAPLAN. In 2017, across all eight areas less than 90 per cent of Indigenous students participated, while participation was over 90 per cent for non Indigenous students. Indigenous participation rates are lower for secondary students and students living in remote areas.

Low participation rates may skew the measurement of NAPLAN outcomes (COAG Reform Council 2012; Thompson 2013). For example, Indigenous participation in the reading test ranged from 89 per cent in Year 3 to 75 per cent in Year 9 — implying a quarter of Year 9 Indigenous students were not counted in the 2017 reading results.

*17 The target as originally agreed also included writing results. However, due to a change in the test from narrative writing to persuasive writing, the writing results from 2011 onwards are not comparable with results from previous years, and so have been excluded.*

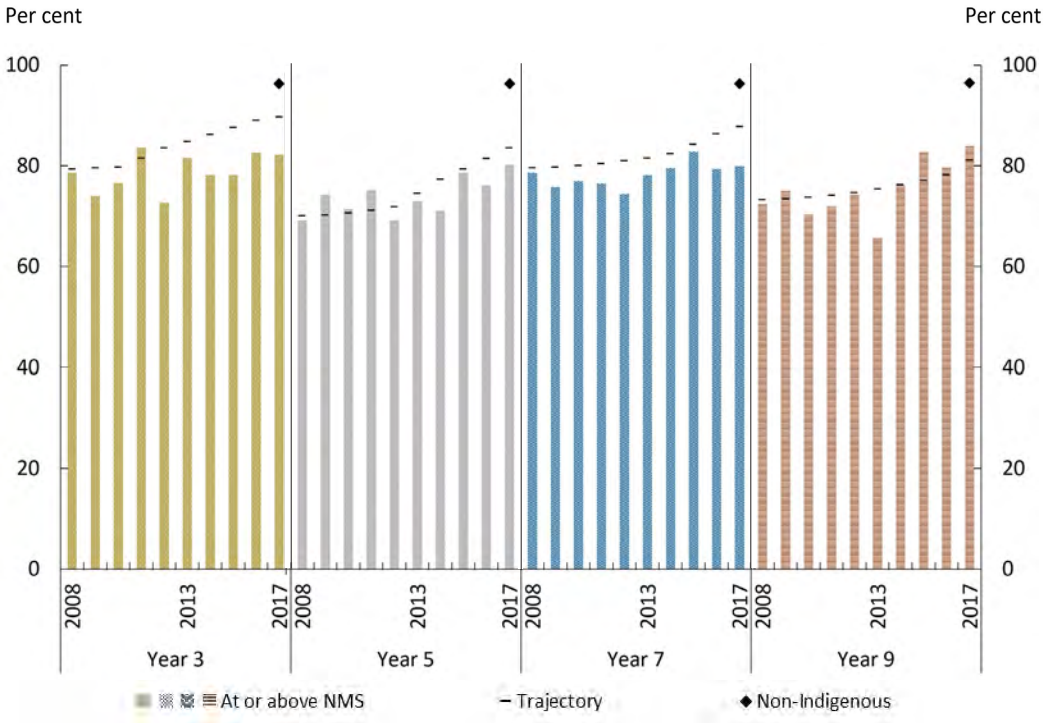
*18 Statistical significance is reported for changes in the proportion of students at or above national minimum standards. However, statistical significance is not reported for changes in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes.*

**Figure 3.6: Indigenous students at or above national minimum standards for reading**



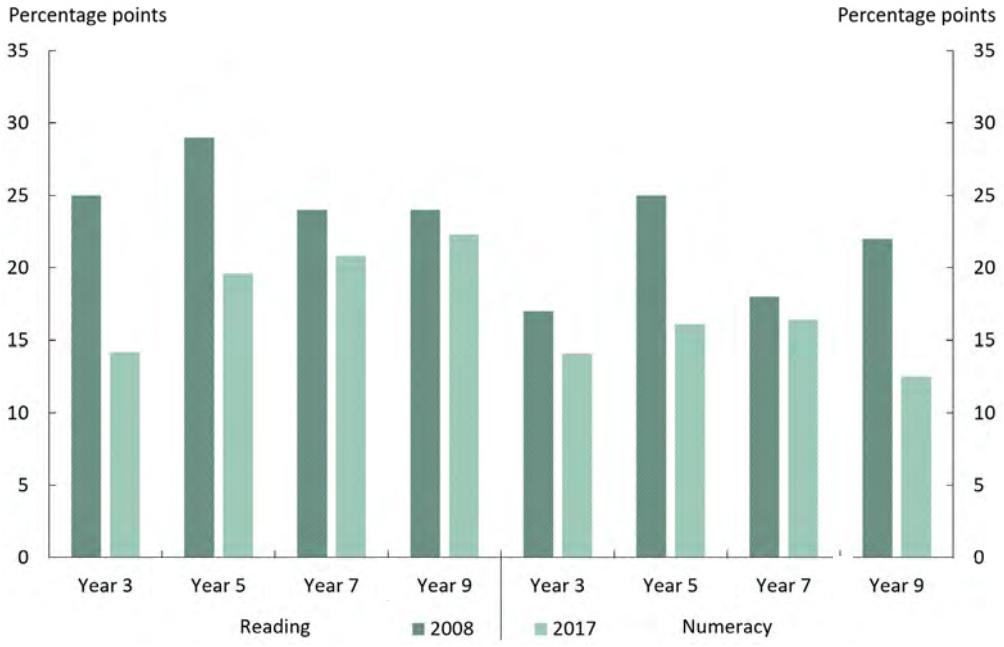

*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017, NAPLAN Results, viewed 15 January 2019, <http://reports.acara.edu.au/NAP>; and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

**Figure 3.7: Indigenous students at or above national minimum standards for numeracy**




*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017, NAPLAN Results, viewed 15 January 2019, <http://reports.acara.edu.au/NAP>; and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

**Figure 3.8: The gap in meeting national minimum standards**




*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017, NAPLAN Results, viewed 15 January 2019, <http://reports.acara.edu.au/NAP>.*

## STATES AND TERRITORIES

The gap in schooling outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students varies by state and territory.

At the jurisdictional level, the target to halve the gap in reading and numeracy outcomes was assessed across 64 result areas — that is, for each of the eight jurisdictions, across the four year levels (Years 3, 5, 7 and 9), for both reading and numeracy outcomes (Table 3.1).

Results were on track in 29 of these result areas, including Year 9 numeracy for all jurisdictions.[19]

In 2017, the Australian Capital Territory was the only jurisdiction on track across all eight areas. Tasmania was on track in all but two areas (Years 7 and 9 reading), while Victoria was on track in half of the areas. New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia each had three areas on track. Both Queensland and the Northern Territory were only on track in Year 9 numeracy. The Northern Territory had the lowest proportion of Indigenous students at or above the national minimum standards.

**Table 3.1: Reading and numeracy areas on track by jurisdictions, 2017**

| | NSW | VIC | QLD | SA | WA | TAS | ACT | NT | AUST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | | | | | | | | | |
| Year 3 | ● | ● | | | ● | ● | ● | | |
| Year 5 | | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● | | |
| Year 7 | | | | | | | ● | | |
| Year 9 | | | | | | | ● | | |
| Numeracy | | | | | | | | | |
| Year 3 | | | | | | ● | ● | | |
| Year 5 | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | ● | | |
| Year 7 | | | | | | ● | ● | | |
| Year 9 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |

*Note: Green dot indicates results on track for the target. The target was not on track for the remaining measures.*
*Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017, NAPLAN results.*

*19 Results are found to be on track based on confidence intervals. The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have the largest confidence intervals. For example, in the Australian Capital Territory in 2017, the results for seven of the eight areas were under the trajectory points, but were still consistent with the trajectories due to their large confidence intervals.*

# YEAR 12 ATTAINMENT

**TARGET**

*Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020)*

## KEY POINTS

- As outlined in the 2018 Report, the target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent rate by 2020 is on track. Nationally, the gap has narrowed from 36 percentage points in 2006 to 24 percentage points in 2016.
- Indigenous Year 12 attainment rates have improved across all regions. In Major Cities, where over 40 per cent of Indigenous 20–24 year olds live, the Year 12 attainment rate increased from 59 per cent in 2006 to 74 per cent in 2016.
- There has also been a marked improvement in Remote and Very Remote areas. Young Indigenous Australians living in Very Remote areas have experienced the largest gains in Year 12 attainment, with rates rising from 23 per cent in 2006 to 43 per cent in 2016.

# WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

## NATIONAL

As outlined in the 2018 Report, the target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent by 2020 is on track. This is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2016 data released in October 2017. There are no new national data to assess progress against the target this year.

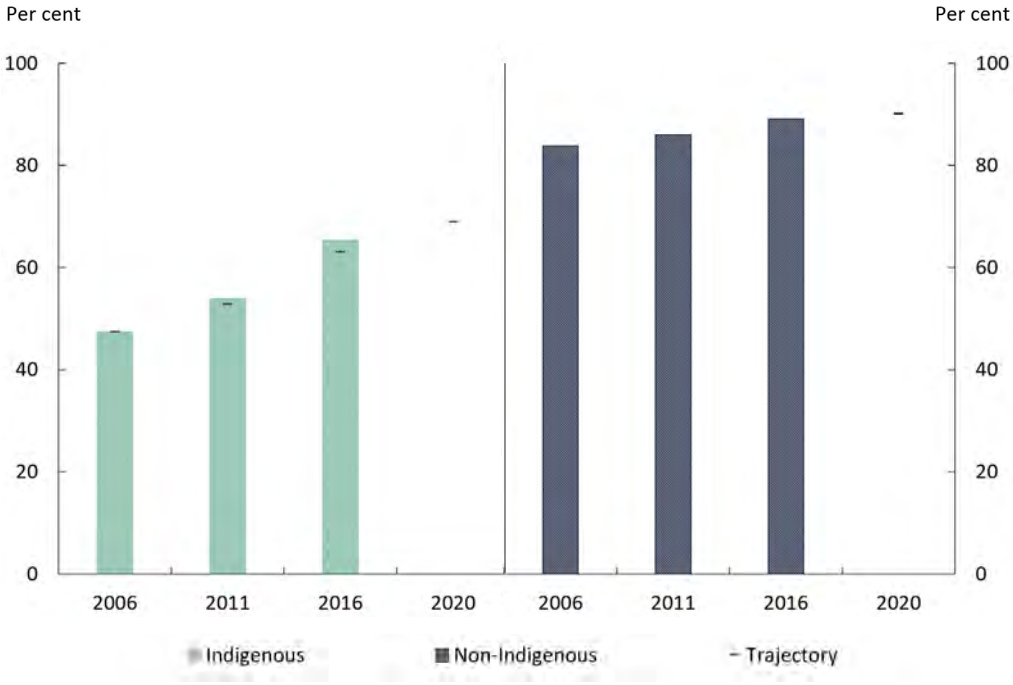
Progress against this target is measured using data on the proportion of 20–24 year old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have completed Year 12, or obtained a Certificate level II or above qualification.

Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous 20–24 year olds who had achieved Year 12 attainment or equivalent increased from 47 per cent in 2006 to 65 per cent in 2016 (Figure 3.9). While the rate of non-Indigenous Year 12 attainment or equivalent also increased over the period, the gap has reduced by around 13 percentage points over the past decade, from 36 percentage points in 2006 to 24 percentage points in 2016.

There are slight differences by gender, with young Indigenous women (aged 20–24) marginally more likely to have a Year 12 or equivalent qualification than their male counterparts (3 percentage point difference). The same percentage point difference as in 2006. By gender, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is marginally larger (24 percentage points) than the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men (23 percentage points).

Indigenous women face different challenges to Indigenous men, with childcare responsibilities being one factor related to lower participation in education for women (see Box 3.3).

**Figure 3.9: Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate, Indigenous 20–24 year olds**

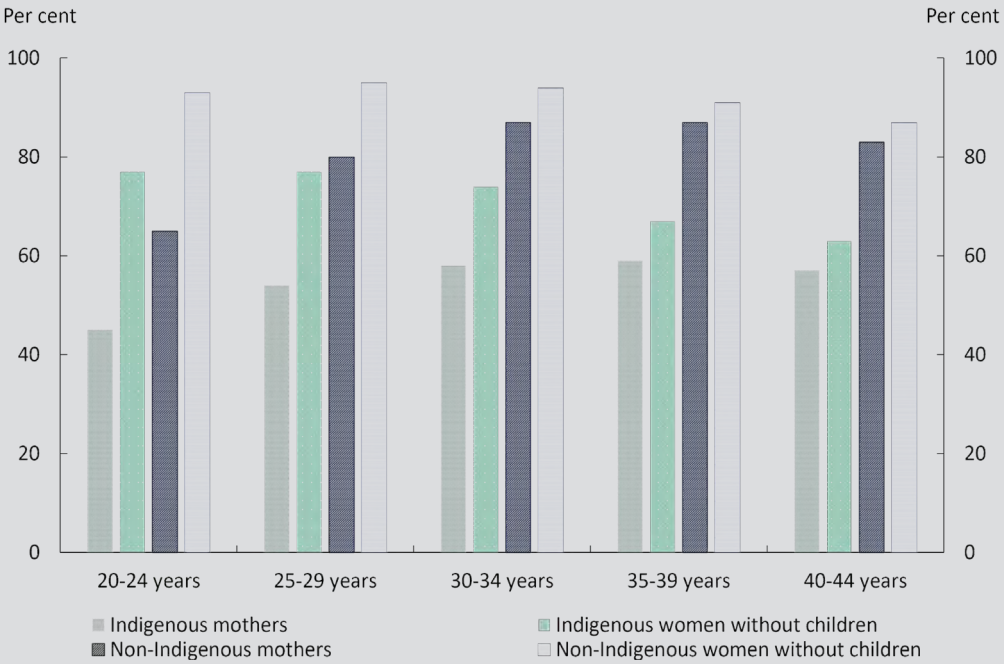



*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra; and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

## Box 3.3: Women with Children

Childcare responsibilities is one driver affecting young women's participation in education. The rate of Year 12 attainment or equivalent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 20–24 year old women without children is around 33 percentage points higher than the rate of attainment for their counterparts with children (Figure 3.10). By comparison, the corresponding gap among non Indigenous 20–24 year old women was 28 percentage points.

**Figure 3.10: Year 12 attainment rate in 2016, by 5 year age range**




*Source: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, 2016 Census TableBuilder Pro, Cat. No. 2037.0.30.001, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.*

*Box 3.3: Continued*

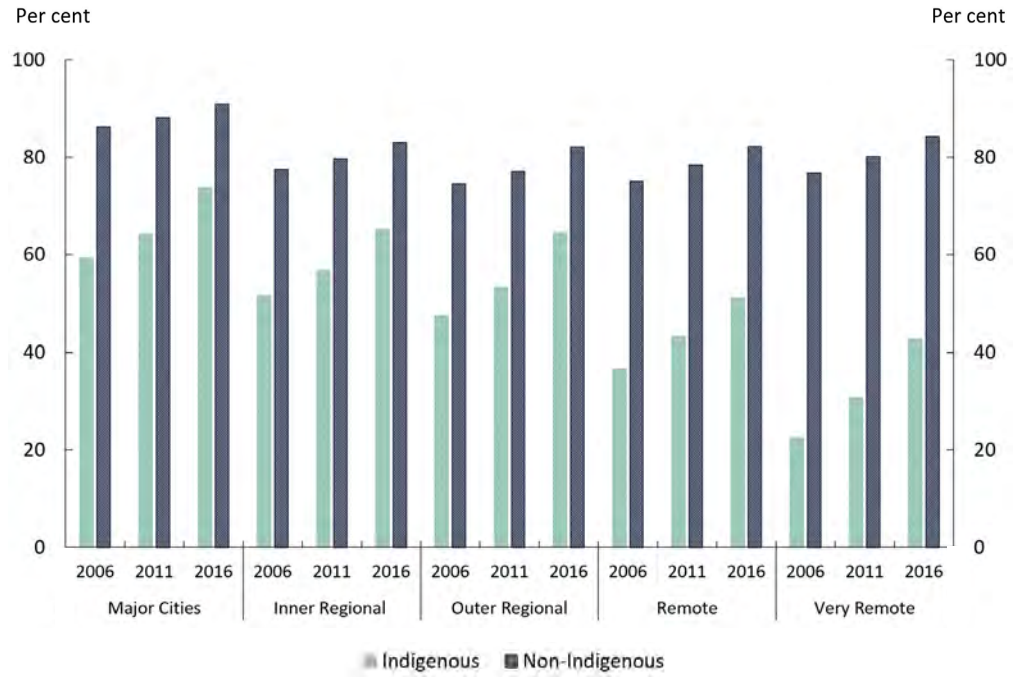
Notably, the difference in Year 12 or equivalent attainment between mothers and women without children was smaller, in 2016, among older age groups for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women (Figure 3.10). For instance, the difference between Indigenous mothers and Indigenous women without children reduces from 33 percentage points at 20–24 years old to only 5 percentage points at 40–44 years old. The relatively low Year 12 attainment rates among young Indigenous mothers (aged 20–24 years) highlight the importance of initiatives to support and promote alternative pathways and entry points into education later in life.

Under the IAS, the Government provides funding for a range of activities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to finish school and complete further tertiary study. For instance, the Cape York Girl Academy aims to support young Indigenous mothers and their children to engage with and to complete schooling. This holistic approach includes access to VET, work experience and school-based traineeships aimed at preparing students for future employment opportunities. The Government also works closely with state and territory governments and service providers to better support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, particularly those still at school.

## REMOTENESS

Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates have increased across all remoteness categories (Figure 3.11). Rates of Indigenous Year 12 attainment or equivalent are higher in metropolitan areas, and lower in remote areas. In 2016, rates of Year 12 attainment or equivalent for Indigenous Australians ranged from 74 per cent in Major Cities and 65 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 43 per cent in Very Remote areas.

**Figure 3.11: Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate, by remoteness, 20–24 year olds**




*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra; and Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2013, National Agreement performance information 2012–13: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra.*

*There has also been marked increases in Year 12 attainment or equivalent between 2006 and 2016 in Remote areas and Very Remote areas.*

The gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent improved across all remoteness categories over the decade to 2016. A large proportion of Indigenous 20–24 year olds live in Major Cities (over 40 per cent) where the attainment rate has increased from 59 per cent in 2006 to 74 per cent in 2016. This improvement has resulted in a narrowing of the gap to around 17 percentage points in 2016.

Indigenous Year 12 attainment has also increased by 17 percentage points in Outer Regional areas and 14 percentage points in Inner Regional areas between 2011 and 2016. This narrowed the gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent to around 18 percentage points in each area.

There has also been marked increases in Year 12 attainment or equivalent between 2006 and 2016 in Remote areas and Very Remote areas. In particular, young Indigenous Australians living in Very Remote areas experienced the largest gains in Year 12 attainment or equivalent, with rates rising from 23 per cent in 2006 to 43 per cent in 2016.

# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The Australian Government will continue to work across agencies, with state and territory governments, experts and relevant stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to improve:

- **Attendance.** Consistent school attendance lays a foundation for improved outcomes. Evidence also shows that the attendance gap widens by remoteness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with attendance rates 21.8 percentage points lower in Very Remote areas when compared to major cities (ACARA 2018).
- **Literacy and Numeracy.** A significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote schools are English as an Additional Language or Dialect learners. Key to supporting their literacy and numeracy development is recognition of their existing language skills in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and supporting their language development as English learners.
- **Teacher quality.** Teacher quality is the most significant in-school determinant of student achievement. Further work is required to improve initial teacher education programs, and professional development of the existing educator workforce, to build overall capacity to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers also needs to be improved, as they are significantly underrepresented in the education workforce.




*In North Queensland, the Australian Institute of Marine Science engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students to bolster the interest, experience and hands-on skills needed for tertiary studies in marine science. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Marine Science Scholars' Initiative brings students together in interactive workshops under the guidance of marine researchers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. The program aims to foster links between western marine science and traditional ecological knowledge. Back row (left to right): Jeneke Forrest, Shane Pilot, Jakahn Von Senden, Shakira Travers, Zane Lydom. Front row (left to right): Tanieka Kyle, Samantha Icely, Jordan Hann.*

# TERTIARY EDUCATION

Government investment includes:

- **Higher education support.** The Government provides funding for services such as scholarships, tutorial assistance, mentoring, safe cultural spaces and other support services to assist students to enrol in and successfully complete a higher education degree.
- **Tertiary education access for remote and regional students.** Enabling students to remain in their communities and complete their studies by distance education supports access to education.
- **Higher education for regional students.** The Government supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through regional study hubs and scholarships. The hubs provide facilities such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and internet access for university students who wish or need to remain in their local area for study, but where enrolments are not sufficient to justify a university establishing a regional campus.
- **Earning a TAFE Certificate while serving Australia.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) receive high quality training and education including TAFE studies in literacy and numeracy, physical fitness, military training and cultural studies. On completion, they have the option of continuing with ADF careers or returning to civilian life with new workplace skills.

## WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

University enrolments by Indigenous Australians have increased significantly over the past decade, possibly reflecting higher Year 12 completion rates. Data from the Department of Education and Training (2018a) show the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education award courses has more than doubled, from 9,329 in 2007 to 19,237 in 2017. In comparison, domestic award student numbers increased by 44 per cent over the same period. Female students make up 66 per cent of the Indigenous cohort, compared with 58 per cent of the total domestic student population.

There has also been a 69 per cent increase in the number of Indigenous higher education completions between 2007 and 2017. Nonetheless, Indigenous students remain underrepresented in universities. Indigenous students comprise less than 2 per cent of the domestic higher education student population.

# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

- **Improving university and VET completion rates.** Efforts should aim to maintain and increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men entering into higher education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women undertaking trade apprenticeships. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are significantly more represented at university than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are significantly more represented in trade apprenticeships. However, once tertiary qualifications are completed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university graduates have, on average, higher salaries than other Australian graduates in the short and medium term (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching 2018).
- **Building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic workforce.** Around 1 per cent of the Australian higher education workforce are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (DET 2018b). Greater numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the higher education workforce ensure that all Australians are able to better benefit from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives. Building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education workforce requires development of a pipeline of students who are undertaking research degrees and progressing onto employment in the higher education sector.

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS

- In **Nhulunbuy**, the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation will establish a regional study hub to support university students in Nhulunbuy Yirrkala and Gunyangara, with satellite hubs in the communities of Ramingining, Millingimbi (Yurrwi) and Galiwink'u. Similarly students from Ngukurr and Numbulwar will be supported by the hub at Wuyagiba outstation. This initiative provides access to tertiary studies for remote students in a supportive environment.

CHAPTER 4

# EMPLOYMENT

*'Australia has benefitted from having an employment Closing the Gap target. While progress over the past ten years against this target has been variable, its existence has ensured a continued focus on employment as a key desired outcome for Government, communities and business. It has ensured that questions are asked of policy makers, service providers and individuals around what is working, and what needs improvement.'*

Participant in the Closing the Gap Refresh consultation

# INTRODUCTION

Having a job can be transformational. It creates financial independence and fosters new and improved skills. It also acts as a gateway to other opportunities.

Employment is critical to the health and prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It offers social and economic benefits that flow to individuals, families, communities and the economy as a whole.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are thriving in workplaces across Australia, however progress towards the target to halve the gap in employment rates has been slow. It is important to understand the drivers and barriers affecting Indigenous employment when considering the pace of change required.

Life circumstances fundamentally affect a person's capacity for work. Capacity to gain sustainable employment is affected by broader influences, including education, access to housing and adequate health care. In turn, the number and types of jobs available impact on success rates.

To achieve long-term progress, pathways must be built from school to further education and training, then into self-employment or to trades and professional industries that provide culturally competent workplaces for Indigenous Australians.

Complex influences on employment mean that a range of policies can impact on progress. Australian Government macro-economic policies and employment services must work in concert with state and territory government employment initiatives and the health and education systems. The private sector also plays a critical role by recruiting and developing staff and providing safe workplaces. More broadly, a society that values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and people provides a supportive environment for employment.

*Employment is critical to the health and prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It offers social and economic benefits that flow to individuals, families, communities and the economy as a whole.*




*Each year the Australian Army works together with a remote Indigenous community to deliver infrastructure projects and vocational skills training. Courses in hospitality, business and construction were well attended in Toomelah, NSW.*

# EMPLOYMENT

**TARGET**

***Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018)***

## KEY POINTS

- As outlined in the 2018 Report, the target to halve the gap in employment by 2018 is not on track. Nationally, the Indigenous employment rate has not improved and the gap has widened over the past decade.
- The share of Indigenous Australians employed varies across remoteness. In 2016, 54 per cent of Indigenous Australians of working age and living in Major Cities were employed, compared to 31 per cent of those living in Very Remote areas.
- After adjusting for changes in remote employment programs, the employment rate for Indigenous Australians rose around 4 percentage points, and in Very Remote areas by around 11 percentage points over the decade to 2016.

## NATIONAL

As outlined in the 2018 Report, the target to halve the gap in employment outcomes within a decade is not on track.

Progress against this target is measured using data on the proportion of working age (15–64 years) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples employed (the employment-to-population ratio, referred to here as the employment rate). There are no new data to assess progress against the target this year.[20]

Nationally, the employment rate for Indigenous Australians has not improved over the past decade. The Indigenous employment rate fell from 48 per cent in 2006 to just under 47 per cent in 2016 (Figure 4.1). Over the same period, the non-Indigenous employment rate was broadly stable, at around 72 per cent. As a result, the gap has widened by 1.5 percentage points to around 25 percentage points in 2016.

Measuring progress toward the employment target is affected by the cessation of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program. The CDEP program paid participants CDEP wages (derived from income support) to participate in activities or training and were previously classified as being employed. Job seekers who were eligible for the CDEP are now supported through *jobactive* and Disability Employment Services (in non-remote areas) and the Community Development Program (CDP) (delivered in 60 regions and more than 1,000 communities) and are not classified as being employed.[21]

Focusing on changes in the non-CDEP employment rate over time can provide a more accurate sense of labour market developments. After adjusting the employment status of CDEP participants, the employment rate for Indigenous Australians was around 42 per cent in 2006 (Figure 4.1). In 2016, the employment rate for Indigenous Australians increased to 47 per cent. This represents an approximate 4 percentage point improvement in the share of Indigenous Australians employed over the past decade. However, this increase is likely to be an underestimate of the actual improvement in the non-CDEP employment rate because the Census underestimates the number of CDEP participants.[22]

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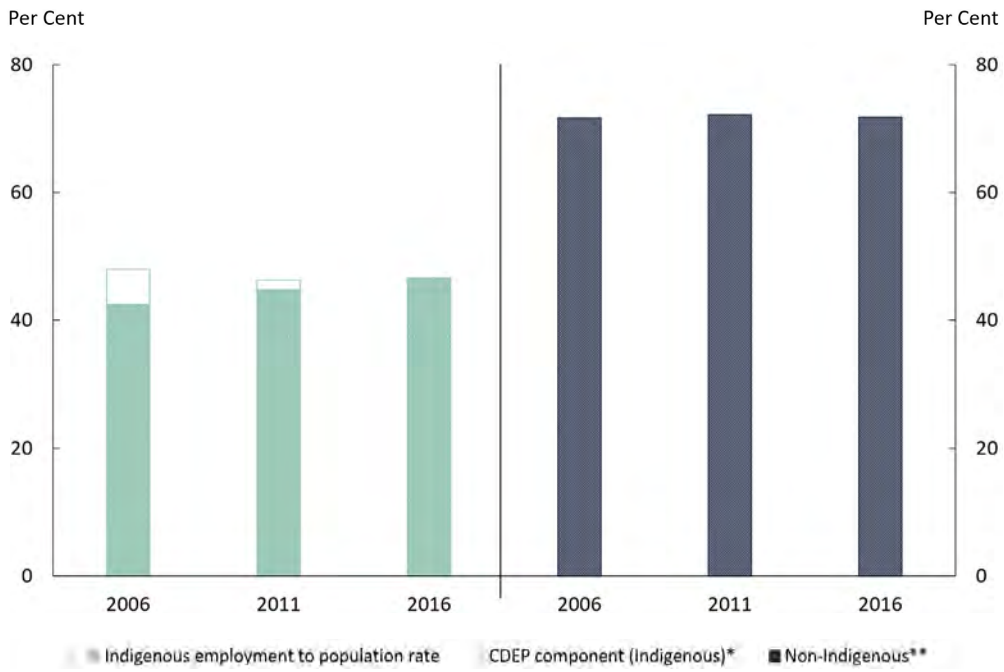
*20 The main data sources used to assess progress against the employment target are the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) and Social Survey (NATSISS). Data from the 2014-15 NATSISS published in the 2017 Closing the Gap report showed this target was not on track. While not directly comparable with the NATSIHS and NATSISS, the ABS Census provides an alternative source of data for this target. Data from the 2016 Census, the most recent dataset for this target, were released in 2017 and included in the 2018 Closing the Gap report. The final datum point for this target will be sourced from the 2018-19 NATSIHS, due to become available in late 2019.*

*21 As the CDEP was wound down and participation declined, many of these individuals transferred across to other employment services, where they received income support and were then counted as unemployed.*

*22 The ABS Census only asks people who were counted using an Interviewer Household Form about their participation in CDEP. This form is primarily used for discrete Indigenous communities. To compare, around 32,800 Indigenous Australians were registered as CDEP participants in administrative data around the time of the 2006 Census; however, only 14,497 people were counted as CDEP participants in the Census itself (Hunter 2016).*

**Figure 4.1: Employment to population rate, 15–64 years**




*Note:*

** Employment rates are adjusted to exclude those CDEP participants employed, while including all CDEP participants in the underlying population count. The CDEP program did not exist in 2016 so no estimate is shown.*

*** Non-Indigenous CDEP participants have not been identified separately due to the small size of the cohort.*

*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra; and Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2013, National Agreement performance information 2012–13: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra.*

## REMOTENESS

Employment outcomes vary markedly across regions. In 2016, the Indigenous employment rate ranged from 54 per cent in Major Cities to 31 per cent in Very Remote areas.

Without adjusting for the effect of the CDEP program, over the decade to 2016 the share of Indigenous Australians employed in both Major Cities and Inner Regional areas increased slightly (by 2.3 and 1.2 percentage points respectively). However, over the same period, employment rates for Indigenous Australians living in Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote areas fell (ranging from 2.0 percentage points in Outer Regional areas to 16.5 percentage points in Very Remote areas) (Figure 4.2).

As outlined above, focusing on changes in the non-CDEP employment rate over time can provide a more accurate sense of labour market developments. For example, recent analysis has demonstrated that the impact of the cessation of the CDEP program on Indigenous employment rates was likely to be more pronounced in remote areas, where CDEP participation was relatively high (Venn & Biddle 2018).

For Indigenous Australians living in remote areas, while the unadjusted employment rate (counting CDEP participants as employed) declined between 2006 and 2016, the adjusted employment rate increased (Figure 4.2). Specifically, over the decade to 2016 the employment rate in:

- Remote areas increased by almost 3 percentage points to around 40 per cent in 2016 (in contrast, the unadjusted rate decreased by 6 percentage points).
- Very Remote areas increased by around 11 percentage points to 31 per cent in 2016 (the unadjusted rate fell by around 16 percentage points).

Negligible changes were observed in the adjusted employment rate for Indigenous Australians in Outer Regional areas (the unadjusted rate fell by 2 percentage points).

**Figure 4.2: Employment to population rate by remoteness for Indigenous Australians, 15–64 years***




*Note:*

** Employment rates are adjusted to exclude those CDEP participants employed, while including all CDEP participants in the underlying population count. The CDEP program did not exist in 2016 so no estimate is shown.*

*Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2018, National Agreement performance information 2017–18: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra; and Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2013, National Agreement performance information 2012–13: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra.*

## Box 4.1: Future employment growth

As the nature of employment continues to evolve, certain types of jobs decline or become redundant and new opportunities and industries will emerge.

These trends reflect a number of factors, including ongoing technological change and the automation of many routine jobs. Over recent decades, employment growth has come from non-routine cognitive jobs such as managers and professionals, and more recently, from non-routine manual jobs such as community and personal service workers (Heath 2017).

While this transformation can drive innovation and productivity growth, the effect across industries and occupations may not be uniform. For example, the rate of growth in routine manual[23] employment such as technicians, trade workers, labourers and machine operators was much slower in the decade to 2016. Employment levels in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors also fell over this same period (PMC analysis of ABS 2018a).

More routine and manual jobs will become increasingly susceptible to automation over the next few decades (Edmonds & Bradley 2015). This includes those industries with historically large workforces such as retail trade, manufacturing and construction.

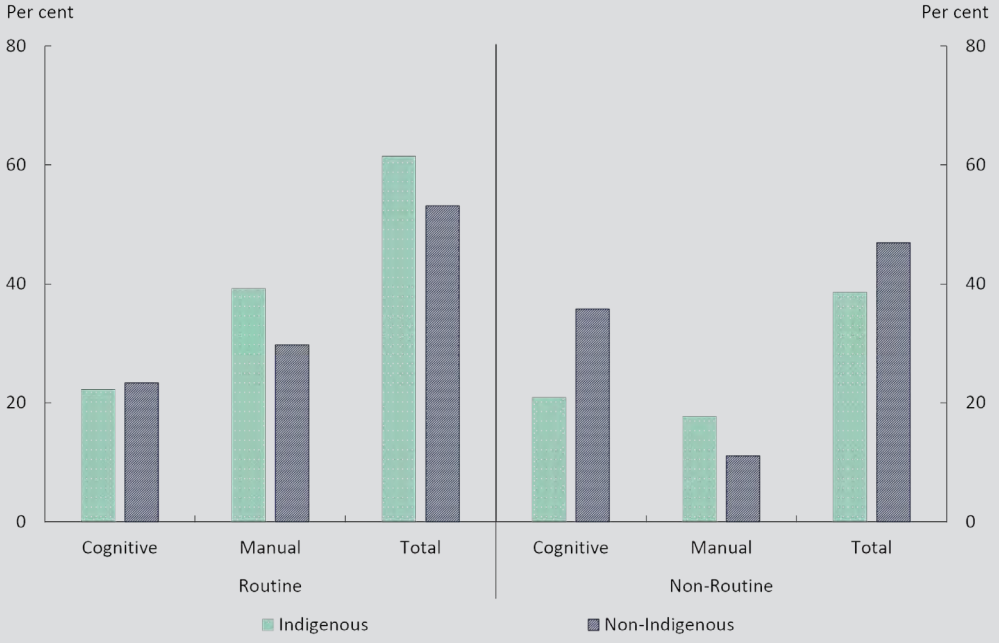
While the proportion of Indigenous Australians in routine manual employment has declined over the decade, it remains a significantly more common employment type for the Indigenous workforce compared with the non-Indigenous workforce (Figure 4.3).

Indigenous Australians also have a comparatively low representation in the non-routine forms of employment that are forecasted to make a significant contribution to future employment growth. The forecasted growth in non-routine employment is expected to be concentrated in cognitive roles such as in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, as well as more interpersonal and manually-focused jobs such as education and healthcare (Hajkowicz et al. 2016).

*23 As defined by the Reserve Bank of Australia (Heath, 2017).*

*Box 4.1: Continued*

**Figure 4.3: Routine and non-routine work for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, 15–64 years in 2016**




*Source: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, 2016 Census TableBuilder Pro, Cat. No. 2037.0.30.001, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.*

# TRANSLATING POLICY INTO ACTION

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments are working together to improve employment outcomes for all Australians. Employment services play an important role to support job seekers find work. Government investment includes support for:

- **Mainstream employment programs.** Like all Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians receive support and services through government-funded mainstream programs, including employment services programs. It is essential mainstream programs are able to support Indigenous Australians. Indigenous job seekers can access support through mainstream employment programs, such as jobactive, Transition to Work, YouthPaTH and ParentsNext. jobactive provides services to the majority of Indigenous job seekers. The Closing the Gap – Employment Services package enhances the ability of mainstream employment services to place more Indigenous job seekers into work.
- **Complementary Indigenous-specific programs.** The Government funds Indigenous-specific employment programmes, such as Vocational Training and Employment Centres, the Employment Parity Initiative, Tailored Assistance Employment Grants and the Indigenous Rangers. Increasingly, many employment service providers funded through these programs are Indigenous organisations themselves, supporting the growth of the Indigenous business sector and the delivery of culturally competent services. The Government has also established the Time to Work Employment Service. The service is an in-prison employment service that aims to better prepare Indigenous prisoners for their release from prison, improve the likelihood of connecting with post-release employment services and support post-release employment service providers to place ex-offenders in employment. The service aims to help address the current pattern of high rates of Indigenous recidivism.

- **Disability Employment Services.** Over 12,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with a disability are supported through Disability Employment Services, with a steep increase in the number of participants who stay employed for more than 13 weeks. In addition, strategies to build and diversify the Indigenous allied health workforce will benefit participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme living in rural/remote areas to increase access to culturally appropriate allied health services and other service delivery.
- **Remote employment programs.** The Government acknowledges remote jobs are often more sporadic and short term. In response to feedback from remote communities and other stakeholders, the Government is implementing reforms to the remote employment service, the Community Development Program (CDP). From 2019, the CDP reforms will help more remote job seekers transition from welfare into real jobs, and better support vulnerable job seekers.
- **Employment of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Commonwealth-funded services.** For example, the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) employs 495 staff who play a vital role in getting children to school. Approximately 93 per cent of RSAS staff identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- **Direct employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Commonwealth Public Sector.** Indigenous representation has increased steadily towards the 3 per cent by 2018 target (reaching 2.9 per cent as at 30 June 2018), supported by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the Commonwealth has grown by almost 25 per cent since 2015 (PMC 2019). In addition, the public sector supports secondments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations under the Jawun program.



*The Midwest Employment and Economic Development Aboriginal Corporation (MEEDAC) has gone from strength to strength since starting a project to supply fruit and vegetables to local mines. MEEDAC gained funding to construct a 10,000 square metre state of the art shadehouse at Innovation Park.*

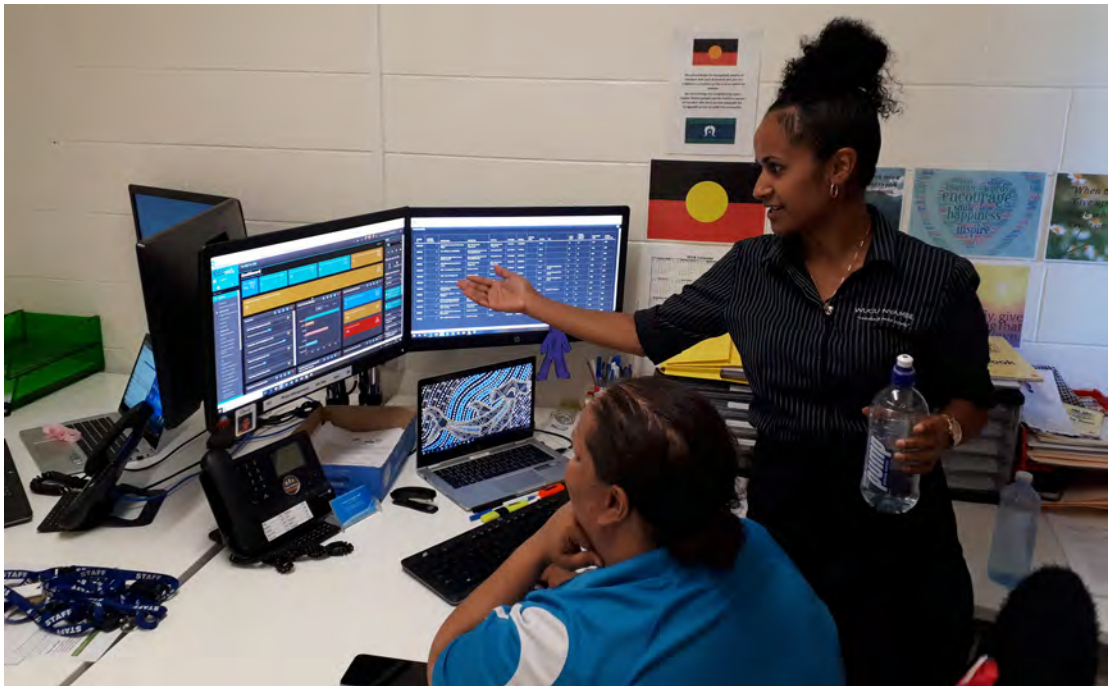
# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The Australian Government will continue to work across agencies, with state and territory governments, industry, experts and other stakeholders, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to:

- deliver effective and culturally competent employment services through mainstream programs;
- ensure Indigenous-specific programs complement mainstream programs where necessary;
- tailor the CDP based on the needs of remote communities and job seekers;
- ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have access to quality employment opportunities, including in growth industries; and
- better understand the employment opportunities of the future and link relevant educational offerings to ensure Indigenous Australians are job ready.

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS

- In **Ceduna, SA**, the Maximising Indigenous Employment and Economic Opportunities (MIEEO) pilot works with Traditional Owners and ten key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to promote potential business opportunities arising from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Ceduna MIEEO has directly led to an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled NDIS providers in the region.



*In Yarrabah, employment services are being delivered in the community by the community. This trial of a place-based employment service draws on the local knowledge and connections staff who are either residents of Yarrabah or who have a close connection to Yarrabah. To build the capacity of Yarrabah to deliver employment services, a flexible funding pool is available to deliver local employment projects, such as a community skills and training activity.*

CHAPTER 5

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*'A robust and sustainable Indigenous economy is essential for self-determination, independent communities and 'closing the gap'. More Indigenous people than ever are seeking to achieve economic independence by contributing to the economy through the establishment of Indigenous businesses.'*

Jodie Sizer, PwC Indigenous Consulting

# INTRODUCTION

Economic development includes skills development, business development and employment. It paves the way for improving social and economic participation and is in turn linked to better health and education outcomes. For this reason, the Australian Government has made economic development a central tenet of its approach to Indigenous Affairs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been engaging in trade and commerce for thousands of years. Owning a business continues to be an effective way to achieve financial independence for families and communities. Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have growing success in the business sector. Indigenous Australians' access to and participation in economies across Australia has benefits far beyond the people and communities involved.

*Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have growing success in the business sector. Indigenous Australians' access to and participation in economies across Australia has benefits far beyond the people and communities involved.*

Access and participation can be improved by addressing the complex factors linked to economic development. The Australian Government has a primary role to play in delivering initiatives that stimulate economic growth in communities and in the Indigenous business sector. This can only be achieved in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. State and territory governments will continue to have a central role to play in delivering policies and programs to stimulate regional business and support Indigenous businesses.



*On Melville Island, an Aboriginals Benefit Account grant enabled development of fabric screen printing at Jilamarra arts centre, which shows how empowerment and economic development can occur through cultural activities.*




*Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion addresses the 2019 Tradeshow which brought together 800 people and 70 businesses.*

# TRANSLATING POLICY INTO ACTION

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to improve economic development outcomes. The Australian Government aims to:

- **Leverage the Australian Government's multi-million dollar procurement** through the Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP). Since the IPP commenced on 1 July 2015, over 1,400 Indigenous businesses have won approximately 12,000 contracts valued in total at over $1.8 billion.
- **Provide funds and advice to start up organisations** through the Indigenous Entrepreneurs Fund. Since the Fund started, it has provided over $30 million in funding and Business Advisors have provided advice to over 400 Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- **Foster self-employment and small businesses** in remote areas through the Community Development Program (CDP) Business Incubator pilot and the expansion of microenterprise support and microfinance services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will have access to initiatives that improve both business skills and access to capital while linking businesses with community economic priorities.
- **Provide culturally safe spaces for Indigenous businesses** to access business support services, short-term office space and connections to commercial opportunities, through Indigenous Business Hubs.
- **Support business development activities** through Indigenous Business Australia (IBA). In 2017–18, IBA made 155 business loans totalling $21.6 million, with an additional 69 leases and four producer offset deals valued at a total of $9.6 million. Over 700 customers received business support.





*In Central West NSW, major Commonwealth and state infrastructure projects, such as the Inland Rail and Dubbo Rail Maintenance Hub provide Aboriginal communities with opportunities for economic and social prosperity.*

# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The Australian Government will continue to work with state and territory governments, Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses to implement the Indigenous Business Sector Strategy.

The strategy sets out a ten year plan to improve access to business and financial support for Australia's growing Indigenous business sector. A key initiative for 2019 is the pilot of an Indigenous Entrepreneurs Capital Scheme to unlock a wider range of finance and capital products for Indigenous businesses who are looking to transition to mainstream banking.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to include Indigenous employment and supplier-use targets in major projects, such as roads and infrastructure in city deals. For example, the Cape Leveque road upgrade in Broome, Western Australia exceeded targets to achieve a 68 per cent Indigenous workforce, of whom, 88 per cent are locals. The total dollar value percentage awarded to Indigenous businesses is 56 per cent.

In addition, the Australian Government has developed proposals to reform Native Title legislation to make it more effective and efficient by simplifying processes for claims and management of native title land.

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS



*In Djarindjin, WA, the local Aboriginal corporation is an innovative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business operating a helicopter refuelling service, staffed solely by Indigenous workers. The airport is one of a handful of airports in the country with a world-class helicopter hot refuelling service (refuelling while the engine is running).*

CHAPTER 6

# HEALTHY LIVES

*'We recognise that the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of the whole community is paramount in determining the health and wellbeing of individual members. The holistic nature of our knowledge and cultures locates health in culture, community and kinship networks.'*

Janine Mohamed, CEO,
Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Nurses and Midwives

# INTRODUCTION

Access to health services is a fundamental right for all Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a right to be healthy, well and safe.

Healthy lives rely on complex, multi-sector, whole-of-government approaches. Income, employment, education, culture and community safety have a significant impact on health.

Improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health requires an integrated approach which includes strengthening community functioning, reinforcing positive behaviours, improving economic participation, developing regional economies, housing and environmental health, gender-specific strategies and spiritual healing.

*Healthy lives rely on complex, multi-sector, whole-of-government approaches. Income, employment, education, culture and community safety have a significant impact on health.*

The Australian Government leads the delivery of primary health care, the Medicare Benefits Scheme, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and funding for Indigenous health through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme. State and territory governments are responsible for the provision of acute care services.

The Australian Government also has specific initiatives that focus on key areas for improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including mental health programs, social and emotional wellbeing supports for members of the Stolen Generation and their families, alcohol and other drug treatment services and the rollout of low aromatic fuel.



*HealthLAB is a mobile health education clinic that focusses on youth and Indigenous communities with the aim of providing education about positive lifestyle choices. A National Science Week grant supported travel around the Northern Territory from Darwin to the Tiwi Islands, and across to Nhulunbuy and the East Arnhem Land community of Yirrkala. Here, NT Thunder captain Shannon Rioli tests it out at the official launch of HealthLAB during National Science Week (image credit: National Science Week).*

# LIFE EXPECTANCY

**TARGET**

*Close the life expectancy gap within a generation (by 2031)*

## KEY POINTS

- The target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is not on track.
- Between 2010–12 and 2015–17, Indigenous life expectancy at birth has improved by 2.5 years for Indigenous males and by 1.9 years for Indigenous females (both not statistically significant), which has led to a small reduction in the gap.
- Large gaps remain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy estimates.
- Indigenous life expectancy estimates reduce with increasing remoteness while non-Indigenous life expectancy estimates are similar across remoteness areas, resulting in particularly marked gaps in life expectancy estimates in Remote and Very Remote areas.
- There have been significant[24] reductions in the Indigenous mortality rate from chronic diseases, particularly from circulatory diseases since 1998. However, Indigenous mortality rates from cancer are rising and the gap in cancer mortality rates is widening.

*24 Throughout this chapter, the word significant is used to denote statistical significance. It has not been used in any other sense.*

# WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

## NATIONAL

The target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is not on track.

The target is measured by estimates of life expectancy at birth, which are available every five years.[25] According to the latest ABS estimates, Indigenous males born between 2015 and 2017 have a life expectancy of 71.6 years (8.6 years less than non-Indigenous males) and Indigenous females have a life expectancy of 75.6 years (7.8 years less than non-Indigenous females) (Table 6.1). Between 2010–12 and 2015–17, Indigenous life expectancy at birth has improved by 2.5 years for Indigenous males and by 1.9 years for Indigenous females (both not statistically significant), which has led to a small reduction in the gap.

Indigenous life expectancy has been growing at a faster rate than for non-Indigenous Australians, and the rate of increase in Indigenous life expectancy has also increased over the recent five year period (2010–12 to 2015–17) compared to the previous five year period. The annual increase in life expectancy for Indigenous males was 0.5 years between 2010–12 and 2015–17 compared with 0.3 years between 2005–07 and 2010–12. The annual increase for Indigenous females was 0.4 years between 2010–12 and 2015–17 compared with 0.1 years between 2005–07 and 2010–12.

While these improvements are welcome, they are not sufficient to meet the life expectancy target of closing the gap by 2031. According to the Indigenous life expectancy trajectory, the annual rate of increase required was about 0.75 year for males and about 0.58 for females (Figure 6.1).

*25 The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publishes life tables and calculates life expectancy for the Australian population and by Indigenous status. These measures are based on three years of data (for example, 2015–17) to reduce the effect of variations in death rates from year to year. Updated estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy were published by the ABS in November 2018.*

The improvement in Indigenous life expectancy and the reduction in the gap between 2010–12 and 2015–17 should be interpreted with considerable caution as the population composition has also changed between the 2011 and 2016 Censuses (ABS 2018b).[26] More detailed analyses of variations in life expectancy estimates across geographical areas provide insights into life expectancy gains (Box 6.1).

**Table 6.1: Life expectancy at birth, by Indigenous status, 2005–07 to 2015–17**

| | Indigenous | | Non-Indigenous | | Gap (years) [a] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| **Life expectancy at birth estimates** | | | | | | |
| 2005–07[b] | 67.5 | 73.1 | 78.9 | 82.6 | 11.4 | 9.6 |
| 2010–12 | 69.1 | 73.7 | 79.7 | 83.1 | 10.6 | 9.5 |
| 2015–17 | 71.6 | 75.6 | 80.2 | 83.4 | 8.6 | 7.8 |
| **Improvements in life expectancy at birth** | | | | | | |
| Change over last 5 years (2010–12 to 2015–17) | **2.5**[c] | **1.9**[c] | 0.5 | 0.3 | -2.0 | -1.7 |
| Change over last 10 years (2005–07 to 2015–17) | 4.1[d] | 2.5[d] | 1.3 | 0.8 | -2.8 | -1.8 |

*Note:*

*(a) Based on unrounded estimates*

*(b) Revised estimates, published with the 2010–12 life expectancy estimates.*

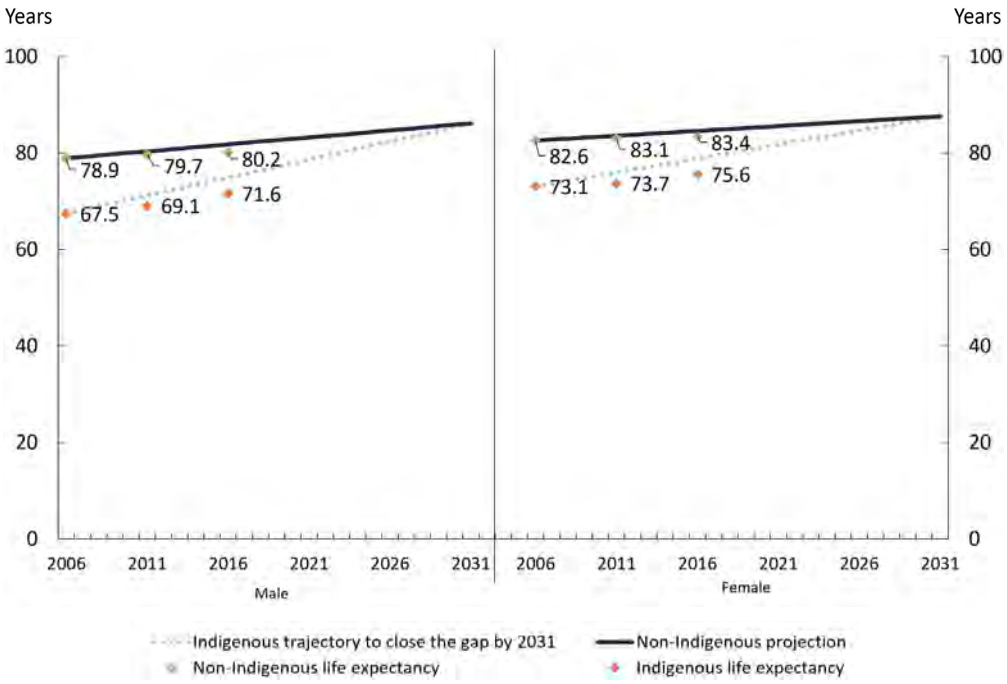
*(c) Changes are not statistically significant.*

*(d) Statistical significance of the changes cannot be calculated as confidence intervals could not be produced for the revised 2005–07 estimates.*

*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2015–2017. Australian Bureau of Statistics Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003. Canberra; and ABS 2013, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2010–2012. Australian Bureau of Statistics cat. no. 3302.0.55.003. Canberra.*

*26 According to the ABS analysis, part of the change in Indigenous population composition between 2011 and 2016 Censuses (about 21 per cent) cannot be explained by demographic factors. Rather it can be attributed to changing propensities to identify and methodological improvements in coverage and response rates in the Census (more details are available from ABS 2018b).*

**Figure 6.1: Life expectancy at birth estimates**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2015–2017, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013, Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2010–2012, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

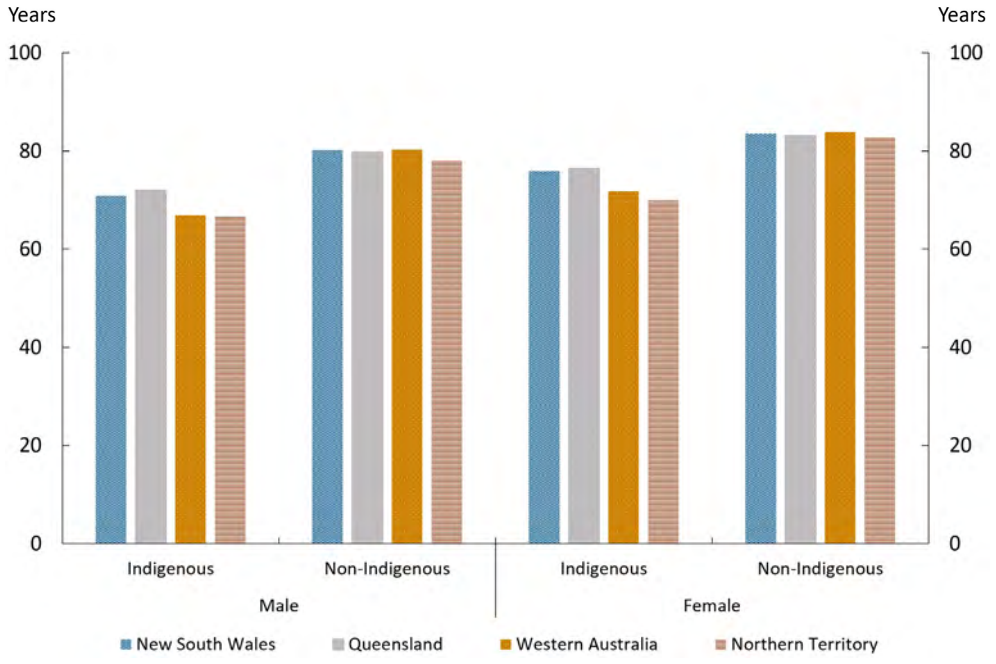
## STATES AND TERRITORIES[27]

Indigenous life expectancy was highest in Queensland (72.0 years for males, 76.4 years for females) and lowest in the Northern Territory (66.6 years for males, 69.9 years for females) (Figure 6.2).

The gap in life expectancy was the largest for males in Western Australia (13.4 years) and for females in the Northern Territory (12.8 years).

During the five-year period from 2010–12 to 2015–17, the largest improvement in life expectancy was in Queensland (3.3 years for males and 2.0 years for females), and the lowest improvement was in New South Wales (0.4 years for males and 1.3 years for females). The Indigenous life expectancy increase for Queensland males was the only statistically significant increase.

**Figure 6.2: Life expectancy at birth by Indigenous status by jurisdiction, 2015–17**

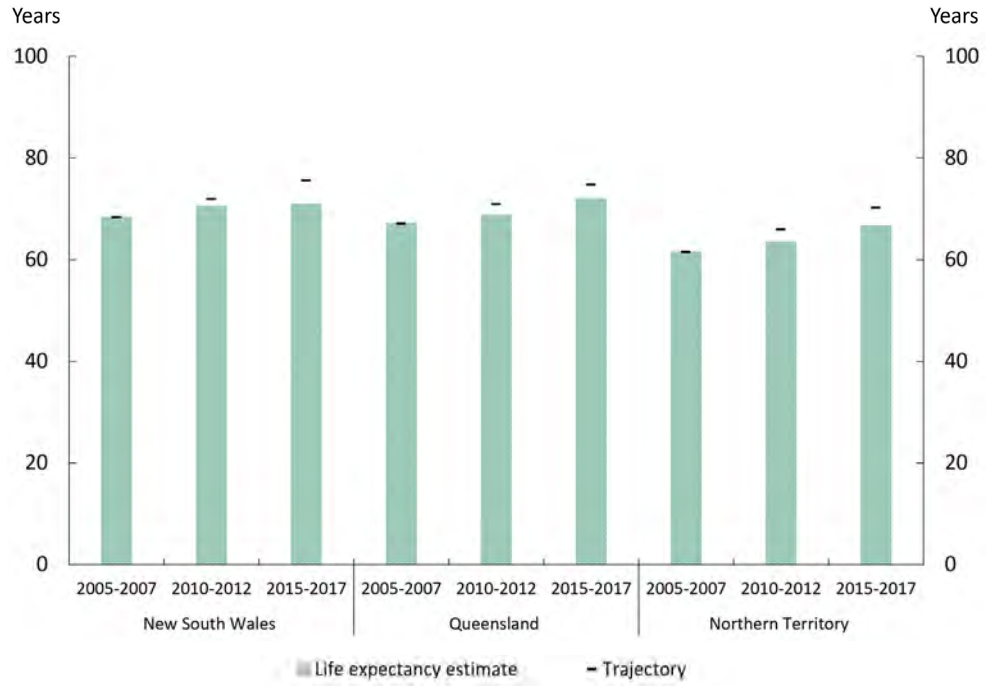



*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2015–2017, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.*

*27 Life expectancy estimates are produced for New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory only. Due to the small number of Indigenous deaths in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, it is not possible to construct separate reliable life tables for these jurisdictions.*

Of the three jurisdictions with agreed trajectories for the life expectancy target, none had life expectancy results on track to meet the target (Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4).[28]

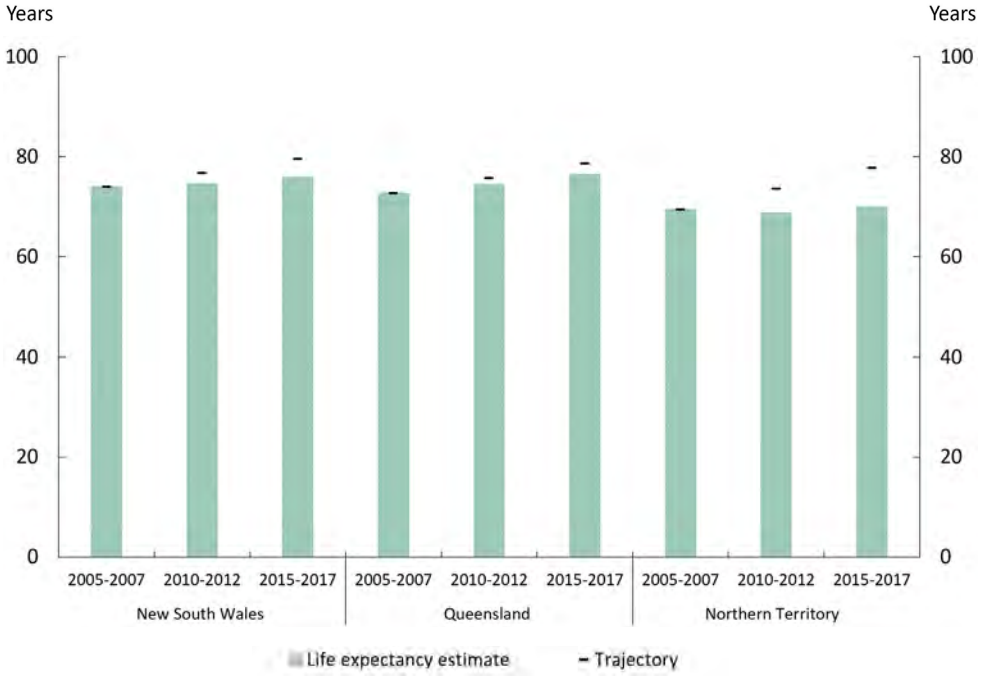
**Figure 6.3: Life expectancy at birth—Indigenous males**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2015–2017, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013, Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2010–2012, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

*28 Of the four jurisdictions for which life expectancy estimates are produced, Western Australia does not have an agreed trajectory.*

**Figure 6.4: Life expectancy at birth – Indigenous females**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2015–2017, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013, Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2010–2012, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Information Management Group, unpublished.*

## Box 6.1: Life expectancy estimates by socio-economic disadvantage and remoteness

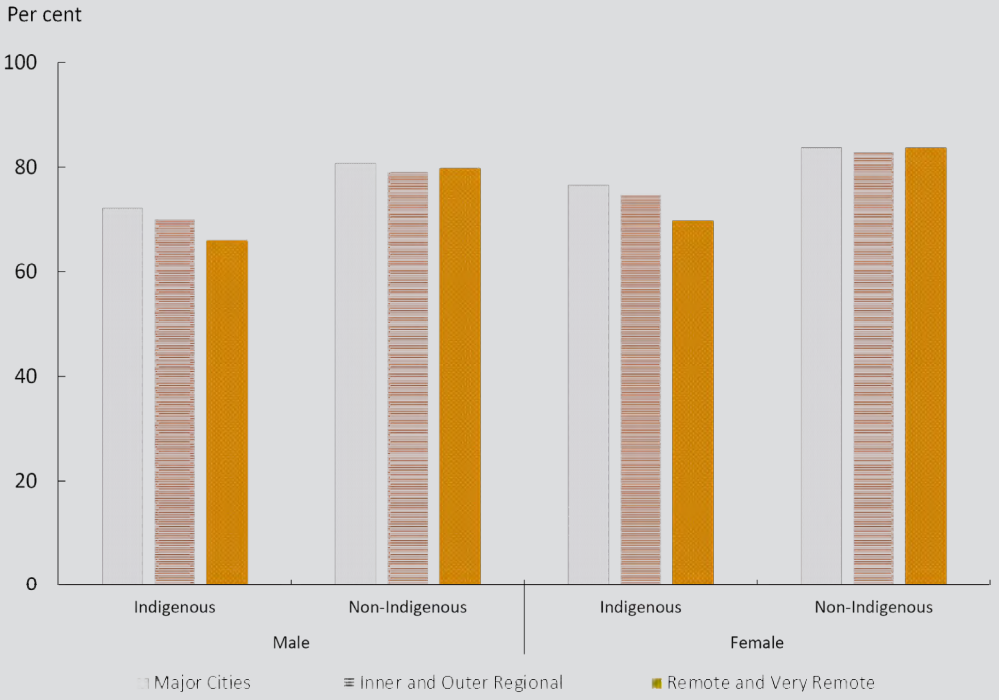
National estimates may mask variations in life expectancy estimates for different groups in the community. More disaggregated analyses can provide insights for some groups.

Life expectancy for Indigenous Australians living in Remote and Very Remote areas was lower than those living in Major Cities: 6.2 years lower for males and 6.9 years lower for females. Life expectancy for non-Indigenous Australians did not vary much across remoteness areas, with Inner and Outer Regional areas slightly lower than Remote and Very Remote areas and Major Cities. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancies was most marked in Remote and Very Remote areas, with the gap being 13.8 years for males and 14.0 years for females. However, while this indicates a social gradient for Indigenous life expectancy by remoteness, it is important to note the highest Indigenous life expectancy in Major Cities (72.1 years for males and 76.5 for females) was still lower than the lowest life expectancy of non-Indigenous Australians which occurs in Inner and Outer Regional areas (79.1 for males and 82.8 for females) (Figure 6.5).

There is also a gradient when looking at socio-economic status. Indigenous Australians living in the most disadvantaged areas had about four years lower life expectancy than those living in the least disadvantaged areas. For Indigenous males, life expectancy varied from 68.2 years for the most disadvantaged areas to 72.4 in the least disadvantaged areas, and for females, it varied from 72.8 years in the most disadvantaged to 76.6 in the least disadvantaged areas. Non-Indigenous life expectancies had similar variations across socio-economic disadvantaged areas. However, Indigenous life expectancy was still lower in the least disadvantaged areas compared with non-Indigenous Australians in the most disadvantaged areas (77.9 for males and 82.0 for females) (Figure 6.6).

*Box 6.1: Continued*

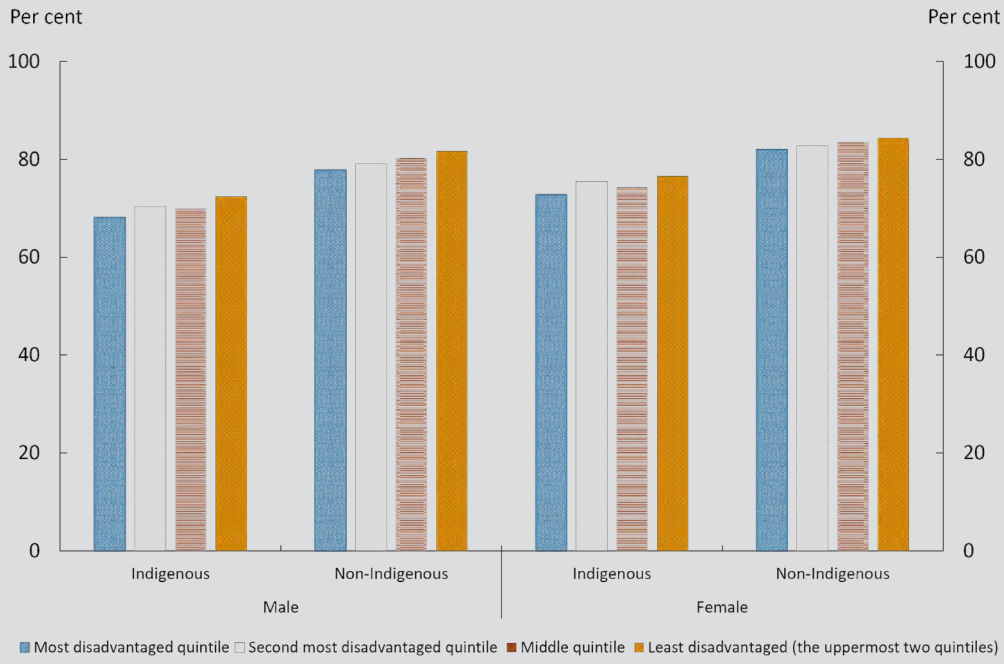
**Figure 6.5: Life expectancy at birth by remoteness**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2015–2017, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.*

*Box 6.1: Continued*

**Figure 6.6: Life expectancy at birth by SEIFA**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2015–2017, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.*

## MORTALITY

While official Indigenous life expectancy estimates are only available every five years, mortality data are collected annually, allowing the tracking of progress for this target on an annual basis.

In 2017, there were 2,988 deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (1,631 males and 1,357 females), at the rate of 976 per 100,000 persons.[29] This was 1.8 times the non-Indigenous rate (556 per 100,000) in 2017.

Over the long term (1998–2017), the overall Indigenous mortality rate has declined significantly, by 14 per cent.[30] Non-Indigenous mortality rates have also declined over this period, and the gap has narrowed by about 8 per cent (not statistically significant). Despite these long-term declines, there has been no significant change in the Indigenous mortality rate between the 2006 baseline and 2017.

## LEADING CAUSES OF INDIGENOUS MORTALITY

In the period 2013–17, the five leading causes of Indigenous mortality were circulatory diseases (23 per cent), cancer and other neoplasms (22 per cent), external causes (15 per cent), respiratory diseases (9 per cent) and endocrine disorders (mainly diabetes) (9 per cent). These diseases have remained the leading causes of Indigenous death for decades although the relative contribution of diseases has changed. Between 2003–07[31] and 2013–17, the relative share of circulatory diseases has reduced from 27 per cent to 23 per cent, whereas the share of cancer has increased from 18 per cent to 22 per cent with the contribution of the other three diseases remaining similar over this time.

The non-communicable chronic diseases account for more than half the deaths of Indigenous Australians, and are also responsible for the majority of the gap in mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In the period 2013–17, circulatory diseases contributed 22 per cent of the gap in mortality rates, and cancer contributed 16 per cent. While external causes accounted for 15 per cent of Indigenous deaths, they contributed only 11 per cent to the gap. In contrast, diabetes, which caused 8 per cent of Indigenous deaths, contributed 16 per cent to the gap, and respiratory diseases, which account for 9 per cent of deaths, contributed 14 per cent of the gap.

Over the long run, there has been a significant decline in the Indigenous chronic disease mortality rate. Between 1998 and 2017, the Indigenous chronic disease mortality rate decreased significantly

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*29 Indigenous mortality data includes: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory only, which are the jurisdictions considered to have adequate levels of Indigenous identification suitable to publish. As the Indigenous population is much younger, comparisons of mortality rates with non-Indigenous Australians can be made after adjusting for the different age structures of the two populations.*

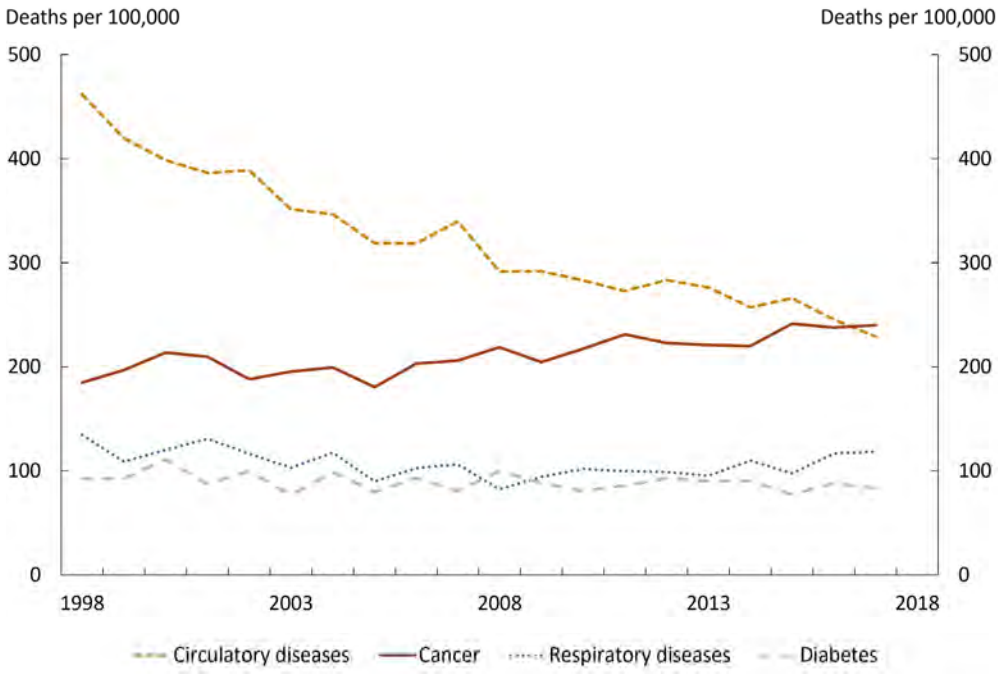
*30 References to per cent change in mortality rates in this chapter are derived through linear regression analysis, and statistical significance is tested at 95 per cent level of significance. For details on the specifications for the mortality indicator used in this report, refer to the NIRA data specifications on the AIHW METeOR website https://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/697096.*

*31 Sourced from Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009, National Agreement performance information 2008-09: National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Productivity Commission, Canberra.*

by 19 per cent, from 951 per 100,000 in 1998 to 745 per 100,000 in 2017. In the shorter run too, between 2006 and 2017, the Indigenous chronic disease mortality rate decreased significantly by almost 7 per cent, from 826 per 100,000 in 2006 to 745 per 100,000 in 2017. However, the non-Indigenous chronic disease mortality rate has declined at a faster rate, and there has been no significant change in the gap in chronic disease mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The decrease in Indigenous chronic disease mortality rates has largely been driven by the decline in mortality rates from circulatory diseases. Indigenous mortality rates from circulatory diseases reduced by 47 per cent between 1998 and 2017. Since the 2006 baseline also, there has been a significant decrease of 26 per cent in Indigenous circulatory disease mortality rates. Indigenous mortality rates from respiratory diseases (14 per cent) and diabetes (11 per cent) have also declined (although not statistically significant) since 1998. However, cancer mortality rates are rising for Indigenous Australians. Between 1998 and 2017, there has been a significant increase by 25 per cent in the Indigenous cancer mortality rate (Figure 6.7). In 2017, for the first time, the cancer mortality rate for Indigenous Australians was larger than for circulatory diseases (240 per 100,000 compared with 229 per 100,000). Although the data are sometimes volatile year on year, this shift is consistent with the trend.

**Figure 6.7: Trends in Indigenous mortality rates of leading chronic diseases**




*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018 analysis of National Mortality Database, unpublished.*

*Over the long run, there has been a significant decline in the Indigenous chronic disease mortality rate. Between 1998 and 2017, the Indigenous chronic disease mortality rate decreased significantly by 19 per cent.*

Several of these non-communicable chronic diseases have common preventable risk factors, such as a lack of physical exercise, alcohol consumption, smoking and poor nutrition. For example, smoking, and tobacco use, is the leading contributor to cancer, respiratory and circulatory diseases (mainly the cardiovascular diseases), and accounted for 12 per cent of the total Indigenous disease burden in 2011 (AIHW 2016).

There has been some progress in controlling prevalence of these risk factors. Smoking prevalence for Indigenous Australians (aged 15 years and over) has declined significantly from 51 to 42 per cent between 2002 and 2014–15. The rate of drinking alcohol at lifetime risky levels has also declined from 19 per cent to 15 per cent, between 2008 and 2014–15, among Indigenous Australians (aged 15 and over) (AHMAC 2016). However, while some health effects of the positive changes in risk factor prevalence may be immediate, there is a long lag between changes in risk behaviours and the full impact upon mortality outcomes. For example, the long latent period for lung cancer which can be up to 30 years, means that, despite falls in smoking rates, smoking related deaths may continue to rise over the next decade, before peaking (Lovett, Thurber & Maddox 2017).

Continued focus on reducing prevalence of health risk factors, improving health literacy and social determinants of health, together with improving access to medical care especially early detection and management of chronic disease is critical to reduce the Indigenous chronic disease mortality rate and, in turn, the life expectancy gap.




*The Australian Army works with the remote community of Laura, Queensland to deliver complementary health services.*

# TRANSLATING POLICY INTO ACTION

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to improve health outcomes, with a priority focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The Australian Government contribution includes support for:

- **Providing culturally appropriate primary care.** For most people, primary care is the first and main contact with the health system, and the gateway to specialist, allied and other health services. More than 160 organisations (including around 130 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services) are funded through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme to provide comprehensive primary health care.
- **Promoting eye health.** Vision impairment and blindness is three times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non-Indigenous Australians. A total of $34.2 million is being provided from 2018–19 to 2021–22 to improve eye health.
- **Helping kids hear well.** Ear disease is highly prevalent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and repeated episodes can lead to hearing loss if not treated early. A total of $95.3 million is being provided from 2018–19 to 2021–22 to improve ear and hearing health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- **Promoting culturally appropriate and trauma-informed health care.** Ensuring health services are culturally safe and trauma-informed is a key aspect of access to health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Major steps towards better access include supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professional organisations, increasing the cultural competence of our next generation of GPs and allied health providers, and developing the Indigenous health workforce.
- **Fighting cancer.** First Australians have a higher incidence of fatal, screen-detectable and preventable cancers and are diagnosed at more advanced stages, and often with more complex comorbidities. Through Cancer Australia, the Australian Government is developing monitoring frameworks, optimal care pathways, national leadership and health promotion. The Australian Government, working jointly with state and territory governments, delivers screening programs to detect breast, cervical and bowel cancer. Specialised programs such as the National Indigenous Bowel Screening Pilot Project aim to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander screening rates.

- **Tackling chronic disease.** Chronic diseases were responsible for 64 per cent of the total disease burden (fatal and non-fatal) for Indigenous Australians, and 70 per cent of the gap in 2011 (AIHW 2016). The Australian Government provides a range of measures to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living with chronic disease, from subsidising medications for more than 300,000 patients to improving access to coordinated and multidisciplinary care through Primary Health Networks.
- **Supporting good mental health.** Primary Health Networks commission mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are joined up, culturally appropriate and safe, and designed to holistically meet mental health needs at the local level. These services complement and link with other activities such as social and emotional wellbeing services, headspace, suicide prevention approaches, and alcohol and other drug services. These services can put people on a different path, a path where they are able to make different choices about their lives, where they are making positive decisions for their future.
- **Supporting members of the Stolen Generations** to reconnect with families and heal the impact of trauma. Services provide community based healing initiatives, social and emotional wellbeing support services and support for family reunions. This includes the work of The Healing Foundation.
- **Improved nutrition in remote communities.** More than 100 licensed stores operate under the Northern Territory Community Stores Licensing Scheme, making healthy food and drinks more accessible for local residents. The Commonwealth-owned company, Outback Stores, manages 37 remote community stores on a fee for service basis across the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia. In 2017–18 Outback Stores-managed stores sold 430 tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables, and created 402 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobs in communities. Through store-based sugar reduction strategies, there were 7.6 tonnes less sugar consumed from sugary drinks in these communities.

- **Providing sport and recreation activities for young people.** As at 31 December 2018, $24.2 million had been committed to sport and recreation activities to improve wellbeing and resilience, improve educational attendance and attainment, engage youth, and provide employment and training opportunities.
- **Enabling older people to stay close to home and community** in remote and very remote areas. As of 1 January 2018, there are 35 aged care services funded to deliver 860 aged care places, including residential and home care, with funding for more than 900 aged care places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the next four years.
- **Improving housing affordability and supply.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households are less likely to own their house and almost three times as likely to experience some amount of overcrowding compared to other households. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement provides $1.5 billion per annum to support state and territory governments in the delivery of housing and homelessness services, including social and affordable housing, and support for young people at risk of homelessness. In addition, the Australian Government provides support to the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, an organisation with a mandate to improve housing outcomes by reducing pressure on housing affordability.
- **Supporting Indigenous people with disability.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at greater risk of disability. The Australian Government provides support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to build awareness, provide peer support, links and referrals, and assist mainstream organisations to become more culturally competent.



*Health Minister Greg Hunt (R) and Indigenous Health Minister Ken Wyatt AM (L) sharing time with Marilyn Nangala and announcing $25 million in funding, after receiving a heartfelt letter from the Purple House Director.*

# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The Australian Government will continue to work across agencies, with state and territory governments, experts and other stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their representatives to deliver the next iteration of the *Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–23* so that it aligns with the refreshed Closing the Gap agenda. This includes:

- strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of health by transforming the findings of the *My Life, My Lead* report into action. The *My Life, My Lead* report highlights the impact of social determinants, such as housing, education, employment, and interactions with the justice system, on health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At least 34.4 per cent of the gap in health outcomes can be attributed to social determinants (AHMAC 2017). The *My Life, My Lead* report also highlights the positive role culture plays in supporting good health; and
- further improving hearing health through a Hearing Health Roadmap for all Australians. In addition, all jurisdictions have agreed to explore a national approach to reducing the burden of middle ear disease through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Standing Committee.

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS

- In **Port Pirie**, Country Health SA Local Health Network hosted a Tarpari Wellbeing Day in April 2018. With a theme of "looking forward- new beginnings", the event focused on Aboriginal health, culture and reconciliation and recognised that working together will bring a more inclusive and healthy future.
- In **Port Lincoln**, the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service has established the Chronic Condition Self-Management Team that provides coordinated case management of chronic illness through Health Assessments for chronically ill clients over 55 years. Recognising the impact of chronic disease on life expectancy, dedicated staff including a GP have been allocated to provide clinical services to close the gap in chronic disease.

CHAPTER 7

# SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES

*'It is us as communities with our insight and foresight that are qualified to respond to our needs and unresolved historical trauma. It is us as a community that must lead the way in creating an environment primed for positive change.'*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Social Justice Commissioner,
June Oscar

# INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, like all Australians, have the right to live in a safe and healthy home and community. However, Indigenous Australians are more likely to experience child abuse and neglect, family violence, and incarceration than non-Indigenous Australians.

This is why the Australian Government makes safer communities a key priority in Indigenous Affairs.

Making communities safer depends on our capacity to address entrenched disadvantage and the factors that drive violent and criminal behaviour, and reduce the over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the child protection and justice systems.

State and territory governments are responsible for public order and safety and the delivery of child protection services, police, courts and corrective services. The Australian Government also plays an important role in supporting vulnerable families through measures designed to assist families and communities, particularly those experiencing family violence. Government funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services also supports access to justice for Indigenous Australians.

In addition, the Australian Government has a role to play in addressing the underlying social and economic factors that see Indigenous Australians more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be incarcerated and experience child abuse and neglect, family violence and other forms of violent crime. This includes investing in crime prevention and early intervention activities that supplement state and territory efforts, and ensures Indigenous Australians have access to justice.

Addressing these complex factors requires coordinated effort from all levels of government, across sectors and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

*Making communities safer depends on our capacity to address entrenched disadvantage and the factors that drive violent and criminal behaviour, and reduce the over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the child protection and justice systems.*



*Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion greets Marianne from the Community Night Patrol in Gunbalayna.*

# TRANSLATING POLICY INTO ACTION

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to improve community safety outcomes, with a priority focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The Australian Government contribution includes support for:

- **Enabling victims and reducing family violence.** Investment in Family Violence Prevention Legal Services to provide culturally safe support and legal assistance to victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault. In addition, integrated duty lawyer and family violence support services assist families with complex needs who may be involved in matters across the family law, child protection and family violence systems. The Government is funding specialist domestic violence services that provide legal assistance, integrated with other support services, for women experiencing family violence. These services are operating in 21 locations of high need across Australia, including in rural and remote communities with high Indigenous populations, such as Kununurra in Western Australia and Alice Springs and Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory.
- **Providing intensive family-focussed case management and therapeutic services for children.** The Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children provides these services, along with behaviour change programs for those who use violence.
- **Protecting children at risk** of entering, or already in child protection services. The Government is assisting children at risk of entering, or already in child protection services, through services including culturally appropriate family dispute resolution; intensive family support services; place-based responses to child sexual abuse in remote communities; and intensive support for young people in out-of-home care to thrive into adulthood.
- **Crime prevention, diversion and rehabilitation.** The Government funds community night patrols and services to support adult prisoners and young people in youth detention facilities reintegrate into the community, return to their families and break the cycle of offending.

- **Custody notification services.** Some states and territories have Custody Notification Services (CNS), which ensure legally mandated provision of fundamental legal advice and a welfare check for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people taken into police custody.
- **Alcohol and other drugs treatment services.** The Government has introduced policies to support a reduction in the demand, supply and harm from alcohol and other drugs use. Approximately $70 million is provided annually for Indigenous alcohol and other drug treatment services. In addition, the Primary Health Networks are provided $241.5 million to commission drug and alcohol treatment services, including $78.6 million for culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is a commitment of $11.7 million in 2018–19 to support low aromatic fuel being made available from more than 175 outlets across Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia to help reduce petrol sniffing occurring in regional and remote communities, and a further $3 million to provide other volatile substance misuse harm reduction activities.

The Australian Government is also working collaboratively with the Northern Territory Government and community sector to support reforms arising from the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS

- In the **Pilbara region**, the Blurred Borders project uses art and storytelling to assist frontline legal assistance staff to communicate so that clients can better understand and make informed legal choices and to actively participate in legal processes.
- In **Tennant Creek**, the Australian and Northern Territory governments have worked with the local Aboriginal community to form a Cultural Authority Group, which advises governments on service delivery and investment priorities to address embedded social issues and support the region's future growth and prosperity. The work of the Cultural Authority Group is further supported by a $30 million investment from the Commonwealth to support the economic and social development of the region.
- In **communities across Western Australia**, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians taken into police custody will soon have access to culturally appropriate, holistic wellbeing support through a mandated CNS. The important safeguard provided by this critical welfare check and referral process is the result of a partnership between the Australian Government, the Western Australian Government and the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia. This is in addition to the CNS in New South Wales delivered by the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT and the Northern Territory CNS which will be delivered by North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency from 2019. The Australian Government has offered introductory funding for a Custody Notification Service to all jurisdictions.



*In Cunnamulla, Indigenous Elders and community representatives, the Cunnamulla Aboriginal Corporation for Health, Paroo Shire Council and other partners worked together to co-design the 'Cunnamulla – Strong Families, Strong Community' project. The project focusses on prevention first, community education, and creating respectful relationships, with decisions made by a management committee comprising key local leaders. The program was implemented with a whole of community approach working in partnership and other service providers. There has been a 60 per cent reduction in domestic violence occurrences from December 2016 to October 2018.*

# WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The Australian Government will continue to work with state and territory governments, experts and other stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their representatives to identify priority actions to:

- support the efforts of states and territories to reduce Indigenous incarceration rates and improve Indigenous justice outcomes;
- continue to support the safety of children at-risk of experiencing child abuse and neglect, including targeted responses to support families with high needs; and
- continue to support victims of family violence, and prevent perpetrators from re-offending.



*Ruth Abdullah was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the Indigenous community of Western Australia. Ruth is the Aboriginal Liaison Co-Ordinator at Kimberley Community Legal Services, one of the Domestic Violence Units funded by the Australian Government. Since 2000, Ruth has been helping Aboriginal people to understand their legal rights and acting as a role model for younger generations.*

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APPENDIX A:

# COAG MEETING COMMUNIQUÉ, 12 DECEMBER 2018

## CLOSING THE GAP

1. COAG is listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and their peak and governing bodies. Leaders are committed to ensuring that the finalisation of targets and implementation of the Closing the Gap framework occurs through a genuine, formal partnership between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and Indigenous Australians through their representatives.
2. This formal partnership must be based on mutual respect between parties and an acceptance that direct engagement and negotiation is the preferred pathway to productive and effective outcomes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must play an integral part in the making of the decisions that affect their lives – this is critical to closing the gap.
3. Today, COAG issued a statement outlining a strengths based framework, which prioritises intergenerational change and the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across all Australian communities. The finalisation of this framework and associated draft targets will be agreed through a formal partnership.
4. Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives will share ownership of, and responsibility for, a jointly agreed framework and targets and ongoing monitoring of the Closing the Gap agenda. This will include an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led three yearly comprehensive evaluation of the framework and progress.
5. The arrangements of the formal partnership between COAG and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation will be settled by the end of February 2019, and will include a Ministerial Council on Closing the Gap, with Ministers nominated by jurisdictions and representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The framework and draft targets will be finalised through this Council by mid-2019, ahead of endorsement by COAG. A review of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement will be informed by the framework.

APPENDIX A CONTINUED:

# COAG STATEMENT OF THE CLOSING THE GAP REFRESH, 12 DECEMBER 2018

## THE CLOSING THE GAP REFRESH

In December 2016, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda ahead of the tenth anniversary of the agreement and four of the seven targets expiring in 2018. In June 2017, COAG agreed to a strengths-based approach and to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were at the heart of the development and implementation of the next phase of Closing the Gap.

In 2018, a Special Gathering of prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians presented COAG with a statement setting out priorities for a new Closing the Gap agenda. The statement called for the next phase of Closing the Gap to be guided by the principles of empowerment and self-determination and deliver a community-led, strengths-based strategy that enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to move beyond surviving to thriving.

Since the Special Gathering identified priorities, all governments have worked together to develop a set of outcomes and measures for inclusion in the Closing the Gap Refresh. COAG has now agreed draft targets for further consultation to ensure they align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities' priorities and ambition as a basis for developing action plans.

## PARTNERSHIPS WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AUSTRALIA

COAG recognises that in order to effect real change, governments must work collaboratively and in genuine, formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as they are the essential agents of change. This formal partnership must be based on mutual respect between parties and an acceptance that direct engagement and negotiation will be the preferred pathway to productive and effective agreements. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must play an integral part in the making of the decisions that affect their lives – this is critical to closing the gap.

COAG will ensure that the design and implementation of the next phase of Closing the Gap is a true partnership. Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will share ownership of and responsibility for a jointly agreed framework and targets and ongoing monitoring of the Closing the Gap agenda. The refreshed Closing the Gap agenda recognises and builds on the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

## CLOSING THE GAP – A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Closing the Gap requires us to raise our sights from a focus on problems and deficits, to actively supporting and realising the full participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the social and economic life of the nation. COAG recognises there is a need for a cohesive national agenda focussed on important priorities for enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and communities to thrive.

COAG has listened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders. COAG has heard there is a need to focus on the long term and on future generations, to strengthen prevention and early intervention initiatives that help build strong families and communities, and to prioritise the most important events over the course of a person's life and the surrounding environment.

COAG acknowledges Closing the Gap builds on the foundation of existing policies and commitments within the Commonwealth and each state and territory. Closing the Gap does not replace these policies, but provides a people and community centred approach to accelerate outcomes.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS

The Special Gathering Statement to COAG in February 2018 recommended the priority areas for the next phase of Closing the Gap:

- Families, children and youth
- Housing
- Justice, including youth justice
- Health
- Economic development
- Culture and language
- Education
- Healing
- Eliminating racism and systemic discrimination.

All priority areas are important and interconnected, and COAG is committed to achieving positive progress in all areas.

The Commonwealth, states and territories have consulted widely on these priorities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, peak bodies, service providers, technical experts and members of the public had the opportunity to provide their views on the future of Closing the Gap.

In considering where to set targets, there was a focus on the priority areas that lend themselves to the design of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound targets. This focus on evidence and data enables COAG to effectively track progress over time.

## CROSS SYSTEM PRIORITIES

Governments must deepen their relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This means understanding what matters to communities and continuing to build capability for genuine collaboration and partnership, acknowledging the differing priorities and challenges in different places across urban, regional and remote Australia.

All Australian governments are committed to working cooperatively in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their communities, to positively transform life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

COAG recognises that progress reports over the past decade confirm that closing the gap in remote Australia requires particular focus, recognising the rich cultural strengths as well as the need for targeted approaches to address disadvantage in these areas.

COAG acknowledges that culture is fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' strength and identity. COAG further acknowledges the impacts of historical wrongs and trauma faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and families.

All Australian governments recognise the need to address intergenerational change, racism, discrimination and social inclusion (including in relation to disability, gender and LGBTIQ+), healing and trauma, and the promotion of culture and language for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These will be taken into account as cross system priorities for all policy areas of the Closing the Gap agenda. Cross system priorities require action across multiple targets.

## REFRESHED TARGETS

The Commonwealth, states and territories share accountability for the refreshed Closing the Gap agenda and are jointly accountable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. COAG commits to working together to improve outcomes in every priority area of the Closing the Gap Refresh.

The refreshed Closing the Gap agenda will commit to targets that all governments will be accountable to the community for achieving. This approach reflects the roles and responsibilities as set out by the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), and specified in respective National Agreements, National Partnerships and other relevant bilateral agreements.

While overall accountability for the framework is shared, different levels of government will have lead responsibility for specific targets. The lead jurisdiction is the level of government responsible for monitoring reports against progress and initiating further action if that target is not on track, including through relevant COAG bodies.

The refreshed framework recognises that one level of government may have a greater role in policy and program delivery in relation to a particular target while another level of government may play a greater role in funding, legislative or regulatory functions. Meeting specific targets will require the collaborative efforts of the Commonwealth, states and territories, regardless of which level of government has lead responsibility. Commonwealth, state and territory actions for each target will be set out in jurisdictional action plans, and may vary between jurisdictions. COAG acknowledges that all priority areas have interdependent social, economic and health determinants that impact the achievement of outcomes and targets.

Through a co-design approach, jurisdictional action plans will be developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, setting out the progress that needs to be made nationally and in each jurisdiction for the targets to be met. Action plans will clearly specify what actions each level of government is accountable for, inform jurisdictional trajectories for each target and establish how all levels of government will work together and with communities, organisations

and other stakeholders to achieve the targets. Starting points, past trends and local circumstances differ, so jurisdictions' trajectories will vary and may have different end-points.

COAG recognises that promoting opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be involved in business activities contributes to economic and social outcomes for families and communities, and has committed to publishing jurisdiction specific procurement policies, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and business outcomes annually.

| Outcome statement | Desired outcome | Draft COAG Targets |
|---|---|---|
| *Families, children and youth*<br><br>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are safe, resilient, and thriving | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years | **Commonwealth-led**<br><br>Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census to 45 per cent by 2028 |
| | | **State-led**<br><br>Existing target: 95 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025 |
| | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe | **State-led**<br><br>Significant and sustained progress to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.<br><br>AND/OR<br><br>A significant and sustained reduction in violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children |

| Outcome statement | Desired outcome | Draft COAG Targets |
|---|---|---|
| *Health*<br><br>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are healthy, well and safe | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives | **Commonwealth-led**<br><br>**Existing target:** Close the gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation, by 2031 |
| | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong | **Commonwealth-led**<br><br>By 2028, 90-92 per cent of babies born to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers have a healthy birthweight |

| Outcome statement | Desired outcome | Draft COAG Targets |
|---|---|---|
| *Education*<br><br>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people achieve their learning potential and flourish | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students succeed at school | **State-led**[1]<br><br>Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the top two bands of NAPLAN reading and numeracy for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 by an average of 6 percentage points by 2028<br><br>AND<br><br>Decrease the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the bottom two bands of NAPLAN reading and numeracy for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 by an average of 6 percentage points by 2028 |
| | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students stay in school | **State-led**<br><br>Existing target: Halve the gap in attainment of Year 12 or equivalent qualifications between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non Indigenous 20-24 year olds by 2020 |
| | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways | **Commonwealth-led**<br><br>47 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (aged 20-64 years) have completed Certificate III or above, including higher education, by 2028 |

*1 Once proficiency measures are adopted in national reporting, this target could be re-calibrated to proficiency standards. This would be consistent with the approach being taken in the current schooling agreement.*

| Outcome statement | Desired outcome | Draft COAG Targets |
|---|---|---|
| *Economic Development*<br><br>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience equal opportunity and economic prosperity | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education | **Commonwealth-led**<br><br>65 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) are in employment, education or training by 2028 |
| | Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce participation | **Commonwealth-led**<br><br>60 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25 64 years are employed by 2028 |
| *Housing*<br><br>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives | **State-led**<br><br>Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 82 per cent by 2028 |
| *Justice, including youth justice*<br><br>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system | **State-led**<br><br>Reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention by 11-19 per cent and adults held in incarceration by at least 5 per cent by 2028 |

| Outcome statement | Desired outcome | Draft COAG Targets |
|---|---|---|
| *Land and waters*<br><br>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain distinctive spiritual, physical and economic relationship with the land and waters | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' land, water and cultural rights are realised | **Commonwealth-led**<br>(target to be further refined during further consultation)<br><br>A Land and Waters target will be developed by mid-2019 by all jurisdictions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' access to, management and ownership of, land of which they have a traditional association, or which can assist with their social, cultural and economic development |

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Closing the Gap is a whole-of-government agenda for the Commonwealth and each state and territory. To provide direct accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Australian public as a whole, each jurisdiction will report publicly each year on its Closing the Gap strategy. The Prime Minister will make an annual statement to parliament.

Governments will engage with the community to develop a meaningful framework for transparently tracking and reporting progress with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

## INDEPENDENT REVIEW

The Productivity Commission's Indigenous Commissioner will conduct an independent review of progress nationally and in each jurisdiction every three years. All governments will provide input into the Productivity Commission's review, taking into account differences between urban, regional and remote areas.

The Closing the Gap targets may be subject to refinement, where appropriate, through the review of the NIRA and periodic Productivity Commission reviews.

## WHERE WE ARE GOING FROM HERE

A new formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through their representatives, will be established by the end of February 2019.

Building on the work undertaken to date, working through this new partnership, the Commonwealth, and states and territories, will by mid 2019:

- finalise all draft targets;
- review the NIRA; and
- work with the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Commissioner to develop an independent, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approach to the three-yearly comprehensive evaluation and review of progress nationally and in each jurisdiction.

One of the lessons governments have learned over the last ten years is that effective programs and services need to be designed, developed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We must place collaboration, transparency, and accountability at the centre of the way we do business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. Working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is fundamental to Closing the Gap.

All governments are committed to broadening and deepening their partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities over the lifetime of the refreshed agenda. This includes strengthening mechanisms to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have an integral role in decision making and accountability processes at the national, regional and local levels, building on existing arrangements and directions within different jurisdictions.

To guide the development of Commonwealth, state and territory action plans by mid-2019, COAG has endorsed a set of Implementation Principles informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities:

**Shared Decision-Making** – Implementation of the Closing the Gap framework, and the policy actions that fall out of it, must be undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Governments and communities should build their capability to work in collaboration and form strong, genuine partnerships in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be an integral part of the decisions that affect their communities.

**Place-based Responses and Regional Decision Making** – Programs and investments should be culturally responsive and tailored to place. Each community and region has its own unique history and circumstances. Community members, Elders and regional governance structures are critical partners and an essential source of knowledge and authority on the needs, opportunities, priorities and aspirations of their communities.

**Evidence, Evaluation and Accountability** – All policies and programs should be developed on evidence-based principles, be rigorously evaluated, and have clear accountabilities based on acknowledged roles and responsibilities. Governments and communities should have a shared understanding of evidence, evaluation and accountability.

**Targeted investment** – Government investments should contribute to achieving the Closing the Gap targets through strategic prioritisation of efforts based on rigorous evaluation and input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, especially as it relates to policy formation, outcomes and service commissioning.

**Integrated Systems** – There should be collaboration between and within Governments, communities and other stakeholders in a given place to effectively coordinate efforts, supported by improvements in transparency and accountability.

## WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM – TEN YEARS OF CLOSING THE GAP

In 2008, COAG agreed to the NIRA to implement the Closing the Gap agenda. In signing the agreement, governments acknowledged that a concerted national effort was needed to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in key areas.

At the time, Closing the Gap was the most ambitious commitment ever made by governments to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, the agreement was negotiated with little to no input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and without an adequate understanding of the mechanisms and timeframes needed to deliver lasting change. It also perpetuated a deficit-based view that framed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy as a series of responses to disadvantage and inequality, and under-emphasised the strength and agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

While some progress has been made to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, educational achievement, employment and early childhood education, only three of the seven current targets were on track at the agreement's ten-year anniversary in 2018. There is a shared view among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the broader Australian community and Australian governments that we must do better.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement on the Refresh has been led by the Commonwealth at the national level, and by states and territories at the local and regional levels.

**COAG Public Discussion Paper and Consultation Website:** In December 2017 the COAG public discussion paper and Closing the Gap Refresh consultation website were launched, with the website open for feedback and submissions from the public until the end of April 2018. Feedback from the website, including over 170 major submissions, was collated and used to inform the technical workshop process and COAG's consideration of target areas for the next phase of the agenda.

**Special Gathering of Prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians:** In February 2018, COAG leaders agreed that the priority areas identified in the statement of the Special Gathering would form the basis for remaining community consultations on the Refresh. The Special Gathering priority areas were tested in the national roundtables and other engagement processes led by the Commonwealth from February 2018 and have been strongly supported by stakeholders.

**Consultations:** The Commonwealth held 18 national roundtables in state capitals and regional centres across the country, ending with a national peaks workshop in Canberra in April. Roundtables sought feedback from participants on the priorities identified in the Special Gathering statement. Over 1,000 people were directly engaged through the meetings and roundtables hosted by the Commonwealth in this first phase of public engagement.

In May and June 2018 the Commonwealth hosted a series of technical workshops to develop potential targets and indicators for the refreshed agenda. The workshops brought together academics, business and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community experts and data custodians with Commonwealth and state officials in a co-design process structured around the Special Gathering priority areas.
The first technical workshop in May was attended by officials from all jurisdictions and over 70 subject matter experts, including representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, academics and practitioners. A similar number attended the second technical workshop in June, which had a stronger emphasis on data issues and technical design.

A second series of national roundtables were conducted to test the analysis arising from the initial consultations, submissions and technical workshops. This phase of consultation sought to return to stakeholders who had previously been engaged in the process or lodged submissions to the public consultation website, including members of the Redfern Alliance, national peak bodies, national service providers, and other individuals and organisations. The outcomes of this phase of consultations were fed into discussions between governments in the lead up to the COAG meeting in December 2018.

States and territories held consultations over the same period to ensure views from across the country were heard and incorporated into the Refresh.

All governments remain committed to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other stakeholders to finalise and implement the Closing the Gap Refresh.

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