



Australian Government  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

# CLOSING THE GAP

PRIME MINISTER'S REPORT 2016

## **Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2016**

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Please be aware that this report may contain images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away.

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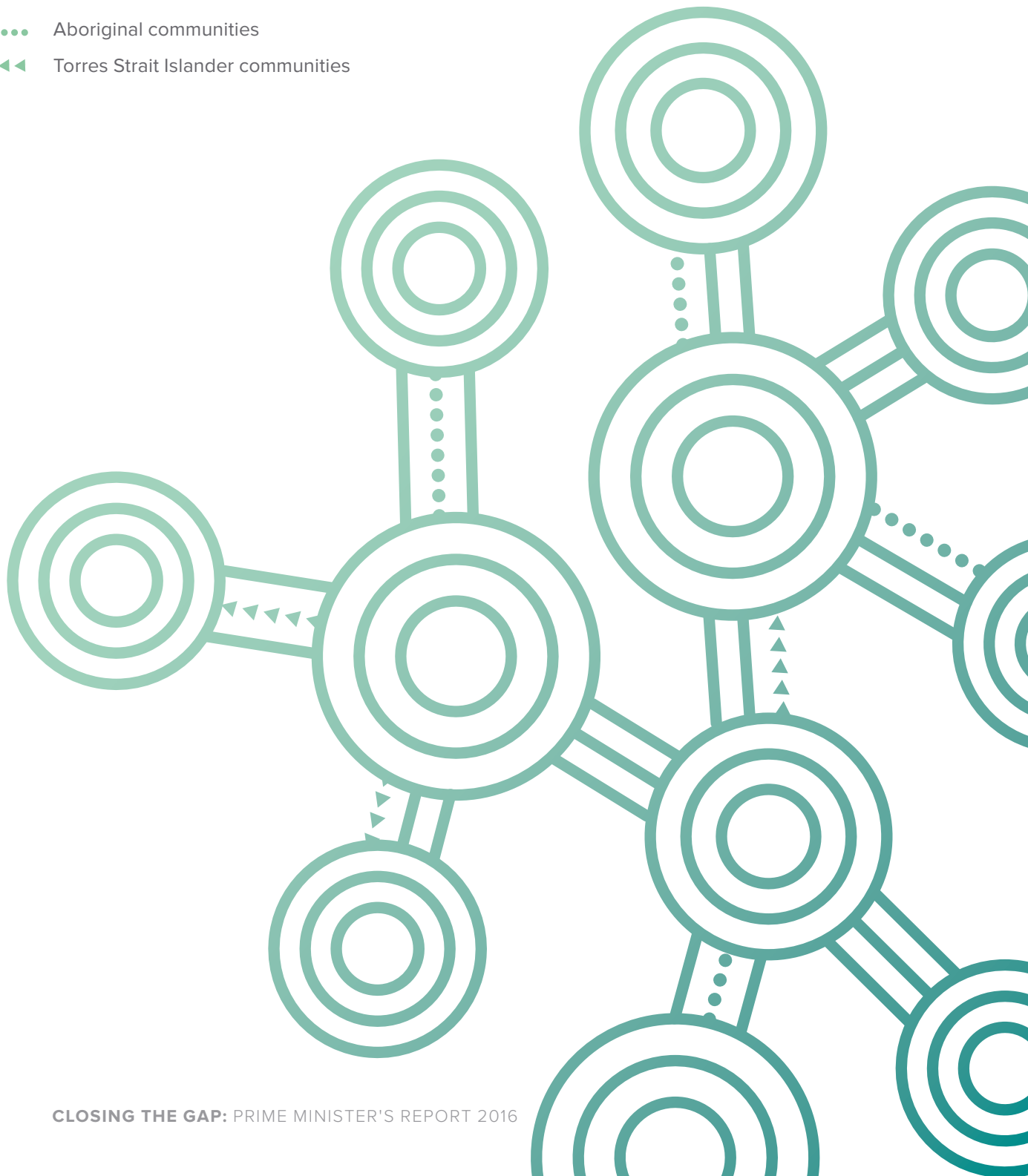
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## THE IDEA BEHIND THE DESIGN

The motif depicts people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) working together, connected, creating pathways to achieve equality.

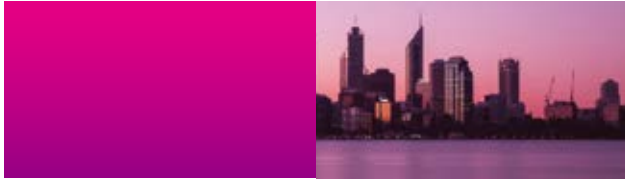
As people and communities work together, creating and fulfilling opportunities the gap between them closes and they are drawn closer together.

- ..... Aboriginal communities
- ◀◀◀◀ Torres Strait Islander communities



The colour palette is inspired by the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the Australian landscape.

#### Cityscape



#### Salt water



Torres Strait Region Authority

#### Rainforest/tropics



Bruce Rose

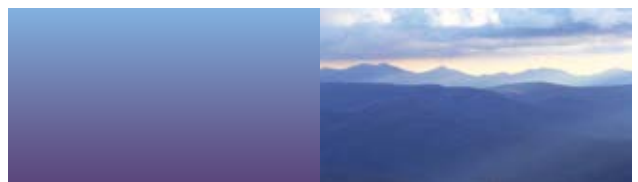
#### Desert



#### Bush flowers

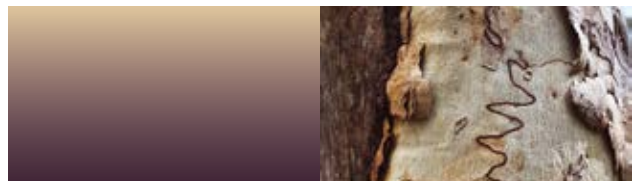


#### Mountains



Phillip Moses

#### Trees/wildlife



Brian Yap

#### Fresh water



# PRIME MINISTER'S INTRODUCTION

## CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

In the days following my appointment as Prime Minister in September, I outlined my key aspiration that our first Australians be afforded the same opportunities and prosperity that everyone else enjoys in this great country. We pride ourselves on having built an egalitarian country where everyone has the same chance to realise their dreams and to fulfil their potential. But it is not until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same opportunities for health, education and employment that we can truly say we are a country of equal opportunity. The expectations must be the same for everyone – from each newborn, to the child about to start school, the student dreaming of his or her future and parents trying to pay the bills and best nurture their families.

As a nation, we are a work in progress, and closing the substantial gaps in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is one of our most important tasks. We all share this responsibility – state and federal governments, communities, businesses and individuals, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

It has now been 10 years since Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians together sparked the Close the Gap campaign, which gave impetus to the development of targets to monitor and measure progress. Since this time there has been encouraging progress, built on the combined efforts of successive governments, business, community and most importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves. But it is undeniable that progress against targets has been variable, and that a more concerted effort is needed.

I was heartened to see in this latest 2016 Closing the Gap report that there are some positive gains. For instance, Indigenous mortality rates are declining, especially those deaths from circulatory diseases (such as heart disease and stroke) and the Indigenous infant mortality rate has more than halved in the past 16 years. The fact that there is a high rate of immunisation among Aboriginal and Torres Strait



Islander children at five years of age is encouraging. But the life expectancy of Indigenous Australians is still around 10 years less than non-Indigenous Australians – an unacceptably wide gap.

In education, the report shows a 70 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education courses over the past decade. And there is almost no employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous university graduates. An increasing proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completing Year 12 means we are well on track to meeting the target of halving the gap for Year 12 attainment by 2020. For Year 3 reading, the target of halving the gap would have been met if a further 640 Indigenous students nation-wide met the national minimum standards.

The evidence shows that the Closing the Gap targets are closely interrelated. The data linking educational attainment with successful employment is unequivocal. Employment not only brings financial independence and choice, it is also fundamental to a sense of self-worth and pride. So in addition to a focus on early childhood education and learning at school, we have assisted around 50 Indigenous Australians into a job every day under the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*. That is over 1,300 new employment opportunities each month.

Indigenous economic development is at the heart of the national agenda, recognising that economic participation, underpinned by cultural participation, leads to vastly improved social outcomes. This requires a cooperative effort with Indigenous leaders and a greater emphasis on place-based solutions, while creating the right conditions for people to feel they can participate. We know from research that

Indigenous businesses are 100 times more likely to hire Indigenous Australians than non-Indigenous businesses which is why we are creating an environment where Indigenous business and innovation can grow and prosper.

While many of the employment challenges are more pronounced in remote communities, it is important to acknowledge that almost 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in major cities or regional areas. So engagement with and support for Indigenous Australians should not be limited by where people live. As such, in addition to an obvious and necessary emphasis in remote areas, I want to see a focus from all governments on addressing the significant challenges faced by urban and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We know that investing in women and girls has a positive flow on effect for families, communities and the economy. Empowered women also have greater employment opportunities and reduced vulnerability to poverty, homelessness and family violence.

My first policy announcement as Prime Minister was a package of measures to improve the safety of women and children at high risk of experiencing violence, especially the disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who are exposed to violence in their homes and communities. These measures will increase frontline services, leverage new technologies and help change community attitudes to violence and abuse.

Of course, in order for policies and programmes to deliver desired outcomes, they must not only be built on evidence, but be developed in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities who will benefit from them. This report provides further insight into where and how we can better target our resources.

It is the responsibility of government to ensure that we truly partner with Indigenous Australians to address the disparity that still exists. A key opportunity for partnership will be through the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution. It will be the recognition of an enduring culture that forms such an intrinsic part of Australia's identity.

It is clear that Closing the Gap is a national responsibility that belongs with every Australian. Ending the disparity is complex and challenging. This will not lessen our resolve or diminish our efforts, even when some problems seem intractable and targets elusive. Quite the opposite. It will strengthen our commitment to work with Australia's First Peoples, to listen to their voices, and build a society of equality and opportunity for all Australians. As a nation we will walk side by side with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the journey of recognition and reconciliation, to build a promising future for all.



**The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP**  
**Prime Minister of Australia**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 2016 Closing the Gap report shows, as in previous years, that there have been mixed levels of success in meeting the targets set by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2008. It underscores the need for all Australian governments to intensify their efforts and partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all Australians to effect change.

The results outlined in this report reiterate that while these targets may be ambitious, striving to meet them is essential in building a robust and healthy Australia. The targets focus on the areas of health, education and employment, which are recognised as the key drivers for success in addressing the significant disparity in the health, wellbeing and prosperity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The targets and their impacts cannot be considered independently – they are intrinsically interlinked. Improvements in one area can positively impact another. For example, providing children with a healthy start to life will give them the best chance of academic success which will, in turn, have positive flow-on effects for employment opportunities.

The report shows that, while progress against a number of the targets has been limited, the actions taken over recent years are making a difference. The data summarised in this report provides valuable insight into where the need is greater and what strategies are most effective.

## THE POPULATION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up three per cent of Australia's population with almost 80 per cent living in regional and metropolitan areas. The locations with the largest Indigenous populations are in the cities and regional centres closest to coastal areas. While only 14 per cent of Indigenous Australians live in very remote areas, they make up a large proportion (45 per cent) of Australians living in these areas. The proportion of the Indigenous population who live in remote and very remote areas is projected to fall from 21.3 per cent in 2011 to 17.5 per cent in 2026.

As well as differences in where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live, there is great diversity in cultures, language, experience and circumstances. Inherent in this diversity, is a strong connection to country and culture.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is quite young compared to the general population. In 2011, 36 per cent of Indigenous Australians were aged 0-14 years compared to 18 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians. However, the Indigenous population is getting older and by 2026 the proportion of the Indigenous population aged over 65 is projected to almost double from the proportion in 2011 (from 3.4 per cent in 2011 to 6.4 per cent in 2026).

Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in education, employment and safety vary by remoteness. For example, in 2015, Indigenous Year 5 students in metropolitan areas were, on average, twice as likely to meet national minimum standards in reading as Indigenous students in very remote areas.

## PROGRESS AGAINST THE TARGETS

There have been some tangible successes and continuing improvement in many of the areas critical to addressing inequality. While long-term improvements are evident, it is important to note that overall progress has been varied and that meeting many of the Closing the Gap targets remains a significant challenge. State and territory governments will continue to have a critical role in making progress against the targets.

The target to **halve the gap in child mortality by 2018** is on track. Over the longer-term, Indigenous child death rates declined by 33 per cent and the gap narrowed (by 34 per cent) between 1998 and 2014. Immunisation rates for Indigenous children are high – by the age of five a higher percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are immunised compared with other Australian children. While total Indigenous mortality rates have declined (by 16 per cent since 1998), particularly from circulatory diseases (such as heart disease and stroke) the target to **close the gap in life expectancy by 2031** is not on track.

In remote areas, 85 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds were enrolled in preschool in 2013. In December 2015, COAG renewed the early childhood education target, aiming for **95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025**. The baseline data for this new target will be available in March 2016.

The latest data show mixed progress on the target to **halve the gap in reading and numeracy for Indigenous students by 2018**. Across the eight areas (reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9), the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving national minimum standards is on track in four of these eight areas.

In May 2014, COAG agreed to a new target to **close the gap in school attendance by the end of 2018**. In 2015, the attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was 83.7 per cent, little change from the rate in 2014 (83.5 per cent). Progress will need to accelerate for this target to be met.

An increasing proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are completing Year 12, up from 45.4 per cent in 2008 to 58.5 per cent in 2012-13. This means the target to **halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020** is on track. Over the past decade there was a 70 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education award courses. There is almost no employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous university graduates.

The target to **halve the gap in employment by 2018** is not on track. Factors such as economic growth, strong Indigenous businesses and gains in Indigenous education will have an impact on the results.

## HOW IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONDING?

It is a shared responsibility of all governments to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in order to meet the Closing the Gap targets. COAG has identified Indigenous affairs as a key priority on its agenda and governments are working together to pursue national reforms that will expand opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

In 2015, the Australian Government transformed the way Indigenous programmes are funded through the implementation of the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*. The Strategy consolidates policies and programmes into five overarching themes: Jobs, Land and Economy; Children and Schooling; Safety and Wellbeing; Culture and Capability; and Remote Australia Strategies. These changes have enabled greater flexibility and responsiveness in programme delivery, to better meet the aspirations and priorities of individual communities.

Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a positive start to life will strengthen their opportunities later in life. The Government's *Better Start to Life* approach is expanding established maternal and child health programmes aimed at improving prenatal, postnatal and child health and parenting. Indigenous parenting and playgroup services are helping to build parent-child relationships, develop parent and carer capacity, and provide support to vulnerable children and families, so young children have the opportunities to develop skills in the important years before formal schooling. The focus on early childhood health complements the ongoing investment in chronic disease prevention and management, both essential elements to close the gap in life expectancy. The Government is also continuing its strong support for Aboriginal community controlled health organisations as critical providers of effective primary health care to Indigenous Australians.

Early childhood and school education will continue to be prioritised across governments, both of which are critical for increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children later in life. Communities are being supported to identify and address barriers to school attendance through the *Remote School Attendance Strategy*, resulting in more children regularly attending school in remote Indigenous communities. And beyond school attendance, there are strategies to improve school attainment outcomes, which will lead to increased employment opportunities.

Under the new *Community Development Programme* job seekers in remote Australia are contributing to their communities and gaining valuable work skills. There has been a promising increase in the number of remote Indigenous job seekers on Newstart now engaged in work-related activities. The Australian Government

will continue to establish economic development opportunities for Indigenous businesses and native title holders. Recent amendments to the Government's procurement policy have encouraged government departments to increase their use of Indigenous businesses in their supply chain. This new approach has resulted in new contracts with Indigenous businesses conservatively valued at around \$36 million between July and December 2015. Meanwhile, opportunities for Indigenous land owners and native title holders to leverage their land assets for economic development will be explored, in line with the recommendations of the *COAG investigation into Indigenous land administration and use*.

All governments are working together to reduce substance abuse and harm, prevent crime, reduce violence and support victims – particularly women and children. The Australian Government's \$100 million *Women's Safety Package* includes \$21 million to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This report highlights the interrelated elements that impact the cultural, physical and social wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. It provides valuable insight into where progress is being made, what is and isn't working and where a more concerted effort is needed.

Meeting all the Closing the Gap targets will be challenging, and will take a national commitment and resolve across Indigenous-specific and mainstream programmes. Responsive and innovative solutions are essential to address the current disparity and build a promising future. This will be achieved through true partnership between governments, businesses and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



## CHAPTER ONE: INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Creating a better future for children and their families starts from the very beginning – from conception and pregnancy through infancy and early childhood education. By the age of three a child's brain has reached 90 per cent of its adult size and many of the neural pathways have developed.



Two children celebrating their graduation from the HIPPY programme in Broken Hill, where HIPPY is delivered by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in partnership with Maari Ma Aboriginal Health Corporation.

## 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 by 2018 is on track.
- Since 1998, Indigenous child mortality rates have declined and the gap has narrowed.
- There have been some improvements in recent years in the proportion of Indigenous mothers attending antenatal care and reduced rates of smoking during pregnancy.
- Prenatal and postnatal care, parent and family programmes and support for vulnerable children, as part of a whole-of-community approach, are critical to giving children the best start in life.

## WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?

This target is on track. Figure 1 shows the 2014 Indigenous child mortality rate was within the range to meet the target by 2018.<sup>1</sup> Over the long-term (1998 to 2014), the Indigenous child mortality rate declined significantly (by 33 per cent). There was also a significant narrowing (34 per cent) of the child mortality gap. In the short-term, there was a decline in Indigenous child mortality rates of around 6 per cent from the 2008 baseline.<sup>2,3</sup>

Any death of an infant or child is a tragedy. Preventing these deaths is a universal responsibility that demands commitment from all governments. In the period 2010 to 2014, there were 611 Indigenous child deaths, of which 505 (or 83 per cent) were infant deaths (children aged less than one year). The Indigenous infant mortality rate has more than halved from 13.5 per 1,000 live births in 1998 to 6.4 in 2014, and the gap has narrowed significantly (by 84 per cent) over this period. While these improvements are encouraging, there remains an unacceptable disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous infant mortality rates.

FIGURE 1: Child mortality rates by Indigenous status: NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT combined, 1998 to 2018



Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database

- 1 In last year's Closing the Gap report we noted a sudden increase in Indigenous child deaths in 2013 (mainly due to a lag in death registrations). The 2014 Indigenous child mortality rate has dropped back within the range required to meet the target.
- 2 The decline in Indigenous child mortality between 2008 and 2014 was not statistically significant.
- 3 Indigenous mortality rates are not published by remoteness due to the large variation in the quality of Indigenous identification in the deaths data in remote areas compared with urban areas.

There are encouraging signs of improvement in key factors which influence the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children including access to antenatal care, rates of smoking during pregnancy and child immunisation.

Most Indigenous mothers and their babies are doing well. Regular antenatal care provides the foundation for good health outcomes for mothers and babies (AHMAC, 2015). Between 2010 and 2013, the proportion of Indigenous mothers who attended antenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy increased from 50 per cent to 52 per cent. However, these rates were still lower than for non-Indigenous mothers in 2013 (60 per cent). The proportion of Indigenous mothers receiving antenatal care in the first trimester was highest in very remote areas (59 per cent) and lowest in major cities (43 per cent) (AIHW, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, the proportion of babies born to Indigenous mothers with low birth weight has remained around 12 per cent over the period 2003 to 2013 – twice the rate for babies born to non-Indigenous mothers. Smoking during pregnancy is a major factor contributing to the high rates of low birth weight among babies born to Indigenous mothers. A multivariate analysis of 2009 to 2011 data showed that 51 per cent of low birth weight births to Indigenous mothers were attributable to smoking during pregnancy, compared with 19 per cent for other mothers (AHMAC, 2015). The proportion of Indigenous mothers who smoked during pregnancy declined from 50 to 48 per cent between 2009 and 2013. However, this remains 3.7 times the rate for non-Indigenous mothers.

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

The key to making progress on reducing Indigenous child mortality is high quality prenatal and postnatal care, and ensuring parents and carers have access to knowledge and skills to help their children thrive. Supporting children and their families in the early years is far more effective than remedial intervention later in life. Recognising this, the Government is working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to give children the best start, supporting them through a range of programmes and services. These programmes and services include childcare, early childhood education, parenting support and child protection, often using an integrated approach to cover all these areas.

<sup>4</sup> Data in this paragraph and subsequent data in this section have been age standardised to account for the different age profiles of Indigenous and non-Indigenous mothers.



Baby One health worker Johanna Hunt visiting a family in Aurukun.

## ABORIGINAL HEALTH WORKERS LEADING THE WAY IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

On Queensland's Cape York, Aboriginal health workers lead a home visiting programme to support women during the antenatal period and during their babies' early years. They also give advice on pre-conception care for subsequent pregnancies in a family centred approach.

The Baby One Program is operated by the Apunipima Cape York Health Council and funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments. In 2014-15, in the communities where Apunipima operates:

- 90 per cent of pregnant women and their families in Cape York were signed up to the Baby One Program
- 50 per cent accessed antenatal care before the thirteenth week of their pregnancy
- 100 per cent received five or more antenatal visits during pregnancy with an average of more than 13 antenatal contacts per pregnancy
- 80 per cent of babies were born within normal weight range
- 90 per cent of Cape York babies were born after 36 weeks gestation
- 94 per cent of children under five were recorded as fully immunised (above the national average).

As part of the Government's *Better Start to Life* approach, the Government has committed \$94 million over three years from 2015-16 to expand two established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander maternal and child health programmes:

- *New Directions: Mothers and Babies Services* will expand from 85 sites to 136 by 2018 to provide more support for families including antenatal, postnatal and child health services for children aged 0 to 4 years.
- By 2018, the *Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program* will be expanded from three to 13 sites. This will see more nurse-led home visits aimed at improving prenatal health, child health and development and supporting parents who want to complete their education and find work.

Vulnerable children and families are supported through Government programmes including:

- *Stronger Communities for Children* – an integrated place-based approach focused on early intervention and prevention services for Indigenous children and young people operating in 10 communities in the Northern Territory. Community members have a strong role in deciding what services are most needed and providers work collaboratively to deliver services. Funding of \$25.5 million has been committed over five years to 2017-18.
- *Children and Parenting Support* – prevention and early intervention including playgroups, parenting courses, home visits, school readiness and peer support groups.
- *Communities for Children Facilitating Partners* – a whole-of-community approach, focusing on the development and wellbeing of children from 0 to 12 years of age. Services include parenting support, early learning and literacy programmes, peer group support, home visiting services, community events and case management. Funding of \$254 million (over five years to 2018-19) to support 52 communities, including two locations with large Aboriginal populations.

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## SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN WESTERN NSW

The Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service serves the communities of Wellington, Dubbo, Narromine and Gilgandra in western New South Wales through the Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program. A highly trained Nurse Home Visitor and an Aboriginal Family Partnership Worker visit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and their families in their own homes to help improve their health, wellbeing, and self-sufficiency.

The visits continue until the child is two years old. They focus on healthy pregnancies, labour and birth, attachment, parenting, the importance of learning through play, healthy lifestyle choices, goal setting, communication skills and healthy relationships. These activities can contribute to long-term improvements in a child's development and school readiness, as well as positive outcomes for mothers.

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## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### TARGET:

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

### KEY POINTS:

Early childhood education prepares a child for school and can have a positive impact on school attendance and academic success.

- In 2013, 85 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds in remote communities were enrolled in early childhood education – a higher rate than in regional areas (74 per cent) and in major cities (67 per cent).<sup>5</sup>
- All governments are prioritising early childhood education programmes for all children in the year before full-time school.
- The original target to ensure access for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities to early childhood education expired unmet in 2013. Australian governments remain committed to closing the gap in the developmental outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by increasing their participation in quality early childhood education. A revised Closing the Gap target has been agreed between Australian governments.

The renewed target aligns with the objectives and outcomes of the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education*, which includes a focus on lifting the preschool participation rates of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, regardless of setting.

Early childhood education prepares a child for school and provides a solid foundation for learning and achieving at school and beyond. This can be delivered through a preschool or childcare setting – the important factors are a quality programme and regular participation. Evidence shows quality early childhood education is particularly important for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and can have a positive impact on school attendance and academic success.

After controlling for a range of factors, Arcos, Holzinger and Biddle (2015) found at ages five

to seven (two years after preschool enrolment) participation in preschool had a significant positive impact on vocabulary for Indigenous students. Over the longer-term (three to five years after preschool enrolment) positive impacts on developmental outcomes, reading and maths achievement were seen for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Evidence based on the Programme for International Student Assessment survey (OECD, 2014) shows 15-year-old students who had attended at least a year of preschool outperformed students who had not, even after accounting for socio-economic background.



Anthony and Pryce Williams on the beachfront at Seisia. The boys go to the Red Dust Playgroup in Bamaga run by the Northern Peninsula Area Family and Community Services Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation.

### WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?

In 2013, 85 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds in remote communities were enrolled compared to the required benchmark of 95 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Enrolment of Indigenous children in early childhood education programmes was higher in remote areas (85 per cent) than in major cities (67 per cent) and regional areas (74 per cent).

In view of this, the new national target agreed to by all Australian governments focuses on increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's participation in quality education programmes nationally, extending beyond the original focus on remote communities.

<sup>5</sup> Data are for children enrolled in the year before full-time schooling.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

To accelerate progress we need to work with state and territory governments to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to, and are participating in, early childhood education.

Since 2008, the Australian Government has made available more than \$2.8 billion to support state and territory governments to increase children's participation in early childhood education programmes.

The *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education*, with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and vulnerable and disadvantaged children, provides funding to state and territory governments to deliver quality early childhood education programmes for all children in the year before full-time school.

In response to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's *Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning*, the Australian Government will invest around \$40 billion on childcare support over the next four years through the *Jobs for Families Childcare Package*. It includes a subsidy to reduce the cost barriers for families to access childcare, as well as targeted support for vulnerable children and families.

## Integrating services

Better integration of services has been identified as an effective way to improve support for vulnerable children and families. From 2016-17, the Government is investing \$10 million annually through the *Community Childcare Fund* to integrate early childhood, maternal and child health and family support services with schools in a number of disadvantaged Indigenous communities. The focus is on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families so their children make a positive transition to school.

This investment is in response to *Creating Parity: Review of Indigenous Training and Employment* undertaken by Mr Andrew Forrest in 2014, which recommended all governments prioritise investment in early childhood, including through integrated early childhood services. The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments and other stakeholders to identify locations to expand the delivery of integrated early childhood services.

## Empowering parents to be first teachers

A number of initiatives involve working with parents to be their child's first teacher:

- *Families as First Teachers – Indigenous Parenting Support Services Program* – builds family knowledge of early learning and supports school readiness for Indigenous children through behaviour modelling, parenting workshops, home visiting and individual consultations. It is operated by the Northern Territory Government in 21 very remote sites, with an additional 14 very remote sites serviced by outreach.
- *Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)* – a two year, home-based parenting and early learning programme that empowers parents and carers to be their child's first teacher. Once fully implemented, HIPPY will operate in 50 communities with an Indigenous focus and 50 non-Indigenous communities that experience high levels of disadvantage.



## CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATION

Education is a foundation for hope and success and can help people overcome other disadvantages. At higher levels of education, there is virtually no employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Karmel, Misko, Blomberg, Bednarz, & Atkinson, 2014). In contrast, those with low educational attainment tend to have poorer health outcomes, lower incomes and reduced employment prospects (AHMAC, 2015).

The management and delivery of schooling is the responsibility of state and territory governments. The Australian Government's efforts are focused on early intervention, engaging with parents, encouraging school attendance, adaptive teaching methods and training and supporting high quality school leaders and teachers.



Parents in Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory walking their children from school. From left to right: Miles Fitz, Ibe & Reanna Bathern, Jasmine Fitz and Tina Holt. Tina is mum for Miles and Jasmine.

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

School attendance – going to preschool, attending school regularly, engaging actively in learning and continuing at school through to Year 12 – is critical for children to achieve their full potential.

An analysis of the gap in school performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous 15-year-olds concluded that, all things being equal, approximately 20 per cent of the gap in performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous 15-year-olds is explained by relatively poor school attendance among Indigenous students (Biddle, 2014).

The report *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts* found that average academic achievement on the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests declined with any absence from school, and continued to decline as absence rates increased (Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence, & Zubrick, 2013).

Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise three per cent of the population, the younger demographic of the Indigenous population means they comprise 6.7 per cent of school enrolments in government schools (ABS, 2015b).

In May 2014, COAG agreed to a new target to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance by the end of 2018. Agreement to this target reflects the strong link between school attendance and student performance.

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### TARGET:

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

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### KEY POINTS:

- Recognising the critical importance of school attendance, all governments are working with communities and families to encourage and support children going to school regularly.
- In 2015, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.7 per cent, compared with 93.1 per cent for non-Indigenous students.



Tiwi students (left to right) Hailey, Roshani, Kane & Simone receive their Excellent Attendance Awards from the Arrikinanga Shirts.

- There has been little change in the Indigenous school attendance rate from 2014 (83.5 per cent) to 2015 (83.7 per cent). Progress will need to accelerate from now on for this target to be met.
- In some remote communities, where attendance rates can be low, a new, community-led approach through the *Remote School Attendance Strategy* has seen improvements.

## WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?

In Semester 1, 2015, the national school attendance rate (Year 1 to 10) was 92.6 per cent, however, there is a sizable gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In 2015, the attendance rate for Indigenous students was 83.7 per cent, over 9 percentage points lower than the comparable rate for non-Indigenous students (93.1 per cent). While this is a sizeable gap, the data tells us that on a given school day the vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are attending school.

There has been little change in the rate of school attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from 2014 (83.5 per cent) to 2015 (83.7 per cent). As the Indigenous attendance rate was below the agreed trajectory point in 2015, progress will need to accelerate from now on if this target is to be met.<sup>7</sup>

There was also little change in the rate of attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 2014 to 2015 by state and territory. All of the changes were less than one percentage point, apart from the ACT (1.3 percentage point rise) and Victoria (1.0 percentage point rise).

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<sup>7</sup> Trajectories have been developed to assess whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school attendance rates are rising fast enough to close the gap from the 2014 baseline to the end point for the target (Semester 1, 2019). These trajectories have been agreed by states and territories.

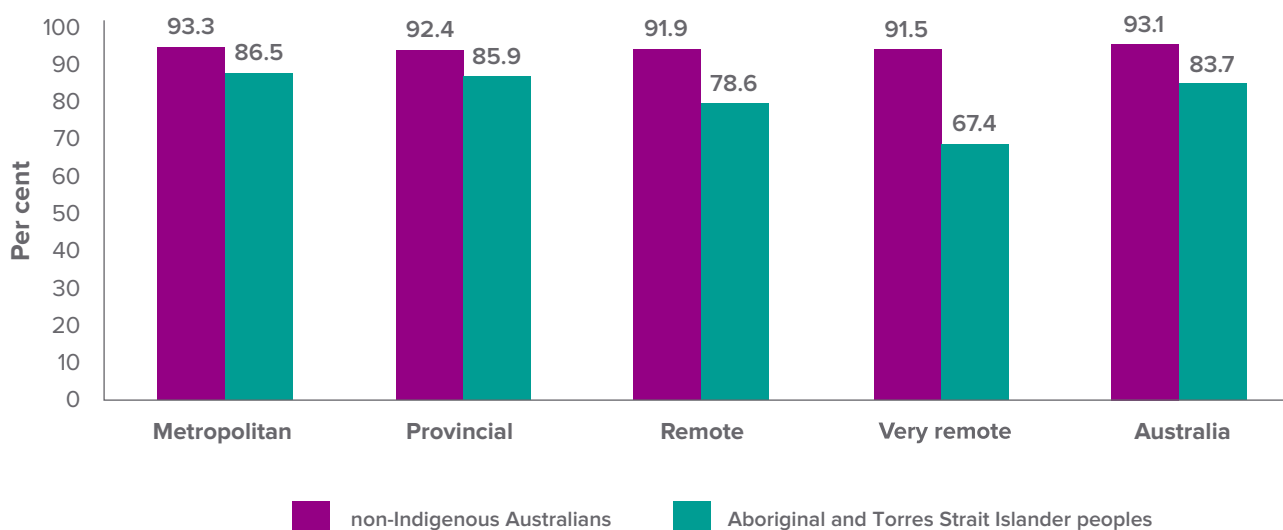
Three jurisdictions (Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT) were on track with this target in 2015.<sup>8</sup> Progress will need to accelerate in the other jurisdictions from now on if the target is to be met.

This year, there has been a significant improvement in data collection. For the first time we now have national estimates of school attendance. Prior to this year, national data were not available due to differences in the way in which school attendance was reported across jurisdictions. Progress against the new target will be assessed with Semester 1 attendance data (Year 1 to 10) each year. As the agreed end point for the target is the end of 2018, the closest semester point is Semester 1, 2019.<sup>9</sup>

Data are now also available for the first time on Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates by remoteness area:

- The Indigenous attendance rate in very remote areas (67.4 per cent) is much lower than in metropolitan areas (86.5 per cent), as illustrated in Figure 2.
- As there is little variation in attendance rates for non-Indigenous students by remoteness area, the gap is much larger in very remote areas (24.1 percentage points) than it is in metropolitan areas (6.8 percentage points) or provincial areas (6.5 percentage points).

FIGURE 2: Student attendance rates (per cent) Year 1 to 10 combined, by Indigenous status and remoteness, Semester 1, 2015



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

<sup>8</sup> The Indigenous attendance rate was counted as being on track if the attendance rate (rounded to a whole number) was equal or greater than the agreed trajectory point.

<sup>9</sup> The national collation of school attendance for Term 3 each year only commenced in 2015 so these data cannot be used to assess progress against the target which commenced in 2014.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance rates for 2015 were lower than for non-Indigenous students for all year levels. Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates both fall at higher year levels, however the decline for Indigenous students is more rapid. As a result the attendance gap increases at higher year levels.

### Improving transparency around school attendance

In December 2013, COAG agreed to increase the level of transparency around school attendance. Attendance data will be published twice a year by schools for all students, split by Indigeneity (subject to privacy thresholds). Previously, attendance figures for schools were only published without a split by Indigeneity once a year on the *MySchool* website.<sup>10</sup>

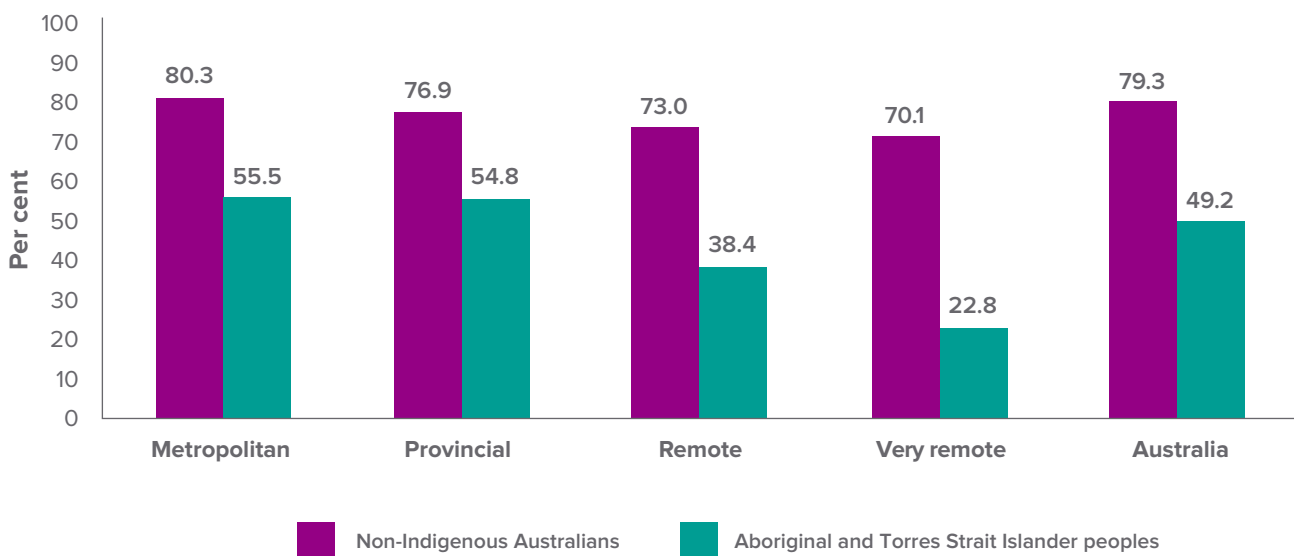
COAG also agreed to the publication of the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students attending school more than 90 per cent of the time for each school from 2015.

Data on the proportion of students attending school 90 per cent or more of the time (in Semester 1) was published on 19 November 2015 and attendance data for Term 3 was published on *MySchool* on 18 December 2015.<sup>11</sup>

The new data show a significant gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In Semester 1, 2015, 79.3 per cent of non-Indigenous students attended school 90 per cent or more of the time compared to only 49.2 per cent of Indigenous students. While this is a large gap it is worth noting that around 20 per cent of non-Indigenous students are not attending school 90 per cent or more of the time. Clearly attendance is not just an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

There is a strong pattern by remoteness area with 55.5 per cent of Indigenous students in metropolitan areas attending school 90 per cent or more of the time compared with 22.8 per cent of Indigenous students in very remote areas (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Proportion of students attending school 90 per cent or more of the time (per cent), Year 1 to 10 combined, by Indigenous status and remoteness, Semester 1, 2015



Note: Excludes NSW government schools

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

<sup>10</sup> Data on school attendance for Semester 1 each year has been published on MySchool for individual schools since 2008. Attendance data for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students was published for the first time in 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately data for this new measure has not been provided for NSW Government Schools, however, these data will be provided when available.

A recent study has also shown that Indigenous boys have a lower level of school attendance than Indigenous girls and this difference between boys and girls is larger for Indigenous students than for non-Indigenous students (Meehl and Biddle 2016).

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

Achieving and sustaining improved school attendance rates demands concerted effort from governments, communities and families. School attendance and engagement is one of the priorities for collaborative action under the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*. This includes work to better understand the complex factors influencing school attendance, and to better assist and support student engagement.



Remote School Attendance team from Normanton State School in Far North Queensland celebrating the start of the school year with a fun day themed: School is Cool!

The *Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS)* was developed in partnership with communities to lift school attendance levels in remote communities, where attendance rates are often very low. RSAS employs local people to work with parents and carers, the community and schools to support children to go to school every day they possibly can. In 2014 and 2015, it operated in 73 schools across 69 communities.

From Term 2, 2013 to Term 2, 2015:

- The attendance rate (Year 1-10) rose in 10 Queensland Government RSAS schools and fell in one school. Overall there was a 3 percentage point increase in the attendance rate in these schools. Schools where there were large rises in attendance included Camooweal State School (up 17.3 percentage points) and Doomadgee State School (up 8.8 percentage points).
- Twenty one (70 per cent) of the Northern Territory Government RSAS schools recorded an increase in their attendance rate (Year 1-10). The average attendance rate in Northern Territory Government RSAS schools rose by 3.2 percentage points. Schools where there were large rises in the attendance rate over this period included Ngukurr School (up by 15 percentage points) and Alekarenge School (up by 14.8 percentage points).

Attendance data published on *MySchool* shows that out of the 73 RSAS schools, 49 schools saw their attendance rate rise, 21 schools experienced a fall and three schools had no change in their attendance rate from Semester 1, 2013 to Semester 1, 2015. RSAS has been extended for a further three years from 2016 to 2018 with an additional \$80 million in funding.

## LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Literacy and numeracy skills are vital for students to succeed at school and move into employment. A recent study found that if Indigenous and non-Indigenous students reach the same level of academic achievement by the time they are 15, there is no significant difference in subsequent educational outcomes such as completing Year 12 and participating in university or vocational training (Mahuteau, Karmel, Mayromaras, & Zhu, 2015).

A child's ability to acquire good literacy and numeracy is associated with a positive start to life. Guthridge et al. (2015) investigated the association between early life risk factors and NAPLAN results in a large cohort study of children in the Northern Territory. They found that, controlling for other factors, low-birth weight is associated with poorer numeracy results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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## TARGET:

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

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## KEY POINTS:

- Across the eight areas (reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9), the proportion of Indigenous students achieving national minimum standards is on track in four areas.
- NAPLAN results for Indigenous students vary sharply by remoteness area and were better for female students than males.
- Although the literacy and numeracy gap remains, the numbers required to halve the gap are within reach.
- Improving literacy and numeracy requires a twofold approach: addressing early childhood education, and accelerating learning for students currently at school.

## WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?

Progress against this target is assessed using data on the proportion of students at or above the National Minimum Standards (NMS) as measured through the NAPLAN. Progress is tracked each year for reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.<sup>12</sup>

This year's results are considerably more positive than the results for 2014. However caution is required as results vary from one year to the next. Last year at the national level, no statistically significant improvements were evident in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at or above the NMS in reading and numeracy results in any year level from 2008 to 2014. This year, there were statistically significant improvements in five of the eight areas. Improvements from 2008 to 2015 were evident for Year 3, 5 and 7 reading and for Year 5 and 9 numeracy. However, there has been no significant change from 2008 to 2015 for Year 9 reading and Year 3 and Year 7 numeracy.

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<sup>12</sup> Writing results from 2011 onwards cannot be directly compared to the writing results from previous years, and so have been excluded.

Another way to assess progress is to see whether the latest results are consistent with the agreed trajectory points. These points allow us to assess whether progress is occurring at a sufficient rate to halve the gap by 2018. In 2015, results in four of the eight areas (Year 7 reading and Year 5, 7 and 9 numeracy) were consistent with, or above, the required trajectory points at the national level. In the other four areas, 2015 results were below the required trajectory points, which mean that progress will need to accelerate for this target to be met.

Although the numeracy and literacy gap remains, the good news is that in terms of actual student numbers the gap is not large. If an additional 640 Indigenous children had achieved national minimum standards in reading and 1,270 in numeracy, the target would have been met for Year 3 in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

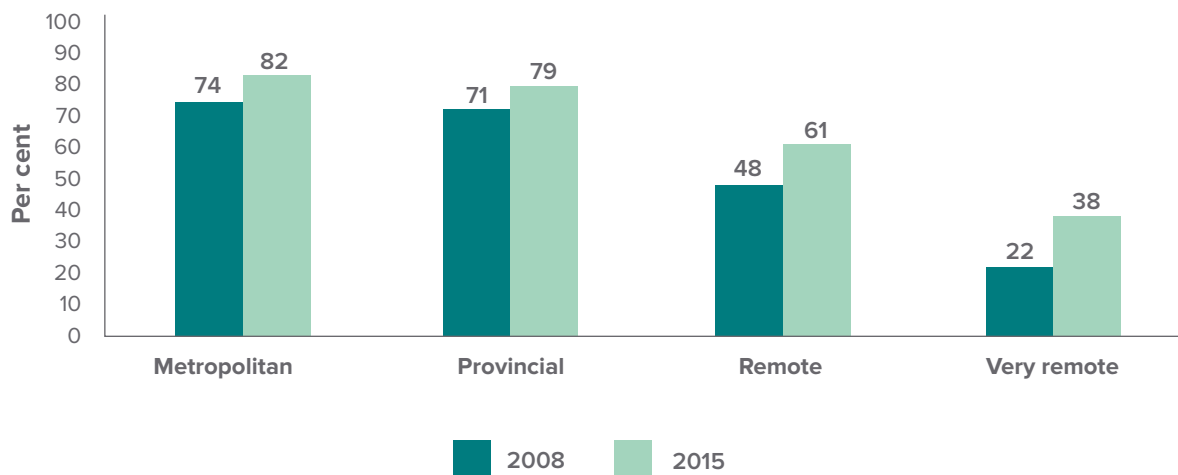
NAPLAN results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students vary sharply by remoteness area. For example, in 2015, 82 per cent of all Indigenous students in metropolitan areas met or exceeded the NMS for Year 5 reading compared to only 38 per cent of students in very remote areas. As results for non-Indigenous students show less variation by remoteness area, the gap is much wider in very remote areas than it is in metropolitan areas.

In the instances where Indigenous results improved significantly from 2008 to 2015 (Year 3, 5 and 7 reading and Year 5 and 9 numeracy), significant improvements are evident in metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote areas. The three instances with no significant change from 2008 to 2015 showed no significant improvements across the four geographic areas. Figure 4 illustrates the (significant) changes in Year 5 reading.

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<sup>13</sup> This only counts students who participated in the test in 2015, excluding those who were absent or withdrawn. Since these numbers are not projected to the target year (2018), they do not have to be adjusted for population growth or potential changes in non-Indigenous rates.

FIGURE 4: Indigenous students reaching National Minimum Standards for Year 5 reading by remoteness, 2008 and 2015



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Results also vary by state and territory. The Northern Territory has the lowest proportion of Indigenous students at or above the NMS for each year level (of reading and numeracy). This result partly reflects the pattern by remoteness area as the Northern Territory has a much higher proportion of Indigenous students in remote or very remote areas than any other jurisdiction.

Queensland has shown the largest improvements, with significant improvement in seven of the eight tests (all but Year 9 reading) from 2008 to 2015. Figure 5 illustrates this using Year 5 reading results. Overall there has been significant improvement in Indigenous results for 21 of the 64 state-level measures (numeracy and reading across four year levels in eight jurisdictions).<sup>14</sup>

FIGURE 5: Indigenous students reaching National Minimum Standards for Year 5 reading by state and territory, 2008 and 2015



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

<sup>14</sup> However there were also three significant declines – New South Wales in Year 9 reading, Victoria in Year 3 numeracy, and Tasmania in Year 9 reading.

There is a significant gap in performance at school between Indigenous boys and girls. For reading literacy on average, 15-year-old Indigenous males are performing about one-and-a-third years of schooling below their female peers (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013). A recent study by Meehl and Biddle (2016) shows that for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, females outperform their male counterparts when maths, reading and science test scores are averaged. The gap between females and males is considerably larger for the Indigenous population.<sup>15</sup>

The NAPLAN data also suggests that Indigenous girls are performing better than Indigenous boys. Indigenous girls outperform Indigenous boys in reading across all year levels and across all remoteness areas.<sup>16</sup> As an example, in very remote areas 53 per cent of all Indigenous girls met the NMS for Year 3 reading in 2015 compared to 41 per cent of Indigenous boys.

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

Addressing the disparity in literacy and numeracy outcomes requires a twofold approach: preventative strategies such as better early childhood education services as well as strategies to accelerate learning for students currently at school.

National collaborative action to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has been endorsed by COAG's Education Council in the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*. It guides jurisdictions in developing and implementing localised policies and actions with a focus on school and child readiness, attendance, literacy and numeracy, and transition points including pathways to post-school options.

Under the Australian Government's *Students First* approach there is a focus on school autonomy, quality teachers, an effective curriculum, and increased parental engagement for all Australian students. This includes:

- An estimated \$221.75 million in 2015 for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student loading to assist schools to provide additional

support for students through needs-based school funding arrangements.

- \$11.6 million over three years from 2014 to specific non-government schools for the additional costs associated with boarding and educating Indigenous students from remote communities.
- \$22 million over four years (2013-14 to 2016-17) under the *Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Programme* to address the disparity in literacy outcomes between metropolitan and rural and remote schools.
- \$4 million in funding over four years (2014-15 to 2017-18) to the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth to undertake research and develop resources to help parents better engage in their child's education – with a key focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific parent engagement.

The single most important in-school determinant for student outcomes is the quality of teachers. The Government is focusing on improving teacher quality by building on nationally agreed standards. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) provide a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality and defines what teachers should know and be able to do at different stages across their careers. The Standards require teachers to know about and use strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students grounded in an understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

<sup>15</sup> This analysis is based on the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth which includes results from the Programme for International Student Assessment.

<sup>16</sup> There is little difference in numeracy results but a slightly higher share of Indigenous girls meet the NMS in numeracy than Indigenous boys in 12 of the 16 areas. That is across the four year levels (3, 5, 7 and 9) and the four remoteness areas (metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote).



Maureen Liddy teaches a class at the Cape York Academy's Coen campus.

## IMPROVING LITERACY IN REMOTE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Programme aims to lift literacy learning in disadvantaged, low-performing schools through the introduction of Direct Instruction (DI) and Explicit Direct Instruction. It's being piloted in 33 schools across the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. Over 75 per cent of students in these schools are Indigenous students.

These teaching methods have a proven record in lifting standards in disadvantaged, low-performing schools. Professor John Hattie found the DI method is one of the most effective teaching interventions for improving student outcomes and delivers approximately 1.5 years of progress in one year of schooling (Hattie, 2009).

Explicit teaching methodologies have shown promising results in the Cape York Academy (CYA) Schools. For example, in 2015 Coen's entire Year 3 cohort achieved a result above the National Minimum Standard in Numeracy and the Year 5 cohort exceeded the National Minimum Standard in Reading and Numeracy. All CYA schools reported an increase in the number of students with attendance over 90 per cent. Although it's early days, the Flexible Literacy Programme is showing promise. Students are making progress, their engagement is increasing and the quality of teaching is improving.

"I have been amazed by the improvements I have seen in such a short period of time. The DI programme has had a greater demonstrable effect on student literacy than I have seen in any programme previously." – Teacher, Northern Territory

## YEAR 12 ATTAINMENT

Attainment of a Year 12 or equivalent qualification is a key building block to forge a successful career or move to higher education.

### TARGET:

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

### KEY POINTS:

- The target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020 is on track.
- The proportion of Indigenous students attaining Year 12 was higher in major cities and regional areas than remote and very remote areas.
- Over the long-term there have been improvements in apparent retention rates to Year 12<sup>17</sup> for Indigenous students, up from 32 per cent in the late 1990s to 60 per cent in 2014.
- Scholarships and mentoring support students from remote areas to move away to complete their secondary studies.
- Different pathways, such as school-based apprenticeships, are offered to support students at risk of leaving school early.

### WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?

There has been no new national data released on Indigenous Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates since last year's *Closing the Gap Report*. New data will be available in April 2016 from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey.

This target is on track. Nationally, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 20 to 24-year-olds who had achieved a Year 12 or equivalent level of education increased from 45.4 per cent in 2008 to 58.5 per cent in 2012-13. Between 2008 and 2012-13, the gap with non-Indigenous Australians narrowed by 11.6 percentage points (from 39.6 percentage points in 2008 to 28 percentage points in 2012-13).

<sup>17</sup> Apparent retention rates estimate the proportion of Year 7/8 students who have stayed at school until Year 12.

For non-Indigenous Australians, the proportion of 20 to 24-year-olds who achieved a Year 12 or equivalent level of education rose slightly (85.0 per cent in 2008 to 86.5 per cent in 2012). The Year 12 gap would have been halved by 2012-13 (from the 2008 baseline) if an additional 8,000 Indigenous 20 to 24-year-olds had a Year 12 or equivalent level of education.<sup>18</sup>

In 2012-13, Year 12 attainment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 20-24 years varied considerably by remoteness, ranging from 65.5 per cent in outer regional areas to 36.8 per cent in very remote areas.

Longer-term trends demonstrate that significant progress is being made to boost the rate of Year 12 attainment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, in 1976 over half of all Indigenous men aged 20-64 had either never attended school or left school at 14 or younger. By 2011, only 14 per cent of all Indigenous men had either never attended school or left school at Year 8 or below.<sup>19</sup>

While we do not have any new data for the target we do have new data on the apparent retention rate which is an estimate of the proportion of Year 7/8 students who have stayed at school until Year 12.<sup>20</sup>

In 2014, the apparent retention rate data suggested that three out of five Indigenous students stayed at school until Year 12. This is a vast improvement on the late 1990s when only one in three stayed until Year 12. For the most part this rate has been steadily increasing and the gap with non-Indigenous young people has narrowed. The apparent retention rate also reveals higher rates for Indigenous females than for Indigenous males in 2014 (63.8 per cent compared with 55.1 per cent).

The relationship between Year 12 and disability is explored in Chapter Five.

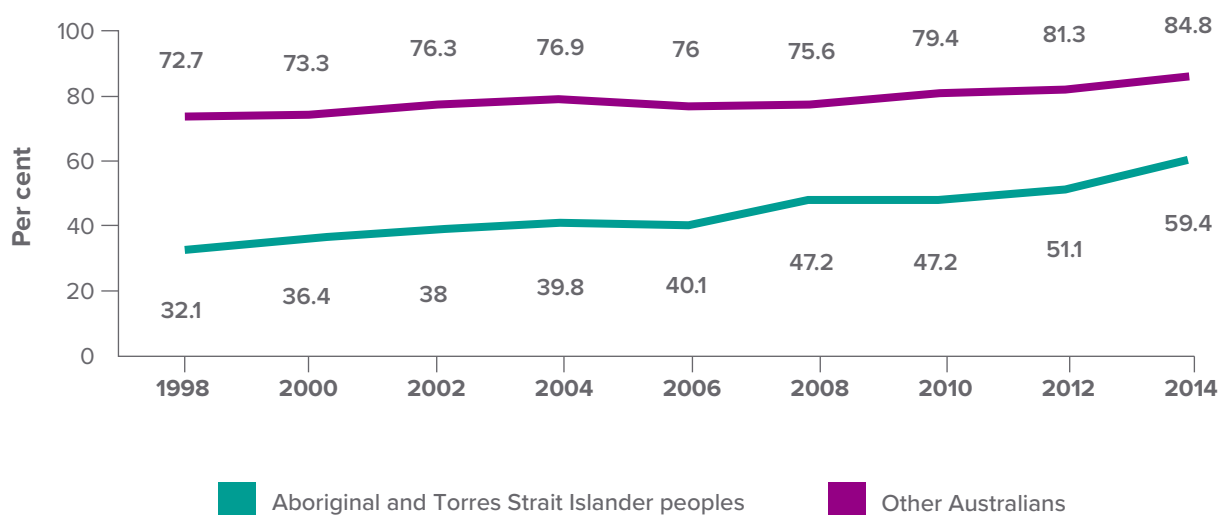
## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

The *Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Children and Schooling Programme* is providing \$222.3 million in 2015-16 for a number of projects that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to increase engagement and retention in education, training and employment, and diversionary programmes to encourage re-engagement.

Australian Government funding supports:

- Mentoring activities such as those delivered by the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience.

FIGURE 6: Apparent retention rates for Year 7/8 to Year 12 by Indigenous status, 1998-2014



Note: 'Other' includes non-Indigenous Australians and those for whom Indigenous status was not stated.

Source: ABS Schools, Australia 2014 (ABS, 2015b)

<sup>18</sup> An additional 19,000 Indigenous 20-24-year-olds will need to achieve Year 12 or equivalent to halve the gap in attainment by 2020. More than half of this increase reflects population growth.

<sup>19</sup> Current Year 8 figures are the closest approximation available for comparison to the 1976 data for 14-year-olds.

<sup>20</sup> The apparent retention rate estimates all students who progress to Year 12, not just those who complete Year 12.

- Full-time, intensive school-based academies to improve student engagement such as those delivered by the Clontarf Foundation and Role Models and Leaders Australia.
- Scholarship and mobility projects such as those delivered by the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, Career Employment Australia and the Smith Family help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people move from regional and remote communities for education and training, including Year 12 completion or Certificate III qualification or above. Secondary school scholarships, mostly for students from remote locations, enable young people to attend secondary schools – government and non-government, day and boarding schools. The students receive help with accommodation, mentoring, life skills and other practical support to help them finish their studies.
- *Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASBA)* which combine paid employment as an apprentice or a trainee, off-the-job vocational training and senior secondary school studies. In 2014, 1,817 Indigenous young people started ASBAs representing 8.7 per cent of the total number of starters. This is an increase on 2010 when 1,190 started, making up 6.9 per cent of the commencing cohort (NCVER, 2015; NCVER, 2011).
- *Australian Apprenticeship Support Network* which supports employers and apprentices, including Indigenous apprentices, to complete their apprenticeships.



Education officers De'arne French and Janelle Knack (back row) with students from St Margaret Mary's College in Townsville: (left to right) Tess Baker, Jamaica Lampton and Gabriella Bogdanek.

## JUMP IT SCHOLARSHIPS

The Townsville Catholic Education Office has created 'Jump It' scholarships to assist around 490 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through Years 10 to 12 to complete their secondary school qualification and then 'jump the gap' into university studies, training or apprenticeships and into a job or career. The scholarships are funded under the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*.

## JERICKA MUNGATOPI – WINNER OF THE 2014 NORTHERN TERRITORY BOARD OF STUDIES TELSTRA REMOTE INDIGENOUS STUDENT AWARD

Jericka Mungatopi from Tiwi was the winner of the Northern Territory Board of Studies 2014 Telstra Remote Indigenous Student Award, which recognises the highest achievement by an Indigenous student receiving the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) while studying in a remote location.

"When I was in Year 12 I was motivated to come to school because I wanted to finish and get my NTCET to make my family proud and help me get a good job," Jericka said. She is now working at the school as an assistant teacher while studying to become a qualified teacher.



Jericka Mungatopi proudly showing off her award with parents Katrina and Fredrick.



Ryan D'Souza aiming high in engineering.

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## RYAN D'SOUZA AIMING HIGH IN ENGINEERING

Twenty-four year old Ryan D'Souza from Western Australia always had an interest in civil and mining opportunities, but it wasn't until he began a traineeship at Macmahon Holdings that he realised how far it could take him. In 2013, Ryan completed a Certificate III in Civil Construction Plant Operations through Macmahon Holdings, in conjunction with its Indigenous employment centre, Doorn Djll Yoordaning.

He has since been offered an engineering cadetship and he is now working towards a Bachelor of Engineering.

“Before starting with Macmahon, I was drifting, and now I have a real direction – I want to be a civil engineer. I really hope to set a good example and be a mentor and role model for other Aboriginal people to get a great career they enjoy.”

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## HIGHER EDUCATION

Over a decade there was a 70 per cent increase (from 8,895 in 2004 to 15,043 in 2014) in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education award courses compared with 43 per cent growth for all domestic undergraduate students. Indigenous enrolments continue to grow more quickly than enrolment rates for all domestic students: in 2014 Indigenous students represented 1.48 per cent of domestic students in higher education, up from 1.41 per cent in 2013 and 1.25 per cent in 2004.

Indigenous graduates have strong employment outcomes: in 2014, around 77 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates were in full-time employment following completion of their award compared with 68.1 per cent of all graduates (Guthrie, 2015). Data from the 2011 census shows that Indigenous Australians with bachelor or higher qualifications have very high levels of employment, compared to those with Certificate II and below qualifications and those who have no post-school qualifications.

In 2014, 55 per cent of all higher education students in Australia were female. Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 66 per cent were female (Department of Education and Training, 2015). This contrasts with Indigenous participation in Vocational Education and Training where the majority of Indigenous students were male (55 per cent) (NCVER, 2015).



## CHAPTER THREE: EMPLOYMENT

Being employed improves the health, living standards and the social and emotional well being of individuals, families and communities. Employment not only brings financial independence and choice, it also contributes to self-esteem. Growing up in a household where one or both parents are employed gives children strong role models to shape their own aspirations.



Paul Rymer, a participant in the Green Army Programme, working with colleague Taigan Grenfell at the Killalea State Park project, Shell Cove, NSW.

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## TARGET:

Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018). (No new data)<sup>21</sup>

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## KEY POINTS:

- This target is not on track. However, although no progress has been made against the target since 2008, Indigenous employment rates are considerably higher now than they were in the early 1990s. Historically, cyclical softening of the labour market, where employment levels have fluctuated, has impacted adversely on employment prospects.
- There is a strong link between education and employment – at high levels of education there is virtually no employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are being generated through setting targets for government procurement, public service employment and through the efforts of corporate Australia.
- Indigenous employment rates are considerably higher in the major cities than in remote areas.

## WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?

There has been no new national Indigenous employment data released since last year's report. New data on Indigenous employment will be available in April 2016 from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). Progress against this target is measured using data on the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of workforce age (15-64 years) who are employed (the employment rate).

This target is not on track. The Indigenous employment rate fell from 53.8 per cent in 2008 to 47.5 per cent in 2012-13. This occurred in the context of a general softening in the labour market over this period. The overall employment rate for all Australians fell from 73.4 per cent in June 2008 to 72.1 per cent in June 2013, with sharper falls evident

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<sup>21</sup> Labour force data for Indigenous Australians will also be available in 2017 from the 2016 Census.

for men with relatively low levels of education. The employment rate for men with a Year 10 or below level of education fell from 67.4 per cent in 2008 to 63.3 per cent in 2013.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore not surprising the employment rate for Indigenous men fell sharply from 2008 to 2012-13 as nearly half of all Indigenous men of workforce age have a Year 10 or below level of education.<sup>23</sup>

In its independent report on progress against the employment target, the Productivity Commission acknowledged "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have almost certainly been more adversely affected by recent cyclical softness in the labour market" (PC 2015, p. 11).

Another important factor in this decline is the gradual cessation of Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), which ceased operations on 30 June 2015. The CDEP scheme was an Australian Government initiative that enabled job seekers (usually members of Indigenous communities) to undertake various work and training activities, managed by local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community organisations. During the life of the programme, the ABS classified CDEP participants as being employed.<sup>24</sup> The decline in CDEP participants between 2008 and 2012-13 accounted for 60 per cent of the decline in the Indigenous employment rate over this period.

To get a more accurate sense of the employment gap, it is better to focus on the non-CDEP employment rate and how this has changed over time. While this rate fell between 2008 and 2012-13, the decline was not statistically significant.

It is also worth noting while there has been no progress against this target there have been some longer-term improvements. The Indigenous employment rate was considerably higher in 2012-13 (47.5 per cent) than 1994 (37.6 per cent) (Figure 7).

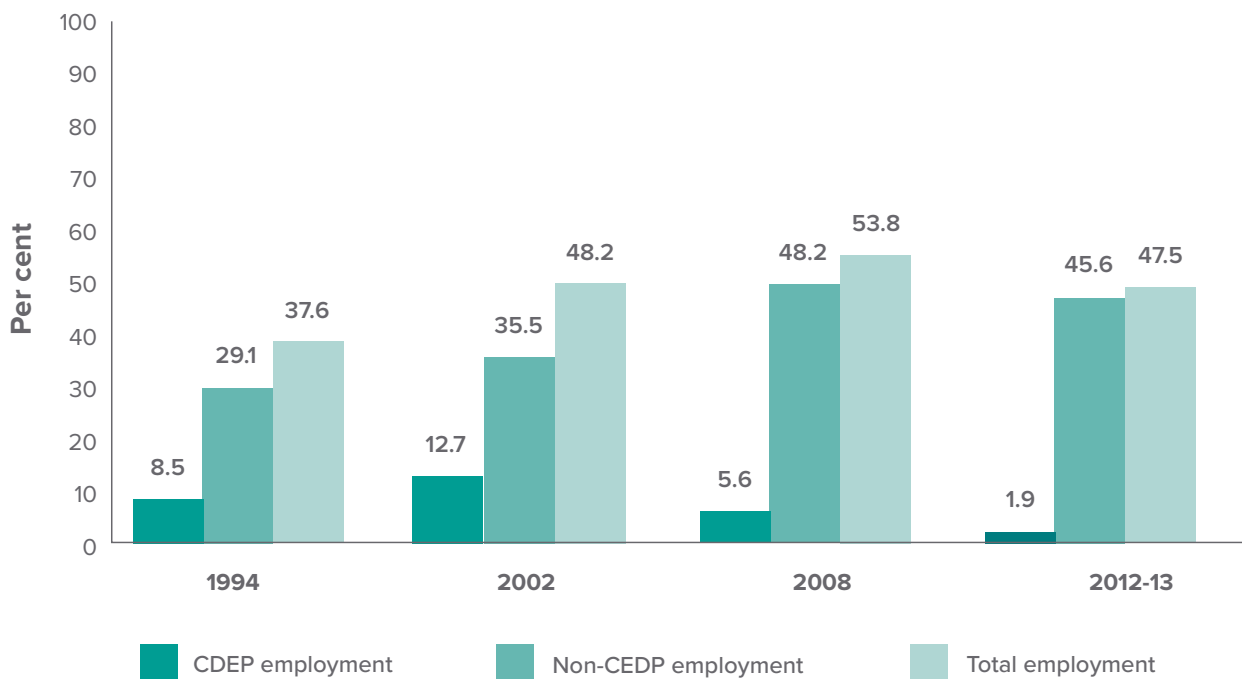
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<sup>22</sup> Unpublished data from the ABS Survey of Education and Work.

<sup>23</sup> Unpublished data from the 2011 Census for Indigenous men aged 20-64. The Indigenous female employment rate showed little change from 2008 to 2012-13.

<sup>24</sup> CDEP was a Commonwealth employment programme in which participants were paid CDEP wages (derived from income support) to participate in activity or training. As CDEP was wound down and participation declined, many of these individuals transferred across to other employment services such as RJCP, where they received income support and were then counted as unemployed.

FIGURE 7: Indigenous employment rate (age 15-64), 1994 to 2012-13 (per cent)



Source: ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey 1994, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002 & 2008, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004-05, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (core component) 2012-13

Indigenous employment rates vary sharply by geography. In 2012-13, only 30.4 per cent of all Indigenous people of workforce age (15-64 years) in very remote areas were employed in a non-CDEP job compared with 49.8 per cent of those living in the major cities. Most Indigenous men of workforce age in the major cities (55.8 per cent) and inner regional areas (54.3 per cent) were employed in 2012-13.

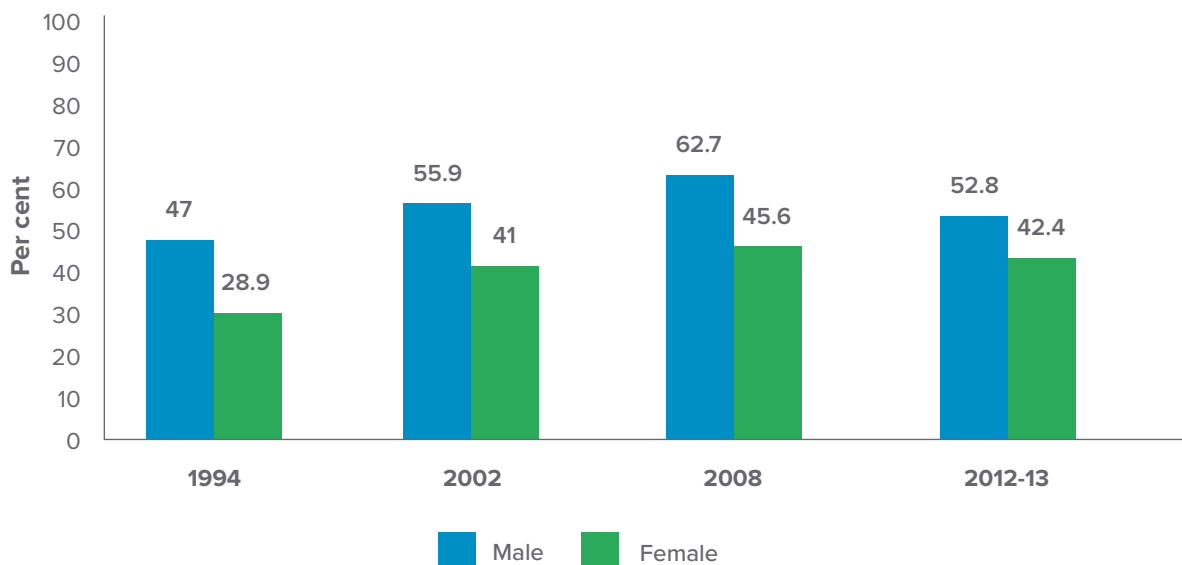
The longer-term data tells an important story by gender. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have made substantial progress in employment over the longer-term. Despite a small fall after 2008, the employment rate for working aged women in 2012-13 (42.4 per cent) is still higher than the mid-1990s (28.9 per cent). Also, while Indigenous female employment rates are considerably lower than Indigenous male employment rates, the gap has narrowed considerably since 1994.<sup>25</sup>



Border Monitoring on Saibai Island, left to right; Harry David, Margaret Dau, Jerry Babia and Peter Levi. Border Monitoring Officers are recruited directly from Torres Strait Islander communities to monitor and report the arrival and departure of traditional visitors from Papua New Guinea.

<sup>25</sup> Indigenous male employment had been impacted by the decline in the number of CDEP participants. The Indigenous male non-CDEP employment rate rose from 34.1 per cent in 1994 to 55.3 per cent in 2008 before falling to 50.1 per cent in 2012-13. The equivalent figures for Indigenous women are 23.4 per cent, 41.6 per cent and 41.2 per cent.

FIGURE 8: Indigenous working age (15-64) employment rates, by sex, 1994 – 2012-13 (per cent)



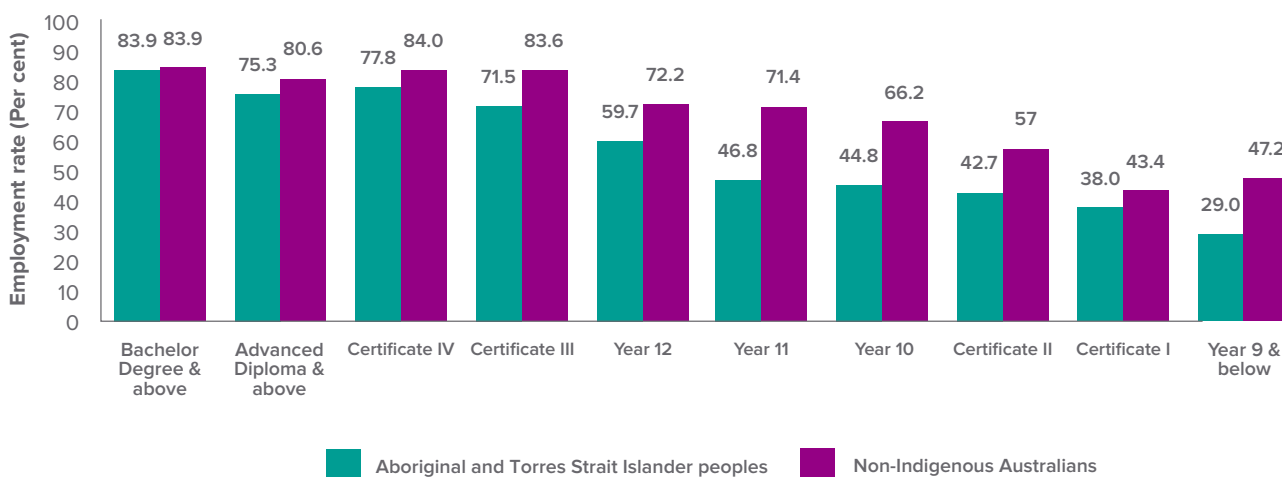
Source: ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey 1994, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002 & 2008, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (Core Component) 2012-13

There is a strong link between education and employment. As noted in Chapter Two there is no significant difference between the subsequent educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students once we control for academic achievement at age 15. This, allied with the fact the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people declines as the level of education increases, highlights just how important education is for closing the employment gap (see Figure 9). While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are considerably less likely to have a Certificate III or higher levels of qualification there have been some longer-term improvements.

For example, in 1971 only 4.9 per cent of all Indigenous men aged 20-64 years had a post school qualification – by 2011 this proportion had risen to 31 per cent.

While closing the employment gap is very challenging we know improving education levels can make an important difference. In each year cohort the number of Indigenous people is not large. For example, in 2015 there were 16,500 Indigenous eight-year-olds. If we focus on improving educational outcomes for each cohort of school age children, this will in turn have a positive impact on the employment gap in years to come.

FIGURE 9: Employment rate for persons aged 20 to 64 years by level of highest educational attainment, 2011



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

Between 1 September 2013 and 31 December 2015, Government employment programmes under the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, including the *Employment Parity Initiative*, the *Community Development Programme* and *Vocational Training and Employment Centres*, have facilitated more than 36,000 jobs for Indigenous Australians.

In addition, in its first six months (to 31 December 2015), the Government's employment service for urban and regional centres *jobactive* has achieved 13,617 job placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Strong economic growth and sustainable development are precursors for increasing employment opportunities in the labour market. Cyclical softening of the labour market and changes to the composition of labour demand – employers requiring higher skilled workers – have significantly impacted the labour market opportunities for Indigenous Australians, particularly for those with lower education and skills.

### Transitioning from school to further education, training and employment

The transition from school to work or further education can be a make or break point in a young person's life. Australian Government programmes to support this transition include:

- *Transition to Work* initiative which will help around 29,000 15 to 21-year-olds each year. It is anticipated that 16 to 20 per cent of participants will be young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- *Empowering YOUth Initiatives* encourage not-for-profit and non-government organisations to run innovative initiatives for young people to prevent long-term unemployment, remove barriers to employment and help sustain employment. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, aged between 15 and 24 years who are long-term unemployed or at risk of long-term welfare dependency, are one of the priority groups for round one funding.
- A number of projects which focus on school leavers and training linked to employment (funded under the demand-driven employment stream of the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Jobs, Land and Economy Programme*).



Participants in the Indigenous Australian Government Development Programme (IAGDP) pictured with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion in Canberra. The IAGDP is a 15 month programme that combines ongoing employment with structured learning to increase the representation of Indigenous Australians working in the Australian Government.

### Creating opportunities for employment

Leading by example, the Government has set a new target of three per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Australian Government public sector by 2018. The *Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy* aims to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Government public sector to 9,270. For the first time, the Government has set robust agency-level targets for Indigenous representation. State and territory governments have also set targets for Indigenous employment.

Under the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, support is provided to connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of working age with real and sustainable employment. Community by community, business by business, jobs are tailored to address employer demand and local circumstances and needs. Between 1 July 2014, when the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* was introduced, and 31 December 2015 demand-driven projects supported more than 5,300 employment opportunities for Indigenous job seekers.



Murray Riley moved to Melbourne with his wife and their young son to join Crown's Indigenous employment programme under the *Employment Parity Initiative*. Now working as a Training Administrator, Murray is an enthusiastic and highly respected employee. He says he's come a long way – both geographically and professionally – since moving from Perth and is proud that he had the courage and determination to make the move when he didn't know anyone in Melbourne.

The Government is partnering with some of Australia's largest employers to support an additional 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into real jobs by 2020. Ten companies – Compass Group, Accor Pacific, ISS Facility Services, Crown Resorts, Sodexo Australia, Spotless Facility Services, Hutchinson Builders, Woolworths Limited, MSS Security and St Vincent's Health Australia – are now signed up to the *Employment Parity Initiative*, securing 6,815 new jobs. There are plans for another three contracts in early 2016. These agreements combined will ensure 8,658 unemployed Indigenous Australians will have access to sustainable jobs.

The Government is also supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to move into jobs through *Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs)* with almost 3,500 Indigenous Australians starting employment since the pilot started in 2014. VTECs connect Indigenous job seekers with jobs and bring together the support services necessary to prepare them for long-term employment.

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## CHARTING A NEW CAREER PATHWAY

Born and raised in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia, Denise Sampi had worked as a tour guide and an aged care worker but wanted a different career pathway. She started with the Vocational Training and Employment Centres programme at the beginning of 2015, undertaking a work-readiness course. A highlight was being part of a team working alongside celebrity chef Matt Moran in the acclaimed 'Kimberley Kitchen' event.

Her enhanced skills – such as literacy and numeracy plus her strong work ethic – helped her land a job as an activity supervisor with local organisation East Kimberley Job Pathways. As a result of her determination and commitment, she was recently nominated for the Kimberley Encouragement Award as part of the 2015 Kimberley Group Training Excellence Awards.

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Denise Sampi from East Kimberley learning new skills.

## Remote employment services

In very remote areas, almost one in five adults of workforce age receives income support payments. People in remote Australia tend to move onto welfare at a younger age and stay on it for longer than people in urban areas. The difficulties in accessing training and the absence of strong labour markets make it difficult to secure continuous, paid employment. These unique circumstances require a different approach to employment and participation than urban Australia.

In 2015 the Government reformed remote employment services to tackle the challenges created by high levels of welfare dependency. The newly-established *Community Development Programme* (CDP) provides:

- Opportunities for job seekers (18 to 49 years) to contribute to their communities, gain experience and skills and build self-esteem while looking for paid employment.
- Culturally appropriate, tailored activities in a range of areas including construction and maintenance, administration, the arts, fisheries, agriculture and horticulture, caring for country, food preparation and nutrition, elder care and childcare.
- Opportunities for formal study in a range of fields including business, housing maintenance, early childhood education, hospitality, agriculture and conservation and land management.
- Access to driver training and basic car maintenance, recognising that the lack of a driver's licence can be a significant barrier to employment.
- Placements with local employers, including local councils, energy organisations and childcare and aged care facilities, for up to six months of work experience.
- Support to overcome non-vocational barriers to employment such as poor literacy and numeracy, homelessness, domestic violence or substance misuse.

In the first six months of implementation, CDP has supported Indigenous Australians into 2,778 jobs. There was also a significant increase in the number of remote Indigenous job seekers contributing to their communities and developing skills while they look for work – from 46.7 per cent at 30 June 2015 (under the former *Remote Jobs and Communities Programme*) to 68.5 per cent (17,138 job seekers) at 31 December

2015. As of 14 December 2015, 620 Indigenous job seekers had been placed in hosted placements in industries including childcare, fisheries, landscaping and conservation, hospitality and construction.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME JOB SEEKERS PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY IN THE DESERT

In the South Australian communities of Colebrook, Beltana and Marree providers have been working with job seekers to pilot an aquaponics project to provide an innovative solution to the challenges of growing, cultivating and distributing fresh food in the desert. Aquaponics combines both aquaculture and hydroponics where waste from the fish provides nutrients for the plants.

Around 30 job seekers are participating and gaining valuable skills through building tanks, fitting out the enclosed environments and growing fresh fruit and vegetables. Their training and experience will result in long-term economic and environmental benefits for their communities, including producing food in a region that would otherwise be considered arid and unsuitable for farming.



Jason Marriott (CDP Supervisor) and Kristopher Stuart growing fresh food in the desert.



Brendan Marrilama being instructed by Jimmy Burpur at the Milingimbi Bukmak workshop.

## FURNITURE MAKING BOOSTS MILINGIMBI ECONOMY

In the small island community of Milingimbi in the Northern Territory, a furniture-making enterprise called Bukmak is giving job seekers new skills and stimulating the local economy.

Community Development Programme provider Arnhem Land Progress Association Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) has set up the new venture in partnership with commercial fit-out company Ramvec and Swinburne University of Technology.

The completed products are sold locally in the community through ALPA's Milingimbi store with plans to provide a separate line of high-end products for sale in major cities around Australia.

## Caring for the environment

Australian Government programmes to protect the environment are also creating jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- *Indigenous Rangers Programme* – 775 full-time equivalent Indigenous ranger positions are funded providing 1,600 people with employment in full-time, part-time and casual ranger jobs. Junior ranger programmes are also being developed to support school attendance and ensure the passing down of traditional ecological knowledge.

- *Specialised Indigenous Ranger Programme* – supports the skill diversification of current Indigenous Rangers to ensure the sustainable harvest of marine turtles and dugongs.
- *Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) programme* – complements the work of ranger groups. There are over 550 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in full-time, part-time and casual jobs under the IPA programme.
- *National Landcare Programme* – focuses on partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities so they can fully participate in land and sea management resulting in the employment of around 50 people and a number of Indigenous traineeships in regional areas.
- *Green Army Programme* – young people work on local environmental and heritage conservation programmes, developing on the job skills and the potential for vocational training leading to further qualifications. With a target of engaging 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in its first five years, 725 were engaged by November 2015.
- *Emissions Reduction Fund projects* – Indigenous land managers participate in domestic carbon markets, particularly savanna fire management activities. This is creating employment, economic, social and cultural opportunities in remote northern Australian communities. Savanna fire management projects combine Indigenous land management practices with modern science, and have already generated more than 1.5 million tonnes of emissions reduction.
- *National Environmental Research Programme* – 279 local Indigenous Australians, including Indigenous rangers and Traditional Owners, were employed on 16 research projects which aimed to improve biodiversity conservation in northern Australia between 2011 and 2015.



Riverland Ranger Karmel Milson and her sons Jack and Kallum from South Australia.



Jesse Williams tracking Tasmanian Devils during the save the Tasmanian Devil Program, Bronte Park Tasmania.

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## KARMEL MILSON – WORKING ON COUNTRY

You only have to talk to the people involved in the Riverland Rangers **Working on Country** programme to realise the positive effect of employment.

*“I’ve been saying to my kids for years, ‘can’t afford that, can’t afford that’. Now, I can pay my bills, I can give my kids everything,”* says Karmel Milson a ranger working at Calperum Station, north of Renmark in South Australia. *“My youngest – he’s eight – wants to be a Calperum Ranger, and my kids are proud of me.”*

The Riverland Rangers project is designed to support the Aboriginal community’s desires for greater involvement in natural and cultural resources management and to address community problems such as high unemployment, low school attendance and health and wellbeing issues. The team of six Aboriginal rangers and a coordinator, work primarily on Calperum and Taylorville Stations in the Murray-Darling Basin.

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## Urban and regional employment services – *jobactive*

With almost 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in cities and regional centres, mainstream employment services have a vital role in boosting Indigenous employment. The Government has introduced reforms and invested \$6.8 billion over four years in *jobactive* – its new employment service for urban and regional centres. With a more outcomes-focused approach, it has stronger participation requirements to effectively engage job seekers and align their obligations with community expectations.

For the first time, *jobactive* employment services providers have specific Indigenous employment targets which are part of a provider’s ongoing assessment, creating a stronger incentive for providers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers to find and keep a job. Over the first six months of operations (to 31 December 2015), *jobactive* has achieved 13,617 job placements for Indigenous Australians.

In Sydney, *jobactive* job seekers are gaining entry level technical skills to work on the Sydney Metro Northwest project. As well as helping to meet the workforce needs of the rail link project, this collaborative effort with the New South Wales State Government has resulted in more than 40 job seekers gaining employment, including seven Indigenous job seekers. This successful model can be adapted to other industries.



## CHAPTER FOUR: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development brings businesses, goods and services into local economies and creates opportunities for employment and training. The Government is working to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same opportunities for economic participation as other Australians by improving education and employment outcomes and increasing the number of Indigenous businesses operating across Australia.



Mona Lisa Kantilla sews fabric at the Bima Wear workshop in Wurrumiyanga, Bathurst Island, Tiwi Islands.

## KEY POINTS:

- All governments are prioritising Indigenous economic participation through the development of a strategic framework to boost investment in Indigenous businesses and communities.
- The Australian Government's new *Indigenous Procurement Policy* has seen Government contracts valued in total at \$36 million awarded to 52 Indigenous businesses.
- Traditional Indigenous culture can open new opportunities for economic development.
- Land is a significant asset base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Governments are working on how they can better support communities to leverage their land assets for economic development, as part of the mainstream economy.

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

The biggest gains in Indigenous employment and prosperity are likely to be in regional and urban areas where there are more market opportunities and where the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live. However, targeted effort is needed to support economic development in remote Australia, where disadvantage is most concentrated and severe. The Government's role is to set conditions conducive to Indigenous businesses and investment. Economic development relies upon Indigenous entrepreneurship, community support and leadership, and private sector investment and involvement.

The Australian and state and territory governments have agreed through COAG to the development of a new strategic framework that puts Indigenous economic participation at the heart of the national agenda. This recognises that economic participation underpinned by cultural participation leads to improved social outcomes. The framework will ensure an economic development lens is applied to all investment in Indigenous communities so the provision of government goods and services can create business and employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It will also support an increased focus on place-based solutions, increased economic independence, and a reduced reliance on welfare (COAG 2015).

## Building the Indigenous business sector

Each year the Australian Government purchases goods and services valued at billions of dollars. In 2012-13, Indigenous businesses were estimated to have secured only 0.02 per cent (\$6.2 million) of the overall Australian Government procurement commitment of around \$39 billion.<sup>26</sup> The Government's *Indigenous Procurement Policy* started on 1 July 2015. It aims to significantly increase procurement from Indigenous businesses:

- In the first six months, the Government awarded contracts valued in total at \$36 million to 52 Indigenous businesses<sup>27</sup> in a range of sectors, for the delivery of goods and services as diverse as electrical cabling and financial literacy resources. An interim target of 0.5 per cent is set for 2015-16, which will gradually increase to three per cent by 2019-20 for domestic contracts.
- Indigenous businesses will have the opportunity to quote first on all contracts in remote areas as well as for all contracts valued between \$80,000 and \$200,000.
- For high value contracts – \$7.5 million and over – in specified industry sectors, mandatory minimum requirements for Indigenous employment and Indigenous supplier use apply.

The policy puts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses at the front and centre of the way the Government does business whether through direct contracts or through joining the supply chains of some of Australia's largest companies.

The Indigenous business sector continues to benefit from assistance from Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) which offers loans to prospective and existing Indigenous businesses on terms that are generally outside commercial lenders' risk tolerance. In 2014-15, IBA approved 49 new business loans worth a total of \$18.3 million and 365 businesses received business advice or support.

<sup>26</sup> Indigenous Business Australia unpublished analysis of data extracted from AusTender 2012-13 matched with known First Australian business lists, including Supply Nation, the ICN gateway and Digedi directories. The figure is likely to be an underestimate due to difficulty in identifying First Australian businesses.

<sup>27</sup> This figure is conservative as it only includes contents recorded in AusTender and with Indigenous businesses listed in Supply Nation's Indigenous Business Direct.



33Creative directors Mayrah Sonter (left) and Georgia Cordukes.

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## EXCITING START FOR 33CREATIVE

On 4 November 2015, Indigenous communications business 33Creative signed a contract with the Australian Civil Military Centre (ACMC) marking the beginning of a strong relationship with ACMC fostered under the Indigenous Procurement Policy. Recognising that as a small organisation it needs to outsource expertise, ACMC is using companies like 33Creative to produce high quality communications products for Australian government agencies and for the international and non-government organisations it works with.

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## INDIGENOUS SECURITY FIRM WINS \$9.2 MILLION CONTRACT

Indigenous NSW central coast security firm, the Fields Group, was awarded the largest contract under the Indigenous Procurement Policy to date. As part of the \$9.2 million contract awarded by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Fields Group will subcontract Wilson Security to assist in the delivery of services. The arrangement will allow the Fields Group to draw on Wilson's expertise in order to grow its business. The Fields Group will also engage several other Indigenous providers in the delivery of these services, including Outback Global, the Muru Group, and Our Mob.

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Shane Fields, Director of Fields Group and Ms Jennifer Rawson, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

## Remote business development

Obstacles to economic development are high for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As their distance from larger markets increases, the cost of doing business also rises. Consumer bases become smaller and infrastructure is less adequate. The Government is supporting Indigenous business development in remote Australia:

- *Indigenous Enterprise Development (IED)* – boosts the number of Indigenous-owned businesses and creates jobs by helping entrepreneurs overcome the two biggest barriers to establishing a business: getting the right help at the right time and access to finance.

Under the IED, \$30 million is available to start and grow sustainable businesses or social enterprises, of which \$25 million is earmarked for enterprises in remote Australia. Entrepreneurs who can demonstrate their business idea could be commercially viable are offered a tailored support package which could include business planning support, start-up funding and up to two years' worth of post-establishment mentoring. To ensure Indigenous businesses are established from the outset according to commercial principles, start-up grants only cover part of the required start-up capital; the rest must be covered by a commercial loan.

- *Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS)* – more than 7,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are supported to generate income via the Indigenous visual arts industry. Operational funding to around 80 Indigenous-owned art centres supports the production and promotion of Indigenous visual art as well as employment and professional opportunities for over 300 Indigenous arts workers. In some remote communities the local art centre may be the only generator of external income. The work of many of the artists is now internationally recognised.
- *Indigenous Language and Arts (ILA)* – \$22 million to support the revival and maintenance of Indigenous languages including more than 60 language activities across a network of over 50 Indigenous language organisations. A range of arts projects including contemporary theatre, music, visual art and screen based works, jewellery, traditional weaving and carving are also supported.



Evonne Munyungu from Bula'bula Arts in Ramingining NT, makes string from sand palm. Photo Kate Riley.

## Infrastructure

Infrastructure underpins opportunities for Indigenous economic development:

- *National Broadband Network (NBN)* – will improve access to fast broadband to foster innovation, better service delivery and new industries. Over the next three years, the Government will spend \$6.7 million helping to maximise access to new internet services previously unavailable in remote communities.
- *Mobile Black Spot Programme* – Round One will deliver 499 new or upgraded mobile base stations across regional and remote Australia, providing new and upgraded handheld coverage to 68,600 square kilometres and new external antenna coverage to over 150,000 square kilometres. A further \$60 million has been allocated to the second round.
- *Road upgrades* – the \$262 million upgrade of the Peninsula Developmental Road and other community infrastructure will improve accessibility to Cape York, support the growth of the local industry and increase economic activity in Indigenous communities. Upgrade of the main access road in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (\$106 million) will cut the high costs of service delivery and provide employment opportunities for local residents.
- *Air services* – in remote Indigenous communities, vital air services carrying passengers and freight including fresh food, medicines and other urgent supplies are subsidised. Where not commercially viable, aerodrome infrastructure is maintained and safety inspections are carried out at remote airstrips.

## Developing Northern Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have a direct interest in large parts of the north have an integral role to play in the development of Northern Australia, which is a key priority for the Australian Government.

The Government is investing \$1.2 billion to develop the North, through the *Our North, Our Future, White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*, with a focus on land, water, business, trade and investment, infrastructure, workforce and governance. This will create new opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share in economic development. This includes:

- \$600 million for a Northern Australia Roads Package (which includes targets for Indigenous employment and supplier use).
- \$200 million for the northern component of a new National Water Infrastructure Development Fund.
- \$75 million for a new Cooperative Research Centre in the North to investigate climate, soils and biosecurity, with a strong focus on agriculture.

The White Paper will create Indigenous-specific opportunities for economic development, while protecting the Indigenous cultural and natural assets that make the north so unique.

- Support for native title holders to build their capacity and effectively engage with potential investors (\$20.4 million from 2015-2019).
- Funding for township lease negotiations and land administration measures aimed at increasing economic activity on Indigenous land by making transactions on Indigenous land easier (\$17 million from 2015-2018).
- Expanding opportunities for Indigenous Ranger groups to support increased biosecurity surveillance across the north (\$12.4 million from 2015-2018).
- Funding for land tenure pilots as practical 'next steps' for investors wanting to develop projects that demonstrate the benefits of tenure reform (\$10.6 million from 2015-2019).
- Consideration of options to use exclusive native title rights for commercial purposes.
- Supporting the native title system with the aspiration of finalising all existing native title claims within a decade (around \$110 million a year over the next four years).

This is in addition to investments of \$5 billion for infrastructure projects announced in 2015-16 and \$100 million for the *Northern Australia Beef Roads Fund*.

## Land and economic development

Land is a significant asset base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that can support their economic independence. Together, governments are working on how they can better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to leverage their land assets for economic development, as part of the mainstream economy. All jurisdictions have agreed to implement the recommendations of the *COAG Investigation into Indigenous land administration and use*, subject to their unique circumstances and resource constraints (COAG, 2015).

Township leases are a lever for economic development, delivering long-term tradeable tenure to underpin commercial activities and home ownership. They simplify leasing and land use across a whole town and makes it possible for individuals to obtain long-term subleases to support a loan.

Leasing agreements have the potential to modernise Indigenous land arrangements. In Gungahara in North-East Arnhem Land, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Australian Government and the Gumatj clan to negotiate a community entity township lease.

## INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND HISTORY

Developments in communication and digital technologies are enabling some Indigenous businesses to get off the ground in a way which would not have been possible a decade ago. Indigital is an Indigenous enterprise harnessing the power of new technologies to build tourist awareness of Indigenous culture and history through the creation of its Digital Rangers augmented reality mobile app. When activated by cultural site image recognition the app shares Aboriginal recorded stories, music, video and images in a hologram-like format with its user. No internet is required allowing Traditional Owners to share content in Australia's most remote and beautiful locations such as Kakadu World Heritage Area. This type of innovative solution to economic development and cultural preservation will only become more common as technology and connectivity improves.

## **Harnessing traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge**

The application of traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge has the potential to strengthen the economic future of Australia in a range of areas.

In May 2015, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs delivered title to several areas of land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* to the Yanyuwa people, in the Borroloola region of the Northern Territory. This will allow Jawuma (Black Rock Landing) to be developed as an operational hub for the li-Anthawirriyarra (people of the sea) Sea Ranger Unit, which manages the Yanyuwa Indigenous Protected Area as part of the National Reserve System of protected conservation areas. This initiative will support community aspirations for small-scale enterprise activities, including tourism, cultural interpretation and contract service delivery. The traditional owners have committed over \$100,000 and have attracted the support of a number of government and private sector partners.



The unique properties of spinifex have the potential to create new industries for Indigenous Australians.

## **ABORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE CREATES NEW INDUSTRIES IN REMOTE AUSTRALIA**

Aboriginal knowledge and scientific knowledge are combining to identify potential technological applications for a widespread but uniquely Australian resource – spinifex. The Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people of North-West Queensland have long known spinifex’s properties as a medicine and an adhesive similar to glue. Current research reveals the plant has extremely strong microscopic fibres that could be used as an additive to make plastics and rubbers more durable and create a completely natural carbon fibre product.

The Camooweal based Dugalunji Aboriginal Corporation, on behalf of the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people, and the University of Queensland recently signed a joint agreement to further research the properties of the spinifex fibre and are well-placed to share the benefits through licencing the intellectual property and establishing itself as a market leader in the area of spinifex harvesting, processing and supply. The spinifex project will create jobs in agronomy and pastoral production, giving Indigenous people the technical skills to pursue hi-tech careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Dugalunji Aboriginal Corporation Managing Director Colin Saltmere said, “The research agreement gives Aboriginal people the right to decide if the product is commercialised but also opens up opportunities for the corporation to become a large industrial operation.”



## CHAPTER FIVE: HEALTHY LIVES

The inter-relationships between health and social determinants such as education, employment status, overcrowding and income are well established in the national and international literature (Marmot, 2015).

In turn, health influences educational participation and attainment. For example, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children has found 83 per cent of Indigenous children with better health attended school at least 80 per cent of the time compared with 65 per cent of the time for children with poorer health. Similarly, poor health adversely affects employment (Holzinger and Biddle, 2015).



Lleyton Gumbula enjoying healthy food in Ngukurr in the Northern Territory.

## TARGET:

Close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation (by 2031).

## KEY POINTS:

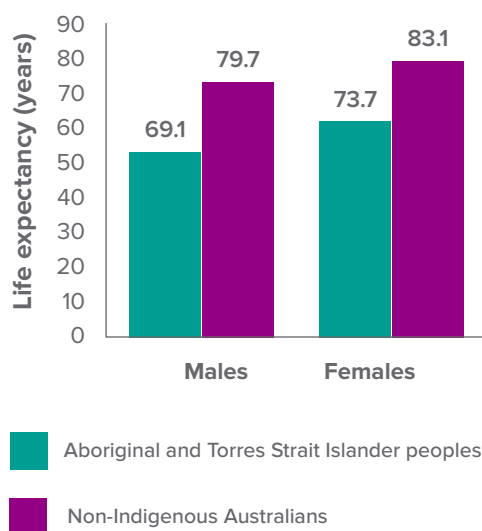
- While Indigenous mortality rates have declined by 16 per cent since 1998, we are not on track to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 and it is important to accelerate progress.
- Since 1998, there have been significant improvements in the Indigenous mortality rate from chronic diseases, particularly from circulatory disease. However, Indigenous cancer mortality rates are rising and the gap is widening.
- There have been improvements in healthcare access and reductions in smoking which should result in long-term improvements in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Working collaboratively across governments, the health sector and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on local and regional responses is central to the Government's approach to improve life expectancy.
- Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience higher rates of mental health issues than other Australians, the Government is improving access to culturally sensitive, integrated mental health services.

## WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?

The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is slowly improving but the current rate of progress will have to gather pace if the life expectancy target is to be met by 2031. Meeting this target remains challenging because, among other things, non-Indigenous life expectancy is expected to rise over the coming years. This means, for example, Indigenous life expectancy will probably have to increase by almost 21 years for males and 16 years for females from 2006 to 2031 to meet the target. Average annual Indigenous life expectancy gains of between 0.6 and 0.8 years are needed.

The most recent life expectancy figures were published in late 2013 and have featured in the last two Closing the Gap reports. In 2010-12, Indigenous life expectancy was estimated to be 69.1 years for males and 73.7 years for females, a gap of 10.6 years for males and 9.5 years for females (see Figure 10). Between 2005-07 and 2010-12, there has been a small reduction in the gap of 0.8 years for males and 0.1 years for females. Health outcomes for Indigenous Australians are often worse in remote areas than in urban and regional areas.<sup>28</sup>

FIGURE 10: Life expectancy at birth, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by sex, 2010-12



Source: ABS (ABS, 2013)

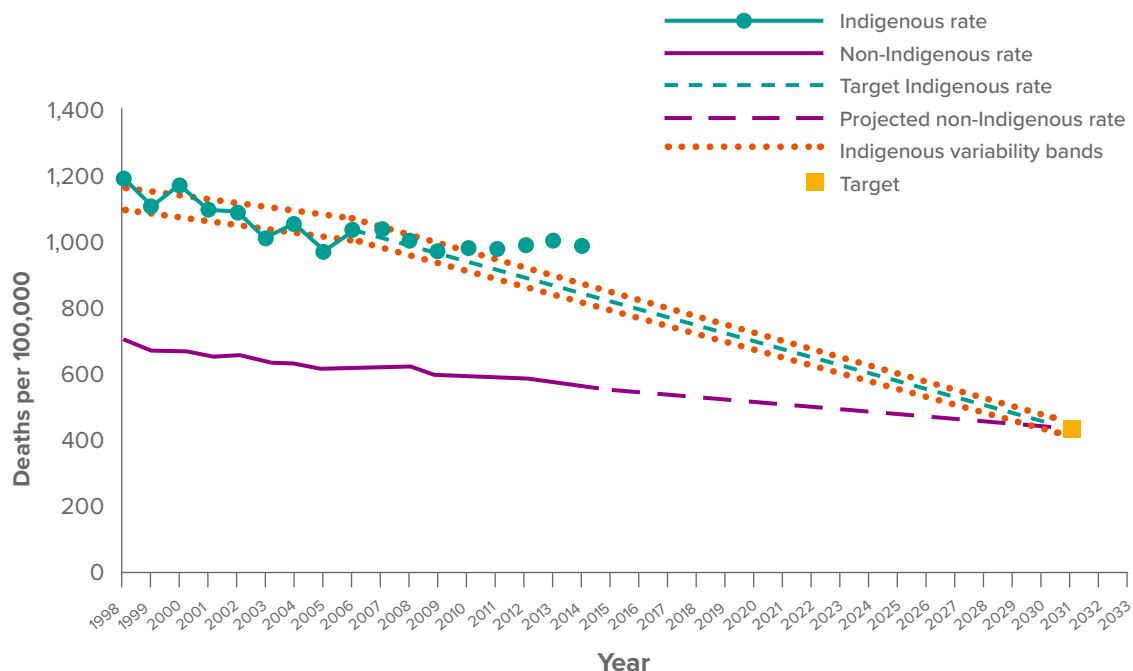
While official Indigenous life expectancy estimates are only available every five years, we track progress for this target annually using mortality rates.

From 1998 to 2014, the overall Indigenous mortality rate has declined significantly (by 16 per cent) and there has been a significant decline in the gap (of 13 per cent).<sup>29</sup> Figure 11 shows that the Indigenous mortality rate in 2014 is above the required trajectory to meet the target.

<sup>28</sup> Only limited data is available on life expectancy by remoteness area. Indigenous life expectancy was slightly higher in cities and inner regional areas combined compared with outer regional and remote areas combined (0.7 years higher for males and 0.8 years higher for females). Indigenous Australians in remote areas have higher rates of diabetes and end stage kidney disease than those living in urban and regional areas.

<sup>29</sup> However, no significant change was detected between the 2006 baseline and 2014.

FIGURE 11: Overall mortality rates by Indigenous status: NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT combined 1998-2031



Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database

Health outcomes at a population level generally do not improve within short or medium timeframes. There is a time lag between interventions and improvements in outcomes. While it is undeniable that progress needs to be faster, there have been long-term, gradual improvements in health outcomes.

Over the long-term, improvements in health care access and reductions in smoking are expected to have a positive impact. From 2002 to 2012-13, there has been a 7 percentage point decline in smoking rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over (from 51 per cent to 44 per cent). Over the same period, for those who continue to smoke, there has also been a decline in the average number of cigarettes smoked daily. Despite these improvements, in 2012-13 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over were still 2.5 times as likely to be a current smoker as non-Indigenous Australians.

Chronic disease accounts for around three quarters of the gap in mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Between 1998 and 2013, the Indigenous mortality rate from circulatory disease decreased by 41 per cent and the gap has narrowed. Over the same period there was also a significant decline in the Indigenous mortality rate from respiratory disease (by 27 per cent). Between 2006 and 2013 there was a significant decline in the Indigenous kidney disease mortality rate (by 38 per cent).

However, cancer mortality rates are rising and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians dying from cancer is widening. Between 2006 and 2013, there was a 10 per cent increase in cancer death rates for Indigenous patients and a 6 per cent decline for non-Indigenous Australians.

Australia remains on track to eliminate trachoma from remote Aboriginal communities by 2020. The 2014 Australian Trachoma Surveillance Report (National Trachoma Surveillance and Reporting Unit, 2015) shows the overall prevalence of active trachoma in screened five to nine-year-olds decreased from 14 per cent in 2009 to 4.7 per cent in 2014.

## BIRTHING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

In Brisbane, improving the continuity of services and making them more culturally responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families is producing encouraging results. With Australian Government funding, the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health, the Brisbane Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service and the Mater Hospital have partnered to offer a midwifery group practice model of maternity care. In its first two years 197 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women participated in the programme. Over that period:

- 76 per cent of women attended for their first antenatal visit in the first trimester of pregnancy, with 88 per cent attending for at least five visits during the antenatal period.
- Smoking rates among pregnant women decreased from 36 per cent at the first antenatal visit to 24 per cent at the time of discharge from the Birthing in Our Communities programme.
- Only 17 per cent of women required delivery by caesarean (compared to 32 per cent nationally).
- Rates of both preterm birth and low birth weight were as low as 6 per cent, around half the national rates of both measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies, with only 7 per cent of infants requiring admission to the neonatal nursery.
- At the time of discharge from the Birthing in Our Communities programme, 81 per cent of women were exclusively breastfeeding.

Looking beyond mortality rates, biomedical samples were collected for the first time as part of the 2012-13 Health Survey (ABS, 2014)<sup>30</sup>. This biomedical data provides clinical measures of disease in addition to the data usually collected on self-reported conditions. Based on this data, 11 per cent of Indigenous adults had diabetes, which was three times the non-Indigenous rate. The survey also tested for signs of kidney disease, with 18 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people showing signs of kidney problems. Almost 90 per cent of those showing signs of kidney disease did not

<sup>30</sup> Indigenous and non-Indigenous study participants voluntarily contributed blood and urine samples as part of the survey.

have a diagnosed condition. Kidney disease if left untreated can result in kidney failure, or end stage kidney disease requiring regular dialysis treatment. Rates of Indigenous Australians commencing treatment for end stage kidney disease are much higher in remote areas (over four times as high) compared with rates in major cities.



Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

To meet the life expectancy target, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy must increase at a faster rate than the general population. There is a long lead time before changes in the health system and in people's lives start to impact on life expectancy. The Australian and state and territory governments and Aboriginal community controlled health services all play a role in the delivery of prevention, primary care and acute care services.

Collaboration across governments, the health sector and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people underpins the *Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023*. Recognising the centrality of culture in the health of Indigenous Australians, the Implementation Plan has a strong focus on prevention as well as supporting local and regional responses to identified needs.

Collaboration was key in developing the Implementation Plan. Indigenous leaders from the health sector, who make up the National

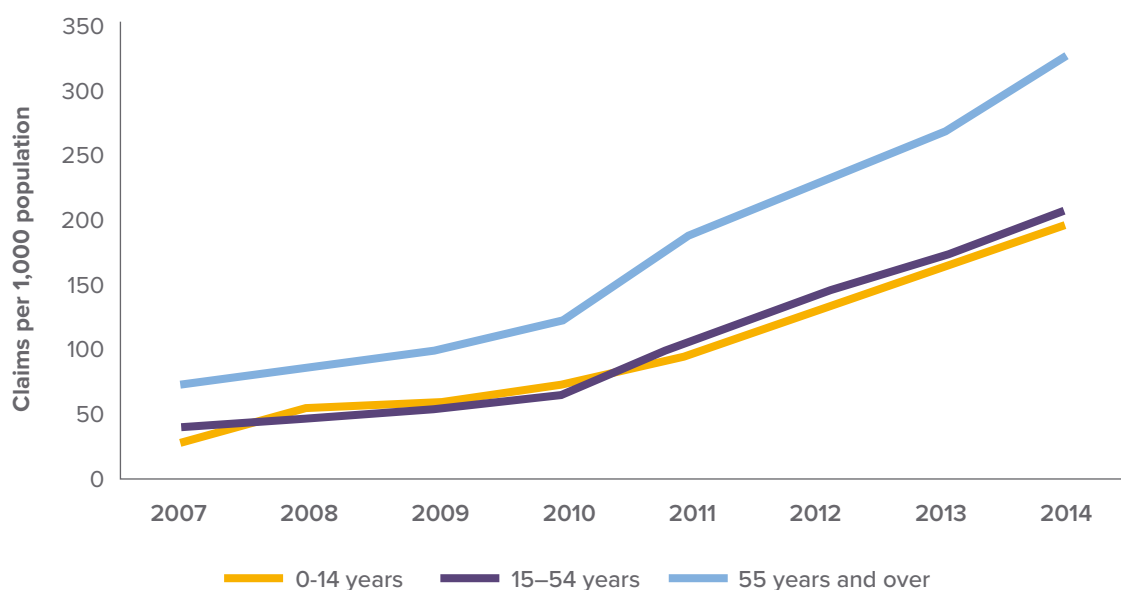
Health Leadership Forum (NHLF), partnered with the Australian Government to inform the development. They will continue to monitor and review the implementation of actions, ensuring ongoing involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

To maintain efforts to improve health outcomes, including chronic disease prevention and management, the Australian Government funds Indigenous-specific and mainstream programmes including:

- \$3.3 billion over four years from 2015-16 for primary health care and supporting infrastructure through the *Indigenous Australians' Health Programme* – an increase of over \$500 million compared to the previous four years. This includes \$94 million for expanded maternal and child health programmes and \$116 million for a targeted *Tackling Indigenous Smoking* programme.
- \$85 million over three years from July 2016 to improve access to culturally sensitive, integrated mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, commissioned at the local level by Primary Health Networks (PHNs), with the close involvement of Aboriginal community controlled health services.

- \$241 million over four years from July 2016 for local alcohol and drug treatment services in response to the National Ice Taskforce's Final Report, including a substantial investment in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services through PHNs, with the close involvement of Aboriginal community controlled health services.
- *Medicare Benefits Schedule* – between July 2009 and June 2014, Indigenous health assessment rates for 0 to 14-year-olds increased by 184 per cent; 15 to 54-year-olds increased by 204 per cent; 55 and over increased by 156 per cent (Figure 12). In the same period, GP management plans and team care agreements claimed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have doubled. Rates are now higher for these services for Indigenous Australians than non-Indigenous Australians.
- *Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme* – between 1 July 2010 and 30 June 2015, more than 345,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have received assistance with the cost of medicines for chronic disease.

FIGURE 12: Rate per 1,000 persons receiving Medicare Benefits Schedule Health Assessments, by age group, Indigenous Australians, 2006-07 to 2013-14



Source: AIHW analysis of Medicare Australia data



Dr Nadeem Siddiqui, Executive Director, Clinical Services treating Greg Hazel at the Winnunga Nimmitjiah (Strong Health) Aboriginal Health Service, Australian Capital Territory.

**Episodes of care delivered by Australian Government funded Indigenous primary health care organisations increased from 1.2 million in 1999-2000 to 3.1 million in 2012-13, partly reflecting expansion in the sector.**

### Health workforce

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is integral to ensuring the health system addresses the needs of Indigenous Australians. They can improve patient care, access to services and ensure culturally appropriate services. There has been an increase in the proportion of the Indigenous population employed in health-related occupations from 1 per cent of the Indigenous population in 1996 to 1.6 per cent in 2011. However, this is still below the proportion of the non-Indigenous population employed in health-related occupations (3.4 per cent).

The *Greater Northern Australian Regional Training Network* aims to improve the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait health workforce:

- *Aboriginal Health Worker/Practitioners Training Pathway* model enhances clinical training and placement capacity for Aboriginal Health Workers in rural and remote Aboriginal community controlled health services.
- *Northern Australia Indigenous Health Workforce Network* identifies clinical placement capacity within Aboriginal health and develops the Indigenous health workforce.

## WIRADJURI WOMAN EKALA FRENCH IS WORKING HARD TO CLOSE THE HEALTH GAP

Ekala, a Wiradjuri woman from central New South Wales, is an Aboriginal Health Worker with the Orange Aboriginal Medical Service. After finishing high school Ekala began a traineeship, working to address the health issues affecting Aboriginal people in the Orange region. This included working on a population health approach in the area to address the health of the whole community rather than just the individual. "By looking at the health issues facing a community, we can better identify the gaps in the services offered and how we can improve our services, particularly in primary health prevention," Ekala said.

Ekala is already planning the next step of her career in Indigenous health, "I have a passion about Aboriginal health and I'm looking to become a nurse. Health workers are important to a community's wellbeing but as a nurse I'll have a greater opportunity to work with my community and offer services health workers can't provide."



Wiradjuri woman Ekala French is passionate about improving Indigenous health.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience higher rates of mental health issues than other Australians and as part of its response to *Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities – Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services*, the Government is providing \$85 million over three years, from 1 July 2016, to improve access to culturally sensitive, integrated mental health services.

Under this initiative, Primary Health Networks will plan, commission and implement services joining up closely related services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, suicide prevention and alcohol and other drug treatment. Primary Health Networks in each region will lead the reform work, and collaborate closely with relevant local Indigenous and mainstream primary health care organisations, including Aboriginal community controlled health services and peak bodies.

In 2015-16 more than \$38 million under the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Community Safety and Wellbeing Programme* is being invested in programmes aimed at boosting the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their capacity to respond to stressors in their lives. Services include counselling, case management and healing activities. Seven *Link-Up* services across Australia offer emotional support to members of the Stolen Generations as they access personal and family records and arrange family reunions.

## PREVENTING YOUTH SUICIDE

Around Australia, Indigenous youth and young adult suicide is high: from 2008–2012, the suicide rate for Indigenous Australians was almost twice that of non-Indigenous Australians. Of particular concern is the rate for Indigenous males aged 20-24 years.

But psychologist Tanja Hirvonen believes there is hope. An Aboriginal woman who grew up in Mount Isa, Tanja is one of 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists who are members of the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA).

She says the number of people lost to suicide is devastating.

“There is immeasurable loss which extends across our immediate and extended families, kinship networks and peer groups, communities and states.

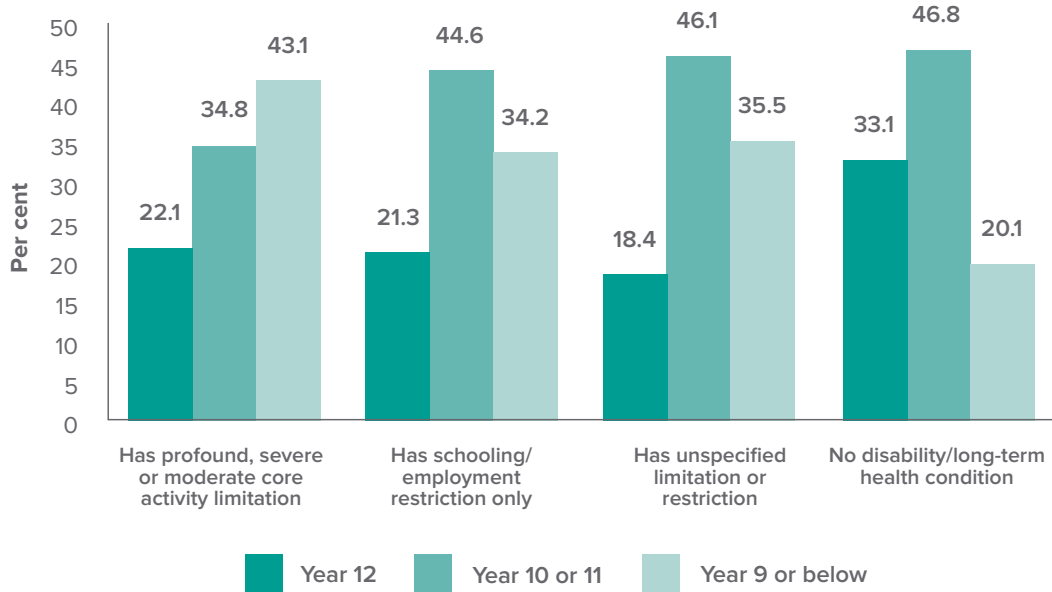
“Suicide is a complex issue and there’s no one specific reason why someone might end their life. What we do know though is that chronic life stressors such as poverty, lack of education, high levels of substance use and unemployment, which leads to elevated levels of psychological distress, are reported factors for increasing risks for suicide. As are issues like trauma and ongoing grief, and increased incarceration rates, along with loss of cultural identity,” she said.

But Tanja is optimistic about the early intervention and prevention programmes being developed and run by professionals and community members. “Evidence shows community-led solutions are the most effective. Cultural connections are known to be a key protective factor for robust social and emotional wellbeing. Connections to land, sea, country, family, community and spirituality are key. We need to work together nationally on this but each community will have its own response that will work best for them.”

## DISABILITY

There is a clear relationship between education, employment and disability. Indigenous adults with a profound, severe or moderate core activity limitation were less likely to have completed Year 12 compared to those without a disability (22 per cent compared with 33 per cent) (Figure 13).

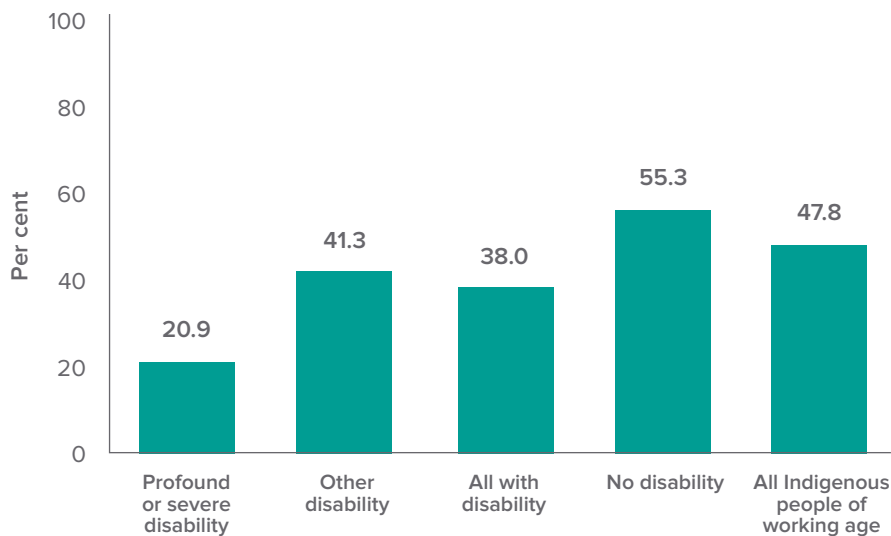
FIGURE 13: School attainment of Indigenous adults (18+) population, by disability status, 2012-13 (per cent)



Source: ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2012-13

Disability has a large impact on Indigenous employment. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of workforce age without a disability were employed in 2012-13 (55.3 per cent). In contrast only 38 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability were employed (Figure 14).

FIGURE 14: Indigenous working age (15-64 years) employment rates by disability status, 2012-13, (per cent)



Source: ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS component) 2012-13



National NAIDOC Sportsperson of the Year award winner and wheelchair basketballer player Ryan Morich.

## WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALLER RYAN MORICH

Ryan Morich is a Noongar man from Western Australia, currently on a wheelchair basketball scholarship at the University of Alabama. He is the first Aboriginal person with disability to take up a sports scholarship in the USA.

In his first year, he made the Intercollegiate All-Rookie Team. In 2013, Ryan represented Australia at the Under 23 World Championships, where he led the team to a bronze medal win. He is currently a member of the Australian Rollers senior team. Ryan is captain of the Red Dust Heelers – a wheelchair basketball team with a strong focus on fostering future Aboriginal athletes with disability.

Ryan is partnered with the Wheeling and Healing Program, which helps people deal with negative feelings arising from their disability. He helps others by sharing his story on cancer, limb loss and losing loved ones to cancer. His goal is to represent his country at the Paralympic games and to further opportunities for young people with disability.

The *National Disability Strategy* provides a 10 year policy framework (2010 to 2020) to improve the lives of people with disability. The Strategy aims to improve the accessibility of mainstream services for people with disability and will complement existing specialist disability services and programmes. The introduction of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS) represents a significant action under the Strategy to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access support across the lifespan:

- *School Leaver Employment Supports* project – aims to improve the pathway for young people with a disability from school to work through the collaborative effort of schools and Government employment services (in Tasmania and the ACT).

- *Shared Support Plan* project – explores the concept of integrating education and NDIS plans, focusing on opening communication pathways to ensure therapy strategies can be shared (in Barwon in Victoria).
- In the Barkly region of the Northern Territory, people with disability are receiving support including new equipment as part of a new community approach that builds local capacity through partnerships and is focused on developing solutions to the challenges of building the NDIS in remote and very remote areas.

Strategies are also in place to support people with disability into employment:

- *Disability Employment Service* – helping people with disability, injury or a health condition get ready to look for a job, find a job and keep a job. Four providers deliver specialist services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from 21 sites in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. There is also financial assistance available for employers for workplace modifications, equipment and services.
- *Supported Wage System* – supports people whose work productivity is significantly reduced as a result of their disability.

## VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The *Indigenous Veterans' Strategy 2015-2020* supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans and ex-serving personnel, and their families, to access repatriation benefits and entitlements. It sets out steps to develop and improve services within Indigenous communities. To improve its remote service delivery, the Department of Veterans' Affairs delivers services via state and territory offices in partnership with government and non-government agencies.



## CHAPTER SIX: SAFE, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Strong, safe and functioning communities can support people and provide them with a sense of connection and belonging. Connectedness to country, resilience, leadership, having a role in family and society and feeling safe are all important aspects of functioning communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AHMAC, 2015).

Safe and functional housing with utilities such as electricity and running water, and infrastructure like community facilities, roads and transport also support safe communities.



Vicki Rigney at the launch of the Community Bush Garden in Adelaide.

## WHAT WE KNOW

Compared with other Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience disproportionately high levels of violence, substance misuse and incarceration.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women are more likely to be hospitalised for family-related assault than non-Indigenous Australians, 28 times more likely for men and 34 times more likely for women. Rates of hospitalisation for assault are highest in remote and very remote areas. Indigenous children are much more likely to experience child abuse and neglect (SCRGSP, 2014). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also experience high rates of suicide, self-harm and poor mental health. These problems are complex and intergenerational, and include socio-economic factors such as poor education and low employment, as well as trauma, grief and loss resulting from past government policies and practices.

These factors contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being over-represented in the criminal justice system – in 2015 there were 9,885 prisoners who identified as Indigenous, representing 27 per cent of total prisoners (ABS, 2015a). Between 2000 and 2015, the imprisonment rate for Indigenous adults increased by 77.4 per cent. Rates of re-offending are high and around half of Indigenous Australians in prison are there for violent offences.

Primary responsibility for criminal justice rests with the state and territory governments, which deliver a range of programmes to reduce incarceration and re-offending. The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to ensure its investment complements their efforts and leads to real improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives.

## KEY POINTS:

- The Government is addressing immediate issues such as violence and substance misuse at the same time working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build strong, resilient communities.
- Policies and services focus on keeping women and children safe, crime prevention, reducing incarceration rates, access to nutritious food and safe housing.

- Under the *National Ice Action Strategy* specialist drug and alcohol treatment services including Indigenous-specific treatment services and culturally appropriate mainstream services will be provided.

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS

Creating safe, healthy communities requires a multi-faceted approach. The real and immediate issues of violence and substance misuse are priorities. At the same time, it is important to create opportunities for education and employment, and support the strength, leadership and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Australian Government has committed to continuing its long-term investment in the Northern Territory through a new National Partnership Agreement on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. This new agreement, which is being negotiated with the Northern Territory Government, is an investment of more than \$988 million over seven years.

All governments are working together on the priority areas of alcohol misuse, improving policing and reducing Indigenous Australians' contact with the criminal justice system.

The Australian Government is working with 360 organisations across the country to improve community safety as part of the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Safety and Wellbeing Programme*. This includes:

- reducing substance misuse and harm through the delivery of alcohol and other drug treatment services
- crime prevention, diversion and rehabilitation through the delivery of prisoner rehabilitation and other justice-related activities
- violence reduction and victim support through the provision of legal services and family safety activities, particularly for women and children
- improved wellbeing and resilience activities to foster social participation or reduce antisocial behaviour through social and emotional wellbeing counselling activities
- creating safe and functional environments through community night patrols.



Verna Peters and her colleague Albie (Mingkili) Wilson check their vehicle before the start of a night patrol shift.

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## ON PATROL WITH VERNA PETERS IN THE APY LANDS

Verna Peters is a well-known and trusted member of the Pipalyatjara community on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the north west of South Australia.

Verna's described as a person 'who looks after everyone'. So it's no surprise that on 2 November 2015, she was the first woman to become a senior Community Night Patroller for the first night patrol operation in the APY Lands. Patrols in five other communities – Amata, Ernabella, Fregon, Indulkana and Mimili have followed and in Amata, Indulkana and Pukatja women patrollers and team leaders are also helping make their communities safe.

Verna's day job is as an Aboriginal education worker at the local preschool. When the sun goes down, she can be found working with other local Anangu people to make her community safer. This can include calming potentially violent situations, offering culturally sensitive assistance and providing transportation for either victims or perpetrators to a safe place.

Patrols have a role to play ensuring that children are at home or in another safe location at night with a parent or carer, so that they are able to go to school every day. As well as making communities safer Community Night Patrols create jobs. In 2014-15, 96 per cent of the 339 patrollers and team leaders delivering services on the ground identified as Aboriginal. In 2015-16, \$28.6 million is available for Community Night Patrols across the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

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## Reducing substance misuse and harm

The Government is addressing substance misuse to ensure communities are safe and healthy, and break the cycle of disadvantage. This includes restricting access to harmful substances, minimising harm, and providing rehabilitation and treatment services:

- *Indigenous alcohol and other drug treatment services* – support services such as residential rehabilitation, counselling, referral, transitional aftercare and sobering up shelters across Australia.
- *National Ice Action Strategy* – almost \$300 million over four years including \$241 million for specialist drug and alcohol treatment services administered through 31 Primary Health Networks including Indigenous-specific treatment services and culturally appropriate mainstream services. The Government will also work with sporting clubs in Indigenous communities, including 20 remote communities, to spread prevention messages. The National Drug Strategy Household Survey results show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 1.6 times more likely to use methamphetamine than non-Indigenous Australians (AIHW, 2014).
- *Low aromatic fuel* – to reduce petrol sniffing in areas where it is a problem. In 2015, low aromatic fuel was extended to the Katherine region in the Northern Territory and the western side of Cape York in Queensland, bringing the number of sites in remote and regional Australia with low aromatic fuel to over 150. Research shows that sniffing levels have been reduced by 89 per cent in areas that have a comprehensive rollout compared with 2005-07 baseline levels (AHMAC, 2015).

## Crime prevention, diversion and rehabilitation

The best way to reduce the number of Indigenous people in incarceration is by reducing offending. Preventing young Indigenous people going to prison in the first place and creating opportunities for people to move into employment when they exit the criminal justice system, is critical to reduce reoffending. This is achieved by providing education and employment opportunities and tackling alcohol and other substance misuse.

Programmes to address the factors which contribute to high rates of Indigenous incarceration include services to reduce recidivism, rehabilitation, intensive case management and community-based mediation services in remote communities. In 2014-15 the Australian Government funded nine prisoner throughcare services that provided intensive, individualised case management for more than 1,100 prisoners, including over 750 released from prison. Of these, 179 released prisoners went on to reoffend and return to prison in 2014-15.

## Protecting Women and Children

Keeping women and children safe is a priority for all governments. Australian Government strategies include:

- *Women's Safety Package* – to improve frontline support and services, leverage innovative technologies to keep women safe, and provide education resources to help change community attitudes to violence and abuse. The \$100 million package includes \$21 million specifically targeted to Indigenous families for policing and support services.
- *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* – reflects the long-term commitment of the Australian, state and territory governments and the non-government sector to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children. One of its priorities is to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people needing child protection services.
- *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* – focuses on the two main types of violent crimes that have a major impact on women in Australia—domestic and family violence and sexual assault. It acknowledges some Indigenous communities



The Community Safety Patrol is delivered by the Tiwi Islands Regional Council in three communities across the Tiwi Islands. Team Leader, Jane Puatjimi, Illucia Kantilla and Rhonda Kerinaiaua are members of the Wurrumiyanga Community Safety Patrol on Bathurst Island.

need extra assistance to address particular factors and disadvantage which contribute to the higher rates of family violence among Indigenous Australians.

## Community policing

State and territory governments face unique challenges in delivering effective police services to remote Indigenous communities. The Australian Government has made significant funding contributions to building new police stations and supporting infrastructure in remote communities. Two new police stations in Arlparra and Yuendumu in the Northern Territory were built last year, with another station to be built in Wadeye.

## POLICING IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments are jointly funding Community Engagement Police Officers (CEPOs). CEPOs are experienced police officers who work across the community to support crime prevention, help out in the community and build trust with the police. They work with Remote School Attendance Officers to get children to school, and deliver road safety and 'say no to drugs' messages in classrooms. They also get involved in activities like organising community clean ups, sports carnivals and helping with community emergencies like cyclones.



Jilkminggan community members (left to right) Stuart Yunupingu, Harry Albert and Matthew Conway at work building the community's new store.

## Healthy food

Nutritious food is essential for good health. In remote communities, Australian Government programmes focusing on healthy food include:

- *Community Stores Licensing Scheme* – supports good health and nutrition for children and families with access to high quality, affordable and safe food, drinks and grocery items in remote communities in the Northern Territory. Stores are encouraged to adopt pricing policies to make nutritious food more accessible and affordable by reducing price mark-ups on healthy food.
- *Outback Stores* – manages 36 stores nationally: 22 in the Northern Territory, 10 in Western Australia, three in South Australia and one in Queensland. There is a nutrition strategy in the stores to encourage and promote healthy food choices, including health promotion activities and cooking demonstrations.
- Over the past 12 months, through the *Aboriginal Benefits Account*, new stores have opened in Beswick, Bulman, Canteen Creek, Engawala, Epenarra and Peppimenarti and major upgrades completed in Jilkminggan and Pirlangimpi.

The average number of varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables available in remote Northern Territory stores in 2014 was 29, compared with only 22 in 2007 when the licensing scheme was not in place (Northern Territory Government Department of Health, 2014).

## Cashless Debit Card Trial

The Australian Government is working closely with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community leaders in Ceduna in South Australia and in Kununurra and Wyndham in Western Australia to design the trial of a cashless debit card. These communities have expressed an interest in participating, as a way to support people, families and communities where high levels of welfare dependence can co-exist with high levels of social harm.

The trial will test whether reducing the amount of discretionary cash available in a community will reduce the overall social harm caused by welfare fuelled alcohol, gambling and drug misuse. In the trial, 80 per cent of a person's income support, for those on working age payments, will be restricted so it cannot be used on alcohol, gambling or withdrawn as cash. The trial, starting in 2016, will also include community support services, such as mental health and drug and alcohol services, financial management services and other community safety initiatives.

## Housing

A safe and healthy place to live is a prerequisite for children and adults to thrive and actively participate in society. Overcrowding risks exposure to infectious disease and exacerbates chronic infections. It can also affect children's attendance and attainment at school.

Longer-term trends (2004-05 to 2012-13) show some progress is being made in overcrowding, although rates of overcrowding remain high – 23 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in overcrowded households compared with 5 per cent of other Australians (AHMAC, 2015). In remote areas, Government programmes include:

- *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH)* – \$5.5 billion over 10 years to help address significant overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages in remote Indigenous communities.
- *A new Remote Housing Strategy* – is currently being negotiated to replace the last two and a half years of NPARIH. The Strategy will improve the focus on outcomes, including Indigenous employment and participation, business engagement and making housing in remote communities more sustainable through improved property and tenancy management. The Strategy will build on the NPARIH's local employment targets in capital works and property and tenancy management.

Other initiatives to address housing affordability and homelessness include:

- *National Affordable Housing Agreement* – all governments have agreed the shared objective for all Australians to have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing. This includes improving amenities and reducing overcrowding in remote areas. In 2015-16 the Australian Government will provide state and territory governments with approximately \$1.324 billion through the *National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment (NAHSPP)*.

- *National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS)* – offers financial incentives for the construction and rental of dwellings for low and moderate income households at a rate that is at least 20 per cent below the market value rent. As at 30 April 2014, 1,876 of 42,820 residents of NRAS dwellings identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* – \$230 million over two years to 30 June 2017, to be matched by state and territory governments, to fund frontline homelessness services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are identified as a key priority to receive assistance across Australia.
- *Reconnect* – a community-based early intervention and prevention programme for young people aged 12-18 years, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families (\$23 million per year). Nationally, there are more than 100 Reconnect services, including 10 specialist services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

## HOUSES AND JOBS AT WARRUWI

The construction of new houses and housing upgrades in the Goulburn Island community of Warruwi is not only improving living conditions for local people, it also provided employment and training for local people. Under the NPARIH and *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory*, 20 Yagbani employees undertook construction work. In addition, four local community residents were employed to provide camp services and be part of the cleaning crew. These four employees obtained a Certificate II in Cleaning Operations as a result of their efforts.

## Home ownership

Buying a home should be a realistic choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families. Owning a home can create a source of financial security and independence for current and future generations. The Australian Government provides direct support for Indigenous home ownership. This includes initiatives to increase the number of home owners on remote community-titled land and the progressive resolution of land tenure administration to secure investment and home ownership opportunities.

The Australian Government also provides home loans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through Indigenous Business Australia (IBA). As at 30 November 2015, IBA had 4,547 active home loans in major cities, regional and remote areas. Under the *Remote Indigenous Home Loan Programme*, which commenced in August 2015, IBA offers specialised support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become home owners in remote locations, including on communally-titled Indigenous land. A number of loans have already commenced under this programme.

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who lived in a home owned, with or without a mortgage, by a member of their household increased from 21.5 per cent in 1994 to 27.4 per cent in 2002 and 30.1 per cent in 2012-13. (SCRGSP, 2014, p. 9.23).



Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) customers Eddie Clarke and Sophie Henry and IBA Home Loan Officer Vanessa McAndrews at their newly built home in Zuccoli, Palmerston. Eddie and Sophie had previously applied unsuccessfully for a home loan with IBA, but were successful after financial advice from IBA's loan officers.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION



Members of the Bell River Band at the Journey to Recognition event in Bourke. Photo by Wayne Quilliam.

## RECOGNISING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION

Underpinning our work in Indigenous affairs is our commitment to working towards the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution. Constitutional recognition is an opportunity for us to make a clear statement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can share in every opportunity this great country has to offer, as well as being proud of their culture and history.

Constitutional recognition is about acknowledging there was a flourishing Indigenous culture here when Europeans arrived, and it is a vital, living, breathing component of our national identity today. As a country we need to acknowledge the long and enduring history of the First Peoples, the original inhabitants of this land, while at the same time recognising theirs is a living culture, with an ongoing connection to the land and the water.

Recognition can acknowledge the past, and affirm our commitment to a future built on true reconciliation. At a meeting between the then Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and 40 important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders on 6 July 2015, a bipartisan commitment was made to progress the national conversation about constitutional recognition. This commitment included the establishment of a Referendum Council, and a significant national conversation about recognition.

On 7 December 2015 Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull with the Leader of the Opposition the Hon Bill Shorten MP, announced the establishment of a Referendum Council. The Referendum Council will lead a national discussion on constitutional recognition, including a series of Indigenous-designed and led consultations. The Council held its first meeting on 14 December 2015.

The Referendum Council comprises 16 eminent Australians who bring expertise, experience and commitment to the table. Professor Patrick Dodson and Mr Mark Leibler AC are Co-Chairs of the Referendum Council. Professor Dodson and Mr Leibler were the Co-Chairs of the former Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, and will provide consistency in this important process. The Referendum Council will

draw on the work undertaken by the Expert Panel, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Act of Recognition Review Panel and the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The other members of the Referendum Council are: Ms Pat Anderson AO; Professor Megan Davis; Mr Andrew Demetriou; Mr Murray Gleeson AC QC; Mr Mick Gooda; Ms Tanya Hosch; Professor Kristina Keneally; Ms Jane McAloon; Mr Michael Rose; Ms Natasha Stott Despoja AM; Mr Noel Pearson; Ms Amanda Vanstone; Ms Dalassa Yorkston and Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu AM.

The Referendum Council considers consultation and community engagement is paramount. The Council will ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to share their views about constitutional recognition. This will include a series of Indigenous-designed and led consultations, to give First Australians an opportunity to address this issue.



The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition attend the first meeting of the Referendum Council.

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