



7.0 Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Indigenous peoples of Australia. They are not one group, but comprise hundreds of groups that each have their own distinct set of languages, histories and cultural traditions.

There were an estimated 761,300 Indigenous Australians, or 3% of the total Australian population, in June 2017. Indigenous communities pass on knowledge, tradition, ceremony and culture from one generation to the next through language, performance, protection of significant sites, storytelling and the teachings of Elders. In 2014–15, 62% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over identified with a clan, tribal or language group, and 74% recognised an area as homelands or traditional Country.

As a group, Indigenous Australians experience widespread socioeconomic disadvantage and health inequality. This chapter examines factors affecting their wellbeing, including community safety; closing the gap in Indigenous education; income and employment; and use of disability and aged care services.

Educational achievements of Indigenous children and youth have been improving but substantial gaps remain. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is an assessment of 'school readiness' carried out in a child's first year of full-time schooling, usually at the age of 5. The AEDC results show that the gaps in child development between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children have, on average, developed even at this early age. In all three AEDC collections since 2009, Indigenous children were more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to be assessed as developmentally vulnerable. However, there has been encouraging progress: the proportion of Indigenous children assessed as vulnerable on 1 or more of the 5 assessed domains dropped from 47% in 2009 to 42% in 2015—a larger fall than for non-Indigenous children over this period.

Of the three education-related Closing the Gap targets for which trend data are available, only one is on track—the target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020.

The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians continues into working age. Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 are less likely to be in the labour force than non-Indigenous Australians, on average earn less, and are more likely to receive a government pension or allowance as their main source of income. However, the proportion of Indigenous adults with incomes in the bottom 20% of equivalised gross weekly household incomes has decreased over the past decade.

