

## CHAPTER 10

## TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS

### INTRODUCTION

Few health data sets currently identify Torres Strait Islanders separately from Aboriginal people reliably enough to allow useful reporting on the Torres Strait Islander population to occur. Previous editions of this report have drawn upon health data with a specific Torres Strait Islander focus (ABS 1997c; McDermott et al. 1998) to go some way toward illustrating the health status of the Torres Strait Islander population. Through national surveys, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) continues to work toward providing reliable estimates of the health, welfare and social characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples using extended Indigenous sampling design (Chapter 11). For example, the 2002 Indigenous Social Survey (ISS) included an extended sample to support estimating of both the Torres Strait region as well as for the Torres Strait Islander population. A similar extended sample is proposed for the 2004–05 Indigenous Health Survey.

At present there are limited national health and welfare data on Torres Strait Islander peoples, and issues of Indigenous identification within administrative health data sets are currently being pursued and collection improvements implemented. The information in this Chapter is predominantly based on the 2001 Census of Population and Housing, the ABS vital statistics collection (births and deaths), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) National Hospital Morbidity Database (NHMD) and the AIHW National Perinatal Statistics data collection. This information can be used to provide some context for the health and welfare status of Torres Strait Islanders, as new ABS survey and improved administrative data become available in the coming years.

Results from the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey indicate that Torres Strait Islanders living on the mainland had a similar view of their health status to that of the total Australian Indigenous population. However, Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area reported a differing prevalence of health conditions and illnesses (ABS 1997c). Where possible, this Chapter presents comparisons between all persons of Torres Strait Islander origin living in the Torres Strait and those living on the Australian mainland. Comparisons are also made with Aboriginal, non-Indigenous and total Australian populations.

The 1996 Census of Population and Housing was the first Census in which people were able to indicate if they were of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. In the 1991 Census and earlier, Indigenous respondents were asked to identify as being of either Aboriginal origin, or of Torres Strait Islander origin. Due to this change, comparisons with previous Censuses should be made with care. People who identified in 1991 as Aboriginal or as Torres Strait Islander may, in 1996 or 2001 Census, have identified as being of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

INTRODUCTION *continued*

In this Chapter, any person who indicated they were of Torres Strait Islander origin is included within 'all persons of Torres Strait Islander origin' (i.e. this group includes persons who identified as being either of Torres Strait Islander origin or of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin).

DEMOGRAPHY

Census counts In the 2001 Census, 43,574 people identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin, accounting for 0.2% of the total Australian population. This number includes 17,528 people who identified as being of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (0.1% of the total Australian population). Torres Strait Islanders who additionally identify as being of Aboriginal origin account for 40% of all Torres Strait Islanders. Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait Area accounted for around one in four (24%) of all Torres Strait Islanders who usually live in Queensland and around 14% of all Torres Strait Islanders living in Australia.

In 2001 the Torres Strait Islander population had a younger age distribution than the total Australian population. Of Torres Strait Islanders, 73% were under 35 years of age compared to 49% of the total Australian population. The age distribution of Torres Strait Islanders was almost identical to that of the Aboriginal population (table 10.1).

10.1 AGE DISTRIBUTION — 2001

	Units	Torres Strait area		Rest of Australia			All Australia
		All Torres Strait Islanders	Torres Strait Islanders	All Torres Strait Islanders	Torres Strait Islanders	Aboriginal	
Age group (years)							
0-14	%	40	40	40	39	20	21
15-34	%	31	33	33	34	28	28
35-54	%	20	19	19	20	29	29
55 and over	%	9	8	8	7	22	22
Total	%	100	100	100	100	100	100
Population	no.	6 000	37 574	43 574	366 429	17 591 489	18 769 249

(a) Includes persons for whom Indigenous status was not stated.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Estimated Indigenous resident population To arrive at an estimate of the size of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population using the Census count (on a usual residence basis), allowance is made for net undercount, and for instances in which Indigenous status is unknown. In addition, population estimates for dates other than the Census date also take account of births, deaths and migration in the intervening period. The final experimental Indigenous estimated resident population (ERP) for all persons of Torres Strait Islander origin at 30 June 2001 was 48,800, 10.6% of the total Indigenous population. Based on the experimental Indigenous ERP figures, 59% of all Torres Strait Islanders lived in Queensland, with the remainder spread across Australia (table 10.2).

#### 10.2 EXPERIMENTAL INDIGENOUS ERP(a) BY STATE WITH PROPORTION OF ALL PERSONS OF TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORIGIN — 2001

	Torres Strait Islander	Both Torres Strait Islander & Aboriginal	All Torres Strait Islanders	All Torres Strait Islanders	Aboriginal	Non-Indigenous	Total
	no.	no.	no.	%	no.	no.	no.
New South Wales	4 770	3 887	7 679	17.7	126 231	6 440 329	6 575 217
Victoria	1 913	1 147	2 780	6.3	24 786	4 776 880	4 804 726
Queensland	18 525	10 105	25 440	58.7	97 280	3 503 036	3 628 946
South Australia	837	575	1 344	2.9	24 132	1 486 184	1 511 728
Western Australia	962	1 492	2 200	5.0	63 477	1 835 228	1 901 159
Tasmania	1 375	986	2 179	4.8	15 023	454 411	471 795
Northern Territory	679	1 239	1 661	3.9	54 957	140 893	197 768
Australian Capital Territory	164	121	277	0.6	3 624	315 408	319 317
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>29 239</b>	<b>19 552</b>	<b>43 574</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>409 729</b>	<b>18 954 720</b>	<b>19 413 240</b>

(a) Experimental Indigenous Estimated Resident Population, final rebased figures at 30 June 2001.

(b) Includes Other Territories.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

**Births** As mentioned above, the majority of Torres Strait Islanders live in Queensland. The following information relates to all births registered as Torres Strait Islander (or 'both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander') irrespective of the jurisdiction in which these births were registered.

The standard ABS Indigenous status question was included on Queensland birth registration forms from 1996, however meaningful data on Torres Strait Islander births have only been available since 1999. While the coverage of Indigenous births (including Torres Strait Islander births) is considered to be incomplete, it is estimated to range between 90% and 95% for the period 1999–2001 (ABS 2002g). It is important to note that coverage ratios for birth and death data are calculated for the total Indigenous population only and it is assumed they are the same for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Compounding the coverage issues, a large number of births each year are coded as 'Indigenous' with no distinction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Given these issues with coverage, any examination of 2001 births data for Torres Strait Islanders is indicative only and should be regarded with caution.

Births *continued* Between 1999 and 2001, the number of births registered as Torres Strait Islander (including 'both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander') in Australia represented over 10% of the total registered Indigenous births. In Queensland in 2001, births registered as Torres Strait Islander represented 27% of the total Indigenous births and 2% of all registered births (table 10.3).

### 10.3 REGISTERED BIRTHS — 1999–2001

	Torres Strait Islander births(a)	Total Indigenous births	Torres Strait Islander as a percentage of total Indigenous births	Total births	Torres Strait Islander as a percentage of total births
	no.	no.	%	no.	%
<b>1999</b>					
Queensland	781	2 974	26.3	46 503	1.7
Australia — remainder	290	7 606	3.8	202 367	0.1
Australia(b)	1 071	10 580	10.1	248 870	0.4
<b>2000</b>					
Queensland	840	3 172	26.5	47 278	1.8
Australia — remainder	285	7 723	3.7	202 358	0.1
Australia(b)	1 125	10 895	10.3	249 636	0.5
<b>2001</b>					
Queensland	909	3 337	27.2	47 678	1.9
Australia — remainder	371	8 068	4.6	198 716	0.2
Australia(b)	1 280	11 405	11.2	246 394	0.5

(a) Includes 'Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'.

(b) Includes Other Territories.

Source: ABS 2002b, ABS data available on request, Births Registrations Database.

Despite the coverage issues and caution referred to above, 2001 births data still provide information on Torres Strait Islander births in comparison with total Indigenous births and all births. A greater proportion of Torres Strait Islander births were registered as nuptial than total Indigenous births. In addition, a greater proportion of Torres Strait Islander births were to parents who were both Indigenous compared to total Indigenous births.

In 2001, the median age of mothers who identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin only was 25.3 years, higher than that of total Indigenous mothers whose median age was 24.8 years. The median age of fathers of children born to all Torres Strait Islander mothers was 28.1 years, higher than the 27.8 years median age of fathers of children born to all Indigenous mothers (table 10.4).

10.4 REGISTERED BIRTHS(a) — 2001

	Unit	Torres Strait Islander births	Both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal births	All Indigenous births	Births to Torres Strait Islander mothers	Births to mothers who are both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal	Births to all Indigenous mothers	All births
Total births	no.	702	578	11 405	559	265	8 334	246 394
Nuptial births	%	25.1	20.8	18.8	20.2	19.2	14.3	69.3
Ex-nuptial births	%	74.9	79.2	81.2	79.8	80.8	85.7	30.7
Paternity-acknowledged	%	57.7	72.7	65.0	58.1	66.4	63.5	27.0
Paternity-not-acknowledged	%	17.2	6.6	16.2	21.6	14.3	22.2	3.7
Both parents Indigenous	%	52.7	69.0	30.7	..	..	..	..
Mother only(b)	%	23.5	15.9	42.3	..	..	..	..
Father only(c)	%	23.8	15.1	26.9	..	..	..	..
Age of mother (years)								
19 and under	no.	105	120	2 251	86	57	1 755	11 704
20–24	no.	216	193	3 434	185	82	2 513	37 208
25–29	no.	189	127	3 006	142	58	2 159	73 711
30–34	no.	123	101	1 883	96	47	1 335	79 784
35–39	no.	57	29	695	40	15	483	36 733
40 and over	no.	12	7	129	10	5	83	7 102
Not stated	no.	—	—	7	—	—	6	152
Total confinements	no.	689	569	11 269	547	261	8 231	242 340
Median age of mother	years	25.7	23.9	25.0	25.3	24.4	24.8	30.0
Median age of father	years	28.5	27.3	27.9	28.1	28.1	27.8	32.3

(a) 2001 coverage of Indigenous births in Australia has been estimated at 111% on 1991 Census-based projections and 95% on 1996 Census-based projections. See ABS 2001b, table 10.9.

(b) Includes paternity-not-acknowledged and origin of father not stated.

(c) Includes origin of mother not stated (9%).

Source: ABS 2002b, ABS data available on request, Births Registration Database.

**Babies** Low birthweight babies are less common for Torres Strait Islander mothers than for Aboriginal mothers. The latest information available from the AIHW National Perinatal Data Collection on the health of Torres Strait Islander mothers and their babies is for 2000.

There were 583 babies by 575 mothers attributed to Torres Strait Islanders representing 0.2% of all reported births in Australia in 2000. Of these babies, 68 were born low birthweight (less than 2,500 grams at birth), accounting for 11.7% of all 583 babies. The proportion of low birthweight of Torres Strait Islanders is higher than that (6.6%) of non-Indigenous mothers in Australia; but lower than that (13.7%) of Aboriginal mothers. Within these low birthweight babies, about 29.4% (20) were born very low birthweight (less than 1,500 grams at birth). This proportion is higher than that of both non-Indigenous mothers (22.1%) and Aboriginal mothers (23.8%).

*Babies continued* The perinatal death rate was 13.7 per 1,000 Torres Strait Islander births, lower than that of Aboriginal births (28.7 per 1,000 Aboriginal births) but higher than that of non-Indigenous births (9.6 per 1,000 births) in 2000. Low birthweight was one of the contributing factors for perinatal deaths. In 2000 all of perinatal deaths (8) of babies born to Torres Strait Islander mothers were born low birthweight, and seven of them were born very low birthweight.

*Deaths* As for births above, while the majority of Torres Strait Islanders live in Queensland, the following information relates to all deaths registered as Torres Strait Islander (or 'both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander') irrespective of the jurisdiction in which these deaths were registered.

While the standard ABS Indigenous status question was included in deaths registration forms for Queensland from 1996, meaningful deaths data on Torres Strait Islanders for Queensland (and therefore nationally) have only become available since 2001. Indigenous deaths (including Torres Strait Islander deaths) are considered to be under-enumerated. Estimated coverage of Indigenous deaths varies across states and territories, however, nationally in 2001, coverage was estimated at 55% based on 1996 Census-based projections and 85% based on 1991 Census-based projections (see ABS 1998a). Given issues with coverage, any examination of 2001 deaths data for Torres Strait Islanders is indicative only and should be regarded with caution.

While calculated from relatively small numbers for only one year, 2001 data suggest that the median ages of death for both Torres Strait Islander males and females were considerably higher than those of total Indigenous males and females. This is particularly true for males (table 10.5).

#### 10.5 TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER MEDIAN AGE AT DEATH — 2001

	<i>Deaths</i>			<i>Median age at death</i>		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>
	<i>no.</i>	<i>no.</i>	<i>no.</i>	<i>years</i>	<i>years</i>	<i>years</i>
Torres Strait Islanders	77	49	126	59.3	60.2	59.5
Torres Strait Islanders and 'Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders'	28	12	40	57.5	56.8	57.0
Aboriginal Indigenous	1 113	784	1 897	51.6	57.6	53.8
Total Indigenous	1 213	845	2 063	52.0	57.6	54.2
<b>Total Australian population</b>	<b>66 835</b>	<b>61 709</b>	<b>128 544</b>	<b>75.5</b>	<b>81.8</b>	<b>78.5</b>

Source: ABS 2002c, ABS data available on request, Deaths Registration Database.

Deaths *continued*

Examination of deaths by broad age groups shows that for 2001, the age profile for Torres Strait Islanders deaths was different from that of the total Indigenous population. Torres Strait Islanders recorded a greater proportion of total deaths in the younger (less than 1 year to 14 years) and older (55 years and over) age groups and a smaller proportion of total deaths in the middle age groups (15–34 years and 35–54 years) when compared to the total Indigenous population (table 10.6).

#### 10.6 TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DEATHS BY AGE GROUP

Age group (years)	Torres Strait Islander(a)	Proportion of total Torres Strait Islander deaths	Total Indigenous	Proportion of total Indigenous deaths
	no.	%	no.	%
MALES				
0–14	13	12.4	102	8.4
15–34	17	16.2	203	16.6
35–54	17	16.2	354	29.1
55 and over	58	55.2	559	45.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1 218</b>	<b>100.0</b>
FEMALES				
0–14	9	14.8	69	8.2
15–34	5	8.2	90	10.7
35–54	14	22.9	234	27.7
55 and over	33	54.1	452	53.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>845</b>	<b>100.0</b>
PERSONS				
0–14	22	13.2	171	8.3
15–34	22	13.2	293	14.2
35–54	31	18.6	588	28.5
55 and over	91	54.9	1 011	49.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2 063</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Includes 'Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'.

Source: ABS 2002c, ABS data available on request, Deaths Registrations Database.

An examination of 2001 deaths by underlying cause (in major ICD-10 groupings) indicate that death patterns by causes for Torres Strait Islanders are very similar to those for the total Indigenous population (table 10.7).

## 10.7 CAUSES OF DEATH — 2001

	Torres Strait Islanders(a)	Proportion of total deaths	Total Indigenous	Proportion of total deaths
	no.	%	no.	%
Malignant neoplasms (C00–C97)	30	18.1	329	15.9
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00–E90)	14	8.4	173	8.3
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00–I99)	48	28.9	595	28.8
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00–J99)	15	9.0	194	9.4
Diseases of the digestive system (K00–K93)	5	3.0	96	4.6
External causes of morbidity and mortality (V01–Y98)	24	14.5	343	16.6
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2 063</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Includes 'Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'.

(b) Includes all causes of death.

Source: ABS 2002c, ABS data available on request, Deaths Registrations Database.

## HOSPITAL SEPARATIONS

Of the 177,054 hospital separations for Indigenous patients during 2000–01, 12,564 or 7.1% were for Torres Strait Islander patients. Over 77% of the separations of Torres Strait Islander patients were from Queensland hospitals. Queensland Health has indicated that the quality of the data identifying Torres Strait Islanders is in need of improvement, similar to the quality of their other Indigenous identification data for hospitals. The quality of data for jurisdictions other than the Northern Territory and South Australia is also in need of improvement. These data should therefore be used with caution. For a more complete discussion of data quality please see Chapter 11.

Table 10.8 presents hospital separations for 2000–01 by age and sex for Torres Strait Islander and total Indigenous patients. There were 4,894 separations for male Torres Strait Islander patients. Of these, most (24.1%) were for patients in the 45–54 years age group. For Indigenous patients generally this age group had the second largest proportion of separations (18.8%). For Torres Strait Islander patients the second largest group was the 35–44 years age group (11.8%) whereas this age group accounted for the largest proportion (18.9%) of all Indigenous separations.

There were 7,670 separations for female Torres Strait Islander patients during 2000–01. Of these, most (17.5%) were for patients in the 35–44 years age group. The next largest proportion of separations was for the 55–64 years age group (15.4%). For Indigenous female patients generally, the 35–44 years age group had the second largest proportion of separations (17.2%). Patients in the 25–34 years age group had the largest proportion of Indigenous female separations (19.4%) whereas for Torres Strait Islander female patients this group accounted for 13.8% of separations.



## 10.8 INDIGENOUS HOSPITAL SEPARATIONS — 2000–01

Age group (years)	Torres Strait Islander(a)		Total Indigenous	
	no.	%	no.	%
MALES				
Less than 1	292	6.0	5 303	7.0
1–4	396	8.1	5 718	7.5
5–14	336	6.9	5 510	7.3
15–24	352	7.2	5 678	7.5
25–34	558	11.4	11 247	14.8
35–44	577	11.8	14 368	18.9
45–54	1 181	24.1	14 268	18.8
55–64	564	11.5	8 087	10.6
65–74	511	10.4	4 333	5.7
75 or more	127	2.6	1 452	1.9
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>4 894</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>75 965</b>	<b>100.0</b>
FEMALES				
Less than 1	247	3.2	4 232	4.2
1–4	315	4.1	4 695	4.6
5–14	323	4.2	4 541	4.5
15–24	1 032	13.5	15 382	15.2
25–34	1 060	13.8	19 587	19.4
35–44	1 342	17.5	17 393	17.2
45–54	1 014	13.2	15 598	15.4
55–64	1 185	15.4	11 290	11.2
65–74	941	12.3	5 809	5.7
75 or more	211	2.8	2 551	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7 670</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>101 078</b>	<b>100.0</b>
PERSONS(b)				
Less than 1	539	4.3	9 535	5.4
1–4	711	5.7	10 415	5.9
5–14	659	5.2	10 051	5.7
15–24	1 384	11.0	21 060	11.9
25–34	1 618	12.9	30 836	17.4
35–44	1 919	15.3	31 762	17.9
45–54	2 195	17.5	29 868	16.9
55–64	1 749	13.9	19 381	10.9
65–74	1 452	11.6	10 142	5.7
75 or more	338	2.7	4 003	2.3
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>12 564</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>177 054</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Includes patients reported as Torres Strait Islander and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

(b) Total figures include separations for which sex and/or age were not reported.

Source: AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database.

Table 10.9 shows separations for Torres Strait Islander and total Indigenous patients, by principal diagnosis in ICD-10-AM chapter groupings for 2000–01. Principal diagnoses in the group ‘Care involving dialysis’ (Z49) accounted for the largest proportion (35.0%) of separations for Torres Strait Islander patients. This was similar to the proportion in this category for all Indigenous persons (30.1%).

Hospital separations for  
Torres Strait Islander  
peoples *continued*

'Pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium' (O00–O99) was the second most common category of principal diagnoses (10.6%) for separations of Torres Strait Islander patients, followed by 'Injury, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes' (S00–T98, 6.9%) and 'Diseases of the Respiratory system' (J00–J99, 6.2%). For all Indigenous patients, 'Injury, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes' (S00–T98) was the second largest group (9.2%), followed by 'Pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium' (O00–O99, 8.9%) and 'Diseases of the Respiratory system' (J00–J99, 8.9%).

#### 10.9 INDIGENOUS HOSPITAL SEPARATIONS, BY PRINCIPAL DIAGNOSIS — 2000–01

<i>ICD-10-AM chapter groupings</i>	<i>Torres Strait Islander(a)</i>		<i>Total Indigenous</i>	
	<i>no.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>no.</i>	<i>%</i>
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases (A00–B99)	255	2.0	5 290	3.0
Neoplasms (C00–D48)	346	2.8	2 629	1.5
Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs) and certain disorders involving the immune mechanism (D50–D89)	54	0.4	806	0.5
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00–E90)	263	2.1	3 549	2.0
Mental and behavioural disorders (F00–F99)	470	3.7	8 314	4.7
Diseases of the nervous system (G00–G99)	137	1.1	2 822	1.6
Diseases of the eye and adnexa (H00–H59)	152	1.2	1 207	0.7
Diseases of the ear and mastoid process (H60–H95)	99	0.8	1 830	1.0
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00–I99)	461	3.7	6 355	3.6
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00–J99)	785	6.2	15 727	8.9
Diseases of the digestive system (K00–K93)	681	5.4	10 347	5.8
Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue (L00–L99)	295	2.3	5 104	2.9
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue (M00–M99)	294	2.3	3 544	2.0
Diseases of the genitourinary system (N00–N99)	380	3.0	5 714	3.2
Pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium (O00–O99)	1 337	10.6	15 786	8.9
Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period (P00–P96)	172	1.4	2 278	1.3
Congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities (Q00–Q99)	74	0.6	792	0.4
Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings, not elsewhere classified (R00–R99)	462	3.7	8 289	4.7
Injury, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes (S00–T98)	862	6.9	16 281	9.2
Factors influencing health status and contact with health services (excluding Z49)	587	4.7	7 033	4.0
Care involving dialysis (Z49)	4 398	35.0	53 357	30.1
Total excluding care involving dialysis	8 166	65.0	123 697	69.9
Total	12 564	100.0	177 054	100.0

(a) Includes patients reported as Torres Strait Islander and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Source: AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The 2001 Census results indicate that the social and economic conditions experienced by Torres Strait Islanders were generally closer to those experienced by Aboriginal people than those of the total Australian population. There were some notable differences between Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area and those who live elsewhere.

**Languages** More than three-quarters (82%) of Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area stated that they spoke a language other than English at home. Speaking a language other than English at home, was reported to a far lesser extent by Torres Strait Islanders living in the rest of Australia (13%), closer to the total level for Aboriginal people (14%) and non-Indigenous people (16%). Only about one in five Torres Strait Islanders (18%) living in the Torres Strait area spoke only English at home, compared to more than 84% of Torres Strait Islanders living in the rest of Australia. In the Torres Strait area, 20% of Torres Strait Islanders reported they spoke English not well, or not at all compared to a far smaller proportion of Torres Strait Islanders living in the rest of Australia (2%), again, similar to the levels for Aboriginal people (3%) and non-Indigenous people (3%) (table 10.10).

10.10 PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH — 2001

	<i>Torres Strait Area</i>	<i>Rest of Australia</i>	<i>All Australia</i>			
	<i>All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin</i>	<i>All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin</i>	<i>All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin</i>	<i>Aboriginal</i>	<i>Non-Indigenous</i>	<i>Total(a)</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Speaks English only	18	84	75	82	83	81
Speaks another language and speaks English well or very well	62	11	18	11	13	13
and speaks English not well or not at all	20	2	4	3	3	3
<i>Total</i>	82	13	22	14	16	15
Not stated	1	3	3	4	1	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) Includes not stated.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

**Education** Data from the 2001 Census indicate that Torres Strait Islanders aged 15 years and over were more likely than Aboriginal persons and less likely than non-Indigenous persons to have completed Year 10 or equivalent. Of Torres Strait Islanders aged 15 years and over who were no longer at school, 27% and 26% of those living in the Torres Strait area and other areas respectively, had not completed Year 10 or equivalent. This compares to 34% of Aboriginal persons, and 18% of non-Indigenous persons (table 10.11).

Education *continued* Torres Strait Islanders were more likely than Aboriginal persons, and less likely than non-Indigenous persons to have completed higher levels of schooling. In addition, of Torres Strait Islanders aged 15 years and over who were no longer at school, those living in the Torres Strait area were more likely to have completed Year 12 (or equivalent) than those living in the rest of Australia (29% to 22% respectively). This compares to 16% of Aboriginal persons, and 41% of non-Indigenous persons (table 10.11).

#### 10.11 HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOLING COMPLETED(a) — 2001

	Torres Strait Area		Rest of Australia			All Australia	
	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	Aboriginal	Non-Indigenous	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Still at school	4	6	6	5	3	3	
Year 8 or below	19	13	13	17	9	9	
Year 9 or equivalent	6	11	10	14	8	7	
Year 10 or equivalent	23	27	26	27	25	24	
Year 11 or equivalent	10	10	10	9	10	10	
Year 12 or equivalent	29	22	23	16	39	38	
Did not go to school	2	2	2	3	1	1	
Not stated	7	10	10	8	5	8	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

(a) Persons aged 15 years and over, excludes not applicable.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Among Torres Strait Islanders aged 15 years and over in 2001, 10% reported having a non-school qualification. Fewer Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area reported a non-school qualification (7%) than did Torres Strait Islanders living in the rest of Australia (10%). Overall, Torres Strait Islanders were one-third as likely as non-Indigenous persons to have a non-school qualification.

Among Torres Strait Islanders aged 15 years or over in 2001, 2% had a bachelor degree or higher qualification, less than one-fifth the level reported by the non-Indigenous population; and 8% had a diploma or certificate (table 10.12).

10.12 HIGHEST NON-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION COMPLETED — 2001

	Torres Strait Area	Rest of Australia	All Australia			
	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	Aboriginal	Non-Indigenous	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Has qualification(a)						
Degree or higher	0.8	1.7	1.7	1.8	10.8	10.2
Diploma level	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.5	5.0	4.8
Certificate level	4.3	6.9	6.9	5.6	13.1	12.5
Total	6.8	10.4	10.4	8.9	28.9	27.5
No non-school qualification(b)	85.3	80.7	80.7	83.3	64.4	63.5
Inadequately described or not stated	7.9	8.9	8.9	7.9	6.7	9.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Persons aged 15 years and over.

(b) Includes persons aged under 15 years, persons with no qualifications and persons who have a qualification that is out of scope of this item.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

**Income** The 2001 Census results indicated that median weekly income for Torres Strait Islander persons was greater than for Aboriginal persons, but less than median weekly income for non-Indigenous persons. While this was true for both males and females, the difference between non-Indigenous median weekly income and that reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons was much less for females than males. The median weekly income for non-Indigenous males was \$506 per week, compared to \$274 for Torres Strait Islander males, and \$202 for Aboriginal males. The median weekly income for non-Indigenous females, however, was \$293 per week, compared to \$264 for Torres Strait Islander females, and \$233 for Aboriginal females (table 10.13).

Both male and female Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait Area reported a lower median weekly income than Torres Strait Islanders living in the rest of Australia. In addition, Torres Strait Islander females living in the Torres Strait area, reported higher median weekly incomes than Torres Strait Islander males (table 10.13).

10.13 PERSONAL INCOME(a) — 2001

	Torres Strait area	Rest of Australia	All Australia			
	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	Aboriginal	Non-Indigenous	Total(b)
<b>Males</b>						
Median weekly income (\$)	219	286	274	202	506	498
Proportion with income less than \$500 per week (%)	86	71	73	77	49	50
<b>Females</b>						
Median weekly income (\$)	252	267	264	233	293	291
Proportion with income less than \$500 per week (%)	85	81	82	84	71	72

(a) Persons aged 15 years and over, excludes not stated income.

(b) Includes not stated Indigenous status.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

**Labour force status** At the time of the 2001 Census, 57% of all Torres Strait Islander persons aged 15 years or more, living in the Torres Strait area reported being employed. Nearly half (49%) of employed Torres Strait Islanders were involved in the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) scheme (table 10.14). Torres Strait Islanders living outside the Torres Strait area were more likely (41%) than those living in the Torres Strait area (29%) to report being employed in non-CDEP scheme jobs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were less likely than the non-Indigenous population to be employed, even when CDEP scheme employment is taken into consideration. Further discussion on the CDEP scheme is in Chapter 2.

The labour force participation rates for all Torres Strait Islanders (58%) and for Aboriginal people (51%) were lower than the non-Indigenous rate (63%). High CDEP scheme participation by Torres Strait Islanders in the Torres Strait area contributed to higher participation rates (63%) and lower unemployment rates (5%) than for Torres Strait Islanders living elsewhere. The unemployment rates for all Torres Strait Islanders (18%) and for Aboriginal people (20%) were higher than the non-Indigenous rate (7%) (table 10.14).

10.14 LABOUR FORCE STATUS(a) — 2001

	Units	Torres Strait area	Rest of Australia	All Australia		
		All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	All persons of Torres Strait Islander origin	Aboriginal	Non-Indigenous
Employed						
CDEP(b)	%	28	2	6	7	—
Other	%	29	41	39	32	58
Total	%	57	43	45	40	58
Unemployed	%	3	11	10	10	4
Not in labour force	%	36	41	41	47	36
Not stated	%	4	4	4	3	1
Total	%	100	100	100	100	100
Unemployment(c)	rate	5	20	18	20	7
Participation(d)	rate	63	57	58	51	63

(a) Persons aged 15 years and over.

(b) Community Development Employment Project scheme.

(c) Unemployed persons as a proportion of all employed and unemployed persons.

(d) Persons in the labour force (employed plus unemployed persons) as a proportion of all persons minus not stated.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

10.15 IMPROVING DIABETES CARE IN THE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE SETTING

The Torres Strait health region is a remote area with the population concentrated around Thursday Island. It consists of the far northern tip of mainland Queensland and 150 islands in the Torres Strait. Seventeen of the islands are inhabited, and there are mainland settlements at Bamaga, Injinoo, Seisia, New Mapoon, and Umagico, covering a total area of 1,864 square kilometres. The Torres Strait area has a population of 8,531, which includes 6,850 Indigenous people. Some 83.5% of the Torres Strait population is under 45 years of age, in comparison with 64.9% under 45 years in the general Australian population.<sup>1</sup>

Daily plane services from the mainland to Horn Island, bus and barge services to Thursday Island, and charter planes and boats are available. There is a barge service from Cairns, and inter-island transport is mainly by dinghy.

There are two public but no private hospitals in the Torres Strait region. Thursday Island Hospital is the major provider of medical and health services in the region and delivers the following services: accident and emergency care, aged care, general surgical, acute care, obstetrics and gynaecology, oral health services, outpatients, pathology, pharmacy, physiotherapy, radiology and rehabilitation. Additional services include training in allied health and laboratory technologies, a women's health team (a clinical nurse consultant and a health worker) for Torres Sector, and sexual health services, including an HIV/AIDS program. Bamaga Hospital on the mainland provides services that include accident and emergency care, acute care, general non-acute care, long-term and respite care, medical, outpatients, pharmacy and sexual health. Both hospitals have visiting specialist services.

...continued

10.15 IMPROVING DIABETES CARE IN THE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE SETTING  
*continued*

Torres Strait communities have the highest recorded prevalence of diabetes in Australia (24% of adults over the age of 15) and increasing rates of hospitalisation and deaths from diabetes complications. Improved care of diabetics in the community setting can reduce these complications. A study investigated how this research evidence could be transplanted into improved practice in the remote clinics of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District.

At the beginning of the study, patients receiving diabetes care in all 21 clinics had their health records checked to see how good their care was in terms of routine check-ups and number of hospitalisations in the previous year. A new diabetes outreach service was then started in all communities. Eight of the centres were randomly allocated to set up a locally managed recall and reminder system for routine diabetes care.

After one year, a repeat audit of medical files showed that most measures of good diabetes care had improved everywhere and that, overall, hospital admission rates among diabetics had fallen by 18%. The greatest improvement in both quality of care and reduction in hospitalisations occurred in the centres that had locally managed recall systems, where the proportion of diabetics hospitalised for diabetes-related conditions fell by 41%, mainly due to a reduction in diabetes-related infections.

The study showed that, within one year, a diabetes outreach team working with a high-risk population in a remote health care setting could improve the quality of care and reduce the proportion of people with diabetes admitted to hospital. A well-supported, locally managed recall information system was able to achieve significant added benefits over the control group, including better implementation of evidence-based care plans and a greater reduction in the proportion of diabetics hospitalised. The study was able to show a significant and early reduction in diabetes-related hospital admissions, mainly for infections.

Endnotes

1. ABS 2000, *Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories*, ABS cat. no. 3201.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

*Source: Department of Health and Aged Care ed. (2001), 'Better Health Care: Studies in the Successful Delivery of Primary Health Care Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians', Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, pp. 46-47.*