



7.1 Community factors and Indigenous wellbeing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Indigenous peoples of Australia. They live in all parts of the nation, from major cities to remote tropical and desert areas. Indigenous Australians are not one group, but comprise hundreds of groups that have their own distinct set of languages, histories and cultural traditions.

Indigenous Australians can be of Aboriginal origin, Torres Strait Islander origin, or both. The Australian Government defines Indigenous Australians as people who are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin and who are accepted as such in the communities in which they live, or have lived. In most data collections, a person's Indigenous status is based on the first two parts of this definition.

Indigenous population

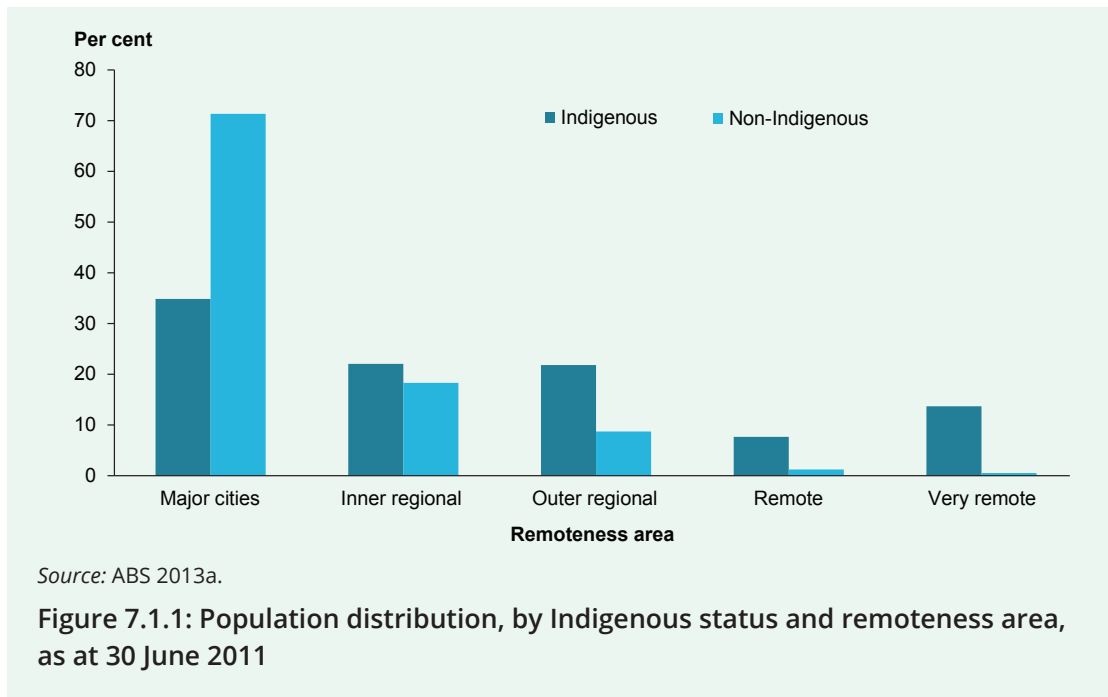
As at 30 June 2017, there were an estimated 761,300 Indigenous Australians, who made up 3.1% of the total Australian population (ABS 2014). Indigenous population estimates based on the 2016 Census were not available at the time of writing (see Box A in this report's preliminary pages). The Indigenous population is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, and Indigenous Australians are more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to live outside of the *Major cities* areas.

- In the 2011 Census, 90% of Indigenous Australians identified as being of Aboriginal origin only, 6% as Torres Strait Islander origin only, and 4% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.
- In June 2011, the median age of the Indigenous population was 21.8 (compared with 37.6 for the non-Indigenous population). Only 3.4% of the Indigenous population was aged 65 or over compared with 14% of the non-Indigenous population (ABS 2013a).
- The majority (79%) of Indigenous Australians live in non-remote areas, with more than one third (35%) living in *Major cities*. 7.7% live in *Remote* areas, with a further 14% in *Very remote* areas (see Glossary for information about the remoteness classification used in this report). By comparison, 1.7% of the non-Indigenous population live in *Remote* or *Very remote* areas of Australia (Figure 7.1.1).
- More than half of all Indigenous Australians live in New South Wales (31%) or Queensland (28%), with a further 13% in Western Australia and 10% in the Northern Territory.
- The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Indigenous Australians in its population at 30%; in the other jurisdictions, Indigenous people make up 1–4% of the population (ABS 2013a).





Australia's welfare 2017



The 2011 Census identified around 209,000 households where at least one Indigenous person was a usual resident (referred to in this section as an Indigenous household).

- Three-quarters (75%) of these were one-family households, 6% consisted of two or more families, 14% were one-person households and 5% were group households.
- Indigenous households were less likely than other households to be single-person households (14% compared with 25%), more likely to consist of 2 or more families (6% compared with 2%) and more likely to contain 5 or more people (23% compared with 10%) (ABS 2012a).

In 2011, there were 181,700 families living in Indigenous households.

- Families in Indigenous households were more likely than families in other households to include children aged under 15 (59% compared with 38%), and more likely to be one parent families with children aged under 15 (28% compared with 7.7%).
- The proportion of families with dependent students was similar in Indigenous and other households (14% and 15%, respectively) (AIHW analysis of ABS 2011 Census (TableBuilder)).

Why focus on Indigenous Australians?

Indigenous Australians experience widespread socioeconomic disadvantage and health inequality. They are more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be exposed to poverty, unemployment, violence, substance abuse and imprisonment. Indigenous children tend to have poorer educational outcomes than non-Indigenous children (see Chapter 7.4 'Closing the gap in education'), and are more likely to have contact with the child protection and youth justice systems. Given current mortality rates, an Indigenous baby born in 2010–2012 has an expected life span 10 years shorter than that of a non-Indigenous baby (ABS 2013b).





The reasons for these disparities are complex, and include dispossession, marginalisation, and racism, as well as the ongoing and cumulative effect of past policies of forced removal and cultural assimilation (HREOC 1997; SCRGSP 2016a).

The 2008 National Indigenous Reform Agreement (the Agreement) (COAG 2008) commits all Australian governments to actions aimed at closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. The Agreement notes that efforts will be directed across seven key platforms: early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities, and governance and leadership. It also acknowledges the importance of culture and of eliminating discrimination. The wide range of actions across multiple sectors recognises the complex web of factors involved in creating and perpetuating Indigenous disadvantage, and that the approach to closing the gap must be coordinated and multifaceted. It must involve not just governments but also the corporate sector, non-government organisations and the Indigenous community.

In October 2015, the Australian Government released the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023. The Implementation Plan outlines 106 actions to be taken by the Australian Government, the Aboriginal community controlled health sector, and other key stakeholders to give effect to the vision, principles, priorities and strategies of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023. The Implementation Plan sets a number of goals to be achieved by 2023 for a set of 20 indicators for Indigenous health care processes and outcomes at the national level. These goals complement the existing Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Closing the Gap targets and focus on prevention and early intervention across the life course. For more information on the Implementation Plan, its vision and the context for its goals, see *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023* (DOH 2015) and the associated technical companion document (AIHW 2015).

This chapter focuses on two of the key factors that support the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: a well-functioning community and a safe, secure home with working facilities. Information about some of the factors that reduce Indigenous wellbeing (such as exposure to discrimination and violence) and on educational outcomes, employment and income for Indigenous Australians can be found in other parts of Chapter 7.

Indigenous community functioning

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. Family and kinship are integral to establishing relationships, positions and obligations within and outside the community (Bourke & Edwards 2004). Having a cohesive and well-functioning community, which provides opportunities for education, employment and recreation, as well as the infrastructure of adequate housing, transport and other services—and where people are empowered to make choices—can help to deal with the social and economic issues that result in social isolation, poor mental wellbeing, and anti-social behaviour (such as violence, crime and drug use) (ABS 2004; Hirschfield & Bowers 1997; Victorian Government 2015).





Functioning in this context is about the things people achieve or experience, consistent with their account of wellbeing. It varies from basic needs (such as being adequately nourished and being free from avoidable disease) to very complex activities or personal states (such as being able to take part in the life of the community and having self-respect). The conversion of capabilities into functioning is influenced by the values and personal features of individuals, families and communities, and by the social and cultural environment in which they live. Different cultures give greater or lesser priority to different types of functioning (Sen 1999, as cited in AHMAC 2015).

In 2008 and 2010, workshops were undertaken to inform the development of community functioning measures for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework. These workshops drew together Indigenous people from across Australia, who described the various elements of family and community life essential for high levels of functioning. Six themes central to Indigenous Australian community functioning were identified: Connectedness to Country, land, and history, culture and identity; Resilience; Leadership; Having a role, structure and routine; Feeling safe; and Vitality (AHMAC 2015).

The next few sections present information about some aspects of community functioning that relate to each of these themes. The majority of the data are drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), conducted most recently in 2014–15, with previous surveys conducted in 2008 and 2002. The available data suggest that, in terms of these key themes supporting wellbeing through community functioning, circumstances for Indigenous Australians have either been maintained or have improved since 2008. Comparison data for non-Indigenous Australians is from the ABS 2014 General Social Survey (GSS).

Connectedness to country, land and history, culture and identity

This theme comprises being connected to country, land, family and spirit; strong and positive social networks with Indigenous people; a strong sense of identity and being part of a collective; and sharing, giving and receiving, trust and love, and looking out for others (AHMAC 2015).

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
- 18% of Indigenous people aged 15 and over spoke an Australian Indigenous language, with a further 20% speaking some words. Around one-third (34%) of Indigenous people aged 4–14 spoke at least some words of an Indigenous language
- an Indigenous language was the main language spoken at home for 11% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over, and for 7.5% of Indigenous children aged 4–14. Speaking an Australian Indigenous language as the main language spoken at home was considerably more common in remote than non-remote areas (41% compared with 2.0% for people aged 15 and over)
- almost two-thirds (63%) of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over and three-quarters (75%) of Indigenous children aged 4–14 had been involved in Indigenous cultural events, ceremonies or organisations in the previous 12 months (ABS 2016)





- more than 4 in 5 (83%) Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over had weekly face-to-face contact with family or friends living outside their household, a higher proportion than among non-Indigenous Australians (77%) (ABS 2015a; 2016)
- half (50%) of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over provided support (such as money, food, clothing or transport) to relatives living outside their household (ABS 2016).

These results are all similar to those from the 2008 survey. Comparable data from the 2002 survey indicate that the proportion speaking an Indigenous language (including as a main language spoken at home) was similar in 2014–15 and 2002, while the proportion identifying with a clan or language group was higher in 2014–15 (62% compared with 54% in 2002). However, the proportion of Indigenous Australians who had attended an Indigenous cultural event in the last 12 months was somewhat lower in 2014–15 than in 2002 (63% compared with 68%) (AIHW 2017a).

Resilience

This theme comprises coping with the internal and external world; power to control options and choices; ability to proceed in public without shame; optimising what you have; challenging injustice and racism, standing up when required; coping well with difference, flexibility, and accommodating; ability to walk in two worlds; engagement in decision making; and external social contacts (AHMAC 2015).

In 2014–15 among Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over:

- 62% had not experienced unfair treatment in the previous 12 months
- 86% had not avoided situations in the previous 12 months due to past unfair treatment
- almost all (97%) had participated in sporting, social or community activities in the previous 12 months
- 49% felt able to have a say in their community on important issues at least some of the time. This is similar to the result among non-Indigenous Australians (53%)
- of people who were employed and had cultural responsibilities, their work allowed them to meet these responsibilities in 71% of cases
- most (92%) could get support from outside their household in times of crisis. This is similar to the result among non-Indigenous people (95%) and an increase since 2008 (89%)
- 80% of people who had seen a general practitioner in the previous 12 months felt that their doctor listened carefully to them, and 85% felt that their doctor showed respect
- 81% felt that their doctor could be trusted (ABS 2016)
- more than half (58%) felt that local police could be trusted, an increase from 52% in 2008 (AIHW 2017a).

Leadership

This theme comprises strong Elders in family and community, both men and women; role models, both men and women; strong direction, and vision; and a 'rock', someone who has time to listen and advise (AHMAC 2015).





In 2014–15:

- half (51%) of Indigenous children aged 4–14 in remote areas and almost one-quarter (23%) of Indigenous children in non-remote areas spent at least 1 day with a leader or Elder each week
- most (82%) Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over had someone outside the household in whom they could confide
- half (50%) of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over living in remote areas felt that their community had strong leadership, and more than half (52%) felt that the leaders in their community had time to listen and give advice (ABS 2016).

Having a role, structure and routine

This theme comprises having a role for self: participation, contributing through paid and unpaid roles; capabilities and skills derived through social structures and experience through non-formal education; knowing boundaries and acceptable behaviours; sense of place—knowing your place in family and society; being valued and acknowledged; and disciplined (AHMAC 2015).

In 2014–15:

- 61% of Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 were in the labour force, with most of these people (79%) being employed. By comparison, 77% of non-Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 were in the labour force in 2014, with 94% of these people being employed (AIHW analysis of ABS 2014–15 NATSISS (TableBuilder) and AIHW analysis of ABS 2014 GSS (TableBuilder))
- 72% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over lived in a household where household members had not run out of money for basic living expenses in the previous 12 months, a similar proportion to that in 2008 (AIHW 2017a).

More information about income and employment among Indigenous Australians can be found in Chapter 7.5 'Income and employment for Indigenous Australians'.

Data from the 2011 Census show that:

- families living in Indigenous households were more likely than those in other households to have had some or all residents move house in the previous year (29% compared with 19%) (AIHW analysis of ABS 2011 Census (TableBuilder)).

Feeling safe

This theme comprises lack of physical and lateral violence (see Glossary); safe places; emotional security; cultural competency; and relationships that can sustain disagreement (AHMAC 2015).

In 2014–15 among Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over:

- most (84%) felt safe at home alone after dark, an increase from 80% in 2008
- over half (54%) felt safe walking alone in their local area after dark, similar to the result from 2008 (53%)
- most (87%) had not been a victim of physical violence in the previous 12 months, a similar proportion to that in 2008 (85%) (AIHW 2017a).





More detailed information about safety issues, contact with the criminal justice system and the exposure of Indigenous Australians to violence can be found in Chapter 7.3 'Community safety among Indigenous Australians'.

Vitality

This theme covers community infrastructure, access to services, education, health, income and employment (AHMAC 2015).

In 2014–15:

- 47% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over had a non-school qualification—that is, educational attainments other than those of a pre-primary, primary and secondary education. These qualifications may be attained after completing school, or concurrently with obtaining school qualifications. This proportion was significantly higher than that in 2008 (32%)
- 22% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over were enrolled in formal study—a significant increase from 19% in 2008
- 39% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over were daily smokers, a drop from 45% in 2008 and 49% in 2002, but still almost 3 times the rate among non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2016)
- the majority (74%) of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over who had tried to access services in the previous 12 months (such as health care, utilities, employment services and financial institutions) had no problems accessing these services. This was the same as for non-Indigenous Australians (74%) (AIHW analysis of ABS 2014–15 NATSISS (TableBuilder) and AIHW analysis of ABS 2014 GSS (TableBuilder))
- 81% of Indigenous Australians were living in houses of an acceptable standard (AIHW 2017a)
- 40% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over rated their general health as very good or excellent, a fall from 44% in 2008 (ABS 2016).

Housing and homelessness

A stable and adequately maintained and serviced home is fundamental for health. As well, it provides a safe and secure environment, and underpins a well-functioning community. Not having affordable, secure and appropriate housing can have negative consequences. These include homelessness, poor health, and lower rates of employment and education participation—all of which can lead to social exclusion and disadvantage.

This section focuses on housing stability (including tenure and housing assistance), housing quality (including facilities and structural soundness) and potential overcrowding. It also looks at homelessness and the use of relevant support services by Indigenous Australians.





Housing tenure

Housing tenure describes whether a dwelling is owned or rented, or occupied under some other arrangement (see also Box 7.1.1). Survey data from the NATSISS show that, in 2014–15, of the estimated 283,900 Indigenous households:

- 3 in 10 (30%) were home owners—10% owned their home outright (about 29,000 households) and 20% had a mortgage (56,900 households)
- nearly 7 in 10 (69%) were renters—30% lived in social housing (about 84,400 households), while the remainder (39%) were private renters or rented from another type of landlord (110,300 households)
- 1.3% occupied their dwelling under some other arrangement, or did not provide information on household tenure (Figure 7.1.2).

The rate of home ownership among Indigenous households (30%) was less than half that for other households (68%) (Figure 7.1.2).

The proportion of Indigenous households who owned their home with or without a mortgage in 2014–15 (30%) was similar to the proportions in 2012–13 and 2008 (both 32%) (SCRGSP 2016a).



Figure 7.1.2: Housing tenure of households, by Indigenous status, 2014–15

There were also differences in tenure type by remoteness area (Figure 7.1.3). In 2014–15:

- Indigenous households in non-remote areas were twice as likely to own their home (with or without a mortgage) as Indigenous households in remote areas —33% compared with 16%
- Indigenous households in remote areas were more than twice as likely to live in social housing as Indigenous households in non-remote areas—60% compared with 24%.



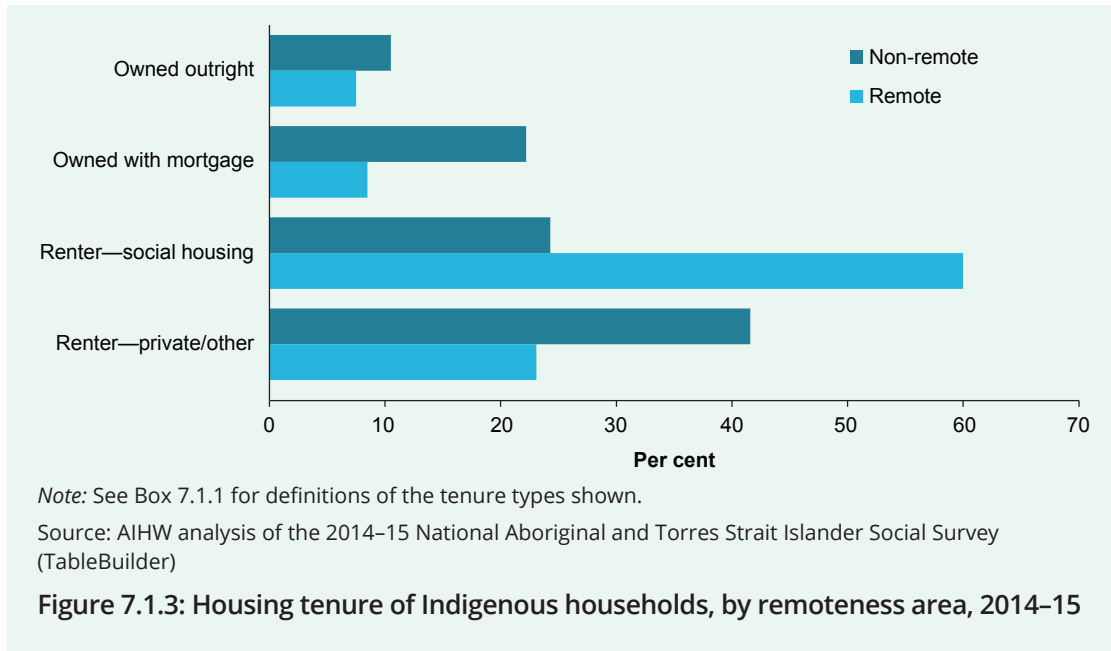


Figure 7.1.3: Housing tenure of Indigenous households, by remoteness area, 2014–15

Box 7.1.1: About the housing tenure data in this article

Tenure type describes whether a dwelling is owned, rented, or occupied under some other arrangement. For the analyses shown in this chapter, distinctions are made between:

- two types of home owners—people with and without a mortgage. The category ‘owned with a mortgage’ consists of participants in rent/buy and shared equity schemes and those living in a household in which payments were being made on mortgages or secured loans towards the purchase of the dwelling.
- two types of renters:
 - people renting from social housing providers
 - private/other renters (includes people renting from real estate agents, unrelated persons, relatives, owner–managers of caravan parks, employers and other landlords, and people for whom landlord type was not stated)
- households with some other tenure type (including dwellings being occupied under a life tenure scheme) and households for which information on tenure type was not stated.

Households occupying their dwelling ‘rent free’—that is, where the household exchanges no money for lodging and is not an owner of the dwelling—are classified as renters. Information about housing tenure can be presented about ‘households’ (see Glossary) or about ‘people living in households’. This article presents information about households. Indigenous households are defined as households in which at least one resident (of any age) identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.





Housing assistance

Housing assistance aims to relieve the pressures of housing costs, and provide safe and secure housing for many low-income households, particularly households that are disadvantaged or vulnerable (see also Chapter 6.1 'Social housing').

Due to the multiple disadvantages that many Indigenous Australians face in the housing market, they are a priority group for (or focus of) many housing assistance services. This section provides information on the programs that assist the largest number of Indigenous households, namely Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) and social housing (see Box 7.1.2). Note that the data in this section are administrative by-product data, rather than survey data as in the previous section on 'Housing tenure'. Due to differences in the collections, the estimates of the number of households living in social housing differ between the two sources.

Assistance from CRA

CRA is a non-taxable income supplement payable to eligible people who rent in the private or community housing rental markets (see Box 7.1.2). Recipients of CRA are 'income units'—that is, a person or a group of persons within a household, whose command over income is shared (see Glossary).

Data on the recipients of CRA show that:

- as at 26 June 2016, 67,387 income units receiving CRA reported having an Indigenous member (this represents 5% of all CRA recipients of around 1.3 million income units)
- the proportion of Indigenous income units in total CRA income units has increased from 3.6% in 2009 to 5.0% in 2016
- over the period 2009 to 2014, the proportion of Indigenous income units in rental stress, even after receiving CRA, ranged within a narrow band of 29% to 31%; this proportion was slightly higher in 2015 and 2016 (both 33%) (AIHW analysis of AIHW 2014a; SCRGSP 2014, 2015, 2016b, 2017).

While CRA data relate to income units rather than to households, data from the ABS 2013–14 Survey of Income and Housing suggest that, in practice, the clear majority of income units are households. Specifically, data from that survey indicate that, among CRA recipients, there are about 9.3 households for every 10 income units (see the 'Methods and conventions' section of this report for supplementary technical information related to housing assistance data; S7.1.1). Using this information, it can be estimated that 62,900 Indigenous households were receiving CRA in June 2016—equating to one-quarter (25%) of all Indigenous households (see 'Methods and conventions'; S7.1.2). By comparison, an estimated 13% of other households (or about 1.2 million) were receiving CRA. Although an estimated 75% of Indigenous households do not receive CRA, some would receive other forms of housing assistance.





Box 7.1.2: Major housing assistance programs

Social housing: This is rental housing provided by not for-profit, non-government or government organisations to eligible households, with rents set below market rates (based on a percentage of a tenant's income).

There are four main social housing programs in Australia. Of these, two are 'mainstream' programs available to all Australians—public housing and community housing (see Chapter 6.1 'Social housing'). The other two are specifically aimed at Indigenous Australians—state owned and managed Indigenous housing, and Indigenous community housing. As well, from 2008–09, some remote dwellings in the Northern Territory were transferred from Indigenous community housing programs to public housing. These are referred to as 'NT remote public housing'.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance: This is a non-taxable income supplement funded by the Australian Government. It is payable to people who rent in the private housing market and receive an income support payment, or more than the base rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A, and who pay rent above a minimum threshold. CRA is paid at 75 cents for every dollar above a minimum rental threshold until a maximum rate is reached. The minimum threshold and maximum rates vary according to the composition of an income unit's household, including the number of children. CRA may also be payable to people living in mainstream community housing or Indigenous community housing and, in some jurisdictions, to people living in state owned and managed Indigenous housing.

Recipients of CRA are 'income units' not households (see Glossary). Indigenous income units are those in which at least one member has self-identified as being Indigenous.

Social housing assistance

As at 30 June 2016:

- 44,228 Indigenous households lived in social housing managed through either the public housing program, mainstream community housing program or state owned and managed Indigenous housing programs
- almost 18% of Indigenous households were living in social housing managed by one of these three programs, compared with 3.9% of other households
- of these three programs, public housing was the largest provider of social housing to Indigenous households, with 13% of Indigenous households living in this housing
- Indigenous households were 4 times as likely as other households to live in public housing (12% compared with 3.1%, respectively) and 3 times as likely to live in mainstream community housing (2.2% compared with 0.7%) (Table 7.1.1).





Table 7.1.1: Households living in social housing, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2016

Type of social housing	Indigenous households		Other households	
	Number	Rate ^(a)	Number	Rate ^(a)
Public housing	29,293	11.8	282,926	3.1
Mainstream community housing ^(b)	5,377	2.2	62,821	0.7
State owned and managed Indigenous housing	9,558	3.8	102	0.0
Total	44,228	17.8	345,849	3.8

(a) Per 100 households. See 'Methods and conventions'; S7.1.2 for information on the denominator used.

(b) Total household counts for Mainstream community housing data may not match other published totals due to gaps in detailed information about tenants. Queensland provided partial unit record tenant data for the first time in 2015–16 (unit record data was not available for 3,840 households). Unit record data are not provided for the Northern Territory.

Sources: AIHW analysis of ABS 2015b; AIHW 2017b; AIHW National Housing Assistance Data Repository.

In addition to the dwellings managed by these three social housing programs, Indigenous households also access social housing via the Indigenous community housing program and the Northern Territory remote public housing program. Together, these two programs managed 22,630 dwellings in 2015–16, however information about whether these dwellings are tenanted and the Indigenous status of tenants living in these dwellings is incomplete or not available. For more information on social housing, see Chapter 6.1 'Social housing'.

Housing quality

The 2014–15 NATSISS collected information on basic types of household facilities that are considered important for a healthy living environment, as well as whether the household dwelling had any major structural problems. These data show that in 2014–15:

- 29% of Indigenous Australians (28% of people aged 15 and over and 32% of people aged under 15) were living in a dwelling with major structural problems. Most commonly, these problems were major cracks in the walls or floors, followed by major plumbing problems
- 15% of Indigenous Australians (15% of people aged 15 and over and 14% of people aged under 15) were living in a household in which at least 1 basic facility considered important for a healthy living environment (namely, facilities for preparing food, for washing clothes, for washing people, or sewerage facilities) were not available or did not work
- nearly 1 in 5 (19%) Indigenous people were living in a house that did not meet an acceptable standard; that is, at least one basic household facility was unavailable or there were more than 2 major structural problems (Table 7.1.2).

Indigenous Australians in remote areas were more likely than Indigenous Australians in non-remote areas to be living in a dwelling with major structural problems (37% compared with 27%), that lacked basic household facilities (27% compared with 11%) and that did not meet acceptable standards (31% compared with 16%) (Table 7.1.2).

The proportion of Indigenous adults living in dwellings with major structural problems or in which 1 or more basic facilities were not available was similar in 2014–15 and 2008. Comparable data for non-Indigenous Australians are not available.





Table 7.1.2: Proportion of Indigenous Australians living in dwellings with structural problems or with household facilities that are not available or do not work, by remote and non-remote areas, 2014–15

	Non-remote	Remote	Australia
Major structural problems			
Number of types of structural problem			
1–2	*20.5	*27.7	22.0
3 or more	6.6	8.9	7.1
<i>At least 1 major structural problem</i>	*27.1	*36.8	29.1
Most common structural problems			
Major cracks in walls / floors	10.8	13.2	11.3
Major plumbing problems	*6.2	*12.1	7.4
Walls or windows that are not straight	*5.8	*10.7	6.9
Major electrical problems	*5.0	*9.9	6.1
Wood rot / termite damage	5.8	6.3	5.9
Household facilities			
Has household facilities that are not available or do not work ^(a)	*11.3	*26.7	14.5
Facilities that do not work			
Facilities for preparing food	*6.8	*18.3	9.1
Facilities for washing clothes or bedding	*5.7	*15.2	7.7
Facilities for washing people	2.1	5.1	2.8
Sewerage facilities	*2.2	*4.2	2.6
Overall housing standard^(b)			
Not acceptable	*16.1	*31.1	19.3
Total^(c)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (number)	542,800	143,800	686,900

* Statistically significant difference between the proportions for remote and non-remote areas ($p < 0.05$).

(a) Includes facilities such as cooking facilities, a fridge, toilet and bath or shower.

(b) A house was deemed to be of an acceptable standard where it had fewer than 3 structural problems and had working facilities for washing people, for washing clothes or bedding, for preparing food, and working sewerage facilities. A house was deemed to be not of an acceptable standard where any of these facilities were unavailable or there were more than 2 structural problems.

(c) Total includes 'not stated' responses. Sum of components does not equal the total as households may have reported more than one type of structural problem or lack of access to more than one type of household facility.

Source: AIHW analysis of 2014–15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (TableBuilder).





Overcrowding

In basic terms, overcrowding occurs when a dwelling is too small for the size and composition of the household living in it. Overcrowding can put stress on household infrastructure, such as food preparation areas, sewerage systems and laundry facilities. It can also adversely affect health, education and family relationships (AIHW 2014b; SCRGSP 2016a).

Various approaches are used to define and measure the extent of overcrowding. This chapter uses the definition currently used by the ABS, which is based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) (see Glossary). Using this definition, a dwelling is overcrowded if it requires at least one additional bedroom to accommodate the people who usually live there, given their ages, sex, and relationships to each other.

Note that the concept of overcrowding is subjective; Indigenous people—indeed, any Australians—may be defined as living in overcrowded conditions based on a particular standard such as the CNOS, but may themselves not feel that their household is overcrowded (Keys Young 1998; Memmott et al. 2012).

According to data from the 2014–15 NATSISS, 10% of Indigenous households were living in overcrowded dwellings (29,000 households). This was 3 times the rate of overcrowding among other households (3.0% in 2013–14, corresponding to about 258,300 households, based on the ABS Survey of Income and Housing) (ABS 2016).

As well as information about Indigenous households, data are also available on the number of Indigenous people living in overcrowded dwellings. Those data show that, in 2014–15:

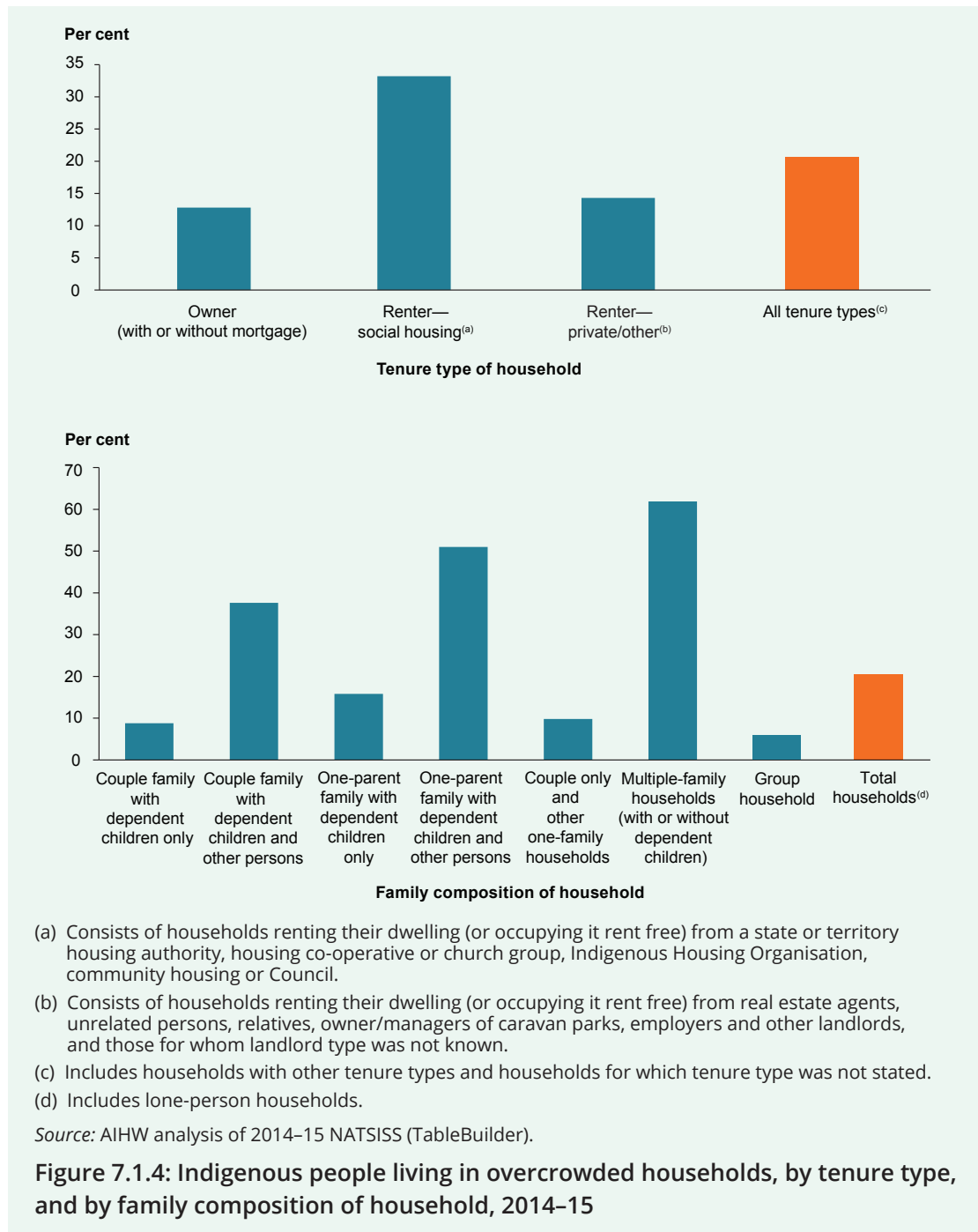
- 1 in 5 (21%, or 141,400 people) Indigenous Australians were living in overcrowded dwellings
- younger Indigenous Australians were more likely than Indigenous Australians in older age groups to live in overcrowded conditions—about one-quarter of people aged under 15 and aged 15–24 were living in overcrowded conditions (24% and 25%, respectively), compared with 17% of people aged 24–34, 35–44 and 45–54, and 10% of people aged 55 and over
- Indigenous Australians living in remote areas were more than twice as likely to be living in overcrowded conditions as Indigenous Australians in non-remote areas—41% compared with 15%
- across states and territories, the rate of overcrowding was highest in the Northern Territory, where just over half (53%) of Indigenous Australians were living in overcrowded conditions. The rate of overcrowding in the Northern Territory was about double that for the jurisdiction with the next highest rate—Western Australia (25%)
- within the Northern Territory, the rate of overcrowding was highest in *Very remote* areas, where two-thirds (67%) of Indigenous Australians were living in overcrowded conditions (compared with 36% in *Remote* areas, and 31% in non-remote areas)
- the rate of overcrowding varied according to housing tenure, with the highest rate among Indigenous Australians living in social housing (33%), and the lowest among Indigenous Australians living in a home owned outright or with a mortgage (13%)
- the rate of overcrowding also varied according to the family composition of the household (Figure 7.1.4).





Available data suggest a decline in overcrowding over time:

- NATSISS data indicate that the proportion of Indigenous people living in overcrowded conditions decreased from 27% in 2004–05 to 21% in 2014–15 (see Chapter 9.2 'Indicators of *Australia's welfare*'). (SCRGSP 2016a).
- Census data indicate that the proportion of Indigenous households that were living in overcrowded conditions fell from 16% in 2001 to 11% in 2016.





Homelessness

The 2014–15 NATSISS asked Indigenous Australians about experiences of homelessness. Note, however, that the NATSISS did not specifically ask about the experience of living in severely crowded dwellings (households that require 4 or more bedrooms according to the CNOS), which is considered homelessness under the ABS statistical definition (see Glossary). According to NATSISS data:

- 29% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over (an estimated 129,000 people) had been homeless at some time in their life. More than 1 in 4 (27%) of these people had been homeless in the previous 2 years. The results were similar for males and females (ABS 2016). By comparison, data from the 2014 GSS suggest that 13% of non-Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over had ever experienced homelessness.

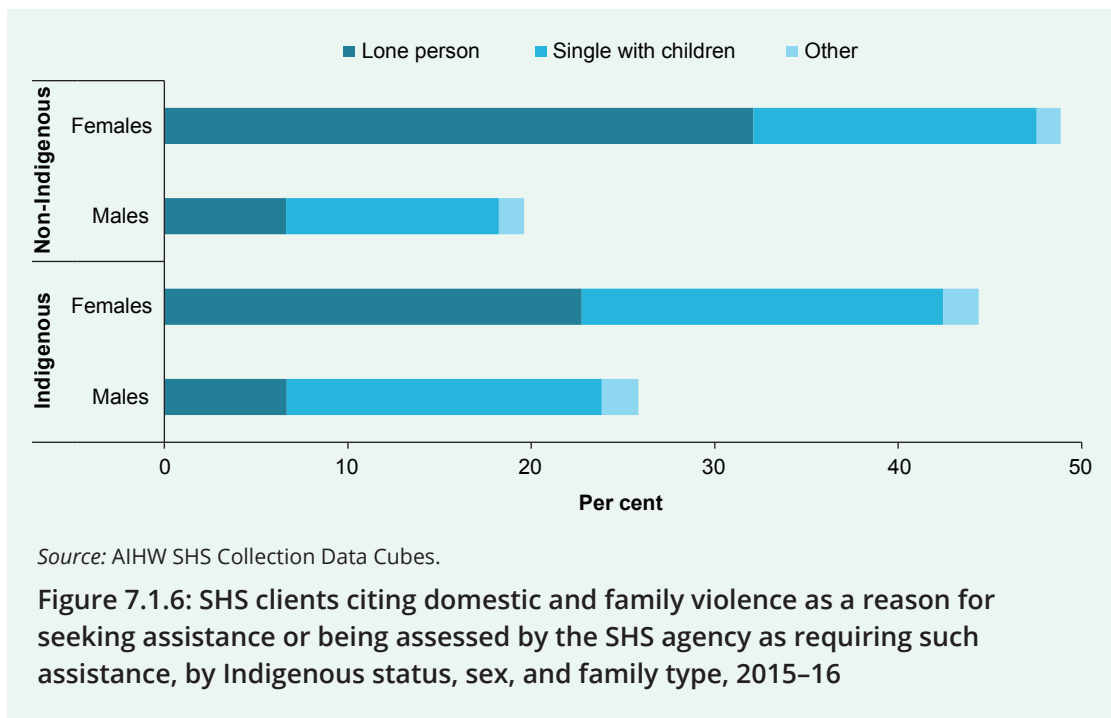
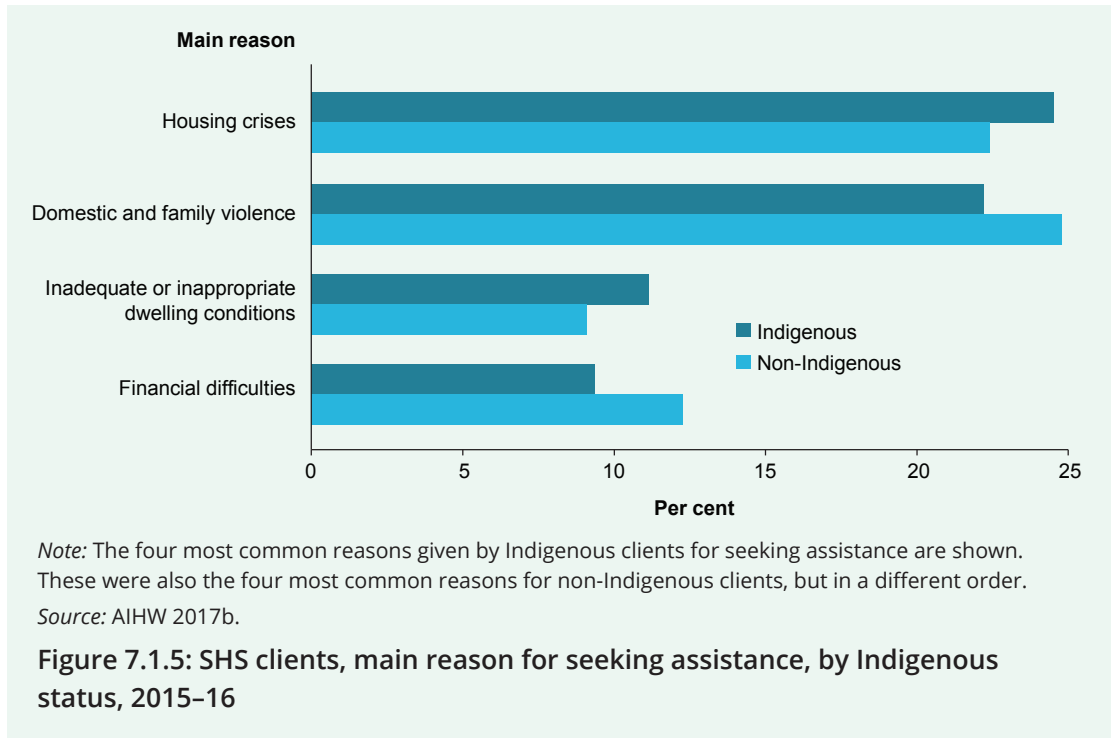
Governments across Australia fund a range of services to support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. These specialist homelessness services (SHS) are delivered by non-government organisations. These include those that specialise in delivering services to specific groups (such as young people or people experiencing domestic and family violence), as well as those that provide more generic services to people facing housing crises.

- In 2015–16, an estimated 61,700 Indigenous people accessed SHS.
- Indigenous people made up 24% of people accessing SHS in 2015–16. The rate of use of these services among Indigenous Australians was more than 9 times that for non-Indigenous Australians.
- A total of 61% of Indigenous SHS clients in 2015–16 were female, compared with 58% of non-Indigenous clients.
- Indigenous SHS clients tend to be younger than non-Indigenous clients; in 2015–16, more than half (54%) were aged under 25 compared with two-fifths (41%) of non-Indigenous clients.
- In 2015–16, more than 1 in 5 Indigenous SHS clients (22%) cited domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance, slightly less than the proportion among non-Indigenous clients (25%) (Figure 7.1.5).
- More than 1 in 3 (37%) Indigenous SHS clients in 2015–16 reported domestic and family violence as a reason for seeking assistance or were assessed by the SHS agency as having a need for domestic and family violence assistance, a similar proportion to that among non-Indigenous clients (37%). Lone females and single clients accompanied by children were more likely than other clients to require domestic and family violence assistance (Figure 7.1.6).
- The proportion of Indigenous clients ending an SHS support period in stable housing (either public or private) increased from 57% in 2012–13 to 64% in 2015–16 (AIHW 2017b).





Australia's welfare 2017





What is missing from the picture?

Much of what we know about Indigenous Australians and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes relies on statistics that are calculated using data from the Census, surveys and administrative data from service providers. These data collections rely on people identifying themselves and/or their family members as Indigenous, and this information being accurately recorded and supplied to relevant agencies. The AIHW and the ABS strive to collect and present accurate data, as well as to ensure that service providers are aware of the importance of collecting accurate Indigenous status information. However, they acknowledge that, for various reasons, not all Indigenous people are identified in the different data sets, which can lead to an under-count. For example, it is estimated that around two-thirds of Indigenous Australians have formally identified as such to Medicare either on enrolment or using the Voluntary Indigenous Identifier form. Under-identification of Indigenous people in key data collections makes it difficult to report accurately on the circumstances and experiences of Indigenous Australians, and to assess whether their needs are being met.

The Indigenous estimated resident population (ERP) is derived from the Census counts after adjusting for the under-count and for those records where Indigenous status is unknown. In 2011, the Indigenous under-count was estimated to be 17% (114,000 persons) and about 1 million Census records (4.9%) had an unknown Indigenous status (ABS 2012b). The 2011 Indigenous ERP was 669,881 people—an increase of 152,838 people, or 30% from the 2006 ERP. The increase was due to several factors, including natural population growth, improved Census estimates and changes in Indigenous identification.

Caution is needed when comparing data from two Censuses. For example, Census data show that, in 2006, 4.6% of Indigenous Australians needed help with daily activities due to a disability or health condition, compared with 5.7% in 2011. This could suggest that the proportion of Indigenous people who needed help has increased since 2006. However, the change could be due to more people with a disability being identified as Indigenous in 2011 or due to the population having aged since 2006. While it is likely that all scenarios have contributed, it is often difficult to separate these effects.

Complete information on the use of housing assistance among Indigenous Australians is not currently available. There is a lack of reliable information on the number of households living in social housing and also receiving CRA; hence, it is not possible to derive the number of Indigenous (or other) households receiving assistance from at least one major housing assistance program.

There is a high level of missing information about Indigenous status in some housing assistance data (for example, Indigenous status was missing for 25% of households in public housing in 2015). The coverage of some administrative data collections is also incomplete (for example, data on mainstream community housing in the Northern Territory are not available by Indigenous status).

Available information about the housing aspirations of Indigenous people is limited. Research suggests that most Indigenous Australians aspire to home ownership, with the main motivations being intergenerational asset building for future generations, and housing security (Memmott et al. 2009). Further information about the housing aspirations of Indigenous Australians would be useful in determining the appropriateness of current housing policies.





If successful programs are to be put in place to deal with the myriad of factors underlying and perpetuating Indigenous disadvantage, more information about the effectiveness of existing or newly implemented programs is needed. There has been relatively little robust evaluation of the performance and effectiveness of Indigenous programs and policies (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2009; Productivity Commission 2015). Rigorous evaluation of policies, programs and interventions can provide the evidence for 'what works' and ensure that future efforts are directed at strategies that produce positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Where do I go for more information?

Data on issues covered in this Chapter are available from [The health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 2015](#), and the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework](#).

The [AIHW website](#) includes further information on housing assistance programs. The reports [Housing circumstances of Indigenous households: tenure and overcrowding](#), [Housing assistance for Indigenous Australians](#) and other recent publications are available for free download.

Information from the 2014–15 NATSISS is available from the [ABS website](#).

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