

2.17 Indigenous people with access to their traditional lands

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living on or visiting traditional areas of land with which they have ancestral and/or cultural links

Data sources

Data for this indicator come from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS).

The 2002 NATSISS collected information from 9,400 Indigenous Australians across all states and territories of Australia. The sample covered persons aged 15 years and over who were usual residents of private dwellings. It collected information on a wide range of subjects including family and culture, health, education, employment, income, financial stress, housing, and law and justice. The 2002 NATSISS is the second national social survey of Indigenous Australians conducted by the ABS. Selected non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the 2002 General Social Survey (GSS). The ABS plans to conduct the NATSISS every 6 years. The next survey is planned for 2008.

Data analyses

Access to traditional lands

- In 2002, approximately 30% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over reported they did not recognise their homeland or traditional country. Approximately 22% reported they lived on their homeland, 46% were allowed to visit their homeland and 1.5% were not allowed to visit their homeland/traditional country.

Access to traditional lands by age group

- In 2002, the proportion of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over who reported they did not recognise their homelands was highest among those aged 15–34 years (34%) and lowest among those aged 55 years and over (23%) (Table 2.17.1).
- A higher proportion of those aged 55 years and over reported they either lived on their homeland (26%) or were allowed to visit their homeland (50%) than the younger age groups.

Table 2.17.1: Access to homelands/traditional country, by age group, Indigenous Australians, 2002

	Does not recognise homelands/traditional country	Recognises homelands/traditional country			Total
		Lives on homelands/traditional country	Allowed to visit homelands/traditional country	Not allowed to visit	
Per cent					
15–34 years	34.1	20.2	44.4	1.3	100.0
35–44 years	25.8	23.0	48.6	2.6 ^(a)	100.0
45–55 years	28.9	23.7	46.6	0.8 ^(a)	100.0
55 years and over	23.1	25.7	49.6	1.6 ^(a)	100.0
Australia	30.4	21.9	46.2	1.5	100.0

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

Source: AIHW analysis of 2002 NATSISS.

Access to traditional lands by state/territory

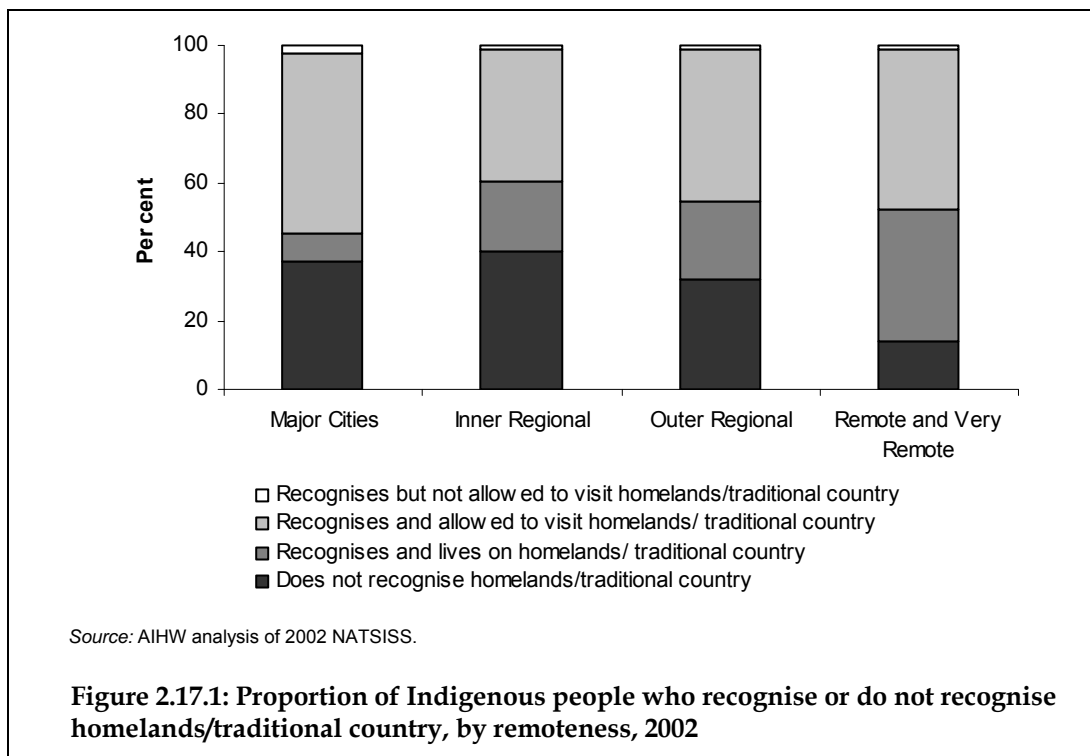
- The proportion of Indigenous Australians who reported they did not recognise their homelands varied by jurisdiction, being highest in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (51%) and lowest in the Northern Territory (9%) (Table 2.17.2).
- The proportion of Indigenous Australians who lived on their homeland was highest in the Northern Territory (38%) and lowest in Queensland (13%).
- The proportion of Indigenous people who were allowed to visit their homelands/traditional country was highest in Queensland (58%) and lowest in Tasmania/Australian Capital Territory (31%).

Table 2.17.2: Access to homelands/traditional country, by state/territory, Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over, 2002

State/territory	Does not recognise homelands/traditional country	Recognises homelands/traditional country			Total
		Lives on homelands/traditional country	Allowed to visit homelands/traditional country	Not allowed to visit	
Per cent					
NSW	39.1	23.8	35.3	1.8	100.0
Vic	36.5	14.9	46.4	2.2 ^(a)	100.0
Qld	27.6	13.4	57.8	1.3 ^(a)	100.0
WA	27.9	26.4	44.5	1.2 ^(a)	100.0
SA	29.4	16.1	52.2	2.3 ^(a)	100.0
Tas/ACT	50.5	17.3	30.5	1.6 ^(a)	100.0
NT	9.1	38.0	51.8	1.1 ^(a)	100.0
Australia	30.4	21.9	46.2	1.5	100.0
Number	85,879	61,700	130,287	4,338	282,205

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

Source: AIHW analysis of 2002 NATSISS.



Access to traditional lands by selected health characteristics

- In 2002, 79% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over who did not recognise their homelands reported excellent/very good/good health status, compared with 72% of Indigenous Australians who recognised their homelands but were not allowed to visit. (Table 2.17.4). Around 76% of Indigenous Australians who recognised their homelands and either lived there or were allowed to visit reported excellent/very good/good health status.
- Approximately 18% of Indigenous Australians who lived on their homelands reported medium/high-risk alcohol consumption compared with 12% of Indigenous Australians who recognised their homelands but were not allowed to visit.
- Approximately 42% of Indigenous Australians who lived on their homelands reported they did not consume alcohol in the 12 months before the survey compared with 29% of Indigenous Australians who recognised their homelands but were not allowed to visit.
- A higher proportion of Indigenous Australians who recognised their homelands but were not allowed to visit were current smokers (59%), compared with 49% who did not recognise their homelands.

Table 2.17.4: Access to homelands/traditional country, by health status and risk factors, Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over, 2002

	Self-assessed health status			Alcohol consumption				Smoking		
	Excellent/ very good/ good	Fair/ poor	Total ^(a)	Medium/ high risk alcohol consump- tion	Low risk alcohol consump- tion	Did not consume alcohol	Total ^(a)	Current smoker	Ex- smoker or never smoked	Total ^(a)
Per cent										
Does not recognise homelands/traditional country	79.2	20.8	100.0	13.9	51.4	34.7	100.0	48.6	51.4	100.0
Recognises and lives on homelands/traditional country	75.6	24.4	100.0	18.3	40.1	41.5	100.0	54.8	45.2	100.0
Recognises and allowed to visit homelands/traditional country but does not live there	75.7	24.3	100.0	14.8	45.7	39.5	100.0	51.0	49.0	100.0
Recognises homelands/traditional country but does not live there and not allowed to visit	71.6	28.4 ^(b)	100.0	11.8*	59.6	28.6	100.0	59.1	40.9	100.0
Total	76.6	23.4	100.0	15.3	46.4	38.3	100.0	51.2	48.8	100.0

(a) Excludes not stated.

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

Source: AIHW analysis of 2002 NATSISS.

Access to traditional lands by community cohesion

- In 2002, approximately 13% of Indigenous Australians who recognised their homelands but were not allowed to visit did not have support in a time of crisis, compared with around 9% of those who recognised their homelands but were allowed to visit (Table 2.17.5).
- A higher proportion of Indigenous Australians who recognised their homelands but were not allowed to live there reported neighbourhood problems (85%), compared with 71% who did not recognise their homelands.

Table 2.17.5: Access to homelands/traditional country, by community cohesion, Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over, 2002

	Support in time of crisis			Presence of neighbourhood/community problems		
	Does not have support in time of crisis	Has support in time of crisis	Total	Neighbourhood/ community problems reported	No neighbourhood/ community problems reported	Total ^(a)
	Per cent					
Does not recognise homelands/ traditional country	9.1	90.9	100.0	71.4	28.6	100.0
Recognises and lives on homelands/traditional country	11.8	88.2	100.0	75.2	24.8	100.0
Recognises and allowed to visit homelands/traditional country but does not live there	8.8	91.2	100.0	75.5	24.5	100.0
Recognises homelands/ traditional country but does not live there and not allowed to visit	13.0*	87.0	100.0	84.7	15.3 ^(b)	100.0
Total	9.6	90.4	100.0	74.4	25.6	100.0

(a) Excludes not stated.

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

Source: AIHW analysis of 2002 NATSISS.

Access to traditional lands by personal stressors

- In 2002, 30% of Indigenous Australians who lived on their homelands reported overcrowding, 25% reported a member of the family was sent to jail and 30% reported alcohol/drug problems (Table 2.17.6).
- Around 27% of Indigenous people who recognised their homelands but were not allowed to visit reported divorce or separation, 41% reported they were not able to get a job and 27% reported involuntary loss of a job.

Table 2.17.6: Access to traditional lands, by type of personal stressors in last 12 months, Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over, 2002

Type of stressor	Recognises homelands/traditional country			
	Does not recognise homelands/traditional country	Lives on homelands/traditional country	Allowed to visit homelands/traditional country	Not allowed to visit
Serious illness or disability	25.2	33.0	33.5	30.9
Serious accident	8.4	15.0	12.0	11.4 ^(a)
Death of family member or close friend	37.1	51.5	49.0	37.1
Member of family sent to jail/currently in jail	11.4	25.4	22.2	16.0 ^(a)
Overcrowding at home	10.8	29.8	22.8	11.2 ^(a)
Divorce or separation	11.7	12.3	17.0	27.4
Not able to get a job	25.3	28.8	26.8	41.1
Involuntary loss of job	7.3	7.2	9.1	26.9
Alcohol/drug problems	16.2	30.3	28.1	23.2 ^(a)
Witness to violence	8.5	21.7	17.4	20.4 ^(a)
Abuse or violent crime	7.2	14.6	12.2	14.0 ^(a)
Trouble with police	13.9	20.7	20.1	21.8 ^(a)
Gambling problem	7.4	19.8	16.9	16.2 ^(a)
Total^(b)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	85,879	61,700	130,287	4,338

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

(b) Sum of components will not sum to 100% as multiple stressors can be reported.

Source: AIHW analysis of 2002 NATSISS.

Data quality issues

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)

The NATSISS uses the standard Indigenous status question. The NATSISS sample was specifically designed to select a representative sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and thus overcome the problems inherent in most national surveys with small and unrepresentative Indigenous samples. As with other surveys, the NATSISS is subject to sampling and non-sampling errors. Calculations of standard errors and significance testing help to establish the accuracy of the estimates and differences.

Information recorded in this survey is essentially 'as reported' by respondents. The ABS makes every effort to collect accurate information from respondents, particularly through careful questionnaire design, pre-testing of questionnaires, use of trained interviewers and assistance from Indigenous facilitators. Nevertheless, some responses may be affected by imperfect recall or individual interpretation of survey questions (ABS 2004).

Non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the General Social Survey. Time series comparisons are available through the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

In remote communities there were some modifications to the NATSISS content in order to accommodate language and cultural appropriateness in traditional communities and help respondents understand the concepts. Some questions were excluded and some reworded. Also, paper forms were used in communities in remote areas and computer-assisted interview (CAI) instruments were used in non-remote areas. The CAI process included built-in edit checks and sequencing.

Further information on NATSISS data quality issues can be found in the 2002 NATSISS publication (ABS 2004).

Homelands/traditional country data

Sources of non-self-reported data in regard to those living on their homelands/traditional country exist for some states/territories, for example ABS data on the population of statistical local areas for land categorised as 'Aboriginal land' under the land rights legislative regimes of South Australia, the Northern Territory and possibly New South Wales. But no such precision is usually possible for land to which Indigenous Australians have a traditional connection under native title legislation, or for land to which use/access has been denied to Indigenous Australians but to which they nevertheless feel a traditional connection.

A further problem exists in regard to obtaining objectively derived data because of variations in the understanding by different groups of what is meant by 'homelands/traditional country'. In some parts of Australia, for example the Northern Territory, 'homelands' refers only to small communities of very closely related kin living on their specific clan estate, and is differentiated from the larger conglomerated settlements (usually former missions, but nevertheless situated on Aboriginal-owned land) where a number of clans live together on other clans' estates. This meaning may not exist in all parts of Australia. The subjective understandings inherent in self-reported data, and publication of data on a state/territory basis, may be the only ways to deal with such definitional variations.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2004. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002. ABS cat. no. 4714.0. Canberra: ABS.