

1.13 Disability

The prevalence of disability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children with special needs

Data sources

Data for this measure come from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, the 2006 Census of Population and Housing and the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)

The ABS 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.

Census of Population and Housing

The ABS Census of Population and Housing is conducted by the ABS at 5-yearly intervals, with 2006 the most recent, and is designed to include all Australian households. The Census uses the ABS standard Indigenous status question and it is asked for each household member.

The Census data are adjusted for undercounts at the person level to arrive at the estimated resident population (ERP), but no such adjustment is done for the statistics used in this measure.

Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey

This survey was a large-scale investigation into the health of 5,289 Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 years. It was undertaken in 2001 and 2002 by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in conjunction with the Kulunga Research Network. The survey was the first to gather comprehensive health, educational and developmental information on a population-based sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families and communities across the state. Current work is under way to assess applicability of the results of this survey in other jurisdictions.

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health defines disability as a multi-dimensional concept, relating to:

- the body functions and structures of people
- the activities people do and the life areas in which they participate
- the factors in their environment which affect these experiences.

Analyses

Comparisons of NATSISS and Census data

Both the 2002 NATSISS and 2006 Census included measures of disability, but the questions and criteria used in the two surveys differ and thus data from the two sources should not strictly be compared.

The 2002 NATSISS included two measures of disability. The first 'common' measure is based on a set of common criteria used to identify Indigenous people aged 15 years and over with a disability in both remote and non-remote areas. This measure does not include people whose only reported disability was psychological (that is, a nervous or emotional condition and/or mental illness requiring supervision). The second 'broader' measure was collected in non-remote areas only. It includes Indigenous people with a psychological disability and is directly comparable to criteria used to identify non-Indigenous people with a disability in the ABS 2002 General Social Survey. Comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are therefore limited to those aged 18 years and over in non-remote areas.

The 2006 Census asked three questions about need for assistance with core activities of self-care, mobility and communication and then a further question about the reason(s) that help was needed. Responses to these questions were used to identify whether there was a core activity need for assistance. Although conceptually consistent with the 'severe/profound core activity limitation' concept from the 2002 NATSISS, the Census criteria asked fewer questions to identify people with disability. Because of this, the proportion of people identified in the 2006 Census as needing assistance with core activities (16,000 or 5.6% for Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over) will generally be lower than comparable estimates of people with a profound/severe core activity limitation from the 2002 NATSISS (15,800 or 7.7% for Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over).

This measure presents data included in the 2006 edition of this report – 2002 NATSISS data for Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over and Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons aged 18 years and over for those with a profound/severe core activity limitation – and new data from the 2006 Census for persons of all ages for those who had a core activity need for assistance. Data from the NATSISS are presented first followed by data from the 2006 Census.

In order to include all respondents from the 2002 NATSISS (from remote and non-remote areas), the majority of tables in this measure are based on the disability populations identified using the common criteria, that is, the more restrictive criteria used in remote areas. The broader criteria are used in making comparisons with the non-Indigenous population (from the 2002 General Social Survey), and in the more detailed tables examining disability status of Indigenous people.

NATSISS data

Disability status

Common criteria

The common criteria for disability are based on a set of common criteria used to identify Indigenous people aged 15 years and over with a disability in both remote and non-remote areas. This measure does not include people whose only reported disability was psychological (that is, a nervous or emotional condition and/or mental illness requiring supervision).

Tables 1.13.1, 1.13.2 and 1.13.3 present data on the disability status of Indigenous Australians in 2002 based on the common criteria for disability.

- In 2002, 102,900 (36%) of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over had a disability or a long-term health condition according to the common criteria (Table 1.13.1). Of these, 21,800 or 8% of the population aged 15 years and over had a profound or severe core activity limitation, meaning that they always or sometimes needed assistance with at least one activity of everyday living (self-care, mobility or communication).
- The rate of disability or long-term health condition increased with age. Approximately 70% of people aged 55 years and over had a disability or long-term health condition.
- Overall, the prevalence rate, or proportion of people with a disability or long-term health condition, was similar in males (37%) and females (36%) (Table 1.13.2).
- In 2002, there was little difference between the proportion of Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over reporting a disability or long-term condition in remote and non-remote areas (35% and 37% respectively) (Table 1.13.3).

Table 1.13.1: Disability status, by age group, Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, 2002

Disability status	15–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55 years and over	Total
	Per cent					
Has profound/severe core activity limitation	3.8	5.9	7.2	12.3	17.4	7.7
Disability/restriction not further defined	19.0	23.1	31.0	37.3	52.2	28.7
Total with disability or long-term health condition	22.7	29.0	38.2	49.6	69.6	36.5
No disability or long-term health condition	77.3	71.0	61.8	50.4	30.4	63.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number	82,700	71,100	57,800	38,400	32,200	282,200

Source: AIHW analysis of the ABS 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey.

Table 1.13.2: Disability status, by sex, Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, 2002

Disability status	Male	Female	Persons
	Per cent		
Has profound/severe core activity limitation	7.4	8.0	7.7
Disability/restriction not further defined	29.5	28.1	28.7
Total with disability or long-term health condition	36.9	36.1	36.5
No disability or long-term health condition	63.1	63.9	63.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number	135,200	147,000	282,200

Source: AIHW analysis of the ABS 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey.

Table 1.13.3: Disability status, by remoteness, Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, 2002

Disability status	Remote	Non-remote
	Per cent	
Has profound core activity restriction	4.0	2.9
Has severe core activity restriction	4.9	4.4
Disability/restriction not defined	26.5	29.6
Total with disability or long-term health condition	35.4	36.9
Total number	77,100	205,100

Source: ABS & AIHW analysis of the ABS 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey.

Broader criteria

The broader criteria for disability were used in non-remote areas only. They include Indigenous people with a psychological disability and are directly comparable to criteria used to identify non-Indigenous people with a disability in the ABS 2002 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS collected information on non-Indigenous persons aged 18 years and over. Comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are therefore limited to those aged 18 years and over in non-remote areas using the broader criteria.

Tables 1.13.4 and 1.13.5 present disability rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over using the broader criteria for disability in non-remote areas of Australia.

- In 2002, after adjusting for differences in age structure, Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over in non-remote areas were 1.4 times more likely to have a disability or long-term condition than non-Indigenous Australians in non-remote areas (Table 1.13.4).
- Indigenous people were twice as likely to have a profound or severe core activity limitation as non-Indigenous Australians.
- Indigenous people had a higher rate of profound and severe core activity limitation than non-Indigenous people in all age groups. The greatest difference in rates occurred in the 45-54 year age group where Indigenous Australians reported a disability or long-term condition at around four times the rate of non-Indigenous people.
- In 2002, Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over had higher rates of disability than non-Indigenous Australians in all states and territories (rate ratios of between 1.3 and 1.6) except the Northern Territory, where rates were similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Table 1.13.5).
- The proportion of Indigenous Australians with a profound or severe core activity limitation was around three times that for non-Indigenous Australians in Victoria and Tasmania.

Table 1.13.4: Disability status, by Indigenous status and age group, persons aged 18 years and over, non-remote areas, 2002^(a)

Disability status	18–24		25–34		35–44		45–54		55 and over		Total		Total—age-standardised ^(b)		Rate ratio
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	
	Per cent														
Profound/severe core activity limitation	3.6	1.8	6.8	2.2	7.5	4.0	12.4	3.5	14.5	9.6	8.1	4.9	10.5	5.0	2.1
Disability/restriction not further defined	30.0	20.7	32.6	22.3	44.4	27.4	48.5	37.1	62.6	53.6	41.0	34.8	46.1	35.1	1.3
Total with disability or long-term health condition	33.7	22.5	39.4	24.5	51.9	31.4	60.9	40.6	77.1	63.2	49.2	39.6	56.6	40.0	1.4
No disability or long-term health condition	66.3	77.5	60.6	75.5	48.1	68.6	39.1	59.4	22.9	36.8	50.8	60.4	43.4	60.0	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.0
Total number	37,439	1,850,494	51,224	2,805,628	42,384	2,864,507	28,249	2,597,818	22,764	4,045,650	182,061	14,164,097	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

(a) Includes psychological disability.

(b) Directly age-standardised proportions.

Source: AIHW analysis of the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002.

Table 1.13.5: Disability status, by Indigenous status and state/territory, persons aged 18 years and over, non-remote areas, 2002^(a)

			Profound/ severe core activity limitation	Moderate/ mild core activity limitation	With schooling/ employment restriction only	No specific limitation	Total with disability or long-term health condition	No disability or long-term health condition	Total
NSW	Indig.	%	10.3	10.9	13.0	22.9	57.1	42.9	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	5.4	6.5	4.8	22.5	39.1	60.9	100.0
	Ratio		1.9	1.7	2.7	1.0	1.5	0.7	
Vic	Indig.	%	13.1	11.5	10.9	28.4	63.8	36.2	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	4.6 ^(b)	7.3	5.4	21.8	39.1	60.9	100.0
	Ratio		2.8	1.6	2.0	1.3	1.6	0.6	
Qld	Indig.	%	9.7	9.3	6.7	27.8	53.5	46.5	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	4.0 ^(b)	9.7	5.2	23.9	42.7	57.3	100.0
	Ratio		2.4	1.0	1.3	1.2	1.3	0.8	
WA	Indig.	%	9.7	13.5	8.3	25.8	57.3	42.7	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	5.5 ^(b)	8.6	6.5	20.6	41.2	58.8	100.0
	Ratio		1.8	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.4	0.7	
SA	Indig.	%	7.9	9.9	10.3	28.4	56.4	43.6	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	5.9 ^(b)	8.8	5.4	21.3	41.2	58.8	100.0
	Ratio		1.3	1.1	1.9	1.3	1.4	0.7	
Tas	Indig.	%	14.8	13.2	9.9	22.9	60.7	39.3	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	5.9 ^(b)	10	6.0	17.6	39.6	60.4	100.0
	Ratio		2.5	1.3	1.7	1.3	1.5	0.7	
ACT	Indig.	%	9.4 ^(b)	8.8 ^(b)	8.4 ^(b)	30.7	57.3	42.7	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	4.4 ^(b)	6.3	3.5	21.3	35.4	64.6	100.0
	Ratio		2.1	1.4	2.4	1.4	1.6	0.7	
NT	Indig.	%	6.5 ^(b)	5.5 ^(c)	4.3 ^(c)	9.0 ^(b)	25.3^(b)	74.7	100.0
	Non-Indig.	%	6.1 ^(c)	6.5	3.0	16.6	32.1	67.9	100.0
	Ratio		1.1	0.8	1.4	0.5	0.8	1.1	

(a) Includes psychological disability.

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

(c) Estimates with a relative standard error greater than 50% are considered too unreliable for general use.

Note: Proportions are age-standardised.

Source: ABS & AIHW analyses of ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002 and 2002 General Social Survey.

Disability type

Using the common criteria, disabilities and long-term health conditions have been grouped into broad disability types: physical, sensory/ speech (sight, hearing or speech) and intellectual.

- In 2002, 24% of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over had a physical disability or long-term health condition, 14% had a sensory/speech disability and 7% had an intellectual disability (Table 1.13.6). One in six Indigenous people (16%) had an unspecified long-term health condition (requiring treatment) which could not be coded to a disability type.
- The proportions of Indigenous people with a sensory/speech, physical or intellectual disability were higher in the older age groups. In the 55 years and over age group, 30% of Indigenous people reported a sensory/speech disability, 50% reported a physical disability and 9% reported an intellectual disability.

Table 1.13.6: Disability type, by age group, Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, 2002

Disability type	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55 or over	Total
	Per cent					
Sight, hearing, speech	7.6	10.5	13.3	19.3	30.0	13.7
Physical	13.5	16.6	24.0	35.8	50.2	23.6
Intellectual	7.4	6.3	6.7	5.5	9.0	6.9
Total with a disability or long-term health condition^(a)	22.7	29.0	38.2	49.6	69.7	36.5
Total with no disability or long-term health condition	77.3	71.0	61.8	50.4	30.3	63.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number	82,800	71,100	57,800	38,300	32,300	282,200

(a) Includes disability type not specified. Note that more than one disability type may be reported and thus the sum of the components may add to more than the total.

Source: AIHW analysis of the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002.

Disability by selected population characteristics

Table 1.13.7 presents disability status of Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over in non-remote areas of Australia by selected population characteristics. Data are based on the broader criteria used to identify persons with a disability in non-remote areas.

- In 2002, in non-remote areas, around two-thirds of Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over with a disability or long-term condition did not have a non-school qualification. Around half (51%) of Indigenous persons with a disability reported the highest year of school completed was Year 9 or below.
- Approximately 51% of Indigenous Australians in non-remote areas with a disability were in the lowest quintile of household income, and for 65% their principal source of income was government cash, pensions or allowances.
- The majority of Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over with a disability or long-term condition were not in the labour force in 2002 (54%).
- Approximately 87% of Indigenous persons in non-remote areas with a disability reported they had been involved in social activities in the last 3 months and 89% were able to get support in a time of crisis. Around 54% of Indigenous persons with a disability or long-term condition had been removed, or had a relative that had been removed, from their natural family and 27% currently lived on their homelands.

Table 1.13.7: Disability status, by selected population characteristics, Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, non-remote areas, 2002

	Has disability or long-term health condition	Has no disability or long-term health condition
	Per cent	
Education		
Attending post-school education institution	11.2	13.6
Non-school qualification ^(a)		
Has a non-school qualification	34.0	37.3
Does not have a non-school qualification	66.0	62.7
Highest school qualification attained ^(b)		
Completed Year 12	12.5	21.8
Completed Year 10/11	36.8	49.0
Completed Year 9 or below	50.7	29.2
Household income		
1st quintile	51.4	36.0
5th quintile	4.8	8.5
Total	56.1	44.5
Principle source of personal income		
Community Development Employment Program (CDEP)	8.3	11.5
Other wage or salary	18.1	35.3
Government cash, pensions, allowances	64.6	42.0
Other sources of income	3.4	2.9
<i>Subtotal received income</i>	95.2	92.3
Did not receive personal income	4.8	7.7
Employment		
Employed		
Full time	18.8	32.7
Part time	14.6	21.0
<i>Total employed</i>	33.2	53.7
Unemployed	13.3	14.0
Not in the labour force	53.6	32.3
Transport access		
Can easily get to places needed	64.6	78.3
Cannot, or often has difficulty, getting to places needed	14.1	6.4

(continued)

Table 1.13.7 (continued): Disability status, by selected population characteristics, Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, non-remote areas, 2002

	Has disability or long-term health condition	Has no disability or long-term health condition
	Per cent	
Family and culture		
Involved in social activities in last 3 months	86.2	92.3
Had undertaken voluntary work in last 12 months	34.0	30.3
Able to get support in time of crisis from someone outside the household	89.3	93.8
Has been removed from natural family	12.0	7.0
Relatives removed from natural family	41.7	35.6
Currently lives in homelands	27.4	22.6
Attended cultural event(s) in last 12 months	27.0	25.7
Total	47.2	52.7
Total number	102,900	179,300

(a) Rate for persons aged 25–64 years.

(b) Excludes persons still at school.

Note: Data based on the broader criteria for disability.

Source: AIHW analysis of the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002.

Census data

According to the 2006 Census 19,614 Indigenous Australians (4%) had a core activity need for assistance. After adjusting for differences in the age structures of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were almost twice as likely as non-Indigenous people to have a core activity need for assistance in 2006 (ABS & AIHW 2008).

Disability by age and sex

- The prevalence of core activity need for assistance increased noticeably from about 35 years of age onwards for both Indigenous men and women (Table 1.13.8). The disability rate ranged from around 1% of Indigenous children aged 0–4 years to 38% of Indigenous persons aged 75 years and over.
- Indigenous Australians had a higher rate of core activity need for assistance than non-Indigenous Australians across all age groups. The greatest differences occurred in the age groups 40–69 years, where Indigenous Australians reported a core activity need for assistance around three times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians (Table 1.13.8).
- Indigenous males were slightly more likely than Indigenous females to have a core activity need for assistance (4.5% compared with 4.1%). In comparison, non-Indigenous females were more likely than non-Indigenous males to have a core activity need for assistance (4.6% compared with 3.9%).

Table 1.13.8: Indigenous persons with core activity need for assistance, by sex and age group, 2006

Age group (years)	Indigenous						Non-Indigenous						Rate ratio		
	Males		Females		Persons		Males		Females		Persons				
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	Males	Females	Persons
0–4	388	1.4	238	0.9	628	1.1	6,421	1.1	3,828	0.7	10,249	0.9	1.2	1.3	1.2
5–9	963	3.3	525	1.9	1,487	2.6	16,422	2.7	8,017	1.4	24,439	2.1	1.2	1.3	1.2
10–14	970	3.3	556	2.0	1,528	2.7	15,799	2.5	8,175	1.4	23,974	1.9	1.3	1.5	1.4
15–19	697	2.8	422	1.8	1,117	2.3	11,191	1.8	7,081	1.2	18,272	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5
20–24	461	2.5	318	1.7	779	2.1	8,464	1.4	6,403	1.1	14,867	1.2	1.8	1.6	1.8
25–29	381	2.6	308	1.9	688	2.2	7,759	1.3	6,272	1.1	14,031	1.2	1.9	1.8	1.8
30–34	482	3.2	351	2.1	833	2.6	9,404	1.5	7,979	1.2	17,383	1.3	2.1	1.8	2.0
35–39	572	4.0	562	3.4	1,135	3.7	11,819	1.8	10,428	1.5	22,247	1.6	2.2	2.3	2.3
40–44	711	5.6	689	4.8	1,400	5.2	14,661	2.2	13,328	1.9	27,989	2.0	2.6	2.5	2.6
45–49	742	6.9	786	6.6	1,527	6.8	17,062	2.6	16,780	2.4	33,842	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.7
50–54	773	9.0	817	8.7	1,590	8.8	19,558	8.8	19,617	3.1	39,175	3.2	2.8	2.8	2.8
55–59	796	12.7	787	11.3	1,583	12.0	27,660	4.8	23,793	4.1	51,453	4.4	2.6	2.8	2.7
60–64	688	16.3	717	15.1	1,405	15.6	29,695	6.6	22,383	5.0	52,078	5.8	2.5	3	2.7
65–69	500	18.5	578	17.4	1,077	17.9	23,405	6.7	22,483	6.3	45,888	6.5	2.8	2.8	2.8
70–74	382	21.6	581	25.0	962	23.5	24,813	9.1	30,308	10.1	55,121	9.6	2.4	2.5	2.4
75 and over	642	33.3	1232	40.3	1,874	37.6	108,098	22.7	221,711	32.1	329,809	28.2	1.5	1.3	1.3
Total (crude)	10,147	4.5	9,468	4.1	19,613	4.3	352,231	3.9	428,586	4.6	780,817	4.3	1.2	0.9	1.0
Total—age-standardised^(a)	..	7.5	..	7.2	..	7.4	..	3.9	..	4.2	..	4.1	1.9	1.7	1.8

(a) Age-standardised to the 2001 Australian standard population.

Source: ABS & AIHW analysis of 2006 Census data; ABS & AIHW 2008.

Prevalence of disability among Indigenous children

The 2006 Census was the first national survey to include a question on disability which included Indigenous respondents under 15 years of age.

Table 1.13.9 presents proportions of Indigenous children with core activity need for assistance.

- In 2006, among Indigenous children aged 0–18 years, a higher proportion of males than females required assistance with core activities.
- Indigenous children aged 0–4 years were slightly more likely to have a core activity need for assistance than non-Indigenous children of the same age (ratios of 1.2 for males and 1.3 for females).
- Approximately 3% of Indigenous children aged 5–18 years had a core activity need for assistance. Indigenous males and females in this age group were 1.3 and 1.5 times as likely to have a profound or severe disability as non-Indigenous males and females of the same age.

Table 1.13.9: Indigenous children aged 0–18 years with a core activity need for assistance, by sex, 2006

Age group (years)	Males		Females		Persons		Ratio		
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	Males	Females	Persons
0–4	388	1.4	238	0.9	626	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.2
5–18	2,526	3.2	1436	1.9	3,962	2.6	1.3	1.5	1.4
0–18	2,914	2.7	1674	1.6	4,588	2.2	1.3	1.4	1.3

Note: Data exclude those for whom whether needed assistance with core activities was not stated (7% for Indigenous and 2% for non-Indigenous all ages).

Source: ABS & AIHW analysis of 2006 Census data; ABS & AIHW 2008.

Data relating to disability in Indigenous children were also collected in the Western Australia Aboriginal Child Health Survey which collected information on the health of Aboriginal and a small number of Torres Strait Islander children in Western Australia over 2001 and 2002. Parents and carers were asked a number of questions in relation to their child's health and special needs.

An estimated 2% of Indigenous children aged 4–17 years in Western Australia needed help with activities of daily living such as eating, dressing, bathing and going to the toilet. Limitations in vigorous activity were experienced by 4% of children of the same age. Approximately 8% of Indigenous children did not have normal vision in both eyes, and 7% did not have normal hearing in both ears (ABS & AIHW 2005).

Additional information

Indigenous carers

Information on Indigenous carers of persons with a disability, long-term health condition or problems related to old age is available from the 2006 Census. Information on the carers of Indigenous children with a disability, chronic illness or pain is available from the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey. These data are presented below.

In 2006, the Census collected, for the first time, information on the number of carers aged 15 years and over in Australia. Table 1.13.10 presents data for carers by Indigenous status and age.

- After adjusting for differences in the age structures of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, Indigenous Australians were more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be caring for another person with a disability, long-term illness or problems related to old age.
- The median age of Indigenous carers was 37 years, compared with 49 years for non-Indigenous carers (ABS & AIHW 2008). The age groups 35–44 years and 45–54 years had the highest proportion of Indigenous carers and the age group 55–64 years had the highest proportion of non-Indigenous carers.
- Indigenous persons aged 15–34 years were almost twice as likely as non-Indigenous persons of the same age to be carers in 2006. The proportion of persons aged 45 years and over who were carers was similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Table 1.13.10: Carers^(a) by Indigenous status and age, 2006

Age group (years)	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Rate ratio
	(%)	(%)	
15–24	7.9	4.5	1.7
25–34	12.1	7.5	1.6
35–44	14.7	11.2	1.3
45–54	15.3	15.0	1.0
55–64	14.0	16.5	0.9
65 and over	10.4	10.4	1.0
Total^(b)	11.9	10.8	1.1
Total—age-standardised^(c)	12.4	10.5	1.2
Total carers^(a)	31,600	1,532,057	..

(a) Persons aged 15 years and over living in private dwellings who provided unpaid care, help or assistance to another person because of their disability, long-term illness or problems related to old age.

(b) Rates are age-specific so will not add to 100%.

(c) Age-standardised to the 2001 final ERP.

Source: ABS & AIHW 2008.

In the survey, carers of Indigenous children were asked whether each child placed a burden on them and the family as a result of any disability, chronic illness or pain. Carers reported that around 5% of children placed a 'little or some' burden on their carers and families, and 3% children placed 'quite a lot or very much' burden on their carers and families. The

experience of burden on carers and families declined with increasing level of relative isolation. Burden was reported to be particularly high in families where children were reported to have impairments in self-care (e.g. activities of daily living). Just over half of the carers of the 380 children who needed special help with eating, dressing, bathing or toileting reported that this placed 'quite a lot or very much' burden on the family (Zubrick et al. 2004).

Data quality issues

Census of Population and Housing

The Census uses the standard Indigenous status question and it is asked for each household member. Measures that are drawn from Census data are subject to broad data concerns relating to the unexplainable growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population since the 1991 Census, and limitations of self-identification. Other Census data issues relate to the accuracy of the Census count itself, for example, whether people are counted more than once, or are undercounted (ABS 1996).

The 2006 Census included a short series of questions in relation to core activity need for assistance. This is a new variable for the 2006 Census. This variable has been developed to measure the number of people with a profound or severe disability, that is, people needing help or assistance in one or more of the three core activity areas of self-care, mobility and communication, because of a disability (lasting 6 months or more), long-term health condition (lasting 6 months or more) or old age. This population is a subset of the broader disability population, and is more readily and consistently identifiable than that broader population.

Note that because of the collapsed nature of the questions and different collection methodology, the census data should not be used for prevalence estimate updates between disability survey years. The disability variable in the Census was designed to capture the characteristics of the population of interest rather than to obtain exactly the same population, even though conceptually it is the same as 'profound or severe core activity limitation' from the survey and module approaches.

Although this topic is based on the criteria used in the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, the population measured will differ as a result of the different collection methodology used and reduced question format. On this basis, data for this topic should be taken as an indication of the characteristics of people who report a need for assistance, not as the total prevalence of people with a 'profound or severe core activity limitation' as represented in the survey data.

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 overcomes 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 identify 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.

(continued)

Data quality issues (continued)

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

Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey

Survey data are subject to sampling and non-sampling errors. Confidence intervals are published with the data to provide a guide to the reliability of the estimates. Non-sampling errors can occur in surveys due to questionnaire design problems, respondent difficulty recalling information/lack of appropriate records, and errors made in the recording and processing of the data. Every effort was made to minimise non-sample errors in this survey.

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