

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 (NATSISS) 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 or 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, as well as 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.

The 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 with 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.

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 for Indigenous people.

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 has been the first to gather comprehensive health, educational and developmental information on a population-based sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their families and communities across the state. Current work is underway 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

Self-reported prevalence

Disability status

Common criteria

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 or 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 or 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 or 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 older, 2002

	15–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55 years and over	Total
Disability status	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
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 older, 2002

	Male	Female	Persons
Disability status	(%)	(%)	(%)
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
	%	%
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

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 older, non-remote areas, 2002^(a)

Disability status	18–24		25–34		35–44		45–54		55 and over		Total		Total—age standardised ^(b)		
	Indig. (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Indig. (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Indig. (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Indig. (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Indig. (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Indig. (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Indig. (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Rate ratio
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
<i>Total with disability or long-term health condition</i>	<i>33.7</i>	<i>22.5</i>	<i>39.4</i>	<i>24.5</i>	<i>51.9</i>	<i>31.4</i>	<i>60.9</i>	<i>40.6</i>	<i>77.1</i>	<i>63.2</i>	<i>49.2</i>	<i>39.6</i>	<i>56.6</i>	<i>40.0</i>	<i>1.4</i>
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)

	Disability status		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 25–50% 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: SCRGSP 2005 - (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 older, 2002

Disability type	15–24 (%)	25–34 (%)	35–44 (%)	45–54 (%)	55 or over (%)	Total (%)
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
<i>Total with a disability or long-term health condition^(a)</i>	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 three 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 older, non-remote areas, 2002

	Has disability or long-term health condition (%)	Has no disability or long-term health condition (%)
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 older, non-remote areas, 2002

	Has disability or long-term health condition (%)	Has no disability or long-term health condition (%)
Family and culture		
Involved in social activities in last three 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.

Additional information

Prevalence of disability among Indigenous children

There is no national survey of disability amongst children that includes Indigenous respondents. Therefore the only national data currently available on children with special needs are the self-reported data from the NATSISS for Indigenous peoples aged 15–18 years. Data on disability among Indigenous persons aged 15–18 years in non-remote areas are presented in Table 1.13.8. It should be noted that the sample size for this small population group is small and thus results should be interpreted with caution.

- In 2002, in non-remote areas of Australia, approximately 29% of Indigenous males and 35% of Indigenous females aged 15–18 years reported a disability or long-term condition.
- Approximately 3% of Indigenous persons aged 15–18 years reported a profound or severe core activity limitation, 3% reported a moderate or mild core activity limitation, 9% reported a schooling/employment restriction only and 16% reported no specific limitation.

Table 1.13.8: Disability status, Indigenous persons aged 15–18 years, non-remote areas, 2002

Disability status	Males (%)	Females (%)	Persons (%)
Has profound/severe core activity restriction	3.8	3.0	3.4
Has moderate/mild core activity restriction	3.4	2.9	3.1
Has a schooling/employment restriction only	10.7	8.1	9.3
Has no specific limitation	11.5	20.9	16.1
Total with disability or long-term health condition	29.4	34.9	31.8
Total number	14,700	14,800	29,500

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

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).

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 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 address language and cultural appropriateness in traditional communities, as well as to assist respondents in understanding 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 national publications (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.

References

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

ABS & AIHW (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2005. The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 2005. ABS cat. no. 4704.0, AIHW cat. no. IHW 14. Canberra: ABS & AIHW.

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2005. Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage: key indicators 2005. Canberra: Productivity Commission.