

2.07 Employment status

The employment status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 15–64 years

Data sources

Data for this measure come from the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS).

The 2004–05 NATSIHS collected information from 10,439 Indigenous Australians of all ages. This sample was considerably larger than the supplementary Indigenous samples in the 1995 and 2001 National Health Surveys. The survey was conducted in remote and non-remote areas of Australia and collected a range of information from Indigenous Australians about health-related issues including health-related actions, health risk factors, health status, socioeconomic circumstances and women's health. It is planned to repeat the NATSIHS at six-yearly intervals, with the next NATSIHS to be conducted in 2010–11. Selected non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the 2004–05 National Health Survey (NHS).

The following labour force categories and terminologies have been used in this measure:

- **Employed** – persons who had a job or business, or who undertook work without pay in a family business for a minimum of one hour per week. Includes persons who were absent from a job or business and Community Development Employment Projects participants.
- **Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme** – enables participants (usually members of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities) to exchange unemployment benefits for opportunities to undertake work and training in activities that are managed by a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community organisation. Participants in the program are therefore classified as employed.
- **Unemployed** – persons who were not employed and actively looking for work in the four weeks prior to the survey, and were available to start work in the week prior to the survey.
- **Not in the labour force** – persons who are not employed or unemployed as defined above, including persons who:
 - are retired
 - no longer work
 - do not intend to work in the future
 - are permanently unable to work
 - have never worked and never intend to work.
- **Participation rate** – for any group, the labour force expressed as a percentage of the civilian population in the same group.
- **Employment to population ratio** – for any group, the number of employed persons expressed as a percentage of the civilian population in the same group.

Data analyses

Employment status

- In 2004–05, the labour force participation rate for the Indigenous population aged 15–64 years was estimated to be 60%, 51% employed (40% in non-CDEP and 11% in CDEP) and 9% unemployed. The remaining 40% were not in the labour force.
- After adjusting for differences in age structure, Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 years were less likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be in the labour force (58% compared with 78%), less likely to be employed (51% compared with 75%) and more than twice as likely to be unemployed (8% compared with 3%) (Table 2.07.3).

Employment status by age and sex

- Indigenous Australians aged 25–34 and 35–44 years were most likely to be employed (58% and 63% respectively) than those in the younger and older age groups (Table 2.07.1). Indigenous Australians aged 15–24 were most likely to be unemployed (16%).
- A higher proportion of Indigenous males reported they were employed than Indigenous females (58% compared with 44%) (Table 2.07.2). Indigenous males were also more likely than Indigenous females to be unemployed (11% compared with 8%).

Table 2.07.1: Persons aged 15–64 years: labour force status, by Indigenous status and age, 2004–05

	15–24		25–34		35–44		45–54		55–64		Non age-standardised total		Age-standardised total		
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio
Number															
In the labour force	51,413	1,972,397	46,523	2,342,043	40,922	2,435,089	23,748	2,236,395	6,194	1,177,087	168,801	10,163,011	..	..	..
Employed CDEP	8,130	..	9,938	..	7,556	..	3,793	..	1,138	..	30,555	..	..	..	..
Employed non-CDEP	28,999	1,790,270	30,852	2,242,187	29,610	2,365,122	17,783	2,179,872	4,823	1,145,136	112,067	9,722,586	..	..	..
Total employed	37,129	1,790,270	40,790	2,242,187	37,166	2,365,122	21,576	2,179,872	5,961	1,145,136	142,622	9,722,586	..	..	..
Unemployed	14,285	182,127	5,733	99,857	3,756	69,967	2,172	56,523	233	31,951	26,179	440,425	..	..	..
Not in the labour force	40,654	663,802	23,249	419,311	18,135	464,476	15,830	469,185	14,735	922,338	112,603	2,939,112	..	..	..
Total	92,067	2,636,199	69,772	2,761,354	59,057	2,899,566	39,578	2,705,580	20,930	2,099,424	281,404	13,102,123	..	..	..
Per cent															
In the labour force	56*	75*	67*	85*	69*	84*	60*	83*	30*	56*	60*	78*	58	78	0.7*
Employed CDEP	9	..	14*	..	13*	..	10	..	5	..	11	..	11	..	..
Employed non-CDEP	31*	68*	44*	81*	50*	82*	45*	81*	23*	55*	40*	74*	40	75	0.5*
Total employed	40*	68*	58*	81*	63*	82*	55*	81*	28*	55*	51*	74*	51	75	0.7*
Unemployed	16*	7*	8*	4*	6*	2*	5*	2*	1 ^(a)	2	9*	3*	8	3	2.3*
Not in the labour force	44*	25*	33*	15*	31*	16*	40*	17*	70*	44*	40*	22*	42	22	1.9*
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	..

* Represents results with statistically significant differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error above 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Sources: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.

Table 2.07.2: Labour force status of Indigenous persons aged 15–64 years, by sex, 2004–05

	Males	Females	Persons
Labour force status	%	%	%
In the labour force	69	51	60
Employed CDEP	13	9	11
Employed non-CDEP	46	35	40
<i>Total employed</i>	58	44	51
Unemployed	11	8	9
Not in the labour force	31	49	40
Total	100	100	100

Source: AIHW and ABS analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS.

Table 2.07.3: Labour force status of persons aged 15–64 years, by Indigenous status and sex, 2004–05

	Males			Females			Persons		
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Ratio
	%	%		%	%		%	%	
In the labour force	68	86	0.8*	50	71	0.7*	58	78	0.7*
Employed CDEP	12	..	..	9	..	..	11	..	..
Employed non-CDEP	46	82	0.6*	35	67	0.5*	40	75	0.5*
<i>Total employed</i>	59	82	0.7*	44	67	0.6*	51	75	0.7*
Unemployed	9	4	2.5*	7	3	2.0*	8	3	2.3*
Not in the labour force	32	14	2.2*	50	29	1.7*	42	22	1.9*
Total	100	100	..	100	100	..	100	100	..

* Represents results with statistically significant differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Note: Data are age standardised.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.

Employment status by state/territory and remoteness

- The proportion of Indigenous Australians who were unemployed ranged from 12% in Tasmania to 6% in the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory (Table 2.07.4). The proportion of Indigenous Australians not in the labour force ranged from 29% in the Australian Capital Territory to 50% in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Indigenous Australians employed in CDEP (24%).
- In every state and territory except the Australian Capital Territory, a higher proportion of Indigenous Australians than non-Indigenous Australians were unemployed. In every state and territory a higher proportion of Indigenous Australians than non-Indigenous Australians were not in the labour force (Table 2.07.5).

- Indigenous Australians in remote areas were more likely to be employed in CDEP (29%) and less likely to be employed in non-CDEP (23%) than Indigenous Australians in non-remote areas (4% and 46% respectively) (Table 2.07.6; Figure 2.07.1).

Table 2.07.4: Labour force status of Indigenous persons aged 15–64 years, by state/territory, 2004–05

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Labour force status	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
In the labour force	59	64	66	60	55	61	71	50	60
Employed CDEP	5	4 ^(a)	9	21	12	0 ^(b)	1 ^(b)	24	11
Employed non-CDEP	45	51	46	29	36	48	64	19	40
<i>Total employed</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>65</i>	43	<i>51</i>
Unemployed	9	9	11	9	7	12	6 ^(a)	6	9
Not in the labour force	41	36	34	40	45	39	29	50	40
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

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

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error above 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Source: AIHW and ABS analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS.

Table 2.07.5: Labour force status of persons aged 15–64 years, by Indigenous status and state/territory, 2004–05

	NSW		Vic		Qld		WA		SA		Tas		ACT		NT		Australia	
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.
	(number)																	
In the labour force	48,614	3,371,351	11,256	2,568,214	49,751	1,983,571	23,988	989,308	8,768	769,523	6,567	219,869	1,812	187,635	18,044	73,540	168,801	10,163,011
Employed CDEP	3,929	..	645	..	6,918	..	8,326	..	1,984	..	38	..	18	..	8,697	..	30,555	..
Employed non-CDEP	37,297	3,221,271	8,942	2,454,330	34,360	1,893,972	11,848	952,823	5,680	738,449	5,237	208,252	1,646	180,483	7,058	73,007	112,067	9,722,586
<i>Total employed</i>	<i>41,226</i>	<i>3,221,271</i>	<i>9,588</i>	<i>2,454,330</i>	<i>41,278</i>	<i>1,893,972</i>	<i>20,174</i>	<i>952,823</i>	<i>7,663</i>	<i>738,449</i>	<i>5,275</i>	<i>208,252</i>	<i>1,664</i>	<i>180,483</i>	<i>15,755</i>	<i>73,007</i>	<i>142,622</i>	<i>9,722,586</i>
Unemployed	7,388	150,080	1,668	113,885	8,473	89,599	3,815	36,485	1,105	31,075	1,292	11,617	148	7,151	2,289	533	26,179	440,425
Not in the labour force	33,690	1,002,445	6,393	753,306	25,766	534,436	16,306	293,391	7,161	217,577	4,241	82,044	741	36,425	18,305	19,490	112,603	2,939,112
Total	82,304	4,373,796	17,649	3,321,520	75,517	2,518,007	40,294	1,282,698	15,930	987,100	10,808	301,913	2,553	224,060	36,349	93,030	281,404	13,102,123

(continued)

Table 2.07.5 (continued): Labour force status of persons aged 15-64 years, by Indigenous status and state/territory, 2004-05

	NSW		Vic		Qld		SA		WA		Tas		ACT		NT		Australia	
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.
	(per cent)																	
In the labour force	58*	78*	62*	78*	63*	79*	54*	79*	58*	77*	60*	74*	71*	84*	51*	79*	58*	78*
Employed																		
CDEP	4	..	3 ^(a)	..	9	..	12	..	20	..	0 ^(b)	..	1 ^(b)	..	25	..	11	..
Employed non-CDEP	46*	74*	51*	74*	44*	76*	36*	76*	30*	75*	50*	70*	65*	81*	21*	79*	40*	75*
<i>Total employed</i>	51*	74*	54*	74*	53*	76*	48*	76*	50*	75*	50*	70*	66*	81*	46*	79*	51*	75*
Unemployed	7*	3*	8	3	10*	4*	6*	3*	8*	3*	9*	4*	5 ^(a)	3	5*	1 ^{*(b)}	8*	3*
Not in the labour force	42*	22*	38*	22*	37*	21*	46*	21*	42*	23*	40*	26*	29*	16*	49*	21*	42*	22*
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

* Represents results with statistically significant differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

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

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Note: Data are age standardised.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004-05 NATSIHS and 2004-05 National Health Survey 2004-05.

Table 2.07.6: Labour force status of Indigenous persons aged 15–64 years, by remoteness, 2004–05

	Remote	Non-remote	Australia
Labour force status	%	%	%
In the labour force	58	61	60
Employed CDEP	29	4	11
Employed non-CDEP	23	46	40
<i>Total employed</i>	51	50	51
Unemployed	7	10	9
Not in the labour force	42	39	40
Total	100	100	100

Source: AIHW and ABS analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHSational Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey.

Table 2.07.7: Labour force status of persons aged 15–64 years, by Indigenous status and remoteness, 2004–05

	Remote			Non-remote			Total		
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Ratio ^(b)	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Ratio ^(b)	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Ratio ^(b)
Labour force status	%	%		%	%		%	%	
In the labour force	58	82	0.7*	58	78	0.7*	58	78	0.7*
Employed CDEP	28	..	..	4	..	..	11	..	..
Employed non-CDEP	24	80	0.3*	46	75	0.6*	40	75	0.5*
<i>Total employed</i>	52	80	0.7*	50	75	0.7*	51	75	0.7*
Unemployed	6	3 ^(b)	2.3*	8	3	2.4*	8	3	2.3*
Not in the labour force	42	18	2.4*	42	22	1.9*	42	22	1.9*
Total^(c)	100	100	..	100	100	..	100	100	..

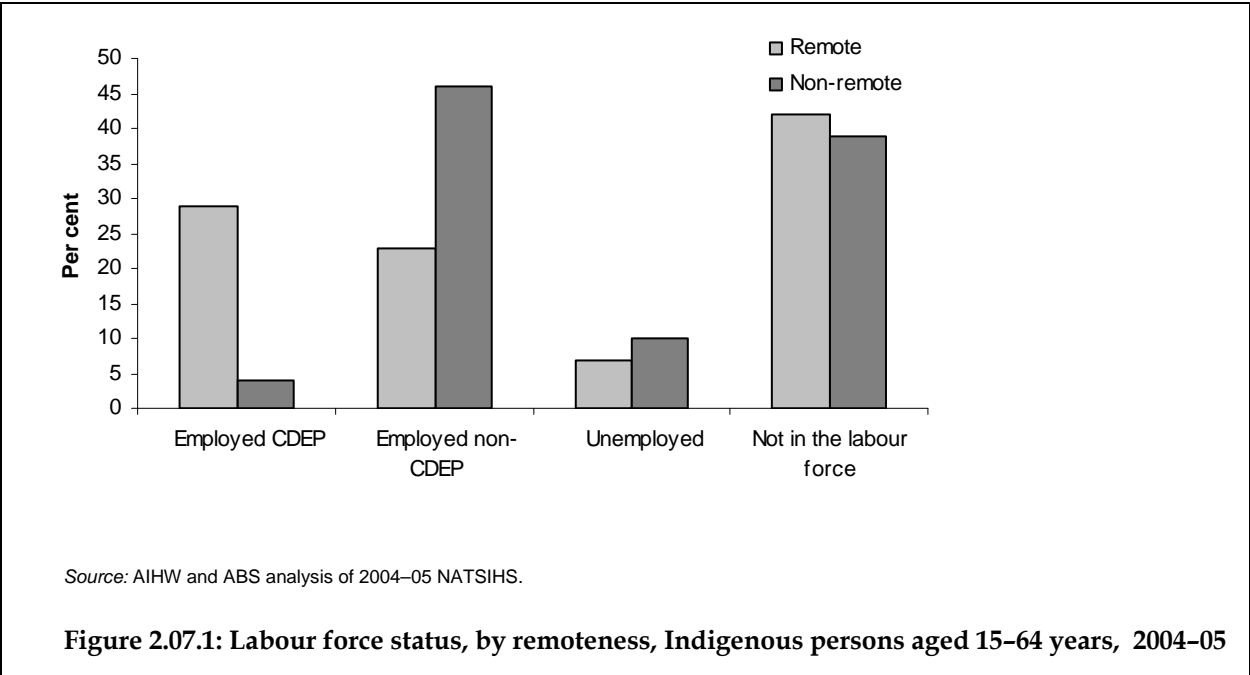
(a) Ratio = Indigenous proportion divided by the non-Indigenous proportion.

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

(c) Includes labour force status not stated.

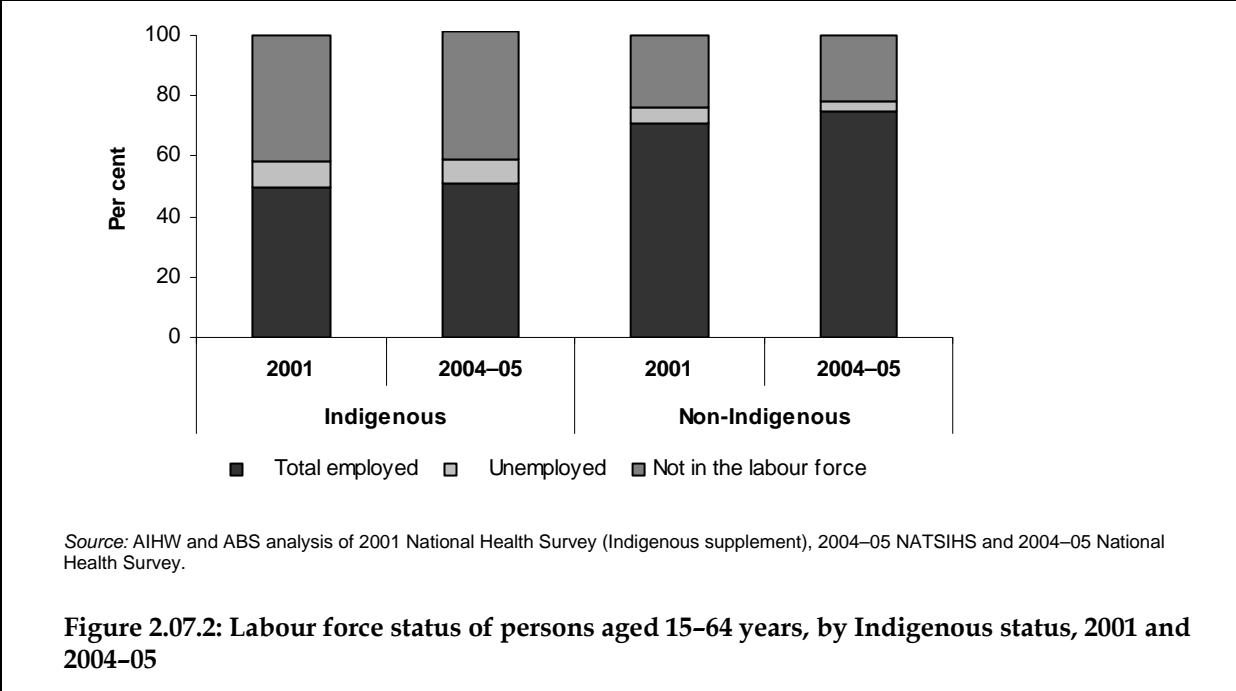
Note: Data are age standardised.

Source: AIHW and ABS analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.



Time series analysis

Various data sources suggest different trends in employment status. Data from the NATSIHS and National Health Surveys presented in Figure 2.07.2 suggest that there has been little change in the labour force status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians between 2001 and 2004-05. However data from the 1994 NATSIS and 2002 NATSISS indicate that nationally, the labour force participation rate for Indigenous Australians aged 18 to 64 years increased from 57% in 1994 to 64% in 2002 and the unemployment rate fell from 30% to 20% in the same period (SCRGSP 2005).



Employment status by summary health characteristics

- In 2004–05, approximately 65% of Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 years with reported excellent/very good/good health were in the labour force (55% employed) compared to 43% of Indigenous Australians with reported fair/poor health (35% employed) (Table 2.07.8a). Approximately 13% of Indigenous Australians with no long-term health conditions were unemployed compared to 7% of Indigenous Australians with three or more long-term conditions.
- Indigenous Australians with no long-term health conditions were three times as likely as non-Indigenous Australians with no long-term health conditions to be unemployed. Indigenous Australians with three or more long-term health conditions were twice as likely as non-Indigenous Australians with three or more long-term health conditions to be unemployed (Table 2.07.8b).

Table 2.07.8a: Labour force status of Indigenous persons aged 15–64 years, by summary health characteristics, 2004–05

	Self-assessed health status		Number of long-term health conditions				Total
	Excellent/very good/good	Fair/poor	0	1	2	3+	
	per cent						
In the labour force	65	43	60	65	65	56	60
Employed CDEP	12	7	16	12	9	8	11
Employed non-CDEP	43	28	31	43	47	40	40
<i>Total employed</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>51</i>
Unemployed	10	8	13	10	9	7	9
Not in the labour force	35	57	40	35	35	44	40
Total^(a)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total number	222,665	58,668	66,107	53,741	49,337	112,219	281,404

(a) Includes labour force status not stated.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS.

Table 2.07.8b: Labour force status of persons aged 15–64 years, by summary health characteristics and Indigenous status, 2004–05

	Self-assessed health status						Number of long-term health conditions															
	Excellent/very good/good			Fair/Poor			0			1			2			3+			Total			
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	
	%	%		%	%		%	%		%	%		%	%		%	%		%	%		%
In the labour force	64	81	0.8*	45	61	0.7*	61	79	0.8*	64	82	0.8*	62	82	0.8*	56	76	0.7*	58	78	0.7*	
Employed CDEP	12	..	..	7	..	..	17	..	..	12	..	..	9	..	..	8	..	..	11	..	..
Employed non-CDEP	45	..	..	29	..	..	35	..	..	44	..	..	46	..	..	40	..	..	40	..	..
<i>Total employed</i>	57	78	0.7*	36	56	0.6*	52	76	0.7*	56	79	0.78	55	79	0.7*	48	72	0.7*	51	75	0.7*	
Unemployed	7	3	2.2*	9	5	1.8*	9	3	2.7*	8	3	2.4*	7	3	2.5*	8	4	1.9*	8	3	2.3*	
Not in the labour force	36	19	1.9*	55	39	1.4*	39	21	1.9*	36	18	2.1*	38	18	2.1*	44	24	1.8*	42	22	1.9*	
Total^(a)	100	100	..	100	100	..	100	100	..	100	100	..	100	100	..	100	100	..	100	100	..	

* Represents results with statistically significant differences in the Indigenous/non-Indigenous comparisons.

(a) Includes labour force status not stated.

Note: Data are age standardised

Source: ABS & AIHW analysis of 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey & 2004–05 National Health Survey.

Data quality issues

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey

The NATSIHS uses the standard Indigenous status question. The NATSIHS sample was specifically designed to select a representative sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and thus overcomes the problem inherent in most national surveys with small and unrepresentative Indigenous samples. As with other surveys, the NATSIHS 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.

Non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the National Health Survey (NHS). The NHS was conducted in major cities, regional and remote areas, but very remote areas were excluded from the sample. Time series comparisons are available through the 1995 and 2001 National Health Survey.

In remote communities there were some modifications to the NATSIHS 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 NATSIHS data quality issues can be found in the national publication (ABS 2006).

References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2006. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004–05. Canberra: ABS.
- SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2005. Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage: key indicators 2005. Canberra: Productivity Commission.