

INTRODUCTION

Torres Strait Islander people are a culturally distinct group within the Indigenous population. They comprise 11% of the total Indigenous population in Australia and 26% of the Indigenous population in Queensland. Most people of Torres Strait Islander origin do not live in the Torres Strait Area. Those Torres Strait Islander people who do live in the Torres Strait Area often have different characteristics to those who live in other parts of Australia, whose characteristics are more like the total Australian Indigenous population.

This chapter draws on information from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing, the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) vital statistics collection (births and deaths), the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), the 2002 General Social Survey (GSS), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) National Hospital Morbidity Database (NHMD), the AIHW National Mortality Database and the 2002 AIHW National Perinatal Statistics data collection.

Where possible, comparisons are made between all persons of Torres Strait Islander origin living in the Torres Strait Area and those living in other parts of Australia. Comparisons are also made with people of Aboriginal origin only and with the non-Indigenous population. People who were identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin or both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin have been included in the Torres Strait Islander population.

At present the national health and welfare data on Torres Strait Islander people are incomplete. The ABS, through its national surveys, continues to work towards providing reliable estimates of the health, welfare and social characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples using extended Indigenous sampling design. The 2002 NATSISS provides results for Torres Strait Islander people, while the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) has sufficient sample size to be able to report separately for Torres Strait Islander people. Improvements in Indigenous identification within administrative health data sets are also being pursued and collection improvements implemented on an ongoing basis.

DEMOGRAPHIC  
CHARACTERISTICS

*Estimated Indigenous  
resident population*

To arrive at an estimate of the size of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population using the Census count (on a usual residence basis), allowance is made for net undercount and for instances in which Indigenous status is unknown. In addition, population estimates for dates other than the Census date also take account of births, deaths and migration in the intervening period. The experimental estimated resident population (ERP) for all persons of Torres Strait Islander origin at 30 June 2001 was 48,800 or 11% of the total Indigenous population.

*Estimated Indigenous  
resident population  
continued*

Overall, more than half (59%) of all Torres Strait Islander people live in Queensland (including the Torres Strait Area), with a further 18% in New South Wales (table 12.1). The Torres Strait Area is home to around 14% of the Torres Strait Islander population of Australia (table 12.2).

### **12.1** EXPERIMENTAL INDIGENOUS ESTIMATED RESIDENT POPULATION, by state or territory of usual residence—June 2001

State/territory		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Aboriginal only	Indigenous
New South Wales	%	17.7	30.8	29.4
Victoria	%	6.3	6.0	6.1
Queensland	%	58.7	23.7	27.5
South Australia	%	2.9	5.9	5.6
Western Australia	%	5.0	15.5	14.4
Tasmania	%	4.8	3.7	3.8
Northern Territory	%	3.9	13.4	12.4
Australian Capital Territory	%	0.6	0.9	0.9
Australia	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Population estimate</b>	no.	<b>48 800</b>	<b>409 700</b>	<b>458 500</b>

(a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.  
Source: ABS 2004e

The Torres Strait Islander population has a young age structure. In 2001, an estimated 73% of Torres Strait Islander people were under 35 years of age compared with 48% of the non-Indigenous population. Only 8% of Torres Strait Islander people were aged 55 years or over compared with 22% of the non-Indigenous population (7% of Aboriginal people were aged 55 years or over) (table 12.2).

### **12.2** EXPERIMENTAL INDIGENOUS ESTIMATED RESIDENT POPULATION, by age—June 2001

#### TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(a)

Age (years)		Torres Strait Area	Balance of Australia	Total	Aboriginal only	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
0–14	%	40.0	39.6	39.6	38.9	39.0	20.1
15–34	%	32.1	33.0	32.9	34.2	34.1	28.3
35–54	%	19.5	19.4	19.4	20.2	20.1	29.2
55 or over	%	8.4	8.0	8.1	6.7	6.8	22.3
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Population estimate</b>	no.	<b>6 900</b>	<b>41 900</b>	<b>48 800</b>	<b>409 700</b>	<b>458 500</b>	<b>18 954 700</b>

(a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin. Source: ABS 2004e

#### *Births*

A birth is recorded as a Torres Strait Islander birth where at least one parent is identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin (or of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin). While the identification of Indigenous births (including Torres Strait Islander births) is incomplete, identification for the period 2001–03 is estimated to be 91% for Australia and 94% for Queensland (ABS 2004a). Separate identification ratios for each of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births are not available.

*Births continued*

In addition to the under-identification of Indigenous births generally, the distinction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births is not always made when a birth is registered. 2001–03 births data for Torres Strait Islander people should therefore be viewed as indicative only.

In the period 2001–03, there were 3,738 births registered as Torres Strait Islander, of which two-thirds (2,432 births) were to Torres Strait Islander mothers. The remainder (1,306 babies) had a Torres Strait Islander father, but not a Torres Strait Islander mother. The median age of Torres Strait Islander mothers was 25 years (table 12.3).

**12.3** CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS—2001–03

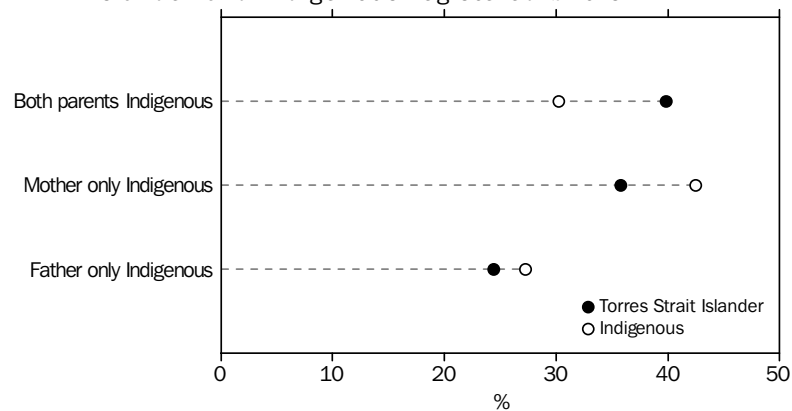
		Torres Strait Islander mothers(a)	Indigenous mothers
Age of mother (years)			
Less than 20	%	16.5	21.1
20–24	%	32.6	30.4
25–29	%	26.5	24.9
30–34	%	15.9	16.0
35–39	%	6.5	6.2
40 or over	%	2.0	1.2
Total	%	100.0	100.0
Median age of mother	years	25.1	24.7
Median age of father	years	28.0	27.9
<b>All registered births</b>	no.	<b>2 432</b>	<b>23 553</b>

(a) Includes mothers who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: ABS, *Births Registration Database*

Two in five babies registered as Torres Strait Islander in origin (40%) had two Indigenous parents, compared with 30% of Indigenous babies overall (graph 12.4).

**12.4** INDIGENOUS STATUS OF PARENTS — 2001–03, Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous registered births



Source: ABS, *Births Registration Database*

*Births continued*

Torres Strait Islander births accounted for 11% of all registered Indigenous births and 0.5% of all registered births in Australia in 2001–03 (ABS 2004a). Over this period, the number of births registered as Torres Strait islander averaged around 1,250 annually (table 12.5).

**12.5** TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER REGISTERED BIRTHS—2001–03

	Torres Strait Islander births	Indigenous births	Torres Strait Islander births as a proportion of Indigenous births
	no.	no.	%
2001	1 280	11 405	11.2
2002	1 172	11 488	10.2
<b>2003</b>	<b>1 286</b>	<b>11 740</b>	<b>11.0</b>
Queensland	877	3 408	25.7
Balance of Australia	409	8 332	4.9
Males	651	5 959	10.9
Females	635	5 781	11.0

Source: ABS, *Births Registration Database*

*Babies*

The AIHW National Perinatal Data Collection recorded 548 babies born to Torres Strait Islander mothers in 2002. Of these babies, 52 were low birthweight babies (less than 2,500 grams at birth). Torres Strait Islander mothers (9%) were less likely to have low birthweight babies than Aboriginal mothers (14%) but more likely to have low birthweight babies than non-Indigenous mothers (7%).

In 2002, the perinatal death rate was 16 per 1,000 births to Torres Strait Islander mothers — lower than the perinatal death rate for births to Aboriginal mothers (17 per 1,000 births) but higher than that for babies with non-Indigenous mothers (9 per 1,000 births). Low birthweight was a contributing factor in all the perinatal deaths of babies with a Torres Strait Islander mother in 2002 (AIHW National Perinatal Data Collection).

*Deaths*

It is likely that most deaths of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people are registered, but not all are correctly identified, resulting in some under-counting of Indigenous deaths. While there is incomplete coverage of Indigenous deaths in all state and territory registration systems, data from Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory have been assessed by the ABS as having a sufficient level of coverage to enable statistics on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mortality to be produced. Data for these four jurisdictions have been combined for the 1999–2003 period and are presented in tables 12.6 and 12.7. Deaths data for Torres Strait Islander people should be regarded as indicative only.

Over the 1999–2003 period, the median age at death for Torres Strait Islander men was 56 years and for women it was 61 years (table 12.6).

Deaths continued

**12.6** INDIGENOUS DEATHS, by sex—1999–2003(a)

		Torres Strait Islander(b)	Indigenous
<b>Median age at death</b>			
Males	years	55.5	49.0
Females	years	60.5	56.0
Persons	years	58.0	51.0
<b>Deaths</b>			
Males	no.	244	4 222
Females	no.	174	3 165
Persons	no.	418	7 387

- (a) Data for Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory combined. Deaths are based on year of occurrence of death for 1999–2002 and year of registration of death for 2003.
- (b) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: AIHW, National Mortality Database

Cause of death

An examination of Torres Strait Islander deaths for the 1999–2003 period by underlying cause (in major ICD-10 groupings) shows that diseases of the circulatory system (essentially heart diseases) remain the most commonly recorded cause of death among both Torres Strait Islander people and Indigenous people overall (27%). Torres Strait Islander people were more likely than Aboriginal people to die from cancer (malignant neoplasms), and less likely to die as a result of external causes (including injury) (table 12.7).

**12.7** UNDERLYING CAUSES OF DEATH—1999–2003(a)

	Torres Strait Islander(b)		Indigenous	
	no.	%	no.	%
Neoplasms (C00–D48)	84	20.1	1 094	14.8
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00–E90)	47	11.2	675	9.1
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00–I99)	113	27.0	2 016	27.3
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00–J99)	32	7.7	637	8.6
Diseases of the digestive system (K00–K93)	19	4.5	360	4.9
External causes of morbidity and mortality (V01–Y98)	56	13.4	1 198	16.2
<b>All causes</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>7 387</b>	<b>100.0</b>

- (a) Data for Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory combined. Deaths are based on year of occurrence of death for 1999–2002 and year of registration for death for 2003.
- (b) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: AIHW, National Mortality Database

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
CHARACTERISTICS

Results from the 2002 NATSISS and 2001 Census indicate that the educational, economic and social circumstances of Torres Strait Islanders are similar to those of Indigenous people overall, with some differences between the circumstances of Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Area and those who live in other parts of Australia.

*Language spoken at home*

The preservation of language through everyday use is an important element in the maintenance of culture, and proficiency in spoken English improves access to services and mainstream educational and employment opportunities.

Results from the 2001 Census show that a majority (82%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over in the Torres Strait Area spoke a language other than English at home. Just over half (52%) spoke an Oceanian Pidgin or Creole (e.g. Tok Pisin) and 29% spoke an Australian Indigenous language (e.g. Torres Strait Creole). Five out of six Torres Strait Islander people in the Torres Strait Area (84%) who spoke a language other than English at home also assessed themselves as competent English speakers (Appendix 6).

In 2002, three-quarters (75%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over spoke English as their main language at home. A further 11% spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language and 14% spoke another language—most likely an Oceanian Pidgin or Creole (e.g. Tok Pisin). One in ten Torres Strait Islander people reported difficulty understanding and/or being understood by service providers where English was the only language spoken (table 12.8).

**12.8** MAIN LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME AND DIFFICULTY COMMUNICATING WITH SERVICE PROVIDER(S)—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Indigenous
Main language spoken at home			
English only	%	(b) 74.7	(b) 85.9
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language	%	11.4	12.0
Other language(c)	%	(b) 13.9	(b) 2.0
Has difficulty communicating with service provider(s)(d)	%	10.0	10.3
<b>Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over</b>	no.	<b>29 800</b>	<b>282 200</b>

- (a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.
- (b) Difference between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data is statistically significant.
- (c) Includes Oceanian Pidgins and Creoles.
- (d) Refers to services or offices where only English is spoken. Asked of all persons, including those whose main language was English.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS

*Highest year of school completed*

In 2001, the Year 12 completion rate for Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over in the Torres Strait Area (33%) was higher than that for both Torres Strait Islander people in other parts of Australia (27%) and for Indigenous people overall (20%) (Appendix 6). This is due, in part, to relatively high Year 12 completion rates among Indigenous people in Queensland, when compared with Indigenous people living in all other states and the Northern Territory.

Results from the 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS show that Torres Strait Islander people (26%) and Indigenous people overall (18%) were less likely to have completed Year 12 than non-Indigenous people aged 18 years or over (44%) (table 12.9)

**12.9** HIGHEST YEAR OF SCHOOL COMPLETED (a)—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(b) (c)	Indigenous(d)	Non-Indigenous(c) (d)
<b>Highest year of school completed(e)</b>				
Year 12	%	(f) 26.2	(f) 18.5	43.5
Year 10 or Year 11	%	45.2	40.7	35.5
Year 9 or below(g)	%	(f) 28.6	(f) 40.8	21.0
<b>Total</b>	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Persons aged 18 years or over who were not still at school</b>	no.	<b>26 900</b>	<b>249 900</b>	<b>14 292 100</b>

(a) Items in this table are comparable between the 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS. Data have not been age standardised.

(b) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) All differences between Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(d) All differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(e) Includes people with a non-school qualification. Excludes people still at school.

(f) Differences between Torres Strait Islander data and Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(g) Includes people who never attended school.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS

*Highest non-school qualification*

In 2001, Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years in the Torres Strait Area (23%) were less likely to have a non-school qualification than those in other parts of Australia (28%) (Appendix 6). In the 2002 NATSISS, around one-third of Torres Strait Islander people (33%) and Indigenous people overall (32%) reported a non-school qualification, compared with 57% of non-Indigenous people (table 12.10).

**12.10** HIGHEST NON-SCHOOL QUALIFICATION (a)—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(b) (c)	Indigenous(d)	Non-Indigenous(c) (d)
<b>Highest non-school qualification</b>				
Bachelor degree or higher	%	**4.2	4.6	20.6
Certificate or diploma				
Certificate III or above(e)	%	15.1	14.4	26.3
Certificate I/II	%	11.0	9.8	8.5
Total with a non-school qualification(f)	%	33.0	32.1	56.9
No non-school qualification	%	67.0	67.9	43.1
<b>Total</b>	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Persons aged 25–64 years who were not still at school</b>	no.	<b>19 900</b>	<b>186 400</b>	<b>10 258 000</b>

\*\* estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use

(a) Items in this table are comparable between the 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS. Data have not been age standardised.

(b) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) Apart from Certificate I/II, differences between Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(d) Apart from Certificate I/II, differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(e) Includes people with a Diploma or Advanced Diploma.

(f) Includes level of non-school qualification not determined.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS

*Labour force status*

In 2002, the labour force participation rate for Torres Strait Islander people aged 18–64 years was 70%. The participation rate for Torres Strait Islander men (80%) was higher than that for women (60%) (table 12.11).

*Labour force status*  
*continued*

Just over half (55%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18–64 years were employed in 2002, including 15% who were participating in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme (table 12.11). Results from the 2001 Census show that CDEP work comprised almost half (48%) of all employment for Torres Strait Islander people aged 18–64 years in the Torres Strait Area whereas a majority (95%) of employed Torres Strait Islander people living in other parts of Australia were in mainstream jobs (Appendix 7).

The unemployment rate for Torres Strait Islander people aged 18–64 years was 22% in 2002, similar to that for Indigenous people overall (20%) (table 12.11).

**12.11** LABOUR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS (a)—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(b)(c)	Indigenous(d)	Non-Indigenous(d)(c)
Labour force status				
Employed				
Employed—CDEP	%	*14.6	13.5	. .
Employed—Other	%	40.1	37.8	74.4
Total	%	54.7	51.3	74.4
Unemployed	%	15.0	13.0	4.6
Not in the labour force	%	30.3	35.7	21.1
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
Labour force participation rate				
Males	%	80.4	76.5	86.9
Females	%	60.3	53.3	70.8
Persons	%	69.7	64.3	78.9
Employment to population ratio				
Males	%	62.7	60.5	82.0
Females	%	47.6	43.0	66.6
Persons	%	54.7	51.3	74.4
Unemployment rate				
Males	%	22.0	20.9	5.6
Females	%	21.1	19.4	6.0
Persons	%	21.6	20.3	5.8
<b>Persons aged 18–64 years</b>	no.	<b>26 100</b>	<b>238 500</b>	<b>12 131 600</b>

\* estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution

. . not applicable

(a) Items in this table are comparable between the 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS. Data have not been age standardised.

(b) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) All differences between Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(d) All differences between Indigenous data and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS

*Income*

An equivalence scale developed for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been used to adjust the actual incomes of households so that the relative wellbeing of people in households of different size and composition can be compared. This adjusted income is called equivalised gross household income and amounts are presented on a per person per week basis. For more information on the calculation of equivalised gross household income, refer to the Glossary.



*Income continued*

In 2002, the mean equivalised income of all Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over (\$377 per week) was lower than for Indigenous people overall (\$394 per week), and equal to 57% of the mean equivalised gross household income for non-Indigenous adults (\$665 per week) (table 12.12).

People with low incomes can be defined as those with mean equivalised gross household income in the second and third deciles (see Glossary for more information). While 20% of the non-Indigenous population had incomes in the second or third income deciles, 46% of Torres Strait Islander people were in this low income group in 2002 (table 12.12).

**12.12** SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS (a)—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(b)(c)	Indigenous(d)	Non-Indigenous(c)(d)
<b>Income</b>				
Mean equivalised gross household income per week(e)	\$	(f)377	(f)394	665
Second and third income deciles	%	(f)46.3	(f)37.5	19.8
<b>Housing tenure</b>				
<b>Owner</b>				
Without a mortgage	%	11.0	10.0	38.5
With a mortgage	%	*19.9	16.5	34.6
<b>Total owner/purchasers</b>	%	<b>30.9</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>73.1</b>
<b>Renter</b>				
State or Territory housing authority	%	*16.6	21.2	3.8
Indigenous Housing Organisation/Community housing	%	*22.0	24.5	0.4
Private and other renters	%	27.9	24.2	20.1
<b>Total renters</b>	%	<b>66.6</b>	<b>69.6</b>	<b>24.3</b>
Total(g)	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>State of repair of dwelling</b>				
Dwelling has major structural problems	%	34.4	39.3	..
No repairs or maintenance in last 12 months	%	32.0	35.4	..
<b>Persons aged 18 years or over</b>	no.	<b>27 000</b>	<b>251 400</b>	<b>14 353 800</b>

\* estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution

.. not applicable

(a) Items in this table are comparable between the 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS. Data have not been age standardised.

(b) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) Apart from Private and other renters, differences between Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(d) All differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(e) Derived from gross household income in occupied private dwellings, where all incomes were reported.

(f) Difference between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data is statistically significant.

(g) Includes people in dwellings being purchased under a rent/buy scheme or occupied rent-free or under a life tenure scheme.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS

*Housing*

The relationship between adequate housing and the general health and wellbeing of Indigenous people has been discussed in Chapter 4 of this report. In addition to home ownership, community and cooperative housing can offer people secure tenure. In 2001, a relatively high proportion of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over in the Torres Strait Area (58%) were living in community or cooperative housing, compared with 7% of Torres Strait Islander people living elsewhere (Appendix 7). In 2002, 31% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over were living in houses that were owned or being purchased (table 12.12).

*Housing continued*

Results from the 2002 NATSISS indicate that around one-third of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over were living in dwellings that had major structural problems(34%) and/or in dwellings where no maintenance or repairs had been carried out in the preceding year (32%) (table 12.12).

*Information technology*

In 2002, around one in five (22%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over did not have a working telephone in their home. In the preceding year, 58% of the Torres Strait Islander population had used a computer and 42% had accessed the Internet, most commonly at home (table 12.13).

**12.13** ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Indigenous
Does not have a working telephone at home	%	(b)21.5	(b)28.7
Used a computer in last 12 months			
at home	%	31.2	31.7
elsewhere(c)	%	47.3	46.6
<b>Total(d)</b>	%	<b>58.0</b>	<b>55.5</b>
Accessed the Internet in last 12 months			
at home	%	20.3	20.2
elsewhere(c)	%	34.4	34.4
<b>Total(d)</b>	%	<b>41.6</b>	<b>41.0</b>
<b>Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over</b>	no.	<b>29 800</b>	<b>282 200</b>

(a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.  
 (b) Difference between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data is statistically significant.  
 (c) Includes work, school, public libraries and other peoples' homes.  
 (d) Components do not add to total as people may have provided more than one response.  
 Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS

**12.14** THE ISLAND WATCH (LAGAW ASMER) PROJECT

As part of the Australian Government's Networking the Nation program, the \$5.5 million Island Watch project has been established to provide enhanced and affordable telecommunications to people living in the Torres Strait. It is anticipated that the installation of video-conferencing facilities in 15 locations will be beneficial in enabling doctors to make remote diagnoses and conduct pre-admission consultations with patients. As well as video-conferencing facilities, the Island Watch project will also provide many households with the opportunity, for the first time, to have a phone in their home or to access the mobile phone network (with a proposed pre-paid billing product). Local businesses, government agencies and community members throughout the Torres Strait will also gain Internet and email access. Improved access to phones (for personal safety) and video-conferencing facilities (to assist with the delivery of training, education and medical services) should have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Torres Strait Islanders.

Source: *Namalata Thusi, Issue 25, 3rd quarter 2004 and Office of Government ICT, Queensland Government Department of Public Works.*

*Cultural attachment*

In 2002, seven out of ten Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over had attended a cultural event in the preceding year. Commonly reported activities included attendance at festivals involving art, craft music and dance (38%), and sports carnivals and ceremonies (both 33%). Although one in six Torres Strait Islander people (16%) reported living in traditional country, 67% recognised their homelands and 44% said they identified with a clan, tribal group or language group (table 12.15).

**12.15** CULTURAL ATTACHMENT—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Indigenous
Identifies with clan, tribal/language group	%	(b) 44.3	(b) 54.1
Recognises homelands	%	67.2	69.6
Currently lives in homelands/traditional country	%	(b) 16.4	(b) 21.9
Attended cultural event(s) in last 12 months			
Attended funeral	%	46.7	46.6
Attended ceremony	%	(b) 32.5	(b) 23.5
Attended sports carnival	%	33.3	29.8
Attended festival/carnival involving arts, craft, music or dance	%	38.1	35.7
Involved with Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander organisation	%	27.0	26.1
<b>Total reporting at least one cultural event(c)</b>	%	<b>70.4</b>	<b>68.1</b>
<b>Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over</b>	no.	<b>29 800</b>	<b>282 200</b>

(a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Differences between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(c) Components do not add to total as people may have provided more than one response.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS

*Social participation*

The 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS collected information on a range of social characteristics such as participation in community activities, support in times of crisis, and personal and financial stressors.

Most Torres Strait Islander people reported an active involvement in community life in 2002. In the three months prior to interview, 89% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over had been involved in social activities. In the preceding year, 51% had participated in sport or physical recreation activities and 29% in voluntary work (table 12.16).

**12.16** SELECTED SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS (a) — 2002

		Torres Strait Islander(b)	Indigenous(c)	Non-Indigenous(c)
<b>Family and culture</b>				
Involved in social activities in last 3 months	%	89.0	89.5	92.2
Participated in sport or physical recreation activities in last 12 months	%	(d) 51.1	45.6	(d) 64.2
Had undertaken voluntary work in last 12 months	%	29.3	27.6	34.4
Able to get support in time of crisis from someone outside household	%	90.5	90.5	94.0
At least one stressor experienced in last 12 months	%	(d) 82.6	82.6	(d) 57.3
<b>Financial stress</b>				
Unable to raise \$2,000 within a week for something important	%	(d) 54.2	54.3	(d) 13.6
Had at least one cash flow problem in last 12 months(e)	%	(d) 44.0	44.7	(d) 19.3
<b>Persons aged 18 years or over</b>	no.	<b>27 000</b>	<b>251 400</b>	<b>14 353 800</b>

(a) Items in this table are comparable between the 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS. Data have not been age standardised.

(b) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) Differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(d) Differences between Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(e) Data collected in non-remote areas only.

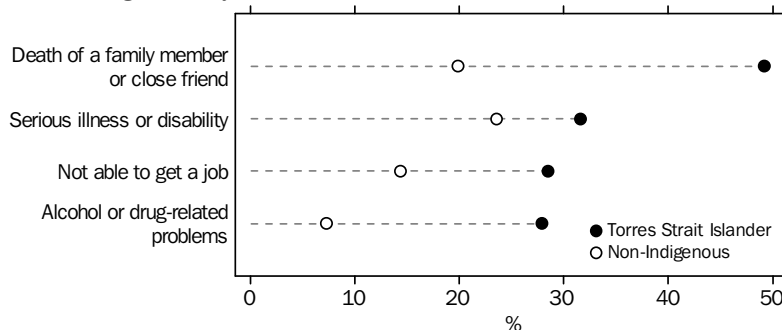
Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS

**Stressors**

In 2002, five out of six Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over (83%) had experienced at least one personal stressor in the previous year and 44% of those in non-remote areas were in households where cash flow problems had been experienced. Nevertheless, 90% of Torres Strait Islander people reported that they were able to get support from someone outside their household in times of crisis (table 12.16 above).

The most commonly reported personal stressor among Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people aged 18 years or over was the death of a family member or friend (49% and 20%, respectively). More than one-quarter of Torres Strait Islander people reported serious illness or disability (32%), inability to find work (28%), and/or alcohol or drug-related problems (28%) (graph 12.17). One-quarter (25%) of Torres Strait Islander people reported stress as a result of overcrowding at home.

**12.17** SELECTED PERSONAL STRESSORS (a)(b) — 2002, Persons aged 18 years or over



(a) Data have not been age standardised. All differences between Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous data are statistically significant.

(b) People may have reported more than one of these stressors.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS

*Neighbourhood problems*

Serious neighbourhood problems are often associated with poor socioeconomic circumstances rather than Indigenous status alone. Torres Strait Islander people, along with Indigenous people generally, often report high levels of theft, vandalism and violence in their immediate environment. In 2002, around three-quarters (73%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over reported at least one problem in their neighbourhood or community. The types of problems most commonly reported by Torres Strait Islander people related to theft (42%), alcohol (36%), illegal drugs (35%), vandalism and other damage to property (33%), youth-related problems (32%), and family violence (26%) (table 12.18).

**12.18** SELECTED NEIGHBOURHOOD PROBLEMS—2002

		Torres Strait	
		Islander(a) (b)	Indigenous(b)
Neighbourhood/community problems reported(c)			
Theft including burglaries, theft from homes, motor vehicle theft	%	42.0	43.0
Problems involving youths, such as youth gangs/lack of youth activity	%	32.1	32.3
Vandalism/graffiti/damage to property	%	32.9	32.9
Alcohol	%	35.6	33.5
Illegal drugs	%	34.8	32.3
Family violence	%	26.5	21.2
Assault including sexual assault	%	25.7	21.0
Levels of neighbourhood conflict	%	23.2	14.9
<b>Total reporting at least one neighbourhood problem(d)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>73.4</b>	<b>73.6</b>
No neighbourhood/community problems reported	%	24.9	25.3
<b>Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over</b>	<b>no.</b>	<b>29 800</b>	<b>282 200</b>

(a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Differences between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data are not statistically significant.

(c) Not all reported problems are shown in this table.

(d) Components do not add to total as people may have provided more than one response.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS

## HEALTH INDICATORS

Administrative data on hospital separations and results from the 2002 NATSISS provide a range of insights into the health and wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander people and Indigenous people more generally.

*Self-assessed health and disability*

In 2002, using the three broad self-assessed health status categories, Torres Strait Islander people rated their health similarly to Indigenous people overall. Over one-third (35%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over had a disability or long-term health condition (table 12.19). For information on criteria used to ascertain disability status in the 2002 NATSISS, see Chapter 5 of this report.

Self-assessed health and  
disability *continued***12.19** SELECTED HEALTH AND WELLBEING INDICATORS—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(a) (b)	Indigenous(b)
Self-assessed health status			
Excellent/very good	%	44.9	44.1
Good	%	32.3	32.4
Fair/poor	%	22.8	23.3
Has a disability or long-term health condition			
Sight, hearing, speech	%	12.6	13.7
Physical	%	22.1	23.6
Intellectual	%	5.0	7.0
Type not specified	%	14.5	16.3
Total(c)	%	34.8	36.5
No disability or long-term health condition	%	65.2	63.5
<b>Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over</b>	no.	<b>29 800</b>	<b>282 200</b>

(a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Differences between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data are not statistically significant.

(c) Components do not add to total as people may have provided more than one response.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS

*Risk factors*

In 2002, just under one-half (44%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over were regular smokers i.e. they smoked at least one cigarette a day. In non-remote areas, 25% of Torres Strait Islander people reported having used an illicit substance in the last 12 months, with a further 19% reporting use of an illicit substance prior to that (table 12.20).

The 2002 NATSISS collected two measures of alcohol consumption using National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines, one on long-term use (usual consumption patterns) and the other on recent, most heavy use (binge drinking). For more information on the NHMRC guidelines and their use in the 2002 NATSISS, refer to Chapter 8 of this report.

In 2002, around one in five Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over (22%) reported risky or high risk alcohol consumption over the long term (i.e. during the preceding 12 months). The proportion of Torres Strait Islander people who reported risky or high risk alcohol consumption over the short term (previous two weeks) was 39% (table 12.20). While a higher proportion of Torres Strait Islander people than Indigenous people overall reported risky or high risk alcohol consumption in the 2002 NATSISS, these differences are not statistically significant.

In 2002, one-quarter (25%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over reported that they or a relative of theirs had been removed from their natural family, compared with 38% of Indigenous people overall. A similar proportion of Torres Strait Islander people (26%) reported that they had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the 12 months prior to interview (table 12.20).

*Risk factors continued***12.20** SELECTED RISK FACTORS—2002

		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Indigenous
<b>Law and justice</b>			
Victim of physical or threatened violence in last 12 months	%	25.9	24.3
Arrested by police in last 5 years	%	12.8	16.4
Incarcerated in last 5 years	%	(b)4.6	(b)7.1
<b>Family</b>			
Person or relative removed from natural family	%	25.1	37.6
<b>Risk factors</b>			
Current daily smoker	%	44.4	48.6
Risky/high risk alcohol consumption in last 12 months	%	21.9	15.1
Risky/high risk alcohol consumption in last 2 weeks	%	38.8	34.9
<b>Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over</b>	no.	<b>29 800</b>	<b>282 200</b>
<b>Illicit substance use(c)</b>			
Has used illicit substance(s)			
in last 12 months	%	25.5	23.5
not in last 12 months	%	19.1	16.1
<b>Total(d)</b>	%	<b>44.9</b>	<b>40.2</b>
Has never used illicit substance(s)	%	49.3	51.4
Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over in non-remote areas	no.	22 400	205 100

(a) Includes people who are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Difference between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data is statistically significant.

(c) Data only available for people in non-remote areas.

(d) Includes people whose use of substance(s) in the last 12 months was not stated.

Source: ABS, 2002 NATSISS

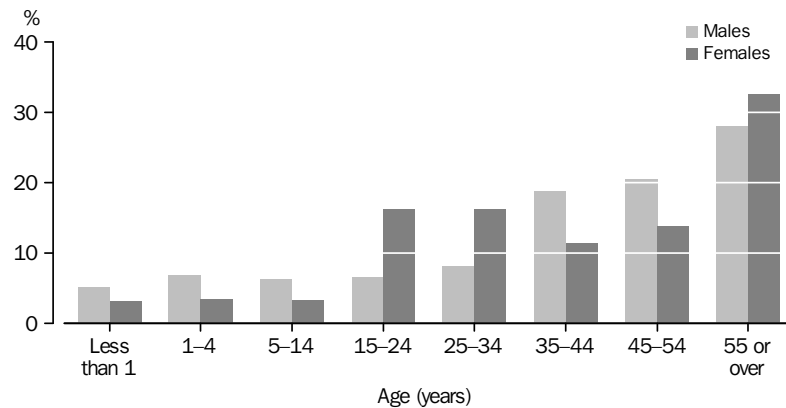
*Hospital separations*

In 2003–04 there were 15,401 hospitalisations involving Torres Strait Islander people, accounting for 7% of all Indigenous hospitalisations. Women comprised around 56% of both Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous patients overall.

Among Torres Strait Islander patients, there were considerable differences in the distribution of males and females according to age. The number of hospitalisations in 2003–04 was high for women of child-bearing age (i.e. aged 15–34 years) and then peaked again for older women (aged 55 years or over). Hospitalisation rates were relatively constant for Torres Strait Islander men under 35 years of age (comprising one-third (33%) of all male hospitalisations) before rising quite rapidly for men aged 35 years or over (graph 12.21).

Hospital separations  
continued

**12.21** HOSPITALISATIONS BY AGE AND SEX—2003–04, Torres Strait Islander people



Source: AIHW, National Hospital Morbidity Database

Table 12.22 shows hospitalisations for Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous patients, by principal diagnosis in ICD-10-AM chapter groupings for 2003–04. Care involving dialysis (for kidney disease) was the most commonly recorded principal diagnosis, accounting for 31% of all Torres Strait Islander hospitalisations. Men were more likely than women to be receiving dialysis at a young age. Over one-half of hospitalisations involving Torres Strait Islander men aged 35 years or over (51%) and women aged 55 years or over (59%) were for care involving dialysis (AIHW 2005b).



## 12.22 HOSPITALISATIONS OF TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PERSONS AND ALL INDIGENOUS PERSONS, by principal diagnosis—2003–04

	Torres Strait Islander(a).....		Indigenous.....	
	no.	%	no.	%
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases (A00–B99)	323	2.1	5 069	2.3
Neoplasms (C00–D48)	429	2.8	3 279	1.5
Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs and certain disorders involving the immune mechanism (D50–D89)	82	0.5	1 034	0.5
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00–E90)	384	2.5	4 291	2.0
Mental and behavioural disorders (F00–F99)	662	4.3	9 558	4.4
Diseases of the nervous system (G00–G99)	185	1.2	3 191	1.5
Diseases of the eye and adnexa (H00–H59)	232	1.5	1 443	0.7
Diseases of the ear and mastoid process (H60–H95)	159	1.0	1 807	0.8
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00–I99)	552	3.6	7 260	3.4
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00–J99)	896	5.8	16 041	7.4
Diseases of the digestive system (K00–K93)	872	5.7	11 604	5.4
Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue (L00–L99)	367	2.4	5 230	2.4
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue (M00–M99)	407	2.6	3 858	1.8
Diseases of the genitourinary system (N00–N99)	538	3.5	5 949	2.8
Pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium (O00–O99)	1 640	10.6	16 783	7.8
Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period (P00–P96)	195	1.3	2 349	1.1
Congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities (Q00–Q99)	104	0.7	851	0.4
Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings, n.e.c. (R00–R99)	578	3.8	9 317	4.3
Injury, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes (S00–T98)	1 156	7.5	17 318	8.0
Factors influencing health status and contact with health services (Z00–Z99)	795	5.2	7 727	3.6
<b>Total excluding care involving dialysis</b>	<b>10 560</b>	<b>68.6</b>	<b>134 159</b>	<b>62.1</b>
Care involving dialysis (Z49)	4 841	31.4	81 983	37.9
<b>Total (b)</b>	<b>15 401</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>216 142</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Includes patients who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Includes a small number of patients for whom no principal diagnosis was recorded.

Source: AIHW, National Hospital Morbidity Database

### SUMMARY

While Torres Strait Islander people have their own distinctive cultural identity, they share many of the characteristics of Indigenous Australians generally. They are a relatively young population, with a higher birth rate and lower life expectancy than the non-Indigenous population. Like other Indigenous Australians, Torres Strait Islander people are actively involved in community life. Furthermore, various measures of educational attainment, labour force participation and associated economic status indicate that Torres Strait Islander people experience similar levels of disadvantage as other Indigenous Australians.

