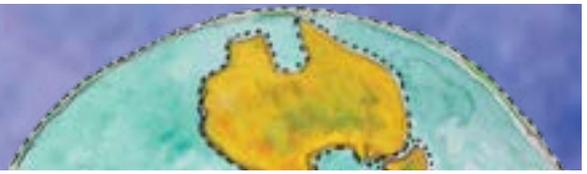


7.5 Social determinants of Indigenous health



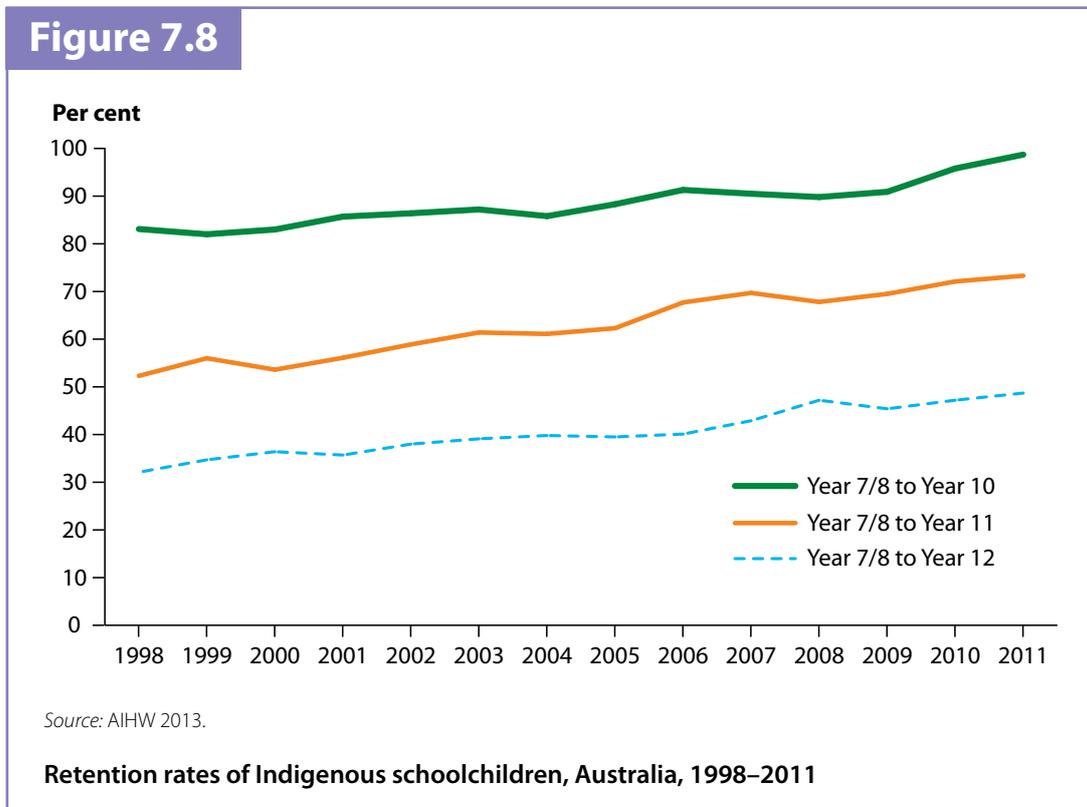
Social determinants of health are social and economic factors that can have a positive or negative effect on the health of individuals and communities by affecting the environment and conditions in which they live. They can also affect people's health by influencing their behaviours and decisions (see Chapter 7 'Health behaviours of Indigenous Australians'). For example, people living in houses without safe drinking water may be at risk of diarrhoeal diseases, and those on low incomes may not eat fresh fruit and vegetables regularly if they cannot afford them. The social disadvantages Indigenous people experience in relation to housing, education, income and employment have contributed to the differences in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Housing

- The 2011 Census data show that about 36% of Indigenous households were home owners or purchasers and 59% were renters, compared with 68% and 29% of non-Indigenous households respectively.
- About 12% of Indigenous households were considered overcrowded in 2011, compared with 3% of non-Indigenous households. Levels of overcrowding in remote Indigenous households fell from 22% in 2006 to 20% in 2011 (FaHCSIA 2013).
- The rate of homelessness for Indigenous Australians was 14 times as high as the rate for non-Indigenous Australians in 2011 (ABS 2012b).
- Despite making up 3% of the population, Indigenous people represented 22% of people accessing specialist homelessness services in 2012–13.

Education

- In each state and territory, average National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores for Indigenous students across all learning areas in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were substantially lower than those for non-Indigenous students in 2013 (ACARA 2013).
- One area where there has been significant improvement is reading among Year 5 Indigenous students, where the proportion who met or exceeded the national minimum standard increased from 65% in 2012 to 83% in 2013, compared with 93% to 97% for non-Indigenous students (ACARA 2013).
- Almost half (49%) of Year 7/8 Indigenous students stayed at school until Year 12 in 2011, compared with 81% of non-Indigenous students. However, there has been a significant rise in retention rates for Indigenous students from Year 7/8 to Years 10, 11 and 12 between 1998 and 2011 (Figure 7.8).
- The proportion of Indigenous people aged 20–24 with a Year 12 or equivalent qualification increased from 47% in 2006 to 54% in 2011 (COAG Reform Council 2013).

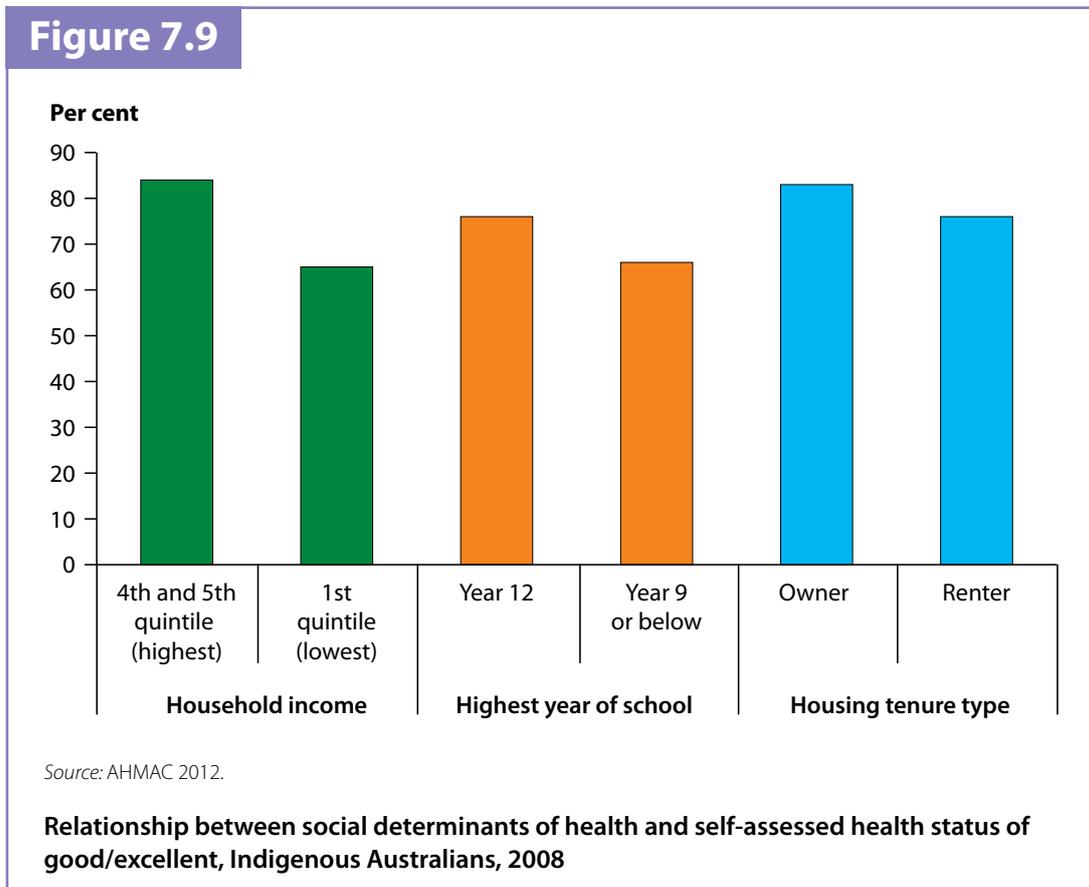


Income and employment

- Half of all Indigenous people aged 15 and over had a personal weekly income of \$362 or less in 2011 compared with \$582 or less for non-Indigenous people.
- In 2011, 42% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over were employed compared with 61% of non-Indigenous people.
- Unemployment rates were 17% for Indigenous Australians and 5% for non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2012a).

Impact on health

- Indigenous Australians were more likely to assess their health as good or excellent if they had higher incomes and education levels, and owned their home (Figure 7.9).



What is missing from the picture?

The relationship between social determinants and health is complex and can be difficult to measure (see Chapter 7 ‘The size and causes of the health gap’). For example, several social determinants may interact to create certain health outcomes, so separating the effects of each is not straightforward. Also, the time taken for investments in education, employment and housing to affect a person’s health can vary from immediate to many years.

Where do I go for more information?

More information on the social determinants of Indigenous health is available at www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous-observatory. Recent AIHW reports and other publications available for free download include [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2012: detailed analyses](#), [The health and welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: an overview 2011](#), [A profile of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#) and [Specialist homelessness services 2012–2013](#).



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