



Guide to communicate research involving First Nations peoples

For users of the National Health Data Hub (NHDH)

Purpose

This guide promotes a respectful, strengths-based, and culturally informed standard for writing, reporting, and sharing findings from the NHDH that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) peoples. Adopting these principles supports alignment with the Australian Government's [Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data](#).

Scope

This guide applies to all NHDH data outputs, including projects that are not exclusively focussed on First Nations peoples but may involve the analysis, reporting, and/or publication of data that include Indigenous status identifiers or First Nations populations. This includes any projects that may produce output such as high-level statistics, comparisons or trends that may relate to First Nations peoples.

Principles

Data should be appropriately contextualised and framed to support accurate interpretation and the constructive analysis of systems, services, and outcomes that affect First Nations people. This is important because it clearly reinforces that inequity arises from systems and structures, rather than being inherent to people or communities.

All publications and reporting should avoid deficit narratives by using strengths-based language that recognises the knowledge, leadership, and strength of First Nations people, while clearly acknowledging the real and ongoing impacts of systemic and structural inequities without diminishing their complexity or lived consequences.

Guidance

Other specific suggestions for how to present a more balanced view include:

- Where relevant, publications should include a **Cultural Notice** at the very beginning. Suggested wording is as follows: 'Cultural notice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are respectfully advised that this *document/publication/report* discusses themes that may be upsetting. It may also contain references to people who have passed.'
- Make sure the relevant **context** for the data being analysed is explained. For example, situating the data within the broader historical, socioeconomic and environmental factors that shape outcomes.



- Always **begin with data that relates specifically to First Nations people**. To do this, talk about the crude rate and the actual number and percentages of First Nations people impacted before introducing comparative analysis with non-Indigenous Australians.
- Where possible, **reflect the diversity within the First Nations populations**, by making comparisons by age, sex, remoteness, region or other characteristics where data quality permits.
- Tracking **trends over time** helps in understanding whether outcomes are improving, staying the same, or worsening. This analysis can help target efforts where needed.
- Always highlight areas of **strength or positive changes alongside challenges**.
- Use comparisons with non-Indigenous Australians **selectively and purposefully**, focusing on key statistics that can help inform and support decision making.
- For First Nations focussed projects, output should be shared **prior to publication** with the First Nations representative/s with oversight of the project. This supports cultural safety, contextual accuracy, and the identification of potential risks, misinterpretation, or unintended harm.
- Where appropriate, clear, accessible summaries of findings and their implications should be developed in forms that **support appropriate interpretation, reuse, and decision-making** by First Nations led organisations and governance bodies.

The pre-publication checklist

Before releasing any report, brief, or abstract, consider the following:

- Is the tone respectful?** Have I removed stigmatising language?
- Is sufficient context provided?** Does the reader understand *why* the numbers look this way?
- Is it culturally and socially safe?** Is there a risk this analysis could inadvertently stigmatise the First Nations people, Nations or communities?
- Is it accurate?** Have I properly cited and correctly identified the specific Nations or regions involved, rather than generalised?
- Is it governance compliant?** Does it meet NHDH data output protocols, ethics approval conditions, and applicable third-party release requirements?