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2002

Summary Booklet

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey



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Introduction

The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) provides a broad, current social picture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and updates selected information collected in the 1994 survey. This booklet has been prepared so that you can conveniently and quickly access the key findings from the survey.

As part of the 2002 NATSISS, the ABS collected information from 9,400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over living in urban, rural and remote areas of Australia.

The summary of results presented in this booklet cover a variety of social issues, such as:

- culture and language
- family and community
- education
- health
- work
- housing

It also contains comparisons with the results from the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey and with non-Indigenous data from the 2002 ABS General Social Survey (GSS).

The success of the 2002 NATSISS was dependant on the very high level of cooperation received from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities. Their continued cooperation is very much appreciated. Without it, the range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics published by the ABS would not be possible.

Information received by the ABS is treated in strict confidence as required by the Census and Statistics Act 1905.

Population

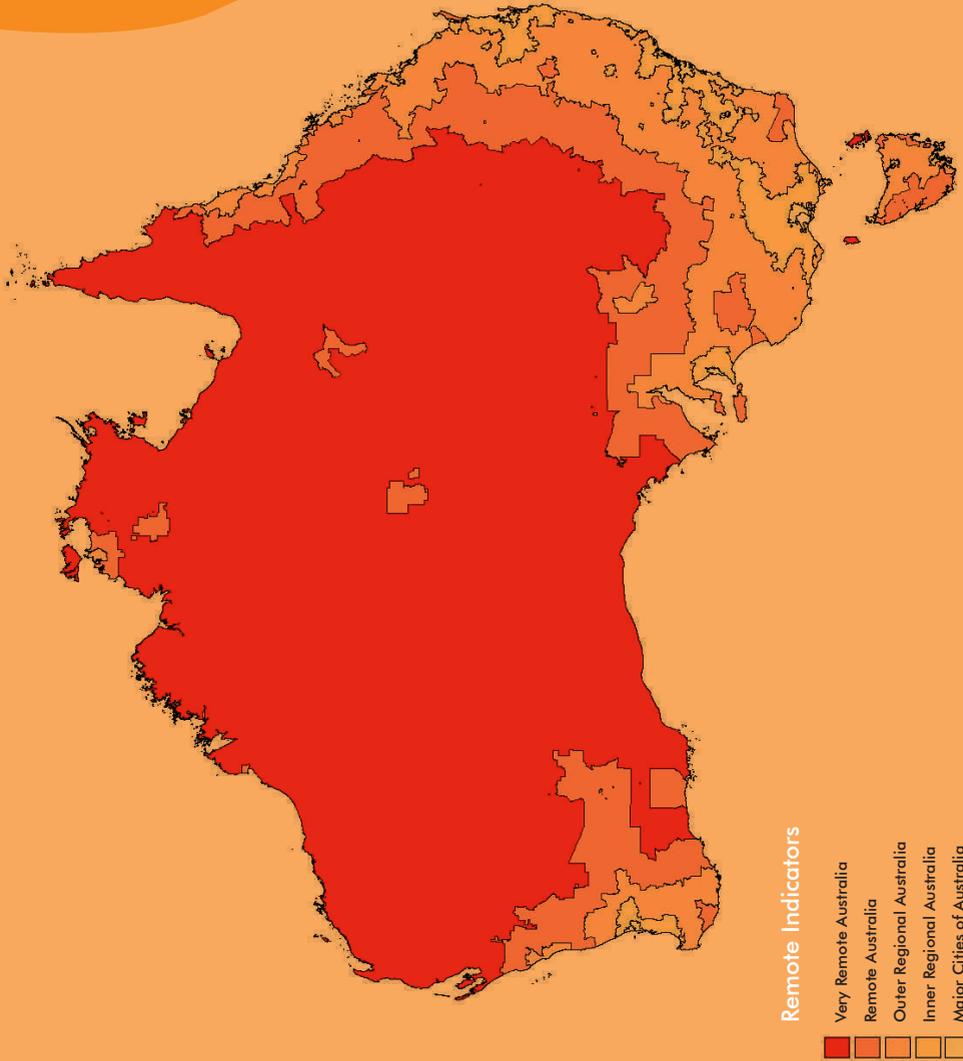
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up about 2.4% of the total Australian population.

On 30 June 2001 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia was estimated to be about 458,500 people, or 2.4% of the total population of Australia.

Over half of Australia's Indigenous population lived in either New South Wales (29%) or Queensland (27%). Nearly one third of the Northern Territory's population was Indigenous, the highest proportion of any state or territory.

The 2002 NATSISS data summarised in this booklet generally relate to the 282,200 Indigenous Australians aged 15 years or over. Selected data relate to those aged 18 years or over (251,400).

Around one in four Indigenous Australians lived in remote areas of Australia compared to approximately one in fifty non-Indigenous Australians. (For more information see 'remoteness' on page 20).



Remote Indicators

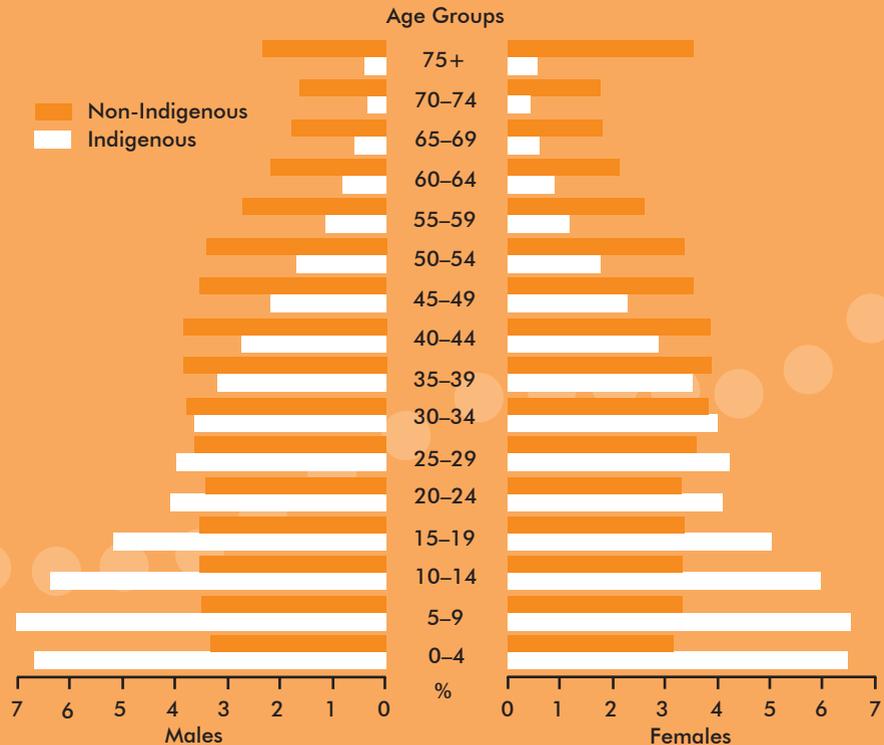
- Very Remote Australia
- Remote Australia
- Outer Regional Australia
- Inner Regional Australia
- Major Cities of Australia

Age structure

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is considerably younger than the rest of the population.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a young population, with half aged 21 years or less. In contrast, half of the non-Indigenous population are aged 36 years or less.

Because of the stark differences in the ages of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (see age pyramid below), for some comparisons in this booklet the statistics have been age standardised. (For more information see ‘Age standardisation’) on page 19.



Culture and language

Indicators of attachment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture do not show any decline.

In both 1994 and 2002, just over half of the Indigenous adult population identified with a clan, tribal or language group; about seven out of ten Indigenous people had attended at least one cultural event in the year before the survey, and for about one in eight Indigenous adults the main language spoken at home was an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language.

In 2002, an Indigenous language was the main language spoken at home for two out of five Indigenous adults in remote areas, but for only one in fifty (2%) in non-remote areas. Even when it was not the main language spoken at home, overall 21% of Aboriginal adults and 23 % of Torres Strait Islander adults spoke an Indigenous language. Indigenous languages were used more in remote areas (54%) than in non-remote areas (9%). Three out of every four Indigenous adults (77%) living in the Northern Territory spoke an Indigenous language.

In 1994 just under one in every three Indigenous people (29%) lived in homelands or traditional country, compared to just over one in every five (22%) in 2002.

Community participation

In 2002, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults had been involved in social activities in the 3 months before the survey.

Strong family life and involvement with the wider community are important for the functioning of any society. Participation in social activities and voluntary work, availability of community support, and the presence of stressors can provide some insight into the resilience of communities.

In the three months prior to the survey, nine in ten Indigenous adults participated in social activities such as ceremonies, festivals and visiting a museum or art gallery.

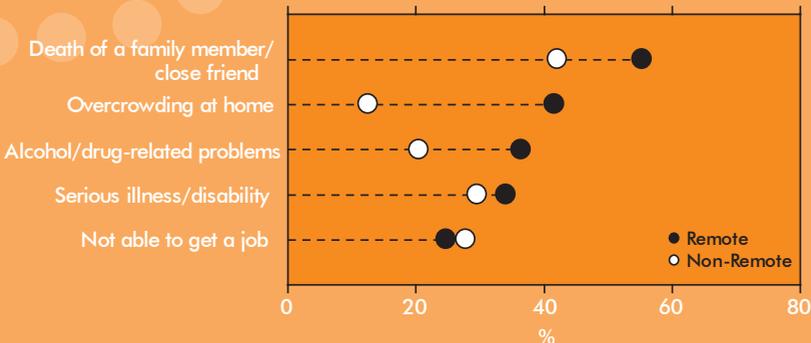
In the year leading up to the survey, nearly half (49%) of the Indigenous population over 15 years old had participated in sport or physical recreation activities.

Stressors

In 2002, eight in ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had experienced at least one stressor in the year before the survey.

Indigenous people were much more likely than non-Indigenous people to have experienced a stressor in the year before the survey (82% compared to 57%). The most common stressor reported by Indigenous people living in remote and non-remote areas was the death of a family member or close friend (46%). In remote areas, the next most common stressors reported were overcrowding at home (42%) and alcohol and drug-related problems (37%). In non-remote areas the next most common stressors were serious illness or disability (31%) and inability to get a job (27%).

SELECTED REPORTED STRESSORS^(a) IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over



(a) Respondents may have reported more than one type of stressor.

Nine out of ten Indigenous people said that in a time of crisis they could get support from someone outside their household.

Removal from natural family

Four in ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over, reported that they or one of their relatives had been removed from their natural family.

The 2002 NATSISS asked Indigenous people aged 15 years or over whether they or any of their relatives had been removed from their natural families. Eight per cent (8%) of Indigenous people reported that they themselves had been taken away from their family. Thirty-six percent (36%) reported that they had a relative who had been removed from their natural family. These relatives were most commonly grandparents, aunts or uncles, and parents (for more detail see 'Removal from natural family' on p20).

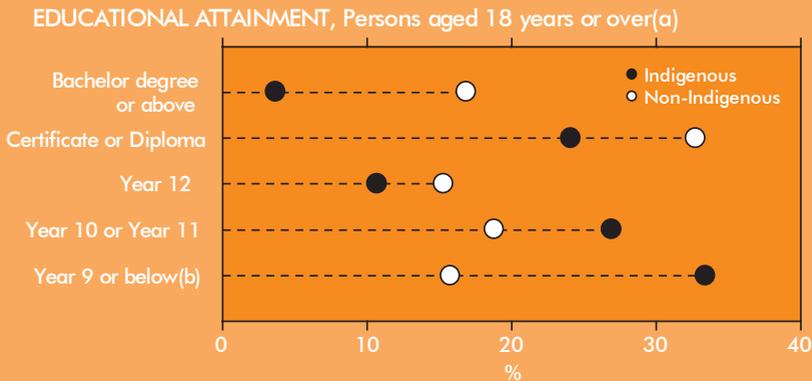
Education

Educational and other qualification levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people increased between 1994 and 2002.

Year 12 was the highest level of education completed by nearly 10% of Indigenous people in 2002 compared to 7% in 1994. The non-Indigenous figure was 15%.

The number of Indigenous people who completed a Certificate or Diploma doubled between 1994 and 2002 (from 11% to 22%). More Indigenous people also reported that they had completed a Bachelor degree or above (3% in 2002 compared with 1% in 1994).

Indigenous people were also twice as likely as non-Indigenous people to leave school before completing Year 10 (33% compared to 16%). This was particularly evident in remote areas, where nearly half (45%) of the Indigenous population aged 18 years or over had not completed Year 10.



(a) Based on 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS data.
(b) Includes people who never attended school.

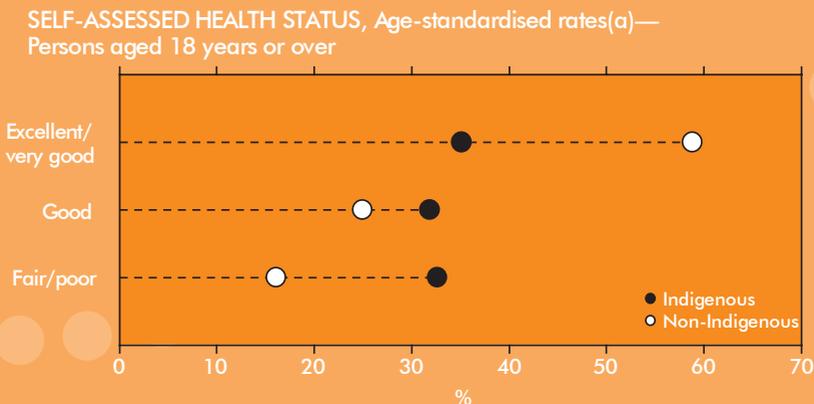
Health status and disability

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rated their own health as either good, very good or excellent in 2002, although one in three reported a disability or long-term health condition.

Overall, Indigenous people had a positive view of their own health in 2002, with more than three in four (76%) reporting their health as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent'.

When results were adjusted to account for the different age structures in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, Indigenous people were twice as likely to rate their health as 'only fair' or 'poor' than were non-Indigenous people.

Indigenous people in non-remote areas were almost one and a half times more likely to have a disability or long-term health condition than non-Indigenous people.



(a) Based on 2002 NATSISS and 2002 GSS data.

Health risk factors

Almost half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population aged 15 years or over were regular smokers in 2002.

In 2002 about half (49%) of the Indigenous population were regular cigarette smokers.

The highest reported rates of daily smoking were for those aged 25-44 years (55%).

In both 1994 and 2002, about seven in ten Indigenous people reported drinking alcohol in the year before the survey.

In 2002, one in six (15%) Indigenous people reported drinking risky or high risk amounts of alcohol in the year before the survey. Overall, men (17%) were more likely than women (13%) to drink alcohol in excess.

In 2002, about one quarter (24%) of Indigenous people living in non-remote areas reported using drugs for non-medical reasons (most commonly marijuana) in the year before the survey.

Work

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were employed in 2002 than in 1994.

Between 1994 and 2002, there was an increase in the number of employed Indigenous people aged 15 years or over (from 36% to 46%). There was an increase in both mainstream and Community Development Employment Project scheme (CDEP) employment (see 'Employment' and 'CDEP' on p19).

Despite this increase, Indigenous people aged 18 years or over were less likely to have a job than non-Indigenous people in 2002. More than three out of five non-Indigenous people aged 18 or over (64%) were employed compared with around two out of five Indigenous people (43%). When the effects of age differences were removed, the unemployment rate for Indigenous people was more than twice that for non-Indigenous people.

Unemployment was highest for Indigenous people aged 15-24 years (22%).

Patterns of employment were different between remote and non-remote areas, with the majority of Indigenous people in remote areas having jobs with the CDEP scheme (63%). In non-remote areas 90% of employed Indigenous people had jobs in mainstream employment.

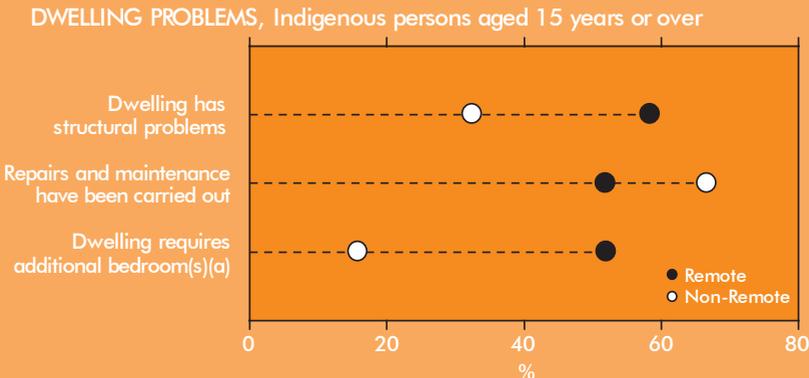
Housing

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in homes that were owned or being purchased in 2002 compared with 1994.

In 2002, almost three in ten (27%) Indigenous people lived in homes that were either owned or being purchased, up from 22% in 1994. About seven in ten Indigenous people lived in rented accommodation in 2002.

One in four Indigenous people were living in overcrowded homes in 2002. About half (52%) of people living in remote areas had homes that needed at least one extra bedroom compared to 16% of people living in non-remote areas.

In 2002, four in ten (40%) Indigenous people reported living in a home that had structural problems, such as major cracks in the walls or floor or serious electrical or plumbing problems. Sixty three percent (63%) of Indigenous people lived in homes where repairs or maintenance had been carried out in the year before the survey. Examples of home maintenance include painting, roof repair or plumbing work. Overall, these dwelling problems were more common for people living in remote areas than those living in non-remote areas.



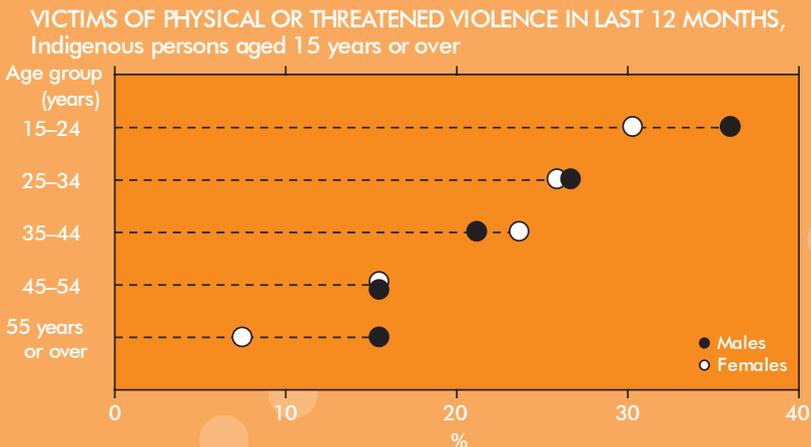
(a) Based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard for housing appropriateness. See paragraphs 49–50 in Explanatory Notes of cat. no. 4714.0.

Law and justice

In 2002, one in four Indigenous people stated they had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the year before the survey.

In 2002, the rates of reported victimisation were similar for people living in remote (23%) and non-remote areas (25%). (See 'Victimisation' on page 21).

As shown in the graph below, reported victimisation was highest among younger Indigenous people. Over one in three Indigenous men aged 15-24 (36%) reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence, the highest proportion of any age group.



After adjusting for age differences, Indigenous people aged 18 years or over were twice as likely as other Australians to have reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence in 2002.

Between 1994 and 2002, there was a decline in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who reported that they had been arrested in the previous 5 years.

In 2002, 16% of Indigenous people had been arrested in the five years before the survey. This rate had decreased from 20% in 1994.

Of the 16% of Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over who reported that they had been arrested by police in the last five years, 38% were living in households with Indigenous children under 5 years of age, and 63% were living in households with Indigenous children under 15 years of age.

Men were more likely to have been arrested than women: 24% of Indigenous men reported that they had been arrested in the five year period before the survey compared with 9% of Indigenous women.

In 2002, 20% of Indigenous people aged 15 years or over reported using legal services in the year before the survey. This was an increase from 15% in 1994.

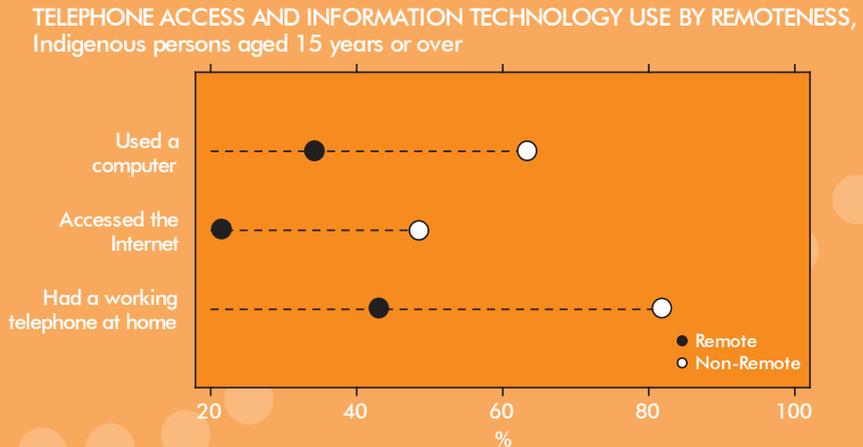
Information technology

In 2002, over half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population reported using a computer in the last 12 months.

Over half (56%) of Indigenous people used a computer in the 12 months prior to interview, while four in ten (41%) had accessed the Internet.

After the effects of age differences were removed, Indigenous people were less likely to have used a computer (44% to 68%), or to have accessed the Internet (30% to 58%), than non-Indigenous people.

Only 43% of Indigenous people living in remote areas had access to a working telephone at home compared to 82% of those in non-remote areas.



Torres Strait Islander people

At the 2001 Census, approximately 48,800 people, or one in every ten Indigenous Australians, identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

Just under half of the Torres Strait Islander population (45%) reported being in 'excellent' or 'very good' health in 2002, while about one in three (32%) reported that they were in 'good' health.

One in three (35%) reported having a disability or long-term health condition.

In 2002, five out of six Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over (83%) had experienced at least one personal stressor in the previous year.

About one in four (28%) had a non-school qualification in 2002.

Half of the Torres Strait Islander population aged 15 years or over were employed at the time of the survey, while about one in six (16%) were unemployed.

In 2002, two in three Torres Strait Islander people (66%) were living in rented accommodation, while about one in three (31%) lived in homes that they owned or were buying.

About one in four Torres Strait Islander people (26%) reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence in the year before the survey.

Background information

Age standardisation

Differences in the age structure of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations must be taken into account when comparisons are made between age-dependent characteristics of the two populations.

Before making comparisons between age-dependent characteristics of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, the ABS accounts for the difference in age structures of the two populations through a process known as 'age standardisation'.

Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP)

The CDEP scheme was established in the late 1970's. It was designed to help overcome the limited employment opportunities that Indigenous people face, particularly in remote areas. The scheme works by providing jobs, often in community projects, for Indigenous people who agree to forego an unemployment allowance.

Employment

If a person had work for at least one hour per week in the week leading up to the survey, then they were counted as employed. This included working in a business, a mainstream job, working on CDEP, or doing unpaid work for a family business.

Remoteness

The ABS uses the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) Remoteness Structure to categorise how remote particular locations in Australia are. The Structure uses five levels of remoteness: “Major cities of Australia”, “Inner regional Australia”, “Outer regional Australia”, “Remote” and “Very Remote”. These levels are shown in the map on page 3.

It can be useful to compare characteristics of a population using only two levels of remoteness, “Remote” and “Non-Remote”. Therefore survey findings are sometimes presented with the first three levels “Major cities of Australia”, “Inner regional Australia” and “Outer regional Australia” combined as “Non-remote” areas, while “Remote” and “Very Remote” are combined as “Remote” areas. This publication uses the two levels of ‘Remote’ and ‘Non-Remote’.

Removal from natural family

Removal from natural family in this survey includes the removal of the person or their relatives, as a child, from their family as part of government policy. It does not include those who were removed from their family for a period of less than six months and those who had been separated from their family for other reasons such as family break-up or traditional adoption.

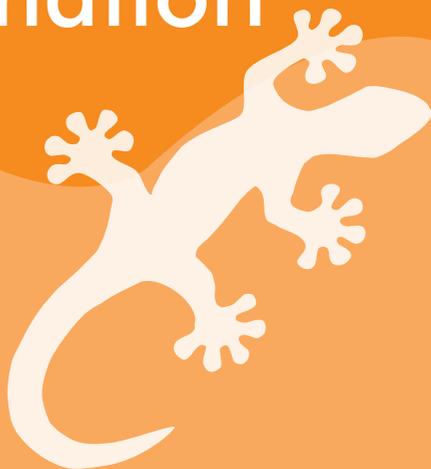
Unemployment

People were counted as unemployed if they were not working but had been looking for work in the four weeks before the survey was conducted, and they were available to start work during the week before the survey. People were not counted as unemployed if they were not in the labour force because of retirement, if they were unable to work on a permanent basis, if they had never worked before or if they intended never to work.

Victimisation

In this survey, the term 'victimisation' refers to any physical violence or threats of violence made against a person in the 12 months before the survey. The information on victimisation is based on what people reported in the survey, not on official records like reports made to police or hospitals.

More Information



All information in this Summary Booklet is from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2002 (cat. no. 4714.0).

This report contains more detailed information and is available free of charge through the ABS website: www.abs.gov.au. Also available through the website are electronic State/Territory versions of the publication tables.

For more information about ABS statistics on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population:

Phone: **1800 633 216** (free call)

Email: **ncatsis@abs.gov.au**

Internet: Indigenous Theme page on the ABS web site

www.abs.gov.au

Note: All electronic publications are now available free of charge from the ABS web site.



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