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# ABS Directions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics

June 2007





# **ABS Directions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics**

**Australia**

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## PREFACE

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It is seven years since the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) published *Directions in Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics* and three years since a progress update was included in the ABS Annual Report (of 2003–04). Indigenous policy development remains an important priority for Australian governments. It is timely to reassess the ABS directions for Indigenous statistics to ensure that they are in line with current national, state and territory priorities.

There have been significant improvements in the range, quality and availability of statistics on Indigenous people over the past decade and the ABS, in conjunction with other relevant agencies, continues to increase the breadth and quality of Indigenous statistics in recognition of its commitment to expanding and improving the National Statistical Service and in response to the needs of the broader community.

This paper outlines a number of key strategic areas that are expected to guide the development of the ABS Indigenous statistics work program over the next five years. ABS has sought the views of a wide range of key stakeholders on the relevance, value and appropriateness of the strategic areas identified in this paper, and in particular acknowledges the contribution of the Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (AGATSIS).

The success of ABS Indigenous surveys together with other statistical activities is dependent on the very high level of cooperation received from Indigenous Australians and their communities. Their continued cooperation is very much appreciated; without it, the range of Indigenous statistics published or planned by the ABS would not be possible.

Brian Pink  
Australian Statistician

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>AGATSIS</b>	Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics
<b>AIHW</b>	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
<b>ATSIC</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
<b>cat. no.</b>	Catalogue number
<b>CDEP</b>	Community Development Employment Projects
<b>CDSMAC</b>	Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council
<b>CDSMC</b>	Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference
<b>CHINS</b>	Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey
<b>COAG</b>	Council of Australian Governments
<b>CURF</b>	confidentialised unit record file
<b>DEST</b>	Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training
<b>ERP</b>	estimated resident population
<b>FaCSIA</b>	Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
<b>ICC</b>	Indigenous Coordination Centre
<b>IDP</b>	Information Development Plan
<b>IEM</b>	Indigenous Engagement Manager
<b>LSIC</b>	Footprints in Time - The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children
<b>MCATSIA</b>	Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
<b>MCEETYA</b>	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
<b>NACCHO</b>	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
<b>NAGATSIHID</b>	National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data
<b>NATSIHS</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
<b>NATSIS</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
<b>NATSISS</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
<b>NCVER</b>	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
<b>NDN</b>	National Data Network
<b>NHIMPC</b>	National Health Information Management Principal Committee
<b>NHMRC</b>	National Health and Medical Research Council
<b>OID</b>	Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage
<b>OIPC</b>	Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (Australian Government Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)
<b>SIMC</b>	Statistical Information Management Committee
<b>SLD</b>	Statistical Longitudinal Dataset
<b>SRA</b>	Shared Responsibility Agreement
<b>UNPFII</b>	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
<b>VET</b>	vocational education and training
<b>WAACHS</b>	Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey



## SUMMARY

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### SUMMARY

Building on the sound basis of our existing statistical program, this paper outlines areas where the ABS could extend and enhance the suite of statistics for understanding the circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our ongoing work program will continue to include activities to understand and improve the quality of population estimates and projections, Indigenous mortality and life expectancy estimates, and measures of Indigenous labour force characteristics. We will continue to conduct a vigorous survey program aimed at producing high quality information on the Indigenous population. Collaborative efforts with other agencies, and national committees and forums, will be directed at promoting the appropriate use of Indigenous statistics, and working together to develop and improve identification in important administrative collections, such as births and deaths, and courts and police systems.

In progressing ABS directions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics, a key concern will be to balance responsiveness to emerging issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy while ensuring longer-term consistency and quality within the ABS Indigenous collections. Section 2 outlines the current context for the development and use of Indigenous statistics.

After reviewing the current policy context of Indigenous affairs and following consultation with stakeholders, six key strategic areas were identified to guide new or enhanced statistical activity:

- Engagement
- Understanding and measuring Indigenous wellbeing
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth
- Indigenous engagement in economic activity
- Improved reporting and analysis of comparisons over time
- Regional data: improved capacity to support regional and small area analysis

The ABS will continue to build on its current engagement strategy, with future initiatives focusing on increasing its engagement with Indigenous people, Indigenous communities, governments, and the research community (refer to section 3.1).

The ABS will develop a framework for the measurement of Indigenous wellbeing in consultation and collaboration with stakeholders, taking into account both Indigenous perspectives of wellbeing, and policy and research priorities (refer to section 3.2).

The ABS will explore how its existing collection and analytical program could incorporate more information on Indigenous children and youth and will seek advice on the feasibility of collecting additional data on young people through Indigenous surveys in the household survey program (refer to section 3.3).

The ABS will position itself to understand, and respond to, emerging needs for Indigenous economic and business statistics through continued exploration and assessment of external administrative data sets and by investigating prospective frameworks for measuring Indigenous economic activity (refer to section 3.4).

The ABS will continue to enhance existing survey collections to improve the availability and usefulness of Indigenous data and will support efforts to improve the quality of administrative collections so as to facilitate better measurement of change over time across a range of statistics, including births and deaths registration data, population

## SUMMARY *continued*

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### SUMMARY *continued*

estimates and projections, life expectancy, labour force characteristics, participation in education and crime and justice statistics (refer to section 3.5).

The ABS will continue to engage with data users to monitor regional data needs and will explore innovative ways of improving availability of small area data (refer to section 3.6).

Implementation of the future activities discussed in this paper will be carried out by the ABS, continuing to fulfil our commitment to providing a National Statistical Service that is relevant, timely and accessible. The ABS is committed to ongoing consultation on its work program, and intends to continue to review its Indigenous statistics program on a regular basis.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Comprehensive, reliable and timely statistical information is fundamental to measuring, understanding and reporting on the circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to understand potential disadvantage and to identify strengths and agents for positive change.

1.2 The ABS is committed to improving the quality and comprehensiveness of data wherever possible to assist users to understand the circumstances of Indigenous people. The ABS has a lead role in the national statistical system in avoiding the duplication of statistics, attaining comparability between collections undertaken by different agencies and maximising the utilisation of statistics. This role is of particular importance within Indigenous statistics, given the problem of respondent burden amongst the relatively small, highly-researched Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

1.3 In broad terms the ABS Indigenous statistics program aims to provide a range of information to:

- Monitor the social and economic circumstances of Indigenous Australians.
- Support the development, implementation and evaluation of relevant policies and programs of Australian federal, state and territory governments.
- Support research related to better understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perceptions, expectations and experiences of 'wellbeing'.
- Enhance the quality and utility of Indigenous data sets and data collection systems across the national statistical system.

## 2. CONTEXT

### 2. CONTEXT

2.1 Since the ABS published *Directions in Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics* in 2000, there have been a number of changes in the administration of Indigenous affairs at the Commonwealth level including:

- Changes to the portfolio administration of Indigenous Affairs.
- The abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).
- Creation of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) to facilitate a 'whole of government' approach to design and delivery of services to Indigenous communities.
- Emergence of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) processes for monitoring Indigenous disadvantage and progress.

These changes also reflect increased efforts by State and Territory governments to avoid duplication and gaps in service delivery of relevant government programs.

2.2 Through initiatives of COAG there has been renewed focus on jurisdictional reporting on the effectiveness with which government programs meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This reporting is conducted under the auspices of the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth and State Service Provision and is presented in the biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report (first published in 2003). The OID report has quickly become a key report quantifying the level of disadvantage of Indigenous people and the frameworks behind the report allow for measurement of the impacts of programs to address and reduce disadvantage in future years.

2.3 The range of national and jurisdictional reporting arrangements has expanded in recent years placing increased demand on the ABS, and other agencies, to produce reliable, consistent data for effective development and monitoring of policies and programs. The major reporting mechanisms are summarised in Appendix 1. In addition to the OID report these include:

- The annual *Report on Government Services* (Indigenous Compendium) by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision.
- The annual *Social Justice Report* by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.
- The biennial report *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, jointly produced by the ABS and AIHW.
- The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework*.
- Reports prepared by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) under the national reporting frameworks for Indigenous health and housing data.
- The annual *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training*.

2.4 Driving and/or supporting the data reporting initiatives are a range of data development forums with specific focus on Indigenous data issues. Externally, the ABS and other agencies support information development through information advisory structures in a number of fields, such as health, housing, education, crime and justice, and Indigenous affairs. These are outlined in more detail in Appendix 2.

## 2. CONTEXT *continued*

### 2. CONTEXT *continued*

2.5 In addition, the ABS is engaged with stakeholders in some of these fields through the development and management of Information Development Plans (IDPs). These are agreements among the key stakeholders on the statistical development work required in a particular subject field, to better inform and support the key policy and research issues facing governments and researchers. IDPs have been published by the ABS for Education, Crime and Justice, Children and Youth, and Rural and Regional statistics and others are being developed (e.g. for Housing and Ageing). Similarly, information plans are also developed and agreed to by national groups, such as the Health Statistical Information Management Committee (SIMC) which reports to the National Health Information Ministerial Principal Committee (NHIMPC). The ABS contributes to the development of these plans through its membership of various committees. In most of the IDPs published by the ABS, and other agreed plans, priorities have been identified relating to improving the information base on the social circumstances of Indigenous people. Stakeholders in the particular fields (including the ABS) continue to work together to address gaps in the availability of statistical information (see detail in Appendix 3).

2.6 The mechanisms described above assist the ABS to better understand the requirements of data users for Indigenous data and these same mechanisms allow the ABS to inform the community and to work with relevant agencies to develop information. In these discussions the ABS contributes to the development of data standards, and improved approaches to data collection, analysis and dissemination, all of which lead to improved data quality.

2.7 The ABS has a well-established, regular program of Indigenous statistical activity, including:

- Production of Indigenous population estimates and projections.
- Implementation of the Census Indigenous Enumeration Strategy.
- Conducting regular Indigenous household surveys (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)).
- Conducting other surveys commissioned by external agencies e.g. the 1999, 2001 and 2005 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Surveys (CHINS).
- Publication of experimental Indigenous labour force estimates from the Labour Force Survey.
- Publication of Indigenous data in major ABS collections e.g. schools, births, deaths, corrective services etc.
- Providing input to improve the quality of Indigenous identification in administrative collections (e.g. births, deaths, education and training, law and justice).
- Contributing to understanding of the social conditions of Indigenous people through its analytical work program.

Further details of the current ABS Indigenous statistics program are provided in Appendix 4.

2.8 Building on the sound basis of the existing statistical program, this paper outlines areas where the ABS could extend and enhance the suite of statistics for understanding the social conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our ongoing work program will continue to include work to understand and improve the quality of

## 2. CONTEXT *continued*

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### 2. CONTEXT *continued*

population estimates and projections, Indigenous mortality and life expectancy estimates, and measures of Indigenous labour force characteristics. The ABS program of household surveys is under review during 2007. While the final program is yet to be decided, there is demand to continue our Indigenous surveys program and to further expand it if feasible. Collaborative efforts with other agencies, and national committees and forums, will be directed at promoting the appropriate use of Indigenous statistics, and working together to develop and improve identification in important administrative collections, such as births and deaths, and courts and police systems.

2.9 The ABS has established an Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (AGATSIS). The group provides advice to the ABS on advancing the directions set by the mechanisms described above, and in setting further strategic directions for the ABS's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics work program. Special purpose, technical sub-groups will also be formed to work on specific issues as needed. The advice provided by AGATSIS will enhance the continued relevance of the ABS's work to whole-of-government policy directions, Indigenous stakeholders and the research community.

2.10 The ABS Corporate Plan promotes responsiveness to changing client needs, whilst maintaining a high level of integrity, objectiveness and quality of service. In progressing ABS directions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics, a key concern will be to balance responsiveness to emerging issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy, while ensuring longer-term consistency and quality within the ABS Indigenous collections.

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY

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#### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY

Known priorities for development of Indigenous information are broadly grouped into the following six key strategic areas:

- Engagement
- Understanding and measuring Indigenous wellbeing
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth
- Indigenous engagement in economic activity
- Improved reporting and analysis of comparisons over time
- Regional data: improved capacity to support regional and small area analysis

These key strategic areas are discrete, yet inform and build upon each other. A strong foundation of Engagement with Indigenous communities and other stakeholders will enhance the ABS's work in Understanding and Measuring Indigenous Wellbeing. In turn, a greater understanding of 'wellbeing' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians will support the development of indicators for Early Intervention and Resilience. A greater understanding of 'wellbeing' at the community level may contribute to analysis and reporting of Indigenous Engagement in Economic Activity. Finally, developments in the preceding key areas may enrich the Reporting and Analysis of Comparisons Over Time, and Regional and Small Area Analysis.

The ABS aims for better use of existing data wherever possible. There is scope for the collection of new data within some of the key priorities described in this document, particularly in the areas of Early Intervention and Resilience and Understanding and Measuring Indigenous Wellbeing. Other key strategic directions remain focussed on enhancing the value of existing data and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of current data collection and analysis activities.

#### 3.1 Engagement

3.1.1 The ABS will continue to build on its strategies for engaging with Indigenous communities, policy makers, researchers and other users of Indigenous statistics, in order to maximise the relevance and value of the ABS's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics program, and to encourage accurate interpretation of results.

3.1.2 Future initiatives will focus on two broad areas - engagement with Indigenous people and communities, and engagement with governments and the research community.

#### ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

##### *Current activities*

3.1.3 In 2004, the ABS established an Indigenous Community Engagement Strategy, the centrepiece of which is the recruitment of state/territory based Indigenous Engagement Managers (IEMs). With the support of the ABS state/territory regional offices and the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (NCATSIS), the IEMs:

- Provide an ongoing communication channel between the ABS and Indigenous communities and organisations (both discrete communities and community groups).
- Fulfil the role of State Indigenous Managers in the Census and undertake a dissemination role, returning user-friendly information to communities and Indigenous organisations for their own purposes.

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.1 Engagement *continued*

##### *Current activities continued*

- Promote ABS products and services, and provide training and advice to Indigenous communities and organisations on the use of statistical information for their own purposes.
- Provide feedback to the ABS on community-level data users' information needs and interests.
- Assist in the development of appropriate collection methodologies and contribute to the successful conduct of ABS Indigenous surveys and, for discrete communities, the ABS Monthly Population Survey.
- Support data analysis and validation processes with community-level local knowledge.
- Undertake consultation and follow-up in regard to business surveys.
- Provide a 'mentor' in ABS regional offices for entry-level Indigenous staff, such as Indigenous cadets or Indigenous people recruited to the ABS permanent household interviewer panel or as census collectors.

##### *Future directions*

3.1.4 Through the Indigenous Community Engagement Strategy the ABS expects to build its understanding of, and better manage, issues such as respondent burden among Indigenous people. It will also assist the ABS to make data available to Indigenous people in more accessible formats, and where needed, ensure that appropriate assistance is provided in the interpretation of Indigenous statistics. It is hoped that through these efforts, and through support for research on Indigenous topics, the ABS will be able to assist in building statistical and research capacity among Indigenous people.

3.1.5 The ABS recognises that ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities is a whole-of-government activity. ABS engagement strategies should be responsive to the role and activities of other agencies, and ABS engagement practices within communities should coordinate with those other agencies where appropriate. In addition, the ABS is well-positioned to take a lead role in the development of 'best practice' principles for whole-of-government approaches to engagement with Indigenous communities on statistical issues.

#### ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENTS AND THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

##### *Current activities*

3.1.6 As noted above, the ABS has established the Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (AGATSIS) to assist in obtaining feedback and advice from the user community on current and planned developments in the ABS relating to Indigenous statistics activities. It is anticipated that the group will provide the ABS with wide ranging and cross-sectoral advice on Indigenous statistics development.

3.1.7 The purpose of the group, as described in the terms of reference for AGATSIS is:

- To provide advice to the ABS on the strategic directions of its program of Indigenous statistics.
- To identify data gaps and areas requiring improvement; and advise on proposed strategies for improvement.



### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.1 Engagement *continued*

#### Current activities *continued*

- To provide the ABS with user perspectives on contemporary and emerging Indigenous policy issues requiring a statistical response.
- To provide views and advice on developmental work being undertaken by the ABS on Indigenous statistics, recognising the broader context for development activities that include the work of national committees and Commonwealth and State/Territory agencies.
- To provide advice on strategies for liaison and engagement with Indigenous communities.

Membership has been drawn from Commonwealth government agencies, State and Territory agencies, Indigenous peak bodies and Indigenous data working groups and other research bodies.

3.1.8 The ABS also contributes to whole-of-government activities that draw on the available statistics to report on the circumstances of Indigenous people. A key focus has been, and will continue to be, the provision of support for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage reporting process. These reports draw together jurisdictional information from various sources and have quickly become, since the first biennial report in 2003, a key reference on social and economic conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The ABS is a major contributor of material and analysis published in the OID reports.

3.1.9 The ABS currently works with the following forums, all of which ensure their activities are consistent with the COAG reporting processes:

- The National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data (NAGATSIHID - Health).
- The National Committee for Housing Information (NCHI - Housing).
- The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs Performance Monitoring and Reporting Taskforce (MCEETYA - Education).
- The Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) sub groups (Indigenous affairs generally).

3.1.10 Through the above processes, and many other arrangements, the ABS works with Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies in collecting, compiling, analysing and publishing a wide range of data on Indigenous people. In particular, the biennial report: *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, (ABS cat. no. 4704.0) jointly produced with the AIHW, is well established as an authoritative and comprehensive compendium on Indigenous health and welfare data.

3.1.11 The full range of ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistical publications are available from the ABS website free of charge. The ABS provides fee-based support services for data users via the Information Consultancy Service, and provides advice to researchers on survey design and data analysis via the Statistical Consultancy Service. In addition to these services, the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (NCATSIS) supports users of ABS Indigenous data, provides more detailed analysis of ABS Indigenous data on a consultancy basis and fulfils a leadership and coordination role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistical activity. Research organisations are also able to purchase access to Confidentialised Unit Record

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.1 *Engagement continued*

#### *Current activities continued*

Files (CURFs) of ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surveys, with specified conditions for use.

#### *Future directions*

3.1.12 ABS Indigenous statistics have been used extensively by the research sector for a number of years, with the statistics forming a key component of many significant reports. The ABS has working relationships with the research sector and makes considerable use of various experts in development and review of Indigenous statistical activity. The ABS also engages the research sector directly in analysing and publishing ABS data (e.g. several major pieces of work have resulted from the Australian Census Analytical Program). These relationships will continue into the future, and will be expanded as new opportunities arise.

3.1.13 The National Data Network (NDN) has considerable potential as the platform for raising awareness of Indigenous Statistics. The NDN initiative promotes improved integration and consistent systems across government by facilitating greater collaboration between data providers and faster and consistent access to data. The NDN will deliver significant value and benefits to:

- Government agencies, by sharing development costs.
- Policy makers, by supporting efficient access to data.
- Researchers, by articulating clear and consistent access protocols.
- The community, by improving outcomes from government policies.

Data Custodians have access to a range of web based services, protocols, procedures and tools to assist them to more efficiently manage and share data in a way that ensures security and privacy. The ABS is the lead agency in developing the National Data Network.

3.1.14 The ABS acknowledges the importance of building research capacity among Indigenous people, and will work with the research sector to find appropriate ways that the ABS can support activities directed towards this aim.

#### 3.2 *Understanding and Measuring Indigenous Wellbeing*

3.2.1 In understanding and measuring the wellbeing of Indigenous individuals and communities in Australia, it is important to take a holistic approach that encompasses strengths and capacities as well as needs. In order to develop reliable indicators of social and emotional wellbeing, this concept must first be adequately defined, from an Indigenous perspective as well as a policy perspective.

3.2.2 Australian policy makers are recognising the importance of culturally appropriate social and emotional wellbeing measures in various areas, such as planning for community development and sustainability and assessing mental health needs and program effectiveness. Achieving a better understanding of what constitutes social and emotional wellbeing for Indigenous peoples, and developing appropriate indicators to measure this, is also a priority issue within international spheres such as the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Peoples.

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.2 *Understanding and Measuring Indigenous Wellbeing continued*

3.2.3 Alongside the development of such wellbeing indicators, the ABS recognises the importance of measuring and reporting on areas of disadvantage and poor outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The extent and effects of grief and trauma, family violence, self-harm and other such issues affecting many Indigenous communities must also be measured and reported, in order to support policy development and service delivery for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. However, the sensitivity of these issues, and the potential impact of their inclusion in household surveys on the wellbeing of survey respondents, on overall response rates and on ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities and stakeholders, warrant careful consideration.

#### CURRENT ACTIVITIES

3.2.4 A survey module on social and emotional wellbeing was developed in collaboration with National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO) and implemented in the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey. A comprehensive evaluation of the module, conducted by the ABS and AIHW under NAGATSIHID, in consultation with NACCHO and other Indigenous data stakeholders, was undertaken in 2006.

3.2.5 Using these and other available data, the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is explored in publications such as the joint ABS / AIHW publication *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2005* (ABS cat. no. 4704.0).

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

3.2.6 The ABS will develop a framework for the measurement of Indigenous wellbeing, in consultation and collaboration with stakeholders. This will involve the review of existing frameworks, concepts and measures and the formation of indicators for relevant concepts, which could include (though are not limited to):

- Sources of support, resilience and coping mechanisms, at the individual and community levels.
- Community leadership, governance, capacities, participation and social capital.
- Functional family relationships.
- Access to land, language, culture and recreation.
- Mental and spiritual health, as well as physical health.
- Access to adequate and appropriate housing, living standards and environmental health.
- Financial wellbeing.
- Social and emotional wellbeing.

3.2.7 The ABS publication, *Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics* (cat. No. 4160.0) outlines the value and functions of statistical frameworks as follows:

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.2 *Understanding and Measuring Indigenous Wellbeing continued*

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS *continued*

"There can be no single measure of wellbeing that satisfies all parties interested in helping people improve their lives. Rather, a range of measures needs to be available to researchers, policy makers, welfare providers and other community groups and members who will select from this range to inform their own particular issues of interest (p6). Frameworks are a well-recognised tool used to support statistical measurement, data analysis and analytical commentary. A primary function of a framework is to 'map' the conceptual terrain surrounding an area of interest, such as 'wellbeing'. In other words, frameworks can define the scope of inquiry, delineate the important concepts associated with a topic and organise this into a logical structure." (p15)

3.2.8 Work on developing a framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing will be undertaken in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous researchers and other stakeholders, and will also be informed by national and international examples, such as the COAG Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage reporting framework, New Zealand's Statistical Framework for Maori Wellbeing, and workshops through the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) on Indicators of Indigenous Wellbeing.

3.2.9 Guided by this Framework, the ABS will integrate a greater 'wellbeing-focus' into its Indigenous collections. This will entail a greater effort to identify strengths and capacities, alongside indicators of disadvantage and need.

3.2.10 In addressing stakeholder needs for data on more sensitive issues (such as family violence), the ABS will focus on the improvement and use of existing data from administrative and other sources that may serve to meet needs in this area and will continue to investigate the feasibility of Indigenous household surveys as a vehicle for collection of such information.

#### 3.3 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Youth*

3.3.1 Information available on the social circumstances of Indigenous people highlights significant disadvantage across a range of areas, including education, health, housing and crime. To address this, policy makers are focussing on preventative models that seek to identify areas for positive intervention and build upon existing strengths, whether they are at the individual or community level. This has led to a particular focus on interventions that help to build healthy children and youth, and strong resilient communities. Positive interventions in the antenatal stages and the early years of life can strengthen the foundations for successful life pathways, especially in health, education and work.

3.3.2 Three of the seven strategic areas for action identified by the COAG Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage reporting framework relate to childhood development and transition issues: Early childhood development and growth; Early school engagement and performance; and Positive childhood and transition to adulthood. Work is needed to continue to develop the information base in this area, so that suitable indicators can be developed and used to monitor change. These data can also inform the provision of services (including education, disability, antenatal services, health and child-care) to special target groups such as Indigenous parents, children and young people.

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.3 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Youth continued*

3.3.3 Through its Indigenous Generational Reform initiative, COAG has reaffirmed the commitment of Australian governments to closing the outcomes gap between Indigenous people and other Australians over a generation and has resolved that the initial priority for joint action should be on ensuring that young Indigenous children get a good start in life. In April 2007, COAG agreed that urgent action was required to address data gaps to enable reliable evaluation of progress and transparent national and jurisdictional reporting on outcomes. COAG also agreed to establish a jointly-funded clearing house for reliable evidence.

#### CURRENT ACTIVITIES

3.3.4 Current activities and sources of information about Indigenous children and youth, their families and communities include the five yearly Census of Population and Housing, the six yearly NATSIHS, other surveys such as the WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) and administrative collections. A wide range of administrative data covering health and education are published by the ABS, the AIHW and DEST.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

3.3.5 In consultation with stakeholders, the ABS will explore how its existing collection and analytical program could incorporate more information on children and youth. It will seek advice on the feasibility of collecting additional data on young people through the Indigenous surveys in the ABS household survey program. Activities include:

- Assessing the feasibility of collecting information on children for the next National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS).
- Exploring the feasibility of expanding the range of questions on children's health issues in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS).
- Through the extensive consultative program associated with the range of Information Development Plans developed by the ABS, and working with stakeholders across governments and the research community, seeking opportunities to improve the range and quality of data to support analysis of early intervention and resilience. This could include:
  - Data on access to, and use of, services for Indigenous children and their families, such as child care, early education, sports and recreational activities and access to technologies.
  - Data on the wellbeing of Indigenous children through measures such as cognitive and emotional development, physical health, housing, growth and nutrition, parenting, parental stressors and coping, and sources of support.
  - Data on Indigenous youth through measures such as mental health, social networks and relationships, use of welfare and legal services, and risk factors such as substance abuse.
  - Better estimates of young Indigenous people in Vocational Education and Training (VET), higher education and employment.
  - Improved estimates and small area data on children and youth living in regional and remote Australia.

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.4 Indigenous engagement in economic activity

3.4.1 The Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs and the National Indigenous Council have identified "building Indigenous wealth, employment and entrepreneurial culture..." as an area for priority action. There is little data on Indigenous economic activity currently available and the ABS continues to look at how information in this area might be developed. There is also increasing interest in the different types of corporate arrangements relating to and impacting on Indigenous economic activity and Indigenous labour market participation. Once again, relatively little statistical information about these arrangements is currently available.

#### CURRENT ACTIVITIES

3.4.2 Current activities being undertaken by ABS include:

- The main focus of ABS statistics on the economic activity of Indigenous people has been on labour force and income data from the Census of Population and Housing and household surveys, with a limited amount of information on self-employment available through the Census.
- Since March 2001 the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS) has included the standard Indigenous identifier to enable Indigenous results to be produced on an annual basis. Experimental estimates of the labour force characteristics of Indigenous people for 2002 to 2004 were released in January 2006 and results for 2005 and onwards have since been released on an annual basis.
- Through its economic surveys program, the ABS has collected some statistics on businesses engaged in the sale of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and crafts, including the value of artworks sold, business costs and levels of employment. With these data, the ABS has contributed to work auspiced by the Cultural Ministers Ministerial Council to assess the value of Indigenous cultural product.
- The ABS is currently collaborating with Northern Territory Government agencies in a project on Indigenous business activity, looking at how this integrates with the broader notion of Indigenous economic participation, particularly at the local, community level.
- The ABS is assessing the feasibility of using existing data sources to extract or derive information about Indigenous economic activity, Indigenous businesses and the participation of Indigenous people in the Australian economy.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

3.4.3 The ABS will position itself to understand, and respond to, emerging needs for Indigenous economic and business statistics through:

- Exploratory work with prospective users to develop a framework for measuring Indigenous economic activity, identifying specific needs and concepts for measurement. These issues may include:
  - measuring and understanding economic resources available to remote Indigenous communities
  - the characteristics and activities of incorporated Indigenous organisations
  - community-level governance and business leadership
- Assessment of the outcomes of the NT collaborative project on Indigenous business activity, to identify opportunities for measurement of Indigenous business activity across other jurisdictions and at a national level.

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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#### 3.4 Indigenous engagement in economic activity *continued*

##### FUTURE DIRECTIONS *continued*

- Analysis of 2006 Census Indigenous self employment data with the view to including these in COAG Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage reporting; and providing them to the Ministerial Council on Small Business.
- Further exploration of the potential use of external agency 'business' related administrative data.

#### 3.5 Improved reporting and analysis of comparisons over time

##### FUTURE DIRECTIONS *continued*

3.5.1 A number of analytical efforts across the government and research sectors are directed at identifying and understanding changes over time in the economic and social circumstances of Indigenous Australians. Among these, the COAG biennial reports on Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (from 2003) have emphasised the vital importance of tracking changes in the socioeconomic circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in order to assess the effectiveness of government policy and interventions.

3.5.2 The ABS conducts Indigenous-specific surveys, such as the NATSISS and the NATSIHS, which are designed in consultation with Indigenous people, employ a sampling design that will produce reliable estimates of the circumstances of the Indigenous population and use culturally sensitive methodologies to facilitate the collection of meaningful, quality data about Indigenous households, families and communities.

3.5.3 The ABS will maintain an ongoing program of Indigenous-specific household surveys in order to provide high quality and relevant information that can be monitored over time. In addition, the ABS will explore options to enhance the comparability between Indigenous-specific surveys and standard household surveys of the general population.

3.5.4 While a strong platform now exists for measuring changes in Indigenous circumstances over time through ABS household surveys and the Census of Population and Housing, there remains a limit to the extent that such statistical movements can be interpreted as representing real change. This is due to uncertainties associated with varying levels of Indigenous identification over time and in different settings, and improvements in Indigenous enumeration practices and measurement techniques.

3.5.5 Since the representation of Indigenous people in Australia's total population is small (2.4% of the total population) and geographically dispersed, the sample design of most ABS household surveys does not currently allow for the production of useable estimates relating to the Indigenous population. The ABS will evaluate use of the Indigenous status question in standard household surveys in order to facilitate more effective use of data within and across these surveys. In addition to the cost of such measures and their impact on sample design, the consequent additional respondent burden on Indigenous people will be assessed.

3.5.6 There are a number of challenges in the compilation of administrative data; for example, Indigenous identification remains a challenge in collections such as death registrations, and without reliable coverage across all states, it is difficult to assess

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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3.5 *Improved reporting and analysis of comparisons over time continued*

whether changes to death rates over time are due to changes in Indigenous mortality or variations in the identification of Indigenous status in registration data.

#### CURRENT ACTIVITIES

3.5.7 Current activities being undertaken by ABS include:

- Continuation of the ABS Indigenous Community Engagement Strategy, and improvements to the Indigenous Enumeration Strategy for the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, sought to ensure that the best quality data were collected from Indigenous people. The data collected will support analysis of the changes in the characteristics of Indigenous Australians over time and assist in developing more accurate Indigenous population estimates.
- Continuation of the ABS program of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surveys on a regular basis. This will build capacity to monitor the change in a range of social circumstances observed through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Surveys (1994 and 2002 ); and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (2004–05) (which can be compared to the Indigenous sub-samples of the 1995 and 2001 National Health Surveys).
- Continued publication of experimental estimates describing the labour force characteristics of Indigenous Australians will supplement data available from social surveys, and enable some analysis of annual movements.
- Efforts within and outside the ABS to improve Indigenous identification in administrative collections, so that the quality of these collections continues to improve, and meaningful comparisons over time can be extended. Examples include:
  - The ABS Indigenous Mortality Data Strategy, which aims to improve the quality of Indigenous identification in death registrations through direct efforts with Registrars in states with lowest coverage rates, building relationships with relevant State government agencies to support these efforts, and education campaigns targeted at funeral directors, health workers and Indigenous communities.
  - The ABS Census Data Enhancement project includes a quality study to assess Indigenous identification - and levels of under-identification - in the collection of mortality data by bringing together data from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing and death registrations. This quality study may reveal opportunities to improve Indigenous identification in deaths registrations and may also offer an opportunity to enhance the accuracy of Indigenous population estimates.
  - External efforts, such as NAGATSIHID's 2006–07 project to develop best practice guidelines for collecting and recording Indigenous status in administrative collections, in which the ABS is contributing as a steering committee member.
- Subject to a feasibility investigation, the ABS intends to create a Statistical Longitudinal Data Set (SLDS) by combining Census of Population and Housing data over time, based on a 5% sample of persons. This will allow analysis of patterns in individual experiences over time and of factors influencing these experiences for the Australian population as a whole, including Indigenous people.



### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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3.5 *Improved reporting and analysis of comparisons over time continued*

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

3.5.8 The ABS will continue to enhance existing survey collections and will support efforts to improve the quality of administrative collections so as to facilitate better measurement of change over time across a range of statistics, including births and deaths registration data, population estimates and projections, life expectancy, labour force characteristics, participation in education, and crime and justice statistics.

3.5.9 The ABS will continue its focus on activities to improve data for analysis of trends in the social conditions of Indigenous people, and will build on the existing statistical program as far as possible. Through its participation on NAGATSIHID and other forums, the ABS will continue to contribute to improvements in the measurement of health and mortality through collaborative work on collection methodology and the development of new analytical techniques. The ABS will continue to improve the quality of vital statistics collections and Indigenous population estimates and projections, giving particular focus to states where coverage is known to be low.

3.5.10 Through its collaboration with the AIHW, the ABS will be seeking ways to improve the analytical approach to Indigenous mortality data, extending the work recently published in the joint publication *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2005* (ABS cat. no. 4704.0).

3.6 *Regional data: improved capacity to support regional and small area analysis*

3.6.1 There is strong user demand for more comprehensive small area data about Indigenous Australians. Indigenous governance takes place at many levels, but local and community governance structures are particularly important in the context of the recent policy focus on developing community level Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs), the COAG 'whole of government' initiatives at community level and Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination-sponsored evaluations of selected communities.

3.6.2 Government and non-government agencies, in recognition of moves towards more localised planning, require information at regional and community level, along with data provided at broader geographical and State/Territory levels, to develop and evaluate targeted programs.

3.6.3 While the ABS may not be able to deliver regional and small area data to the level of detail desired by some stakeholders, due to confidentiality and privacy considerations, limitations on sample sizes and respondent burden constraints, it can assist Indigenous communities and researchers as well as government bodies in the best use of administrative and/or survey data available, and in collecting community-level data for their own use. The ABS has a leading role in the development and use of Indigenous statistical indicators and instruments, and is therefore well-positioned to support the application of ABS standards and the use of standard instruments for data collection at a local level.

#### CURRENT ACTIVITIES

3.6.4 Through its statistical program, the ABS provides national and state level population benchmarks. It disseminates a large amount of small area Census data free of charge through the ABS website, including a suite of Indigenous profiles that present a wealth of information at the community level.

### 3. KEY STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NEW OR ENHANCED STATISTICAL ACTIVITY *continued*

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3.6 *Regional data: improved capacity to support regional and small area analysis continued*

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

3.6.5 The ABS will continue to engage with data users to monitor regional data needs and will explore innovative ways of improving availability of regional data, including:

- Production of user friendly 'Indigenous community level' reports based on Census data.
- Exploration/analysis of administrative data on a regional basis.
- Exploration of experimental synthetic estimates for small areas.
- Reviewing sampling strategies for Indigenous household surveys to better support sub-state outputs.
- Inclusion of options for Indigenous data (e.g. Statistical Local Area Estimated Residential Populations) in ABS Regional Statistics output platforms.
- Exploration of National Data Network (NDN) opportunities to disseminate regional data.
- The provision of customised estimates and projections at the small-area level for specific purposes, on a consultancy basis.
- Assisting Indigenous communities and researchers to collect community-level data, through the development and provision of indicator frameworks and standard instruments for Indigenous statistics.

## 4. CONCLUSION

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### 4. CONCLUSION

4.1 This paper has discussed past and current activities to produce statistics on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and outlined six key strategic areas to guide further development of this program of statistics. It drew on information from the range of external committees which advise on information priorities and gaps for Indigenous statistics, or which use existing information for reporting on the circumstances of Indigenous people. The proposed strategic directions have also been informed by the priorities for development identified in the Information Development Plans that have been produced for a number of areas of social concern, such as health; education and training; crime and justice; rural and regional; and children and youth.

4.2 ABS Directions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics will be both a reference document and a guide to future developments in Indigenous statistical improvements. Implementation of the future activities discussed in this paper will be carried out by the ABS, continuing to fulfil our commitment to providing a national statistical service that is relevant, timely and accessible.

4.3 The ABS is committed to ongoing consultation on its work program, and intends to continue to review its Indigenous statistics program on a regular basis. We would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of the government agencies, Indigenous organisations and communities, and research groups involved in the consultation process.



## APPENDIX 1 KEY INDIGENOUS DATA FRAMEWORKS AND REPORTS

*The ABS produces a number of key reports on issues such as Indigenous population estimates, health, community infrastructure and housing, and social circumstances, based on data from the Census of Population and Housing and ABS survey collections. The ABS also supports the production of, and provides data outputs to, a number of the key Indigenous data frameworks and reports, produced by external agencies, listed below.*

### OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE: KEY INDICATORS

In April 2002, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commissioned the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to produce a regular report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. The first report, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* was published in November 2003, and thereafter biennially. This report provides information on the impact of changes to policy and service delivery on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also provides a way to assess the effect of COAG's commitment to achieving the shared goal for Indigenous Australians:

'to enjoy the same standard of living as other Australians - for them to be as healthy, as long-living and as able to participate in the social and economic life of the country.'

### REPORT ON GOVERNMENT SERVICES

This annual report is produced by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP). It is used for strategic budget and policy planning and evaluation. Information in the report is also used to assess the resource needs and resource performance of government departments. The data in this report provide an incentive to improve the performance of government services by enhancing measurement approaches and techniques in relation to aspects of performance, such as unit costs and service quality. Since 1997, the report has increased its reporting on Indigenous Australians across all service areas and from 2003 a separate compendium of data on services to Indigenous people has been published.

### ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HEALTH PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework (HPF) is the basis of a biennial report, with the first edition released in late 2006. The Framework was developed by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (SCATSIH) - a subcommittee of the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC). The HPF was developed to provide the basis for quantitative measurement of the impact of the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and to streamline reporting on health and healthcare delivery. It covers the entire health system including Indigenous-specific services and programs, and mainstream services across the continuum of care. In addition, the HPF includes measures of health outcomes and determinants of health that are outside the health system, consistent with the whole-of-government approach recommended by COAG.

### THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF AUSTRALIA'S ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

This report has been produced jointly by the ABS and AIHW every two years since 1997. The publication draws together the results of ABS surveys and censuses and the range of data held by the AIHW to provide a comprehensive statistical overview, largely at the national level, of the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Among the topics included are: maternal and child health; risk factors; ill-health; disability and ageing; mortality; and access to, and use of, services.

### NATIONAL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

This framework for 2004–09 was designed to complement the *National Mental Health Plan 2003–2008* and the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2003–2013*. It was endorsed by AHMAC and aims to respond to the high incidence of social and emotional wellbeing problems and mental illness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by providing a strategic framework for national action. It also outlines data development priorities.

## APPENDIX 1 KEY INDIGENOUS DATA FRAMEWORKS AND REPORTS

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### INDIGENOUS HOUSING INDICATORS

This biennial indicator report prepared by AIHW is based on the National Reporting Framework for Indigenous Housing data. It provides data that can be used to monitor progress in the seven outcome areas outlined in the Housing Ministers' 10-year statement of new directions for Indigenous housing, *Building a Better Future: Indigenous housing to 2010*.

### NATIONAL REPORT TO PARLIAMENT ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND TRAINING

This report is presented annually to Parliament in accordance with the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. The report tracks progress in Indigenous education and training and discusses issues under the major goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT

Since 1993, through the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has published an annual report about contemporary issues relating to the human rights of Indigenous people in Australia. The *Social Justice Report 2005* considered progress in achieving improvements in the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and set out a human rights framework for achieving health equality within a generation. The report also examined the implementation of the new arrangements for Indigenous affairs in a post-ATSIC environment.

## APPENDIX 2 KEY INFORMATION STRUCTURES

*The following presents the activities and governance arrangements of committees and other bodies that are concerned with Indigenous information and its management. While this represents the situation at the time of writing it may be subject to change.*

ABS ADVISORY GROUP ON  
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER STATISTICS  
(AGATSIS)

The main function of the Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (AGATSIS) is to provide the ABS with a means of gathering high level, cross-cutting advice on its statistical activity relating to Indigenous Australians. AGATSIS assists the ABS in meeting its responsibility for leadership and coordination of national statistical activity about Australia's Indigenous peoples, contributes to strategic planning across a range of ABS forums and covers ABS activity relating to surveys, censuses and administrative collections as well as analytic reports. Membership of AGATSIS includes senior representatives from key user agencies responsible for Indigenous policy/program initiatives, and others with expertise in the field of Indigenous statistics.

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL FOR  
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS  
(MCATSIA)

The Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) is the highest level policy advising and policy driving body on Indigenous affairs in Australia. It is a forum where all Indigenous Affairs Ministers meet to exchange ideas and develop Indigenous-related policies that will have an impact at a local, state and national level. ABS participates in and/or contributes to relevant working groups established when required to provide statistical and data development advice to MCATSIA and/or its standing committee (SCATSIA).

NATIONAL ADVISORY GROUP  
ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER HEALTH  
INFORMATION AND DATA  
(NAGATSIHID)

The National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data (NAGATSIHID) was established following a decision taken at the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) meeting in October 2000. It provides broad strategic advice to the National Health Information Management Group (NHIMG) on the improvement of the quality and availability of data and information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and health service delivery. NAGATSIHID also draws together the range of existing activities into a coordinated and strategic process. Following changes to national health committee structures, Health Ministers agreed that NAGATSIHID would become a standing committee of, and provide broad strategic advice to the National Health Information Ministerial Principal Committee (NHIMPC). NAGATSIHID membership includes government health bodies, peak Indigenous health organisations, and national statistical and program measurement agencies (ABS and AIHW). It oversees progress against activities in its *Strategic Plan for the Development of Data and Information about the Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2006–2008*.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR  
HOUSING INFORMATION  
(NCHI)

The National Committee for Housing Information (NCHI) is a national housing data committee established by the Housing Minister's Advisory Council (HMAC). It is responsible for the development and management of the national mainstream and Indigenous housing data, as outlined in the National Housing Data Agreement (NHDA) and the Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information (ANIHI). The committee was established in October 2006 following the disbanding of three national housing data groups and their associated sub-committees. The three data groups were the National Housing Data Agreement Management Group (NHDAMG), the National Indigenous Housing Information Implementation Committee (NIHIC) and the National Housing Data Development Committee (NHDDC).

The Policy Research Working Group (PRWG) and the Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing (SCIH) are responsible for the allocation of the housing information budget provided through HMAC. The NCHI develops and oversees the implementation of the HMAC-endorsed work plan and is directly accountable to the PRWG. It is required to provide six-monthly reports to PRWG and SCIH on the implementation of the

## APPENDIX 2 KEY INFORMATION STRUCTURES *continued*

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR HOUSING INFORMATION (NCHI) <i>continued</i>	mainstream and Indigenous housing work programs. Membership of the committee comprises representatives of the parties who are signatories to the NHDA and ANIHI, including the ABS and AIHW.
STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE PROVISION	This committee comprises senior representatives from the central agencies of all governments to manage the Review of Government Services with the assistance of a Secretariat from the Productivity Commission. The ABS participates in Steering Committee meetings and related working groups, and provides substantial data input to various chapters of the Report.
REFERENCE GROUP ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION	The Reference Group on Indigenous Education provides a forum for matters relating to Indigenous education. Members are drawn from federal and state/territory government departments and independent education bodies with responsibility for Indigenous education. The reference group reports to the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) and Ministerial Committee for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). Its roles include: responsibility for progressing and implementing recommendations outlined in the paper <i>Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008</i> , consulting with stakeholders, providing policy advice on matters referred to it by AESOC and MCEETYA and drafting the chapter on Indigenous education published in the annual national report on schooling.
STRUCTURES FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE DATA	<p>The range of structures that oversee data development in the areas of police, the courts and corrective services institutions are listed below. These bodies guide the work program of the ABS National Centre for Crime and Justice Statistics, including the Indigenous component of that work program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Australasian Police Ministers' Council (APMC).</li><li>■ Ministerial Council on the Administration of Justice (MCAJ).</li><li>■ Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) and the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General Officers (SCAG Officers).</li><li>■ Corrective Services Ministers' Conference (CSMC) and the Corrective Services Administrators' Conference (CSAC).</li></ul>
NATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICES INFORMATION MANAGEMENT GROUP	The National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) is a sub-committee of the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CSMAC) and is comprised of representatives of State, Territory and Commonwealth community service authorities, the ABS and the AIHW. NCSIMG was established by, and to manage the operations of, the National Community Services Information Agreement (NCSIA). The NCSIA is a multilateral agreement between government community services and statistical agencies and provides the framework for a cooperative approach to national community service information development. The NCSIMG also oversees progress against the development activities described in its strategic information plan ( <i>National Community Services Information - A strategic plan 2005–2009</i> ) and in the related National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Services Information Plan.



## APPENDIX 3 INFORMATION DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND INDIGENOUS DATA PRIORITIES

### INFORMATION DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Information Development Plans (IDPs) represent an agreement between key stakeholders about areas where further development is needed in a field of statistics and a plan to improve the quality, coverage and use of data within that field.

Each IDP embodies three kinds of knowledge and shared commitment to statistical development activity:

- Demand for information - a picture of the information including statistics that would, ideally, support informed design and evaluation of policy, other decision-making, research and community discussion.
- Supply of information (and of raw data that might be used to create statistics) - a picture of the existing data pool that might satisfy the demand for information.
- Agreed statistical development activity - identified through the comparison of demand and supply, which defines and prioritises information gaps, overlaps and deficiencies (e.g. in sub-population disaggregation).

Since requirements for information on the Indigenous population are cross-cutting, these requirements are addressed in the IDP for each field of statistics. At present, IDPs have been released by ABS for crime and justice, education and training, emergency management, and rural and regional statistics. An IDP for child and youth statistics was released in 2006 and at the time of writing an IDP was under development for statistics on ageing.

### ABS INFORMATION DEVELOPMENT PLANS *Crime and Justice*

An agreed priority area identified in the Crime and Justice IDP is improvement in information on Indigenous people to provide an improved evidence base for Indigenous policy development and research. Crime and justice issues are closely connected to issues of socioeconomic wellbeing such as health and work. Current ABS sources of information include the six-yearly NATSISS. Administrative data sources include information from corrective services institutions (published by the ABS). Identified data gaps include survey information on the personal safety of Indigenous people. Data developments include the implementation of the ABS standard question on Indigenous status in police processes and systems, and the investigation of the feasibility of transferring, for statistical purposes, Indigenous status information to the courts sector. Indigenous data for selected jurisdictions from the National Recorded Crime Victims Collection was first published in June 2007 (*Recorded Crime - Victims Australia*, ABS cat. no. 4510.0). For further information see *Information Paper - National Information Development Plan for Crime and Justice* (ABS cat. no. 4520.0).

### *Education and Training*

The Education and Training IDP identifies the emerging need for data across the education sectors to be presented and analysed in a holistic manner to provide a perspective for important sub-populations, such as young people, Indigenous Australians, and people with a disability. Key ABS sources of data include the six-yearly NATSISS, the six-yearly NATSIHS and the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing. Administrative sources include the National Schools Statistics Collection, published by ABS, the National Preschool Census, and information from the vocational and higher education sectors. Priority areas for data development for Indigenous statistics include the consistency and comparability of national reporting of pre-school and school attendance, reporting of learning outcomes by geographic regions, state and territory breakdowns of 15–24 year olds in transition from school to work, participation in and outcomes from vocational educational and training, and engagement of Indigenous people in all sectors of the education workforce. For further information see *Information Paper - Measuring Learning in Australia: Improve the Quality, Coverage and Use of Education and Training Statistics* (ABS cat no. 4231.0)

## APPENDIX 3 INFORMATION DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND INDIGENOUS DATA PRIORITIES *continued*

### *Rural and Regional*

The Rural and Regional IDP identifies the need for regional statistics about Indigenous people together with four other sub-populations: young people, older persons, women and persons with a disability. Current ABS sources of regional information on Indigenous people include the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing and population estimates and projections. Administrative sources of regional data include school enrolments and persons in police custody. These collections are subject to limitations due to varying levels of completeness of the identification of Indigenous status. User needs for information about Indigenous people living in regional and remote areas include statistics on health and economic wellbeing, as well as ensuring that the geographic unit for Indigenous output reflects the spatial frameworks used by Indigenous administration and advocacy bodies. The IDP includes a data development priority to investigate options for expanded regional analysis of sub-populations using data from existing sources. For further information see *Information Paper: Regional Research in Australia - the Statistical Dimension: an Information Development Plan for Rural and Regional Statistics* (ABS cat no. 1362.0)

### *Children and Youth*

In developing an Information Development Plan for Children and Youth, Indigenous children and youth are identified as a key sub-population for data development. Current ABS sources of data include the six-yearly NATSIHS the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing and experimental estimates and projections of the Indigenous population. Administrative data sources include information on pre-school and school enrolments and child protection information. Priority areas for Indigenous information development include data to monitor early intervention programs. For further information see *Information Paper: Improving Statistics on Children and Youth - An Information Development Plan, 2006* (ABS cat. no. 4907.0).

### OTHER INFORMATION PLANS

#### *Indigenous Community Services*

The AIHW and ABS prepared a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Services Information Plan for the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG). NCSIMG reports to the Community and Disability Services Minister's Conference through the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council. The combined ABS and AIHW unit preparing the plan reviewed the collection protocols of Indigenous status in community services, and examined issues affecting the collection of Indigenous status, in order to develop principles and standards for the collection of this information.

The purpose of the plan is to improve information in both the government and non-government sectors about the Indigenous clients of community services, through:

- The use of the standard ABS Indigenous status question and the National Community Services Data Dictionary protocol.
- Developing a supportive base and infrastructure for data collection and use.
- Improving the technical aspects required to facilitate quality Indigenous community services information.
- Gaining national commitment to implement recommendations to improve Indigenous information.

#### *Indigenous Health*

The NAGATSIHID *Strategic Plan for the Development of Data and Information about the Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2006–2008* outlines 20 priority themes for Indigenous health information and data. The themes listed encompass data development, quality improvement and capacity building activities; specific health-related topics such as mental health, violence and prisoner's health; and research and analysis issues such as health trends and burden of disease. Each theme is addressed in terms of the current context, NAGATSIHID's role, and 'next steps and monitoring progress'.

## APPENDIX 3 INFORMATION DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND INDIGENOUS DATA PRIORITIES *continued*

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### *Indigenous Health continued*

In addition to NAGATSIHID's key advisory role, the group is also responsible for continuing the implementation of the *1997 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information Plan - This time let's make it happen* (AIHW 1997). The NAGATSIHID Strategic Plan has been developed within the context of this Plan.

### *Indigenous Housing*

The Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information aims to: improve the quality and range of Indigenous housing information at a national level; improve access to Indigenous housing information and facilitate the use of data, whilst maintaining and protecting data confidentiality; minimise duplication of efforts and maximise the compatibility of Indigenous housing data with other housing data sets, and with other relevant health and community services data. Specific objectives include the development of a National Housing Data Dictionary, and a National Minimum Data Set. The National Indigenous Housing Information Implementation Committee (NIHIC) is responsible for the overall operation of the Agreement.

The agreement has been developed within the context of the Indigenous issues and priorities addressed in the *National Community Services Information Plan 2005-09*.

### INDIGENOUS DATA PRIORITIES

As described in the main paper, the breadth of data collection for Indigenous people has increased in quality and quantity over recent years. In addition, the IDP process provides a basis for setting priorities and focusing work in a number of areas. The ABS and other agencies have made progress in a range of areas, including population estimation, survey output and identification of Indigenous people in administrative collections. Nevertheless, there are still major data gaps (eg. as identified in the COAG reports and by NAGATSIHID).

The following provides an indicative list of some key areas where demands for further improvement or additional data have been expressed by users of Indigenous statistical data:

- more accurate and reliable population counts, estimates and projections at small area level;
- continued improvements in vitals data, Indigenous identification coverage and resulting analyses;
- improved Indigenous identification in other administrative data collections (particularly in jurisdictional housing; police and courts; hospitals; and Vocational Education and Training (VET) data collections);
- more detailed data on children and youth, including on health (specifically mental health), risk factors, child abuse and neglect;
- more detailed data on youth suicide;
- data on family violence;
- provision of longitudinal data on all aspects of health, environmental health and wellbeing;
- more comprehensive data on illicit substance use;
- improved Indigenous education attendance and attainment data;
- more detailed (regional) and regular data on labour market participation;
- more comprehensive data on Indigenous economic and business activity;
- more comprehensive small area statistical data, including down to 'community' level to meet regional planning and monitoring requirements and the possible evaluation requirements of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs).

## APPENDIX 4 CURRENT ABS INDIGENOUS STATISTICS PROGRAM

### CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING

The five-yearly Census continues to be the centrepiece of the ABS Indigenous statistics work program. It provides the basis for estimates of the Indigenous population and a wide range of socioeconomic information on housing, income, employment, education and language. Much information from the Census is available free of charge from the ABS web site and information from the 2006 Census will be available from mid 2007.

Since 1971 there has been a continual process of reviewing and improving Census enumeration procedures in an effort to raise the quality of the count of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. All Censuses from 1986 have been supported by an Indigenous Enumeration Strategy (IES) aimed at improving Census awareness, forms design and field procedures to facilitate effective and accurate enumeration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, particularly those living in remote areas. Approximately 4% of the Census field staff in 2006 were Indigenous people (1,600).

The development of the 2006 Census IES was guided by a Working Group comprising experts from Indigenous organisations, Australian and state/territory government agencies, research organisations and practitioners in Indigenous data, field procedures and protocols. The 2006 Census IES was designed to have sufficient flexibility to allow for the unique cultural aspects of Indigenous society while ensuring the quality and consistency of results overall. It included a new form layout designed to facilitate collection of information from large households, extending the Post Enumeration Survey (undertaken after each Census to assess Census undercount) to cover remote Indigenous communities, and independent observational studies of Indigenous enumeration and processing.

Indigenous specific products from the 2006 Census will generally be available free of charge via the internet from [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au):

- Indigenous Quickstats for basic information on a place of interest.
- Indigenous Census tables for more detailed information on a single topic on a place of interest.
- Indigenous community profiles for 30 detailed tables on a place of interest, and the publications *Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* (ABS cat. no. 4705.0), and *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* (ABS cat. no. 4713.0). These will become available progressively from mid 2007.

In 2008 a CD-ROM release of Australian Indigenous Geographical Classification Maps and Census Profiles (cat. no. 4706.0.30.001) will be available.

### ABS INDIGENOUS HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS

At the time of writing, ABS is reviewing its program of household surveys. This program currently includes two specific Indigenous surveys (NATSISS and NATSIHS), the CHINS conducted by ABS on behalf of FaCSIA and other surveys, most notably the Labour Force Survey, from which some Indigenous data are output. While the revised household surveys program has yet to be decided, there is demand to continue the current Indigenous component and to further expand it if feasible.

#### *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)*

The NATSISS is currently planned to be run six-yearly and provides a wide range of socioeconomic information including demographic and housing details, education, labour force participation, personal income, transport and mobility, health, culture, family and community, crime and justice, physical and threatened violence, and perceived neighbourhood problems. The 2002 survey provides comparisons with results from the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSISS) and the 2002 General Social Survey (GSS).

## APPENDIX 4 CURRENT ABS INDIGENOUS STATISTICS PROGRAM

*continued*

*National Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Social Survey  
(NATSISS) continued*

The 2002 NATSISS was designed in collaboration with government agencies and committees, Indigenous organisations, and researchers. Development included extensive consultation with Indigenous communities and enumeration was assisted by Indigenous facilitators.

The 2002 NATSISS collected information about personal and household characteristics for people aged 15 years and over in remote and non-remote areas of all states and territories in Australia. Some 9,400 people responded to the survey (about 1 in 30 of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over). Initial results were released in June 2004 in *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey* (ABS cat. no. 4714.0) which is available free of charge on the ABS web site together with additional parallel state/territory tables. Key comparisons with results from the 1994 NATSIS, and with non-Indigenous results from the 2002 GSS, are included in the publication. The Confidentialised Unit Record File of the NATSISS is available for researchers wishing to undertake more detailed studies. The ABS has released a summary booklet of main findings and state and territory posters based on the results of the NATSISS as part of the survey dissemination strategy.

Preparations for the 2008 NATSISS commenced in 2006 with the circulation of a consultation paper among AGATSIS members and other stakeholders. ABS aims to design the 2008 NATSISS so that it is both relevant to emerging policy directions and continues to collect standard indicators for analysing change over time. Following an initial assessment of user views and some initial testing of possible new data items, a workshop involving key stakeholders will be held in mid 2007 to firm up survey content.

*National Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Health Survey  
(NATSIHS)*

The NATSIHS is currently planned to be run six-yearly and provides information about the health of Indigenous Australians including measures of health status, health actions taken, and lifestyle factors which may influence health. The NATSIHS is designed to provide comparisons with results from the three-yearly National Health Survey (NHS).

The introduction of a more frequent NHS and the new NATSIHS following the 1998–99 review of the ABS household survey program was partially supported through funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing under a partnership agreement with ABS. Prior to the 2004–05 survey, sample supplementation was used to ensure sufficient Indigenous respondents to provide measures of the health of Indigenous people from the NHS.

As with the 2002 NATSISS, the development of the 2004–05 NATSIHS was guided by a survey reference group comprising Indigenous experts and representatives from Indigenous organisations, government agencies and academia. Advice was also provided by NAGATSIHID. Similarly, this survey consulted with Indigenous community councils and health services in the communities and employed Indigenous facilitators in communities to gain support and assistance with the conduct of the survey.

The 2004–05 NATSIHS included a new module on social and emotional wellbeing (adult respondents only) and expanded content in oral health, kidney disease and discrimination. The development of the social and emotional wellbeing module for the 2004–05 NATSIHS was undertaken in partnership with both the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO) and AIHW. This successful collaboration addressed a high priority need for information in this area of Indigenous health.

Around 10,000 respondents were interviewed in remote and non-remote areas, with information collected on individuals (adults and children) in their households. Initial results were released in April 2006 in *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey* (ABS cat. no. 4715.0) which is available free of charge on the ABS web site

## APPENDIX 4 CURRENT ABS INDIGENOUS STATISTICS PROGRAM

*continued*

*National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) continued*

together with additional parallel state/territory tables. Key comparisons with Indigenous and non-Indigenous results from the 1995 and 2001 NHS are included in the publication. The Confidentialised Unit Record File of the NATSIHS is available for researchers wishing to undertake more detailed studies. The ABS has released a summary booklet of main findings and a set of posters as part of the survey dissemination strategy.

*Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey*

Information covered by CHINS includes: details of current housing stock, management practices and financial arrangements of Indigenous organisations that provide housing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and details of housing and related infrastructure such as water, electricity, sewerage, drainage and solid waste disposal, as well as other facilities available in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In 1999 and 2001, the ABS conducted the CHINS covering Indigenous housing organisations and discrete Indigenous communities on behalf of the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. The ABS was engaged by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) to conduct a 2006 CHINS. The 2006 CHINS has provided information on changes within the Indigenous community housing sector and on circumstances in discrete communities since 2001. The ABS published *Housing and Infrastructure in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, 2006* (ABS cat. no. 4710.0) in April 2007. Ongoing dissemination of results from the 1999, 2001 and 2006 CHINS is managed and undertaken by FaCSIA.

### OTHER ABS HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS

*Labour Force Survey*

Since March 2001 the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS) has included the standard Indigenous status question to enable Indigenous results to be produced on an annual basis. Experimental estimates of the labour force characteristics of Indigenous people for 2002 to 2004 were released in January 2006 and results for 2005 and onwards have since been released on an annual basis. Results are presented for states/territories and for remoteness areas. See *Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Experimental Estimates from the Labour Force Survey* (ABS cat. no. 6287.0).

*Survey of Education and Training*

The ABS Survey of Education and Training incorporates the Indigenous status question to enable some Indigenous results to be produced. This four-yearly survey has, from 1993, presented a limited range of statistics regarding Indigenous education and training participation and completion. For further information see *Education and Training Experience, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 6278.0).

### OTHER INDIGENOUS SURVEYS

*Western Australia Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS)*

Other Indigenous survey activities of national interest in which ABS has participated include:

The ABS provided consultancy services and advice for the design, conduct and dissemination strategies of the Telethon Institute of Child Health Research (ICHR) Western Australia Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS). This was a survey of Indigenous children aged zero to 17 years that detailed the factors that contribute to significantly higher death rates, illness and disability in comparison with other Australians, as well as identifying resilience factors. Information was collected on more than 5,200 Aboriginal children in WA. Interviews were conducted with 11,300 family members, 2,000 families, and more than 3,000 teachers over the period May 2000 to June 2002. In June 2004, the first volume of findings *The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People* was launched. Since then, further volumes of statistical analysis have been released on a range of health-related topics, including social and emotional wellbeing, education, and family and community.

## APPENDIX 4 CURRENT ABS INDIGENOUS STATISTICS PROGRAM

*continued*

2004 Survey of Indigenous Vocational Education and Training Students

The ABS assisted the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) with the design and methodology for the 2004 Survey of Indigenous Vocational Education and Training Students. Initial results were released in the publication *'Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics: Indigenous Australians' training experiences 2004 - First findings'* in 2005 and information is available on request from NCVER.

ADMINISTRATIVE COLLECTIONS

Administrative data collected by state and territory agencies complement and extend the information collected by the ABS and other national agencies. The cooperation and willingness of agencies to engage with the ABS is instrumental in improving the quality of Indigenous information from these collections.

The ABS uses and disseminates a range of statistics from Australian Government agencies and state and territory data sets, to supplement and improve the quality and breadth of existing surveys. For example:

- Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces obtained from Registrars General in each state and territory and the Family Court of Australia;
- Education data from state and territory education departments, DEST and the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER);
- Crime and justice collections from corrective services institutions, police and courts; and
- Combining Australian Taxation Office (ATO) aggregated administrative data with FaCSIA aggregated data to develop experimental regional estimates of the sources of personal income.

There is ongoing work to develop administrative datasets in order to improve the quality and coverage of the data. Collection methods, changes in definitions or estimation methods, scope, imputation, revisions and Indigenous identification processes need to be understood and reported in any publication of data. The ABS and relevant agencies have all put considerable effort into identifying and addressing quality issues.

The ABS is developing frameworks to assess the quality of administrative datasets through all stages of the statistical process. The first of these frameworks relates to Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces and is initially focusing on births and deaths data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Development commenced in 2005. The ABS has been working cooperatively with the Registrars General, funeral directors and the health/hospital sectors in each jurisdiction to develop processes to improve and assess the quality of data at source, and achieve sustained improvements over time. Current work on births, deaths and marriages will produce new analytical processes to regularly monitor changes in data quality and provide an early warning system for data quality issues. Similarly, the ABS continues to work with the education and training sector to improve and support best practice in collection of enrolment data.

ABS DEMOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY PROGRAMS  
*Population estimates and projections*

Following each of the last three Population Censuses, the ABS has released experimental estimates and projections of the Indigenous population. *Experimental Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 1991–2009* (ABS cat. no. 3238.0) was released in 2004. Preliminary estimates of the Indigenous population based on the 2006 Census are due for release in August 2007 with final estimates and projections planned for release in June 2009. This work is experimental due to the incompleteness of births, deaths and migration data needed in the standard projection models. The ABS has expended considerable effort to improve the quality of the Census data which forms the base for population estimates and projections, and continues to work with key partners to improve the quality of births and deaths data. Revisions to the methods used in the estimation process have also been refined in light of recent developments.

## APPENDIX 4 CURRENT ABS INDIGENOUS STATISTICS PROGRAM

*continued*

### Population estimates and projections *continued*

In September 2004, the ABS released *Demography Working Paper 2003/4 - Calculating Experimental Life Tables for Use in Population Estimates and Projections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* (ABS cat. no. 3106.0.55.003). This working paper describes how the life expectancy estimates used in deriving the 1991–2009 population estimates and projections for the Indigenous population were developed. Estimation procedures and assumptions will continue to be refined and modified as life expectancy estimates based on the 2006 Census are developed.

Separate estimated resident population figures for the Torres Strait Islander population have not been available until recently. Due to the small size of the Torres Strait Islander population and differences in the census counts of this population between 1996 and 2001 these estimates should be considered developmental at this stage. Following the release of the 2006 Census, the ABS plans to again produce estimated resident population data for the Torres Strait Islander population.

### Geography

The 'regional and remote' classification introduced to the AUSTRALIAN STANDARD GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATION in 2001 is now widely used by both state/territory and Commonwealth governments. The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) that underpins the classification will again be used for output from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

A common need articulated by users is for more small area data. In response, an innovative micro-level of statistical geography, called mesh blocks, has been developed. These small units can be amalgamated into a variety of higher levels or types of geographical classification. As such they will enable the untying of dissemination and enumeration geography and will lead to more flexible definition of regions. Mesh blocks will be supported by a comprehensive geographical coding infrastructure based on G-NAF that will in turn facilitate the creation of new and more relevant regional data. Mesh blocks will first be available in the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, giving access to flexible geographic output for a limited range of data items.

### DATA DISSEMINATION

Quality data collection and analysis is only as valuable as its relevance and access to users. The ABS has developed dissemination initiatives to encourage the ready use and understanding of its outputs. This involves the development of reference materials and data packages to support its tables and publications, training initiatives in data use, and increased use of web-based publications and customised services. In addition, Confidentialised Unit Record Files (CURFs) are available to approved users and can be delivered on CD-ROM or through the Remote Access Data Laboratory (RADL) (a secure online data query service).

The ABS publishes a suite of catalogued reports from its various surveys and analytical work and these are available on the ABS web site: [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au).





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