



Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status 2019

Key facts

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

- ⦿ In 2019, the estimated Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 847,190.
- ⦿ In 2019, NSW had the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (the estimated population was 281,107 people, 33% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population).
- ⦿ In 2019, NT had the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in its population, with 32% of the NT population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

- ⦿ In 2016, around 37% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in major cities.
- ⦿ The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is much younger than the non-Indigenous population.

Births and pregnancy outcomes

- ⦿ In 2018, there were 21,928 births registered in Australia with one or both parents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (7% of all births registered).
- ⦿ In 2018, the median age for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers was 26.0 years.
- ⦿ In 2018, total fertility rates were 2,371 births per 1,000 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.



Births and pregnancy outcomes

- ⦿ In 2017, the average birthweight of babies born to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers was 3,202 grams.
- ⦿ The proportion of low birthweight babies born to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers between 2007 and 2017 remained steady at around 13%.



Mortality

- ⦿ For 2018, the age-standardised death rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT was 9.1 per 1,000.
- ⦿ Between 1998 and 2015, there was a 15% reduction in the death rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT.
- ⦿ For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people born 2015-2017, life expectancy was estimated to be 71.6 years for males and 75.6 years for females, around 8-9 years less than the estimates for non-Indigenous males and females.

Mortality

- ⦿ In 2018, the median age at death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT was 60.2 years; this was an increase from 55.8 years in 2008.
- ⦿ Between 1998 and 2015, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infant mortality rate has more than halved (from 13.5 to 6.3 per 1,000).
- ⦿ In 2018, the leading causes of death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT were ischaemic heart disease (IHD), diabetes, chronic lower respiratory diseases and lung and related cancers.



Mortality

- ⦿ For 2012-2017 the maternal mortality ratio for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women was 27 deaths per 100,000 women who gave birth.
- ⦿ For 1998-2015, in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT there was a 32% decline in the death rate from avoidable causes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 0-74 years.

Hospitalisation

- ⦿ In 2017-18, 4.9% of all hospital separations were for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- ⦿ In 2017-18, the age-adjusted separation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 2.6 times higher than for non-Indigenous people.
- ⦿ In 2017-18, the main cause of hospitalisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was for ‘factors influencing health status and contact with health services’ (mostly for care involving dialysis), responsible for 49% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander separations.
- ⦿ In 2017-18, the age-standardised rate of overall potentially preventable hospitalisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 80 per 1,000 (38 per 1,000 for chronic conditions and 13 per 1,000 for vaccine-preventable conditions).



Cardiovascular health

- ⦿ In 2018-19, around 15% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported having cardiovascular disease (CVD).
- ⦿ In 2018-19, nearly one quarter (23%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults were found to have high blood pressure.
- ⦿ For 2013-2017, in Qld, WA, SA and the NT combined, there were 1,043 new rheumatic heart disease diagnoses among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a crude rate of 50 per 100,000.

Cardiovascular health

- ⦿ In 2017-18, there 14,945 hospital separations for CVD among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, representing 5.4% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hospital separations (excluding dialysis).
- ⦿ In 2018, ischaemic heart disease (IHD) was the leading specific cause of death of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT.

Cancer

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 1.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported having cancer (males 1.2%, females 1.1%).
- ⦿ For 2010-2014, the most common cancers diagnosed among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Vic, Qld, WA and the NT were lung cancer and breast (females) cancer.
- ⦿ Survival rates indicate that of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Vic, Qld, WA, and the NT who were diagnosed with cancer between 2007 and 2014, 50% had a chance of surviving five years after diagnosis.

Cancer

- ⦿ In 2016-17, there 8,447 hospital separations for neoplasms¹ among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- ⦿ For 2013-2017, the age-standardised mortality rate due to cancer of any type was 238 per 100,000, an increase of 5% when compared with a rate of 227 per 100,000 in 2010-2014.

¹Some data sources use term 'neoplasm' to describe conditions associated with abnormal growth of new tissue, commonly referred to as a tumour. Neoplasms can be benign (not cancerous) or malignant (cancerous) [1].

Diabetes

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 7.8% of Aboriginal people and 7.9% of Torres Strait Islander people reported having diabetes.
- ⦿ In 2015-16, there were around 2,300 hospitalisations with a principal diagnosis of type 2 diabetes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- ⦿ In 2018, diabetes was the second leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- ⦿ The death rate for diabetes decreased by 7.0% between 2009-2013 and 2014-2018.



Social and emotional wellbeing

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 31% of Aboriginal and 23% of Torres Strait Islander respondents aged 18 years and over reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- ⦿ In 2014-15, 68% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over and 67% of children aged 4-14 years experienced at least one significant stressor in the previous 12 months.
- ⦿ In 2012-13, 91% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported on feelings of calmness and peacefulness, happiness, fullness of life and energy either some, most, or all of the time.



Social and emotional wellbeing

- ⦿ In 2014-15, more than half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over reported an overall life satisfaction rating of at least 8 out of 10.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 25% of Aboriginal and 17% of Torres Strait Islander people, aged two years and over, reported having a mental and/or behavioural condition.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, anxiety was the most common mental or behavioural condition reported (17%), followed by depression (13%).

Social and emotional wellbeing

- ⦿ In 2017-18, there were 21,940 hospital separations with a principal diagnosis of International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 'mental and behavioural disorders' identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- ⦿ In 2018, 169 (129 males and 40 females) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Qld, WA, SA, and the NT died from intentional self-harm (suicide).
- ⦿ Between 2009-2013 and 2014-2018, the NT was the only jurisdiction to record a decrease in intentional self-harm (suicide) death rates.

Kidney health

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 1.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Aboriginal people 1.9%; Torres Strait Islander people 0.4%) reported kidney disease as a long-term health condition.
- ⦿ For 2014-2018, after age-adjustment, the notification rate of end-stage renal disease was 6.3 times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than for non-Indigenous people.
- ⦿ In 2017-18, 'care involving dialysis' was the most common reason for hospitalisation among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Kidney health

- ⦿ In 2018, 310 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people commenced dialysis and 49 were the recipients of new kidneys.
- ⦿ For 2013-2017, the age-adjusted death rate from kidney disease was 21 per 100,000 (NT: 47 per 100,000; WA: 38 per 100,000) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and NT.
- ⦿ In 2018, the most common causes of death among the 217 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were receiving dialysis was CVD (64 deaths) and withdrawal from treatment (51 deaths).



Injury, including family violence

- ⦿ In 2012-13, 2.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported having a long-term condition caused by injury.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 16% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over had experienced physical harm or threatened physical harm at least once in the last 12 months.
- ⦿ In 2016-17, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hospitalised injury was higher for males (44 per 1,000) than females (39 per 1,000).



Injury, including family violence

- ⦿ In 2017-18, 20% of injury-related hospitalisations among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were for assault.
- ⦿ In 2018, intentional self-harm was the leading specific cause of injury deaths for NSW, Qld, SA, WA, and NT (5.3% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths).



Respiratory health

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 29% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported having a long-term respiratory condition.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 16% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported having asthma.
- ⦿ In 2014-15, crude hospitalisation rates were highest for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presenting with influenza and pneumonia (7.4 per 1,000), followed by COPD (5.3 per 1,000), acute upper respiratory infections (3.8 per 1,000) and asthma (2.9 per 1,000).
- ⦿ In 2018, chronic lower respiratory disease was the third highest cause of death overall for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT.

Eye health

- ⦿ In 2018-19, eye and sight problems were reported by 38% of Aboriginal people and 40% of Torres Strait Islander people.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, eye and sight problems were reported by 32% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and by 43% of females.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, the most common eye conditions reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were hyperopia (long sightedness: 22%), myopia (short sightedness: 16%), other diseases of the eye and adnexa (8.7%), cataract (1.4%), blindness (0.9%) and glaucoma (0.5%).



Eye health

- ⦿ In 2014-15, 13% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, aged 4-14 years, were reported to have eye or sight problems.
- ⦿ In 2018, 144 cases of trachoma were detected among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in at-risk communities in Qld, WA, SA and the NT.
- ⦿ For 2015-17, 62% of hospitalisations for diseases of the eye (8,274) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were for disorders of the lens (5,092) (mainly cataracts).



Ear health and hearing

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 14% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported having a long-term ear and/or hearing problem.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-14 years, the prevalence of otitis media (OM) was 2.6% and of partial or complete deafness was 3.8%.
- ⦿ In 2017-18, the age-adjusted hospitalisation rate for ear conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 4.1 per 1,000 population.

Oral health

- ⦿ In 2014-15, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 4-14 years with reported tooth or gum problems was 34%, a decrease from 39% in 2008.
- ⦿ In 2012-2014, 61% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 5-10 years had experienced tooth decay in their baby teeth, and 36% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 6-14 years had experienced tooth decay in their permanent teeth.
- ⦿ In 2016-17, there were 3,418 potentially preventable hospitalisations for dental conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The age-standardised rate of hospitalisation was 4.6 per 1,000.



Disability

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 27% of Aboriginal and 24% of Torres Strait Islander people reported having a disability or restrictive long-term health condition.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 8.2% of Aboriginal and 8.3% of Torres Strait Islander people reported a profound or severe core activity limitation.
- ⦿ In 2016, 6.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a profound or severe disability reported a need for assistance.



Disability

- ⦿ In 2017-18, 5.9% of disability service users were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with most aged under 50 years (82%).
- ⦿ In 2017-18, the primary disability groups accessing services were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a psychiatric condition (24%), intellectual disability (23%) and physical disability (20%).
- ⦿ In 2017-18, 2,524 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Disability Agreement service users transitioned to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.



Communicable disease

- ⦿ In 2017, there were 7,015 notifications for chlamydia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, accounting for 7% of the notifications in Australia.
- ⦿ During 2013-2017, there was a 7.9% and 9.8% decline in chlamydia notification rates among males and females (respectively).
- ⦿ In 2017, there were 4,119 gonorrhoea notifications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, accounting for 15% of the notifications in Australia.
- ⦿ In 2017, there were 779 syphilis notifications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accounting for 18% of the notifications in Australia.

Communicable disease

- ⦿ In 2017, Qld (45%) and the NT (35%) accounted for 80% of the syphilis notifications from all jurisdictions.
- ⦿ In 2018, there were 34 cases of newly diagnosed human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.
- ⦿ In 2017, there were 1,201 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people diagnosed with hepatitis C (HCV) in Australia.



Communicable disease

- ⦿ In 2017, there were 151 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people diagnosed with hepatitis B (HBV) in Australia.
- ⦿ For 2013-2017 there was a 37% decline in the HBV notification rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- ⦿ For 2011-2015, 1,152 (14%) of the 8,316 cases of invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD) were identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Communicable disease

- ⦿ For 2011-2015, there were 26 deaths attributed to IPD with 11 of the 26 deaths (42%) in the 50 years and over age-group.
- ⦿ For 2011-2015, 101 (10%) of the 966 notified cases of meningococcal disease were identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- ⦿ For 2006-2015, the incidence rate of meningococcal serogroup B was 2.8 per 100,000, with the age-specific rate highest in infants less than 12 months of age (33 per 100,000).

Communicable disease

- ⦿ In 2015, of the 1,255 notifications of TB in Australia, 27 (2.2%) were identified as Aboriginal and seven (0.6%) as Torres Strait Islander
- ⦿ For 2011-2015, there were 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people diagnosed with invasive *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) in Australia.
- ⦿ Between 2007-2010 and 2011-2015 notification rates for Hib decreased by around 67%.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reporting a disease of the skin and subcutaneous tissue was 3.2% (males 2.4% and females 4.0%).



Nutrition

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 39% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported eating an adequate amount of fruit per day but only 4.2% reported eating an adequate amount of vegetables per day.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 92% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 2-3 years old were reported to eat an adequate amount of fruit per day and 23% were reported to eat an adequate amount of vegetables per day.



Nutrition

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 24% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported that they usually consumed sugar sweetened drinks every day and 5.5% consumed diet drinks; 71% usually consumed sugar sweetened drinks or diet drinks at least once per week.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 20% of children aged 2-14 years usually consumed sugar sweetened drinks daily and 1.5% consumed diet drinks daily; 63% usually consumed sugar sweetened drinks or diet drinks at least once a week.
- ⦿ In 2012-13, on average, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported consuming 111 grams of sugar daily.



Nutrition

- ⦿ In 2012-13, the average daily sodium intake for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was approximately one teaspoon of salt.
- ⦿ In 2012-13, 22% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported running out of food or unable to buy food.
- ⦿ In 2014-15, 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-3 years had been breastfed.



Physical activity

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 89% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over had not met the physical activity guidelines, and 22% had not participated in any physical activity in the week prior to being surveyed.
- ⦿ The highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who met the guidelines lived in the ACT (21%) compared with the lowest proportion living in the NT (7.2%).



Bodyweight

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 71% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over were either overweight or obese (Aboriginal people: 71% and Torres Strait Islander people: 75%), 25% were in the normal weight range and 3.9% were underweight.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 2-17 years, 38% were overweight or obese; 53% were normal weight and 8.8% were underweight.

Tobacco use

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 37% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over reported they were current daily smokers, a reduction from levels reported in 2012-13 (41%).
- ⦿ Since 2009, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers who reported smoking during pregnancy has decreased from 52% in 2009 to 44% in 2017.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas reported a higher proportion of current daily smokers (49%) than those living in non-remote areas (35%).
- ⦿ Between 2004-05 and 2018-19, the highest reductions in daily smoking have been found in the younger age-groups (18-34 years).



Alcohol use

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 26% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults reported abstaining from alcohol.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 19% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults did not exceed the guideline for drinking at risk on a single occasion, and 26% did not exceed the guideline for lifetime risk.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males were more likely to exceed the guideline for lifetime risk (30%) than females (10%).

Alcohol use

- ⦿ For 2010 to 2016, there was a decline (32% to 20%) in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 12 years and over who exceeded the 2009 guidelines for lifetime risk (two standard drink/day).
- ⦿ There was a reported 50% reduction of mothers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who drank through pregnancy, from 20% in 2008 to 9.8% in 2014-15.
- ⦿ For 2013-2017, the main cause of alcohol-related deaths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was from alcoholic liver disease.



Illicit drug use

- ⦿ In 2018-19, 70% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and older and in 2016, 73% aged 14 years and over reported they had never used illicit substances in the last 12 months.
- ⦿ In 2018-19, 28% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over and in 2016, 27% aged 14 years and older reported that they had used an illicit substance in the previous 12 months.
- ⦿ In 2014-15, hospitalisation for mental/behavioural disorders from use of amphetamines had the highest rate of separations due to drug use and was 1.5 per 1,000 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Illicit drug use

- ⦿ For 2010-2014, SA recorded the highest rate of drug-induced deaths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (24 per 100,000), followed by NSW (17 per 100,000), and WA (9 per 100,000).
- ⦿ For 2010-2014, rates of drug induced deaths were higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males (14 per 100,000) than for females (10 per 100,000).



Volatile substance use

- ⦿ In 2012-13, 6.6% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and 4.2% of females had ever used petrol or other inhalants.
- ⦿ In 2014-15, the rate of hospital separations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from poisoning and accidental poisoning due to the toxic effect of organic solvents (e.g. petrol) was 0.05 per 1,000.



Immunisation

- ⦿ In September 2019, 97% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 5 year old children were fully immunised against the recommended vaccine-preventable diseases.



Environmental health

- ⦿ In 2016, 18% of Aboriginal and Torres Islander people were reported living in overcrowded households.
- ⦿ In 2016, 72% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households reported living in houses of an acceptable standard.
- ⦿ In 2014-15, 26% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households reported structural issues within their dwelling.
- ⦿ In 2014-15, over 90% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households reported that they had access to working facilities for: washing people, clothes and bedding; preparing food; and sewerage facilities.



Environmental health

- ⦿ In 2014-15, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crude hospitalisation rates for selected diseases related to environmental health were 7.6 per 1,000 for intestinal infectious diseases, 7.4 per 1,000 for influenza and immunisation, 5.1 per 1,000 for and bacterial disease and 2.3 per 1,000 for scabies.
- ⦿ For 2010-2014, in NSW, Qld, WA, SA and the NT, after age-adjustment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males died as a result of disease associated with poor environmental health at 46 per 100,000 and females 41 per 100,000.



Reference

Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2020) *Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status, 2019*. Perth, WA: Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet