

INTRODUCTION

Torres Strait Islander people are a significant cultural group representing one-tenth of the Australian Indigenous population. While they share many of the characteristics of other Indigenous Australians, some health and welfare characteristics are different from those of Aboriginal peoples.

Since 1971, Torres Strait Islander people have been recognised as a separate group from Aboriginal people according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) standard. From the 1996 Census of Population and Housing onwards, Indigenous people have also been able to indicate if they are of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin. Torres Strait Islander people are defined in this chapter as those who identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin only, or of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

The information in this chapter is drawn from the Censuses of Population and Housing for 2006, 2001 and 1996, the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS), the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), the 2006 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS), the ABS Birth Registrations Collection, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) National Hospital Morbidity Database (NHMD), the AIHW National Mortality Database and the AIHW National Perinatal Data Collection.

National data on Torres Strait Islander health and welfare continue to be improved through better design of the Indigenous sample in ABS collections, and through enhanced Indigenous identification within administrative health data sets.

This chapter compares Torres Strait Islander people with the overall Indigenous population, which comprises people of Torres Strait Islander origin and people of Aboriginal origin. Contrasts are also provided with the non-Indigenous people of Australia, and between Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region and those living in other areas.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Estimated resident Indigenous population

The census count of Torres Strait Islander people, based on their place of usual residence, is used to generate a more reliable estimate of the size of this population by adjusting for net undercount and for instances in which Indigenous status is unknown. Births, deaths and migration are taken into account in calculating the Estimated Resident Population (ERP) which provides an estimate of the size of the Torres Strait Islander population, and the Aboriginal population, as well as the total Indigenous population.

The ERP for all people of Torres Strait Islander origin at 30 June 2006 was 53,300 (table 12.1). Torres Strait Islander people comprised around 10% of all Indigenous Australians, 23% of Indigenous people in Queensland and 0.3% of the total Australian population. Across Australia, 20,200 people were estimated to be of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (38% of all Torres Strait Islander people).

*Estimated resident
Indigenous population
continued*

In 2006, 62% of Torres Strait Islander people lived in Queensland (including 15% in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region) and a further 15% lived in New South Wales. There were an estimated 7,800 Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region. This was 23% of all Torres Strait Islander people who usually live in Queensland, and 15% of all Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

12.1 ESTIMATED RESIDENT INDIGENOUS POPULATION, by state/territory of usual residence—2006 (preliminary)

State/territory		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Aboriginal only	Total Indigenous
New South Wales	%	15.4	30.2	28.7
Victoria	%	5.8	6.0	6.0
Queensland	%	62.2	24.4	28.3
South Australia	%	2.8	5.3	5.0
Western Australia	%	5.1	16.2	15.1
Tasmania	%	3.6	3.2	3.3
Northern Territory	%	4.7	13.8	12.9
Australian Capital Territory	%	0.5	0.8	0.8
Australia(b)	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
Population estimate (b)	no.	53 300	463 900	517 200

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Includes Other Territories, comprising Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Source: ABS 2007f

The age distribution of Torres Strait Islander people was similar to that of the overall Indigenous population. In 2006, 71% of Torres Strait Islander people and the same proportion of the overall Indigenous population were less than 35 years of age. This compared with 47% of the non-Indigenous population who were in this younger age group. Only 10% of Torres Strait Islander people were aged 55 years or over compared with 8% of all Indigenous people and 24% of non-Indigenous people (table 12.2).

12.2 ESTIMATED RESIDENT POPULATION, by Indigenous status and age—2006 (preliminary)

		TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(a)					
Age group (years)		Torres Strait Indigenous Region	Balance of Australia		Aboriginal only	Total	
			Total	Total		Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
0–14	%	38.9	38.1	38.3	37.3	37.4	19.1
15–34	%	32.3	32.5	32.4	33.5	33.4	27.8
35–54	%	19.5	19.3	19.3	21.6	21.4	28.8
55 and over	%	9.2	10.1	10.0	7.6	7.8	24.3
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Population estimate	no.	7 800	45 500	53 300	463 900	517 200	20 184 300

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: ABS Unpublished data, available on request

Births

A Torres Strait Islander birth is registered as such when at least one parent identifies as being of Torres Strait Islander origin or of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin. Indigenous births data are subject to under-identification and registrations do not always distinguish between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births. Identification of Indigenous births for the period 2002–2006 is estimated to be 95% for Australia and 98% for Queensland (ABS 2007a). Separate estimates of the level of identification of Torres Strait Islander births are not available.

Over the period 2004–2006, Torres Strait Islander births comprised 11% of all registered Indigenous births. In 2006, one-quarter (25%) of Indigenous births in Queensland were registered as being Torres Strait Islander births (table 12.3).

12.3 TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER REGISTERED BIRTHS—2004–2006

	<i>Torres Strait Islander births(a)</i>	<i>Total Indigenous births</i>	<i>Torres Strait Islander births as a proportion of all Indigenous births</i>
	no.	no.	%
2004	1 296	12 006	10.8
2005	1 374	12 078	11.4
2006	1 378	12 496	11.0
2006			
Queensland	864	3 463	24.9
Balance of Australia	514	9 033	5.7
Males	709	6 288	11.3
Females	669	6 208	10.8

(a) Includes births where mother or father was of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: ABS Birth Registrations Collection

There were 4,048 births registered as Torres Strait Islander in the period 2004–2006, of which two-thirds (2,582) were to Torres Strait Islander mothers. The median age of Torres Strait Islander mothers was 25 years which was the same as for all Indigenous mothers (table 12.4). This was younger than the median age of non-Indigenous mothers (31 years).

Births continued

12.4 AGE OF PARENTS, Torres Strait Islander registered births—2004–2006

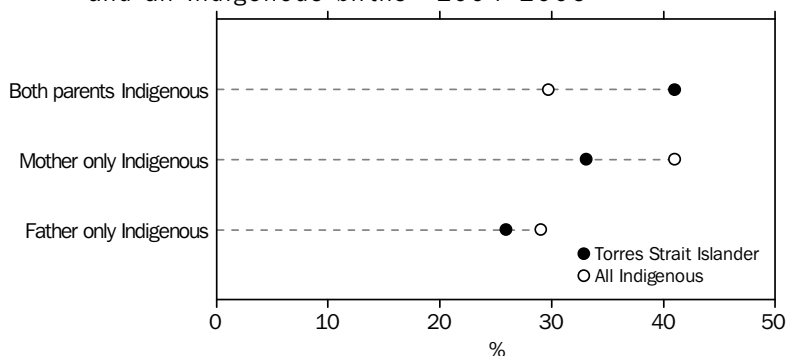
Age of mother (years)		Torres Strait Islander mothers(a)	Total Indigenous mothers	Non-Indigenous mothers
Less than 20	%	17.0	21.1	3.4
20–24	%	31.1	31.1	13.4
25–29	%	23.7	23.3	26.9
30–34	%	18.9	16.2	34.9
35–39	%	7.7	7.0	17.8
40 and over	%	1.5	1.3	3.5
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
Median age of mother	years	25.3	24.6	30.9
Median age of father	years	28.2	27.7	33.1
All registered births	no.	2 582	25 989	743 943

(a) Includes mothers who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: ABS Birth Registrations Collection

Forty-one percent of babies registered as being of Torres Strait Islander origin in 2004–2006 had two Indigenous parents, compared with 30% of Indigenous babies overall (graph 12.5).

12.5 INDIGENOUS STATUS OF PARENTS, Torres Strait Islander(a) and all Indigenous births—2004–2006



(a) Includes births where the mother or father was of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: ABS Birth Registrations Collection

Babies

The AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU) collects birth data from midwives and other health professionals who attend births. As birth registrations are based on information provided by parents to state and territory Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages, different sources mean that statistics obtained vary. Only the Indigenous status of the mother is collected by the NPSU, while birth registrations collect the Indigenous status of both mother and father.

The AIHW National Perinatal Data Collection recorded an average of 1,041 liveborn babies with a Torres Strait Islander mother each year in the period 2003–2005. Of these babies, 96 each year, on average, were low birthweight babies (less than 2,500 grams at birth) including an average of 20 very low birthweight babies (less than 1,500 grams at birth) per year. With around one in ten liveborn babies (9%) recording a low birthweight,

Babies continued

Torres Strait Islander mothers were less likely than Indigenous mothers overall (13%) but more likely than non-Indigenous mothers (6%) to have low birthweight babies.

Over the same period, the perinatal death rate was 17 per 1,000 births to Torres Strait Islander mothers. This was similar to the perinatal death rate for births to Indigenous mothers overall (18 per 1,000 births) but 70% higher than the perinatal death rate for births to non-Indigenous mothers (10 per 1,000 births).

Deaths

Undercounting of Indigenous deaths is likely to result from some Torres Strait Islander people not being identified as such when their death is registered. Although identification of Indigenous deaths is incomplete in all state and territory registration systems, the ABS has determined that data for Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory have sufficient coverage to enable the production of mortality statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2001–2005, the rate of coverage of Indigenous deaths was over 50% for each of these states and 92% in the Northern Territory. Deaths data presented in this chapter have been combined from these four jurisdictions and should be regarded as indicative only.

During 2001–2005, the median age at death was 55 years for Torres Strait Islander males and 62 years for Torres Strait Islander females (table 12.6).

12.6 INDIGENOUS DEATHS, by sex and median age at death(a)—2001–2005

		Torres Strait Islander(b)	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Deaths				
Males	no.	375	4 329	119 211
Females	no.	263	3 215	108 185
Persons	no.	638	7 544	227 396
Median age at death				
Males	years	55	49	76
Females	years	62	55	82
Persons	years	58	51	79

(a) Data are for Qld, WA, SA and NT combined, based on state/territory of usual residence. Deaths are based on year of registration of death for 2001–2005.

(b) Includes deaths where person was of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: AIHW National Mortality Database

Cause of death

The most commonly recorded cause of death among Torres Strait Islander people in the period 2001–2005, accounting for 30% of registered deaths, were diseases of the circulatory system (e.g. heart diseases). Circulatory diseases were also the most common cause of death in the Indigenous population (accounting for 27% of registered deaths). Torres Strait Islander people were more likely than Indigenous people overall to die from cancer (malignant neoplasms) (21% compared with 15%), and were less likely to die as a result of external causes (including injury) (10% compared with 16%) (table 12.7).

*Cause of death continued***12.7** UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH(a), by Indigenous status—2001–2006

	TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER (b)		TOTAL INDIGENOUS	
	no.	%	no.	%
Malignant neoplasms (C00–C96)	132	20.7	1 113	14.8
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00–E90)	73	11.4	682	9.0
Diabetes (E10–E14)	63	9.9	600	8.0
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00–I99)	190	29.8	2 006	26.6
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00–J99)	40	6.3	659	8.7
Diseases of the digestive system (K00–K93)	25	3.9	433	5.7
External causes of morbidity and mortality (V01–Y98)	66	10.3	1 220	16.2
Other causes	112	17.6	1 431	19.0
All causes	638	100.0	7 544	100.0

(a) Data are for Qld, WA, SA and NT combined, based on state/territory of usual residence. Deaths are based on year of registration of death for 2001–2005.

(b) Includes deaths where person was of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: AIHW National Mortality Database

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The economic and social circumstances of Torres Strait Islander people differ substantially depending on whether they live in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region, or in other parts of Australia. While Torres Strait Islander people living outside of the Torres Strait Indigenous Region display characteristics which are generally similar to the overall Indigenous population, those living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region tend to share the socioeconomic outcomes of Indigenous people living in very remote parts of Australia. Over a range of indicators, Torres Strait Islander people generally experience greater socioeconomic disadvantage than do non-Indigenous Australians.

Language spoken at home

The preservation of language, as a key element in the maintenance of cultural identity, contributes significantly to overall well-being and health outcomes in Indigenous communities.

According to the 2006 Census, 75% of Torres Strait Islander people in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region reported speaking an Australian Indigenous language at home. Of these, 72% spoke Torres Strait Island Creole and 17% spoke Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya.

The majority of Torres Strait Islander people living outside of the Torres Strait Indigenous Region (80%) spoke only English at home and 7% spoke an Indigenous language. Similarly, 82% of the overall Indigenous population spoke only English at home, and 11% spoke an Indigenous language.

Around four out of five Torres Strait Islander people (81%) who spoke an Indigenous language at home reported being able to speak English well or very well, which was comparable with the level of English proficiency of all Indigenous people who spoke an Indigenous language at home (79%).

In the Torres Strait Indigenous Region, 19% of Torres Strait Islander people who spoke an Indigenous language at home did not speak English well, or did not speak it at all.

This was the same proportion reported for all Indigenous people. However, only 13% of

*Language spoken at home
continued*

Torres Strait Islander people living outside the Torres Strait Indigenous Region who spoke an Indigenous language at home did not speak English well, or at all (table 12.8).

12.8 LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME AND PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH—2006

	TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(a)			
	Torres Strait Indigenous Region	Balance of Australia	Total	Total Indigenous
	%	%	%	%
Language spoken at home				
English only	12.5	80.3	70.3	81.8
Australian Indigenous language	75.2	6.8	16.9	11.4
Other language	8.1	6.1	6.4	1.6
Total(b)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Proficiency in English				
Spoke English well or very well	80.2	83.8	81.4	78.6
Did not speak English well, or at all	18.6	13.2	16.7	19.0
Total persons who spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home(c)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Includes language spoken at home not stated.

(c) Includes proficiency in English not stated.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

*Highest year of school
completed*

The relationship between higher levels of educational attainment and improved overall health status in the Indigenous population has been discussed in Chapter 3 of this report.

In 2006, 32% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over (excluding those still at school) had completed Year 12; an increase from 27% in 2001. While the Year 12 completion rate for all Indigenous Australians increased from 20% to 23% over the five year period, it remained lower than for Torres Strait Islander people.

Year 12 completion by Torres Strait Islander people was higher among those living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region (39%) than for those in other parts of Australia (31%). However, levels of secondary school completion were still lower than those for the non-Indigenous population (49%) in 2006 (table 12.9).

12.9 HIGHEST YEAR OF SCHOOL COMPLETED—2006

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(a)						
		Torres Strait Indigenous Region	Balance of Australia	Total	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Year 12	%	38.5	31.0	32.2	23.0	49.1
Year 10 or 11	%	35.7	42.9	41.7	43.2	35.2
Year 9 or below(b)	%	25.8	26.1	26.1	33.9	15.8
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Persons aged 15 years and over(c)	no.	3 880	19 664	23 544	232 870	13 346 618
Highest year of school completed not stated	no.	132	3 709	3 841	32 951	730 000

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Includes persons who never attended school.

(c) Excludes persons whose highest year of school completed was not stated.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Highest non-school qualification

In 2006, there were around 5,000 Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years with a non-school qualification (32% of the Torres Strait Islander population). The following analysis focuses on non-school qualifications of Certificate III or higher. For further explanation of the differences between certificate levels, see Chapter 3.

Just over one-quarter (27%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years had attained a Certificate III or higher qualification in 2006, similar to the rate in the overall Indigenous population (25%). These rates were both significantly lower than those for non-Indigenous people (50%). In 2001, 20% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years had a Certificate III or higher qualification.

Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region in 2006 were as likely as those living in other parts of Australia to have completed a non-school qualification of Certificate III or higher (28% and 27% respectively) (table 12.10).

12.10 HIGHEST NON-SCHOOL QUALIFICATION—2006

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(a)						
		Torres Strait Indigenous Region	Balance of Australia	Total	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Bachelor degree or above	%	4.0	6.0	5.6	6.1	22.6
Certificate or Diploma, Certificate III or above(b)	%	23.9	21.0	21.5	18.8	27.5
Total with a non-school qualification, Certificate III or above	%	27.8	27.0	27.1	24.9	50.1
Certificate I/II(c)	%	9.1	4.4	5.2	4.1	3.4
No non-school qualification	%	61.2	67.0	66.0	69.6	44.7
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Persons aged 25–64 years(d)	no.	2 452	12 925	15 377	156 391	9 324 895
Highest non-school qualification not stated	no.	273	2 675	2 948	26 399	493 215

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Includes persons with a Diploma or Advanced Diploma.

(c) Includes persons with a Certificate n.f.d.

(d) Includes persons with level of education inadequately described. Excludes persons with level of education not stated.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Labour force status

Labour force data from the 2006 Census have been used in this report. For further information on the main differences between labour force data from the Census and Indigenous-specific surveys, refer to Chapter 2.

Labour force participation by Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–64 years was 59% in 2006, having changed little since 1996 when the rate was 57%. Their participation was greater than the overall Indigenous rate (54%) but lower than the participation rate for non-Indigenous people (75%). Among Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–64 years, the male labour force participation rate was 65% and the female rate was 53% (table 12.11).

Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–64 years had a lower unemployment rate (12%) than did all Indigenous people in this age group (16%) in 2006. The corresponding unemployment rate for non-Indigenous Australians was 5%. The Torres Strait Islander unemployment rate of 12% had decreased from 19% in 1996, consistent with the general decline in unemployment Australia-wide.

The unemployment rate was 5% for Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region in 2006, compared with 14% for those living in other areas. While full-time employment was reported at similar rates for all Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–64 years, part-time employment was almost twice as common for those living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region than in other parts of Australia (29% compared with 15%).

12.11 LABOUR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS—2006

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(a)						
		Torres Strait Indigenous Region	Balance of Australia	Total	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Labour force status						
Employed						
Full-time	%	31.5	28.5	28.9	24.1	45.9
Part-time	%	28.5	15.1	17.1	16.6	20.5
Total(b)	%	66.5	49.1	51.6	45.2	70.8
Unemployed	%	3.3	7.9	7.2	8.4	3.8
Not in the labour force						
Total(c)	%	26.7	36.2	34.8	40.7	24.2
Total(c)	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Labour force participation rate						
Males	%	78.6	62.4	64.7	59.1	81.0
Females	%	61.7	51.3	52.9	48.4	68.5
Persons	%	69.9	57.0	58.9	53.6	74.7
Unemployment rate						
Males	%	4.1	13.4	11.8	15.8	5.1
Females	%	5.4	14.5	12.8	15.4	5.2
Persons	%	4.7	13.9	12.3	15.6	5.1
Total persons aged 15–64 years						
	no.	3 934	22 921	26 855	268 807	12 276 785

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Includes persons who were away from work.

(c) Includes persons whose labour force status was not stated.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

*Labour force status
continued*

The comparatively low unemployment rate and greater share of part-time work among Torres Strait Islander people in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region is largely the result of higher participation in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) programme. Results from the 2004–05 NATSIHS show that CDEP work comprised 56% of all employment for Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–64 years in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region, whereas 91% of employed Torres Strait Islander people living in other parts of Australia were in mainstream jobs. For further information on the CDEP programme, refer to the Glossary.

Income

In comparing the relative economic wellbeing of households of different size and composition, the actual incomes of households are adjusted using an equivalence scale to produce the equivalised gross weekly income of each person in that household. For further explanation of equivalised gross household income, see the Glossary.

In 2006, the median equivalised gross household income for Torres Strait Islander people was \$388 per week. This was higher than that for all Indigenous people (\$362 per week), and was equal to 60% of the median equivalised household income for non-Indigenous people (\$642 per week).

Torres Strait Islander people who lived in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region had a lower median equivalised household income than those in other parts of Australia (\$354 compared with \$400). Torres Strait Islander median equivalised incomes were lower for women than for men (\$379 compared with \$399), and this was also reflected in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

LOW RESOURCE HOUSEHOLDS

People with equivalised gross weekly household incomes in the lowest quintile (i.e. less than \$315 per week) who were living in a dwelling that was not owned (with or without a mortgage) by a household member, and in which no household member was the owner/manager of an unincorporated business, were considered to be living in low resource households. For further information on income quintiles and low resource households, refer to the Glossary.

In 2006, 32% of Torres Strait Islander people, 39% of Indigenous people overall, and 8% of non-Indigenous people were living in low resource households. Torres Strait Islander people in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region were more likely to be living in low resource households (39%) than those living in other parts of Australia (31%) (table 12.12).

12.12 EQUIVALISED GROSS WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME(a)—2006

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(b)						
		<i>Torres Strait Indigenous Region</i>	<i>Balance of Australia</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total Indigenous</i>	<i>Non-Indigenous</i>
Lowest income quintile (Less than \$315)						
Low resource households(c)	%	38.7	31.1	32.4	38.7	8.0
Remainder of households	%	2.8	7.8	6.9	6.5	11.6
Second and third income quintiles	%	52.0	42.9	44.4	39.0	39.5
Fourth and fifth income quintiles	%	6.5	18.2	16.2	15.8	40.8
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	no.	5 899	28 804	34 703	337 503	15 288 123
Income not stated(d)	no.	442	7 342	7 784	73 054	1 893 333

(a) Derived from gross weekly household income in occupied private dwellings, where all incomes were reported.

(b) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) Excludes persons in dwellings that were partially or fully owned by a household member and persons in households where a household member was an owner manager of an unincorporated enterprise.

(d) Comprises Nil income, Negative income, Partial incomes stated, All incomes not stated and Not applicable.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Housing

Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to be living in a rented dwelling in 2006 than in a dwelling that was owned (with or without a mortgage) by a household member (65% compared with 28%). While the same proportion of Indigenous people overall (65%) were renting, around one-quarter of non-Indigenous people (24%) were living in rented housing.

In 2006, one in ten Torres Strait Islander people (10%) lived in a dwelling that was fully owned, and almost one in five (18%) lived in a dwelling that was being purchased. Similarly, 8% of Indigenous people lived in fully owned dwellings and 20% lived in dwellings that were being purchased. Around one-third of non-Indigenous people (30%) were living in fully owned dwellings and 42% were in dwellings that were being purchased (table 12.13).

There was no significant change in the proportion of Torres Strait Islander people living in homes which were owned (with or without a mortgage) between 1996 (29%) and 2006 (28%). Rates of housing rental among Torres Strait Islander people also changed little (from 60% to 65%) over this period.

In the Torres Strait Indigenous Region in 2006, 88% of Torres Strait Islander people were living in rented housing compared with 61% of Torres Strait Islander people living in other parts of the country. A much smaller proportion of Torres Strait Islander people in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region (7%) were living in a dwelling that was owned (with or without a mortgage), compared with 31% of Torres Strait Islander people living in other areas. Housing tenure among Torres Strait Islander people in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region mirrored that of Indigenous people in other very remote parts of Australia, where 84% lived in rented dwellings and 4% lived in a home that was owned (with or without a mortgage).

In the Torres Strait Indigenous Region, 40% of Torres Strait Islander people were living in housing provided by Indigenous Housing Organisations (IHOs), other housing

Housing continued

co-operatives, or church or community groups, compared with 8% of Torres Strait Islander people living elsewhere in Australia.

12.13 HOUSING TENURE(a)—2006

	TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER(b)					
		Torres Strait Indigenous Region	Balance of Australia	Total	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Homeowner						
Fully owned	%	5.6	10.4	9.7	7.8	30.2
Being purchased	%	1.2	20.8	17.8	20.5	41.6
Total owners/purchasers	%	6.8	31.1	27.5	28.3	71.8
Renter						
State or territory housing authority	%	37.7	21.5	23.9	22.5	3.2
Indigenous housing organisation/community housing	%	39.7	7.6	12.4	16.9	0.4
Private and other renter(c)	%	11.0	31.5	28.5	25.3	20.8
Total renters	%	88.4	60.6	64.8	64.6	24.4
Other tenure type(c)	%	2.6	2.4	2.4	2.8	1.8
Tenure type not stated	%	2.2	5.8	5.3	4.3	2.0
Total						
	no.	6 341	36 146	42 487	410 557	17 181 456

(a) Data are for persons living in occupied private dwellings. Excludes visitors, Other not classifiable and Not Applicable.

(b) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) Includes landlord type not stated.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

The 2006 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey collected information about the state of repair of dwellings owned or managed by IHOs. While dwellings in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region were less likely than other IHO dwellings to require major repairs (14% compared with 26%), they were equally likely to require replacement (9%).

12.14 DWELLING CONDITION, permanent dwellings owned or managed by Indigenous Housing Organisations—2006

	Dwellings in Torres Strait Indigenous Region		Dwellings in balance of Australia		Total Australia	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Minor or no repair required	911	77.7	9 382	64.9	10 293	65.7
Major repair required	160	13.7	3 750	25.9	3 910	25.0
Replacement required	101	8.6	1 323	9.2	1 424	9.1
Total IHO owned or managed permanent dwellings	1 172	100.0	14 455	100.0	15 627	100.0

Source: ABS 2006 CHINS

Internet access

In 2006, 35% of Torres Strait Islander people had access to an Internet connection in their home. Internet access was significantly lower in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region, where 84% of people of Torres Strait Islander origin did not have Internet access at home, compared with 54% of those living in other parts of Australia. The situation in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region was similar to very remote areas overall, in which

*Internet access
continued*

86% of Indigenous people did not have Internet access at home. More than half (58%) of Indigenous people and 27% of non-Indigenous people were without Internet access at home (table 12.15).

12.15 INTERNET ACCESS (a)—2006

		TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER (b)				
		Torres Strait Indigenous Region	Balance of Australia	Total	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Type of Internet connection						
at home						
Broadband	%	6.3	23.5	21.0	22.1	47.0
Dial-up	%	6.2	13.6	12.5	13.1	23.1
Total (c)	%	13.3	38.3	34.6	36.2	70.7
No internet connection at home		%	84.1	54.0	58.5	27.0
Total (d)	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	no.	6 341	36 146	42 487	410 557	17 181 456

(a) Information collected for occupied private dwellings.

(b) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) Includes other types of Internet connection.

(d) Includes type of Internet connection not stated.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

*Social and cultural
participation*

The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) collected information on participation in social activities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural activities. According to the survey, 44% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over identified with a clan, tribal group or language group. While the proportion was higher for all Indigenous people in this age group (54%), similar proportions of Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous people overall recognised homelands or traditional country (67% and 70%) (ABS & AIHW 2005).

In 2002, almost all Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region (99%) had attended some kind of cultural event in the previous 12 months. In comparison, 67% of Torres Strait Islander people living in other parts of Australia reported having attended a cultural event in this period. The majority of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over (90%) had been involved in social activities in the previous three months, equal to the level of social participation reported by Indigenous people overall. Torres Strait Islander people were more likely than Indigenous people overall to have been involved in church or religious activities in the last three months (30% compared with 24%).

In the 12 months preceding the 2006 Census, 17% of Torres Strait Islander females aged 15 years or over and 14% of Torres Strait Islander males in this age group had undertaken voluntary work. The rates for Indigenous people overall were similar (15% for females and 12% for males). In the non-Indigenous population, corresponding rates were 21% for females and 17% for males.

Stressful life circumstances

In 2004–05, 73% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over reported that a stressful life event or circumstance had been a problem for them or someone close to them over the previous 12 months. For further information on the stressors included in the 2004–05 NATSIHS, refer to the Glossary of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004–05 (ABS 2006c).

Most commonly reported stressors among Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over in 2004–05 were the death of a family member or friend (40%), household financial stress (39%), overcrowding at home (16%) and inability to find a job (14%). Indigenous adults had similar experiences of life stressors, however Torres Strait Islander people were less likely than Indigenous people overall to report financial stress (39% compared with 51%) and alcohol-related problems (11% compared with 20%).

Neighbourhood problems

In the 2002 NATSISS, 73% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over reported the presence of at least one serious problem in their neighbourhood or community. This was comparable to the overall proportion of Indigenous people reporting neighbourhood problems (74%) (ABS & AIHW 2005).

The types of problems most commonly reported by Torres Strait Islander people related to theft (42%), alcohol (36%), illegal drugs (35%), vandalism and other damage to property (33%), youth-related problems (32%), and family violence (26%) (ABS & AIHW 2005).

HEALTH INDICATORS

Self-assessed health and long-term health conditions

In the 2004–05 NATSIHS, 44% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over reported that their health was excellent or very good while 23% said they had fair or poor health. These were similar to the rates reported by all Indigenous people (43% and 22% respectively).

Almost three-quarters (73%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over had a long-term health condition in 2004–05, similar to the proportion of all Indigenous people of the same age (77%) (table 12.16). Reporting of long-term conditions by Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region was comparable to those living in other areas (70% and 73% respectively).

The most commonly reported long-term conditions among Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over were eye/sight problems (38%) and back pain/problems (18%). While the prevalence of most long-term conditions were similar in the Torres Strait Islander and total Indigenous populations, Torres Strait Islander people were less likely to report heart disease and/or circulatory problems (13% compared with 18%).

Self-assessed health and
long-term health
conditions *continued*

12.16 HEALTH STATUS AND SELECTED LONG-TERM CONDITIONS, by
Indigenous status—2004–05

		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Total Indigenous
Self-assessed health			
Excellent/very good	%	44.5	43.2
Good	%	32.6	34.9
Fair/poor	%	22.9	21.9
Eye/sight problems	%	38.4	43.6
Back pain/symptoms	%	18.3	20.9
Heart and circulatory problems/diseases	%	(b)13.2	(b)18.1
Asthma	%	12.7	15.8
Ear/hearing problems	%	12.1	13.9
Arthritis	%	11.6	14.6
Diabetes/high sugar levels	%	8.8	9.8
Has a long-term condition	%	72.9	77.3
No long-term condition	%	27.1	22.7
Total persons aged 15 years and over	'000	30.7	29.4

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) Difference between Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous data is statistically significant.

Source: ABS 2004–05 NATSIHS

12.17 IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE CREATES POSITIVE HEALTH
OUTCOMES FOR TORRES STRAIT COMMUNITIES

The incidence of water and hygiene-associated communicable diseases in the Torres Strait region decreased in the period 1996 to 2006. This has been attributed to improvements in the region's environmental health infrastructure as part of the Torres Strait's Major Infrastructure Program (MIP). The facilities delivered through MIP in a partnership between the Torres Strait Regional Authority and the Queensland Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation, are producing positive health outcomes in the 15 outer Torres Strait Island communities and the two Northern Peninsula communities of Bamaga and Seisia.

In the Torres Strait region, notifications of environmental health-related diseases such as Shigellosis, Salmonella, and Hepatitis A halved between 1996 and 2006, according to data from the Queensland Notifiable Conditions Database (NOCs). Close to 40 cases were reported in the region in 1996 and under 20 cases were reported in 2006. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2006, 88% of global environmental infectious diseases such as diarrhoea were attributable to poor water, sanitation and hygiene.

Since 1998, developments in the Torres Strait region have included increased access to clean and safe drinking water, flushing toilets, serviced housing lots, sealed roads and drainage systems. Island Councils are better able to manage community waste through the installation of sewerage treatment plants and improved refuse control techniques. Projects commenced in 2007 continued to improve infrastructure standards in the region, including further installation of portable desalination units for the use of island communities affected by drought conditions in recent years.

Source: TSRA media release, MIP Continues To Deliver, 20/02/2007.

Risk factors

In 2004–05, around half (49%) of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over were current daily smokers. This is similar to the rate reported by the overall Indigenous population (50%). Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region reported lower rates of regular smoking than did those in other parts of Australia (38% compared with 51%).

The 2004–05 NATSIHS collected two measures of alcohol consumption using National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines—one on long-term use and the other on short-term, heavy use (binge drinking). For further information, see the Glossary and Chapter 8 of this publication.

In 2004–05, 13% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over reported long-term risky or high risk alcohol consumption and 16% reported risky or high risk short-term alcohol consumption. These rates of alcohol consumption were not significantly different from those reported by Indigenous people overall (table 12.18).

A sedentary lifestyle, defined by very low levels of exercise or no exercise at all, was reported by 36% of the 22,700 Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over in non-remote parts of Australia. Indigenous people overall were more likely to be sedentary, with 47% of those aged 15 years or over in non-remote areas reporting that they do very little or no exercise. Despite their greater engagement in physical exercise, Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over in non-remote areas were just as likely as Indigenous people overall to be overweight or obese (57% and 56% respectively).

In non-remote areas in 2004–05, 45% of Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over who agreed to answer questions regarding substance use reported that they had used illicit substances, and 31% had used illicit substances in the past 12 months. These rates of illicit substance use were not significantly different from those of the overall Indigenous population.

*Risk factors continued***12.18** SELECTED HEALTH RISK FACTORS—2004–05

		Torres Strait Islander(a)	Total Indigenous
Current daily smoker	%	49.4	50.0
Risky/high risk alcohol consumption			
long-term	%	13.0	16.5
short-term	%	16.0	19.3
Total persons aged 18 years and over	%	100.0	100.0
	no.	26 600	258 300
Overweight	%	29.1	27.5
Obese	%	27.9	28.7
Total overweight and obese	%	57.0	56.2
Total persons aged 15 years and over in non-remote areas who reported a BMI(b)	%	100.0	100.0
	no.	19 900	177 500
Persons aged 15 years and over in non-remote areas who did not report a BMI(b)	no.	2 800	35 900
Has used illicit substances			
during lifetime	%	44.9	49.1
in last 12 months	%	30.7	28.2
Has never used illicit substances	%	53.9	49.1
Total persons aged 15 years and over in non-remote areas who answered substance use form(c)	%	100.0	100.0
	no.	17 600	165 600
Persons aged 15 years and over in non-remote areas who did not answer substance use form	no.	5 100	47 900

(a) Includes persons who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(b) For an explanation of Body Mass Index, refer to Glossary.

(c) Includes persons who did not state whether they had ever used illicit substances.

Source: ABS 2004–05 NATSIHS

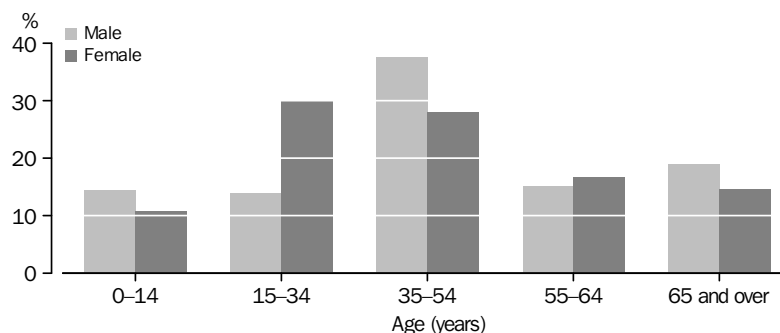
Hospitalisations

A hospital separation (hospitalisation) refers to an admitted patient completing an episode of care in hospital, by being discharged, transferring to another hospital or care facility, or dying. It is therefore possible for the same patient to be counted more than once if they are hospitalised on multiple occasions. For further information on hospital separations, refer to the 2005 edition of this report (ABS & AIHW 2005). While Indigenous identification in hospital separations data are incomplete nationally, coverage in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory is sufficient to support statistics on hospitalisations of Torres Strait Islander people. In 2005–06, these jurisdictions recorded 15,216 hospitalisations involving Torres Strait Islander people, accounting for 8% of all hospitalisations of Indigenous people. More than half (56%) of all hospitalisations involving Torres Strait Islander people were for females, similar to the pattern for Indigenous people overall (57%).

Hospitalisations of Torres Strait Islander females were most common for those of child-bearing age (15–34 years) (29%), and for those aged 35–54 years (26%). The hospitalisation rate for Torres Strait Islander males aged 35–54 years (40%) was significantly higher than for males in other age groups (graph 12.19).

Hospitalisations
continued

12.19 HOSPITALISATIONS (a), Torres Strait Islander persons (b)—2005–06



(a) Data are for NSW, Vic., Qld, WA, SA and NT based on state/territory of usual residence.

Excludes private hospitals in the NT.

(b) Includes patients who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

Source: AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database

During 2005–06, kidney disease involving dialysis was the most commonly recorded principal diagnosis, accounting for 39% of hospitalisations of Torres Strait Islander people, similar to the hospitalisation rate for dialysis for Indigenous people overall (41%) (table 12.20). Over half (53%) of hospitalisations for dialysis treatment of Torres Strait Islander males involved those aged less than 55 years. The corresponding proportion of hospitalisations involving Torres Strait Islander females less than 55 years was 45%.

12.20 HOSPITALISATIONS BY PRINCIPAL DIAGNOSIS(a), for Indigenous persons—2005–06

	Torres Strait Islander(b).....		Total Indigenous.....	
	no.	%	no.	%
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases (A00–B99)	285	1.5	5 249	2.2
Neoplasms (C00–D48)	435	2.3	3 532	1.5
Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs and certain disorders involving the immune mechanism (D50–D89)	124	0.7	1 161	0.5
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00–E90)	400	2.1	4 797	2.0
Mental and behavioural disorders (F00–F99)	726	3.8	10 083	4.1
Diseases of the nervous system (G00–G99)	192	1.0	3 347	1.4
Diseases of the eye and adnexa (H00–H59)	158	0.8	1 170	0.5
Diseases of the ear and mastoid process (H60–H95)	104	0.6	1 714	0.7
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00–I99)	644	3.4	7 859	3.2
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00–J99)	921	4.9	15 722	6.5
Diseases of the digestive system (K00–K93)	1 119	5.9	12 906	5.3
Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue (L00–L99)	386	2.0	5 599	2.3
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue (M00–M99)	416	2.2	4 205	1.7
Diseases of the genitourinary system (N00–N99)	556	2.9	6 220	2.6
Pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium (O00–O99)	1 807	9.6	18 012	7.4
Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period (P00–P96)	241	1.3	2 601	1.1
Congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities (Q00–Q99)	109	0.6	879	0.4
Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings, n.e.c. (R00–R99)	642	3.4	10 461	4.3
Injury, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes (S00–T98)	1 261	6.7	18 843	7.8
Factors influencing health status and contact with health services (Z00–Z99 excluding Z49)	1 001	5.3	8 529	3.5
Total excluding care involving dialysis	11 529	61.0	142 953	58.8
Care involving dialysis (Z49)	7 367	39.0	100 153	41.2
Total(c)	18 896	100.0	243 106	100.0

(a) Data are for NSW, Vic., Qld, WA, SA and NT combined, based on state/territory of usual residence. Excludes private hospitals in the NT.

(b) Includes patients who were of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin.

(c) Includes hospitalisations for which no principal diagnosis was reported.

Source: AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database

SUMMARY

Torres Strait Islander people have more favourable outcomes than other Indigenous people for several social and economic indicators. They have higher rates of secondary school completion, higher equivalised incomes, and lower unemployment rates than Indigenous people overall. Like the Indigenous population as a whole, however, Torres Strait Islander people experience higher levels of disadvantage than do non-Indigenous Australians across most indicators of health and welfare.

The data suggest that the health and welfare of the Torres Strait Islander population is improving. Between 2001 and 2006, educational attainment improved in terms of Year 12 completion and non-school qualifications. In addition, labour force participation increased and the unemployment rate decreased for Torres Strait Islander people over this five-year period.

When compared with Torres Strait Islander people in other parts of Australia, those living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region had significantly different outcomes for certain socioeconomic indicators. Torres Strait Islander people in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region had higher rates of secondary school completion and cultural participation, and lower unemployment than those living elsewhere. They also had comparatively low equivalised household incomes, lower rates of home ownership and limited Internet access, reflecting the general disparity in opportunities and services that exist between people living in urban and very remote parts of Australia.