



## 6.1 Profile of Indigenous Australians

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Indigenous peoples of Australia. They comprise hundreds of groups, each with their own distinct set of languages, histories and cultural traditions. Indigenous communities pass on knowledge, tradition, ceremony and culture from one generation to the next through language, performance, protection of significant sites, storytelling and the teachings of Elders. Indigenous Australians live in all parts of the nation, from major cities to remote tropical and desert areas.

The Australian Government defines Indigenous Australians as people who are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and who are accepted as such in the communities in which they live, or have lived. In most data collections, a person's Indigenous status is based on the first two parts of this definition. While there is evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to identify as Indigenous now than in the past, there is still under-counting of Indigenous Australians in official statistics. The Australian Bureau of Statistics takes the Census counts (the number of people who identified as Indigenous) and adjusts the data to produce the estimated resident population data (ERP) and this snapshot uses ERP data where possible.

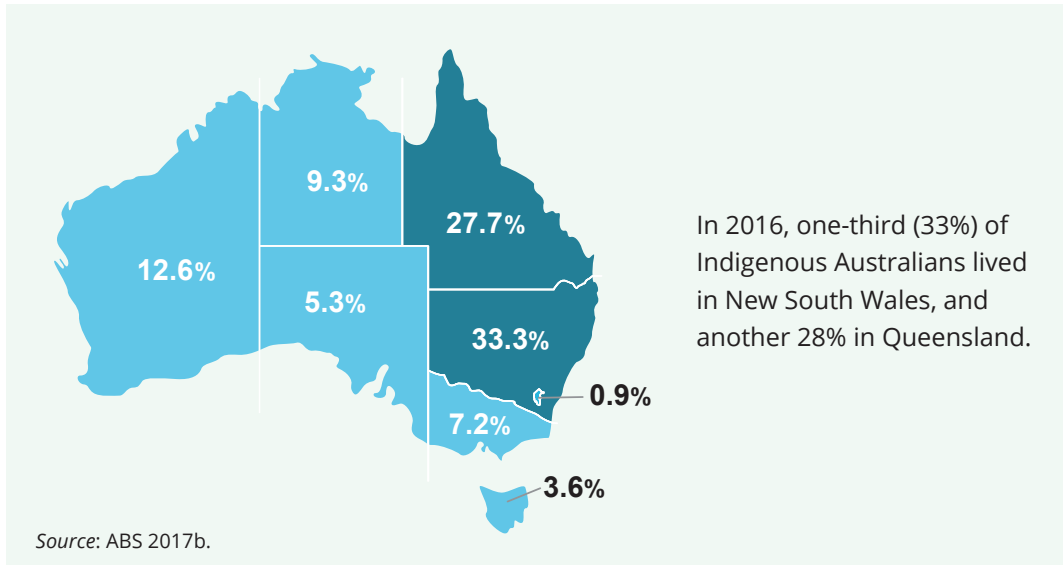
### How many people identify as Indigenous?

In 2016, an estimated 787,000 Australians identified as Indigenous (3.3% of the population). Between 2011 and 2016, the estimated Indigenous population increased by 19%, compared with an 8.0% increase for the non-Indigenous population (ABS 2017a). These are preliminary estimates, with the final ERP estimates to be released later in 2018. In 2016, 91% of people identifying as Indigenous were of Aboriginal origin, 5.0% were of Torres Strait Islander origin and 4.1% identified as being of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (ABS 2017a).

#### Where do Indigenous Australians live?



Source: ABS 2013.

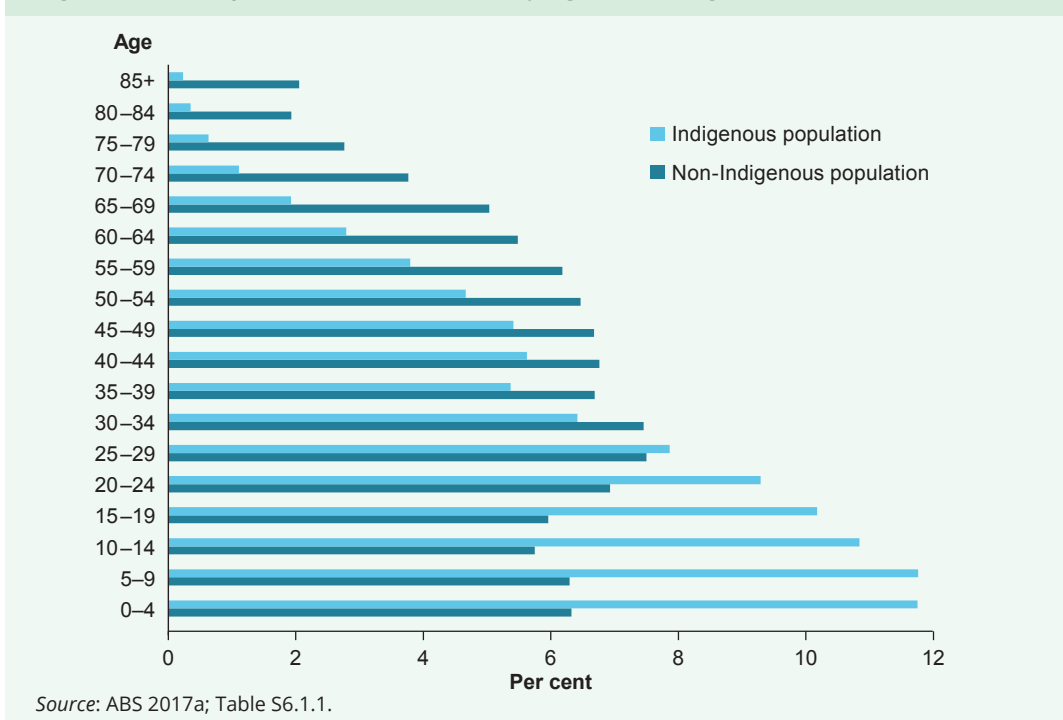


## Age profile

The Indigenous population has a much younger age distribution than the non-Indigenous population. The median age of the Indigenous population in the 2016 Census was 23, compared with 38 for the non-Indigenous population (ABS 2017c).

In 2016, 34% of Indigenous Australians were aged under 15, compared with 18% of non-Indigenous Australians, and only 4.3% of Indigenous Australians were aged 65 and over (Figure 6.1.1).

Figure 6.1.1: Population distribution, by age and Indigenous status, 2016





## Household composition

In 2016, Indigenous households were more likely to be made up of families, and less likely to be lone-person households than non-Indigenous households (Table 6.1.1).

**Table 6.1.1: Percentage distribution of household composition, by Indigenous status, 2016**

Household composition	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
One family	74.7	69.2
Multiple families	5.1	1.8
Lone person	14.7	24.7
Group	5.5	4.2

Source: ABS 2017c.

## Language

The 2016 Census reported that:

- one in 10 (10%) Indigenous people spoke an Indigenous language at home
- 150 different Australian Indigenous languages were spoken at home
- 85% of the 63,800 Indigenous people who spoke an Indigenous language at home reported speaking English well or very well (ABS 2017d).

## Social and economic capital

In 2016:

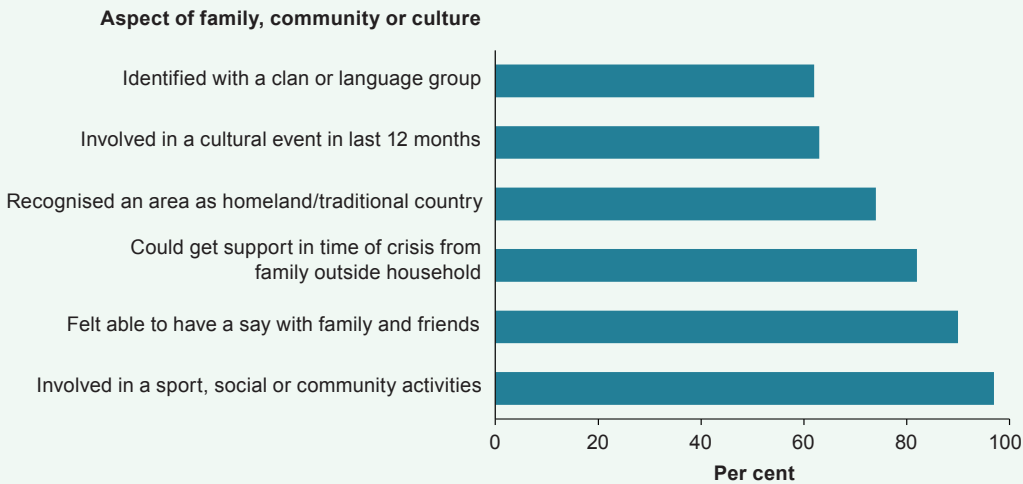
- the employment-to-population ratio among people aged 15 and over (employment rate) for Indigenous Australians was 45%
- 12% of Indigenous households owned their homes outright, another 26% owned with a mortgage, and the majority (57%) rented their dwellings
- median equivalised household income for Indigenous Australians was \$1,203
- the proportion of Indigenous people aged 20–24 who had completed Year 12 or its equivalent increased by more than a third between 2011 and 2016, from 37% to 47% (ABS 2017d).

## Family and cultural life

Data from the 2014–15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey show that Indigenous Australians have strong connections to family, community and culture (Figure 6.1.2).



Figure 6.1.2: Percentage distribution of participation in aspects of family and cultural life, Indigenous Australians, 2014–15



Source: ABS 2016; Table S6.1.2.

## What is missing from the picture?

Changes in Indigenous identification rates between Censuses can affect population counts and the statistics derived from them. Due to the small Indigenous population in some jurisdictions and remoteness areas, it is not always possible to produce specific, reliable statistics for smaller areas. Detailed information on cultural factors and participation is only available every 3 years from Indigenous-specific surveys.

## Where do I go for more information?

Find more information on the composition of the Indigenous population on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website at [www.abs.gov.au/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Peoples](http://www.abs.gov.au/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Peoples).

An overview of reports and statistics about Indigenous Australians is available from the AIHW website at [Indigenous Australians](#).

## References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2013. Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011. ABS cat. no. 3238.0.55.001. Canberra: ABS.
- ABS 2016. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014–15. ABS cat. no. 4714.0. Canberra: ABS.
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- ABS 2017b. Census of Population and Housing—counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Australia, 2016. ABS cat. 2075.0. Canberra: ABS.
- ABS 2017c. Census of Population and Housing: reflecting Australia—stories from the Census, 2016. ABS cat. no. 2071.0. Canberra: ABS.
- ABS 2017d. 2016 Census of Population and Housing—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples profile. ABS cat. no. 2002.0. Canberra: ABS.

