

Human wellbeing: Australia

9

Australians enjoy one of the highest levels of human wellbeing in the world. As a nation they also enjoy one of the highest life expectancies of any country, although this is not true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Life expectancy for Indigenous Australians is 10 to 17 years less than other Australians.

In this chapter, we investigate the reasons for, and consequences of, spatial variations in human wellbeing in Australia, with specific reference to the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also examine initiatives designed to improve human wellbeing in Australia.

OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 9A** What are the reasons for, and consequences of, spatial variations in human wellbeing in Australia?
- 9B** To what extent does the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians vary from that enjoyed by non-Indigenous Australians?
- 9C** To what extent have initiatives to improve human wellbeing in Australia been successful?



Before you begin

GLOSSARY

Country an Aboriginal person's land, sea, sky, rivers, sites, seasons, plants and animals; their place of heritage, belonging and spirituality

dispossession the act of taking away land or forcing people from their land, way of life and culture

equality of opportunity equal treatment of all people in a society, regardless of race, age, gender, religion, or mental or physical disability

locational disadvantage areas of concentrated poverty and disadvantage, where people cannot access work, education, health and other services

poverty line the estimated level of income needed to secure the necessities of life; this level of income differs between countries

quartile a statistical value representing 25 per cent of a population (a quarter)

quintile a statistical value representing 20 per cent of a population

social mobility the movement of individuals, families or households between the various levels of class in Australia, for example from middle class to upper middle-class

socio-economic status a level of economic and social wellbeing based on factors such as employment, income, education and social position relative to others

spatial inequality unequal amounts of qualities or resources and services depending on the geographical location; distinct geographical divisions between poor and affluent areas

9.1 Poverty in Australia

Poverty

In theory, no one in Australia should live in a state of absolute poverty. Australia's social welfare system means that everyone should have access to adequate food, clothing and shelter. But we have all seen homeless people living on the streets of our large cities and we know that some people go without meals. Australia enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world. However, the wealth that underpins this high standard of living is not evenly distributed. Some people have a larger share than others.

Relative poverty occurs when people do not enjoy a minimum standard of living as determined by a government. In Australia, the minimum standard of living is defined by what is referred to as the **poverty line**. The poverty line is set at 50 per cent of median income. In Australia, for a single adult, the poverty line was \$426.30 per week in late 2016; for a couple with two children it was \$895.22.

Poverty in Australia: Key facts

- Poverty rate: An estimated 2.9 million people, or 13.3 per cent of the Australian population, live below the internationally accepted poverty line.
- Income support: 36.1 per cent of people on social security payments live below the poverty line.
- Unemployed: 63.2 per cent of people who are unemployed live below the poverty line.
- Working poor: 32.1 per cent of people living below the poverty line come from a household with wages as their main income.
- Location: 13.8 per cent of people in capital cities live in poverty compared with 14 per cent outside capital cities. Tasmania has the highest proportion of its population living below the poverty line (15.1 per cent). The ACT has the lowest (9.1 per cent).

Poverty in Australia: People at most risk

- Women are more likely to experience poverty than men (13.8 per cent compared to 12.8 per cent).
- Sole parents (most commonly women) are at a higher risk, with 33 per cent living in poverty in 2012. Nearly 37 per cent of all children in poverty were in sole-parent households.
- Children and older people face higher risks of poverty compared with other age groups (17.7 and 14.8 per cent respectively).

- Overseas-born residents are at greatest risk of poverty, especially when their main language is not English (18.8 per cent). Those born in English-speaking countries are also at risk.
- An estimated 19.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in poverty.
- An estimated 27.4 per cent of people with a disability live in poverty.
- More than 60 per cent of people who are unemployed live below the poverty line, as do many who rely on part-time and casual employment.

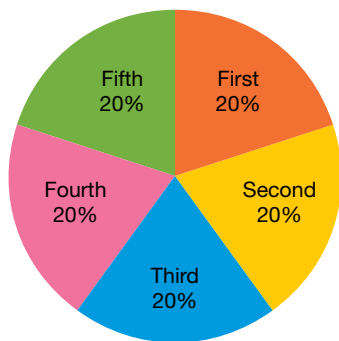
Inequality in Australia

In a country that has long prided itself on being the land of the 'fair go', there is a growing gap between people who have a lot and people who only have a little. The nature and extent of inequality is the responsibility of policy makers. Governments have the capacity to either reduce inequality or increase it. Tackling inequality can be seen as a political choice, not an economic problem.

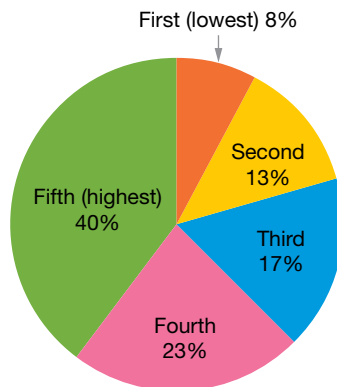
Inequality is bad for Australia. It undermines the fairness of our economic system and results in division within society. Countries with lower levels of inequality tend to have faster and more lasting economic growth. Countries with high levels of inequality often experience high levels of violence, suicide, mental illness and imprisonment, and lower life expectancy.

Inequality means that people in the lower income groups do not have the same access to opportunities as those in the higher groups. For example, those in the lowest groups find it more difficult to access higher education than someone in the highest group. Wealthier people can afford not to rely on services such as public schools and public hospitals. They use private schools and hospitals. When this happens, they have less interest in supporting public schools and hospitals, leading to a more divided society.

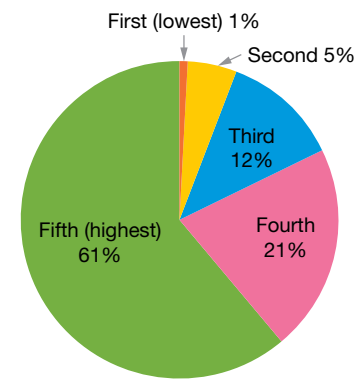
In the past, government policies have protected Australia from the worst forms of inequality. But Australia must be careful to avoid policies that increase inequality. When the government cuts income support to the needy, people who rely on such payments slide further down the inequality scale.



9.1.1 If the distribution of income and wealth by quintile were equal in Australia



9.1.2 The distribution of income in Australia is unequal.



9.1.3 The distribution of wealth in Australia is unequal.

Measuring inequality

Inequality can be measured in two ways:

- 1 by determining how much income a person or household receives; that is, income inequality
- 2 by determining how much wealth is held by a person or household; that is, wealth inequality.

Wealth inequality is higher in Australia than income inequality. If the distribution of income and wealth by **quintile** were equal it would look like the distribution in Figure 9.1.1. In Australia, though, the share of income is not equal.

Note: A quintile is a statistical value representing 20 per cent of the total population. The first quintile represents the lowest (poorest) fifth of the population (1–20 per cent); the second quintile represents the second fifth (21–40 per cent) and so on. The fifth quintile is the wealthiest 20 per cent of the population.

Figure 9.1.2 shows that, when looking at average income in Australia, a person in the highest income group has about five times the income of a person in the lowest income group. People most likely to be found in the lowest income group include:

- older people
- sole parents
- unemployed people
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The share of wealth in Australia is not equal, as is shown in Figure 9.1.3. When looking at average wealth, a person in the highest wealth group has about seventy times as much wealth as someone in the lowest wealth group. People in the highest wealth group are more likely to have their wealth in the form of property, shares and superannuation.

Those in the lowest quintile are more likely to hold their wealth in the form of low-value items such as cars and home contents.

Tables 9.1.4a and 9.1.4b show the income and wealth quintiles in Australia.

9.1.4a Income and households

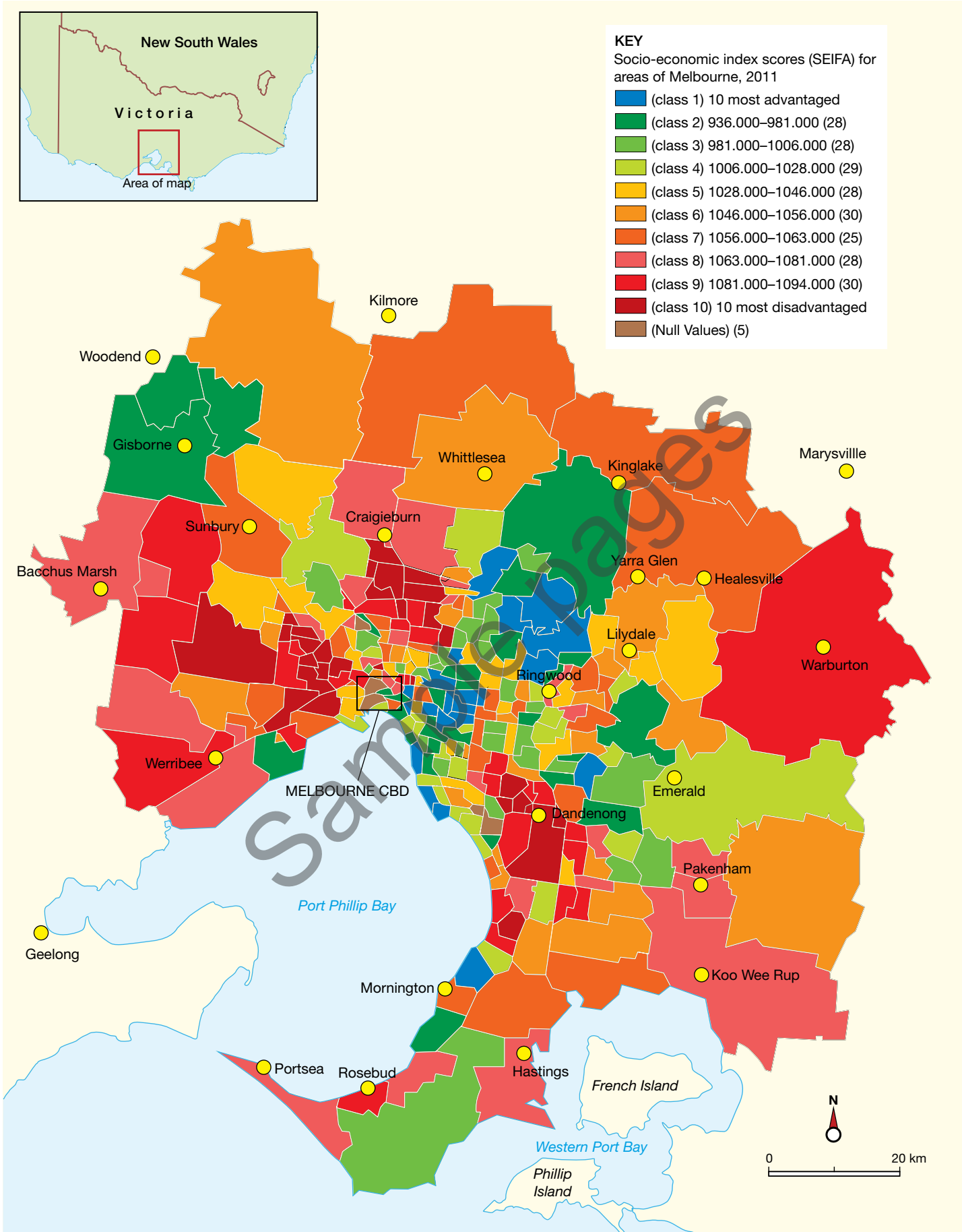
	First (lowest)	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth (highest)
Average annual income before tax	\$33911	\$67113	\$99570	\$134127	\$232175

9.1.4b Wealth and households

	First (lowest)	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth (highest)
Average total wealth	\$31100	\$190900	\$437700	\$766400	\$2212200

Inequality is increasing

The gap between the poorest and wealthiest groups is increasing. The share of income and wealth going to the wealthiest 20 per cent of households has increased, while the share going to the poorest groups (and, in the case of wealth, also the middle groups) has decreased over the past two decades. Over the 25 years to 2010, real wages (purchasing power as opposed to actual money received) increased by 50 per cent on average, but real wages only increased by 14 per cent for those on lower incomes compared with 72 per cent for those on higher incomes. In terms of wealth, the wealth of the top 20 per cent of households increased by 28 per cent in the period 2004–2012; by comparison the wealth of the poorest households increased by just 3 per cent.



9.1.5 The majority of Melbourne's advantaged areas are located in the inner and eastern suburbs.

Barriers to equality of opportunity

Equality of opportunity is the concept that everyone can meet their full potential through education and employment, regardless of factors such as their socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity or age.

There are a number of barriers to **social mobility** in Australia:

- discrimination barriers (for example gender, ethnicity, age)
- welfare trap barriers (for example intergenerational welfare dependency, when generations of people get used to relying on welfare)
- employment barriers (for example shortage of low-skilled jobs)
- education barriers (for example lack of access to resources such as computers, text books)
- health barriers (for example chronic health conditions, disabilities)
- housing barriers (for example overcrowding, poorly maintained housing)
- spatial and transport barriers (for example being a long way away from services and employment opportunities).

These issues can be very difficult to solve. There are, however, some steps that can be taken to help ensure that all Australians enjoy an acceptable standard of living:

- providing incentives for the new knowledge-based industries to be located in the areas where people need employment, especially where they have lost work opportunities due to economic and technological change
- retraining those who have been marginalised and demoralised by the decline in manufacturing employment

- ensuring that young people are better educated and therefore better able to fill the jobs being created in the new information-based economy
- redistributing income (via the tax system) from high-paid to low-paid Australians
- increasing government spending on health care, education, housing and public transport.

Spatial pattern of wellbeing in Melbourne

Melbourne like all Australian cities has a level of **spatial inequality** and the difference in living standards between the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged parts of the city is becoming greater. Areas of poverty, unemployment, violence and social distress are now a feature of Melbourne. There are also areas characterised by great wealth and privilege. However, care must be taken when making generalisations such as these. Within all suburban areas there are people with different levels of income and wealth.

Figure 9.1.5 highlights the spatial pattern of wellbeing in Melbourne. Melbourne could be described as a 'divided' city with an affluent centre and inner-to-middle east and a less affluent outer ring of suburbs surrounding the whole city. Some of these suburbs have pockets of extreme poverty, while others have families who are slightly below the average means.

This pattern of advantage and disadvantage is closely related to a person's income and/or wealth. The greater the person's wealth and/or income, the greater the choice they have about where to live. This means that the most disadvantaged people tend to be concentrated in the least popular part of the city, often far from the services they need and employment opportunities. This results in **locational disadvantage**.

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 State why no one in Australia should live in 'absolute poverty'.
- 2 Define 'relative poverty'.
- 3 Outline how the 'poverty line' is determined in Australia.
- 4 Outline the extent of poverty in Australia. Who is most at risk?
- 5 State how inequality in Australia is measured. What trends are apparent?
- 6 Outline the barriers to 'equality of opportunity'. How might these barriers be addressed?

Applying and analysing

- 7 Study Figures 9.1.2 and 9.1.3. Using data from the graphs, describe the distribution of income and wealth in Australia.

- 8 Study Figure 9.1.5. Describe the pattern of advantage and disadvantage in Melbourne. Account for this pattern.

Evaluating and creating

- 9 Create a mind map about the impacts of poverty in Australia.
- 10 You are preparing a debate about poverty in Australia and you are on the affirmative side. Outline your arguments supporting the following topic.
All Australians have a right to an acceptable standard of living.

9.2 Spatial patterns of Indigenous advantage and disadvantage

Socio-economic status

A widely accepted indicator of disadvantage is a person's **socio-economic status**. It takes into account factors such as educational attainment, occupation, income and housing. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in terms of people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society.

In every part of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are worse off, and do not enjoy the same level of wellbeing, as most other Australians. They consistently experience disproportionately higher levels of social disadvantage.

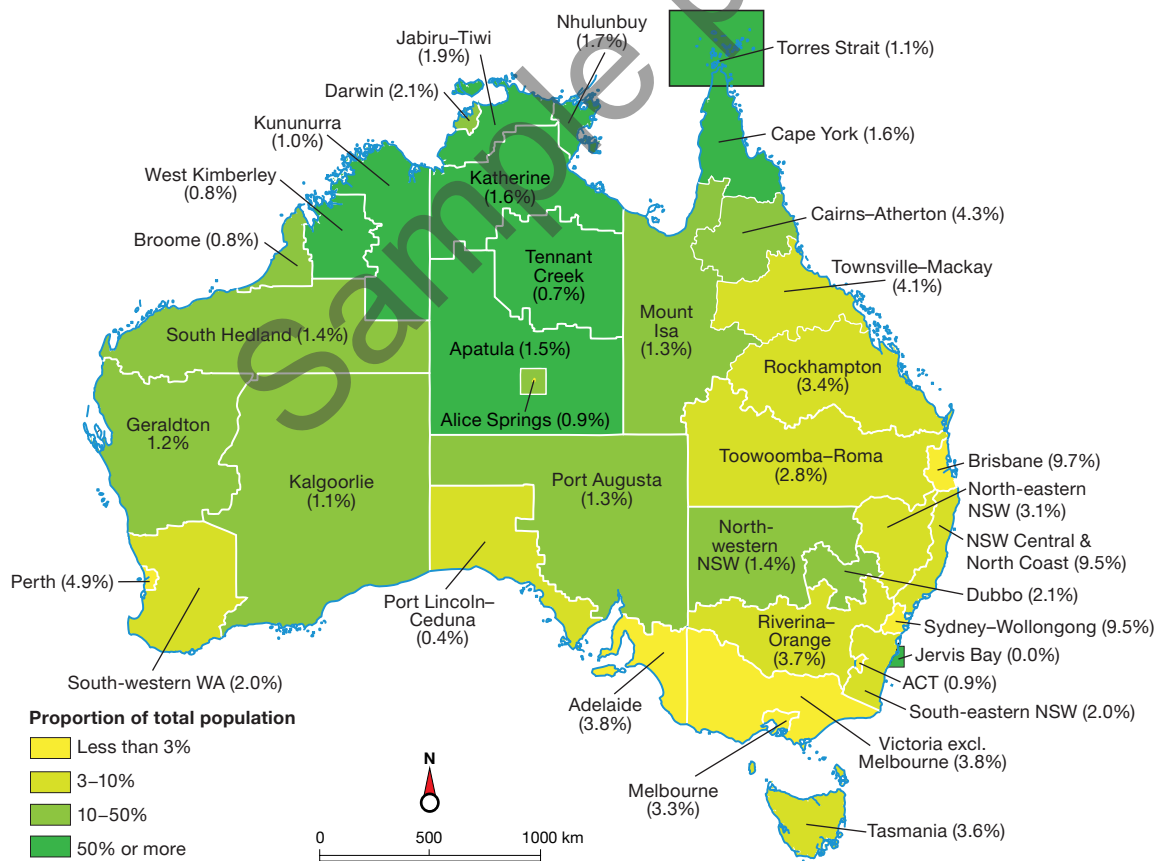
Housing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely to live in areas of relative disadvantage. More than a third of Indigenous Australians (36.6 per cent) live among

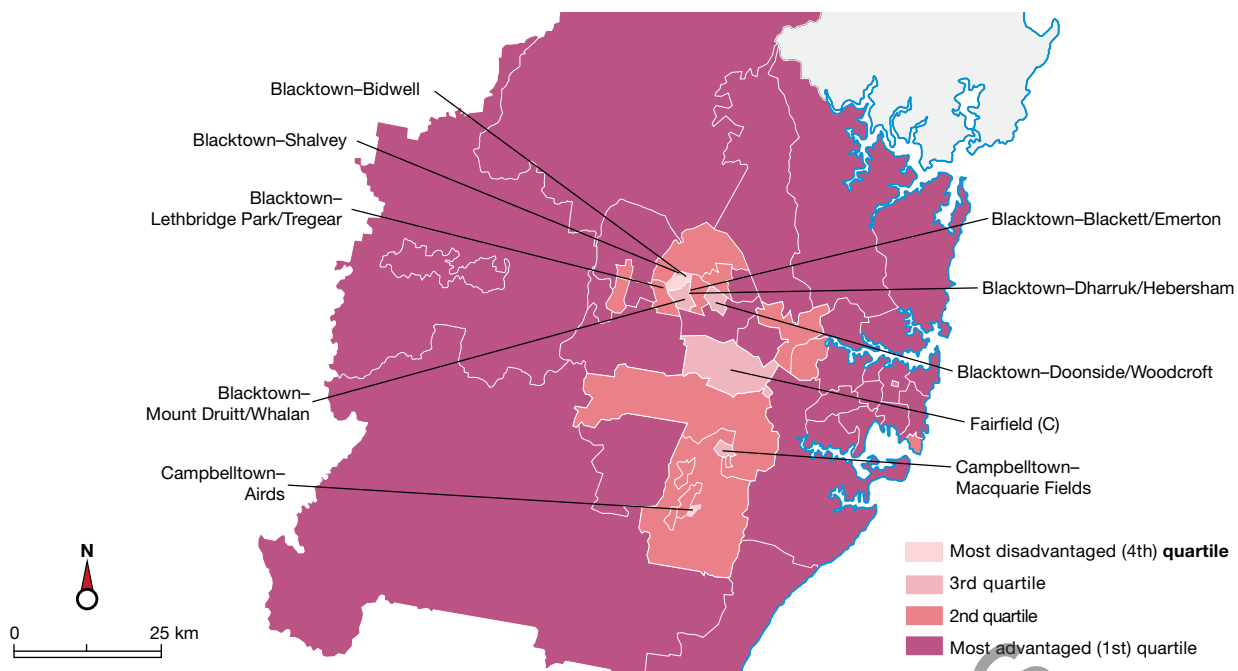
the most disadvantaged 10 per cent of the Australian population and only 1.7 per cent live among the most advantaged top 10 per cent.

Where Indigenous Australians live

Figure 9.2.1 illustrates the percentage of the total population in regions across Australia who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin in the 2011 Census. The percentage is highest in the relatively remote regions of north, central and western Australia. Yet the regions with the highest numbers of Indigenous Australians are in the south and east of the country and in cities. Brisbane, the central and northern coasts of New South Wales, and the Sydney–Wollongong region all have an Indigenous populations of 60 000 or more. The most remote regions have populations of about 10 000 or less.



9.2.1 Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live



9.2.2 Patterns of Indigenous advantage and disadvantage in Sydney

Variations in the spatial patterns of disadvantage

The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses a variety of economic and social information about people and households within an area to create the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD). The ABS measures education levels, occupation and types of jobs, home ownership and size, car ownership, internet connection and the health and disability within an area.

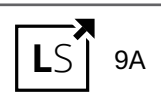
- A low score indicates greater disadvantage and a lack of advantage. For example, there are many households with low incomes, or many people in unskilled occupations, and few households with high incomes, or few people in skilled occupations.
- A high score indicates a relative lack of disadvantage and greater advantage. For example, there are many households with high incomes, or many people in skilled occupations, and few households with low incomes, or few people in unskilled occupations.

Spatial patterns in Sydney

While the advantage and disadvantage differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations are greatest in remote areas, even in remote areas some communities fare better than others. There are also wide variations in both regional and urban communities.

The Sydney metropolitan area has the greatest diversity in the socio-economic status of Indigenous Australians. In 2011, according to the IRSAD, six of the seven most advantaged Indigenous areas in Australia were found in Sydney. The smallest disadvantage gap between the two populations was in Sydney's lower north. Yet ten areas that were found to be especially disadvantaged were also in Sydney (see Figure 9.2.2).

Activities



Remembering and understanding

- 1 Identify those parts of Australia that have the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those that have the greatest numbers.
- 2 Describe the ABS definition of socio-economic status.
- 3 Outline the measures used to determine socio-economic status.
- 4 Describe how advantage and disadvantage are measured.

Applying and analysing

- 5 Study Figure 9.2.1 and answer the following questions.
 - a In which state/territory do Indigenous Australians make up the largest percentage of the population?
 - b In which state/territory do Indigenous Australians make up the smallest percentage of the population?
 - c What percentage of Australia's Indigenous population is found in New South Wales?
 - d What percentage of Australia's Indigenous population is found in the Northern Territory?

9.3 Origins of disadvantage

Dispossession

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived sustainably in Australia for up to 65 000 years, but they were quickly plunged into turmoil when the Europeans arrived in 1788. Many of the issues that trouble Indigenous Australians and disadvantage them today can be traced back to **dispossession**—when the Europeans took away the land and property of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and forced them to live away from their land and culture.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples believed in respect and responsibility for **Country**, their ancestors and each other. They believed in the collective responsibility for land. They did not see it as a privately owned commodity to be bought and sold.

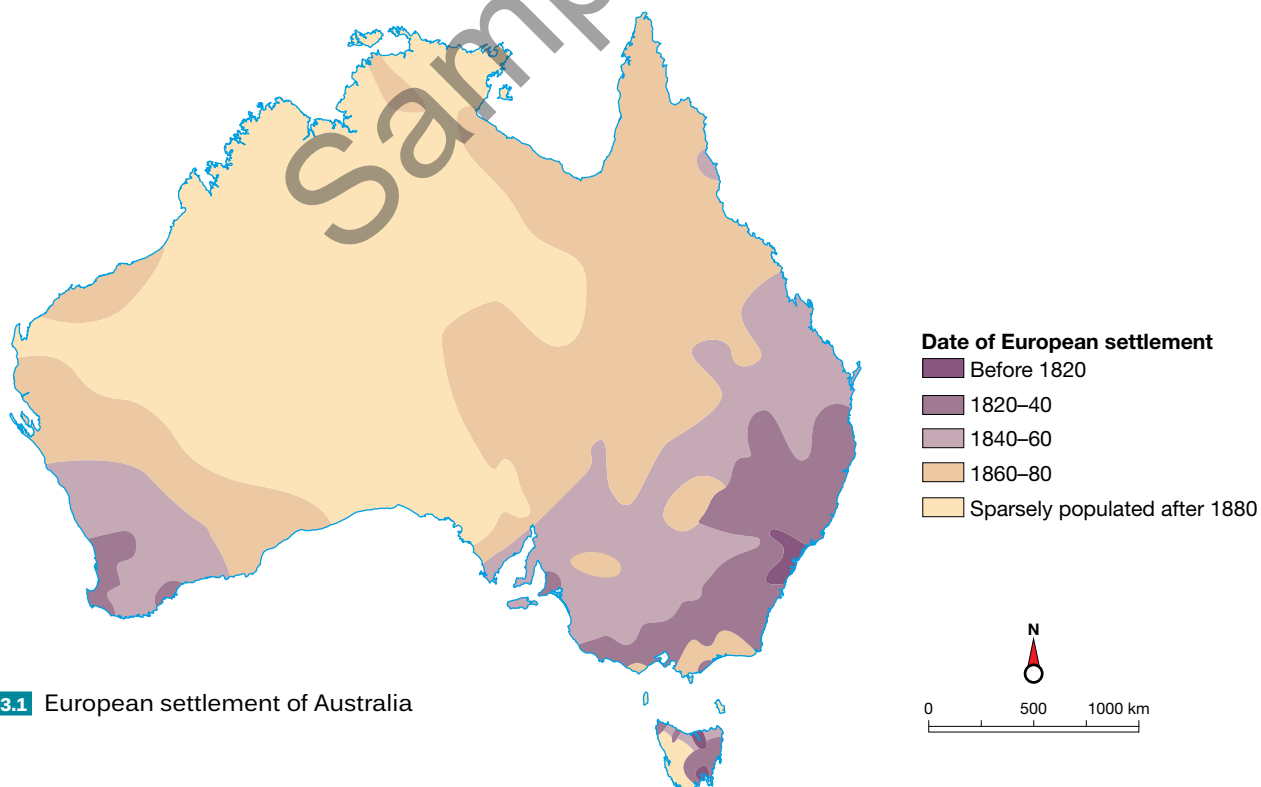
The colonial mindset

When the British arrived, they laid claim to the country, applying the notion of terra nullius—a land belonging to no one. They argued that since no one owned the land, they could colonise it. They justified this position by arguing that there were no permanent structures to indicate ownership. Thus, the occupancy rights of the original inhabitants were ignored and, from an Aboriginal perspective, the invasion of their lands by Europeans began.

Missions and reserves

The colonial frontier spread out from the British colony in New South Wales across the continent during the nineteenth century (see Figure 9.3.1). There were inevitable conflicts as Aboriginal people resisted having their food and water supplies taken away from them. They were excluded from their traditional lands. Some were offered refuge on mission settlements, but they were expected to adopt European ways (see Figure 9.3.2). The government also established reserves where they could protect and control Aboriginal communities, but the conditions were often very poor. Many drifted to the edges of towns, and lived in the worst of circumstances.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were severely affected by the spread of European settlement. They had no immunity to introduced diseases such as influenza, tuberculosis and smallpox. Disease swept through communities even before they came in direct contact with any settlers. The Indigenous population dipped below 100 000 in the first half of the twentieth century.



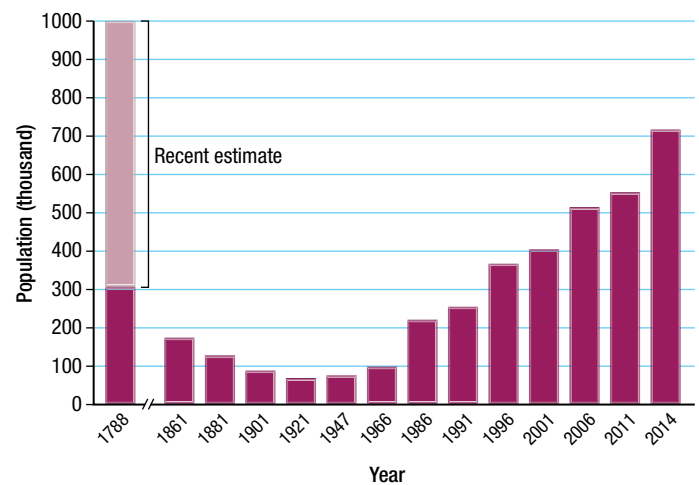
9.3.1 European settlement of Australia



9.3.2 An Aboriginal community outside the church of a mission at Lake Tyers in Victoria's Gippsland region in 1910

Consequences of dispossession

The forced relocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their traditional lands to missions and settlements had a dramatic impact on Indigenous population levels, as shown in Figure 9.3.3, and on their health and wellbeing. The social consequences of dispossession and marginalisation made the problems even worse. They could no longer support themselves as they had done successfully for tens of thousands of years. This resulted in a dependence on government welfare payments. They were pushed into remote areas, far away from many of the services most Australians take for granted.



9.3.3 Changes in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

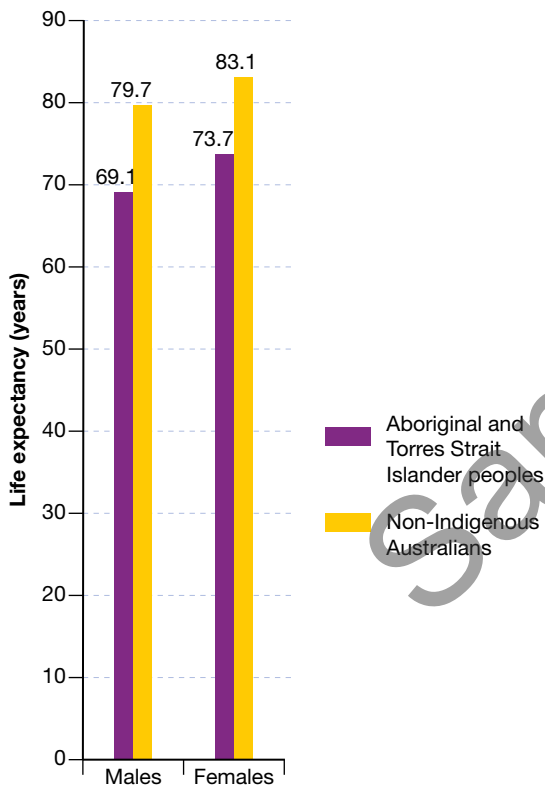
Health

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples generally have poor health compared with other Australians, as indicated by a lower life expectancy (see Figure 9.3.4). Heart disease is a major cause of premature death, and diseases such as diabetes, liver and kidney disease, and cancers linked to smoking, are more common in Indigenous Australians. The health of Indigenous people prior to their contact with Europeans was much better than it generally is today.

Discrimination, depression, poverty and idleness affect quality of life. Drug and alcohol addiction and abuse have become embedded in many Indigenous communities, with serious consequences. Heavy drinking brings on health problems and can lead to violence, which often triggers assaults, self-harm and family breakdowns.

Did you know?

Indigenous people are twice as likely as non-Indigenous people to be smokers.



9.3.4 Life expectancy at birth, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by sex, 2010–12

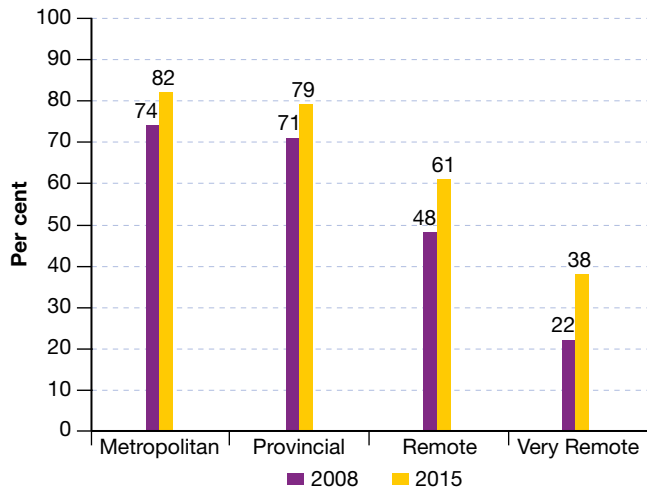


9.3.5 Cartoon by Nicholson, *The Australian*, 2005

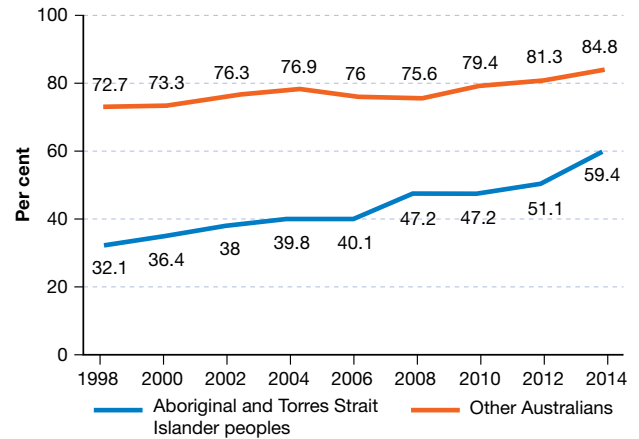
Education

Educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain well below those achieved by the non-Indigenous population, as is shown in Figure 9.3.6a–c. Rates of participation (attending school) and continuing from the first year of secondary schooling to the next year level (retention rates) are low. Literacy rates also remain low compared with the non-indigenous population. Students in remote areas experience the greatest disadvantage.

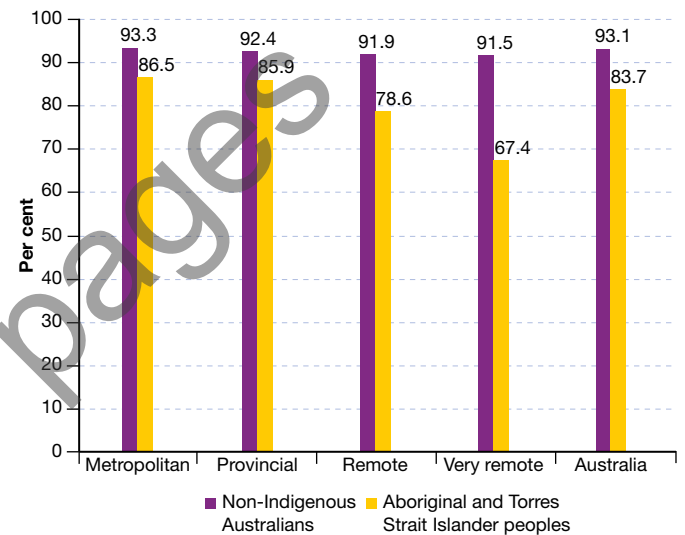
9.3.6 a–c Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations on selected measures of wellbeing



a Indigenous student attendance rates (per cent), Years 1 to 10 combined, by remoteness, Semester 1, 2015



b School retention rates for Year 7/8 to Year 12, 1998–2014



c Students reaching National Minimum Standards for Year 5 reading by remoteness, 2008 and 2015

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Explain how the British justified their claim on Australia.
- 2 Outline how the Aboriginal way of life was affected by the spread of settlement.
- 3 Describe how the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was affected.

Applying and analysing

- 4 Study Figure 9.3.3 and answer the following questions.
 - a What was the estimated percentage change in population from 1788 to 1921?
 - b For how many decades was the population estimated to be below 100 000?

- 5 Study Figure 9.3.5. As a class, discuss the point Nicholson is seeking to make in his cartoon. What is the link between work and social and economic disadvantage?
- 6 Study Figures 9.3.4 and 9.3.6a–c. Using data from the graphs, write a paragraph comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations on the measures of wellbeing illustrated.

Evaluating and creating

- 7 Research the living conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples after they were displaced by European settlement. Prepare an annotated visual display contrasting this existence with their traditional way of life and demonstrate how it affected their health and wellbeing.

9.4 Wellbeing and remoteness

Measures of wellbeing

The levels of disadvantage of Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations are widely acknowledged and considered unacceptable. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are disadvantaged in many ways. Obtaining accurate measurements of such disadvantage is vital if we are to eliminate the gap.

Life expectancy

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous Australians. The differences are most apparent in the population pyramid in Figure 9.4.1. The shape for the Indigenous population resembles that of a developing country, with lower life expectancies and a younger population. Over one-third of the population is aged 15 years or less, compared to one-fifth of the non-Indigenous population.

Life expectancy is a broad indicator of a population's long-term health and wellbeing. In 2010–11, the life expectancy for Indigenous males was estimated to be 69.1 years, which is 10.6 years less than for non-Indigenous males. For Indigenous women it was 73.7 years, some 9.7 years below non-Indigenous women. In 2011, fewer than 4 per cent of Indigenous people were 65 years or over, compared to 14 per cent of non-Indigenous people. There has been a slight improvement in recent years, but the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is still unacceptably low compared with that of other Australians.

Health

A health survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in 2012–13 revealed that:

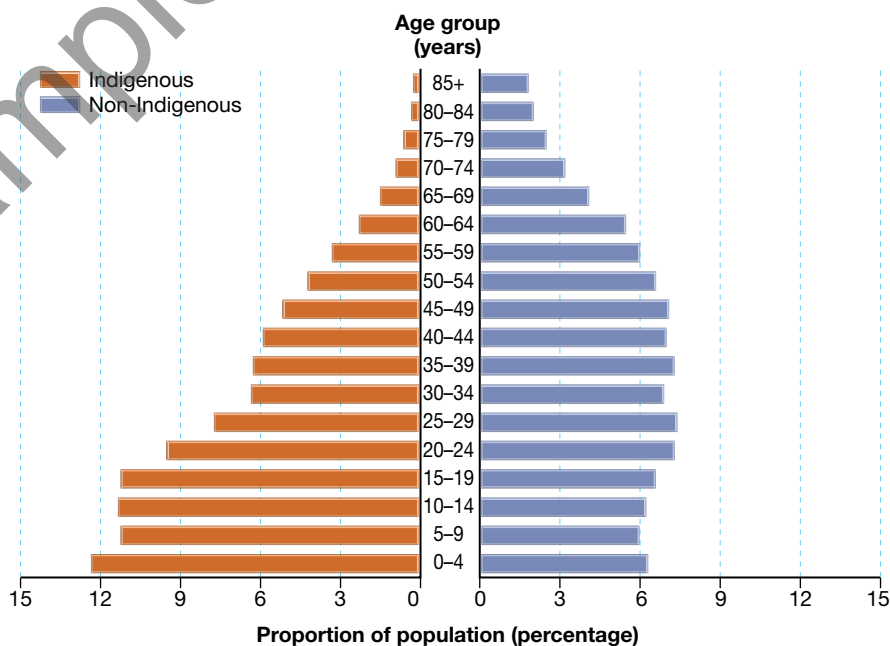
- ▶ one in six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had asthma (twice as high in remote areas)
- ▶ one in eight reported diseases of the ear and/or hearing problems
- ▶ one in eight had heart disease
- ▶ they were three times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to have diabetes.

Education

There is a significant number of Indigenous students who are failing basic literacy and numeracy tests, and a large gap is evident between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes, particularly at higher levels of attainment. Gaining an educational qualification provides broader life prospects for young people. In 2011, only 44 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population aged 15–64 had attained Year 12 or Certificate Level II or above, nearly 30 per cent less than the non-Indigenous rate of 73 per cent.

Impact of remoteness

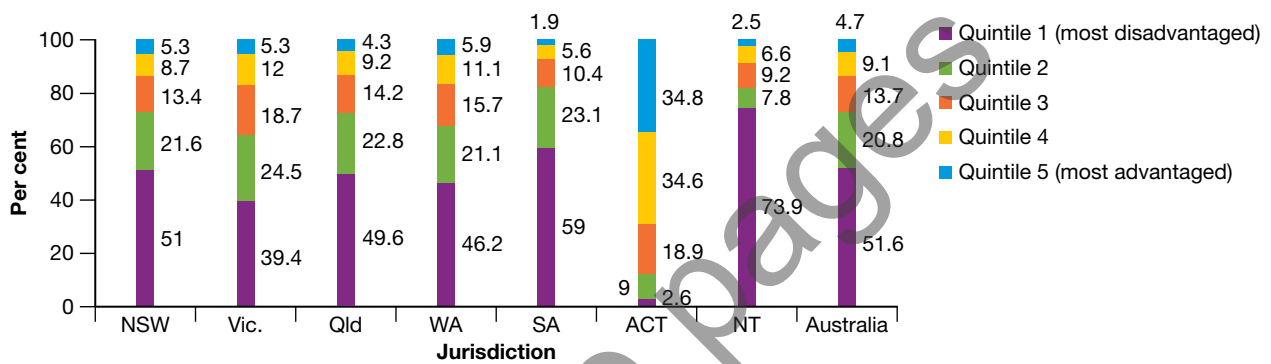
As Table 9.4.2 illustrates, disadvantages tend to increase in more remote areas. Indigenous people in all remote and very remote areas are comparatively disadvantaged across each of the measures of education, employment and income. A rate ratio compares the rates of disadvantage in two groups that differ by demographic characteristics or exposure history. Figure 9.4.3 shows the variations in the levels of wellbeing by state/territory. The spatial distribution of the most advantaged and disadvantaged regions in Australia is shown in Figure 9.4.4



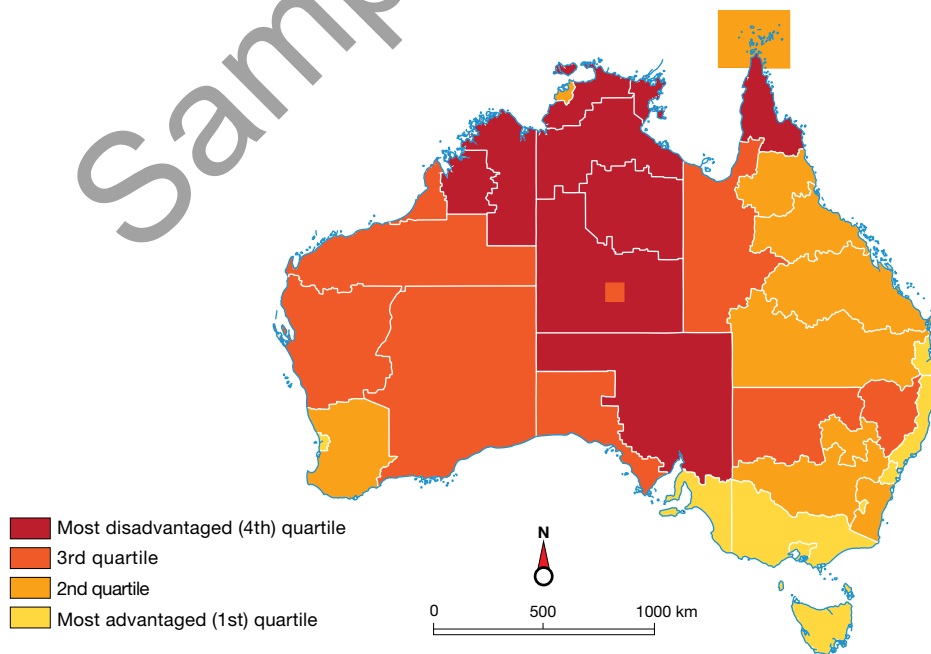
9.4.1 Population pyramid of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations

9.4.2 Life expectancies at birth of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, by remoteness areas, 2010–12

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (years)	Non-Indigenous (years)	Total	Difference between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy at birth (years)
Males				
Major cities and inner regional	68.0	79.9	79.7	11.9
Outer regional, remote and very remote	67.3	78.5	77.4	11.2
Females				
Major cities and inner regional	73.1	83.0	82.8	9.9
Outer regional, remote and very remote	72.3	82.5	81.5	10.2
Differences between males and females				
Major cities and inner regional	-5.1	-3.1	-3.1	
Outer regional, remote and very remote	-5.0	-3.9	-4.1	



9.4.3 Population distribution by advantage/disadvantage, Indigenous population by state/territory and total population



9.4.4 Disadvantage/advantage across Australia. The most disadvantaged parts of Australia are in remote areas.



9.4.5 Aboriginal children at a remote school

Recognising the disadvantage

The level of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians increases with the degree of geographic remoteness. Overcoming such disadvantage is regarded as a national priority by the Australian government. The issues are often complex, however, and will require governments to work with Indigenous communities rather than simply impose what outsiders consider to be the most appropriate response.

Isolation compounds the multiple disadvantages suffered by remote communities. The people are often welfare-dependent and there are serious social issues associated with drug and alcohol abuse and gambling.

Educational outcomes

Indigenous schools—those with more than 75 per cent Indigenous enrolments—have the highest educational failure rates in Australia. Some 20 000 students are enrolled in such schools, which are located mainly in bush communities on Indigenous land where there is no private-sector economic activity and no real jobs. As a result, the inhabitants are totally dependent on welfare. These schools typically have failure rates of more than 90 per cent and many students do not attend school regularly. In the few schools where specific programs have been put in place to get students to school, and students make progress from day to day and from week to week, attendance booms.

Education in remote communities

Improving educational outcomes is the key to overcoming disadvantage. Acquiring literacy and numeracy skills improves employment prospects. Breaking away from welfare dependency and gaining meaningful work transforms lives and flows on to better health and living conditions. This can only be achieved if children are able to attend a school. Some live so far away from existing schools that it would not even be possible to get there in a day. Those living in the remotest areas suffer the greatest disadvantage and ways must be found to address the situation.

Getting students to attend schools regularly is difficult in communities where parents do not value education. It is of the utmost importance that school attendance is effectively promoted.

The success of a school is closely tied to the quality of the teachers. Good teachers must be provided with incentives such as public housing to remain in remote communities, where they are desperately needed.

Reconnecting with Country

Traditional lands are deeply significant to Indigenous Australians, and those who have lost their connection to it have suffered the most. The barriers that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from living on their Country according to their culture need be removed.

Spotlight

Remote community of Yuendumu

With a population of 800 people, Yuendumu is one of the largest Aboriginal communities in central Australia. As it sits on the edge of the Tanami Desert and is some 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, the community has faced all the problems associated with remoteness. Isolation, idleness and boredom have led to violence and alcohol and substance abuse, especially among young people.

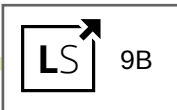
The community faced a crisis in 1993 when half of the teenage population had taken to petrol sniffing and roaming the street in gangs at night. As a response to the crisis, these young people were taken from Yuendumu to a safe environment at Mount Theo, a remote outstation 160 kilometres away and over 50 kilometres from the closest road, so they could not run away. Here they were looked after by the Warlpiri tribal elders, while their bodies detoxified and recovered from petrol sniffing.

While at Mount Theo, the young people reconnected to their traditional Country and its culture with trips to significant sites. There was a mix of recreational and cultural activities, and they were taught how to hunt and track animals, cook traditional food, paint and make their own fires. It was a safe and supportive environment for them to discuss and deal with their problems. The program successfully stopped petrol sniffing in the community.



9.4.6 Founders of the Mount Theo program, Johnny Miller OAM (right) and Peggy Brown OAM (left), who set up an outstation as a place of respite for petrol sniffers in 1993

Activities



Remembering and understanding

- 1 Why is it important to measure disadvantage?
- 2 Compare the life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.
- 3 Describe the health of Indigenous Australians.
- 4 Describe the effect of remoteness on the levels of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians.
- 5 Explain why education is important.
- 6 With reference to the Mount Theo program, assess the importance of connection to Country in overcoming disadvantage.
- 7 Study Figure 9.4.1 and do the following tasks.
 - a Compare the percentages of the Indigenous population in the 0–9 years cohort with the percentage of non-Indigenous Australians.
 - b Compare the percentage of the Indigenous population above 65 years with the percentage of non-Indigenous Australians.
- 8 Study Figure 9.4.3 and answer the following questions.
 - a Which state/territory has the lowest percentage of Indigenous Australians

classified as 'most disadvantaged'? Suggest possible reasons for this.

- b Which state/territory has the highest proportion of the Indigenous population classified as 'most disadvantaged'?

Applying and analysing

- 9 Consider the distribution of the Indigenous population throughout Australia. Do you think that efforts to improve the quality of life of Indigenous Australians should be directed to remote areas? Justify your decision.
- 10 Study Figure 9.4.4 and do the following tasks.
 - a List all state and territories from the most advantaged to the most disadvantaged.
 - b What are the most advantaged areas in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia? Can you provide reasons for this distribution?

Evaluating and creating

- 11 Research how the young people of Yuendumu are currently being supported. Present your findings in an annotated visual display. Include a location map of Yuendumu.

9.5 Initiatives to close the gap

Challenges and targets

‘Closing the gap’ was an initiative and commitment to overcome the inequality in human wellbeing that exists between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

In 2008, all governments committed to six targets set by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). These are listed in Figure 9.5.1. Over time, a strategic framework has been developed to tackle the underlying causes of Indigenous disadvantage. Comprehensive strategies and policies will need to be sustained for a long time given the enormity of the challenge. Each of the targets is measurable and closely monitored to determine if progress is being made. Results are published annually by the Australian government in the Closing the Gap reports.

Success

The progress of ‘closing the gap’ targets have been mixed—some have stagnated and some have gone backwards. One of the few targets currently on track was the goal to halve the gap in Year 12 graduation rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students.

Indigenous efforts

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have called for a treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and official recognition of Indigenous people in the Australian Constitution. The recommendations were outlined in the Referendum Council Final Report, 2017. The belief is that constitutional recognition will be the first part of the process to overcome the inequality in human wellbeing that exists between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Uluru Statement was written by Indigenous people outlining a proposal for constitutional reform and was presented to Parliament and the Prime Minister. The statement proposes that a constitutionally enshrined First Nations representative body be established to advise Parliament on policies that affect Indigenous peoples. In addition, the statement wants Australia to commit to a process of truth-telling in regards to its colonial history.

The statement calling for constitutional reform would require a referendum to change the Australian constitution. Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are working together to ensure the plan is implemented.

9.5.1 Closing the Gap targets

Close the life expectancy gap within a generation (by 2031)



Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (by 2018)



Ensure that all Indigenous 4-year-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within 5 years (by 2013)



Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018)



Halve the gap for Indigenous people aged 20–24 in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020)



Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018)



Spotlight

Uluru Statement From the Heart

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60 000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.

It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Explain why the Closing the Gap program was initiated.
- 2 Account for the government choosing 'getting children to school' as its first priority.
- 3 Summarise the aims of the Uluru Statement From the Heart.

Evaluating and creating

- 4 Research the strategies used by the Australian government to improve the school attendance of Indigenous students. Present your findings in a newspaper report.
- 5 Research the Referendum Council report and prepare a short report. In your report include the following information:
 - a outline the main aims
 - b update the status of Indigenous recognition in the constitution and a treaty.

9.6 Role of NGOs

Non-government organisations

While governments have an important leadership role in addressing disadvantage, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also very active in helping to build better lives for disadvantaged Australians. In many instances, they work closely with people to build on and strengthen the network of relationships and the resources of local communities.

NGOs are able to raise funds from donations or subscriptions, and this money is put to use in supporting initiatives to enhance the wellbeing of Australians. There are many Australian NGOs that are very committed to working with disadvantaged Australians.

Smith Family

The Smith Family is an NGO that focuses on improving the wellbeing of children in Australia. The Smith Family now focuses on education, believing that the best way to break the cycle of disadvantage is via education. They aim for Australian children to get the most out of their education, so they can create better futures for themselves, and for future generations.

NGOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

NGOs have a significant role to play so that the life opportunities of Indigenous Australians are comparable to those of non-Indigenous Australians. By their very nature, people who work or volunteer in NGOs display a genuine desire to make a difference in the lives of others.

Global NGOs often become involved in widely publicised issues. The situation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has drawn international attention. Amnesty International has been vocal in campaigning to protect the human rights of Indigenous Australians, especially the maintenance of their connection with their traditional, ancestral lands.

Many Australian NGOs are very committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Anglicare NT

Anglicare NT is one of the largest providers of welfare, social justice and community-development programs in the Northern Territory. Over 400 staff and 250 volunteers implement around 80 different programs in urban, rural, regional and remote Northern Territory communities.

Intensive Youth Support Service

The Intensive Youth Support Service (IYSS) is a responsive and flexible service that provides support for vulnerable,

high-risk young people and their families in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin. The intensive supports aim to improve the opportunities and outcomes for young people, and ensure they have limited or no further involvement with the child protection system.

Youth Housing Options and Pathways Program

The Youth Housing Options and Pathways Program (YHOPP) provides accommodation and case management to 15–19 year olds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Youth Diversion Program

The Youth Diversion Program supports young people in Gunbalanya and Jabiru through the diversion process using restorative justice principles, including diversionary activities, reintegration support, victim/offender meetings and opportunities for remediation. Young people, families, local elders and community organisations work together to develop diversionary plans that engage young people with meaningful activities and contribute constructively to the local community.

ReConnect

ReConnect is an early intervention youth homelessness program offered in Darwin, Palmerston and rural areas as well as East Arnhem. It supports young people to build positive relationships with family and community.

Pandanus Childbirth Education and Perinatal Support Program

The Pandanus Program is a free and confidential service for young pregnant women and young parents under 25 years wanting pre- and post-natal support and education. The program aims to increase awareness of healthy relationships and enable young people to build support networks.



9.6.1 Pandanus Childbirth Education and Perinatal Support Program, an Anglicare NT service



9.6.2 An ophthalmologist screens a man for diabetic retinopathy

The Fred Hollows Foundation

The Fred Hollows Foundation is inspired by the work of the late Professor Fred Hollows (1929–93). When he became aware of the high incidence of eye disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adults, Professor Hollows organised the provision of medical services to treat people in remote areas.

Fred Hollows inspired many doctors and other health professionals to volunteer their time for the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program. From 1976 to 1978, his teams visited 465 communities and screened 100 000 people, of whom 62 000 were Indigenous Australians. They found that nearly half Australia's Indigenous population had trachoma, an infectious disease that causes blindness. In some regions in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, the trachoma rate was 80 per cent. Approximately 27 000 people were treated for trachoma, more than 1000 operations were performed and more than 7000 pairs of glasses were dispensed.

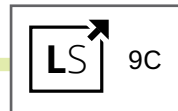
The Foundation was established in 1992. It continues to work to achieve Professor Hollows's vision of a world in which no one is needlessly blind and Indigenous Australians exercise their right to good health.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are six times more likely to go blind, but 94 per cent of vision loss is preventable or treatable. The Foundation's program in Australia focuses on education, screening and treatment to put an end to these alarming figures.

The Foundation supports increased investment in, and access to, culturally appropriate eye care services for remote and under-served Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Since 2013, the Foundation has been working with governments and partners to screen more than 26 000 Indigenous Australians and support 3175 eye operations and treatments, including sight-restoring cataract surgery and treatment for diabetic retinopathy (see Figure 9.6.2). The Foundation has also supported the training of 452 doctors, nurses, and community health workers and leaders.

Activities



Remembering and understanding

- 1 Describe how NGOs are active in addressing Indigenous disadvantage.
- 2 Outline the services provided by Anglicare NT.
- 3 Assess the work of the Fred Hollows Foundation.

Evaluating and creating

- 4 Select an NGO that works with Indigenous people. Research this NGO and create a pamphlet to promote the NGO and encourage people to donate to it.