



about Australia

Indigenous programs: education, health and housing

- Over the past decade, the Australian Government has focused on achieving practical outcomes for Indigenous Australians in the key areas of education, health and housing. The government firmly believes that a practical focus on these areas is the best way of addressing the inequalities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Education

The Australian Government has committed to halving the gap in literacy and numeracy outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade. Education and training are essential to reduce Indigenous disadvantage.

The Australian Government is encouraging greater Indigenous participation and retention in all levels of education, particularly preschool education. To close the gaps in education and training access, attendance and educational outcomes, the government is working with Indigenous families and communities. Practical targets measure the effectiveness of strategies and initiatives to address Indigenous educational disadvantage.

Federal Indigenous education programs are designed to complement existing state and territory programs and aim to improve Indigenous students' access to and participation in the education system. Their main elements are:

- supplementary recurrent assistance payments to education and training providers for Indigenous students on a per capita basis

- a scheme that gives supplementary tuition to Indigenous students at crucial stages of their schooling through in-class and after-hours assistance
- innovative projects that engage with Indigenous parents and communities to improve attendance, literacy, numeracy and year 12 completion rates.

Indigenous education awards

Under a joint initiative of the Australian Government and the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, the Dare to Lead Excellence in Leadership in Indigenous Education Awards have been presented annually since 2004. The awards recognise teachers and schools that demonstrate high levels of effective leadership, Indigenous community involvement and improvements in targeted outcomes.

More culturally inclusive schooling

Although the Australian Government recognises there is still a long way to go to increase the education levels of Indigenous

Australians, progress has been encouraging. Between 2001 and 2006, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school enrolments increased by 21.6 per cent. As a proportion of the total school population, this represented an increase from 3.5 per cent in 2001 to 4.2 per cent in 2006.

Indigenous participation was highest for the primary student population during this period: Indigenous students comprised 4.7 per cent of the primary student population, compared with 3.4 per cent of the secondary student population in 2006.

In 2006, the proportion of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over who had completed their schooling at the end of year 12 was 23 per cent, compared with 20 per cent in 2001. The proportion completing schooling at years 10/11 also increased—43 per cent in 2006 compared with 41 per cent in 2001. There was a commensurate reduction in the proportion completing schooling at year 9 or below (from 39 per cent in 2001 to 34 per cent in 2006).

The number of Indigenous students participating in vocational education and training has grown steadily in recent years, as indicated by the proportion of Indigenous people with a non-school qualification. This increased from 20 per cent in 2001 to 26 per cent in 2006.

Indigenous students numbers in higher education remained steady in 2006, at about 7100. The proportion of the Indigenous population with a bachelor degree or higher increased slightly from 4 per cent in 2001 to 5 per cent in 2006.

Health

Australia has one of the most inclusive and affordable health systems in the world.

However, the health status of Australia's Indigenous population remains worse than that of any other sector of Australian society.

The main focus of the National Strategic Framework on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, a 10-year framework introduced in 2003, is to provide better access to primary healthcare services. These services offer coordinated clinical care and population health programs to help prevent illness and encourage early intervention. The strategy aims also to maximise the responsiveness of mainstream health services to the needs of Indigenous Australians.

Programs are funded by federal, state and territory governments and implemented in partnership with Indigenous communities. By 2006–07, federal government spending on Indigenous-specific health services was \$371 million. This spending, combined with other investments in areas such as environmental health infrastructure, housing and education, provides the best opportunity to improve the health status of Indigenous people in Australia.

While there is still a long way to go, some improvements are apparent. There has been a significant decline in Indigenous infant mortality, for example, with a reduction in the order of 50 per cent during the period 1991–2005.

Housing

The Australian Government is committed to providing \$1.6 billion over four years (2007–08 to 2010–11) for the delivery of Indigenous housing and infrastructure. These funds will be used to address overcrowding, homelessness and other housing needs among Indigenous people across Australia. They will provide for the construction of new

houses, upgrade of existing houses and the opportunity for Indigenous people to enter home ownership.

Currently Indigenous housing and infrastructure funds of \$380 million per year are delivered through the states and territories under the Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Agreements. Opportunities for training and employment of local Indigenous people will be developed in the delivery of housing.

Northern Territory Emergency Response

In June 2007, in response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report, the Australian Government announced a set of national emergency measures to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory from abuse.

These measures—which involve a combination of welfare reform, the deployment of specially trained army details, additional police and medical officers and special infrastructure projects—are currently in force. They are designed to protect children, stabilise communities, normalise services and infrastructure, and provide longer-term support to build for the future.

Under this program, \$83 million in additional funding has been provided in 2006–07 for conducting voluntary health checks on children under 16 years of age in the affected communities and town camps, as well as for any necessary follow-up treatment. An additional \$100 million will be provided over 2008–09 and 2009–10 for more doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and a remote area health workforce agency to improve primary health care for Indigenous children and their families.

In addition to current funding, \$793 million has been provided to upgrade existing houses, build new ones, and create training and employment opportunities.

Another key aspect of the intervention is the phasing out of Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) programs in the affected areas. CDEP participants will be assisted in moving from the programs into work or mainstream income support.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all dollar amounts are in Australian dollars.

Further information

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

www.deewr.gov.au

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

www.fahcsia.gov.au

Department of Health and Ageing

www.health.gov.au

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Western Australia coastline.

