



Increasing the participation of Indigenous and homeless electors (chapter 6)

KEY POINTS:

- Indigenous and homeless electors can face particular challenges in engaging with the electoral system.
- The committee welcomes the Australian Government's commitment in the 2009-10 Budget to allocate \$13 million over four years for an Indigenous Electoral Education Program to improve Indigenous participation in the electoral system. **(see page 158)**
- The committee has made a number of recommendations aimed at raising participation amongst Indigenous electors including:
 - the Australian Government provide ongoing and appropriate funding for the re-introduction of a specific program modelled on the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service (ATSIEIS) program, which was abolished in 1996. **(recommendation 17) (see page 157)**
 - that more flexible arrangements for mobile polling at town camps be permitted. **(recommendation 18) (see page 157).**
- The committee has made several recommendations to increase participation by homeless electors including:
 - facilitating enrolment of homeless electors by creating a specific class of elector modelled on provisions applying in Victoria. **(recommendation 19) (see page 171)**
 - facilitating voting by allowing for mobile polling to take place at locations where there is likely to be sufficient demand such as homeless shelters. **(recommendation 20) (see page 172).**

BACKGROUND:

- **Indigenous** Australians gained the right to vote in 1962, but data indicates that significant numbers do not actively participate, and turnout is much lower than the national average – 77% turnout in remote areas, compared to 95% voter turnout across Australia **(see page 148)**
- Prior to 1996, the ATSIEIS program operated specifically to engage Indigenous Australians in the electoral system. Since the abolition of the program in 1996, participation in electorates where a high proportion of the population is Indigenous

remains well below the national average in many of these electorates, with declining participation in a number of these divisions (table below).

Table Voter turnout, selected divisions, House of Representatives, 1993 to 2007 elections (per cent)

Division	Share Indigenous population	1993	1996	1998	2001	2004	2007
Kalgoorlie	18.3%	89.7	88.8	87.0	86.8	83.5	84.6
Leichhardt	15.8%	93.4	92.3	92.0	92.1	91.2	92.6
Kennedy	12.5%	93.9	93.7	93.2	93.4	92.6	93.4
Parkes	11.3%	95.6	95.9	94.9	95.6	95.7	95.9
Calare	8.2%	96.9	96.8	96.2	96.2	95.7	95.8
Herbert	6.9%	95.6	94.1	94.7	95.2	93.8	94.1
New England	6.5%	96.6	96.1	95.2	96.0	95.4	95.9
Grey	6.4%	94.6	95.0	94.6	94.6	94.2	95.0
NT (Lingiari+Solomon 2001 onwards)	27.6%	88.8	89.1	90.3	86.1	84.3	86.5
National average	2.3%	95.8	95.8	95.0	94.9	94.3	94.8

See page 155.

- **Homeless** electors face particular barriers as they move between accommodation service providers or other places of residence. PILCH estimated that 64,000 homeless 'voter eligible' people did not vote in the 2007 federal election, while a survey by Hanover Welfare Services estimated that only 57% of its clients actually voted. Of those who did not vote, 60% were not enrolled. **(see page 161)**
- Itinerant voting provisions of the Commonwealth Electoral Act do not provide sufficient flexibility to facilitate the enrolment of many homeless electors. Including a definition of homelessness within the Act, as adopted in Victorian electoral legislation, will facilitate the enrolment of electors who otherwise find it difficult to enrol and maintain their enrolment under the itinerant enrolment provisions. **(see page 164)**
- The adoption of mobile polling facilities at homeless shelters as used at the recent Victorian state election would provide further engagement opportunities for homeless people. **(see pages 169–172)**

For media comment: please contact the Committee Chair, Daryl Melham, on (02) 6277 2054 (Parliament House Office).

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