

Walgett key points

This report provides information about Walgett's strengths, challenges confronting the community, as well as government and non-government services in Walgett. The information was largely collected during 2009, but often relates to earlier points in time (in particular, the census data is from 2006).

This section of the report provides a summary of key topics identified about Walgett. It begins by providing background information about the community. This is followed by strengths in the community. Next are the challenges confronting the community, and consideration of issues with service provision in the community. Finally, a list of recent investments in the community is provided.

Background community information

People

- The population of Walgett (including Namoi Village and Gingie Reserve) in 2006 was estimated to be 2,257 people, of whom 1,220 were Indigenous.
- Around 60 per cent of this Indigenous population were of working age (15 to 64 years).
- The Aboriginal people of Walgett are mostly from the Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay, and Ngayiimbaa nations.

Population projections

- The Indigenous population of Walgett is projected to grow by 43 per cent from 1,220 in 2006 to 1,748 in 2026.
- The number of Indigenous people aged under 20 is predicted to increase from 571 to 681 over this period (an increase of 19%).
- The changing size and age composition of the Indigenous population of Walgett will increase the need for housing, employment opportunities, and particularly aged care and health services.

Geography

- Walgett is located in central north New South Wales, at the junction of the Namoi and Barwon rivers. It is nine hours' drive north-west of Sydney, three hours north of Dubbo, and 1.5 hours south of the Queensland border.

Community strengths

Culture and capacity

- Cultural studies are taught at Walgett Community College, integrated into units of work, and supported by elders and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.
- The Dharriwaa Elders Group provides support and advocacy services for elders and to preserve and promote culture and heritage.
- The Young Leaders Program is funded for three years to all Murdi Paaki communities and is administered by the Aboriginal Affairs NSW regional office.
- A Circle Sentencing Program, an alternative sentencing process that involves the offender's community, is available to the court in Walgett.

Schooling

- Both Walgett Community College and St Joseph's Primary School receive the staff they are entitled to under the allocation formula. In addition, Walgett Community College receives a significant number of additional staff (including specialist staff) through various agreements and programs.
- Both schools have strong cultural programs including local language.
- The Community College appears to be making headway with increasing attendance and decreasing suspension rates.
- The school has specialist behavioural disorder and mild intellectual disability classes.
- St Joseph's initiatives in reading are regarded positively, and the Restorative Justice program is showing promise.
- At both primary schools a high proportion of students in Years 3 and 5 took part in NAPLAN testing in 2009. Results were largely above those of statistically similar schools, although significantly lower than the national average.
- However, a low proportion of Walgett College's secondary students took part in NAPLAN testing in 2009, and performed poorly compared to statistically similar schools, with few achieving the national minimum standard.

Municipal and emergency services

- Walgett has municipal and essential services which meet the current needs of the town, and are well maintained. Services are of approximately the same standard as provided in the comparison community (Nyngan).
- Walgett residents also have access to emergency services comparable to Nyngan and standards across NSW, and emergency calls are responded to in a timely manner.

Crime and justice

- The number of offences in Walgett recorded by police shows a downward trend over the last five financial years, and between 2004–05 and 2008–09 has decreased by 16 per cent.
- The number of offences recorded as acts intended to cause injury has fallen every financial year, and in 2008–09 was 42 per cent lower than in 2004–05. However, over the same period, public order offences have increased by 68 per cent. Sixty-six per cent of public order offences over 2004–05 to 2008–09 were alcohol-related.

Challenges

Disengaged youth

- Attainment of either Year 12 or Certificate II or higher post-school qualifications by Indigenous 20- to 24-year-olds in Walgett was 38 per cent in 2006, well below the national Indigenous attainment rate of 47 per cent.
- Secondary school attendance for 2008 at Walgett Community College was low, at 67 per cent compared to 89 per cent for NSW as a whole.
- The engagement of Indigenous 15- to 24-year-olds in full-time employment or study (27%) was also low compared to the statewide Indigenous rate (47%).

- Between July 2004 and June 2009, 199 juvenile community-based orders were commenced for Indigenous young offenders resident in Walgett.

Employment

- Even when Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) participants are included as employed, the percentage of Indigenous people aged 15 to 64 in Walgett who were employed (the employment rate) in 2006 was relatively low (36%).
- Walgett's 2006 Indigenous unemployment rate (23%) was significantly higher than the national Indigenous rate (15%).

Alcohol issues

- For alcohol-related conditions, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations for Indigenous Australians in the Walgett statistical local area (SLA) was more than 15 times the national average (2003–04 to 2007–08).
- Alcohol-related offences made up over a third (37%) of all recorded offences in Walgett from 2004–05 to 2008–09.
- In 2009, Walgett had the second highest rate of assault related to domestic violence of all local government areas in NSW.
- Alcohol was identified as a factor in 71 per cent of all domestic violence offences (2004–05 to 2008–09).

Health

- For mental and behavioural disorders, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations for Indigenous Australians in the Walgett SLA was nearly four times the national average (2003–04 to 2007–08).
- After adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations relating to assault for Indigenous Australians in the Walgett SLA was 16 times the national average.
- For diabetes, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations for Indigenous Australians in the Walgett SLA was four times the national average.
- After adjusting for age differences, the rate of Indigenous hospital separations for total ambulatory care sensitive conditions for residents of the Walgett SLA was four times the national rate. Ambulatory care sensitive conditions are those that could be addressed by better access to primary health care and conditions that relate to avoidable chronic diseases.
- Over the five-year period 2003–04 to 2007–08, Indigenous persons residing in the Walgett SLA were hospitalised for preventable acute conditions at a rate more than four times the rate for New South Wales as a whole.

Healthy homes

- In 2006, 19 per cent of Indigenous households in Walgett experienced overcrowding.
- For diseases associated with poor environmental health, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of Indigenous hospital separations in the Walgett SLA was more than three times the national average.

Early childhood

- The proportion of Indigenous children in the Walgett local government area (LGA) considered developmentally vulnerable in the languages and cognitive skills domain of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in 2009 was 16 per cent. This compares to a rate for all Australian Indigenous children of 29 per cent, and for non-Indigenous children in Australia of 8 per cent.
- The Indigenous age-specific fertility rate for mothers aged 15–19 in the Walgett SLA (130.8 per 1,000 women) was more than three times the non-Indigenous rate in Walgett (40.0), and nearly eight times the national average (2003 to 2007).
- The Indigenous rate of low birthweight babies in the Walgett SLA (126.7 per 1,000 live babies) was nearly twice the non-Indigenous rate in the Walgett SLA (73.4), and two and a half times the national average (47.8) (2003 to 2007).

Potential issues with service delivery

Staff accommodation

- Rental accommodation is very scarce in Walgett. Current housing stock varies in quality, with some buildings falling into disrepair.
- Housing stock needs to be increased and/or significantly upgraded to meet the expectations of potential employees.

Municipal services in associated communities

- Both Gingie Reserve and Namoi Village are located close enough to Walgett that residents can access many of the amenities and services available in the town. However, the water supply at Gingie Reserve is a major issue, as bore water is generally not suitable for drinking or cooking, and the rainwater tank supply is not sufficient for prolonged drought conditions. Similarly water pressure to Namoi Village is inadequate.
- The sewerage systems in both Gingie Reserve and Namoi Village require maintenance work, and neither waste management system meets base level standards.
- Since the audit of these services was undertaken it is worth noting that, as part of a \$51.7 million funding program by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (announced on 23 April 2010), \$4.2 million has been allocated to Walgett for a filtered water upgrade project to improve capacity and relieve pressure problems with raw water supply to Namoi Village. This funding also covers a project to upgrade Walgett's sewage treatment plant and to install pumps to pump sewage from Namoi Village to Walgett for treatment.

Health services

- Walgett has a district hospital and an Aboriginal medical centre.
- The hospital has only one midwife, which is not sufficient to meet current need, particularly in cases of high-risk pregnancy.
- There are currently unfilled staffing positions including a family and child health registered nurse position and a diabetes educator.
- The medical centre clinic buildings are only a few years old and already have structural damage due to movement in concrete base slabs.

Transport

- Public transport to access major centres is a problem for residents. The daily bus service to Dubbo is costly if residents are not eligible for subsidised fares.
- A twice-daily air service to Walgett ceased approximately 18 months ago, which has impacted the community significantly. The Medical Service is currently using fortnightly charters of small aircraft, to support visiting specialist services, without specific funding for air transport.

Significant new investments

Children and Family Centre

- A Children and Family Centre will be established in Walgett through the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development.
- It is intended that the centre will bring together important services for children and families, including childcare, early learning, parent and family support programs.
- The centre is expected to connect with other services in the community to ensure families can easily access the services they need, for example, maternal and child health services, playgroups or family literacy programs.

Investments in education

- Under the Building the Education Revolution program, Walgett Community College, St Joseph's Primary School, and the Walgett TAFE campus will benefit from several construction, refurbishment and updating projects collectively worth over \$4.7 million.
- Walgett Community College is participating in the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership, and St Joseph's Primary School is expected to benefit from both the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, and the Smarter Schools—Literacy and Numeracy national partnerships.

Investments in infrastructure

- Several roads in the Walgett area will be improved under the Roads to Recovery program, with Commonwealth funding of \$935,000 in 2009–10.

Investments in water and wastewater services

- As noted earlier, as part of a \$51.7 million funding program, \$4.2 million has been allocated to Walgett for a filtered water upgrade project to improve capacity and relieve pressure problems with raw water supply to Namoi Village. This funding also covers a project to upgrade Walgett's sewage treatment plant and to install pumps to pump sewage from Namoi Village to Walgett for treatment.

National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing

- Under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, two new dwellings have been proposed for construction in Walgett during 2010–11.
- Over the coming years, the National Partnership Agreement will provide funding for further housing in remote Indigenous communities through a process of competitive bids. From 1 July 2010, state governments will submit proposals for new dwellings, refurbishment activity and employment-related accommodation for their communities.

Wilcannia key points

This report provides information about Wilcannia's strengths, challenges confronting the community, as well as government and non-government services in Wilcannia. The information was largely collected during 2009, but often relates to earlier points in time (in particular, the census data is from 2006).

This section of the report provides a summary of key topics identified about Wilcannia. It begins by providing background information about the community. This is followed by strengths in the community. Next are the challenges confronting the community, and consideration of issues with service provision in the community. Finally, a list of recent investments in the community is provided.

Background community information

People

- The population of Wilcannia (including Warrali Mission and Mallee Mission) in 2006 was estimated to be 628 people, of whom 453 were Indigenous.
- Nearly half of Wilcannia's Indigenous residents are aged under 20 years, while people aged 50 years or more make up 13 per cent of Wilcannia's Indigenous population (compared to 31 per cent of the total Australian population).

Population projections

- The Indigenous population of Wilcannia is projected to grow by 41 per cent from 453 in 2006 to 637 in 2026.
- The number of Indigenous people aged under 20 is predicted to increase from 212 to 241 over this period (an increase of 14%).
- The changing size and age composition of the Indigenous population of Wilcannia will increase the need for housing, employment opportunities, and particularly aged care and health services.

Geography

- Wilcannia is located on the banks of the Darling River, 965 km from Sydney.
- Wilcannia township is located on the traditional country of the Paakantji (Barkandji) people.

Community strengths

Language and culture

- Cultural studies, including a Barkandji language revival program, are taught at the Wilcannia Central School.
- The construction of an arts and cultural centre is underway.

Policing

- There is a permanent police presence in Wilcannia that provides support services to victims of domestic violence.
- The relationship between the community and the police has been identified as strong.

Accessibility

- There is year-round access to Wilcannia via sealed roads.
- An airstrip is available for emergency medical evacuations.

- The successful trial of a subsidised community bus has improved Wilcannia's access to Broken Hill.

School-based initiatives

- Individual Learning Plans have been implemented at St Therese's Community School. This appears to be working well and having a positive impact on learning and development for children.
- The Primary Literacy Groups at Wilcannia Central School have been identified as effective, and the physical education program has been successful in fostering engagement with boys in the school.
- There is an identified need to build on existing strengths by encouraging a strong community presence within the schools and increasing the amount of support and input the schools receive from the community.

Challenges

Employment

- The percentage of Indigenous people aged 15 to 64 in Wilcannia who were employed (the employment rate) was 39 per cent in 2006. This compared to an Indigenous rate in NSW of 45 per cent and a total national rate of 71 per cent.
- When Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) were not included as employment, the Indigenous employment rate in Wilcannia was 30 per cent in 2006.
- The median personal weekly incomes for Indigenous people aged over 15 in Wilcannia was \$228 in 2006, compared to the Indigenous NSW median of \$296.

Disengaged youth

- There were no Indigenous 20- to 24-year-olds in Wilcannia who had attained either Year 12 or Certificate II or higher post-school qualifications in 2006. This compared to the national Indigenous attainment rate of 47 per cent, and the total national rate of 83 per cent.
- The average attendance rate for junior secondary students in 2009 at Wilcannia Central School was relatively low at 56 per cent, compared to 89 per cent for NSW as a whole.
- In 2006 the engagement rate of Indigenous 15- to 24-year-olds in full-time employment or study (15%) was around one third that of the New South Wales Indigenous rate (47%).
- Between July 2004 and June 2009, 88 juvenile community-based orders were commenced for young offenders resident in Wilcannia.

NAPLAN results

- Participation in NAPLAN testing at Wilcannia Central School was low for Years 3, 5 and 9. Participation for these years ranged from 22 per cent for Year 9 numeracy testing, to 85 per cent for Year 7 reading, writing, spelling, and grammar and punctuation.
- The large majority of students who were tested did not meet the national minimum standards.

Alcohol issues

- Wilcannia has restrictions on the sale of full-strength alcohol. This has been identified by police as an effective measure in reducing crime incidents.

- For alcohol-related conditions, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations for Indigenous Australians in the Central Darling statistical local area (SLA) (including Wilcannia) was more than 25 times the national average (2003–04 to 2007–08).
- Alcohol-related offences made up over half (57%) of all recorded offences in Wilcannia (2004–05 to 2008–09).
- Alcohol was identified as a factor in 81 per cent of all domestic violence offences (2004–05 to 2008–09).

Health

- In the five-year period from 2003–04 to 2007–08, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations relating to assault for Indigenous Australians in the Central Darling SLA was more than 13 times the national average.
- For mental and behavioural disorders, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations for Indigenous Australians in the Central Darling SLA was nearly five times the national average (2003–04 to 2007–08).
- For diabetes, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of hospital separations for Indigenous Australians in the Central Darling SLA was more than three times the national average (2003–04 to 2007–08).
- After adjusting for age differences, the rate of Indigenous hospital separations for total ambulatory care sensitive conditions for residents of the Central Darling SLA was more than three times the national rate. Ambulatory care sensitive conditions are those that could be addressed by better access to primary health care and conditions that relate to avoidable chronic diseases.
- Over the five-year period 2003–04 to 2007–08, Indigenous persons residing in the Central Darling SLA were hospitalised for preventable acute conditions at a rate nearly three times the rate for New South Wales as a whole.

Healthy homes

- In 2006, 21 per cent of Indigenous households in Wilcannia experienced overcrowding.
- For diseases associated with poor environmental health, after adjusting for age differences, the observed number of Indigenous hospital separations in the Central Darling SLA was more than two-and-a-half times the national average (2003–04 to 2007–08).

Early childhood

- The proportion of Indigenous children in the Far West statistical division (including Wilcannia) considered to be developmentally vulnerable in the languages and cognitive skills domain of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in 2009 was 34 per cent. This compares to a rate for all Australian Indigenous children of 29 per cent, and for non-Indigenous children in Australia of 8 per cent.
- The Indigenous rate of live births to mothers aged 15–19 in the Central Darling SLA (82.5 per 1,000 women) was five times the national rate (16.4) from 2003–2007.
- The Indigenous rate of low-birthweight babies in the Central Darling SLA (133.3 per 1,000 live babies) was nearly three times the national rate (47.8).

Gaps in service provision

Infrastructure and community facilities

- Wilcannia suffers from a shortage of staff accommodation. Housing is scarce and most existing staff housing does not meet the base level standard.
- There is also a shortage of available and adequate housing for the aged, people with disability, single men and young couples.
- Primary deficiencies are the lack of a childcare centre or a public library.

Municipal services

- Recreational facilities are poorly maintained because of tight budgets and limited availability of maintenance staff.
- The electricity supply in Wilcannia is unreliable; this has implications for service provision within the community and the life of electrical goods for residents.

Education

- There is demand for improved infrastructure with an emphasis on early childhood, primary and secondary facilities.
- There is scope for developing young people's engagement with training in the secondary program through the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program.

Employment

- There are limited opportunities for employment in the community.
- There is also an identified need for behavioural change through the prioritisation of youth services programs and promoting leadership among young people.

Youth services

- The short-term nature of available funding is restricting the long-term development of effective programs.
- There is also inadequate coordination between youth services providers.
- Youth services are not effectively attracting and retaining qualified staff.

Health services

- There is an identified need for a resident GP and increased provision of mental health and alcohol and other drug services.
- Increased health education in the community may reduce the high rate of avoidable and preventable illnesses.

Significant new investments

Investments in education

- Under the Building the Education Revolution program, both Wilcannia Central School and St Therese's Community School will benefit from several construction, refurbishment and updating projects collectively worth over \$1.2 million.

- Both these schools are also expected to benefit from the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership.

Investments in water and wastewater services

- As part of a \$51.7 million funding program by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (announced on 23 April 2010), \$2.2 million has been allocated to Wilcannia for various works. These include refurbishment of the water treatment plant, the provision of a cross-connection between raw water supply and bores to increase security of supply, and the relining of water reservoirs. This funding will also provide for an upgrade of the Wilcannia sewage treatment plant, replacement of pumping stations and effluent pumps, and de-sludging of septic tanks in the community.

Investments in infrastructure

- The White Cliffs to Broken Hill Road will be upgraded under the Roads to Recovery program at a cost of approximately \$1 million, shared between the Commonwealth and NSW governments.

National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing

- Under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, three new dwellings have been proposed for construction in Wilcannia during 2010–11.
- Over the coming years, the National Partnership Agreement will provide funding for further housing in remote Indigenous communities through a process of competitive bids. From 1 July 2010, state governments will submit proposals for new dwellings, refurbishment activity and employment-related accommodation for their communities.

