

# Chapter 3

## Overview of data on Indigenous wellbeing

3.1 This chapter will provide a broad overview of selected data on community wellbeing, including in areas of health, education, housing and community infrastructure, juvenile justice, employment and child protection across all states and territories with regional and remote Indigenous populations. The committee thought it useful to illustrate broadly some aspects of the wellbeing of Indigenous populations between both the states and territories in metropolitan and in regional and remote areas within each jurisdiction are being measured and reported.

3.2 According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) there are two main types of data useful for evaluation purposes, these are statistical and administrative collections:

...statistical collections refer to data collected solely for statistical purposes, such as sample surveys and censuses...[and] administrative collections refer to data collected in the process of administering or evaluating a government or community program or service (i.e. the data are a by-product of an administration process).<sup>1</sup>

3.3 The main source of the data used for this report is the ABS' statistical and administrative collections as well as other sources such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

3.4 A comprehensive table listing the range of data available on Indigenous communities was provided to the committee by the ABS and formed the basis of the table that can be found at Appendix 4 of this report.

3.5 As outlined in its first report, the committee uses the most widely accepted geographical definition of remoteness which is the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+). ARIA+ measures the remoteness of a locality based on the physical road distance to the nearest urban centre and classifies localities according to the following definitions:

- major city;
- inner regional;
- outer regional;
- remote; or
- very remote.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 53*, p. [1].

2 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *First report 2008*, September 2008, p. 3.

3.6 The committee also wishes to note that data can be interpreted in many different ways and to suit the purposes of the user. The committee does not consider the data presented here to be a definitive and absolute picture of regional and remote Indigenous communities across the states and territories. Rather the committee intends for the data to present a broad illustration of the status and wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities.

### **Issues with current data collections**

3.7 During the committee's inquiry a number of submissions and witnesses presented evidence to the committee on the need for better and more extensive data collection at both national and state levels.<sup>3</sup> A focus on attaining more accurate and detailed data would assist in the assessment and monitoring of both the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities and the effectiveness of government policies and service delivery.

3.8 The ABS noted the importance of quality data in its submission, stating that:

To assess the impact and effectiveness of government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities, high quality evidence that is comparable over time and across jurisdictions is required. Targets will only provide motivators for improvement if there is data to show whether or not they are being met. Good data also provide the broader evidence base for understanding what interventions might be successful, and in which locations and situations.<sup>4</sup>

3.9 The committee firmly agrees with the ABS that accurate and relevant data must provide the evidence base for informing successful policies and to make progress towards increasing the wellbeing in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

3.10 The National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA) noted that:

Improved knowledge and understanding of data...is important for several reasons. It allows benchmarks to be established against which programs can track progress. It allows goals to be set for improvements and it provides an empirical basis for the development of targeted interventions.<sup>5</sup>

3.11 The committee also notes that the Commonwealth Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, in an address to the National Press Club, highlighted the Commonwealth government's commitment to evidence and evaluation, which the committee agrees requires a commitment to accurate and extensive data collection.

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3 Australian Association of Social Workers, *Submission 4*; National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission, *Submission 40*; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 53*; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 69*.

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 53*, p. [1].

5 National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, *Submission 44*, p. 5.

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Inevitably there will be difficult decisions but all these decisions will be driven by one single criterion - evidence. This is the Government's obsession and we make no excuses for it. It is my abiding fixation and I readily acknowledge it.

All our policy decision-making will be based on a thorough, forensic analysis of all the facts and all the evidence. Once implemented, all programs will be rigorously and regularly evaluated. This is the principle I will impose across my portfolio.

Spending buckets of money and hoping for the best, does not work - a point repeated again by Coroner Hope who says in the Kimberley there have been massive funding allocations with minimal accountability.<sup>6</sup>

3.12 The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) also presented data in its submission to the inquiry which included both administrative and statistical data. The AIHW noted that the availability, representativeness and quality of data on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people in regional and remote areas is insufficient:

Some surveys are limited by the sample size and therefore the level disaggregation possible. Other surveys, ask different questions of people living in remote areas, reducing comparability. For administrative data sets the issues are more related to differences in the completeness of Indigenous identification by remoteness—with people living in remote and very remote areas being more likely to identify as Indigenous than those living in urban areas...Information on area of residence needed to derive remoteness categories is not available for many administrative data sources. For example, the juvenile justice and child protection data sets...cannot be disaggregated by geographical area below a very broad scale. The lack of specific locational information in some health and welfare administrative data sets makes it impossible to present information for Indigenous people by remoteness.<sup>7</sup>

3.13 The ABS in its submission outlined similar concerns to the AIHW.

Increased resources and support, from all levels of government, for improving identification of Indigenous people in administrative datasets is essential for the ABS and others to maintain the momentum for further progress in this area.<sup>8</sup>

3.14 Both the ABS and the AIHW also outlined particular concerns and problems with the collection of administrative data at the committee's Canberra hearing. The AIHW outlined some issues with collecting Indigenous data.

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6 The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Closing the Gap - Building an Indigenous Future*, Speech to the National Press Club, Canberra, 27 February 2008, [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/closing\\_the\\_gap\\_27feb08.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/closing_the_gap_27feb08.htm) (accessed 9 June 2009).

7 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 69*, p. 5.

8 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 53*, p. [8].

Basically our problem with Indigenous data is two-fold. Usually with survey data, sometimes people who are under survey think across regions. They can ask the question in urban areas but they change the question slightly in remote areas, and that makes the data not comparable. Or sometimes they drop a question completely because they think it is too sensitive in remote areas and therefore we are not going to ask the question, in which case we have a gap...

...Our problem is really mostly with administrative data. Identification level can be variable by state and variable by remoteness. People in remote areas are more likely to identify as Indigenous...They are still involved in Indigenous cultural practices and so on. As you move into major cities this becomes less clear. Therefore it is very difficult when we look at health status by remoteness for us to separate the fact of identification or whether there is an actual change in health status between the two areas, really.<sup>9</sup>

3.15 The ABS noted particular concerns with administrative data collections, stating that:

When we work with administrative systems we are in the hands of the people who run those systems. We develop standards and we encourage people to adopt those standards. Indigenous identification is one of the issues in an area like criminal justice, but there is actually a paucity of data across-the-board in many of these areas, particularly where the administration is primarily with state and territory governments, which quite reasonably set up independent systems, have different legislative frameworks, and then we have to try to develop a national framework that fits around that. Our experience is that that takes a very long time and it does not go as fast as anyone, including us, would like it to.<sup>10</sup>

3.16 The Commonwealth Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, at the 2008 launch of a joint ABS and AIHW report on Indigenous health, also outlined what the government considers as the current inadequacies in data collection:

As the authors and drivers of policy we need quality data to know what works and what doesn't.

But there are glaring gaps in national data collection. For example this report only contains data on Indigenous deaths from the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland.

This reveals serious gaps in the collection of essential information including Indigenous mortality. This must be addressed.

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9 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 13.

10 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 46.

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The Government knows that if we are to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage we must fill in the gaps in data collection.<sup>11</sup>

3.17 The Productivity Commissioner, in a presentation at the ABS NatStats conference in 2008, noted that improvement of the existing data collections on births and deaths, hospitals, Medicare, and school enrolment, as well as addressing the immediate gaps in data on crime victims and perpetrators and regional data was required to improve the measurement of outcomes for Indigenous people.<sup>12</sup>

3.18 The committee also notes that extensive gaps in baseline data exist in relation to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). The report of the NTER review board noted that:

While considerable quantitative and qualitative data is available in the key areas of health, housing, education, policing and employment in remote Territory communities, it was clear that little or no baseline data existed to specifically evaluate the impacts of the NTER.

Apart from some initial scoping data, there was little evidence of baseline data being gathered in any formal or organised format which would permit an assessment of the impact and progress of the NTER upon communities. The lack of empirical data has proved to be a major problem for this Review and is an area that requires urgent attention.<sup>13</sup>

3.19 The Department of Human Services provided information in their submission on where income managed funds had been allocated, stating that:

As at 23 January 2009, a total of \$133,065,182.70 has been income managed, of which \$130,618,623.34 has been allocated by customers to various priority items. Food is by far the highest expense incurred by income managed customers. Representing just under 64 per cent, followed by housing at 9.5 per cent. This is further supported by anecdotal reports of more money being spent on food, children being well-clothed and fed, houses being furnished and roadworthy vehicles being purchased.<sup>14</sup>

3.20 At the Canberra public hearing the committee inquired as to how the department had collected this data and how it had established that the majority of income managed funds was being spent on food. The department responded:

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11 The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Launch of the AIHW/ABS Report: The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 2008*, Speech, 28 April 2008, [http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/health\\_welfare\\_29apr08.htm](http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/health_welfare_29apr08.htm) (accessed 9 June 2009).

12 Robert Fitzgerald AM, Commissioner, Productivity Commission, *Measuring outcomes for Indigenous Australia*, ABS NatStats conference, 20 November 2008.

13 Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board, *Report of the NTER Review Board*, October 2008, p. 16.

14 Department of Human Services, *Submission 70*, p. 11.

Ms Gaha—We know that 64 per cent of money has been spent in shops that primarily sell food. We cannot actually say every single item, because they also sell clothes...

Senator SIEWERT—Exactly. There are household goods and all sorts of things.

Ms Gaha—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—You do not actually know that 64 per cent has been spent on food.

Ms Gaha—No. We know that that amount of money has been spent in shops that primarily sell food.

Mr Tidswell—As the table said, it is the allocated funds. When we sit down with customers, as you are well aware, we work through to allocate to their priority needs. That is where that data is taken from.

Senator SIEWERT—That is where that comes from.

Mr Tidswell—Yes. It is not after sale.<sup>15</sup>

3.21 The committee notes that although there is anecdotal evidence to support an increase in money being spent in shops and retail outlets that sell food, as well as other approved items, it notes that there is no itemised data available from the use of the BasicsCard to identify what income managed funds have actually been spent on. It may not be accurate to say that almost 64 per cent of income managed funds are being spent on food as there is no system to record whether this actually occurs. The committee considers that this should be clarified when the Commonwealth government is reporting on the use of income managed funds.

3.22 The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) noted in its submission that it is 'committed to providing policy advice and implementation of programs based on the best available evidence'.<sup>16</sup> The committee notes that DoHA contracted the AIHW to collate and analyse the data from the NTER Child Health Check Initiative and the AIHW publicly releases the findings from the data every six months.

3.23 The committee agrees with the NTER Review Board that the quality of data collection and its use must be given urgent attention and that extensive consideration must be given to the methodology and process for collecting and analysing this data. The ABS outlined that high quality data is best obtained:

...when the procedures used are culturally appropriate and where the Indigenous community is highly engaged in the statistical process. This is particularly true for remote Indigenous communities. ABS, in its statistical collection activity, has developed, over a number of years, a national Indigenous engagement strategy to ensure that Indigenous communities are better engaged in the statistical process, understand the uses to which the

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15 *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 26.

16 Department of Health and Ageing, *Submission 75*, p. 3.

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statistical information is put in developing and evaluating policies that may impact on them, and have statistical information returned to them in ways in which they can use it.<sup>17</sup>

3.24 The ABS also cautions against the creation of additional new data collections suggesting that in order to meet the current requirement for good expansive data, governments should focus on improving the quality of existing collections through better 'application of appropriate data management principles, including the use of agreed definitions and classifications'.<sup>18</sup> Limiting the number of data collections would also avoid increasing the respondent load which is very important in Indigenous communities. As the ABS explained:

Improving the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians is a key focus for Australian governments. As the demand for evidence to support Indigenous policy making continues to grow, so does the load placed on the small Indigenous population by surveys and other research.

There is significant load placed on communities through the collection of administrative data required as part of, or in support of, particular service delivery programs. In addition, large-scale, national surveys such as the ABS collections described in paragraph 9 and surveys commissioned by other government agencies (state/territory and Australian government), which generally are not national but can also be quite onerous, add to the respondent load. However, research in Indigenous communities extends beyond statistical collections such as national surveys and censuses to include smaller-scale studies, for example, case studies which may be limited to one or two Indigenous communities. In an environment of slow change, as the research load on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population increases, so does the likelihood of the Indigenous population becoming disengaged from the data collection and statistical processes. This impacts on the ability to collect high quality, relevant information to inform policy and research.<sup>19</sup>

3.25 The committee agrees with the ABS and AIHW that better data collection and awareness of the importance of quality data is required. The committee also urges governments to consistently and rigorously familiarise themselves with available data and be disciplined in utilising the available data when developing and implementing policies. This was a particular issue highlighted in the NTER Review Board's report which noted that clearly identifying the size and composition of the Indigenous population was critical to be able to assess the NTER's effectiveness and the future resources required to achieve its objectives. However the NTER did not appear to use the ABS 2006 estimates of the Indigenous population in the NTER prescribed areas which was estimated at 44 229. The Review board found that internal NTER planning documents cited the population as 35 929, which according to the Review Board

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17 Mr Ian Crettenden, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 42.

18 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 53*, p. [1].

19 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 53*, p. [5].

raised 'questions about the adequacy of the demographic base that has informed the NTER roll-out'.<sup>20</sup>

3.26 The committee is concerned that although quality data from the ABS was available it was not sufficiently utilised in the development of the NTER policies. As the ABS noted in its submission:

One of the legislated functions of the ABS (ABS ACT 1975) is to ensure coordination of the operations of government agencies in the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics and related information. This includes avoiding duplication in information collection, attaining compatibility between statistics compiled by agencies, and maximising utilisation of information available for statistical purposes.<sup>21</sup>

The committee is deeply concerned that reliable data was available from the ABS but it was not used when the measures of the NTER were being developed.

### **Recommendation 1**

**3.27 The committee recommends that COAG make a concerted effort to improve the quality and scope of existing data collections on regional and remote Indigenous communities and urges all departments and agencies to routinely utilise the expertise of dedicated statistical agencies such as the ABS and AIHW when collecting and analysing data to ensure that it is consistent and accurate across all jurisdictions.**

#### *Undercount of Indigenous populations in the Census.*

3.28 The committee also notes that in its previous report it highlighted concerns regarding a substantial undercount of the Indigenous population in the 2006 Census.<sup>22</sup> The ABS advised the committee that they have made reforms and changes that will more accurately reflect the Indigenous population:

After evaluating the results from the 2006 census, and particularly undercount for the Northern Territory, WA and Queensland, we have set up a working group that comprised representatives from state and federal agencies, local government, various development commissions and Indigenous organisations to look at the issue surrounding the conduct of the 2006 census. As a result of that working group we came up with over 30 recommendations on how we could address some of those issues. Some of those recommendations have now been included in our plans for the 2011

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20 Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board, *Report of the NTER Review Board*, October 2008, p. 17.

21 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 53*, p. [1].

22 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *First report 2008*, September 2008, p. 11.



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Census and we will continue to work closely with that working group in the lead-up to the 2011 census.<sup>23</sup>

- 3.29 Some of the strategies the ABS are employing for the 2011 Census include:
- reducing the overall national under-enumeration rate for the Indigenous population by reducing the enumeration period for remote communities;
  - seeking earlier and ongoing engagement with Indigenous groups and communities and all levels of government;
  - expanding the current Indigenous Community Engagement Program;
  - employment of local engagement managers in areas where the ABS has had problems with enumeration such as Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Tennant Creek and Mount Isa;
  - provision of a greater level of support for Indigenous people in completing their forms;
  - an expanded public relations campaign;
  - expanding the sample of remote Indigenous communities that are selected in the post enumeration survey;
  - employment of an additional 300 Indigenous people to provide assistance to Indigenous households in completing the questionnaires; and
  - establishment of 'flying squads' and mobile teams to travel to areas where problems have been identified during enumeration.<sup>24</sup>

3.30 The committee will continue to monitor the release of new data throughout the inquiry and will detail the findings of t

3.31 he new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) which is due to be released in October 2009 in its next report.

### **Social and demographic context of Indigenous communities**

3.32 When comparing the wellbeing of Indigenous communities across the states and territories, an understanding of the different social and demographic contexts is important. There are substantial and very important differences across the states and territories which no doubt influence the way policy is developed and the method of service delivery.

3.33 Table 1 illustrates the dramatically higher proportion of Indigenous people that live in the Northern Territory compared to all other states.<sup>25</sup> For example, 30 per

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23 Mr Paul Lowe, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 44.

24 Mr Paul Lowe, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, pp. 44-45.

25 Note: The Australian Capital Territory is not included as it has no classified regional or remote areas.

cent of the total population of the Northern Territory are Indigenous but in all other jurisdictions the overall Indigenous population is less than 4 per cent. This large difference is again repeated when looking only at remote and very remote populations in each state and territory. In the Northern Territory 32 per cent of the remote population are Indigenous, compared with the next highest number in New South Wales at 19 per cent. This is similar to very remote areas of the Northern Territory where 74 per cent are Indigenous compared again with the next highest of Queensland and Western Australia at just under 40 per cent.

**Table 1: Demographic context of indigenous populations by state and territory**

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Aust
<b>% of population that are Indigenous</b>	2.24%	0.65%	3.54%	1.79%	3.45%	3.76%	30.39%	2.50%
<b>% of population in remote areas that are Indigenous</b>	19.73%	2.04%*	14.66%	2.65%	13.11%	4.91%*	32.19%	15.19%
<b>% of population in very remote areas that are Indigenous</b>	27.49%	N/A	39.80%	29.07%	39.27%	N/A	74.07%	47.45%

Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

\* Includes outer regional and remote areas

3.34 Table 2 presents data from the most recent 2002 NATSISS that identifies the proportion of Indigenous people in each state and territory that live on homelands and/or traditional country and who identify with a language group or clan. Again the Northern Territory has the highest percentage of its Indigenous population, at 38 per cent, who still live on homelands and/or traditional country followed by Western Australia with just over 26 per cent and New South Wales with 23 per cent.

**Table 2: Social context of indigenous populations by state and territory**

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Aust
<b>% of Indigenous people living on homelands/traditional country</b>	23.8%	14.9%	13.4%	16.1%	26.4%	N/A	38.0%	21.9%

Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

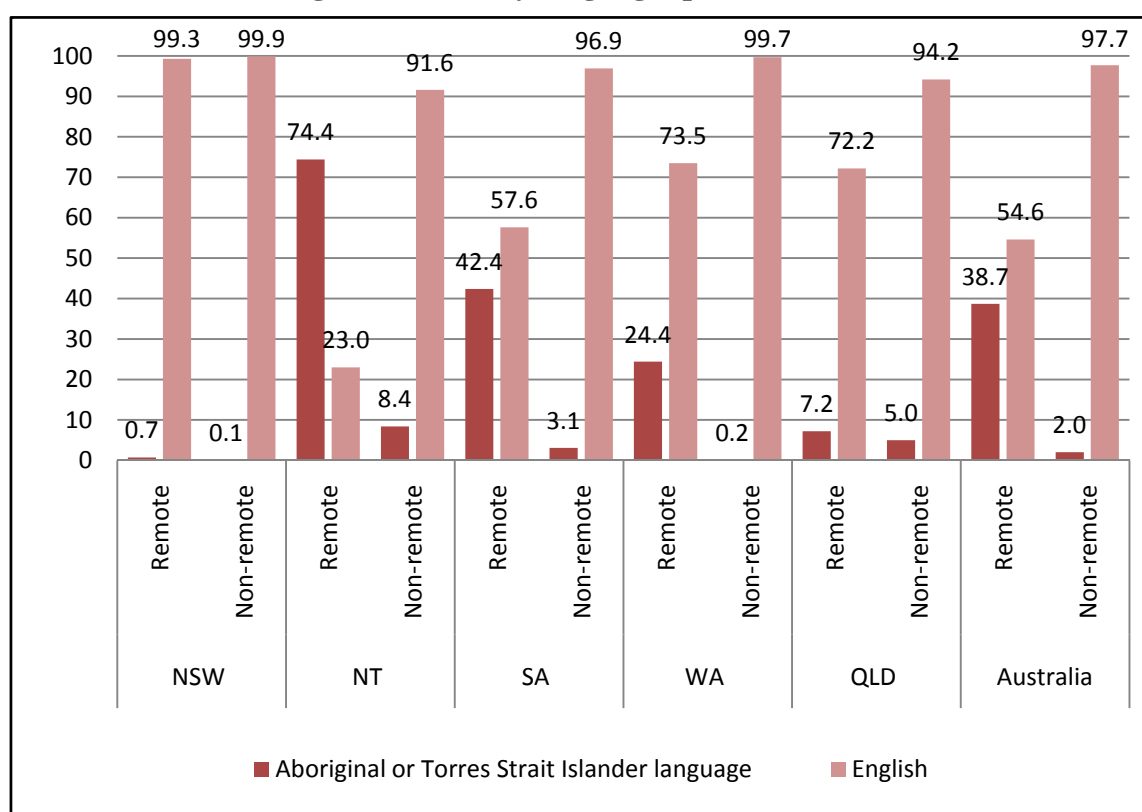
3.35 Table 3 below shows the percentage of the Indigenous population identifying with a tribal group or language group or clan in remote and non-remote areas in New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. The table illustrates that New South Wales has the lowest percentage of Indigenous people identifying with a tribal group or language group or clan. The Northern Territory has the highest percentage of the population identifying with a tribal group or language group or clan, at almost 95 per cent in remote areas, followed by South Australia, remote areas in Western Australia and Queensland.

**Table 3: Identification with tribal group or language group/clan**

	NSW	QLD	SA	WA	NT	Aust
Remote	45.3%	65.4%	77.6%	68.7%	94.3%	76.6%
Non-remote	41.5%	53.0%	58.8%	40.8%	41.5%	45.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.7%</b>	<b>56.2%</b>	<b>63.3%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>	<b>88.4%</b>	<b>54.1%</b>

Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.36 Another significant area of difference between the states and territories in the social and demographic context is the percentage of Indigenous people who do not speak English as the main language at home, as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Primary language spoken at home**

Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.37 In New South Wales less than one per cent of Indigenous people in both remote and non-remote areas speak an Indigenous language as the main language at home, whereas in the Northern Territory almost three-quarters of Indigenous people speak an Indigenous language at home followed next by remote areas of South Australia with 42 per cent and Western Australia with just under one-quarter. Most of the other states also have sizeable differences between remote and non-remote areas except for New South Wales and Queensland where there is no significant statistical difference between the two populations.

3.38 Overall, this broad outline of some of the main data on the demographic and social context of Indigenous communities indicates that the Northern Territory has the largest remote Indigenous populations with the highest level of Indigenous language speakers and people living on homelands or traditional country. The committee notes that when developing and implementing policies and delivering services to Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory the government would face greater logistical challenges and costs than many of the other jurisdictions.

### **General wellbeing in regional and remote Indigenous communities**

3.39 The 2002 NATSISS and the 2004-05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) collected data on the general, social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous communities including personal stressors, community issues, mental health, cultural identification and racism. The AIHW also reports on the wellbeing of Indigenous people including data on 'health, health determinants, welfare, access to housing and/or homelessness services, aged care and other services'.<sup>26</sup>

3.40 Figure 2 over the page illustrates some differences between states and territories in relation to the types of personal stressors experienced in the last 12 months by Indigenous people in remote and non-remote areas.

3.41 The types of stressors reported by respondents differ significantly according to remoteness. Figure 2 illustrates that Indigenous adults who lived in remote areas in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland were significantly more likely than other Indigenous adults to say that they had been a witness to violence, had a gambling problem, and/or had been involved in a serious accident. Remote areas in Queensland recorded the highest reported stressors across all five listed in the graph with over 50 per cent of respondents reporting overcrowding and alcohol or drug related problems as personal stressors followed with the next highest percentages in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia respectively. Only in New South Wales did a non-remote area report a higher instance of one of the stressors, that being alcohol or drug related problems, otherwise all other stressors were more prominent in remote areas.

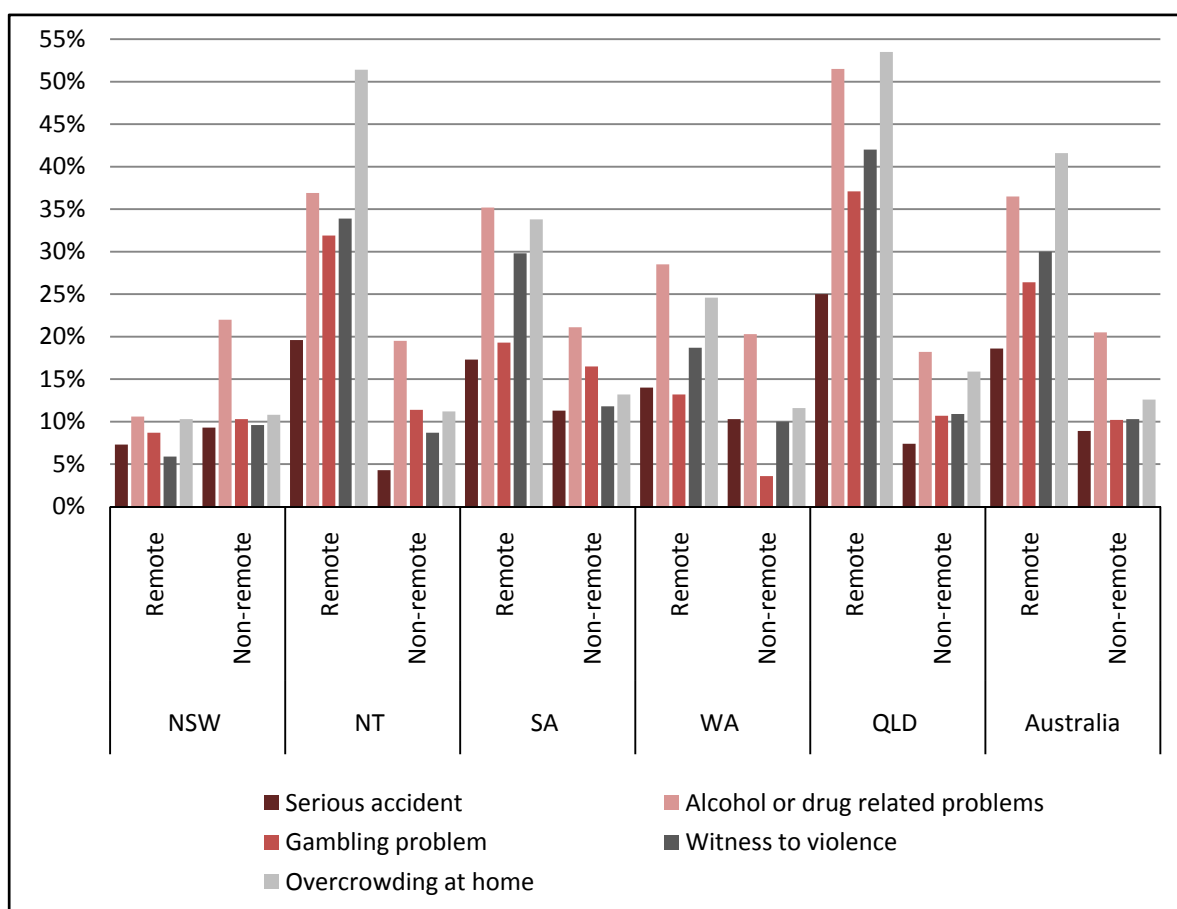
3.42 The AIHW notes that the higher incidence of Indigenous people living in remote or very remote areas reporting stressors than those in major cities is most likely to be related to socioeconomic and environmental disadvantage:

...for example, 2% of Indigenous houses are community rental housing in major cities compared with 55% in remote Australia, and more Indigenous clients received support for homelessness in regional and remote areas than in major cities.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 69*, p. 2.

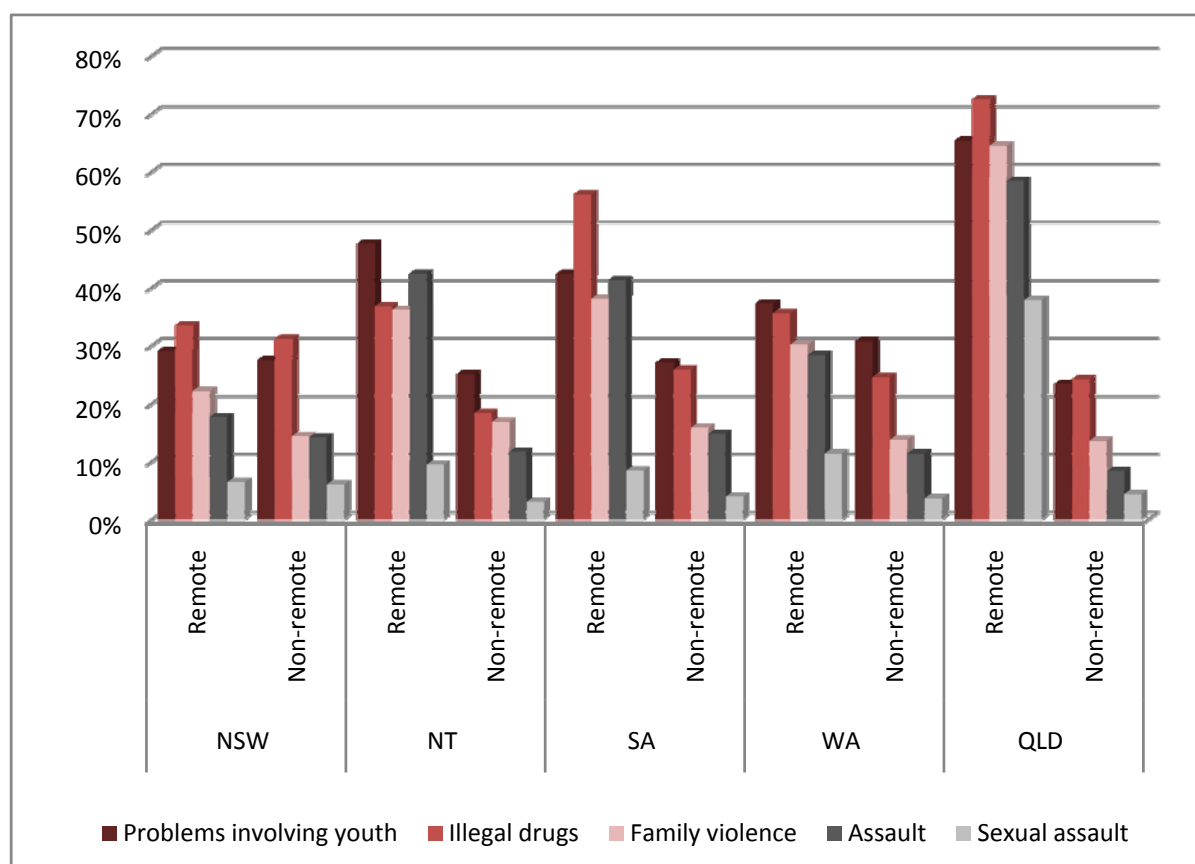
27 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 69*, p. 3.

**Figure 2: Type(s) of personal stressors experienced in last 12 months**

Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.43 The NATSISS also surveyed the percentage of the Indigenous population over 15 years of age that reported neighbourhood and community problems in both remote and non-remote areas. The graph below illustrates a small section of the responses which again differ across jurisdictions. In New South Wales there was very little difference between remote and non-remote areas however in Queensland the difference is quite distinct with all of these reported in higher numbers in remote areas. The remote areas of Queensland reported the highest levels of all these community problems, with almost 40 per cent of respondents reporting sexual assault as a problem in remote areas of Queensland with the next highest in the Northern Territory at just under 10 per cent. Over 50 per cent of respondents reported that illegal drugs were a concern in remote Queensland and South Australia.

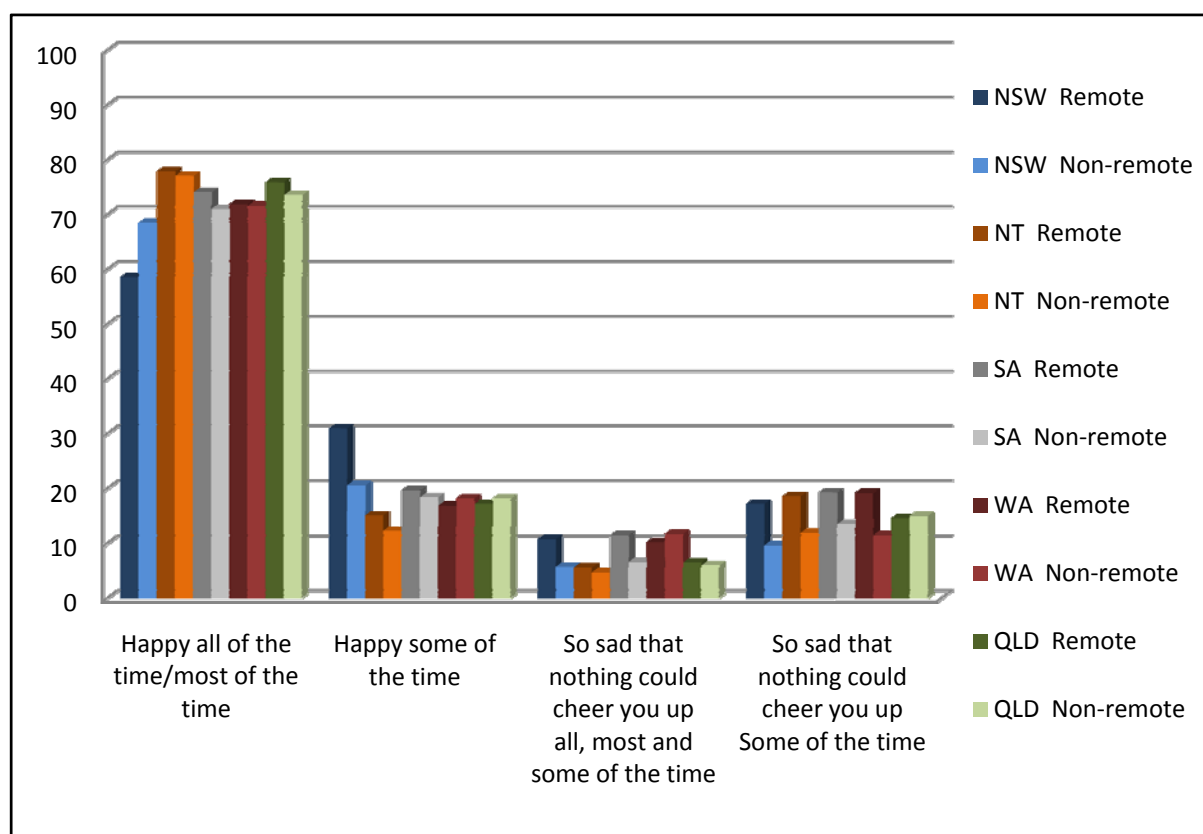
3.44 Also evident is the high rate of reported community and neighbourhood problems involving young people. Apart from remote areas of New South Wales, where it was just under 30 per cent, in all other jurisdictions over 30 per cent of respondents reported that young people were causing problems in the community, with remote Northern Territory reporting almost 50 per cent and remote Queensland again the highest at over 60 per cent.

**Figure 3: Neighbourhood/community problems reported, 2002**

Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.45 A similar result is also illustrated in the graph over the page which is a selection of positive wellbeing indicators taken from the most recent NATSIHS. Apart from New South Wales at least 70 per cent of respondents in the other states and territories were happy all or most of the time but more New South Wales respondents in remote areas reported being happy some of the time. The overall level of happiness reported in Indigenous communities was for the most part similar across the states and territories.

3.46 On the other hand Figure 4 below also provides data on sadness, with almost 10 per cent of respondents in remote areas of New South Wales and South Australia as well as both the remote and non-remote areas in Western Australia being so sad that nothing could cheer them up all or most of the time. Almost 20 per cent of respondents in remote New South Wales, Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia recorded being so sad that nothing could cheer them some of the time. However again, overall there was no sizeable difference across the states and territories in positive wellbeing even though many of the contributing factors—such as housing, safety and education—can differ significantly in the same areas.

**Figure 4: Selected indicators of positive wellbeing, by remoteness, 2004-05**

Source: ABS 2004-05 NATSIHS

3.47 The committee also notes the lack of data on the characteristics of Indigenous carers and their wellbeing. When asked at the committee's hearing in Canberra whether the AIHW was aware of any data on carers in Indigenous communities looking after the elderly population and people with disabilities, the AIHW responded:

We are not aware of anything specific in relation to Indigenous carers. We are doing some further work on carers at the moment, basically off administrative data sets for our biennial publication *Australia's Welfare*, which has not been published yet but may well have come up with further information. At this stage there is nothing further that we could suggest.<sup>28</sup>

3.48 The committee finds this lack of data and a seeming lack of any plans to improve this data concerning and urges the Commonwealth government to consider improving data collection in this area.

## Housing and community infrastructure

3.49 There is comparable data on housing and community infrastructure that again illustrates sizeable differences between the states and territories.

28 Dr Penelope Allbon, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 14.

3.50 The data illustrated here in Table 4 identifies that the Northern Territory has both the highest number of Indigenous people living in an overcrowded household and in a dwelling with major structural problems. For example in the Northern Territory only 39 per cent of Indigenous people live in a dwelling with no major structural problems whereas all other jurisdictions record that almost 60 per cent of Indigenous people live in a dwelling with no major structural problems. Overcrowding in the Northern Territory is three times greater than the national average and more than twice the rate of overcrowding in the state with the next highest rate, which is Western Australia.

**Table 4: Indigenous housing, 2004-05**

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Aust
% of Indigenous people Living in a dwelling with no major structural problems	64.3%	62.3%	64.3%	59.9%	59.2%	73.5%	39.5%	60.4%
% of Indigenous households that were overcrowded in 2006	9.0%	8.3%	13.6%	10.7%	14.2%	6.7%	33.7%	12.4%

Source: ABS 2004-05 NATSIHS

3.51 In regards to houses being connected to essential infrastructure, the AIHW's report on *Indigenous housing indicators 2005-06* found that:

The majority of discrete Indigenous communities in Australia were connected to an organised supply of water (99%), sewerage (98%) and electricity (97%). The Northern Territory had the largest number of communities not connected to an organised supply of these services, with seven not connected to water or sewerage and 20 not connected to electricity.<sup>29</sup>

3.52 The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report noted that data on access to clean water and functional sewerage needs to be collected on a regular basis to allow 'comparison between services in Indigenous communities and those delivered by major utilities'.<sup>30</sup>

3.53 The committee notes that although all states and territories need to focus on improving Indigenous housing there is a clear deficiency in the standard and availability of Indigenous housing in the Northern Territory when compared to the other jurisdictions with significant remote and very remote Indigenous populations. The committee notes that current Commonwealth and Northern Territory policy is focused on alleviating some of this housing distress by the selection of 15 out of the

29 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Indigenous housing indicators 2005-06*, October 2007, p. 13.

30 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2007*, June 2007, p. 66.

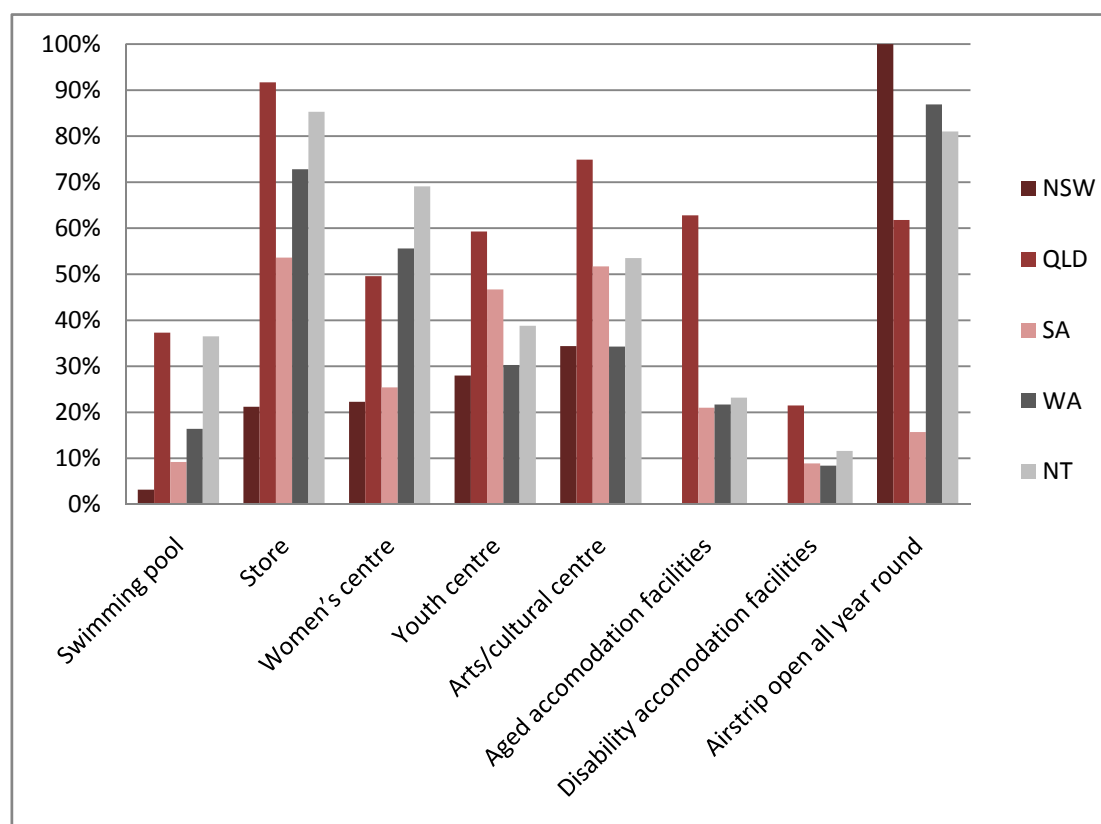


26 priority communities earmarked for new housing being in the Northern Territory. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.54 The levels of community infrastructure and services provided in Indigenous communities also differ greatly between states and territories. As previously noted, the Northern Territory has the poorest housing figures, yet in some areas of access to community infrastructure it records some of the more positive outcomes. For example, as Figure 5 illustrates, the Northern Territory has the highest proportion of its Indigenous population in discrete Indigenous communities with a women's shelter and, along with Queensland, the highest recorded percentage for swimming pools.

3.55 The data presented in Figure 5 below suggests that access to youth centres is low across all jurisdictions with only Queensland having more than 50 per cent of its population of discrete Indigenous communities with access to youth centres. All the other jurisdictions all recorded less than 30 per cent. The lack of access to youth centres as well as other youth programs in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in particular is supported by the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service's outline in their submission on the infrastructure needs in the Central Australian region of the Northern Territory.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 5: Proportion of reported usual population of discrete Indigenous communities with access to facilities, 2006**



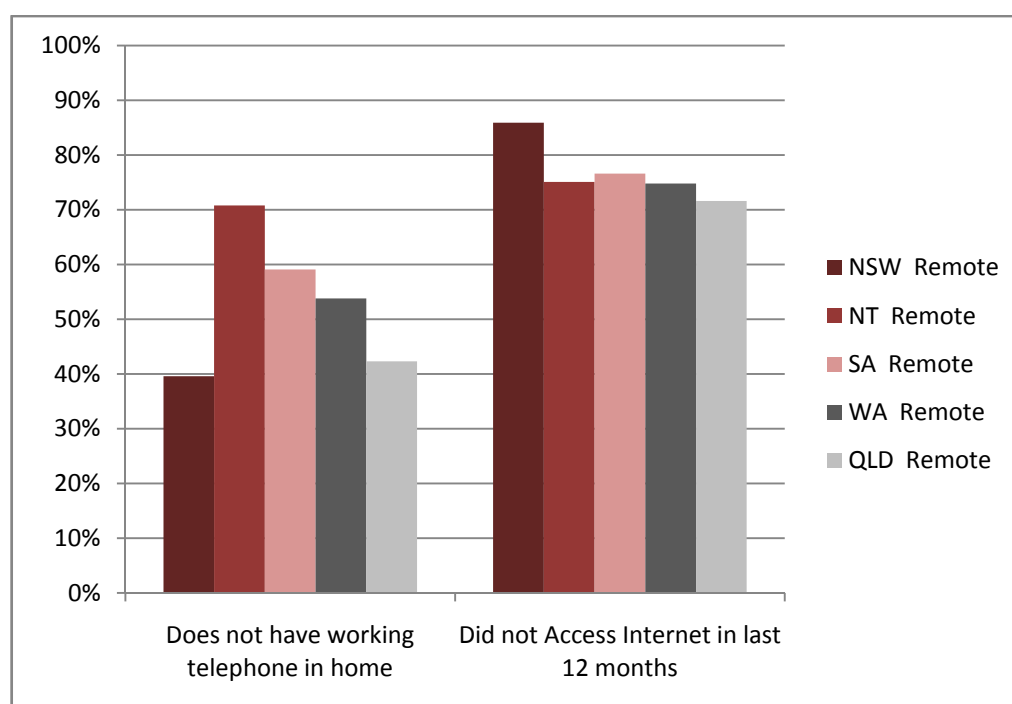
Source: AIHW 2008 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework report

31 See Central Australian Youth Link Up Service, *Submission 26*, pp. 50-54.

3.56 The committee also notes that Figure 5 illustrates that New South Wales recorded the lowest proportions across all four selected categories, recording almost half the availability/existence of community infrastructure of Queensland. For example New South Wales has no aged or disability accommodation facilities in its discrete Indigenous communities. All other states, apart from South Australia, also registered a very low proportion of access to both aged facilities and to disability accommodation facilities, with no state or territory recording more than 20 per cent of the reported usual population in discrete Indigenous communities having access to disability accommodation facilities.

3.57 The committee is concerned that the data indicates very low access to aged facilities and disability accommodation facilities in all jurisdictions in discrete Indigenous communities. Such facilities, as well as other respite facilities, are very important in any community in a regional or remote area. The committee discusses this further in relation to the NTER, and will pursue further investigations into aged care support and facilities in its remaining reports.

**Figure 6: Indigenous access to telephone and internet in remote areas**



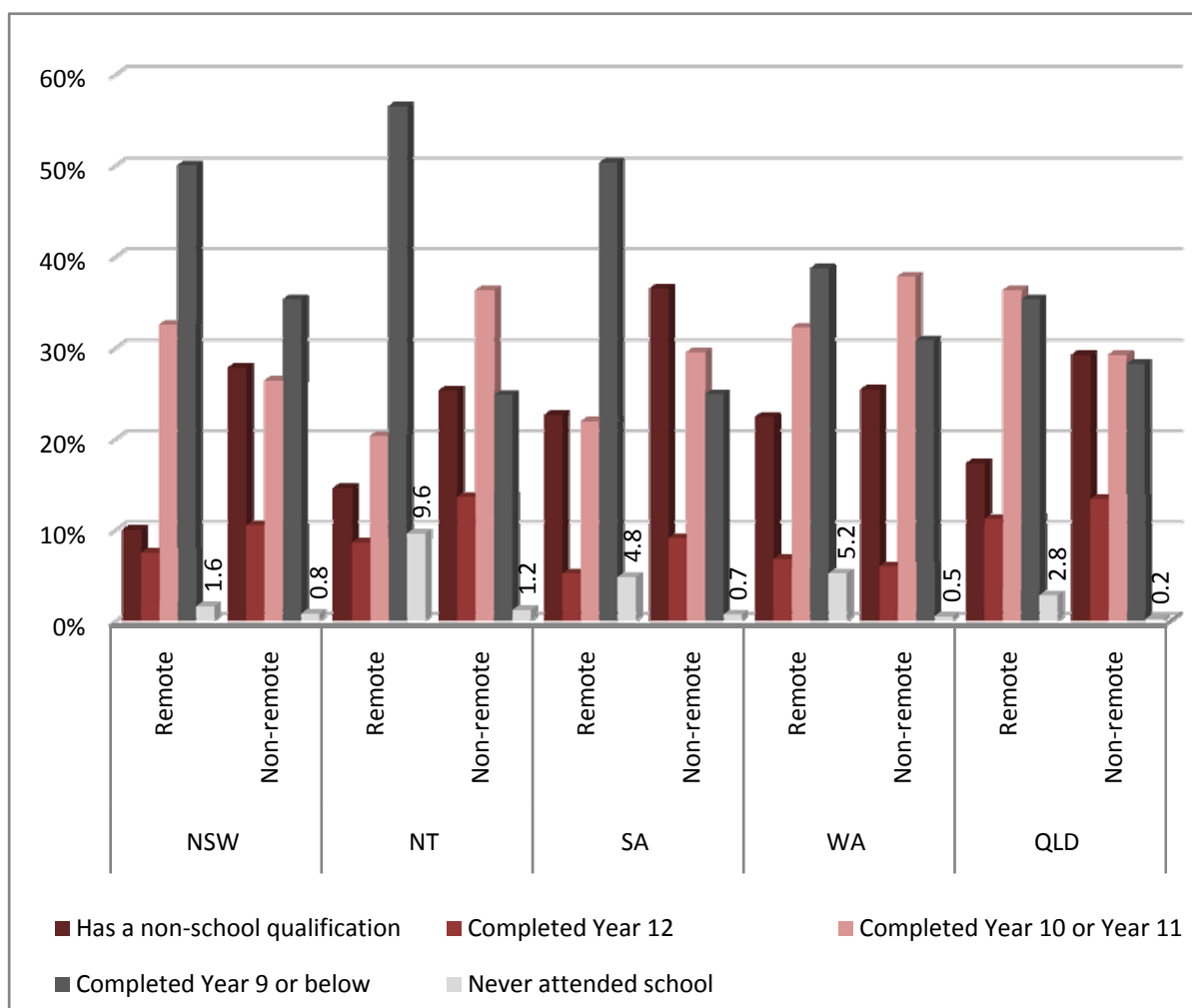
Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.58 Figure 6 above depicts access to telephones and the internet in remote areas across the states and territories. Access to the internet was comparatively limited across all jurisdictions with at least 70 per cent of people not using the internet in the last 12 months. However with telephone access in the home results were much more varied, with just over 70 per cent of Indigenous people in remote areas of the Northern Territory not having access to a telephone in their own home, compared to 40 per cent in New South Wales. Clearly a greater focus is required in bridging the 'digital divide' in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

## Indigenous educational attainment and standards

3.59 In the area of education the data again illustrates large differences between the standards of reported Indigenous attainment levels across the jurisdictions. The graph below outlines the educational attainment of Indigenous people aged over 15 years that were surveyed in the NATSISS. From this graph the highest proportion of Indigenous people who have never attended school live in remote areas of the Northern Territory, almost 10 per cent, followed by remote areas of Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and finally New South Wales with 1.6 per cent. Across all jurisdictions the number of people who never attended school was much lower in non-remote areas.

**Figure 7: Level of educational attainment of Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over, 2002**



Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.60 Figure 7 above also shows that remote areas in New South Wales have the lowest percentage of Indigenous people with non-school qualifications at just below 10 per cent. Only the remote areas of South Australia and Western Australia registered more than 20 per cent of Indigenous persons aged over 15 with a non-school qualification.

3.61 NCETA notes in its submission that:

Potential factors contributing to the low levels of Indigenous students' school retention rates include availability and accessibility of schools, especially secondary schools, racism at school, parents' negative experiences of schooling, wellbeing of the children (poor health, hunger, hearing difficulties, substance abuse), and the perceived quality and relevance of available schooling.<sup>32</sup>

3.62 The National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test is another recent addition to nationally comparable data collections on educational achievement that specifically identifies Indigenous students and geographical locations. The committee notes the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has stated that the results of the NAPLAN tests will be used as performance indicators by the COAG Reform Council to measure progress against the Closing the Gap target to 'halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade'.<sup>33</sup>

3.63 The most recent tests for which results have been released were conducted in May 2008 for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across Australia. This was the first time all students in the same year level have been assessed on the same test items across reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy in all states and territories. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in the report on the results of the 2008 NAPLAN tests stated that:

The tests broadly reflect the curriculum content across all States and Territories, and the types of test questions and test formats were chosen so that they would be familiar to teachers and students.

NAPLAN is an important innovation in national literacy and numeracy assessment in Australia. It reports the full range of student achievement against a common scale and uses a common set of tests to resolve the technical difficulties associated with equating State and Territory based tests.<sup>34</sup>

3.64 The NAPLAN results show that overall at all year levels Indigenous students were less likely to be achieving at or above the national minimum standards than non-Indigenous students. The report notes that across year levels:

...there is a decline in the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student mean scores for Reading, Spelling, Grammar and

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32 National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, *Submission 44*, p. 6.

33 Council of Australian Governments, Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, November 2008, p. 8.

34 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Report: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy 2008*, September 2008, p. 2.

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Punctuation, but there is an increase in the differences for Writing. The differences in Numeracy are the same at each year level. The participation rate for Indigenous students declines as year level increases.<sup>35</sup>

3.65 The committee has outlined in this report the reading and numeracy results for Years 3 and 7 across all jurisdictions with remote and very remote populations. The results from the NAPLAN for these areas are illustrated Figures 8-11 on the following pages.

3.66 For the year 3 results in reading, remote and very remote areas in New South Wales and South Australia had the highest percentages of Indigenous students at or above national minimum standard, at around 70 per cent in remote areas and 60 per cent in very remote areas. However, in very remote areas in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory less than 40 per cent of Indigenous students were at or above national minimum standard, with the Northern Territory scoring around 14 per cent. Again in numeracy New South Wales and South Australia performed the best out of all jurisdictions in remote areas while in very remote areas only the Northern Territory recorded less than 50 per cent of students at or above national minimum standard.

3.67 Figure 9 illustrates reading achievements for Year 7 students. The committee notes the very low percentage of Indigenous students that are at or above the benchmark in very remote areas in South Australia and the Northern Territory. In South Australia only 17 per cent were at or above the benchmark and in the Northern Territory it was just under 14 per cent. The Northern Territory government has previously acknowledged the need to improve Indigenous literary and numeracy skills in a 2008 policy document:

The ability to read and write and to be numerate is the foundation for all school learning. Good literacy and numeracy skills are critical if young people are to complete their schooling successfully. These skills are also required if they are to participate fully in the economic and social development of the NT and the nation.

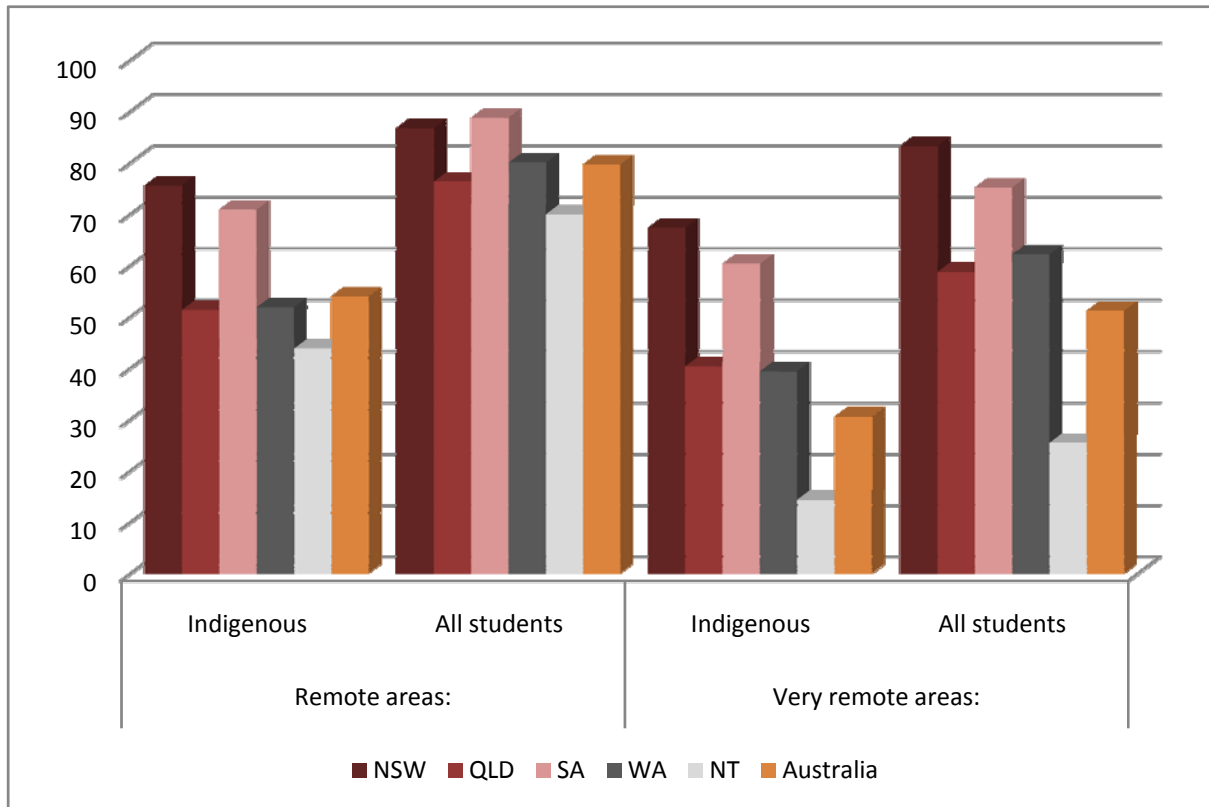
Despite substantial investment by the NT and Australian governments in supporting the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills for students, and the genuine effort of Department of Education and Training (DET) staff over many years to improve results, there has been no significant improvement in NT students' literacy and numeracy outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

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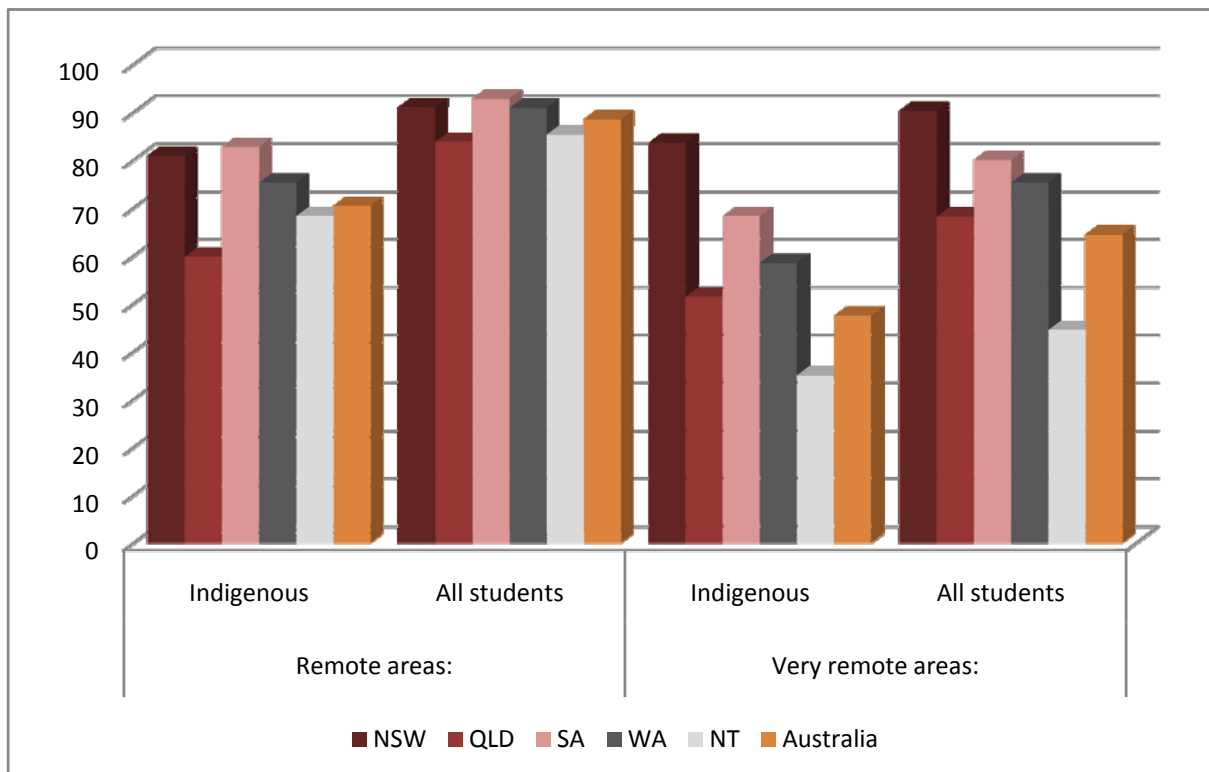
35 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Report: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy 2008*, September 2008, p. 203.

36 Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, *Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day*, policy document No. 2008/2492, November 2008, [http://www.det.nt.gov.au/corporate/policies/curriculum\\_studies/CompulsoryEnglishFourHoursEachDay.pdf](http://www.det.nt.gov.au/corporate/policies/curriculum_studies/CompulsoryEnglishFourHoursEachDay.pdf) (accessed 18 June 2009).

**Figure 8: Percentage of Year 3 students at or above national minimum standard in reading, 2008**

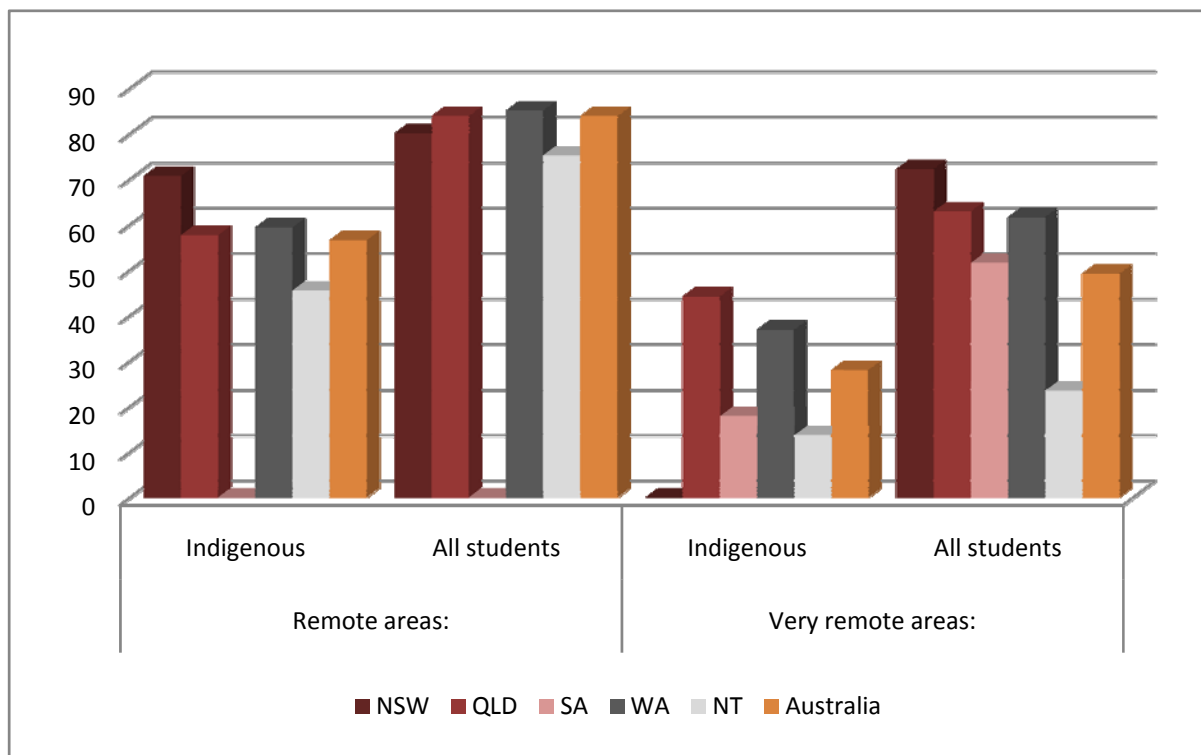


**Figure 9: Percentage of Year 3 students at or above national minimum standard in numeracy, 2008**



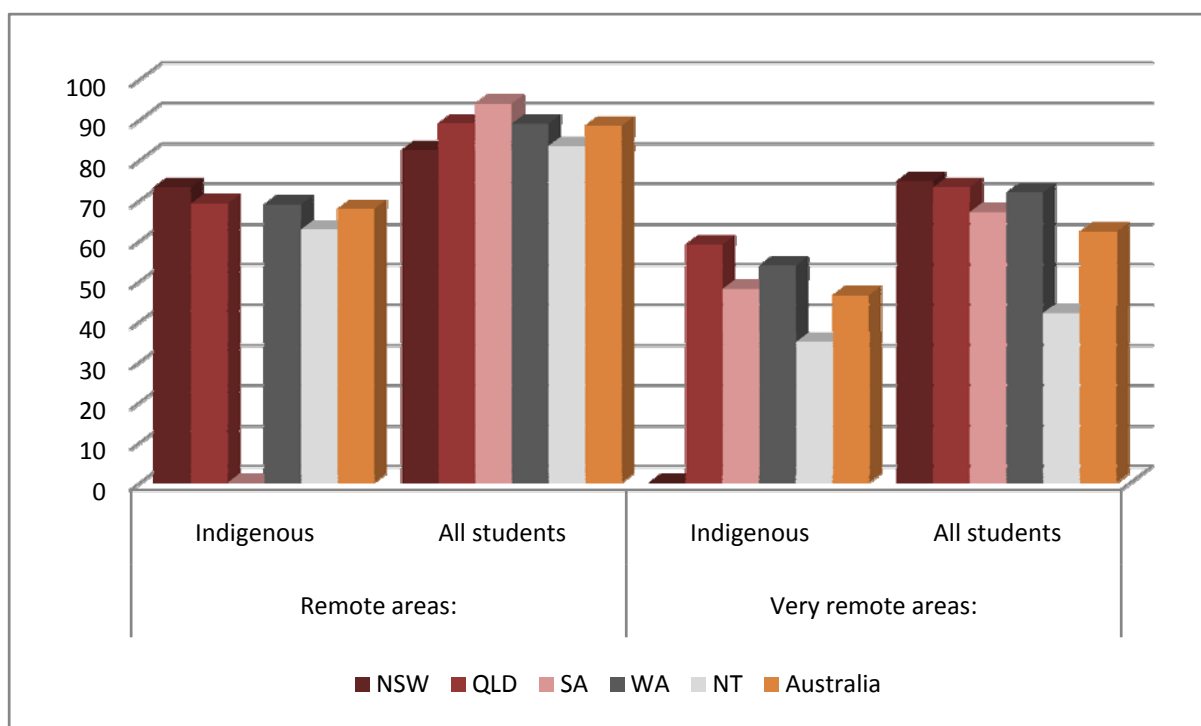
Source: MCEETYA 2008 NAPLAN

**Figure 10: Percentage of Year 7 students at or above national minimum standard in reading, 2008**



*Note: Where there are no results this indicates that the data was not published as there were no students tested or the number of students tested was less than 30.*

**Figure 11: Percentage of Year 7 students at or above national minimum standard in numeracy, 2008**



Source: MCEETYA 2008 NAPLAN

3.68 The MCEETYA report noted that the Year 7 results for reading and numeracy showed that:

In the Northern Territory, Indigenous students are one-quarter to one-third as likely to be achieving at or above national minimum standards in literacy domains and half as likely to be achieving at or above national minimum standard in Numeracy...

...the mean score for Indigenous students [across Australia] is substantially lower than that for non-Indigenous students, and is cause for major concern. In Reading, for example, the difference in the means across Australia is 74 points, the difference in the Northern Territory is 145 points and in Western Australia it is 83 points.<sup>37</sup>

3.69 In addition to student attainment, student attendance levels are another area of interest to the committee for comparison across the states and territories. The MCEETYA *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2007* outlined the data on comparable school attendance across the jurisdictions for full time students in Years 1-10. The report noted that school attendance was 'a new performance measure and currently student attendance data is not collected uniformly across jurisdictions and schooling sectors'.<sup>38</sup> The report also noted that:

...due to variance in the systems in place for collecting student attendance data across the sectors and jurisdictions it is not yet possible to collect the data consistently across Australia in all jurisdictions/sectors.<sup>39</sup>

3.70 Figure 12 over the page depicts the attendance rates for government schools but the MCEETYA report did not disaggregate the data by remoteness area and did not list any source of such disaggregated data in the statistical annex.

3.71 The committee considers this is a priority area as the COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement has identified national, jurisdictional and geo-locational—the school's geographical location—school attendance rates as one of the two performance indicators to be used to measure progress against the Closing the Gap target to 'Halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020'.<sup>40</sup>

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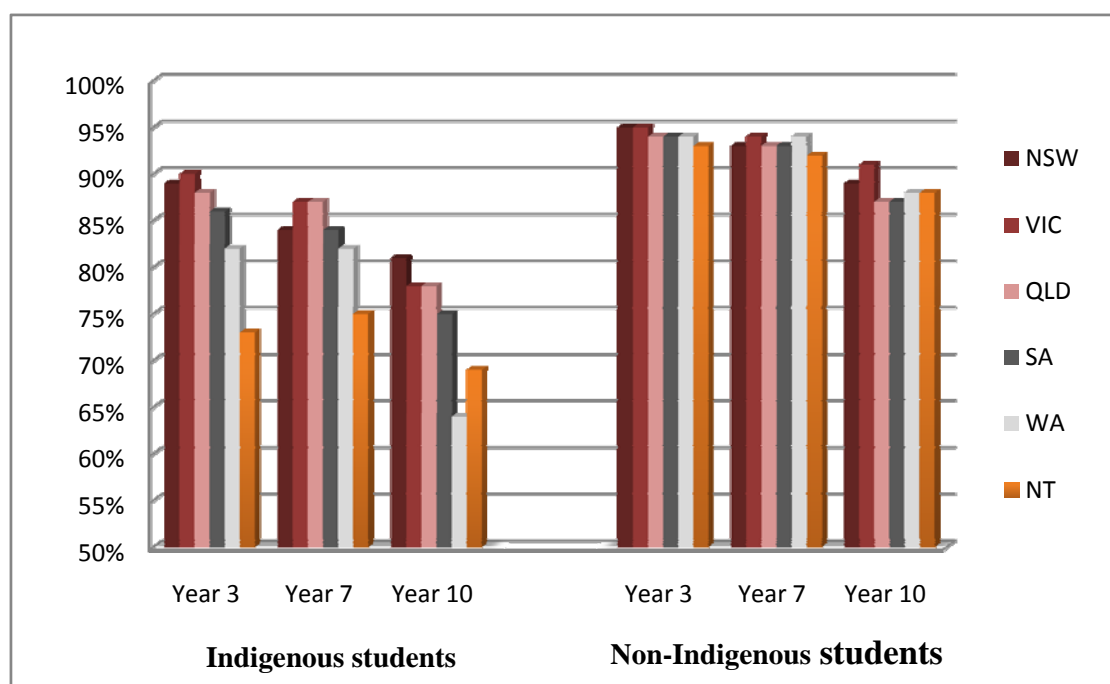
37 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Report: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy 2008*, September 2008, p. 153.

38 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2007*, Appendix 1: Statistical annex, p. 47, <http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/anr2007/> (accessed 1 June 2009).

39 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2007*, p. 46.

40 Council of Australian Governments, Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, November 2008, pp. 10-11.



**Figure 12: Student attendance rates in government schools in 2007**

Source: MCEETYA 2009 National Report on Schooling in Australia 2007

3.72 In general, student attendance in Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales tended to be higher than the other jurisdictions. The Northern Territory attendance rates were lower than those of other states for each year level. The Northern Territory had the lowest levels of attendance in all years for Indigenous students except in year 10 where Western Australia was slightly lower at just under 65 per cent compared to the Northern Territory's 68 per cent. The MCEETYA reported noted that the data indicated that:

...Indigenous students attended school at lower rates than non-Indigenous students, with the variation in attendance more pronounced in the later years of schooling. For some States and Territories, there was a difference of more than ten percentage points in attendance rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In the Northern Territory, particularly from years 6 to 10, the difference was close to 20 percentage points.<sup>41</sup>

3.73 The committee notes that the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training has published its own school attendance data, which is provide below in Table 5, but this is not comparable to other jurisdictions. The committee acknowledges the particular logistical difficulties faced by the Northern Territory government with a high proportion of its Indigenous population residing in remote and very remote areas. However the committee is concerned that this data suggests that very little progress has been made since 2008.

41 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2007*, p. 46.

**Table 5: School attendance in the Northern Territory 2008-09**

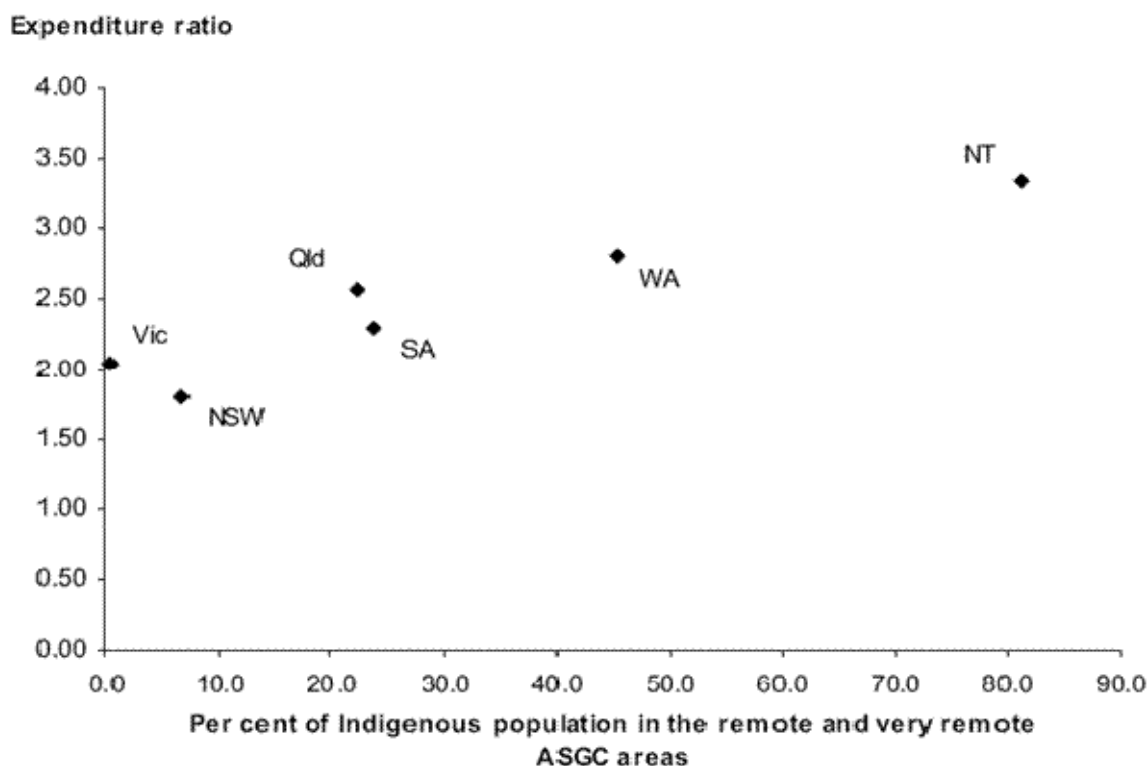
Geolocation	2008			2009		
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
Provincial	81.1%	90.6%	88.7%	82.6%	91.9%	90.1%
Remote	81.9%	92.4%	87.7%	82.5%	92.7%	88.0%
Very Remote	65.7%	91.0%	69.1%	63.5%	90.1%	67.0%

Source: Northern Territory Department of Education and Training - Enrolments and attendance 2008-2009

### The health of the Indigenous population

3.74 The AIHW report *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2008 report* analyses data on the comparative state and territory government expenditure on health goods and services for Indigenous people. The report noted that the Northern Territory (\$5,461) and South Australia (\$4,011) had the highest average expenditure per person for Indigenous people. As Figure 13 below depicts, the increased expenditure is related to the proportion of the Indigenous population that reside in remote and very remote areas.

**Figure 13: Expenditure ratio on Indigenous health**



Source: AIHW 2008

3.75 The committee notes that there is no universally collected primary healthcare data currently available. At the committee's hearing in Canberra on 9 June 2009 the committee asked the AIHW if there was anything being done to address this vacuum:

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Generally in terms of primary healthcare data it is a difficult area to get data on. We have, say, seven million hospital separations a year that we collect data on but a great many more are primary care episodes. Filtering out and trying to get a useful data collection out of that is an interesting problem. A few months back we published a report towards primary healthcare data looking at what existing data there is because there are various electronic collections that do collect data. It is certainly something that we are hoping to do further work on. I think the Primary Healthcare Strategy will be a key document from which data collection will be launched because that overall policy will be clear about what needs to be collected. It is really a case of what should be collected. We are doing some work at the moment with the states and territories on trying to develop a national minimum dataset, that is the minimum number of standard items that should be collected in relation to primary healthcare and community health. We are certainly trying to take it forward.<sup>42</sup>

3.76 In terms of other basic health indicators available, the 2004-05 NATSIHS collected various data on Indigenous health in regional and remote Indigenous communities including information on general health, smoking, alcohol consumption, long term health conditions, oral health, Body Mass Index, immunisation and women's health issues.

3.77 The committee notes that very little data is currently available about the patterns and levels of alcohol and drug use by Indigenous people, especially amongst young Indigenous people. NCETA noted in its submission that it has undertaken investigation of data that examines the pattern of alcohol and drug use by school aged children. The study found that

Indigenous students were 1.27 times more likely to have used any illicit drug in the last year compared to non-Indigenous students (with age, gender, school type (Government, Catholic, Independent), self-rated academic performance, alcohol and tobacco use, socio-economic disadvantage, and language spoken at home controlled for).

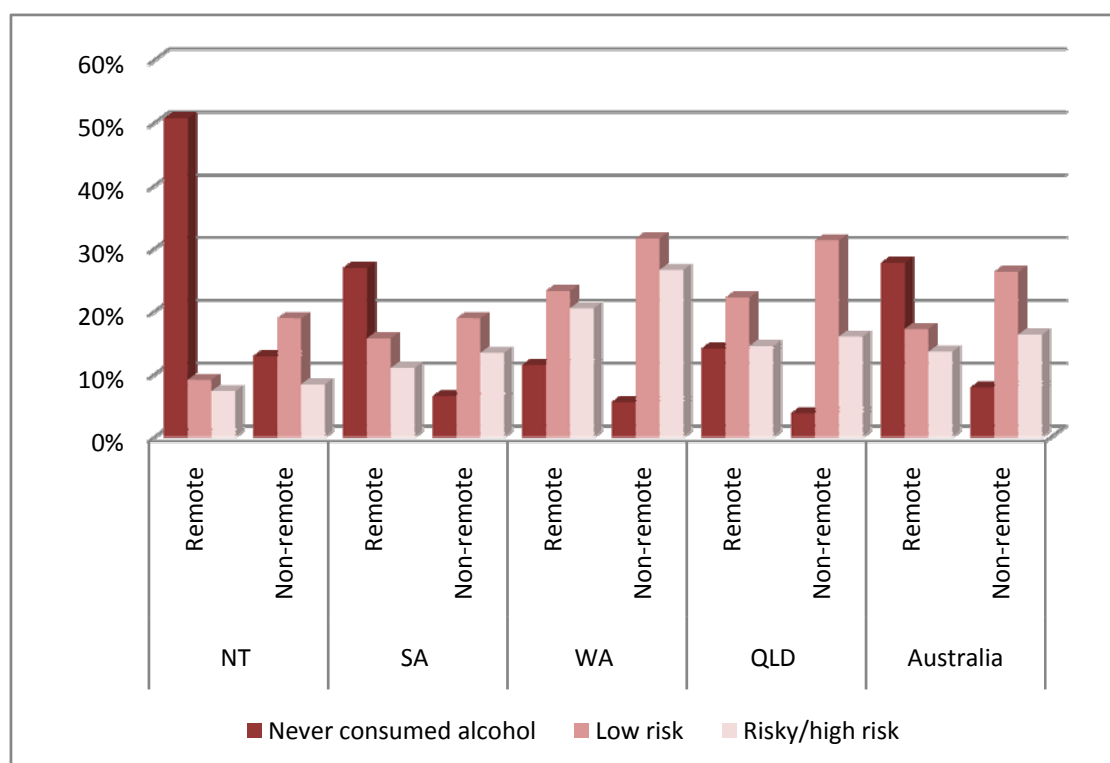
The most commonly used illicit drugs among Indigenous students were cannabis, inhalants, and tranquillisers.<sup>43</sup>

3.78 The NCETA noted that very little of the available data has been published and is currently preparing documents that report these findings. The committee looks forward to the release of additional data on the patterns of alcohol and drug use of young people and would also like to see the data reported by geographical location and on a state and territory level.

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42 Dr Penelope Allbon, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 12.

43 National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, *Submission 44*, p. 4.

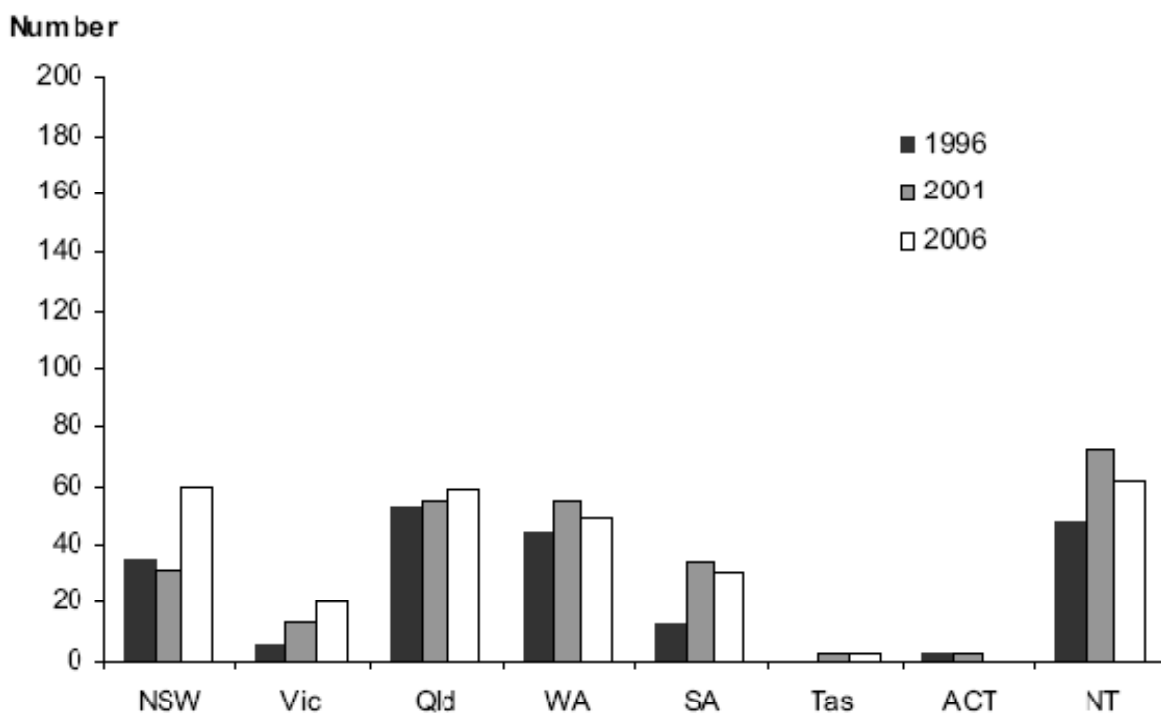
**Figure 14: Alcohol risk of Indigenous persons aged 18 years and over, 2004-05**

Source: ABS 2004-05 NATSIHS

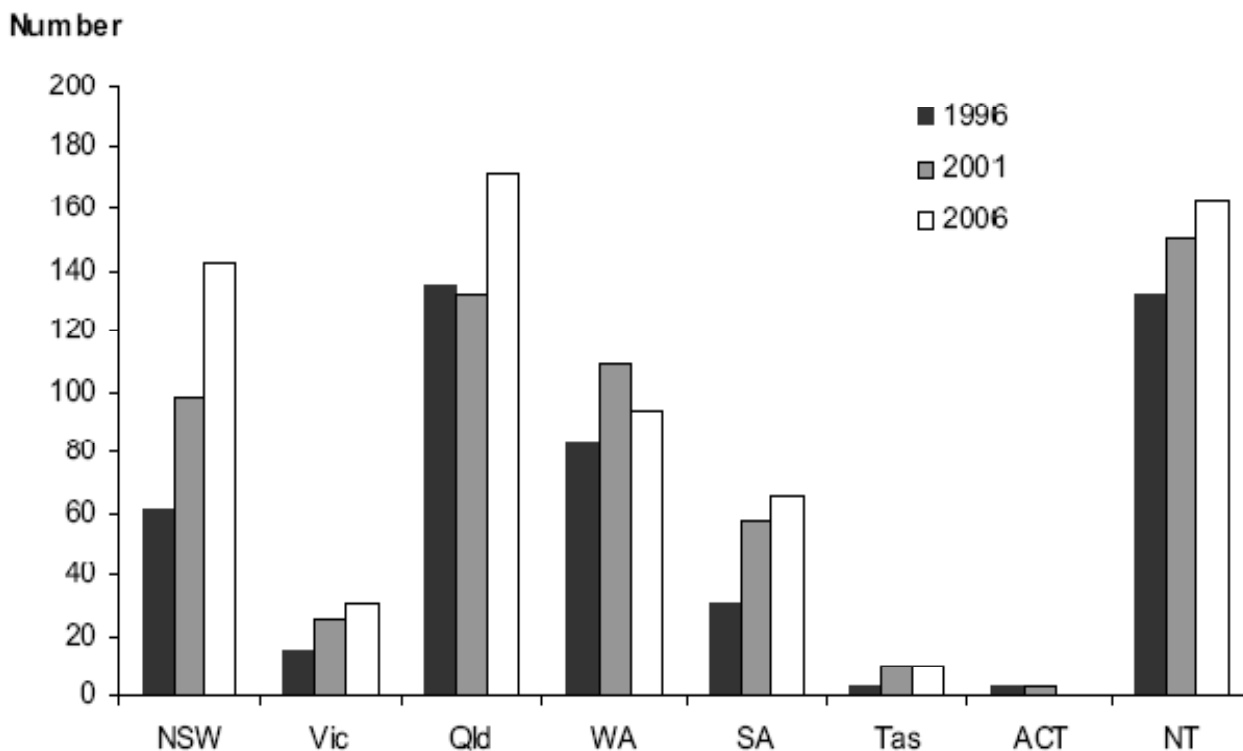
3.79 Figure 14 above illustrates the alcohol risk of Indigenous people across states and territories and in both remote and non-remote areas. Of particular interest is that 50 per cent of Indigenous people in remote areas of the Northern Territory reported having never consumed alcohol which was far above any other jurisdictions either remote or non-remote. Overall a higher proportion of Indigenous people in remote areas had never consumed alcohol than in non-remote areas across all jurisdictions and there was less reported low risk, risky and high risk drinking in remote areas as well.

3.80 The committee also notes the data available on Indigenous health workers and the numbers of medical practitioners. As discussed in Chapter 5, the number of Aboriginal Health Workers (AHW) has been declining in some states and territories recently. This is also supported by data analysed by the AIHW which is illustrated over the page in Figure 15. As the graph shows, from 2001–2006 the number of male AHWs increased in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland but decreased in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. For female AHWs, numbers in New South Wales and Queensland increased by over 20 per cent in South Australia and the Northern Territory, slightly increased in the Northern Territory and South Australia but decreased in Western Australia.

**Figure 15: Male AHWs by state and territory, 1996, 2001 and 2006, Census.**



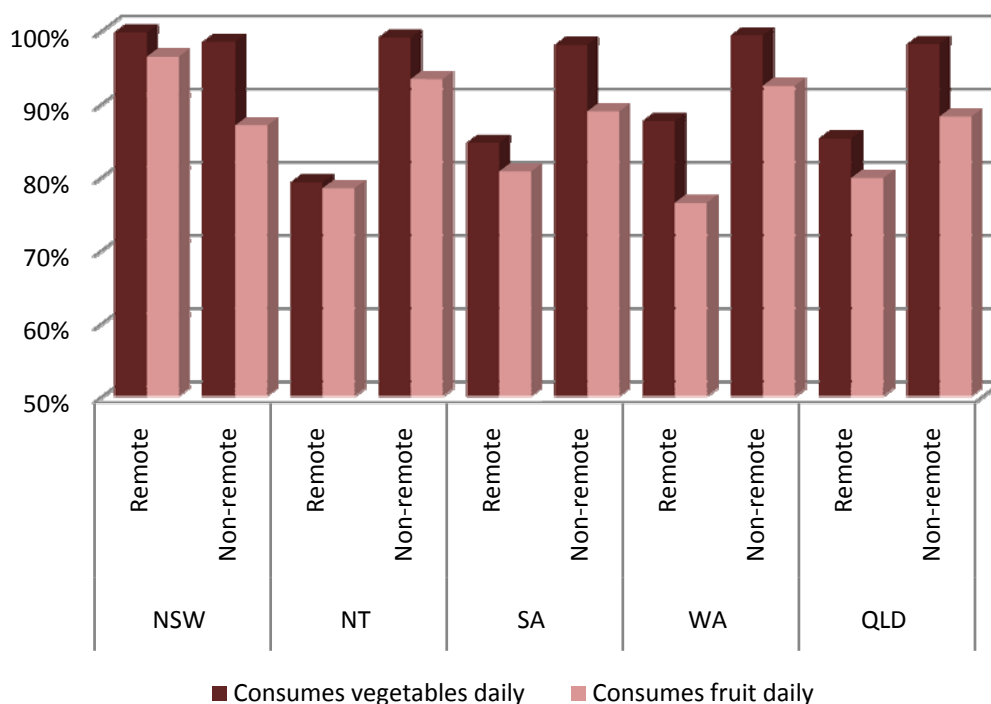
**Figure 16: Female AHWs by state and territory, 1996, 2001 and 2006, Census.**



Source: AIHW 2009 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health labour force statistics and data quality assessment.

3.81 In Figure 17 below, apart from New South Wales all remote areas had a lower reported daily consumption of fruit and vegetables than non-remote areas, with daily fruit consumption the lowest in remote Western Australia and vegetable consumption the lowest in the Northern Territory.

**Figure 17: Selected dietary habits of Indigenous persons aged 12 years and over, 2004-05**



Source: ABS 2004-05 NATSIHS

**Table 6: No. of psychiatric beds in public acute hospitals with psychiatric units per 100 000 people, 2004-05**

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Aust
<b>Inner regional</b>	12.9	11.7	22.7	0	5.8	20.1	N/A	14.4
<b>Outer regional</b>	0.4	4.7	16.4	0	14.7	0	23.8	9.3
<b>Remote</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	6.6	1.2
<b>Total all regions (including major cities)</b>	13.3	18.1	23.4	11.2	20.9	17.8	16.0	17.2

Source: AIHW (2007) *Mental health services in Australia 2004-05*

3.82 In terms of mental health, the AIHW released a comprehensive report on mental health services in Australia in April 2007. The aim of the report was to provide information on a wide range of mental health-related services provided in Australia, as well as the resources associated with those services. Although the report is not Indigenous-specific it does provide information on mental health facilities available by remoteness area as Table 6 above illustrates. Only the Northern Territory has

public psychiatric beds available in remote areas and it also has the most available per 100 000 people in outer regional areas. The committee was surprised to note that South Australia has no beds available in outer regional or remote areas.

## Employment

3.83 The ABS 2002 NATSISS also collected data on the size of the Indigenous labour force and the difficulties Indigenous people have finding employment. Figure 18 below outlines the percentage of Indigenous people not in the labour force by state and territory and remoteness. Remote areas of the Northern Territory recorded the highest percentages, just on 50 per cent, followed by the remote areas of New South Wales and the non-remote areas of Western Australia and South Australia respectively. In Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia the percentage of Indigenous people not in the labour force was greater, even if only slightly, in non-remote areas than in remote areas.

**Figure 18: Percentage of Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over not in the labour force, 2002**



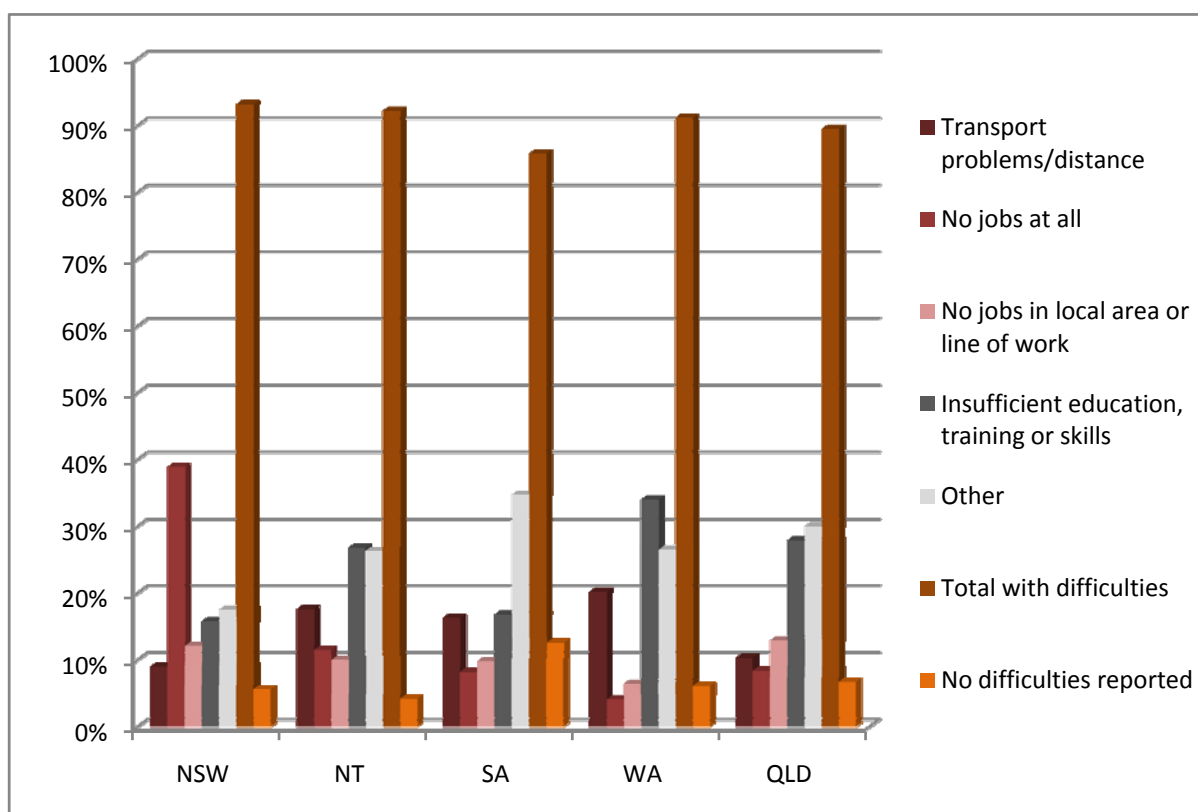
Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.84 Figure 19 over the page illustrates that over 80 per cent of unemployed Indigenous people in remote areas find it difficult to find work, rising to over 90 per cent in New South Wales where the most common barrier to finding work is that there are no jobs at all. However in the Northern Territory and Western Australia the greatest barrier is insufficient education, training or skills to find a job and this reason is second only to no jobs in local area or line of work in Queensland.

3.85 NCETA notes in its submission that:

Employment status and employment opportunities are key factors in the health and wellbeing of individuals and the communities in which they live. Employment status and opportunities are also heavily implicated in the risk of problematic alcohol and other drug use. So, from a prevention perspective, the need to ensure that adequate employment options exist is of fundamental importance.<sup>44</sup>

**Figure 19: Main difficulty finding work for unemployed Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over in remote areas, 2002**



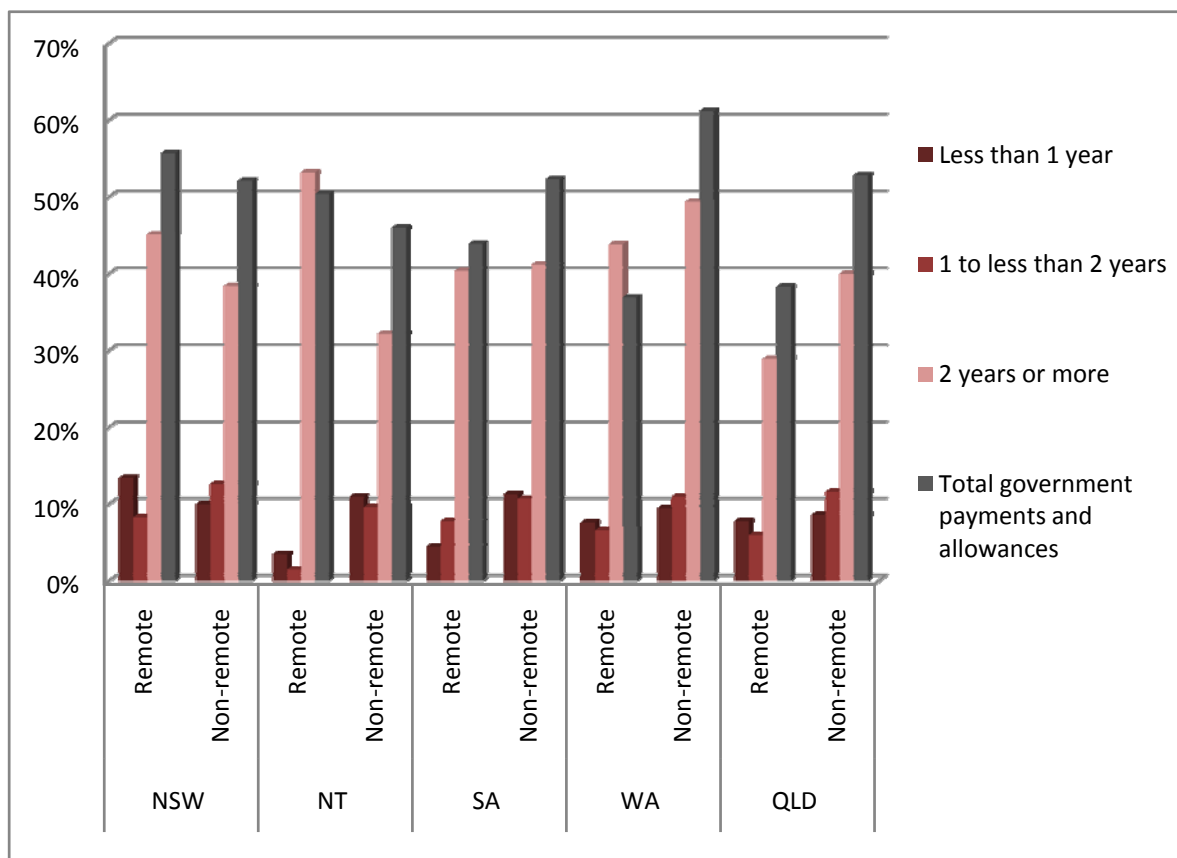
Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

3.86 Figure 20 over the page outlines the percentage of the total Indigenous population in remote and non-remote areas for which government pensions and allowances have been the main source of income. The majority of Indigenous people have been on government pensions and allowances for more than two years with a higher percentage of Indigenous people in Western Australia and Queensland in non-remote areas on government pensions and allowances than in remote areas. In remote areas in the Northern Territory and South Australia fewer than 5 per cent have been on government pensions and allowances for less than one year whereas in New South Wales is more than double that number at 13.5 per cent. Also of interest is that overall the Northern Territory has a smaller percentage of Indigenous people in remote and non-remote areas on government pensions and allowances than New South Wales.

44 National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, *Submission 44*, p. 8.



**Figure 20: Times that government pensions and allowances have been the main source of income in the last 2 years for Indigenous people aged 15 years and over, 2002**



Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS

## Welfare and security of children and young people

3.87 The committee is unable to compare data on juvenile justice and child protection across states and territories in regional and remote areas. This is because, as the AIHW noted in its submission, :

...data on young people in juvenile justice facilities or under juvenile justice supervision can be disaggregated by state and territories but cannot be disaggregated by geographical location. The same is the case for children in the child protection system where the child protection data set does not allow for the reporting of the data by region or remoteness.<sup>45</sup>

3.88 The committee was particularly concerned with the limited data available in this area given that at the time of arrest and incarceration details on where the offence was committed and where the person resided would be recorded. The committee is also concerned with the lack of detailed data in this area given that juvenile detention

45 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 69*, p. 7.

rates are one of the 12 Headline Indicators for the Productivity Commission's annual *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report.<sup>46</sup>

3.89 Although geographical regions within jurisdictions cannot be compared, the more general differences between states and territories can. The AIHW report on *Juvenile justice in Australia 2006-07* identifies that while rates of juvenile justice supervision:

...for non-Indigenous young people were similar across all states and territories, there was considerable variation in the rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Western Australia had the highest Indigenous rate, with around 80 per 1,000 Indigenous young people under supervision, followed by South Australia with 50 per 1,000...the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Victoria had the lowest rates, which ranged from 20 to 26 per 1,000.<sup>47</sup>

3.90 The report also notes that both Western Australia and Tasmania have had large increases in the rate of Indigenous people under supervision. In Western Australia, the rate of Indigenous young people under juvenile justice supervision:

...increased from 70 per 1,000 in 2003–04 to 80 per 1,000 in 2006–07...In contrast, the Indigenous rate decreased in South Australia from 62 to 50 per 1,000.<sup>48</sup>

3.91 The report outlines the average daily number of young people in detention by Indigenous status in each state and territory. On a daily average almost 90 percent of young people in detention in the Northern Territory are Indigenous followed by Western Australia with just over 70 per cent. It is also clearly evident that a further disaggregation of this data into remoteness areas would provide valuable information and allow better comparison between states with large urban populations and those with relatively large remote populations.

**Table 7: Average daily number of young people in detention 2006-07**

	NSW	QLD	WA	SA	NT	Aust
<b>Indigenous</b>	184	91	83	21	26	443
<b>Total all young people</b>	386	145	117	52	29	941
<b>% that are Indigenous</b>	48%	63%	71%	40%	90%	47%

Source: AIHW 2008

46 See Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2007*, June 2007, <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2007/> (accessed 21 June 2009).

47 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Juvenile justice in Australia 2006-07*, August 2008, p. 32.

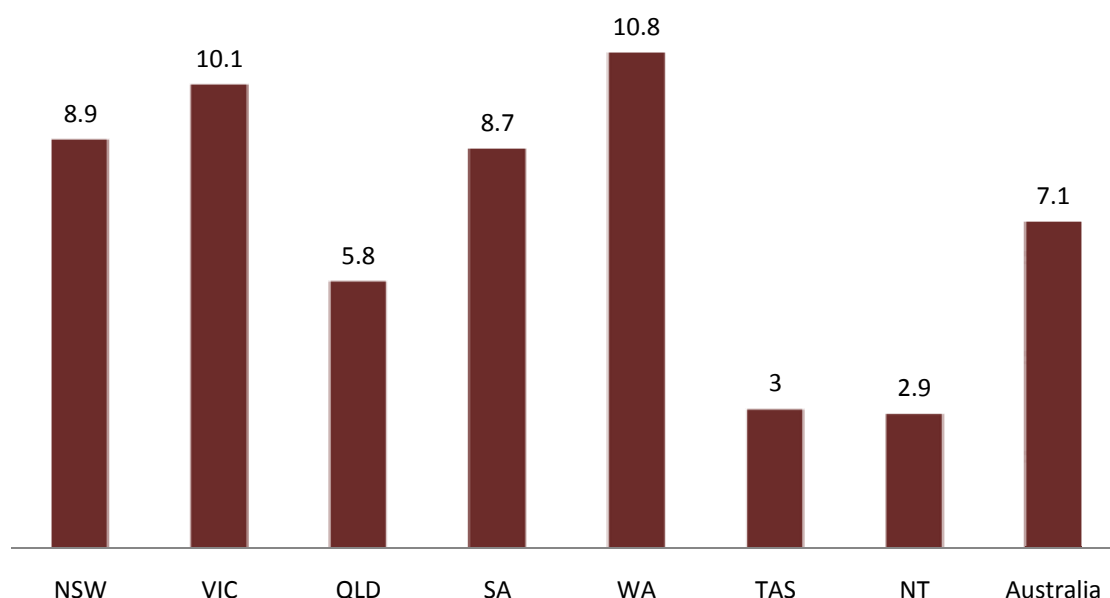
48 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Juvenile justice in Australia 2006-07*, August 2008, p. 36.

3.92 The committee's research has shown that there are similar problems with data collections related to child protection. The most recent *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report noted that existing data collections needed to be developed to:

...better reflect the underlying extent of child protection issues that are not necessarily apparent from administrative data on substantiations, notifications and orders.<sup>49</sup>

3.93 Figure 21 below illustrates the number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders in each state and territory, which differs greatly. It should also be noted that even though the Northern Territory has a low ratio it does not necessarily give a complete picture as it may also indicate a lack of services in remote and very remote areas where a substantial proportion of the Indigenous population reside.

**Figure 21: Ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous children on care and protection orders, July 2007**



Source: AIHW 2008

3.94 The AIHW's report *Child protection Australia 2006–07* also lists the type of abuse or neglect that is reported by state and territory. There are many notable differences, for example in Western Australia, 50 per cent of the notifications are for neglect while in Queensland it is 33 per cent and in Victoria it is 19 per cent. In addition South Australia only has 2.7 per cent of notifications for sexual abuse while Western Australia has 12.5 and the Northern Territory has almost 10 per cent. The Northern Territory and Victoria have by far the highest notifications for physical abuse with just over 30 per cent with the next closest at 22 per cent.

49 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2007*, June 2007, p. 66, <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2007/> (accessed 1 June 2009).

3.95 The comparisons with non-Indigenous children are also interesting as although Indigenous children across all jurisdictions have a higher percentage of notifications for neglect and for emotional abuse, excluding Queensland, while non-Indigenous children, with the exception of the ACT and Tasmania (for which the data should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of Indigenous children), have a higher percentage of notifications for sexual and physical abuse. It also must be noted that there may be substantial under-reporting of child abuse across all jurisdictions.

**Figure 22: Percentage of children aged 0-17 years who were the subject of substantiated notifications: type of abuse or neglect, by Indigenous status and state/territory, 2006-07**

Type of abuse or neglect	NSW	Vic <sup>(a)</sup>	Qld <sup>(b)</sup>	WA	SA	Tas <sup>(c)(d)</sup>	ACT	NT
<b>Indigenous children</b>								
Physical abuse	16.5	31.3	22.6	19.6	10.0	9.7	15.8	30.1
Sexual abuse	8.7	4.6	4.9	12.5	2.7	19.4	3.9	9.9
Emotional abuse	37.1	44.8	39.5	17.5	50.0	9.7	39.5	30.1
Neglect	37.7	19.4	33.0	50.3	37.3	61.3	40.8	29.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Other children</b>								
Physical abuse	20.8	34.8	22.7	24.3	15.9	22.6	13.3	42.9
Sexual abuse	16.6	7.4	6.7	22.5	5.9	12.1	3.1	14.3
Emotional abuse	36.9	42.3	46.4	16.9	46.7	28.7	50.4	29.9
Neglect	25.7	15.5	24.2	36.3	31.5	36.5	33.2	12.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Because of new service and data reporting arrangements, the Victorian child protection data for 2006–07 may not be fully comparable to previous years data. See AIHW (2008) for more information.

(b) 2006–07 data for Queensland are interim and will be revised in 2008.

(c) Data relating to substantiations in Tasmania for 2006–07 should be interpreted carefully because of the high proportion of investigations in process by 31 August 2007.

(d) The high number of children with an 'unknown' Indigenous status at substantiation in Tasmania makes the counts for both Indigenous children and other children unreliable.

*Source: AIHW 2008*

3.96 The committee notes that the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in its submission, outlined that:

A simple examination of the statistics showing an over-representation of Indigenous children and young people in the child protection and out-of-home care systems does not answer why this occurs. Such correlational data need to be examined in detail to see whether there is something inherent in Indigenous populations, in the policies and procedures of authorities (such

as overt or covert racism, which may mean that problems in Indigenous families are more likely to be observed and come to the attention of authorities), or whether such overrepresentation can be explained by some other underlying causes (e.g., socio-economic disadvantage).<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusions from the data

3.97 Throughout the broad examination of some basic data on areas related to the terms of reference for the committee's inquiry, such as health, welfare, wellbeing, child protection and employment, what becomes obvious is the great difference between the status and wellbeing of Indigenous people across the country. It also provides some additional quantitative evidence to substantiate the constant pleas the committee receives from witnesses that there can be no one-size-fits-all solution as there is no one consistent problem across jurisdictions or communities.<sup>51</sup> This was also acknowledged recently by the Commonwealth Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in an address to the National Press Club:

The Government realises that there is no single solution to what is a systemic, complex problem. It just doesn't make sense to think that what works in one remote Indigenous community can be effectively transposed to another. This has to be tackled community by community, with local input and ownership.<sup>52</sup>

3.98 Providing an overview of some of the available data also illustrates the importance of good data collection and analysis for developing policy and assessing the needs of people who live in particular areas. Using accurate and relevant data specific to the location of the intended area of implementation is essential, as situations and needs can vary between remote and very remote areas as well as in regional areas. The committee notes that more work on improving data collection that can be disaggregated to regional locations and by remoteness areas needs to be undertaken.

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50 Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Submission 51*, p. 8.

51 Jennifer Walker, *Submission 15*; Oxfam Australia, *Submission 17*; Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, *Submission 24*; Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc, *Submission 28*; Mission Australia, *Submission 43*; Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, *Submission 48*; NSW Department of Education and Training, *Submission 64*; Mungoorbada Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 83* and *Committee Hansard*, 20 May 2009; Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 85*; Dr John Boffa, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, 1 May 2009; Mrs Danelle Batchler, Kalano Community Association Inc, *Committee Hansard*, 20 May 2009; Assistant Commissioner Grahame Kelly, Northern Territory Police, *Committee Hansard*, 21 May 2009; Mrs Leanna Haynes, Anglicare NT, *Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2009; Ms Kandie Allen-Kelly, Australian Association of Social Workers, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009.

52 The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Closing the Gap - Building an Indigenous Future*, Speech to the National Press Club, Canberra, 27 February 2008, [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/closing\\_the\\_gap\\_27feb08.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/closing_the_gap_27feb08.htm) (accessed 9 June 2009).