Why it's important

The health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people, and the discrepancy in life expectancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, have been described as a "national disgrace" (e.g. Ministerial Statements *Closing the Gap,* 22 February 2016).
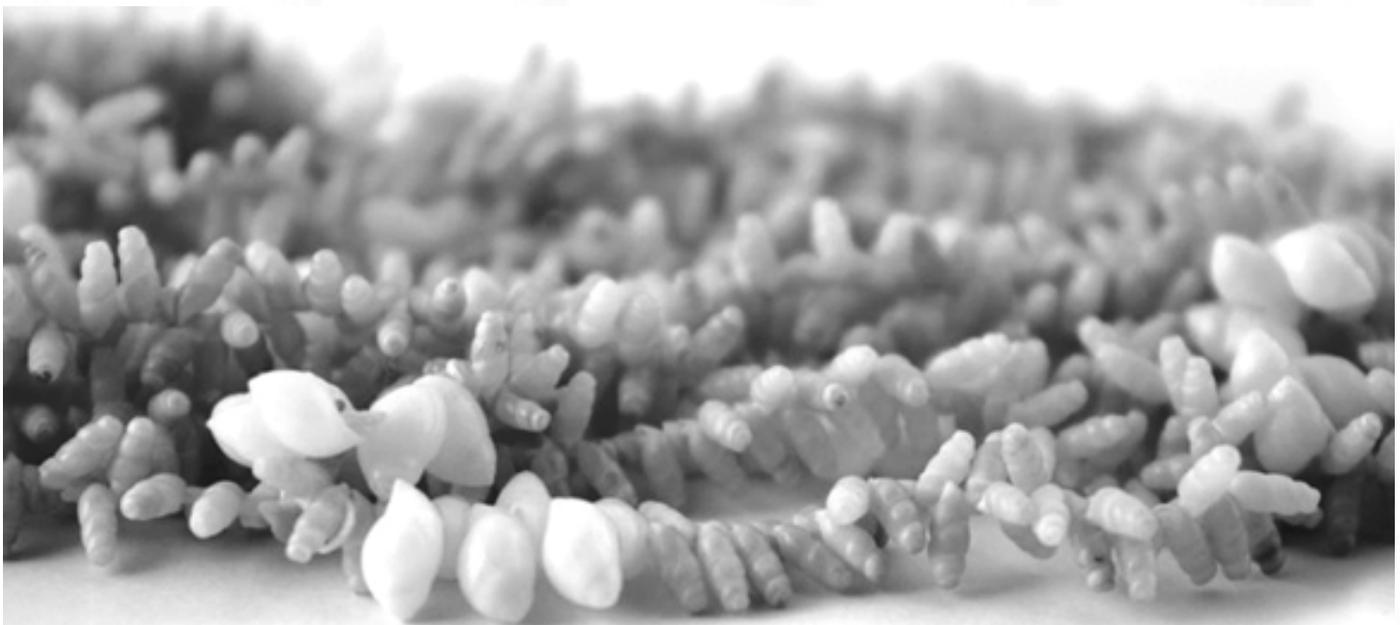
The life expectancy at birth for Aboriginal people in Australia is much lower than for non-Aboriginal Australians. For the period 2010–2012, the life expectancy at birth was estimated to be 69 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and 74 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females. In contrast, life expectancy at birth for non-Indigenous Australians for the same period was 80 years for males and 83 years for females. That is a difference of 11 years for males and 9 years for females. Indigenous Australians had higher death rates than non-Indigenous Australians across all age groups during 2007–2011. In the 35–44 age group, Indigenous people died at about 5 times the rate of non-Indigenous people (Australia's Health 2014).

The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is closely linked with the history of colonisation. The colonisation of Australia by Europeans initiated on an ongoing crisis for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in terms of their cultural identity, connection to the land and overall displacement.

Nationally, data shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to:
*   suffer from ill health, disability and reduced quality of life
*   smoke tobacco and drink alcohol in excess
*   have poor nutrition and higher levels of obesity
*   live in overcrowded and sub-standard housing
*   have lower levels of education, be unemployed and live in poverty (Australia's Health 2014).

In addition, as a result of systemic displacement, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience cultural disruption, social exclusion, increased feelings of stress, a decreased sense of identify, political and social oppression, and a loss of control over their lives and livelihoods.

The Social Determinants of Health
Working together to address the social factors that affect the health & wellbeing of Tasmanians

Why is *Indigenous Status* an issue for the health of Tasmanians?

About 4% of the Tasmanian population are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 19,625, Tasmanians identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the 2011 Census.[1] This represents 4% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia of 548,370 and about 4% of Tasmania's population as a whole—the second-highest proportion of Indigenous people in any Australian state or territory, after the Northern Territory.[2]

90% of Indigenous people in Tasmania identified as being Aboriginal, 6% identified as being Torres Strait Islander and 4% identified as being both.[2]

The median age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tasmania was 22 years, compared to 40 years for non-Indigenous people.[2]

Indigenous people have a lower life expectancy

The life expectancy at birth (2010-12) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females in Tasmania was 74.6 years and 70.5 for males —compared to 82.6 years and 78.7 years for non-IndigenousTasmanians.[2]

Indigenous people are more likely to experience risk factors for poor health

The Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report 2010* states that:
- More Indigenous peoples live in over-crowded households (9%) than non-Indigenous peoples (6%) in Tasmania
- Indigenous young people are less likely to continue secondary education (from Grade 7-12): 40% of Indigenous young people compared to 77% in Tasmania
- 44% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults were in the lowest income quintile in Tasmania in 2008
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults were 3.2 times as likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous Tasmanians
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 2.6 times as likely to be in out of home care.[3]

The health of Indigenous people is closely linked with the history of colonisation, trauma and racism

The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is closely linked with the history of colonisation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences of cultural disruption, social exclusion, a lost sense of identity, political and social oppression, racism, and a feeling of loss of control over their lives, influence health outcomes and disparities by affecting biological functioning (e.g. cardiovascular and immune function), mental health and emotional wellbeing and the quality of their relationships with others; and by promoting psychological distress (self-efficacy, depression, anger) that can be associated with risk-taking and unhealthy behaviours.[4]

The question of racism is present not only in society but also institutionally in the health care sector.[4]

Aboriginal people who were part of the *Stolen Generations* are more likely to suffer from depression, have worse health and a shorter life span than other Indigenous people.[4]

References & Resources

1. ABS 2012, *2011 Census tells the story of Tasmania's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:* abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/tas-32?opendocument&navpos=620.
2. ABS 2011, *Census Quick Stats, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - usual residents:* censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/IREG601?opendocument&navpos=220.
3. ABS 2014, *3238.0 - Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026:* abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6694405ADBF2B03BCA257CC9001439A6?opendocument.
4. Department of Health & Ageing (Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council) 2010, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework:* health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/health-oatsih-pubs-framereport-toc/$FILE/HPF%20Report%202010august2011.pdf.
5. Social Determinants of Health Advocacy Network 2013, *Submission to Joint Select Committee on Preventative Health Care.*

- Australian Government, *Culture and Closing the Gap:* arts.gov.au/culture-and-closing-the-gap.

Communities

- Engage with, and support Aboriginal communities in Tasmania.

- Celebrate Aboriginal culture and creative endeavours.

- Help to create a culture in your community that does not tolerate discrimination.

- Speak out about the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and inequities in health (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups or write to the media).

- Foster partnerships between Aboriginal organisations and other community organisations.

- Learn about local Aboriginal heritage.

- Promote good news stories about Aboriginal culture in your community.

- Use health promotion resources specifically developed for Indigenous communities. For example, *Live Longer! Community health action pack: a practical guide to health promotion planning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*. See: healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/promotion-resources?lid=21635.

Individuals

- Enjoy the stories, arts and culture of local Aboriginal communities.

- Challenge your thoughts and behaviours, and those of others, in relation to discrimination.

- Support Tasmanian Aboriginal people in their endeavours for social justice.

- Develop an understanding of the significant difference between the health status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Speak out about the need for government and non-government organisations to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to seek solutions.

- Advocate for equal access to health and social services for all Tasmanians.

- Encourage and support young Aboriginal people to fulfil their dreams.

- Volunteer your time to work with Aboriginal communities.

- Develop your own interpersonal skills so that you are able to show empathy towards people who come from different backgrounds than yourself.

Workplaces (Managers, Workers, Volunteers) & Service Providers

- Help to collect data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Know how to ask clients and patients about their Indigenous status.

- As an organisation, undertake cultural competence training.

- Support the *Close the Gap Campaign*: humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/projects/close-gap-indigenous-health.

- Develop a *Reconciliation Action Plan* (RAP). See: Reconciliation Australia - reconciliation.org.au/raphub/. RAPs provide a framework for organisations to realise their vision for reconciliation. RAPs are practical plans of action built on relationships, respect and opportunities. RAPs create social change and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Politicians & Governments

- Give Indigenous Tasmanian communities power over their own endeavours.

- Support Indigenous people to become leaders and decision-makers at all levels of Government.

- Continue to act on the findings of the *Bringing them home: The Stolen Children Report* (1997): humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/bringing-them-home-stolen.

- Make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health a priority, invest appropriately, focus on health promotion and cultural development, and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies that aim to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

- Deliver on the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023* including the following outcomes:

    - close the life expectancy gap within a generation (by 2031)

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

    - ensure all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years

    - halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018)

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

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

    Read more about the Plan here: health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/B92E980680486C3BCA257BF0001BAF01/$File/health-plan.pdf.

- All politicians and government employees should participate in cultural competency training.

- Government departments should have *Reconciliation Action Plans* (RAP) as outlined above.

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