



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Significant initiatives have been undertaken in recent years to better understand the determinants of Indigenous disadvantage, and to improve the coordination of efforts and resources that can address both the pervasive consequences and causes of that disadvantage.

At the highest level of government there is intense resolve to improve coordination and deliver better programs and services that focus on changing these outcomes in partnership with Indigenous people. This approach is heavily informed by the internationally renowned research undertaken in Western Australia through the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (TICHR). As well as providing the causal pathways research that underpins the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* reporting framework, further TICHR research on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children gives Western Australian service providers an extensive database on which to expand their understanding of the extent and depth of Indigenous disadvantage.

The purpose of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* is to enable a coherent and consistent framework of reporting, analysis and performance enhancement, with a focus on outcomes, to take place across government. This will enable the tracking of performance over time against a causal pathways framework that specifies Strategic Areas for Action that will impact on longer-term indicators of Indigenous disadvantage.

This report also provides a section on initiatives that have demonstrated, or have the potential to demonstrate, a positive impact on particular Strategic Areas for Action. In future reports this section has the potential to report on formal evaluations of strategies, or share grassroots experiences of strategies that have been shown to work in specific regions. For the moment, this section comprises a small selection of projects, initiatives and proposals, discovered in the process of working with stakeholders and investigating data sources.

This report is the first of its kind for Western Australia. It provides a compendium of concise indicators highlighting the relatively disadvantaged position held by Indigenous people in Western Australia. It extends on the analysis provided in the national *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report by expanding on Western Australian specific time series analysis, and more detailed analyses of geographic, gender, and age characteristics, where available.

When combined with the *National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians*, agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments in 2004, a comprehensive foundation of substantial agreement between the two levels of government is in place that makes it possible to discuss a joint plan of action for Indigenous affairs in Western Australia.

There is a range of important messages throughout this indicator report – the key messages have been summarised here, and presented according to the structure of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* reporting framework:

## Headline Indicators

### *Life expectancy*

The life expectancy of Indigenous persons is typically around 15-20 years less than that of non-Indigenous persons. Western Australia has the second highest Indigenous mortality rates in Australia.

### *Rates of disability and/or core activity restriction*

Given the general burden of ill health, Indigenous people who have a disability or long-term health condition are at risk of a range of poor outcomes. An estimated 39% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over had a disability or long-term health condition in 2002.

*Years 10 and 12 retention and attainment*

Around a quarter of full-time Indigenous students continue to Year 12 (from Year 8), compared with close to three-quarters of non-Indigenous students. The Indigenous retention rate has risen in recent years, from 16% in 1996 to 26% in 2003.

*Post secondary education – participation and attainment*

In 2001, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people had similar rates of participation in post secondary education, although Indigenous people were more likely to undertake post secondary study at a TAFE institution than non-Indigenous people.

Less than one in ten Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over had attained a post school qualification (9.4%). This is lower than the rate among non-Indigenous people (32%) and all Indigenous Australians (12%).

Remoteness has an impact on the number of Indigenous people completing post secondary qualifications.

*Labour force participation and unemployment*

A relatively low proportion of the Indigenous population are engaged in employment when compared with non-Indigenous persons. This is the result of relatively low labour force participation rates coupled with a rate of unemployment that was 2-3 times higher than that for non-Indigenous persons in 2001. Further, CDEP employment accounts for over 30% of Indigenous employment, although this proportion is higher in Very remote areas (69%).

*Household and individual income*

In Western Australia in 2001, 43% of Indigenous people had a gross weekly individual income of less than \$200. The corresponding proportion for the non-Indigenous population was 28%.

In the same year, the equivalised household income for Indigenous people in Western Australia was \$268, compared with \$501 for non-Indigenous Western Australians.

*Home ownership*

The level of home ownership in Western Australia was significantly greater among non-Indigenous people (74%) when compared with Indigenous people (19%).

*Suicide and self-harm*

Although Indigenous male suicides in Western Australia have decreased in recent years (from 70 per 100,000 population in 1998 to 38 in 2002), the rate is still nearly double that for non-Indigenous males.

In Western Australia, Indigenous hospitalisation separation rates for self-harm are far higher than the rates for non-Indigenous persons.

*Substantiated child protection notifications*

In Western Australia in 2003-04, the rate of substantiated child protection notifications among Indigenous children was nearly eight times that reported for non-Indigenous children. Indigenous children were most likely to suffer neglect (43% of all substantiations), whereas non-Indigenous children were most likely to suffer sexual abuse (29%).

*Deaths from homicide and hospitalisation for assault*

Indigenous Western Australians are over 15 times more likely to be homicide victims than non-Indigenous people, and are most likely to be victimised by another Indigenous person.

Indigenous Western Australians are far more likely to be hospitalised for assault than non-Indigenous people.

### *Victim rates for crime*

The incidence of assault was much higher among Indigenous persons than non-Indigenous persons – this is especially the case among Indigenous females, who were 12 times more likely to be assaulted than non-indigenous females, in 2001.

### *Imprisonment and juvenile detention rates*

Indigenous people are vastly over-represented in the prison population. As at 30 June 2004, 38% of all prisoners in Western Australia were Indigenous, whereas Indigenous people make up only 3.5% of the population of Western Australia.<sup>31</sup> The majority of Indigenous prisoners were young men aged 20-34 years.

Indigenous juveniles were 40-50 times more likely to be detained in juvenile facilities than non-Indigenous Western Australians.

## Strategic Areas for Action

### EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

#### *Rates of hospital admission for infectious diseases*

The hospital separation rate in Western Australia for Indigenous children aged 0-3 years is four times higher than that for non-Indigenous children. Rates are highest for children in remote regions.

#### *Infant mortality*

In 2002, perinatal deaths were three times more prevalent among births to Indigenous mothers than non-Indigenous mothers. There has been little consistent improvement in the mortality rate for Indigenous babies in the last decade.

#### *Birthweight*

Birthweight is one of the key predictors of poor health and disability. In Western Australia, 14% of babies born to Indigenous mothers during 2002 were regarded as having low birthweight.

#### *Hearing impediments*

As at 2000-2001, over one-quarter of Western Australian Indigenous children aged 0-17 years had experienced an ear infection at some stage in their life.

Rates of ear infection in Indigenous communities in Australia can be over ten times the level described by the World Health Organization as “a massive public health problem”, i.e. 4%.<sup>32</sup>

### EARLY SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

#### *Preschool and school attendance*

Western Australia had the highest school participation rates for Indigenous children aged 5-8 years in Australia.

#### *Year 3 literacy and numeracy*

In 2004, there was a disparity of between 16 and 34 percentage points in the proportion of Year 3 Indigenous students and all Year 3 students achieving the national benchmarks in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy.

#### *Primary school children with dental caries*

The incidence of decayed, missing and filled teeth is far greater among Indigenous children than other children, and is more prevalent in areas where traditional lifestyles and diet have been most significantly disrupted.<sup>33</sup>

## POSITIVE CHILDHOOD AND TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

### *Years 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy*

In national benchmark tests, the proportion of Indigenous Western Australian children meeting the benchmarks is lower than that of non-Indigenous children at both Years 5 and 7.

### *Retention at Year 9*

Retention rates to Year 9 have improved among Indigenous students in recent years, and were similar to the rates for non-Indigenous students in 2003.

### *Indigenous cultural studies in school curriculum*

There is insufficient data available to determine the level or the impact of Indigenous cultural studies in the school curriculum.

There were 51 schools teaching Aboriginal languages, as of semester 1, 2004.

### *Involvement of Indigenous people in development and delivery of Indigenous studies*

There is insufficient data available to determine the level or impact of Indigenous people's participation in the development and delivery of Indigenous cultural studies.

Indigenous people are under-represented in teaching and non-teaching staff positions of secondary schools.

### *Organised sport, arts or community group activities*

There is insufficient quality data available to fully determine the level of Indigenous people's participation in organised sports, arts or community group activities.

Some research indicates that involvement in sport, arts and community activities can have very positive social, economic and health outcomes for young Indigenous people.

### *Juvenile diversions as a proportion of all juvenile offenders*

Indigenous juveniles are over five times more likely to come in contact with police than non-Indigenous juveniles and, when they do, are more likely to be apprehended and charged.

### *Transition from school to work*

The employment and education outcomes of Indigenous young people are far poorer than those of non-Indigenous young people, creating greater difficulties for making a successful transition from school to work and adult life.

## SUBSTANCE USE AND MISUSE

### *Alcohol and tobacco consumption*

Alcohol and tobacco misuse reflect the emotional and social wellbeing of the person and may impact directly on the individual and family. In the 12 months to 2002, 16% of Indigenous persons had consumed alcohol at risky or high risk levels. This is twice as likely to be the case in Remote areas than in Non-remote areas.

### *Alcohol related crime and hospital statistics*

There is a fundamental link between alcohol consumption, crime and the high rates of homicide and assault experienced by Indigenous communities. Nearly 90% of all Indigenous homicides in Australia involve alcohol.

The Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne health regions of Western Australia had the highest per capita rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol related hospitalisation costs. These regions have experienced significant increases in alcohol related assaults in recent years and, correspondingly, the overall cost of alcohol caused hospital admissions had doubled between 1995 and 1997-1998.

### *Drug and other substance use*

Drug related hospitalisations occurred in the Indigenous population at more than twice the rate of the non-Indigenous population (4.8 compared with 2.3 per 1,000 population, respectively). In 2003-2004, the highest rates of Indigenous drug related hospitalisations were reported in the Country Noongar (7.2 per 1,000 population) and Perth Noongar (6.3 per 1,000 population) regions.

## **FUNCTIONAL AND RESILIENT FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**

### *Children on (long term) care and protection orders*

The rate of Indigenous children on care and protection orders is eight times the rate for non-Indigenous children. The number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders has risen in recent years, although this may be related to improved services and identification rather than increases in the actual incidence of child abuse.

### *Repeat offending*

Almost three-quarters of all adult Indigenous offenders in prison as at June 2004 were repeat offenders. Preventive interventions need to occur in early years of life to reduce the incidence of recidivism among Indigenous young people.

### *Access to the nearest health professional*

Around two-thirds of Indigenous people in Western Australia's discrete communities lived more than 100 kilometres from the nearest hospital. A range of factors, including remoteness, access to transportation and cultural appropriateness of services, influence Indigenous access to health professionals. The 2001 Census found that Indigenous households were more than three times as likely as other households to be without a vehicle.

### *Proportion of indigenous people with access to their traditional lands*

Western Australia has approximately 252 Aboriginal Reserves for the use and benefit of Aboriginal people that occupy 52% of the total reserved area of Western Australia. Western Australia also has more than 20,000 registered Indigenous sites of significance.

## **EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS**

### *Rates of diseases associated with poor environmental health*

Indigenous people were hospitalised at six times the rate of non-Indigenous people for Influenza and pneumonia, and Intestinal infections; and four and a half times the rate for Upper respiratory tract infections.

### *Access to clean water and functional sewerage*

There has been an increase in the proportion of discrete Indigenous communities with monthly testing and treatment of water supplies from 1997 to 2004, however there has not been a similar improvement found in the proportion of individual dwellings in these discrete communities with connection to sewerage disposal systems.

Sustainable positive environmental health outcomes are linked to, and require investment in, human capital, governance and economic development initiatives in discrete Indigenous communities.

### *Overcrowding in housing*

Overcrowding affects nearly one-quarter of people living in Indigenous households in Western Australia. Overcrowding is most prevalent in Very remote regions of Western Australia, affecting 52% of people living in Indigenous households.

## ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT

### *Employment by sector, industry and occupation*

Full-time employment rates in the non-Indigenous population are around 1.6 times higher than in the Indigenous population, with greater differences evident in the 20-24 years and 25-34 years age brackets. Indigenous people tend to be more likely to be employed in lower skilled occupations, a factor arising from lower levels of education and training.

### *CDEP participation*

CDEP participation accounts for over a quarter of the Western Australian Indigenous labour force, and can be above 70% in remote areas.

### *Long term unemployment*

Long-term unemployment creates social and economic risks for families and individuals. Rates of long-term unemployment are highest for Indigenous people in Very remote areas.

### *Self employment*

Western Australia has very low levels of Indigenous self-employment. Factors that may influence this include remoteness, as well as cultural perceptions about what constitutes being self-employed.

### *Indigenous owned or controlled land*

Significant investment in the governance capacity of communities is required to sustain the economic development of Indigenous owned or controlled land. Legislative and policy reform is required to create a more flexible land tenure framework to enable potential economic, social and cultural aspirations of Indigenous people to be realised.

Indigenous landholdings (excluding freehold) in Western Australia cover a total of 37.3 million hectares, or 15% of Western Australia's land area. It comprises land tenures made under various enabling legislation, providing grants of interests in land that are subject to government ministerial and executive control.

The Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) holds approximately 27 million hectares, or about 12% of the State. As at April 2005, it comprised of 327 parcels of land under various forms of tenure such as reserves, leases and freehold. Of the total ALT estate, 43 parcels of land have to date been transferred to the direct management and control or ownership of Indigenous people.

### *Accredited training in leadership, finance or management*

Indigenous women are undertaking accredited training in leadership, finance or management at higher rates than Indigenous men (1.1% compared to 0.7%). Indigenous women undertake this type of training at four times the rate of non-Indigenous women.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2003, p. xvii.
- <sup>2</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2003, p. xx.
- <sup>3</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2003, p. 1.2.
- <sup>4</sup> Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Many Ways Forward: Report of the Inquiry into Capacity Building and Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2004, p. 240.
- <sup>5</sup> Council of Australian Governments (COAG), *Communiqué*, 3 November, 2000, [online], available at <<http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/031100/index.htm#reconciliation>>, [accessed 9 May 2005].
- <sup>6</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1997, p. 105.
- <sup>7</sup> A. Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2000.
- <sup>8</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1997, p. 112.
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- <sup>10</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1997.
- <sup>11</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1997, p. 402.
- <sup>12</sup> S.R. Zubrick , D.M. Lawrence , S.R. Silburn , E. Blair, H. Milroy , T. Wilkes , S. Eades , H. D'Antoine, A. Read, P. Ishiguchi & S. Doyle. *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2004, p. xiii.
- <sup>13</sup> S.R. Zubrick , D.M. Lawrence , S.R. Silburn , E. Blair, H. Milroy , T. Wilkes , S. Eades , H. D'Antoine, A. Read, P. Ishiguchi & S. Doyle. *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2004, p. xvii.
- <sup>14</sup> S.R. Zubrick, S.R. Silburn, D.M. Lawrence, F.G. Mitrou, R.B. Dalby, E.M. Blair, J. Griffin, H. Milroy, J.A. De Maio, A. Cox & J. Li, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2005, p. xxi.
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- <sup>18</sup> Western Australia, Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Hope for the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy: a Vision for Quality of Life in Western Australia*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 2003.
- <sup>19</sup> For further information see <<http://indigenous.gov.au/coag/>>.
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- <sup>21</sup> See for example, J. Taylor & O. Stanley. *The Opportunity Costs of the Status Quo in the Thamarrurr Region*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, Canberra, March 2005.
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- <sup>23</sup> S.R. Zubrick, S.R. Silburn & M. Prior, *Resources and contexts for child development: implications for children and society*, paper submitted to the Academy of Social Science in Australia, 2004.
- <sup>24</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2003, Appendix 3, p. A3.1.
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