4.0 Outcomes
This chapter provides an overview of the outcomes in Queensland’s remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**Key points**

- As there is no single accepted indicator of community wellbeing, outcomes are measured using a suite of indicators such as educational attainment, arrest rates, employment and health indicators. These may not reflect wellbeing or the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote and discrete communities.

- Disadvantage is generally greater in remote and discrete communities:
  - The 16 most disadvantaged local government areas in Queensland are all discrete communities (as measured by the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage).
  - Across a range of measures, including education, economic and health outcomes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote regions fare worse than their counterparts in the rest of the state.
  - This may not necessarily mean that wellbeing is worse for residents in remote and discrete communities—national data suggest that those living in remote areas may be better connected to their culture, have a greater social network and have a lower incidence of poor mental health.

- There is little economic activity in remote and discrete communities and high unemployment. Available employment in mainland discrete communities is concentrated in the public sector, making up almost half of all jobs. Three sectors—education, health, public administration and safety—account for 67 per cent of all Indigenous employment.

- Available data suggest progress in closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has been slow:
  - Some progress has been made in educational attainment, health and overcrowding; however, outcomes are lower than for non-Indigenous Queenslanders and Indigenous Queenslanders in the rest of the state.
  - No or very little progress has been made in improving economic or community safety outcomes, and incarceration rates have worsened significantly.

- Indicators for the Torres Strait are significantly better than for other remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities:
  - For some indicators, particularly in relation to education and economic participation, outcomes are on par with, or close to, outcomes for non-Indigenous Queenslanders in the rest of the state.
  - It is not clear why this is the case. A possible factor is that the Torres Strait region has been able to maintain strong governance, which has allowed it to exercise a degree of control over service delivery. This is consistent with the experience of Indigenous communities in northern America.
4.1 Data sources and challenges

There are significant data challenges to examining outcomes and progress in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including:

- the small size of populations in communities can introduce volatility that can make year-to-year comparisons meaningless—for many outcomes, longer time series may be required to infer whether meaningful change has occurred
- limited availability of timely, relevant and up-to-date data, particularly over longer time periods.

Outcomes reported in this chapter are largely limited to publicly available information (Box 4.1). A range of administrative data (such as incarceration rates by home postcode) that might help to shed light on outcomes in communities are available, but were not easily accessible for the purposes of this inquiry.

**Box 4.1 Indicators for remote and discrete communities**

Key data sets used by the Commission include the following:

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey provides the most comprehensive measure of outcomes for Indigenous persons in Australia. However, sample sizes are too small to make meaningful comparisons over time or between Queensland’s regions.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Census of Population and Housing provides the most comprehensive indicators available at the community level. However, there are concerns about undercounting in remote Indigenous communities and the data relate largely to population, housing and employment or study.

The Queensland Government Statistician’s Office publishes data on communities, and has also made unpublished data available to the Commission.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) also holds data, and provides some community-level Census data through its community profiles.

Queensland Health publishes comprehensive data on Indigenous health outcomes through its Closing the Gap (Queensland Health, 2015) and Burden of Disease and Injury in Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Queensland Health, 2017, 2014) reports. Data does not always differentiate remote parts of Queensland and little contemporary data available for remote communities.

Torrens University Australia’s Public Health Information Development Unit regularly publishes a Social Health Atlas, which includes social and health indicators for Indigenous persons at the Indigenous Area (IARE) level.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) publishes a nationwide data collection of early childhood development, undertaken every three years of children commencing their first year of full-time school. It collects data relating to five key areas of early childhood development: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.

NAPLAN data, showing education outcomes by Indigenous status and remoteness, are published by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority.
These challenges aside, it is widely recognised that Indigenous people’s perceptions of wellbeing extend beyond the indicators commonly used in reporting frameworks (Taylor, 2006; United Nations 2006). There is also no single accepted indicator of wellbeing (ABS 2001; OECD 2011), and none for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As a result, community-level outcomes are measured using a suite of indicators such as educational attainment, arrest rates, employment and health indicators. This means that care should be used when reading the outcome data in this chapter—they may provide incomplete indicators of the progress being made in Queensland’s remote and discrete communities.

Frameworks for measuring wellbeing are discussed further in Chapter 10 (Evaluation).

### 4.2 Education

#### Year 12 attainment is low but increasing

School completion rates (to Year 12) have increased over the past five years. However, they remain lower than the Queensland average. In 2016, 31 per cent of Indigenous people in remote communities completed Year 12, compared with 39 per cent of Indigenous people in Queensland and 56 per cent of people in Queensland. Similarly, in 2016, 77 per cent of Indigenous people in remote communities completed year 10, compared to 81 per cent of Indigenous people in Queensland and 89 per cent of non-Indigenous people in Queensland.

**Figure 16 Highest level of schooling completed, 2011–2016**

A high proportion of children starting school are considered developmentally vulnerable

Children in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are more likely to be considered developmentally vulnerable in at least one domain. In 2015, 26 per cent of children in Queensland were considered developmentally vulnerable in at least one domain, compared to 44 per cent of children in mainland discrete communities and 43 per cent in the Torres Strait. While figures for individual communities are volatile due to small population sizes, there have been significant improvements in some communities (AEDC 2015).

Figure 17 shows the proportion of developmentally vulnerable children decreased in mainland discrete communities between 2009 and 2012, but has not materially changed after this. Results in non-discrete remote communities have not improved.

**Figure 17 Proportion of children developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains, 2009–2015**

School attendance rates are lower in discrete communities

In Queensland's mainland discrete communities students attended on average 69 per cent of classes, with only 25 per cent of students attending more than 90 per cent of classes. While in the Torres Strait students attended 79 per cent of classes, with 61 per cent of students attending more than 90 per cent (Figure 18).

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8 The Australian Early Development Census collects data relating to five areas of early childhood development, referred to as ‘domains’. These include: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.
NAPLAN results are lower in remote areas

NAPLAN reporting is available only by Indigenous status and by remoteness for 2008 through to 2016. While results are available by school, many students from discrete communities go to school outside of their community.

NAPLAN results are lower for Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous people, and this difference increases significantly with remoteness. In 2016, the proportions of Indigenous Year 3 students in remote Queensland who achieved the national minimum standards in reading, writing and numeracy were 73 per cent, 80 per cent and 76 per cent per cent respectively, compared to 96 per cent, 98 per cent and 97 per cent per cent for non-Indigenous students.

The results are similar for Year 9 (Figure 20). Remote Indigenous students also performed worse than non-remote Indigenous students.

**Figure 20 Proportion of students above national minimum standards, NAPLAN, Year 9, 2016**

[Bar chart showing proportions of students above national minimum standards for Year 9, 2016, by region and Indigenous status]

*Source: ACARA 2017a.*

Progress against NAPLAN has been mixed, with results varying significantly from year to year, making the identification of long term trends difficult.

While there are signs of improvement in year 3 reading and writing, there does not appear to be any long-term improvement in trends for numeracy (Figure 21).9

**Figure 21 Proportion of remote Indigenous students above national minimum standards, NAPLAN, Year 3, 2008–16**

[Chart showing proportions of remote Indigenous students above national minimum standards for Year 3, 2008–16]

*Source: ACARA 2017a.*

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9 The writing test was changed in 2011 from narrative writing to persuasive writing, meaning results can only be compared from 2011 to 2016.
At the Year 9 level, while 2015 was the best performing year since the national minimum standards were introduced in 2008, there does not appear to be any long-term improvement in trends for remote indigenous students in reading, writing or numeracy (Figure 22).

**Figure 22** Proportion of remote Indigenous students above national minimum standards, NAPLAN, Year 9, 2008–16

![Graph showing proportion of remote Indigenous students above national minimum standards, NAPLAN, Year 9, 2008–16](image)

Source: ACARA 2017a.

### 4.3 Economic participation

Participation for Indigenous populations generally falls as remoteness increases

In 2014–15, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote parts of Queensland was over 30 per cent (compared to under 3 per cent for non-Indigenous Queenslanders). Labour force participation was lower compared to non-remote regions or to the non-Indigenous population (Table 12).

**Table 12** Labour force statistics by remoteness, Queensland, 2014–15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remoteness</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>Labour Force Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major cities</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner regional</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer regional</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very remote</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2016b.
Progress on economic outcomes in remote areas is mixed

The phasing out of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) since 2008 makes comparisons of labour force status in 2016 and 2011 with 2006 difficult. CDEP participants were previously classified as employed by the ABS; when the program was phased out, participants transitioned into either employment or NewStart (unemployed).

Overall engagement of 18 to 24 year olds in work or education increased for Indigenous people in Queensland between 2011 and 2016, while decreasing for non-Indigenous youths. Excluding CDEP participation, Indigenous engagement in remote areas, remains at similar levels in 2016 as it was in 2011.

Figure 23 Proportion of 18–24 year-olds fully or partially engaged in work or study, by remoteness, 2006–16


Between 2011 and 2016, youth engagement rates in work or study, increased in mainland discrete communities but decreased in Torres Strait communities (Figure 24). In non-discrete remote areas, Indigenous engagement in work or study (56 per cent) is over twice that in discrete communities (24.2 per cent). However, in non-discrete remote areas, Indigenous engagement has fallen around 6 percentage points since 2006.
Discrete communities depend on public funding for jobs

In 2016, 20 per cent of employed Indigenous Queenslanders worked in the public sector. However, this proportion rises to 46 per cent in the Torres Strait and 45 per cent in mainland discrete communities. While local governments represent 1.6 per cent of all jobs and 4.1 per cent of Indigenous jobs in Queensland, in mainland discrete communities they account for 26 per cent of all jobs. In non-discrete remote communities, the private sector provided most (80 per cent) jobs (Figure 25).

Figure 25 Indigenous employment by sector, 2016

Source: ABS 2016a.

While the ABS data does not provide a breakdown of non-government jobs, many of these, particularly in discrete communities, are likely to be reliant on public funding. These include NGOs providing services in communities that are funded by government.
This is reflected in the lack of economic diversity in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Figure 26 shows employment in Queensland’s discrete communities by industry sector. The three largest sectors—education; health and public administration and safety; which are largely dependent on public funding—account for 67 per cent of total Indigenous employment.

In comparison, Queensland’s non-discrete remote communities have much greater diversity of employment. The three largest employers of Indigenous people in non-discrete remote communities in 2016 were mining 18 (per cent); health (13 per cent) and agriculture, forestry and fishing (10 per cent). Education and health; public administration and safety; and other services, account for only 34 per cent of indigenous employment in non-discrete remote communities.

**Figure 26 Indigenous employment by industry in Queensland, 2016**

Source: ABS 2016a.

4.4 Health

The burden of disease and injury is higher in remote Indigenous communities

In remote parts of Queensland, the burden of disease and injury for Indigenous Queenslanders rises to 2.4 times that of Queensland’s non-Indigenous population (using an age-standardised rate per 1,000 population).

In 2011, for Queensland’s remote Indigenous population (Figure 27):

- the largest contributor to the burden of disease and injury was cardiovascular disease (responsible for 48.9 years of lost life and 15.5 years of disability per 1,000 population and making up 17.7 per cent of the total burden)
- the second-largest contributor was diabetes (responsible for 38.8 years of lost life and 19.5 years of disability per 1,000 population).
Figure 27 Burden of disease and injury by broad cause and remoteness for Indigenous Queenslanders, 2011

Source: Queensland Health 2017b.

While mental disorders represent the single largest cause of the burden of disease and injury for Indigenous persons living in major cities (28.8 per cent), they are only the third-largest cause in remote Queensland (9.4 per cent). However, while mental disorders are a much smaller cause of the burden of disease and injury in remote areas, intentional injuries (including suicide and self-harm) is a much larger component of the total burden in remote areas (1.8 times the Indigenous average).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote areas also have lower health-adjusted life expectancy than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in cities. While Queenslanders born in 2007 could expect to live 73.5 years of healthy life and Indigenous persons in major cities could expect to live 65.3 years free of disability, the health-adjusted life expectancy of Indigenous persons in remote areas was only 57.8 years in 2007 (Queensland Health 2014).

Health outcomes have improved

Some progress appears to have been made in improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote parts of Queensland. The number of years of life lost to premature death or disability fell by 5.7 per cent, from 315 per 1,000 people in 2007 to 297 in 2011 (Queensland Health 2017, 2014).

This fall is consistent across most of the major components of the total burden of disease and injury (Figure 28). However, years lost to premature death from diabetes increased 18.3 per cent from 49.2 per 1000 people in 2007 to 58.2 in 2011. The burden from neonatal causes also increased from 4.1 years in 2007 to 5.0 in 2011 and the burden from cancer also rose from 31.7 years in 2007 to 33.0 years in 2011.

10 The health-adjusted life expectancy is a measure of the number of years a person can expect to live in perfect health from birth. It differs from a standard life expectancy in that it takes into account non-fatal outcomes.
The breakdown of the total burden (years of life lost to premature death and years of healthy life lost to disability) in remote regions is not publicly available. However, across all Indigenous persons in Queensland, while the fatal burden due to cardiovascular disease declined significantly between 2007 and 2011, the non-fatal burden remained the same. This likely indicates that improvements have been made in treating Indigenous people with cardiovascular disease, rather than preventing it.

### 4.5 Community safety

Indigenous people living in remote areas are more likely to have experienced violence

National data (Figure 29) shows that Indigenous people in remote communities are more likely to have experienced physical or threatened physical violence, been arrested or been incarcerated in the past five years than Indigenous people living in non-remote communities.
Overall Indigenous incarceration rates have increased significantly in Queensland since 2000. As demonstrated in Figure 30, Indigenous incarceration rates have risen 53 per cent since 2000, while non-Indigenous incarceration rates rose only 8.5 per cent in the same period. While total incarceration rates have risen steeply since 2012, Indigenous incarceration rates rose faster (30 per cent) than the non-Indigenous rate (23 per cent) over this period.

In 2014–15, reported offences against the person were significantly higher in discrete communities. While offence rates were also higher in the Torres Strait compared to the rest of Queensland, the rate of reported offences was approximately a quarter of that in mainland discrete communities.
For child safety, the rate of child safety substantiations in Queensland’s remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is higher than the Indigenous average in Queensland. The Torres Strait has a lower rate of substantiations than the Indigenous average, although it remains higher than the non-Indigenous rate. The overall rate of substantiations for Indigenous children has fallen from 25.8 per 1,000 population aged 0–17 in 2012–13 to 21.9 in 2015–16. The rate of substantiations in discrete communities fell between 2014–15 and 2015–16 (pre-2014–2015 data is not available in the same form to indicate whether this is a sustained trend).

4.6 Housing

Home ownership rates are low

Housing in Queensland’s remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities is primarily social housing (59 per cent in 2016). This rises to 90 per cent in discrete communities and 80 per cent in the Torres Strait. While improvements have been made in rates of Indigenous home ownership in remote Queensland, rising from 10 per cent in 2006 to 20 per cent in 2016, there has been little change in discrete communities or in the Torres Strait.

Figure 33 Housing by tenure type, Indigenous residents, 2006–16

Overcrowding is high but improving

Indigenous households in Queensland’s remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities also experience greater levels of overcrowding than elsewhere in Queensland. Using a measure of the number of households with at least three more persons than bedrooms, 27 per cent of Indigenous households in remote and discrete communities were overcrowded in 2016. This increases to 39 per cent in mainland discrete communities and 29 per cent in the Torres Strait. By contrast, only 5 per cent of all households in Queensland are overcrowded.

There has been progress in reducing the amount of overcrowding in remote and discrete communities, with the proportion of overcrowding falling from 41 per cent in 2006 to 27 per cent in 2016. The bulk of the reduction came between 2011 and 2016. However, some caution should be used when interpreting these results—while they are compiled from Census data, response rates for the questions required to compile these estimates were relatively low.11

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11 Estimates of indigenous households with overcrowding were compiled using only households that had stated all of Indigenous status, number of bedrooms, and number of persons in the household. Households that were missing any one of these were excluded from the calculation. However, in the 2016 Census, only 61 per cent of all households in remote and discrete communities provided all three pieces of information.
Figure 34 Proportion of indigenous households with overcrowding, by location, 2006–2016

Source: ABS 2016a, 2011a, 2006; QPC estimate.

The number of households with an internet connection has risen since 2011 (Figure 35). According to the 2016 Census, 61 per cent of Indigenous households in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities had internet access from their dwelling, up from 48 per cent in 2011. However, this remains below the 79 per cent of non-Indigenous households in the same areas and the 86 per cent of all Queensland households.

Figure 35 Proportion of Indigenous households with no internet access at home

4.7 Wellbeing

Discrete communities experience high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage

The Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes an Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD), which ranks all Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Australia according to relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. The IRSAD is comprised of 25 variables from Census data and presents an overall score with a lower score representing most disadvantaged and a higher score representing most advantaged.

The 16 most disadvantaged LGAs in Queensland in 2011, according to the IRSAD, were all discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. Torres Shire, the 22nd-most disadvantaged LGA (out of 74 total) was the most advantaged remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, however, it was only more advantaged than 16 per cent of LGAs nationally (ABS, 2011b).

Speaking an Indigenous language (and its value as an element of identity and self-esteem) has been linked with improved wellbeing and health outcomes (AIATSIS, 2014). While only three per cent of Queensland’s Indigenous population speak an Indigenous language, almost 20 per cent of those living in remote areas, and 74 per cent in the Torres Strait do so.

Table 13 Proportion of Indigenous residents who speak an Indigenous language, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Remote</th>
<th>Mainland Discrete</th>
<th>Torres Strait</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaks an Indigenous language</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2016a.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey provides the most comprehensive measures of community wellbeing. However, the small populations in remote regions mean that remoteness data are only available at the national level. Data from this survey show that Indigenous Australians living in remote regions are significantly more likely to suffer from overcrowding, but are more likely to report good health, and are more connected to their culture than their counterparts in less remote parts of the country.

Figure 36 Outcomes for Indigenous Australians, by remoteness, 2014–15

Source: ABS 2016b.
Several attempts have been made to develop an indicator of community wellbeing for Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Relative Socioeconomic Outcomes index (IRSEO), is an indigenous-specific index derived by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR, 2011) from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing. The IRSEO is composed of nine socioeconomic outcomes of the usual resident population.

The IRSEO reflects relative advantage or disadvantage at the Indigenous Area (IARE) level, where a score of one represents the most advantaged area and a score of 100 represents the most disadvantaged area.\(^{12}\) Using a population weighted average of each IARE, Queensland received an average score of 42, while remote Indigenous areas had a higher average of 68. The Torres Strait, however, was much closer to the state average with an average of 46. An index for 2016 has not yet been published.

### 4.8 Indicators for the Torres Strait

Indicators are better for the Torres Strait

Indicators for communities in the Torres Strait are generally better than in other communities. Reported offence rates in the Torres Strait are less than one-third of the rates observed in mainland discrete communities, although there are still high levels of overcrowding. Educational attainment rates are higher, unemployment is lower and the rate of youth engagement with work or study is high, despite the geographic isolation of many Torres communities.

#### Figure 37 Selected indicators for Torres Strait and mainland discrete communities

![Selected indicators for Torres Strait and mainland discrete communities](image)

*Source: ABS 2011a; DATSIP 2017a.*

\(^{12}\) IARE regions are in many cases too large to identify individual discrete communities.
While the Torres Strait is in many ways quite different to the mainland Aboriginal communities, one possible reason for the better outcomes is that the Torres Strait region has been able to maintain strong governance, which has allowed it to exercise a higher degree of control over service delivery than other communities. This is consistent with the experience of Indigenous communities in northern America (discussed further in Chapter 6). For example, research undertaken by the Harvard project on Indian Development found:

...the evidence indicates that a federal policy of supporting the freedom of Indian nations to govern their own affairs, control their own resources, and determine their own futures is the only policy orientation that works. Everything else has failed.

In our work, we cannot find a single case of successful economic development and declining dependence where federal decision makers have exercised de facto control over the key development decision. In every case we can find of sustained economic development on Indian reservations...the tribe is in the driver's seat. In every case, the role of the BIA and other outside agencies has shifted from decision maker to merely a source of helpful resources, from the controlling influence in decisions to advisor or provider of technical advice.

The underlying logic to the finding that only sovereignty works in overcoming the long-standing problems of reservation poverty, dependence, social ill-being is clear. As long as the BIA or some other outside organisation carries primary responsibility for economic conditions on Indian reservations, development decisions will reflect the goals of those organisations, not the goals of the tribe... As long as the outside decision maker doesn't pay the price of bad decisions, there's no incentive for that decision maker to make better decisions. (Cornell and Kalt 1998, p. 28)

4.9 Conclusion

Indicators of community wellbeing for Queensland’s Indigenous people living in remote and discrete communities are worse than for Indigenous people living in other parts of the state. Overall, outcomes were better in the Torres Strait, and worst in mainland discrete communities:

- Educational performance and attendance rates, employment, health outcomes and home ownership rates are significantly lower in remote communities and there is little evidence of improvement.

- Indigenous people in remote communities are more likely to have experienced physical or threatened physical violence, been arrested or been incarcerated in the past five years than Indigenous people living in non-remote communities.

- Remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face significantly higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

While there has been an improvement in some indicators, overall progress has not met community expectations and there are significant opportunities for improvement.