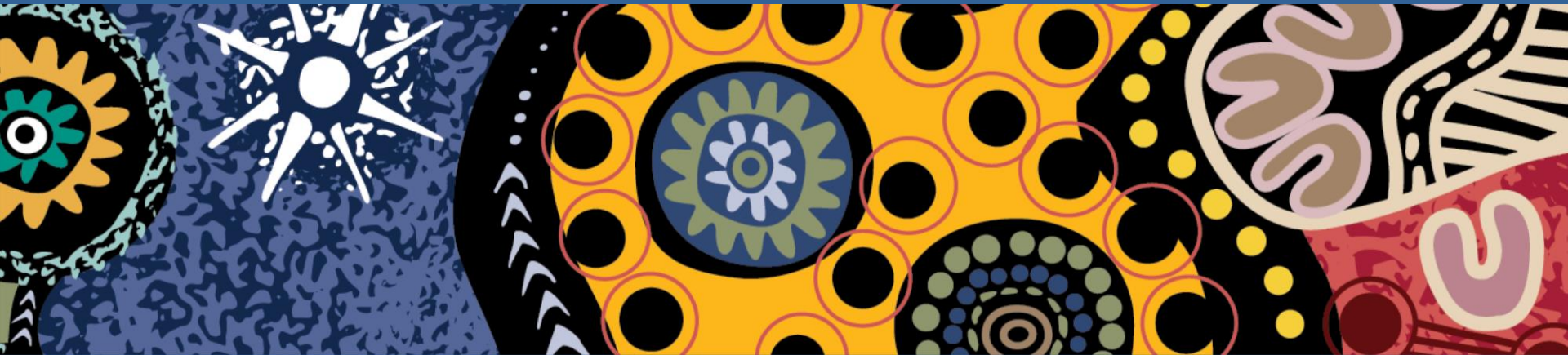


# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics in Australia

Luke Verghese

Director, Centre of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics  
Australian Bureau of Statistics

'Our Story. Our Future.' was created by proud Wiradjuri, Wotjobaluk, Yuin and Gumbaynggirr artist **Luke Penrith** and Maluililgal people, Badu Island artist **Naseli Tamwoy**.





Our Story.  
Our Future.

*The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and Elders, past, present and emerging.*



- The Australian context
- Standards and classifications
- Statistical collections and publications
- Community engagement
- Challenges and opportunities





Our Story.  
Our Future.

## The Australian context



## Statistics in Australia

## Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975

Establishes:

- ABS as an independent statutory authority
- The office of Australian Statistician
- The Australian Statistics Advisory Council

## Census and Statistics Act 1905

Authority to:

- Conduct statistical collections, including the Census of Population and Housing
- When necessary, to direct a person to provide statistical information

Requirement to:

- Publish and disseminate compilations and analyses of statistical information
- Maintain the confidentiality of information collected under the Act



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples





# Indigenous Data Sovereignty



Our Story.  
Our Future.

- In Australia, '*Indigenous Data*' refers to information or knowledge, in any format or medium, which is about and may affect Indigenous peoples both collectively and individually.
- '*Indigenous Data Sovereignty*' refers to the right of Indigenous people to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous Data.
- '*Indigenous Data Governance*' refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to autonomously decide what, how and why Indigenous Data are collected, accessed and used. It ensures that data on or about Indigenous peoples reflects our priorities, values, cultures, worldviews and diversity.

2018 Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit







Australian Government

## Governance of Indigenous Data

### Framework on a page

Australian Public Service (APS) agencies now have a single Framework for working with Indigenous data.

The *Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data* (GID) enshrines the importance of partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on data.

Acknowledging data's significance for self-determination, the Framework provides a stepping stone towards greater support by the APS of the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

For more information, visit [www.niaa.gov.au](http://www.niaa.gov.au)



#### 1. Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

**Insight:** Better outcomes are achieved if Indigenous communities have a genuine say in matters affecting them, including use of data to inform policy-making in government.

**Intended outcome:** Government meaningfully partners with Indigenous communities across all stages of the data lifecycle.



#### 3. Provide knowledge of data assets

**Insight:** APS agencies need to identify the Indigenous data they hold, and make it easy for communities to access and use these data.

**Intended outcome:** Indigenous peoples can easily access and use their data for self-determination and community development.



#### 2. Build data-related capabilities

**Insight:** The APS needs to partner better with Indigenous communities to support data-related capability building.

**Intended outcome:** The APS effectively supports Indigenous communities to use their own data, tell their own stories, make their own decisions, and set their own priorities.



#### 4. Build an inclusive data system

**Insight:** APS data systems need to better reflect what Indigenous people say are their own priorities.

**Intended outcome:** A more accessible and culturally competent public service that is inclusive, responsive, transparent and coordinated.

#### Vision

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have greater agency over how their data are governed within the Australian Public Service so that their priorities and aspirations are reflected.

# Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data

# The National Agreement on Closing the Gap



Our Story.  
Our Future.

The objective of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.

17 Targets with indicators and measures of progress underpinned by data

4 Priority reforms about improving the system

- Priority Reform number 4 is: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level



# Closing the Gap and other National Reporting



Our Story.  
Our Future.

ABS surveys, the Census of Population and Housing and other administrative data are a key source of information for Closing the Gap and national government reports

## Closing the Gap

11 of 17 targets use ABS data sources

Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Health  
Performance  
Framework

Intergenerational  
Report

Report on Government  
Services (RoGS)

Australia's Health

Australia's Welfare



## Standards and classifications

## Indigenous Status Standard

The standard enables the provision of consistent information about people who identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

### Standard question module

1. [Are you] [Is the person] [Is (name)] of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?  
(For persons of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, mark both 'Yes' boxes.)

No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, Torres Strait Islander	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL)

This classification is used for the collection, storage and dissemination of statistical and administrative data on languages spoken in Australia.





Our Story.  
Our Future.

Collections

## The Census of Population and Housing (the Census)

- Point in time measure of every person in Australia, every 5 years
- Australia has a very good response rate (95.8% in 2021)
- Most comprehensive data source about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

## Surveys of people and households

- Sample surveys for a range of topics
- Some include a question on 'Indigenous status'
- Some are dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surveys

## Administrative data

- Information that government departments and other organisations collect through operations
- E.g. tax, education and health records
- Some data includes Indigenous status







Our Story.  
Our Future.


## Collections – The Census

- The most comprehensive snapshot of the country and tells the story of how Australia is changing.
- Includes a range of topics and questions, like age, country of birth, religion, ancestry, languages, work and education.
- Most households complete the Census online
- Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities complete it through interviewers



Paper – 17%

## Interviewer Household Form – 0.3%



**Australian  
Bureau of  
Statistics**

# 2021 Census

## Interviewer Household Form

**To complete the front of this form**

- Copy the **Drop off Field Area (DFA) Number** and **Record Number (RNO)** from your Workload List into the boxes provided.
- Write the number of this form and the total number of forms for the dwelling, for example: Form 1 of 2\* or Form 2 of 2, into the boxes provided.
- Write the date of this interview in the boxes provided.
- Write the address of the dwelling in **Question 1** below.

DFA Number		Record Number	

Date of interview	
Day	Month Year

**How to answer**

- Please use a **black or blue pen**.
- Mark boxes, like this:
- Write in **CAPITAL** letters and keep each letter within one box, like this: A R T I S T
- Use every box in turn and only miss a box to leave a space between words, like this: M O T O R   M E C   H A N I C
- If you make a mistake in a box, draw a line through the box, like this: +
- Or O R
- Draw a line through the box and continue writing, like this: P A I N T I N G I N 6

**1 Address of dwelling**

Please use CAPITAL letters only.

House number (if any)   Street name (if any)  

Community name  

Suburb, rural locality or town  

State/Territory   Postcode

**What is the Census?**

The Census is a snapshot of Australia's people and housing, and tells the story of how we are changing. It is used to estimate Australia's population, distribute government funds, and plan services for communities right across Australia.

This form asks questions about health, education, cultural background, employment and living situations. This information helps make sure the right services are available to individuals, families and communities, where and when they are needed.

Go to [www.census.abs.gov.au](http://www.census.abs.gov.au) to find out more about why the Census is important.

**Do I have to complete the Census?**

Yes, the Census is compulsory. This information is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1955*.

Go to [www.census.abs.gov.au/privacy](http://www.census.abs.gov.au/privacy) to find out more about why the Census is compulsory.

**Is my information confidential?**

Yes, the information you provide is confidential. The *ABSI* is legally required to keep data secure and not release information in a way that will identify any individual, household or business. Your data is protected by the secrecy provisions of the *Census and Statistics Act 1955*.

Go to [www.census.abs.gov.au/privacy](http://www.census.abs.gov.au/privacy) to find out more about how we keep your information secure.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2021

# Interviewer Household Form

7 In the table below, list all people who usually live in this dwelling, as well as any visitors who will be staying overnight.				8 How is the person related to Person 1/Person 2?		9 Is the person married?		10 Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?	
Person Number	Name	Is the person:	Date of Birth and Age	Person No.					
Person 1	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	1	No answer to this question required for Person 1	Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 2	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	2	Husband or wife of Person 1 De facto partner of Person 1 Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 1 Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 3	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	3	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 4	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	4	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 5	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	5	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 6	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	6	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 7	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	7	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 8	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	8	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 9	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	9	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 10	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	10	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 11	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	11	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No
Person 12	First or given name Surname or family name	Male Female Other sex	Day Month Year AND Age Years	12	Child of both Person 1 and 2 Child of Person 1 only Other relationship to Person 1 (please specify)	Child of Person 2 only Grandchild of Person 1 Never married Widowed Divorced	Separated but not divorced Married	Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	No

If there are more than 12 people, continue onto another form.

Total: Total Male(s) Total Female(s) Total Other sex

17 Was the person born in Australia?

16 In which country was the person born?

- Mark one box, like this: ☐

☐ Australia ▶ Go to 18

England

☐ New Zealand

India

Philippines

☐ Vietnam

Italy

Other (please specify)

24 Does the person use an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language at home?

- If more than one language, specify the language that is used most.
- Where possible, write the full name of the language.
- If the person speaks Creole, where possible provide more information. For example: CAPE YORK CREOLE, BROOME KRIOL, YUMPLATOK (TORRES STRAIT CREOLE).

☐ Yes - write name of language

[illegible]

- ☐ No, uses only English ► Go to 26

☐ No, English only ► Go to 22

- If more than one language other than English, write the one that is used most often.
- Include use of sign languages (for example, AUSLAN) in the 'please specify' option.
- Include use of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages in the 'please specify' option.
- Mark one box, like this: ☒

☐ Yes, Mandarin☐ Yes Arabic☐ Yes, Cantonese☐ Yes, Vietnamese☐ Yes, Italian☐ Yes, Greek

Yes, other language (please specify)

- A survey run by the ABS shortly after the Census – a 'Post Census Review'
- Independently assesses the completeness of the Census count.
- How many people should have been counted in the Census, how many people were missed and how many were counted more than once or in error?
- Largest household survey conducted by the ABS.  
(2021 PES had a random sample of approximately 45,000 households → over 117,000 people)
- It's how we know about the net undercount of each Census





Our Story.  
Our Future.

## Collections – Surveys



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surveys conducted by the ABS



Our Story.  
Our Future.

- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey (NATSINPAS)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Measures Survey (NATSIHMS)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)



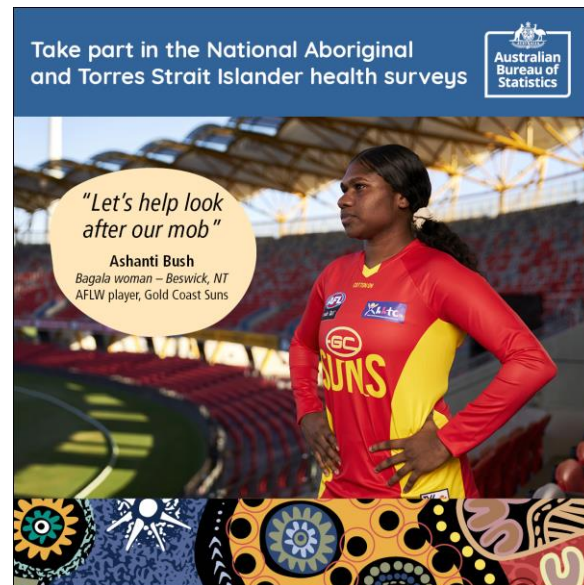
# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)



Our Story.  
Our Future.

Main topics in 2022-23:

- demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
- language and cultural identification
- health outcomes
- use of health services
- health risk factors
- use of the internet (proxy for digital inclusion)
- household food security status
- other household items such as financial stress



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey



Our Story.  
Our Future.

Main topics in 2023:

- food and nutrient intakes
- dietary behaviours
- physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep
- smoking
- food security
- selected health outcomes



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Measures Survey (NATSIHMS)



Our Story.  
Our Future.

- Respondents from Health Survey and Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey were asked to participate
- Voluntary
- Tests for biomedical indicators of some chronic diseases
  - e.g. heart disease, kidney disease, anemia
- Tests for biomedical indicators of common nutrient deficiencies
  - e.g. folate, iodine, iron
- Urine only for children aged 5-11 years, blood and/or urine for people aged 12 years and over



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Social Survey (NATSISS)



Our Story.  
Our Future.

## Main topics in 2014-15:

- demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
- language and cultural identification / participation / education
- health and health risk factors
- social and emotional wellbeing
- community strength and social contact
- use of the internet
- experiences of homelessness
- feelings of safety, experiences of harm, contact with police, incarceration



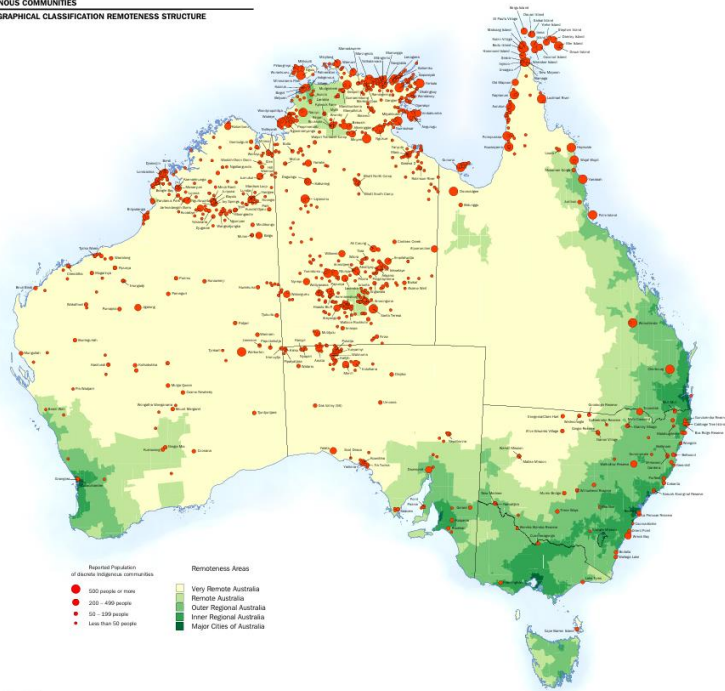
# Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey



Our Story.  
Our Future.



DISCRETE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES  
AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATION REMOTENESS STRUCTURE



- Last collected in 2006
- Complete enumeration of all discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Housing Organisations
- Urban, regional and remote
- All states and territories
- Housing stock
- Infrastructure e.g. water quality
- Facilities e.g. health services

# How Census and survey topics are decided



Our Story.  
Our Future.

ABS consults anyone with an interest in information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Topic  
consultation  
papers

e-Surveys /  
written  
submissions

Meetings and  
workshops

Webinars

Advisory Groups /  
Reference Groups

Topic Advice  
Groups

Expert  
Advisory  
Panels





# How the data is collected and processed



Our Story.  
Our Future.

- Cover all of Australia
- Knock on doors to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households
- Number of adults and children selected for interview depends on survey and whether in non-remote/remote
- Face-to-face interviews using trained interviewers
- Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors and/or ABS Engagement Managers assist in communities
- Questions may vary in remote areas





Our Story.  
Our Future.

## Collections / Data Assets – Administrative Data and Data Integration

## Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA)

- ABS integrates administrative data from 10+ Commonwealth agencies, ABS surveys and Census
- Coverage: whole of Australian population from 2006-present
- Accessed by 200+ research projects across Government, universities and policy institutes

## Core Indigenous module in PLIDA

- Multiple sources = increased coverage, reliability and accuracy
- Allows researchers to access important data in one place
- Resources guide and promotion of Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles

### Single-source tables:

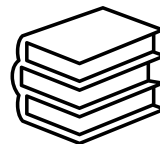
SPINE_ID	INGP
PERSON1	1
PERSON2	2
PERSON3	1

- + Census
- + DOMINO
- + Deaths

### + code/pseudocode for deriving single values:

- ever-identified
- Identified  $\geq 2$  sources
- majority-identified
- ...

### + supporting resources to provide context

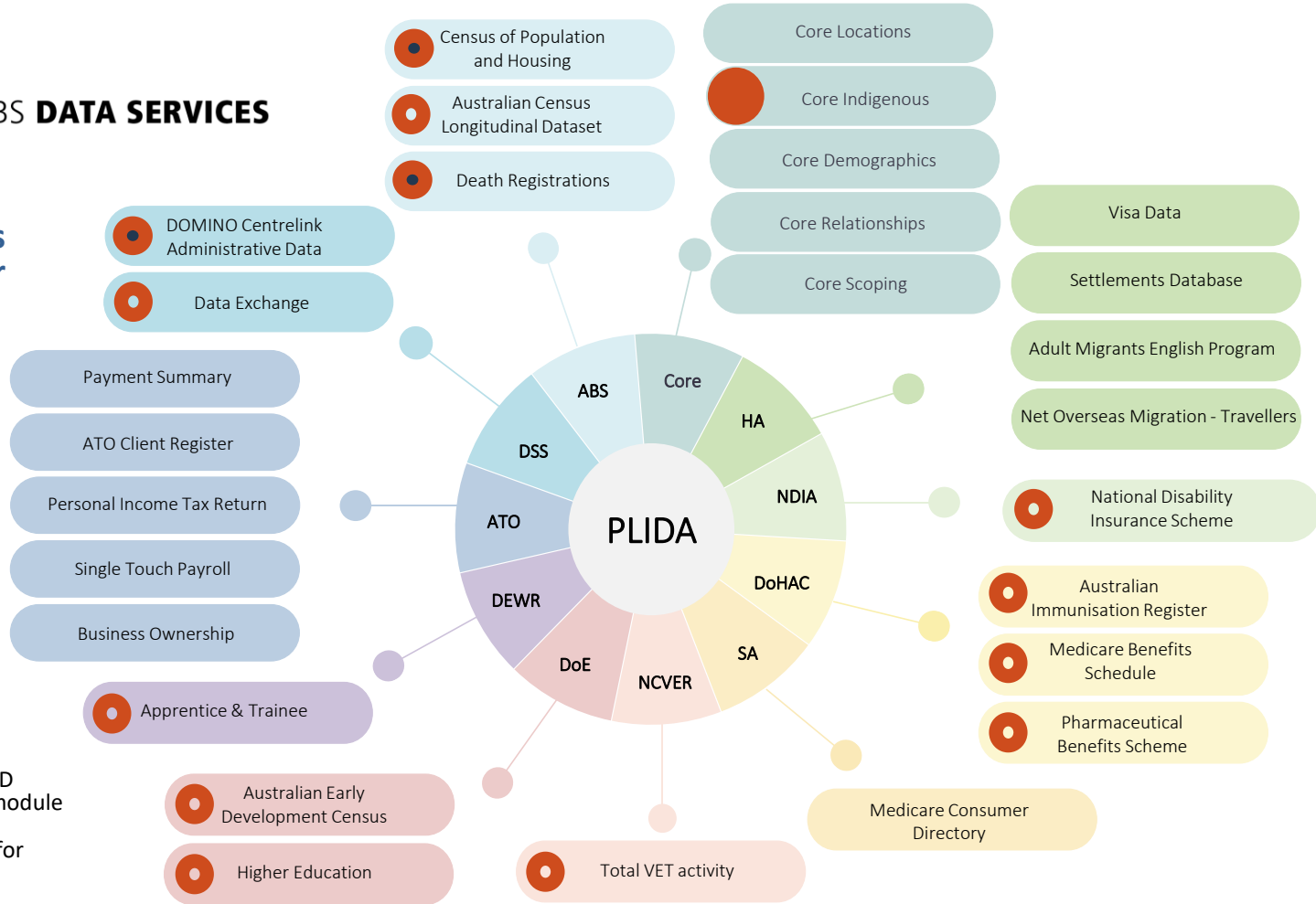




## ABS DATA SERVICES

### Indigenous indicators in the PLIDA Modular Product (PMP)

- Has Indigenous indicator
- Has Indigenous indicator AND feeds into *Core Indigenous* module
- Single multi-source module for Indigenous status



## Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment (BLADE)

- An economic data tool combining tax, trade and intellectual property data with information from ABS surveys to provide a better understanding of the Australian economy and businesses performance over time.
- The current BLADE asset contains data on all active businesses from 2001-02 to current, sourced from a large range of data sources.
- PLIDA and BLADE are linked – so we can research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that own businesses
- Some additional research underway linking Indigenous Business Registries with BLADE:  
<https://dilinduwa.com.au/snapshot-2>





Our Story.  
Our Future.

Publications

## Population estimates

- Estimates and projections
- Life expectancy
- Births
- Deaths

## In-depth topic analysis

- Education
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- Housing

## Census

Best resource for low level data analysis

- Understanding change in counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- 2021 Census data summaries

## Data tools

- Data by Region
- TableBuilder (Census and other datasets)
- Census QuickStats
- Census Community Profiles



# Some recent key statistics



Our Story.  
Our Future.

**983,700**

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population as at 30 June 2021

**25.2%**

increase in Census count between 2016 and 2021

**2,027**

people lived in the Galiwinku Northern Territory Indigenous Location in 2021

**24**

median age in 2021

**68.1%**

of people aged 20-24 attained Year 12 or equivalent qualification or a non-school qualification at Certificate level III or above

**76,978**

people spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language in 2021

**81.4%**

lived in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing in 2021



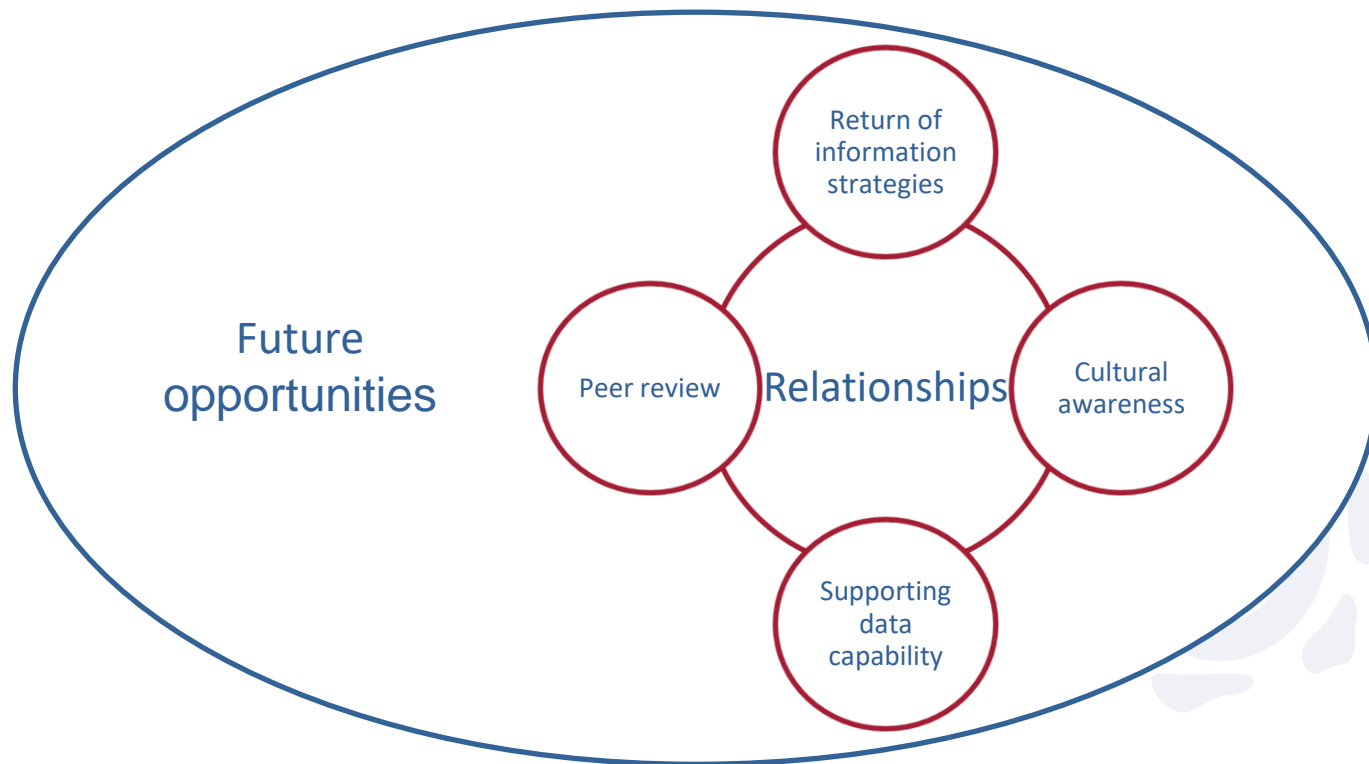
Our Story.  
Our Future.

## Consultation and engagement

# Working together to tell stories with data



Our Story.  
Our Future.



# Working together to tell stories with data



Our Story.  
Our Future.

Australian Bureau of Statistics  
6d · 9

This Sunday is National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day which celebrates the strengths, resilience and culture of Abo... See more

## Top 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

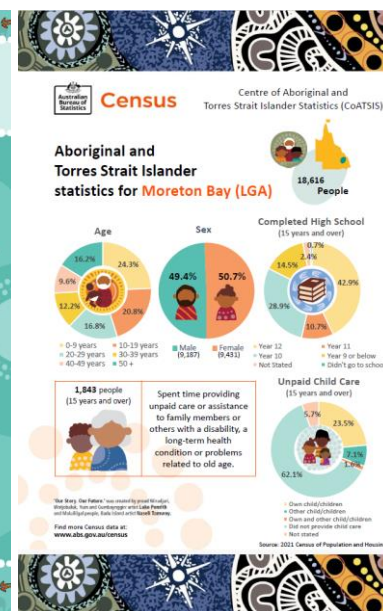
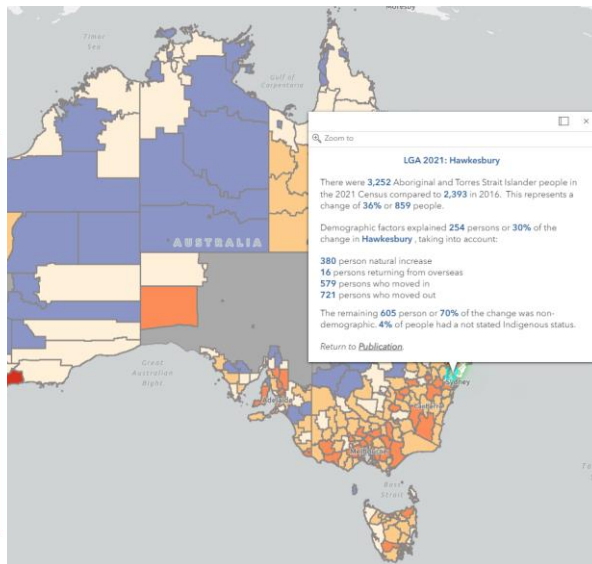


Note: Refers to children aged 0-14 years.

Source: ABS, Language Statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2021

124 18 comments 18 shares

Like Copy Share



This publication has been externally peer-reviewed. The ABS greatly values the knowledge, expertise and contributions of these reviewers and thanks them for their time and input.

Understanding change in counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: Census, 2021

# Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics



Our Story.  
Our Future.

- Established March 2013
- Members are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with grassroots level experience and experience in research, policy, service provision, statistics and advocacy
- Help improve ABS engagement with grassroots community level Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Help improve data quality, statistical literacy and help ensure the ABS embraces the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty



# Engagement Managers



Our Story.  
Our Future.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- Connecting with communities across Australia
- Sharing expertise and building ABS cultural capability
- Making statistics mean something for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



# Engagement Managers Unit

## Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Survey IHMHS



Our Story.  
Our Future.



Successful engagement in South Australia to support IHMHS testing with Copley community and the Aboriginal Medical Centre (AMS) in Pika Wiya.

EM stall at Flinders Family fun day event in Lie Creek



# Engagement Managers Unit

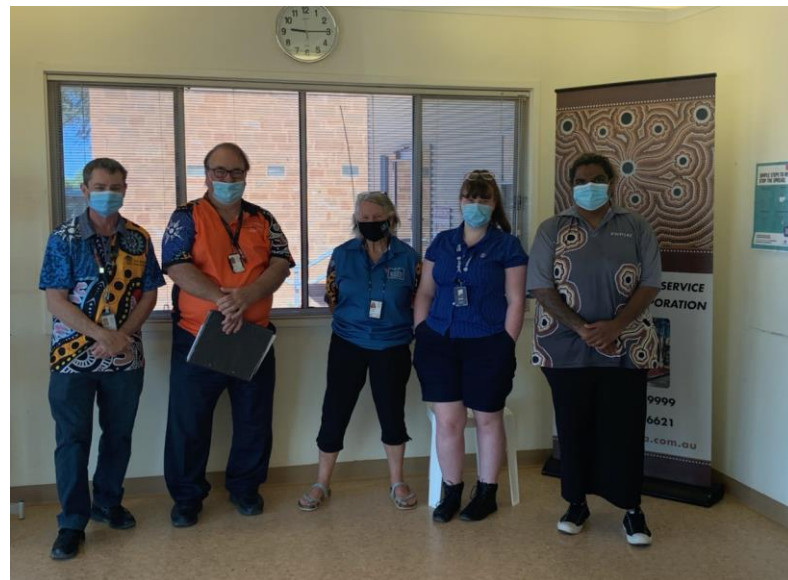
## Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Survey



Our Story.  
Our Future.



Service providers attend and as part of that EMU presented to the crowd what was happening with IHMHS.



Bio Meds conducted at AMS in Pika Wiya.



# Engagement Managers Unit

## Census 2026 Testing



Our Story.  
Our Future.

Engagement to support  
Census 2026 Content Testing  
for Remote Communities  
This round of testing occurred  
in Yirrkala NT.





Our Story.  
Our Future.

## Challenges and opportunities

Contact:

[luke.Vergheese@abs.gov.au](mailto:luke.Vergheese@abs.gov.au)

[coatsis@abs.gov.au](mailto:coatsis@abs.gov.au)

'Our Story. Our Future.' was created by proud Wiradjuri, Wotjobaluk, Yuin and Gumbaynggirr artist **Luke Penrith** and Maluililgal people, Badu Island artist **Naseli Tamwoy**.

