

Federal Election 2007

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Indigenous people deserve a collaborative approach

Why is this issue important?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia is approximately half a million people or 2.5% of the total population (down from an estimated 750,000 Aboriginal people at the time of European settlement).

Aboriginal people, live very different lives and in very different places than the rest of the Australian community. They live predominantly in regional and remote communities and have a life expectancy of almost 20 years less than other Australians. They are unequivocally the most disadvantaged and marginalised population group in Australia.

What are the facts?

In 2001, 30% of the Indigenous population lived in major cities, 43% in regional areas and 26% in remote areas. The majority of Indigenous people live in New South Wales (29% of the Indigenous population) and Queensland (27%), Western Australia (14%) and the Northern Territory (12%). Indigenous people comprise about 30% of the Northern Territory population but less than 4% in all other state/territory populations.

Indigenous people remain disadvantaged, compared to other Australians, across a range of areas of social concern. Indigenous people continue to experience lower levels of employment (and higher levels of unemployment) than non-Indigenous people, with Indigenous adults in 2002 being more than twice as likely to be unemployed (13%) as non-Indigenous adults (4.6%). The real mean equalised gross household income of Indigenous people was \$384 per week in 2002, equal to 59% of that of non-Indigenous adults in 2002, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The life expectancy at birth for Indigenous Australians is 59.4 for males and 64.8 for females, a difference of approximately 17 years for both non-indigenous males and females.

In the period 1996-2001, the life expectancy at birth for Indigenous Australians was estimated to be 59.4 years for males and 64.8 years for females, compared with 76.6 years for all males and 82.0 years for all females for the period 1998-2000, a difference of approximately 17 years for both males and females.

For the period 1999-2003, in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, 75% of recorded Indigenous male deaths and 65% of Indigenous

female deaths occurred before the age of 65 years. This compared with 26% and 16%, respectively, of deaths of non-Indigenous males and females. For all age groups below 65 years, the age-specific death rates for persons identified as Indigenous in the selected jurisdictions were at least twice those for other Australians. The largest differences occurred at ages 35-44 and 45-54 years where the death rates for Indigenous Australians were five times those recorded for non-Indigenous Australians.

There has been improvement in some areas such as a decline in Indigenous mortality rates between 1991 and 2002 as well as a decline in infant mortality rates in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. However, the life expectancy of Indigenous Australians is still around 17 years less than for other Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are behind other Australians and their chances of a healthy life with gainful employment, living in stable housing are significantly diminished.

Education participation rates have also increased at primary and secondary levels, particular in cities and large regional centers but in many remote communities educational outcomes for Aboriginal children are significantly less than for other Australian children and only a small

group, comprising less than 1% of all enrolments, participate in higher education.

In housing, Aboriginal people are far less likely than other Australians to be owner/purchasers and they primarily live in various forms of social housing, much of it in very poor condition.

In summary, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in every major area significantly behind other Australians and their chances of a healthy life with gainful employment, living in stable housing are significantly diminished.

What would Anglicare Australia like to see?

Anglicare Australia is calling on all political parties to both fundamentally change the ways in which they engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to develop a set of clear policy targets in that process which are then adequately resourced.

It is also critical that this work is underpinned by a recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original inhabitants and custodians of this land and that a process of reconciliation is about cultural, social and economic recognition and action.

In modern Australia this means that in many communities with high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the wider Australian community – Governments, the business community and the wider community, including community service organisations – need to work together with Aboriginal Elders and leaders to set key policy targets and put in place resources in the following areas:

- Housing

- Education
- Employment and economic development
- Child Protection
- Drug and substance abuse
- Health

Anglicare Australia also believes that any Indigenous policy must be based on a sound policy framework which recognises all of the aforementioned issues but also includes:

- A commitment to human rights
- Engagement and participation of Indigenous peoples in policy making
- A capacity building and community development approach
- Supporting sound Indigenous governance
- Fostering and recognizing leadership
- A learning framework/planning for implementation
- Needs-based funding and planning processes
- Monitoring and evaluation
- A culture of implementation and government accountability
- Reflections on the current policy framework for Indigenous Affairs

[Taken from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission – Social Justice Report 2006]

What does the Research say?

The data provided above comes from a range of well respected statistical and research bodies including ABS, AIHW, the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in WA, and many government and non-government agencies.

The data trends are clear. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia is significantly behind the rest of the Australian population on almost every social and economic indicator.

Other Issues

Anglicare Australia, in conjunction with many other community organisations and leaders has called on the leaders of Australia to urgently take action. What is happening in the Northern Territory, and in other communities around Australia, in terms of child abuse and community breakdown is an indictment of us all.

Anglicare Australia wishes to work collaboratively with Governments and the communities affected to ensure that children are protected. We would like to see greater investment in the services that support Indigenous families and communities, the active involvement of these communities in finding solutions to these problems and greater Federal Government engagement in delivering basic health, housing and education services to remote communities.

There is also a need for a longer term plan to address the underlying causes of the problem, including community breakdown, joblessness, overcrowding and low levels of education.

We offer our support to Indigenous communities and the Government in:

- Development programs that will strengthen families and communities to empower them to confront the problems they face;
- Consulting adequately with the communities and Northern Territory Government, and community service, health and education providers; and
- Developing a long term plan to address and resolve the causes of child abuse including joblessness, poor housing, education and commit the necessary resources to this.

The answer is not about the “mainstreaming” or “assimilation” of Aboriginal people into the wider Australian community but rather the protection, encouragement and development of Aboriginal culture as the underpinning of our multicultural Australia.

Aboriginal people should be recognised as the “first peoples” or “the first nation” of Australia and their place in our cultural history and practices should be enhanced not diminished. We as a nation need to say sorry for past injustices and move on together to create opportunities for us all.

NOTES FOR THE MEDIA:

This release is part of a series published by Anglicare Australia calling for government action on the income divide, housing affordability, climate change, reconciliation, and State and Federal relations.

The Anglicare Australia network is made up of 43 agencies in Australia who spend \$635 million every year supporting disadvantaged Australians. 20,000 volunteers and 10,000 staff provide services to almost 500,000 people in every state and territory of Australia at every stage of life. Anglicare agencies feel strongly that there is more to supporting people than simply meeting their immediate need and seeks to speak out to provide a strong voice for Anglican care in Australia.
