



**Queensland
Government**
Queensland Health

Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy at birth in Queensland and Australia

Bryan Kennedy, Karen McGill
Health Statistics Centre, Queensland Health

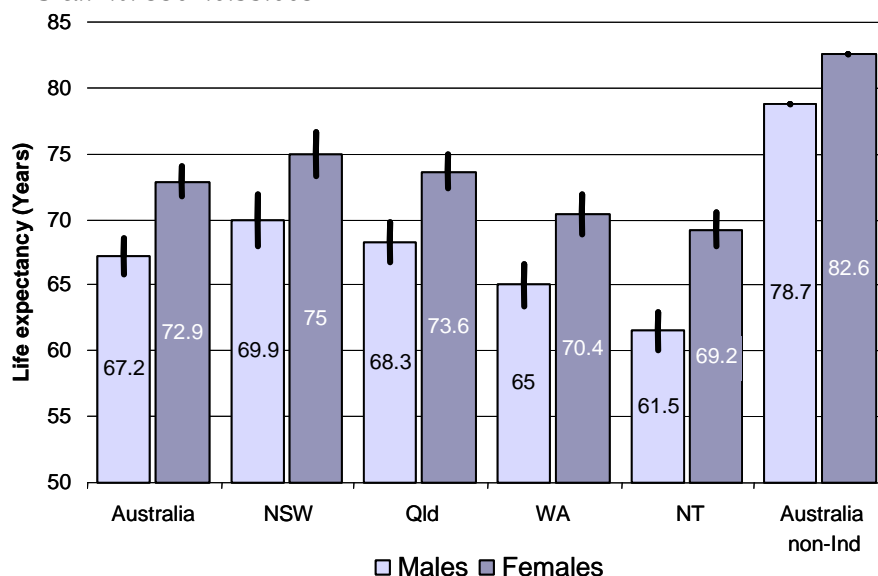
Indigenous life expectancy at birth is a key indicator proposed to measure the gap in overall health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Australian Government and all jurisdictions through COAG are committed to “closing the gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy within a generation (25 years or by the year 2031).

When this target was established in 2008, the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was estimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to be about 17 years at 2001, the latest estimate available at that time. However, a detailed review of the indirect method used for calculating the gap was found to be methodologically flawed¹. In response to this review, ABS have used a direct method for Indigenous life expectancy estimates for 2005-2007 which have produced significantly higher life expectancy estimates. The gap between Queensland Indigenous males and females and the Australian non-Indigenous population is now estimated to be 10.4 and 9 years respectively. The estimates were adjusted for Indigenous under-identification in deaths registrations and under-enumeration in population estimates. The rationale for using the direct method was discussed in detail in a discussion paper released by ABS in November 2008².

On 25 May 2009, the ABS released new estimates of Indigenous life expectancy at birth for Australia overall, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Estimates for other states were not able to be developed because of the small numbers of recorded deaths³. Figure 1 provides a breakdown by jurisdiction and sex compared with the non-Indigenous Australian population. It is important to recognise that there is some uncertainty about the accuracy of the estimates, and ABS have included sensitivity errors shown as black bars in Figure 1. For Queensland, sensitivity errors range from +or- 2 years for males and +or- 1.6 years for females, and for Australia +or- 1.4 and 1.2 years for males and females respectively.

Figure 1. Indigenous Life expectancy at birth by State and Territory, 2005-2007

Source: ABS cat no. 3302.0.55.003



Long term trends in overall life expectancy

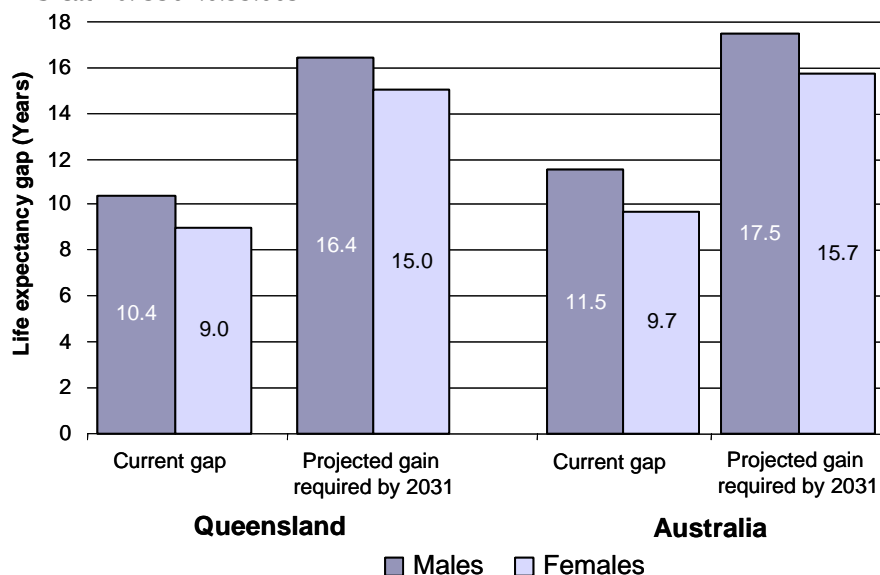
For the Australian population overall, life expectancy at birth has increased by an average of 0.25 years per year since the year 1900. Increases in overall life expectancy for the last 25 years have been maintained close to that trend, 0.24 years per year. If this trend continues, by 2031 there will be an approximate gain in overall Australian life expectancy of 6 years.

What is required to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy?

To close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy by the year 2031 (the “closing the gap” target), there will need to be a gain in Queensland Indigenous life expectancy of 16.4 years for males and 15 years for females over the next 25 years (Figure 2). This equates to a gain required of 0.66 years per year for Queensland Indigenous males and 0.60 years per year for Queensland Indigenous females; nearly three times the gains achieved by the overall Australian population in the last 25 years.

Figure 2. The current gap (2005-2007) and projected gain required in Indigenous life expectancy compared with the Australian population overall, by sex for Queensland and Australia,

Source: ABS cat no. 3302.0.55.003



Discussion

While the latest estimates of the gap in life expectancy are significantly less than previous published estimates, it is important to recognise that the differences are primarily a result of a different method of calculation and these latest figures cannot be directly compared with earlier published figures.

Closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy by 2031 will require a rate of gain in life expectancy which took over 60 years for the overall Australian population to attain. Thus, while the estimated gap is less than previous estimates, it will require a concerted effort to achieve the 2031 target.

References:

¹Assessment of Methods for Developing Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006 (ABS. cat. no. 3302.0.55.002) November 2008

²Census Data Enhancement - Indigenous Mortality Quality Study, 2006-07 (ABS. cat. no. 4723.0) November 2008

³Experimental Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2005-2007 (ABS. cat. no. 3302.0.55.003) May 2009