

Health status of Pacific Islander populations in Queensland

Who are Pacific Islanders?

Migrants to Australia from the island groups of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia are referred to collectively as 'Pacific Islanders'.¹ Despite often being grouped together in this way, populations from these different regions are heterogeneous with diverse cultures, languages and religions.



Figure 1: Map of Oceania
Source: www.graphicmaps.com

It is important to distinguish between Pacific Islanders and Australian South Sea Islanders. Pacific Islanders are migrants to Australia, whereas Australian South Sea Islanders are the Australian-born descendants of predominantly Melanesian people who were brought to Queensland as indentured labourers, between 1863 and 1904. Australian South Sea Islanders originate from eighty different Pacific islands, primarily Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands².

In 2008/09 the Queensland Government prioritised Pacific Islander populations as a whole-of-government priority group as a way to start addressing their relative social disadvantage.

How many Pacific people live in Queensland and where do they live?

Pacific Islanders have been described as 'statistically invisible' in Australia, because many have migrated from or through New Zealand, and are identified in Australian Census data as New Zealanders. The number of Pacific Islanders in Queensland may be significantly higher than what is captured in official data. Community informants advise that people may tick 'other' and not their country of birth on forms such as the Census form.

Given the challenge to obtain accurate data on the number and location of Pacific Islander populations in Queensland, a number of sources should be considered:

¹ Pacific Islanders come from three main regions in the Pacific – Melanesia (including Papua New Guinea, the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Irian Jaya, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands); Micronesia (the Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, and the Federated States of Micronesia); and Polynesia (New Zealand, Niue, the Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, the Midway Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, and Easter Island). Polynesia is the largest of the three zones.

² Multicultural Affairs Queensland, *Australian South Sea Islander Recognition*, undated, http://www.multicultural.qld.gov.au/media/assi_recognition.pdf

- Maori – can only use ancestry data as this population is ‘embedded’ in the New Zealand-born population
- Samoa – as 89% of this population retains its language at home, the most accurate data is language other than English – Samoan – spoken at home. Also a significant proportion of this population was born in New Zealand and Australia and therefore COB data is not reliable
- Papua New Guinea – can use country of birth data but a significant number (23%) of Papua New Guinea born people living in Australia are the children of Australians working in Papua New Guinea when Australia was responsible for administering the Territory of Papua New Guinea
- Fiji – can use country of birth data but does not identify ethnicity of the two major groups – Melanesian Fijians and Fijian Indians
- Cook Islands – can use country of birth data but should be used with caution as many migrate through New Zealand. Ancestry data could be more accurate. A community survey in Cairns showed that the population there was around 1,200. Community informants advise that the Cook Islands population also congregates in Logan and Redcliffe/Deception Bay.
- Tonga – can use country of birth data but should be used with caution as some migrate through New Zealand. Ancestry data could be more accurate. The Australian Tongan Association advises that the community is comprised of approximately 10,000 people. Most significant areas of residence are the Ipswich-Goodna corridor, Logan, Redcliffe-Deception Bay, Gold Coast, Townsville and Cairns.

Attachment A lists the populations by statistical subdivision. This data indicates that Queenslanders from Pacific Islander backgrounds comprise approximately 1.92% of the Queensland population.

The Pacific Islander populations are growing fast in Queensland. According to the 2006 Census, the total number of Pacific Islanders and New Zealanders (10.9% are Maori and an unknown number are other Pacific Islanders) in Queensland rose by approximately 30% between 2001 and 2006. The 2006 Census revealed that more than 30,000 Queenslanders identify as having Maori ancestry (the largest number in Australian states), while more than 35,000 people (more than in any other state except NSW) indicated their ancestry from other Pacific Islander groups.

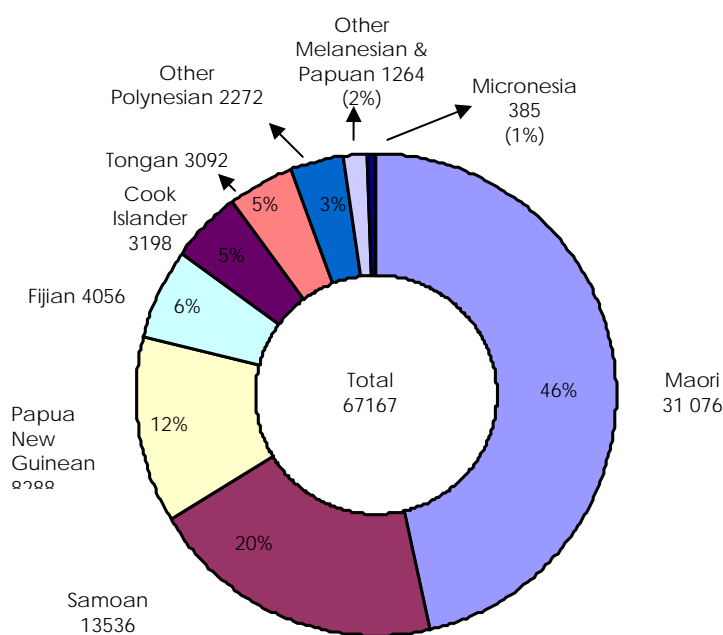


Figure 2: Queenslanders who identified Pacific ancestry, Census 2006

Health inequities among Pacific people

Six Pacific populations in Queensland have been studied to determine their health needs. A number of significant health inequities have been found for all of the populations studied, using the Queensland Hospital Admitted Patient Data Collection data. Findings are summarised below. Compared to the Queensland population:

- the *Samoan-born* population has a mortality rate 1.5 times higher for total deaths and 2 times higher for avoidable deaths, and for hospitalisation rates between 7 times and 2 times higher depending on the condition
- the *Cook Islands-born* population has hospitalisation rates between 9 times and 1.3 times higher depending on the condition
- the *Tonga-born* population has hospitalisation rates between 2 times and 1.5 times higher depending on condition
- the *Fiji-born* population has hospitalisation rates 2 times higher for coronary heart disease and for diabetes complications
- the *Papua New Guinea-born* population has almost 1.5 times higher the ratio for diabetes.
- Health data on the Maori population cannot be obtained from Queensland Health collections, as this population is embedded in the 'New Zealand' born category. However, New Zealand data indicates that this population is likely to have a similar disadvantaged health status to the other Pacific Islanders populations

Responding to Pacific health

There is limited experience in Australia in responding to the complex health needs of Pacific people. However, in New Zealand where Pacific people comprise 6.9% and Maori comprise 14.6% of the population, there is considerable experience. Dedicated health policies, programs, research and services have dominated the Pacific health response in New Zealand in recognition of the complex cultural, social and economic barriers that prevent Pacific Islander people from comprehending mainstream health messages and accessing mainstream health services.

Fifteen focus groups with Pacific Islander people in Queensland were conducted by Queensland Health between April and August 2009. Findings indicate that Pacific Islander people have low health literacy, low comprehension of the health system and poor access to services. The need for culturally tailored health resources, translated resources, Pacific health workers and a culturally appropriate mechanism for connecting with and referring Pacific people to the services they require, were themes in these focus groups.

Key contacts in Queensland

Pan Pacific Oceania

President: Mr Samataua Sitagata Hanamenn Hunt

hanamennhunt@bigpond.com

Pacific Communities Council of Far North Queensland Inc.

President: Rev Dr. Hedley Fihaki

hfihaki@bigpond.com

Pacific Island Communities Advocacy Worker

Elaine Seeto, Multilink

Elaine@multilink.org.au

Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland Chronic Disease Program

chronicdisease@eccq.com.au

Marina Chand
Queensland Health Multicultural Program
Marina_Chand@health.qld.gov.au

Acknowledgment: Demographic description is based on an unpublished paper produced by Multicultural Affairs Queensland, 'Issues facing Pacific Islander communities', 2008.

Attachment 1 – Pacific Islander populations by Queensland statistical subdivisions (2006 Census)

Statistical Sub-Division	Maori (ancestry)	Samoan (speaks Samoan at home)	Papua New Guinean (cob)	Fijian (cob)	Cook Islander (ancestry)	Tongan (ancestry)	Total
Inner Brisbane	400	32	319	154			905
Northwest outer Brisbane	2,253	1,863	1,239	446			5,801
Northwest inner Brisbane	792	89	817	1,677		Community info	3,375+
Southeast inner Brisbane	943	87	584	437			2,051
Southeast outer Brisbane	2,716	467	1,145	1,558			5,886
Beaudesert shire	354	45	87	54			540
Caboolture shire	943	665	397	238			2,243
Ipswich city	1,206	2,088	241	353		Community info	3,888+
Logan city	4,107	2,738	898	1,012	Community info	Community info	8,755++
Pine Rivers Shire	1,028	285	452	491	Community info	Community info	2,256++
Redcliffe City	523	208	150	140	Community info	Community info	1,021++
Redland Shire	1,260	93	373	229			1,955
Gold Coast north	775	144	169	126			1,214
Gold Coast east	2,114	60	336	202		Community info	2,712+
Gold Coast west	3,969	88	454	316			4,827
Gold Coast sd bal	72	0	47	8			127
Sunshine Coast	1,181	28	470	175			1,854
Sunshine Coast SD Bal	294	4	182	52			532
Upper West Moreton	86	6	31	14			137

Statistical Sub-Division	Maori (ancestry)	Samoan (speaks Samoan at home)	Papua New Guinean (cob)	Fijian (cob)	Cook Islander (ancestry)	Tongan (ancestry)	Total
Lower West Moreton	143	15	101	46			305
Bundaberg	191	6	81	72			350
Hervey Bay	185	0	91	50			326
Wide Bay Burnett SD bal	458	14	197	78			747
Toowoomba	365	20	307	149			841
Darling downs SD bal	236	13	83	52			384
South West	77	4	28	20			129
Rockhampton	217	16	95	81			409
Gladstone	295	6	54	49			404
Fitzroy SD balance	397	3	109	59			568
Central West	103	0	7	6			116
Mackay City Part A	370	3	130	50			553
Mackay SD Bal	444	30	126	54			654
Townsville City Part A	410	36	439	140		Community info	1,025+
Thuringowa City Part A	206	13	243	57			519
Northern SD Bal	185	7	95	44			331
Cairns City Part A	873	137	1,396	148	1,200 community info	Community info	3,754++
Far North SD Bal	485	29	471	56			1,041
North West	257	0	106	28			391
Total	30,913	9,342	12,550	8,921	3,198 (ancestry)	10,000 community info (3,092 ancestry)	74,924+