The Aboriginal population of NSW in 2015: Policy options and challenges
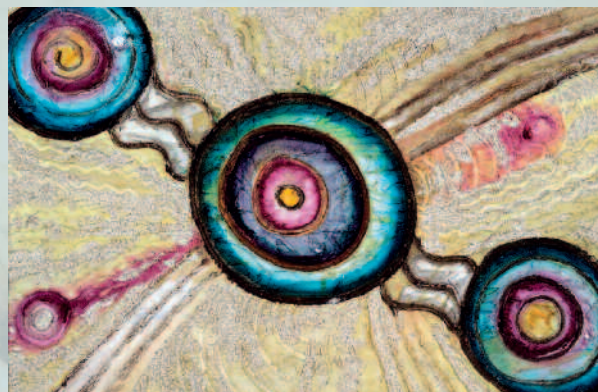
ARTIST RECOGNITION (COVER)

Kim Healey is a descendant of the Bundjalung and Gumbaynggirr nations, and also a descendant of the Djunbun (Platypus) Clan, original custodians of the Washpool at Lionsville in Northern NSW. She currently lives within Country in South Grafton NSW, creating and telling her stories along the mighty Clarence River. Kim strives to capture Country and utilise her voice through her work, to interpret the world around her.

This work captures Kim Healey's connection to Country. It speaks of the Bundjalung and Gumbaynggirr nations which were created by the Yuladarah, the creator of rivers, boundaries and tribal land. This is the Clarence River boundary with Susan Island in the middle of these two tribes which is a birthing place. Using a sgraffito technique, scribing in the sandy medium is a mapping system of Country.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

NSW has the largest and arguably one of the most diverse Indigenous populations of any jurisdiction in Australia. The Aboriginal population[1] of NSW lives in areas ranging from remote townships with majority Aboriginal populations, to global cities like Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong alongside a diverse array of migrant population groups. In between these extremes, there are a large number of regional towns and cities with significant Aboriginal populations.

Previous analysis for Aboriginal Affairs NSW identified a number of important demographic trends. This includes growing rates of mixed partnerships with an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partner and children who tend to be identified as Aboriginal. A related trend is very high rates of identification change where those not identified as Aboriginal in one year are identified as such in subsequent years. A third and fourth trend that is common for Indigenous groups nationally is an aging and urbanising population.

Beyond demography, there are also important trends in the labour market and in education. The economy of NSW, like that of other parts of Australia, is continuing in its transition from one based on low-skilled manufacturing and resources extraction, to one based on services and high-skilled research and development. This transition is uneven, and will require a very different workforce and skills-mix. A cause of this transformation is improving health care options with workers able to stay engaged much longer. These health care options are also affected by industry transformation. These can be expensive, but is likely to lead to ongoing gains in life expectancy, provided other things don't worsen.

Aboriginal Australians are exposed to all these trends. However, there are also Aboriginal-specific needs and aspirations related to land, language and culture that need to be balanced against mainstream notions of development. If taken into account, these Aboriginal-specific priorities will be enhanced rather than conflict with improvements in health and socioeconomic status.

The objective of this research project is to undertake a scan of the trends in NSW, and where relevant broader demographic, economic and social environments to identify emerging issues relevant to Aboriginal people in NSW. A further aim is to identify the main areas of change in NSW relevant to the work of Aboriginal Affairs in fulfilling its functions. We identify 19 areas of policy relevance, spanning demography; the economy; education; health and wellbeing; heritage; and justice and protection. For each, we consider: What is the issue? What does the literature say? What does the data say? The crucial question though is what does it mean for policy?

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1 In much of the data used in the analysis for this paper, it is not possible to separately identify the Aboriginal population of NSW from those who identify as Torres Strait Islander. Where this is the case, we use the term 'Indigenous' to refer to both populations.

DEMOGRAPHY

1   POPULATION GROWTH

What is the issue? It has been said many times before that 'demography is destiny.' While this may be an overstatement, it is certainly true that the size and composition of a population affects policy options and policy constraints. Segments of the population that are growing relative to the rest of the population require increasing services. Those that are relatively young or old (especially if increasingly so) require a different mix of services. The Aboriginal population of NSW is both growing and aging.

What does the literature say? The demographic literature is structured around the demographic balancing equation (Biddle and Wilson 2013). In essence, we start with a cohort aged (a) at a particular point in time (t), with a population $P_{a,t}$. In a given number of years (x), the size of the cohort aged $a+x$ is expressed as $P_{a+x,t+x}$ and is equal to the base population, plus births that have occurred over the period, minus deaths, plus the difference between those who have moved in and out of the area. For the Aboriginal population, an additional factor needs to be added, representing people who change their status over the period.

What does the data say? The ABS (2014) provides the most up-to-date projection of the size of the Indigenous population of NSW, now and into the future. At the end of June 2015[2], it was estimated that the Indigenous population of NSW was 225,349. This represents 30.9% of the total Australian Indigenous population. The 2015 total NSW population is estimated to be 7,586,093, meaning that the Indigenous population makes up 3.0% of the state. By 2026, it is projected that the NSW Indigenous population will be 282,962, making up a slightly smaller share of the total Indigenous population (30.6%). However, while the NSW Indigenous population is projected to grow at a slightly slower rate than the total Indigenous population, it is projected to grow faster than the total NSW population. For this reason, it is projected that the share of the state identified as Indigenous will increase to 3.2% by 2026. Separate projections albeit using a similar methodology as the ABS (Biddle 2013) predict that the Australian Indigenous and NSW Indigenous population will age over the foreseeable future.

What does it mean for policy? NSW has the largest Indigenous population of all jurisdictions in Australia. This is likely to continue to be the case over the next decade. As the share of the population identified as Aboriginal increases, the proportion of services that will need to be Indigenous-specific will also increase. There will continue to be a need for Indigenous-specific services targeted towards the young and those in remote and regional parts of the state. However, there will also be an increasing need for services in urban areas and targeted towards those of retirement age or beyond.

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2 Using the ABS Series B projection.

DEMOGRAPHY

2   POPULATION MOBILITY

What is the issue? One of the contributions to population change at the State/Territory level is movement into and out of the particular jurisdiction. For the total Australian population, this includes migration from another State/Territory, as well as net overseas migration, which in some years can be quite large. For the Aboriginal population, on the other hand, net overseas migration is negligible, leaving inter-state migration as the main contribution to inflows and outflows. At the same time, movement within NSW of the Aboriginal population has the potential to change the geographic distribution of the population.

What does the literature say? Many factors influence peoples decision to change their place of usual residence, including a comparison of the characteristics of the area in which they live and the characteristics of other potential areas of residence. In the economics literature (Harris and Todaro 1970), this human capital approach assumes that individuals or families make the decision to migrate after comparing the benefits of moving (higher incomes, more pleasant climate/conditions, location of family and friends) with the financial and social costs. In the broader migration literature (Greenwood 1997), the modified gravity model has also provided useful insights at the population level by highlighting the effect of distance between the source and potential destination areas, and the respective composition of the two populations. However, there are also a range of factors specific to the Indigenous population that either enhance or reduce the motivation to move (Taylor 2006), including ceremonial activities and filial obligations.

What does the data say? According to the 2011 Census, 6,587 Indigenous Australians were recorded as moving from NSW to other parts of Australia over the previous five years. During the same time period, 4,591 Indigenous Australians moved in the opposite direction, leading to a net migration rate of -1.4 % (expressed relative to the relevant 2006 usual resident population). The corresponding net internal migration rate for the non-Indigenous population was -1.2%. Although these two figures are broadly similar, internal outflows of the non-Indigenous population were counterbalanced by net overseas inflows. Net Indigenous outflows were highest amongst those aged 15 to 24, and of those Indigenous Australians who moved into NSW, 53% came from Queensland. Within NSW, there was a small net outflow of the Indigenous population from major cities to regional and remote NSW. This was equivalent to -0.7% of the relevant usual resident population. There was a net outflow from major cities for all age groups (aged 0 to 14 in 2006, aged 25 to 54 and aged 55 plus) apart from those aged 15 to 24 years. For this group there was a net inflow into major cities equal to 2.8% of the relevant usual resident population.

What does it mean for policy? Internal migration is a relatively small driver of population change for NSW as a whole and for specific regions or area types. However, where this net change is demographically inconsistent, there can be important policy effects.

DEMOGRAPHY

3   IDENTIFICATION CHANGE

What is the issue? Unlike some countries, the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is a self identified one. Specifically, the person who fills out each census form is asked for each person in the household 'Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?' How people respond to this question can vary across the life course, by the context in which the form is filled out, and due to societal and policy change. In NSW if people are changing their identification (or at least being identified differently), then the population is likely to grow faster than predicted by natural population increase alone. If those who are newly identified are different to those who were previously identified, then average characteristics of the population are likely to change. This can affect policy needs, as well as the ability to evaluate policy.

What does the literature say? Liebler, Rastogi et al. (2014) used linked US Census data (consisting of Census 2000 records linked to Census 2010) to investigate changing ethnicity. They estimated 8.3% of the U.S. population changed how they reported their racial identity, and further, found differences in the likelihood of change for different racial groups. In a study with similar aims, Carter, Hayward et al. (2009) analysed characteristics associated with changes in self-identified ethnicity in three waves of survey data in New Zealand. The strongest predictor of change in ethnicity between waves two and three was ethnicity in wave one. Those reporting more than one ethnicity were far more likely to change subsequently; however, those identifying solely as Maori were also more likely to change in later waves. Biddle and Crawford (2015) found similar patterns for the Australian Indigenous population, with significant change amongst the young.

What does the data say? Data from the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset (ACLD) can be used to disaggregate the 2006 NSW population into four groups – the always identified (Indigenous in both 2006 and 2011), the never identified (not Indigenous in either year); the newly identified (Indigenous in 2011 but not 2006) and the formerly identified (Indigenous in 2006 but not 2011). The newly identified (28,578) made up a much larger proportion of those identified as Indigenous in 2011 than for Australia as a whole and for all other large jurisdictions. In fact, the NSW newly identified population makes up almost half (44.6%) of the total Australian newly identified population. However, although there was a net inflow into the Indigenous population, there were still a large number of people who changed their Indigenous status in the opposite direction. Those who were newly identified in NSW were more likely to live in urban areas and were more socioeconomically advantaged compared to the always identified.

What does it mean for policy? It cannot be assumed that Indigenous identification is fixed through time. It is likely that the NSW Aboriginal population will continue to grow much faster than predicted by births and deaths, and change in its composition. Policy planning needs to reflect this.

DEMOGRAPHY

4   MIXED PARTNERSHIPS

What is the issue? Aboriginal females in NSW have high fertility rates relative to the rest of the state's population, a contributing factor to the rapid population growth discussed earlier. In addition to births of Aboriginal children to an Aboriginal mother, births of Aboriginal children to a non-Aboriginal mother but an Aboriginal father is an additional contributor to population growth. In other words, births from mixed partnerships increase the Aboriginal population, with the size of that contribution dependent on the rate of mixed-partnerships. In addition though, the characteristics, opportunities and service needs of children born to an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parent, may differ from those with two Aboriginal parents.

What does the literature say? Mixed partnerships, according to Walker and Heard (2014) is indicative of social integration and the breaking down of sociocultural barriers of 'difference'. They remark that mixed partnerships may suggest increasing similarities between ethnic groups or point to individuals seeking partners of similar characteristics (for example, socioeconomic circumstances). Little is known about the experiences of people in mixed partnerships in Australia. A particular paucity of information is evident regarding parents (especially non-Indigenous parents) navigating parenthood and the cultural wellbeing of their Indigenous children. Of particular interest are the sociocultural consequences of family separation, particularly where the primary custodial parent is non-Indigenous. What is known about mixed partnerships is largely statistical and descriptive (based on census and births data).

What does the data say? According to the ABS (2014), in NSW in 2013, 78% of Indigenous babies were born to parents where only the mother (44% of total Indigenous births) or father (34% of total Indigenous births) were Indigenous. This is among the highest in Australia. In their analysis of data from the 2011 census for NSW, Walker and Heard (2014) show the majority of Indigenous males and females are in mixed partnerships (males: 84% in Sydney, 67% rest-of-NSW; females: 85% in Sydney, 69% rest-of-NSW). The authors also find higher levels of education among Indigenous Australians to be associated with mixed partnering. Income, education and employment inequalities between Indigenous-only and mixed partnerships are also found by Biddle and Johnstone (2014).

What does it mean for policy? Mixed partnerships will continue to contribute to rapid population growth of the Aboriginal population of NSW. But, this population growth is likely to occur alongside a changing social structure where Aboriginal children (and increasingly Aboriginal adults) with two Aboriginal parents is the exception rather than the norm. At the same time though, policies targeting Aboriginal outcomes may not be as effective if solely focused on Aboriginal adults. This is particularly true for children, as the majority of Aboriginal children have one parent who is non-Aboriginal.

THE ECONOMY

5   EMPLOYMENT

What is the issue? Stable, well-paid employment remains one of the key determinants of an adult's wellbeing and sense of place in society. While there are times across the life-course when other activities take precedence – for example, whilst studying full-time or caring for those who need full-time care – wanting to work, but being unable to, places a heavy financial and psychological burden on job seekers (Shields, Price et al. 2009, Stavrova, Schlösser et al. 2011). It is true that the type of work matters (Parasuraman and Simmers 2001), but for the most part, any form of employment is of benefit to the individual and their family (Frey 2008). Aboriginal Australians in NSW remain less likely to be employed than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, impacting their lives and the lives of their families, as well as placing an ongoing burden on the taxpayer.

What does the literature say? Nationally, Gray, Hunter et al. (2014) have shown that the cost of Indigenous underemployment runs into the billions of dollars. Gray, Hunter et al. (2012) state that the 'reasons for the lower employment rates [of Indigenous Australians nationally] include lower levels of education, training and skill levels (human capital), poorer health, living in areas with fewer labour market opportunities, higher levels of arrest and interactions with the criminal justice system, discrimination, and lower levels of job retention.' Traditional definitions of discrimination point to unfair treatment that is conscious and resulting from personal animosity or hostility towards another group. More recently however, behavioural research has shown that most prejudice is implicit and, perhaps even more surprisingly, that implicit discrimination can have a more damaging effect on those who experience it. Specifically, Hardin and Banaji (2013) define implicit prejudice as that which is 'unwitting, unintentional and uncontrollable' and make it clear that 'Implicit prejudice is not limited to judgement of others, however, but also affects self-judgement and behavior, especially with regard to intellectual performance.'

What does the data say? In 2012-13, according to the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (AATSIHS), 45% of the Indigenous population aged 15 to 64 years was employed. This is about 0.6 times the percentage for the non-Indigenous population (76%). The Indigenous population of NSW had a lower rate of employment than all jurisdictions apart from the Northern Territory. Analysis in Biddle (2014) showed that education, location, age and language spoken at home explains some, but not all of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians nationally in terms of employment probabilities. Analysis for this paper further shows that this is also the case in NSW. Nationally, Biddle, Howlett et al. (2013) and Biddle (2013) provided strong evidence for labour market discrimination against Indigenous Australians.

What does it mean for policy? Governments must continue to invest in the education and health of the potential Aboriginal workforce. However, it also must be kept in mind that many of the barriers to Aboriginal employment reside in non-Aboriginal employers.

THE ECONOMY

5   HOUSING AND HOME OWNERSHIP

What is the issue? Where a person lives can have a significant effect on their life opportunities. This includes the community in which they live (Biddle 2014), and also their housing circumstances. This is most acute when it comes to homelessness, but living in a house that is overcrowded or is in major need of repair can also have serious consequences for a person's health, their education participation and their broader wellbeing (Rauh, Landrigan et al. 2008). While housing is a consumption good (that is, it brings immediate benefits), home ownership is also a form of investment, contributing significantly to a person's accumulated wealth and ability to borrow for other purposes.

What does the literature say? In understanding the Aboriginal experience of homelessness, crowding and home ownership, it is important to take into account different preferences and values. Memmott, Greenop et al. (2012) argue that 'crowding is a complex construct whose definition may be affected by a number of other, culturally specific, factors such as the number of families within one home, climatic and geographic factors such as remoteness, seasonable habitability of outside areas, access to kin, neighbours and other alternative places for entertainment and socialisation.' Despite or perhaps because of this complexity, it is informative to look at how Aboriginal people themselves view their own circumstance. According to Biddle (2011), 'Indigenous Australians themselves express a greater level of dissatisfaction with their housing situation than non-Indigenous Australians.'

What does the data say? According to the 2011 Census, 29,074 households in NSW owned their own home or were purchasing their home that included at least one Indigenous usual resident. This represents 39% of what the ABS labels 'Indigenous households' for NSW, slightly larger than the 34% of Indigenous households for the rest of Australia. This is lower than for non-Indigenous households in NSW (71% were owners/purchasers). There were 22,389 Indigenous households in NSW in the private rental market, and 16,990 through State or Community housing. Biddle (2013) showed that compared to most other jurisdictions (apart from Victoria, Tasmania, and the ACT), the Indigenous population of NSW is less likely to live in a dwelling that is deemed overcrowded by the occupancy standard used by the ABS. However, there were still large differences within the state compared to households without an Indigenous usual resident. In the region of North-Western NSW, households with an Indigenous usual resident were around six times as likely to be overcrowded compared to other households. In all other regions apart from Sydney-Wollongong (which had a ratio of 1.7), Indigenous households were at least four times as likely to be overcrowded.

What does it mean for policy? Having a stable home environment supports a range of other policy aims. Some Aboriginal Australians express a strong preference for community housing, at least relative to the private rental market. However, there are many more Aboriginal homeowners and issues of affordability are likely to be acute for this group.

THE ECONOMY

7   SELF EMPLOYMENT

What is the issue? One path to economic development is through self-employment and owning one's business. This can be a particularly attractive option when there are barriers to other forms of employment. Furthermore, Aboriginal self-employment has the potential to lead to development opportunities for other members of the community through favourable hiring and firing decisions.

What does the literature say? The most comprehensive analyses of Indigenous self-employment and Indigenous businesses are provided by Hunter (2014) and Hunter (2014). The author identifies a number of motivations for Indigenous Australians starting a business. Firstly, self-employment is seen as a way to avoid discriminatory treatment from employers, financiers and customers. Further, working with people who share similarities in ethnicity and culture helps promote and reinforce Indigenous identity. Finally, Indigenous businesses may open up opportunities for other Indigenous job seekers.

What does the data say? The Aboriginal workforce in NSW is predominantly made up of employees, as opposed to employers. According to the 2011 Census, only 8% of employed Indigenous people in the state were owner managers of enterprises or contributing family workers. This is slightly higher than for the rest of Australia (7%), but substantially lower than for the state's non-Indigenous workforce (18%). Although the 3,631 Indigenous owner managers of enterprises or contributing family workers in 2011 is a 33% increase from 2006, the percentage of the workforce has not changed. This group have quite different characteristics to the rest of the labour force. They are older (19% aged 55 years and over compared with 9% of employees) and more often male (65% are male compared with 50% for the rest of the labour force). There are also differences by education with 32% of the Indigenous owner managers of enterprises or contributing family workers having completed year 12 (compared with 37% of the total Indigenous workforce) and 40% having obtained a post-school qualification (compared with 53% of the total Indigenous workforce). Regional variations are also observed, with proportionally more Indigenous owner managers of enterprises or contributing family workers in NSW living in a regional area as opposed to either major cities or remote areas, compared to the rest of the Indigenous labour force (49% compared with 45%). They are also more likely to change their labour market status than their non-Indigenous counterparts, with around one-quarter moving into non-employment between 2006 and 2011, 1.8 times the rate of non-Indigenous employers.

What does it mean for policy? In early July 2015, the Commonwealth Government released a policy statement with the target of 3% of Commonwealth contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses by 2020. If successful, and replicated at a jurisdictional level, this is likely to have large effects on community development. There are other potential ways in which government and the broader community might support Indigenous businesses and the self-employed, including financial planning advice, support in accessing finance, and networking opportunities.

EDUCATION

8   EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

What is the issue? Early childhood education is a fundamental aspect of social and educational outcomes, including wellbeing and performance. Provision of and access to inclusive quality early childhood education is integral for equitable futures of Aboriginal young people.

What does the literature say? Steven Barnett (1998) details a strong short-term relationship between early childhood education and care (ECEC) participation and cognitive outcomes. Positive developmental outcomes (such as motivation, discipline, self-control and self-esteem) are also enhanced by ECEC participation, and these developmental aspects play an important role in determining long-term educational outcomes (Heckman and Kautz 2013). Specific to the Australian population, Warren and Haisken-DeNew (2013) found year 3 NAPLAN numeracy and literacy scores to be much higher for children who had attended ECEC programs than those who had not.

What does the data say? Outside of census years, there is some uncertainty around the exact level of preschool participation in NSW. This is because the number of children attending (the numerator) is based on one source of data, whereas the total number of children who might potentially attend (the denominator) is based on population estimates. Despite this uncertainty, it is reasonably clear from the data that Aboriginal children in NSW continue to participate in early childhood education at much lower rates than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, as well as their Indigenous peers in other jurisdictions. Specifically, there were 3,121 Indigenous children aged 4-5 years enrolled in preschool in 2013 from an estimated total of 5,176 children aged 4. As children tend to attend preschool for one year only, dividing the two gives an estimated enrolment rate of 60%. The corresponding figure for the non-Aboriginal population of the state was 72%. In comparison, the enrolment rate for Indigenous preschool-aged children across Australia was 74% (Productivity Commission 2014). Preschool is associated with lower rates of developmental vulnerability for Indigenous children (Biddle and Bath 2013) with analysis showing that this holds once other background characteristics are controlled for (Arcos-Holzinger and Biddle 2015). Aboriginal children in NSW were much more likely in 2012 to be rated as vulnerable in their first year of school using the Australian Early Development Census in physical health and wellbeing (18%), social competence (17%), emotional maturity (13%), language and cognitive skills (15%) and communication skills and general knowledge (17%) when compared with non-Aboriginal children (8%, 8%, 6%, 4% and 8% respectively) (AEDI 2015).

What does it mean for policy? There is considerable evidence that investing in early childhood education is one of the most effective ways to improve the life chances of an individual (Heckman and Mosso 2014). The data suggests a large gap in this investment for Aboriginal children in NSW with a strong role for government to work with the community to identify effective and inclusive models.

EDUCATION

9   SCHOOL EDUCATION

What is the issue? Numerically, high school education dominates the Closing the Gap targets. Two of the original targets were related to literacy and numeracy, as well as Year 12 attainment (or equivalent). Recently, a third target was added related to school attendance. Biddle and Cameron (2012) show that for Indigenous Australians, employment opportunities, health outcomes, and social and emotional wellbeing are positively associated with high school attainment.

What does the literature say? Biddle (2014) examined factors associated with school attendance and found that observable characteristics (such as location, health and socioeconomic background) explain some, but not all, of the difference in attendance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Health is a critical determinant of school attendance. Household stress, housing issues and family crises were all found to be more important predictors of non-attendance than income support. A student's self-reported experience was also an important determinant. The literature considers additional costs of education for minority groups, particularly related to social costs. Even when individuals do not consciously resist education, their fear, anxiety or concern in a situation which has the potential to confirm a negative stereotype about their social group has been shown to worsen their performance (Steele and Aronson 1995). This is particularly likely to happen when that negative stereotype is salient, for example in a classroom setting or intervention that reinforces the fact that the person's population sub-group performs worse on average.

What does the data say? In 2011-13, 57% of the 20–24 year old Indigenous population of NSW held at least a year 12 or equivalent level of education. This is compared with 87% of the non-Indigenous population and is lower than all other jurisdictions, apart from WA and the NT (Productivity Commission 2014). Analysis for this paper shows that Indigenous students who were aged 15 in 2009 were significantly and substantially more likely to have dropped out of school by 2012 compared with non-Indigenous students. However, this difference is much smaller once background characteristics are controlled for, and virtually non-existent when test scores at age 15 are controlled for. Hence, in NSW Indigenous status itself is not the main determinant of school disengagement in later school years. Rather, early school experience and background characteristics are crucial.

What does it mean for policy? Targets to increase student engagement and attendance need to account for the factors that influence student decision-making concerning school completion, and which include the role of teachers in promoting educational aspirations. Addressing Indigenous-specific barriers (like discrimination) is essential. However, it is also important to recognise that interventions targeting Indigenous students have the potential to make Indigenous status salient and reinforce negative stereotypes.

EDUCATION

10 POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION

What is the issue? As Australia and NSW transition to an economy based on services and highly-skilled knowledge work, there is increasing demand for people with higher levels of education (Bradley review 2008, p. xi). Participation in post-school education (including vocational education and training, and university) brings individual and social benefits and, in the case of the Aboriginal population in NSW, higher levels of education also support greater empowerment and participation in leadership and decision-making roles.

What does the literature say? Within the Indigenous population nationally, four specific groups are under-represented in higher education: women who are primary carers; young men; prisoners; and people with disabilities (Kinnane et al. 2014). Some of the factors associated with lower participation in higher education include lower rates of Year 12 completion and lower achievement levels; remoteness; a lack of financial resources and caring for children or for someone with a disability (Pechenkina and Anderson 2011, Behrendt, Larkin et al. 2012, Bexley, Daroesman et al. 2013, Crawford and Biddle 2015). Sikora and Biddle (2015) reported that Indigenous youth have lower expectations concerning post-school education, particularly Indigenous boys. A number of cultural factors, including historically less experience with higher education among students' families and communities, under-representation among university staff, cultural barriers and discrimination, have been identified as affecting higher education participation among the Indigenous population (Behrendt, Larkin et al. 2012).

What does the data say? The number of Indigenous people enrolling in NSW universities increased from just under 1,000 in 2004 to 2,200 in 2013. The percentage also increased from about 0.9% of all students in 2004 to 1.3% in 2013 (Department of Education 2013, 2014). In 2011, about 28,000 Indigenous people in NSW aged 20-64 years had a post-school qualification. This represented about 39% of all Indigenous people in this age group; by comparison, 61% of the non-Indigenous in this age group in NSW had a post-school qualification. Most of the difference was in the attainment of higher level qualifications: 8% of Indigenous people in NSW in this age group had a degree or above, compared with 28% of their non-Indigenous counterparts.

What does it mean for policy? Governments can support increased Aboriginal participation in tertiary education, particularly higher education, in a number of ways including the provision of scholarships and financial support. Alternative pathways to higher education may need attention (continuing provision of VET courses in secondary schools and providing access to education in correctional centres). Different modes of delivery may be required for students living in regional and remote areas. Other approaches include Aboriginal-only courses that integrate Aboriginal perspectives (Bajada and Trayler 2014), as well as mentoring programs. Mature age Indigenous students embarking on university studies for the first time may need support such as child care or other services, if combining study with work and family responsibilities.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

11   LIFE EXPECTANCY

What is the issue? Life expectancy is a key measure of wellbeing with lower levels reflecting differentials in health across the life course. Disability and poor health are important considerations in longevity.

What does the literature say? Life expectancy is a statistical measure constructed using age-specific death rates to determine mortality and survivorship. The life table comprises a hypothetical starting population and exposes it to the mortality and survivorship functions at each age. Life expectancy at birth typically refers to the estimated years a baby born in the given reference period would likely live if the rates of age- and sex-specific mortality of the period held across their lifetime. Slightly different methodology is used by the ABS to calculate life expectancy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to avoid issues arising from small numbers of deaths of Indigenous Australians. There remains considerable uncertainty with these estimates though. Historically, the largest improvements in life expectancy have came from reductions in infant mortality and infectious diseases, and increases in immunisation and preventive health (Skolnik 2008). Socioeconomic and environmental risk (tobacco, alcohol, and illicit substance use), and protective factors (nutrition, physical activity, and breastfeeding) also contribute.

What does the data say? While improvements have been made in the health of Indigenous Australians, it is still considerably lower compared with that of non-Indigenous people. In 2010-2012 life expectancy for Indigenous males in NSW was 70.5 years and 74.6 years for females (ABS 2013). For the same period, life expectancy for non-Indigenous males in NSW was 79.8 years and 83.1 years for females. This is a gap of 9.3 years for males and 8.5 years for females with mortality of Indigenous Australians higher across all ages (AIHW 2014). Life expectancy data are not released by the ABS at a sub-state level. However, data by remoteness for Australia in 2010-2012 shows overall males and females living in more urban areas experience higher life expectancy. Regional inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy for males was highest in major cities and inner regional areas (11.9 years), whereas for females it was highest in outer regional, remote and very remote areas (10.2 years). For the same period in NSW, infant mortality (or the number of deaths of children under one year of age per 1,000 live births) was 3.8 for Indigenous children, only slightly higher than the 3.5 deaths per 1,000 for non-Indigenous children (ABS 2014). This is substantially lower than for all other available jurisdictions, and is a very large reduction from 1998-2000 (11.8 per 1,000).

What does it mean for policy? Measures aimed at reducing health risk factors among Indigenous people, and promoting preventive health measures and greater access to health services, are integral to continued progress towards closing the gap in life expectancy. There is an opportunity to learn from the positive gains that have been made (in NSW in particular) in reducing infant mortality.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

12   DISABILITY

What is the issue? The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) aims to provide individualised support to meet the needs, preferences and aspirations of people with relatively severe levels of disability, and to support their carers. Understanding the characteristics of those with a disability is vital for a successful transition to the NDIS.

What does the literature say? Indigenous people have more than double the rate of severe or profound disability compared to the non-Indigenous population nationally. Around 18% of Indigenous males' and 13% of Indigenous females' life expectancy is spent in disability (compared with 10% and 9% for non-Indigenous males and females, respectively) (Vos, Barker et al. 2007). This is in addition to an already lower life expectancy when compared with non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people with a disability have less access to services, particularly in remote areas but also in non-remote areas due to services not always being sensitive to Indigenous cultural values (Biddle, Al-Yaman et al. 2014). Exposure to risk factors (socioeconomic disadvantage, smoking, poor nutrition and physical inactivity) accounts for almost half the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in Disability Adjusted Life Years (Productivity Commission 2011).

What does the data say? According to the 2011 Census, in NSW there were about 6,900 Indigenous people with a core activity need for assistance (this broadly aligns with the definition of a severe or profound disability), most of whom were in Sydney (about 2,200), the Hunter (880), the Mid-North Coast (670) and North Western NSW (610). After adjusting for age differences in the two populations, Indigenous Australians were more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous Australians to need help with daily activities, this holds for both NSW and Australia. The rate of age-standardised self-reported disability for the Indigenous population is slightly higher in NSW (7.7%) compared with the national average (7.4%), and the difference between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population is slightly larger for NSW than it is nationally (Biddle, Al-Yaman et al 2014, p. 146). Physical disability is the most common broad disability type among Indigenous Australians aged 15-64 with a severe profound disability (experienced by 82%). Around 30% experienced intellectual or psychological-related difficulties (Biddle, Al-Yaman et al. 2014).

What does it mean for policy? There is some scope for the NDIS to address Indigenous disability through prevention and early intervention, but there is a need to also address socioeconomic disadvantage. Biddle, Al-Yaman et al. (2014) give a number of specific recommendations to overcome barriers to NDIS service delivery for Indigenous people such as block funding suitable providers, supporting smaller operations that are in touch with local communities, and employing local Indigenous staff and developing the cultural competency of non-Indigenous staff. The NDIS provides an opportunity to better meet the needs of the Aboriginal population of NSW with a disability; support their carers; and boost Aboriginal employment.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

13   SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

What is the issue? The ABS defines wellbeing as a 'state of health or sufficiency in all aspects of life'. Many government policies (for example the Closing the Gap framework) use wellbeing as an overarching goal, even though very few would use subjective measures as explicit targets. However, as Dockery (2010) has noted, there is a potential tension between some wellbeing measures (for example maintaining Indigenous culture) and achieving equity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in mainstream socioeconomic outcomes.

What does the literature say? Dockery (2010) suggests that Indigenous people with either strong or very weak attachment to their traditional culture had better outcomes than those in between. Biddle (2014) shows that Indigenous people who were employed had higher levels of emotional wellbeing, while those with very low levels of education, with poorer self-assessed health, or who had been a victim of an assault, had lower levels. Indigenous Australians living in remote areas, who are the most socioeconomically disadvantaged, report higher levels of happiness. Examining the relationship between income and subjective wellbeing, Biddle (2015) found a strong correlation for Indigenous men living in non-remote areas but a much weaker effect among women and those living in remote areas. Experiences of discrimination are negatively associated with subjective wellbeing, with Biddle, Howlett et al. (2013) finding higher rates of discrimination in non-remote areas and amongst those with high levels of education.

What does the data say? Analysis of recent (2011-13) Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (AATSIHS) and the Australian Health Survey (AHS) show that after standardising for age, 66% of Indigenous Australians in NSW assessed their own health as being good, very good or excellent, compared with 68% of Indigenous people Australia-wide. These results were lower than for the total population, with 86% for NSW and for Australia as a whole. Similarly, 7% of the total population reported being so sad that nothing could cheer them up at least some of the time in a four-week period. This was much lower than for the Indigenous population of NSW (17%), which in turn was slightly lower than for the Indigenous population Australia-wide (20%).

What does it mean for policy? Self-assessed health is strongly associated with Indigenous people's subjective wellbeing, so improving health among Indigenous people continues to rank highly as a policy priority. The association between socioeconomic status and wellbeing is much more complex and the question is whether socioeconomic equity should be pursued at any cost. Although employment and a certain minimum level of education are associated with higher levels of wellbeing, there are other important contexts such as cultural identity and attachment, social capital and for example, the greater exposure of highly-educated Indigenous people living in urban areas to discrimination and racism in the labour market and wider society.

HERITAGE

14   LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

What is the issue? Aboriginal peoples of NSW have a diverse cultural heritage with ties to land and Aboriginal peoples of NSW have a diverse cultural heritage with ties to land and country that date back tens of thousands of years (Broome 2010). Aboriginal languages provide a unique view of the world with the iconic Indigenous language map created by Horton (1999) showing a multitude of languages spoken across NSW at colonisation. At the same time, new ways of speaking (Miller, Webster et al. 2014) and new Aboriginal cultural and artistic expressions are developing in NSW.

What does the literature say? Biddle and Swee (2012) found that 'learning an Indigenous language and participating in Indigenous cultural activities' was positively associated with two measures of subjective wellbeing. Verdon and McLeod (2015) found that 'social and environmental factors such as primary caregivers' use of an Indigenous language and level of relative isolation were found to be associated with higher rates of Indigenous language maintenance.' In their most recent *Overview of Australian Arts*, the Australia Council for the Arts (2015) note that 'a high proportion of visual arts painters in Australia are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.' What's more, the Australia Council reported that 'art production is the main source of commercial income for many remote communities', with important contributions made to the wider economy through tourism and to society through non-Indigenous engagement with Aboriginal art and culture. Marmion, Obata et al. (2014) find that 'for languages with full speakers, but where transmission to younger people has been interrupted, evidence from around the world demonstrates that two types of immersion programs, the master–apprentice program and language nests, have been particularly effective, especially where transmission of languages and nurturing of the next generation of speakers are the aim.'

What does the data say? According to data from the 2011 Census, there were 1,194 Indigenous Australians in NSW who spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home. This is less than 1% of the population that answered that question, compared to around 17% for the rest of the country. Biddle (2013) showed that all regions of NSW had rates of Indigenous language usage below 1%. Remoteness is positively associated with Indigenous language usage, but language usage is lower in NSW even after controlling for remoteness. The Census can also tell us about who is working in industries related to 'Creative and Performing Arts Activities' as well as 'Heritage Activities.' The Census counted 372 Indigenous Australians in NSW in such industries, 23% of all Indigenous Australians in such industries, but only 0.8% of the total Indigenous workforce in NSW (slightly higher than the 0.6% of non-Indigenous workers).

What does it mean for policy? Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests form a large part of the NSW Government's 'Plan for Aboriginal affairs' or *OCHRE*. Data at baseline shows ongoing barriers to Aboriginal language and cultural maintenance in NSW, highlighting a need for continued investment and support.

HERITAGE

15 ENVIRONMENT AND LAND

What is the issue? Looking after country is a broad concept based on a symbiotic relationship between Indigenous people and the environment (Hunt et al. 2009, 1). However, the management of natural resources in NSW is not always conducted with full engagement with relevant Aboriginal communities and organisations (Lane and Williams 2008). This has been particularly noted with regard to fishing rights, with potential conflict between commercial fisheries and important activities of Aboriginal groups. Drought is a major concern for Indigenous communities as it affects their relationship with each other and the land. As climate change makes drought incidents more frequent this is a growing concern (Kiem 2013).

What does the literature say? There are benefits to be derived from the engagement of Indigenous peoples in natural resource management, in particular positive social outcomes like increased access to education, reduced community conflict, and the building of social networks (Hunt et al. 2009, xii). Biddle and Swee (2012) found a positive association between participation in hunting, gathering and fishing for the Australian Indigenous population and their subjective wellbeing. Many Indigenous organisations place high value on groups that look after country, finding them both important and productive (Putnis et al. 2007) due to their achievement of various outcomes. An example of effective engagement between government bodies and Indigenous Australians is through fire management, resulting in improvements to understanding fire behaviour and limiting bushfire environmental impact (Roughley and Williams 2007). Regulations around water and fishing are pertinent, as lack of access and management of this resource can have negative consequences (Hunt et al. 2009, 23-24). Of particular relevance for NSW is the Murray-Darling Basin. Indigenous engagement in the management of this system has been celebrated (Morgan et al. 2006), however it has also been noted that the plan was flawed in its complexity and lack of specificity (Hunt et al. 2009, 24). There is also a clear value placed on water resources and access to these for Indigenous peoples on coastal NSW (Barnett and Ceccarelli 2007).

What does the data say? By definition, 100% of NSW was Aboriginal land in 1788. However, the most recent data suggests that only 0.5% of land in NSW is Aboriginal-owned (Hunt et al. 2009, 18). Indigenous people who are engaged and involved in caring for country have better health indicators than those who do not (Burgess and Johnston 2007; Garnet and Sithole 2007).

What does it mean for policy? As only a limited amount of land in NSW is Aboriginal-owned, any efforts that aim to facilitate Indigenous engagement in caring for country needs to account for this lack of legal landholder rights. There are well-documented benefits to those Aboriginal Australians involved in caring for country, but the benefits to the wider society through protection and stewardship may be larger still.

HERITAGE

16   CULTURAL HERITAGE

What is the issue? Land, language, culture and the environment can all be linked as Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. Specifically, in the consultation document compiled by the *Office of Environment and Heritage* (OEH), on *Aboriginal heritage legislation in NSW*,[3] it is noted that 'Aboriginal culture is based on 'Country'' and that 'Country refers to the land and water, which includes people, plants and animals and also embraces the seasons, stories and creation spirits of Aboriginal people. It includes both tangible (physical) and intangible (non-physical) aspects – it is the landscapes, places, objects, customs, and cultural traditions and practices that communities have inherited from the past and wish to conserve.' Protecting this cultural heritage is important for the present and the future.

What does the literature say? There has been a mixed relationship historically between the discipline of archaeology, government and Aboriginal peoples in the protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (Smith 2000). This reflects to a certain extent the competing principles of economic and agricultural development; demand for artefacts from non-Indigenous peoples and institutions; and Aboriginal desires for control and stewardship of their own heritage. This conflict can be demonstrated by analysis undertaken by Rolfe and Windle (2003) that had the aim of placing an economic value on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites. While the experiment was undertaken in central Queensland as opposed to NSW, the main finding that 'there are significant differences in values between [I]ndigenous and general population groups' is likely to hold for NSW. It should be noted though that the relationship has changed and is changing through time. English (2002) has noted 'an increasing impetus for Aboriginal cultural interests to be factored into key aspects of environmental planning such as regional vegetation management.'

What does the data say? The OEH maintains the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS), which is one of the main sources of data on cultural heritage in NSW. The AHIMS includes: information about Aboriginal objects; information about Aboriginal Places that have been declared by the Minister for the Environment to have special significance; and archaeological reports. AHIMS contains detailed information on 67,000 recorded sites and 10,700 archaeological and other Aboriginal heritage reports.

What does it mean for policy? There are conflicting values placed on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage that need to be negotiated. However, the NSW government has recognised in its discussion document the important 'role of Aboriginal people in the management of their culture and heritage as understood and culturally determined by them.' It is important to continue to recognise the role of Traditional Owners in 'Speaking for Country', whilst also noting the value of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage to all Aboriginal Australians and the broader population.

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3 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/cultureheritage/110391issues.pdf

JUSTICE AND PROTECTION

17 CHILD PROTECTION

What is the issue? In Australia, statutory child protection is the responsibility of state and territory governments. Departments responsible for child protection provide assistance to vulnerable children who are suspected of being abused, neglected or harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection. On the one hand, the data suggests a potentially very high rate of abuse and neglect for Indigenous children. On the other hand, according to Libesman and McGlade (2015), the responsibility for sexual abuse falls both on the perpetrators and on the institutional and social context which created an environment that made children vulnerable. There is considerable concern that Indigenous children may be removed from their parents at a rate that is disproportionate to a culturally appropriate understanding of the wellbeing of children and their families.

What does the literature say? A number of reports and academic articles document the very rapid increase in the number and per cent of Aboriginal children in out of home care (Herring, Spangaro et al. 2013). According to Lonne, Harries et al. (2012) with a high volume of child protection notifications, increasing numbers of children in state care, and a decreasing number of foster-carers, the system in Australia is struggling to meet the increasing need for child protection services. There are workforce issues as well, with Lonne, Harries et al. (2012) noting that the 'toxic work conditions' in child protection systems has negative repercussions for both employees but also harms the families and children that the system exists to protect. Decision-making within the child protection system is an area of considerable research with this work often focused on improving decision-making through risk management processes. Behavioural research in other contexts has shown that stressful situations can induce implicit biases with workers under considerable time and workload pressures being more likely to rely on intuition to aid in decision-making (Team 2014). Furthermore, according to Herring, Spangaro et al. (2013), cultural competency is merely a 'starting point' for service providers, and is rather limited in its efficacy in resulting in any actual tangible changes to service provider behaviour and practice.

What does the data say? Nationally, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) estimates that Indigenous children were 7 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be receiving child protection services. Furthermore, the NSW Ombudsman in 2012 reported that Aboriginal children and young people are the subject of over 20% of all child protection reports and represent a third of the 17,000+ children in out-of-home care (NSW Ombudsman 2013).

What does it mean for policy? Child protection is a very complex policy domain with balances needing to be made between responding to risk in individual cases whilst recognising the rights of children to grow up in a culturally appropriate setting. The balance is likely to be best met through working with Aboriginal communities and recognising the biases and their triggers within the child protection workforce.

JUSTICE AND PROTECTION

18   CRIME AND INCARCERATION

What is the issue? Leaving aside the issue of retribution, under the utilitarian approach to punishment for crimes committed, there are generally taken to be three main motivations for imprisonment (Pollock 1997) – deterrence (making illegal activity less attractive); incapacitation (physically restricting individuals from undertaking illegal activities); and rehabilitation (using incarceration as an opportunity to educate and reform). However, the Aboriginal population of NSW continues to be incarcerated at a much higher rate than the non-Aboriginal population, implying that none of these three goals are being met with Borland and Hunter (2000) documenting the link between arrest and future employment.

What does the literature say? The deterrence effect of incarceration relies upon the consideration of future legal repercussions for criminal actions: a consideration that does not occur for many offenders when under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Darley, 2005, Sentencing Advisory Council 2011, 15). Emerging research suggests that certainty of punishment is the dominant deterrent effect, over the severity of punishment (Sentencing Advisory Council 2011, 16, see also Pogarsky 2002, Robinson and Darley 2004, Durlauf and Nagin 2010). Language is still a barrier to justice for Indigenous people due to the need for interpreters (Eades 2013, 234) and pervasive hearing problems. Issues with bail continue to be a problem: the money and support systems required to access bail is often not available to Indigenous offenders, meaning they must remain in custody. For those who have been convicted, some imprisonment alternatives have been shown to have efficacy in reducing the recidivism rate, for example the NSW Magistrate Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) diversion program.

What does the data say? In NSW in 2014, the Indigenous population was imprisoned at 11 times the rate of the non-Indigenous population in NSW. Additionally, recidivism rates are high, with 81% for Indigenous prisoners sentenced in the previous 12 months having been previously imprisoned, compared with 59% of non-Indigenous prisoners (ABS 2014). Young people make up a larger portion of Indigenous offenders than non-Indigenous offenders: in NSW, prisoners aged 24 and below comprised 25% of all Indigenous prisoners, compared with 15% of all non-Indigenous prisoners (ABS 2014, table 20).

What does it mean for policy? Darley and Alter (2013) state that 'conventional approaches to dealing with crime, punishment, and deterrence in the legislative policy deviate from what research on behavioural decision making has recently discovered about how people actually think and behave.' The most comprehensive analysis of the determinants of Indigenous arrest and incarceration is Weatherburn (2014) in which he states that effort to reduce over-representation should focus on six areas: child development; substance abuse; school attendance and performance; workforce participation; and bail and recidivism.

JUSTICE AND PROTECTION

19 COMMUNITY SAFETY

What is the issue? Many of the victims of the high rates of crime and incarceration amongst Indigenous Australians are other community members. This is often referred to as Lateral Violence and according to a quote in Gooda (2007) includes 'the organised, harmful behaviours that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group: within our families; within our organisations and; within our communities. When we are consistently oppressed we live with great fear and great anger and we often turn on those who are closest to us.' Furthermore, Indigenous Australians are more likely to live in areas where there are high rates of crime amongst the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous Australians are also substantially more likely to be the victims of crime than non-Indigenous Australians.

What does the literature say? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are disproportionately represented amongst the victims of certain crimes, including homicide, sexual assault and kidnapping or abduction (ABS 2013). As highlighted by Fitzgerald and Weatherburn (2002), 'Aboriginal victimisation in violent crime is predominantly the result of offending by other Aboriginal people.' Biddle (2011) analysed NATSISS data and showed that 'after controlling for a range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, Indigenous females are no more or less likely to report that they had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months than an Indigenous male' and that although some of the predictors of victimisation differed for Indigenous males and females, 'for both sexes, victimisation is highest amongst the young and significantly and substantially lower for those aged 55 years and over.' Biddle (2011) also showed that 'having been arrested in the previous five years was significantly associated with having been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the previous year.'

What does the data say? According to recorded crime data compiled by the ABS, Indigenous people in NSW in 2012 were the victims of assault at a rate of 4 times the non-Indigenous rate (2,942/100,000, compared with 811/100,000). This is likely to understate the true level of feelings of unsafety, partly because victims of crime may be reluctant to identify as being Indigenous, but also because assault reported to police is only the most extreme form of victimisation. According to data from the 2008 NATSISS, 14% of Indigenous Australians in non-remote NSW in 2008 reported they were a victim of physical violence in the previous 12 months, and 20% reported they were a victim of threatened violence. Furthermore, only 44% felt safe or very safe walking alone in the local area after dark.

What does it mean for policy? Reducing rates of Indigenous crime and incarceration is likely to have flow-on affects to reducing rates of victimisation and improve feelings of safety. In addition though, victims of physical and threatened violence will need specific support through housing, health, education and employment services.

SUMMING UP THE POLICY OPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

The NSW Aboriginal population is large, and growing. This growth is being added to by high rates of net identification change, as well as high rates of mixed partnerships. The Aboriginal population is also diverse, living in major urban centres or in small regional or remote towns. Many Aboriginal people in NSW are successfully negotiating mainstream institutions whilst maintaining a strong attachment to Aboriginal languages and a vibrant and evolving Aboriginal culture. Others need a greater degree of support.

There is considerable debate around the exact role of government in a modern society like that of NSW. Different views reflect ideological positions, as well as a person's own social and economic position. However, according to a relatively recent ANUPoll, 'the public is keen to see the Australian Government invest more heavily in health, education, the old age pension and police and law enforcement, and spend less on unemployment benefits' and 'Australians are not overly supportive of increased spending for business and industry.'[4]

These views on government expenditure reflect a desire to focus on equality of opportunity. However, the data presented in this paper suggests that many Aboriginal people in the state are not sharing in the opportunity presented by the modern Australian economy. The Aboriginal population is less likely to be employed and less likely to own their own business. They are less likely to own their own home and more likely to be homeless or to live in an overcrowded dwelling. The Aboriginal population has a much lower life expectancy and higher rates of disability, whilst participating in all forms of education at a much lower rate than the rest of the population. Across the state, the Aboriginal population is more likely to be arrested and incarcerated, and much more likely to be a victim of crime. Governments have clearly failed at the goal of shared opportunity.

These statistics can be used to paint a picture of deficit, deprivation and despair. However, they can also be used to highlight the potentially large returns from a well-targeted and shared investment. *OCHRE* – which stands for *opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility, empowerment* – is the NSW Government's Plan for Aboriginal Affairs, launched in 2013. As part of this plan, the NSW Government has recognised the strong desire of Aboriginal communities and the benefits to the rest of the state, of government building 'a genuine and sustainable partnership with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal organisations.'[5]

Investing in early childhood education has been shown to have very high returns to governments and families. But our preschools and schools need to be supportive of Aboriginal children for that investment to pay dividends. Returns to education are cumulative, and the analysis summarised in his paper showed that an Aboriginal youth in NSW is no more likely to drop out of school before completion than a non-Aboriginal youth with the same characteristics. The data suggests that successive governments in NSW have underinvested in early childhood education for the Aboriginal population.

There are increasing calls for governments both in Australia (Schwartz 2013) and internationally (Austin,

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4 http://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/research/projects/electoral-surveys/anupoll/public-priorities-government-expenditure

5 http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government-aboriginal-affairs-strategy/

SUMMING UP THE POLICY OPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Cadora et al. 2013) to divert some of the funds devoted to incarceration to measures that reduce the probability of arrest in the first place. This *Justice Reinvestment* is not without its own difficulties, as it requires solid evidence on what reduces arrest as well as on the upfront costs to be paid while incarceration remains high. But, as a guiding principle, the approach has considerable merit.

This paper also documented some success stories. Data from the ABS suggest that infant mortality for the Aboriginal population of NSW has declined significantly in the last decade or so and is now essentially on par with that of the non-Aboriginal population. This is likely to have contributed to gains in life expectancy, albeit with gaps still remaining. The paper also documented an ongoing attachment to land, language and culture, which, although in desperate need of support, still remains strong and contributes to a range of measures of subjective wellbeing.

OCHRE rightly points to the need for partnerships between government and Aboriginal communities and organisations. However, there is also a need for partnerships with the wider NSW and Australian community. The majority of teachers of Aboriginal children will continue to be non-Aboriginal, as will the majority of doctors, lawyers, professors, employers and customers. This is not because the Aboriginal population is not capable of undertaking these roles. Far from it. Rather, it is because of the relative size of the two populations. What we often overlook also is the fact that the majority of Aboriginal people in the state will have a non-Aboriginal partner, and the majority of Aboriginal children will have one Aboriginal parent and one non-Aboriginal parent.

Given this need for partnering, the analysis of Truong, Paradies et al. (2014) that showed that 'interventions to improve cultural competency can improve patient/client health outcomes' could be extended to other areas of service delivery. Herring, Spangaro et al. (2013) document the potential benefits in social work, for example. At the same time, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population of the state and more broadly, need to be aware of their own implicit and explicit biases. This was discussed in this paper with regards to labour market discrimination and child protection, but could be extended to all other areas.

Ultimately, the data and literature summarised in this paper document a range of policy challenges. There are, however, opportunities that could be seized through genuine partnerships and by explicitly taking into account the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples within the state.

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