
**Review of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key
Indicators* report**
for the
**Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service
Provision**

Report

by



Australian Council *for* Educational Research

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Acknowledgements

ACER acknowledges the contribution made to this review by a wide range of stakeholders during the period of consultation. We thank OID Working Group members and their colleagues who helped organise small discussion groups and meetings at relatively short notice. We also thank each person who gave up their time to provide commentary and perspectives on the OID report.

Consistent with the title of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* reports, the term 'Indigenous' has been used in this report to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is also used to refer to Indigenous peoples overseas in the literature review section of this report.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHMAC	Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRC	COAG Reform Council
Clearinghouse	Closing the Gap Clearinghouse
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DoHA	Department of Health and Ageing
DHS	Department of Human Services
FAHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
IER	Indigenous Expenditure Report
LSIC	Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children
NAGATSIHID	National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NCIE	National Centre of Indigenous Excellence
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
OID	Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage
PC	Productivity Commission
RoGS	Report on Government Services
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision

Executive Summary

In May-June 2012, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) conducted a review of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID): Key Indicators* report on behalf of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. Stakeholder feedback was invited through several different means: an email survey, telephone interviews, participation in small group discussions and written submissions. Public sector users of the OID report made up a large proportion of the stakeholders who contributed to the review. Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders across a wide range of organisations participated in the consultations.

The review found a range of different stakeholder views in relation to the OID report. On the one hand the report was generally considered to be meeting its purpose in reporting on the performance of Australian governments in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. On the other hand, a proliferation of other government performance reports in recent years has led to some questioning of the relevance of the OID report and its place in this larger array of reports. The review found that while there is some overlap with other government performance reports there are also two key features that make the OID report unique amongst these others: its focus on outcomes and its whole-of-government perspective.

The OID report was found to reflect international 'best practice' in several respects, most notably in its reporting against specific targets. Key strengths of the report were seen to be the breadth of the information provided, disaggregation of data, time series analyses, clear identification of progress towards reaching targets, information around successful initiatives, and provision of information at different levels of detail and in different formats (text/commentary/charts and tables; hard and soft copy) to meet the needs of a variety of users.

The most commonly identified limitations were around the reporting of data, need for greater analysis of the interconnections and linkages between indicators, and the need for a more strengths-based approach in the reporting of Indigenous experience. This latter finding highlights an inherent tension between the purpose of the OID report – which reports on an explicitly endorsed COAG 'Closing the Gap' agenda – and a desire on the part of a significant number of stakeholders for a more positive report, something that recognises achievements, strengths, and the positive dimensions of Indigenous experience.

The OID report is used in a variety of ways, including as a reference, for presentations, writing submissions and briefings, teaching, and by some for policy purposes, although it is not clear how well used the report is by policy makers given the number of people who thought the report should provide more analysis on linkages between indicators and between policy and outcomes. The review also suggests there is limited use of the report among Indigenous stakeholders, which is a significant gap in knowledge that needs to be investigated.

The consultations provided a range of practical suggestions for improving the quality, reach and usefulness of the OID report. On the basis of the consultations the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- (a) That the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) consider changing the title of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report to one that is more suggestive of Indigenous strengths.
- (b) That the SCRGSP examine ways in which information about Indigenous strengths (such as connectedness to land and country, resilience, Indigenous leadership, language) can be incorporated to help shift the balance of the report from a negative focus on disadvantage to a more positive focus on *overcoming* this disadvantage.

Recommendation 2

That the SCRGSP use the good practice principles outlined in this report as a guide to develop a set of criteria against which the OID report can measure its continuous improvement as a 'best practice model' of government performance reporting.

Recommendation 3

That the SCRGSP investigate the feasibility of bringing together key representatives of those organisations which currently produce government performance reports in the area of Indigenous disadvantage to review:

- the role and purpose of each report
- target audience
- unique features
- existing or potential duplication (and whether or not this matters)
- data sources used
- how each contributes to the broad picture of Australian governments' progress in reducing Indigenous disadvantage
- how each reflects the perspectives of the Indigenous people on whose lives they are reporting.

Recommendation 4

That the case studies be retained in the OID report and their quality strengthened by having:

- clear and transparent criteria for selection
- evidence of effectiveness
- (where possible) evidence of progression over time
- evidence-based examples from sources such as the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

Recommendation 5

That (where possible) the OID report provide more disaggregation in relation to:

- Remoteness
- Indigenous people living in an urban context
- community level data
- sub-groups within the Indigenous population (such as homeless and highly mobile groups) that might otherwise be lost in the data collection on the Indigenous population.

Recommendation 6

That the SCRGSP investigate further the reasons for the apparently low level of use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, with a view to adjusting the OID Report to better accommodate their policy and research needs.

Recommendation 7

- (a) That the OID report provide more analyses that reflect the complexity of disadvantage, particularly in regard to the linkages between indicators.
- (b) That the OID report provide more rigorous statistical analyses, in particular when comparing trends and outcomes in administrative data.

Recommendation 8

- (a) That the SCRGSP investigate the possibility of providing a series of smaller reports in between publication of the biennial report that would highlight particular indicators, outcomes, themes or linkages.
- (b) That the SCRGSP examine the feasibility of providing a separate tailored report for each state and territory based on available data

Recommendation 9

- (a) That the SCRGSP increase the level of Indigenous representation on the OID Working Group and publish the membership of the OID Working Group in the OID report to raise awareness of this group among stakeholders.
- (b) That the SCRGSP investigate the feasibility of establishing other reference groups centred on the key strategic areas of action to support the work of the OID report writers to increase awareness of Indigenous input into the report.
- (c) That the OID report include a list of the Indigenous organisations and experts who have contributed to the development and drafting of the OID report to increase awareness of Indigenous input into the report.

Introduction

Background to the review

In May-June 2012 the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) undertook a review of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* (OID) report on behalf of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision.

After five editions, and given changes in the external policy environment and the emergence of other publications reporting on government performance, it was considered timely to review the role and usefulness of the OID report.

Purpose and scope of the review

The aim of the review was to identify:

- how the OID report is used
- how useful the OID report is to users
- how the OID report compares with other equivalent publications
- the extent to which the OID report is achieving the objectives set for it by COAG
- changes that could improve the usefulness of the OID report.

The long-term objective of the report is to inform Australian governments about whether or not their policies and programs are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people and to help inform further work.

The intention of the review was to assess the report's usability and usefulness; it was not intended to be a comprehensive 'root and branch' assessment. The review did not focus on the usefulness of the OID framework or indicators (although some stakeholders did comment on these) but on whether or not people use the report, how they use the report, its strengths and limitations, how it might be improved, and how to maximise its influence.

It needs to be said at the outset that some issues raised by stakeholders are outside the ambit of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. For example, several stakeholders suggested a wider review of the OID framework and indicators (including introducing more positive indicators) is needed. A more substantial review of this nature falls under the purview of COAG and not the Productivity Commission in its role as Secretariat for the Review of Government Service Provision.

The terms of reference are provided below.

Structure of this report

The report is separated into two sections. Part 1 contains the terms of reference, methodology, key findings and the recommendations. Part 2 contains the list of people and organisations who contributed to the review and the information gathered through the surveys, phone conversations and face-to-face discussions.

PART ONE

Terms of reference

The review was guided by the following terms of reference:

1. Examine the origins, purpose and terms of reference (original and revised) for the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* (OID) report, and the extent to which the OID report has achieved its objectives.
2. Identify the extent to which the OID report reflects international best practice in government performance reporting of outcomes for Indigenous or special needs groups.
3. Examine the role of the OID report within the broader context of reporting, including the:
 - National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) and other National Agreement and National Partnership reports (both Steering Committee and COAG Reform Council reports)
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report
 - Prime Minister's Report to Parliament
 - ABS and AIHW publications on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and welfare
 - Indigenous Expenditure Report.
4. Examine the particular 'value add' of the OID report in light of reader needs and the availability of other publications, and recommend how the 'value-add' of the report could be increased. This examination is to consider the following OID content:
 - contextual material and evidence base
 - breadth of indicators
 - time series analysis
 - geographic disaggregation (State/Territory, remoteness, other)
 - presentation of data in charts, tables, commentary and attachments
 - 'things that work' case studies.
5. Identify the major users of the OID report and how, and to what extent, readers use the report and the way that users process and use the information in a large multi-layered report.

6. Examine how users access the report (print or web versions) and what content and components they use. Recommend ways to improve report readability and usefulness.
7. Identify opportunities to streamline and improve the efficiency of the production of the OID report, in particular, the role of the OID Working Group and the process for obtaining data from data providers.

Methodology

In addressing the terms of reference, ACER sought the views of a wide range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders in, government, non-government organisations and academia. Appendix A provides a list of the individuals and organisations who contributed to the review. (Survey respondents have not been named, only the organisations they represent.) In the report all contributions have been de-identified to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

Document review

ACER reviewed past and current COAG and OID documents relating to the origins, purpose, and terms of reference (original and revised) to provide a context for the use and usefulness of the OID report, including how it has evolved over the years in response to wider political contexts, and the changing needs of users. This included various editions of the OID report and earlier stakeholder consultation findings.

Literature review

ACER examined equivalent national and international publications to identify the extent to which the OID report reflects international best practice in government performance reporting of outcomes for Indigenous or special needs groups. ACER examined a range of Australian and international documents which report on, analyse and make recommendations about the social conditions of Indigenous peoples. Scopus, ERC, ERIC and the web were searched on “advisory body” government, performance reporting and then by adding keywords such as health, disadvantaged, education, and terms to describe Indigenous (eg Indigenous, Aboriginal, American Indian, Inuit, Canadian Native, Maori, Pasifika, First Nations) or country names (eg Canada, New Zealand). Disadvantage terms were searched with indicators, measure, criteria, and benchmark. Additional search terms were used to identify best practice in the area of government performance reporting.

Comparison with other Australian reports

ACER examined a range of other reports, including the COAG Reform Council’s National Indigenous Reform Agreement performance reports; other National Agreement and National Partnership reports; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report; Prime Minister’s Report to Parliament; ABS and AIHW publications on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and welfare; and the Indigenous Expenditure Report. The purpose of the review was to identify the unique features of the OID report in relation to these other reports, the areas of overlap and current gaps.

Consultations

ACER sought the views of the widest possible range of stakeholders whose organisations were known to be users of, or contributors to, the report. ACER prepared an initial list of potential contributors to the review and this list was amended in the light of feedback from the Secretariat. Additional stakeholders were added on the recommendation of OID Working Group members and others familiar with the report. This stakeholder list became the basis for the consultations. Stakeholders were then consulted in several ways.

Survey

ACER developed a short email survey to capture the views of a wide cross section of users. These were sent to each stakeholder organisation identified in the original stakeholder list. The survey included a mixture of Yes/No, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. Survey data were coded using standard classifications (for example, industry type). The purpose was to find out who uses the OID report, for what main purposes, and how frequently, and how accessible and useful the report is for each type of user.

The surveys were emailed to users because it was thought that a personal communication might elicit more responses than a generic web-based survey.

Surveys were sent to key contacts in 90 organisations from the stakeholder list. Recipients were asked to distribute these within their organisations to users of the OID report.

Thirty-five completed surveys were returned. While this number is small it covers a diverse range of users. Of the 35 survey respondents, three were of Aboriginal origin and one was of Torres Strait Islander origin. The main industry areas represented were public administration and safety; professional, scientific and technical services; and education.

Phone interviews with targeted users

Telephone interviews were conducted with 44 stakeholders. These conversations were designed to explore in more detail usage patterns, usefulness and the 'value add' of the OID report. ACER conducted phone interviews with OID Working Group members (some OID Working Group members contributed to the review via videoconference or in small discussion groups) and with other users of the report chosen to reflect a range of user types, sectors and types of organisations. The phone interviews were aimed at identifying what stakeholders thought in regard to different components of the OID report (eg contextual material and evidence base; breadth of indicators; time series analyses; geographic disaggregation; presentation of data; 'things that work' case studies), strengths and limitations of the report and suggestions for improvement. Interviewees were from a wide range of industry areas, including health, economics, employment, education and vocational training, public administration, housing, social policy, criminal justice and human rights.

Small discussion groups

The purpose of the discussion groups was to target more specifically government officers and representatives from Aboriginal organisations to hear their perspectives on the usefulness or otherwise of the OID report, extent and nature of use, and suggestions for improvement. Face-to-face

meetings were held in all capital cities except for Hobart where the discussion was held via a videoconference. While the review was initially intending to incorporate some face-to-face meetings with one or two regional communities this proved difficult in the timeframe available. However, some feedback was received from regional stakeholders via phone interviews or surveys.

The face-to-face meetings allowed different groups working in the one organisation to present their views and for differences in need, usage and usefulness to be identified. Altogether around 95 stakeholders participated in the discussions.

Additionally, several stakeholders provided written responses, either on specific aspects of the OID report or in the form of written responses to the phone interview or small group discussions if the contributors were unable to participate in these.

Key findings

It is not surprising, given the range of organisations and users who participated in this review of the OID report, that there was a wide range of views on matters to do with the OID report. At one end of the spectrum were people who saw the OID report as performing a relevant, unique and important function; at the other end were those who saw the OID report as anachronistic, overly cumbersome and negative. In the middle were the majority of stakeholders who still saw a role for the OID report but had varying views in regard to its relevance, usefulness and future direction.

While the questions used in the surveys, phone discussions and face-to-face discussions were based on the terms of reference, the level of interest and expertise in relation to each of these terms varied considerably. The questions which attracted most discussion were those which invited ideas for improving the publication. The case studies attracted particular interest in this regard. The process of data collection aroused the least amount of commentary. Stakeholders either did not know enough about these processes or, if they did, did not generally have a strong view either way about them. The issues associated with data quality and reporting of these data were discussed but the issues of how data collection itself might be improved or how the role of the OID Working Group might be improved did not elicit much commentary.

The key findings are structured as they relate to each of the Terms of Reference.

1. Examine the origins, purpose and terms of reference (original and revised) for the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* (OID) report, and the extent to which the OID report has achieved its objectives

Feedback from stakeholders indicated a degree of uncertainty around the extent to which the original purpose of the OID report is still appropriate today. The question of purpose is fundamental to any debate about the future direction of the OID report. It has implications, for example, for COAG and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. While in general terms there was a good understanding of the purpose as being to report on the progress of Australian governments on each of the Closing the Gap targets and on the accompanying indicators, a number of stakeholders questioned whether or not this purpose was still relevant today and whether or not the original objectives were being met.

Origins

In 2002, COAG agreed to:

commission the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision to produce a regular report that would help to measure the impact of changes to policy settings and service delivery and provide a concrete way to measure the effect of the Council's commitment to reconciliation through a jointly agreed set of indicators.¹

The long-term objective of the OID report is to inform Australian governments about whether or not their policies and programs are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people and to help inform further work. The reports serve 'as a public account of progress against the six targets set by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), together with a number of significant indicators' (COAG, 2009).

In November 2008 COAG agreed on a new framework for the OID report that took account of the six targets to which COAG has committed:

- closing the life expectancy gap within a generation
- halving the gap in the mortality rate for Indigenous children under five within a decade
- ensuring all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to quality early childhood programs within five years
- halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment rates or equivalent attainment by 2020; and
- halving the gap in employment outcomes within a decade.

The terms of reference (original and revised) for the OID report refer to data quality and integrity; accessibility; and relationships within the national performance reporting system. All three broad areas were covered in the consultations and are described in this report.

Purpose

The question of purpose is critical as user perceptions of what the OID report can and cannot do, should or should not do, are shaped by their understanding of the purpose of the report. Most stakeholders saw the purpose as consistent over the years, regardless of changing external circumstances. The original intention of the OID report was to measure government performance and its purpose today is still to inform governments about whether or not their policies are improving outcomes for Indigenous people.

In general, stakeholders thought the report provided a framework to measure commitment across a range of indicators. The report was seen to:

¹ Extract from COAG communiqué 5 April 2002, <http://www.coag.gov.au/>

- help government address disadvantage
- give an overview of the current state of play which can then help determine policy direction
- show where more data are required and where more work needs to be done to obtain better data
- show progress over time as regards long-term goals
- provide a snapshot of disadvantage.

One stakeholder suggested that ‘the report tells us how we do as agencies and how we meet our responsibilities as it links back to the indicators and the framework’. Not all contributors to the review were clear about the purpose of the OID report however and this influenced the suggestions that were made to improve the usefulness of the report (some of which are outside the ambit of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision).

Meeting its objectives

The OID report was generally seen to be meeting its objectives in terms of reporting on government performance but the objectives themselves were questioned. It was suggested that the origins of the report are to be found in a traditional deficit model rather than being grounded in a strengths-based model. Scerra (2011: 1) describes a strengths-based perspective as one that ‘recognises the resilience of individuals and focuses on the potentials, strengths, interests, abilities, knowledge and capacities of individuals, rather than their limits ... It is in this way that a strengths-based approach is seen to differ from traditional deficit models’. The origins of the OID report, with its original and amended terms of reference, mean that it necessarily reflects a perspective that focuses on gaps, absences, lack, and the need to get Indigenous performance in key strategic areas to the same levels as non-Indigenous performance in these areas. Most stakeholders who expressed the view that the OID report is too negative were aware that the report reflects a COAG agenda and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap), and that any re-visiting of the purpose will be constrained by these national initiatives.

Nevertheless, across all stakeholder groups a common criticism of the OID report today was the strong focus on disadvantage rather than on the overcoming of this disadvantage or the more positive dimensions of Indigenous experience. While this is tied to the original intention of the report, some users are working in environments where the focus is increasingly shifting towards a more strengths-based approach. The OID report continues to have headline indicators around negative matters, such as imprisonment, child abuse, and family and community violence. The perception that the OID report is focused on the negative, rather than on positive indicators or changes that are taking place, was not confined to particular groups. Stakeholders in sectors such as health, early childhood, education, employment, and crime echoed this viewpoint. While Indigenous stakeholders expressed this view most consistently, there were also non-Indigenous stakeholders who shared this perception of the report being bound, because of its links to COAG’s agenda, to tell a gloomy tale. Even among people who were otherwise quite satisfied with the report, this kind of observation was made: that the report should include more positive evidence to show the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, instead of focusing on programs that are not working or statistics that are not accurately

reflecting progress. It was suggested that the closest the report comes to showing Indigenous experience in a positive light is in the case studies.

This concern among stakeholders reflects an inherent tension between the 'closing the gap' imperative and the desire on the part of many stakeholders to see a story of hope rather than of despair. Examples given of positive elements of Indigenous experience were resilience; connectedness to country and land; and diversity of language and culture.

Many stakeholders questioned whether or not the original purpose was still as relevant today as in the early years of the publication given that circumstances have changed since 2003. The most commonly cited change was in the broader policy context. Some stakeholders who have been closely involved in the Closing the Gap initiative felt the report did not take into account sufficiently the positive changes that have occurred as a result of this initiative. The question was raised as to whether the original purpose was still relevant given these changed circumstances. It was suggested that:

there is not much point looking at gaps and problems when policy changes like this have occurred since the OID report was conceived. A lot of the information in the 2011 report is either 2008 or before then. The media report negative findings without knowing the positive things that have been done.

One discussion group felt that the OID report, like other similar reports, 'fails in its fundamental purpose' because it does not acknowledge the time lag that occurs. The nature and timing of change needs to be better understood by governments and reflected in the OID report.

One source of change that led some participants in the review to question the relevance of the OID report today stems from the effectiveness of the OID report in the early years. 'The OID report was a benchmark. In 2003 it was held up to be the leading approach to monitoring and evaluation. Now, while it is still a useful tool, it no longer has that same importance.' One of the early strengths of the OID report was that it filled a gap – it encouraged jurisdictions to think about the need to report and monitor Indigenous outcomes. However, in increasing the spotlight on this policy area, and helping to build expertise in the jurisdictions, the OID report has helped the states and territories to be in a better position to take the lead in this area. This line of argument suggests the OID report is a victim of its early success and has been made redundant because its role is now being taken on – or could be taken on – at least partially, by the jurisdictions. Despite this, stakeholders still saw a role for the OID report because of its national, whole-of-government focus.

A number of stakeholders expressed the view that the purpose of the OID report in relation to other reports had become unclear. There was a feeling that perhaps the original purpose of the OID report was now being met or at least shared across these other reports.

One stakeholder summed up in this way: 'the OID report tracks how well the nation is going against COAG targets. It is the best we have got. It is fulfilling the purpose but not in a perfect way.' Another acknowledged that 'this is a very difficult framework to report on – it's a very big book when it comes out, and it can't be all things to all people'.

The consultations suggest there needs to be a rethink about the purpose of the report – what makes it uniquely useful and how it can continue to provide relevant and respected reporting in the area of Indigenous disadvantage and the *overcoming* of this disadvantage. While there are many who think it

is fulfilling its purpose of reporting on the COAG indicators and government performance there are also many who believe the focus on 'gaps' and 'disadvantage' should be alleviated by including more positive indications of progress and achievement.

Recommendation 1

- (a) That the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) considers changing the title of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report to one that is more suggestive of Indigenous strengths.
- (b) That the SCRGSP examine ways in which information about Indigenous strengths (such as connectedness to land and country, resilience, Indigenous leadership, language) can be incorporated to help shift the balance of the report from a negative focus on disadvantage to a more positive focus on *overcoming* this disadvantage.

2. Identify the extent to which the OID report reflects international best practice in government performance reporting of outcomes for Indigenous or special needs groups.

The main aim of the literature review was to identify the extent to which the OID report reflects international best practice in government performance reporting of outcomes for Indigenous or special needs groups. The literature review examined a range of Australian and international documents which report on, analyse and make recommendations about Indigenous peoples and special needs groups. Few equivalents to the OID report were found. Most of the reports examined were focused more narrowly on particular areas, such as health or incarceration or employment, and did not have the breadth of the OID report. Even fewer had targets or indicators to measure progress against.

A review of the international and national literature suggests the OID report is more advanced in several respects than many of the government performance reports on Indigenous outcomes that are currently available. This is mainly because few of the reports examined are reporting against targets. However there are some areas in which the OID report could potentially benefit from the practices of other reports.

Best practice

The OID report compares very favourably with what is currently available internationally. The main difference between the OID report and overseas reporting on Indigenous disadvantage is that the OID report is underpinned by an evidence-based and robust reporting framework, with clearly articulated targets and headline indicators. It covers more areas of disadvantage in greater depth than equivalent performance reports overseas. It draws on a diverse and wide range of data and it reports regularly.

However, there are elements of some reports that could potentially be considered in relation to the OID report. For example, the recently released National Aboriginal Economic Development Board (NAEBD) *Aboriginal Economic Benchmarking Report* (NAEDB, 2012) in Canada sets a tone and expectation that is positive – without sugar coating the 'gaps' – at the very outset:

The Benchmarking Report provides solid evidence that Aboriginal Canadians are making some measurable progress toward improving their economic outcomes. Despite these gains, our report also shows that significant gaps remain between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. Clearly, much of our economic potential remains unrealized, and there is still much work to be done before Aboriginal Canadians are in the same position as other Canadians to contribute to and benefit from one of the world's wealthiest economies.

Contrast this to the 2011 OID report on page 3 which states that:

Across virtually all indicators in this report, there are wide gaps in outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians. The report show that the challenge is not impossible – in a few areas, the gaps are narrowing. However, many indicators show that outcomes are not improving, or are even deteriorating. There is still a considerable way to go to achieve COAG's commitment to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

The *Aboriginal Economic Benchmarking Report* begins with a Foreword by the Chair of the Board, Chief Clarence Louie, which sets an expectation that this is not simply another report about performance indicators but a report that is about and for Aboriginal Canadians, is relevant to their lives, has some good and some not-so-good news and, crucially, begins its first section on 'Trends in the Aboriginal economy' with 'Aboriginal people in Canada have made important gains', rather than 'the substantial gaps' which are discussed subsequently. Small touches like the photo of the Aboriginal Canadian Chair and the list of Board members at the front of the document reinforce the Indigenous representation associated with the production of the report and the recognition that this is not a clinical audit of progress but a journey involving 'Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses, communities, governments and other partners work[ing] together to increase the economic participation of Aboriginal Canadians'. The acknowledgement section shows the breadth of the expertise that has gone into the report.

While the many differences between the OID report and the *2012 Aboriginal Economic Benchmarking Report* make comparisons problematic, there is still something about the latter report that is missing from the former. The introduction to the NAEDB report, for example, begins with a brief description of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis), which reminds readers of the cultural diversity that exists and that the report is about the lived experience of the people described here. The section on Aboriginal economic development begins by saying that:

Aboriginal Canadians are critical to Canada's future prosperity. Our sizeable, growing, and relatively youthful population, our significant land holdings, and our rapidly growing business sector are key to moving ahead with economic opportunities across the country.

In this way readers are reminded of the importance of their Indigenous peoples to the country as a whole. Among the strengths of the *2012 Aboriginal Economic Benchmarking Report* are that it has a visible Aboriginal presence, a strong sense of its Aboriginal audience, a clear acknowledgement of the gains without downplaying the size of the task ahead, a 'bold' vision in the targets that have been set, and a sense of the future in its 'The Way Forward' and 'Next Steps' sections of the report. This report is the first one in what will be a regular reporting cycle and it will be interesting to see how subsequent reports balance the gains and the gaps.

CCAF-FCVI² is a national, non-profit research and education foundation in Canada that has been reporting on public sector governance and accountability for around thirty years. A recent CCAF-FCVI review (2007) of effective public performance identified the following practices as contributing to good performance reports:

- Reporting against explicit targets set out in plans
- Linking performance to broader government priorities
- Using performance measures consistently from year to year but maintaining flexibility for continuous improvement
- Paying particular attention to relevance and understandability
- Disclosing the level of assurance on the reliability and relevance of performance information
- Consulting users
- Producing performance reports in formats that meet user needs.

These characteristics are consistent with others that have been identified in reviews of government performance reporting. The Manitoba Treasury Board Secretariat (2008) in its *Performance Reporting Principles and Guidelines* also suggests that:

- Performance information looks forward and backward in time
- The strategic context for the plan and reported context is discussed
- Information is clear, relevant, credible and balanced.

Discussions with stakeholders yielded some additional characteristics of ‘best practice’ in relation to government performance reporting on Indigenous outcomes. It was suggested that such reports:

- Would have a focus on outcomes and ‘where we go from here’
- Would have a robust reporting framework
- Could be used for planning
- Would make clear its relationship to other similar reports
- Would place the onus of responsibility on those who are responsible for the issues (that is, not blame the ‘victim’)
- Would contain discussions about constitutional and legal issues; history and trauma; and relationships with non-Indigenous Australians.

On most of these measures the OID report fares well although there are areas that could be improved. For example, reservations have been expressed by some stakeholders regarding the quality of data and how this is reported.

² CCAF-FCVI is the name of the organisation rather than an acronym. The full name is rarely, if ever, used.

Best practice principles	The OID report
Reporting against explicit targets set out in plans	In the OID report performance is measured against clearly articulated targets and indicators. It is one of the few government performance reports on Indigenous disadvantage to do this. In this regard it can be considered 'best practice'.
Linking performance to broader government priorities	The OID framework is linked clearly to COAG's six high level targets for Closing the Gap in Indigenous outcomes and priority areas for reform.
Using performance measures consistently from year to year but maintaining flexibility for continuous improvement	The performance measures are consistent. There have been opportunities for stakeholder feedback on the framework and indicators. The high level of consultation, including the current review, reflects the Steering Committee's commitment to continuous improvement of the OID report.
Paying particular attention to relevance and 'understandability'	<p>Stakeholders have questioned the OID report's relevance in at least three respects: the focus on gaps rather than achievements or strengths; the outdated nature of some of the data used; and its relevance given the many other government performance reports now available. In the first instance, the report necessarily reports on 'Closing the Gap'; in the second instance, the report's biennial nature means that data sources will inevitably become out-dated (but in some cases still be the most current that exist); in the third instance, it is the only report that brings together the key COAG targets and headline indicators across all domains in a single document.</p> <p>In terms of understandability, the majority of stakeholders believe the report to be accessible and easy to read. The Fact Sheets were also praised in this regard.</p> <p>However, some stakeholders suggested ways of improving the accessibility and 'understandability' of the report so that it can better engage Indigenous stakeholders and communities.</p>

Best practice principles	The OID report
Disclosing the level of assurance on the reliability and relevance of performance information	The OID report regularly comments on the reliance and reliability of its performance information. However, a number of stakeholders suggested there needed to be more contextual information around some data than is currently the case. For example, more clarity could be given around how data should or should not be interpreted. More information and evidence could be provided to support the selection of particular statistics and to indicate where the data are coming from. Currency is also an issue given that the report is biennial and some of the data relied on may be no longer current. The OID report addresses some of these issues (such as currency) in its commentary but does not always flag the problematic nature of some data.
Consulting users	Regular consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including extensive consultation with Indigenous stakeholders, have been a consistent feature of the OID report. Despite this, some stakeholders called for more visibility around the Indigenous organisations and individuals consulted.
Producing performance reports in formats that meet user needs	Having online and printed versions gives users options. Stakeholders have also highlighted a range of measures that could potentially improve the OID report's usefulness for readers, such as an app, online updates, or separate theme-based reports.
Performance information looks forward and backward in time	The OID report looks at performance in relation to targets so in this sense could be said to be both looking back and looking ahead. However, some stakeholders have suggested there is insufficient historical context for a report that focuses on Indigenous disadvantage and some stakeholders would like a stronger sense of 'vision' and of 'next steps' in the report.
The strategic context for the plan and reported context is discussed.	The OID report provides a strategic context for the COAG targets and indicators and its role. Some stakeholders have called for more contextual discussion of the data where these could be misconstrued by readers or are problematic in some way

Best practice principles	The OID report
Information is clear, relevant, credible and balanced.	Stakeholders confirm the information is generally clear and relevant within its terms of reference. The OID report is also seen as a reliable source of information despite some questioning of the accuracy and reporting of some data. However, there is less consensus around its 'balance', with many believing there is too much focus on negative indicators and not enough on positive indicators of Indigenous achievement and experience. Several stakeholders also questioned whether the report should be comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups or Indigenous and low SES groups.
Would have a focus on outcomes and 'where we go from here'.	While there is a focus on outcomes in the OID report there is less focus on 'where we go from here'. As mentioned earlier, some stakeholders would like a stronger sense of 'vision' and of 'next steps' in the report.
Would have a robust reporting framework	The OID report excels in this regard. Few, if any, other international reports examined have the same rigour and robustness as the OID report.
Could be used for planning	This is currently not the case for many stakeholders. Those working in the government policy area in particular called for more connection between the information reported and policy implications. One even suggested there could be a separate section at the beginning of the guide addressed specifically to policy stakeholders and explaining how the report could be used by them.
Would make clear its relationship to other similar reports	This is currently not the case. There is some discussion in the OID report of the NIRA performance reports but it is up to users of the various reports to source the information that is most relevant. The consultations show that the relationship between the various reports is unclear.
Would place the onus of responsibility on those who are responsible for the issues	Several stakeholders felt that, in its strong focus on the negative aspects of Indigenous experience, the OID report appeared to be 'blaming the victims' rather than governments whose policies had not worked.

Best practice principles	The OID report
Would contain discussions about constitutional and legal issues; history and trauma; and relationships with non-Indigenous Australians.	The OID report does not currently provide a broader context of this nature.

Indigenous consultations and input

A key finding of this review is that there is a gap or disconnect between the reality of the consultations that have taken place with Indigenous stakeholders in relation to each edition of the OID report and the perception that the OID report does not sufficiently represent the views or needs of Indigenous stakeholders.

Expert Indigenous consultants were engaged to review all or parts of the 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 editions of the OID report during the drafting process. Visits have been made to a wide range of Indigenous communities across Australia to collect feedback on the OID report (SCRGSP, 2006). Details of consultations that have been carried out are listed on the Secretariat website.³

How, then, can there be this disconnect between the regular consultations being carried out and the perception among a number of different stakeholders that the OID report needs to better reflect Indigenous experience? In part this perception is associated with the strong focus in the report on closing the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous performance and an expressed desire from these stakeholders for a more positive representation of Indigenous experience to balance out what is perceived to be a largely negative report. In part this disconnect arises because some Indigenous stakeholders do not necessarily see themselves in the report. That is, there is no list of reference groups with Indigenous experts listed in the report or list of Indigenous organisations attached to the OID report itself where readers can see clear evidence of Indigenous input. There is no reporting on things like resilience or connectedness to community, land and culture; and other components of what the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Performance Framework* has called 'community functioning' (AHMAC, 2010). It may be that this is outside the terms of reference in that the OID report is intended to report on progress in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage but if the OID report is genuinely to fulfil the objective of producing a report 'that is meaningful to Indigenous people' (SCRGSP, 2010: 1.2) then the review provides a timely opportunity to reflect on ways in which these current perceptions might be addressed.

International literature

The literature review focused on equivalent countries where Indigenous peoples have been the subjects of colonisation: New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America. Comparisons were also made with other Australian performance publications. Not many examples were found of organisations performing a similar role to that of the Secretariat. Similarly, not many reports were

³ See for example, <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/indigenous/consultations2006/report>

found that report publicly on performance indicators in the area of Indigenous matters or special groups. The OID report notes that there are limited quantitative data on outcomes for Indigenous people in different countries (SCRGSP, 2011: 3.20).

Two global reports that focus on aspects of Indigenous disadvantage are *The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2009) and *The Report of the Meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Indicators of Well-Being* (FAO, 2006). The former discusses issues facing Indigenous peoples around the world, including those addressed by the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Like the OID report, the UN report has a broad mandate in terms of issues covered – culture, environment, contemporary education, health, human rights – although with a strong focus on human rights and an additional chapter on emerging issues. These emerging issues have been identified as the misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge, impact of globalisation, commodification of Indigenous culture, tourism and intellectual property rights. In this regard the UN report perhaps has a stronger focus on the broader social and political context in which Indigenous disadvantage operates globally than does the OID in an Australian context.

New Zealand

A number of New Zealand agencies report and make recommendations on social policy as this affects Māori people. The reports of the National Health Committee (NHC), an independent statutory body which provides advice to the Minister of Health, identifies areas of concern and suggests solutions but does not set targets or identify indicators. Unlike the OID report, which is an integral part of Australia's national reporting system on Indigenous outcomes, these National Health Committee reports are advisory.⁴ Another government body, the Policy, Strategy and Research Group of the New Zealand Department of Corrections (New Zealand Department of Corrections, 2007), has reported on the over-representation of Māori in the criminal justice system. This report is also largely descriptive, offering tentative and generalised solutions, and does not have an ongoing reporting role. Like the NHC, the Department of Corrections identifies a familiar list of areas in which action is needed but the reports are not as robust or as embedded in the reporting of government performance as the OID report is in an Australian context.

There are a range of other New Zealand reports that focus on aspects of Māori disadvantage. These neither mandate targets or specify indicators. For example, New Zealand's Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), a non-profit registered charity funded entirely by member donations and grants from charitable trusts, has published a series of reports since 2001 that describe the worsening situation for the children of New Zealand families in poverty in regard to parental incomes and the lack of job opportunities, parental support, health, housing, education and social hazards. While the situation of Māori families is specifically addressed in these reports, the Child Poverty Action Group's status as an independent advocacy group, and the philosophical nature of the approach that is taken in the report mean that the recommendations do not, and are not intended to, constitute targets.

Canada

In many respects Canadian Indigenous peoples' experience of colonisation parallels that of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Certainly the areas of social disadvantage identified in

⁴ See <http://www.nhc.health.govt.nz/>.

their contemporary situation are similar. A number of organisations report on current and historical disadvantage. While many of them rely on Statistics Canada for their data, they tend to be more concerned with broad policy initiatives than targeted indicator-based programs.

For example, the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) has produced a number of reports that contribute expertise to public debate on trends in living standards and the factors contributing to them.⁵ In their various reports statistical analysis is used to advocate specific policy action, but without recommending targets. The National Aboriginal Economic Development Board⁶ has recently published *The Aboriginal Economic Benchmarking Report* (mentioned earlier) which has three core indicators (employment, income, wealth/wellbeing) and five underlying indicators (education, entrepreneurship and business development, governance, lands and resources, and infrastructure). The Board expects the number of indicators and measures that are tracked to increase as better data become available. Of all the reports examined, this seems to be closer to the OID in intent and approach, with its focus on Aboriginal Canadians and use of indicators to track progress, than many of the other performance reports.

The National Council of Welfare (NCW) reports to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada on matters concerning poverty, the realities of low income Canadians and related programs and policies. Its brief is not restricted to Indigenous Canadians, but includes them. Its 2007 report (NCW, 2007) focused on disadvantage in the young and was intended to build understanding and support for Indigenous peoples, challenge assumptions, take a stand against racism and ensure the awareness of political leaders of the actions required 'to improve Aboriginal lives'. Similar to the COAG targets and headline indicators in the OID report, the NCW report identified as areas of concern employment, education, language and culture, health, wellness and safety, housing, the welfare system, and the justice system. While the NCW report recognises the urgent need for action and that more targeted and assessable direction is needed it also recommend adopting 'a specific long-term vision for Aboriginal peoples along with targets, timelines, indicators, intergovernmental coordination, and accountability to Aboriginal Canadians for results' (NCW, 2007: 108).

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) is an independent research institute concerned with issues of social, economic and environmental justice. Its 2010 report (Wilson and Macdonald, 2010) argues, like the CSLS reports discussed above, that government spending on Indigenous education and labour market outcomes is investment, recoverable in economic terms from the increased productivity it generates. It focuses on First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and uses Statistics Canada data from the 1996, 2001 and 2006 census information, as well as additional data relating to employment income to make projections. It concludes that Aboriginal people who are employed make significantly less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and that this inequality in income is fundamentally a result of entrenched colonialist policies of assimilation rather than reconciliation. This change of policy attitude is the report's major recommendation. It cites as authority the extensive report of the 1991 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) which

⁵ See <http://www.csls.ca/>.

⁶ The National Aboriginal Economic Development Board is an advisory body to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. It was established in 1990 and 'provides advice to government on strategies approaches and programs aimed at promoting greater economic development for Canada's Aboriginal people whether of First Nations, Inuit or Métis heritage'.

recommended sweeping and fundamental legislative change in the areas of *inter alia* treaties, land rights and parliamentary representation as being the basis for the eradication of Aboriginal disadvantage. Some of the recommendations for root and branch legislative reform were implemented, but both these reports, while relying on statistical evidence, are more concerned with broad policy initiatives than targeted indicator-based programs.

United States of America

As with the reports from New Zealand and Canada, the USA reports do not generally have the same level of accountability in reporting progress towards targets as the OID report. The Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, has been mandated to publish 'not less than biennially, a report on the American Indian and Alaska Native population who are eligible for services provided by the Secretary of the Interior to American Indian and Alaska Native People'. The reports are census-taking exercises, which nevertheless provide employment and income data.⁷

The federal government's Office of the Surgeon General, the Centre for Mental Health Services, and the National Institute of Mental Health produced a report which describes the history and current status of Indigenous peoples under the headings of geographic distribution, family structure, education, income, physical health status as a way of explaining the cultural and historical bases for mental disorder.⁸ It also provides illustrative case studies. However, American Indians and Alaska Natives (Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts) are only the focus of one chapter in this publication.

The US Department of Health and Human Services' Indian Health Service (IHS) reports on a number of indicators, called performance measures, relating to behavioural health, cancer screening, cardiovascular disease, dental, diabetes, immunizations and other clinical aspects, in their Quality of IHS Health Care program. Each performance measure heading covers a number of more specific sub-headings; the information is collected for Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) purposes. The subheadings give the GPRA measure, and then report progress against indicators (under the head 'How is IHS doing?'). While reporting performance against health measures, the IHS report focuses only on health rather than on the broad range of indicators addressed by the OID report. The OID report focuses on health as one of a number of areas that affect Indigenous life.

The Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI, 2011) functions as a resource for Indigenous health organisations engaged in identifying health priorities, allocating resources, developing new programs, identifying gaps in data and needs for new data collection, planning analyses to examine indicators among clinic patients and providing statistics and figures to use in grant applications that require supporting data. Over ten years they have produced an extensive range of reports on particular health indices, which include statistical data and analysis, and 'Success Stories', a form of 'What works' case studies.

The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development conducts research and teaching designed to answer the question 'What works, where and why?' in relation to sovereignty, institutions, culture, and leadership matters.⁹ It reports on an extensive range of projects similar in

⁷ See <http://www.bia.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/text/idc-001719.pdf>.

⁸ See <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44242/>.

⁹ See Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (<http://hpaied.org/publications-and-research/research-overview>).

purpose to the OID report's 'Things That Work' case studies, and in fact the OID follows the Harvard Project in Chapter 11 'Governance and leadership', in which it bases the 'six determinants of good governance' on those in the Harvard Project.

Australia

Australia produces a number of reports about Indigenous disadvantage (some of which are briefly described in the next section). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) reports, for example, are cited in the OID report.

The Australian Social Inclusion Board advises the government on ways to achieve better outcomes for the most disadvantaged in our community. The Board's (ASIB, 2009) *A compendium of social inclusion indicators: How's Australia faring?* identifies a number of indicators (with, in each case, several supplementary measures: poverty and low income; lack of access to the job market; limited social supports and networks; effect of the local neighbourhood; exclusion from services; health; contextual) and reports against them. Although concerned with Australian society in general, the compendium makes reference to Indigenous Australians throughout. The report acknowledges its general coverage and refers to the OID report's more specific reporting focus.

The Australian Human Rights Commission monitors and evaluates the human rights performance of Australian governments, including assessing domestic situations against international human rights benchmarks. The *Social Justice Report 2011* discusses the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples; the Indigenous Human Rights Network Australia; the Northern Territory Emergency Response; the Australian Government's engagement framework; the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution; the Close the Gap campaign; and the marking of 20 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The report on progress is in the form of commentary rather than against indicators however.

Some states and territories are producing reports that make use of the OID, or similar, indicators to measure progress. The 2011 OID report provides an appendix of jurisdictional comments that summarise how each is performing in terms of implementing the framework.

Recommendation 2

That the SCRGSP use the good practice principles outlined in this report as a guide to develop a set of criteria against which the OID report can measure its continuous improvement as a 'best practice model' of government performance reporting.

3. Examine the role of the OID report within the broader context of reporting, including the various reports on government performance

Other reports to emerge in recent years that were examined as part of this review were the:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework – Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council

- Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report – Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- COAG Reform Council National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA): Performance report for 2009-10 – COAG
- Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples – Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 2011: An overview – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Indigenous Expenditure Report – Indigenous Expenditure Report Steering Committee¹⁰

National Partnership Agreement reports were excluded from the review as not all National Partnerships are relevant to all jurisdictions and not all reports are published. Only a few National partnerships are focused on Indigenous reform.

Several stakeholders suggested during the consultations that a longer and more comprehensive review of the OID report and the various other performance reports that have emerged in recent years should be carried out to rationalise what is currently offered, reduce duplication and improve accessibility to data for users. However such a review is outside the purview of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision as different organisations are responsible for producing these reports. However, it might be possible for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to initiate a forum that would enable the producers of each performance report to come together to discuss their reports individually and collectively.

The discussions reveal some tensions among stakeholders regarding the relevance and uniqueness of the OID report in comparison with a range of other government performance reports. While the purpose of the OID report in relation to government performance reporting is clear to users, its continuing relevance in this role is not as clear given the proliferation of other government reports performing a similar function. A common question was: 'What does the OID do that is unique?'

Uniqueness

Several aspects of the OID report were identified as contributing to its 'unique' role. For one group of stakeholders:

The OID report is unique in that it not only looks at the COAG indicator headlines, it [discusses] the key indicators under strategic areas for action, allowing the user to review each key contributor that is a part of that COAG headline indicator.

The OID report focuses on outcomes, reporting which of the 45 quantitative indicators in the report are showing improved outcomes, have stayed much the same, or deteriorated.

¹⁰ Responsibility for the *Indigenous Expenditure Report* has been handed over to the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. The former IER Steering Committee will continue as a working group providing expert advice to the new Steering Committee. See <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/ier>.

The OID report also has a national focus: 'it can look more broadly across portfolios when compared with other similar reports'. Many other government performance reports have a narrower focus. They are either topic-specific (health, finance) or jurisdictional (the National Partnership Agreement state and territory reports). The OID report has genuine breadth and this is a key strength.

Another unique feature identified by stakeholders is that it presents time series data for various areas of disadvantage covering multiple sectors: 'This is particularly relevant in that the report has now been published for almost a decade and is probably the only report which has time series data across the range of Indigenous disadvantage'. (It should be noted here that the *Report on Government Services* (RoGS)¹¹ also provides time series analyses by Indigenous status.)

The OID report is distinct from other reports in these key respects: it focuses on outcomes and is cross-sectoral in nature.

Other Australian performance reports

When the OID report was first published its role was unique in national government performance reporting on progress in relation to the Indigenous population. Now there is an array of reports, each aiming to deliver something particular in this space and each targeting many of the same stakeholders as the OID report.

Stakeholders acknowledged the plethora of reports and identified some areas of potential duplication but opinions were divided as to whether this duplication of information was a good or bad thing. On the one hand there were those who argued that duplication was unhelpful and confusing to readers (and possibly a costly exercise). On the other hand there were those who argued that it does not matter if the same information comes from a range of different sources, or if there is debate about the meaning and value of data obtained from these sources, as both can benefit users.

In general, there was some uncertainty as to how each report, including the OID report, fits together in the overall reporting of government performance. The level of understanding differed according to which reports individual stakeholders mainly use. For example, those in the health sector had a good understanding of the similarities and differences between the OID and the various health-focused reports. Those in finance recognised the role of the COAG Reform Council *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)* performance reports in relation to the OID report. Those with less familiarity did not always see a unique role for the OID report and even experienced users of the various reports described the range as 'bewildering' or 'confusing'.

COAG Reform Council's National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA): Performance reports and other National Agreement and National Partnership reports

The OID report was considered to be similar to the NIRA performance reports in that it has a similar framework, uses the Closing the Gap targets and a form of the indicators, and its definitions and data sources are consistent with the NIRA performance reports. The reports also have similar target audiences.

¹¹ See <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/rogs/2012>.

However, the OID report has indicators, additional to those of the NIRA performance reports, across the seven building blocks and a broader purpose. While reporting against National Agreements focuses strongly on State/Territory disaggregation, the OID report also includes extensive disaggregation of national data by remoteness.¹² The OID report uses the ABS National Health Survey rather than the ABS Survey of Education and Work to provide non-Indigenous comparators for education and labour force indicators. Use of the National Health Survey for the OID report allowed disaggregation of some indicators by remoteness areas and provided a longer time series, which is not possible using the Survey of Education and Work (SCRGSP, 2011: 4). Most stakeholders saw disaggregation for remoteness and time series length and comparability as strengths of the OID report.

Some stakeholders saw value in what they perceived to be the independence of the OID report compared with the 'negotiated' nature of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement which underpins the performance reports, and that the OID report has a wider remit. There was more information in the OID report, which made the NIRA performance reports more accessible, but stakeholders did not want to lose the material in the OID. It was also pointed out that the NIRA performance reports were contingent on the existence of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, and that the OID had a longer history: 'It's the only one with a longitudinal perspective'.

A number of stakeholders remarked on the effects of the updated terms of reference¹³ on the report's framework, and some believed that the OID report now needs to have its purpose clarified. One saw the new framework as a confusing overlay on the earlier form of the report. Another stakeholder asked 'What does the OID do if the CRC is now doing the baseline data reporting? There needs to be a clear[er] understanding of the differences between the OID and this other [NIRA] report.'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report

This report by the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) for the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC, 2011) uses ABS and AIHW data. It reports performance progress and areas of concern against 71 Health Performance Framework measures. While primarily a health-focused document, it also goes beyond health-related areas. Tiers 1 and 3 report on health outcomes and health system performance while Tier 2 looks at determinants of health (such as overcrowding, community safety, and income) which are factors outside health.

This report is seen by some stakeholders as covering similar ground to the OID in relation to health outcomes but, unlike the OID, looks more at the causal factors leading to improved outcomes. Importantly, the producers of the report have worked with Indigenous people to develop a positive indicator of Indigenous strengths: a measure of community functioning that seeks to capture the wellbeing of the community as a whole by examining the dimensions of connectedness to country, land and history; culture and identity; resilience; leadership; having a role, structure and routine; feeling safe; and vitality.

¹² SCRGSP (2011) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key indicators 2011*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2.10.

¹³ In a letter dated 11 March 2009 the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, notified the Chairman of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision about the updated Terms of Reference, SCRGSP, 2011, p. XXVI.

This measure seeks to describe both in aggregate and as single measures, the level of key functionings Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have described as important to the quality of, and equality in, life (AHMAC, 2011: 40).

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* report builds on the earlier work of the OID report but fills a need that was identified in the earlier report by some health stakeholders: to provide a report on progress in a more positive framework and in a way that can inform policy analysis. A key difference between the OID report and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* report is that the latter provides an explanation of the implications of the findings in regard to each of their 71 indicators. Another difference between the two reports is that, unlike the OID report, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* report does not discuss time trends.

Discussions with two different groups of health stakeholders revealed that a high proportion of them use this report rather than the OID report in their work. One of these groups also indicated they did not think their own stakeholders used the OID report because these stakeholders refer to other reports when discussing data or findings or policy implications but not the OID report. If this is the case, then it would appear that, for this particular group of stakeholders, the broader OID report is less useful than a more focused national report of government progress against Indigenous health-related indicators to inform policy development and whole-of-government action on the determinants of health. While there is some overlap, this does not invalidate the role and place of the OID report, merely expands the options available to users who are seeking health-related data and analysis.

Prime Minister's Report to Parliament

The OID report serves a very different function from the Prime Minister's report, which is intended as an annual update. The Prime Minister's report serves a political purpose in that it is seen as being largely composed of success stories which validate policy. It could not function as a replacement for the OID report, being statistically less substantial and written for a significantly different audience and purpose.

ABS and AIHW publications on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Welfare

These various publications serve a different but complementary purpose. They are a source of data for the OID report and also provide their own tailored reports in specific areas. For example, a range of Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) publications report on dental health, child safety, disability, homelessness, eye health in more detailed ways than the broader remit of the OID report allows.

The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ABS and AIHW, 2012), describes its function as being to provide a comprehensive statistical overview, largely at the national level, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and welfare online and in printed format. The electronic version of these reports allows information to be updated as new data become available. For example, school retention data have been updated online to reflect the availability of more recent information released in early 2012. In this way the data can be kept more current than is the case for a biennial publication. The purpose of these reports is to provide statistical data that can support research and inform policy rather than holding governments accountable in the way the OID report is intended.

Indigenous Expenditure Report

The *Indigenous Expenditure Report* (IERSC, 2010) is a more recent publication which provides 'comprehensive and comparable information on expenditure on both Indigenous specific services and the estimated Indigenous share of mainstream services by the Australian, State and Territory governments' (p. III). It has been framed against the Closing the Gap building blocks and is intended to provide governments and policy makers with a clearer picture of their expenditure in areas that are critical to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. The *Indigenous Expenditure Report* complements the functions of the OID and the NIRA performance reports by making estimates in the areas covered by the Closing the Gap building blocks. However it could not replace the functions and breadth of coverage provided by the OID report.

Gaps

Collectively, these reports appear to provide a comprehensive overview of what Australian governments are doing to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse publications (Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, 2012) are addressing what has previously been a gap in the form of concise, evidence-based summaries for a general audience (as well as other stakeholders) of what is and is not working to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. However, one area in which there is still a gap in reporting is in the provision of robust examples of good practice. The case studies in the OID report, while improved, could show more clearly the particular characteristics that have led a program or practice to be effective, the nature of the evidence that shows success, the potential for sustainability and replicability, and how it is evolving over time. One option could be to produce a separate volume (printed or online or both) that captures and promotes the elements of a good case study and the positive nature of the stories. These could be written in clear, accessible English, disseminated widely, including in Indigenous communities. As the Clearinghouse continues to build its research base these case studies could potentially come from here.

Overall

Each report has its particular purpose although there is some overlap in terms of target audience and in some cases data sources and a lack of clarity around some of these various purposes. However, it is important to note that while a number of stakeholders expressed concern that the 'uniqueness' of the OID report was becoming less apparent, or potentially being undermined by some of these other reports, there were very few stakeholders suggesting it should no longer be produced. Even those who saw it as being no longer relevant could still see its value as a national repository of information compared with the narrower focus of the other reports. The call was more for clarification around the different reports and for improving the usefulness of the OID report than for its demise.

Of all the reports, perhaps the one closest to the OID report in terms of monitoring performance in closing the gap is the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* report. In some respects it does three things that the OID report under its current terms of reference is not perceived to do: it provides an explanation of the findings for each indicator with a view to informing policy; it explores the links between determinants and outcomes; and it provides a positive quantitative indicator in the form of 'community functioning' that reflects strong Indigenous input. This is not to say that one report is 'better' than the other. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

Health Performance Framework report arguably builds on, and enhances, what exists in the OID report but also recognises the need for a more positive measure of the lived experience of Indigenous people, one that is important to Indigenous people themselves. It seems that the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* report is currently meeting the needs of some health stakeholder groups better than the OID report.

While there is some overlap with aspects of other reports, this review of the suite of government performance reports suggests the OID report is distinctive in its focus on outcomes and in providing a national overview but that its difference from other reports needs to be more clearly articulated to stakeholders. Users would benefit from having a clearer understanding of the purpose of each report, target audience, data to be found there, implications of the findings being reported in each, how each report relates to the others, how each contributes to the broad picture of Australian governments' progress in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, and how each reflects the perspectives of the Indigenous people on whose lives they are reporting. It was also suggested that there could be more alignment in terms of indicators and data across the various reports to provide greater consistency.

Some stakeholders supported the idea of some kind of overview of all government performance reporting to ensure the ongoing relevance and usage of the OID report. This would involve the producers of the various reports coming together to review the reports individually and collectively.

Recommendation 3

That the SCRGSP investigate the feasibility of initiating an open forum of key representatives of those organisations that currently produce government performance reports in the area of Indigenous disadvantage with a view to jointly examining:

- the role and purpose of each report
- target audience
- distinctive features of each
- existing or potential duplication (and whether or not this matters)
- data sources used
- how each contributes to the broad picture of Australian governments' progress in reducing Indigenous disadvantage
- how each incorporates and reflects the perspectives of the Indigenous people on whose lives they are reporting.

4. Examine the particular 'value add' of the OID report in light of reader needs and the availability of other publications, and recommend how the 'value-add' of the report could be increased. This examination is to consider the following OID content: contextual material and evidence base; breadth of indicators; time series analysis; geographic disaggregation; presentation of data in charts, tables, commentary and attachments; and 'things that work' case studies

The consultations revealed some difference of opinion around the extent to which each of these are 'value adds'. Stakeholders also had stronger views about some components than others. For example,

the case studies probably attracted the most interest. Geographic disaggregation also attracted comment, mainly in the form of whether or not greater disaggregation was desirable and/or feasible. Little comment was made in the discussions about how the 'value add' of the contextual material could be increased although there were suggestions regarding how the reporting of data might be improved. Given that the review was not intended to revisit the nature of the indicators it is not surprising perhaps that there was not much discussion of the breadth of indicators apart from several stakeholders commenting that there are too many indicators and that the most important or lead indicators need to be identified. The time series analysis was seen as one of the strengths of the OID report (although it was also suggested that these did not correlate with the period under review and were not based on primary data or independent data). The case studies attracted the most interest. There is also some difference of opinion around some of these, reflecting the wide range of different purposes and uses of the report by stakeholders.

Contextual information and evidence base

The 'evidence base' was rarely mentioned as such although there was considerable discussion around the quality and nature of the data that constitutes this evidence base. The fact that the OID report was underpinned by a wide range of data sources was seen to be one of its strengths. The literature review confirms this given that not many of the overseas reports reviewed drew on such a breadth of data. However there were a number of comments about the quality of the data and the nature of the explanatory comment that is provided to contextualise the data.

Contextual information in general

Most interviewees who chose to comment on the contextual information felt that the report contained sufficient and relevant contextual information for their purposes. The contextual information helped to identify the differences between states, inform conclusions about the data and provide a connection to the story being mapped out by the data. However not all stakeholders saw the contextual information as one of the report's strengths. For example, one found the contextual information to be 'pretty poor' and thought it gives 'no sense of the fundamental diversity of Indigenous Australia or the extent of difference in some geographically and culturally remote circumstances'. One suggestion made by several stakeholders was to have more of an overall Indigenous context, such as some discussion about constitutional and legal issues; history and trauma; and relationships with non-Indigenous Australians. It was felt this would help ground the particular strategic areas of interest in a more integrated whole. However, as with nearly all suggestions made, there was no desire to make the report longer than it is already.

Contextual information around data

Representatives from several different stakeholder groups – mainly users with expertise in data collection, analysis and provision – identified an issue relating to the need to foreground the problematic nature of some data sources and information more than is currently done. For example, it was suggested that there needs to be clearer acknowledgement of the existence of 'non-sampling error' and the implications for users of the data; and the concept of 'statistical significance' given the small size of the Indigenous population. Another researcher gave the example of a reference to the Harvard project in the chapter on governance in the 2011 OID report, noting that there was no

mention of the debate around the applicability of the Harvard project to an Australian context. The failure to mention this was seen by this person as 'a significant gap'.

Some data need more analysis and interpretation. An example was given of hospitalisation rates and the range of possible explanations that could account for an increase in these rates, such as 'increases in the incidence and prevalence of disease, improved access to primary health care, hospital care and/or better identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in hospital data' (AHMAC, 2010: ii). It was suggested that the lack of clarity around the factors contributing to changed rates needs to be acknowledged more.

It was suggested that there should be a clear description of the text under each table to clarify the data and tables for people who are not experienced in data use. 'Some of the bridges between the data and reporting needed to be highlighted; some people couldn't work out how some of the figures were being used.'

One suggestion was to provide a short explanation of why something might be an incomplete measure rather than to be putting caveats in the footnotes. This kind of context would enable the data sources to be used with appropriate guidance as to their reliability or contested nature.

Breadth of indicators

There was some disagreement about the appropriateness of the current set of indicators. Many stakeholders found the indicators satisfactory or appropriate for their purposes, although some also believed that the indicators needed to be reviewed. A strong theme in the discussions was the call for more systematic analysis. This came from a number of different stakeholder groups. While some believed the purpose of the OID report was to provide an overview of national statistics and leave the interpretation and analysis to the users, most contributors to the review who commented on the breadth of indicators also suggested the OID report would benefit from more analysis and more connections to be made between outcomes and policy and across indicators. It was also recognised that this would be a difficult and complex task and probably require its own separate report.

Several stakeholders cited the broad range of indicators as one of the strengths of the report and said that they provide context: 'It's good to know the big picture. You need to know the big picture to know that initiatives in one place aren't in conflict or competition with those in others.' This data was also considered useful for measurability and comparability. Some researchers felt that the consistency enabled more effective historical documentation as information for comparison could reliably be found in OID reports dating back several years.

The main criticisms of the indicators were that:

- Some of the high-level indicators are too broad, in that they do not move much over periods of years: indicators 'have to evolve with information from year to year' and the indicators need to be reviewed to retain relevance.
- The indicators are 'too quantitative and diminish the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', particularly the indicators relating to health, and need to better reflect relevance to Indigenous people.

- A 'more nuanced account' would occur if the disadvantage gap was also described in terms of the gap between disadvantaged Indigenous people and disadvantaged non-Indigenous people.
- 'There is no distinction made under the heading of 'non-Indigenous'; the figures don't allow for important distinctions, such as between 'European-descended people' and the African refugee population.
- Several researchers referred to two competing frameworks operating within the report, one initial framework and a more recent COAG-imposed framework that is affecting the relevance of the content and indicators and causing some users to question the purpose of the OID report.
- The indicators focus too much on the negative rather than having some more positive indicators (such as the number of languages spoken by Indigenous people).
- 'Is the Productivity Commission capturing the cross indicators? To what extent does it look at things like the Working on Country program? Are there differences in health or education or housing? Are there any baselines being done? A lot can change in five years.'

It was not clear if and to what extent the indicators could be amended, given they are COAG defined, and given that there have been consultations already on the framework and indicators, but there was a strong perception among a minority of stakeholders that the indicators would benefit from being reviewed again.

Time series analysis

These were seen as a key strength of the OID report, making it somewhat unique when compared with other similar reports. Most interviewees believed the data are useful and provide an indication of progress or otherwise. The fact that the reports have been collecting data for several years now and that the report can show trends was seen as a distinct value add. One suggestion was to make better use of the longitudinal data and provide more trend analyses. An example was given by one academic of being able to track student data relating to school completions with destinations the following year. For example, where are Indigenous students going – to further education, VET, university, work (and what kind of work), apprenticeships or traineeships?

While the need to compare current with previous statistics is essential to gauge progression, many interviewees believe the report's emphasis on state by state comparison is unhelpful. One stakeholder expressed reservations about the time series analyses because these were not based on primary data.

Disaggregation by state/territory and remoteness

This component of the report generated some debate, mainly around how it could be made more useful for readers. The value of disaggregation was widely recognised and appreciated. The main benefit was seen to be that it enabled the comparison of data when working on a national level. One interviewee who works for a national organisation found the disaggregation useful in helping to determine areas that are experiencing higher success rates and in targeting specific areas for improvement. The disaggregated data made these judgements possible.

Some groups wanted to see more disaggregation in the OID report and others were satisfied with the current level. There was a lot of support from the states and territories for separate reporting by state and territory, perhaps with a separate small printed volume or an online volume. This possibility was raised by representatives from nearly every jurisdiction. All seemed to have a common reading pattern of searching through the OID report when it is first released to see what the report says about their particular programs and effectiveness. At the same time, it was recognised that the national perspective cannot be lost. Some OID Working Group members welcomed the idea of further geographical disaggregation by remoteness. Stakeholders working in urban and regional policy development would find more urban information useful.

Some participants expressed a need for information that is disaggregated to the level of community if possible. Given that much disadvantage is related to community rather than to state, it was thought that to disaggregate at this level would give a more nuanced picture. It was recognised that this might not be possible but that it would be useful to go below the state level. However, others suggested that only a few indicators can be disaggregated and that there is not much more that could be done to improve the 'value add' of this element of the OID report. It was generally recognised that disaggregation will always be constrained by the data sources.

The OID report has limited capacity to report at the local level. OID reports are about national trending rather than the jurisdictions. However participants in discussion groups still raised this as an issue. It was generally agreed that the report was presented at too high a level of aggregation and thus the fine-grained information of smaller communities or differentiation based on socio-economic status was lost. Local agencies require information at a local community level, not just at a whole state or a national level.

Another type of disaggregation suggested was by Indigenous sub-groups. One stakeholder group made the point that it is important to report on the differences within the Indigenous population. There are differences in outcomes in health and education. It is useful to know why one sub-group might be doing better than another. What factors are at work? A specific suggestion was made in relation to knowing more about homelessness among Indigenous people. This kind of breakdown would make the OID data more relevant to policy makers.

Stakeholders in every state and territory referred to the usefulness of having the report disaggregated further while acknowledging limitations in data quality would make this difficult and, in the case of separate reports for states and territories, the amount of work involved in producing separate tailored reports for each jurisdiction based on the data available, which will vary across jurisdictions.

The most commonly cited examples of potential breakdowns were by state and territory; by urban and regional; and by sub-groups within Indigenous population. Several stakeholders also raised the possibility of comparisons being made between Indigenous groups and low-socioeconomic groups in Australia rather than between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Presentation of the data in charts, tables, commentary

The presentation of data in these various ways attracted little commentary. Those who contributed views on this generally indicated they were satisfied with the current arrangement. One person considered the tables the most valuable part of the report but also the most under-rated part. For

many stakeholders, the inclusion of charts, tables and commentary allowed readers to examine data from different points of view. Most were pleased with the layout and presentation of the different forms of data, suggesting the information is presented clearly and is easy to read, with an appropriate balance between charts and tables and commentaries. One particularly liked the charts showing state/territory comparison, saying 'it's a useful cross-jurisdictional comparison [but that] there could be possibly more on remoteness'. Some suggestions were that:

- Some more descriptive commentary alongside the statistical data would enable readers to incorporate the information more easily into their work without being daunted by statistics.
- The tables could be fitted into a portrait rather than landscape layout where possible to increase readability.
- Tables are more useful than charts for some users because it is easier to brief ministers with this kind of information.

Some of the few negative comments were that the graphics were poor and difficult to read and that the graphs often lacked accurate or up-to-date information.

Several stakeholders commented favourably on the fact sheets, indicating a shared liking for the quick and succinct contextual overview provided. At least two people indicated they used the fact sheets at regional or community level meetings. One government officer participant in a small group discussion identified the communiqués that are attached in Appendix 1 of the OID report as being 'a very valuable resource' because the COAG site is 'hard to navigate'.

Attachment tables

Most interviewees who provided commentary on these found the attachment tables helpful. One interviewee stated that these are the most useful element of the report along with being the most difficult to navigate. Another believed the tables were very useful in electronic format for research purposes and presented a different perspective on the data and more detailed information. Several stakeholders reported using the attachment tables more than the main report and felt that the format was well suited for data analysts. The fact that the data were often hard to get from other sources was another reason for valuing these tables. However, it was also suggested that the presentation of information in the attachment tables led to it being 'buried away on the web'.

The 'things that work' case studies

The case studies attracted more comment than the other OID components and probably generated the most debate. On the one hand the case studies were seen to be an important source of hope in an otherwise rather negative publication. The principle of identifying 'what works' was generally perceived to be a good one. Several stakeholders commented on the fact that this section of the report was the closest to capturing the 'lived experience' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than anywhere else in the report and for this reason alone was worth retaining.

On the other hand, there was also much criticism of the quality and usefulness of the case studies. These were criticised for having no obvious evidence of effectiveness, for being one-off examples that are not followed through, for being biased jurisdictional examples, and for not being useful. A

common theme in the consultations was that the case studies need to tell a more convincing story than they currently do. This means showing how and why the programs or initiatives work. It means re-visiting how these are selected and examining whether or not the assessed research in the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse might not be a better source for these examples. It means making transparent the criteria by which the case studies are selected.

A different view, while acknowledging the flawed nature of the case studies, was that these cases are illustrative only and were never intended to be evaluated studies. The report is a high level one and it is appropriate to have illustrations. One suggestion was to report on these cases separately, perhaps in the form of a data compendium with caveats. Another interviewee believes it is important to include a critical analysis about why a particular case study is being used and the context in which it is being used. Otherwise OID report users could fall into the trap of referring to them as if they were the only model of engagement.

Some critics did not see a role for the case studies in the report at all as ‘they are not drawing out more general findings. They are outside the scope and relevance of the report’. Several stakeholders suggested that many of the stakeholders who either use the OID report or contribute data to it are likely to have a different set of expectations around case studies and the burden of proof required than is currently the case in the OID report. However, most people who were critical of the quality of the case studies also acknowledged that it is hard to gather these stories and that governments are not always able to find examples that are appropriate and reflective of good practice. Some of the case studies might only be funded for a short time but, if this is the case, then they are not likely to be examples of good practice (if not sustainable).

Another interviewee cautioned against thinking the case studies reflected successful programs that should be implemented everywhere across the board – ‘it’s not one size fits all’ – but if a particular community has a number of similarities with the one in the case study, comparison can be useful. Operationally, ‘knowing someone had a good idea in a similar context to your own gives you the chance to determine which elements of that idea might be transferable to your own context’.

To increase the usefulness of the case studies several suggestions were made:

- The OID report should make clearer why these studies are examples of good practice. Users want to know what impact have these programs or initiatives had and the evidence that shows this. They want to know why these cases have worked.
- More community case studies could be included rather than having only government ones. There is a perceived conflict of interest in the case studies. It is in the interests of governments that fund programs to identify ‘success’.
- A set of selection criteria could be developed to facilitate identification of the cases.
- There needs to be a stronger link between the data in the report and the case studies.
- It would be good to have case studies that can be followed up so users of the guide can see progression.
- The case studies could provide readily accessible information that would enable users to find out more, particularly if they are underpinned by evaluations that are not in the public domain and users would like to access these.

- It would be better for OID report to source its case studies from the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse as these publications are peer reviewed and written by subject experts.

It was also suggested that care must be taken to provide fresh case studies, rather than using the same examples, or including the same case studies, across multiple publications or repeating them in the biennial report.

Recommendation 4

That the case studies be retained in the OID report and their quality strengthened by having:

- clear and transparent criteria for selection
- evidence of effectiveness
- (where possible) evidence of progression over time
- evidence-based examples from sources such as the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

Recommendation 5

That (where possible) the OID report provide more disaggregation in relation to:

- Remoteness
- Indigenous people living in an urban context
- community level data
- sub-groups within the Indigenous population (such as homeless and highly mobile groups) that might otherwise be lost in the data collection on the Indigenous population.

5. Identify the major users of the OID report and how, and to what extent, readers use the report and the way that users process and use the information in a large multi-layered report.

The consultations show that information on Indigenous disadvantage and outcomes is being sourced from a wide range of publications and reports in addition to the OID report. For survey respondents the most commonly cited sources (other than the OID report) were ABS publications and research papers. The most common sources cited by interviewees were ABS data, AIHW reports and Closing the Gap Clearinghouse publications. Various other government data sources and reports were also used although less frequently, including:

- Annual and other reports from state/territory and Commonwealth government departments
- Native Title implementation reports
- Standing Committee of Attorneys-General Working Group on Indigenous Justice reports
- Prime Minister's reports
- Closing the Gap monitoring reports
- Reports from the Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services

- NCVER reports
- NAPLAN reports
- COAG Reform Council reports
- NIRA performance reports.

National and international journals and internal research were also cited as sources of information. Nine interviewees referred to community consultations, workshops, meetings, field trips and regular contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as sources of information. Sources mentioned by interviewees but not by survey respondents included research publications by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health publications and University of Technology Sydney Jumbanna Indigenous House of Learning; the Australian HealthInfoNet, Indigenous newspapers, the Social Justice Commissioner reports; data from police and juvenile agencies, the National Congress, and the Australian and Torres Strait Regional Authority.

Interviewees commented that the sources of information drawn on at any given time depended on the nature and specific focus of the work they were doing.

One interviewee reported that his department uses its own administration data, which looks at the number of people on income support, different types of income support payments, debts. This data is collected for a variety of reasons and purposes and is not publicly available. Similarly, an interviewee in the early childhood sector cited their main source as being information they collect themselves: 'A lot of the information we require is operational, and it's at a point in time – we collect data in 2011 for use in 2012'.

The major users

The identification of sources from which to gather data for this review was strongly shaped by the original purposes of the OID report. These purposes were to support the development and review of policy related to achieving improved outcomes for Indigenous communities and people. As the *Foreword* to the latest edition of the report notes: 'The reports help governments monitor and address the disadvantage that limits the opportunities and choices of many Indigenous people'.

Thus the review did not look widely beyond settings related to these parameters. However, within these settings, there appear to be a wide range of users, especially in those policy contexts with a strong focus on Indigenous outcomes.

Partly because of the scope of the data collection, it is unclear how widely the OID report is used by Indigenous academics or researchers.

How the OID Report is used

This section considers the purposes to which the OID report is put by its users. A common pattern of usage is to look first at the OID report to see what measures are available on a particular topic, then go to other sources (such as the ABS or AIHW) to find more specific information about the topic. The OID report is here being used as a 'pointer' to other references, data and sources. Examples of this type of usage included comments such as:

- 'I use it as a quick reference for an area where I don't have specialist knowledge'
- 'It provides guidance – it's a touchstone, it reminds us of the major issues and keeps reminding us that there are still things yet to be achieved'
- 'To see the state of play, where progress is at, what's improved. Generally it's doom and gloom but it does try to put a positive spin and gives examples'
- 'It tells where things are trending'
- 'If I refer to the report I use it directly. The report itself is of course a secondary use of data – it quotes from the AIHW and other sources. It's a compendium – not a primary source of research data. If we were to go to the primary source we'd go to the AIHW.'
- 'I use the report for baseline purposes'.

It was clear from a number of respondents that when the report is first released there is a keen interest among jurisdictions in knowing what is being said about their own particular state or territory. (The Overview is also considered useful for these purposes.) One interviewee commented that the OID report is particularly useful for seeing how other sectors are doing. The OID report is also used by a small number of interviewees to check their own work against. For example, a person might be writing a report and will then go back to the OID to check their information. In these various ways the report is used to get the 'big picture', against which other settings might then be compared. The report is used for writing presentations and submissions. It is also used in educational settings. One academic prescribes the OID Report as pre-reading for her lectures. Another uses the OID report when giving lectures and encourages students to access it as well as the OID data for their own study and presentations.

The OID is also used to support research activities. Interviewees indicated that they use the OID report to cross check research based on government and other reports and field work; to identify how indices have changed or are progressing; and to evidence claims around Indigenous disadvantage in education, health and access.

The influence of the OID Report was seen to be pervasive by some interviewees:

- 'It gets to influence so many other discussions and reports that you get to know it by osmosis as much as anything else.'
- 'In some circumstances we use it directly, in others it's a reference point. Because we don't do dedicated policy work with the Indigenous community, it's often wrapped into other work that we're doing.'

Some government stakeholders indicated that they will also then look at the 'things that work' examples: 'it's certainly nice to see those things recognised'.

Related to the question of how the report is used, is the extent to which it is useful to them. Question 13 of the survey asked about the usefulness of each section of the report. The various components of the report were, on average, seen to be of moderate usefulness. The fact sheets were seen to be less useful although those relying on the Fact Sheets when presenting information at regional meetings had a different view.

The extent to which the OID Report is used

Interviewees were asked how often they use the OID report. Usage ranges from almost never through to constant use. For most people the frequency of use depended on the type of work they were doing, and so it was difficult to discern any clear patterns about the extent to which the report is used. The following responses give a sense of the diversity in the extent to which the OID report is used:

- 'very regularly – every time I speak publicly, every time I write something'
- 'regularly when writing public addresses or journal articles'
- 'once a month, when writing'
- 'mainly when writing a report or a submission'
- 'different frequency with different roles, more frequently in a policy role'
- 'every couple of months, when doing major pieces of work or when preparing briefings or submissions on behalf of the Department'
- 'two to three times a year, depending on why the information is needed'
- 'infrequently, there will be reference to it around the time a briefing is coming out – when people are looking for things quickly' and then less often or not at all after that.

Usage of the report appears to be higher when it is first published, for example:

- 'It varies. I use it regularly when it first comes out and a little less as it gets older'
- 'Quite often early on, on a weekly basis, after a year maybe monthly'
- 'On average once a week. A lot when it's just been published'.

More detailed information was available from the survey. Twenty-seven of the 35 survey respondents reported using the OID report at least once in the past year. Two people reported using the Overview 12 times; two people reported using the main report 15 times and two people reported using the attachment tables 20 or more times. One person used the Fact Sheets seven times. These were the most frequent occurrences of usage for each component of the OID report. By contrast, seven people had used the Overview once in the past year, four people had used the main report once, four people had used the attachment tables once, and five people had used the fact sheets once in the past year. In between were varying usage levels for each section with no particular pattern evident.

There are some groups who appear to use the OID report less frequently than might be hoped for and this is potentially a concern. For example, two prominent Indigenous academics who were approached to be interviewed do not use the report. Another had not heard of the report and questioned how and where it might have been made available to their university. It is unclear if the reasons for non-use are through lack of knowledge about the report or because it is not perceived to be relevant or culturally appropriate. This is a significant gap in knowledge arising from this review given that the OID report is reporting on Indigenous people.

Overall, it is also not clear how well used the report is by policy staff. Participants in the discussions in particular had a variety of positions in and outside of government but there was not a strong sense from the consultations of the report being very useful to policy makers in its current form. One reason

put forward in some of the discussion groups was because the OID report does not make clear the connections between the outcomes being reported and their implications for policy. For example, the Closing the Gap initiative was cited by several stakeholders as an example of how the policy context is quite different from the context in which the OID was originally developed. The implication is that the OID report does not currently tell Closing the Gap policy staff how well various programs are going and the reasons for their effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

The ways in which users process and use the information in the OID Report

Many stakeholders mention seeking out primary sources or other government documents to cross-check or source additional information. The Overview provides 'a quick snapshot' for users needing a less-detailed summary and the main report enables users to drill down as needed. The information on specific areas can be useful for some users who look at trends and long term results over time. These users often do not have the resources to locate this data themselves and rely on the report.

Stakeholders appear to use the OID report in a diverse range of ways, depending on their needs at the time. The consultations show that the report is used both directly and indirectly; online and in printed form; and for a range of purposes – for example, as background information; unpublished primary source data; secondary data; fact sheets for presentations; data for reports, briefs, proposals and submissions; content for presentations and lectures. Its accessibility means it is quick and easy to use when searching for quotes to include in presentations and reports.

When asked if they use the report directly or via other sources, most interviewees indicated they use the report directly, mainly for unpublished data although one interviewee made the point that often the cuts of data are too broad and it would be useful to have data disaggregated further.

Other information related to the use of the OID Report

Knowledge of the report

Interviewees were asked how they found out about the OID report. Some knew about it because they are or have been involved in some way. For example, they might be contributing data; providing case studies; being asked to comment on a briefing; being consulted early on in the development of the framework and in regular discussions with the Secretariat about the report; or serve as a member of the OID Working Group.

Others found out about the report from the web, media or media releases, colleagues, secondees from the Secretariat, from having the report sent to them or to the organisation/institute, through the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Several people had not heard about the report and only discovered its existence when invited to take part in the review. One interviewee finds out about the OID report through the Australian Policy Online alerts.

Best features of the report

The best aspects of the Overview were identified as the policy overview, the Closing the Gap targets, the summaries of key data, the things that work, and the fact that it is easy to read and reference. One respondent commented that the Overview 'helps determine whether the relevant section of the

report is useful for my immediate purposes'. Another suggested that the best feature of the Overview was that it indicates any changes and limitations.

For the main report the best features were said to be the:

- comprehensiveness of the data
- scope and 'big picture' view it provides
- jurisdictional comparisons
- provision of data that readers might not otherwise have access to
- breadth of indicators
- overview of data
- evidence-based research
- information around successful national initiatives
- clear identification of progress towards reaching targets
- detailed information regarding programs, outcomes and current situations
- publication frequency
- credibility because it comes from a government-related entity
- its provision of information in different levels of detail and in different formats (text/commentary/charts and tables; hard and soft copy) so that it meets the needs of the variety of users.

There are other benefits attached to the production of the OID report. For example, one group of stakeholders believed a key strength was the OID report's:

persistent pressure on data providers to improve collections and push for more data linkage projects. Linking data sets allows for more robust analysis and provides a better picture around causes of disadvantage.

There was a perception among some stakeholders that the OID report encouraged governments to collect data that they might not otherwise have collected. It was thus seen as a tool for change by drawing government attention to critical data that could be used to measure progress.

The OID report was likened to a compendium that brings together information from a range of different sectors and areas of concern.

Limitations of the report

As with other aspects of the OID report, the consultations revealed differences of opinion in terms of the perceived shortcomings of the report. The most commonly cited limitations were around the reporting of data, lack of analysis, and the need for a more strengths-based approach to be taken.

In addition to the suggestions made earlier in this report around providing more contextual information to help users better interpret and understand the strengths and limitations of the data, it

was also suggested that more information and evidence could be provided to support the selection of particular statistics and to indicate where the data are coming from.

Currency was an issue for many in government where staff can be asked to locate up-to-date data quickly. Some government staff indicated that they can get more up-to-date data from other government agencies than from the OID report. It was recognised that there are constraints on how often the OID report can be updated. One suggestion was to provide updated data online between publications of the full report. It was also acknowledged that: 'There is a limitation in a sense that [*the data quality*] limits the usefulness of the report but this is not the fault of the Productivity Commission or the Steering Committee. They can only work with what they can get.'

Another issue was raised in relation to the reporting of data. It was pointed out that baseline data are very important to the success and accuracy of the report, and that people identify as Aboriginal differently depending on the survey or the purpose of the question: 'the way someone might identify in an ABS population and housing census, or the way they identify when they're enrolling a child at school or at a hospital' will be different, leading to different data being recorded each time'. The issue here, as with some of the other comments about data accuracy or quality, is about reporting the caveats so that users who are not adept at quantitative analysis can be guided as to which data they should treat with caution (and why).

Not all stakeholders see the OID report as being independent by virtue of its ties with COAG (although this same link with COAG is seen by others as a source of authority and credibility).

Recommendation 6

That the SCRGSP investigate further the reasons for the apparently low level of use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, with a view to adjusting the OID Report to better accommodate their policy and research needs.

Recommendation 7

- (a) That the OID report provide more analyses that reflect the complexity of disadvantage, particularly in regard to the linkages between indicators.
- (b) That the OID report provide more rigorous statistical analyses, in particular when comparing trends and outcomes in administrative data.

6. Examine how users access the report (print or web versions) and what content and components they use. Recommend ways to improve report readability and usefulness.

As at 14 October 2011, the Secretariat had distributed around 3576 Overviews and 3104 main reports of the 2011 report, which was released on 25 August 2011. As at 21 August 2009, the Secretariat had distributed around 5000 Overviews and 3600 main reports of the 2009 report, which was released on 2 July 2009.

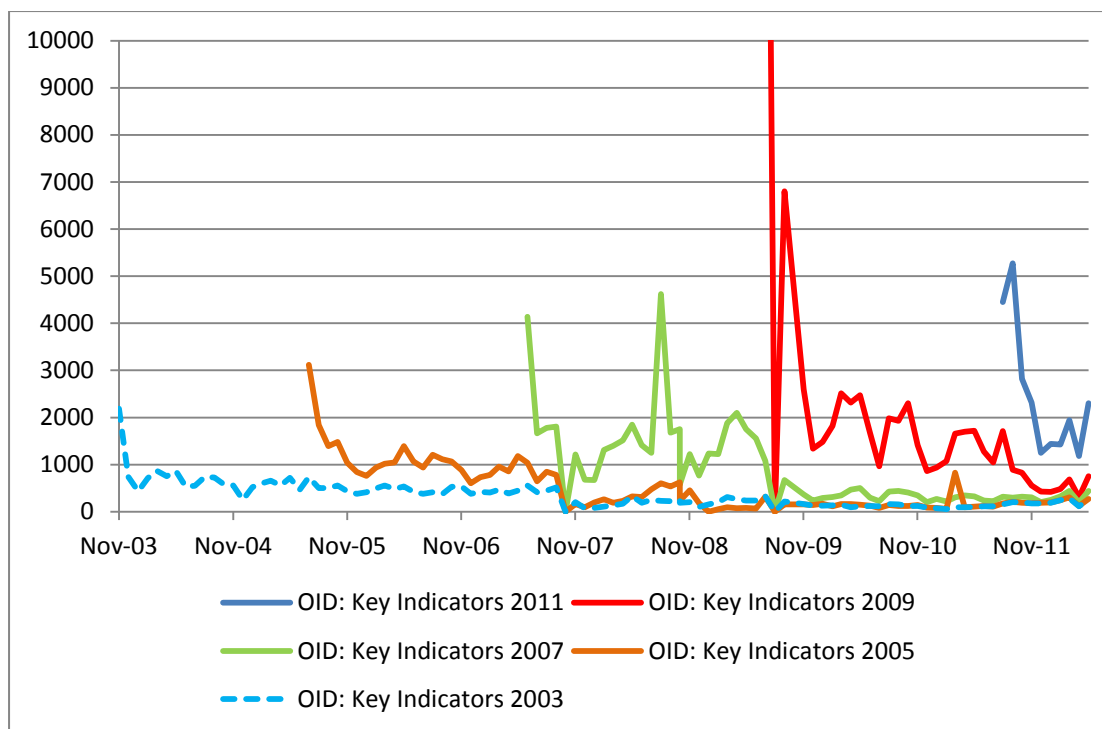


Figure 1 Number of times the OID report was accessed on the web for each report from 2003 to 2011 (July 2009 truncated at 10,000. The actual value was 23,604.)

Figure 1 shows the number of times the OID Report was accessed online for each report during each month since 2003. The highest number was in July 2009, with 23,604 hits being recorded. (This is not shown in **Figure 1**, because the scale is truncated at 10,000 to make the rest of the graph more readable.) This spike in August coincided with two events: the July COAG meeting at which the Chair of the Secretariat gave a presentation to COAG on the findings of the OID and with the joint launch of the report by the Chair and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin. (No data were collected for the following month so the apparent collapse in the numbers accessing the Report reflects missing data.)

Analysis of the monthly website hits shows that interest in each edition of the main report and Overview is highest when these are released and then tapers off in subsequent months. There has been a steady increase in usage over the period 2003 to 2011. This can be seen by the increasingly high number of times the report is accessed upon release. For example in 2003 the initial peak for the report is over 2000, in 2005 it is over 3000 and in 2007 it is over 4000. **Figure 2** also shows the number of times the OID Report was accessed online for each report from 2003, but disaggregated by year. (All graphs in this figure are on the same scale.) This graph helps to see that with the release of a new report there is a spike in access, which slowly declines with time. By examining the same time period, say November 2009 for each of the graphs shown in **Figure 2**, it can be seen that a spike in the use of a new report does not see a corresponding spike in the number of times other, previous editions, of the report are accessed. This implies that for most users of the OID report online, the latest version is the most important and supersedes previous ones.

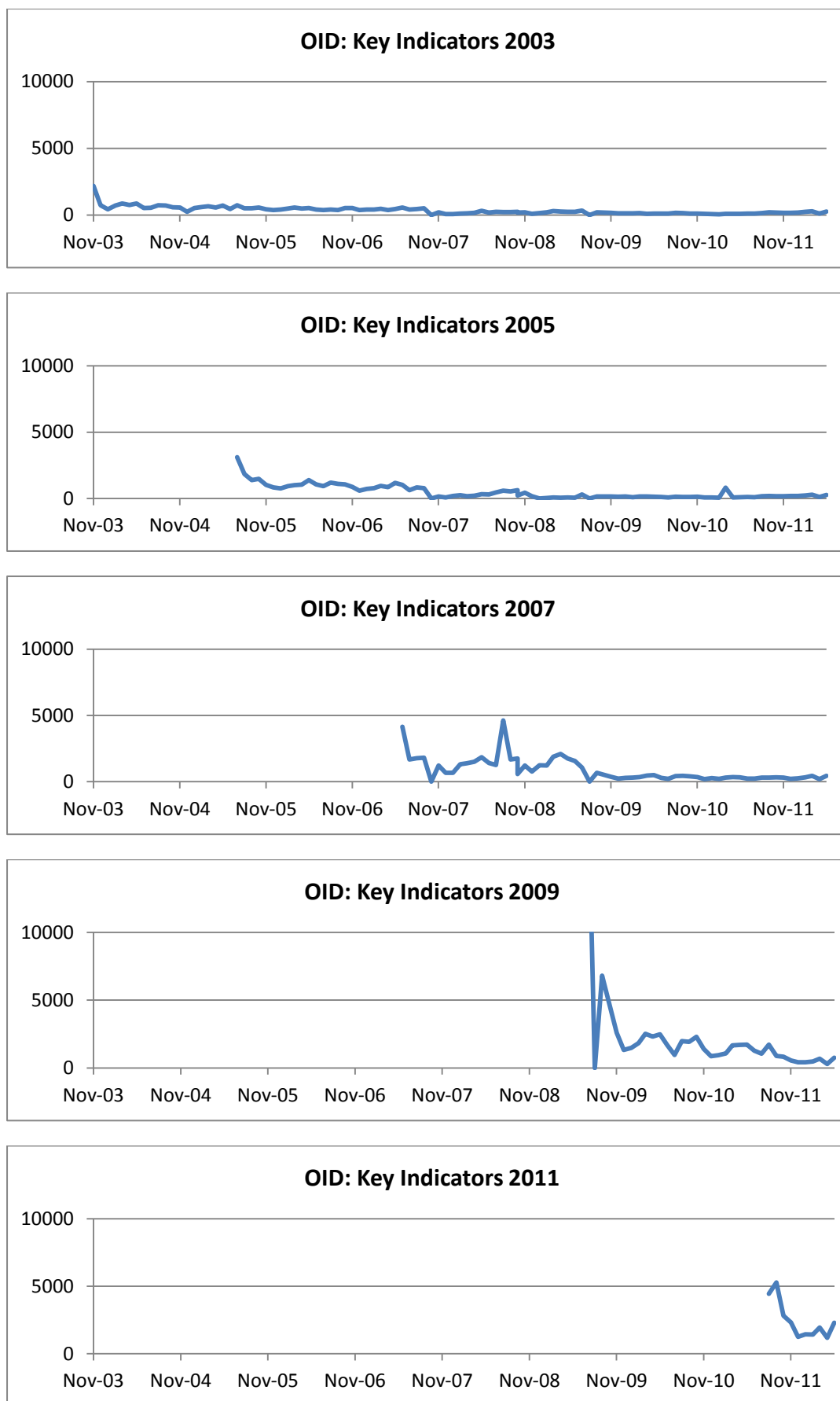


Figure 2 Number of times the OID report was accessed on the web for each report disaggregated for the years 2003 to 2011 (July 2009 truncated at 10,000. The actual value was 23,604.)

Sections used

Most interviewees use the whole report with the Overview being the most commonly used section. The Overview appears to provide a starting point for those who are pressed for time and want some insight into the rest of the document although several stakeholders made the point that the Overview was not a genuine summary. A frequently made point was that usage depends on the purpose. For example, the overall report might be used when a researcher is preparing an academic paper and needs evidence in the form of statistics to back up the points being made. Some interviewees found the fact sheets excellent for a quick reference, as a way into the more detailed report, but also as material to take to stakeholder meetings and when doing presentations. Some like the case studies because they 'give practical and localised information'; others do not use the case studies because they are perceived to be one-off programs that are not supported by evidence.

Participants use the report in a range of ways without a clear pattern emerging. So much depends on the purpose at a particular time, the user's needs, their preferred way of obtaining information, their access to other sources. Stakeholders working in particular areas of expertise will go to the chapters with information about those areas but, once there, differ in how they use the information.

Accessing the print version

Some stakeholders in the phone interviews expressed a preference for the hard copy because it can be annotated, because having their own copy means it can be used as a quick resource, because the contents page in the print copy is easy to use, and because they are not as adept online.

I have a print copy of the Overview as one of a number of resources I use ... the online version is more used by our policy people, because it's easier for them to search. I tend to download a copy of the report, read it and highlight it, and then carry the copy around to use as a reference document if people are asking questions.

Those who use both print and online versions cited the search function of the online version and the fact that they like the print copy in front of them as reasons for using both. The main report is seen as too large to download in its entirety. The Overview is more likely to be downloaded than the main report. A common view expressed by those who use both print and online versions was that the print version was a tangible product that could be reached for immediately and the online version was useful to search and copy and paste.

If I have a submission or a speech to write it's usually the online version, but I actually quite like having the print copy on the shelf. There's something almost more authoritative about the hard copy.

Stakeholders in two different workplaces thought there was a generational difference in terms of who opts for the online version and who opts for the hard copy but other feedback did not suggest this was the case across all workplaces.

Accessing the web version

Many stakeholders seem to prefer the web version of the report. The main reasons given for using the online version are because it is searchable. It is also perceived to be good for snapshots of data or copying and pasting for presentations.

It's easier for me to download the whole thing to my computer. I work from home and I only have a limited amount of data download so it's easier. I don't print a copy – I don't mind reading it from the screen.

Of the interviewees who prefer to access and read the report online rather than download, the most common section used online was the Overview, with equal numbers accessing (rather than downloading) the main report, the attachment tables and the Fact Sheets online.

The majority of online users find the website easy to use and accessible. Commonly used words were that it is 'compatible'; 'user friendly'; 'it's easy to find what you are looking for'; 'easy to negotiate'; 'navigable'. Two frequent comments were that the online version has a search function which means it is quicker and easier to go online to search than to try and find something using the print version; and that the report is usable because of the way it is divided into sections. The fact that the PDFs were in easy-to-use separate sections was seen to be a strength. A user can go straight to a particular chapter or appendix and download that section without having to download the whole report.

Less positive comments on useability included:

It is hard to navigate around attachment tables. You need to know the report extremely well to find data otherwise it can take too long to find useful information.

Spreadsheets could be easier. You have to know the name of the report.

One stakeholder also warned against the assumption that the online version would be easier to access for all users:

Definitely keep both print and online, because there are a lot of our mob who don't feel comfortable with the internet yet, including older people, not just Indigenous ones. And that's something we struggle with at the university, telling people "Not everyone can afford internet".

Improving readability, accessibility and presentation

Many practical suggestions were made to improve these aspects of usage. Perhaps the most common criticism of the report in this respect was its size. One suggestion made by several people was that having page numbers would facilitate quick and efficient use. Some stakeholders suggested the navigation and search option could be improved for ease of use by readers unfamiliar with the content of the report or the exact wording of the information they are searching for.

Ways of increasing engagement

- Promote the website more widely by printing the URL for the online version on the back of the hard copy.
- Write a press release at the time of the report's publication which promotes the positive aspects of the report and encourages media reporting of achievements rather than only the negative findings.
- When the report is released do a road show, taking the report out to Indigenous communities, providing translators, talking about the findings.

- Identify robust case studies to help bring some of the data to life. Sometimes the framework of a particular report can 'disperse the picture and make people feel disconnected', whereas the level of detail in the case studies can engage users and provide a more positive framework around the data.
- Make clearer the amount of Indigenous input into the report. Consider attaching a list of those Indigenous organisations and experts who have provided input.
- Publish the names of OID Working Group members in the report.
- Increase the representation of Indigenous people on the OID Working Group and other reference groups with Indigenous experts in particular fields, such as in the medical profession, education, criminal justice.
- 'Tell the story behind some of these numbers. This might make people engage with it more.' Give more thought as to how Indigenous communities could use the report. 'The report needs to make this story relevant to local communities'.
- Consider changing the order of things that are included in the OID report. Instead of having the first 20 pages or so with the contents page, glossary, acronyms, list of Steering Committee members, letter from the Chair – 'it takes many pages before the report even starts' – begin the report in a way that invites engagement.

Ways of improving readability

The main suggestion for improvement was to reduce the size of the OID report. Several stakeholders also commented on the size of the Overview, suggesting that at 70 pages it was still too long for an overview. 'The Overview is not correctly named because it is a chapter on a set of specific indicators not an overview of the entire report'.

Suggestions for improving readability included:

- Make more use of online and interactive opportunities to provide OID report content.
- Have a summary of key findings of the whole report.
- Have an easy-to-use index or searchable table of contents.
- Provide better referencing particularly between the tables and discussion.
- Have the attachment tables downloadable as Excel documents to facilitate analysis.
- Provide page numbers.

Ways of improving usefulness

Create links

As the Secretariat website is not an obvious place to turn when seeking information about overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, provide links to the report from other websites, such as Indigenous sites, where people might logically go to seek this kind of information.

Provide a link to the COAG reform council data and 'reports on the measures that are put in place under the National Partnership Agreements'.

Another suggestion was to include and analyse international data to determine how Australia sits on a broad global spectrum in terms of effective policy. However, the OID report has noted the limitations of the available data in this regard (SCRGSP, 2011: 19).

Provide more links online to primary sources.

Link to the *Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children* (LSIC) reports and data. The LSIC report shows the strengths of kinship, resilience, independence and cultural knowledge in preschool Indigenous children. Use the LSIC data more in the reporting of Indigenous children's progress.

Trend analysis

Given that the OID report has been around for some years now it would be timely to have a trend analysis in relation to a range of statistics. This could also be used to tell a comparative story, state by state.

More analysis of the interconnections

A common theme in the consultations was the request for more in-depth and critical analysis, particularly around identifying the linkages and connections between policies, outcomes and across indicators. For example, what are the connections between education, housing and health? Between housing overcrowding, family size and children's resilience? It was suggested that the report would better suit user purposes if there were 'more disaggregated data available [and] a more critical engagement with the data to find out the potential causes of the patterns they are finding'.

While the producers of the OID report recognise that understanding such interconnections could help governments develop more effective policies and programs they also note that 'the practical application of data linkage may take several years, because of the technical challenges in linking data and the need to address concerns about privacy that arise when databases are linked' (SCRGSP, 2011: 2.9).

Governance and leadership

The report could present governance and leadership building blocks as enablers of other building blocks rather than having this as a stand-alone component in the report. The case studies could then demonstrate how governance and leadership contributed to specific targets. '

Comparing oranges with oranges

Several participants in discussions suggested the OID report needs to compare Indigenous performance with the performance of people in low socio-economic circumstances rather than with non-Aboriginal people as much of the disadvantage described in the OID is to do with poverty.

Emerging areas

Some stakeholders wanted to see more information related to specific areas, such as 'emerging areas' (although these were not defined) good health services information, regional information, the impact

of not having land, further breakdown of indicators by jurisdictions and geographical areas, and the latest research being undertaken in universities on issues related to the content of the report, such as research in early childhood.

Suggested frequency of publication

There were a range of views from publishing updates online every six months to publishing every few years with the majority of interviewees preferred to retain the current publication of the report every two years. Reasons for not changing the frequency of publication included that: data are not available more frequently; if the report were more frequent it might lose quality; change does not occur quickly enough to warrant more frequent data collection and reporting; the current timing allows researchers to compare the data; and there is time to receive feedback from communities between publications. A suggestion that found favour with several stakeholders was to produce a rolling update of various parts released, say, quarterly, while having a consolidated report and overview released every two years.

Recommendation 8

- (a) That the SCRGSP investigate the possibility of providing a series of smaller reports in between publication of the biennial report that would highlight particular indicators, outcomes, themes or linkages.
- (b) That the SCRGSP examine the feasibility of providing a separate tailored report for each state and territory based on available data.

7. Identify opportunities to streamline and improve the efficiency of the production of the OID report, in particular, the role of the OID Working Group and the process for obtaining data from data providers.

This is the most difficult aspect of the review to report back on as, apart from members themselves, few stakeholders knew about the OID Working Group and not many were in a position to comment on the process for obtaining data from data providers.

Opportunities to streamline production

There were few suggestions about how to streamline production of the report. Most stakeholders felt they had insufficient information (if any information at all) about this process.

Role of the OID Working Group

The members of the OID Working Group are not widely known as members of this group nor is the role of the Working Group widely known. Thus it was difficult for most stakeholders to provide information about its role. There was some evidence of a perception among some Indigenous stakeholders that there is insufficient Indigenous representation on this group. Some stakeholders asked who the members were.

Process for obtaining data

No one provided information about processes for obtaining data as they felt, again, that they had insufficient information. Those who advocated that the OID report be issued more frequently sometimes included discussion about what this might imply for obtaining data. During these discussions it was noted that as the OID Report brings together data collected by other agencies, the timing of data release was largely beyond the control of the Working Group.

Conclusion

This review of the OID report reveals a wide range of different views, some contradictory, in relation to the report. Most stakeholders recognised that the report was meeting its purpose of reporting on government progress in relation to the COAG 'Closing the Gap' targets and indicators but differed in their opinions of how effectively it was doing this, how useful and relevant the report continues to be amid a larger array of government performance reports, and ways in which this usefulness might be enhanced.

The uniqueness of the OID report was seen to lie mainly in its focus on outcomes and whole-of-government perspective. The OID report was found to reflect international 'best practice' in several respects, most notably in its reporting against specific targets. However other areas were seen to be in need of improvement, including the need for a more positive focus on the strengths and achievements of Indigenous people and the provision of more rigorous statistical analysis.

The main strengths of the OID report were seen to be the breadth of the information provided, disaggregation of data, time series analyses, clear identification of progress towards targets, information around successful initiatives, and its provision of information at different levels of detail and in different formats (text/commentary/charts and tables; hard and soft copy) so that it meets the needs of the variety of users.

The main limitations were around the reporting of data, need for greater analysis of the interconnections and linkages between indicators, and the need for a more strengths-based approach to be taken to reporting Indigenous experience. In regard to the reporting and analysis of data it was recognised by stakeholders that this is a mammoth undertaking on the part of the Secretariat and to a large extent they are constrained by the quality of data available. However it was suggested that in reporting on this data the writers of the report could make its problematic nature more explicit.

Usage of the OID report appears to be higher when it is first published. For most people the frequency of use depends on the type of work being done. The OID report is used in a variety of ways, including as a reference, for presentations and writing, submissions, briefings, and policy purposes. Stakeholders use both the print and web versions of the report. Each has its advantages but the search function of the web was highly valued. Some preferred the print version because they could annotate.

The review suggests there is relatively limited use of the OID report by Indigenous stakeholders and this is a gap in knowledge that needs further exploration given that the OID report is about and for these same stakeholders. While there has been considerable consultation with Indigenous people in relation to the OID report over the years there is still a perception among many stakeholders (both

Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that Indigenous input into the report needs to be more transparent and the report itself promoted in ways that can engage Indigenous communities.

The review provided a range of practical suggestions for improving the quality, reach and relevance of the OID report, including ways of increasing the usefulness of the report to Indigenous stakeholders.

PART TWO

Appendix A: Organisations and people consulted

The following people contributed to the review of the OID report through written comments and/or participation in phone or face-to-face conversations (small discussion groups and some one-on-one meetings). Individuals who completed a survey are not listed only their representative organisations.

In some cases (such as the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and Queensland Health) the person named below also facilitated feedback from others in the organisation and so this contribution represents their collective input.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW	John Ridley
Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet	John Wright
Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division, SA Department of the Premier and Cabinet	Caroline Batty (OID Working Group member)
Aboriginal Affairs Taskforce, Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development	George Pavloglou
Aboriginal Affairs Taskforce, Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development	Jenny Samms
Aboriginal Affairs Taskforce, Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development	Trevor Fleming
Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Communities	Helen Huszar-Welton
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	Glen Hansen
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit, Department of Community Safety	Michael Stubbins
Attorney-General's Department	
Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE), Charles Darwin University	Bronwyn Rossingh
Australian Human Rights Commission	Mick Gooda
Australian Indigenous Education Foundation	Andrew Penfold
Australian Institute of Criminology	Matthew Lyneham
Australian Institute of Criminology	Matthew Willis

Australian Institute of Family Studies	Jacqueline Stewart
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Dr Fadwa Al-Yaman (OID Working Group member)
Australian Local Government Association	
Australian National Audit Office	
Australian National University	
Australian National University and Centre for Independent Studies	Professor Helen Hughes
Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership	
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU	Dr Boyd Hunter
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU	Nikki Stephenson
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU	Dr Nicholas Biddle
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU	Professor Jon Altman
Centre for Australian Indigenous Knowledges, University of Southern Queensland	
Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University	Sue Reys
Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University	Lynette Mallard
Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University	Gerard McKelvie
Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University	Mattie Turnbull
Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University	Robin Barrington
Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body	Rod Little
Charles Darwin University	Lynda McCaffery
Charles Sturt University	Professor Jeannie Herbert
Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research	Professor Sven Silburn
Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research	Dr. Thelma Perso

Child Protection Research Program, Menzies School of Health Research	Kate McGuinness
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Board (Chair)	Professor Meredith Edwards
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Scientific Reference Group	Professor Ian Ring
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Scientific Reference Group	Dr Ching Choi
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Therese Bourke
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Kate Wright
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Helen Johnstone
COAG and Research Planning, Migration, COAG and Evidence Brand	
Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	Niran Gunawardena
Cooperative Research Centre – Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP)	John Guenther
Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia	Assoc. Professor Frank Morgan
Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute, Curtin University	Professor Sandy Thompson
Curtin University	Natasha Moore
Data and Research, Community Services Directorate (ACT)	Colin Farlow (OID Working Group member)
Demography and Indigenous Statistics, Queensland Treasury	Sandi Van Roo
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	
Department of Communities and Social Inclusion	Shane D 'Angelo
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)	
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Prem Thapa (OID Working Group member)
Department of Families, Housing, Community	Vicki Argiron

Services and Indigenous Affairs

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Anne Sattler
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Cath Halbert
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Stephen Powrie
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Chris Beitzel
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Barbara Middleton
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Deborah Katona
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	David Pollack
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Laura Bennetts-Kneebone
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Frances Byers
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Wayne Beswick
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Chanel Whalley
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Cathy Jackway
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Ming Toh
Department of Health and Community Services (by videoconference)	Mark Johnson
Early Childhood Education and Childcare	
Economic and Statistical Analysis Branch, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing	Craig Winfield
Education and Demographics, Menzies School of Health Research	John McKenzie
Education, Parent and Community Engagement, Menzies School of Health Research	Yalmay Yunupingu

Education, Parent and Community Engagement, Menzies School of Health Research	Julie Fraser
Equal Opportunity Commission (WA)	
Health in Social Policy Branch, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing	Sue Purtell
Housing and Hygiene Research Program, Menzies School of Health Research	Liz McDonald
Indigenous Analysis and Reporting, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Michelle Gourley
Indigenous Coordination Centre (SA)	Julia Gregory
Indigenous Economic Strategy Group, Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	Ross Ryan
Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, Queensland University of Technology	Dr. Chris Sarra
Indigenous Knowledge Systems Deakin University (Chairperson)	Professor Mark Rose
Indigenous Policy Branch, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Cwlth)	Dot Wright (OID Working Group member)
Indigenous Strategies, Cwlth Department of Human Services	Shane Hoffman
Institute Management Group, University of Newcastle	Professor John Lester
Jim-baa-yer Indigenous Higher Education Unit, Australian Catholic University	Naomi Wolfe
Koori Centre, University of Sydney	Lyn Riley
Kurungkurl Katitjin, Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Edith Cowan University	Professor Colleen Hayward
National Congress of Australia's First Peoples	Scott Avery (OID Working Group observer)
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)	Dr Sophie Couzos
National Catholic Education Commission	
National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE)	Jason Glanville
National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)	Tom Karmel

National Reform and Intergovernmental Strategy, Aboriginal Affairs NSW	Kristy Delaney
National Reform and Intergovernmental Strategy, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet	Meg Montgomery (OID Working Group member)
NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet	Dana Aspin
NT Department of Health and Ageing	Jenny Norris
The Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University	Dr Payi Linda Ford
The Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University	Assoc. Professor Ruth Wallace
Northern Land Council	Robert Dalton
Northern Land Council	Sarah Barr
NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services	Linda Weatherhead (OID Working Group member)
NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services	Camille Damaso
NT Department of Justice	Caroline White
Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services	Rebecca Barnes
Office of Early Childhood, Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	Jenny Dean
Office of the Commissioner, Queensland Police Service	Lillian Bensted
Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University	Cheryl Godwell
OATSIH – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing	Debra Reid
OATSIH – Health Systems Analysis, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing	Paul Linden
OATSIH – Health Systems Analysis, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing	Kirrily Harrison
Oodgeroo Unit of the Queensland University of Technology	Assoc. Professor Anita Lee Hong
OxFam	Andrew Meehan
Performance and Evaluation Branch, OIPC Group,	Matthew James (OID Working Group

FaHCSIA	member)
Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services Coalition	Thea Watson
Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services Coalition	Garth Morgan
Qld Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs	Daniel Blundell
Qld Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services	Michael Power
Qld Department of Education, Training and Employment	Kevin Sirriss
Qld Department of Environment and Resource Management	Alex Ackfun
Qld Department of Housing and Public Works	Ron Fogarty
Qld Department of Natural Resources and Mines	Ken Carse
Qld Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts	Andy Gray
Queensland Health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Branch	Daniel Williamson
Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University	Professor Owen Stanley
SA Attorney-General's Department	Sally Cunningham
SA Department of Communities and Social Inclusion	Julie White
SA Department of Education and Child Development	Vicki Wilson
SA Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology	Bill Wilson
SA FaHCSIA	Graham Brice
SA Department of Health and Ageing	Vickie Dodd
SA Department of Premier and Cabinet	Ben Stirling
SA Department of the Premier and Cabinet	John Rice
School of Education, Charles Darwin University	Dr Peter Kell
Social Policy, Qld Department of the Premier and Cabinet	Ainslie Barron (OID Working Group member)
Social Policy Branch, Department of Premier and	Simone Gianfrotta (OID Working Group

Cabinet (Vic)	member)
Strategic Policy Branch, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing	Tarja Saastamoinen
Strategy and Reform, Aboriginal Affairs NSW	Peter Swain
Student Services, Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University	Jeannie Morrison
Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet (by videoconference)	Nick Evans (OID Working Group member)
Umpi Korumba Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation for Housing	Mary Proctor
University of Tasmania	Clair Anderson
Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC)	
Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	Susan Dennett
Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	Tim Fitzgerald
Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet	Thea Snow
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)	Karen Toohey
WA Department of Education	Alan Dodson
WA Department of Education	Dale Miller
WA Department of Education	Rosemary Cahill
WA Department of Health	Geoff Davis
WA Department of Indigenous Affairs	Garrick Stanley (OID Working Group member)
WA Department of Indigenous Affairs	Steven Jones
WA Department of Indigenous Affairs	Gemma Archer
WA Telethon Institute for Child Health Research	Glenn Pearson

Appendix B: Survey questions and analysis

Survey questions

1. What is the name of your organisation?
2. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?
 - No
 - Yes, Aboriginal
 - Yes, Torres Strait Islander
3. In which industry area do you work?
4. What are your main sources of information on Indigenous disadvantage and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people?
5. Do you use the web version of the OID
 - Yes
 - No
6. Which parts of the OID report have you downloaded and either printed or saved for later use?
 - Overview
 - Main report
 - Attachment tables
 - Fact Sheets
 - Other
7. Which parts of the OID report have you looked at online?
 - Overview
 - Main Report
 - Attachment Tables
 - Fact Sheets
 - Other
8. Do you use the print version of the OID report?
 - Yes
 - No
9. How do you access the print version of the report?
 - Receive it in the mail
 - Borrow from a colleague
 - Borrow from a library
 - Other
10. In the past year have you used the OID report at least once?
 - Yes
 - No

11. In the past year, about how many times have you used the...

Overview
Main Report
Attachment Tables
Fact sheets
Other

12. In the past year, what was the main purpose in using the...

Overview
Main report
Attachment Tables
Fact Sheets
Other

13. To what extent was the part or parts used useful?

Overview	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Main report	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Attachment Tables	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Fact Sheets	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Other	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)

14. To what extent were the part or parts you used readable?

Overview	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Main report	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Attachment Tables	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Fact Sheets	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)
Other	(Not at all/to a minor extent/to a moderate extent/to a major extent)

15. What was the one best feature of the part or parts you used?

Overview
Main report
Attachment Tables
Fact sheets
Other

16. How could the part or parts you used be improved?

Overview
Main report
Attachment Tables
Fact Sheets
Other

17. From your point of view, what is the optimal frequency for the OID report?

Once every ____year(s)

18. What months of the year do you use the OID report most?

19. Please make any other comments you may have about the OID report here:

Surveys

Because of the relatively small number of responses the findings are reported as whole numbers rather than as percentages. The number of respondents precluded any bivariate analyses. The findings are of interest mainly because they are consistent with the feedback provided by stakeholders in the interviews and discussions.

Respondents were asked (Question 4) to indicate their main sources of information on Indigenous disadvantage and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The responses show information is being sourced from a wide range of publications and reports. The most commonly cited in order from most to least commonly used were: the ABS reports (13 respondents), OID (10) and research papers (7).

Use of the OID report

Most of the respondents used the web version of the report. Of the 33 respondents to Question 5, which asked about usage of the web version of the OID report, 22 indicated they used the web version. Question 6 asked which parts of the OID report respondents had downloaded. Nine respondents reported they had downloaded the review, 11 had downloaded the main report, 12 had downloaded the attachment tables, eight had downloaded the Fact Sheets and three did not specify which sections they had downloaded.

In response to Question 7, which asked about the sections of the OID report which respondents had looked at online (as opposed to the sections downloaded), equal numbers of respondents (18) said they used the Overview and main report online, 14 indicated they used the attachment tables online and 10 used the fact sheets online.

Twenty-two respondents indicated they use the print version of the OID report. For those who use the print version the main way of receiving this is via mail, followed by borrowing from a colleague. Only two people reported accessing the OID report from a library.

Twenty-seven of the 35 respondents reported using the OID report at least once in the past year. Two people reported using the Overview 12 times; two people reported using the main report 15 times and two people reported using the attachment tables 20 or more times. One person used the Fact Sheets seven times. These were the most frequent occurrences of usage for each component of the OID report. By contrast, seven people had used the Overview once in the past year, four people had used the main report once, four people had used the attachment tables once, and five people had used the fact sheets once in the past year. In between were varying usage levels for each section with no particular pattern evident. As these numbers are so small, they need to be read in conjunction with the findings from the interviews and discussions.

Respondents were asked (Question 12) about the main purpose in using each component of the OID report in the past year. The main purpose was to obtain data for briefs and reports. One respondent wrote that the report was used:

to identify key trends, themes and issues in the report that are relevant to the work I am doing, to get a sense of the key information in the main report and where I can find further detail.

Variations of this response are reflected in other responses to this question.

Survey responses did not show much difference in terms of reasons for use across the different sections of the report.

There was broad consensus among the 31 respondents to Question 17, which asked about the optimal frequency of the report's publication. Fifteen people preferred publication every two years and seven suggested annual publication would be better. Others proposed three years, or even less frequently.

Question 18 asked respondents to indicate which part of the year they used the OID report most. The most common response was 'once every two years'.

Usefulness of the OID report

Question 13 asked about the usefulness of each section of the report. The various components of the report were, on average, seen to be of moderate usefulness. Figure 1¹⁴ shows that on average the main report and the attachment tables were seen to be of most use. (A score of 3 in this figure means that the OID was judged to be 'moderately' useful.) The fact sheets were seen to be less useful.

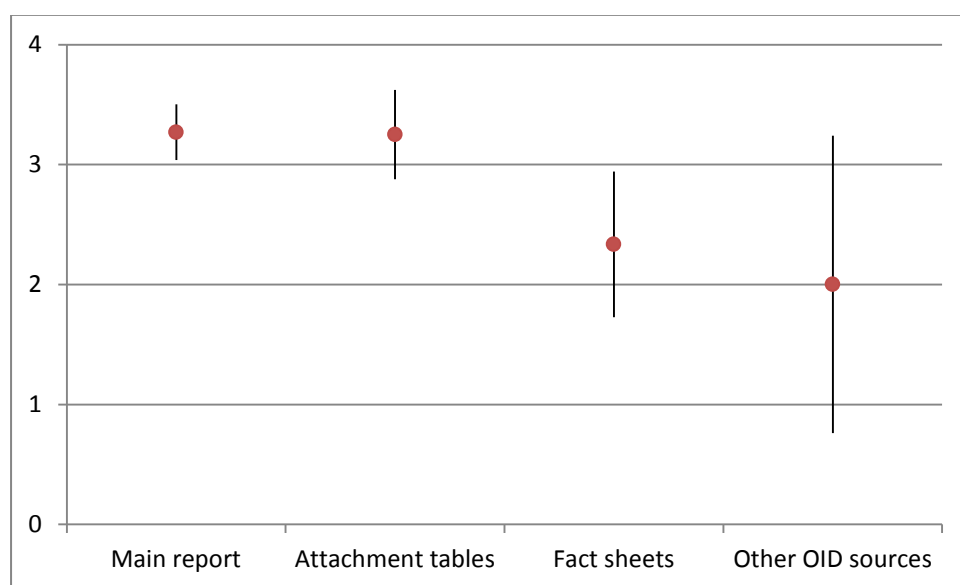


Figure 3 Average levels of usefulness of various components of the OID, showing 95% confidence intervals

Question 14 asked about readability of the various elements of the OID. Figure 2 shows that on average the components were moderately readable. (Only three people found the attachment tables (1) and fact sheets (2) to be 'not at all' readable.)

¹⁴ The mean is represented by the circle at the midpoint of the vertical lines shown in Figure 1. The vertical line indicates the range of the 95% confidence interval around the mean. Where a vertical line does not overlap with another, there is a statistically significant difference between the means. A score of 1 substantively means 'Not at all useful', 2 = 'Useful to a minor extent', 3 = 'Useful to a moderate extent' and a score of 4 = 'Useful to a major extent'. The scale extends to zero to enable the full confidence interval range to be represented.

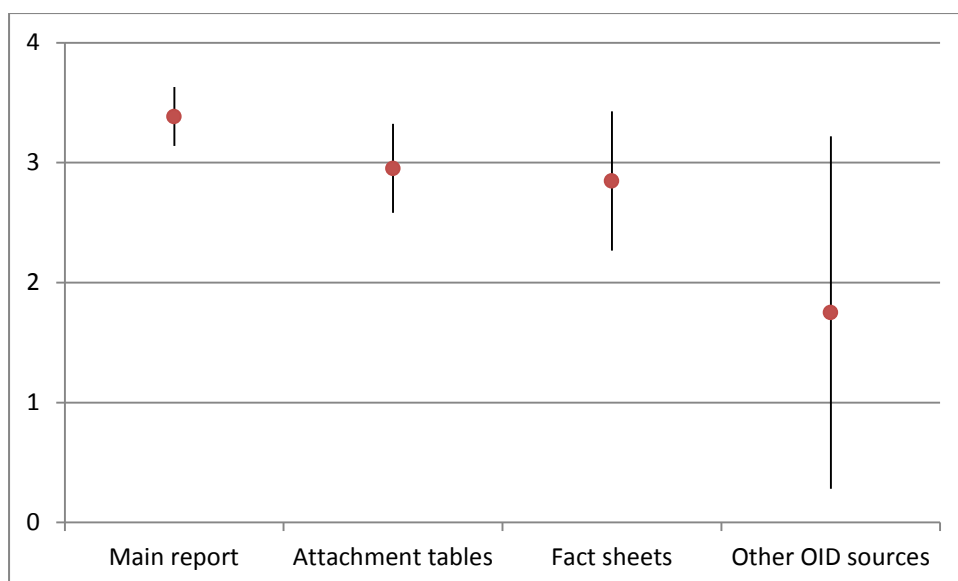


Figure 4 Average levels of readability of various components of the OID, showing 95% confidence intervals

Question 15 asked respondents to identify the best feature about each section of the OID report. There was a wide range of responses to this question. The best feature of the Overview was identified variously as being the policy overview, the Closing the Gap targets, the summaries of key data, the things that work, and the fact that it is easy to read and reference. One respondent commented that the Overview ‘helps determine whether the relevant section of the report is useful for my immediate purposes’. Another suggested that the best feature of the Overview was that it indicates any changes and limitations.

For the main report the best features were said to be its jurisdictional comparison, the fact that it provides data that readers might not otherwise have access to, the breadth of indicators, the overview of data, the evidence-based research, information around successful national initiatives and clear identification of progress towards targets, and the detailed information it provides regarding programs, outcomes and current situations.

Fewer people commented on the attachment tables although one respondent liked the fact that it is ‘often easier to access ABS data from the tables than from the ABS website’. The fact sheets were commented on by five respondents and they shared a liking for the quick and succinct contextual overview provided.

Suggestions for improvement

Question 16 provided an opportunity for respondents to suggest improvements to the OID report. Question 19 also provided an opportunity for additional comments, most of which continued the theme of how the OID report might be improved. The main suggestions for improvement (based on responses to Questions 16 and 19) were:

- The OID report needs a good graphic designer (the layout is ‘clunky’ and boring).
- The navigation of the main report needs to be easier. Suggestions included:
 - having a summary of key findings of the whole report. ‘The Overview is not correctly

named because it is a chapter on a set of specific indicators not an overview of the entire report’.

- having an easy-to-use index or searchable table of contents.
 - providing better referencing particularly between the tables and discussion.
 - making the OID shorter and ‘have fewer bits of irrelevant data’.
 - having a better way to navigate the collection of unpublished data that is provided for public scrutiny: ‘You need to know the report extremely well to find data’.
 - having the attachment tables downloadable as Excel documents would facilitate analysis.
- There needs to be more contextual information. More linkages need to be made between the different indicators and their relative importance.
 - The OID report should use the same data and indicators as other reports. Currently these are not aligned with other major sources of information.
 - To avoid producing a huge report every two years, perhaps there could be a rolling update of various parts released, say, quarterly. A consolidated report and over view could be released every two years.
 - Given that the OID report has been around for some years now it would be timely to have a trend analysis in relation to a range of statistics. This could also be used to tell a comparative story, state by state.
 - The main report is probably too long. Consideration should be given to a balance of information between the main report and attachment tables. This should be supported by more common formatting in the main report, such as the five key facts in point form.
 - Information on initiatives that support the outcomes – linked to the case studies – would be useful so there is a better indication of whether these initiatives are one-off projects or sustained.
 - The report could present governance and leadership building blocks as an enabler of other building blocks rather than a stand-alone component. The case studies could then demonstrate how governance and leadership contributed to specific targets.
 - Exercise more care in the assumptions around literacy. The report implies it is only concerned with English literacy but many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have literacy in other languages.

Appendix C: Telephone interview questions and analysis

Questions

Background

1. Name:
2. Name of organisation:
3. Broad industry area in which the you work:
[eg Professional; Scientific and Technical Services; Administrative and Support Services; Public Administration and Safety; Education and Training; Health Care and Social Assistance; Arts and Recreation Services; Other Services]
4. What are your main sources of information on Indigenous disadvantage and outcomes for Indigenous people?

Your use of the report

5. How did you find out about the report? (e.g. web, media, colleagues, OID information session, postcard, email, the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, other sources?)
6. How often do you use the OID report?
7. What is your main reason for using the report?
8. Do you use the report directly or source the OID information from elsewhere (eg quoted in other reports? Obtained from colleagues? Other sources?)
9. Which sections do you use? [the detailed main report? the Overview? The fact sheets? Other parts?]
10. Do you use the online version of the report or use a print copy? (If print copy, how did you receive this?)
11. How do you find the website? (eg Is it easy to use?)
12. Do you have any comments about the report's accessibility or presentation?
13. Do you have any comments on the level of detail contained in the report? (eg too much? too little? about the right amount of detail for your purposes)

Usefulness of the report

14. How useful do you find each of the following and why do you think this?
 - a. breadth of indicators – Do you find these useful? Why or why not?
 - b. time series analysis
 - c. disaggregation by state/territory and remoteness
 - d. presentation of the data in charts, tables, commentary

- e. attachment tables
 - f. the 'things that work' case studies
 - g. contextual information
15. What do you see as the main strength of the OID report? What other strengths, if any, do you think it has?
16. What is its main limitation? What other limitations, if any, do you think it has?
17. Is there anything missing from the report that could potentially be included?

Improving the report

18. To what extent does the report meet your needs? (thinking back to your main purpose in using the report)
19. Do you have any suggestions for improving the report's
- a. content?
 - b. readability?
 - c. presentation?
 - d. accessibility? (that is, how easily you can navigate the website? Do you think the different ways of presenting the information helps make the information accessible to a broader audience?)
 - e. frequency and timing?
20. Are there any other comments you would like to make about any aspect of the OID report?

Phone interviews

Forty-four people representing the following organisations contributed to the review of the OID report through a phone conversation.

- WA Department of Education
- Qld Department of Environment and Resource Management
- Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, Queensland University of Technology
- Riawunna Centre, University of Tasmania
- Kurungkurl Katitjin, Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Edith Cowan University
- Koori Centre, University of Sydney
- Australian National University and Centre for Independent Studies
- Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Communities
- Australian Indigenous Education Foundation

- Oodgeroo Unit of the Queensland University of Technology
- WA Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Institute Management Group, University of Newcastle
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
- Australian Human Rights Commission
- Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body
- Indigenous Strategies, Department of Human Services (Cwlth)
- National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE)
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems Deakin University (Chairperson)
- Australian Institute of Criminology
- Jim-baa-yer Indigenous Higher Education Unit, Australian Catholic University
- Charles Sturt University
- Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute, Curtin University
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)
- SA Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Data and Research, Community Services Directorate (ACT)
- NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services
- NT Department of Justice
- Indigenous Policy Branch, Department of the Premier and Cabinet (Cwlth)
- Indigenous Coordination Centre (SA)
- NT Department of Health and Ageing
- Oxfam
- Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (QLD) (provided written answers to the phone interview questions)
- NT Chief Minister's Office (provided written responses to the phone interview questions)

As the list above suggests, interviewees were from a wide range of industry areas, including health, economics, employment, education and vocational training, public administration, housing, social policy, criminal justice and human rights.

The main sources of information used by interviewees were similar to those used by survey respondents with the most commonly cited being the OID report, ABS data, AIHW reports, Closing the

Gap Clearinghouse publications. Various other government data sources and reports were also used although less frequently, including:

- Annual reports from the NSW Education Department
- Native Title implementation reports
- Standing Committee of Attorneys-General Working Group on Indigenous Justice reports
- NSW Department of Justice reports
- Attorney Generals Department reports
- State and Territory Government reports
- Prime Minister's reports
- Intervention reports
- Government department annual reports
- Reports from the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous communities
- Social Justice Report
- NCVER reports
- NAPLAN reports
- COAG Reform Council reports
- Various public and private sector reports
- NIRA performance reports.

National and international journals and internal research were also cited as sources of information. Nine interviewees referred to community consultations, workshops, meetings, field trips and regular contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as sources of information.

Sources mentioned by interviewees but not by survey respondents included research publications by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health publications and University of Technology Sydney Jumbanna Indigenous House of Learning; the Australian HealthInfoNet, Indigenous newspapers, the Social Justice Commissioner reports; data from police and juvenile agencies, the National Congress, and the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

Interviewees commented that the sources of information drawn on at any given time depended on the nature and specific focus of the work they were doing.

One interviewee reported that his department uses its own administration data, which looks at the number of people on income support, different types of income support payments, debts. This data is collected for a variety of reasons and purposes and is not publicly available. Similarly, an interviewee in the early childhood sector cited their main source as being information they collect themselves: 'A lot of the information we require is operational, and it's at a point in time – we collect data in 2011 for use in 2012'.

Knowledge of the report

Interviewees were asked how they found about the OID report. Some knew about it because they are or have been involved in some way. For example, they might be contributing data; providing case studies; being asked to comment on a briefing; being consulted early on in the development of the framework and in regular discussions with the Secretariat about the report; or serve as a member of the OID Working Group.

Others found out about the report from the web, media or media releases, colleagues, secondees from the Secretariat, from having the report sent to them or to the organisation/institute, through the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Some knew about the report because they need to use it as part of their work or because they have worked in areas related to the report. Two interviewees had not heard about the report and only discovered it when contacted by ACER to take part in the interview. One interviewee finds out about the OID report through the Australian Policy Online alerts.

Use of the OID report

A common approach by government staff reporting to ministers or preparing media releases on the progress of their state or territory is to scan the report first for any references to the particular state or territory and consolidate this information into a document. When the report is first released there is a keen interest among jurisdictions in knowing what is being said about their own particular state or territory. The Overview is also considered useful for these purposes. The content is viewed to see if it is being reported fairly, and whether the state or territory is being portrayed positively or negatively. Some government stakeholders will also then look at the 'things that work' examples – 'it's certainly nice to see those things recognised'.

Interviewees were asked how often they use the OID report. For most people the frequency of use depended on the type of work they were doing. Examples were given of potential use:

- 'regularly when writing public addresses or journal articles'
- 'once a month, when writing'
- 'mainly when writing a report or a submission'
- 'different frequency with different roles, more frequently in a policy role'
- 'every couple of months, when doing major pieces of work or when preparing briefings or submissions on behalf of the Department'
- two to three times a year, depending on why the information is needed
- 'infrequently, there will be reference to it around the time a briefing is coming out – when people are looking for things quickly' – and then less often or not at all after that
- 'very regularly – every time I speak publicly, every time I write something'.

Usage of the report also appears to be higher when it is first published. For example:

- 'It varies. I use it regularly when it first comes out and a little less as it gets older'
- 'Quite often early on, on a weekly basis, after a year maybe monthly'

- 'On average once a week. A lot when it's just been published'.

Usage ranges from almost never using it to occasional use through to constant use.

In response to a question about their main reason for using the report, interviewees reported that they used the OID report as a reference, for presentations and writing, or for the data. Only one specifically mentioned using it for policy purposes.

Reference, background or context

A common pattern of usage is to first look at the OID report to see what the government is measuring on a particular topic, then go to other sources (such as the ABS or AIHW) to find out more specific information about the topic. Several interviewees use the report in this way as a 'pointer' to other references, data and sources. Another interviewee commented that the OID report is particularly useful for seeing how other sectors are doing. The OID report is also used by a small number of interviewees to check their own work against. For example, a person might be writing a report and will then go back to the OID to check their information.

Examples included:

- 'I use it as a quick reference for an area where I don't have specialist knowledge'
- 'It provides guidance – it's a touchstone, it reminds us of the major issues and keeps reminding us that there are still things yet to be achieved'
- 'To see the state of play, where progress is at, what's improved. Generally it's doom and gloom but it does try to put a positive spin and gives examples'
- 'It tells where things are trending'
- 'I use the report for baseline purposes'

Several interviewees use the OID report for policy and project work where there are references to the Indigenous community: 'we use it as a resource or a reference point. We also use it for speeches and presentations and submissions to government. The OID report is also a reference point for us.'

Writing, presentations, submissions

- 'I use it when I'm making speeches or submissions'
- 'I use it for my keynotes'
- One academic prescribes the OID report as pre-reading for her lectures.
- One person uses the report as a means of stimulating discussion in staff conversation forums: 'I used it to make the point that the Australia we're all living in is like this, and I can point people who want to know the facts and stats to [the report]'

One stakeholder uses the OID report when giving lectures and tells her students about why and how they can access the OID data and to go to the Report for their presentations.

Data

Interviewees use data from the attachment tables as a source of data for submissions, identification of need; for checking data on aspects of Indigenous wellbeing that are not health related; for business planning, presentations and articles; for conferences.

One interviewer uses the OID report as an example of what not to do from the perspective of critical social commentary. Most data is secondary and some data are not engaged with critically enough.

Research

Interviewees use the OID report to cross check research based on government and other reports and field work, to identify how things have changed or are progressing; and to back up what they are doing around Indigenous disadvantage in education, health and access. They use the evidence to support what they are researching. When asked if they use the report directly or via other sources, most interviewees indicated they use the report directly, mainly for unpublished data although one interviewee made the point that often the cuts of data are too broad and it would be useful to have data disaggregated further.

- 'It gets to influence so many other discussions and reports that you get to know it by osmosis as much as anything else.'
- 'I might source information from other publications where the OID report is quoted.'
- 'In some circumstances we use it directly, in others it's a reference point. Because we don't do dedicated policy work with the Indigenous community, it's often wrapped into other work that we're doing.'
- 'If I refer to the report I use it directly. The report itself is of course a secondary use of data – it quotes from the AIHW and other sources. It's a compendium – not a primary source of research data. If we were to go to the primary source we'd go to the AIHW.'

Sections used

Most interviewees use the whole report with the Overview being the most commonly used section. The Overview appears to provide a starting point for those who are pressed for time and want some insight into the rest of the document although several made the point that the Overview was not a genuine summary. A frequently made point was that usage depends on the purpose. For example, the overall report might be used when a researcher is preparing an academic paper and needs evidence in the form of statistics to back up the points being made. Some interviewees found the case studies to be particularly useful; others found the fact sheets excellent for a quick reference, as a way into the more detailed report, but also as material to take to stakeholder meetings and when doing presentations. Some like the case studies because they 'give practical and localised information'; others do not use the case studies because they are perceived to be one-off programs that are not supported by evidence.

One participant describes her use of the OID Overview and main report in this way:

I would use the Overview a lot, but I also use chapters of the main report, depending on what I'm looking for. When I lecture in health I do want to touch on education, but I mainly want to talk about healthy lives, and that will lead me to want to know about

mortality rates and that sort of thing, so I'd go to the relevant chapter. I do like the way you can skip to a particular chapter.

Participants use the report in a range of ways without a clear pattern emerging. So much depends on the purpose at a particular time, the user's needs, their preferred way of obtaining information, their access to other sources. Stakeholders working in particular areas of expertise will go to the chapters with information about those areas but, once there, differ in how they use the information. Most stakeholders read what is relevant to their core business.

Print or online

Most interviewees use both the online and print versions, with not many using only the print version. While some reasons were given for preferring one over the other ultimately this seems to be more about personal preference. The main reasons given for using the online version are because it is searchable and good for snapshots of data or copying and pasting for presentations.

- 'It's easier for me to download the whole thing to my computer. I work from home and I only have a limited amount of data download so it's easier. I don't print a copy – I don't mind reading it from the screen.'
- 'I do a cut and paste of information, a snapshot and put it into reports or presentations.'

Two people said that they use the online version but would prefer a hard copy because it can be annotated. Some people like to have their own copy to use as a quick resource. One interviewee finds the print copy easier to use because the quality of the index makes searching easy. Two interviewees preferred the printed version because they are not as adept online.

- 'I have a print copy of the Overview as one of a number of resources I use ... the online version is more used by our policy people, because it's easier for them to search. I tend to download a copy of the report, read it and highlight it, and then carry the copy around to use as a reference document if people are asking questions.'

Those who use both print and online versions cited the search function of the online version and the fact that they like the print copy in front of them. The main report is seen as too large to download in its entirety. The Overview is more likely to be downloaded than the main report. Examples of how interviewees are using both versions:

- One has the hard copy on her bookshelf and likes to read this, but also used the e-version quite extensively when quoting from the publication.
- One uses the printed document and online appendix tables.
- One uses the online version because it's searchable and she can look for key terms but the print version is more familiar.
- 'I'd like a paper copy, but I'm not sure how to get one. I like to read that way, but when I'm writing I prefer to have the information online so I can cut and paste or add a link. So I like both depending on what I'm doing, but online is good because you can get hold of it anytime.'
- 'If I have a submission or a speech to write it's usually the online version, but I actually quite like having the print copy on the shelf. There's something almost more authoritative about the

hard copy’.

- One organisation only receives one copy so staff use the online version as the hard copy is not always at hand.
- One interviewer uses the spreadsheets not the actual PDF unless wanting a direct quote.

Website use

Only three of those interviewed had not used the online version of the report. The general consensus among interviewees is that the website is easy to use and accessible. Commonly used words were that it is ‘compatible’, ‘user friendly’; ‘it’s easy to find what you are looking for’; ‘easy to negotiate’; ‘navigable’. Two frequent comments were that the online version has a search function which means it is quicker and easier to go online to search than to try and find something using the print version; and that the report is usable because of the way it is divided into sections. Interviewees liked the fact that the PDFs were in easy-to-use separate sections. A user can go straight to a particular chapter or appendix and download that section without having to download the whole report. One interviewee commented that the links are straightforward and all are in working order.

It was suggested that useability could be improved:

- ‘It is hard to navigate around attachment tables. You need to know the report extremely well to find data otherwise it can take too long to find useful information’
- ‘Spreadsheets could be easier. You have to know the name of the report.’

Accessibility and presentation of the report

Interviewees were invited to comment on the accessibility and presentation of the report. As indicated earlier, most found the report to be easily accessible, commenting that the separate sections and chapters make it easier to find and read information. However it was also noted that the report is quite large.

One researcher who did not know about the fact sheets prior to this review had since tried unsuccessfully to find them, which suggests they are not as accessible as they could be. Another asked how and where the OID reports are distributed. It appears that a copy might have come to her organisation’s library but she was not sure.

A number of interviewees responded that they mainly use the Overview, which is well presented for their needs. When they do use the main report they found the format ‘pretty good, accessible and user friendly’. According to many of the interviewees the report uses well-rounded and direct language and the information is laid out in an attractive and organised manner. One researcher said it is important to ‘keep the linear format to show trends’.

The report has been described as a ‘credible’ document that is useful for mapping trends and ‘can close the gap between the research and thinking’. One stakeholder commented that the report demonstrates a ‘need to understand and appreciate the data’ and its accessibility means it is quick and easy to use when searching for quotes to include in presentations.

Some interviewees who felt the report was inaccessible argued that:

- 'It's far too long, far too boring and inaccessible to Indigenous people, across the spectrum; few Indigenous academics have the technical quantitative skills to interrogate the report and certainly even fewer in the community would find this reporting accessible'.
- 'Colleagues and Indigenous participants in policy debates ... tell me they find the volume difficult to use. It requires an index for users not accustomed to working with similar reports.'

Level of detail

Many interviewees believed the report's level of detail was sufficient for their purposes and that there are other sources if more information is needed. They mention seeking out primary sources or other government documents to cross-check or source additional information.

The Overview provides 'a quick snapshot' for users needing a less-detailed summary and the main report goes into more detail to enable users to drill down as needed. One interviewee said 'the structure of the report means that readers can access the level of detail that they require' and that the format is helpful for researchers needing to access relevant information for their purposes. The information on specific areas can be useful for some users who look at trends and long term results over time. These users often do not have the resources to locate this data themselves and rely on the report.

In one case the report was seen as a 'driver for change because it is not seen as a Commonwealth report but for all governments', which has driven the improvement of data collection. One interviewee thought that in the case of data analysis: 'the more detail the better' and found the report to be adequate for his purposes.

There was a view that the case studies helped bring some of the data to life. Sometimes the framework of a particular report can 'disperse the picture and make people feel disconnected', whereas the level of detail in the case studies can engage users and provide a more positive framework around the data.

One stakeholder believes 'the analysis of the data is too simple and needs to be more rigorous. The simple cross tab analysis does not yield useful information on complex and significant issues.' Other interviewees said the report did not go into enough detail in specific areas and failed to mention significant factors (such as not mentioning NAPLAN in the education section). One interviewee thought there was a stronger focus on state and territories and not enough detailed information on remote areas. Another believed there needed to be more detailed comparative data, such as student data pertaining to school completions with extrapolation to destinations the following year, with a breakdown into Indigenous/non-Indigenous/migrant categories linked to regional employment statistics to demonstrate the effectiveness of regional universities in keeping young people in regional locations.

Usefulness of the report

The interviewees who answered this question commented that the report was useful overall for its clarity and the accessibility. One stakeholder said the whole report was 'all useful in different ways –

you can go back from 2005 to 2011, you can see how funding is distributed to remote and very remote, you can see across the States, see the population data in charts and tables' and interpret the information according to your own perspective.

According to another interviewee, the most important aspect of the report is the study of trend lines. Part of his work involves looking at headline indicators to see where the improvements are happening and he relies on the report to provide credible data.

Breadth of indicators

Many stakeholders found the indicators satisfactory or appropriate for their purposes, although they also believed that the indicators needed to be reviewed. One stated 'I don't want anything but broad indicators when I look at other people's areas' and many others felt that the broad range was suitable for a national overview. Operationally they could find other sources with more detailed information regarding their specific area when needed. Some interviewees believed the purpose of the OID report was to provide an overview of national statistics and leave the interpretation and analysis to the users, in contrast with other contributors to the review (for example, in the discussions) who called for more analysis and more connections to be made between outcomes and policy and across indicators.

Several stakeholders cited the broad range of indicators as one of the strengths of the report and said that they provide context: 'It's good to know the big picture. You need to know the big picture to know that initiatives in one place aren't in conflict or competition with those in others.' This data was also considered useful for measurability and comparability. Some researchers felt that the consistency enabled more effective historical documentation, as information for comparison could reliably be found in OID reports dating back several years.

According to one stakeholder 'indicators have to evolve with information from year to year' and the indicators need to be reviewed to retain relevance, whereas another interviewee believed the 'measures change each report cycle making it difficult to make any comparisons over time'.

Other comments were that the indicators are 'too quantitative and diminish the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', particularly the indicators relating to health. The indicators need to be reviewed to better reflect relevance to Aboriginal people: 'Our mob just gets reviewed and reported on so often that we don't know what they're saying about us'. The indicators, and the OID report as a whole, should meet the needs of the community, rather than meeting 'the needs of the politicians', according to one interviewee. Another stakeholder argued that the OID report is a reflection of the 'incoherence of the Indigenous affairs policy framework' due to its lack of Aboriginal input. One researcher in the health services field believed there was not enough focus on the spiritual or cultural side of health and wellbeing in any of the indicators.

Several researchers referred to two competing frameworks operating within the report, one initial framework and a more recent COAG-imposed framework that is affecting the relevance of the content and indicators and causing some users to question the purpose of the OID report. Another interviewee questioned the categories used for comparison and believed 'many of the indicators used are derivatives rather than real data'. For example, the OID emphasis is on the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students but 'this "gap" is minimised by including passing Indigenous

students in the “gap” rather than comparing all passing students – Indigenous and non-Indigenous and failing Indigenous (and other) students’.

One stakeholder stated that there needed to be clearer indicators of disadvantage, since that is the focus of the report. Another thought there would be a ‘more nuanced account if the disadvantage gap was also described in terms of the gap between disadvantaged Indigenous people and disadvantaged non-Indigenous people’. Also ‘there is no distinction made under the heading of “non-Indigenous” – the figures don’t allow for important distinctions, such as the African refugee population as opposed to the European-descended.’ This issue was also raised in one of the discussions where it was pointed out that one of the most disadvantaged groups of all are Sudanese refugees.

According to one researcher, there is ‘not much chance of changing [the indicators], given they are COAG defined’. They would like to see some indicators expanded, such as health indicators, but the scope of indicators in that field is too big and would require a committee to sift through for relevant ones. Since there are primary sources already available, it would not be worthwhile dramatically altering the OID indicators of health as the purpose of this report is just to ‘bring things together in an easy-to-use single report’.

Time series analysis

Most interviewees believed the time series analysis of data is useful and provides an indication of progress, or otherwise. One stakeholder believed the report would be meaningless without the time series analysis, as there needs to be something with which to compare the latest data. While the need to compare current with previous statistics is essential to gauge progression, many interviewees believe the report’s emphasis on state by state comparison is unhelpful, and that longitudinal figures are a necessary inclusion in the report. Several stakeholders would like the report to go further with the time series analysis, both further back and in more depth, particularly in remote areas.

Disaggregation by state/territory and remoteness

Most of the stakeholders who chose to answer this question believe that further disaggregation would be useful to gain a clearer picture across the nation. Several interviewees stated that disaggregation is just as important to include in the report as time series analysis in order to develop an overarching view of progress. It is ‘good for offering a more nuanced idea of what is going on in a particular area, and for comparison purposes’.

According to one stakeholder, disaggregation allows for a specific area focus if required, and it ‘also allows a focus on an area more removed from the local context, which is really useful when trying to present a more dispassionate approach to a local issue’. It allows for comparison to another area that may be experiencing similar results and determination of whether a specific policy is working in one area and not in another.

Another benefit of disaggregation is the ability to compare data when working on a national level. One interviewee works for a national organisation and found the disaggregation useful to determine areas that are experiencing higher success rates, for example participation rates in early childhood spaces are higher in remote localities than in urban or regional areas, enabling the organisation to target specific areas for improvement. This information would not be available without disaggregated data.

Some interviewees did not believe that disaggregation was as effective as it could be. They were interested in the data specifically targeting their local area, rather than sifting through information ranging across a variety of regions with such differing key comparative factors. One claimed that 'smaller area data is far more useful to develop policy. State averages and national remoteness data distorts the story on issues.' However disaggregation will be constrained by the data sources.

According to one representative of a national organisation based in NSW:

- 'it's useful to know what's happening in NSW, but also as a national organisation we've got more than 5000 young people a year coming through this place from every corner of the country so in terms of preparing the ground for groups from different parts of the country it's useful to have an easy-to-access snapshot of the situation these people are coming from.'

Another stakeholder reported a similar experience:

- 'At the moment we're doing some work around the Victorian population and other states; it helps to explain to people that geography really does have an effect ... the national level doesn't reflect differences across Australia, and if you're ... trying to understand what the differences are between the experience in Victoria and the experience in the Territory – you can't do that without disaggregated data. And having it all in one report makes it more explicable, instead of having a number of organisations producing state-based reports.'

Another issue that has been identified by an interviewee is the problem of categorisation. State and territory data are often used for comparisons, but the focus has shifted to 'remoteness', which causes issues when trying to compare data historically or nationally. Some stakeholders believe there should be less emphasis on remoteness as, in itself, it should not be held responsible for certain results. Against this other interviewees suggest that there should be a more in depth and targeted focus on remoteness.

Presentation of the data in charts, tables, commentary

For many interviewees, the inclusion of charts, tables and commentary allowed readers to examine data from different points of view. Those stakeholders who answered this question were mostly pleased with the layout and presentation of the different forms of data, suggesting the information is presented clearly and is easy to read, with an appropriate balance between charts and tables and commentaries.

One interviewee believed that having access to descriptive commentary alongside the statistical data would enable the reader to incorporate the information more easily without being daunted by statistics. From a readability perspective, one interviewee said 'all those things help' to interpret the data.

Another stakeholder particularly liked the charts showing state/territory comparison, saying 'it's a useful cross-jurisdictional comparison [but] there could be possibly more on remoteness'. One interviewee commented that the graphics were poor and difficult to read and believed that the graphs often lacked accurate or up to date information.

Attachment tables

Most interviewees who answered this question were in favour of the attachment tables and found them helpful. One interviewee stated that these are the most useful element of the report along with being the most difficult to navigate. Another believed the tables were very useful in electronic format for research purposes and presented a different perspective on the data and more detailed information. One stakeholder said 'I use the attachment tables more than the main report' and felt that the format was well suited for a data analyst.

The data contained in the attachments was described by one stakeholder as 'unpublished and normally hard to get'; this interviewee also believed the presentation of information in the attachment tables led to it being 'buried away on the web'.

The 'things that work' case studies

There are mixed responses to the case studies. They have been described by many interviewees as a crucial inclusion and an effective mechanism for humanising the issues presented in the report. The case studies are said to add an element of story and context to 'dry figures' and most stakeholders believe they contribute a positive aspect to the report by showcasing things that are working. A number of stakeholders commented that they enjoy reading the case studies and would like to see more in depth or detailed case studies being included. Interviewees reported:

- 'I like seeing where people have done something good – that's great. It's more about giving recognition to something where people have done something successful.'
- 'It gives a more human face to things and the feeling that this isn't something that we can't do better in.'
- 'The case studies/vignettes balance out the "bad news" data'.
- 'It's very important to acknowledge what appears to be working.'
- 'It's good to have some positives about what actually works. More of the same old thing hasn't worked and won't work.'

It was suggested that people can misunderstand case studies – 'it's not one size fits all' – but if a particular community has a number of similarities with the one in the case study, comparison can be useful. Operationally, 'knowing someone had a good idea in a similar context to your own gives you the chance to determine which elements of that idea might be transferable to your own context'. Another interviewee believes it is important to include a critical analysis about why a particular case study is being used and the context in which it is being used. Otherwise OID report users could fall into the trap of referring to them as if they were the only model of engagement.

Several interviewees expressed scepticism regarding the potential benefit of including case studies in the report, as they could be considered 'feel good stories' without the critical data analysis necessary to determine their value. One stakeholder does not believe the case studies are 'robust enough' and that they add little value to policy debate.

One interviewee cautioned against thinking the case studies reflected successful programs that should then be implemented everywhere across the board. Programs that work in one location will not

necessarily work elsewhere. Another stakeholder stated that the case studies are unhelpful because 'they are shallow and do not critically engage with what's happening in those places'. This person believed there should also be negative case studies, to balance this out, whereas some other interviewees were inclined to feel that more positive elements needed to be included to demonstrate actual success that is occurring, which is often overlooked. Although one stakeholder described the case studies as 'good news stories', he takes them seriously and would like to see more comprehensive evidence of measuring impact.

It was suggested that care must be taken to provide fresh case studies, rather than using the same examples or including the same case studies across multiple publications or repeating them in the annual report. There also needs to be some transparency about the particular criteria that underpins the inclusion of certain case studies.

One interviewee did not believe the case studies contributed to the report; 'they do not meet minimal standards of the Productivity Commission's – or any other – project and program evaluation organisation.' She claimed they were anecdotes with no substantial evidence to suggest any measure of success and did not accurately reflect good things that are actually happening. Worse, the case studies provide support for programs that are costly, ineffective and 'counterproductive –they exacerbate and perpetuate Indigenous disadvantage'.

Contextual information

Most interviewees who answered this question felt that the report contained relevant contextual information for their purposes. The contextual information helped to identify the differences between states, inform conclusions about the data and provide a connection to the story being mapped out by the data. One stakeholder believed the contextual information was one of the report's strengths.

Another interviewee had a different view, stating that the contextual information was 'pretty poor' and gave 'no sense of the fundamental diversity of Indigenous Australia or the extent of difference in some geographically and culturally remote circumstances'.

Strengths of the report

The main strengths cited by interviewees were the comprehensiveness of the data included in the report; the importance of localising the information so it is easier to access; the scope and 'big picture' view it provides; and the way in which it provides information at different levels of detail and in different formats (text/commentary/charts and tables; hard and soft copy) so that it meets the needs of the variety of users.

Other positive comments were that the report shows areas where success is evident. It is articulate and empirically valid. It is a compendium, bringing together information from a range of different sectors and areas of concern. Other interviewees mentioned the depth of information; its comprehensiveness; the accuracy of the data; its reliability; its publication frequency; and the credibility of it because it comes from a government-related entity as strengths.

One group of stakeholders believed a key strength was the OID report's 'persistent pressure on data providers to improve collections and push for more data linkage projects. Linking of data sets allows

for more robust analysis and provides a better picture around causes of disadvantage.’ It is a powerful tool for change and draws government attention to critical data.

An interviewee said:

- ‘It is very useful in terms of tracking how things are progressing – for better or worse. For example, whether the rates of smoking are decreasing will affect other things, such as life expectancy, and we can see these trends over time in the report.’

Another stakeholder cited the case studies as a major strength of the report and the accessible layout makes it easy to find what you want.

Limitations

The majority of interviewees identified as limitations the quality of the data and analysis included in the report. For example, the data analysis has been criticised for being too general; stakeholders would like to see more in-depth examination of the figures and explanations of what they reflect. It was also suggested that more information and evidence could be provided to support the selection of particular statistics and to indicate where the data is coming from. There are a number of sections in the report that seem to rely on state and territory jurisdictions to keep good data and make it available; the report writers need to ensure they are including accurate and qualified data. While the report is not currently meeting the needs of policy creators (arguably), the data must still be reliable to ensure good policy.

Another stakeholder felt that the timing of the report limited its accuracy, since the data dates quickly. There are constraints on how often the report can be updated, but the interviewee believes that out-of-date information is a significant weakness. Baseline data is very important to the success and accuracy of the report, and people identify as Aboriginal differently depending on the survey or the purpose of the question: ‘the way someone might identify in an ABS population and housing census, or the way they identify when they’re enrolling a child at school or at a hospital’ will be different, leading to different data being recorded each time. One stakeholder mentioned that Aboriginal organisations often have little to do with collecting community data, instead the OID report relies on external data collection agencies to provide figures, which also contributes to inaccuracies in the data.

The size and scope of the publication have both been mentioned as strengths, but are also considered limitations. Several stakeholders mention the difficulty in gaining specific information from such a wide-ranging and broad spectrum report. They believe the comprehensiveness of the report is ‘daunting’ and limits its ability to be used to develop policy, as it is more of an overview of a range of issues than a drilled down examination of specific issues. The indicators are too general to be useful. Another interviewee queried whether the report should be used as a single report or as a resource due to its sheer volume. Another suggested its status as a compendium could be seen as a weakness in that it is not providing primary source data.

Despite the complaints about the report being too large, some stakeholders feel that it does not contain enough information; ‘it doesn’t drill down enough’. There are significant gaps being recorded by users who claim there needs to be more detail and greater examination of specifics. One interviewee suggested the absence of links to other documents and sources was a limitation and that

greater evidence of cross-referencing and cross-promotion with other relevant sites would enhance the publication and raise awareness of the report. She is concerned that a user might read the report and think they have an accurate sense of what it means to be healthy in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander context, but the indicators are limited and the report does not give a comprehensive picture.

Three interviewees commented on the report's lack of appropriate publicity; there are still many people who are unaware of the publication and its purpose. One finds this surprising, given the completeness and quality of the report. Another believes that it is difficult to find credible and reliable sources of information that other people have access to as well, so it is important to promote the OID report because it enables users in the same field to work from the same baseline data. It was suggested that 'it could be better and more widely publicised, particularly to junior public servants' and that it needs greater publicity to ensure there is a receptive audience. One stakeholder believed the report could be easily misunderstood and if readers 'don't connect with the story they might miss the critical points of views or ignore them'. Another interviewee suggested that a press release issued at the time of the report's publication had negatively impacted on the potential audience by focusing on 'despair' rather than promoting the positive aspects of the report.

Not all stakeholders see the report as being independent. One stakeholder believes it is impossible for the report to be neutral: 'the Steering Committee cannot by its very constitutions be objective'. Whereas global organisations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and social program evaluations in Sweden and Denmark and similar organisations all separate policy formulation and implementation from cost/benefit and other evaluation and review, it was felt that 'until Australia separates policy implementation from evaluation there may be cosmetic improvements but there will be no real change'. Another interviewee also mentions the report's ties with government as a limitation, because the report has to fit in with a particular structure, making it less useful.

According to several interviewees, the OID report originates from a deficit model and needs to be reviewed and re-worked to give it relevance for Indigenous Australians and ensure it contains accurate information. The report overlooks positive evidence that would show the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, instead focusing on programs that are not working or statistics that are not accurately reflecting progress. It also appears not to include Indigenous and community perspectives.

One stakeholder believes the report's main limitation is that it is based on a premise that Aboriginality rather than poverty is to blame for the levels and types of disadvantage experienced. According to this perspective the OID report blames Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for disadvantage rather than flawed government policies. Several stakeholders suggested that the OID report should be comparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with people in low socio-economic circumstances rather than with non-Aboriginal people.

Very few interviewees thought there were no limitations. Four stakeholders stated that the report was satisfactory for their purposes. One acknowledged that 'this is a very difficult framework to report on – it's a very big book when it comes out, and it can't be all things to all people', but believed it was improving each year.

What's missing

The key things interviewees considered to be missing from the report are Indigenous input and community consultation. The views of Indigenous Australians would contribute significantly to the report according to most interviewees who answered this question. The value of community dissemination and feedback has been mentioned by several stakeholders and it would play a key role in shaping the future of the report.

According to one interviewee, the report is trying to capture some of the problems faced by Indigenous Australians, but these are too extensive and far-reaching to be accurately recorded in their entirety. The interviewee believes 'some of those deficits are the result of other things, such as dysfunctional communities – communities where education, for example, is not seen as a particularly valuable thing to aspire to' and feels that the report needs to address underlying problems relating to community development, which are much harder to measure, compare and report on. An example of an issue needing inclusion is the:

'sense of hopelessness that many people feel; another is that they have no control over their own lives – there are a whole range of interventions that are not as efficacious as they could be, as people don't see them as useful. The social scientists and others could look at what are the appropriate indicators to measure such things as community dysfunction.'

One stakeholder believes that including some externally funded data collection within the report, such as commissioning other organisations to compile information or write part of a chapter, would make it clearer that the report is neutral and objective.

One interviewee believes there is the potential to integrate more, such as the IER and OID indicators and RoGS report, and bring these together in a chapter, for example, discussing access to services. Another stakeholder would like to see data comparison between Indigenous Australian disadvantage and international disadvantage. It would be interesting to see how other countries measure data and what indicators they use.

Another important theme was the need for more in-depth analysis of the data. For example, the report states that Indigenous unemployment rates have decreased, but only gives the statistic without examining whether the drop is good enough or if it is a reflection of good policy or bad policy. Another interviewee believes there should be a closer analysis of the differences between data classified as remote, regional and urban to determine why there is a difference in the success or otherwise of programs specific to the particular geographical category

Two interviewees would like to see greater detail when referencing. Rather than just listing the name of the body reporting, the document could include the actual reports used to source data or add a link in the online version.

Improving the report

Most interviewees believe the report meets their needs. Some positive answers given by interviewees were:

- 'It's a great resource, and I wish I'd known about it earlier. In terms of a teaching resource, you can go back [to earlier reports]. The summary book is particularly great to read. You go to parts you need.'
- 'It's good to know it's there and every now and then I can go there and get bits and pieces.'
- 'As a tool for preparation for reports and submissions it is of great use.'
- 'You can go to the report and get legitimate, verifiable data.'
- 'Very valuable as a single compendium.'
- 'Being able to access unpublished data from administrative collections is useful.'
- 'A reliable source of information for planning purposes for business analysis and demographic analysis.'

One stakeholder working in a service delivery position believed it was more useful and better suited to the needs of policy makers, while another indicated that negotiated targets for the indicators would be more useful for their purposes, such as a Closing the Gap target. It was suggested that the report would better suit user purposes if there were 'more disaggregated data available, to have a more critical engagement with the data, to find out the potential causes of the patterns they are finding'.

One interviewee who did not find the report useful for their purposes as an economist stated that the report is 'erroneous and misleading' for failing to describe and analyse 'the low standards of governance in communities on Indigenous lands and in Indigenous organisations more generally'. Another stakeholder, also an economist, found the report only met his needs in a limited way, but was useful for facilitating 'critical engagement with the dominant policy framework'.

Many interviewees suggested the report could be reduced in size or made into a more manageable size either by having less context or more specific information and that controversial projects mentioned in the report needed to include references to the controversy. Another supported this suggestion by citing an example of an unsubstantiated claim in the report and called for the inclusion of more references to specific evidence.

The scope and lack of specificity of the data have been mentioned a number of times in response to different questions. One suggestion was for a state-based report to narrow the focus and provide a more comprehensive look at specific areas. The interviewee also proposed 'a critique of the Commonwealth one-size-fits-all model'.

It was suggested the report could be improved by clearly identifying the target audience of the report and being written in 'plain English' to encourage wider readability. It was also suggested that to make clear the amount of Indigenous input into the report, the names of OID Working Group members could be published along with the consultations that have taken place.

One interviewee believed that the Steering Committee fails to take note of suggestions for improvements that are submitted each year.

Improving content

Most suggestions from interviewees regarding suggestions for improved content refer to expanding areas of the report and included greater community dissemination and feedback. The main suggestion was, as previously mentioned, the need for more in depth and critical analysis. Also, the wish to see international data being included and analysed to determine how Australia sits on a broad global spectrum in terms of effective policy.

One interviewee sees the report as just a starting point for research and can be used to add value in the policy space. It would be useful for the report to focus on a particular area and provide insightful analysis and more specific policy recommendations. One stakeholder stated that a more nuanced report which moves beyond just a simplistic cross tab analysis of the issues would be far more useful.

A stakeholder commented that they found the overarching framework problematic: 'it made a lot of assumptions about the cycles of poverty models, such as more education leads to better employment and better housing and better health, etc. This model is based uncritically on the modernisation paradigm which has been subject to much global critique but it doesn't reflect Indigenous reality'. The interviewee believes the report does not ask the right questions to find an answer to 'make things better' for Indigenous people.

Improving readability, accessibility and presentation

As already mentioned, the size of the report is often an issue for interviewees and the majority have suggested a reduction to 'bite sized chunks' as its current size is 'difficult to go through'. The report has been described by most stakeholders as using plain language, although one interviewee said this could be further improved by including clearer terminology for a more general audience. Another interviewee pointed out the need to ensure 'accessibility at all levels', but also cautioned against 'dumbing it down – that's an insult'.

Of the interviewees who commented on the presentation of the report the majority said that it was fine. They mostly found the layout of tables and pictures to be well presented.

One stakeholder commented that the published hard copy is too large to be useful and that a 'more user friendly web version would be preferred'. Although the website was considered accessible by most interviewees, the navigation and search option could be improved for ease of use by readers unfamiliar with the content of the report or the exact wording of the information they are searching for.

Another interviewee sees the issue of accessibility as an awareness issue and suggested the report's existence could be more widely promoted. She proposed the Fact Sheets be 're-launched at other national or local events that don't necessarily have a solely Indigenous focus' to engage a wider audience.

Another stakeholder believes the lack of awareness of the report is a result of the Secretariat website not being an obvious place to turn when seeking this kind of information. She suggested that providing links to the report from other websites, such as Indigenous sites, where people might go to seek this kind of information, would help raise awareness.

One interviewee preferred the hard copy to the online version and another warned against the assumption that the online version would be easier to access:

- ‘Definitely keep both print and online, because there are a lot of our mob who don’t feel comfortable with the internet yet, including older people, not just Indigenous ones. And that’s something we struggle with at the university, telling people “Not everyone can afford internet”’.

It was suggested that the main users of the online publication were policy makers who would not be concerned with navigation, rather they would require evidence that the report is ‘reliable, credible and comprehensive’.

Improving frequency and timing

Most interviewees who answered this question were satisfied with the annual publication rate. The main reasons against changing the frequency of publication included: data is not available more frequently; if it was more frequent it might lose quality; change does not occur quickly enough to warrant more frequent data collection and reporting; the current timing allows researchers to compare the data; and there is time to receive feedback from communities between publications.

Other comments were that the report dated quickly and more up-to-date information could be found in other publications; one year was not enough time to demonstrate significant differences, whereas two years would allow researchers to tag trends; ‘there is no point publishing the report if there are no new data’; and frequent online updates would eliminate the need to publish the entire report on an annual basis.

Appendix D: Small discussion group questions and analysis

Questions for small discussion groups

Name:

Name of organisation:

Questions are framed within the context of the review's terms of reference.

Origins and purpose

1. What do you understand to be the key purpose of the OID report?
2. To what extent do you think the OID report is fulfilling this purpose? (Why do you think this?)

Comparability with other reports

(Examples: National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) and other National Agreement and National Partnership reports - both Steering Committee and COAG Reform Council reports; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report; Prime Minister's Report to Parliament; ABS and AIHW publications on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and welfare; Indigenous Expenditure Report); international performance reports.

3. What does 'best practice' in government performance reporting of outcomes for Indigenous or special needs groups look like? What features or characteristics would you expect such reporting to have?
4. Does the OID report have these features?
5. What does the OD report provide that is unique?
6. What does it provide that could be found elsewhere? (If its content or function does overlap with other reports, does this matter?)

'Value add'

7. How could the 'value add' of each of the following components of the OID report be increased?
 - a. contextual material
 - b. breadth of indicators
 - c. time series analysis
 - d. geographic disaggregation (State/Territory, remoteness, other)
 - e. presentation of data in charts, tables, commentary and attachments
 - f. 'things that work' case studies.

8. What do you think is the main strength of the OID report?
9. What is its main limitation?
10. Is there anything missing from the report that you would like to see included?

Users and usage patterns

11. Who are the main users of the report? (in your organisation or from what you know firsthand)
12. How is the information in the report mainly used? (in your organisation or from what you know firsthand)
13. Do you use the print or online versions of the report (or both?)
14. Do you source OID report information from the report directly or from other sources (if so, from which other sources?)
15. What is your main reason for using the report?
16. Which sections of the report do you mainly use?
17. How often would you use the report?

Improving the OID report

18. How could the review be improved (eg content, presentation, resources, accessibility, marketing, readability)

Questions for OID Working Group members

These overlap with the questions for both the telephone interviews and the small group discussions and responses were gathered in both ways from OID Working Group members

Questions are framed within the context of the review's terms of reference.

Examine the origins, purpose and terms of reference (original and revised) for the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators (OID) report, and the extent to which the OID report has achieved its objectives.

- 1. What do you understand to be the key purpose of the OID report?**
- 2. To what extent do you think the OID report is fulfilling this purpose? (Why do you think this?)**

Identify the extent to which the OID report reflects international best practice in government performance reporting of outcomes for Indigenous or special needs groups.

- 3. Are you aware of any other of international or national reports that would be comparable to the OID report? (We will follow these up in the literature review.)**

Examine the role of the OID report within the broader context of reporting, including the:

- National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) and other National Agreement and National Partnership reports (both Steering Committee and COAG Reform Council reports)*
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report*
- Prime Minister's Report to Parliament*
- ABS and AIHW publications on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and welfare*
- Indigenous Expenditure Report.*

- 4. What is unique about the OID report when compared with these other reports?**
- 5. To what extent does this report fulfil a unique role when compared with these other reports?**

Examine the particular 'value add' of the OID report in light of reader needs and the availability of other publications, and recommend how the 'value-add' of the report could be increased. This examination is to consider the following OID content:

- contextual material and evidence base*
- breadth of indicators*
- time series analysis*
- geographic disaggregation (State/Territory, remoteness, other)*
- presentation of data in charts, tables, commentary and attachments*
- 'things that work' case studies.*

6. What do you think is the main strength of the OID report?
7. What is its main limitation?
8. Is there anything missing from the report that you would like to see included?
9. What (other) improvements (if any) would you like to see made to the OID report?
10. How useful are the information sessions and presentations provided by the Convenor and Secretariat?

Identify the major users of the OID report and how, and to what extent, readers use the report and the way that users process and use the information in a large multi-layered report.

11. Who are the main users of the report? (in your organisation or from what you know firsthand)
12. How is the information in the report mainly used? (in your organisation or from what you know firsthand)

Examine how users access the report (print or web versions) and what content and components they use. Recommend ways to improve report readability and usefulness.

13. Do you use the print or online versions of the report (or both?)
14. Do you source OID report information from the report directly or from other sources (if so, from which other sources?)
15. What is your main reason for using the report?
16. Which sections of the report do you mainly use?
17. How often would you use the report?
18. Do you have any suggestions as to how the *readability* of the report could be improved?
19. Do you have any suggestions as to how the *usefulness* of the report could be improved?

Identify opportunities to streamline and improve the efficiency of the production of the OID report, in particular, the role of the OID Working Group and the process for obtaining data from data providers.

20. How does the OID Working Group support the publication of the OID report?
21. How do you find the process for obtaining data from the data providers?
22. How could this process be streamlined or improved?

Small group discussions

A wide range of stakeholders participated in these discussions.

Key purpose

Participants in the discussions were asked to identify the main purpose of the OID report. The discussions revealed some differences of opinion. This question of purpose is critical as it goes to the heart of the future of the OID report. User perceptions of what the OID report can and cannot do, should or should not do, are shaped by their understanding of the purpose of the report.

Most stakeholders saw the purpose as consistent over the years, regardless of changing external circumstances. The original intention of the OID report was to measure government performance and its purpose today is still to inform governments about whether or not their policies are improving outcomes. It was suggested that 'a tool like this should be about providing advice around what's the best use of government money. It should be about using evidence to inform policy development.'

In general, stakeholders thought the report provided a framework to measure commitment across a range of indicators. The report was seen to help government address disadvantage; give an overview of the current state of play which can then help determine policy direction; show where more data are required and where more work needs to be done to obtain better data; show progress over time as regards long-term goals; provide a snapshot of disadvantage; and show the 'closing the gap targets' compared with other jurisdictions. One stakeholder suggested that 'the report tells us how we do as agencies and how we meet our responsibilities as it links back to the indicators and the framework'. Not all participants were clear about the purpose however.

When asked to what extent participants thought the OID report was fulfilling its purpose, responses varied with most suggesting the purpose needed to be re-visited.

Participants in the discussions who were familiar with the genesis of the report suggested that the original intention was no longer relevant as circumstances had changed since 2003. The most commonly cited change was in the broader policy context. Some stakeholders who have been closely involved in the Closing the Gap initiative felt the report did not take into account sufficiently the changes that have occurred as a result of this initiative. The question was raised as to whether the original purpose was still relevant given these changed circumstances. It was suggested that

there is not much point looking at gaps and problems when policy changes like this have occurred since the OID report was conceived. A lot of the information in the 2011 report is either 2008 or before then. The media report negative findings without knowing the positive things that have been done.

Other changes noted were that when the OID report was first developed there was no central report on Indigenous wellbeing, and the OID report mapped the inter-relationship between various domains of wellbeing. Reporting has moved on since this earlier time and there are other sources now that are readily available. The OID report was the only report that existed at the time and that is no longer the case.

At the time of its inception the OID report was a seminal document designed to bring together statistics and functioned as an important conduit between Commonwealth and state governments. Since then, the relationships between Commonwealth and states or territories have improved and there is also other administrative data that can be sourced.

Another source of change identified by participants stems from the effectiveness of the OID in the early years. 'The OID report was a benchmark. In 2003 it was held up to be the leading approach to monitoring and evaluation. Now, while it is still a useful tool, it no longer has that same importance.' It encouraged jurisdictions to think about the need to report and monitor Indigenous outcomes and increased the spotlight on this policy area. As the expertise has built up, jurisdictions are now in a better position to take the lead.

However, for the majority of participants who chose to comment on this question in the discussions, there was some doubt around the purpose of the OID report today and whether or not the original purpose was being fulfilled. It was felt that the purpose had become unclear with the rise of other publications reporting on government performance. One group felt that the OID report, like other similar reports, 'fails in its fundamental purpose' because it does not acknowledge the time lag that occurs. The nature and timing of change needs to be better understood by governments and reflected in the OID report.

For one stakeholder, the report tracks how well we are going against COAG targets. 'It is the best we have got. It is fulfilling the purpose but not in a perfect way.'

Comparability with other reports

Comments made in regard to the OID report's relationship with other similar reports follow on from the comments about purpose. For those stakeholders who see the OID report as still having a unique role this uniqueness was associated with several features in particular:

- The OID report has a longitudinal perspective. Other similar reports are annual. 'The OID is the ideal avenue for time series data.'
- It is unique in its comprehensiveness. It can help 'if you are looking for the big picture in what is going on in Indigenous affairs and you do want to know what it is like to be Independent in NSW or other states'.
- Its case studies are an attempt to go beyond the numbers.
- 'It is the only report that truly looks at all jurisdictional performances.'
- The OID allows linkages to be made across areas of policy interest (how well it does this was the subject of other discussions and is reported later in this report).
- Data quality is important. The processes used by the Secretariat to produce the report are robust. It is seen to be a very open process. It offers a useful combination of qualitative and quantitative data.
- Quality of interpretation is important. The OID report acts as an advocate for the information. 'The data are linked in with the ABS and other sources. You can predict what the information will be by the presentation of the data. The OID is predictable in its presentation. We can be sure we are interpreting the data correctly.'

In contrast to this view, many stakeholders participating in the discussions questioned the role of the OID report in comparison with other similar reports. It was suggested that there is considerable overlap across the reports, particularly with the OID and some of the AIHW publications. A common question was: 'Is the OID report really doing anything different from other available reports?' A further comment was that 'You have several other reports competing for the exact same data'.

Specific comparisons were made:

- There is an overlap between the Health Performance Framework (HPF) and the OID. Unlike the OID report, the HPF does measure progress and the causal factors leading to improved outcomes.
- The Report on Government Services (RoGS) shows what governments are doing without the analysis. 'Is this what the OID report is also doing? Is it just a whole lot of indicators?' Like the OID report, the RoGS report is not generally used on a day to day basis but seen as a very
- broad representation of gap measures.
- The OID and NIRA also duplicate each other to some extent. Both have indicators. However, 'the NIRA purpose is clearer'. While the OID report pre dates NIRA & CRC, 'the reliance on the OID has been diluted since NIRA'.
- It was suggested that once the COAG reform council reports came along, it became much harder to see a connexion between the various reports. It was argued that the OID should do the reporting, not the COAG. The COAG reports, it was further argued, are compromised because they do not deal with multivariate relationships. Indeed, it was claimed that the COAG reports consist of comments derived from a very narrow base of data, which can lead to error. 'It is not fit for purpose'. The OID has tried to fit around the reporting of COAG and NIRA. 'If [the OID] disappeared we would not lose that much, but you would need to know where to look.'
- While there are some overlaps with the Health Performance Framework (HPF) the issues are reframed in a positive way as much as possible and include positive indicators such as community functioning, which is not captured comprehensively anywhere else.

Some stakeholders suggested there is some capacity for the OID report to be more complementary with the other reports. 'We need to line up the CRC, PM statement and Indigenous compendium to the ROGS. The OID is a tremendous resource but how do they all relate?'

One example of a report on progress that has been developed in line with the OID but focusing specifically on NSW is the *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators* which provides baseline and trendline data across seven priority areas, which are in line with COAG targets. Regional reports are also provided. One group of NSW government stakeholders indicated they are more likely to use the *Two Ways Together* report as a source document on progress than the OID report because their publication tracks progress over a number of years and is NSW specific.

Best practice

The discussions yielded several main features associated with best practice in government performance reporting:

- A good practice report would have more of a focus on outcomes and ‘where we go from here’.
- Such a report would be robust.
- It could be used for planning.
- The data could be used across all reports.
- A best practice report would show how it interacts with other reports and what is unique about it.
- A best practice report would place the onus of responsibility on those who are responsible for the issues
- Such a report would also contain discussions about constitutional and legal issues; history and trauma; and relationships with non-Indigenous Australians.

Value add

Participants in the discussions were asked to consider how the ‘value add’ of each component of the OID report could be increased. The bulk of comments were around geographic disaggregation and the case studies. The others did not attract a lot of interest. For example, little comment was made in the discussions about how the ‘value add’ of the *contextual material* could be increased. In relation to the *breadth of indicators* it was suggested that there are too many indicators and that the most important or lead indicators need to be identified. The *time series analysis* did not attract much comment.

Geographic disaggregation (State/Territory, remoteness, other)

There were two main perspectives on disaggregation by state/territory and remoteness: those wanting more disaggregation and those satisfied with the current level. Some participants expressed a need for information that is disaggregated to the level of community if possible. Given that much disadvantage is related to community rather than to state, to disaggregate at this level would give a more nuanced picture. It was recognised that this might not be possible but that it would be useful to go below the state level. However, others suggested that only a few indicators can be disaggregated and that there is not much more that could be done to improve the ‘value add’ of this element of the OID report. Another request was to have more information about Indigenous outcomes in urban areas.

Presentation of data in charts, tables, commentary and attachments

Most participants seemed satisfied with the current presentation and did not have suggestions for improvement here other than one person wanting to have the tables fitting into a portrait rather than landscape layout where possible. Another expressed an interest in tables over charts as it is easier to brief ministers with exact figures. Several participants commented on the usefulness of the fact sheets: ‘they use simple language, are designed well, easy to take with you and give to people and they understand’; ‘they are very useful, especially for the regions’. One person considered the tables

the most valuable part of the report but also the most under-rated part. Another person identified the communiqués that are attached in Appendix 1 of the OID report as being ‘a very valuable resource’ because the COAG site is hard to navigate.

‘Things that work’ case studies

Comments ranged from ‘very good’ to ‘outside the scope of the OID’. As with the telephone interviews, the face-to-face meetings attracted a mixed response to the case studies with some discussion participants arguing for their retention but many more questioning their quality and usefulness. An important reason for retaining them, or a variation of them, was because it provided something positive in an otherwise pessimistic report. The concept of having ‘things that work’ provides positives when often the reporting on Indigenous matters presents a picture of unrelieved gloom and misery.

A consistent theme in the discussions, as in the phone interviews, was the poor quality of the case studies, particularly the absence of strong evidence. Many of the stakeholders, who either use the OID report or contribute data to it, will have a different set of expectations around case studies and the burden of proof required when compared with the OID report. It is hard to gather these stories and governments are not always able to find examples that are appropriate and reflective of good practice. Some of the case studies might only be funded for a short time but, if this is the case, then are they likely to be examples of good practice (if not sustainable)?

To increase the usefulness of the case studies several suggestions were made:

- The OID report should make clearer why these studies are examples of good practice. Users want to know what impact have these programs or initiatives had and the evidence that shows this. They want to know why these cases have worked. More explanation would assist policy staff.
- Include community case studies rather than having only government ones. There is a conflict of interest in the case studies. Governments who fund programs are being asked to identify their successful programs.
- A set of selection criteria could be developed to facilitate identification of the cases.
- There needs to be a stronger link between the data in the report and the case studies.
- It would be good to have case studies that can be followed up so users of the guide can see progression.
- While the commentary is generally good the case studies could be written in plain English.
- It would be better for OID to source its case studies from the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse as the Clearinghouse publications are peer reviewed and written by subject experts.

A different view, while acknowledging the flawed nature of the case studies, was that these cases are illustrative only and were never intended to be evaluated studies. The report is a high level one and it is appropriate to have illustrations. One suggestion was to report on these cases separately, perhaps in the form of a data compendium with caveats. Some critics did not see a role for the case studies in the OID report as ‘they are not drawing out more general findings. They are outside the scope and relevance of the report’.

Main strengths

The main strengths identified in the discussions related to the breadth of the report, its role as a national reference point, and its integrative function in terms of bringing data from various sources tighter in one place. The wide ranging nature of the identified strengths is indicated below:

- The report is the only one that documents national overall information.
- It provides a timely and updated commentary on inequality in Australia.
- Its 'big picture' information can form the basis of strategic planning and operations.
- It set an early benchmark in data standardisation. It gives a standardised format for looking at Closing the Gap. People can compare across the silos.
- Its time series is a valuable source of information.
- It is comprehensive in its scope.
- It is independent.
- It is attractively presented and readable. It can be a useful reference for non-statisticians.
- The 'things that work' provide hope in an otherwise bleak collection of reports on government performance around Indigenous disadvantage.
- It performs an integrative function, providing an overview of what agencies are achieving and giving coherence to services that are fragmented.
- The Secretariat has more weight behind it (COAG) than line agencies when it comes to collecting data from the jurisdictions.
- Particular components have a role to play. For example, the fact sheets are very useful, in giving presentations to the regions.
- The OID attempts to deal with outcomes at broader levels than those that can be aligned with administrative areas only.
- The OID has a release date which primes media interest.
- It reports better on governance – as a fundamental principle that underpins the success of other areas and not only as content in a separate chapter – better than any other report.

Limitations

The most commonly cited limitations were around data quality, disaggregation, lack of analysis, and the need for a more strengths-based approach to be taken.

Data quality

Currency was an issue for many in government where staff can be asked to locate up-to-date data quickly. Some government staff indicated that they can get more up-to-date data from other government agencies than from the OID report. For policy planning they need a time series. Comments included: 'Many of the projections are either out of date or not strictly measureable'; 'The IER builds on the OID and some of the information that is being pulled out is anecdotal or around for

ten years'; 'Maintaining currency is important'. It should be noted however that statistically significant change rarely happens in a year.

Some participants had issues with the quality of data collection. Several examples were given. The data collection on mortality was said to be incomplete or under-reported. Investigations carried out by the WA Health Department show that declines in mortality are related to data quality becoming worse over time, not improvement in life expectancy of Indigenous people. 'If data is unreliable it affects the lives of Aboriginal people because policy flows from it'.

Because the Indigenous population is small there are also issues around statistical significance. DoHA has been asked to comment on drafts of the OID and have made these comments before around whether or not a particular difference or trend is statistically significant. The Secretariat doesn't incorporate this advice however. DoHA has worked with both the ABS and AIHW to develop common understandings of statistical significance. The OID data need to be tested for statistical significance. 'Is this really different or is it the aberration you would expect from a small population?'

It was also suggested that there needs to be greater clarity around which data can and can't be interpreted. There should be a clear description of the text under each table to clarify the data and tables for people who are not experienced in data use. 'Some of the bridges between the data and reporting needed to be highlighted; some people couldn't work out how some of the figures were being used.'

'Is the Productivity Commission capturing the cross indicators? To what extent does it look at things like the Working on Country program? Are there differences in health or education or housing? Are there any baselines being done? A lot can change in five years.'

Disaggregation

The OID report has limited capacity to report at the local level. OID reports are about national trending rather than the jurisdictions. Participants in discussion groups raised this as an issue however. It was generally agreed that the report aggregated to too high a level, and in so doing, lost the fine grained information of smaller communities or differentiation based on socio-economic status. Local agencies require information at a local community level, not just at a whole state or a national level. Two stakeholders who work in urban and regional policy development need more urban information. This is a huge priority given that 75 per cent of Indigenous people are urban Australians. 'The OID doesn't cater for this enough'. It was suggested that the Secretariat could obtain data from the states and territories which would enable a disaggregation of urban data.

LSIC shows great regional differences. State level data provide an average but this doesn't reflect the diversity of the population. It was suggested that if the data analysts note any big variants they could report on these and could be trained to do this if needed. While the Secretariat uses some of the LSIC data they don't currently report on it.

Another point that was made was that it is important to report on the differences within the Indigenous population. There are differences in outcomes in health and education. It is useful to know why one sub-group might be doing better than another. What factors are at work? This would make the OID data more relevant to policy makers.

It deals with secondary rather than primary data and that since most of the data was derived from other sources such as the ABS that he would prefer to go to the source data.

Lack of analysis

Another commonly identified limitation was that the OID report doesn't go far enough in analysing the data provided:

There is a focus on outcomes but the report does not show what needs to be done to reach these outcomes. The report should be identifying the services that are currently provided and the services that are needed if outcomes are to be met. It should be identifying what needs to be achieved and how this is going to be achieved for it to be of more use to policy makers and administrators.

As it is currently, the OID report is generally not seen to provide policy makers with the information they need to make decisions and allocate resources. It was suggested that the mix of indicators do not reflect the key policy questions and what governments are seeking to achieve over time. 'What you really need for the minister is what was good, what is not going anywhere, and what is going backwards but that's not easy to get from this report.'

It was also argued that the relationships between different facets of the report are not drawn together. 'It would be handy to know in a couple of years time, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students who were attending kindergarten at age 4 now, how they are going. Are these measures that are being put in place now working?' In other words, there is a real need for tracking over time and the OID report does not give this.

Several people commented on time scale as a major issue. 'Negative reporting is a significant risk. COAG is working on a scale of 25 years. It is generational, not short term. It is currently measuring government policies from up to 20 years ago. It is not necessarily measuring those policies from the last 3 years. We need to acknowledge the changes are going to be slow. The screaming headlines do no good, especially for the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] community. Public confidence in the government is also lost.'

Deficit model

Across all discussion groups a common observation was the focus on disadvantage. While this is tied to the original intention of the report, many users are working in environments where the focus is increasingly shifting towards a more strengths-based conceptual framework. The OID report still has headline indicators around negative matters, such as imprisonment, child abuse, and family and community violence. Participants from the health sector in one discussion agreed that 'the report is an overstatement of the negatives rather than the positives'. 'The report needs to reflect what's positive'; 'What does it achieve to have another report that's damning?'

Staff working in the Closing the Gap policy area also wanted to be able to get more information about the positive gains arising from the initiative. While recognising that the OID report's focus is on Indigenous disadvantage, 'we need to get a more comprehensive picture' as to where the impacts are being felt. 'So many great things are happening in the communities but that is certainly not in the report. There are certain measures communities are taking now, but the government homes in on the numbers and doesn't see how important these things are.'

Stakeholders in other sectors, such as early childhood, education, employment and crime, echoed this viewpoint. It was suggested that the OID report reflects a western paradigm framework but that it needs to come from a more strengths-based approach. 'How can we report on strengths and abilities?' There was a strong perception among the health sector in particular that there should be indicators that show the strengths of Indigenous people rather than indicators measuring them against targets they are not meeting. One group felt the OID Executive Summary oversimplifies many of the key issues and appears to make a range of judgements. It is structured in such a way that it appears to blame Indigenous people for being in the situation they're in. The question was asked: 'How many ASTIs communities use this? Is it useful for their purposes?' Users of the report need to be able to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of Indigenous people than is currently provided. The case studies, while flawed, come closest to capturing this lived experience.

Presentation

While the presentation of the report was generally seen as a strength there were also some users of the report who found the hard copy daunting, 'a door stop' 'prohibitive' in size. The first 20 or so pages of the OID report consist of the contents page, glossary, acronyms, Steering Committee members, letter from the Chair – 'it takes many pages before the report even starts'. For these stakeholders the OID report 'does not invite engagement' and is hard to navigate. It was suggested that the Secretariat could make more use of online and interactive opportunities to provide OID content. Several stakeholders also commented on the size of the Overview, suggesting that at 70 pages it was still too long for an overview.

What's missing?

Most of the elements identified as 'missing' relate to additional information that could be provided, not necessarily extra content but more around how to make the report more relevant and useful. There is also some crossover in terms of what's missing and limitations.

Information

It was suggested that it would be useful for users to have a better understanding of the different types of reports that exist, the purposes of these reports and how the OID is positioned in this broader landscape. For example, the OID report could potentially point users to where they might go (that is, which report) to find particular data.

It was suggested that more thought could be given to how the community could use the report. 'The report needs to make this story relevant to local communities; what are they doing to address that?' 'Tell the story behind some of these numbers. This might make people engage with it more.'

Several participants in discussions suggested the OID report needs to compare Indigenous performance with the performance of people in low socio-economic circumstances rather than with non-Aboriginal people as much of the disadvantage described in the OID is to do with poverty.

Some stakeholders wanted to see more information related to specific areas, such as 'emerging areas' (although these were not defined) good health services information, regional information, the impact of not having land, further breakdown of indicators by jurisdictions and geographical areas, and the

latest research being undertaken in universities on issues related to the content of the report, such as research in early childhood.

Indigenous input

Questions were raised about the extent of Indigenous input into the report. There is a perceived disconnect: Is there an Indigenous reference or advisory group for example? It was thought the current OID Working Group could be reconstituted to involve more Indigenous members. For example, an Indigenous epidemiologist would be able to provide insights into the hospitalisation data. A greater Indigenous presence could ensure the language is more appropriate: 'Is there a better way of incorporating expertise from Indigenous people in the OID?' Who are the people sitting on the Steering Committee and OID Working Group? Who is influencing the reports? What's missing from the report for the stakeholders who expressed this view are the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. '[The report is] all about people. This would be a big benefit, positive.'

Forward thinking

Another gap in the report identified in the discussions was a lack of 'forward thinking'. While the OID report acknowledges the difficulties associated with trying to measure things such as culture or wellbeing 'there is no sense that the OID is embracing change' or letting users know the work they are putting into developing these measures.

Users and usage patterns

Not all participants in the discussions said they use the report. Some are familiar with it but don't use it as they find other sources better meet their needs. There is possibly a trend away from use, or at least a different kind of use, if this stakeholder's experience is typical: '[We use it] infrequently.' Initially it was 'well thumbed' when it came out a few years ago, now the staff know that it is there if they need it, 'but it's not a touchstone document that is used to be'. Staff in this unit now do their own state level data and don't need the OID report. In one jurisdiction it was suggested that the OID report is used 'fairly minimally' and that instead of reading it for themselves staff are more likely to ring a central person who has a good knowledge of the report and seek information from that person.

The main users of the OID report based on the discussions appear to be data experts in the context of performance reporting and policy analysts, with a range of other users, including academics, land councils and tertiary students. All sections of the report are used depending on the user's need at that time. Most government participants look at the information affecting their jurisdictions. People in particular sectors look at the information relating to these sectors. There was general agreement that the Fact Sheets and the Overview are useful. Several stakeholders said the report was most likely to be consulted when information was needed about an area in which the user was not expert, and was seeking an overview.

As with the survey and phone interview feedback frequency, timing and nature of usage varies across jurisdictions, portfolios and roles. For example: 'I don't make much use of it, only if the minister wants some data or facts to dress-up a position; it is not used as a driver for policy and activities, which is what we should be using it for. I look at it maybe once a month'; 'I regard it as an encyclopaedia, like

the report on government services where you can always find something on everything. Maybe you won't find what you want but there will be something on the topic.'

The following examples show the diverse purposes and ways of using the report that exist:

- The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse has used the report to identify ideas for Clearinghouse resource sheets.
- A health sector staff member compares OID data with Health Performance Framework data to identify similarities and discrepancies.
- Staff in government working across a wide range of areas have used it in preparing ministerial or background briefings.
- Stakeholders working in a particular domain, such as health, justice, housing, early childhood or education and training, use the OID report to gain a quick overview both in their specific area of interest but also across portfolios.
- Government staff have used the online attached data for each jurisdiction.
- The report has been used for keynote addresses which need up-to-date data.
- AIATSIS have used the OID report for staff development.
- Staff in a school of education use it in teaching, research and submission writing.
- Several lecturers, including one in policy development, refer students to the OID report to improve their understanding of Indigenous disadvantage.
- In contrast to other stakeholder comment, one person said they typically focus on 'retrieving numbers' from the OID report and are not interested in any of the accompanying analyses.
- Staff in one section of DEEWR are seeking to gain a better understanding of the links between Year 12 and Closing the Gap attainment targets and are looking at how the OID report contextualises education. They are trying to understand how something
- Government staff use the OID report for performance monitoring and for looking at the links and connections in order to be able to make decisions about where funding should be directed.
- The OID report has been used to find information about Native Title and land ownership.

As with interviewees and survey respondents, users of the OID tend either to go there first to obtain general information and then move to other reports or data sources that are more specific to their needs or to start with the specific focus and then move to the broader context offered by the OID.

Not all participants were aware of the online version of the OID report. As with the phone interviews, stakeholders in the discussions use the online version mainly for word searches – 'It's much easier to navigate online' – and the print version to annotate and put sticky notes on it as markers. Some expressed a preference for having a hard copy of the Overview.

The Overview is often skimmed to gain a sense of what's happening. One stakeholder questioned the value of having the full version of the report as a hard copy when the web version is so easy to use but most people who commented on this question expressed interest in using both.

Improving the OID report

Suggestions are consistent with those of other stakeholders in the surveys and phone interviews and included the following:

- reduce the overlap between reports
- re-visit the purpose of the report
- improve awareness of the report
- highlight the good news (such as the life expectancy charts)
- simplify the report
- provide more opportunities to discuss the report
- ensure more Indigenous input into the report itself and greater representation on any reference group to support the Steering Committee
- overlay information about Indigenous disadvantage with information about disadvantage in the wider community
- make the online product more dynamic
- add local community information to a dynamic site; this does not necessarily mean reporting on the specifics of communities but the broader conceptual issues that can be drawn from them.
- provide more interpretation of the data
- contextualise the data more, including how conclusions have been reached
- provide more information about the drivers of change
- provide a short summary for people who only want to know the key messages
- provide more information about service provision
- be more upfront about data limitations, controversies and challenges
- provide an assessed literature about what works and doesn't work
- provide guidance around how to use the document for policy purposes
- assist user accessibility by cross referencing aspects of the print and online versions
- including LSIC data in the report
- produce theme-based editions or supplementary chapters that focus in-depth on a particular issue, either as part of the OID report as a whole or as a separate, succinct volume published in addition to the main report
- extend the time series analysis, disaggregation and data linkages
- put detailed information online, where it is easier to search, rather than in the print version
- introduce more fact sheets on specific topics.

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