

# **The case for establishing Australian indigenous development goals**

**By Bob McMullan**

***15 September 2005***

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## The case for establishing Australian indigenous development goals

Australia can learn some important public policy lessons from developments in the debate about global poverty. Recently, the campaign to combat global poverty and disadvantage has taken on greater momentum. After many years lamenting the shortcomings of development strategies and development assistance policies that debate is moving on into more positive territory.

Public policy concerning the acute relative disadvantage of indigenous Australians needs to take a similar turn. It is time that we, as a nation, focused on the need to achieve better outcomes for our most disadvantaged citizens as the international community has done.

At the United Nations in 2000 world leaders gathered and agreed to a set of goals and specific targets designed to improve the lives of the world's poorest citizens. At that summit they agreed on specific commitments which they pledged to meet by the year 2015. The key goals and targets were:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<i>Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day</i>
	<i>Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger</i>
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	<i>Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</i>
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	<i>Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015</i>
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality	<i>Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate</i>
Goal 5: Improve maternal health	<i>Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio</i>
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	<i>Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</i>
	<i>Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</i>

*\* For full text of Millennium Development Goals, see Appendix 1*

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are derived from the Millennium Declaration agreed at the Millennium Summit in 2000 by representatives of 189 countries including Australia.

These goals were intended to send a powerful message of commitment to the fight against poverty, inequality and the unrest which they breed. But they also marked an important transition point in the debate about assistance and development - a transition from a focus on inputs and processes to a focus on outcomes. Rather than relying on vague goals the MDGs include defined and measurable targets with a specific timetable for meeting them.

It is both appropriate and necessary that there should be debates about the quality and quantity of the inputs into development in poor countries and the processes involved in the distribution of those resources. But it is a long overdue and significant reform that the focus has moved on to outcomes.

Setting specific goals, targets and timetables leads to a measure of accountability and transparency. Beyond this it has the potential to engender debate about the means for achieving these shared goals. At an international level this has begun. Yet, in Australian public policy debate the issue has scarcely surfaced.

There have been a range of reports and analyses assessing the financial implications of a commitment to meet these ambitions. A recent report to the UN Secretary General concluded “to reach the MDGs, United Nations and World Bank’s estimates indicate the need to increase the amount of aid currently available in the amount of US \$50 billion per year”.<sup>1</sup>

Whether that figure is correct or not it has led to an interesting range of specific propositions to mobilise the funds required.

The most realistic option appears to be the International Finance Facility as proposed by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. However, the United States Millennium Challenge Accounts initiative is targeted, additional, untied, and in grant form and therefore has much to offer. Importantly, these developments show that even some of those previously reluctant to commit to additional development assistance are now actively engaged in a positive debate on alternative additional funding options.

Of course, setting such specific goals has shortcomings as well as benefits. Those important issues which may be ninth, 10<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> on the list of priorities are likely to gain less focus relative to those fortunate enough to be included in the top eight. In any goal setting exercise there will be those who disagree with the priorities as articulated and they might be right.

These are also features of what might be called the “tyranny of the measurable”. This reflects the tendency of those things on which progress can be readily measured to displace those which may be equally important but not so readily measured. It is important never to forget that goals may be important even if they are hard or impossible to measure.

However on balance I am in no doubt that the setting of the Millennium Development Goals has been a positive development. It has focused debate on agreed priorities and led to discussion of the best means of mobilising the very large financial flows which will need to be found if the goals are to be achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> The high level Panel on Financing for Development, led by the former President of Mexico, Ernesto Zedillo. (The full report is available on the UN website).

A disappointing aspect of this debate has been the almost complete lack of contribution by the Australian government.

## **Indigenous development goals**

Nevertheless, based on the conclusion that the setting of these MDGs has been a clear positive leading to enhanced effort and more focused debate I want to propose that as Australians we should establish a similar set of goals to increase the collective efforts of Australian governments to reduce the relative and absolute disadvantage suffered by indigenous Australians.

Before turning to the goals themselves there are two preliminary issues which need to be considered: how should the goals be set and how should the goals be monitored?

By its very nature the Millennium Summit had representatives of the poorest nations present. Since the abolition of ATSIC no representative body exists which can give indigenous legitimacy to the goals once established. Obviously, if the goals are to have an impact they need ultimately to be endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Indigenous Affairs and COAG. But in the process of developing the recommendations to both those bodies a more complex process may be required unless prompt and reasonable measures are developed to re-establish a representative indigenous voice.

While I would hope and expect that an incoming Labor government would act quickly on this matter there is no prospect that the Howard government will do so. Therefore we need to develop an alternative model.

What is fundamental is that the process for debating and establishing the goals should have legitimacy, vigour and transparency.

Since the abolition of ATSIC there has been little sign of this in any of the debates concerning indigenous affairs. Hand-picked advisory bodies considering confidential papers in private will not do the job.

Since we cannot afford to wait for the creation of a new indigenous representative body before starting the debate, COAG, or the Ministerial Council, will need to involve indigenous representatives in the process of commissioning, distributing and discussing the papers and reports which can underpin the setting of the goals.

## **The monitoring process**

The lack of a representative indigenous body is even more of a problem in the monitoring and accountability process. I see this as a key role for any re-established indigenous representative body. Rather than being a quasi executive agency to which difficult subjects are referred and to which blame for failure accrues, a future representative body should hold state, Commonwealth and local government agencies accountable for their performance in service delivery to indigenous Australians.

Parliamentary scrutiny will also be necessary. This might best be achieved by amalgamating the various parliamentary committees which look at indigenous affairs in to one major joint committee which deals with native title and general inquiries into indigenous issues as well as taking up the task of monitoring the implementation of any agreed goals.

## The basis for the goals

Clearly, on this basis I am in no position to determine what goals should ultimately be set. However it is time to start. After all, as Peter Beattie said in his recent book, Australia has had over 200 years of failed policy with indigenous Australians.<sup>2</sup> It is time to stop talking about action and fussing about inputs and processes alone and start down the road of setting some clear and ambitious goals.

Some of the goals and targets suggested in this paper will prove too ambitious and others too modest. But the debate about goals, priorities and targets needs to start.

It's not as if the present system is working very well. As the recent study by John Altman and Boyd Hunter of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR)<sup>3</sup> made clear, the approach of so-called practical reconciliation has been far from a success. It is time we tried something new.

Using the coincidence of timing of the change of government at a federal level with the 1996 census Altman and Hunter compare the progress of indigenous Australians against a set of indicators derived from 1991, 1996 and 2001 census data.

They conclude that the relative standing of indigenous people declined in the 1996-2001 period which suggests that "indigenous Australians have not shared in national economic growth to the same extent as other Australians" and that "areas of improvement evident to 1996 have been eroded over the period 1996 -2001."

Of course some will say that we should be focusing on the rights agenda. In fact I agree with that. A focus on the rights agenda is absolutely fundamental but it's just not sufficient by itself. The debate must be conducted along parallel streams about rights and outcomes, while recognising that rights are both important for themselves and as part of the process of change necessary to achieve many of the desired outcomes.

I will never advocate abandoning the commitment to the rights agenda or a slackening of the commitment to delivering enhanced rights and defending existing rights. At the time of the native title debate the then Labor government committed to the development of the social justice package. I consider a commitment to a range of goals to be achieved over the next decade is a necessary step in the process of delivering that still unfulfilled commitment to a social justice package.

It is not as if we're short of information about what needs to be done. Both the Productivity Commission<sup>4</sup> and the Grants Commission<sup>5</sup> have conducted major studies on relative and absolute disadvantage, both nationally and regionally, which give us an objective basis on which to build. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Institute of Criminology also supply a range of fundamental statistics which can guide us in the direction of appropriate goals. Similarly the AMA has been setting down some major objectives in the vital area of health<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Beattie, *Making a Difference*, Harper Collins 2005.

<sup>3</sup> "Monitoring 'practical' reconciliation", J Altman and B Hunter, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005*, Productivity Commission.

<sup>5</sup> *Report on Indigenous Funding*, Commonwealth Grants Commission 2001.

<sup>6</sup> eg AMA: *Public Report Card, 2003, Time for Action*.

In addition, in 1991 a wide range of detailed health goals were specified as a result of a government report<sup>7</sup>. This was funded through the National Better Health program and ATSIC and was undertaken by the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service and the North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Child Care. As inspiring national goals these were probably too detailed and specific but they do indicate the sort of work that can underpin a broader goal setting exercise.

The annual reports of many of the mainstream agencies also include some indication of goals. However, they tend to focus more on goals about increasing inputs or improving processes rather than on achieving social outcomes .

And of course many indigenous writers and commentators have had much to say about the sort of progress they would like to see, both generally and with regard to the specific inquiries such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Bringing Them Home report.

So on the basis of all this work by many committed individuals let me start to speculate on what some of these goals might be. In seeking to choose policy areas for which goals should be set I have referred in particular to the subject areas chosen by CAEPR and the COAG report prepared by the Productivity Commission.

The broad areas I suggest are:

1. Health
2. Education
3. Housing
4. Income
5. Employment
6. Justice and Community Safety
7. Drug use and misuse

## Health

The various reports raise a wide range of health indicators at which we might look. The 1991 report set out 46 goals and hundreds of targets to be achieved in the pursuit of those goals.

By contrast the Altman and Hunter CAEPR report, limiting itself to material drawn from the census, focused on just two goals: life expectancy and the proportion of the population over 55 years.

The Productivity Commission report for COAG considered a number of benchmarks for which it considered absolute and relative progress. These included:

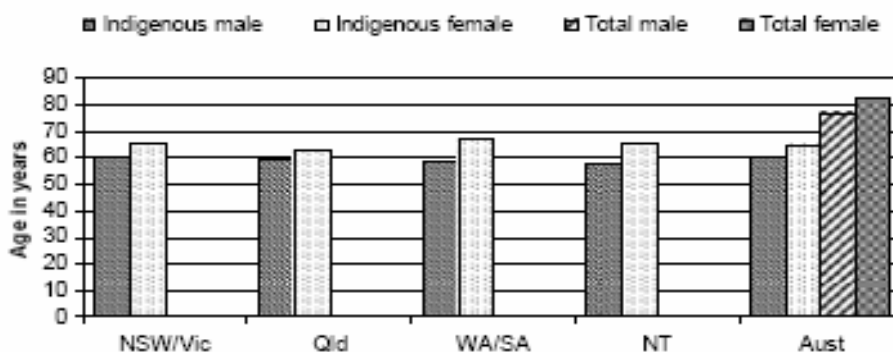
- Life expectancy
- Disability
- Hospitalisations for assault
- Admission for infectious diseases
- Low birth weight
- Hearing impediments
- Substance use and misuse
- Environmental health

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<sup>7</sup> *Interim Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Goals and Targets*, National Better Health Program, 1991.

All analyses appear to argue that the No. 1 measurable goal must relate **to narrowing the life expectancy gap**. The ABS estimates that for both males and females, life expectancy at birth in the indigenous population is 17.2 years less than in the total Australian population .

Figure 3.1.1 Life expectancy at birth, Indigenous 1996–2001, total population 1998–2000<sup>a, b, c</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Indigenous data are for the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and include an adjustment for undercoverage of Indigenous deaths. <sup>b</sup> Indigenous life expectancy excludes Tasmania and the ACT. For Tasmania and the ACT, use data for NSW and Victoria. <sup>c</sup> Life expectancy data for Indigenous males and Indigenous females are for the period 1996–2001. Data for total males and females cover the period 1998–2000, the approximate mid-point of the Indigenous data.  
Source: ABS (2004); table 3A.1.1.

The 1991 report suggested a target that within 10 years this differential should be reduced by 50 per cent. The entrenched nature of the underlying causes of the differential may mean that such a goal is unachievable. In fact Altman and Hunter suggest that the relative position has deteriorated between 1991 and 2001.

At the very least, this trend must be reversed.

The AMA reported in 2002 that Australia was lagging behind comparable countries. They showed that Canada, New Zealand and the USA had reduced life expectancy gaps to less than half that in Australia (5-7 years compared to Australia’s 20 years). Furthermore, these countries have reduced the life expectancy gap by between 2 and 8 years over recent decades, while we have failed to do so.

To match the performance of those countries we must set ourselves the target of stopping the gap from growing any further by 2010 and begin to reduce it by 2015.

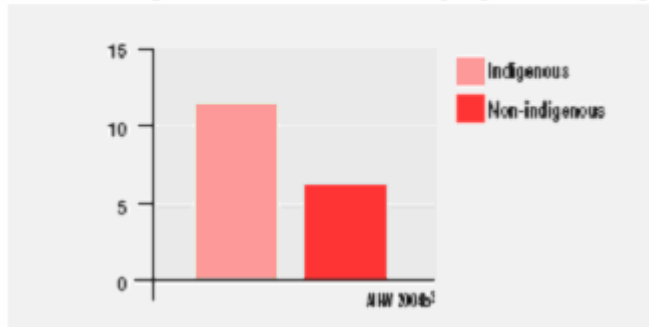
If the USA and Canada can reduce their gap by 2-5 years in 20 years we should aim for no less.

## Low Birth Weight Babies

The AMA in the latest of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Report Cards focused on **low birth weight babies**. Their research shows clearly that indigenous children are more than twice as likely to be born with low birth weight as non-indigenous children, putting 1140 children a year at a physical and developmental disadvantage.

## LOW BIRTH WEIGHT

Low Birth Weight babies are those born weighing less than 2500g.



The AMA's report shows that in the short term LBW is an extremely important factor in infant mortality. Furthermore, surviving low birth weight babies suffer from poor health for the rest of their lives compared to those of full birth weight.

In the medium to long term, LBW is associated with many chronic illnesses including:

- Obesity
- Renal failure
- Adult onset diabetes and
- Heart failure

The AMA calls for the reduction of LBW indigenous babies to be set as a national goal and for monitoring progress towards the achievement of this goal.

They are right!

The AMA reports successful programs from Townsville and the Northern Territory have reduced low birth weight babies from 16% to 11.7% (Townsville) and by 8.4% in the NT case.

Such successes suggest we should set a target of reducing LBW indigenous babies from 12% to 9% by 2010 and to the non-indigenous average of 6% by 2015.

## Education

Altman and Hunter refer to two census-based criteria for measuring trends in educational outcomes:

- The percentage holding post-school qualifications
- The percentage currently attending tertiary education

The Productivity Commission, using more diverse sources, refers to a wide range of criteria including:

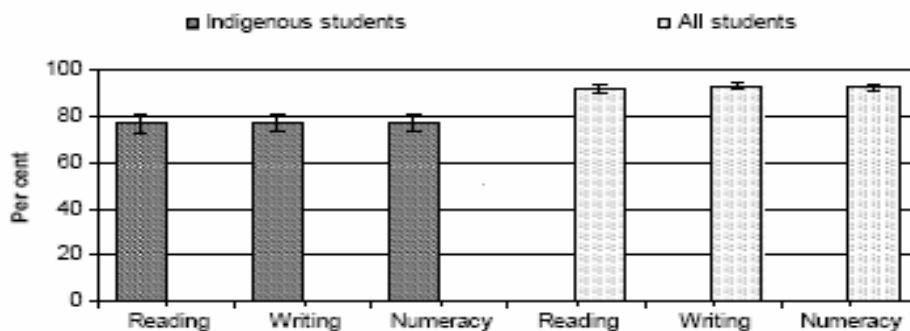
- Year 10 and 12 retention
- Post secondary participation
- Year 3 literacy and numeracy

While there are many reference points it may be appropriated to examine each end of the education cycle.

- a. Year 3 literacy and numeracy
- b. Per cent currently attending tertiary education

Nationally in 2002 the proportion of indigenous students who achieved the year 3 reading benchmark was 76.7% compared to 92.3% of all students; for the writing benchmark the figures were 77.1% compared to 93.6% and for numeracy 77.6% compared to 92.8%.

Figure 6.2.1 Proportion of year 3 students who achieved national benchmarks, 2002<sup>a, b, c, d</sup>



<sup>a</sup> The achievement percentages reported in this chart include 95 per cent confidence intervals, for example 80 per cent  $\pm$  2.7 per cent. <sup>b</sup> Students who were absent or withdrawn from testing are not classified as assessed students and are not included in the benchmark calculations. The proportion of absent and withdrawn students varies considerably across jurisdictions. Hence, readers are urged to be cautious when comparing results. <sup>c</sup> Some of the movements in the results over time may have occurred because of State/Territory equating processes, and may not reflect actual improvements in student performance. <sup>d</sup> The method used to identify indigenous students and students with a language background other than English (LBOTE) varies between jurisdictions.

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) (2005); tables 6A.2.8, 6A.2.18 and 6A.2.29.

This indicator is important because ACER research supports the intuitive judgement that students who do not achieve these benchmarks find more difficulty in school and are less likely to proceed to post-secondary education.

Therefore it must be a priority to close this gap.

According to Altman and Hunter’s assessment of census data the proportion of indigenous youth currently attending a tertiary education institution is around half that of other Australians. They concluded “it is an indictment of current education policy that there was a large decline in the indigenous to non-indigenous ratios from 1996 to 2001.

Post-secondary education achievement is a signpost for improved socio-economic outcomes. If we are not seeing improvement here it is an indication that the socio-economic status gap is not being narrowed effectively.

The percentage of youth attending tertiary institutions rose from 1991-1996 from 11.6% to 13.8% but fell again from 1996-2001 from 13.8% back to 11.6%. The ratio of indigenous to non-indigenous youth attending tertiary institutions rose from 0.50 to 0.55 and has subsequently fallen back to 0.44.

This is a policy area where the potential for improvement has been established. We must set a goal of returning to the 1996 level of 13.8% by 2010 and improving on it to at least 16% by 2015.

# Housing

Housing adequacy is critical to any serious attempt at improving socio-economic status for indigenous Australians. Without an adequate quantity and quality of housing other objectives, for example, health and education, are unachievable.

And, of course, the availability and standard of housing are key indicators of living standards in themselves.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has produced comprehensive housing data<sup>8</sup>. Based on this and census and other survey data there are a range of possible targets for improvement against which reasonable and achievable goals might be set.

Altman and Hunter refer to home ownership and household size.

The COAG report covers:

- Home ownership
- Overcrowding
- Access to water and sewerage

The AIHW material also covers:

- Homelessness
- Rental pressures
- Maintenance requirements

The most important indicator of the need for more housing is probably **overcrowding** which can be a significant contributor to poor health, family violence and poor educational outcomes.

The data indicates that 26% of indigenous people aged 15 years and over lived in overcrowded housing in 2002. This affects more than 70,000 people. While time series and comparative data do not appear to be satisfactory it would be a sufficient goal to reduce this absolute number and percentage significantly over the next 5-10 years.

An ambitious target of reducing the 26% to 20% and then 15% should be a starting point for discussion.

The AIHW analysis of indigenous households in **dwelling with structural problems** is a useful indicator of housing quality.

The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), as analysed by AIHW indicates that 58,100, or 35.1%, of indigenous households were in dwellings with structural problems.

This report does not provide a time series or a basis for comparison with non-indigenous housing. However, the AIHW makes clear that dwellings in need of major repairs may impact seriously on the health and wellbeing of people living in the dwelling.

Therefore, this is an area where concerted attention is warranted.

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005, *Indigenous Housing Indicators 2003-04*.

If we set a target of reducing the housing in need of major repair to below 30% by 2010 and to halve the rate by 2015 this should call for a major effort by all concerned.

**Home ownership** is also an indicator of direct interest and reflects broader movement in socio-economic status. This is an area where there has been slow but steady improvement, from 30% to 33% of households from 1991 – 2001.

This 2001 figure represents a home ownership rate which is only 46% of the non-indigenous rate. Home ownership is not an appropriate goal for every indigenous household, but it is an indicator which is particularly important to indigenous people in urban and regional communities. We should be able to aim to increase the rate of improvement to reach 50% of the non-indigenous rate by 2010 and 55% by 2015. This would represent an indigenous home ownership rate of approximately 36% by 2010 and as high as 40% by 2015.

## **Justice and community safety**

Justice and community safety are not usually included in measures of socio-economic status and living standards. But, without either the capacity to enjoy other opportunities it is seriously diminished.

There is much research in this area, particularly arising from the work of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody.

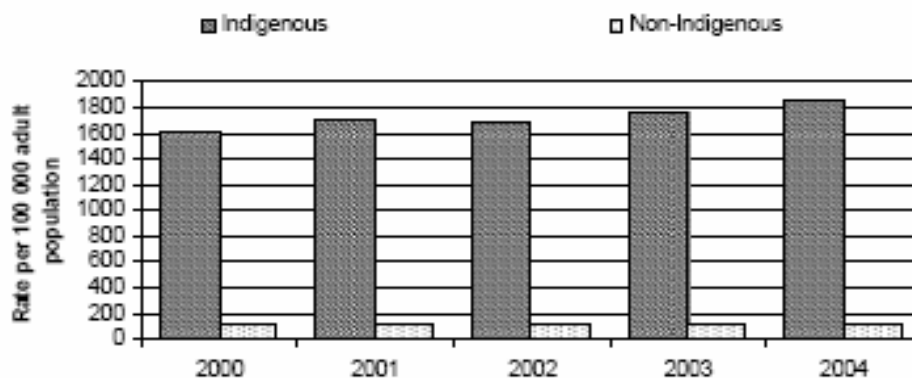
Over-representation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system is well documented.

The Royal Commission identified links between education; child welfare practices, juvenile justice, health and employment opportunities as contributors to the disproportionate representation of indigenous Australians in police and custodial facilities.

Whatever the explanation the figures are stark: indigenous Australians are 11-15 times more likely than other Australians to be imprisoned. Indigenous juveniles are 20 times more likely to be detained than other juveniles.

Between 2000 and 2004 there has been no improvement in imprisonment rates.

Figure 3.12.1 Rate of imprisonment, Australia, 30 June each year<sup>a, b</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Imprisonment rates differ from previously published rates because they have been revised. Imprisonment rates for 2000 and 2001 have been revised using Indigenous population estimates benchmarked on the 2001 Census of Population and Housing. Imprisonment rates for 2002 to 2004 are based on Indigenous population projections based on the 2001 Census of Population and Housing (low series). <sup>b</sup> Data for 2003 for non-Indigenous people was not available.

Source: ABS (2004b); table 3A.12.2; 3A.12.10.

We must set a goal to significantly and consistently reduce **adult and juvenile imprisonment rates** towards the national average. On the other hand, it is important to remember that such data as exists suggests that indigenous Australians are also much more likely to be **victims of crimes**.

NATSISS data as reported by the COAG study indicates that both indigenous men and women experience more than double the victimisation rate of other women and men.

Initiatives are under way to develop nationally comparable data on crime victimisation by indigenous status which will facilitate the development of specific targets. But there is sufficient evidence to suggest we must set an ambitious goal in this area if the lives of indigenous Australians are to be effectively improved.

While further analysis will refine the targets to be set, an initial suggestion might be:

- Reduce the age standardised imprisonment rate for indigenous Australians from the national average of 11.2 times the rate for non-indigenous Australians to the NT ratio of 8.6 by 2010 and reduce it further by 2015, with particular focus on the juvenile detention rate.
- Reduce the proportion of indigenous people aged 18 years or over who are victims of violence from the 2002 rate of 23.3 down to the 1994 rate of 12.9 % by 2015.

## Employment

The measurement of effective indigenous economic participation is made more difficult by the role of the CDEP program which can disguise the real extent of the employment disadvantage facing indigenous Australians.

The COAG report finds that the ratio of **indigenous to non-indigenous full-time employment rate** was 0.7%, based on a 45.3% rate for indigenous Australians compared to 67.2% for the non-indigenous population.

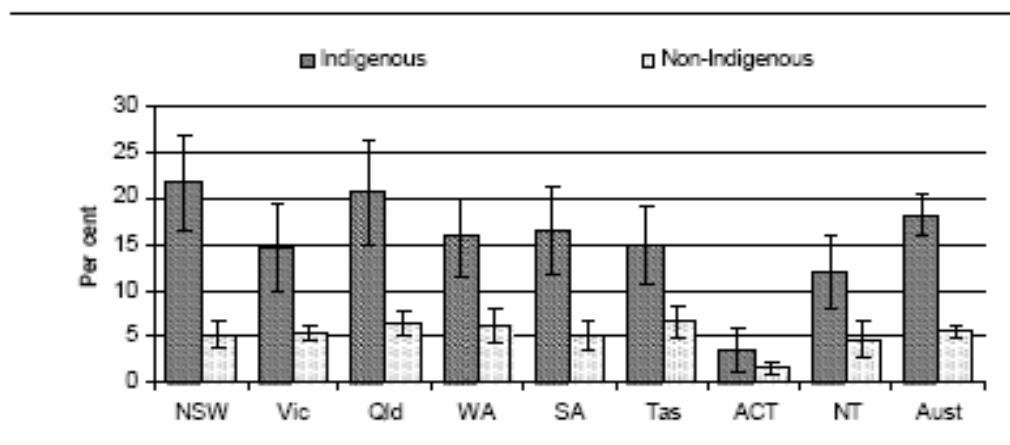
The benefit of using this measure is that it excludes the distortion from the impact of CDEP, particularly in remote areas.

As Altman and Hunter found that this ratio declined from 1996-2001 the first goal must be to reverse this decline.

A reasonable target would be to lift the full-time employment rate to 50% by 2010 and 55% by 2015. This would represent ratios of approximately 0.75 and 0.8 of the non-indigenous rates.

The other key indicator of success in achieving effective employment is the **unemployment rate**. The attached chart from the COAG report illustrates the dramatic differences in the unemployment rate between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Figure 3.5.4 Age standardised unemployment rate, aged 18 years and over, 2002<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> The ACT estimate for Indigenous persons has a relative standard error greater than 25 per cent and should be used with caution.

Source: ABS 2002 NATSISS (unpublished); ABS 2002 GSS (unpublished); table 3A.5.3.

Furthermore, Altman and Hunter show that while the indigenous unemployment rate fell in the 1996 -2001 inter-censal period the comparison with non-indigenous Australians deteriorated from 2.52 times greater to 2.78, suggesting that indigenous Australians have not gained their fair share of the economic prosperity of recent years.

A necessary goal must be to restore the comparative rate to its 1996 level as a first step to improving it steadily until it reaches a ratio of 2.3 or less by 2015.

## Income

The Productivity Commission report for COAG illustrates the significance of income as an indicator of material disadvantage; and an important determinant of socio-economic status and concludes “people who have lower incomes...live shorter lives and suffer more illness than those who are well-off”.

While this indicator is likely to correlate highly with other health and social indicators it is important to track it by itself, although CAEPR indicates some problems of measurement. Income statistics seem the most straight forward but this appearance is deceptive. The CAEPR report

makes clear that “income has several shortcomings as a measure ...” In particular, the focus in census data is on cash income which therefore does not include things like returns from customary activity or superannuation benefits. There is also a risk that census data may not adequately reflect income from art sales or the benefits from mining royalties, particularly in remote areas. Nevertheless, income is so fundamental to living standards it must be included.

As the COAG report indicates, “... the extent to which income for indigenous people is lower than for non-indigenous people is a major indicator of material disadvantage.”

And the evidence suggests the difference is vast and getting worse. After taking into account factors relating to household composition the ABS has calculated that household income for indigenous people was \$394 compared with \$665 for non-indigenous people ie indigenous household income was 59% of that of non-indigenous households.

The story is essentially the same in the CAEPR report based on analysis of census data. In that report Altman and Hunter concluded that in 2001 indigenous median income for indigenous adults was 59% of that of non-indigenous adults and, over the period 1996-2001 the relative income gap widened. The median level was 65% of that for non-indigenous Australians in 1996 but it fell to 59% in 2001.

The Productivity Commission /COAG data on **household income** which allows for household composition and related issues to be taken into account is the more important indicator of household economic wellbeing; but census data on **individual incomes** is also important.

We need to set targets to raise the COAG measure of household income from 59% of non-indigenous income to 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2015. On the individual income measure we must at least aim to get back to the 1991 level of 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2015.

## **Substance use and abuse**

This could be regarded as a subset of either the health or justice and community safety categories.

However, I am inclined to accept Noel Pearson’s analysis that if drug and alcohol abuse is not targeted directly it will be impossible to resolve other problems.

The COAG report covers a range of statistical measures of drug and alcohol use, alcohol related crime and other drug and substance use sourced from the ABS 2002 NATSISS survey.

Comparative data appears not to be readily available but targets to reduce consumption and associated problems can be targeted pending the collection of more and better data.

As initial targets, it would appear appropriate to focus on the most used and abused drugs: cigarettes and alcohol, although it may be necessary to consider other target areas as data emerges, particularly on a regional level.

In the first instance reducing the percentage of cigarette smokers among those 15-24 might make the biggest health impact. If the percentage were reduced from above 45% to below 40% over 5 years this would have a major and lasting impact.

The most straightforward data on alcohol consumption is that from NATSISS relating to the proposition of “high risk” drinkers. This assessment is based on an average daily consumption of 7 or more standard drinks for males and 5 or more for females.

This group comprised more than 15,000 people or 5.6% of indigenous Australians over the age of 15. When medium risk drinkers are included the figure rises to more than 15%.

There is a clear need to focus on reducing this percentage – particularly for the high risk category.

An initial target might be to reduce the high risk consumption rate to less than 5% by 2010 and below 4% by 2015.

There are other data sets, such as those relating to alcohol related crime and data use of other drugs but the biggest and most direct targets are excessive cigarette and alcohol use and reducing these should be our primary targets.

<p>Goal 1: Eliminate the gap in health standards between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians</p>	<p><i>Target 1: Stop the life expectancy gap from growing and begin to reduce it by 2015.</i></p>
	<p><i>Target 2: Reduce the life expectancy gap from 20 years to 15 years by 2025.</i></p>
	<p><i>Target 3: Reduce the percentage of indigenous children with low birth weight from 12% today to 9% by 2010 and to the non-indigenous average of 6% by 2015.</i></p>
<p>Goal 2: Lift the level of educational attainment of indigenous Australians to the national average</p>	<p><i>Target 4: Lift the proportion of indigenous students who achieve the Year 3 reading, writing and numeracy benchmark to 80% by 2010 and to the national average of more than 90% for all indigenous children not in remote areas by 2015 and for all indigenous children by 2020.</i></p>
	<p><i>Target 5: Restore the proportion of indigenous youth attending tertiary institutions to the 1996 level of 13.8% by 2010 and lift it to 16 % by 2015.</i></p>
<p>Goal 3: Increase the quantity and quality of indigenous housing.</p>	<p><i>Target 6: Reduce the proportion of indigenous people living in overcrowded housing from 26% to 20% by 2010 and to 15% by 2015.</i></p>
	<p><i>Target 7: Reduce the proportion of indigenous households in dwellings with structural problems from 35% to below 30% by 2010 and below 20% by 2015.</i></p>
	<p><i>Target 8: Lift the indigenous home ownership rate from 33% to 36% by 2010 and 40% by 2015.</i></p>

Goal 4: Establish the right to live safely in the community for all indigenous Australians,

*Target 9: Reduce the ratio of indigenous incarceration from 11.2 times the rate for non-indigenous Australians to 8.6 by 2010 and reduce it further by 2015 with particular focus on the juvenile detention rate.*

*Target 10: Reduce the proportion of indigenous people 18 years or over who are victims of crimes of violence from the 2002 rate of 23.3% down to the 1994 rate of 12.9% by 2015.*

Goal 5: Lift the level of effective economic engagement of indigenous Australians to the level they seek.

*Target 11: Lift the indigenous full-time employment rate from 45.3% to 50% by 2010 and 55% by 2015 which would represent ratios of approximately .75 and .8 of the non-indigenous rate.*

*Target 12: Restore the ratio of indigenous to non-indigenous unemployment to the 1996 level of 2.5:1 by 2010 and improve it to 2.3 by 2015.*

*Target 13: Raise the comparative household income of indigenous Australians as reported by the Productivity Commission from 59% in 2001 to 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2015.*

*Target 14: Restore the median income for indigenous adults to the 1991 level of 70% of that for non-indigenous adults by 2010 and increase it to 75% by 2015.*

Goal 6: Tackle substance abuse in the indigenous community as an issue in its own right and as a pre-requisite to achieving other goals.

*Target 15: Reduce the percentage of cigarette smokers amongst indigenous Australians 15-24 years old from above 45% to below 40% by 2010 and to the national average by 2015.*

*Target 16: Reduce the high risk alcohol consumption rate amongst indigenous Australians over 15 from 5.6% to below 5% and then to below 4% by 2015 and reduce the high and medium risk level of alcohol consumption to below 10% over the same period.*

## Conclusion

The lessons of the international development debate suggest that until we move the debate from one about inputs and processes to one about goals and targets we will never mobilise the will or the resources to bring about real improvements in living standards.

The issue is not whether we should have shared responsibility agreements or mutual obligation, it is whether we are making real inroads into the actual relative disadvantage of indigenous Australia.

The issue is not whether we need a truly representative indigenous body, it is the reality that we will not get goals with real legitimacy or genuine accountability until we do have one.

The goals themselves, the process for setting them and the means for monitoring them and holding governments accountable will undoubtedly be the subject of great debate as they should be. What I hope is that we can move quickly to an agreement on the need for the goals and set up a process by which we can establish them in a manner which is seen by indigenous and non-indigenous Australians alike as legitimate and which has the endorsement of executive government.

Such an agreement might help end the electoral game-playing at the expense of indigenous people which both parties have indulged in over the last decade.

There is no doubt that the Howard Government has seen electoral advantage in stirring up prejudices against indigenous Australians amongst traditional Labor voters. And the Labor Party has too often backed away from issues for fear of losing votes or, on at least one occasion, tried to get in first and appeal to the same prejudices. But this process has seen the absolute disadvantage continue and relative disadvantage worsen.

Indigenous Australians have not received a fair share of our economic boom. It is time we focused on making sure they do.

## Appendix 1 – Full Text of Millennium Development Goals

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<p><i>Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day</i></p> <p><i>Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger</i></p>
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	<p><i>Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</i></p>
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	<p><i>Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015</i></p>
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality	<p><i>Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate</i></p>
Goal 5: Improve maternal health	<p><i>Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio</i></p>
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	<p><i>Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</i></p> <p><i>Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</i></p>
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	<p><i>Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources</i></p> <p><i>Target 10: Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water</i></p> <p><i>Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers</i></p>
Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development	<p><i>Target 12: Develop further an open, rule based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction—both nationally and internationally)</i></p>

*Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries (includes tariff- and quota free access for exports, enhanced program of debt relief for and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction)*

*Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states (through the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22nd General Assembly provisions)*

*Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term*

*Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth*

*Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries*

*Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies*