

Foreword

Across almost all standard indicators, the Indigenous population has worse outcomes than the non-Indigenous population. Despite the abundance of statistics and a plethora of government reports on Indigenous outcomes, there is very little information on how Indigenous disadvantage accumulates or is mitigated through time at the individual level. The limited research that is available seems to point to two conclusions. Firstly, that Indigenous disadvantage starts from a very early age and widens over time. Secondly, that the timing of key life events including education attendance, marriage, childbirth and retirement occur on average at different ages for the Indigenous compared to the non-Indigenous population. To target policy interventions that will contribute to meeting the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Closing the Gap targets, it is important to better understand and acknowledge these differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous lifecourse, as well as the factors that lead to variation within the Indigenous population.

This research is part of the CAEPR Indigenous Population Project, sponsored by the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA). The core aim of the project is to further explore the dynamics and regional geography of Indigenous population and socioeconomic change. The research program recognises that there is a strong interaction between demography and socioeconomic change. A number of research outputs from the Population Project have demonstrated a relationship between lifecourse patterns and regional change. This monograph extends this work by looking at a much greater range of individual variables using a new source of quantitative data, the 5 per cent Census Sample File from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

The topics covered involve complex social issues facing Indigenous Australians and the authors allude to some of these within the limitations set by available data. The material presented is unapologetically technical in nature as it forms a part of CAEPR's long term commitment to robust evaluation and analysis of data collections. In this endeavour we have maintained a productive and collaborative relationship with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and we recognise their dedication to improving future statistical collections. A key finding is the need for a new structure for Indigenous data collection on order to track individual outcomes through time. The authors argue for a new National Closing the Gaps Survey (NCGS) that will not only allow yearly progress towards government targets to be assessed, but also a greater understanding of the timing and determinants of key life events.