1 Profile of Aboriginal Victorians

SUMMARY

Aboriginal Victorians, while forming only a small proportion of the total population in Victoria (0.5 per cent in 2001) have been growing rapidly in number. The 1991 Census counted 16,728 Aboriginal Victorians and 10 years later the Census counted 25,079 – an increase of 50 per cent. A notable feature of the Victorian Aboriginal population is the higher numbers of children and young people – in 2001, 39 per cent were aged 0-14 years, compared with 20 per cent of non-Aboriginal Victorians in that age group. Approximately half of Victoria's Aboriginal people live in metropolitan Melbourne. ABS projections indicate that by 2009 Aboriginal Victorians will total between 33,045 and 40,134.

A number of reports and websites provide comprehensive information on Indigenous Victorians today. These include the report *Aboriginal People of Victoria* (2002) published by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC); the Koorie Heritage Trust (2004) which aims to protect, preserve and promote the living culture of the Indigenous people of south eastern Australia; and *Mission Voices*, which is a unique collection on the culture and history of Victorian (Koori) people produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) (2004) in partnership with the Koorie Heritage Trust, Parks Victoria and the State Library of Victoria. Demographic information from the ABS on Indigenous Victorians is presented below.

The number of people in Victoria who identify as Indigenous has grown significantly from 1991 to 2001 according to ABS Census figures – increasing by 50 per cent in the ten year period. It should be noted that, as the ABS acknowledges, there may be continued underestimation of Indigenous Victorians (and Indigenous Australians) who may be less likely to complete Census forms or to identify as Indigenous. The ABS is actively addressing this issue (see also Ross, *Occasional Paper: Population Issues, Indigenous Australians, 1996).*

In the 1991 Census, the population of Victoria was 4,232,913 of whom 16,728 or 0.4 per cent self-identified as Indigenous. In the next Census in 1996, this grew to 21,474 Indigenous persons. This growth slowed in the 2001 Census, with 25,079 persons or 0.5 per cent identifying as Indigenous.

1.1 Age and sex

Demographically, the Victorian Indigenous population has a much younger age profile than the non-Indigenous population, as demonstrated by the shape of the age pyramids shown in Figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. Most striking, the median age of Indigenous Victorians in 2001 was 20 years, (19 for Indigenous males, 21 for Indigenous females) compared with the non-Indigenous median age of 35 years. In 2001, the median age of Indigenous persons

in the Melbourne Metropolitan Region was 22 years, compared with 18 for other Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee[2] (RAJAC) Regions within Victoria.

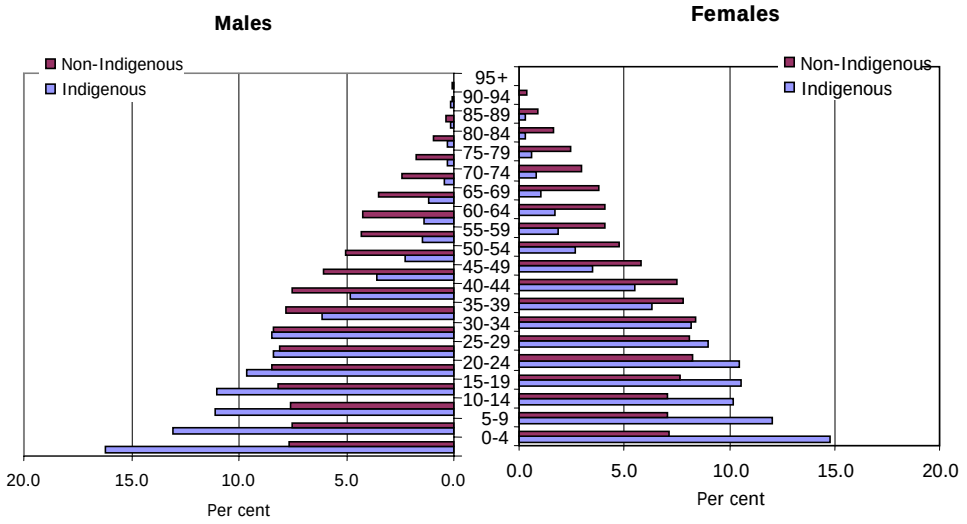
Approximately three-quarters of Victoria's Indigenous population was aged under 35 years in 2001 (73 per cent), compared with less than half (49 per cent) for non-Indigenous persons. In 2001, the 0-14 age group in the Indigenous population was proportionally almost twice as large (38.8 per cent) as the non-Indigenous population (20.3 per cent). The Loddon Mallee RAJAC Region with 42.2 per cent had the highest proportion of Indigenous people within this age group, while for the Melbourne Metropolitan Region (where half the Indigenous Victorian population live) it was 35.8 per cent.

The older age group (persons aged 65 and over) made up only 2.8 per cent of Victoria's Indigenous population in 2001, compared with 12.5 per cent of non-Indigenous persons. For Indigenous persons, the highest proportion in this age group was in the Barwon South West RAJAC Region (3.6 per cent). In the 65 years and over age group, the proportion of Indigenous persons fell slightly between 1991 and 2001 in the Hume RAJAC Region while increasing in all other regions. The proportion of non-Indigenous people in this age group increased across all RAJAC Regions.

Generally between 1991 and 2001, the age profile of Indigenous Victorians changed in relatively similar ways to that of non-Indigenous Victorians. The most notable exception was in the 0-14 age group, where in the Barwon South West, Gippsland and Hume RAJAC Regions the proportion of Indigenous people aged 0-14 years increased between 1991 and 2001 while the proportion of non-Indigenous persons in this age group decreased in these three regions.

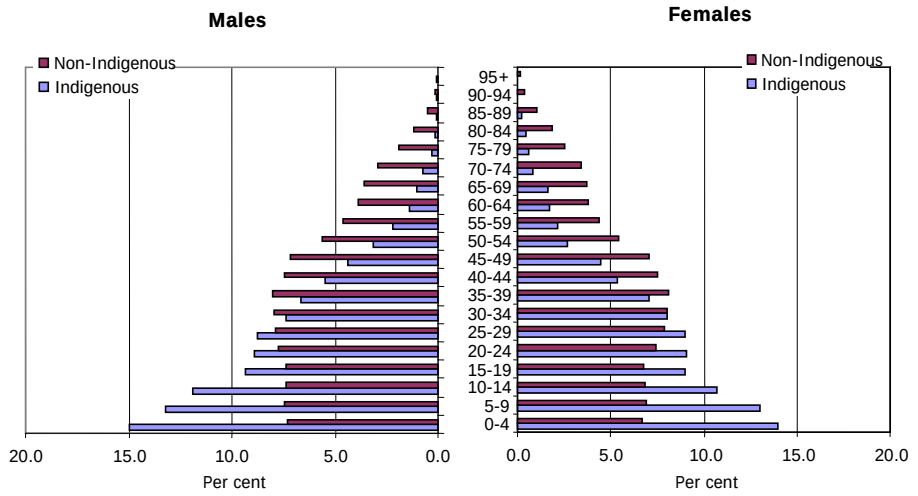
[2] The Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC) Network is an important and successful core initiative under the *Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement* providing a basic and direct link between the criminal justice system and Indigenous communities across the State. There are six RAJACs: five in Regional Victoria (Barwon South West, Gippsland, Grampians, Hume and Loddon Mallee) and one in Melbourne (as shown in Figure 1.4). The RAJAC Regions coincide with the DHS Regions, with the exception of the Melbourne RAJAC which is based on the combined 4 DHS Metropolitan Regions.

Figure 1.1: Age/sex pyramids by Indigenous status, Victoria, 1991



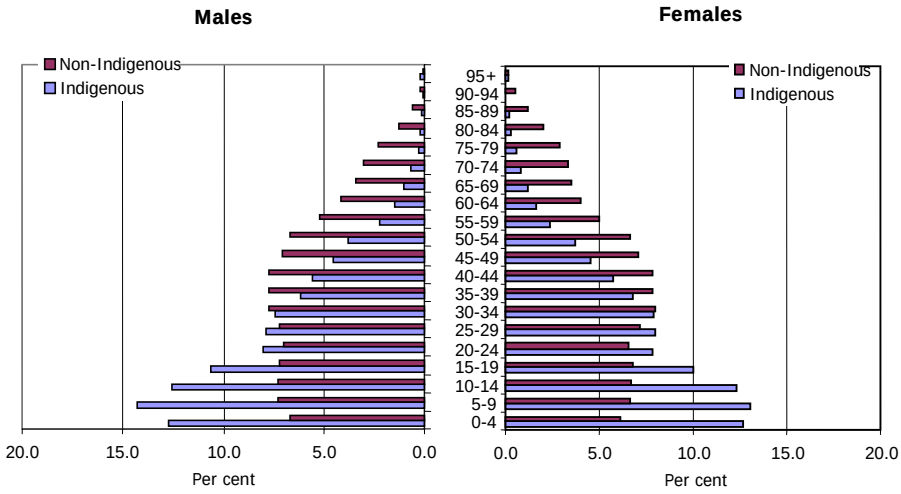
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).

Figure 1.2: Age/sex pyramids by Indigenous status, Victoria, 1996



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).

Figure 1.3: Age/sex pyramids by Indigenous status, Victoria, 2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).

It should be noted that this difference in age profile between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons impacts on other areas, such as educational attainment and economic status.

1.2 Where Indigenous people live in Victoria

Almost half the Indigenous population in Victoria live in the Melbourne Metropolitan RAJAC Region with 7,955 persons (47.6 per cent of the Indigenous population) in 1991, 10,729 persons (50.0 per cent) in 1996 and 12,021 (47.9 per cent) in 2001.

Within this region, the local government areas that had the largest proportions of Indigenous residents in 1991 were Darebin (884 persons, 0.7 per cent), Yarra Ranges (480 persons, 0.4 per cent) and Casey (436 persons, 0.4 per cent). In 1996, the local government areas with the largest proportions were Darebin (1,135 persons, 0.9 per cent), Yarra Ranges (720 persons, 0.6 per cent) and Hume (621 persons, 0.5 per cent). For the 2001 Census there was a return to 1991 patterns with Darebin (1,087, 0.9 per cent), Casey (850 persons, 0.5 per cent) and Yarra Ranges (748 persons, 0.5 per cent).

The RAJAC Region with the highest proportion of Indigenous residents was Loddon Mallee in all 3 census years, with 0.96 per cent of their population in 1991 who were Indigenous, 1.13 per cent in 1996 and 1.38 per cent in 2001. In this region, the Local Government Area that most strongly contributed to this increase was Swan Hill with a proportion of 3.3 per cent in 1991, 3.7 per cent in 1996 and 4.1 per cent in 2001. Swan Hill was also the local government area with the highest proportion of their population who were Indigenous.

Table 1.1: Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations by RAJAC Regions, 1991

RAJAC Region	Indigenous Population	Non-Indigenous Population	Indigenous Proportion (per cent)
Melbourne Metro	7,955	3,005,796	0.26
Barwon South West	1,436	306,787	0.46
Grampians	1,056	191,167	0.55
Loddon Mallee	2,517	260,448	0.96
Gippsland	1,844	222,661	0.82
Hume	1,920	228,462	0.83
Unincorporated Victoria	0	864	0.00
Total Victoria	16,728	4,216,185	0.40

Note: Non-Indigenous population includes persons whose Indigenous status was 'Not Stated'.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).

Table 1.2: Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations by RAJAC Regions, 1996

RAJAC Region	Indigenous Population	Non-Indigenous Population	Indigenous Proportion (per cent)
Melbourne Metro	10,729	3,112,276	0.34
Barwon South West	1,795	308,831	0.58
Grampians	1,256	191,237	0.65
Loddon Mallee	3,047	265,717	1.13
Gippsland	2,328	219,603	1.05
Hume	2,314	234,211	0.98
Unincorporated Victoria	5	782	0.06
Total Victoria	21,474	4,332,652	0.49

Note: Non-Indigenous population includes persons whose Indigenous status was 'Not Stated'.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).

Table 1.3: Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations by RAJAC Regions, 2001

RAJAC Region	Indigenous Population	Non-Indigenous Population	Indigenous Proportion (per cent)
Melbourne Metro	12,021	3,327,248	0.36
Barwon South West	2,215	319,91	0.69
Grampians	1,508	196,563	0.76
Loddon Mallee	3,850	275,776	1.38
Gippsland	2,590	224,306	1.11
Hume	2,892	242,657	1.18
Unincorporated Victoria	3	778	0.38
Total Victoria	25,079	4,587,019	0.54

Note: Non-Indigenous population includes persons whose Indigenous status was Not Stated'.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).

The Indigenous population has grown in all RAJAC Regions since 1991. State wide, the proportion of persons identifying as Indigenous increased by 28.4 per cent from 1991 to 1996 and increased by 16.8 per cent between 1996 and 2001. Over the 10 years to 2001, the number of persons self-identifying as Indigenous in Victoria increased by 49.9 per cent. Between 1991 and 1996 the RAJAC Regions that experienced the largest increase were Melbourne Metropolitan (up 34.9 per cent) Gippsland (up 26.2 per cent) and Barwon South West (up 25.0 per cent). Between 1996 and 2001, the RAJAC Regions that experienced the greatest increases in population were Loddon Mallee (up 26.4 per cent), Hume (up 25.0 per cent) and Barwon South West (up 23.4 per cent). Between 1991 and 2001 the RAJAC Regions that experienced the largest increase were Barwon South West (up 54.2 per cent), Loddon Mallee (up 53.0 per cent) and Melbourne Metropolitan (up 51.1 per cent).

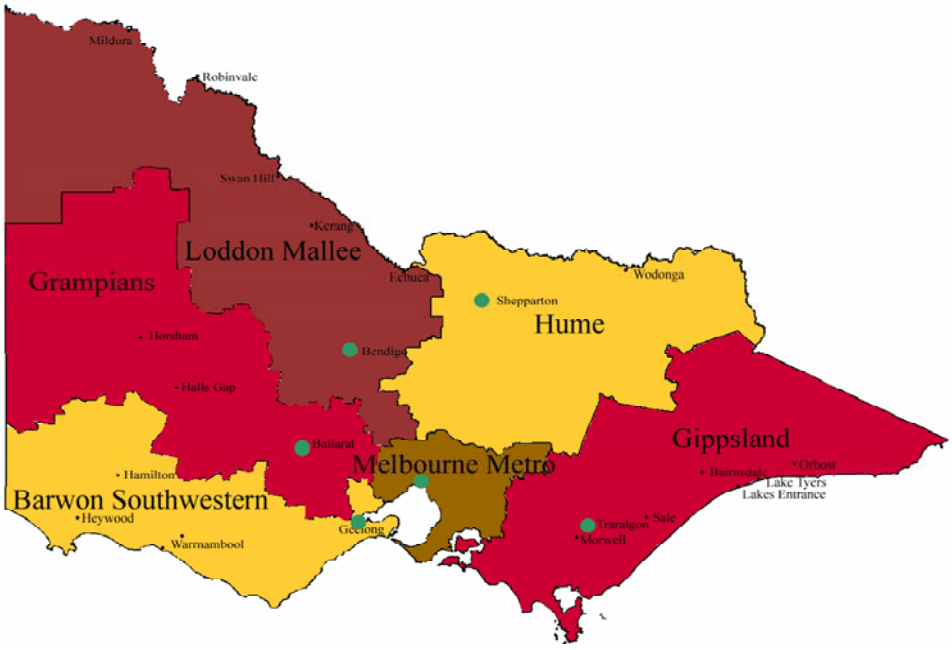
Table 1.4: Indigenous population and percentage change by RAJAC Regions, 1991, 1996, 2001

RAJAC Region	1991 Indigenous Population	1996 Indigenous Population	% Change 1991-1996	2001 Indigenous Population	% Change 1996-2001	% Change 1991-2001
Melbourne Metro	7,955	10,729	34.9	12,021	12.0	51.1
Barwon South West	1,436	1,795	25.0	2,215	23.4	54.2
Grampians	1,056	1,256	18.9	1,508	20.1	42.8
Loddon Mallee	2,517	3,047	21.1	3,850	26.4	53.0
Gippsland	1,844	2,328	26.2	2,590	11.3	40.5
Hume	1,920	2,314	20.5	2,892	25.0	50.6
Total Victoria (a)	16,728	21,474	28.4	25,079	16.8	49.9

(a) Total Victoria includes counts for Unincorporated Victoria

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).

Figure 1.4: RAJAC Regions Boundaries



Note: Regions are filled with colour to discern borders.

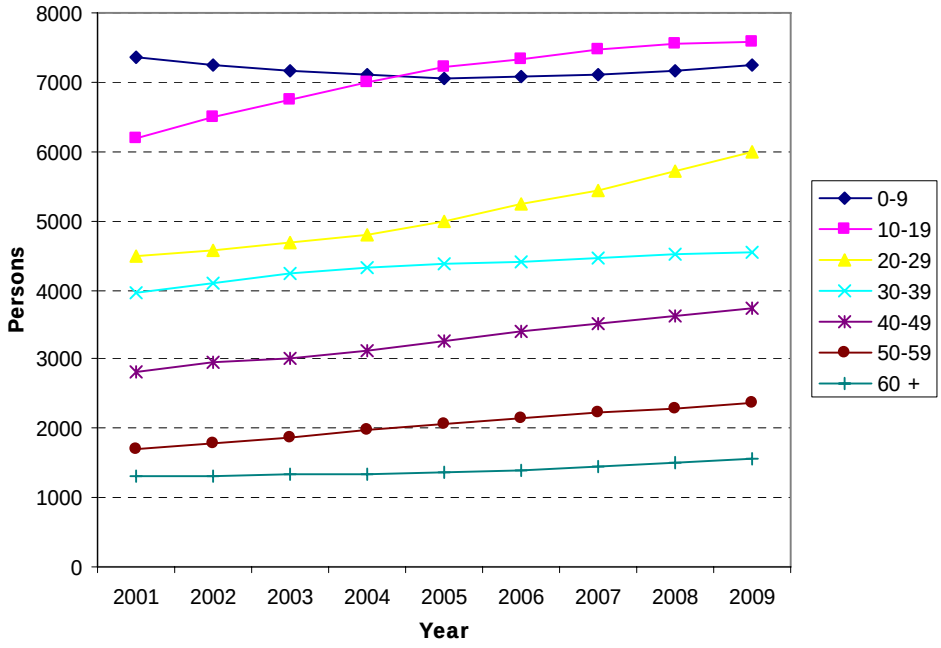
Source: Department of Justice (2005).

1.3 Indigenous population projections

The ABS has provided population projections for the Indigenous community in Victoria (based on a high growth assumption and a low growth assumption). Using the conservative estimate, Indigenous Victorians are expected to increase from 27,846 in 2001 to 33,045 in 2009 (up 18.7 per cent). The more optimistic estimate is an increase of 44.1 per cent and totalling 40,134 in number by 2009.

Of particular note are the age-specific growth projections shown in Figure 1.5 and which highlight the marked growth in the younger age groups, especially in the 10-24 year age group. These projections have implications not only for the criminal justice system but also for key services in education and health.

Figure 1.5: Experimental Indigenous population projections, low series, Victoria



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a).