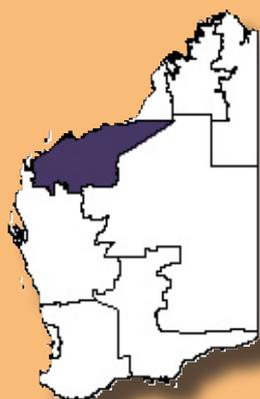


# THE HEALTH OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## NGARDA NGARLI YARNDU (SOUTH HEDLAND) ATSIK REGION



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM VOLUME ONE OF  
THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD  
HEALTH SURVEY

*This booklet summarises information on the South Hedland ATSIC region from the first volume of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People.*

## **About the survey**

The survey was conducted by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (The Institute) in conjunction with the Kulunga Research Network. Information was collected on almost 5,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The survey also collected information on the carers and other relatives living in these homes and went into some of the schools of these children and young people to interview the school teachers and principals.

The survey was carried out to identify the developmental and environmental factors that help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people develop well and survive.

## **Aims of the survey**

The aims of the survey were to estimate the prevalence and functional impact of:

- Chronic medical conditions and disabilities
- Mental health and behavioural problems in children and youth
- Adverse health behaviours (eg smoking, alcohol, drug and volatile substance misuse)
- Early school leaving, conduct problems and juvenile offending
- Resiliency and competence in children and young people
- Home-community-school influences on development.

## **What information was collected?**

Information was collected from a wide range of issues and included:

- Physical health and disabilities
- Risk behaviours (smoking, alcohol and other drug use)
- Housing
- Family and culture
- Employment and education

## **How was the survey done?**

The survey was done in three parts. Over 130 people were trained to collect data and information out in the field. Approximately 60% of these people were Aboriginal. The three components of the WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey were:

1. Household Survey - information collected on more than 11,000 family members from 2,000 families across WA.
2. Youth Survey - separate youth survey for 12-17 year olds.
3. Schools Survey - information collected from some of the schools attended by Aboriginal children who were selected for the survey (including information from teachers and principals).



## Analysis

One of the important aspects of the survey was the ability to link the collected information to several key administrative data sets including the WA Hospitals Database and the Maternal and Child Health Research Database (MCHRDB). The WA Hospitals Database details when and why a person is admitted to a hospital and the MCHRDB has birth records of all children born in WA since 1980.

## Consultation

All phases of the survey, including its development, design and implementation, were under the direction of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Steering Committee. The Steering Committee comprises of senior Aboriginal officers from a cross section of agencies and settings, and has the on-going responsibility to control and maintain:

- The cultural integrity of the survey methods and processes
- Employment opportunities for Aboriginal people
- Data access issues and communication of the findings to the Aboriginal and general community, and
- Appropriate and respectful relations within the study team, with participants and communities, with stakeholders and funding agencies and with the governments of the day.

## Why South Hedland ATSIC Region Data?

For reasons of confidentiality of individuals and families the information provided in this profile can only be given at South Hedland ATSIC regional level.

Unless otherwise stated, all data in this publication refers to the South Hedland ATSIC Region.

## About the South Hedland ATSIC region

The South Hedland ATSIC Region extends from Port Hedland in the north to Paraburdoo in the south.

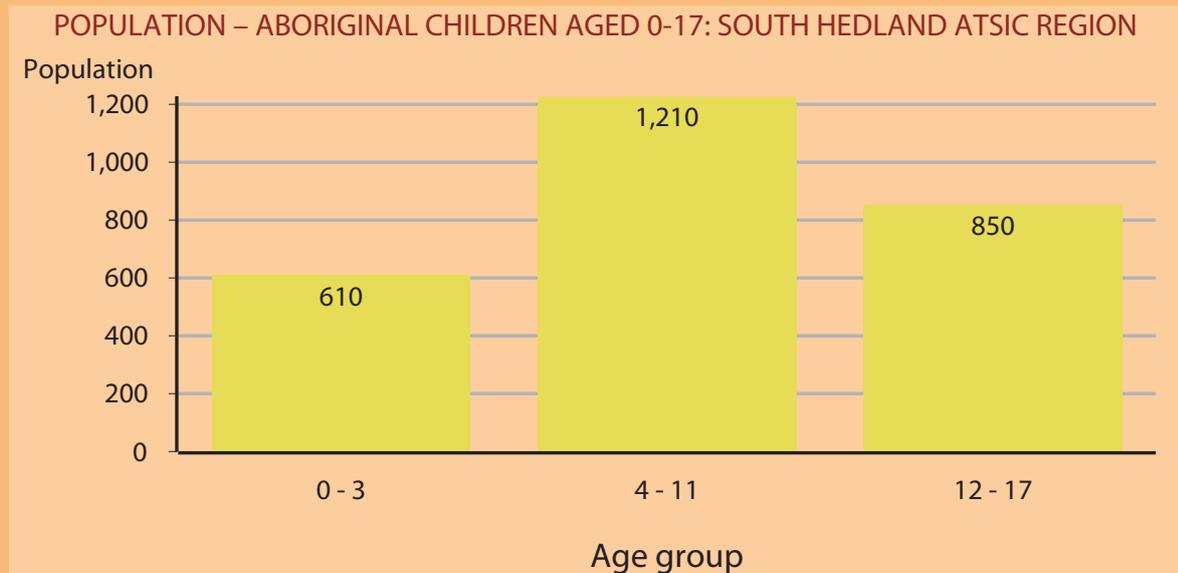
Karratha, Onslow, Tom Price, Marble Bar and Port Hedland are the major towns in the region. There are several larger Aboriginal communities in the region. These include Warralong and Yandeyarra. Some of the smaller communities in the region include Bunnengarra, Ngurawaana and Woodstock.



## Population

At the end of June 2001 there were about 66,000 Aboriginal people living in Western Australia. This works out to be 3.5% of the total population of WA. Nearly half (45%) of the total number of Aboriginal people in WA was under the age of 18 (representing 6% of the WA general population for 0-17 year olds).

In the South Hedland ATSIC region there were about 2,670 Aboriginal children aged 0-17 years, which means 9% of Aboriginal children and young people lived in the South Hedland ATSIC region.



## Level of Relative Isolation

The method we have used to describe the remoteness and physical isolation of where Aboriginal people live in WA is called the "Level of Relative Isolation", or LORI for short - a new version of ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia).

This groups people into five separate categories of isolation within WA:

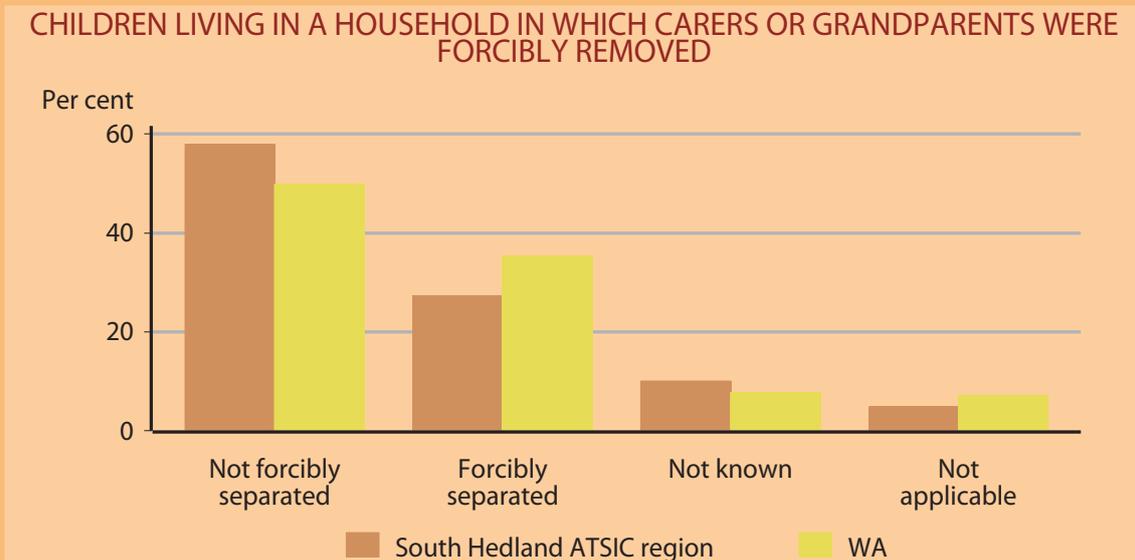
- None (e.g Perth Metropolitan area)
- Low (e.g Geraldton)
- Moderate (Fitzroy Crossing)
- High (Bayulu)
- Extreme (Iminji)

## Family and culture

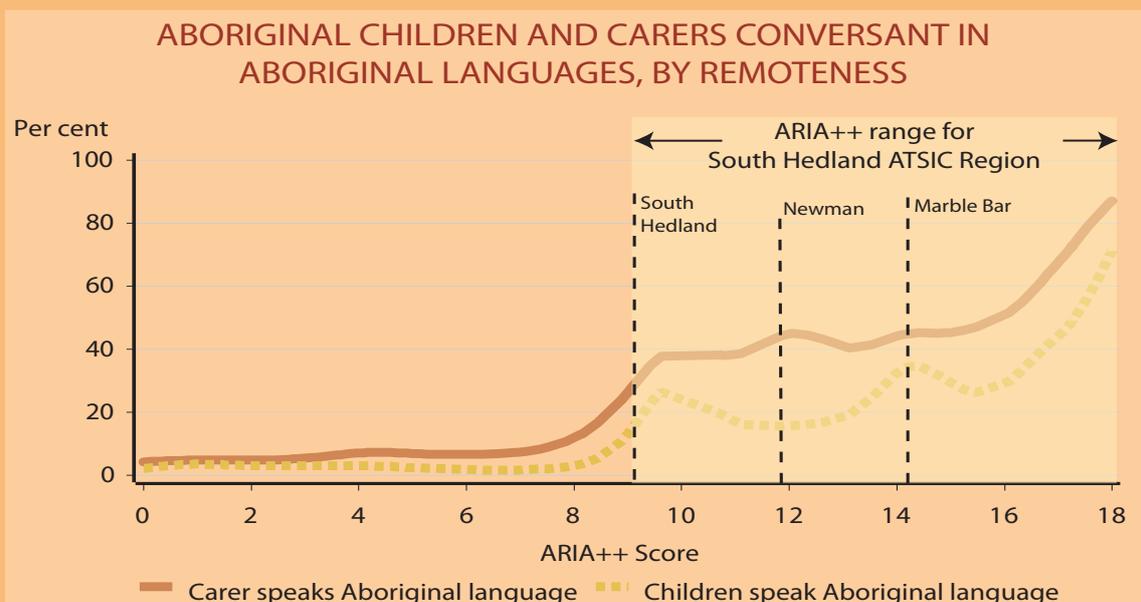
**Type of child carers** Around 90% of the main carers for Aboriginal children and young people in the South Hedland ATSIC region were Aboriginal (85% for the whole of WA). 74% of these children were still being looked after by their natural mother in the South Hedland ATSIC region compared with 80% in WA overall.



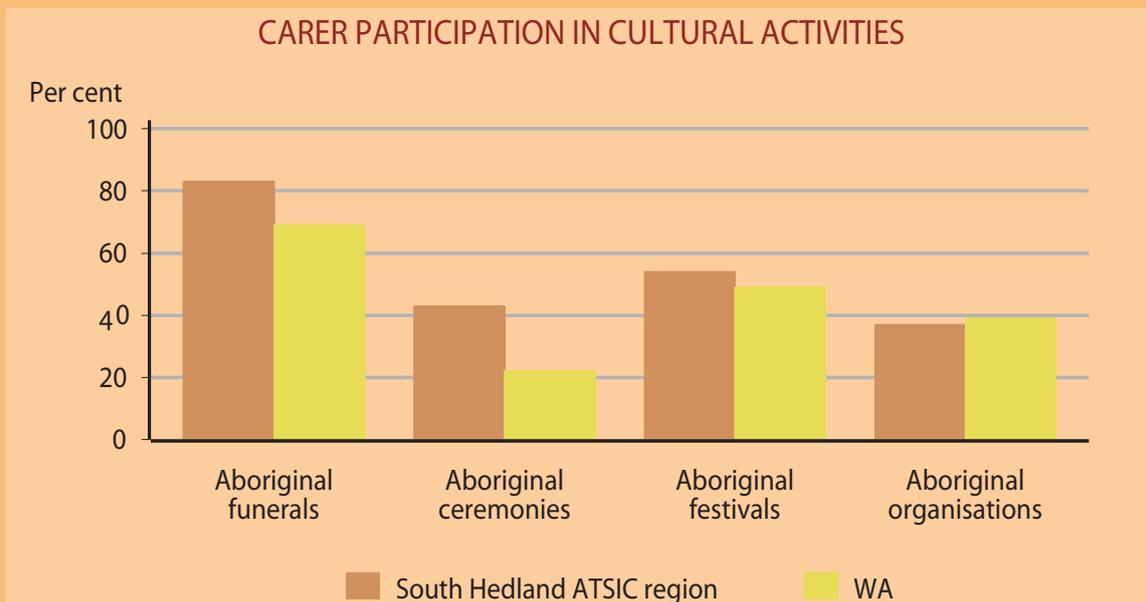
**Forced removal of carers or grandparents** A total of 27% of children in the South Hedland ATSIC region were living in a home where one or more carers or grandparents were taken away from their family. 11% of carers said that they were forcibly removed from their natural family and 9% of carers were forcibly removed from traditional lands.



**Aboriginal language spoken** In the South Hedland ATSIC region 48% of carers said that they spoke an Aboriginal language and 34% of carers said that their children could also speak an Aboriginal language. This was much higher than the WA average where overall 23% of carers can speak an Aboriginal language, and 13% said that their children can speak an Aboriginal language.

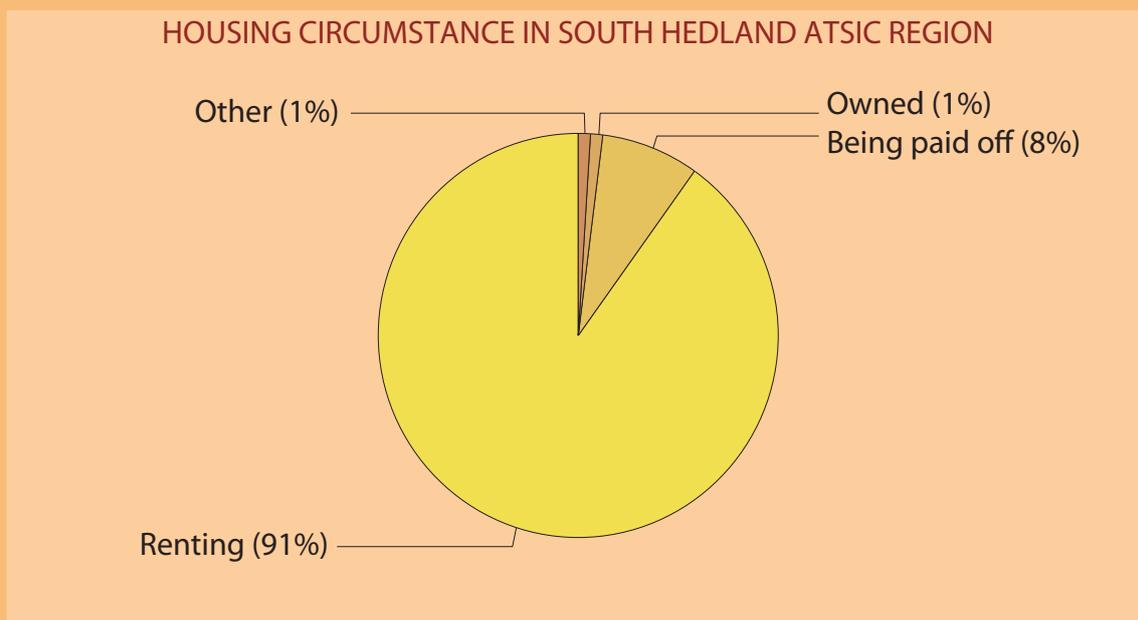


**Cultural activities of carers** Participation in Aboriginal cultural activities in the South Hedland ATSI region was higher than the average for the whole of WA. For example, 83% of all carers in the South Hedland ATSI region said that they had attended an Aboriginal funeral compared with 69% for the whole of WA.



## Housing Ownership

In the South Hedland ATSI region, 1% of families said that they owned their own homes, 8% were paying off their home and 91% were renting. The state average for WA rentals was lower at 71%. The state average was higher for home ownership at 7% and the number of families who were paying off their houses was doubled at 16%.



## Children at birth

**Maternal age** In the South Hedland ATSIC region about 28% of Aboriginal children were born to mothers aged 19 years or less. This equals the state average of 28% for Aboriginal children in WA.

**Prematurity** About 12% of all Aboriginal children in the South Hedland ATSIC region were premature (less than 37 weeks gestation). In WA, 13% of Aboriginal children were premature.

**Breastfeeding** In the South Hedland ATSIC region 41% of Aboriginal children were breastfed for more than 12 months by their birth mothers, compared to 35% for WA. Only 13% of children were breastfed for less than three months, compared to 27% for WA.

**Drug use during pregnancy** Certain drugs taken during pregnancy can contribute to low birth weights and can effect the growth and development of babies.

In the South Hedland ATSIC region, over half (54%) of mothers smoked tobacco during pregnancy and 22% drank alcohol during pregnancy. In total the mothers of 59% of children had used tobacco during pregnancy in WA.

Smoking during pregnancy reduces the average birthweight of babies by 200 grams and can endanger the health of the baby.

**Mean birth weight** The average birth weight for babies in the South Hedland ATSIC region was 3,190 grams. 12% of babies born in the South Hedland ATSIC region were of low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams), this rate is higher than the state with 11% of Aboriginal babies in all of WA.



## Physical health

**Recurring infections** There are a large number of children with multiple infections. On average, 16% of Aboriginal children aged 0-17 years in the South Hedland ATSIC region were reported by their carers to have recurring ear infections, 10% were reported to have recurring chest infections, and 8% were reported to have recurring skin infections.

**Asthma prevalence** The prevalence of asthma in the South Hedland ATSIC region was 22% for Aboriginal children aged 0-17 years. Asthma was found to be less likely in the South Hedland ATSIC region (23%) than in the Perth ATSIC region (30%).

**Ear Health** In the South Hedland ATSIC region, 12% of Aboriginal children suffered from runny ears (also known as Otitis Media). 11% of Aboriginal children suffered from runny ears in the Perth ATSIC region. In WA, 13% of Aboriginal children were reported to suffer recurring ear infections with at least one instance of runny ears.

**Diet** Four indicators of dietary quality were assessed:

- drinking sufficient fresh water
- drinking sufficient fresh milk
- eating enough vegetables, and
- eating enough fresh fruit

In the South Hedland ATSIC region, 61% of children met at least three of these criteria (compared with 59% in WA overall). The consumption of vegetables in the South Hedland ATSIC region was a concern, with 28% of children in the region meeting this criterion compared with 36% of WA children who met this criterion.

**Teeth problems** In the South Hedland ATSIC region, 28% of Aboriginal children had a tooth filling compared to 27% of Aboriginal children in WA. 11% of children in the South Hedland ATSIC region had to have teeth removed because their teeth were bad compared with 9% of WA children.

## Use of Services

**Doctor** In the South Hedland ATSIC region, 51% of Aboriginal children had seen a Doctor in the last six months, compared to 49% for WA.

**Nurse** 41% of Aboriginal children in the South Hedland ATSIC region had seen a Nurse in the last six months, compared with 25% of Aboriginal children seeing a Nurse within the last six months for WA.

**Aboriginal Health Worker** 20% of Aboriginal children in the South Hedland ATSIC region were more likely to have seen an Aboriginal Health Worker in the last six months, compared to 15% for WA.



**Aboriginal Medical Service** 26% of Aboriginal children in the South Hedland ATSIC region had gone to an Aboriginal Medical Service compared to 15% for the whole state.

The following tables are a summary of the data presented in this document. It provides an overview of all the statistical information relevant for the South Hedland ATSIC region and Western Australia.

<b>General</b>	<b>South Hedland ATSIC region</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>
Population of Aboriginal children aged 0-17	2,670	29,800
<i>0 – 3 years</i>	(610) 23%	(6,910) 23%
<i>4 – 11 years</i>	(1210) 45%	(13,800) 46%
<i>12 – 17 years</i>	(850) 32%	(9,100) 31%
Type of care arrangements for child		
<i>Both original parents</i>	40%	47%
<i>Sole parent</i>	37%	33%
<i>One original parent + new partner</i>	7%	7%
<i>Aunts / Uncles</i>	10%	6%
<i>Grandparents</i>	3%	4%
<i>Other</i>	3%	3%
Children whose primary carer is Aboriginal	90%	85%
Children whose primary carer is birth mother of the child	74%	80%
Aboriginal language spoken – conversational level		
<i>Carers</i>	48%	23%
<i>Children</i>	34%	13%
Participation in cultural activities in last 12 months		
<i>Aboriginal funerals</i>	83%	69%
<i>Aboriginal ceremonies</i>	43%	22%
<i>Aboriginal festivals or carnivals</i>	54%	49%
<i>Aboriginal organisations</i>	37%	39%
Forced separation and forced relocation of carers		
<i>Forcibly separated from natural family</i>	11%	12%
<i>Forcibly removed from traditional lands</i>	9%	6%
Children affected by forcible removal of carer of grandparents		
<i>Children living in household where one or more carers or grandparents forcibly separated from natural family</i>	27%	35%
<i>Children living in household where one or more carers or grandparents forcibly removed from traditional lands</i>	21%	24%
Housing tenure		
<i>Owned</i>	1%	7%
<i>Being Paid off</i>	8%	16%
<i>Rented</i>	91%	71%
<i>Other</i>	1%	6%



<b>Children at birth</b>	<b>South Hedland ATSIC region</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>
Mean birth weight (grams)	3,190 grams	3,170 grams
Low birth weight babies (<2500 grams)	12%	11%
Prematurity (births < 37 weeks gestation)	12%	13%
Children born to teenage mothers		
<i>Mother under 20 years</i>	28%	28%
<i>Mother under 18 years</i>	13%	13%
<i>Mother under 16 years</i>	3%	3%
Breastfeeding		
- 12 months or more (duration)	41%	35%
- Less than 3 months (duration)	13%	27%
Drug use during pregnancy		
<i>Used tobacco</i>	59%	49%
<i>Smoked cigarettes</i>	54%	46%
<i>Chewed tobacco</i>	6%	3%
<i>Alcohol</i>	22%	23%
<i>Gunjah</i>	9%	9%

<b>Health of children</b>	<b>South Hedland ATSIC region</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>
Asthma	22%	23%
Indicators of poor diet		
<i>Usually drinks water when thirsty</i>	81%	68%
<i>Regularly drinks unsweetened milk</i>	92%	93%
<i>Eats sufficient fresh vegetables</i>	28%	36%
<i>Eats sufficient fresh fruit</i>	65%	70%
<i>Overall diet meets at least 3 of the quality indicators</i>	61%	59%
Teeth problems		
<i>Fillings</i>	28%	27%
<i>Teeth removed</i>	11%	9%
Vision problems	6%	8%
Hearing problems	10%	7%
Recurring infections		
<i>Recurring ear infections</i>	16%	18%
<i>Recurring chest infections</i>	10%	12%
<i>Recurring skin infections</i>	8%	8%
<i>Recurring gastrointestinal infections</i>	5%	6%
<i>Otitis Media (recurring ear infections with at least one instance of runny ears)</i>	12%	13%

<b>Use of services</b>	<b>South Hedland ATSIC region</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>
Children using the following health services in the last six months:		
<i>Doctor</i>	51%	49%
<i>Dentist</i>	24%	21%
<i>Nurse</i>	41%	25%
<i>Aboriginal Health Worker</i>	20%	15%
<i>Hospital emergency department or outpatients clinic</i>	16%	13%
<i>Aboriginal Medical Service</i>	26%	15%

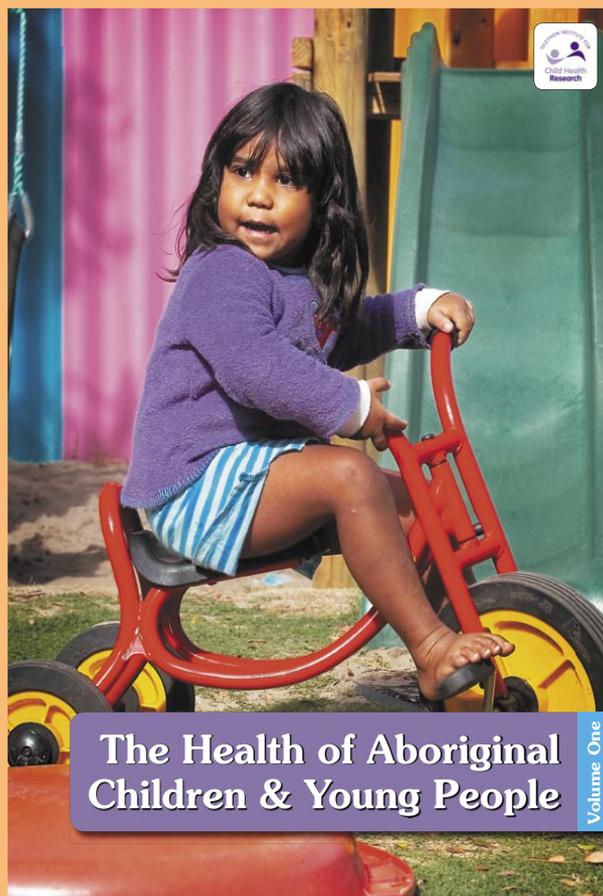


## Further Information

### ***How to obtain a copy of the main report***

A copy of the report *The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People* can be purchased for \$60 (plus postage & handling) from the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research on 08 9489 7777.

A PDF version of the main publication can also be downloaded from our website:  
[www.ichr.uwa.edu.au](http://www.ichr.uwa.edu.au)



### ***Further information***

If you would like further information about the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, please call our information line on 08 9489 7777 or email: [waachs@ichr.uwa.edu.au](mailto:waachs@ichr.uwa.edu.au)





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