

EMBRACE INDIGENOUS DATA TO HELP CLOSE THE GAP: REPORT

23 September 2024

Changes to the types of data collected about First Nations people, how it is used and who controls it are needed if Australia wants to progress towards improving the lives and futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a report commissioned by the Actuaries Institute suggests.

The report, *Getting to Grips With Indigenous Data*, says despite significant attention on the rights and outcomes of First Nations people in the past few decades, major issues remain for their communities amid limited progress on meeting Closing the Gap targets, including Priority Reform 4 which targets improved data sharing to empower communities.

Authors and actuaries Hugh Miller and Laura Dixie from Taylor Fry suggest that better progress could be made if the types of information collected about First Nations people is expanded. Currently most focus on traditional Western definitions of data. More "Indigenous data" is needed to provide more context and details about Indigenous culture, the environment, land, skies and resources.

The paper supports First Nations people need to have "Indigenous Data Sovereignty", which is defined as the right of Indigenous people to own, control, access and possess data that derive from them, and which pertain to their people, knowledge systems, customs or territories.

"These kinds of measures would ensure that data is more reflective of the things that are important to First Nations communities. Part of the data challenge though is that the things that Indigenous communities are most interested in measuring progress on are the things that, in some ways, are the hardest to measure or aren't being measured," Dr Miller said.

"The indicators we have in Closing the Gap are not really designed for Indigenous communities at all. The emphasis on gaps with non-Indigenous people is deficit-based and reproachful; the diversity of cultures across First Nations communities is not reflected in reporting; and context, such as the often-strained relationship between police and First Nations people, or cultural values, is stripped out."

The Report suggests that given the growing role of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and other Aboriginal businesses in the delivery of services, they could play a greater role in the collection and use of Indigenous data, which could be used to demonstrate the value of their activities. It also highlights several programs – at government, research and program levels - that have successfully embraced Indigenous data sovereignty principles to help improve outcomes for First Nations people. These programs highlight how progress is being made and can continue.

"There remains a collective need to improve the lives of First Nations communities, which still endure significant disadvantage. Improving our approach to Indigenous data is central to both enabling and measuring what really matters as progress, as well as empowering First Nations communities," Actuaries Institute CEO, Elayne Grace, said.

Hugh Miller is available for interview.

For media inquiries, please contact:

Belinda Tasker, Cannings Strategic Communications

M +61(0) 434 056 724

E belinda.tasker@canningscomms.com

About the Actuaries Institute and the Profession

As the peak professional body in Australia, the Actuaries Institute represents the profession to government, business and the community, and serves the public interest by using data for good.

Actuaries use data for good by harnessing the evidence to navigate into the future and make a positive impact. They think deeply about the issue at hand, whether it's advising on commercial strategy, influencing policy, or designing new products. Actuaries are adept at balancing interests of stakeholders, clients, and communities. They're called upon to give insight on complex problems, they'll look at the full picture. Actuaries analyse the data and model scenarios to form robust and outcome-centred advice.