

Aboriginal Australians' welfare 'stagnating or worsening'

November 17 2016

Imprisonment and self-harm rates have soared among Aboriginal Australians, an official report said Thursday as it slammed a lack of research into whether government programmes were effective at addressing the issues facing the community.

Aborigines—who make up about three percent of the total national population of 24 million—are among the most disadvantaged Australians.

They suffer disproportionate levels of disease, imprisonment and social problems as well as significantly lower education, employment and [life expectancy](#).

The government-backed Productivity Commission [report](#) said that violence among Aboriginal families and hospitalisations for self-harm "have stagnated or worsened" in recent years.

"Alarminglly the national imprisonment rate has increased 77 percent over the last 15 years, and hospitalisation [rates](#) for self-harm have increased by 56 percent over the last decade," the Commission's head Peter Harris said in a statement.

Deputy chief Karen Chester told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation the report should serve as a wake-up call for Canberra to make sure "money is being spent not just in terms of bang for buck for taxpayers, but that we're not short-changing indigenous Australians".

"Of over a thousand policies and programmes, we could only identify 34 across the whole of Australia that have been robustly and transparently evaluated," she said.

"At the end of the day, we can't feign surprise that we're not seeing improvement across all these wellbeing indicators if we're not lifting the bonnet and evaluating if the policies and programmes are working or not."

The report said family and community violence rates were unchanged between 2002 and 2014-2015, affecting around one in five of the adult indigenous population. While juvenile detention rates slipped, they still stood at 24 times that for non-indigenous youth.

The report acknowledged some positives, including an improvement in mortality rates and an increase in the number of children finishing school.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull admitted this year that Australia was failing to close an "unacceptably wide" gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and non-indigenous people, with the annual "Closing the Gap" report highlighting drug and alcohol abuse as a key problem.

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