

Trends Between the 1997 EHNS and the 2004 EHNS

The EHNS 2004 Report shows that progress is being made in addressing environmental health needs in discrete Indigenous communities across the State. This is evident for the core indicators of water, electricity and sanitation services, especially in larger communities.

Service agencies appear to have been very successful in targeting the priority needs identified in the 1997 survey, as most communities that had priority indicators listed in 1997 had their environmental health problems addressed by 2004.

Trends between the 1997 and 2004 surveys also show some improvements in community satisfaction regarding water, electricity, waste removal and the standard of housing. This is likely to reflect improvements in:

- intergovernmental planning and, the targeting of resources;
- large-scale infrastructure programs; and,
- improved standards and controls over the quality of housing and infrastructure.

Regular housing repairs and maintenance, solid waste disposal, dust control and dog programs in communities still require greater attention. There is also a large backlog to address for housing and environmental health infrastructure in remote and town-based Indigenous communities.

Increased effort is required in housing and essential services to reduce crowding and homelessness; upgrade, maintain and manage existing stock; and, bring the standard of environmental health infrastructure up to equivalent mainstream standards.

The 2004 EHNS report is an important tool to identify priority needs, promote effective coordination and target available resources toward areas of greatest need. The information contained in the 2004 EHNS report is being used by funding agencies and service providers to identify ongoing needs, as well as to prioritise program expenditures.

Effectively addressing the environmental health needs of Indigenous communities across the State is a complex problem, requiring long-term and concerted efforts by all levels of government, in partnership with Indigenous communities.

To Receive Further Information

The EHNS 2004 Report is available in the following ways:

1. on the Department of Indigenous Affairs web site (www.dia.wa.gov.au/Publications); or,
2. as a hard copy, which can be mailed to you. Contact Reception (DIA) at 9235 8000 (EHNS2004@dia.wa.gov.au).

You can also write to the Department at:

Department of Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 7770, Cloisters Square
Perth, WA 6850



Environmental Health Needs of Indigenous Communities in Western Australia

THE 2004 SURVEY AND ITS FINDINGS
The 2004 Survey and its Findings

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE 2004 EHNS

The EHNS 2004 Report

In 2003, the Environmental Health Needs Coordinating Committee (EHNCC) commissioned a survey of all discrete (remote and town based) Indigenous communities in Western Australia. A similar survey was conducted in 1997 and released the following year.

The EHNCC is assisted by the Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) on environmental health. IGWG comprises:

- Department of Indigenous Affairs (Chair)
- Department of Housing and Works
- Department of Health
- Department of Local Government and Regional Development
- Commonwealth Government Department of Family and Community Services
- Commonwealth Government Department of Health and Ageing
- Western Australian Local Government Association

The survey was funded jointly by the Commonwealth and State agencies represented on IGWG. It was conducted in late 2003 and early 2004 by Environmental Health Officers and Aboriginal Environmental Health Workers employed by local governments and public health units.

The key objectives of the survey were to:

- provide a reliable and shared data source on environmental health needs across the State in order to assess relative needs and to inform resource allocation;
- promote effective coordination between government agencies and service providers;
- monitor and report on progress in addressing need; and,
- inform policy, program and budget development.

The 2004 EHNS Report presents the survey results of 274 remote and town based Indigenous communities in Western Australia. This includes 2,801 individual households, with a total population of 16,952 (based on usual population). Of that population, nearly 40 per cent live in only 7 per cent of the communities (in 19 communities, each with a population of 200 or greater).

The report provides analyses on the core environmental health indicators of water, electricity, housing, sanitation, solid waste, dust, dog control and emergency management. It also provides information on related areas, such as community planning, clinical health services, foodstores, nutrition, disability and mobility, telecommunications and Indigenous languages.

Core Indicators

Water

- 85% of communities were not connected to a town supply; 73% used bore water.
- 87% of small communities (population < 20, representing only 4% of the population) have untreated water vs 36% of larger communities (9% of the population).
- Kullari had the highest proportion of communities with no disinfection of drinking water (83%) and no monthly testing of their water (80%).

Electricity

- Nearly all communities had an electricity supply; only 13 communities (with a total of 73 people) had no electricity supply.
- Most communities (214) were not connected to a town supply and were operating their own generators.
- 56% of communities not on a town supply reported regular power interruptions, caused by fuel shortages, overload, lack of storage, equipment failure and natural hazards, such as lightning strikes. This was most at issue in Kullari, with 75% of its communities reporting interruptions.
- 40% of communities reported having an unsatisfactory power supply, with Kullari having the highest proportion of its communities (69%) noting this as an issue.

Housing

- There is a backlog of repairs and maintenance, with 34% of unoccupied houses needing major repairs, which was the main reason for houses being unoccupied.
- The average number of occupants in habitable dwellings is about 7 people (Kullari averaged 14 people). The data indicate a slight decrease in overcrowding since the 1997 survey.

Solid Waste Disposal

- 27% of communities stated that they experienced periods when household rubbish was not collected.
- 24% of communities reported unsatisfactory tip management, and these were mostly in the Kullari, Malarabah and Wunan regions.
- The majority of tips (72%) were not properly fenced, with this the highest in Country Noongar (100%), Wunan (86%) and Kullari (79%) regions.

Sanitation

- 20% of communities (representing only 8% of the population) were without adequate sewage disposal and treatment.
- Only 6 communities (each with < 30 population) had unfenced waste water lagoons.
- 50% (86) of the communities using septic tanks reported not having pump-out equipment, with 33 out of 47 communities in Wunan (70%) representing the highest regional total.

Dust

- 56% of communities reported high or excessive dust levels.
- 80% of communities lacked a dust suppression or revegetation program.
- 83% of communities had unsealed roads, which contributed to dust generation.

Dog Programs

- 76% of the 2046 households (who responded to questions about dogs) had dogs inhabiting them.
- The Western Desert region had 115 households with five or more dogs.
- 52 communities reported not having a dog program (to treat parasites, sterilise and euthanise), with 28 out of 47 communities in Kullari (60%) representing the highest regional total.

Emergency Management

- 84% of communities prone to bushfires reported being without fire-fighting equipment, with 61 out of 69 communities in Kullari (88%) representing the highest regional total.
- 80% of communities in cyclone prone regions did not have emergency evacuation plans, with 56 out of 69 communities in Kullari (81%) representing the highest regional total.