

# MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **Indigenous Australians ‘out of sight, out of mind’ in urban and regional cities**

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of Indigenous Australians live in cities and towns rather than remote areas of the country, yet remain segregated and “invisible” from the daily lives of non-Indigenous Australians, a new report has found.

The report, *Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia*, is based on research by the Housing and Community Research Unit, based at the University of Tasmania, and explores the implications of the “invisibility” of Indigenous Australians.

“In 2006, the Australian Indigenous population surpassed half a million. Yet while public and political discourse invariably concentrate on remote Australia, geographically, more than 75% of the Indigenous population is regional or urban and some 31% of Indigenous Australians live in the major cities,” the report says.

“Despite physical proximity, segregation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia remains. The vast majority of non-Indigenous Australians live in an Indigenous free zone - they do not interact with any Aboriginal people on a regular basis,” it says.

The report’s authors – Unit Director Dr Rowland Atkinson and Dr Maggie Walter, School of Sociology and Social Work, UTAS, and Dr Elizabeth Taylor, RMIT University – suggest that the pronounced distance between the spaces shared by Indigenous and other Australians has important implications.

“This situation has allowed prosperous, white and urban communities to live their lives in ways which prevent them from witnessing the consequences of Indigenous underinvestment, exclusion and absolute poverty,” Dr Atkinson said.

“Aboriginal life is still seen as ‘other’, neglected, different and, indeed, deviant from the market rhythms and aspirations of ‘normal’ Australians...A major challenge to future governments is how to cross these social and spatial boundaries in ways that raise both the visibility and importance of Indigenous problems,” he said.

The research mapped Census Collection Districts (CCD) with a sizeable Indigenous population (more than 40 people) and compared these locations to those of higher educational and occupational advantage.

This mapping found that in 2006:

- Urban Indigenous communities are economically, spatially and socially separated. Aboriginal people are concentrated in disadvantaged and poorly serviced enclaves within regional towns and urban locations.
- In Sydney, more than 80% of the Indigenous population are located in CCD areas of low to middle relative educational and occupational advantage compared to 53% of the total population.
- In capital cities with small Indigenous populations such as Melbourne and Canberra, these populations are located in distant and distinct parts of the city, chiefly in more isolated pockets of public housing.
- In capital cities with a larger Indigenous population (including Brisbane, Perth, and Sydney) these populations are concentrated in poorer suburban corridors (for example, the south west of Sydney).
- In all cities the areas of relative Indigenous household concentration are separated from more advantaged areas.

“This physical proximity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in towns and cities has neither yielded significant social contact, understanding nor effective policy responses,” the report says.

**A media summary of the report is attached.**

**For the full report, visit:**

**[http://www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/occasional\\_papers.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/occasional_papers.htm)**

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