

Body mass index distribution in adults in the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey

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In 1994, the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a nationally representative survey of indigenous Australians that covered many aspects of health, housing, justice, etc. Height and weight measurements were done on all persons aged five years and older who agreed to these measurements. Indigenous interviewers, who were not health professionals, were employed in each area of the country. Information concerning housing, income, employment, justice, race (by self-identification) was gathered. The body mass index (BMI, kg/m²) distribution of adults aged 18 and older was calculated and divided into the four categories described by NHMRC; rounding was not employed prior to applying the cutpoints.

The percentage distributions of BMI is shown by sex, race and geographical location of residence (rural denotes persons living in communities of less than 1000 residents). The BMI distribution in the table is extrapolated to the 1994 estimated indigenous population using the sample weighting factors whereas the number in each group shows those actually measured.

Sex and BMI group	All		Race			Geographical location		
	Indigenous (n=3686)	Aboriginal* (n=3414)	TSI* (n=235)	Capital city (n=518)	Other urban (n=1637)	Rural (n=1531)		
Men (%)								
<20	6.1	6.4	1.6	4.3	5.9	7.9		
20 to 25	25.4	25.7	21.6	27.5	24.6	24.6		
>25 to 30	27.8	27.7	25.6	31.1	28.7	23.8		
>30	18.7	17.9	35.1	21.2	20.0	15.1		
not measured	22.0	22.3	16.1	15.9	20.8	28.6		
Women (%)								
<20	9.2	9.4	3.7	11.4	9.0	7.6		
20 to 25	21.2	21.8	12.5	22.3	21.8	19.3		
>25 to 30	20.4	20.3	22.6	22.9	21.5	16.5		
>30	20.3	19.1	39.0	21.9	20.9	17.9		
not measured	29.0	29.4	22.2	21.6	26.9	38.7		

*persons identifying as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (TSI) are excluded from these two columns.

The vast majority of persons selected for interview consented to participate although 20% of these refused height and weight measurements during the interview. This varied among the groups. It is unusual to have such extensive social and demographic detail on unmeasured respondents in a survey and so further analyses are underway to determine whether the observed BMI distributions in this survey are biased by non-consent.

This work does not necessarily reflect the official views of the Australian Bureau of Statistics.