

Australian Indigenous languages, Queensland, Census 2021

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Census of Population and Housing, 2021, data extracted from TableBuilder

At a glance

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples		2016	2021	Change 2016 to 2021	
Census population count ¹	Persons	186,482	273,303	27.3%	↑
Spoke Australian Indigenous language at home	Persons	13,135	19,018	44.8%	↑
	%	7.0	8.0	1.0ppts	↑

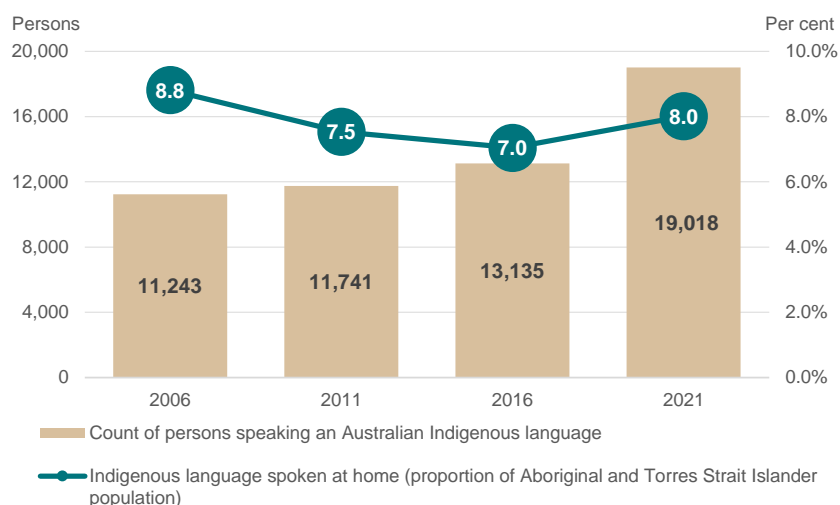
Key points¹

In 2021, in Queensland:

- fewer than one in ten (8.0% or 19,018 persons) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents reported speaking an Australian Indigenous language at home (Figure 1). There were 407 non-Indigenous Queensland residents who reported speaking an Indigenous language at home.²
- the most widely spoken Australian Indigenous languages were:
 - Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole) (7,380 persons, or 3.1% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland)
 - Wik Mungkan (0.4%)
 - Kalaw Kawaw Ya / Kalaw Lagaw Ya (0.3%).
 - most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders (85.3% or 202,342 persons) reported speaking only English at home — similar to the proportion reported by non-Indigenous Queenslanders (84.8%).

Almost **8 in 10** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders living in Torres Strait Indigenous Region (IREG) and more than **half** living in Cape York IREG reported speaking an Australian Indigenous language at home

Figure 1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Indigenous language speakers, Queensland



Both the number and proportion of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples speaking an Australian Indigenous language at home increased in 2021, compared with 2016

¹ All data in this brief are based on place of usual residence.

² Non-Indigenous persons were not included in the calculations or data presented in this brief.

By geography

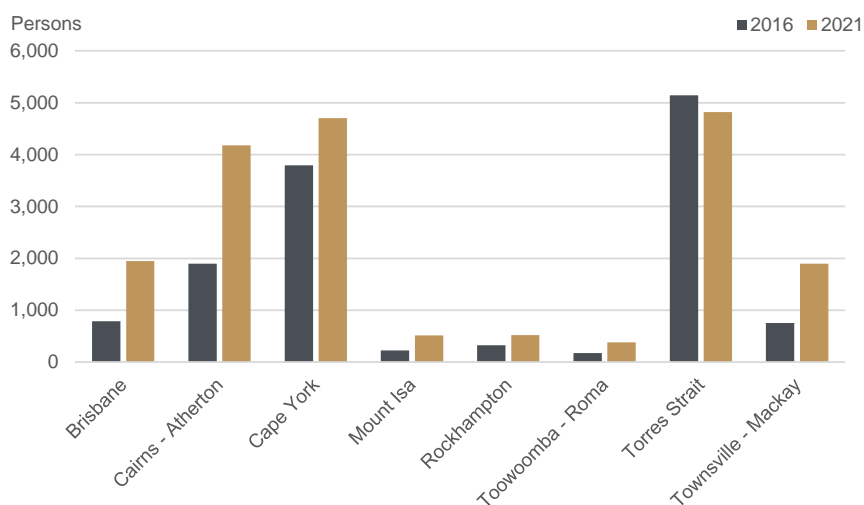
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders from remote IREGs such as Torres Strait and Cape York, were more likely than those from urban areas to speak an Australian Indigenous language (Table 1).

Over the five years to 2021, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders speaking an Australian Indigenous language increased from 7.0% to 8.0%. This reflects a 44.8% increase in the number of people indicating that they spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home — 19,018 in 2021 compared with 13,135 in 2016.

Of the Queensland IREGs, Cairns - Atherton recorded the largest numerical increase in Australian Indigenous language speakers since 2016, with an additional 2,284 persons (Figure 2).

The number of Australian Indigenous language speakers more than doubled in five of the eight IREGs, while Torres Strait was the only IREG to record fewer Australian Indigenous language speakers in 2021 compared with 2016. Despite this decrease between 2016 and 2021, Torres Strait IREG remained the region with the largest number of Australian Indigenous language speakers, followed by Cape York and Cairns - Atherton.

Figure 2 Australian Indigenous language speakers, Indigenous Regions in Queensland, 2016 and 2021



More than **7 in 10** of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous language speakers lived in just three IREGs:

Torres 25.4%

Cape York 24.8%

Cairns - Atherton 22.0%

By age group and sex

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders younger than 30 years were slightly less likely to speak an Australian Indigenous language at home than those aged 30 years and over in 2021, while those aged 40–49 years had the highest percentage indicating that they spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home (9.4%) (Figure 3).

There was little difference between the percentages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males (7.8%) and females (8.2%) stating that they spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home, with females slightly more likely than males in most age groups.

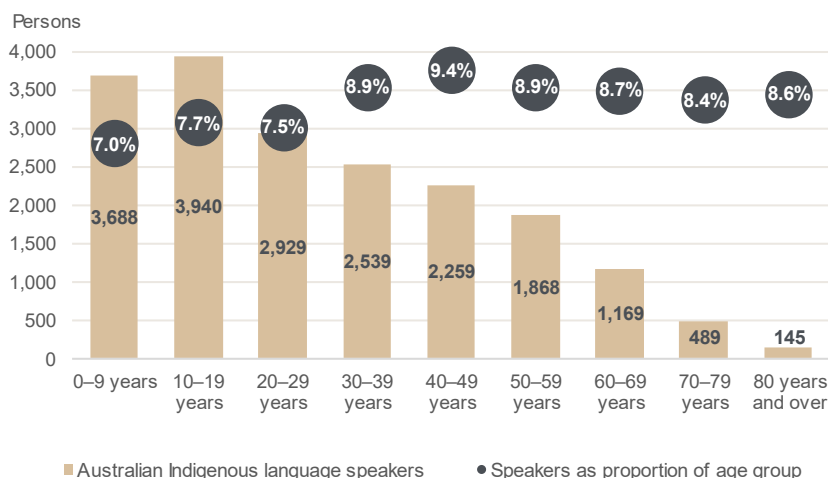
Table 1 Distribution of Indigenous language speakers by Indigenous Region^(a), Queensland, 2021

Indigenous Region	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander usual residents	% of those residents who speak an Australian Indigenous language
	— number —	— % —
Brisbane	100,929	1.9
Cairns - Atherton	28,466	14.7
Cape York	8,906	52.8
Mount Isa	8,265	6.2
Rockhampton	29,507	1.8
Toowoomba - Roma	22,881	1.7
Torres Strait	6,093	79.1
Townsville - Mackay	31,062	6.1
Queensland^(b)	237,303	8.0

(a) Australian Statistical Geography Standard, 2021 edition.

(b) Includes 'No usual address'.

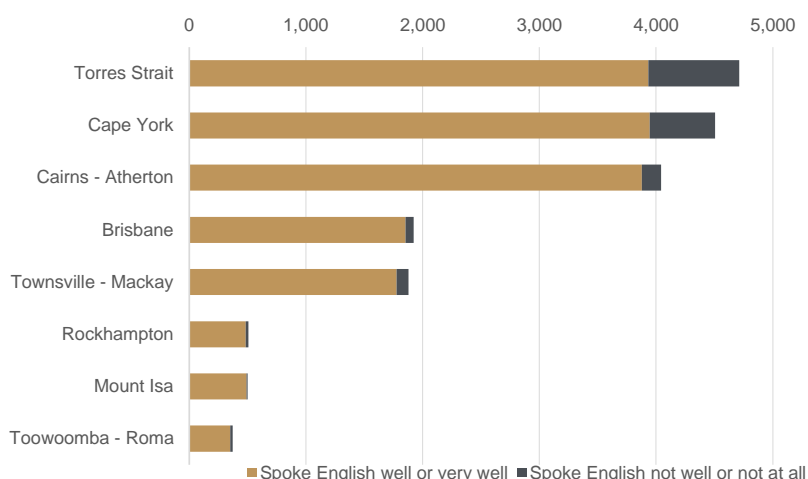
Figure 3 Australian Indigenous language speakers at home by age, Queensland, 2021



English proficiency³

More than 9 in 10 of the 19,018 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who reported that they spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home, also stated that they spoke English 'well' or 'very well' (90.7%), while the remaining 9.3% indicated speaking English 'not well' or 'not at all' (1,727 persons).

Figure 4 English proficiency of Australian Indigenous language speakers by Indigenous Region, Queensland, 2021



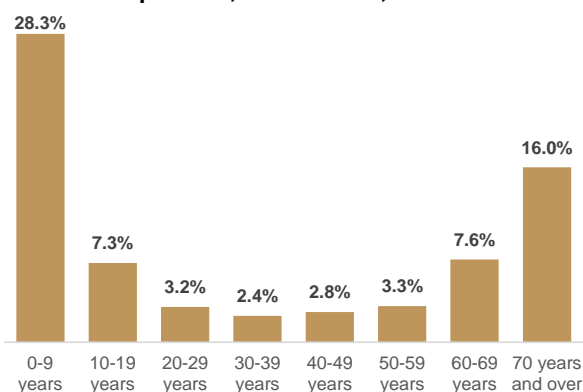
More than three-quarters of Australian Indigenous language speakers who spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all' lived in the Torres Strait and Cape York Indigenous Regions (45.1% and 32.5% respectively). These regions were also the home of the largest numbers of Australian Indigenous language speakers (Figure 4).

Of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that spoke an Australian Indigenous language, more than half (57.3%) of those that spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all' were aged 0-9 years.

Of 0-9 year olds who spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home, more than one in four (28.3%) indicated they spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all'. This percentage declined rapidly for youth aged 10-19 years (7.3%) and was less than four per cent for people in the working-age groups between 20 and 59 years.

Proficiency in English declined again in the older age groups, with 16.0% of Australian Indigenous language speakers aged 70 years and over indicating they spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all'.

Figure 5 Spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all' by age, Australian Indigenous language speakers, Queensland, 2021



³ Persons who did not state their English proficiency were excluded from the calculations in this section. There were 526 Australian Indigenous language speakers who did not provide a response.

Languages

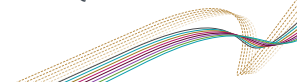
While there were 71 Australian Indigenous languages reported in Queensland in the 2021 Census, only 18 had more than 100 speakers, and 39 had fewer than 20 speakers. Of the Australian Indigenous languages able to be specifically identified, the most commonly spoken language in Queensland in 2021 was Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole) (7,380 speakers), followed by Wik Mungkan (947) and Kalaw Kawaw Ya / Kalaw Lagaw Ya (805). The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people indicating that they spoke Wik Mungkan at home more than doubled to 947 speakers, recording a 115% increase since 2016 (441 speakers).

Table 2 Most commonly spoken Australian Indigenous languages, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons, Queensland, 2021

Australian Indigenous languages (>20 speakers)	Number of speakers	% of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population	% of Australian Indigenous language speakers at home
	— number —		— % —
Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)	7,380	3.1	38.8
Cape York Peninsula Languages, nec ^(a)	2,691	1.1	14.1
Australian Indigenous Languages, nfd ^(b)	1,407	0.6	7.4
Other Australian Indigenous Languages, nec ^(a)	1,292	0.5	6.8
Wik Mungkan	947	0.4	5.0
Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya	805	0.3	4.2
Guugu Yimidhirr	781	0.3	4.1
Aboriginal English, so described	585	0.2	3.1
Torres Strait Island Languages, nfd ^(b)	372	0.2	2.0
Kuku Yalanji	347	0.1	1.8
Lardil	295	0.1	1.6
Meriam Mir	220	0.1	1.2
Gamilaraay	215	0.1	1.1
Kuuk Thayorre	176	0.1	0.9
Cape York Peninsula Languages, nfd ^(b)	169	0.1	0.9
Yugambah	165	0.1	0.9
Kriol	128	0.1	0.7
Wiradjuri	126	0.1	0.7
Batjala	74	0.0	0.4
Djabugay	68	0.0	0.4
Bandjalang	61	0.0	0.3
Girramay	49	0.0	0.3
Bidjara	48	0.0	0.3
Yidiny	46	0.0	0.2
Kayardild	43	0.0	0.2
Alyawarr	40	0.0	0.2
Anindilyakwa	38	0.0	0.2
Nyungar	34	0.0	0.2
Arrente, nfd ^(b)	31	0.0	0.2
Kuuku-Ya'u	30	0.0	0.2
Yolngu Matha, nfd ^(b)	26	0.0	0.1
Dyirbal	26	0.0	0.1

(a) Not elsewhere classified 'nec' is for any language group which is not separately identified in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) because it does not meet the threshold for the minimum number of speakers.

(b) Australian Indigenous Languages nfd is a supplementary code in the ASCL and is not considered a language group.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

In 2021, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders:

- 4.7% of people who identified as Aboriginal spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home
- 28.9% of people who identified as Torres Strait Islander spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home
- 16.7% of people who identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home.

Torres Strait Islander peoples were more likely to speak an Australian Indigenous language at home than Aboriginal peoples in Queensland

For Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Torres Strait IREG, the percentage speaking an Australian Indigenous language at home was higher again, at 81.8%. Torres Strait Islander peoples spoke an Australian Indigenous language at home at higher rates than Aboriginal peoples in all of Queensland's Indigenous Regions.

Technical notes

Population counts in this bulletin are based on census counts of usual residents. While census counts are an important source of information about the characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a more accurate estimate of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is provided by the estimated resident population, based on the Census, but adjusting for net undercount and unknown Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.

Unless otherwise stated, person-level data in this brief refer to the count of people who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander on the census form.

Indigenous Regions (IREGs)

IREGs are large geographic areas covering the whole of Queensland without gaps or overlaps. There are eight IREGs in Queensland.

Population and dwelling counts

Please note that small random adjustments have been made to all cell values to protect the confidentiality of data. Counts may differ across different census data sources, particularly between Community Profile and TableBuilder products.

Rounding

Figures are rounded to nearest whole number. Calculations (such as percentages and rates) are based on pre-rounded figures.

All data in this report were sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Censuses of Population and Housing (www.abs.gov.au).