

Data suppression standard

Example 5: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander data suppression (rule of 10 and aggregation)

The use of a consistent but conservative suppression rule across all populations enables us to protect the information of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, regardless of if they have been identified as such within our data collections. Using a rule of 10 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data is aligned with – or in some cases, more conservative than – other agencies such as:

- [AIHW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework](#) which uses a rule of 5.
- [Voluntary Indigenous Identifier Framework](#) – Australian Department of Health which uses a rule of 10.
- [HealthStats NSW: Privacy issues and the reporting of small numbers](#) – NSWHealth – although the paper discusses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data separately from suppression rules, the most conservative threshold was 10 or fewer (with thresholds of 3 or 5 also supported).

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is the concept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have control over data that is about them. A crucial element of this is the concept of community disclosure – that rather than **only** protecting the privacy of an individual (as the PII Act does), agencies should also be addressing “the right of an Aboriginal community to exercise appropriate control over the availability of Aboriginal community information to others” ([NSWHealth, 2015, p.5](#)).

Applying this principle is complex for agencies with legal obligations under the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (PIIP Act) and the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (HRIP Act). Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) principles extend the

understanding of whose privacy should be protected, requiring a careful balance between privacy laws and Aboriginal community expectations.

The department is committed to working with NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations, NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc, and other Aboriginal community partners to embed Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles while meeting its legal obligations. This work aligns with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4, ensuring that Aboriginal families and communities play a central role in decisions about their data. It also supports Indigenous Data Governance capacity building for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and communities, empowering them to manage and use their data in ways that reflect their priorities and aspirations.

Progressing this work in consultation with Aboriginal community partners will take time. In the interim, the use of a conservative threshold enables the department to confidently provide data.

See also the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data standard (currently under development) for information on collecting, analysing and reporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data.

Base data

Table: Enrolments by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and scholastic Year

| Scholastic Year | # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | # Non-Indigenous students | # All students |
|-----------------|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| Year 7 | 13 | 95 | 108 |
| Year 8 | 11 | 75 | 86 |
| Year 9 | 6 | 82 | 88 |
| Year 10 | 8 | 89 | 97 |
| Year 11 | 11 | 62 | 73 |
| Year 12 | 4 | 59 | 63 |

Note that the column headers are aligned with the [ABS Indigenous Status Standard](#).

Option 1: With treatment using rule of 10

| Scholastic Year | # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | # Non-Indigenous students | # All students |
|-----------------|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| Year 7 | 13 | 95 | 108 |
| Year 8 | 11 | 75 | 86 |
| Year 9 | np | np | 88 |
| Year 10 | np | np | 97 |
| Year 11 | 11 | 62 | 73 |
| Year 12 | np | np | 63 |

In order to prevent re-calculating small cell sizes, we need to suppress both Aboriginal and Torres Islander students and non-Indigenous student data. This creates significant suppression across the dataset, so we should consider if aggregation is a more appropriate approach.

Option 2: With treatment using aggregation

| Scholastic Year | # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | # Non-Indigenous students | # All students |
|-----------------|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| Years 7 - 8 | 24 | 170 | 194 |
| Years 9-10 | 14 | 171 | 185 |
| Years 11-12 | 15 | 121 | 136 |

The use of aggregation enables all cells to be presented so that the user has a complete picture of the data. It does, however, reduce the ability to see variation across scholastic years. Depending on the purpose of the data request, the rule of 10 or aggregation may be most appropriate. The data requester should be consulted to determine which aggregation groupings are most appropriate for their purpose.