



UNIVERSITY OF  
CANBERRA

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students with Disability: Are we doing enough?

Professor Michele Fleming  
Dean of Students  
University of Canberra



UNIVERSITY OF  
CANBERRA

## Acknowledgement

This presentation is based on research undertaken by Michele Fleming and Diana Grace. The research was funded by the **National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education**.

The full report is available at:

<https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/best-practice-in-supporting-indigenous-students-with-disability-in-higher-education/>

# What's the problem?

*In Australia, not just in higher education*

# The Nature of the Problem: Prevalence

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience ill health and disability at a rate much higher than the Australian population as a whole (ABS, 2014; AIHW, 2009).
- However, there is a lack of accurate government statistical data on disability among Indigenous Australians, which negatively affects both the provision of culturally appropriate services and the accessibility of these services (Productivity Commission, 2011).

# The Nature of the Problem: Double Disadvantage

- Being an Aboriginal person with disability has been described as a 'double disadvantage' (Griffis, quoting Rankine in the Koori Mail, 2015)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability experience multiple disadvantage and often multiple layers of racism as a result of their Aboriginality and their disability (Bostock, 2007).

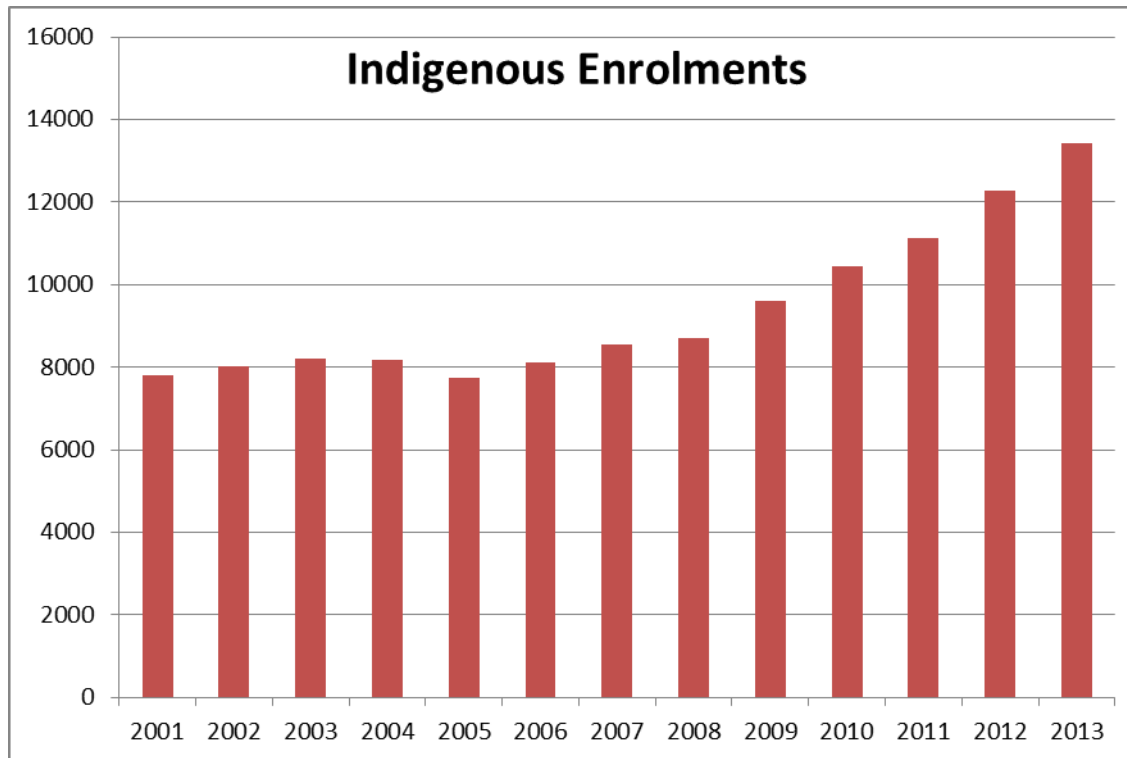
# The Nature of the Problem: Services

- Despite the much recognised need for culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, the vast majority of disability service provision takes place in non-specialist systems.
- Moreover, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do access these services, it is not uncommon for them to face additional barriers and discrimination from the service providers (Bostock, 2007).

# Higher Education Statistics

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students  
with disability at Australian Universities.*

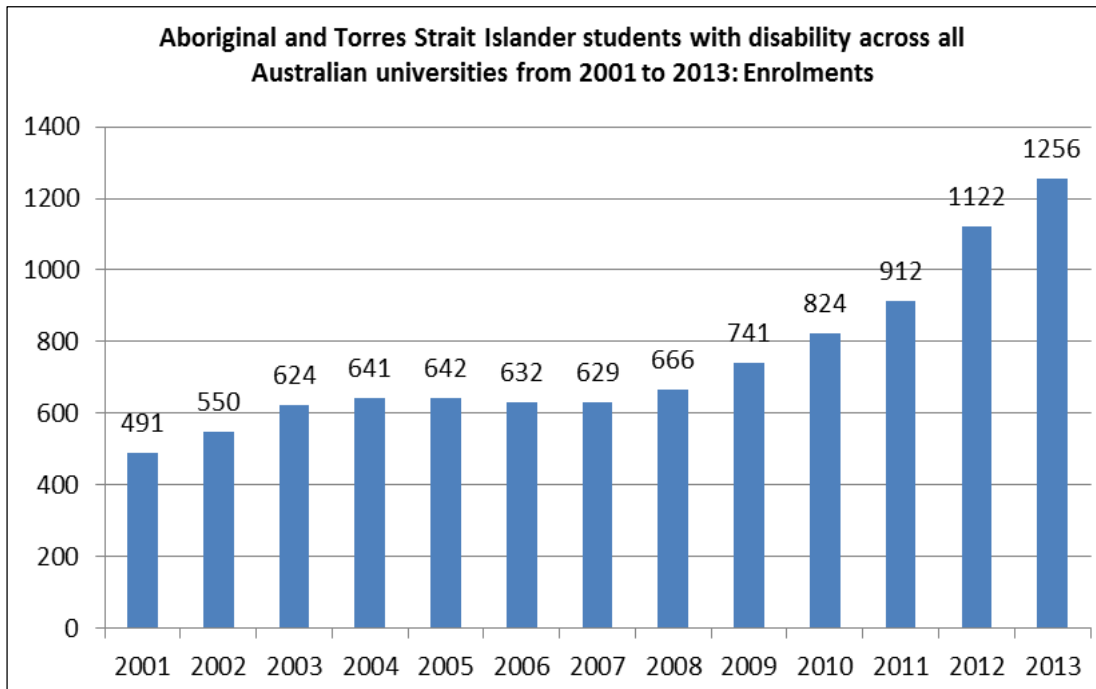
# Indigenous Students: Enrolments



Enrolment rates for Indigenous students have remained relatively stable from 0.93 percent of the student population as a whole in 2001, to 1.09 percent in 2013.

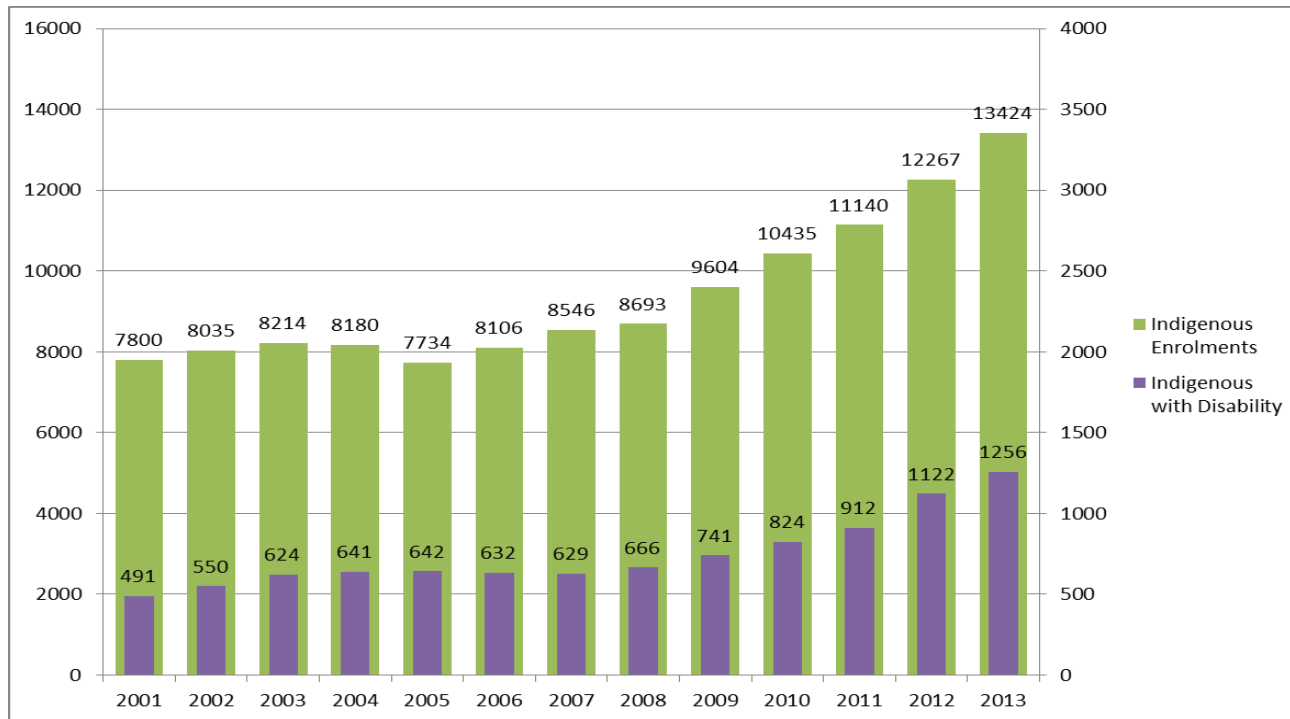


# Indigenous Students with Disability: Enrolments



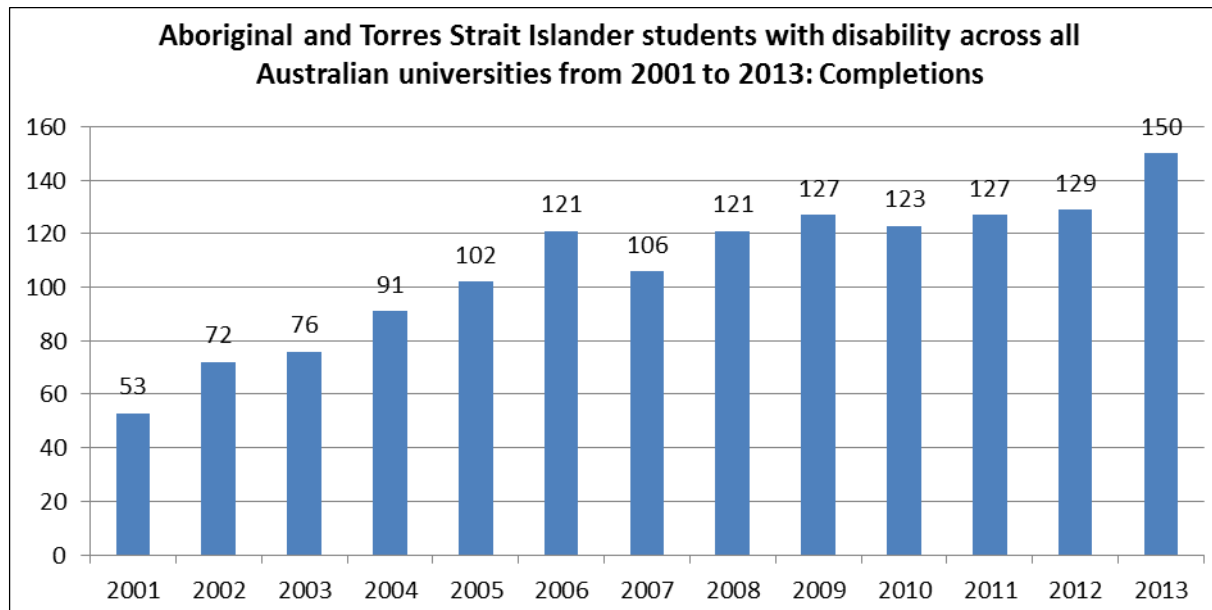
Indigenous students with disability represented only 0.06 percent of all student enrolments in 2001 but 0.10 percent of all students by 2013.

# Percentage of Indigenous Students with Disability: Enrolments



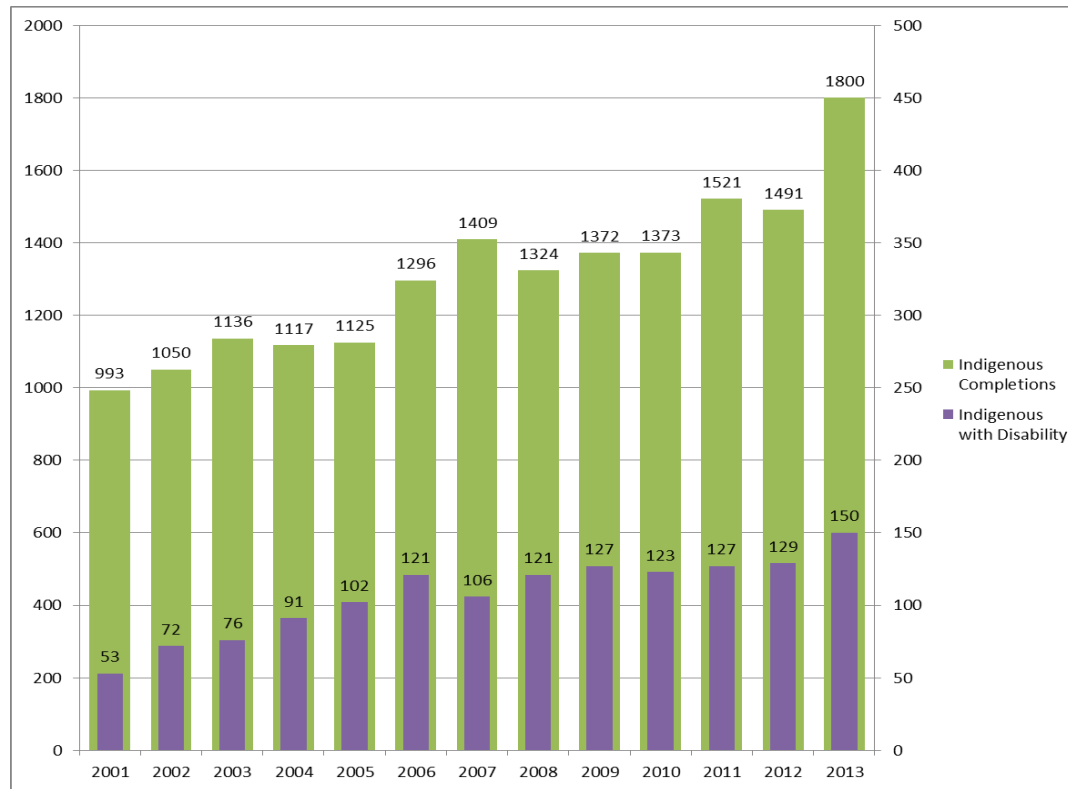
In 2001, 6.29 percent of Indigenous students at university identified as having a disability; in 2013, this had risen to 9.36 percent.

# Indigenous Students with Disability: Completions



Completion rates for Indigenous students with disability were 0.03 percent of all completions in 2001 and 0.05 percent in 2013.

# Percentage of Indigenous Students with Disability: Completions



In 2001, 5.35 percent of Indigenous students with disability completed their degrees whereas in 2013 this figure was 8.33 percent.

# Are we doing our best?

*In the higher education context*

# Are we doing our best?

HE Disability Unit Service Provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students with Disability	Yes	No	No response
Collection of information on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status when registering for disability support	8	9	0
Provision of additional supports for Indigenous students	6	9	2
Work with Indigenous Education Unit	13	3	1
Specific case management practices for Indigenous students	2	15	0
Follow-up/tracking procedures for students	14	3	0
Dedicated Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Adviser	1	15	1
Disability staff trained in Indigenous Cultural Competency	13	3	1

# Recommendations for improvement

- That a whole-of-university approach to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability is taken.
- That more extensive cultural awareness training be made available for staff in DUs.
- That DUs share with IEUs the reasons why referring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability for support by Disability Units will benefit the students in the university context.

# Recommendations for improvement

- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play a key role in decision making processes in relation to disability support services for Indigenous students at Australian universities.
- That DUs form close partnerships with IEUs to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability are fully and appropriately supported.
- That support for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students with disability is provided both face-to face and through various other media to ensure that the needs of all students are met, no matter what their mode of study.



# References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, Australia*. Cat. No. 4433.0.55.005, Canberra, ACT: Author.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2009). *Australia's welfare 2009. 9*, Cat. No. AUS 117. Canberra, ACT: Author.
- Bostock, L. (2007). *Telling it like it is: A report on community consultations with Aboriginal people with disability and their associates throughout NSW, 2004-2005*. Sydney, NSW: Aboriginal Disability Network of NSW.
- Griffis, D. (2015, 25 February). Meeting needs of our people with disability. *Koori Mail*, issue 595, p. 24 (online version).
- Productivity Commission. (2011). *Disability care and support*. Report No. 54. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.