This Local Workforce Profile has been developed by WorkAbility Qld for Far North Queensland NDIS region. Should you require any clarification of the information contained in this document please email info@workabilityqld.org.au.
PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report discusses the population profile of the Far North Queensland NDIS region, comprising the Local Government Authorities of:

- Aurukun
- Cairns
- Cassowary Coast
- Cook
- Croydon
- Douglas
- Etheridge
- Hope Vale
- Kowanyama
- Mapoon
- Mareeba
- Napranum
- Northern Peninsula Area
- Pormpuraaw
- Tablelands
- Torres
- Torres Strait Island
- Weipa
- Wujal Wujal
- Yarrabah

Discussion is aimed at evaluating the demand for and potential supply of workers for the NDIS rollout in the region, and to highlight any areas of opportunity or risk for delivery of services to participants.

In most cases the profile will discuss the picture of the overall population of this NDIS region. In the Appendix you can find comparisons of results of key metrics for each of the geographic areas in order to highlight any particular regional variations.

This report contains statistical data (STAC and DELTA) in relation to Vocational Education and Training (VET) student enrolments. Permission to publish and distribute to external parties requires permission from the Department of Education and Training.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This NDIS region is characterised by having hugely varied demographics among its many LGAs, and a huge geographical area. There is a significant Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population, and relatively low numbers of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse residents. This region will struggle to diversify the disability workforce with its resident population and competition from the aged care workforce.

This NDIS region is dominated by the Cairns LGAs which likely contain the majority of both participants and workforce. The region covers a significant geographical area, with an estimated <5 participants per 100km² which means that the existing and new workforce will need to be comfortable with and supported to cover large distances to provide services.

Another challenge to service delivery and workforce supply is that the only university campus in the region (James Cook University at Cairns) does not offer any of the allied health qualifications – the closest campus offering them is in Townsville.

There is a significant workforce requirement in this region, with a maximum of 1,984 FTE required, per NDIA estimates. There appears to be a significant issue with the ability or desire to access VET in the disability related subjects. The current workforce stands at approximately 850 and even if all part time workers went full time and all VET students in the region decided to work within disability (both unlikely scenarios), there would still be a supply gap of around 833 FTE.
THE NDIS WORKFORCE IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND: A SNAPSHOT

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND POPULATION

38 MEDIAN AGE (RANGES FROM 22-47 YEARS OF AGE)
14.5% POPULATION OVER 65 YEARS OF AGE
15.2% ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POPULATION (RANGES FROM 2.0% - 97.5%)
17.7% BORN OVERSEAS
0 UNIVERSITIES OFFERING ALLIED HEALTH QUALIFICATIONS
8.4% UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (RANGES FROM 2.9% - 66.6%)
377 AGED AND DISABLED CARERS PER 100,000 POPULATION

QUEENSLAND POPULATION

37 MEDIAN AGE
15.3% POPULATION OVER 65 YEARS OF AGE
2.0% ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POPULATION
21.6% BORN OVERSEAS
6 UNIVERSITIES OFFERING ALLIED HEALTH QUALIFICATIONS
6.2% UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
356 AGED AND DISABLED CARERS PER 100,000 POPULATION

REQUIRED WORKFORCE

2000 FTE

CURRENT WORKFORCE

850 FTE

THIS MEANS A PROJECTED WORKFORCE GAP OF

1150 FTE
CONTENTS

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND NDIS REGION POPULATION PROFILE ............................................................. 7
  The Far North Queensland NDIS region population is growing.......................................................... 7
  The age distribution of the Far North Queensland NDIS region reflects a typical profile .......................... 8
  There are variances between the male and female populations at different life stages ........................... 9
  The indigenous population is significant in the region................................................................. 10
  The culturally and linguistically diverse population is a small potential workforce target cohort............ 10

WHO WORKS IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR? ..................................................................................... 11
  Workload variations in Allied Health............................................................................................... 12

WORKFORCE DEMAND .................................................................................................................. 14

HOW CAN WE SUPPLY THE WORKFORCE? ................................................................................. 15
  Part time workforce utilisation....................................................................................................... 15
  Casual workers............................................................................................................................ 16
  Unemployed people....................................................................................................................... 16

GRADUATES IN DISABILITY AND ALLIED HEALTH RELATED QUALIFICATIONS ......................... 17
  Disability........................................................................................................................................ 18
  Allied Health............................................................................................................................... 19
  Mental Health............................................................................................................................. 20

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS ....................................................................................... 21

IS THIS ENOUGH TO MEET PROJECTED DEMAND? .................................................................... 23
  Data Notes.................................................................................................................................... 24
    ABS population data.................................................................................................................. 24
    ABS Census Data...................................................................................................................... 24
    STAC Training Data.................................................................................................................... 24

DATA REGIONS AND MAPS ................................................................................................................. 25
  Department of Education and Training Regions ................................................................................. 26

APPENDIX – LGA LEVEL DATA FOR KEY MEASURES ................................................................... 27
**FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND NDIS REGION POPULATION PROFILE**

**The Far North Queensland NDIS region population is growing**

As at 30 June 2016, the estimated resident population of the Far North Queensland NDIS region was 272,582 people, which equals 5.8% of the Queensland population. The estimated population of the Far North Queensland NDIS region has grown by over 41,000 people since 2010 and the average annual population growth in the region is 1.4% which is less than Queensland overall (1.6%).

![Graph showing population growth from 2006 to 2016](image)

Source: ABS 3218.0, Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2014-15

The population in the region is dominated by the Cairns LGA which has 58% of the Far North Queensland population. This means that most of the disability workforce (and probably participants) are likely to be found in this area. The LGAs in this region vary widely in size, from 157,000 in Cairns to only 284 in Wujal Wujal. This will make recruitment and training a challenge in the LGAs with a small population, and may mean that some of the workforce in larger areas will need to be flexible and mobile to cover the less populated areas.

The *NDIS Queensland Market Position Statement* estimates that this area will have fewer than 5 participants per 100km². This is a considerable risk to workforce supply and service provision, given that the workforce will need to be willing and able to travel great distances and manage with remote supervision and development. This is a large geographical area with varying population density and this will need to be clearly mapped out and understood for effective workforce supply strategies.
The age distribution of the Far North Queensland NDIS region reflects a typical profile

Source: ABS 3235.0, Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, 2014
The population distribution of the Far North Queensland NDIS region reflects a similar population to that of Queensland overall. At the overall state level, 14% of people are over the age of 65 and approaching retirement eligibility. This presents an opportunity to bring the diversity of the workforce in line with the diversity of participants, something that participants consistently indicate that they seek in service provision.

There is wide variance in the age profiles of the LGAs comprising the region, with a median age around 22 for the Northern Peninsula LGA, to 47 in the Tablelands. For the smaller, remote LGAs with a younger population there may be an opportunity to attract younger workers with some targeted marketing and development opportunities, but also this cohort has been historically challenging to attract to the sector which may seriously impact workforce supply – particularly when you factor in the need to travel.

There are variances between the male and female populations at different life stages

There are some small differences between the male and female population age distributions in the region, with more males up to 9 years old, and more females aged 25-45. This could represent a real challenge in increasing the diversity of the disability workforce, because there are fewer males who can be recruited into the workforce. It could also impact any strategies that focus on full time work, given that women of child bearing age are more likely to be seeking part time work.
The indigenous population is significant in the region

The percentage of the population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is depicted in the diagram below. The highest percentage is found in Yarrabah at 97.5%, followed by Napranum at 95.2%. The lowest percentage is in Queensland at 2.0%.

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, Indigenous Profile - I02 (usual residence)

Over 41,000 thousand people in the Far North Queensland NDIS region identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and every LGA has a higher population rate than Queensland overall. The overall percentage of people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in this region is 15.2 – over 7 times as many proportionally as in Queensland overall. 12 of the LGAs have over 50% of their population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This region contains over 50% of the people identifying as Torres Strait Islander in Queensland.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have been identified as key NDIS workforce target populations, and with the size of the population in this area there is a great opportunity for targeted attraction strategies – however these will need to be considered against the constraints of small and/or remote communities.

The culturally and linguistically diverse population is a small potential workforce target cohort

At the time of the 2016 Census, Far North Queensland region had 48,342 persons who stated they were born overseas (17.7% of the Far North Queensland region population). Comparatively, in Queensland overall 21.6% of the population were born overseas. Each of the LGAs in the Far North region have a population...
percentage smaller than that of Queensland overall. Of the overseas born population of Far North Queensland region, 5,688 (2.1%) state that they cannot speak English at all, or not well.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have been identified as key NDIS workforce target populations, but the size of this population in the area suggests that this group may not be sufficient to fill supply gaps. There may need to be specific attention paid to the needs of this cohort, and ensuring that any career marketing and disability support is inclusive and sensitive to cultural and linguistic needs.

WHO WORKS IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR?

For the purpose of this profile and identifying key disability occupations at the LGA level for Far North Queensland region, core community service occupations have been identified at the ANZCO 4 Digit Level using ABS 2011 occupation data. These core occupations give a preliminary scope of the community services workforce most likely to comprise future employment growth because of the NDIS. The core occupations are:

- Aged and Disabled carers
- Occupational therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Speech professionals and audiologists
This covers the allied health occupations, and the only other occupational group that can be clearly identified as relating to disability. It is important to note that it is not known what proportion of people in these occupations actually works within disability, or across other sectors, so these numbers should be considered indicative only.

**Workers in Disability Related Occupations – Far North Queensland Region**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of workers in various disability-related occupations in the Far North Queensland NDIS region as of September 2017.](chart)

Data Source: 2016 Census of Population and Housing

People identifying in the 2011 Census as aged and disabled carers are the largest of the disability related occupations, by a significant margin – with around 11 times as many workers as the next largest occupation.

The Queensland Market Position Statement indicated in 2016 that there were an estimated 780-850 FTE in the Far North Queensland NDIS region workforce; 1226 people identified in the chosen occupations in the census, which may give us a general rule of thumb that around 64-69% of the Census identified workers are actually involved in disability work.

Speech professionals are the smallest cohort, which will need to be compared to forecasted demand to determine whether this may have a detrimental impact for service provision to people with a disability in the region.

**Workload variations in Allied Health**

As a rough indication of the demand placed on workers in the disability related occupations the following graph will show the number of workers in disability related occupations, per 100,000 population.
There are fewer workers per 100,000 population in physiotherapy and speech professionals and audiologists, but slightly more in aged and disability care. This suggests that there may be some issues in provision of allied health services in this region, but that there may already be a reasonable provision of personal support services. This could make recruiting more personal support personnel complex if the people who may be naturally inclined to this work are already employed in the sector.

Obviously not everyone in the region will require the services of a worker in one of these occupations, but this gives a picture of the differential demand placed on workers in disability related occupations in the Far North Queensland NDIS region compared with the Queensland average pattern.
WORKFORCE DEMAND

According to the NDIS Market Position Statement – Queensland, participant numbers will grow to 4,700 by 2019 in the Far North Queensland NDIS Region. Obviously, this will mean an increase in the workforce needed to support them. The Statement also estimates that there are fewer than 5 participants per 100km² which is extremely low. Attracting and developing a new workforce that is willing to travel potentially significant distances to provide support could be a serious blockage to reducing supply gaps.

NDIA have provided workforce projections which will be used in this report. They have provided a low and high full time equivalent (FTE) workforce projection for the region, and the additional workforce numbers required has been proportionally assigned to the LGAs in the area in the following table. A calculation has also been done to show what the total growth in number of workers would be if the current average hours per week of 22 (as reported by Workforce Wizard users) remains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>NDIA Low Projection</th>
<th>NDIA High Projection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FTE</td>
<td>22 hrs/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassowary Coast</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mareeba</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablelands</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torres</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torres Strait Island</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other 13 FNQ LGAs</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole Region</strong></td>
<td><strong>950</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,639</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This could mean that at the highest projection rates, over 1,900 new workers need to be found for the NDIS in the Far North Queensland region. This is a significant workforce demand, requiring significant attraction, retention and capability development work to be undertaken to meet the targets of the Far North Queensland NDIS Workforce Plan.
HOW CAN WE SUPPLY THE WORKFORCE?

Part time workforce utilisation

Part time workers in disability related occupations – Far North Queensland region

- Aged and Disabled Carers
- Occupational Therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Speech Professionals and Audiologists

Data Source: 2016 Census of Population and Housing

In 2016 there were 708 part time workers in the Far North Queensland NDIS region in the selected occupations, of whom the majority are Aged and Disabled Carers (639). Other NDIS sites have explored the idea that some of the increase in FTE could be absorbed by extending the hours of existing part time support workers. According to Workforce Wizard data, the North Queensland care workforce averages around 22 hours per week – as a basic calculation, assuming an average 38 hour full time work week, that means there may be an extra 269 FTE available within the part time Aged and Disabled Carer workforce in the Far North Queensland region[^1] - which would meet only 28% of the lowest workforce demand projection made by the NDIA (950 FTE).

Workforce Wizard data also states that up to 85% of the North Queensland workforce are female, and 64% are over 45 years – traditionally females are more likely to seek part time work and it may therefore be difficult to engage this group in extending their work hours. Also, the work can be physically demanding, so an older workforce may be particularly reluctant to take on the burden of extra work. It may also be challenging to extend the hours of the older age groups who may be in transition to retirement. This also assumes that every part time aged and disabled carer is working within disability, which is unlikely to be the case. Demand for disability support is highest at certain times of day and it is likely this pattern will remain under NDIS. This means that the extra hours of support may be in demand at peak times when current workers are already fully deployed.

Even though current part-time workers can help to fill the gap where there are opportunities to extend working hours, they would not meet the expected demand.

[^1]: Calculated as: 16 hours per week unused time x 639 part time workers = 10,224 extra hours. 10,244 / 38 hours per week = 269 Full Time Equivalents.
Casual workers
Workforce Wizard data states that most of the North Queensland workforce are casual (52%). This may be reflective of provider caution to recruit until service demand is known, and using casual employees to fill employment gaps. Again, it is risky to assume that these casual employees will want to transition to full time work, or have the appropriate skill sets to fill the roles required.

For both casual and part time workers, there may be cross employment, meaning that one worker could potentially appear (for example) as a part time worker in 2 organisations, and a casual worker in a third. This would artificially inflate the employment numbers within the sector, and could also give a false view of part time/full time/casual employment.

Unemployed people
As at March 2017 there were 11,289 unemployed people in the Far North Queensland region – with rates ranging from 66% in Aurukun to 2.9% in Weipa (Queensland overall is 6.2%). Given that training and qualifications have been reported as not being as important to recruitment as the correct attitudes, aptitudes and values, this cohort could be a valuable target group for recruitment, but in communities with very high levels of unemployment (12 of the LGAs are over 20%) engaging the unemployed labour force could be very complex, and careful strategies will be required.
GRADUATES IN DISABILITY AND ALLIED HEALTH RELATED QUALIFICATIONS

Anecdotally we know that training and qualifications are only a part of the match of an employee to the disability sector. Due to the significant interpersonal nature of the work some organisations may be more likely to seek certain aptitudes, attributes, attitudes, values and capabilities in new entrants than formal qualifications.

The LGAs in the Far North Queensland NDIS region sit in the Far North Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) region.

In 2014/15 there were 148 enrolments into disability related qualifications in the Far North Queensland DET region. 82% of these were into Certificate III in Disability – much higher than the proportion in Queensland overall. The relatively low level of enrolments in other subjects point to either a lack of interest, or a lack of availability of courses given the geography of the region.

Given the forecast growth in disability related occupations in the region may be as high as 1,984 new workers, this level of training supply will not be sufficient to meet the demand for new NDIS workers.

Certificate III in Disability has now been superseded by Certificate III in Individual Support, which is already being delivered in some areas of Queensland.

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2 Data for 2015/16 has not been published yet
Disability

Certificates in Disability

At Certificate III level, this qualification addresses work in the community and/or residential facilities under direct or regular supervision within clearly defined organisation guidelines and service plans.

At Certificate IV level, this qualification addresses work in residential group homes, training resource centres, day respite centres and open employment services, other community settings and clients' homes.

These are the core qualifications for disability support roles. Enrolments for Certificate III have increased, but Certificate IV enrolments are very low. It is impossible for enrolled VET students to provide the necessary workforce. When numbers for the Certificate III Individual Support are published it will be necessary to check that enrolments are able to match demand.
Allied Health

Allied Health Assisting qualifications cover workers who provide assistance to allied health professionals, including therapeutic and program related support. This work must be under the guidance of an allied health professional; however, supervision may be direct, indirect or remote, and must occur within organisational requirements. The worker is required to identify client circumstances that need additional input from the allied health professional.

Allied Health Assistants are more common in aged care and hospital settings, although the increased demand for Allied Health services predicted under the NDIS may create the demand for these roles in the Disability sector. Enrolments in these courses in the area are low. The lack of assistant staff could impact the ability of Allied Health Professionals to meet the increased demand for services. Consideration...
could be given to developing these graduates as potential employees in future roles that arise in the disability workforce.

**Mental Health**

This qualification covers workers who provide a range of community services focusing on:

- Rehabilitation and support for people affected by mental illness and psychiatric disability
- Implementing community based activities focusing on mental health, mental illness and psychiatric disability, and
- Mental health promotion work.

Work may focus on engaging people with mental illness in community participation, prevention of relapse and promotion of recovery through programs such as residential rehabilitation, work in clinical settings, home based outreach and centre-based programs delivered by community based non-government organisations. This work may also involve supported employment and programmed respite care.

![VET Enrolments – Certificate IV in Mental Health by DET Regions](image)

Enrolment numbers have dropped significantly in the region over this time period – but more work will need to be done in identifying the reasons why, and establishing demand for newly qualified mental health workers to see if this supply can provide the workers needed within this area. Peer workers and workers with lived experience is an emerging area of focus within mental health services, which may be a concurrent source of workforce supply to be explored. There may also be some cross-sector demand for workers in mental health from Domestic Violence or Alcohol and Other Drugs services for example.
HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

James Cook University has the only campus in the region, located in Cairns – however it doesn’t offer any of the Allied Health qualifications. The closest campus offering them is in Townsville. Further investigation may be required to understand how many students from the region move to other universities in order to pursue these qualifications, and more importantly, how many choose to move back. Also, it may be worth exploring the possibility of bringing these qualifications into the suite offered by the Cairns campus. It may also be possible to attract students in other disciplines into part time disability support work to extend the workforce, and increase diversity.

**Number of registered Occupational Therapists by practice setting in the Far North Queensland Region**

![Bar chart showing number of registered Occupational Therapists by practice setting in the Far North Queensland Region.](chart1)

**Number of registered Physiotherapists by practice setting in the Far North Queensland region**

![Bar chart showing number of registered Physiotherapists by practice setting in the Far North Queensland region.](chart2)

The number of registered occupational therapists in both hospital and non-hospital settings in the Far North Queensland Region remains relatively stable. This is an encouraging sign of allied health support in the region. It also means that any occupational therapy graduates moving to the region will be more likely to find supervision and on the job experience with more experienced therapists.

The number of registered physiotherapists has fluctuated slightly, with an apparent move from hospital to non-hospital setting in 2013. It will be important to monitor this trend to see whether this could impact the provision of allied health services in community.
IS THIS ENOUGH TO MEET PROJECTED DEMAND?

Workforce projections from NDIA put the minimum number of people who need to be newly recruited into disability services in the Far North Queensland region at 1,250, and by calculating the FTE from current average weekly hours, the maximum could be around 1,984. The report above has discussed some potential sources of new workers in the area.

If it were possible to leverage the underutilised part time workforce, and if all currently VET enrolled students chose to stay within the Far North Queensland Region and work in disability services, this would only meet 44% of the minimum demand projection.

These are huge ‘ifs’, and this is a highly unlikely scenario. Strategies that focus on extending working hours, and retention of current students will go some way to closing the demand/supply gap, but there will need to be a significant focus on recruitment – with the caveat that this cannot disadvantage the NDIS rollout across the state (i.e. aiming to recruit from other geographical areas just displaces the problem rather than solves it).

For further strategies and activities being developed and rolled out in the region, the Far North Queensland Region NDIS Workforce Action Plan will be developed and released prior to NDIS rollout. Updates will be available from www.workabilityqld.org.au
Data Notes

ABS population data

Regional Population Growth, Australia 2013-14 (ABS Cat. No. 3218.0)

This data source contains estimates of the resident population of Statistical Areas Level 2 to 4 (SA2s - SA4s) and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSAs) of Australia.

Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, 2014 (ABS Cat. No. 3235.0)

This data source contains estimates of the resident population of Statistical Areas Levels 2 to 4 (SA2s - SA4s) and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSAs) of Australia as at 30 June 2001 to 30 June 2014, by age and sex.

The estimates in this issue are final for 2001 to 2011, revised for 2012 and 2013, and preliminary for 2014.

ABS Census Data

The most recent Census of Population and Housing was conducted on 9 August 2011.

STAC Training Data

STAC Data

- Some students will have not given adequate address details to map them to a DET Region,
- Students with overseas or residential addresses outside of Qld do not map to a DET Region, these students will be mapped to Unknown/Interstate.
Department of Education and Training Regions

Source: http://education.qld.gov.au/hr/recruitment/teaching/locations.html
APPENDIX – LGA LEVEL DATA FOR KEY MEASURES

Estimated resident population 2015

Source: ABS 3218.0, Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2014-15

Percentage of population over 65 years of age

Source: ABS 3235.0, Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, 2014
WorkAbility Qld – Far North Queensland NDIS Region Workforce Profile

**Median Age**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Etheridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cassowary Coast</td>
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<td>Mareeba</td>
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<td>Douglas</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Cook</td>
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<td>Far North Queensland Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
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<td>Cairns</td>
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<td>Croydon</td>
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<td>Wujal Wujal</td>
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<td>Yarrabah</td>
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<td>Torres Strait Island</td>
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<td>Lockhart River</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Peninsula Area</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 3235.0, Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia unpublished data and Queensland Treasury estimates

**Percentage of population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Yarrabah</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napranum</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Vale</td>
<td>92.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wujal Wujal</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Kowanyama</td>
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<td>Aurukun</td>
<td>90.2</td>
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<td>Mapoon</td>
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<td>Lockhart River</td>
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<tr>
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<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Croydon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far North Queensland Region</td>
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<td>Cassowary Coast</td>
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<td>Etheridge</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2011, Indigenous Profile - I02 (usual residence)
Percentage of population born overseas

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2011, Basic Community Profile - B09 (usual residence)