



**Redfern
Legal
Centre**

NSW POLICE PERSON SEARCHES

**A DISPROPORTIONATE
IMPACT**

FEBRUARY 2023

NSW Police – Person Searches



First Nations people are twice as likely to be searched by police than the non-Indigenous population.

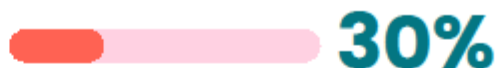


Children: Of the total searches in NSW for the data period, 112,050 (13%) were done on children, although children only comprise 9.7% of the NSW population.

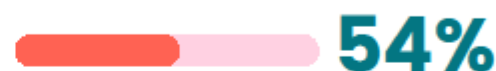
Police conducted a total of 855,038 searches in NSW.

The total number of searches conducted on First Nations people was 65,131.

In the suburb of Waterloo, First Nations people made up 30% of police searches, but only 2.8% of the population.



In the ten-year-old age group, 54% of searches were conducted on First Nations children.



The locations where First Nations people were most over-represented in recorded searches were:

- Waterloo (11x the general population)**
- Surry Hills (11x the general population)**
- Rosebery (8x the general population)**
- Darlinghurst (8x the general population)**
- Erskineville (7x the general population)**

NSW Police Person Searches – A Disproportionate Impact

Introduction

This report collates almost four years of NSW Police data on person searches (excluding strip searches) from 2018 to 2022.

The data shows that First Nations (NSW Police data refer to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people) are more than twice as likely to be searched by police than the general population.

Redfern Legal Centre ('RLC') obtained the data under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act). The data includes a breakdown of the total number of person searches conducted by NSW Police by location, age, gender and number of searches conducted on First Nations peoples for each financial year.

From 1 July 2018 to 21 May 2022, across New South Wales ('NSW') police conducted a total of 855,038 person searches.

In Surry Hills and Waterloo, First Nations peoples are 10 times more likely to be searched than the general population. In key regional areas, they are up to 7 times more likely to be searched.

First Nations peoples are also more likely to be subjected to a search at a younger age, with searches peaking in childhood and remaining high until age 30. One of the most concerning figures is the overrepresentation of First Nations 10-year-olds, who were almost twice as likely to be searched than their peers.

Aside from revealing the overrepresentation of First Nations peoples, the figures also reveal that all children were overrepresented. Of the total searches in NSW for the data period, 112,050 searches (13%) were done on children, although children only comprise 9.7% of the NSW population.

Key findings

First Nations peoples

- Police conducted a total of 855,038 searches in NSW. The total number of searches conducted on First Nations peoples was 65,131.
- First Nations peoples were more than twice as likely to be searched by police than the non-First Nations population.
- The percentage of searches involving First Nations peoples remained around 7% per year, with a slight increase in 2021-2022 to 9.2% (this period included the COVID-19 lockdown period).
- While the total number of searches declined from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022, the number of searches on First Nations peoples for the same period increased.

Location

- The top five locations for person searches were: Liverpool (19,770), Sydney (18,039), Parramatta (17,592), Glebe (15,081) and Surry Hills (14,903).
- The locations with the highest number of person searches involving First Nations peoples were: Dubbo (1162), Redfern (560), Waterloo (538), Cononamble (408) and Surry Hills (380).
- The locations where First Nations peoples were most over-represented in recorded searches were: Waterloo (10.8%), Surry Hills (10.7%), Roseberry (7.6%), Darlinghurst (7.6%) and Erskineville (7.0%).

Age

- For young people aged 10-18 years, the peak age for a person search for First Nations children was 15 years, but for the general population it was 18 years.
- Searches decreased between the ages of 18-30 across the general population, however they remained high for First Nations peoples of this age group.

Children

- Of the total searches in NSW for the data period, 112,050 (13%) were done on children, although children only comprise 9.7% of the NSW population.
- The total number of searches on First Nations children was 9,757, making up 8.7% of searches on children. However, First Nations children comprise only 0.06% of all children in NSW.
- The overrepresentation of First Nations children is starkest in the ten-year-old age group, with 54% of searches in this age group conducted on First Nations children.

Gender

- Males were searched 4 times the rate of females. This figure remained steady across the data period.

Statistical Overview

FIRST NATIONS

What percentage of searches were recorded as involving First Nations people?

7.6% of person searches were recorded as involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. People that identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the 2021 Australian census corresponded to only 3.4% of the NSW population. First Nations people were more than twice as likely to be searched by police than the average person in NSW.

Has the percentage of searches involving First Nations people changed across time?

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022*
Total searches	239534	246378	204704	164422
First Nations searches	18685	17725	13555	15166
First Nations percentage	7.8%	7.2%	6.6%	9.2%

Note: Annual person searches are calculated using financial years. "2021-2022*" includes searches recorded from 01/07/2021 to 21/05/2022 (325 days). See Supplementary Table 2 for changes across time for the locations with the highest number of searches involving First Nations people.

LOCATION

Which location has the highest number of searches involving First Nations people?

Location	First Nations people subjected to searches
Dubbo	1162
Redfern	560
Waterloo	538
Coonamble	408
Surry Hills	380
Glebe	341
Moree	321
Orange	306
Wellington	295
Taree	290

Note: "First Nations searches" corresponds to the average annual number of person searches that were recorded as involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. See Supplementary Table 1 for further information regarding the locations with the highest number of searches involving First Nations people.

Where are First Nations people most over-represented in recorded searches?

First Nations			
Location	Searches (%)	Population (%)	Over-representation
Waterloo	30.3%	2.8%	10.8
Surry Hills	9.9%	0.9%	10.7
Rosebery	7.0%	0.9%	7.6
Darlinghurst	7.2%	1.0%	7.6
Erskineville	10.3%	1.5%	7.0
Armidale	54.7%	7.9%	6.9
Newtown	9.0%	1.3%	6.9
Redfern	21.9%	3.2%	6.9
Camperdown	8.1%	1.2%	6.8
Alexandria	11.3%	1.8%	6.2
Moruya	37.2%	6.5%	5.8
Kingsford	5.7%	1.0%	5.7
Goonellabah	40.8%	7.4%	5.5
Maroubra	6.9%	1.3%	5.4
Merewether	9.9%	2.2%	4.5
Toongabbie	7.0%	1.6%	4.3
Parramatta	2.2%	0.5%	4.2
Yamba	18.8%	4.5%	4.2
Orange	32.5%	7.8%	4.1
Bathurst	22.3%	5.5%	4.1
Blacktown	6.9%	1.7%	4.0
Tuncurry	20.9%	5.3%	3.9
Westmead	2.6%	0.7%	3.9
Tweed Heads	11.6%	3.0%	3.9
Marrickville	6.1%	1.6%	3.8

Note: “Searches (%)” corresponds to the number of person searches recorded as involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people divided by the total number of person searches in each location. Population (%) corresponds to the number of people that identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander on the 2021 census divided by the total census responses in each location. “Over-representation” corresponds to the *ratio* of “Searches (%)” and “Population (%)”. Numbers greater than one reflect a disproportionate number of searches (e.g., First Nations people in Waterloo are 10.8 times more likely to be searched than the average person in Waterloo). Locations with fewer than 100 person searches or 100 First Nations people were excluded.

Locations with the highest number of searches involving First Nations people

Location	Total		First Nations people				Over-represented
	Searches	Population	Searches	Population	Searches (%)	Population (%)	
Dubbo	2274	43516	1162	6784	51.1%	15.6%	3.3
Redfern	2551	13072	560	415	21.9%	3.2%	6.9
Waterloo	1773	16379	538	458	30.3%	2.8%	10.8
Coonamble	485	2666	408	1057	84.1%	39.6%	2.1
Surry Hills	3831	15828	380	147	9.9%	0.9%	10.7
Glebe	3876	11680	341	378	8.8%	3.2%	2.7
Moree	578	8962	321	1841	55.5%	20.5%	2.7
Orange	942	41232	306	3236	32.5%	7.8%	4.1
Wellington	575	4096	295	1178	51.3%	28.8%	1.8
Taree	909	16715	290	2122	31.9%	12.7%	2.5
Armidale	518	23967	284	1889	54.7%	7.9%	6.9
Walgett	340	1824	262	440	77.1%	24.1%	3.2
Bourke	306	1699	260	578	85.2%	34.0%	2.5
Potts Point	3004	7183	240	67	8.0%	0.9%	8.6
Coffs Harbour	1037	27089	237	1765	22.9%	6.5%	3.5
South Tamworth	550	6621	212	1285	38.6%	19.4%	2.0
Camperdown	2506	9381	204	112	8.1%	1.2%	6.8
Newtown	2274	14690	204	190	9.0%	1.3%	6.9
Haymarket	3005	8305	200	14	6.7%	0.2%	39.6
Blacktown	2652	50961	184	882	6.9%	1.7%	4.0
Casino	503	10930	176	1181	35.0%	10.8%	3.2
Campbelltown	2370	16577	167	740	7.0%	4.5%	1.6
Griffith	675	19505	152	1160	22.6%	5.9%	3.8
Nowra	854	9956	148	1229	17.4%	12.3%	1.4
Darlinghurst	2030	10615	146	101	7.2%	1.0%	7.6
Maroubra	2056	30722	141	389	6.9%	1.3%	5.4
Sydney	4637	16667	140	47	3.0%	0.3%	10.7
West Tamworth	287	5471	135	1194	47.0%	21.8%	2.2
South Grafton	422	6288	128	918	30.3%	14.6%	2.1
Broken Hill	559	17706	127	1754	22.8%	9.9%	2.3
Woolloomooloo	1270	3792	124	136	9.8%	3.6%	2.7
West Kempsey	223	5073	119	1045	53.3%	20.6%	2.6
Mount Druitt	1757	16986	116	412	6.6%	2.4%	2.7
Bathurst	502	7001	112	382	22.3%	5.5%	4.1
Brewarrina	118	931	108	519	92.1%	55.7%	1.7

	Total		First Nations people				
Lismore	424	3656	108	246	25.6%	6.7%	3.8
Parramatta	4522	30211	101	159	2.2%	0.5%	4.2
Inverell	356	12057	99	1318	27.8%	10.9%	2.5
Coonabarabran	234	3477	95	434	40.6%	12.5%	3.3
Ashmont	609	3747	94	751	15.5%	20.0%	0.8
Marrickville	1526	26570	93	424	6.1%	1.6%	3.8
Wollongong	1906	20446	93	394	4.9%	1.9%	2.5
Narrabri	234	7327	88	1124	37.6%	15.3%	2.5
Penrith	1647	17966	84	1113	5.1%	6.2%	0.8
Tolland	366	3459	84	438	23.0%	12.7%	1.8
Grafton	289	10563	83	962	28.5%	9.1%	3.1
Tregear	414	3700	81	588	19.6%	15.9%	1.2
Liverpool	5082	31078	79	368	1.6%	1.2%	1.3
Moruya	206	4295	77	278	37.2%	6.5%	5.8
Kelso	244	10039	76	899	31.1%	9.0%	3.5

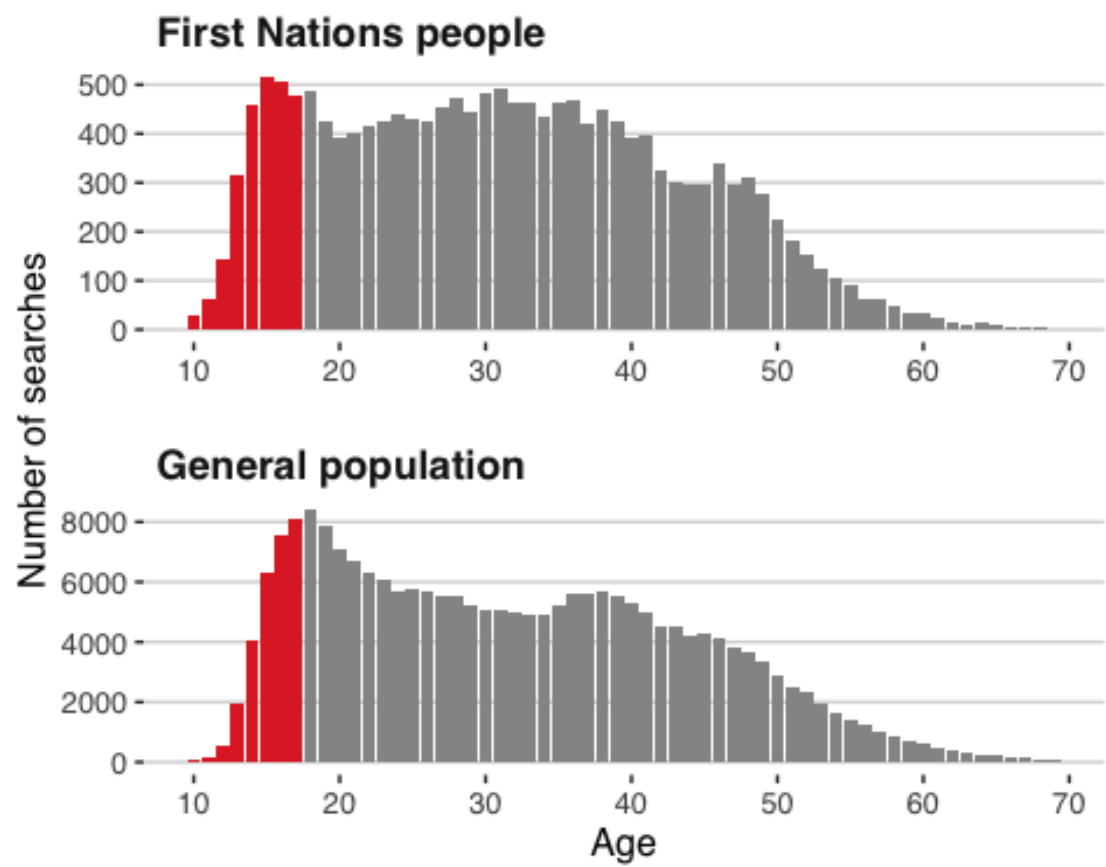
The percentage of searches involving First Nations people across time

Location	First Nations people				Average searches
	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022*	
Dubbo	49.3%	49.1%	48.2%	60.2%	1162
Redfern	25.5%	18.1%	20.1%	25.2%	560
Waterloo	33.2%	30.8%	23.4%	36.9%	538
Coonamble	73.5%	86.2%	88.6%	92.8%	408
Surry Hills	9.5%	8.7%	10.1%	12.6%	380
Glebe	6.8%	9.0%	7.8%	13.3%	341
Moree	53.2%	64.3%	49.2%	58.5%	321
Orange	32.2%	32.1%	32.3%	34.1%	306
Wellington	47.2%	47.4%	48.3%	61.9%	295
Taree	36.6%	32.2%	27.3%	28.9%	290
Armidale	62.2%	51.6%	54.3%	51.4%	284
Walgett	79.3%	79.6%	72.7%	74.7%	262
Bourke	89.9%	78.9%	86.4%	84.4%	260
Potts Point	6.5%	7.6%	7.5%	12.4%	240
Coffs Harbour	24.7%	22.8%	18.9%	23.5%	237
South Tamworth	42.5%	34.6%	30.3%	48.2%	212
Camperdown	7.4%	9.4%	5.0%	10.8%	204
Newtown	8.3%	9.9%	6.0%	11.6%	204
Haymarket	5.8%	6.5%	5.9%	9.0%	200
Blacktown	8.0%	7.5%	5.8%	6.7%	184
Casino	30.6%	31.0%	37.5%	47.0%	176
Campbelltown	5.8%	6.4%	7.8%	9.8%	167
Griffith	21.8%	23.1%	21.8%	24.1%	152
Nowra	17.7%	16.7%	15.8%	21.1%	148
Darlinghurst	6.9%	7.4%	5.8%	9.3%	146

Note: “2018-2019” to “2021-2022*” correspond to the *percentage* of person searches recorded as involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in the specified financial year. “Average searches” corresponds to the average annual *number* of searches recorded as involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. The percentages reflect the number of searches *relative* to the general population whereas the average reflects the *absolute* number of searches. Evaluating the magnitude and reliability of potential trends across time requires both absolute and relative information.

AGE

What is the age distribution of searches involving First Nations people?



Note: “Number of searches” corresponds to the average annual number of person searches. The red bars highlight the disproportionate number of searches involving First Nations children (10-17 years old).

CHILDREN

Children as a percentage of the NSW population

Total NSW population	8,072,161
Total Children	780,368
Children as a % of total NSW population	9.6%
First Nations children	48,412
First Nations children as a % of total NSW children	0.06%

Note: Population data was obtained from the 2021 Census. "Children" refers to the total for age groups 10-17 inclusive. 'First Nations' data was derived from adding the following Census data categories: "Aboriginal", "Torres Strait Islander, and 'Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'.

What percentage of children searched were First Nations people?

Age	Total	First Nations children	
	Searches	Searches	Percentage
10	49	27	54.7%
11	168	65	38.5%
12	559	141	25.3%
13	1959	315	16.1%
14	4072	460	11.3%
15	6285	517	8.2%
16	7585	506	6.7%
17	8124	477	5.9%

Person Searches by Gender

	2018-2019		2019-2020		2020-2021		2021-2022*	
Gender	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	193,676	80.86%	198,628	80.62%	165,486	80.84%	133,149	80.98%
Female	45,858	19.14%	47,750	19.38%	39,218	19.16%	31,273	19.02%
Total	239534	100%	246378	100%	204704	100%	164422	100%

Note: "2021-2022*" includes searches recorded from 01/07/2021 to 21/05/2022 (325 days).

DATA & METHOD

- Data regarding person searches (excluding strip searches) was provided to Redfern Legal Centre by the NSW Police Force following an application under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW).
- The data provided by the NSW Police Force covers person searches conducted between 01/07/2018 and 21/05/2022. The average annual number of searches was calculated as the total number of searches divided by 1421 days multiplied by 365.25 days.
- Separate data sets were provided for 1) all recorded person searches and 2) person searches that were recorded as involving an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. 2778 locations are included in the general population data and only 1416 in the First Nations data.
- The data provided by the NSW Police Force was supplemented with information from the 2021 Australian census. The locations in the police data do not follow the Australian Bureau of Statistics naming conventions. 82 out of 1416 locations are excluded from the location-based statistics that include census data because they either 1) do not correspond to a suburb in the census data (e.g., "Darling Harbour") or 2) are an incomplete match for multiple suburbs that are differentiated using parenthetical information in the census data (e.g., "Alison" in the NSW Police Force data matches both "Alison (Central Coast - NSW)" and "Alison (Dungog - NSW)" in the census data). A further 86 locations were excluded because no First Nations people in that location were recorded in the census (e.g., Port Botany).

Only nine of the excluded locations record *any* person searches involving First Nations people. Only three excluded locations record more than 20 person searches involving First Nations people throughout the almost four-year date range of the NSW Police Force data: Kingswood (217 searches), Mayfield (72 searches), and Mogo (28 searches).

Prepared by

Samantha Lee, Senior Solicitor, Redfern Legal Centre
 Rebecca Campbell, Solicitor, Redfern Legal Centre
 Contact: Redfern Legal Centre: (02) 9698 7277
 Website: rlc.org.au
