Population pyramid

Population pyramids are diagrams that consist of a series of horizontal bars showing the proportion of the population in various age groups in a particular region. They show the percentage of the total population in each female and male age group.

For example, in 2001, women aged over 74 made up 3.5 per cent of Australia’s total population (see diagram (c)). At this time (and now) Australia had an ageing population. In 1947, there was a greater percentage of the Australian population in younger age groups (see diagram (a))—as is the case for Australia’s Indigenous population today (see diagram (b)).

Look carefully at the three population pyramids below, and then complete the activities that follow. If you need to refresh your memory about how to read and prepare population pyramids, check out the relevant pages in the pertinent source listed in the References below.

1. What does the scale on the horizontal axis of a population pyramid show?

2. What would a population pyramid shaped like an inverted triangle (i.e. the point of the triangle is at the bottom and the base at the top) tell you about a population?

3. What does the shape of the population pyramid for Australia in 1947 tell you about the population at this time?

4. What major world event occurred just prior to 1947? Suggest how this event might have influenced the trends shown on the 1947 population pyramid.
5. Approximately what percentage of the population in Australia was aged between 0 and 4 years in 1947? How does this compare with the percentage for this age group in 2001? What conclusions can you make?

6. What does the shape of the population pyramid for Australia in 2001 tell you about overall trends in the population at the start of the new millennium?

7. In 2001, who in Australia are tending to live longer than 74 years — men or women? How can you tell this from the population pyramid?

8. Write a short paragraph to describe the population profile of Australia’s Indigenous population in 2001, pointing out how it compares to the profile for Australia’s population overall. Based on your general knowledge, suggest possible reasons for the differing trends.

References: SOSE Alive 3, pp. 174–5 • SOSE Alive Geography 2, pp. 78–9