



Our Story.  
Our Future.

# Submission to Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

12 December 2022

'Our Story. Our Future.' was created by proud Wiradjuri, Wotjobaluk, Yuin and Gumbaynggirr artist Luke Penrith and Maluilgal people, Badu Island artist Naseli Tamwoy.



## Introduction

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission ahead of the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

While the ABS recognises the importance of the Priority Reforms (the focus of the Review), this submission will focus on areas of ABS expertise, including data provision and the specific Outcomes which use ABS sources.

## Executive Summary

1. This submission focuses on Socioeconomic Outcomes informed by ABS data.
2. In some cases, the wording of the Agreement is not consistent with ABS outputs in relation to sex/gender and disability status.
3. Beyond 2023, the ABS survey program currently does not include a survey specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This impacts on the availability for some Indicators (Driver and Contextual).
4. Some statistical definitions are subject to change. Any changes may impact on time series and consideration should be made to how this may impact reporting and measurement.
5. Outcome 13 has no future data source at present.
6. The wording of Outcome 17's target and indicators require closer examination as current target and indicators cannot be measured using available data.

## Response to Socioeconomic Outcome Targets and Indicators

### General

#### Gender and sex

"Gender" is used as a disaggregation for many of the measures throughout the Closing the Gap documentation. However, most ABS collections (such as [Census](#)) currently output sex and not gender.

#### Disability status

Many of the Outcomes include future disaggregation by disability status. Depending on the data source, the ABS collects various measures of disability. This means disaggregation by complete disability status is only possible in collections where the disability measure allows for this. The 2021 Census collected a measure of disability that identifies a sub-group of the complete population with disability: those with a "[Core activity need for assistance](#)", the population for whom service delivery has the most consequence (and conceptually comparable to the "profound/severe limitation" group identified through other ABS disability measures). While the Census disability measure identifies only a sub-group of the population with disability compared with disability measures used in other [ABS collections](#), Census data supports the disaggregation of outputs at the small area and small population level, something which is generally not supported by survey data.

#### Small geographic regions

Many Outcomes include disaggregation planned for "other small geographic areas". Not all data sources will allow for small geographic areas due to the quality of the statistics available at smaller geographic levels and the need to maintain data confidentiality. For sample surveys, it will depend on elements like sample size and the design of the collection, and generally small area estimates need to be modelled. Using a standard geography built from [SA1s](#) (generally with a total



population of 200–800 people) or [mesh blocks](#) will help to ensure geography is statistically relevant and can be standardised easily, including when boundaries may need to be updated over time.

Census data can be output using the Indigenous geography [structure](#), which includes a lowest level of “[Indigenous location](#)” (ILOC), built from SA1s. ILOCs are designed to represent small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a minimum population of about 90 people and allow the production and analysis of statistics, while also maintaining confidentiality of individuals. Whole ILOCs aggregate to form Indigenous Areas which aggregate to form Indigenous Regions. While such small geographic areas are ideal for Census output, ABS surveys are typically designed to be output at larger geographic levels, such as national, state/territory, or remoteness.

### **Future ABS collections**

Following the 2022–23 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey ([NATSIHS](#), results expected mid-2024), the timing of future ABS surveys (NATSIHS and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)) is uncertain and not yet factored into the ABS forward work program. This has been noted in the respective Outcomes below.

For data needs that may be best met through Census, topic consultation for the 2026 Census will commence in 2023.

### **Productivity Commission Dashboard reporting**

It would be useful to plot graphs as a single graph instead of creating additional graphs when more than one jurisdiction is selected and to have total persons included when males and females are shown, to allow a total comparison against the disaggregation.

## **Outcome 1**

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives)*

### **General**

Changes in life expectancy estimates over time can be attributed to changes in health outcomes of the population, as well as changes in who is counted in the population for which life expectancy is estimated. For statistical purposes, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is defined by how people identify (or are identified) in various data sources, and this can change over time. Data users should consider the potential impacts that the changing composition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population can have when interpreting estimated changes in life expectancy over time. The ABS advises that data providers highlight this to data users when providing information about life expectancy over time.

### **Target (headline and disaggregation)**

The ABS is currently working through recommendations from an independent review that was commissioned to maintain the quality and relevance of ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy estimates.

### **Indicator (Driver): Prevalence of health risk factors**

Following the 2022–23 NATSIHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain. There will also be a break in time series in the 2022–23 NATSIHS Physical Activity output, due to a new set of questions being introduced.

### **Data Development**

The Data Development Plan includes high prioritisation for life expectancy estimates to be produced in all states and territories, and at more frequent intervals (short term, 2022–24). ABS produces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy estimates using the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing and associated Post Enumeration Survey. As a result, ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy estimates cannot be produced more frequently than five-yearly. In addition, input data limitations mean that high quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy





estimates cannot be produced for all states and territories, particularly for jurisdictions where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is relatively small.

### Outcome 3

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years)*

#### General

The new Preschool Reform Funding Agreement may require changes to the annual National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (NECECC). A subset of data from the NECECC is used for National Agreement reporting.

#### Target (headline and disaggregation)

Currently, the data often presents proportions greater than 100% enrolment for some jurisdictions (for example, ACT has a 136.7% enrolment rate). ABS suggests other methods are tested, particularly in calculating the denominator. Integrated data or administrative data such as school enrolments could be used to derive a Year Before Full-time Schooling (YBFS) population (denominator).

### Outcome 5

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential)*

#### Target (headline and disaggregation)

Census generally satisfies data needs. However, the target is intended to include disaggregation by disability status (using ABS Census data as a source). The disability measure collected in the Census identifies a sub-group of the complete population with disability: those with a core activity need for assistance, the population for whom service delivery has the most consequence (conceptually comparable to the “profound/severe limitation” group identified through other ABS disability measures) See [Core activity need for assistance](#).

#### Data Development

The Data Development Plan includes several data items that may be expected to use ABS surveys as a source (e.g. Barriers to completing Year 12 and Experiences of racism). Previous ABS surveys have collected this data. However, following the 2022–23 NATISHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain. This data is not available in the Census.

### Outcome 6

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways)*

#### Target (headline and disaggregation)

Census generally satisfies data needs. However, the target is intended to include disaggregation by disability status (using ABS Census data as a source). The disability measure collected in the Census identifies a sub-group of the complete population with disability: those with a [core activity need for assistance](#).

### Outcome 7

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education)*



**Target (headline and disaggregation)**

Census generally satisfies data needs. However, the target is intended to include disaggregation by disability status (using ABS Census data as a source). The disability measure collected in the Census identifies a sub-group of the complete population with disability: those with a [core activity need for assistance](#).

Disaggregation is planned for “other small geographic areas”. Census data supports most levels of geography, including the Indigenous geography Structure.

**Data Development**

The Data Development Plan includes “Barriers to youth engagement”, which may be expected to use ABS surveys as a source. Following the 2022–23 NATISHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain. This data is not available in the Census.

**Outcome 8**

*(Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities)*

**Target (headline and disaggregation)**

Census generally satisfies data needs. However, the target is intended to include disaggregation by disability status (using ABS Census data as a source). The disability measure collected in the Census identifies a sub-group of the complete population with disability: those with a [core activity need for assistance](#).

**Outcome 9**

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need)*

**Target (headline and disaggregation)**

Census generally satisfies data needs. The target includes the concept of overcrowding. Currently, overcrowding is measured using the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) methodology, noting that an overcrowding measure for Australian conditions has been identified for data development.

The target is intended to include disaggregation by disability status (using ABS Census data as a source). The disability measure collected in the Census identifies a sub-group of the complete population with disability: those with a [core activity need for assistance](#).

Disaggregation is planned for “other small geographic areas”. Census data supports most levels of geography, including the Indigenous geography Structure.

**Indicators (Contextual): Acceptable standard of housing**

This Contextual Indicator is expected to have an ABS survey as a source. Following the 2022–23 NATISHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain.

**Data Development**

The Data Development Plan includes “Levels of overcrowding specific to Australian conditions”, which use ABS Census data as a source. There are data items in the Data Development Plan which might be expected to use NATSISS (“Satisfaction with services provided by public housing service provider”) or NATSIHS (prevalence of certain conditions) as a source. Following the 2022–23 NATISHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain.



## Outcome 10

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system)*

### **Target (headline and disaggregation)**

Future disaggregation is intended to be by remoteness and socioeconomic status of locality. However, the data presented in Prisoners in Australia (from the National Prisoner Census) is collected about people in legal custody. As a result, geography (other than state/territory) will reflect the location of prisons, rather than the location of the person's previous "usual residence". Additional disaggregation includes disability status on the Productivity Commission Dashboard. This is not currently collected.

### **Data Development**

The Data Development Plan includes information on police interactions. The ABS continues to work with all jurisdictions to collect national offender data with robust Indigenous status recording. Some areas of data development will require significant commitment to collaboration between agencies.

## Outcome 13

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe)*

### **Target (headline and disaggregation)**

There is no future data source for Target 13 and many of its indicators.

The ABS previously collected some information about experiences of physical violence in two specialised multi-topic surveys – the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) in 2002, 2008, and 2014–15, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) in 2018–19. This information is not currently being collected in ABS surveys.

During the most recent NATSIHS consultation process conducted in 2020, the ABS sought views from an expert advisory panel on violence (Harm Panel), that included predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts. This group was formed to provide advice on the suitability of collecting high-level data on physical and selected non-physical types of violence in the 2022–23 NATSIHS.

While the Harm Panel agreed on the need for this information, they advised the ABS that the NATSIHS was not an appropriately safe way to collect violence data. Privacy, risk of harm, absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interviewers, insufficient post survey support, and respondent burden were among the common themes identified as key issues. The violence module has not been included in the 2022–23 NATSIHS. The NATSISS in its current format faces similar challenges to the NATSIHS in terms of collecting information about experiences of violence.

The ABS is working with other Commonwealth agencies, led by DSS, to identify opportunities to produce fit-for-purpose statistics which provide culturally safe information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences of family, domestic, and sexual violence.



## Outcome 14

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing)*

### Indicators (Contextual)

There are several Contextual Indicators where data is expected to be drawn from ABS surveys. Following the 2022–23 NATISHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain.

### Data Development

Future reporting is expected to include further disaggregation of data which uses Causes of Death (ABS) as its source. This disaggregation includes all states and territories. Currently mortality rates are not calculated for Tasmania, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory due to both small numbers and quality issues. The ABS continues to work with stakeholders on improving the recording of information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths. Additional disaggregation includes disability status on the Productivity Commission Dashboard. This is not currently collected.

## Outcome 15

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters)*

### Indicators (Contextual): Proportion of people who recognise and live on homelands/traditional country

This Contextual Indicator is expected to have an ABS survey as a source. Following the 2022–23 NATISHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain.

## Outcome 17

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives)*

### General

Information technology questions and data items often change over time as trends and technology change rapidly.

### Target (headline and disaggregation)

The Australian Digital Inclusion [Index](#) does not include Indigenous status. It will be possible to derive a measure of digital inclusion using 2022–23 NATSIHS data. Following the 2022–23 NATSIHS, the timing of future ABS data sources (NATSISS and NATSIHS) is uncertain, so a future data point is not assured.

### Indicator (Driver): Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households accessing the internet

There are no ABS sources that capture this data. The concept is also outdated, as the norm of a “house” being connected to the internet isn’t necessary for a person to use the internet.

### Indicator (Driver): Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing the internet at home (in last 12 months)

The nearest approximation available is in the 2022-23 NATSIHS which will provide the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 5 years and over who have personally used the internet ever/in the last 3 months/daily (without the requirement to be accessed at home).



## Response to Priority Reforms

As noted, this submission focuses on the Socioeconomic Outcomes informed by ABS data. However, in relation to Priority Reform 4 (*Shared access to data and information at a regional level*), the ABS continues to publish and update the freely available online [TableBuilder](#) and [Data by Region](#) products. The ABS is also participating in the current Closing the Gap Implementation partnership forums which explore future data governance requirements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

TableBuilder allows users to create customised tables based on Census data with the ability to cross tabulate by most Census data items, including Indigenous status. TableBuilder currently has data from the 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021 Censuses. TableBuilder data is able to be output in most geography levels, including at the [SA1](#) and [meshblock](#) level.

Data by Region is publicly available and includes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people theme, which consists of the 2016 estimated resident population data and data from the Census (2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021), NATSISS (2014–15), and NATSIHS (2018–19).

A range of geographic levels are available on Data by Region, including Greater Capital City Statistical Area, Local Government Areas (LGAs), Statistical Areas (SA2-4), Remoteness Areas, Indigenous Structure, and States and Territories.

The geography available for each data item is dependent on the suitability of the data.

- Census data is available at all levels.
- Survey data is available at state/territory, remoteness, and national level.

