

8 September 2023

Cassandra Elliott
A/g Director
Disability, Ageing, Carers and Mental Health Statistics
2026 Census Topic Consultation
Locked Bag 10
Belconnen ACT 2616

Email: census.content@abs.gov.au

Dear Cassandra,

Feedback on 2026 Census topic consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed removal of topics for the 2026 Census which include: number of children ever born; number of motor vehicles; unpaid work – domestic activities; work topics; ancestry and ethnic identity; language; and religious affiliations. This response has been prepared from an aged care perspective.

In addition to assessing ACCPA's needs for data to support decision-making, in preparing this response ACCPA also consulted its members to assess their data needs in relation to the above-mentioned topics and the potential impacts of removing these topics. The following are ACCPA's comments in relation to each topic.

Number of children ever born

ACCPA notes "Number of children ever born" data is used to calculate fertility outcomes of females at different ages and is needed for informing fertility assumptions used in population projections for Australia. In the context of delivering services to older Australians, ACCPA and its members have no need for this data.

Number of motor vehicles

ACCPA has no need for this data to support decision-making. Considering that there are already alternative data sources available that provide information relating to the number of motor vehicles (which include state and territory vehicle registrations by location and Road Vehicles, Australia by the Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics), ACCPA would have no objection to this topic being removed from the 2026 census.

Unpaid work – domestic activities

ACCPA is of the view that data relating to unpaid work/domestic activities should be retained. Removing this from the census would make analysis on the topic of carer roles much more difficult and may impact research which is currently underway such as the dementia research being conducted by HammondCare. While alternative data sources are available that provide more detailed information relating to unpaid domestic work, these sources do not provide data at the same level of geography.

Additionally, the data might be useful in identifying/mapping evidence about the consequences of unpaid caring for all carers of older people, and effective interventions to support this carer

population. In this context, ACCPA notes that current evidence fails to fully quantify the impacts that caring for older people has on carers' health and well-being.¹

Systematic measurement of a broad range of outcomes (via appropriate data collection), with comparison to the general population, is needed to better understand the true consequences of caring. Classification of unpaid caring as a social determinant of health could be an effective lever to bring greater focus and support to this population. Further work is needed to develop and identify suitable interventions to support evidence-based policymaking and practice.

Work topics

In Australia, workforce shortages in residential aged care present a significant challenge for the aged care industry. The growing demand for workers in aged care, combined with the shrinking supply of younger workers entering the field, highlights a future workforce crisis. In this context, a range of data relating to work, including labour force status; hours worked; occupation and industry of employment, will be needed to support activities to grow the aged care workforce.

With regard to the four aspects of the Work topics that the Australian Bureau of Statistics is seeking feedback on, ACCPA believes data relating to number of employees; joblessness; and employment arrangements/job security should be retained. ACCPA does not have a strong view about removal of the incorporation status topic from the 2026 Census.

Importantly, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is currently developing an aged care National Minimum Dataset (NMDS) to streamline data collection across different jurisdictions including NMDS relating to the aged care workforce. ACCPA believes there is a need for alignment of data collected by the 2026 Census with aged care data collected across jurisdictions via the aged care NMDS.

Ancestry and ethnic identity, language, and religious affiliations

ACCPA is strongly of the view that data relating to ancestry, ethnic identity, language, and religious affiliations is of national importance and should be retained.

Australia is an ethnically diverse nation, with almost half (49%) of Australians born overseas or having one or both parents born overseas.²

Older people from some culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds can face greater challenges when navigating the health and aged care systems compared to older people who do not identify as CALD. These can include language and cultural barriers, such as not knowing where to seek help or how to access services. Understanding patterns of utilisation of services within CALD populations is important to being able to address the health/aged care needs of the CALD population in Australia.

ACCPA members who provide aged care services to multicultural communities report that these topics are vital to understanding the make-up of their local communities and changes over time, and are used for research, business analysis and service planning. They use this data down to the Local Government Area level after every census in their service planning and community outreach.

A deep understanding of the make-up of local communities (and their intersectionality) is essential for aged care providers to be able to connect with and reach those communities and to develop a

¹ Spiers GF, et al. BMJ Open 2021;11:e046187. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2020-046187

² ABS (2017b) Census of Population and Housing: understanding the Census and Census data, Australia, 2016

better understanding of service needs and gaps. This enables service delivery to be designed in a culturally responsive way which reflects the communities' needs.

Yours sincerely

Anne Liddell
Head of Policy
Aged & Community Care Providers Association