

SENATE ESTIMATES OPENING STATEMENT

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Position: Australian Statistician

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Good evening. I would like to give a brief update on preparations for the 2021 Census.

Census night, Tuesday 10 August, is 69 days away. The Census is the most comprehensive snapshot of the nation and tells the story of how we are changing. It covers 10 million households and over 25 million people. Census data is used to update electoral boundaries, determine the GST distribution between the States and Territories, and facilitate planning by governments, businesses and the community. It tells us about the economic, social and cultural make-up of the country.

After the outage of the 2016 online Census form, and with the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, I'd like to explain some of the enhancements we've made to ensure we deliver a safe, secure and effective Census.

- We've worked with PwC and Amazon Web Services to rebuild completely the Census Digital Service, including cyber-security protections informed by the Australian Cyber Security Centre and other experts.
- There will be an extended period available to complete the Census. People won't have to wait until Census night to fill in their form. They can complete their form (online or on paper) when they receive their instructions in the mail in late July, providing they know where they'll be on 10 August.
- We've included two new questions – one about long-term health conditions, and one on Australian Defence Force service. These additions are the first significant changes to questions collected in the Census since 2006.
- The health and safety of the community and our staff is paramount. We have a Census COVID-Safe plan, which we tested last year in our major Census test, and we're well placed to respond in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak during the Census period. Having

said that, COVID outbreaks do complicate our preparations, as well as our general data collection activities.

The 2021 Census advertising campaign will begin in early July, and we'll have more than 20,000 Field Officers working across the country to help people complete their Census.

It is important that the Census counts everyone, so we have special processes to count people experiencing homelessness, and people in establishments such as aged care homes, hospitals and hotels. We will also provide support options for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or blind or with low vision. This includes providing resources in Auslan, and the ability to order Braille and large print forms working with the relevant non-government organisations.

Census information will be translated to help members of Indigenous and multicultural communities complete the Census. Information for people from a multicultural background will be available in up to 29 languages and there is a Telephone Interpreter Service.

For people living in remote Indigenous communities, the Census will be conducted over an extended period between July and August, providing more time to cover vast areas and visit multiple communities. We recruit Census staff from remote communities to help people in those areas complete the Census through face-to-face interviews.

As you would imagine, conducting a Census is an enormous logistical exercise that takes years of detailed planning – involving everything from building 50+ IT systems to purchasing over 100,000 masks for our field staff, to ensure they are COVID-safe. I'd like to thank ABS staff, and our partners in government and the private sector, for their hard work and dedication in getting us to where we are now: well-prepared and ready to deliver a Census that informs Australia's important decisions, such as where to build hospitals and schools, set up businesses, and provide government and community services.

Of course, the Census is not the only thing the ABS does. I want to end by acknowledging ABS staff for their dedication over the past year rising to the challenge of producing new, more timely statistics in response to COVID-19 in addition to our regular statistical work program.