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Chair
Standing Committee on Community Affairs References Committee
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Dear Chair

I write to you in response to your letter to the Australian Statistician dated 21 October 2015 regarding the inquiry into violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability in institutional and residential settings, including the gender and age related dimensions, and the particular situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, and culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability.

The ABS aims to ensure Australia is well served by a responsive, innovative and dynamic statistical system which continues to meet changing information requirements in a cost effective manner. We are undergoing major transformation over the next five years. This transformation will encompass how we operate as an organisation, both internally and as part of the wider information community, and modernise the ABS statistical program, enabling us to exploit new opportunities and better meet the evolving needs of users.

I have considered your questions and provide the following responses.

- 1) Is the ABS aware of any statistics that describe the extent of violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability?

The ABS has three surveys of interest to this inquiry – the Personal Safety Survey (PSS), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC). The PSS collects detailed characteristics of violence, however, does not separately identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The NATSISS is specifically designed to produce statistics on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,

however, only collects broad information on physical violence. Both surveys include the standard suite of questions used by the ABS to determine whether or not a person had a disability or long term health condition at the time of the interview. The SDAC does not specifically collect information on violence, abuse or neglect; however there are modules that aim to collect information on general feelings of safety, experience of homelessness, access and barriers to healthcare and social and community participation including connectedness to the community that may be of interest to this inquiry.

A summary of these surveys is included below. Additional information from these surveys may be made available by request through the [ABS Information Consultancy](#), or on the [Confidentialised Unit Record File](#).

Personal Safety Survey

The Personal Safety Survey conducted by the ABS in partnership with the Department of Social Services (DSS), aims to build the evidence base on the nature, extent and characteristics of violence in Australia to monitor and evaluate government's success in relation to reducing the prevalence of family and domestic violence and sexual assault in Australia. The 2012 PSS collected information from men and women aged 18 years and over living in private dwellings (excluding remote and very remote parts of Australia and discrete indigenous communities) about their experiences since the age of 15 of physical assault, sexual assault, physical threat and sexual threat; and emotional abuse by a current partner and most recently emotionally abusive previous partner.

The 2012 PSS included for the first time the standard suite of questions used by the ABS to determine whether or not a person had a disability or long term health condition at the time of the interview. The 2012 PSS also included a number of indicators that identify people from a culturally and linguistically diverse population including country of birth, language first spoken as a child and main language spoken at home. The 2012 PSS did not collect an indicator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, though this is planned for the 2016 collection.

Information on the experience of violence by people with a disability at the time of interview was published in [4906.0 - Personal Safety, Australia, 2012](#) (Tables 11.1 and 11.2). PSS only includes people living in private dwellings so residents of 'special dwellings' (such as boarding houses, institutions) with a disability are not in scope for the survey. The requirement for the interview to be conducted in private to maximise respondent safety and confidentiality limits those respondents with a core activity limitation, impacting either on their ability to communicate or to be alone with the interviewer, from participating in an interview.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)

The 2014/15 NATSISS collected information from Indigenous adults living in private dwellings across Australia, including remote and non-remote areas, and discrete indigenous communities. In addition to the standard suite of questions used by the ABS to determine whether or not a person had a disability or long term health condition at the time of the interview, the survey collected whether the respondent was a victim of violence in the 12 months prior to interview and selected characteristics of the most recent incident. Statistics from this survey will be published progressively from April 2016. Information from the 2008 survey was published in [4714.0 - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008](#).

Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC)

The 2012 survey collected information from three target populations; people with disability, older people (those aged 65 years and over), and people who care for people with disability or older people. Data from this survey is used to measure the prevalence of disability in Australia, measure the need for support of older people and those with disability, and provide a demographic and socio-economic profile of people with disability, older people and carers compared to the general population. The survey includes people living in both private and non-private dwellings (including persons in cared-accommodation). The range of data collected in the cared-accommodation component was narrower than in the household component as some topics were not suitable for collection through a proxy or were irrelevant to those residing in cared-accommodation.

- 2) Can the triennial survey on Disability, Ageing and Carers be expanded to collect data on the extent of violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability?
- 3) The committee is cognisant that the survey for 2015 is currently in progress. What would be the process for having the additional data described above, being collected as part of the next survey for 2018?

The ABS transformation will involve major redesign of our statistical collections, methods, products and services in order to deliver a more sustainable statistical program that extracts greater value from all available data. During transformation, the ABS will engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from the Disability sector as well as government, on their information requirements and planned changes to existing statistical collections, including the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. This will include capturing emerging information requirements for new content areas and enhancing statistics for key population groups of interest such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability. As this survey is heavily user funded, future enhancements are dependent on funding and agreement on priority with

the survey funders. Articulation of detailed requirements for people with a disability can be forwarded to Louise Gates (louise.gates@abs.gov.au).

4) Is there a more appropriate or concurrent mechanism, such as a longitudinal study, to collect data on this issue? The committee is interested in hearing about existing and proposed mechanisms as well as intra-agency cooperation on projects?

While it is often possible to address the same questions with longitudinal and cross sectional data, longitudinal data can distinguish changes over time within individuals. The most appropriate mechanism is therefore dependent on the key questions of interest and whether they need to be answered by tracking changes in individuals' lives over time. Enhanced capability to produce longitudinal datasets, whether through enhanced use of administrative data or through direct collection, is also a core element of ABS transformation.

There has been strong interest to date from key stakeholders to commence a longitudinal study of people with a disability with a number of initial scoping studies undertaken. Discussions are continuing regarding proposals in this area, noting that considerable resources would be required and additional funding would need to be identified and secured.

Whilst the ABS is a large information provider, we are not alone in the critical task of collecting and reporting quality statistics for public use. The ABS has strong partnerships and will continue to strengthen these to ensure that we are able to effectively meet increasingly complex information needs, including working with others to provide innovative, value-added statistical solutions.

The [National Centre for Longitudinal Data \(NCLD\)](#) (nclld@dss.gov.au) located within DSS, would be better placed to advise on potential use of their existing suite of longitudinal studies for addressing this issue.

The ABS is aware of a project being undertaken by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS), the [Data Diversity Project](#), which will deliver a state of knowledge paper that will review existing knowledge and gaps in data and information on the experiences of violence by diverse population groups including Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and women with disability.

5) Any other information on data capture and statistics with regard to this inquiry that the ABS may wish to submit.

Within the current household survey paradigm, the collection of detailed information for small sub-groups of the population presents significant challenges. In the absence of accurate information to 'target' households, collecting information for sub-groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability, require large scale and expensive 'screening'

activities to identify sufficient sample with the desired characteristics to produce reliable estimates in population based surveys.

The ABS is working across government to access administrative sources to improve the efficiency and quality of such collection processes in the future and I am confident that the current transformation process will see ABS better placed to address such information needs in the future. Of particular interest to this inquiry would be data collected by the State and Territory Police and Criminal Courts, however there is currently no mandate to collect victim's disability status.

Please contact Dr Paul Jelfs [REDACTED], General Manager, Population and Social Statistics Division should the committee require further information.

Yours faithfully

Luise McCulloch
Deputy Australian Statistician
Statistical Services Group

10 November 2015