Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

Attorney-General's Department

Hearing date: 05 October 2022

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Paul Scarr asked the following question:

CHAIR: Thank you. I want to ask a specific question about data. I'm interested to know, Ms Bogaart or Ms Fraser in particular, whether you're aware as to whether there's been any progress made in relation to this issue. It comes out of the Australian Institute of Criminology report, Missing persons: who is at risk? There was a particular recommendation made in relation to improvements to the collection of missing persons data. There was a proposal that there should be a minimum standard with respect to the dataset collected for missing persons. I'll just read from the data quality and recording section of the report, on page 34. This is a report that was released in 2017, five years ago. It says:

This and previous Australian studies on missing persons have noted the effect of data quality on the presentation of national and jurisdictional trend data on missing persons … Data collected for this study using the NMPCC form demonstrated some of the inconsistencies in the data recorded by state and territory police, which affected compilation of trend data and, critically, national data on key variables. It also affected the capacity for police services to provide different aggregations of data depending on the analysis required.

That section goes on and proposes a minimum dataset which should be compiled for each missing person:

Data items may include:

• health and disability status …

• intent to commit self-harm/suicide;

• alcohol/drug dependency;

• care and protection orders;

• family and social mediators …

This was a clear recommendation from the Australian Institute of Criminology with respect to compilation of data in relation to missing persons. Ms Bogaart, first, are you aware of that issue in terms of the compilation of data, in particular in relation to missing persons and the recommendation to have a minimum dataset? Are you aware of that issue?

Ms Bogaart: I'm not, Senator. The Australian Institute of Criminology has only recently come back into the department, and it doesn't sit within my remit. But I'm very happy to take that on notice and come back to you, or you may like to direct that question to the Australian Institute of Criminology when they appear today.

CHAIR: But you understand, from my perspective, that I'll look at an issue like this, and it's relevant across the whole of government. This is data with respect to missing persons. So you as agencies can understand, and we as elected members can understand, the depth of the issue here, what we can see from the trends, what the data is telling us. Get the data first. That's the primary goal, or it should be, in terms of policy formulation.

Shouldn't all government agencies which have a stake, if you like, in relation to this area ideally be across these sorts of issues, in terms of data collection? It shouldn't just be up to the

Australian Institute of Criminology. It shouldn't just be: 'They've made a recommendation. Ask them.' Do you understand the perspective I'm providing?

Ms Bogaart: I do, and I agree: it's important as a cross-government issue—as are the terms of reference for this inquiry. I absolutely agree, but I will have to take the question on notice; I don't know the answer.

The response to the question is as follows:

The department received the research report *Missing persons: Who is at risk?* (released publicly on 16 November 2017) from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), and is aware of the recommendation for the compilation of a Missing Persons Minimum Dataset.

The National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC), led by the Australian Federal Police, is committed to driving and coordinating national research in relation to missing persons. In 2018, NMPCC developed the Missing Persons Minimum Dataset in conjunction with the Police Consultative Group on Missing Persons and the AIC. The minimum dataset includes demographic information such as Indigenous status. As a result of this agreement, all jurisdictions have made positive progress in the amount of, and consistency in, data collected.