



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare

*Authoritative information and statistics
to promote better health and wellbeing*

Senator Rachel Siewert
Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs – References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra Act 2600

Dear Senator Siewert

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further advice to 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.*

AIHW's previous advice to the Inquiry (provided in June 2015) highlighted the data available from the only source held by the AIHW to which information on both disability and domestic violence is common, that being the Specialist Homelessness Services Data Collection.

Your letter of 21 October 2015 requested further advice from AIHW about:

- whether the AIHW is aware of any statistics that describe the extent of violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability
- what the most appropriate mechanisms are to improve data capture in this area, particularly existing and proposed mechanisms and intra-agency cooperation on projects
- other information on data capture and statistics.

The attachment to this letter provides our advice on these matters. I hope this advice will prove to be of assistance.

Should the committee have any further queries about this information, please contact Mr Mark Cooper-Stanbury, Head, Ageing and Disability Unit

Yours sincerely

Kerry Flanagan PSM
Acting AIHW Director

20 November 2015

Attachment

Statistics that describe the extent of violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability

While AIHW collects information from various sources on both disability and domestic violence, there is only one AIHW dataset in which both topics are covered – the Specialist Homelessness Services Data Collection. Information from this collection was previously provided to the Committee.

The AIHW does not hold any other collection – either survey or administrative – that combines these two topic areas, nor are we aware of other data sources which contain this information.

Mechanisms are to improve data capture

Improvements in data capture concerning the intersection of violence and disability would require the development of standardised questions regarding both violence and disability. Implemented across survey and administrative data collections, these questions could be used in tandem to collect information *within* the collection, or could be used singly and subsequently joined up *across* collections through data linkage methods. However, the data linkage solution has considerable overheads in terms of suitable expertise and infrastructure, data governance (consent, data ownership, rights to use, ethics consideration, etc.) and associated cost and lag times.

Standardised disability questions

Australia is in a very good position with respect to standard disability questions, through the efforts of ABS, AIHW and many other stakeholders.

Along with the Census questions on ‘Core Activity Need for Assistance’, the ABS also developed a short disability module for use in a range of social surveys. This module – derived from items in the comprehensive ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers – allows the demarcation of survey respondents into those without and without specific limitation or restriction¹. This is useful for comparing other survey characteristics for people with and without disability (although it is not designed to produce prevalence estimates).

In 2013, the AIHW built on this earlier work to design a ‘Standardised Disability Flag’, intended for use in administrative data collections to achieve a similar purpose as the short disability module for surveys. The Flag covers the core activity areas as well as 6 other areas, consistent with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. A subset of the Flag items, relating to the core activity areas, was subsequently included in the SHSC. While the SHSC disability questions have been designed to align closely with the concept of ‘core activity limitation’, they are not directly comparable with *prevalence estimates* of disability in the *general population* produced by the ABS. However, the alignment of questions across data collections, including in those such as the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection which does not primarily collect disability data, enables measurement using broadly the same concepts and therefore comparability is greatly improved.

1. The term ‘specific limitation or restriction’ covers both the concepts of core activity limitation and specific schooling or work restriction. A core activity limitation exists where someone needs assistance with mobility, communication or self-care; these are 3 of the 9 life areas designated in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health.

Standardised violence questions

The development and implementation of a set of questions and responses around the concept of disability – led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) with input from the AIHW and other stakeholders – is the kind of process that is required to adequately capture information about violence from the perspectives of the victim, perpetrator, service sector and justice sector.

This would involve development of and agreement on a definition of violence and the scoping of a standard violence module including questions and their responses, developed by experts in the field of violence research, statistical methods and question development, in consultation with victims, perpetrators, service providers, and policy departments.

The ABS has laid useful groundwork for this exercise in *Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence: A conceptual data framework* (ABS 2013), which presents statistical and conceptual information relating to family, domestic and sexual violence. It describes the main concepts, sources and priorities in this field and suggests strategies for information development to address priority information needs in the field.

High-level support for implementation

A critical piece of the puzzle in improving data capture is to get high-level support from policy and program owners (ministers of state, department heads, collection managers, provider organisations) for the development and widespread adoption of the standardised violence and disability modules, which would allow consistent and comparable reporting across sectors, collections, sources, and time.

There are a number of committees and organisations through which this high level support could be gathered. These include:

- The Department of Social Services (DSS), as the Federal social policy agency, has responsibility in both the Women’s Safety and Disability and Carers spaces. Any high level support would need to involve this department.
- The Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety Limited (ANROWS) is an independent, not-for-profit company established as an initiative under Australia’s National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 (the National Plan). ANROWS is one of the key commitments of the national plan. The first major task of ANROWS was to produce the National Research Agenda on behalf of the Australian Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The purpose of the National Research Agenda is to develop a cohesive and comprehensive national evidence base that is relevant to policy and practice and actively contributes to the National Plan outcomes. It will do this by providing strategic direction and identifying research opportunities and priorities that are nationally applicable.
- The Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) group comprises of the heads of departments responsible for children and families and promotes collaboration by jurisdictions on innovative policy approaches to child and family issues. It has broad oversight of identified national priorities relating to abuse and neglect of children including the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children (NFPAC). CAFS provides general direction in relation to key children and families data and measurement issues, meaning support of this group would be important for enabling the collection of nationally consistent statistics in this area.

Other information

The experience with the development of disability statistics shows that the best results are achieved when many stakeholders work collaboratively, and bring to bear the perspectives of official statistics, academia, policy, service provision, and lived experience. Hence it will be important as violence data are developed that a comprehensive range of stakeholders be engaged in the process.

And those that have been involved in the development of the collection methods are then well placed to contribute to the analysis, interpretation and application of findings to effective policy and program responses.

Reference

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2013. Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence: A conceptual data framework. Canberra: ABS. Available at <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4529.02013?OpenDocument>>.