

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND**  
**INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO**  
**2011-12 Additional Estimates Hearings**

**Outcome Number:** 7

**Question No:** 296

**Topic:** Closing the Gap

**Hansard Page:** 17/02/2012 - CA10

**Senator Siewert** asked:

Can you provide headliner examples of improvements to the quality and reliability of data collection in meeting Closing the Gap targets?

**Answer:**

Improving the quality and availability of reliable data remains a priority for all governments. To improve the collection and reporting of data against the Closing the Gap targets, the Australian Government has committed \$46.4 million over four years from 2009-10.

These activities are outlined under Schedule F of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). They include agreed actions to improve Indigenous enumeration in the 2011 Census, to improve the level of Indigenous identification in key data sets, and to develop best practice guidelines for data linkages.

Some headline examples of the data improvements from these and other related actions are:

**Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)**

The ABS adopted several initiatives for the 2011 Census to improve the quality of the count of Indigenous Australians. It also expanded the scope of the Census Post Enumeration Survey to include, for the first time, very remote areas and discrete Indigenous communities.

Whilst the 2011 Census data have not yet been released, preliminary feedback is positive on the outcome of the Indigenous Enumeration Strategy, especially in regard to the shorter enumeration period, the use of Remote Area Mobile Teams and the undertaking of more quality assurance checks whilst in the field.

*In reference to the targets on life expectancy and mortality:*

The ABS will link the 2011 Census records with death registration records to assess under-identification of Indigenous mortality in order to compute more reliable Indigenous life expectancy estimates. It is not currently feasible to develop yearly estimates of Indigenous life expectancy, as the quality of these estimates depends on the Census data linkage, which is expected to be more robust once the 2011 Census data is processed and linked.

The ABS has investigated the quality of Indigenous identification in key data sets. One outcome of this initiative is that the ABS and the Western Australian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages have found that Indigenous mortality data for Western Australia was overstated for 2007, 2008 and to a lesser extent for 2009. This overstatement for Western Australia also affects the accuracy of Indigenous mortality trends at the national level. Work is underway to identify the best options to address this issue and to improve the reliability of Indigenous mortality data for those years.

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*In reference to the target on access to early child hood education in remote communities:*

The ABS also compiles data for the National Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Collection. This Collection compiles data on children, teachers and service providers from all establishments delivering an Early Childhood Education program. The data in this Collection is more reliable than currently available pre-school data because of the wider coverage of pre-school types, and because it has a more consistent interpretation across states and territories, including on Indigenous status.

A second issue of the *Experimental Estimates of Preschool Education, Australia, 2011* (ABS Catalogue 4240.0) was released on March 7, 2012.

**Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)**

The AIHW, together with the ABS, is tasked to improve the level of Indigenous identification in existing key data sets. These data sets include: Hospitals, Mental Health Services, Perinatal, Diabetes, Cancer, Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services, General Practitioner survey data, school enrolments, and birth and death registrations.

All jurisdictions have agreed to adopt the standard Indigenous status question and recording categories on data collection forms and information systems for key data sets.

*In reference to the targets on mortality:*

The AIHW leads the development of an enhanced Perinatal National Minimum Data Set (PNMDS) to provide nationally consistent data on child and maternal health, as currently data is only available for a limited number of jurisdictions.

Some achievements have already been made. Nationally consistent data items on smoking during pregnancy were added to the PNMDS from 1 July 2009, and data on gestational age at first antenatal visit was added from 1 July 2010. Both of these data items are performance indicators under the NIRA.

Implementation by all jurisdictions of the AIHW's *National best practice guidelines for collecting Indigenous status in health data sets* is to be completed by December 2012.