

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

**Department/Agency:** Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
**Outcome/Program:** Outcome 2: Indigenous  
**Topic:** Closing the Gap – Life expectancy data

**Senator:** Siewert, Rachel

**Question reference number:** 296

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**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 1 April 2016

**Number of pages:** 2

**Question:**

Senator SIEWERT: I want to ask around life expectancy data. Can you confirm what datasets and reference point are being used for Closing the Gap measurements.

Mr James: What you are probably referring to is the mortality data that we look at every year—

Senator SIEWERT: Yes.

Mr James: The way that works is that the data is provided by the ABS and we agreed right back when Close the Gap started exactly what data we should use. We agreed we would use mortality data for five jurisdictions, including Queensland and New South Wales. We have been reporting the data in that way ever since. The original assessment of which jurisdictions to include was based on analysis by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. On notice, I can give you all the details around that.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could, that would be appreciated.

**Answer:**

- Life expectancy data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is prepared every five years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).
- ABS mortality data is used as a proxy in the years when no new life expectancy data is available. Assessment of progress with the target is based on the current Indigenous mortality rate compared to a trajectory that predicts the rate at which Indigenous deaths would need to decline to meet the target. If the current rate does not sit within the confidence interval for this trajectory then the target is assessed as ‘not on track’ that year.
- Trend data from 1998 is provided to give historical context given health outcomes at a population level change slowly.

- As part of the 2006 Census, the ABS undertook a data quality study linking the Census with mortality data to determine the quality of Indigenous identification in each jurisdiction. The ABS concluded that NSW, Qld, SA, WA and the NT had sufficient data quality to include in Indigenous mortality analysis. The study was repeated for the 2011 Census and confirmed the inclusion of these five jurisdictions.
- Based on the analysis for those five jurisdictions combined for the latest data (2014) against the trajectory, the life expectancy target is not on track.
- Data for these five jurisdictions represent 89 per cent of the Indigenous population. It has been suggested that the analysis should be restricted to SA, WA, and NT only. However, these three jurisdictions represent 29 per cent of the Indigenous population and could not be used as a national proxy given their unique characteristics. Also of interest, between 1998 and 2013 Indigenous mortality rates declined by 13 per cent for the five jurisdictions combined compared with 20 per cent for the three jurisdictions combined. If we had used this faster rate of change in SA, WA and the NT as the basis of the target analysis there would be a risk of overstating the improvement in Indigenous mortality rates nationally.