

Auckland District Council of Social Services
PO Box 6817 Wellesley Street
Auckland
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Submission on Content of the 2018 Census from the Auckland District Council of Social Services

ADCOSS is a networking, training and advocacy organisation for social and community service organisations and personnel in the Auckland Isthmus area. We have about 100 members and member organisations. We often make submissions on legislation and other consultations on matters of public policy such as the content of the census.

We note that the Statistics Department is currently consulting until June 30th on which questions to ask in the next census in 2018. On your website you have listed 8 criteria to determine which questions to ask. The most important criteria to us are: Does the proposed question add value to New Zealand's society and economy? Will the proposed question produce quality information? ADCOSS is seeking to keep the question on unpaid activities as a vital part of the next census and add questions on housing and transport particularly important to Auckland.

Retaining the Question on Unpaid Activities

ADCOSS is very strongly opposed to the proposal to omit the existing question on unpaid activities. As the Statistics Department acknowledges in its website discussion document, this information demonstrates the extent to which unpaid work underpins total economic activity; is an indicator of social and cultural capital and connectedness; of the extent to which it provides savings that would otherwise have to be resourced; measures effects of an ageing population and of migration; and cross-connects with the Australian Census data. It also provides very valuable information for government, tertiary institutions and the Voluntary Sector on the evolving nature and health of the voluntary social services, environmental, recreational and sporting sectors. This includes recognising the diverse roles of women in voluntary, domestic and paid work and the increasing unpaid roles of older adults and of migrants and understanding other changes taking place over time. This understanding should feed directly into policy as it relates to the contribution made by civil society in many ways the country's wellbeing and to gender issues such as diversity in the workplace, equal pay, and parental leave. For these reasons and others the unpaid activities question should be retained.

The question on paid work should seek information by asking about all of a person's jobs rather than just the main job to address the increasing numbers of "portfolio workers" who now work in a range of part-time jobs.

Better Questions on Housing and Transport

We support the proposed additional questions on housing. These are on the issue of location: usual residence one year ago and second residence. We also urge the inclusion of a question on time in months and years (rather than just the suggested years) at their usual residence. Many low income Auckland residents are forced to move several times a year so this question is necessary to measure transience. On the issue of housing we believe that the question on weekly rent should be extended to also ask for rent as a proportion of income; we agree with collecting information on homelessness; we agree to improving the tenure, tenure holder and sector of landlord questions; we agree with new questions on types of unoccupied dwellings, housing quality, mortgage payment amount and proportion of income and fuel types to heat dwelling.

We agree to the proposed new questions on transport. We agree with the new question on means of travel to education and educational institution address, which need to be addressed for all children as well as adults. We also agree with asking about all transport means used in the journey to work as there are significant cycling and walking components for many. However we ask that the time spent travelling be added to this and to the educational institution question.

We also agree with the request by the GLBT community to add questions on gender identity and sexual orientation. If the number of questions and potential confusion is an issue the gender identity question is the more important and unambiguous.

Methods of Collection of Census data

On the methods of collection of census data we are very concerned at the proposal that filling in the forms be dominantly on line backed up principally by mailing forms more than by door knocking. We are happy for online collection to be utilised more but are very concerned that older and lower income people will lack on line access or don't have the confidence and English language competence to fill it in on line. For many lower income people and many of those for whom English is a second language traditional posted mail is rarely used and we find that residences and apartments in low income areas are littered with letter boxes overflowing with sodden uncollected flyers and mail. The Department of Statistics must liaise with posties to identify such areas and pro-actively hand deliver census forms early as the predominant means of census data collection in such areas. Otherwise these areas will under report and will make mistakes in filling out forms among those who do are willing and able to do so. Special efforts must be made also to get responses from illegal migrants, those in overcrowded conditions, and homeless people or their numbers will be substantially understated. A much better quality response is essential and can be achieved by relating directly to enumerators in person who are knowledgeable in the most common of the 200 languages used in Auckland providing direct personal assistance and advice and interpretation of what many find to be complex questions.

Richard Northey
Chair
Auckland District Council of Social Services