



MEDIA RELEASE

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Peak body advocates further work needed to analyse homelessness figures in the ABS Census count

Homelessness Australia welcomed the Position Paper by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on proposed changes to the methodology used to analyse the count of people experiencing homelessness on Census night. This Paper has been a long time coming. Homelessness Australia has engaged constructively with the ABS over the past six months to ensure that the analysis of Census data is appropriate for counting homeless people.

The Census date of 9th of August provides a point in time count of National, State/Territory and regional homelessness statistics once every five years. Along with the rich data from specialist homelessness services, the Census data helps us understand the extent of homelessness. This year's count is critical as it is the first Census since the release of the White Paper on Homelessness which set a range of interim targets to be achieved by 2013 including a reduction in the overall rate of homelessness by 20%.

"The Census night data provides a critically important point in time count of homelessness in Australia. It is immensely valuable in helping us to understand the overall level of homelessness in Australia. This year's Census is especially important as it will provide the first indication of how well we are tracking towards meeting the target of reducing homelessness by 20% by 2013," said Homelessness Australia's National Chairperson, Narelle Clay, AM. Ms Clay goes on to say, "It needs to be noted that the Census data is only one part of the picture and other data sources such as the data collected from Specialist Homelessness Services are also critical to our understanding."

The ABS has consulted with experts working in the field but at this stage Homelessness Australia remains concerned there is no clear indication that the ABS will respond to concerns raised by the homelessness sector in the consultation. However, it is pleasing that one result is the establishment of a Reference Group of Sector Experts to provide on-going advice on the Census. "The establishment of a Reference Group to work with ABS on an appropriate enumeration methodology is a positive step but further work is necessary for the community services sector to feel confident with the use of Census data for homelessness data collection purposes," said CEO of Homelessness Australia, Nicole Lawder.

The consultation has led to an acknowledgment by the ABS that in counting homeless people there are many complexities and the ABS Paper just released acknowledges there are several areas that require further work before a final methodology can be confirmed.

Homelessness Australia is keen to ensure that concerns raised by non government agencies working with homeless people are dealt with in the final methodology. Counting



people who are homeless in the Census is a complex task and there is potential for some over-counting but also for significant under-counting particularly amongst vulnerable groups such as young people, women escaping violence and Indigenous people. There are also complexities in areas such as counting people in boarding house situations. Homelessness Australia is disappointed that these matters have not been resolved prior to the Census Collection but remains committed to working on these issues prior to the enumeration strategy being finalised.

Homelessness is a serious problem in Australia and there are still many myths about why people become homeless in Australia. People find themselves homeless for many reasons such as domestic violence, child safety, poverty, discrimination and a lack of affordable, secure and safe housing. Homelessness Australia is committed to the cultural definition used for homelessness and would strongly argue any deviation from this would be a backwards step in the understanding of homelessness in Australia.

Homelessness Australia and homelessness services all over the country are committed to working closely with Government to meet the target of halving homelessness by 2020.

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