

18 June 2024

Submission on Consultation on Modernising our approach to the 2028 Census

To Statistics New Zealand,

Te Hiringa Mahara, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to consultation on modernising the approach to 2028 Census.

Te Hiringa Mahara was established as an independent Crown entity following the *He Ara Oranga: Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction*. Our role is to:

- Assess, report, and make recommendations on the mental health and wellbeing of people in New Zealand, and the factors and approaches that affect them.
- Monitor mental health and addiction services and to advocate improvements to those services.
- Advocate for the collective interests of people who experience mental distress or addiction (or both), and the persons (including family and whānau) who support them.

We have specific obligations in our Act to have particular regard to the experience of, and outcomes for, Māori. These roles and responsibilities underpin our submission on this consultation.

Our position

We acknowledge the need for quicker information and the challenges of information gathering via surveys. We support an admin data first policy but have concerns that marginalised populations, including those who experience the poorest mental wellbeing and mental health outcomes are least likely to be captured in administrative data or in traditional survey formats.

Understanding these communities is pivotal to achieving mental wellbeing for all, therefore Te Hiringa Mahara calls on Statistics New Zealand to prioritise the needs of Māori, people with disabilities, marginalised communities such as homeless and transient communities, and communities who historically have low participation in surveys. We call on Statistics New Zealand to utilise methodology that partners with and meets the needs of our most vulnerable tāngata whaiora (people with lived experience of mental distress and/or addiction). We also call on Statistics New Zealand to recognise and adapt data collection to meet the needs of whānau, hapū and iwi Māori.

Admin data first policies also require further investment in the technology that enables them. This includes investment to maximise efficiency of data being collected, cleaned, validated, stored, accessed, and analysed. We call on Statistics New Zealand to commit further investment into the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), in particular improving timeliness and breadth of data available within the IDI, which will enable a more complete picture of the lives and wellbeing of the people of Aotearoa.

Being responsive is vital to meeting the needs of people in Aotearoa, 5 yearly census data no longer meets the changing needs of society. Te Hiringa Mahara supports consideration of annual targeted surveying to replace five-yearly cycles. We also support consideration of new approaches, in particular:

- Investment in kaupapa Māori approaches to understanding whānau, hapū and iwi Māori, in ways that uphold indigenous data sovereignty
- Community led surveying and data gathering for information about marginalised communities, and communities of interest not normally engaged through population surveys.

Discussion

We support admin data first

We agree that an admin data first approach delivers significant benefits. This approach requires sustainable ongoing investment to maximise efficient and effective collection of administrative data. Collection of administrative data should not result in additional administrative costs (e.g., collecting administrative data should not result in more work for frontline staff).

We support more agile and targeted surveying

Smaller and more frequent, targeted surveying allows Stats NZ and its data users to be more responsive to key issues and communities.

Priority must be given to understanding our most marginalised communities

We call for targeting of higher cost approaches to people and communities historically undercounted in traditional survey formats, and those less likely to generate robust administrative data. This must be done in partnership with, or led by communities themselves, upholding the 'nothing about us, without us' principle.

Māori data collection and use must mature

Traditional methods of gathering information at the individual and household level places a Western world view over the individual and family unit. Investment in kaupapa Māori approaches would address this. We support work to date on indigenous data sovereignty and call for increased devolution of decision-making regarding Māori data collection to iwi.

As a vital, and unique source of indigenous data, we encourage re-investment of census cost savings into conducting Te Kupenga more frequently.

Recommendation

Te Hiringa Mahara recommends that Statistics New Zealand supplement an admin data first approach with investment in annual community-led survey modules that prioritise the needs of underserved communities. We recommend Statistics New Zealand invest in critical admin data infrastructure. We recommend continuing to work with Māori leaders and investing in kaupapa Māori approaches to recognise and uphold the mana and whakapapa of Māori, and the views and responsibilities of whānau, hapū, and iwi.

Nāku noa, nā



Dr Ella Cullen

**Kaiwhakahaere Pūnaha Toiora Arataki/Mōhiotanga / Director – Wellbeing System
Leadership & Insights**

Te Hiringa Mahara | Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission