

---

## Editorial



### Introduction to the census questions special issue

**Tom Wilson\*** The University of Melbourne

**Elin Charles-Edwards** The University of Queensland

**Jonathan Corcoran** The University of Queensland

**Julia Loginova** The University of Queensland

**Kirsten Martinus** The University of Western Australia

\* Corresponding author. Email: [wilson.t1@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:wilson.t1@unimelb.edu.au). Address: Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne, 207 Bouverie St, Melbourne, Vic 3010, Australia.

Published on 31 May 2021

In June 2020, the Australian Bureau of Statistics announced which new questions would be included in the 2021 Census of Population and Housing, as well as which existing questions would be dropped (ABS 2020). There will be new questions about defence force service and long-term health conditions, while the internet access question will no longer be asked given how widespread internet access has become.

The process of adding questions to the census questionnaire is, understandably, a lengthy one. Proposed new topics and questions require careful consideration and debate. There needs to be a compelling case for asking the question, insufficient data on the topic from existing data sources, clear public acceptability of the question, limited respondent burden, an ability for the question to be easily interpretable, and a strong likelihood of it yielding accurate data, among other considerations (ABS 2018a). Any potential new question needs to be balanced against the competing demands of both existing as well as other proposed new questions, as well as the value of consistency across censuses for time series analyses. All potential new questions require stakeholder consultation (ABS 2018b), detailed ABS assessment, and extensive testing. Any new questions which successfully make it through this rigorous assessment process into the final ABS assessment are then recommended to Parliament to be included in the next census.

Given we are currently in a census year, *Australian Population Studies* sought to place a spotlight on all things census and put out a special call for short commentary papers on proposed new census topics and questions. This special issue draws together a select number of papers that answered this call. The aim was to broaden the conversation and stimulate useful discussion about potential new topics and questions that might be considered for the 2026 Census. Contained in this special issue are commentary pieces that cover a range of topics, including (1) measuring multi-locational living; (2) highly mobile populations; (3) long-distance commuting; (4) commuting to places of education;

(5) financial wellbeing; (6) gender identity and sexual orientation; and (7) ethnicity and ancestry. Together we hope readers find the collection of papers thought-provoking and seek to draw on in this special issue as a new consolidated resource for scholars and practitioners interested in the census. We note that some papers did not quite make the timing to appear in this special issue of *Australian Population Studies* and will instead be published in a special section in the forthcoming November issue of the journal.

Finally, we would like to thank each of the contributing authors who submitted these interesting commentary pieces, and to the referees who gave their time and provided useful comments on the submitted papers.

## References

ABS (2018a) Census of Population and Housing: Topic Directions, 2021.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2007.0.55.001main+features12021>.

Accessed 2 May 2021.

ABS (2018b) Census of Population and Housing: Consultation on Topics, 2021.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2007.0Main+Features12021?OpenDocument>. Accessed 2 May 2021.

ABS (2020) 2021 Census questions and date announced.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/9A2C37E441CE868ECA25858B0019A7F0?OpenDocument>. Accessed 2 May 2021.