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INFORMATION PAPER: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES PERSPECTIVES ON HOMELESSNESS

AUSTRALIA

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For further information about these and related statistics, contact the National Information and Referral Service on 1300 135 070.

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Jonathan Palmer
Acting Australian Statistician

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In September 2012, after a significant period of consultation, the ABS released a statistical definition of homelessness. The ABS *Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, 2012 (cat. no. 4922.0) provides the context for the development of the definition, as well as describing elements of the statistical definition of homelessness in detail.

Under the ABS definition, when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate, or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

The ABS definition of homelessness has been developed for application to the general population in Australia.

A number of data developments have sought to build the evidence base for developing policy to address and monitor homelessness, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These include, but are not limited to:

- The first official homelessness estimates based on a methodology for operationalising the ABS statistical definition of homelessness. For more information, see *Information Paper - Methodology for Estimating Homelessness from the Census of Population and Housing*, 2012 (cat. no. 2049.0.55.001). The estimates were derived from the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Censuses and were published in *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011* (cat. no. 2049.0);
- The establishment of the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) collection compiled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) from data on the clients of specialist homelessness agencies. The collection includes information on 'support periods' (including previous periods of homelessness) by demographic characteristics such as age, education and employment status;
- The commissioning of the project *Journeys Home: A Longitudinal Study of the Factors Affecting Housing Stability*, funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and conducted by the Melbourne Institute. The project tracks a national sample of individuals exposed to high levels of housing insecurity to assist in understanding the various factors associated with homelessness and housing stability; and
- The Longitudinal Survey of Reconnect Clients, run by DSS to evaluate the role of the Reconnect program in building community capacity for early intervention into youth homelessness.

The homeless rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 487.9 persons for every 10,000 persons enumerated in the 2011 Census, compared with the non-Indigenous rate of 35.2 persons per 10,000 of the population. ABS homelessness estimates are comprised of persons identified across six discrete categories of homelessness, referred to as operational groups (see *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011*, cat. no. 2049.0 for more information). Table 1 shows that of the operational groups, the largest over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons occurred in the group 'Persons living in 'severely' crowded

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INTRODUCTION *continued*

dwellings' (365.9 out of every 10,000 persons). In comparison, only 10.4 out of every 10,000 non-Indigenous persons were living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.

TABLE 1 – NUMBER OF HOMELESS PERSONS BY HOMELESS OPERATIONAL GROUP, BY INDIGENOUS STATUS, AUSTRALIA, 2011(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)

<i>Homeless operational group</i>	<i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</i>		<i>Non-Indigenous</i>		<i>Not stated</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	Persons	Rate per 10,000	Persons	Rate per 10,000	Persons	Rate per 10,000	Persons	Rate per 10,000
Persons who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out	1 677.0	30.6	4 703.0	2.4	433.0	4.1	6 813.0	3.2
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless(f)	3 282.0	59.9	14 313.0	7.2	3 664.0	34.6	21 259.0	9.9
Persons staying temporarily with other households(g)	1 011.0	18.4	16 002.0	8.0	360.0	3.4	17 373.0	8.1
Persons staying in boarding houses	678.0	12.4	13 723.0	6.9	3 316.0	31.3	17 717.0	8.2
Persons in other temporary lodging	41.0	0.7	629.0	0.3	13.0	0.1	683.0	0.3
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings(h)	20 054.0	365.9	20 690.0	10.4	626.0	5.9	41 370.0	19.2
Total homeless	26 743.0	487.9	70 060.0	35.2	8 412.0	79.5	105 215.0	48.9

(a) Source: Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011 (cat. no. 2049.0).

(b) Estimates in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential information.

(c) The estimates presented in this information paper exclude 24 duplicate records included in the initial release of the 2011 homelessness estimates.

(d) Categories are mutually exclusive, therefore persons will only appear in one category.

(e) Rate is the number of persons per 10,000 of the indicated population (excluding usual residents of external territories, at sea, migratory and offshore regions).

(f) Includes those in Specialist Homeless Services.

(g) Includes 'visitor only' households where all persons report having no usual address. Some people who were homeless are likely to be underestimated in this category.

(h) Includes usual residents in dwellings needing 4 or more extra bedrooms under the Canadian National Occupancy Standard. See Explanatory Notes in Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011 (cat. no. 2049.0) for more information.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in estimates of homelessness, there are likely to be additional aspects to homelessness from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective that the definition does not adequately capture.

In recognition of the differences in understanding concepts of home and homelessness, the ABS undertook community engagement activities to identify perspectives of home and homelessness within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. Findings were published in the *Discussion Paper: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Perspectives on Homelessness*, 2013 (cat. no. 4735.0). Further engagement was then undertaken to better inform homelessness measurement and analysis by considering this feedback in the context of the current ABS statistical definition of homelessness.

In this paper, concepts of home and homelessness within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context that emerged from the engagement process are discussed. Findings are mapped to the ABS statistical definition for the purpose of informing the interpretation of current measures of homelessness. Implications for future homelessness measurement among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are then considered.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES PERSPECTIVES ON HOMELESSNESS

UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS WITHIN A CULTURAL CONTEXT

Whilst findings of this engagement process are valuable to inform discussions on meanings of home and homelessness to improve homelessness estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the views and information presented should not be interpreted as being representative of any one group.

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, outreach workers and service provider organisations across Australia revealed that there were several concepts of home and homelessness to be considered within a cultural framework, which addresses factors contributing to homelessness within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.

In conceptualising and operationalising homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, stakeholders noted the importance of acknowledging differences between the subjective experience of homelessness and the objective statistical measurement required to inform policy development. It was widely reported that some people classified as homeless under the ABS statistical definition may in fact report being satisfied with their housing circumstances. Conversely, some people who have adequate shelter, secure tenure and control of, and access to space may feel homeless if living 'off country' due to being disconnected from family and/or their community.

Many stakeholders noted the importance of understanding connection to country, and family and kinship responsibilities in considering the concept of homelessness within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. These issues may also impact on the operationalisation of the homelessness definition through their influence on the measurement of key inputs such as the identification of 'usual residents' and 'visitors', determining reasons for staying in a dwelling and the ability of households to accommodate visitors.

Connection to country

Connection to country is fundamental to the culture and identity of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The connection an individual or group has to country and their ties to the spirituality of the land largely reflect the connection a person has with their ancestry, and their identification as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, disconnection from country is considered a form of homelessness.

In discussions, it was noted that Aboriginal people, particularly from regional and remote Australia, were less likely to perceive themselves as homeless if living on country, irrespective of dwelling adequacy.

Similarly, people from the Torres Strait Islands reported connection to land and identified the family home located on ancestral land as central in their perception of home and homelessness.

Family and kinship responsibilities

The importance of family and kinship connectedness to feelings of home were repeatedly emphasised through discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the view that family disconnection could be seen as a form of homelessness.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES PERSPECTIVES ON HOMELESSNESS *continued*

Family and kinship responsibilities continued

Refusing visitors was considered culturally inappropriate due to cultural expectations to provide shelter for family members needing a place to stay, irrespective of the ability to accommodate visitors, with some stakeholders acknowledging the pressures that accommodating 'visitors' can place on some households. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people travelling for cultural or family reasons between communities or across states and territories can contribute to people living in conditions where there is limited access to space, which under the ABS definition, may be considered homeless in instances where people had no accommodation alternatives.

Mobility and usual address

Through the engagement process, it was reported that Aboriginal people are often highly mobile and can be connected to multiple communities (mother and/or father's country; or adopted into other communities, if residing elsewhere), and can have multiple 'usual residences' where they feel at home. Some participants reported that the concept of 'usual address' in the Census was problematic in such cases and impacted on the usefulness of Census data in understanding mobility patterns of Aboriginal people.

In contrast, Torres Strait Islander people reported that they tended to be less mobile and the concept of usual address was understood as the home or residence where they lived for the majority of the time. For most Torres Strait Islander people, their island home (house) was fundamental to their understanding of home, and this incorporated the elements of land and sea, and a place where any extended family members are welcome to stay.

ABS STATISTICAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The ABS statistical definition of homelessness was developed to underpin the collection of comparable statistics, over time and across data sources. These statistics support informed decision making to enable the effective targeting of policies and services, monitoring of progress and understanding of outcomes for those who are or have been homeless.

The ABS statistical definition has been constructed from a conceptual framework centred on the following elements:

- Adequacy of the dwelling;
- Security of tenure in the dwelling; and
- Control of, and access to space for social relations.

If a person lacks any of these elements of 'home' and does not have access to suitable alternative accommodation they are considered homeless for statistical purposes.

Many of the perspectives on homelessness presented during the engagement process aligned with the ABS' statistical definition of homelessness. There was little disagreement that a person who lacked an adequate house with secure tenure and with lack of control of, and access to space was homeless if they had no suitable accommodation alternatives. However, some different views were presented on how each of these elements within the statistical definition could be interpreted from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The following sections describe each of the elements that make up the ABS statistical definition of homelessness and how feedback from the engagement aligns with each concept. An important finding from the engagement is that there were a variety of views

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES PERSPECTIVES ON HOMELESSNESS *continued*

ABS STATISTICAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS *continued*

on this topic amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, different perspectives were sometimes evident for people from regional Australia when compared against more urban perspectives, and there were also some subtle differences reported across different communities.

Accommodation alternatives

The elements of the statistical definition of homelessness are applied in the context of an overarching consideration of accommodation alternatives. While homelessness is not a choice, some people may choose to live in situations that parallel the living situations of people who are homeless, for example living in a shed while building a home on their own property, or on holiday travelling and staying with friends. These people have a choice because they have the capacity to access other accommodation alternatives that are adequate, secure and provide for social relations. A person's exercise of choice in accessing accommodation alternatives is contingent on them having each of the financial, physical, psychological and personal means necessary to access these alternatives (*Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012*, cat. no. 4922.0).

During the engagement process people mostly agreed with this interpretation of accommodation alternatives, often stating that they would only consider a person homeless when they had nowhere else to go. Some feedback suggested that because of a sense of family responsibility and cultural shared practices, people would always have somewhere to stay. This view was contrasted by examples given of people sleeping rough because of family disconnection, for example due to a family disagreement and not being able to return home.

Although the discussion of family and cultural norms highlighted that shelter should be provided for family members, the differing feedback from engagement highlighted that in some cases this is not always seen as a suitable or accessible accommodation alternative for a person living in an otherwise homeless situation.

Adequacy of the dwelling

This element covers whether the structure of the dwelling renders it fit for human habitation (including, for renters, that the building is used for the purpose for which it is zoned), and the dwelling has access to basic facilities, such as kitchen facilities and bathroom (*Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012*, cat. no. 4922.0).

During the consultation process some people described an adequate dwelling as a place that provides a physical structure, has a bed to sleep in, contains adequate facilities, and is safe. It was noted in some feedback that an adequate dwelling for one person may not be perceived as adequate by others.

It was generally agreed that living on traditional lands did not override the need for adequate housing. However, some people noted that an adequate dwelling, as defined in the ABS statistical definition, was not always essential when considered in the context of the ancestral connection an individual has to country and their ties to spirituality of the land. Examples were provided, such as situations where people were sleeping outside in the landscape, or in an improvised dwelling such as a tent or humpy, to feel at home through their connection to country. While the application of the ABS definition would

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES PERSPECTIVES ON HOMELESSNESS *continued*

*Adequacy of the dwelling
continued*

generally result in a person sleeping outside or in an improvised dwelling being classified homeless, some stakeholders were uncomfortable with this classification in such cases.

*Security of tenure in the
dwelling*

This element covers a person's legal right to occupy a dwelling, with stability and security of tenure such as owning (with or without a mortgage) the dwelling and/or land, or renting with a formal lease or similar right that could be enforced by the tenant. This also includes a familial reflected security of tenure, for example children living with their parents. The rights that could be enforced by the tenant include informal or verbal agreements ('contracts'), written agreements or evidentiary monetary exchange, which establishes a right to occupy that can be enforced through common law and provides the holder with the same residual security of tenure that they would enjoy with a formal lease. Also taken into account is the initial term of the lease agreement, or residual period remaining on a fixed term lease, or the notice period required to terminate a right to occupy (*Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012*, cat. no. 4922.0).

Throughout the consultation process, the importance of being able to stay in a secure shelter for as long as needed was commonly reported. For people in precarious housing situations, the importance of having secure tenure to stay for as long as needed was highlighted as fundamental to them feeling at home. It was also noted that in some cases people were more likely to feel at home if they were contributing rent.

Many people reported that family and kinship responsibilities would mean there is an expectation to provide shelter for extended family members who required assistance, and that those people would have secure tenure when staying with family for as long as needed. Feedback from engagement suggested that in some cases where a person had no suitable accommodation alternatives and they were staying temporarily with family, they would not be considered homeless due to cultural norms and responsibilities to provide accommodation for family.

Conceptually, people in such circumstances would be considered homeless under the ABS statistical definition because even though they may feel at home, their initial tenure is short and not extendable and they ultimately lack access to stable and secure housing beyond the short term. Supporting this interpretation is other feedback noting that for some people, staying with family in the short term, would not feel like being at home.

*Control of, and access to
space for social relations*

This element covers whether a person or household has control of, and access to space so they are able to pursue social relations, have personal (or household) living space, maintain privacy and the household has exclusive access to kitchen facilities and a bathroom (*Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012*, cat. no. 4922.0). Under the ABS statistical definition of homelessness, people living in 'severely' crowded conditions are considered to be homeless as they lack control of, and access to space for social relations.

Feedback received during the engagement process largely aligned with this aspect of the definition. People agreed that a home should provide safety and comfort, allow freedom to make decisions and provide space when visitors were staying. The importance of home as a physical boundary to protect personal belongings was also noted. When

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES PERSPECTIVES ON HOMELESSNESS *continued*

*Control of, and access to
space for social relations
continued*

people did not feel they had these freedoms they reported they would not feel at home. However, some people noted that although they may be living in crowded conditions and have a perceived lack of control and access to space, if they were staying with family they would not see themselves as homeless.

Understanding reasons for different types of mobility and visitor management was also noted as important in order to distinguish between people living in crowded conditions as a result of cultural and family responsibilities from those who have no other accommodation alternatives. Many people noted the importance of homelessness measures to provide accurate estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who:

- Are 'house-less' and seek long term shelter with family in crowded conditions, because no other suitable accommodation alternatives are available; and
- Seek short to long term shelter with extended family in crowded conditions as a result of becoming 'stuck in transit' whilst visiting family for cultural or other family business such as caring for relatives and then cannot afford to return to their alternative accommodation.

CONCEPTS OF
HOMELESSNESS OUTSIDE
THE ABS STATISTICAL
DEFINITION

As noted above, a general finding of this research has been that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people homelessness can be defined as disconnection from country and/or disconnection from family and community. During consultation it was highlighted that disconnection to country and/or family and community may place people at risk of homelessness, or indeed lead to people experiencing homelessness. During engagement, people reported that in order to avoid being disconnected from their family they may live in crowded conditions. Similarly, if no suitable housing was available on country, people may sleep either outside or in improvised dwellings rather than move to an adequate dwelling that is not on country.

In further understanding the implications of this feedback for homelessness research, stakeholders felt it was important to consider the following types of situations:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sleeping rough whilst living on country and who have no other suitable accommodation alternatives, yet may not perceive themselves as homeless;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are sleeping rough, couch surfing or staying in crowded conditions on country, who have accommodation alternatives which may be culturally inappropriate, or inadequate for the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have a dwelling that may be located off country or away from community, for example people who are 'stuck in transit' having travelled to a major centre for medical or other reasons, which may result in people feeling homeless.

These types of nuanced situations are not easily captured in official statistics, particularly through broad measures such as those provided by Census. However it is recognised that there would be value in further considering these situations both in their own right, and also alongside current measures of homelessness.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOMELESSNESS MEASUREMENT

PURPOSE OF ABS STATISTICAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

It is clear from the engagement that when measuring homelessness, there needs to be a clear understanding and distinction between whether the concept of homelessness being explored is based on an objective measure which aims to be consistently applied across population groups, or a measure of self-perception and experience.

The ABS statistical definition of homelessness was developed to underpin the collection of comparable statistics, over time and across data sources. These statistics support informed decision making to enable the effective targeting of policies and services, monitoring of progress and understanding of outcomes for those who are, or have been homeless. Given this purpose it is fundamental that the definition reflects an objective measure of homelessness that can be applied consistently across different situations and across different populations. This is particularly important for measuring and comparing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people against the non-Indigenous population. However, these engagement findings are important when interpreting existing measures of homelessness in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.

Implications for current homelessness measures from the Census

The different perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people emphasised in this paper can be used to help inform the interpretation of estimates of homelessness from the Census. They can also be used to assist the ABS to train staff who might interview Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during the Census to understand conceptual differences.

An overarching issue impacting the estimates of homelessness derived from the Census, is the under-enumeration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Because of this, the estimates of homelessness based on Census data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is likely to be an underestimation. In the 2011 Census, the under-enumeration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 17.2%. Some of those who were not counted in the Census may have been homeless at the time of the Census.

While the current estimates of homelessness will reflect accurate measures of many of the homeless situations reported through engagement, an underestimation of homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were enumerated in the Census may also occur because, for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, reporting of 'usual residence' may mask their homelessness. The concept of usual residence used in the Census relates to the dwelling in which a person lives the majority of the time. In operational terms it is the dwelling at which a person spends six months or more in the Census year (*Information Paper: Population Concepts, 2008*, cat. no. 3107.0.55.006). This form of usual residence is concerned with a physical attachment to place, rather than a person's perception of 'home'.

Consultation has shown that this concept of usual residence does not necessarily align with perceptions of 'home' for many Aboriginal and some Torres Strait Islander people. Feedback from engagement highlighted that many Aboriginal people are connected to multiple communities and as such they have multiple 'usual residences' where they feel at home, and are potentially not attached to a single dwelling for more than six months in the year. Aboriginal people reported that their home is more associated with a place or area, rather than with a dwelling, and the perception of home is often tied to connection to country, and/or family and community. Torres Strait Islander people

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOMELESSNESS MEASUREMENT *continued*

Implications for current homelessness measures from the Census continued

reported their home as being significantly associated with a dwelling although connections to family, community and country were an integral part of their perception of home.

Such concepts are difficult to explore in the Census given the need to produce comparable estimates across population groups. As such, for the Census, it is necessary to continue to employ a more objective measure of usual residence as being the dwelling in which a person lives the majority of the time, for six months or more in the Census year. The implication of this for homelessness estimates derived from the Census is that there is likely an under-reporting of persons with 'no usual address'. This will particularly impact the homeless operational group 'Persons staying temporarily with other households' which represents only 4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are homeless, compared to 23% of non-Indigenous homeless people.

Conversely, there may be some level of over reporting of 'Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings' in cases where people state their usual address is the dwelling they are staying at on Census night when their 'usual address' is actually elsewhere. For example, some feedback suggested people visiting family for cultural reasons may report that they are at 'home' as they are staying with family. In such cases with multiple visitors, this may mean the dwelling is classified as 'severely crowded' as the estimates of severe crowding are derived using the number of usual residents in the dwelling. Potentially offsetting this were discussions that suggested there was some likelihood to under-report the number of people staying in a dwelling due to concerns by residents about breaching housing tenancy arrangements.

Perceptions of homelessness from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people indicate that some people who would not consider their current living circumstances as homeless, would be classified as homeless under a statistical measure, although this is also likely to be the case for some non-Indigenous people. Examples of this reported during the engagement included people sleeping on the land or in an improvised dwelling in order to be connected to country and/or connected to family or community. Whilst these people have no alternative accommodation, they may not perceive themselves to be homeless and would not seek out homelessness services, yet would be included in Census homelessness estimates. In contrast, there were situations where a person would see themselves as homeless but would not be classified as such under the definition, such as a person who felt disconnected from their country and/or family or community but was living in an otherwise adequate dwelling. These issues should be considered when interpreting existing measures of homelessness from the Census.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings of this engagement highlight a number of implications for measurement of homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including informing analysis of current measures of homelessness from the 2011 Census, and providing information which can inform development of future data collections and research. In particular, these findings provide insights which will be considered in the assessment of topics and data collection strategies for the 2016 Census.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS *continued*

However, while the Census is a key data source for collecting a range of data about all Australians, including data which allows the measurement of homelessness in a consistent, repeatable and transparent way, it is not the most appropriate vehicle for measuring some of the complex concepts which were raised during the engagement in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perceptions of home and homelessness. Some of these concepts are more appropriately measured and understood through targeted qualitative research, or surveys of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which can be designed and collected in a culturally appropriate way.

Findings from this engagement have been used to inform and refine the development of a culturally appropriate set of questions on past experiences of homelessness for inclusion in the 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). The set of questions collects data on past experiences of homelessness and the reasons for most recent experience of homelessness, and whether assistance was sought. A similar set of questions was included in the 2014 General Social Survey, and this will allow for a comparison of results between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the non-Indigenous population.

The findings of this engagement will be used to inform future collections of housing and homelessness data in the ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistical program, and informing other collections and research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness conducted outside of the ABS.

APPENDIX CONSULTATION PROCESS

OVERVIEW OF CONSULTATION PROCESS

During 2013, discussions about concepts of 'home' and 'homelessness' were held with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in communities and with some service providers across several jurisdictions. ABS Indigenous Engagement Managers (IEMs) facilitated access to most communities in urban and rural settings. The ABS' National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (NCATSIS) sought advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to determine suitable methodological approaches and question wording to translate complex homelessness concepts into meaningful and understandable questions that were culturally appropriate. Engagement was conducted in a culturally appropriate manner, and with due consideration to the burden of research and time already placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Findings from this first round of engagement were published in the *Discussion Paper: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Perspectives on Homelessness, 2013* (cat. no. 4735.0), released last year.

Submissions were sought from stakeholders in response to publication findings, with the aim of further developing the ABS' understanding of perceptions of home and homelessness and how perceptions aligned with the ABS statistical definition across Australia. Feedback was received from several organisations.

Following engagement used to inform the discussion paper, the ABS conducted a second round of engagement from October 2013 to March 2014 with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, outreach workers and selected service providers to inform this information paper. The first round of engagement in early 2013 involved NCATSIS staff and IEMs visiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to hear perspectives on homelessness. The second round of engagement was undertaken in several locations, again with the assistance of IEMs (see consultation tables), either by video conference with NCATSIS staff in Canberra or through face to face meetings.

Members of the ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics, and IEMs were consulted regarding the discussion topics for both rounds and suggested suitable locations and organisations to engage with. Separate consultation guides were developed and used to frame discussions. The second round centred on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspectives matched with the ABS statistical definition of homelessness.

Key concepts such as home, country, dwelling adequacy and crowding, were used to elicit comments on the elements of the ABS statistical definition of homelessness.

Discussions were aimed at addressing the following:

- How home and homelessness is understood from a service provider perspective and how that might differ compared to the elements of homelessness in the ABS statistical definition (i.e. secure tenure, adequate housing, control of, and access to space for social relations).
- Whether examples of particular circumstances were perceived as homelessness and whether assistance was sought by:
 - Persons living across multiple dwellings with extended family or as a result of cultural factors, for example:
 - (a) persons with no security of tenure or control over space,
 - (b) as a result of having no dwelling to go back to; and
 - (c) persons who choose to live a nomadic lifestyle (cultural) or to visit family/friends.
 - Persons living in improvised dwellings/ tents or sleeping rough, for example:
 - (a) persons who had nowhere else to go; and
 - (b) persons who 'choose' to live on their spiritual homeland but not in a dwelling.
 - A person living in an adequate house but not located in their community or near family.

APPENDIX CONSULTATION PROCESS *continued*

OVERVIEW OF CONSULTATION PROCESS *continued*

- Does connection to country and/or family ever take precedence over the elements of a 'home' as identified in the definition
- How is usual residence/address understood and is there a distinction between 'home' and 'feeling at home' in determining one's usual address.
- What particular aspects of housing make a dwelling more culturally appropriate.
- Potential benefit in a statistical distinction to measure those visiting at a dwelling for cultural reasons from those seeking accommodation because they're homeless; and
- Other cultural values to consider in interpreting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness estimates.

Round 1 Consultations

Dates	Locations	Notes
May-June 2013	NSW	Engagement with communities in regional and urban areas.
May-June 2013	NT	Engagement with communities in regional and urban areas.
June 2013	Cairns, Qld	Engagement with service providers.

Round 2 Consultations

Dates	Locations	Notes
November 2013	Tasmania	Video Conference (VC) held with representatives from local service provider and outreach organisations.
December 2013	Perth region, WA	Video Conference (VC) held with representatives from local service provider and outreach organisations.
February 2014	NT	Video Conference (VC) held with representatives from local service provider and outreach organisations. Arranged with the assistance of the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the NT (APONT).
February 2014	Broome, WA	Meeting held in Broome with representatives from local service provider and outreach organisations.
February 2014	SA	Video Conference (VC) held with representatives from local service provider and outreach organisations.
February 2014	ACT	Visit to the ACT tent embassy.
March 2014	Torres Strait Islands	Presentation and discussion at the Torres Strait Regional Authority Board meeting. Discussions with Torres Strait Island people.

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