

The benefits of Data Integration

A series of case studies conducted by the
ABS on the benefits of data integration.

Case Study

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Life Expectancy



When the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed to closing the gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians by 2031, one of the initial challenges was data quality and reliability.

Data suggested that the gap in child mortality had reduced, while the life expectancy gap was showing little improvement. But before you can be confident of how to fix something this important and multi-faceted, you need a detailed understanding of the problem.

To help with this, the [ABS Mortality Project](#) matched existing death registrations with data from the 2011 Census, to enable a clearer picture of life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The enhanced data provides a benchmark by which COAG goals are measured, and ultimately measures the success of closing the gap for life expectancy. Policy makers can use findings from this data as they chart the course to policy change and better outcomes.

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- Professor Tom Calma

As an Aboriginal leader, public health policy advisor and health data user, University of Canberra Chancellor Professor Tom Calma AO said policy makers and governments need the most accurate data possible to inform good decision making.

“While no health intervention will be effective unless the community own it and drive it, more detailed and more accurate data is important, particularly when we consider social and cultural determinants of health,” Professor Calma said.

“Mortality data is one of the real statistical measures of a population’s long term health and wellbeing - you've got to recognise these statistics are people, they’re real.

“When we look at Infant Mortality Rates it’s extreme for Indigenous people. We want to see that there are improvements and try to identify the catalysts that have led to improvements.

“Without the ability to pull together data sets we would be in a ‘hit and miss’ situation and we ignore the data at our peril. We need to move away from politicians and their gut feelings to looking at the data and what it is telling us and using it to drive the interventions,” Professor Calma said.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) uses ABS mortality data to inform the [Australian Burden of Disease Study](#), exploring fatal disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The ABS’ data integration work on this project and others provides policy makers and the community with more accurate data while maintaining the highest level of individual privacy for respondents.

“The personal information that people provide the ABS remains strictly confidential. The ABS never has and never will release identifiable data,” the Australian Statistician, Mr David W. Kalisch said.

The ABS Mortality Project is giving policymakers a better measure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy in Australia. This improved data accuracy means the COAG goal of closing the mortality gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians can be better informed and monitored.

Find out more about ABS data integration on our [FAQ page](#).