

Census data helps ACT Policing plan community policing services

ACT Policing works to keep people safe and ensure police are where they are needed. Officers work closely with community agencies to protect people most at-risk, whether they be families, young people or the elderly.

Detective Acting Superintendent Matt Craft of ACT Policing says Census data gives them valuable information to know who may be at risk and decide where police and other community services are needed the most.

“Census data helps us get a snapshot of what the ACT community looks like so we can best direct our policing services,” said Mr Craft.

Using Census data, ACT Policing gets insights on population growth in suburbs and known pockets of vulnerability. This evidence recently assisted in securing four years of funding from the ACT Government to improve the public’s safety and help make the police a trusted face in the community through local partnerships, programs and events.

“In the ACT, we’re all working together across government and with locals to support people in particularly vulnerable situations. The ideal is to prevent a crime occurring,” said Mr Craft.

“We use Census data to capture demographics on specific suburbs. For example, 20 years ago the south of Canberra was a big growth area for young families and single parents, and we saw an increase in family violence at that time.”

Levels of unemployment, poverty, or family composition provide intelligence on potential risk to families. It helps the police manage their stations and work with community organisations helping those facing violent or dire situations.

“As the population in Tuggeranong has aged, we’ve since seen a shift in that need to Gungahlin in line with population growth in the north of Canberra.”

The 2016 Census statistics helped anticipate a shift in population age in the southern and northern suburbs of Canberra, with data showing 56.4% of Gungahlin’s population were families with children, compared to 48% in Tuggeranong.

“Ultimately, our goal is to reduce alcohol fuelled violence, prevent crime and avert incarceration rates,” said Mr Craft.

“Using Census data helps us to foresee potential problems, and work with mental health clinicians and other emergency teams early, with the aim to steer people into help rather than the justice system. This delivers a much better outcome for everyone,” Mr Craft said.