

Submission by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

Australia's domestic response to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health report "Closing the gap within a generation".

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Australia's domestic response to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health report "Closing the gap within a generation". We understand this is an important issue and welcome the opportunity to comment.

In particular, we would like to comment on how Australia is responding to the terms of reference and the recommendations as mentioned below.

The terms of reference of the WHO report include

c) extent to which the Commonwealth is adopting a social determinants of health approach through:

iii) appropriate Commonwealth data gathering and analysis

Recommendation 3 of the report is to Measure and Understand the Problem and Assess the Impact of Action. In particular this recommendation states *National governments and international organisations, supported by WHO, should set up national and global health equity surveillance systems for routine monitoring of health inequity and the social determinants of health and should evaluate the health inequity impact of policy and action.*

Since 1977, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has conducted regular National Health Surveys to measure the health of all Australians, including information on

- the health status of the population;
- health-related aspects of lifestyle and other health risk factors; and
- the use of health services and other actions people had recently taken for their health.

A similar survey has been run twice since 2004/05 to separately collect similar information for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

In addition, since 2009, the ABS has been running a Patient Experience Survey which collects national data on access and barriers to a range of health care services, including general practitioners, medical specialists and dental professionals, imaging and pathology tests, and hospital/emergency visits.

A wide range of other surveys conducted by the ABS collect information on other health and social issues such as disability, housing, mental health, income and expenditure. All this data is accompanied by a wide range of demographic and other information to enable analysis of these issues by different social determinants.

The ABS also compiles information from administrative sources on causes of death and produces estimates of life expectancy. These indicators are also available for a wide range of social determinants.

While this extensive collection of data is available historically, a regular 3 yearly collection is currently dependent on the ongoing availability of supplementary funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.