

“The identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in official statistics and other data: critical issues of international significance”

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SYNOPSIS:

The realisation for Indigenous people in Australia to be counted in official statistics occurred in 1967. The identification of Indigenous people in Australia in national data highlights a range of historical and contemporary issues that require our attention. This includes how Indigenous people have been defined and by whom, as well as how identification is operationalised in official data collections. Furthermore, the completeness and accuracy of Indigenous people identified in the data and the impact this has on the measurement of health and wellbeing must also be taken into account. Official national reporting of Indigenous people is calculated using data from censuses, vital statistics, and existing administrative data collections and/or surveys. In alignment with human rights standards, individuals in Australia can opt to self-identify as ‘Indigenous’ in the data. However, challenges persist in deriving quality Indigenous data. This can result in biases in the estimates used to describe Indigenous people and the progress of Indigenous people. Measurement issues arising from incomplete and inaccurate data pertaining to Indigenous people require serious consideration particularly if this data is being used for addressing disparities within Australian society. This article discusses priority issues in identifying Indigenous people in the national data in Australia’s colonial context.