



Socialink

Tūhono Pāpori

Building a Thriving Social Sector

Western
Bay of Plenty

Statistics NZ Public Consultation on Census Transformation

SocialInk response submitted December 2025

Question 1

Do you have feedback on the benefits, opportunities, and challenges of the new census approach?

We want to know if the new census approach can meet your information needs.

SocialLink response:

- We are concerned that the new approach will limit the level, content and coverage of available population data. A nationwide census process collects information from the widest number of people, (especially when paired with administrative data as has been possible over the last few censuses) providing insights which can't be replicated as well through any of the new approaches proposed.
- We recognise that there may be benefits in developing new targeted data collection systems, and in the wider use of administrative datasets as proposed as part of the census transformation process. These approaches may provide more reliable and frequent public data. We are concerned however that in an environment of public sector cost-cutting and retrenchment, our data systems and expertise might be compromised in ways that will be hard to come back from.

Some of the challenges of the new approaches:

- To ensure high quality administrative data we need a well-resourced, expert workforce across the public sector to ensure consistent, reliable, high quality data is collected across government agencies. Large numbers of "back-office" staff have been made redundant in public sector restructuring and cost-cutting over the last few years along with a decrease in investment in data and digital services investment. This will surely impact quality and availability of data. The team here at SocialLink has seen for example that data previously available through HUD is now no longer collected/collated and available. This is just one example. Our question is will we still have

good data available over the long-term that is reliable, bias-free and consistently entered and cleaned and in a usable and collatable form. The human role in data collection, analysis and insight development is critical and can not be replaced through use of artificial intelligence.

Question 2

We've identified specific communities to work with and some examples of what tailored solutions could include. Do you have any suggestions about how Stats NZ could work with communities to design and deliver tailored solutions?

We're prioritising working with partners and communities that are likely to be impacted by changing to the new model (including iwi Māori, Pacific peoples, LGBTIQ+, disabled, and ethnic communities, and transient/homeless populations).

The new model needs to support smaller population groups and stay relevant and inclusive. We want to know how we could develop tailored solutions for partners and communities.

For example, what approaches, values, or practices could guide how we work with communities to meet their unique information needs? Is there anything else you think we should consider?

SocialLink response:

- We acknowledge that 60,000 people is a large sample (for the proposed Census Attribute Survey) - but we are still concerned that sampling won't reach people already facing significant disadvantage (e.g. people without internet access, data on their phones, rural people, older people who are not online etc). We would want to see special attention paid to sample selection methods that recognise that particular groups could be missed without extra measures taken to engage and ensure their involvement. Such processes take more resources. Where cost factors limit best practice in ensuring wide access and engagement the quality of data and insight generated will be compromised..
- A significant proportion of our community now identifies with other ethnicities and we know many within these groups experience significant racism and barriers to accessing services (including language and cultural barriers, institutional racism etc). We don't know enough about the diverse ethnic groups now living within New Zealand. Census (providing ethnicity data to Level 4 specificity) has started to provide really useful information about these communities - and provided a picture of needs, interests and issues that require a response. Data that identifies groups simply as "other" (or at only higher level categorisation) misses opportunities to see and hear the experiences of these groups.
- Stats NZ can connect with community-sector groups such as ourselves who connect with communities. To do this Stats NZ needs people on the ground who are connected with local communities - to get to know them - to ensure connection, relationships and trust - to build motivation and confidence across communities to share meaningful data. It is about whakawhanaungatanga - building relationships and trust on the ground - such approaches require investment. Community engagement requires more than digital engagement out of one or two main centres. It is all about growing the social license for the transformed census process. Doing this ensures a response to the question "Why should we as citizens contribute to this process?"

Question 3: Māori descent

Section 2: Collecting census information and potential impacts for priority communities

Refer to Part 4 of the consultation document, full document: pages 20–29, summary document: pages 8-12

This section asks for feedback on variables that are both:

- of interest to partners and priority communities
- likely to be impacted as we introduce the new census model.

The questions included in this section focus on information about:

- Māori descent
- iwi affiliation
- LGBTIQ+ communities
- ethnicity
- homelessness and housing deprivation
- the disabled population.

Some variables are already well supported by high-quality admin data. Others will rely on the new annual sample survey, which may limit granularity (for populations and/or geographies) or coverage for smaller population groups.

Do you have any feedback about how we plan to collect information on Māori descent for the next census?

SocialLink response:

- Whānau, hapū and iwi in communities are better placed to answer these questions. Consultation has to engage with tangata whenua at a range of levels.
- Iwi affiliation data is helpful. Having this information only available at TA level is of limited use. Counts for iwi who are mana whenua for particular rohe could be provided to iwi/hapu at this level, where available, to support and enhance their own iwi data collection.
- Te Kupenga (post-census survey of people of Māori descent) needs to be done more regularly and be delivered in partnership with hapori Māori/hapū/iwi .

Question 5: LGBTIQ+ communities

Do you have any feedback about how we plan to collect information on sexual identity, variations of sex characteristics, gender, cisgender and transgender status, and the rainbow/LGBTIQ+ population for the next census?

SocialLink response:

- Stats NZ needs to continue to work closely with LGBTIQ+ communities to determine best processes and content of data collection about their communities.
- Better data, makes for better visibility and therefore better options for service delivery and resourcing for marginalised communities. Good data needs to be resourced - for engagement, and to ensure the most appropriate people are involved and shaping data collection processes and analysis.

Question 6: Ethnicity data

Do you have any feedback about how we plan to collect information on ethnicity for the next census?

- As outlined, a significant proportion of our community now identifies with other ethnicities and we know many within these groups experience significant racism and barriers to accessing services (including language and cultural barriers, institutional racism etc . We don't know enough about the diverse ethnic groups now living within New Zealand. Census (providing ethnicity data to Level 4 specificity) has started to provide really useful information about these communities - and provided a picture of needs, interests and issues that require a response. Data that identifies groups simply as "other" (or at only higher level categorisation) misses opportunities to see and hear the experiences of these groups.

Question 7: Data about housing deprivation and homelessness

Do you have any feedback about how we could measure housing deprivation and homelessness for the next census?

SocialLink response:

- The Severe Housing Deprivation Estimates have provided really useful information over the last few censuses. This data is hard to obtain and takes people on the ground to collect good data. This needs to be resourced. We like how the estimates have been enhanced with data about housing quality/inadequate housing (lack of amenities etc). This broader focus (with a wider definition of homelessness and housing stress, begins to recognise the complex and multi-faceted contexts of housing stress. All of the factors and thinking pulling a wider array of variables into this work has been invaluable to build the evidence base and understanding of homelessness and housing stress.

Do you have any suggestions for how we could better reach or represent people experiencing housing deprivation/homelessness?

- Live data collection (e.g. using free tools such as [Kobo Toolbox](#) - used by UN organisations to collect data in challenging environments on the ground), could be useful to enable data collection onsite, within/alongside marginalised communities. Collection of homelessness data in the western BOP at the last Census - a partnership between Statistics NZ and local community groups - was a good example of gathering good data in partnership with community organisations who already have local knowledge and trusted relationships with people experiencing homelessness. This is a model that could be rolled out elsewhere. The most successful data collection happened, not in the main city within the western BOP sub-region (Tauranga), but rather in the smaller communities within the WBOPDC areas - Te Puke and Katikati. The community partners who gathered data alongside census enumerators in the smaller locations knew their communities and as a result better (more comprehensive) data coverage of people

experiencing homelessness was achieved. Ensuring data collection outside main centres can provide rich data and insights and shouldn't be overlooked.

- To collect good data requires funding and resources. A budget is needed to do this well, as well as relationships with people on the ground. An example is delivering a homelessness-focused survey to get robust data on housing deprivation and housing stress, including information on the drivers of homelessness and specifics of living situations such as transience in housing, couch surfing etc, in addition to basic demographic info. This kind of homelessness data is hard to pick up other than through population-wide data collection such as census.

What would be useful for us to know in the WBOP?

Our experience in working in community data sharing and collaboration, is that communities want location-specific information for and about their communities. Information that can provide insights to guide policy, service delivery and resource allocation. Locally we have been creating community data summaries for local communities. Sometimes these combine data from two or more SA2s, sometimes it is a combination of an SA2 with some SA1s - it is about geographic communities as defined by the communities themselves - not matched by formal administrative boundaries (e.g. Statistical units). The new Aotearoa Data Explorer has enabled us to help create these nuanced community data pictures.

Last year, the community of Matakana Island approached us for some data insights about their community. It was in how we worked with the community that enabled accessible information, that they had prioritised, to be presented in ways that made sense to them. For them, this meant not simply focussing on deficit-focused data (they are a community with a deprivation index score of 10 - the highest levels of deprivation - low household incomes, high unemployment, etc). In the end the data they wanted was information about their community makeup - the Island residents are 93% Māori, 57% speak te Reo; 44% had engaged in voluntary work in the previous 4 weeks - supplementing the other data about struggles and challenges facing the community. The combined insights told the story of that community - a story the community had some input into creating.

We have to be careful that we don't end up over-relying on government administrative data (which is often deficit-focused) to paint one-sided pictures of our communities and/or specific groups within those communities.

What other data do we want?

Household-level data - information about material disadvantage out of the General Social Survey provides useful information about issues arising in our communities. It provides vital information on food security, health care etc and barriers to accessing these things. Having this kind of data available to SA2 level is very useful where available.

Question 8: Data about the disabled population

Do you have any feedback about how we plan to collect information about the disabled population in the next census?

Our response:

Disability Survey - we agree this survey needs to be run more regularly - at least every 5 years. Provides more nuanced information about issues and needs and demographics of the disabled population.

Do you have any suggestions for how information about the disabled population could be improved to better reflect your community or lived experience?

Our response:

- Collecting more data on barriers to accessing services, issues impacting on wellbeing. Better opportunities (with tech and AI) to collect qualitative data alongside quantitative data.
- In terms of the admin data about disabilities (e.g. those accessing government financial support Disability Support Payments etc) could this also be linked to Disability Survey info? This might ensure better coverage of the disability population.

Question 9: Quality of life indicators

Do you need information about life satisfaction to be collected through the census?

Yes

What would you use this data for?

SocialLink response:

We would want this data to be segmented across different population groups - e.g. those with disability; age groups; those with Māori descent etc.

With a greater government focus on funding for outcomes (and the move to a social investment approach for community and public services), community groups are being asked to evaluate their impact on the wellbeing of the populations they serve and compare improvements in life satisfaction, wellbeing as part of the evaluation of their services. Better population-based wellbeing measures would also support community evaluation of the impacts of community services and interventions and the needs of the communities they serve.

Sense of purpose

Do you need information about sense of purpose?

Yes

Self-rated general health

Do you need information about self-rated general health?

Yes

SocialLink response:

All of these wellbeing variables - Sense of purpose / individual health etc are individually-focused and cultural constructs that are also culturally contextualised.

Perhaps we should also be asking questions about people's sense of community cohesion and connection - a sense of belonging and connectedness.

What would you use self-rated general health data for that can't be met with life satisfaction information?

SocialLink response:

- Self-rated general health as a one-off question is only somewhat useful. The more thorough info about health in the NZ Health Survey is more helpful.
- The self-rated general health question is the question we would suggest dropping out, if one is to be missed.
- Maybe instead a question about loneliness/social connectedness (linked to both wellbeing and health).
- Are these wellbeing measures supposed to be a proxy measure for happiness? It doesn't show why - or what the factors are contributing to your wellbeing/wellbeing of communities.

Question 10: Income amount by income source

Do you need information about income amount by income source?

No

We haven't used personal income data much. Admin data might be useful - to link income amount by income source. We find household income as a measure more useful than personal income. Can this be linked to address info (i.e. through linking individuals in a household? And then de-identifying and aggregating obviously). Our financial wellbeing is mostly linked to our households -we pay rent and electricity costs as households.

We need to also be able to segment this data by age group and household composition/household type (e.g. Older people vs young families etc)

Question 12: Age of dwelling

Do you need information about the age of a dwelling?

SocialLink response:

Yes

Linked to housing quality - mould mildew/dampness. Good to know if it is older housing stock or new housing providing the problems.

Question 13: Dwelling coldness

Do you need information about dwellings being colder than people would like in winter?

SocialLink response:

- Yes
- But there also needs to be new data about dwellings and heat issues - is the dwelling too hot? We are not collecting data about this. We know this is an increasing and urgent issue, because of climate change. And needs to be linked to housing of vulnerable groups - people with disabilities, older people, young children - people who are the most vulnerable to heat stress - and less likely to have the resources to respond to these issues.

Do you need cellphone access information for households only, individuals only, or both households and individuals?

SocialLink response:

Both households and individuals

Information about digital access and inclusion helps in delivering services. As more and more public services have to be accessed online, knowing who doesn't have access to data and digital services becomes increasingly important. We need a better understanding of the digital divide to develop strategies to improve digital inclusion. Limited financial means to keep devices topped up with data and charged, means more people are potentially disconnected from services and resources. There is an assumption of 24-hour digital connectedness - this isn't the reality for many people. Individual access to data is one thing, but households also need to have physical connectivity - internet options aren't always available for those on multiply-owned land and/or in rural/remote communities.

A one-size fits all data collection strategy also won't be able to collect data from people affected by digital exclusion.

Population-level data will always miss the nuanced perspectives of people with limited resources and barriers to engagement. Drilling down to hear the stories of these people is important.

Should cellphone access for individuals be asked of people aged 5 years and over, or 15 years and over?

Probably 15 years and over.

Question 16: Main means of travel to work and workplace address

Not really relevant to our work.

Is the information we collected in the 2023 Census about working from home at a suitable level of detail for transport planning needs, or do we need a different approach?

Not important to us.

Question 17: Number of rooms

What do you currently use number of rooms data for?

We don't use this info. We use: number of bedrooms (to help identify overcrowding or need for more single/two bedroom homes for single people/smaller households).

What additional types of rooms would you like included in the count of number of rooms?

Count and type of rooms is useful to identify overcrowding and other housing stress issues within communities. Responses need to be community-level (at least to TA level, but more helpfully at SA2 level) - this level of data can lead to more meaningful responses and service delivery). Yes breaking down to room type linked to use (e.g.toilets, cooking facilities/functional kitchen) is useful. If you have a dwelling with 10 people and only one toilet there are likely to be health and wellbeing impacts for household members. Info on halls, pantries or laundries isn;t of relevance. .

Question 18: Content determination framework

Do you have any feedback on the content determination framework guiding questions?

No

Question 20: Meeting broader information needs

We're keen to understand what would make the population and social statistics system more useful, inclusive, and future-focused. Are there particular data needs, gaps, or opportunities you think Stats NZ should consider?

Yes - specific survey on homelessness and housing stress.

As mentioned - more regular survey of Maori wellbeing - developed alongside and data sovereignty remaining with hapori Māori.

More engagement with "Other" ethnic communities - to do better (more regular) data collection.

Youth health and wellbeing survey - conducted biannually through schools. (Youth is a period of 5 years, to see trends for these groups biannual surveys would be good). Young people are a "captive" population - in schools 30 hours per week. With digital technologies surely we should be able to do a more regular national census of secondary school-aged students to understand wellbeing issues (with appropriate privacy and safety features in place) to identify trends and issues impacting young people.

Regular Te Kupenga survey (at least every 5 years).

Question 21

Are there ways that you use Stats NZ data that you want to tell us about?

SocialLink's [Community Insights](#) has been set up to help make data more accessible to communities. Communities are based in small areas, or are groups of people with common experiences and interests.

These communities aren't regional or even territorial authority in their orientation. Information needs to be available down to at least SA2 level to provide pictures of communities and to inform community decisionmaking and resource allocation. Good data needs to be able to reflect communities back to themselves - people need to be able to see themselves in the data - for it to be meaningful and useful. We liked the [Community Insights Explorer](#) developed in 2022 by the Social Wellbeing Agency (now Social Investment Agency). This used Admin data to provide insights for communities at SA2 level. This data was really useful to us, before the Census 2023 (and Aotearoa Data Explorer) release. We still think such a tool has a place (we're disappointed SIA isn't still providing updates of Admin data using this tool). It is much more accessible (in content and presentation) for community users than the ADE.

Health data is the most inaccessible data - there is almost no publicly available health data (that which is available is usually very old) - unless you want to see very limited public service deliverables against targets (which for the most part are easily constructed quantifiable measures but meaningless in relation to general trends in public health and community wellbeing). Make local health data more publically available in accessible forms.

Final thoughts.....

We would be happy to talk further with Stats NZ staff about the work we are doing and the insights we have developed over the last 6 years about community data needs and access.