

# Survey questions to identify priority groups



Survey questions should aim to measure socio-demographic characteristics in the same way, or at least as similar as is feasible, as other data sources, such as administrative data on clients and ABS census data. This facilitates assessing the representativeness of client samples and ensures a shared understanding of who comprises a priority group. In Australia, the Attorney General's Department Data Standards Manual (DSM) provides definitions for most priority groups.

The questions below are recommended by the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, drawing on the definitions of priority groups in the DSM, the ABS Census definitions and our own experience of conducting client surveys. If very short of space, we recommend asking: Age, Gender, Aboriginal status, Postcode.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

1. Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes, Aboriginal
  - c. Yes, Torres Strait Islander
  - d. Yes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Two example questions are provided to identify this group.

The 2016 Census asks about 'origin', so this may be the preferred wording for comparison to Census data. It is more respectful to provide separate responses for 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander', and clients should be able to respond Yes to both. It is likely, though, that sample sizes will preclude separate reporting for Torres Strait Islander's in most jurisdictions.

First Nations is an increasingly preferred terminology but does not currently align with other data sources.

## Children and young people (to age 24), and Older people (65+ or Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander 50+)

1. What is your age in years?
2. Which is your age group?
  - a. 9 or younger
  - b. 10 to 14
  - c. 15 to 17
  - d. 18 to 19
  - e. 20 to 24

**Continue with 5-year age brackets up to "100 or over". If space is short you can collapse the groups.**

- f. 25 to 49
- g. 50 to 64
- h. 65 or over

2016 Census asks for date of birth or age in years. Precise years, rather than brackets, allow for greater flexibility aligning with data from other sources. Where brackets are used, these should allow differentiation between 'under 18', and '18 and over'.

DSM specifies date of birth, but this is likely to result in more missing data than asking age.

To identify the Older people priority groups correctly, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people question must also be asked.

This question can be asked at the beginning of a survey.

# Survey questions to identify priority groups

## People experiencing or at risk of family violence

1. Does anyone you know ever cause you to have concerns about your personal safety [or that of your children]?

**If Yes:**

2. If you feel able, can you tell me your relationship with the person or people that cause you this concern?
  - a. Partner or ex-partner
  - b. Child, parent or other relative
  - c. Another person (specify)

There is no one agreed definition of family violence, or how to best measure it. The priority group does not require the client to have experienced violence.

In most cases a client survey will not be an appropriate place to ask about risk of family violence, but with an appropriately secure methodology it may be asked in some circumstances. A question along the lines of question 1 suggested here is a relatively general, and avoids asking about domestic or family violence specifically. It could also potentially capture abuse from other parties within the home, such as elder abuse.

## People experiencing or at risk of homelessness

1. Which of the following best describes where you currently live:
  - a. Sleeping rough, such as in a tent, shelter, abandoned building or in a motor vehicle
  - b. In emergency or temporary accommodation such as a hostel, hotel, boarding house, or refuge
  - c. In shared longer-term accommodation, such as student hall, long-stay hostel, or care facility
  - d. Squatting with friends or relatives because you have nowhere else to live
  - e. In my own home, rented or owned, shared with others or on your own
  - f. Other
2. How likely is it that you will have to find somewhere else to live within the next month or so?
  - a. Very likely
  - b. Fairly likely
  - c. Not very likely
  - d. Not at all likely

Two example questions are provided to identify this group.

There is no one agreed definition of homelessness and definitions in use have multiple aspects, which would ideally be explored through a series of questions.

Homelessness is not defined in the DSM. The ABS considers a person homeless if their current living arrangement is in a dwelling that is inadequate; has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations (ABS 2012).

This is a sensitive question that is best asked as one of the last questions in a survey.

## Gender

Do you identify as a:

- a. Man
- b. Woman
- c. Non-binary
- d. Other
- e. Prefer not to say

For questions on gender identity, the terminology man/woman is preferred to male/female. Sex at birth is probably a less relevant characteristic in the context of a client survey, but if asked, the options would be Male/Female/other/Prefer not to say.

## Sexual orientation

Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

- a. Heterosexual or Straight
- b. Gay or Lesbian
- c. Bisexual
- d. Other
- e. Don't know or Prefer not to say

Many clients will not see the relevance of being asked about their sexuality, so this question should be used with caution and only if important to the interpretation of the survey findings. ABS released a Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation variables in 2020.

This is a sensitive question that should be asked as one of the last questions in the survey.

# Survey questions to identify priority groups

## State, postcode, suburb (people in rural and remote areas)

1. What state do you live in?
2. What is your postcode where you live?
3. What is the suburb where you live?

State and postcode should be asked at a minimum. Specifying 'where you live' is to minimise the use of PO Box and work related responses. Suburbs are smaller geographic areas and in combination with postcode can be used to assign clients to ABS Statistical Areas. However, this can be resource intensive, particularly due to variations in how suburbs are written.

Not collecting suburb limits analytical power, such as assigning clients reliably to one of the ABS Remoteness Area categories, including inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. While postcode alone can be used, suburb provides a superior match particularly in remote and very remote areas.

## Income / Access to financial resources

What is your total income each week, before any deductions or tax?

- a. Less than \$500 a week (\$26k a year)
- b. More than \$500 but less than \$1000 a week (between \$26k and \$52k a year)
- c. \$1000 or more a week (\$52k or more a year)

The categories suggested allow for comparison with the Census and CLASS. They may need to be adjusted from time to time, but are based on the following reasoning. The poverty line for a single person with no dependents is around \$26k/annum. This is roughly in line with some grant of aid qualifying assessments. The median single person income is around \$52k/annum. This is the cut off used by some legal assistance services for advice or assistance. We recommend separately asking a question about access to financial resources to avoid conflating two measures.

This is a sensitive question that is best asked as one of the last questions in a survey.

## Culturally and linguistically diverse people (CALD)

1. Do you speak a language other than English at home?
  - a. No, English only
  - b. Yes, one or more other languages

### If Yes:

2. What is the main other language you speak at home?
  - a. Mandarin
  - b. Arabic
  - c. Cantonese
  - d. Vietnamese
  - e. Italian
  - f. Greek
  - g. Hindi
  - h. Spanish
  - i. Punjabi
  - j. Other European
  - k. Other non-European

### Ask all:

3. How well do you speak English?
  - a. Very well
  - b. Well
  - c. Not well
  - d. Not at all

The first and second questions can be used to identify clients from a linguistically diverse background, whatever their English language skills.

Question 3 can restrict this group to clients who would benefit from access to interpreters.

An alternative is to ask about the main language the client speaks at home. While a question such as this is often used in surveys, it will undercount CALD clients as it excludes those that aim to mainly speak English at home, whatever their cultural background.

# Survey questions to identify priority groups

## Disability / Mental Illness

1. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expect to last 6 months or more?

- a. Yes
- b. No

**If Yes:**

2. Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry out day to day activities?

- a. Yes a lot
- b. Yes a little
- c. No

3. Do you have any long-term health condition, disability or impairment which reduces your ability to carry out everyday activities?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4. In general, would you say your health is generally very good, fairly good, fairly poor or very poor?

- a. Very good
- b. Fairly good
- c. Fairly poor
- d. Very poor

5. Do you have a long term physical or mental health condition or illness expected to last 6 months or more?

**If Yes:**

6. Does this condition or illness affect you in any of the following areas?

- a. Vision, such as partial sight
- b. Hearing, such as partial deafness
- c. Mobility, such as walking and climbing
- d. Dexterity, such as lifting and opening
- e. Learning, understanding or concentrating
- f. Memory
- g. Mental health
- h. Stamina, breathing or fatigue
- i. Socially or behaviourally
- j. Other (please specify)
- k. None of the above

The 2016 Census indicator of disability status requires responses to four questions and is relatively narrow, asking about whether help is required for self-care, body movement or communication.

Questions 1 and 2 here are based on the UK harmonised disability question, though that asks about 12-month conditions.

If space is short, these could be combined into question 3, but this will exclude people who do not consider their disability has any impact on their activities.

Given the overlap with general health, and the known correlation between poor health and legal need, we would also recommend a question on general health. Question 4 is often asked in general surveys, and gives an indication of the client's own perception of their health status.

Question 5 can be used if there is interest in collecting information regarding the type of impact of a health condition or disability. This is a sensitive question that is best asked as one of the last questions in a survey.

# Survey questions to identify priority groups

## Mental Health

1. Overall, thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

Please give a score of 0 to 10 where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied

The question suggested here is routinely included in wellbeing surveys but is not part of a validated wellbeing measure. Most validated measures of mental health are based on multiple questions. In some circumstances, and subject to questionnaire length, a validated index would be more appropriate, such as the WHO-5, K10 and K6

This is a sensitive question that is best asked as one of the last questions in a survey.

## Low education levels

1. What is your highest educational attainment?
  - a. Masters, Doctorate, Graduate Diploma or Certificate
  - b. First or Bachelor Degree
  - c. Certificate III /IV
  - d. Certificate I / II
  - e. School Year 12 or equivalent
  - f. School Year 11 or equivalent
  - g. School Year 10 or below
  - h. Still in education

The question suggested here is a short form as the Census gathers this information through three questions asking about current educational status, highest year of schooling and qualifications.

Average school year age can be provided to assist those attending overseas institutions

This question can be asked at the beginning of the survey. It can then be used to monitor the impact of education on skipped questions/incomplete survey

## Single Parents

1. Do you currently live with a husband, wife or long-term partner?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

**And:**

2. Which of the following best describes you:
  - a. I do not have any children
  - b. I have one or more children, all aged 18 or over
  - c. I have one or more children, of which at least one is aged under 18

**If Yes to 2c:**

3. Do these / does this child live with you (multi-code):
  - a. All the time
  - b. Some of the time
  - c. Never

**And/or:**

4. Do you share responsibility for taking care of any of your children with someone not in your household?
  - a. Yes –an ex-partner
  - b. Yes –another relative
  - c. Yes –someone else (specify)
  - d. No

Census based indicators of family structure are based on multiple questions. The ABS definition of lone parent excludes parents who reside with a new spouse or partner.

There is no one definition of single parents and therefore no recommended question to identify them.

Question 1, 2 and 3 can be used to identify single parents whose children live with them at least some of the time. Question 4 is intended to identify children for whom there is some caring responsibility, regardless of whether they live with the parent. This question could be further restricted to 'financial care'.