

12 April 2023

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Submission re: Census topic consultation

To David Gruen (Director of ABS)

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission regarding the [2026 Census topic consultation](#).

This submission is being made on behalf of the South Australian Rainbow Advocacy Alliance (SARAA), a community-run charity working to advocate, inform and educate for a LGBTIQ+ inclusive, healthy and safe South Australia.

We note that the Australian Bureau of Statistics has a "[Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables, 2020 \("2020 Standard"\)](#)", however this data did not form part of the 2021 Census. As a result, LGBTIQ+ Australians are frequently not counted in government data or statistics.

On an individual level, this serves to invalidate the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people and perpetuate feelings of invisibility for our communities.

On a systems level, this systematically erases LGBTIQ+ identities and means we're left behind when policies, laws and services are planned.

In public policy making and service design, we know that what gets measured matters. So when data collection excludes us, we lack the evidence base to demonstrate the need for healthcare, housing, aged care and other essential services for our community.

Why is this important?

LGBTIQ+ Australians experience unique barriers to accessing health and community services. There remains a lack of information, data and education that currently exists about our needs. This lack of inclusive data collection means that often the needs of our communities go unidentified and services are inaccessible or inappropriate for LGBTIQ+ people.

LGBTQIA+ inclusive data collection is vital to:

- identifying barriers and gaps in service provision for LGBTIQ+ communities
- developing strategies and approaches to create LGBTIQ+ appropriate services
- changing practice to include LGBTIQ+ communities

- signalling to LGBTIQ+ people that the service is a safe and supportive place for them.

Nevertheless, there remain a number of challenges in collecting data about LGBTIQ+ communities, including:

- questions about one's gender identity, sex, sexual orientation and intersex variation being viewed as intrusive in nature
- history of discrimination and abuse of LGBTIQ+ people by public institutions
- fear of homophobia, transphobia, biphobia or intersexphobia by services
- perceptions of LGBTIQ+ people that they won't be taken seriously or believe
- some LGBTIQ+ people not being "out" to members of one's family or social supports
- LGBTIQ+ people not knowing how the information will be used or where it might be published
- organisations asking for information about one's gender identity, sex, sexual orientation and intersex variation in an insensitive and disrespectful manner.

When asked about how governments should collect data about LGBTIQ+ people, members of our Community Advisory Group told us:

Questions need to be asked in a respectful way using best practice methods and with clear guidelines.

Governments need to take into consideration our privacy and who has access to our information, as well as for what purpose it will be collected so people have agency over what they disclose.

Another member told us:

Currently some forms have made an attempt to integrate gender diversity but don't get it right. For example I've seen forms asking for gender identity with a write in box but still leaving in male and female checkboxes further down the form.

I've also had a medical practice ask for "birth sex" which is a really unsettling choice of wording. That same form also had a section to select gender giving Male/Female/Trans/Non-binary with only one choice. There was no way to say I was female and trans in a way that made me feel comfortable.

What needs to be done?

At the SA Rainbow Advocacy Alliance, we know that what gets measured matters. Collecting information about one's sexual orientation and gender identity is necessary for services to appropriately address the needs of LGBTIQ+ South Australians.

The challenges and complexities in collecting data about LGBTIQ+ communities create the need for a Data collection standard that guides organisations how to respectfully request information about a person's gender identity, sex, sexual orientation and intersex variation.

We also recognise that the [ABS \(2020\) Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables](#) fails to specifically include asexual as a standalone data element in questions about sexual orientation. In comparison to other sexualities, asexuality is frequently erased even in LGBTIQ+ communities. Recognising asexuality in data collection standards is a first step towards understanding the prevalence and needs of asexual communities.

Recommendations

To count our identities properly in data collection and statistics we recommend:

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics collect data relating to sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation in line with the Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables (2020).
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics update the the Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables (2020) to include asexual as a standalone data element in questions about sexual orientation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to the 2026 Census topic consultation. We would be very happy to discuss these matters with you further.

If you wish to discuss these matters further, please contact Varo, SARAA Board Chair at chair@saraa.org.au.

We will also make this submission publicly available to ensure our members and supporters are aware of our position on this Bill.

Kind regards,

Varo L.E.
they/ them

Board Chair
South Australian Rainbow Advocacy Alliance (SARAA)
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SARAA acknowledges and pays respects to the Kurna, Nukunu and Ngarrindjeri people, whose land we operate and live on. Aboriginal land was stolen, never ceded, and we stand in solidarity with First Nations people, especially those who are also members of the LGBTIQA+, Brotherboy and Sistergirl communities.