



Thursday September 5, 2024.

Joint Statement

Advocating for the inclusion of gender and innate variations of sex characteristics in the 2026 Census

The role of the Census is to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the makeup of the Australian community. These data are critical for informing a wide range of programs, including those related to health. When populations are invisible in the Census, they are at increased risk of marginalisation and disadvantage.

We write as representatives of health research institutes with a strong focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LGBTI+) health, advocating for the inclusion of comprehensive demographic questions on sex, gender, innate variations of sex characteristics, and sexual orientation in the 2026 Census.

These questions were developed through an extensive process of consultation in collaboration with national representatives from affected communities and research institutions with expertise in LGBTI+ research. These are not new questions but are derived from established standards, having undergone rigorous testing to ensure they are both effective and reliable. While the Government rescinded its decision last week to drop these questions completely, the new proposal to include a single new question on sexual orientation is not sufficient.

An extensive body of research shows that both sexual orientation and gender diversity are strong predictors of specific adverse health outcomes. People with innate variations of sex characteristics also experience significant health disadvantages but are not visible in standardised and national datasets. The omission of comprehensive data collection on sex, gender, and innate variations of sex characteristics in the 2026 Census will undermine our ability to understand the health needs and socio-economic wellbeing of LGBTI+ populations.

Accurate and inclusive approaches to data collection are essential for addressing health disparities among gender and sexuality diverse populations, and among people with innate variations of sex characteristics. As researchers working with LGBTI+ populations, we often rely on data from smaller, targeted studies which are not always representative of the broader community. This limitation can lead to information gaps that impact our understanding and ability to address the specific health needs of these populations effectively. Inclusion in data collection promotes a broader understanding and acceptance of population diversity, normalising discussions about bodies, identity, and health, which are vital for addressing ongoing social challenges.

Historical erasure and underrepresentation in data underscore the urgent need for an accurate reflection of population diversity. Including these questions in the 2026 Census is crucial to fulfilling Australia's commitment to equitable public health and to enhancing our national data infrastructure. This enhancement will enable precise health interventions that cater to everyone.

We call on our leaders to be clear and bold in ensuring no one is overlooked due to data gaps.