


OFFICIAL





Ref: EC24-000404

## EXECUTIVE BRIEF – FOR ACTION

<b>Brief title</b>	<b>Decision on the conduct of the 2024 September Census Test</b>		
<b>To</b>	Dr David Gruen AO, Australian Statistician		
<b>From</b>	Duncan Young, General Manager of Census & Population Division		
<b>Through</b>	Brenton Goldsworthy, Deputy Australian Statistician, Insights & Statistics Group		
<b>Cc</b>	Nil		
<b>Action required by</b>	<b>25 August 2024</b> <b>Reason:</b> A decision is required today to allow sufficient time to cancel activities on Monday 26 August 2024 in relation to the Test.		
<b>Recommendation</b>			
1. That you <b>approve</b> the change of Census Testing plans, specifically to not proceed with the current large public test with a reference night of 10 September 2024.		<b>Approved</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>			<b>Date: 25 August 2024</b>
<b>Executive comments</b>			

## KEY POINTS

- On Friday 23 August 2024, the Government provided formal advice to the ABS that they have decided to make no changes to Census topics for the 2026 Census (MS24-900012). The Government announced this decision on Sunday 25 August 2024.
- The ABS had planned to test potential new Census topics of Gender, Sexual orientation and Variations of sex characteristics in a large-scale public test. 50,000 selected households would receive a paper form or instructions to complete online from Tuesday 27 August 2024.
- Given the Government decision and public announcement, it would be appropriate to cancel the Test for the following reasons:
  - The value and benefit of testing these new topics has significantly decreased.
  - The Test alongside the recent Government announcement may create public confusion about whether topic changes will occur in the 2026 Census.

<b>Clearing Officer</b>	Brenton Goldsworth	Deputy Australian Statistician Insights & Statistics Group	Mob: 
<b>Date Cleared</b>	25 August 2024		
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Duncan Young	General Manager Census & Population Division	Mob: 

- There is less justification to ask the community topics that some members might find sensitive in the Test given the decision.
- The cancellation of this Test would reduce the unnecessary burden and cost of testing topics that will not be included in the 2026 Census.
- There are alternative mechanisms to test and quality assure other elements of Census preparations, including the possibility of conducting a public test with revised scope and timing. The ABS will conduct a large-scale public Operational Readiness Exercise in 2025.
- A decision made today will allow the Test to be cancelled without any burden on the public. The steps that would be taken following your decision will include:
  - Cancellation of planned media briefing and the issuing of a media release.
  - Mail will not be despatched to selected households with Census forms and instructions. Materials will be securely destroyed.
  - The Census Digital Service and other online materials and services will not be deployed.
  - The Test Contact Centre will not be opened and staff will be redeployed.
  - Promotional activity including the distribution of stakeholder toolkits, radio grabs and paid social media will be stopped.
  - Providing you advice as soon as possible on whether a large-scale public Census Test should be conducted later in 2024.

#### **RISKS AND SENSITIVITIES**

- The ABS may be criticised for the costs incurred in the preparation for this Test. The ABS needed to prepare for this Test in a way that was ready to support any Government decision on Census topics, and Test preparations also assist with preparedness for the 2026 Census.
- The ABS has communicated the value of this Test in relation to the testing of potential changes to the question on Religious affiliation. The ABS will need to rely on alternative testing methods and consider the available evidence in making a decision on how to finalise this question design.
- The ABS may be criticised for not proceeding with the Test as the results would be valuable for other ABS activities or future Censuses.
- There may be broader community concern in relation to the Government decision on 2026 Census topics and this may lead to criticism of the ABS and any decision in relation to the Census and Census Test.



# 2026 Census Topics

## Talking points: 2026 Census Topics

Updated 26 August 2024

These talking points are provided so you can answer high-level questions about the 2026 Census Topics and Census Test in your upcoming stakeholder engagement. You can find additional information about the 2026 Census on the [ABS website](#).

- For Census Test queries not covered by these talking points please escalate to [Census.communication@abs.gov.au](mailto:Census.communication@abs.gov.au) and cc [\[redacted\]](#).
- For Census Topic Review queries not covered by these talking points please escalate to [census.content@abs.gov.au](mailto:census.content@abs.gov.au) and cc [\[redacted\]](#).
- Any media enquiries should be directed to an official ABS spokesperson through [media@abs.gov.au](mailto:media@abs.gov.au)

### Government decision on topics for the 2026 Census

- The Australian Government has made the decision that the same topics will be collected in the 2026 Census that were collected in the 2021 Census.
- This means that the ABS will collect the same broad range of topics that were collected in the 2021 Census and there will be no new topics introduced for the 2026 Census.

### 2024 Census Test cancellation

- The ABS had planned a Test in September 2024 to test Census content, as well as data collection processes and systems. Given the Government's announcement of the 2026 Census topics, the ABS have made the decision not to proceed with the Test.
- The Test would have included topics that the Government has now decided will not be in the 2026 Census. The ABS will adjust testing plans in light of this announcement, in order to best prepare us for a successful Census - one that is safe, secure and easy to complete.
- The ABS has published a media statement on the ABS website - [Changes to 2024 Census Testing Plans | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)