

Basics

22 [REDACTED] /Staff/ABS 29/09/2016 01:43 PM

Send	To 22 [REDACTED] @ABS cc bcc
Subject	3303 suicides by employment status 📎
Protective Mark	UNCLASSIFIED
Categories	22 [REDACTED]

Hello Health and Vitals team,

I work in the Information Referral service team and had a caller inquiring about publication 3303 Causes of Death, and whether the number of suicides could be broken down by employment status. As in, how many of those that had committed suicide were employed/unemployed. I didn't think that was likely but just wanted to confirm.

22 [REDACTED]

Regards,

22 [REDACTED]

Customised Data and Information | Customised and Microdata Delivery Section | Communications and Dissemination Branch

Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) 22 [REDACTED] (F) 22 [REDACTED]

(E) 22 [REDACTED] @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing Report - *Before it's too late* (July 2011)

Request

The following table contains recommendations from the House of Representatives Report *Before it's too late*, which was released on 4 July 2011.

We appreciate your input and thank you for your prompt attention.

Coordination

Please note the following timeframes:

- **Appropriately cleared inputs due COB Tuesday, 23 August 2011**

All enquiries and inputs should be directed to:

22
Assistant Director, Suicide Prevention Section
Mental Health Early Intervention and Prevention Branch
Department of Health and Ageing

Phone: 22
Email: 22@health.gov.au

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Please note the timeframes for these responses are tight – see process timeline attached for explanation.
2. Please address all recommendations (including 'nil' if required)
3. Please note the Final Commonwealth Response will be publicly released following ministerial endorsement
4. Please insert one of the following standard response lines from the below list

Standard Response List:

The Australian Government supports this recommendation.

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in-principle.

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in-principle, noting that

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in-part, noting that.....

The Australian Government notes this recommendation, and

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation, as

Nil - not relevant to this Agency.

Recommendation	Commonwealth Response Input
Entered as per report	<p>Response: <i>Copy down from Standard Response List as per Instructions</i></p> <p>Response Rationale: <i>What is your Agencies position in relation to this recommendation?</i></p> <p>Relevant Action Underway: <i>What is the agency already doing or involved in that supports the rationale of your response?</i></p> <p>Please include as relevant: Committees, councils, advisory groups etc including brief description, aims and funding Examples of Program or Policy including brief description, aims and funding (max. two examples)</p> <p>Total funding allocation to activities relevant to recommendation</p>

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing *Inquiry into early intervention programs aimed at preventing youth suicide report: Before it's too late*

Input Response from: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Contact: [redacted] **Position:** A/g Director Social and Demographic Statistics
Email: [redacted]@abs.gov.au **Phone:** [redacted]

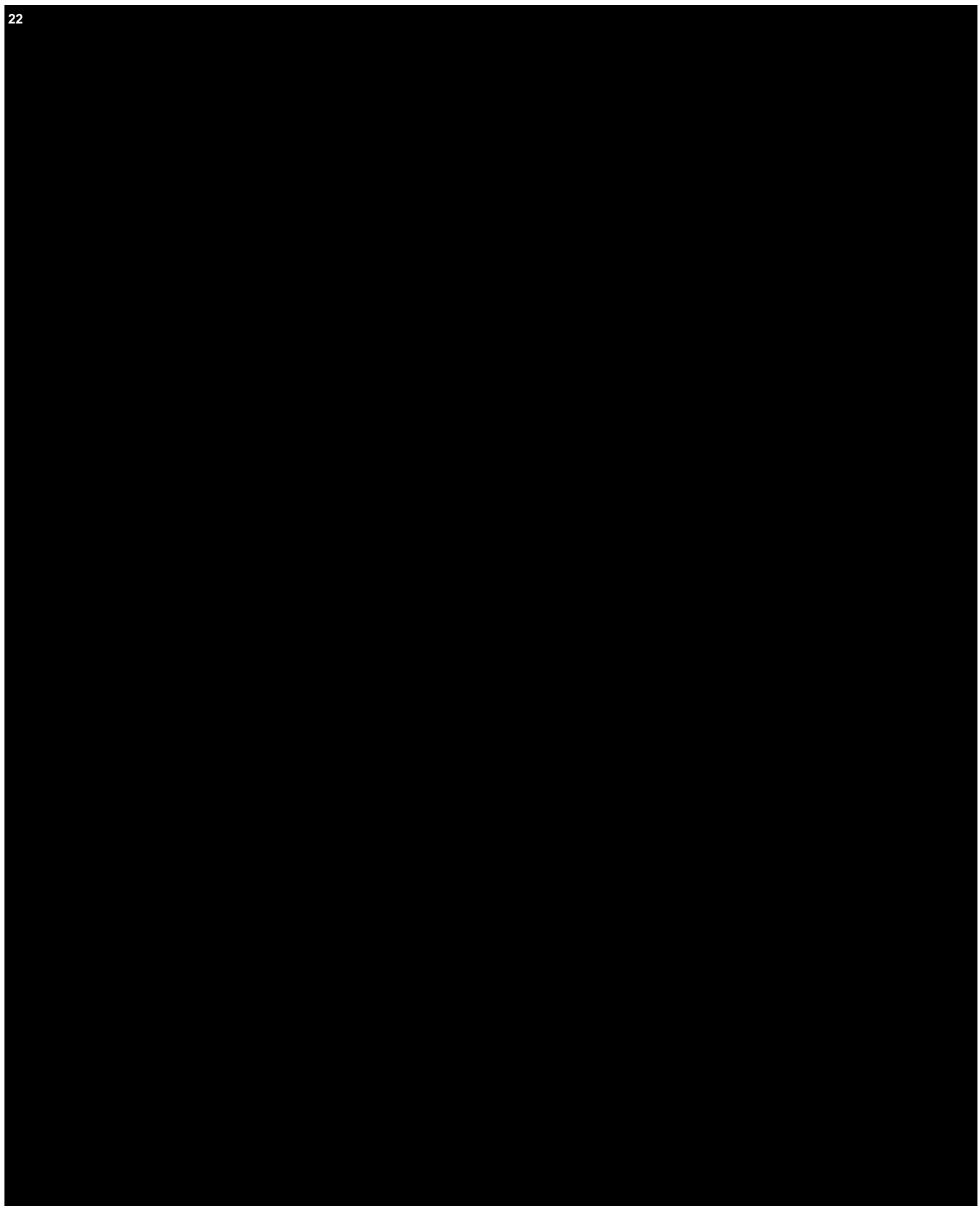
Standard Response List for use:

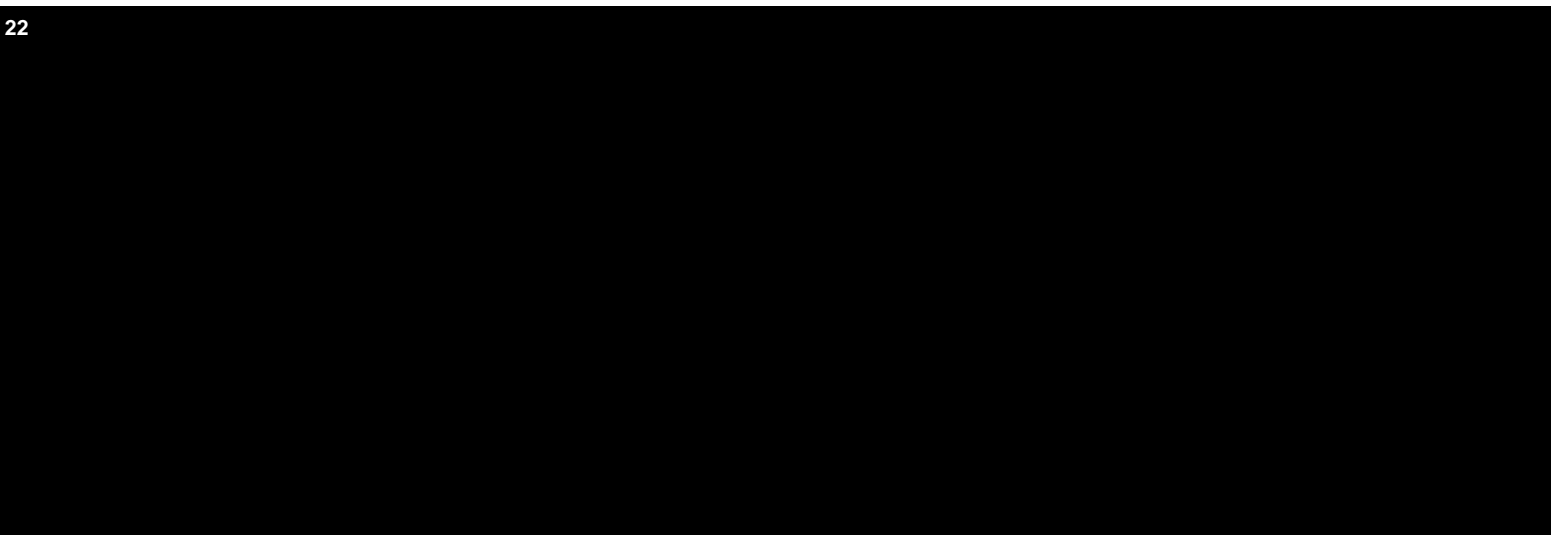
- The Australian Government supports this recommendation.
- The Australian Government supports this recommendation in-principle.
- The Australian Government supports this recommendation in-principle, noting that
- The Australian Government supports this recommendation in-part, noting that.....
- The Australian Government notes this recommendation, and
- The Australian Government does not support this recommendation, as
- Nil - not relevant to this Agency.

Recommendation	Commonwealth Response Input
<p>Recommendation 1</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the National Committee for the Standardised Reporting of Suicide consider options for, and the feasibility of, extending the scope of social and demographic suicide data routinely collected and reported on, to include information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnicity; • culture; • geography; • educational attainment; • employment status; and • socio-economic status. (para 2.23) 	<p>Response: The Australian Government supports this recommendation in-principle, noting that additional work required to collect and disseminate more detailed suicide data is currently unfunded. While ethnicity, geography, educational attainment, employment status, and socio-economic status are understood and defined in this context, culture on the other hand is an ill-defined social construct and will prove difficult to define, measure, collect and be correctly understood/applied by users of the data.</p> <p>It is also noted that careful consideration will need to be given to how these data enhancements can be implemented in a meaningful way, given the relatively small numbers of suicides each year.</p> <p>Response Rationale: The Australian Bureau of Statistics is the appropriate Government Agency to undertake the necessary tasks to produce the required data.</p> <p>Relevant Action Underway:</p> <p>The Australian Bureau of Statistics currently delivers a range of statistical outputs on suicide through the Causes of Death publication (3303.0). A proposal is currently being developed to enhance ABS suicide statistics through the provision of a standalone Suicide publication similar to that produced in 2005. It is proposed that the ABS work in collaboration with the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine to assess the quality of relevant indicators held on the National Coronial Information System, as well as the State and Territory Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages to source or enhance registry based indicators.</p> <p>There are a range of other committees and stakeholders which will need to be consulted to ensure that efforts in this space are not duplicated. Communication with relevant committees will be considered within the proposal.</p>

The ABS commits to completing the investigative work required to provide a comprehensive proposal for enhancing suicide statistics. It is expected that this proposal will include a full costing for additional work required.

22





22, 22 [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]

Health and Vitals WDB

22



03/10/2018 08:10 AM

For-Official-Use-Only

Basics

Protective Mark

For-Official-Use-Only

Validation doc -   (

02/10/2018 05:34 PM From: 22 >
 To: 22 @abs.gov.au
 Cc: 22 @abs.gov.au
 Date: 02/10/2018 05:34 PM
 Subject: ABS Suicide Data

Hi 22 and ABS team,

I would like to put in a request for a new consultancy report – The same as done last year around Suicide (X60-X84, Y870) for our PHN and sub regions (SA2 and SA3).

Based on our previous consultancy reports I would like to request: -

- Table 1: Number, crude death rates and age-standardized death rates due to intentional self-harm by sex (males, females, persons) for combined years of 2013-2017 for all SA3s defined to be under the South Eastern NSW PHN catchment; SENSWPHN total; NSW state and Australia national total
- Table 2: Number and crude age-specific rate of deaths due to intentional self-harm (X60-X84, Y870) by age group (under 25 years, 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years, 55-64 years, 65-74 years, 75 years and over, all ages), and age-standardized death rate of all population for combined years of 2013-2017 for all SA3s defined to be under the South Eastern NSW PHN catchment; SENSWPHN total; NSW state and Australia national total
- Table 3: Number and crude rate of deaths due to intentional self-harm (X60-X84, Y870) for the SA2s defined to be under the South Eastern NSW PHN catchment; SENSWPHN total; NSW state and Australia national total for combined years of 2009-2017

Extra this year:

- Table 4: PHN and SA3 based summary of mechanism of death (hanging, firearm etc.)
- Table 5: Personal characteristics summary for PHN and SA3 (employment status, married status etc.)

Let me know if there are any further questions

Regards,

22

03/10/2018 08:16 AM From: 22 /Staff/ABS
To: 22
Date: 03/10/2018 08:16 AM
Subject: Re: ABS Suicide Data [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]

Dear 22

Thank you for your new request.

This email is to confirm that we have logged your request and to let you know there will be some delay before we can do any work on it.

22/10/2018 07:34 AM From: 22
To: 22 @abs.gov.au
Date: 22/10/2018 07:34 AM
Subject: RE: ABS Suicide Data [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]

Thanks 22, No problems. Take your time – was just sending friendly reminder to not forget about my request ☺

Yes it is basically an update to last year plus 2 extras namely: -

- Table 4: PHN and SA3 based summary of mechanism of death (hanging, firearm etc.)
- Table 5: Personal characteristics summary for PHN and SA3 (employment status, married status etc.)

22

From: 22 @abs.gov.au
Sent: Monday, 22 October 2018 8:28 AM
To: 22
Subject: RE: ABS Suicide Data [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]

Hello 22,

Please accept our apologies for the delay. We were hoping to have a look at your job sometime this week.

We are progressing but haven't reached your job yet. If you could send us an idea of what you want (an update on last year?) we may be able to start on it early next week.

Regards

22

22

Health and Vitals Statistics Section (Qld) | Population & Social Statistics Division | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

PH: 22 (E) 22 @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

"22" ---22/10/2018 07:20:31 AM---22 Any updates on this ?

From: 22 >
To: 22 @abs.gov.au >
Date: 22/10/2018 07:20 AM
Subject: RE: ABS Suicide Data [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]

Hey 22 ,

Any updates on this ?

22

22/10/2018 08:11 AM From: 22 Staff/ABS
To: 22 >
Date: 22/10/2018 08:11 AM
Subject: RE: ABS Suicide Data [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]

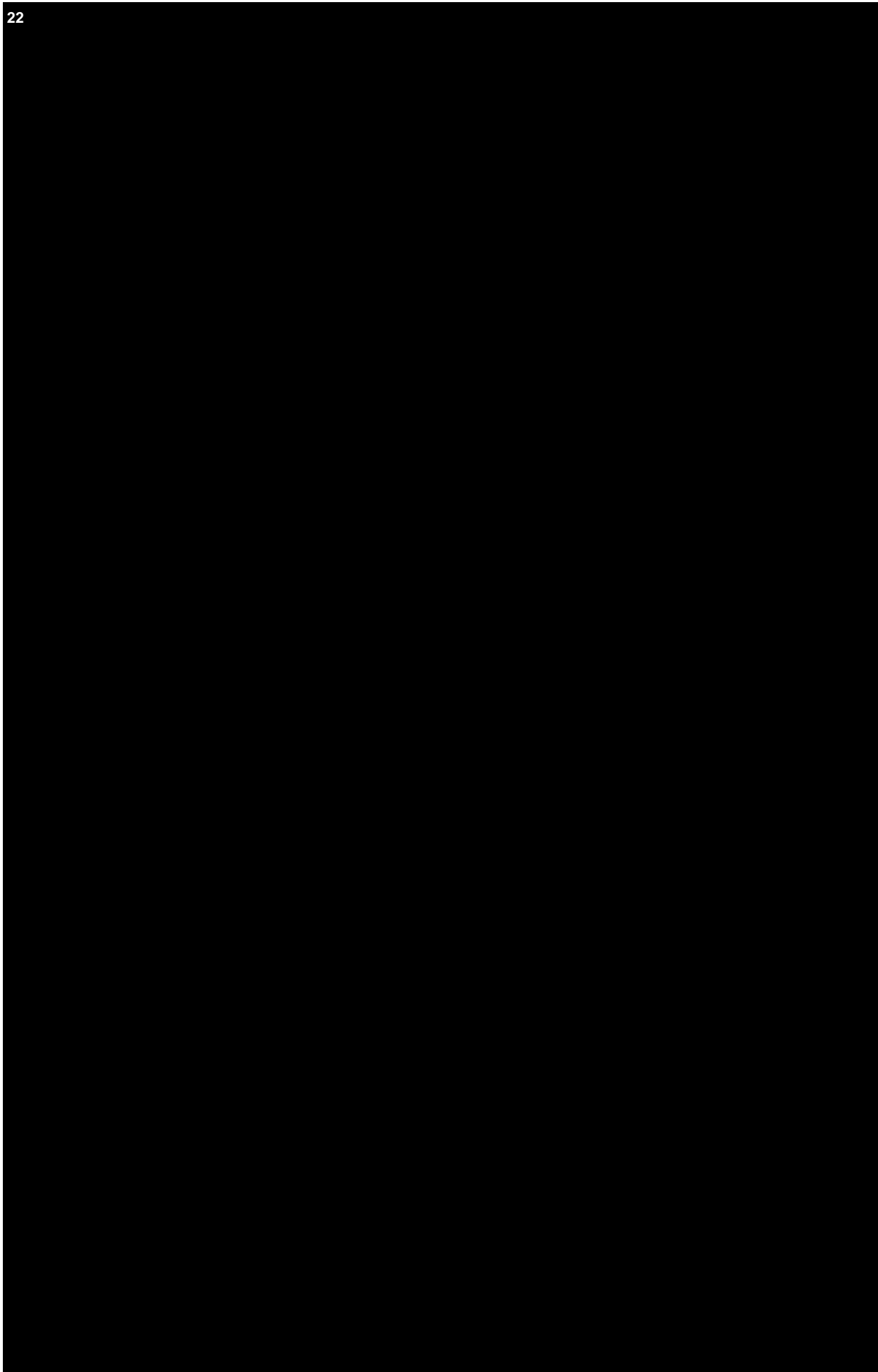
I really appreciate your understanding and patience.
We'll be in touch as soon as we can about your requirements although I can tell you that the Causes of Death dataset does not have employment/occupation data.

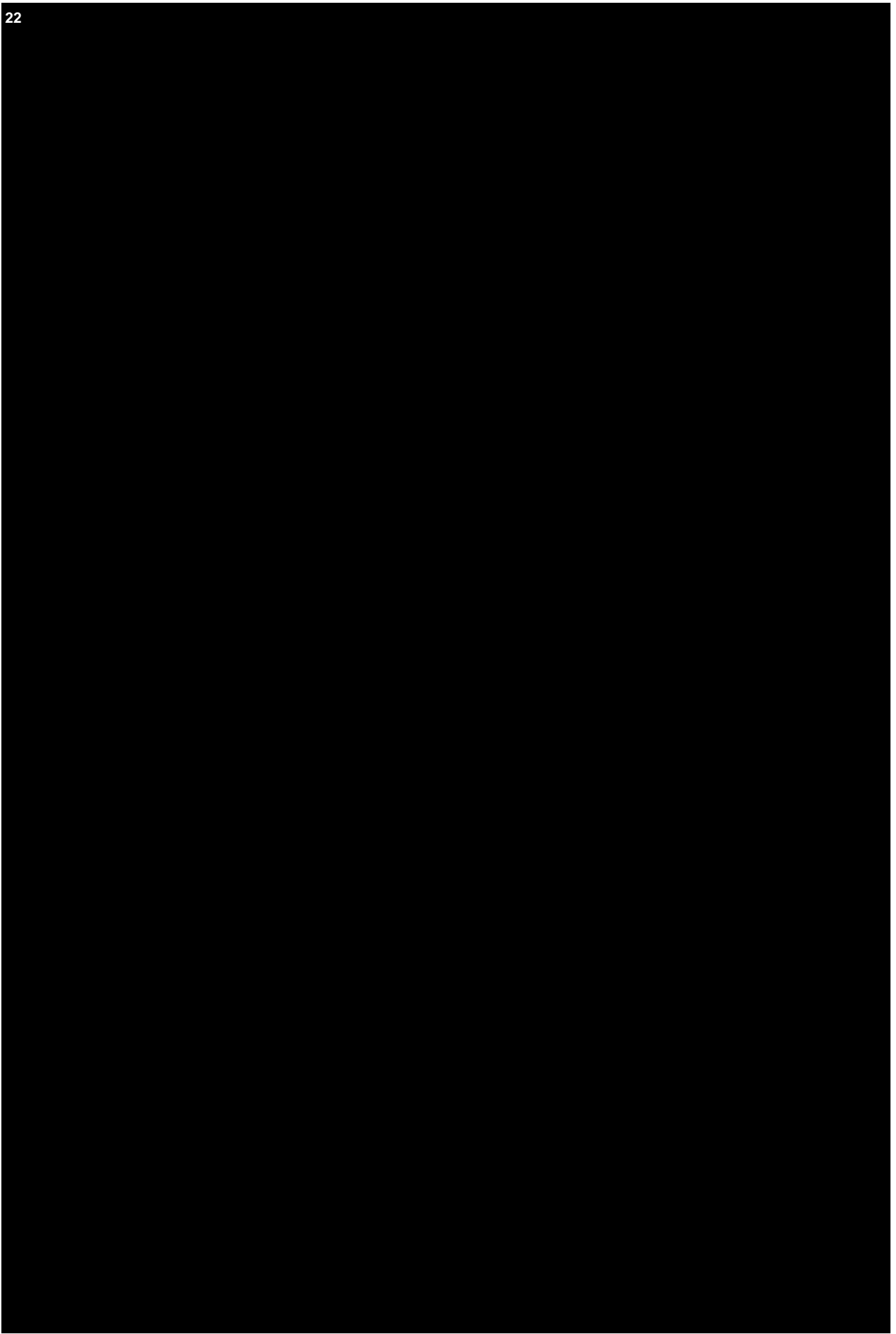
The Deaths dataset does but it is not to a sufficient standard to provide useful information. There are several factors that make the collection of death by type of occupation difficult

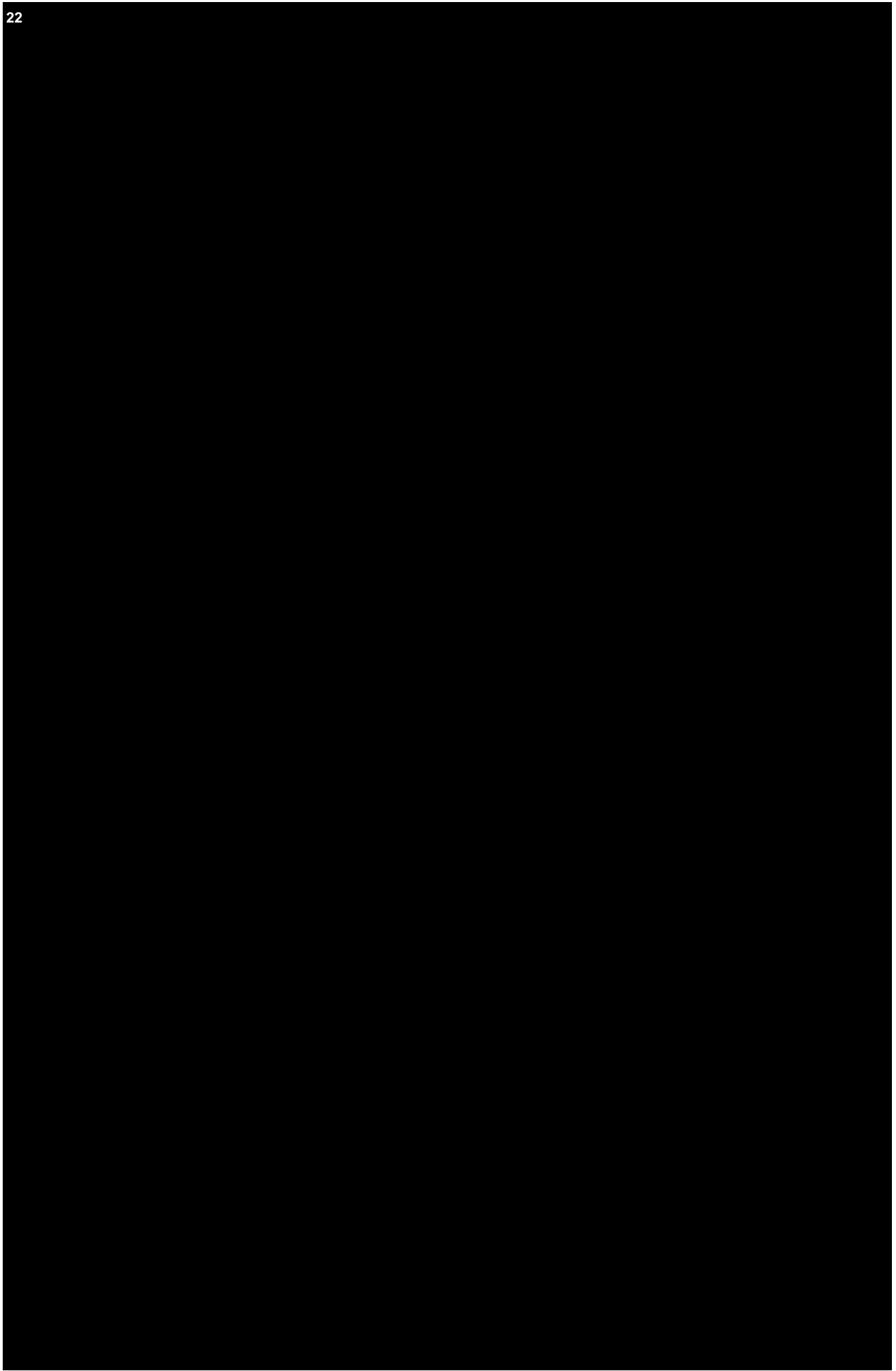
- most people die when they have reached retirement age
- some people have several different occupations during their lifetime and the occupation chosen could either be the last one or the one they spent the most time in or even the one they talked most about to relatives or carers
- some death certificates are completed by people who do not know what the deceased did for a living

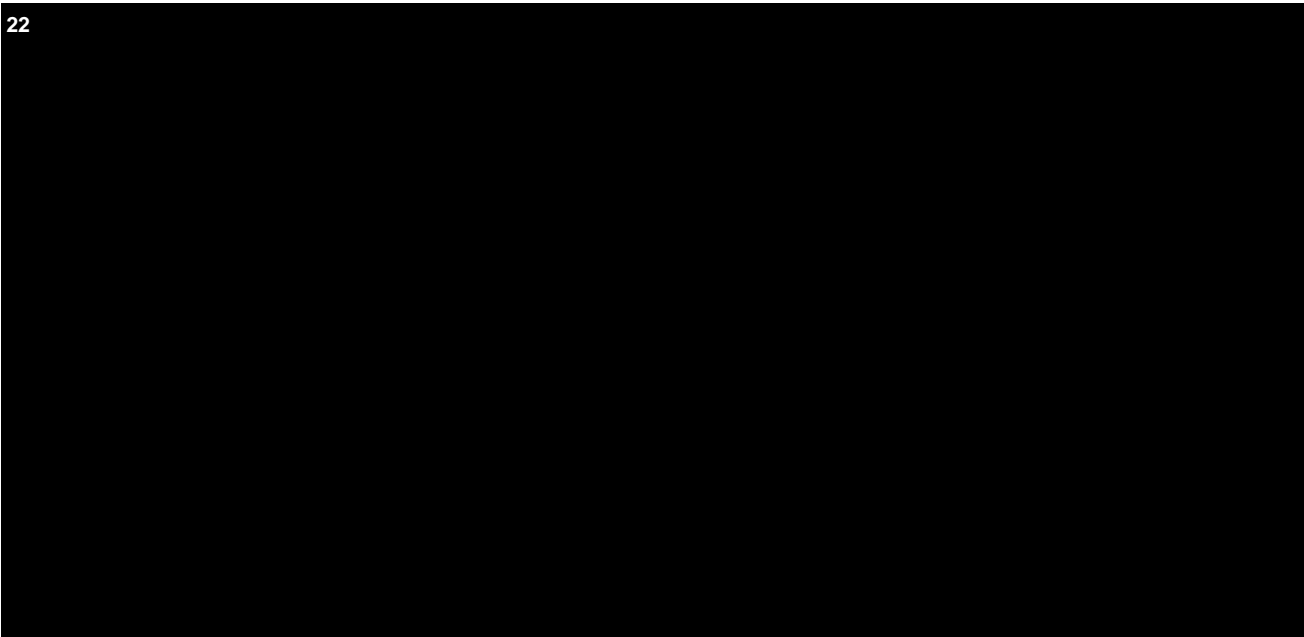
An attempt was made some years ago to assign the information provided to an occupation. The most common description was 'Home Duties' followed by 'Invalid', 'Pensioner' or 'Retired Person'. Death certificates/registrations generally provide insufficient information to assign occupation and in some cases the field is left blank

22









Basics

22 /Staff/ABS 12/05/2011 09:32 AM

Send	To 22 /Staff/ABS@ABS cc 22 /Staff/ABS@ABS, 22 @ABS bcc
Subject	Re: data query 📎
Protective Mark	UNCLASSIFIED
Categories	22

Hi 22,

The Cause of Death collection does not include information regarding health practitioners, or mental health information. This information would be more appropriately sourced from the Health and Disability section in Canberra through the National Health Survey and Mental Health Survey. The contact person you should speak to is 22.

Regarding suicide data, my team does produce data requests for suicides. Before committing to the client that we could provide data, you would need to ascertain precise geography e.g. SLA or other level of geography, before we could agree to providing the data. Producing a suicide rate for a single remote or rural area is complicated by the fact that the number of suicides will be very small and therefore may not be suitable for release.

If you have any other questions, please let me know.

Cheers

22

22 | Health & Vitals Statistics Unit | Australian Bureau of Statistics | 22 |
 22 | @abs.gov.au
 22 | www.abs.gov.au

22 Hi 22 22 suggested I run this que... 11/05/2011 04:54:19 PM

From: 22 /Staff/ABS
 To: 22 /Staff/ABS@ABS
 Date: 11/05/2011 04:54 PM
 Subject: data query

Hi 22

22 suggested I run this query past you.

I have received the data request below and was wanting to know what data is available in relation to the Health data items mentioned (highlighted).

Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks

22

22

Consultancy and Training Services (SA)
Australian Bureau of Statistics



22



22

[@abs.gov.au](mailto:22@abs.gov.au)

----- Forwarded by 22 Staff/ABS on 11/05/2011 04:21 PM -----

From: 22 (PIRSA)" 22 @sa.gov.au>
To: 22 @abs.gov.au>
Date: 11/05/2011 10:58 AM
Subject: RE: Remote Rural Communities Statistics [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Hi 22,

22

Yes I do. I am analyzing some socio-economic impacts on (remote) rural and isolated communities in SA. To be more specific I am interested in the most recent data with relation to the following:

Income

Education (level of education among young people and/or general level of education within rural communities)

Unemployment/**Employment** rates

Health (eg. **Health practitioners**, mental health of rural communities, suicide rates, etc)

Internet/Broadband access

Climate challenges (eg. annual rainfalls)

Comparison of urban society vs rural community (benefits/advantages and/or disadvantages)

Positive factors within rural life style/farming

Your assistance will be much appreciated.

Kind Regards,

22

Strategy Analyst

Corporate Strategy and Policy Branch
Primary Industries and Resources SA

22

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From: 22 [REDACTED]@abs.gov.au
Sent: Wednesday, 11 May 2011 10:48 AM
To: 22 [REDACTED] (PIRSA)
Subject: Re: Remote Rural Communities Statistics [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Hi 22 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED] Are you still looking for the information which you have requested below?

Regards

22 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]

Consultancy and Training Services (SA)
Australian Bureau of Statistics

 22 [REDACTED]

 22 [REDACTED]@abs.gov.au

22 [REDACTED] (PIRSA)" ---28/04/2011 02:36:02 PM---Hi 22 [REDACTED], I am currently working on the project involving remote rural and regional communities, ana

From: 22 [REDACTED] (PIRSA)" 22 [REDACTED]@sa.gov.au>
To: 22 [REDACTED]@abs.gov.au>
Date: 28/04/2011 02:36 PM
Subject: Remote Rural Communities Statistics

Hi 22 [REDACTED]

I am currently working on the project involving remote rural and regional communities, analyzing social impacts and economic characteristics particularly in those isolated areas. I need some statistics capturing **suicide & employment** rates, rural population per health practitioner, etc. Can you please suggest where I can find the most updated data or perhaps suggest who will be the most relevant person to talk to.

Your prompt response will be much appreciated.

Kind Regards,

22 [REDACTED]

Strategy Analyst

Corporate Strategy and Policy Branch
Primary Industries and Resources SA

22



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Draft response to HoRs 'Before it's too late'
Health and Vitals WDB

22

15/12/2011 09:23 AM

Basics

22 /Staff/ABS 15/12/2011 09:26 AM

Send	To	22 @health.gov.au
	cc	22 Staff/ABS@ABS, 22 Staff/ABS@ABS, 22 /Staff/ABS@ABS
	bcc	22
Subject	Draft response to HoRs 'Before it's too late'	
Protective Mark	UNCLASSIFIED	
Categories	22	

Hi 22

22

Please find below ABS wording for the relevant section on page of the draft report. As you can see, it keeps the conversation at a high level, especially as the recommendations suggest national committee consideration of some issues.

Please contact me if there is anything further you need. 22

22

Regards

22

Director | Social and Demographic Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics | 22 |
22 @abs.gov.au |
22 | www.abs.gov.au

[ABS proposal for response to Recommendations 1 and 2](#)

The Australian Government supports these recommendations in principle and appreciates the potential value of additional high quality statistics. Some of the additional social and demographic data recommended by the Standing Committee, particularly information relating to country of birth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin and geographical

location is currently collected. However reporting and increased disaggregation is, in some cases, constrained by data quality, national privacy and data handling legislation and essential procedures required to protect individual confidentiality.

In other cases, the information recommended, particularly in relation to culture, education attainment, **employment** status and individual socio-economic status is not collected consistently within jurisdictional infrastructure and does not currently support robust statistical reporting. The Australian Government acknowledges the efforts of national committees such as the NCSRS in progressing improvements in data collection and reporting and will look to address both information gap and data access issues through Commonwealth membership in such committees.

The Government also notes that the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC), to be established from 1 January 2012 within the Prime Minister's portfolio, has been tasked with developing a new National Report Card on Mental Health and **Suicide** Prevention.

Basics

Protective Mark

UNCLASSIFIED

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The following 4 potential SDSB analytical projects have been identified (in decreasing priority order). More details are provided for each project using the ASB template below.

1. COD: Potential for an analytical project in investigating the possibility of acquiring /reporting data on the proposed variables for **suicide**

22

Details

1. COD: Potential for an analytical project in investigating the possibility of acquiring /reporting data on proposed variables for **suicide**

Motivation for the project (*describe or include any relevant background; does not need to be as long as the example in appendix*)

In the report *Before it's too late: Report on early intervention programs aimed at preventing youth suicide* (2011), the House of Representatives specifically identifies the ABS as an agency in a position to assist in fulfilling the Australian Government's \$274 million plan to reduce the incidence of **suicide**, as documented in the *Mental Health: Taking Action to Tackle Suicide* (2010) package. The HoRs report distilled the *Mental Health* package into three recommendations to the ABS. Relevant here is the recommendation that the ABS expand the scope of **suicide** data currently collected to include the variables ethnicity, culture, geography, educational attainment, **employment** status and socioeconomic status.

The ABS has responded to this recommendation by acknowledging its ability to provide some data on ethnicity and geography through variables already routinely included in the collection. However, the ABS expressed caution about its ability to deliver information on the remaining variables - SES, culture, educational attainment and **employment** status - due to current difficulties in collecting this data or known limitations in the variables' robustness for reporting. The Health and Vitals Statistics

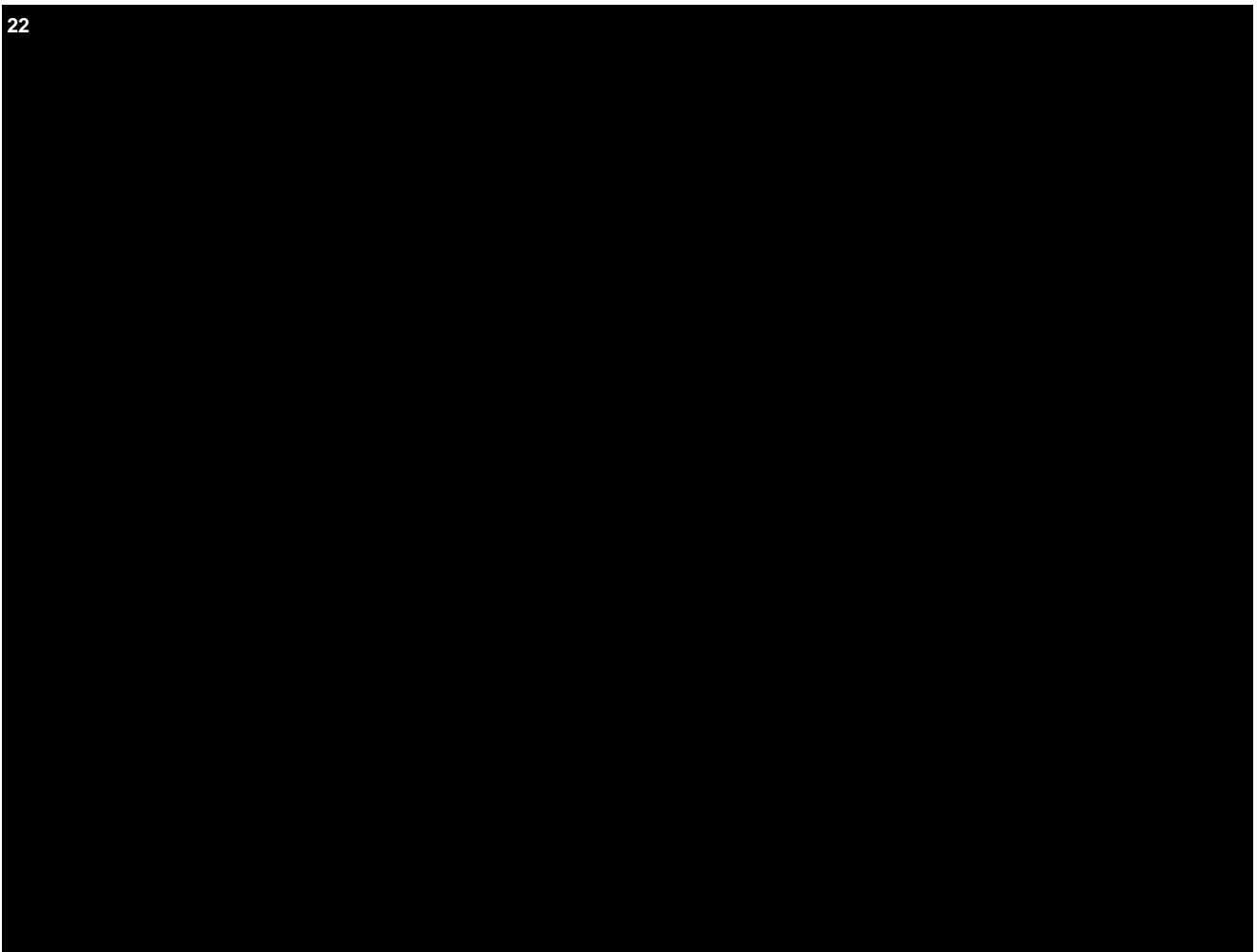
Unit, in collaboration with the ABS Health and Disability section and Department of Health and Aging, is presently working on producing a publication, anticipated for release in July, which will present detailed data about **suicide**, including geography and ethnicity variables. However, to sufficiently address the government's recommendation, the feasibility of reporting data for the remaining four variables in the future needs to be explored.

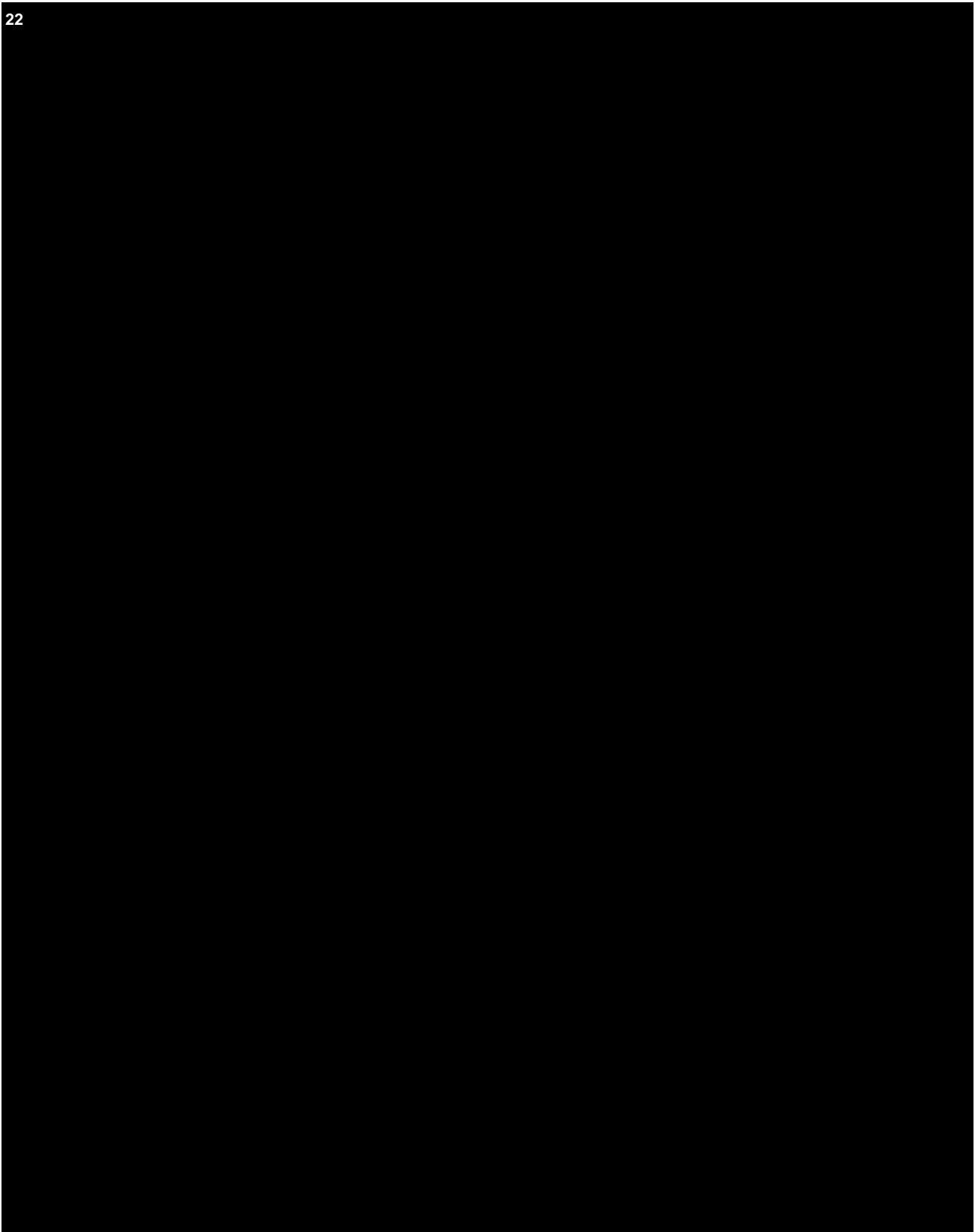
Research questions

The key research questions for the project are:

1. What factors are currently inhibiting the ability to report on the SES, educational attainment, **employment** status and culture variables?
2. What work would need to be undertaken to enable data to be reported on these variables and what are the time frames involved?
3. Is it feasible, in terms of financial and time cost, to perform the required work to enable data to be reported for these variables?

Key outputs	A report indicating the outcome of the assessment of the research questions
Dataset	Causes of Death, Australia (National Coronial Information System dataset is a possible option for extra variables, but there could be other options - would need to consider return to source)
Key ABS client (s)	Health and Vitals Statistics Unit, Health and Disability Section
Key external client (s)	Department of Health and Aging, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, House of Representatives





Suicide by occupation and age [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]

Health and Vitals WDB

22

16/05/2016 10:26 AM

Basics

22 /Staff/ABS 16/05/2016 10:39 AM

Send	To	22 /Staff/ABS@ABS
	cc	22 /Staff/ABS@ABS, 22 /Staff/ABS@ABS, 22 /Staff/ABS@ABS, 22 @ABS
	bcc	
Subject	Suicide by occupation and age [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]	
Protective Mark	For-Official-Use-Only	
Categories	22	

Hi 22

Attached is **suicide** data (as well as 'natural causes' and all deaths) by occupation and age. The not applicable occupation category has been further broken down by labour force status. Data are provided by raw weighted counts and by crude death rate per 100,000 of Cenus population. Of note, generally the highest **suicide** rate is found amongst unemployed persons, which differs from those who died of natural causes (for whom the higher rates were seen in those not in the labour force). Let me know if you'd like anything else investigated.

Schedule 2 Part II Division 2

Thanks,

22

Mortality Data Centre | Health and Vitals Statistics Unit | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

(P) 22

(E) 22 @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

*The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them **and** their cultures, and elders, both past and present.*

Sensitive:Statistics

Basics

Protective Mark

Sensitive:Statistics

Suicide count versus unemployment rate ?

The following table shows the number of male suicides for Qld and Australia that occurred each year compared to the average monthly unemployment rate (original rather than seasonally adjusted or trend) for the same years. The purpose of putting this together was to understand whether there's a pattern between the 2 data series and if so, whether the unemployment data supports the reduction in the number of suicide deaths for Qld and Australia from 2015 to 2016.

This table however shows that the unemployment rate doesn't isn't a particularly reliable comparative measure of the number of suicides when looking at changes from one year to another. However, the steady increase in unemployment in Queensland and Australia from 2011 to 2015 tracks fairly well against the general increase seen in unemployment over this time.

In future it may pay to look at suicide rates rather than numbers to account for population increases, to look at comparisons across other jurisdictions and to look at female suicides. It would be worth having a methodologist do significance testing on the 2 data series. Males were selected separately as they comprise the majority of suicides.

source data cube number 12 from:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Jun%202017?OpenDocument>

Phase 1: Plan to produce proposed suicide report

The House of Representatives and the Senate have conducted hearings into Suicide.

Senate

To follow up

House of Representatives recommendations

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing in its report 'Before it's too late: Report on early intervention programs aimed at preventing youth suicide.' has made a series of recommendations which includes a report on suicide showing tables by the following variables.

- Ethnicity
- Culture
- Geography
- Educational attainment
- Employment status
- Socioeconomic status

The ABS has examined the recommendations and has put in progressive efforts to produce a report that meets much of the information recommended by the Standing committee. Table 1 presents a summary of results of the analysis.

22



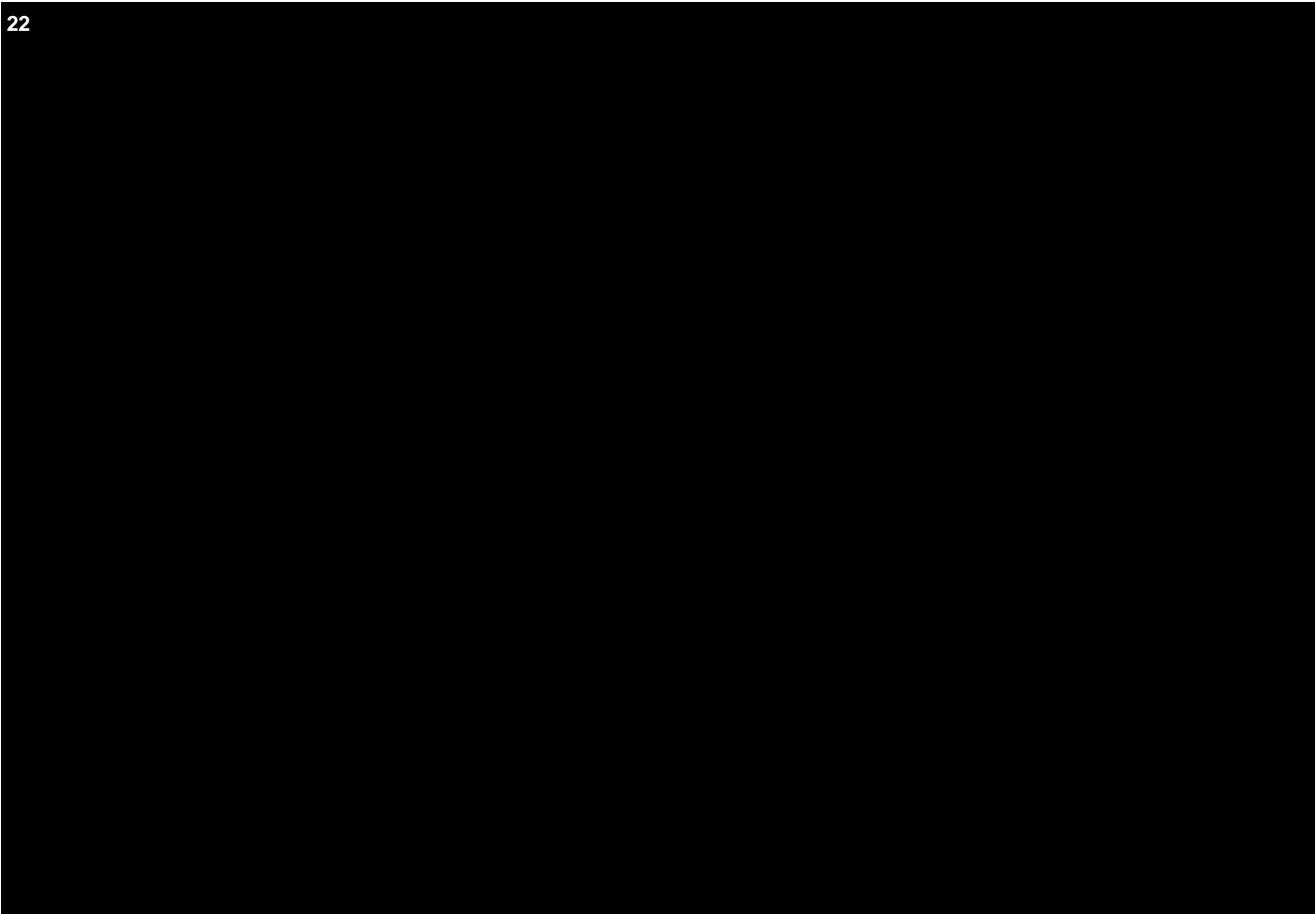
Of the remaining three variables, the ABS will consult with the NCIS to see if information on Educational status and Employment status can be extracted. Such information, if obtained, can be easily cross tabulated with other available information and may be important contributors to multivariate models necessary to find determinants of suicide.

However, to determine the socioeconomic status of the persons who suicided or for the family of the person who suicided is problematic. Information to derive socioeconomic status requires income, education, occupation, health status, and a range of other information for the person.

Should variables such as Educational status and Employment status be extractable from the NCIS data, there may be scope for formalising additional information to be gathered during the formal interview with relatives of the deceased and the Funeral Director and the Coroners hearing process.

Currently no methodology exists to perform a calculation to derive an individual's socioeconomic status, but this could be further researched to see what other countries do.

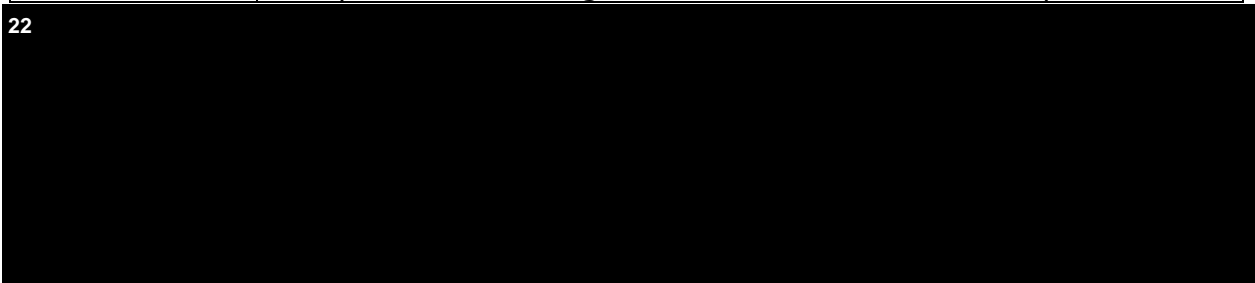
Additional Information



22

Employment status	No data exists. NCIS data to be investigated.
Socioeconomic status	While socioeconomic status can be derived for groups at aggregated levels, no such measure can be easily produced for individuals. Such information will require income, education, occupation and a range of other information for the person.

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Timeline

A report producing the above mentioned available information should take about three person months to produce.

The Report

A formal report might follow along the lines of:

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Possible Proposed table on Employment Status

Table 6 will report employed and unemployed, with unemployed broken down into school attendee

Possible Proposed table on Socio-Economic Status

Table 7 will report by age group, sex and socio economic status.

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Z-Code Project [DLM=For-Official-Use-Only]
Health and Vitals WDB

22

05/10/2016 09:23 AM

For-Official-Use-Only

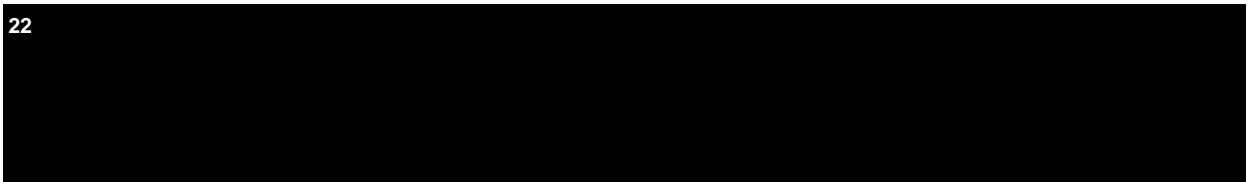
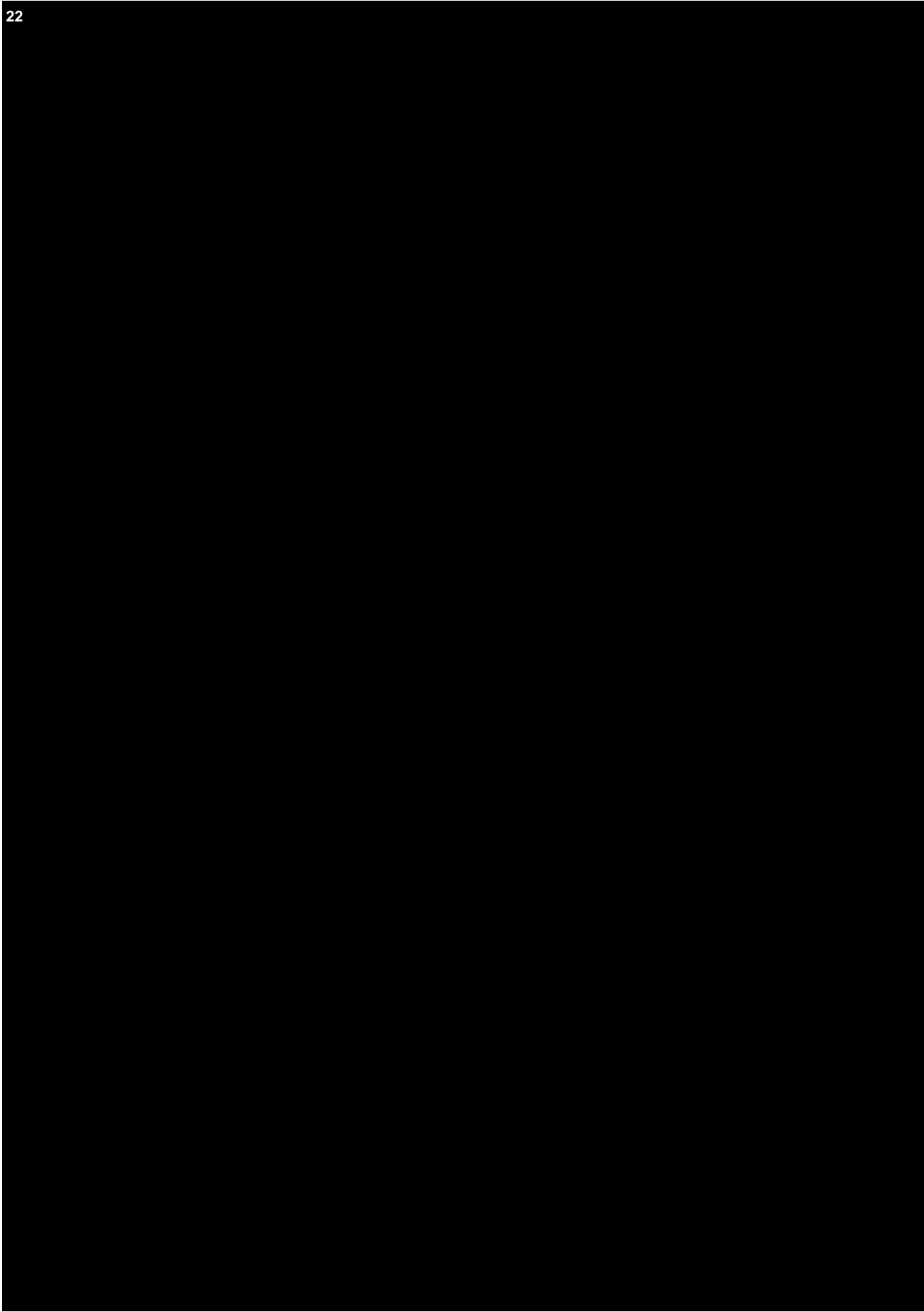
Basics

Protective Mark

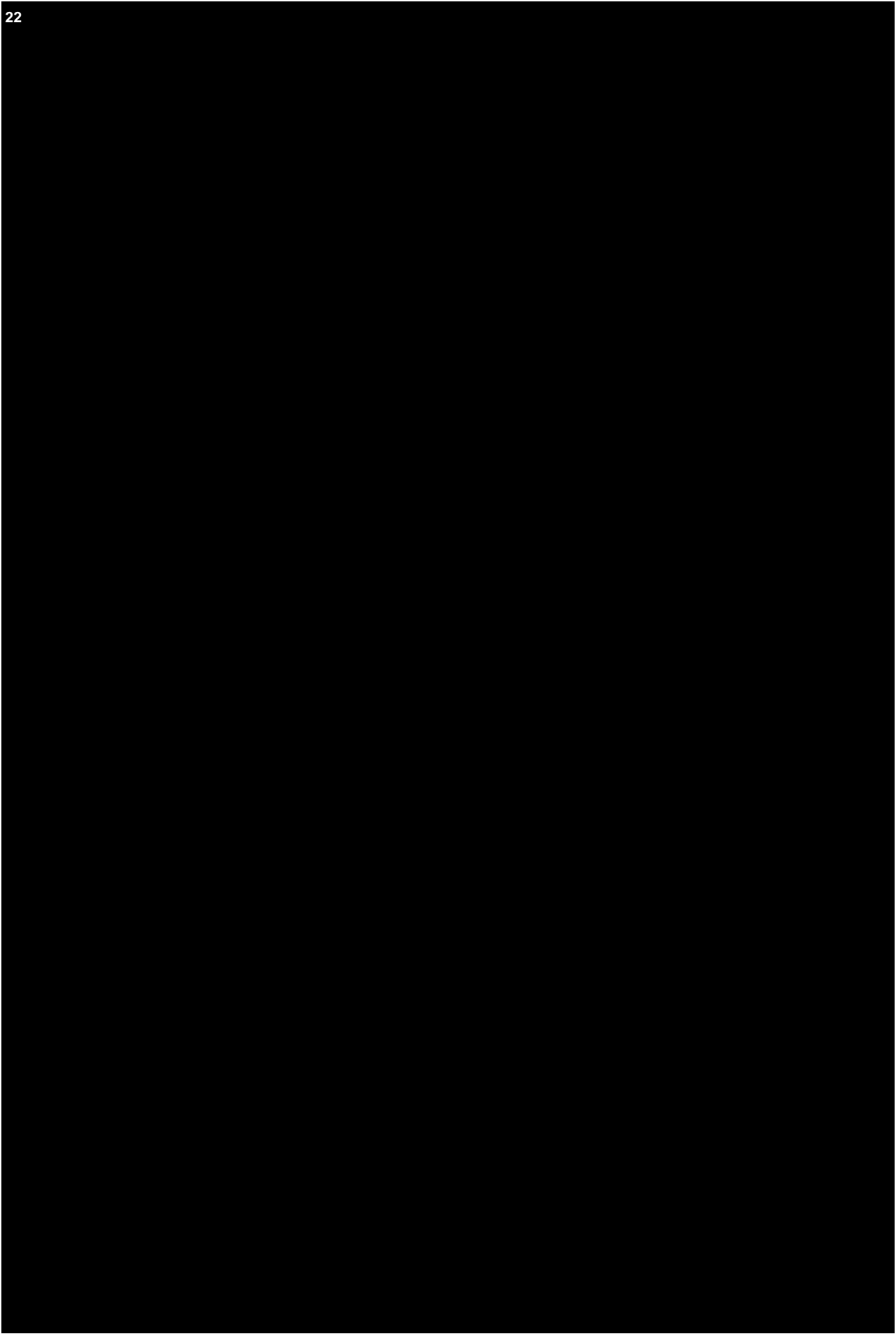
For-Official-Use-Only

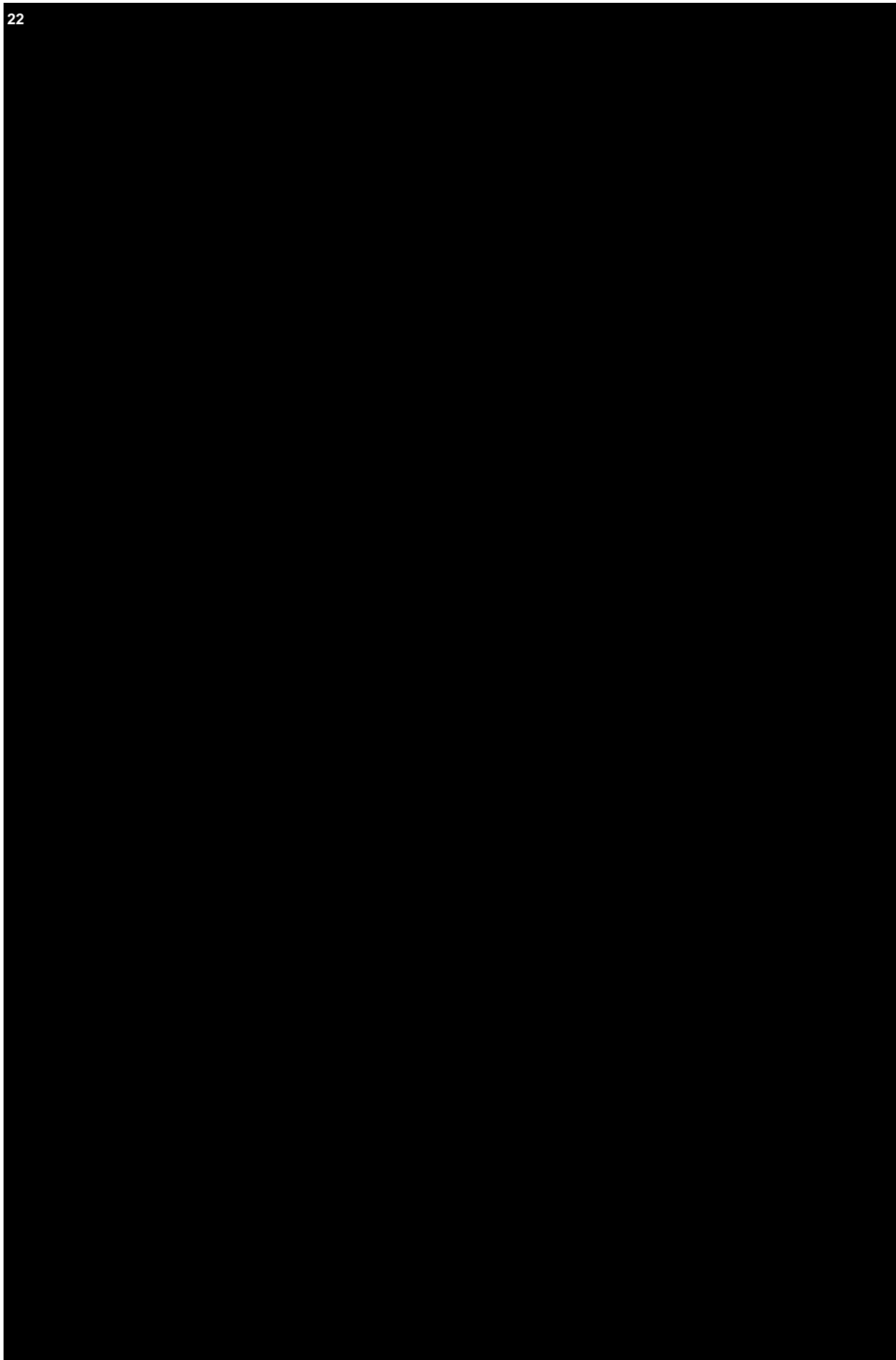
22





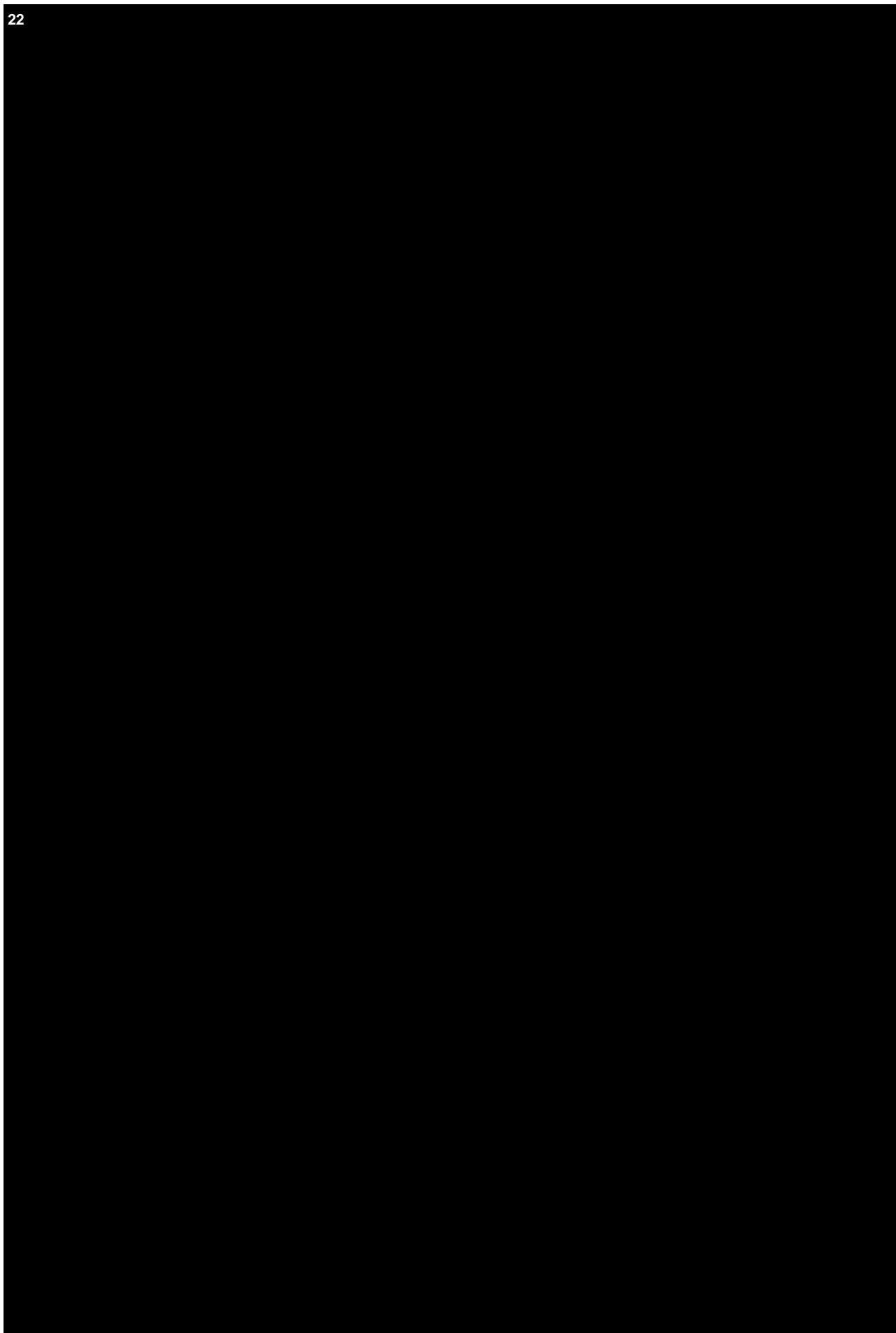
The World Health Organisation explains that context is imperative to understanding risk of deaths such as suicide (1). Currently the contextual information used to assist in assigning codes and intent has not been able to be captured, as these circumstances cannot be coded to ICD-10 mortality codes. 22

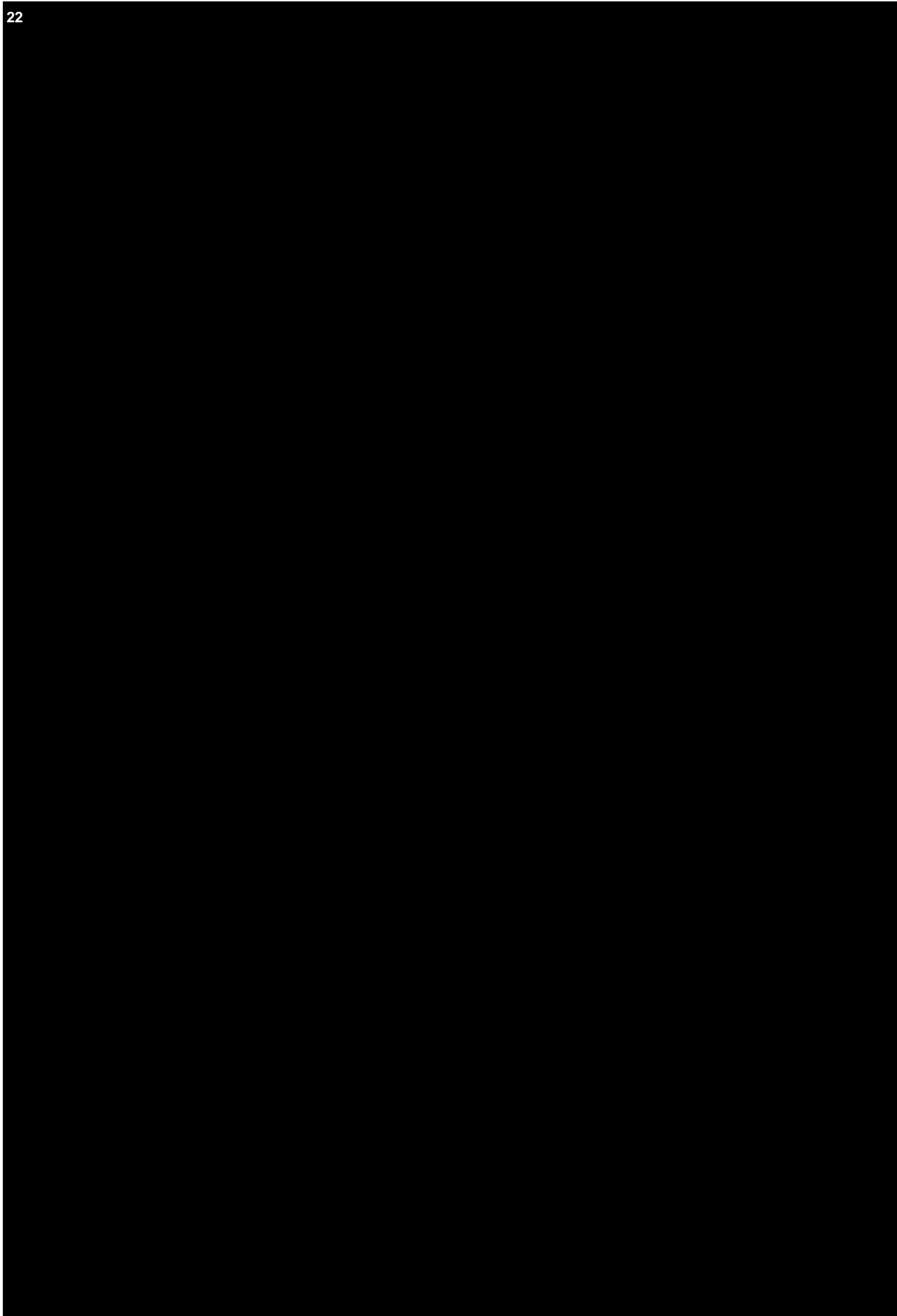




Problems related to **employment** and unemployment has long been understood **to** increase the risk of suicide (24-26), particularly for males (27,28). This is **evident in a** large number of male **suicides** where socioeconomic factors such as these are often listed in coroner reports as a catalyst for the individual taking their life. As these circumstances are currently not captured in the general use ICD-10 codes, it is recommended that Z56 be included in the coding process to identify these risk factors.

Economic and housing circumstances such as poverty, low income, and insufficient welfare support, homelessness and other inadequate housing situations are known risk factors for **suicide** ideality and attempts. Although uncommon in coroner findings, including codes such as Z59.0, Z59.1, and Z59.5-Z59.8 would allow the capture of these important cases and allow contribution to a greater understanding of how these risk factors affect the Australian population. Inclusion of these codes would be in specific circumstances only where the coroner identified these situations as a crucial factor in the death.









Fw: Action: provide input for QON for DSS on Death rates

22 [redacted] to: 22 [redacted]

27/02/2019 04:14 PM

This message is digitally signed.

History: This message has been forwarded.

Hi 22 [redacted],

Correspondence is below. Hapy to do what we can to help. Will let you know if I can find anything on SEIFA based mortality from AIHW.

Cheers

22 [redacted]

22 [redacted]

Director

Health and Vital Statistics Section | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

(P) 22 [redacted] (M) 22 [redacted] (F) 22 [redacted]

(E) 22 [redacted] @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

----- Forwarded by 22 [redacted] Staff/ABS on 27/02/2019 03:13 PM -----

From: 22 [redacted] /Staff/ABS
To: 22 [redacted] Staff/ABS@ABS
Date: 27/02/2019 01:03 PM
Subject: Fw: Action: provide input for QON for DSS on Death rates

22 [redacted]

Program Manager

Health and Disability Branch | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

(P) 22 [redacted] (M) 22 [redacted]

(E) 22 [redacted] @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

----- Forwarded by 22 [redacted] Staff/ABS on 27/02/2019 02:02 PM -----

From: 22 [redacted] Staff/ABS
To: 22 [redacted] /Staff/ABS@ABS
Cc: 22 [redacted] @ABS
Date: 27/02/2019 01:17 PM
Subject: Action: provide input for QON for DSS on Death rates

Hi 22 [redacted]

I am hoping you can assist with this request from DSS. If y not you, please refer to someone that can provide a response.

DSS requires us to provide information on: death rates for a suitable control group by age, allowing for socio-economic background etc.?

Please see the email below and attachments. The Questions on Notice have been highlighted



Proof of Committee Hansard - THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2019.docx



Community Affairs Legislation Committee_2019_02_21_6954 see p 133.pdf

If you could provide me with a respond by COB tomorrow?

Thanks

22

Ministerial Liaison Officer
Parliamentary and Partnerships Section
Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) 22

(E) 22@abs.gov.au

----- Forwarded by 22 /Staff/ABS on 27/02/2019 01:11 PM -----

From: 22@humanservices.gov.au>
To: 22@abs.gov.au>
Date: 27/02/2019 10:56 AM
Subject: RE: Please call me [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Hi 22

Thank you for your email.

See the top of page 113 in the attached document for questions from Senator SIEWERT.

The two questions arising are:

- Do income support payment beneficiaries who receive claim rejections letter suffer a higher death rate than others?
- Do income support payment beneficiaries who receive claim rejections letter suffer a higher suicide rate than others?

DHS can calculate the death and suicide rates by age of those beneficiaries who receive rejection letters.

Could ABS provide death rates for a suitable control group by age, allowing for socio-economic background etc.?

Regards

22

22

Research | Data Strategy
Chief Data Officer | Integrity and Information

22

22

22

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*

Proof Committee Hansard – Estimates - THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2019

BLUE: QUESTIONS

UNDERLINE: RESPONSE/ANSWER

RED – QUESTION OF NOTICE

Senator SIEWERT: Thanks. I want to go to the issue related to deceased people, the answer to the question of online compliance intervention, the number of deaths of recipients of various notifications related to online compliance and the answer to my question HS28SQ18000176.

Senator WATT: In the meantime, could we get a copy of the opening statement that you read out before as well.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, that would be useful, thank you. I've certainly had correspondence from people who have been working with families and have reliable information that at least five people have taken their own lives, and their families directly relate it to having received correspondence related to online compliance. **Have you been notified of any people—**

Ms Leon: I have seen media reports, Senator, where that connection has been made. I think it's important to acknowledge at the outset that, whenever a person takes their own life, it's a terrible tragedy and we completely feel for both the person but, of course, for the people who love them, who've been hurt by the loss of someone they love in those circumstances. And so, I do want to acknowledge that when we talk about this there isn't any sense in which we don't fully recognise the pain that it causes for someone to take their own life and the pain that that causes the people close to them. I think it's also been evident from some at least of the media reports that, as with many cases of suicide, it's always difficult to be crystal clear about what causes someone to take their own life because, by definition, they're not here really to tell you any more about it. So, there is always some risk in to attributing a particular causality between an event and a suicide. We just ought to recognise that in relation to these. Of course we understand that some of our customers are already vulnerable people. Many of our customers might have a mental health condition already. Some of them have already attempted suicide at earlier times in their lives and some of them might, for reasons unrelated to the debt, already be under some personal pressure and then the debt adds to that pressure. In all of those kinds of circumstances, causality is difficult to establish—what exactly caused a person to take their own life? Where a person says something that indicates to us that they are contemplating self-harm, when they are talking to us, we always refer them to our social workers. In relation to our debt recovery work, we have a number of social workers who are dedicated to that part of the department's work. As well, there is the ability, if needed, to refer people to the broader network of social workers, of which we have about 700 across the department, to provide access to crisis support, and refer people to counselling or assistance with whatever else might be causing their stress.

So we don't accept that we haven't done our best to look after the needs of vulnerable people when we are aware of their vulnerability. As you know, in relation to online compliance, unlike all of our other debt recovery work, we have exempted vulnerable people from the online compliance initiative and we've established a separate staff-assisted process that we're piloting to manage debt recovery for the income data matching, which doesn't require them to go online. They have a staff-assisted process, so that we're able to assess if there is any need for additional help. I know that there have been people who have died after receiving a debt notice, but, because we have a lot of customers, I'm afraid to say that there are always some who are dying for a range of reasons.

Senator SIEWERT: I appreciate that. I understand and appreciate that you can't necessarily allocate causation. However, the fact remains that there have been people whose families think there is an association. So my question is, as it relates to those particular circumstances: **have you had contact from family members of people who consider that there is an association with the online compliance system?**

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Ms Leon: As far as I'm aware, there haven't been any online compliance initiative matters about which families have contacted us to assert that they think that the person's suicide was precipitated by the receipt of a debt notice. I'm happy to take on notice as to whether there were, but, in the knowledge of the officers at the table, we're not aware of any.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could take it on notice, that would be appreciated. There's been some public commentary by some families. **Has the department investigated those particular circumstances or looked into or contacted those families?** Some families obviously haven't publicised their names.

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Ms Leon: I'd probably have to take that on notice to the extent it goes to individual cases because we wouldn't necessarily have those at the table. But I'm happy to take on notice—

Senator SIEWERT: Could you take on notice—

Ms Leon: whether there have been individual cases and what action the department has taken, to the extent we can do so without compromising the privacy of individuals.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. That would be appreciated.

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Ms Leon: I may have to answer it in a general way rather than in relation to specific cases.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, I don't want to know about specific cases. I want to know if you've looked into it and the results of that. In terms of the answers I have received and the data, as I said, I accept that there are people who pass away who are on income support regardless of whether they have had a compliance notice. I am concerned though around these figures. **Have you looked into or investigated any further the details behind these figures? Have you compared them to death rates for these cohorts—but not just the death rates, because these groups of people may have particular circumstances that the online process has triggered? Have you looked further into the detail of these statistics?**

Ms Leon: We have looked at the statistics. Across our whole cohort of customers obviously a very large number are age pensioners, so you would expect that there is a higher death rate amongst the elderly than amongst the population at large. So the overall death rate for our whole customer base is necessarily skewed a bit by the age pension.

Senator SIEWERT: But if you take those out—

Ms Leon: If you take out the age pension, I can tell you that the payment that is most relevant for income matching, for example, is Newstart. The death rate across the whole Newstart cohort in that same period is 0.63 per cent, whereas for people who have died after receiving an income data-matching review letter the death rate is 0.2 per cent. I know that this doesn't tell you anything about the individual cases, but it does suggest that there is not an elevated death rate—in fact, to the contrary—amongst people who have received an income data-matching letter. For disability support pension—and again this is a cohort that has a higher death rate than the general population—the death rate is 4.56 per cent. Of course, we would be concerned if we were seeing unusual or excessive death rates amongst customers who have received a debt notice, but in fact the death rates are lower than for the general cohort of Newstart or DSP recipients.

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry, can you give me the DSP one?

Ms Leon: For the period that you had asked in the question, which is from 1 July 2016 to 31 October 2018—the same period we were providing you with data about the death rate amongst income data-matching customers—the death rate of customers on DSP was 4.56 per cent for DSP as a whole cohort and the death rate amongst Newstart customers was 0.63 per cent.

Senator SIEWERT: **Yes, but what was it for DSP?**

Ms Leon: Not for people who have received debt notices but for those on DSP as a whole it was 4.56 per cent.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, but then you compared it to the Newstart one.

Ms Leon: No. These are just two. For DSP the death rate was 4.56 per cent. For Newstart it was 0.63 per cent—that's the whole cohort. For customers who died during that period who had received an income data-matching review letter it was 0.2 per cent.

Senator SIEWERT: That's for all of the cohort?

Ms Leon: That's right.

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry, I thought you were saying that for Newstart.

Ms Leon: No; that is for all. Out of the 925,000 assessments that were issued during that period, 2,030 customers passed away, which is a death rate of 0.2 per cent. It's not to say that we are not troubled that people die; it's just to recognise that their death rate is not particularly elevated. In fact, it is less than the death rates amongst relevant other cohorts.

Senator SIEWERT: Except you're only comparing that to the overall number of letters that were sent out and, as I've understood what you've said, not to the subsequent escalation of debts.

Ms Leon: If we were only to compare a category of people who have—when you say escalation of debts, what do you mean?

Senator SIEWERT: I mean escalation of the process. You send out a letter, a 'please explain your employment discrepancy'—

Ms Leon: I'm just finding out what that data is. I think I've understood your question. We may have that at the table.

Senator SIEWERT: It's as we're going through the 'I'm going to contact you and send you my employment data', and then the process occurs.

Ms Leon: Yes. I'm not a mathematician, but there will start to be some questions of statistics and comparisons here, because, if I very closely define the category of people down to people who are already feeling stressed, then I'll have to really compare that with a category of Newstart recipients who are feeling stressed about something. We'll start to end up without getting like to like.

Senator SIEWERT: I want to get to the vulnerable cohort in a minute.

Ms Leon: But, while we're here, I'll see if we can find out about ratios of debt. The 2,030 number is a subset. That is the total number of people who died who are within the 925,000 assessments. To give you the subset of assessments that have received a debt notice, I will also have to find out of those what percentage died, and we don't have that at the table, I'm sorry.

Senator SIEWERT: That's where I wanted to go to: to understand just how the process has impacted on a person we need to understand how many steps the people have been through as well, so we're comparing, as you said, like with like. Could you take that on notice?

Ms Leon: We'll have to take it on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: I wanted to go to the 663 people who have a vulnerability previously marked—

Ms Leon: Which question on notice is this?

Senator SIEWERT: This is the same one. Of the 2,030, there are 663 who had vulnerabilities marked. In your comment earlier, you said that letters didn't go out to, or that was a separate process to, those that are vulnerable.

Ms Leon: At the very beginning of the process, the people with vulnerability indicators were not excluded, but during the process we have since excluded them—yes.

Senator SIEWERT: I'm trying to talk about the data that is here and the number of people with vulnerabilities who received letters. It seems to me that those with vulnerability indicators are potentially more vulnerable, obviously, to stress, anxiety and depression associated with this process. So I'm particularly interested in the breakdown of those figures, if you're able to, to provide what their vulnerabilities were—obviously, not identifying individuals—

Ms Leon: We'll take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: and the number of people with those particular vulnerabilities, and also where they were in the process. Was it that they had just received an accounts payable notice? Where were they through the process?

Ms Leon: We'll see what we can do. It will just depend on how fine-grained the categorisation is at each stage of the process. If we have that, yes, we can give it to you. I should say, of course, that it's

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quite possible that there is an elevated risk of suicide or other forms of death, in any event, amongst people with a vulnerability indicator—

Senator SIEWERT: Yes! I—

Ms Leon: whether or not they've received a debt.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, I accept that. But, given that people are already vulnerable, I think it's fair to say that receiving and being anxious about a debt that they don't think they owe could also contribute to that anxiety—would you not agree?

Ms Leon: I can't speak for the people who are anxious as to what's precipitating their anxiety. I can say that throughout the history of welfare debt recovery, we have always still had to pursue debts from people with vulnerability indicators. So integrity measures apply whether a person has a vulnerability indicator or not. But we have processes to support people throughout their dealings with DHS, whether that's at the application stage or at the integrity stage. If people are expressing thoughts of self-harm or other inabilities to cope that's why we have our national network of social workers, whose job it is to support people. And we do train all of our staff in recognising the signs that someone might need extra help and support.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay. Ms Leon, it seems to me that the department is in denial about the stress and anxiety that robo-debt has caused. People feel far more pressure in the way that these debt notices are now being applied. It's the fact that they're the ones who have to go and find all the evidence and have all the stress. I can personally attest to this in terms of the number of people who have contacted me and who are extremely distressed about not being able to find their records and about incorrect notices. So, yes, I understand what you said about ongoing compliance being undertaken, but this is a significant jump up. Do you acknowledge that?

Ms Leon: It's an increase in the number of people who are sent income-matching reviews every year, because we now have the ability to data-match with the tax office in much greater numbers. That certainly has increased the volume of identification of debt since we began data-matching with the ATO on a mass basis, rather than on a manual basis.

I think it ought to be recognised that the department has responded quite actively to the concerns that customers expressed about the difficulty of the process, because we've engaged in user-centred design with our customers to redesign the portal to make it easier. We've changed the process so that many people can get assistance—

Senator DEAN SMITH: This is not, in any way, to take away from the seriousness of what we're talking about, thematically, but it is important, I think, to be clear about whether there is causation. I'm not a statistician, but I'll come to that in a moment. **You said that you had seen media reports.**

On the basis of that, is that why the department went and collated or did an investigation in addition to the question on notice from Senator Siewert?

Ms Leon: The death rate numbers?

Senator DEAN SMITH: Yes.

Ms Leon: I think there was a combination of both the question on notice and the media reports that made us make sure that there wasn't an undue correlation between involvement in the debt-recovery process and death rate.

Senator DEAN SMITH: Right. We know that 2,030 people of the 925,000 recipients of the review letters were deceased over that period. **How many families of those individuals corresponded with the department to alert them, discuss with them, raise their concerns, that a family member or friend might have become deceased as a result of this particular initiative?**

Ms Leon: We don't think there have been any but we have taken it on notice—to have a look at whether there are any that the officers at the table aren't aware of.

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Senator DEAN SMITH: Thank you. How many federal parliamentarians provided you with information and evidence, that had been brought to their attention as a result of constituent inquiries, in regard to this matter?

Ms Leon: None, that I'm aware of.

Senator WATT: Can I just say, we had a lengthy Senate inquiry into this, which a number of us were heavily involved in, where many examples were presented by us at those hearings.

Ms Leon: Yes.

Senator DEAN SMITH: Presented to the committee at the hearings?

Senator WATT: And to the department.

Senator SIEWERT: No, and to the department.

Ms Leon: Cases of people taking their own lives.

Senator WATT: Yes, that was absolutely raised.

Senator DEAN SMITH: No, my question goes not to whether issues were raised but whether or not information was provided to the department and whether or not the department took that information and investigated those specific instances. I didn't participate in the inquiry.

Ms Leon: The officers at the table aren't aware of the particular cases that you're referring to, Senator. But we have taken on notice to—

Senator DEAN SMITH: No, sorry. Was that Senator Smith, Senator Siewert or Senator Watt? I'm not aware of any cases.

Ms Leon: The matters that were raised before the inquiry. I can say of any matters that were raised in the inquiry, in general terms, the department would always respond to and look into any particular instances that were raised with us. But we aren't aware of instances that have been raised with us where the income data-matching processes have been drawn to our attention as having caused someone's suicide.

I think we all need to be careful in having this conversation—to the extent that since we aren't able to draw conclusions about causality I also don't want to, potentially, be responsible for creating an enhanced narrative in the public domain that might lead people to think that suicide is an appropriate response to the stress of receiving a debt notice. We all have to take it very seriously and I would like to ensure that we aren't, inadvertently, adding to the kind of anxiety that has led Senator Siewert to raise the questions with us today.

Senator DEAN SMITH: I think everyone is taking it seriously, and I think tone will dictate the seriousness with which senators are addressing the issue. I'm interested in understanding some other information. What do we know about the average or median debt level of the 2,030?

Mr Storen: The debt raised in relation to the recipients who were later recorded as deceased—the average debt was \$2,377 and the median was \$1,248.

Ms Leon: I should say that there isn't any evidence before us of how many of those people died of natural causes or otherwise. The majority of those will not have been people who took their own lives. I just want us to not think that we're talking about 2,000—

Senator SIEWERT: No-one at all has implied that—nobody.

Ms Leon: I just wanted to make sure that that's right.

Senator DEAN SMITH: I'm not going to draw any conclusions from the evidence or the responses to the questions I ask; that will be for others. But it will inform my private view. What do we know about the age breakdown of the 2,030?

Ms Leon: We have the age breakdown in brackets.

Senator DEAN SMITH: I've just seen that the information is—

Ms Leon: Yes, it's in the question on notice.

Senator DEAN SMITH: But because that has not been tabled I do want it on the record.

Senator SIEWERT: It is. No, that's a question on notice. That's tabled.

Senator DEAN SMITH: I want it in the *Hansard* record.

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Ms Leon: There were 102 recipients between 16 and 25, 327 recipients between 26 and 35, 347 recipients between 36 and 45, 466 recipients between 46 and 55, 536 recipients between 56 and 65, 251 recipients between 66 and 80 and one recipient who was between 81 and 100.

Senator DEAN SMITH: My last question goes to the gender breakdown.

Ms Leon: Of those, 637 were female and 1,393 were male.

Senator DEAN SMITH: The 2,030 of the 925,000 represents 0.2 per cent.

Ms Leon: That's right.

Senator DEAN SMITH: Thank you very much.

Senator SIEWERT: Since we've decided that we are going to reaffirm evidence, I'll reaffirm that that's purely against that full number.

Ms Leon: Yes, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT: It's not against the various breakdowns of the sections of the process. So we actually don't yet have those figures, do we?

Ms Leon: We've taken that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: You've taken that on notice.

Ms Leon: Yes, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT: So that 0.02 per cent will potentially change once you actually compare it to the numbers that have been going through the various stages of the process.

Ms Leon: We've taken that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes. Thank you.

Ms Leon: And, of course, none of us at the table have the kind of knowledge that the Department of Health might have about what the death rates for all those age cohorts either. So it may well be that that is a perfectly typical spread of death.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes. But that's my question, and that's been my point all along: I have not been drawing causation. I've never inferred that these people—

Ms Leon: There has been a lot of media reporting that has strongly implied causation, and I think it is a dangerous path to go down for the sake of people who might be vulnerable and who might be triggered by that assertion.

Senator SIEWERT: What I'm trying to establish is: what level of investigation has been undertaken to establish if there is an association here? And we can only do that with the breakdown of the data. You can't just do a gross, across-the-board analysis to drill down into this data, which is why I'm asking these questions and asking for further information and asking whether the department has actually done that drilling down into the data, instead of just doing the overarching comparison to the 925,000. Has the department drilled down into the data, particularly for those who are vulnerable, for that group of people who were getting letters prior to the cessation of the letters going out to those who are vulnerable?

Has the department looked at what their vulnerability indicators are and what stage of the process they were in so there can be some analysis done of whether there is a level of association. It may not be causation, but there could be an association that's contributed to somebody's feeling of ill health, for example, or an association with some other vulnerability that could have contributed to it. That's what we're trying to find out.

Ms Leon: We've taken that on notice, but I think I also gave evidence at a prior hearing that we don't know the cause of death of our customers. Of that 2,000, unless someone has specifically drawn to our attention that the person took their own life, we won't know whether that was the cause of death or there was another cause.

Senator SIEWERT: I've heard what you've said. I have quite a few questions that I will put on notice in terms of more data. In terms of the change in approach, I've had some information that indicates there has been another change in the way that online compliance letters are getting sent out. Has another area of the program started?

Ms Leon: Is this in relation to vulnerable customers or generally?

Senator SIEWERT: No, just more broadly in the online compliance section.

Commented [22]: Question on notice

Commented [22]: Questions on notice

- What level of investigation has been undertaken to establish if there is an association here?
- Has the department drilled down into the data, particularly for those who are vulnerable, for that group of people who were getting letters prior to the cessation of the letters going out to those who are vulnerable?
- Has the department looked at what their vulnerability indicators are and what stage of the process they were in so there can be some analysis done of whether there is a level of association.

Mr Storen: I can talk to that. We've talked previously about how, in February 2017, we introduced a more improved portal for the digital interaction by customers. In December 2018 we implemented another generation of online digital tools for customers to interact in this space. The initiations that started to occur very late November 2018 and early December 2018 directed customers to a different portal than the one we'd been using since February 2017. This portal has been built on more user-acceptance testing, customer experience and so forth, to facilitate customers being able to update their earnings details a lot more easily. We've also implemented a range of questions at the front end of the process to see if we can reduce the impost on a customer and finalise the review without too much information. That started in late 2018.

Senator SIEWERT: What do you mean they don't have to give as much information, because this is part of the whole problem?

Mr Storen: Some of the challenges, and I won't rehash all the hearings—

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, let's not.

Mr Storen: You will recall the challenges that the department and customers have when we have overlapping earning periods with different income support periods. The processes, up until the new system, required compliance officers and customers to work through each Centrelink settlement period to allocate earnings to those periods et cetera. We've implemented a range of questions to try and identify those customers where it's a lot clearer that, for instance, an earnings period may have stopped and they may have commenced study part way through a financial year. If a customer can be clear about those dates, we can move the review on faster.

Senator SIEWERT: I should say first, have you changed the wording of the letters again?

Mr J McNamara: Yes. The initial letter that we sent out is a new letter, and the outcome letter we send is also new. We have changed both letters.

Senator SIEWERT: Can you give us copies of those letters tonight?

Mr J McNamara: Yes, we can. I don't think that's a major issue.

Senator SIEWERT: Can I read you some wording that I've been sent, because, quite frankly—

Ms Leon: Is this wording from us or from a customer?

Senator SIEWERT: I don't know.

Ms Leon: I just want to know that we're not disclosing anyone's customer details.

Senator SIEWERT: No. They're all blanked out. It's fine. It reads: 'We have reassessed your disability support pension. You were paid more than you were entitled to and you need to pay the money back. Why you owe money: the correct amount of your earnings was not taken into account in the payment made to you from'—and there are dates listed. It said: 'This means you have been overpaid'—and it lists a substantial amount of money—'and we are therefore required to recover this amount.' It goes on with more details. Is that a letter that you would—

Mr J McNamara: That's not from this program. That could be from this department but that's not from the income compliance program.

Senator SIEWERT: It could be from the department?

Mr J McNamara: I don't know; we'd have to look at it, but that's not an income compliance outcome letter.

Senator SIEWERT: I'm pretty certain—I'll double check—that there's no—

Mr Storen: Is there a telephone contact number?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, there is. I found this so incredible that I went and checked the telephone number to make sure that it wasn't bogus, and it is your telephone.

Ms Leon: But is it the number that's especially established for the income compliance measure?

Senator SIEWERT: It's Centrelink. I'd need to go back. Frankly, I was checking that it was a Centrelink one.

Ms Leon: If you can provide us the letter, we'll be able to tell you the source and circumstances.

Senator SIEWERT: I'll get a copy during the break. If I got that in a letter—no introduction, no nothing.

Ms Leon: Also, we don't know if that person had been interacting with us about this matter or not.

Senator SIEWERT: Fair enough, but it seems a pretty dramatic way of starting it. What you're saying is it didn't come from the online compliance section but it may have come—

Ms Leon: It's not the same as the text of the letters that we send in relation to online compliance.

Senator SIEWERT: But it could have come in relation to another program?

Ms Leon: From some other part of the debt recovery work.

Senator SIEWERT: I'll provide it during the break. I know that my colleagues want to ask some questions.

Senator MARTIN: Ms Leon, following on from Senator Dean Smith's line of questioning, I'd be interested to find out the geographical details of those 2,030.

Ms Leon: I will see if the relevant officers can come back to the table.

Senator MARTIN: You can take it on notice, if you wish.

Ms Leon: We don't have that with us at the committee, but I'm happy to take it on notice. I take it you mean by state and territory?

Senator MARTIN: Yes, please.

Ms Leon: Yes, we can certainly do that on notice.

Senator MARTIN: If you can expand—I don't want to know that it's 50 in Victoria et cetera. Do you have postcodes?

Ms Leon: That will depend on how many there are in each postcode or area. Our usual practice across government is not to disclose where the numbers are less than 10 because of the risk of identifying who the people are.

Senator MARTIN: I understand that. I don't need names, just the numbers in specific areas, regions—

Ms Leon: We'll take it on notice and see what we can provide.

Commented [22]: Question on notice