



Australian Government  
Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Australian Taxation Office  
Department of Education  
Department of Health  
Department of Human Services  
Department of Social Services

## MULTI-AGENCY **DATA INTEGRATION** PROJECT



# 2019 MADIP CONSULTATION REPORT

NOVEMBER 2019

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the key findings and themes of targeted consultation sessions that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) held with a broad range of stakeholders to support the 2019 update of the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project ([MADIP](#)) Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA).

From July to November 2019, the ABS conducted an update to the [2018 MADIP PIA](#) on behalf of the MADIP Board members – the ABS, the Australian Taxation Office, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Social Services. External privacy advisors [Maddocks](#) were engaged to provide independent advice, review and assurance about the 2019 MADIP PIA Update process and report.

The MADIP PIA Update was conducted to formally examine developments in MADIP since the 2018 PIA was undertaken and new types of data planned for inclusion in MADIP.

Consultation was an essential part of conducting this PIA Update and an opportunity to inform stakeholders about MADIP and its development and to listen to stakeholder views on MADIP and its privacy management arrangements. The consultation sessions were conducted by ABS during August and September 2019.

The MADIP PIA Update, MADIP Board Response, and Independent Assurance Report from Maddocks were published on the [ABS website](#) at the same time as this report.

## 2. OUR APPROACH TO CONSULTING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The objectives of the consultation process were to:

- Inform stakeholders about MADIP, its development, and current privacy practice and protections;
- Seek stakeholder input to assist with the MADIP PIA Update process ; and
- Listen to issues and concerns stakeholders may have about MADIP.

The stakeholders consulted for the MADIP PIA Update included privacy and advocacy groups, government, academics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholder groups, and civil society groups (see [Appendix A](#) for the full list of stakeholders).

These groups were selected based on their:

- Involvement (potential or actual) in the project;
- Representation of key sectors of Australian society;
- Special interest or expertise (including privacy and advocacy); and/or
- Prior contribution to government consultation processes.

Several two and a half hour sessions were held with mixed groups of stakeholders in Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, and Sydney during August and September of 2019.

This included two targeted sessions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, in conjunction with the ABS' Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics. The key themes and issues emerging from these targeted sessions are outlined in [Section 4](#) of this document.

The consultation sessions aimed to identify and discuss stakeholder views on MADIP, particularly on the following topics:

- Linking new types of data to MADIP, including:
  - Additional ABS surveys
  - High level business characteristics (from employer information to employee records)
  - Detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data (e.g. Indigenous Employment Program data)
- Increased volume of data in MADIP
- Use of Cloud storage for analytics in the ABS DataLab
- Data integration in general
- MADIP data use and benefits
- Sensitive data
- Privacy and data security protections
- Stakeholder engagement into the future

Each of the sessions provided valuable feedback about MADIP and the MADIP PIA Update process.

### 3. KEY FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES

#### Communication and transparency

A recurrent theme raised throughout consultation sessions was that transparency and effective communication are essential for building public trust and privacy best practice for MADIP.

Information on the ABS website about MADIP was well received by stakeholders, and many acknowledged and valued the increase in information over the past two years. They particularly valued the [MADIP data and legislation](#) and [MADIP Research Projects](#) pages. However, stakeholders identified a need for more publicly available information about the approval process for the use of MADIP data, such as who is involved in decision-making, what governance arrangements are in place, and how projects are being reviewed. Further information about the data linkage process and how to access MADIP data was also requested.

Stakeholders particularly noted the importance of communicating the benefits of data integration to help the community understand MADIP and how it is used. Suggestions to achieve this included publishing more outputs and case studies, especially those demonstrating a tangible public benefit that has resulted from the use of integrated data.

The amount of public discussion and consultation outside of this PIA consultation process about MADIP was highlighted as an area for improvement. Ongoing public engagement was acknowledged as a key method of building trust. Suggestions for future engagement included a regular focus group to consult on the ongoing evolution of MADIP, such as community expectations about how data about them is used and research projects under consideration.

#### Privacy and data security

The consultation sessions involved an in-depth discussion about the range of privacy and data security protections that are in place for MADIP. Stakeholders were broadly comfortable with the protections discussed, however they suggested that more information about these protections should be made publicly available. Although it was acknowledged that there are robust standards and procedures in place to authorise researchers before providing them with access to data, mandatory security checks for researchers was suggested as an extra safeguard to reduce the risk of data misuse.

A number of stakeholders expressed interest in how risks of data breaches are minimised, and how data breaches would be handled should they occur, and suggested that more information about these processes should be made available.

#### Governance

The governance arrangements for MADIP were detailed in each consultation session. Several stakeholders suggested that more information about these arrangements should be made available publicly, including information about the MADIP Board, the legislation governing data sharing, integration and access, and procedures for considering and approving projects and handling data.

It was suggested that external expert involvement in decision-making for MADIP should be considered. For example, data scientists or experts could be involved in considerations around data protections and the decision-making process for the release of data, and there could be more involvement from expert user groups in research projects.

#### Ethics

A common discussion point across consultation sessions was how ethics considerations are incorporated into MADIP. Data custodians are responsible for considering ethical use of data before it is shared with the ABS. Some data custodians require formal ethics assessments for certain uses of their data in MADIP. The ABS considers elements of data ethics as part of the [Five Safes Framework](#) for managing the risk of disclosure as part of the safe people and safe project controls for data access.

Stakeholders suggested an ethical framework could be developed to be more transparent about data ethics considerations and to ensure that ethics is considered at all stages of the data integration process for MADIP.

## Access

The data available in MADIP for research projects and how this data can be accessed received a lot of interest in many of the consultation sessions. Stakeholders were interested in more detailed information being made available about what data can be accessed, who can access the data, and how to apply for access. The streamlining of MADIP data access through the ABS data access reforms was well received by a number of stakeholders. However, the current inability of non-government researchers to access custom MADIP data (limited release) without government sponsorship was identified as a barrier to potentially beneficial research<sup>1</sup>.

In the consultation sessions, the ABS outlined the steps taken to ensure that MADIP data is only used for statistical and research purposes, and is not used for compliance purposes. Stakeholders noted that there is still a risk of MADIP data being used for small group compliance purposes, and identified a need for more transparency about the definition and scope of 'compliance' and how the risk of unauthorised use of the data is minimised.

For many projects, access to linked data in MADIP is currently funded through the Data Integration Partnership for Australia ([DIPA](#)). Stakeholders noted that potential future charging arrangements should be carefully considered to ensure access to MADIP continues to be driven by public benefit. Some stakeholders felt user charging could increase pressure to release more information, and potentially introduce unacceptable risks to privacy of MADIP data.

## Risk

Risk management was discussed at a number of consultation sessions. Stakeholders indicated that it is important for the ABS to demonstrate it understands the privacy and other risks involved in MADIP, including how these risks are assessed and managed.

This could be achieved by developing documentation about MADIP risk assessment processes, and making this information available to the public.

One stakeholder suggested that Australia needs strong privacy laws and a strong privacy regulator as minimum safeguards to protect individual privacy in MADIP.

## Consent

An overarching theme raised by stakeholders was the issue of consent from individuals for using their information in data integration projects such as MADIP.

It was recognised by most groups that it would not be practical to seek explicit consent from individuals for the use of their data in MADIP and some groups identified that consent can be a barrier to important research. Despite this, most groups also recognised the importance of the principle of consent and it was broadly agreed given the lack of specific consent, transparency about MADIP and uses of data is very important.

Stakeholders indicated that, as required by the [Australian Privacy Principles](#), the public should be informed at the point of collection about how their data will be used, and informed about the benefits of its usage. The use of clear and standard wording for privacy collection notices is an example of a way to increase transparency and understanding. The ABS noted that the information provided for its household surveys in respondent materials, the survey form and on the ABS website, is being updated to be more transparent about the potential use of survey data for data integration purposes. Some MADIP data custodians are also considering reasonable steps to maximise transparency around their data use and disclosure.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Since 2018, the general release MADIP Basic Longitudinal Extract(s) have been available for access applications by government and non-government researchers (without government sponsorship). The ABS is developing a strategy to expand access to custom MADIP data via the ABS DataLab for authorised academics and public policy research officers (without government association) for approved projects.

## 4. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

To consider the potential linkage of detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data to MADIP, the ABS conducted two targeted consultation sessions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, in conjunction with the ABS' Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics. The ABS engaged with an existing group that advises the 2021 Census (the Census 2021 Remote Expert Review Panel<sup>2</sup> and the ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics<sup>3</sup> (which has Australia-wide representation).

These sessions were based on the same format as the general consultation sessions, with a specific focus on topics of interest and concern to these groups. In particular, advice and direction was sought from these groups on a proposed DIPA research project called *Outcomes for jobseekers who have left employment services programs in Remote Australia since July 2013* ('Outcomes for job seekers'). The project proposes to include more detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data in MADIP in order to understand how people are faring after they cease participating in employment services programs in remote Australia.

The key issues and themes from these meetings are outlined below.

### Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in data integration projects

There was general support and interest in the DIPA 'Outcomes for job seekers' project, and stakeholders noted they could see the potential value of this type of research. However, support for this type of data use was conditional on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups being involved in key stages of the project. This would ensure that the research is directed to the issues that matter to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, is informed and guided by them, and is conducted in a culturally sensitive and safe manner.

### Cultural safety

The cultural safety of research projects involving detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data was highlighted by stakeholders as an important issue. Cultural safety involves avoiding actions which diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identity and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>4</sup>

The groups consulted noted that cultural safety must be assessed as a part of the research project process to ensure the cultural safety of the research design and outputs produced.

### Data sovereignty and ethics

Data sovereignty, governance and ethics of use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data were identified as key issues at both consultation sessions.

As described in the Communique of the *Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit* held in June 2018, Indigenous Data Sovereignty refers to the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise ownership over information or knowledge which is about and may affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous Data Governance refers to the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to autonomously decide what, how and why such data are collected, accessed and used.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Membership of this stakeholder group includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have extensive experience working within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Members were selected from remote areas across Australia including the Torres Strait region and bring a range of expertise working in (or across) the research, service provision and community advocacy and government sectors.

<sup>3</sup> An advisory group established by the ABS to facilitate co-design of strategies and improve data quality and engagement approaches with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.natsihwa.org.au/sites/default/files/natsihwa-cultural\\_safety-framework\\_summary.pdf](https://www.natsihwa.org.au/sites/default/files/natsihwa-cultural_safety-framework_summary.pdf)

Drawn from the work of Maori nurses in New Zealand and extended to other contexts and cultures.

Stakeholders discussed the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being closely involved in data integration projects that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data, and in decisions about how their data is used.

The groups also discussed the importance of data ethics and a formal consideration of ethics issues before projects are approved. They considered that research projects involving detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data must be assessed and approved by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ethics committee, with a preference noted for assessment by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Human Research Ethics Committee. The value of peer review as supplement to ethics approvals was also emphasised.

## **Consent**

The groups raised the issue of consent for the use of detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data in MADIP. At the Round table discussion, some stakeholders felt that individual consent was needed to link data, while others noted that seeking consent would not be practical or possible, and a requirement for consent would mean that the 'Outcomes for job seekers' project would be unable to proceed. They noted a particular sensitivity in secondary use of income support data.

## **Access**

Community access to data from research projects involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data was stressed as an important issue for stakeholders. In particular, stakeholders noted that reports produced through these research projects must be published and accessible by communities. It was emphasised that the value of data can be improved through increased access, and noted that increased community access to data and research can give communities a more equal place at the table for decisions affecting them.

Stakeholders stated that researchers not directly involved in research projects involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data should be able to access data to allow for the contestability of research findings. The stakeholders consulted also felt strongly that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community researchers should be able to become authorised researchers, and not need to partner with university researchers and government to gain access to MADIP

## **Data protections**

Stakeholders generally felt that there were adequate privacy and data protections in place for MADIP, and acknowledged that there are a number of layers of protection that work together to keep data safe and secure.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The consultation sessions held as part of the MADIP PIA Update process involved highly engaging and insightful discussions with key MADIP stakeholders. They have provided useful feedback on the project which has been used to inform the 2019 MADIP PIA Update.

## 6. APPENDIX A – STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

ATTENDEES
ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics
Australian Child Rights Taskforce
Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS)
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Australian National University
Australian Privacy Foundation
Australian Taxation Office
Census 2021 Remote Expert Review Panel
Commonwealth Treasury
Consumers Health Forum
Department of Education
Department of Health
Department of Human Services
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
Department of Social Services
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
Families Australia
Information Governance ANZ
Life Course Centre (ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course)
Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research
Mental Health Australia
National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
NSW Information and Privacy Commission
NSW Data Analytics Centre
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)
Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC)
Open Government Forum
Universities Australia
UNSW Centre for Big Data Research
UNABLE TO ATTEND
People with Disabilities Australia (PWDA)
Victorian Centre for Data Insights
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)
Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR)