

2016 Census – Privacy Protection

On 9 August 2016, the ABS will conduct Australia's seventeenth Census.

How the ABS will protect the privacy of individuals in the Census.

The ABS has legal obligations to keep Census data secure and ensure that it does not disclose identifiable information about a person, household or business. The ABS never has and never will release identifiable Census data. To ensure the confidentiality of information provided on Census forms, a comprehensive set of practices is used.

Collection of Census forms

The ABS uses the strongest encryption technology that current internet browsers will support to ensure information from the online form is delivered securely. For those who use a paper form, prepaid envelopes are provided for return of the form. Any individual member of a household (including a visitor) can request their own unique login number for the online form, or a separate paper form and envelope.

Legal obligation of ABS staff to protect privacy

Information provided on Census forms is protected by the secrecy provisions of the [Census and Statistics Act 1905](#) (Census and Statistics Act). These provisions legally bind all ABS staff to protect this information. Staff working on all stages of the Census, including collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of data are bound by this obligation.

Under the Census and Statistics Act, the ABS must not disclose personal information in a way that will identify an individual, household or business. It is an offence for any past or present ABS officer to divulge, either directly or indirectly, any information collected under the Census and Statistics Act. The Act provides for heavy penalties (fines of up to \$21,600 or imprisonment for up to 2 years or both) for anybody convicted of breaching this obligation.

Retaining names and addresses collected in the Census

Following the conduct of a Privacy Impact Assessment and a consultation process, the ABS made the decision to retain names and addresses from the 2016 Census. Recent public consultation and engagement has revealed that Australians expect the ABS to keep their information secure and to use their data for the benefit of them, their community and Australia.

There is also an expectation that the ABS should retain and use the information collected for as long as there is a benefit for the community to do so. Consistent with the Australian Privacy Principles, the information should and will be destroyed once this need no longer exists. For the 2016 Census, the ABS will destroy names and addresses when there is no longer any community benefit to their retention or four years after collection (i.e. August 2020), whichever is earliest.

The benefits of retaining names and addresses in the Census are significant. Names and addresses will be used by the ABS to generate anonymous keys that can be used to combine existing data sets to create richer and more valuable statistics for Australia. The new datasets will contain no names and addresses.

Security of names and addresses

After data collection and processing, the ABS will remove names and addresses from other personal and household information. Names and addresses will be stored securely and separately from one another.

No one working with Census data will be able to view personal information (name or address) at the same time as other Census responses (such as age, sex, occupation, level of education or income).

Stored separately and securely, individuals names will also be substituted with a linkage key, a computer generated random set of numbers and letters, completely anonymising the personal information. Only these anonymous linkage keys will be used by the ABS to bring data sets together.

As an accredited data integrating authority, the ABS complies with a set of [key principles](#) for any project that combines Census data with other data, including assessing every project to ensure that the project provides a significant public benefit and safeguards privacy. The ABS is transparent about every data integration project and publishes the details [online](#).

The ABS complies with the mandatory requirements established by the *Australian Commonwealth Protective Security Policy Framework*, which include implementing governance, physical, and information security measures to protect data held by the ABS.

The ABS will conduct regular audits of the safeguards, the use and the need for the retention of names and addresses collected in the Census.

More information is available on the [ABS website](#) and in the Census Privacy Policy, which will be published on the website before the 2016 Census.