

David Gruen
Australian Statistician
ABS House
45 Benjamin Way
Belconnen ACT 2617

31 July 2020

Re: Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study Consultation paper and Priority content for the National Health Survey 2022

Dear Mr Gruen,

I am writing to you in support of the joint submission made by Dr Susan M Lord to the Priority content for the National Health Survey 2022.

As you and the ABS consider opportunities for some changes in the questions to be asked in the 2022 National Health Survey, Painaustralia would like to take the opportunity again to highlight the crucial need to collect data documenting the pain experience of all Australians.

Since our submission in 2018, more reports and statistics continue to highlight the epidemic of pain facing all Australians. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report released in April 2020, 'Chronic pain in Australia'¹ paints a bleak picture of people living with chronic pain who continue to fall between the cracks of our health and disability systems.

Once again, the AIHW data demonstrates the massive prevalence of chronic pain in our communities, finding that one in five Australians aged 45 and over are living with persistent, ongoing pain.

Importantly, the report also highlights the significant burden of disease, finding that compared with people without chronic pain, those with chronic pain were 2.6 times as likely to have arthritis, 2.5 times as likely to have mental health problems, 2.5 times as likely to have osteoporosis and 2.4 times as likely to have other long-term health conditions or a long-term injury.

The report found that over the past decade GPs are seeing more people for chronic pain—with patient encounters rising by a staggering 67% over 10 years. People with chronic pain continue to be primarily sent down the pharmacological intervention path, with more than half (57%) dispensed analgesics, compared with 1 in 5 (21%) people without chronic pain. People with chronic pain are almost 3 times as likely to be dispensed opioids and other analgesics and migraine medication as those without pain.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. Chronic pain in Australia. Access online [here](#).

The heavy toll chronic pain takes on our health systems was also revealed, with nearly 105,000 hospitalisations involving chronic pain in 2017-18 alone. Hospitalisations involving chronic pain involved more procedures: 22% had 5 or more procedures, compared with 8.9% for other hospitalisations. Unfortunately, the rate of hospitalisations is higher for people in lower socioeconomic areas, underlining the importance of the social determinants of health in this cohort.

These findings shine a light on Australians fighting what is often an invisible illness – pain. Pain is the major reason people go to the doctor, and it is the leading causes of disability, absenteeism and forced early retirement in Australia.

There is now a clear and pressing need for more granular, population-based data and time-trend data to inform policy and healthcare planning. Such data is crucial to inform the public health agenda, especially as the Australian Health Ministers consider recommendations around better care and treatment contained in the draft [National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management](#) which was released by the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP last year.

Data on pain collected through the NHS will be vital in determining whether all Australians have equitable access to tertiary services, irrespective of cultural, socio-economic and remoteness status, and develop policies to address inequities. This data would enable a national research agenda to improve the lives of millions of the over [3.37 million Australian children, adolescents and adults living with pain](#).

We look forward to the announcement on the final topics for the 2022 NHS Survey. Please do not hesitate to contact us if there is anything we can do to assist in this process.

Yours sincerely

Carol Bennett
Chief Executive Officer