
Country of birth

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Identifying and Definitional Attributes

Data Dictionary: NHDD
Knowledgebase ID: 000035 Version number: 1
Metadata type: DATA ELEMENT
Registration Authority: NHIMG Admin status: SUPERSEDED
Effective date: 30-JUN-94

Definition: The country in which the patient was born.

Context: Ethnicity is an important concept, both in the study of disease patterns and in the provision of services. Country of birth is the most easily collected and consistently reported of possible ethnicity data items.

Uses of this data item included:

- investigating the differences in health status between different population groups in Australia and providing a basis for planning, resourcing and service delivery to reduce inequalities cost-effectively;
- enabling health care authorities and organisations to monitor the health status of migrants;
- assisting health care workers to provide socioculturally acceptable and non-discriminatory services to all migrant and ethnic groups.

Relational and Representational Attributes

Datatype: Numeric
Representational form: CODE
Representation layout: NN
Minimum Size: 2
Maximum Size: 2
Data Domain: NOVAL ABS 2-digit classification (0-99)
Related metadata: has been superseded by Country of birth version 2

Administrative Attributes

Source Document:

Source Organisation: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Comments: The development of appropriate data items for classification of patients by ethnicity is made difficult by the confusion of terms used by Aboriginal groups, other ethnic groups, health professionals, States and Commonwealth and the general community.

The National Population Council Guide to appropriate use of terminology (1987) comments that the term ethnic is used in Australia for:

- immigrants of a non-English speaking background
- recent, not long established immigrants
- not Aborigines.

However, some countries refer to ethnic minorities with a long history of settlement in the country sometimes preceding the current dominant cultural group, for example, China.

The National guidelines for the collection of ethnicity data (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1988) made the following points:

- that data items be carefully selected to reflect the purposes of the collection; and
- that the following questions should be considered core questions for ethnicity.

Priority 1: country of birth

Priority 2: proficiency in English

very good

good

not good

none

language at home.

The 1986 census included questions on country of birth, language at home, proficiency in English (as above) and ethnic origin/ancestry. 'What is each person's ancestry? For example, Greek, English, Indian, Armenian, Aboriginal, Chinese, etc.?'

The ABS have proposed that the ancestry question be excluded from the 1991 census and considers that the remaining ethnicity questions are not very satisfactory (ABS 1984).

The Taskforce on National Hospital Statistics (1988) recommended

that the two ethnicity data items 'Country of birth' and 'Period of residence in Australia' in the National Committee on Health and Vital Statistics national minimum data set should be replaced by 'Interpreter required'.

The Morbidity Working Party reviewed the possible ethnicity data items at its December 1988 meeting and identified the following possible measures of ethnicity, which are discussed below:

- country of birth
- period of residence in Australia
- Aboriginality
- ethnic group
- preferred language
- language spoken at home
- proficiency in English
- need for interpreter services.

Country of birth

This is collected by all States and Territories. It is the most easily collected and consistently reported of possible ethnicity data items and is identified as the highest priority item by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The working party decided that this item should be reincluded in the National Minimum Data Set.

Period of residence

There is considerable evidence about changes in morbidity patterns related to length of stay in host country. Some health problem profiles change over time to mirror that of the host culture: for example, cardiovascular disease among Greek immigrants in Australia.

The overall health status of some groups on arrival is poorer than that of Australians.

However, this item was not considered a high priority by the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the working party considered that only country of birth and Aboriginality could be justified for inclusion in the National Minimum Data Set.

Aboriginality

This is included as item P7 'Aboriginality' in the National Minimum Data Set.

Ethnic Group

Some health problems are generally linked to race or ethnic origin;

for example, Mediterranean anaemia in Italians and Greeks, lactose intolerance in Australian Aborigines, and alcohol metabolism (lack of metabolising enzyme) in Japanese.

Some health problems are magnified due to discrimination.

Some problems are created or magnified because of racial or ethnic behaviours; for example, attitude to sex, food taboos, cooking patterns.

The Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health proposed that after 'Country of birth', the second ethnicity data item should be:

- Aboriginal
- Caucasoid
- Chinese
- Arabic
- Negroid
- Vietnamese
- Other

South Australia and Queensland use the following ethnicity categories in their hospital morbidity collections:

South Australia - Caucasian

- Aboriginal
- Asian
- Other

Queensland - Caucasian/European

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Asian
- Other

The Morbidity Working Party concluded that, while other ethnic groups have significant health problems, Aborigines have been clearly identified as having by far the lowest health status of any ethnic or racial group and that resources should be devoted to improving the reliability and uniform collection of Aboriginality rather than towards nationally collecting an expanded set of ethnic categories. The inclusion of 'Country of birth' will in any case go a long way towards identifying the health problems and service use of other ethnic groups. The Nursing Homes Working Party concurred with this view.

Language-related items

See data element 'Preferred language'.

[Data Element Links](#)

