



Outline of Remarks: White House Equitable Data Working Group

BOB:

Opening Remarks

- On behalf of the organizations that we lead, the Population Association of America and Association of Populations Centers, we thank you for the opportunity to present today to the White House Equitable Data Working Group.
- The PAA and APC are two affiliated organizations that together represent over 3,000 behavioral and social scientists, including demographers, economists, and sociologists, who conduct scientific and applied research on the causes and consequences of population change.
- Population scientists have made groundbreaking and meaningful contributions on a wide array of topics relevant to society, including population health and mortality, child and adolescent development, aging, migration, fertility, economic well-being, education, retirement, and post-disaster resiliency.
- Population scientists rely heavily on the availability of high-quality data collected and produced by all 13 principal federal statistical agencies to conduct their research and research training activities.

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- Importantly, members of the PAA and APC are deeply invested in the integrity of the federal statistical system. Many of our members have been formal or informal advisors to these agencies, and a small percentage of our members are employed by federal, state, or local government agencies responsible for collecting, disseminating, analyzing, and/or archiving public data.
- Given our field's dependence on federal data, we applaud the Biden Administration for establishing the Equitable Data Working Group. Further, our organizations endorse the working group's primary goals--to identify inadequacies in our existing Federal data collection infrastructure and develop a strategy for improving equitable data practices in the Federal government.
- Meaningful changes in the existing federal data infrastructure would enhance the productivity of our field and advance understanding regarding how factors such as race & ethnicity, sexual orientation & gender identity, educational attainment, employment and occupational status, and neighborhood, city, county, and state-level contextual factors influence the health and well-being

of Americans across the lifespan. That improved understanding will contribute to nation's well-being through better and more appropriate programs and policies.

- Below, we offer six key recommendations that we hope the working group will consider. They reflect input from population scientists nationwide and not just our organizations' leadership.

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Recommendations

1. Improve the US vital statistics system

- Our vital statistics system needs major improvement. At present, due to data limitations, the National Center for Health Statistics cannot and does not even produce basic life tables for population subgroups that include Asian Americans and American Indians / Alaskan Natives, or the immigrant population.
- Moreover, our vital-statistics-based estimates of mortality rates by socioeconomic status (e.g., education, occupation) are also weak because of poor data quality.
- The larger point is that NCHS does their very best on a modest budget but necessarily relies on inadequate data from state and local systems that are themselves not adequately funded. Moreover, there is a lack of high resolution available vital statistics data (small area detail and not frequent enough) available to researchers. This means that we cannot adequately capture critical aspects of mortality and health disparities at the level of detail where programs and policies meet people. Consequently, we can't answer crucial questions about where is the need and whether policies/programs are having the desired impacts. On the whole then, the NCHS is in need of serious investment to both improve their own data systems and products and to more effectively work with state and local areas on improving the birth and death certificate information that form the foundation of this system.

2. Improve the Census-based count of young children

- Young children (ages 0 to 4) are undercounted at a higher rate than any other age group in the U.S. Census, under-reported at higher rates than other ages groups in Census Bureau surveys, and undercounted in Censuses of many other countries. This deprives child advocates and government agencies of high-quality data on this population. Resources from the federal statistical system should be devoted to understanding why young children are routinely missed and how to correct that problem. We have a nationally recognized expert on this issue, Dr. Bill O'Hare, with us today who is happy to address any questions during the question and answer portion of our program today.

3. Improve the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

- The best dataset for studying inequality among racial/ethnic groups on a yearly basis is the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). This is because of the large sample size of the SIPP. However, the SIPP is a short panel that ends after four years (that is individuals are included in the yearly panel for only four years). This limits the ability to study how inequality between and within groups unfolds over the life course of individuals and families.
- One solution is to convert part of the SIPP sample into a longer-running panel. Instead of rotating off and starting a new panel after 4 years, some portion of the SIPP sample could remain in a longer running survey of up to one generation in length (?). This would make use of the current SIPP infrastructure. A panel of 10 to 20 thousand individuals that oversamples smaller racial/ethnic groups, for example, would go a long way to improving data availability for understudied groups.

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4. Improve the Collection and Dissemination of Immigration/Migration/Refugee/Asylee Data

- Administrative data that track and include, among other things, when children are detained, by whom, for how long, where detained, and where placed is needed. To our knowledge, very few researchers have obtained micro data on unaccompanied children while in HHS/Office of Refugee Resettlement detention. Such federal administrative data are not publicly available or available through a formalized access for the analysis of restricted data. Understanding the trajectories of all migrants (adults, families, and unaccompanied children) from the time they first enter the US at the border during the time they are held by federal agencies (whether Customs and Border Protection and/or Health and Human Services) could provide important insights about the integration and well-being of different migrant groups in the United States.
- Without adequate microlevel administrative data about unaccompanied children, we may also never really understand the problems that many immigrant children face in U.S. schools or the strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. system's capacity to offer care and protection to those without parents or guardians seeking it at the MX-US border.

5. Prioritize improvements in and Access to the Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (FSRDCs)

The development of FSRDCs over the past couple of decades has made researcher access to important federal data sets possible. Building on such success, we offer three ways that the FSRDC's could be even more successful in the future in providing data for researchers to investigate equity issues, particularly if the FSRDC system was better funded.

- **Develop virtual access.** The Census Bureau and its FSRDC partners should be funded to make virtual access to FSRDCs safe and straightforward so that access is not limited to exclusive major universities and agencies.
- **Make more data accessible.** The Census Bureau and its FSRDC partners should be funded to make more and more data sets accessible through the FSRDCs.

- **Enhance data access at Minority Serving Institutions.** The network of RDC directors around the country have been discussing ways to increase the accessibility of restricted federal data for faculty working at minority-serving institutions (MSIs). While the RDC network thus may be able to help researchers at MSIs gain access through institutional arrangements, there are still barriers to equitable access because of lack of research time and funding at many of these institutions. Increased federal funding to support faculty at MSIs who wanted to engage in these labor- and time-intensive RDC research projects could help increase equity.

6. Encourage more geocoding and geo-matching of data

- Following from the Working Group’s statement about initial “efforts on a set of well-defined questions that have historically been difficult to answer,” give attention to expediting the availability of data in user-friendly format. The IPUMS platform, e.g. for the US Current Population Survey, offers such a model. For instance, data already available through this platform could offer improved insights into one of the issues mentioned by the EDWG: “race, ethnicity, and gender of those using or not using unemployment benefits.” This user-friendly approach could be replicated more widely.
- Responding to increasing social science concerns about investigating the effects of context on health outcomes, especially immediate geographic surroundings, the EDWG could press forward to: (a) argue for more geocoding and geo-matching of data of interest in these pressing research areas. This could include program service delivery locations and environmental data, speaking to issues raised by the EDWG. Equally important the EDWG could, (b) argue for the investment of resources in data collection, storage, and access mechanisms that will preserve privacy while enabling fine-grained multi-source analysis.

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Closing Remarks

- We are pleased that the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies are involved in the working group. As the working group’s efforts proceed, we urge the Administration to involve all federal statistical agencies. Further, in subsequent budget requests, we urge the Administration to prioritize funding for the federal statistical agencies so that they can not only meet their existing mandates, but also fulfil the objectives of whatever recommendations that the working group issues.
- In addition, we encourage the Administration to involve the public, including data users, scientists, advocates, and others, in the working group’s future efforts. We often conclude our meetings with policymakers, reminding them of our expertise and willingness to serve as resources. We hope you will continue to not only seek input from the population research community but also give our organizations a chance to help communicate the working group’s report and recommendations.
- With our request for improved and greater accessibility to detailed data, we also urge the administration to work closely with researchers to carefully protect the privacy and rights of individuals and communities. Population researchers have had an outstanding record of responsible handling and management of data and we would ask that all future efforts to enhance

our data infrastructure also include deliberative engagement with our community around these concerns.

- Once again, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today and for the hard work you and your colleagues are conducting to improve Federal equitable data practices.