

National Population and Planning Framework

The objectives of the National Population and Planning Framework are to improve Commonwealth, States and Territories and local governments' understanding of populations, population change and its implications, and set-out a plan for government collaboration on the challenges and opportunities these changes present. The elements of the Framework have been developed for these objectives:

- Element 1 Establishing a common understanding of populations and population change.
- Element 2 Ensuring greater collaboration across jurisdictions.
- Element 3 Increasing transparency.
- Element 4 Facilitating shared action.

The Elements combined will promote greater integration between governments in managing and planning for population changes, such as growth and declines in national, state, regional and remote population levels, and demographic change. The initial focus is on joining-up separate governments' processes and better sharing of information, especially data, across governments. In the longer term, it involves greater coherence of population management and planning across governments and in increased publicly available information of population change and its effect on skills, infrastructure, service usage and other issues.

The National Population and Planning Framework seeks to enhance the ability of jurisdictions to manage their individual population circumstances by offering all levels of government greater visibility of each other's population planning processes. It also seeks to encourage greater cooperation and transparency, with a focus on areas of mutual interest. The Framework includes action items which will be updated annually by the Treasurers' Forum on Population.

Background

On 12 December 2018, COAG established the Treasurers' Forum on Population, which comprises Commonwealth, State and Territory Treasurers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), and requested it develop a National Population and Planning Framework to address population management in Australia.

Note: The word 'Jurisdictions' means the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments, and the Australian Local Government Association in the context of the Framework.

Vision – COAG vision for the National Population and Planning Framework

On 9 August 2019, COAG articulated a vision for the National Population and Planning Framework. COAG's vision is to:

- Improve Australians' quality of life.
- Support economic growth.
- Ensure sustainable urban and regional growth.
- Encourage community cohesion.

Context

Population growth affects the lived experience of Australians. Different parts of Australia are being affected by population growth in different ways. Sydney, Melbourne, South-East Queensland and Canberra have experienced strong population growth. At the same time, some other Australian regions, particularly outer regional and remote areas, have experienced low growth or declining populations. In addition, the nature of Australia's population is changing, including age, skills mix and family formation.

Population growth has increased Australia's economic growth. A larger working age population can increase the number of workers producing goods and services and consumers buying goods and services. Over the past 40 years, population factors (i.e. the share of the population that is working age) have contributed almost a sixth of the growth in Australia's GDP per person. Population growth also creates vibrant cities and regions, stimulates employment and sparks innovation and productivity.

Migration, in particular, has provided a boost to the economy, bringing skilled, working age people to Australia. This has increased labour force participation, and has likely improved productivity. Migrants also make an important social contribution to the Australian community, bringing new ideas and cultural perspectives, and helping to make Australia one of the most successful multicultural nations in the world.

High population growth comes with challenges, such as congestion and increasing pressures on government services. Low population growth comes with challenges of skills shortages, changing demands for infrastructure and services, and maintaining well-functioning communities. Demographic change brings with it different levels of service utilisation and engagement in the labour market.

Different jurisdictions have different objectives for population growth. Some want to ease the population pressures in their capital city and support regional and remote areas. Others want higher population growth in all areas of their state or territory and to address the ageing of their population, skills shortages and other issues.

Commonwealth, State and Territory and local governments share responsibility for many government policies that help shape population change, and some policies are the exclusive responsibility of one level of government. However, most policies have the potential to impact other levels of government.

All governments already undertake substantial planning to provide infrastructure and other government services for their current populations and address population change. This planning is most effective when Commonwealth, States and Territories, and local governments work together.

The National Population and Planning Framework will help jurisdictions better understand populations and population change and their implications for governments. Jurisdictions could then agree to work jointly, multilaterally or bilaterally, on the challenges and opportunities.

Forums already exist for collaboration between jurisdictions for most areas of government policy, for example the Council of Australian Governments' (COAGs') Councils on Federal Financial Relations, Transport and Infrastructure, Skills, Education, and Health. The Treasurers' Forum on Population will determine priorities for future work that are identified as a result of the National Population and Planning Framework, with the Forum to consider the appropriate action.

Element 1: Establishing a common understanding of populations and population change

Population change impacts most aspects of public policy. Understanding population trends and planning to accommodate these trends is therefore vital if Australia is to deliver on COAG's shared vision.

1.1 Jurisdictions share knowledge of populations, and population change and trends

All jurisdictions are actively engaged in planning to provide government services for their jurisdictions' populations, both current and future. The Framework provides for a more 'joined up' approach where jurisdictions share their knowledge of population trends and collaborate on managing the effects of population change.

1.2 Harnessing the population evidence base

If Australia is to successfully plan for changes in the level, composition and location of its population, there needs to be a shared understanding of population trends, what these trends mean, possible policy responses, and the likely impact of these policy responses.

There is already significant data (e.g. ABS population statistics), research (e.g. governments, academic and others) and engagement between governments. However, it is often fragmented across related topics (e.g. migration and skills, infrastructure, housing and data, statistics and forecasts (refer to Attachment A)) or there are different views on how to interpret statistics in a population light.

The Commonwealth has established a national Centre for Population, which will bring together research and expertise on population issues, for broader use by State, Territory and local governments and the public. The Centre will focus on data, insights from the data, and research on populations and population change and trends. It will work with states and territories, including to resolve issues related to the provision of Commonwealth data, offering technical assistance on request and sharing best practice. The Centre will enable a shared understanding of population trends, support and inform debate and policy development, and provide an avenue for new data collection to be considered.

Action item: The Centre for Population to work with States and Territories on understanding populations, and population change and its implications, and proactively contribute to sharing data, research, ideas and expertise on population.

1.3 Aligning processes and timing of population estimates and projections

Population planning must be informed by high quality, timely data. It is unclear if processes for population estimates and projections are aligned and coordinated across jurisdictions so that the most up-to-date information feeds into governments' decisions on population and population planning.

Action item: Jurisdictions to work together to better coordinate timing of population estimates and projections and consider ways to provide a more up-to-date and complete picture of population issues across Australia.

1.4 Taking a longer term view

Adequately planning for population change requires a long term view. Demographic changes such as the ageing of the population, for instance, will play out over more than 50 years. On a more practical level, infrastructure planning lead times can stretch to 15 years or more.

Action item: Jurisdictions to work together to identify and respond to expected longer term population change, including sharing practices, such as processes and methodologies.

1.5 Developing a population plan

While planning for the effects of population change is important, to be most useful, it must be informed by an evidence base and form part of a coherent plan. The Centre for Population will release a population plan every three years, with States and Territories consulted in its development. The Plan will:

- Map population forecasts and projections alongside actual population change at national, and state and territory levels, and economic and social outcomes, including demographic change, alongside the COAG's agreed vision for the Framework. This will provide a high level, publicly accessible explanation at the national level of population issues and how Australia is tracking against projections for population change.
- Factor in state, territory and local government plans for infrastructure and other government services. The Plan will take into account all jurisdictions' policies (and the fact that the Commonwealth is not responsible for all policy levers) in crafting a national plan. Jurisdictions should work together to establish a process for COAG to publish the State and Territory plans and plans being factored into the Population Plan.
- Consider the costs and benefits of population change. This will ensure that the focus is not just on population outcomes but also on the implications of population changes, including community cohesion.

Action item: The Centre for Population to publish a population plan every three years, with the Centre to collaborate with States and Territories and ALGA in its development. The Population Plan would:

- **map objectives, forecasts, projections, actuals and outcomes, including an explanation of any differences,**
- **factor in state, territory and local government plans, and**
- **analyse the costs and benefits of population change.**

Element 2: Ensuring greater collaboration across jurisdictions

2.1 Bringing together discussions, prompting awareness, and raising critical and emerging issues

There is already significant Commonwealth, State and Territory, and local government engagement across a wide range of relevant issues (see Attachment A to the Framework for a small sample of existing Commonwealth-led engagement across migration, infrastructure, skills, housing and data). However, there is a need for these consultations to be more visible and coordinated. The Centre for Population will join-up this engagement and ensure that the consultations and discussions on population are coordinated across all levels of government. It will also participate in some forums, seek to draw out critical and emerging issues where action is necessary and highlight different approaches on issues relevant to population.

Action item: The Centre for Population to coordinate discussions and engagement on population issues across jurisdictions.

2.2 Establishing dedicated population working groups

The Treasurers' Forum on Population has established two official-level working groups – Data & Forecasting and Regional Analysis – to provide dedicated forums for discussing these issues through a population lens. Further working groups will be established on other issues by the Treasurers' Forum as necessary.

Action item: Further population working groups to be established by the Treasurers' Forum as necessary, consistent with it establishing the Data & Forecasting and Regional Analysis Working Groups.

2.3 Elevating and connecting engagement at the Ministerial level

COAG's establishment of the Treasurers' Forum on Population, which is chaired by the Commonwealth Treasurer, will ensure that population issues are elevated to a minister within each jurisdiction with visibility across their jurisdiction's entire economy. This will cut through the disparate nature of existing engagement and ensure population discussions are connected at a higher level. It will also ensure that discussions on population are elevated to those with the power to agree further action.

Following COAG's agreement to the Framework, the Treasurers' Forum will be responsible for progressing the Framework's action items, commissioning further work (including further action items) and reporting to COAG.

Action item: The Treasurers' Forum on Population to be held annually. The Forum will consider progress of the Framework's action items, discuss issues of mutual interest and concern, and determine the priorities to be delivered over the next year.

2.4 Engaging first Ministers

In recognition of the far-reaching impact of population across most aspects of public policy, population will be a standing item on the COAG agenda, consistent with COAG's December 2018 agreement. The Treasurers' Forum will report to COAG on the Framework and related work.

Action item: The Treasurers' Forum to report to COAG on the National Population and Planning Framework and related work for the COAG standing item on population.

Element 3: Increasing transparency

3.1 Increasing updates, improving tracking and sharing best practice

Population planning is most useful when projections and forecasts are updated regularly and are regularly tracked against actual population outcomes. Jurisdictions will publish key population forecasts and outcomes more regularly, including at the regional level, ideally linked into the three-yearly Population Plan. Jurisdictions will share best practice of population modelling, including on net interstate and intrastate migration, which is a key driver of population change across different parts of Australia.

Action item: The Commonwealth, and States and Territories to more frequently publish key population forecasts and outcomes, with greater levels of specificity for key population variables, such as regional age profiles, and skills and occupational labour force requirements, where practical.

Action item: Jurisdictions to consider if there is additional information on net overseas migration that can be shared.

Action item: The Centre for Population to work with States and Territories to better understand the contribution of temporary migrants to net overseas migration, including internal movements of temporary migrants between jurisdictions, movements of temporary migrants between visa classes; and total length of stay.

Action item: The Centre for Population to work with jurisdictions to better understand and forecast net interstate and intrastate (interregional) migration, including their drivers, and work with jurisdictions on methodologies to project net interstate migration and net intrastate (interregional) migration.

Action item: The Centre for Population to work with jurisdictions on sharing methodologies for projecting national, State and Territory and regional populations, and jurisdictions to consider alignment.

Action item: The Centre for Population to work with jurisdictions to share with each other best practice for modelling and data analysis.

Action item: The Centre for Population to work with other jurisdictions on sharing Designated Area Migration Agreements data, in order to improve understanding of the benefits of the program.

3.2 Releasing an annual Population Statement

The Centre for Population will release an annual population statement. This will detail population trends across Australia and the States and Territories and high-level regional and remote trends, such as number and composition of permanent and temporary migration, including the visa category; geographic distribution; and demographic trends. This will provide a statistical snapshot of population trends in Australia for the previous financial year.

Action item: The Commonwealth to release an annual population statement, following consultation with States and Territories and ALGA. The population statement will contain information on actual and expected population trends, and will aim to provide data and/or a narrative that addresses some of the following questions:

- **how Australia's overall population has changed and the drivers of that change;**
- **how the distribution of Australia's population changed (for example, by age, location or migrant status), and what are the drivers of those changes;**
- **how Australia's population outcomes compare to forecasts or projections from earlier years; and**
- **details of assumptions and methods used to develop the population estimates used in the Budget, and whether they have been updated.**

The Commonwealth will also consult states and territories and ALGA on the prioritisation of incremental improvements to the techniques used to develop the statement, including through the Working Group on Data and Forecasting.

3.3 Providing greater visibility

The Commonwealth will seek State and Territory input on the permanent migration program levels over the forward estimates, rather than only for the budget year. This will provide greater visibility for setting

the migration program, including the allocation of visas to different streams, areas of Australia and individual states and territories.

Action item: The Commonwealth to institute multi-year planning for permanent migration.

Element 4 – Facilitating shared action

4.1 Facilitating shared action

The first three Elements of the Framework relate to improving governments' understanding of populations and population change and its implications. The Fourth element sets-out how jurisdictions could take shared action, at their discretion, in areas of mutual interest. This might occur on a multilateral basis or on a bilateral basis, and could be initiated under the Framework by any jurisdiction. It could take a number of forms including: joint action, coordinated action or action heavily informed by jurisdictional feedback.

Forums for collaboration between jurisdictions for most areas of government policy already exist, for example COAG's Councils on Federal Financial Relations, Transport and Infrastructure, Industry and Skills, Education, and Health. The Treasurers' Forum will determine priorities for future work that are identified as a result of the National Population and Planning Framework, with the Forum to consider the appropriate action. For example, if the Treasurers' Forum identifies that skills targeting of the migration program is not meeting local area labour market needs, there would be benefit in the Forum considering how the Commonwealth, States and Territories and local government could work together.

Action item: Expand the existing Skilled Migration Officials Group (SMOG), which considers visa numbers and composition, to include Commonwealth, State and Territory Treasuries, elevate SMOG to a Band 2/Assistant Under Treasurer equivalent level, and require SMOG to report back on key issues to the Treasurers' Forum and/or COAG

Action item: The Commonwealth to work with States and Territories to identify regulatory barriers impacting long term population planning and infrastructure delivery in multiple jurisdictions and develop possible options to reduce or improve them.

Action item: The Commonwealth to work with States and Territories to identify how the Commonwealth can expand existing consultations with States and Territories for future Designated Area Migration Agreements.

Action item: The Treasurers' Forum to determine priorities for future shared action on population.

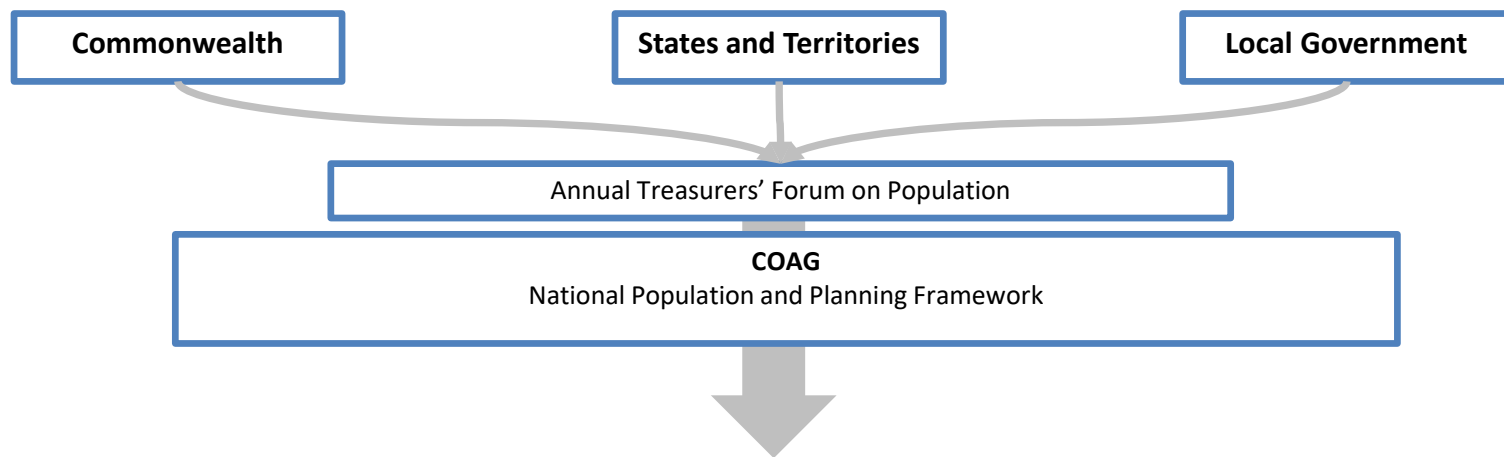
Action item: All jurisdictions will provide an update on progress against the Framework at future Treasurers' Forums.

Sample of current population policy engagement led by Commonwealth

This is a sample of the substantial engagement already occurring on issues relevant to population. The Treasurers' Forum and Framework provide an opportunity to bring together and build on this engagement with a dedicated population focus.

	Migration & skills	Infrastructure	Housing	Data, statistics and forecasts		
Ministerial engagement	<p>Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration (MACSM)</p>	<p>COAG Transport and Infrastructure Council</p>		<p>Australian Digital Council The Council is responsible for overseeing the development of Australia's digital capability. By identifying best practice and pursuing areas for collaboration.</p>		
Responsible Department / Agency	<p>Department of Home Affairs</p>	<p>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development</p>	<p>Department of Social Services – Treasury</p>	<p>Australian Bureau of Statistics</p>	<p>Prime Minister and Cabinet – Data Integration Project Australia Responsible for maximising the use of Aust. Gov data assets</p>	<p>Prime Minister and Cabinet National Data Commissioner Responsible for implementing a simpler data sharing and release framework.</p>
Engagement structures	<p>Skilled Migration Officials Group (SMOG) Forum to discuss new initiatives, share information and consider issues arising in relation to skilled migration.</p>	<p>Infrastructure Working Group (IWG) The IWG supports the Council by developing reforms on infrastructure investment, procurement and financing.</p>	<p>Housing and Homelessness Senior Officials' Network (HHSON)</p> <p>Deputy Heads of Treasuries (DHoTs)</p>	<p>Australian Statistical Advisory Council (ASAC). Key advisory body to the Minister and the ABS on statistical services. All states represented, as well as business and academic members.</p>	<p>AUSDATA Forum Commonwealth, State and Territory Forum on data. Supporting work streams include technology, social licence, social investment, analytics and policy.</p>	<p>Bi-lateral consultation NDC has advised of ongoing state consultation, primarily with Premiers Depts.</p>
	<p>Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group A forum to consult and exchange information on a range of settlement related issues.</p>	<p>Transport and Infrastructure Senior Officials' Committee The Committee develops, coordinates and progress the strategic agenda of the Transport and Infrastructure Council.</p>	<p>Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group develop and support States and other members to implement a Housing and Homelessness Data Improvement Plan.</p>	<p>State Statistical Forum (SSF) Biannual meeting of senior members of the ABS and state and territory governments seeking to discuss technical priorities.</p>	<p>ADC Senior Officers Group</p>	<p>National Data Advisory Council (NDAC) Advise on ethical data use, community expectations, technical best practice, and industry and international developments. No specific state representation.</p>
Engagement through the policy process	<p>Annual Migration Program First Ministers written to on an annual basis</p> <p>National Skilled Occupation Lists States engagement and submissions.</p>	<p>National Partnership Agreements</p> <p>Discrete Deals and investments</p>	<p>National Housing and Homelessness Agreement</p> <p>State and Territory Housing and Homelessness Strategies</p>	<p>Commonwealth/State (& NZ) Population Estimates Technical Workshop (PETW)</p> <p>The Australian and New Zealand Population Workshop (ANZPW).</p> <p>Population Projections State engagement as part of the 5 yearly update</p>		

Forward work program for the Treasurers' Forum on Population



ACTION ITEMS

Element 1: Establishing a common understanding of population and population change

- The Centre for Population to work with States and Territories on understanding populations, and population change and its implications, and proactively contribute to sharing data, research, ideas and expertise on population.
- Jurisdictions to work together to better coordinate timing of population estimates and projections and consider ways to provide a more up to-date and complete picture of population issues across Australia.
- Jurisdictions to work together to identify and respond to expected longer term population change, including sharing practices, such as process and methodologies.
- The Centre for Population to publish a population plan every three years, with the Centre to collaborate with States and Territories and ALGA in its development. The Population Plan would:
 - map objectives, forecasts, projections, actuals and outcomes, including an explanation of any differences,
 - factor in state, territory and local government plans, and
 - analyse the costs and benefits of population change.

Element 2: Ensuring greater collaboration across jurisdictions

- The Centre for Population to coordinate discussions and engagement on population issues across jurisdictions.
- Further population working groups to be established by the Treasurers' Forum as necessary, consistent with it establishing the Data & Forecasting and Regional Analysis Working Groups.
- The Treasurers' Forum on Population to be held annually. The Forum will consider progress of the Framework's action items, discuss issues of mutual interest and concern, and determine the priorities to be delivered over the next year.
- The Treasurers' Forum to report to COAG on the National Population and Planning Framework and related work for the COAG standing item on population.

Element 3: Increasing transparency

- The Commonwealth, and States and Territories to more frequently publish key population forecasts and outcomes, with greater levels of specificity for key population variables, such as regional age profiles, and skills and occupational labour force requirements, where practical.
- Jurisdictions to consider if there is additional information on net overseas migration that can be shared.
- The Centre for Population to work with States and Territories to better understand the contribution of temporary migrants to net overseas migration, including internal movements of temporary migrants between jurisdictions, movements of temporary migrants between visa classes; and total length of stay.
- The Centre for Population to work with jurisdictions to better understand and forecast net interstate and intrastate (interregional) migration, including their drivers, and work with jurisdictions on methodologies to project net interstate migration and net intrastate (interregional) migration.
- The Centre for Population to work with jurisdictions on sharing methodologies for projecting national, State and Territory and regional populations, and jurisdictions to consider alignment.
- The Centre for Population to work with jurisdictions to share with each other best practice for modelling and data analysis.
- The Centre for Population to work with other jurisdictions on sharing Designated Area Migration Agreements data, in order to improve understanding of the benefits of the program.
- The Commonwealth to release an annual population statement, following consultation with States and Territories and ALGA. The population statement will contain information on actual and expected population trends, and will aim to provide data and/or a narrative that addresses some of the following questions:
 - how Australia's overall population has changed and the drivers of that change;
 - how the distribution of Australia's population changed (for example, by age, location or migrant status), and what are the drivers of those changes;
 - how Australia's population outcomes compare to forecasts or projections from earlier years; and
 - details of assumptions and methods used to develop the population estimates used in the Budget, and whether they have been updated.

The Commonwealth will also consult states and territories and ALGA on the prioritisation of incremental improvements to the techniques used to develop the statement, including through the Working Group on Data and Forecasting.
- The Commonwealth to institute multi-year planning for permanent migration.

Element 4: Facilitating shared action

- The Treasurers' Forum to determine priorities for future shared action on population.
- Expand the existing Skilled Migration Officials Group (SMOG), which considers visa numbers and composition, to include Commonwealth, State and Territory Treasuries, elevate SMOG to a Band 2/Assistant Under Treasurer equivalent level, and require SMOG to report back on key issues to the Treasurers' Forum and/or COAG.
- The Commonwealth to work with States and Territories to identify regulatory barriers impacting long term population planning and infrastructure delivery in multiple jurisdictions and develop possible options to reduce or improve them.
- The Commonwealth to work with States and Territories to identify how the Commonwealth can expand existing consultations with States and Territories for future Designated Area Migration Agreements.
- The Treasurers' Forum to determine priorities for future shared action on population.
- All jurisdictions will provide an update on progress against the Framework at future Treasurers' Forums.