



Oregon Public Health Association

818 SW 3rd Ave. #1201
Portland OR 97204
www.OregonPublicHealth.org

July 30, 2018

Jennifer Jessup
Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer
Department of Commerce, Rm. 6616
14th and Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20230

Dear Jennifer Jessup,

As a public health organization that values equity and inclusion, Oregon Public Health Association (OPHA) strongly urges the Commerce Department to remove the proposed citizenship question from the 2020 Census. The citizenship question puts the Census' accuracy at risk, and in turn negatively impacts our ability to support positive health outcomes in communities across the country. The citizenship question will likely result in lower participation and a significant undercount, as stated by the Census Bureau's own Chief Scientist.

Asking about citizenship status will mean that many immigrants (whether documented or not) will not fill out the Census due to fears about the confidentiality of their responses. Census researchers have seen an increase in concerns about data privacy, particularly with regard to immigration status, in recent focus groups. If this pattern continues and a citizenship question is added, this dynamic could erode trust not only in the Census, but in other public institutions, including public health agencies and other programs vital to people's health and well-being.

The Census is a vital tool in assessing and improving public health outcomes. Public health programs rely on Census data to serve communities across the country and to allocate our collective resources. These programs are diverse in scope and size, but they share a common thread: a focus on sustaining thriving and healthy communities. This can mean helping people eat better and stop smoking. It can mean helping children get immunizations and supporting new mothers. And it can mean stopping disease outbreaks and working to prevent disease by ensuring our housing, transportation, and schools are healthy. An undercount will severely impact our ability to accurately gauge and respond to these diverse needs, and could also result in the reallocation of funds away from these crucial programs.

The potential harm of this decision would be universal, and particularly harmful to those that are already likely to be undercounted - such as people of color, young children, and low-income rural and urban residents. These are the same populations that already face avoidable and unfair health outcomes. Undercounting these communities puts them at risk of further isolation from health and social services and reduced access to healthcare.

In sum, OPHA believes the addition of the citizenship question to the Census threatens the ongoing work of the public health sector and the communities we serve. The addition of this question is short-sighted and harmful: it is bad for the Census, bad for our communities, and bad for the health and well-being of our country.

Sincerely,

Marti Franc, MSN
President

Jessica Nischik-Long, MPH
Executive Director