

OMB Data Standards Webinar - Q&A Summary

Ignatius Bau:

Presentation Summary:

The OMB has updated the federal standards for race and ethnicity data for the first time since 1997, re-emphasizing that these categories are social and political, and not biological or genetic and therefore subject to evolving and changing over time), that race and ethnicity should be self-reported (rather than imputed or assigned), and that individuals can self-report multiple races and ethnicities.

Effective immediately, the race and ethnicity categories will be combined and interchangeable (rather than Hispanic as the sole ethnicity, distinct from race), a new Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) category will be added, and disaggregation will be required by the six most numerous subpopulations in each racial and ethnic category with the exception of American Indians and Alaska Natives, who will continue to write-in their tribal affiliation). The revised OMB standards instruct every federal department and agency to have an implementation/action plan by September 2025 which will be publicly available, and finish bringing all data collections and programs into compliance with the updated standards within five years (by 2029). Additionally, the standards require the collection of more detail beyond the minimum race and ethnicity reporting categories, unless an agency requests and receives an exemption. OMB will review the standards every 10 years. There will need to be community advocacy to ensure timely implementation of the new standards and future reviews, a narrow interpretation of any exemption from the disaggregation requirement, and monitoring of the department and agency action plans.

Questions and Answers:

1. Are the top six disaggregation categories nationwide or jurisdiction specific? Seems like it might differ on a state by state basis?
 - a. Yes, the six classification standards are national and based on 2020 Census; presumably, every 10 years review by OMB will be based on each 10-year Census update
2. Have EHRs already implemented these expanded categories?
 - a. Yes, and reinforced in something called the United States Core Data for Interoperability, which has been adopted by the CalHHS in the California Data Exchange Framework for sharing health data
3. Does that mean the top 6 options within each category will only change each 10 years?
 - a. Yes, the every 10 year review by OMB will be an opportunity to update - still will require community advocacy, based on the evolving Census data
4. What are acceptable criteria for including a group in the top six? What data sources are acceptable?
 - a. The top six sub-categories are based on national census data - in this case, 2020 Census
5. Although not imposed state and locally, will this affect any reports to federal agencies, such as CMS? Will these forms be changed when race/ethnicity is one of the elements required in reports to the federal oversight entities?

- a. Yes, for example, the National Committee for Quality Assurance is updating its requirements for race and ethnicity stratification of health care quality measures (HEDIS) for diabetes control, hypertension control, immunizations, etc.
6. Not clear on the opt-out concern. What are the issues that agencies present and are they truly valid or just lazy and racist?
 - a. Main issue is that some forms, surveys, and other data collection instruments don't get updated, so don't go to OMB for review. This is why the Action Plans are an important tool for community advocacy, in order to get all the forms and surveys on a schedule/calendar to be updated.
7. On the combined Race and Ethnicity question: What's the panel's view on reconciling R&E data collected in the past (separated R&E) with data from a combined R&E going forward? What would the data transition from old questions to new question look like? Can there be any overlap with the old data?
 - a. Yes, data bridging is always an issue whenever categories change - but there are lots of good examples and statistical techniques to do so; for example, OMB issued guidance about bridging data after the 1997 revisions. They are likely to issue an updated guidance for these changes

Dr Seciah Aquino:

Presentation Summary:

- *Latines represent 20% of the population in the US*
- *In CA they are 40% of the population*
- *We are the largest racial/ethnic group and expected to increase*
- *In 2023, the Latine share of U.S. GDP was \$3.2 trillion.*
- *If U.S. Latine GDP were its own country, it would rank 5th largest economy in the world*

The Latine community is significantly different post-pandemic. Acute COVID cases, long COVID, socio-economic repercussions and intersections, along with other acute issues like the FLU & RSV, require us to approach the community more intentionally to address the exacerbated disparities.

The updated OMB standards are a step in the right direction to better understand the diversity and needs of the Latine community and communities of color. Some "Pros" of the revised OMB standards include a more detailed set of demographic data, that better reflects the diversity of this country. Specifically, for Latines, it brings Latino on the same level as race, and will improve data collection for this group.

There is still work to be done to ensure that the full diversity of Latines and Indigenous peoples is shown in the implementation of the new standards leading up to 2030 Census. Particularly for multi-racial and multi-ethnic Latines, to signal that they can choose as many as they identify with.

Although these new OMB standards signify progress, California must do better and go beyond the OMB standards to collect disaggregated data for Latines and Indigenous Mesoamerican populations specific to our state. CA must go further by passing SB 1016 (Gonzalez)- Latino and Indigenous Disparities Reduction Act by requiring more detailed data disaggregation for Latine and Indigenous Communities in California.

Amin Nash:

Presentation Summary:

This presentation highlighted efforts to include the MENA category in demographic data. Federally, the Office of Management and Budget approved a distinct MENA category in March 2024 after over 30 years of advocacy by groups like the Arab American Institute. The 2020 Census allowed individuals to write in their identity, revealing 3.8 million MENA individuals, though this is likely an undercount. Locally, the University of California collects Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) data a decolonial and geographic term, leading to the drafting of AB 2763, which broadens the MENA definition to include groups like Armenians and Somalis.

Recognizing the MENA population is crucial due to specific health disparities, such as higher rates of anxiety among Iranians and obesity among Arabs. Recent advances include San Diego County's policy to include a MENA category, and ongoing efforts focused on community engagement and data collection in high-concentration areas like Glendale and El Cajon.

Questions and Answers:

1. Is there anything we can do about the 'Israeli' option in the multiple choice box? This is not representative of the region and their presence should not be normalized at the expense of Palestinians, especially when most 'Israelis' don't identify as from the MENA region.
 - a. This is an important question, and requires the advocacy and opinions of the population reflective of the category. There are opportunities to continue to share opinions and public input with the federal government. You can email me directly as well, and I'd be happy to discuss the matter in more detail.
2. With regards to MENA, can you repeat again the important point of how you prefer to be referred to, as opposed to Middle Eastern, which is the current term the US government uses?
 - a. We'd prefer "West Asian" or "Southwest Asian", because Middle Eastern is a colonial term
3. Can you please put the link to the UC stats web page for MENA population in California?
 - a. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/disaggregated-data>
4. Could Amin give any more insight into classification of the Afghan population? It is listed as an example under Asian on the new detailed OMB collection form. Is there any background information about how the national regional boundaries were determined to form the aggregated groupings? If a person checks the box for MENA and writes in Afghan under the MENA free text space, would they be recategorized to Asian by census? Similarly, if a person checks NHPI and writes in Filipino, should

that self-identity be preserved or should data tabulation recategorize based on the standards?

- a. Thanks for the question. I (Amin) can only speak from my experience and would probably refer to someone with expertise in the Afghan population. Afghanistan has informed me that they would like a disaggregated data category of their own, and we included them in California to try to accommodate that category for them. Federally, the Afghan population is located under the Asian category. The California definition was drafted before the federal announcement, and it was based on SWANA, which includes Afghanistan. Hope that helps.
5. With regards to MENA vs SWANA, are you advocating for all CA agencies to use SWANA the same way the UCs do? Any reasons CA should align with the federal MENA (or maybe find ways to keep SWANA but where needed be able to report MENA as well to align with other standards)
- a. Yes, we hope that CA agencies can capture a broader demographic of California's MENA/SWANA population, and don't want to interrupt what the UC system has developed. SWANA does align with federal MENA, but has additional demographics which has to be teased out a bit more. Hope that helps.

Andrew Lee:

Presentation Summary:

SEARAC applauds the OMB and the Administration for this revision which marks progress for more visibility of the Southeast Asian community, including identifying Vietnamese as one of the detailed communities for data collection and including Hmong as an example of another group within the Asian racial category. However, we are disappointed that the regulation doesn't go further to require the collection of additional Southeast Asian ethnic data, such as Cambodian, Lao, Mien, and many others, through a write-in option as the default standard. We are also concerned about the option for agencies to opt-out of the requirement to collect more detailed race and ethnic data beyond the minimum standards, which would lump all Asian ethnic data under one category.

In California, our laws go above and beyond federal standards for race/ethnicity data (such as AB 1726/State Government Code 8310.7). The revisions provide additional momentum to continue advancing data equity in our state. Complex implementation issues including accountability, technical challenges, and data systems/infrastructure changes need to be addressed via collaborative efforts between governments and community leaders across diverse demographic categories (such as a new CA Dept of Public Health data disaggregation workgroup).

Christine Blake:

Presentation Summary:

The California Health and Human Services (CalHHS) Agency is currently evaluating internal department feedback on the CalHHS draft race and ethnicity data standards. Iterative updates will be made to the draft document based on an ongoing literature review of the OMB SP-15 and other relevant literature and resources which will streamline a path that brings alignment of these standards with all levels of government and provide a standardized process for how we identify the ideal Race and Ethnicity standards to use. In addition, we are working to collaborate with the Office of Data and Innovation to discuss their approach to developing State of California race and ethnicity standards and share the feedback we've received at a high level. In addition, CalHHS looks forward to working with CPEHN to identify strategies to receive feedback from community-based organizations to ensure the CalHHS data standards reflect the population of California.