

American Statistical Association Calls for Reinstatement of Mandatory Long Form in Canadian Census

ALEXANDRIA, VA, AUGUST 5, 2010 – The American Statistical Association (ASA), the nation's preeminent statistical society, strongly supports the use of the mandatory long form in the Canadian census and has signed onto a motion to urge Prime Minister Stephen Harper to immediately reinstate the form for the 2011 census. ASA President Sastry Pantula, at the annual Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM), voted for the motion when the Committee of Presidents of Statistical Societies (COPSS) met at JSM in Vancouver earlier this week.

The motion reads: Whereas the data collected by the long form of the Canadian Census are essential to the Canadian economy and society, and replacement by a voluntary survey will likely result in misleading, poor quality data, the Committee of Presidents of Statistical Societies calls for the immediate reinstatement of the long form as an integral part of the 2011 census.

"I think it's a mistake," Pantula says of Ottawa's move to do away with the mandatory long form and replace it with a new voluntary shorter form. "We need good, reliable data, not just any data, and making the longer form voluntary results in a response rate that is too low and yields biased information. In the long term, Canada could get left behind by nations that have retained a commitment to getting good data to use in public policy decisions that affect everyone. That's why the recent census long form decision in Canada is particularly unfortunate.

"We did attempt a similar change in the U.S. Census some years ago," Pantula said, "which eventually was scrapped because the data obtained by the voluntary responses were deemed too unreliable and more expensive. Eventually, the Census Bureau went to a short form, supplemented by the American Community Survey, which is our version of the long form sent to a sample of Americans on an annual basis. Both the short form and the ACS form, however, are mandatory and failure to comply with them can result in fines. We rely on responses from these mandatory surveys. According to the Brookings Institute study, *Surveying for Dollars*, ACS-related datasets are used to guide the distribution of \$416 billion in federal assistance."

A number of statistical societies around the globe, including the International Statistical Institute, have expressed their concern about the quality of the data resulting from a voluntary census. Other signers of the COPSS motion were COPSS Chairman Xihong Lin, Statistical Society of Canada President Don McLeish, ENAR/International Biometric Society President Sharon-Lise Normand, IBS/WNAR President Peter A. Lachenbruch, and Larry Brown, representing the Institute of Mathematical Statistics. Normand and Lachenbruch also are ASA members.

About the Joint Statistical Meetings

JSM, which has been held annually since 1974, is conducted jointly with the American Statistical Association (ASA), the International Biometric Society (ENAR and WNAR), the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS), the Statistical Society of Canada (SSC), the International Chinese Statistical Association, and the International Indian Statistical Association. JSM activities include oral presentations, panel sessions, poster presentations, continuing education courses, exhibit hall (with state-of-the-art statistical products and opportunities), career placement service, society and section business meetings, committee meetings, social activities, and networking opportunities.

About the American Statistical Association

Headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, the American Statistical Association is the world's largest community of statisticians and the second oldest continuously operating professional society in the United States. For 170 years, the ASA has supported excellence in the development, application, and dissemination of statistical science through meetings, publications, membership services, education, accreditation, and advocacy. Its members serve in industry, government, and academia

in more than 90 countries, advancing research and promoting sound statistical practice to inform public policy and improve human welfare. For additional information about the American Statistical Association, please visit the ASA web site at <http://www.amstat.org> or call 703.684.1221.

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