ABS response to COVID-19
Dr David Gruen – Australian Statistician
Events in Italy and Iran in mid-to-late February suggested the virus was spreading fast, and would be very disruptive when it arrived.

ABS brainstorming session at end February

- Felt like mid 2008: a rapidly evolving crisis makes near real-time information enormously valuable
- We were in a unique position
- What statistical information could we provide faster?
- Knew there would be enormous interest – from government and the community
Used the crisis to

- Redeploy internal resources to core activities and new products (no time for normal consultation processes)
- Give the organisation permission to innovate
- Empower teams to learn from each other – this brought forward a flood of ideas for new faster products
  - We implemented most of them
- Speed up process of getting access to new datasets
  - Enormous goodwill to help from both public and private sectors
Key elements

- Didn’t seek funding for new products at the time
  - Would have slowed down our response – time was of the essence
- Logic: Demonstrate how useful our new products could be; funding would come later
  - This logic paid big dividends
- Also provided free access to our microdata products (for a time) – again to speed up access
- Needed to make arrangements for organisation to work from home
Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey
- Approx. 1,000 households
- Insights into impacts on employment, stimulus packages, financial stress, lifestyle changes et al.

Business Impacts of COVID-19 Survey
- Survey of 3,000 businesses, with approx. 1,200 responding
- Insights into impacts on workforce, operations, impacts of support measures et al.

For both surveys, questions updated after each cycle to ensure their continued relevance (in consultation with government departments)
Initial Household Survey Cycles

23 March

CYCLE 1
Data collection of 1st cycle commences with a seven day enumeration period

DECISION
ABS to run a Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey

31 March

6 April

CYCLE 2
Data collection of 2nd cycle commences with a three day enumeration period.

PROCESSING
Processing of Cycle 1 happening concurrently with finalising content for Cycle 2

14 April

20 April

CYCLE 3
Data collection of 3rd cycle commences with a three day enumeration period.

RELEASE 1
Release of insights from Cycle 1

29 April

1 May

RELEASE 2
Release of insights from Cycle 2
Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia
- Near real-time data extracted from Australian Tax Office (ATO) Single Touch Payroll system (new web-based system by which employers interact with ATO)
- Captures employees from 99% of ‘substantial employers’ and 71% of small employers
- Results published with a 17-day lag

Preliminary and provisional publications – retail trade, international trade, overseas travel, mortality and cause of death

Additional analysis in existing publications

Interactive maps

Securing new data sources to support official statistics – e.g., bank transactions data for National Accounts
Questions?