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Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth

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Media release

New report on young Australians' wellbeing – we're only middle to lower ranking out of 34 OECD countries

Not good for a rich nation like Australia, say experts

The second *Report Card: The Wellbeing of Young Australians*, launched at Parliament House in Canberra today (March 15), reveals we are still trending poorly against several important indicators. It highlights that in spite of much rhetoric about the wellbeing of our kids, in too many areas, we have not budged in five years.

Produced by the [Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth \(ARACY\)](#), the *ARACY Report Card* brings together the most reliable measurements available on 46 indicators, and compares tangible measures of child and youth wellbeing with the average of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

ARACY CEO, **Dr Lance Emerson**, said: "The good news is we rank in the top third for 12 of the indicators but there are ominous signs that this achievement is fragile, particularly when you look at where we are performing poorly or moderately."

Key findings:

- Australia is 'middle of the road' – ranked in the top third of OECD countries for only 12 out of 46 indicators.
- Australia is ranked relatively poorly when it comes to keeping our kids safe and preventing deaths from injuries – 22nd out of 34 OECD countries. Australia ranks 22nd on infant mortality and 29th for rates of some infant vaccinations to prevent disease.
- Teenage pregnancy rates are higher than the OECD average, with Australia ranked 22nd out of 34 OECD countries.
- Nearly one in three (30%) young people aged 15-24 years are overweight or obese and more than half (57%) lead sedentary lifestyles. Most children don't eat the recommended levels of fruit and vegetables.
- Australia fares well when compared to other OECD nations on rates of youth smoking (7% smoke daily) but less favourably for use of illicit drugs (18% using illicit drugs).
- Rates of youth suicide are declining but we are still ranked only 20th of 33 OECD countries. More than one in 10 young people suffer high levels of psychological distress. Indigenous rates of psychological distress and suicide are close to three times the national average.

- School achievement is relatively positive for 15 year olds but below average for primary school reading, maths and science.
- Youth unemployment is increasing despite our strong economy. One in six young people are not in education or in employment.
- The gap between rich and poor is increasing as is the percentage of young children living in jobless families. Over one in six children lived at or below the poverty line in 2010.

According to leading authority on early childhood, Director of Family and Children's Services at Victoria's Doveton College, **June McLoughlin**, the *Report Card* reinforces ARACY's position that policies aimed at young people need to be evidence-based, and more support for the early years is required.

"It is incomprehensible we are in the bottom third for income inequality – which in the past the World Bank and the World Health Organisation have calculated as a key predictor of life expectancy; and that with preschool age children having access to early learning, we're 30th out of 34 OECD nations."

"This is one of the key gaps revealed by the *Report Card* – we under-invest in the early years, which are proven to be critical in maximising the potential of our children and making them ready for school. There is abundant evidence that proven early learning programs track through to better school performance later on."

"So, when you add this poor investment in preschool learning to our middle ranking performance in maths and science at Year 8, there are problems coming down the educational pipeline, which will be very costly to us as a nation," Ms McLoughlin said.

Lawyer and ARACY Board member, **Tim Goodwin**, said: "The *Report Card* confirms what we in the Indigenous community have known for many years, namely that our children have – on average – a significant developmental gap in language and learning compared to non-Indigenous children."

Leading paediatrician and ARACY Board member, **Dr Gervase Chaney**, said: "For a nation which prides itself on being healthy, we are not doing as well as we could in areas such as immunisation, childhood obesity and measures relating to child abuse and neglect. These are issues we can address and we need to."

"For what we call material basics – rates of deprivation have not moved for our most disadvantaged groups," said **Dr Bruce Bradbury**, an expert on child poverty from the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW. "And in fact when you look at the trends since the last ARACY *Report Card* in 2008, several measures are moving in the wrong direction. Family economic resources are of central importance for determining the goods that children can consume and the environments in which they live. In addition, child cognitive and



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behavioural outcomes are strongly associated with family economic resources, and this association is stronger in countries with greater economic inequality.”

Dr Emerson said ARACY has been working with its 2300 members on a comprehensive range of solutions, including [The Nest: a national plan for child and youth wellbeing](#).

“As a large coalition of organisations and individual experts, we are analysing and bringing together the policies that are known to make a difference to child and youth wellbeing, in a National Action Plan. This will assist state and federal governments increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their investment in our future generations. This is work that must be done in collaboration with parents, young people and the organisations which try to improve their wellbeing,” he said.

This second *Report Card* builds on the first, produced in 2008, in that it not only includes these parameters, but most importantly, captures what young people and families say is important, identified through extensive consultation conducted by ARACY for *The Nest*.

“The common framework of the national action plan, with common measures and indicators as set out in the *Report Card*, will enable the community to work together to improve the health and wellbeing of all children and young people,” Dr Emerson said.

Link to full *Report Card*:

<http://www.aracy.org.au/projects/documents/documents>

Ends

ARACY acknowledges the *Report Card* was made possible by funding through the Estate of the Late James Simpson Love, managed by Perpetual. ARACY also greatly appreciates the Bupa Health Foundation’s ongoing support as principal partner of *The Nest*.

For more information about the *Report Card*, including the technical report, visit the ARACY website: aracy.org.au

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