THE WELLBEING OF AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN

A story about data,
a story about change.

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A collaboration between
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unicef | for every child
AUSTRALIA

ARACY

About UNICEF Australia

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, is the world's largest children's charity working to protect the rights of children, globally and here in Australia. Established in 1946 in the aftermath of World War II, we now operate in more than 190 countries and territories.

Run entirely on voluntary donations, UNICEF works to improve the lives of every child, no matter who they are or where they live. Our teams are on the ground to ensure every child has safe water, food, health care, education, and a safe place to grow up.

UNICEF Australia was formed in 1966 to support this mission. From sending emergency supplies to children during conflict, natural disasters, or humanitarian crises, to long-term survival and development programs, UNICEF Australia works to protect children, no matter what.

About ARACY

ARACY catalyses change by bringing people and knowledge together for the benefit of children and young people in Australia.

Our aspiration is that all children and young people are loved and thriving. We believe that all children and young people in Australia should have every opportunity to flourish.

To thrive, children and young people need to be valued, loved and safe; they need their basic material needs met; they need to be healthy; learning; participating in family, community and decision making; and have a positive sense of their identity and culture.

Listening to children and young people is integral to what we do. The right of every child to have a say about issues that affect them is upheld in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). When we listen to the views of children and young people, we make better decisions, write better policy, and directly benefit young Australians.

ARACY believes we can create more significant change by working together. When we channel the efforts of our partners and stakeholders, we can create lasting and transformative change in systems, policies, and practice, and ultimately, improvements in the daily lives and futures of children and young people.

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Foreword

There is a welcome transformation underway in Australia right now. It might not be on the front page of the news or in our daily conversations, but it continues nonetheless. This shift represents a recalibration, whereby once we used to measure success by purely economic means, now there is a desire to broaden our focus and measure it by what really matters – the collective wellbeing of our society.

Within the context of this step change, children present a unique proposition. As children represent the future of our country, their wellbeing forecasts the future wellbeing of Australia. Childhood is the foundation for adult life and when we set children up with the best chance to thrive, they as individuals benefit as well as society more broadly.

This is why UNICEF Australia and ARACY have stepped in to make this important contribution, the *Australian Children's Wellbeing Index*. By using data to measure and track children's progress over time, the Index provides a pulse-check of both their wellbeing and the forecasted wellbeing for the next generation of Australians.

In the first instance, what this data tells us is that for the majority of children Australia is a great place to grow up. Most children have access to the food they need, are participating in education, and are optimistic about the future. But there are also areas which need urgent attention including stagnant poverty, emerging childhood obesity, and increasing rates of psychological distress. There also remains unacceptable inequity in Australia, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and a continued need to elevate the voices of children and young people in all aspects of society.

What then are we to do with this wealth of data and information? Throughout my career I have seen across both the public and private sectors, just how important data is. It drives decision making, focuses investment, and guides the prioritisation of limited resources, all with the goal of ensuring our actions are actually producing their desired outcomes.

If we are serious about changing the game for children's wellbeing, we need to ensure that our decisions, priorities, and investment choices are all data informed. If we can do this well, children and society more broadly will reap the enormous and compounding rewards that come with early investment in childhood.

Beyond measurement and decision making though, what this Index provides is an important accountability tool to help focus our attention. Over time we will be able to see clearly where we are making progress and where progress is stagnating. The Index can and should focus our attention. It should challenge us all to do better, enabling us to meet our collective responsibility as a nation to raise Australia's children in the best way possible.

So this is our contribution. More than a tool, it is an invitation - to take what we can learn from the Wellbeing Index and transform it from knowledge into action. UNICEF Australia stands ready to meet this call and we invite you to join us in doing the same. Together we can realise a greater collective wellbeing for our children and a truly transformative and prosperous change for Australian society.

Ann Sherry AO
Chair
UNICEF Australia

Professor Gervase Chaney, Chair, ARACY – Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

ARACY and UNICEF Australia are proud to bring to you this Children's Index. Our two organisations share a common goal, for children and young people in Australia to have every opportunity to thrive.

For a good life, children and young people need to be loved, valued and safe; to have their basic material needs met; to be learning; to be healthy; to participate; and to have a positive sense of their identity and culture. This is what wellbeing means.

In their first Budget, in October 2022, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Treasurer Jim Chalmers invited Australia to start a conversation about the nation we want to be, and the measures that would tell a truer story about our national wellbeing.

Implicit in this concept of national wellbeing, and explicit in the relevant Budget statement, is our responsibility to Australia's children.

"Broader measurement … allows society and governments to better evaluate the impact of decisions today on future outcomes."
Budget paper No.1, Statement 4 – Measuring What Matters

Securing the future of the nation is the job of government. As noted in the Centre for Policy Development's 2022 report *Redefining Progress*, Australians believe people's wellbeing should be the guiding purpose of government[1].

This paper further notes that "the tools available to decision-makers do not always readily account for the things that matter most to the people they serve."[2]

The Children's Index addresses this. It is a comprehensive picture of Australia's progress in achieving and maintaining the aspects of wellbeing that children require to have a good life. It measures us against comparable nations elsewhere, and where data allows it examines the longitudinal trends that tell us where we are doing better or worse.

While most children in Australia are faring well, there remains much work to ensure that all children can thrive. New initiatives like the federal Early Years Strategy, the work of various jurisdictions to raise the age of leaving care, and the reinstatement of a youth voice to Government in the Australian Government Youth Steering Committee are responding to these persistent inequities.

The Children's Index allows us to see a fuller picture of life for children in Australia. The examination of core data sets, along with expert commentary and analysis, helps us to understand where our efforts are best placed to ensure every child enjoys a good life, one where they can thrive and grow to their full potential. The holistic framework of the Nest exposes the interdependencies and connections, the intended and unintended impacts that can either amplify or stymie our work.

Data tells a story. Let's make the story of Australia's children a good one.

Professor Gervase Chaney
Chair
ARACY – Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

[1,2] Gaukroger, C., Ampofo, A., Kitt, F., Phillips, T., Smith, W. (2022). *Redefining progress: Global lessons for an Australian approach to wellbeing.* Centre for Policy Development, Melbourne.

Executive summary

This report aims to describe how Australian children are faring across all aspects of wellbeing and how this is changing. We want to know what we are doing well, and which areas need special attention to help all Australian children thrive. This report ultimately aims to set policy priorities and guide action to ensure Australia is an equitable place to grow up and improve outcomes for all Australian children.

The data we have used to describe the wellbeing of Australian children builds on earlier work undertaken by ARACY and UNICEF Australia. Seminal works include ARACY's *Report Card* (ARACY, 2018), a series of indicators which provide a snapshot of wellbeing for Australian children; UNICEF's *Innocenti Report Card* (Gromada, Rees, & Chzhen, 2020), which compares wellbeing of children across wealthy countries; and UNICEF Canada's *Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being* (UNICEF Canada, 2019), which inspired this Australian index. ARACY and UNICEF Australia have combined our expertise to provide a high-level analysis of the most recent indicators of child wellbeing coupled with a discussion of emerging issues including the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of climate change on wellbeing.

This report shows that most children are doing well in most areas. Most children and young people have adequate access to food and the educational resources they need, they participate in formal and informal educational opportunities, they feel optimistic about the future and have someone to turn to for support.

However, there are areas of growing concern and persistent inequity that, if addressed, could lift the wellbeing of many Australian children. Some notable findings include the persistently high rates of children in contact with the child protection system, with ongoing disproportionate impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Poverty too remains stagnant and unacceptably high, and the formal education system remains increasingly inequitable. Indicators of physical and mental health are demonstrating emerging issues of childhood obesity linked to diet and sedentary lifestyle and increasing rates of psychological distress and suicide. There is an increased awareness of the importance of culture and identity on health and wellbeing, yet indicators of children's participation and positive sense of identity and culture remain underemphasised in research and policy.

The key to enhancing the wellbeing of Australian children lies in addressing the main drivers of inequitable outcomes, which have been largely enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report provides a powerful and comprehensive picture of how Australian children are faring now and over time. In doing so, we hope to highlight key policy areas that can be leveraged to enhance the wellbeing of all Australian children, ensuring that every child can thrive.

About The Index

This index was developed as a resource to:

- Show what life is like for children and young people aged 0 to 24 in Australia.
- Track progress on children's rights and wellbeing.
- Influence decision-makers to make Australia among the best places to grow up.

The index is built on UNICEF Australia's five Children's Goals. Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Children's Goals work together to capture everything a child needs to live a good life and thrive. They are:

- Every child thrives and survives
- Every child has a fair chance in life
- Every child is protected from violence and exploitation
- Every child lives in a clean and safe environment
- Every child learns

Data is organised using the Nest, Australia's evidence-based framework for child and youth wellbeing. The Nest presents holistic wellbeing as six interdependent domains. A child or young person needs to be doing well in all six domains to thrive. These domains are:

- **Valued, Loved and Safe** – children have trusting relationships with family and friends
- **Material Basics** – children live in suitable housing with appropriate clothing, nutritious food, clean water, and clean air.
- **Healthy** – children have their physical, mental, and emotional health needs met.
- **Learning** – children and young people learn through a variety of experiences within the classroom, the home, and the community in which they live.
- **Participating** – children and young people having a voice, are listened to and have a say in decisions that impact them.
- **Positive Sense of Identity and Culture** – children feel safe and supported to express their identify and have a sense of belonging.

Together, the Children's Goals and the Nest align as shown below:

ARACY's Nest wellbeing domains	UNICEF Children's Goals
Valued, Loved and Safe	Every child thrives and survives Every child is protected from violence and exploitation Every child lives in a clean and safe environment
Material Basics	Every child thrives and survives Every child has a fair chance in life Every child lives in a clean and safe environment
Healthy	Every child thrives and survives Every child lives in a clean and safe environment
Learning	Every child learns
Participating	Every child has a fair chance in life Every child thrives and survives
Positive Sense of Identity and Culture	Every child has a fair chance in life Every child thrives and survives Every child learns

We have collected indicators of wellbeing within each domain and used these to describe the wellbeing of Australia children now and, where the data is available, over time to track our progress and detect important trends. The data we have presented here are key indicators accompanied by an analysis. More detailed data including a breadth of indicators within each domain can be found in our accompanying Technical Report (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021).

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Who are we?

Australian children and young people bring a rich diversity of culture, identity, and experience. At the latest Australian census, children and young people aged 0-24 years make up 30% of the Australian population (ABS, 2021). About 6% of children fall into each of the 0-4, 5-9, 10-14,15-19, and 20-24 years age groups (ABS, 2020).

Just under one third of people aged 0-24 years live outside a greater capital city region (ABS, 2020).

Around 7% live with a disability (AIHW, 2020) and 2.9% are carers (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021).

1 in 5 speak a language other than English at home (ARACY, 2018). 14.6% were born overseas with the most common countries of birth after Australia were India, China, New Zealand, England, and the Philippines (ABS, 2020). More than 90% of 15–24-year-olds participated in at least one organised cultural activity in the last year and about 9 in every 10 report being tolerant of society being comprised of different cultures (ARACY, 2018).

About 60% of 15–24-year-olds identify with a religious affiliation (ARACY, 2018).

4.2% identify as Aboriginal, 0.2% identify as Torres Strait Islander, and 0.2% identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ABS, 2016). About 1 in 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 15-24 years speak at least some words of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language (ARACY, 2018).

48.6% of people aged 0-24 years reported female sex and 51.4% male sex in the most recent Australian census (ABS, 2021). The Australian Bureau of Statistics did not provide population level data on people who are gender diverse. Estimates based on smaller data sets found 1.2% of school aged children (The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, 2020) and 2% of people aged 15-19 years identified as transgender or gender diverse (Tiller, et al., 2021). 75.6% of young people aged 16-27 who identify as LGBTQI years feel pretty good or great about it (The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, 2020).

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, data referenced in the 'What Does This Mean For Children?' headlines are drawn from our accompanying Technical Report (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021).

What is Wellbeing?

Wellbeing can be thought of as a child or young person having everything they need to thrive and reach their full potential. It encompasses all areas of a child's life, which are linked and interdependent. Children have the right to live a safe, full and rewarding life, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF Australia's Children's Goals are drawn from the UNCRC.

The Nest is Australia's national wellbeing framework for children and young people aged 0 to 24 years. It's a way of thinking about the whole child in the context of their daily lives, viewing wellbeing in a way that brings together the different elements a child or young person needs to thrive.

The Nest was developed in consultation with over 4000 experts and children, young people, and families about what they need to thrive. Children and young people told us that what they needed to have a good life fell into six interlinked domains which support a child or young person's wellbeing. These domains are: to be Valued, Loved, and Safe; to have Material Basics; to be physically and mentally Healthy; to be Learning; to be Participating, and to have a Positive Sense of Identity and Culture. To have optimal wellbeing, a child or young person needs to be adequately supported in all six domains.

Wellbeing is therefore seen as a holistic term with domains sitting within it. When many people talk about wellbeing, they are often referring to certain aspects only, such as mental health or social-emotional learning. While these are crucial elements, we need to ensure everyone working with, and for, children and young people, understands that wellbeing refers to ALL the areas of a child's life.

Valued, Loved and Safe

Positive relationships with family and peers. Trusting connections with adults in their life. Personal and community safety. Feeling secure, valued and loved.

Material Basics

Living in secure, stable and suitable housing, with appropriate clothing, healthy food, clean water, and with the materials needed to be an active member of society. Access to suitable transport and local services.

Healthy

Physically, emotionally and mentally well and supported. All health needs are met. Appropriate health services received including preventative measures to address potential or emerging physical, emotional or mental health concerns.

Learning

Learning through formal and informal experiences within the classroom and more broadly at home and in the community. Realising full learning potential and appropriate learning support is provided. Family values and is engaged in child's learning.

Participating

Able to have a voice and feels heard. Involvement and activities with peers and the community. Involved in decision-making processes that affect them. Access to technology for social connections.

Positive Sense of Identity and Culture

Identity is respected and valued. Feeling culturally connected, a sense of spiritual wellbeing. A positive sense of self and a feeling of belonging. Feeling accepted at home and in the community.

Two young students show their creation at an outdoor session of Indi Kindi in Australia's Northern Territory.
© Moriarty Foundation/Quilliam

Where does Australia stand?

The wellbeing of Australian children is mixed when compared to the international standards of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Children and young people in Australia have good life expectancy from birth, most receive a good education and graduate from high school, and they have friends and family they can count on.

However, Australia's children and young people are still lagging in other areas, and there remain significant inequities among outcomes for different children.

Below are a few key indicators which give a snapshot of where we are doing well by Australia's children and where we need to improve.

What Australia is doing well:

- More than 4 in every 5 children attend preschool.
- About 4 in every 5 adults aged 18-24 years report feeling able to have a say among family and friends on important issues all or most of the time.
- 91% of children are fully immunised at age 2.

What Australia needs to improve:

- 1 in 6 children live below the national poverty line.
- Almost 95% of children do not meet the daily recommended intake of vegetables.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under 18 years are 7 times more likely to be in out of home care than the population average.

It's important to note that in some instance the data indicates improvements in outcomes over times despite the absolute number being below target. These trends are just as critical as they provide information on what we are doing well (which can be amplified) and help identify when we need to do something differently.

What's New?

Collecting and analysing data is a complex undertaking. Major collections such as the Australian Census only take place every few years. Therefore, validated data can lag behind what is happening in the daily lives of children and young people. This section considers recent world events and priorities that have yet to be reflected in the major data collections used in Australia.

2022 Supplement

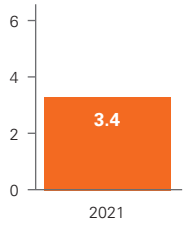
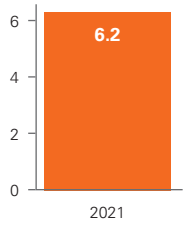
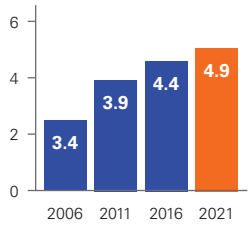
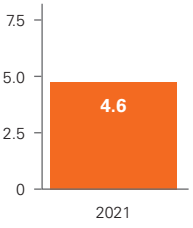
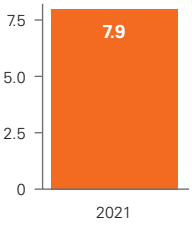
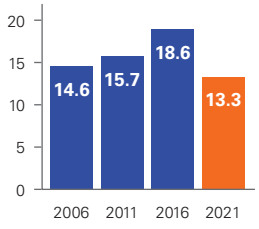
Since the 2021 Nest report, there have been two major data releases important for understanding the well-being of children and young people, these are a new National Health Survey and a new Census for 2020-21 and 2021 respectively. In this supplement to that previous report we identify the key pieces of data from those releases and compare these datapoints to comparable data from previous releases to show which way these measures are trending. Where new data has been added to the tables already included in the report, the new data is shown in orange.

The 2021 Census

The 2021 Census took place on 10th August 2021. The data here is just the first release of census data with another major release expected in October 2022 and further releases in 2023. For this reason, it gives data only on some very specific areas. However, there are already interesting results to see here.

A summary of this data is presented in Table 1, with new data highlighted in orange.

Table 1: Summary of census data

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	Previous rank	Current rank
Chronic condition	% 0-19 yrs with a long-term health problem				
	% 15-24 yrs identifying as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander				
Young People as Carers	% 15-24 giving unpaid assistance to someone with a disability or long-term health condition				
	% 15-24 yrs who spent time doing unpaid voluntary work in the previous 12 months				

The 2020-21 National Health Survey

The National Health Survey data was gathered between August 2020 and June 2021. The survey was collected online-only which is a break with the previous methodology. The ABS recommends not conducting time-series analysis on this data for this reason. We present inter-year comparisons here with the caution that small differences might be explained through this methodological issue.

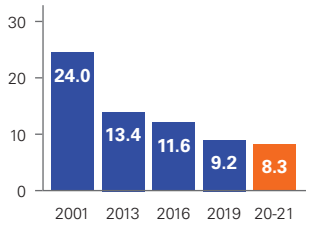
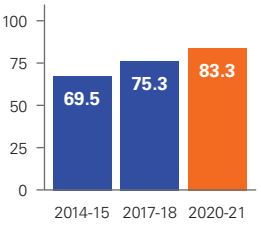
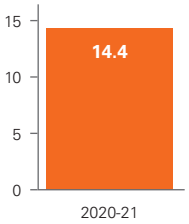
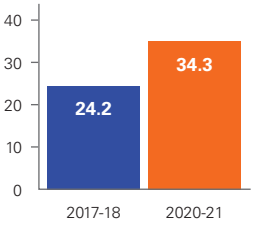
Smoking is decreasing steadily

The two measures concerned with smoking both show young people smoking less than ever before. These changes reflect long-running trends. However, this statistic does not include e-cigarette devices which are counted separately as the health concerns around these are different and less well established. Vaping among young people seems to be growing, though from a very small base (Lung Foundation 2021). The most recently available data on vaping rates is three years out-of-date and may not reflect recent rates of growth.

Physical activity is increasing

There has been a substantial jump in the percentage of young people meeting physical activity guidelines since 2017-18. Part of this may be due to the COVID pandemic in which the 2020-21 survey was conducted. This is in line with research from AusPlay (2021) showing that activity jumped between 2019 and the 2020 lockdowns, although tailed off somewhat when restrictions were removed. The reason for this they speculate is that exercise was one of the only reasons allowed to leave the home during lockdown, making many people eager to exercise.

Table 2: Summary of National Health Survey data

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Smoking	% 18-24 yrs who smoke daily			
	% 18-24 yrs who have never smoked			
Alcohol use	% 18-24 consumed more than 10 drinks in the last week			
Exercise	% 18-24 yrs who met 2014 Physical Activity Guidelines			

The Impact of COVID-19

This section summarises some of the key findings of the effect of COVID-19 on children and young people across Australia. Comprehensive information on the effects of COVID-19 on children can be found in ARACY and UNICEF Australia's Knowledge Acceleration Hub, which includes a suite of digests detailing the impacts of COVID-19 and suggested policy responses (ARACY, n.d.; Harris, Seriamlu, Dakin, & Sollis, 2021).

COVID-19 has had mixed results regarding family dynamics. While some families have experienced benefits such as increased time spent with children for learning and recreational activities, prolonged lockdowns have also resulted in increased stress and feelings of isolation for others. Linked to this is an increase in family violence.

Children and young people have been relatively spared from the physical effects of COVID-19. However, COVID-19 living conditions have created an environment fostering reduced mental wellbeing for children and young people. For example, young people had the largest drop-off in life satisfaction due to the pandemic (Biddle & Gray, 2021). Three in four people aged 12 – 25 reported worse mental health in August 2020 than before the pandemic, and half reported the pandemic had hurt their confidence in achieving their future goals (Biddle & Gray, 2021). This has highlighted significant gaps in the present mental health system.

The pandemic has seen large fluctuations in employment rates corresponding to the onset and easing of lockdowns, which has disproportionately affected people in insecure employment; namely, women, young people, and low-income earners (Harris, Seriamlu, Dakin, & Sollis, 2021). The direct effects of poverty have been at least partially addressed by Australia's internationally commended financial support packages in response to the pandemic (Richardson, Carraro, Cebotari, & Gromada, 2020). However, *ARACY's To Have and Have Not* report demonstrates parental unemployment is associated with negative effects on multiple wellbeing areas (Sollis K. , 2019). Furthermore, young people affected by early unemployment are at risk of "labour force scarring" in recessions which can reduce employability and incomes in the long run (Borland & Charlton, 2020).

Learning has seen significant shifts in response to COVID-19. The move to online learning has benefitted some children (Gore, Fray, Miller, Harris, & Taggart, 2021). However, the net effect of the pandemic has seen a widening of already inequitable educational outcomes for vulnerable children. For example, disadvantaged children and those in rural and remote areas were less able to access and engage in digitalised learning. Policy responses must be centred on effective catch-up programs and focus on mitigating the widening gap experienced by children throughout the education system. Conversely, the policy response to early childhood education facilitated continued access to childcare and prevented closures of childcare facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the difficulties children and young people face in having a say in issues that affect them. Media representation is one example, with less than 4% of news articles featuring young people and a 14% reduction in media coverage of young people during the pandemic (Sollis & Noble, 2020). Children and young people do not feel that they were considered equal stakeholders

in the pandemic responses and that communication with children and young people had been inadequate (UNICEF Australia, 2020). Mitigating this is centred on meaningful engagement with children and young people in the design and implementation of policies and programs.

Children and young people appreciate the importance of positive sense of identity and culture on wellbeing (Sollis & Noble, 2020). However, the pandemic resulted in widespread closures of recreational activities of children and young people such as sporting competitions and music festivals. Additionally, the pandemic fostered racism directed at people of multicultural backgrounds including young people, despite Australia's rich multicultural society and high levels of tolerance for diversity among children and young people.

Much data describing the impact of COVID-19 on young people is missing. The normal data sources used for this report and previously for the ARACY Report Card either is not released quickly or periodically enough to have already captured the effects of COVID-19 or collection of data for these sources has been postponed due to the pandemic. Ongoing data collection and an evolving policy response as the effects of COVID-19 become better understood is central to enhancing the wellbeing of Australian children.

Climate change

Climate change and the environment present major concerns for young people, evidenced by a range of recent surveys conducted both in Australia and globally (The Red Cross, 2020; Tiller, et al., 2020; Harrabin, 2021). Climate change is an issue that concerns many young people and which deeply affects their future lives. For example, young Australians feel very strongly that Australia is not doing enough to reduce carbon emissions (The Red Cross, 2020). Young people's lives worldwide are being impacted by climate change, focusing upon the themes of disrupted educations, starting families, finding work, migration, and emotional impacts (Barford, Mugeere, Proefke, & Stocking, 2021).

Climate change and care for the environment runs throughout the domains of wellbeing. The UNICEF Children's Goals including *Every child thrives and survives* and *Every child has a fair chance in life* require the consideration of climate change and sustainability, and these are explicitly referenced in the goal *Every child lives in a clean and safe environment.*

In ARACY's recent publication, *What's in the Nest?* (Goodhue, Dakin, & Noble, 2021), climate change and sustainability are explicitly referenced in both Valued, Loved and Safe and Material Basics. Health is also directly affected by climate change and will increasingly be influenced by a child's environment unless climate change is controlled.

The growing importance young people place on climate change and sustainability is being recognised by many decision makers. The Tasmanian Government recently released their Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, *It Takes a Tasmanian Village* (Tasmanian Government, 2021) using the Nest as the conceptual framework for the development of the strategy. To be true to the many voices heard about the importance of the environment to child and youth wellbeing, they created a new descriptor and icon across all six of the Nest's domains to give precedence to environmental concerns. Their icon was inspired by a submission from a 12-year-old, who wrote *"Let the Earth Breathe – let it heal and let it live to sustain the generations after ours".*

As stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every person under the age of 18 has the right to participate in the decision-making processes that impact them. This includes a public forum to express their views, and support for them to do it. Governments and key stakeholders have a responsibility to ensure these rights are granted, but to also provide deep and equitable engagement with young people to *learn* from them and with them about how best to tackle this challenge.

For some time, we've known that many experts see climate change as an intergenerational issue and unanimously support an intergenerational dialogue to tackle the problems posed by climate change by breaking the silos and engaging in healthy conversations and discussions (Strazdins & Skeat, 2011). We also know that young people offer knowledge, ideas, dynamism, and political activism to contribute to solutions, and to hold those in formal positions of power to account.

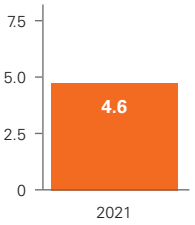
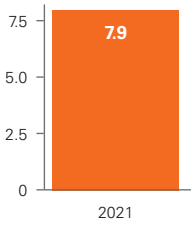
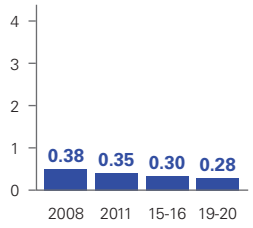
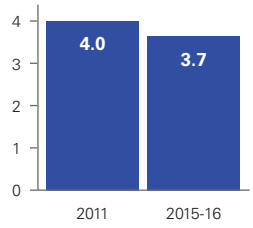
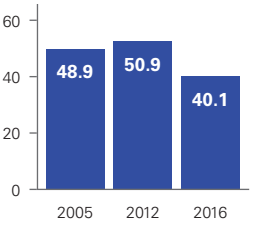
Children and young people are speaking loud and clear about climate change – are we ready to listen to their voices?

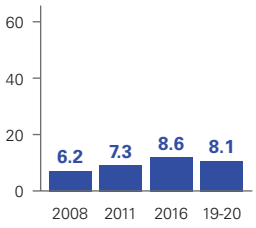
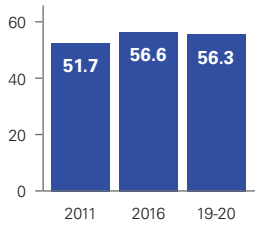
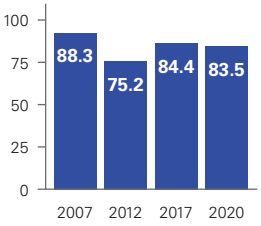
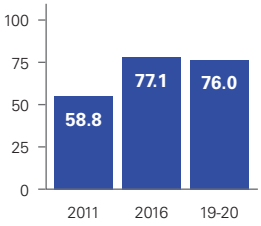
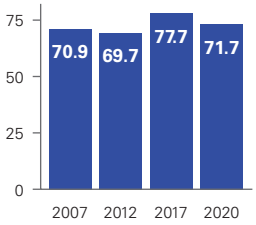
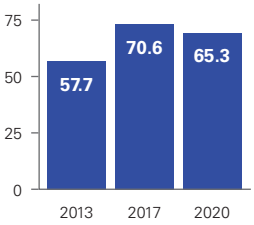
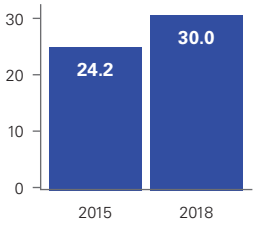
Our Children's Wellbeing: Snapshots by Domain and Goals.

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Valued, Loved and Safe	Every child thrives and survives Every child is protected from violence and exploitation Every child lives in a clean and safe environment

Being valued, loved, and safe means having loving, trusting relationships with family and friends. It involves a child or young person feeling valued by teachers and other adults in their life and knowing that they are important to others and that others are caring and supportive of them. It involves feeling safe at home, in the community and online. Safety also means feeling safe about their future, which includes the knowledge that the environment and climate are a priority and are being protected.

Headline Indicators

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Young People as Carers	% 15-24 giving unpaid assistance to someone with a disability or long-term health condition				
Detention of children and youth	10-17 yrs in detention on an average day (per 1,000)				
Family conflict	% adults who had children in their care while experiencing violence from a current partner				

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Out of home care	0-17 yrs in out of home care (per 1,000)				
Positive peer relationships	% 15-19 yrs turning to others for support …friends				11/43 (OECD rank 2006 -14)
NB: Ranking based on OECD Gallup Wordpoll data where young people say they have relatives and friends they can count on. The same statistic was used for both the positive relationship with parents and positive peer relationship indicators.					
Positive relationship with parents	% 15-19 yrs turning to others for support …parents				11/34 (OECD rank 2006- 14)
NB: Ranking based on OECD Gallup Worldpoll data where young people say they have relatives and friends they can count on. The same statistic was used for both the positive relationship with parents and positive peer relationship indicators.					
Bullying	% 15 yrs who reported any type of bullying act at least a few times a month			30/33 (PISA OECD rank 2015)	31/36 (PISA OECD rank 2018)

What does this mean for children and young people?

Indicators for children regarding their families, neighbourhoods, and social networks are positive for most children and young people. Family cohesion is high, concern about family conflict and family health is low, trends in bullying are improving and most young people have someone they can turn to for support (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021). Young people are also increasingly utilising school supports and the internet as additional forms of social support. However, child protection issues are increasing with inequitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Data gaps remain an issue with limited data regarding the early years and environmental indicators.

Indicators regarding families are largely positive for children and young people in Australia. Most children live with both parents, with about 3 in every 4 children living with both parents in one home (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021). About 1 in 7 children between the ages of 10 to 14 years live with a family member who has a disability or chronic illness, and about 3% of children and young people are carers. The proportion of children concerned about family conflict has steadily declined over the last decade, having roughly halved between 2007 and 2020. This trend is present for children generally as well as specifically within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

However, there is room for improvement in both cohorts: only about 84% of children overall and 79% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not concerned about family conflict (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021). Extreme forms of family conflict are uncommon. For example, parents lying to their children with the intent of turning them against another parent, threatening to harm their children, or threatening to take their children away generally occur at a rate of about 5% or less. Indicators around domestic violence are less promising. For children, witnessing domestic violence can cause lifelong harms to themselves and those around them (Richards, 2011). Of the adults who experience violence at home, a high proportion of them have children in their care at the time. The most recent data indicates that about 40% have children in their care while experiencing violence from a current partner.

Indicators of social networks and peer relationships generally show a positive trend for children and young people alongside a shift in the types and format of support networks. Social networks for adolescents and young adults appear robust: most young adults have a reasonable support network with about 70% of adults aged 18-24 years reporting at least three people they can confide in, a slight upward trend since 2006. Of all support options, young people aged 15-19 years remain most likely to turn to their friends for support (83.5%) followed by their parents (71.7%) with both figures roughly stable since 2007.

Notably there has been a change in who and how young people turn to for support over the last 14 years, with indicators showing a trend toward increased engagement with supports outside of family and friends, as well as a shift toward utilising digital connections. For example, the percentage of young people aged 15-19 years turning to a school counsellor or teacher for support tripled between 2007 and 2020 (30-35% in 2020 compared to about 10% in 2007) and the percentage of young people aged 15-19 years turning to the internet has more than doubled over the same timeframe (from about 22% in 2007 to about 48% in 2020).

Support networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people of this age groups have some overlapping features and trends, also being most likely to turn to their friends (76%) and parents (65.3%) for support and showing an increasing tendency to turn to teachers. There are also some differences, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people slightly more likely to turn to a sibling or other relative/family friend and slightly less likely to turn to the internet.

Bullying indicators are improving with the rate of young people with high levels of concern about bullying has almost halving since 2007. Presently about 12% of people aged 15-19 years are very or extremely concerned about bullying or emotional abuse compared to 21% in 2007. Rates are just slightly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at about 17% in 2020 and show a promising trajectory. Most children are not regularly excluded from peer activities; about 1 in 7 Year 4 students are deliberately ignored or left out of a group at least every few weeks. This decreases slightly with age to about 1 in every 8 or 9 students in Years 6 and 8.

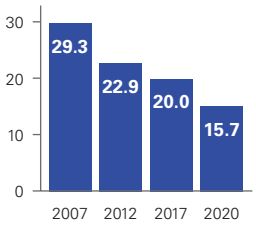
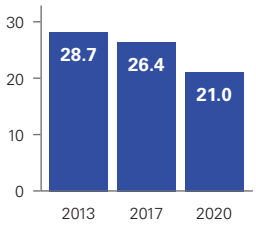
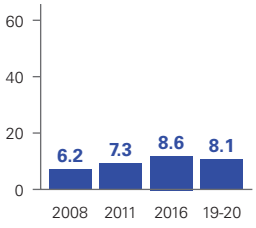
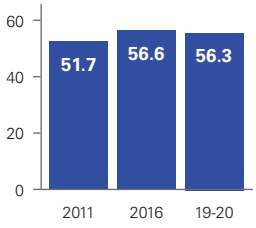
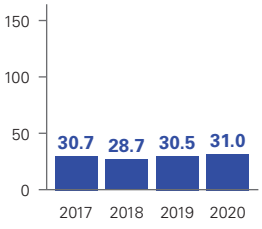
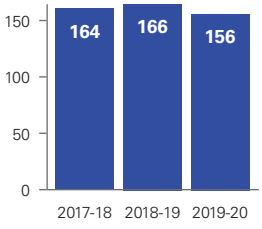
While most children perceive their neighbourhood as safe a significant proportion do not. About 30% of children and just under 20% of adults do not feel safe walking around their neighbourhood at night with similar figures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults (no data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children).

It is worth noting that there are substantial gaps and weaknesses in the data available to us in this dimension. Issues around Valued, Loved and Safe are often not collected in administrative data outside of crime reporting and are difficult to survey due to their sensitivity. Respondents may be unwilling to discuss their experiences or falsely report not being victims of violence or neglect, particularly when the survey is not designed with these questions in mind (for example if procedures are not in place to make sure respondents will not be overheard).

In addition to this, there are two very specific gaps in our data here. The first is a lack of representation of younger children. Younger children are obviously much harder to study than older children on sensitive questions like these. Additional data on their experience on this dimension would be extremely valuable.

We also lack data on the effect that environmental degradation is having on the lives of children, and how this relates to their feelings of safety. This is extremely hard to measure given the difficulty of drawing a causal link between climate change and other environmental issues and the many events related to it that harm the safety of children; for example, bushfires, respiratory disease, or effects like climate-related distress. There is an emerging field of study around "climate anxiety" as well as more sophisticated research and analysis of the impact of "natural" or climate-related disasters. We can also track the importance of these issues to children and young people by the recent test cases in various Australian and international courts on the duty of care governing and corporate bodies hold to ensure children and young people are not adversely affected by decisions relating to climate protection (e.g., Sharma vs the Minister for the Environment; Milieudefensie et al. v. Royal Dutch Shell.; Pabai and Guy Paul Kabai v. Commonwealth of Australia).

These indicators suggest that most young people are doing well in this domain. Concerns about family conflict are decreasing as are concerns about bullying and emotional abuse, and most young people have a range of people they can turn to for support. While friends and parents remain the most frequent forms of support, young people are also increasingly embracing additional supports such as teachers, school counsellors and the internet. The critical issue within this domain is supporting the increasing rates of children and young people in contact with the child protection system and addressing the drivers of inequity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Family conflict	% 15-19 yrs extremely or very concerned about family conflict				
Out of home care	0-17 yrs in out of home care (per 1,000)				
Receiving child protection services	0-17 yrs receiving child protection services (per 1,000)				

Child protection

Child protection issues represent the most extreme form of problematic family dynamics. As a surrogate marker of neglect, rates of parental supervision are high; about 95% of parents of Year 8 children would know if they didn't come home on time. However, child protection remains a key policy issue due to the devastating impact on children and young people, the tendency for intergenerational transmission (Datta, Stratford, Julian, & Shelley, 2019), and because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain highly over-represented (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021).

Out of home care represents the most extreme response within the child protection system. Rates of children in out of home care have generally been increasing, although there has been a modest improvement at the most recent data collection: 8.1 children aged 0-17 years per 1000 were in out of home care in 2020 compared to 8.6 per 1000 in 2016 (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021). This is approximately 1 child in every 125 living in out of home care overall, and 7 in 125 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Ultimately this represents deeply inequitable social determinants coupled with an inability of the present child protection system to adequately meet the needs of vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The following quote from Absec NSW captures this well (Absec NSW, 2020):

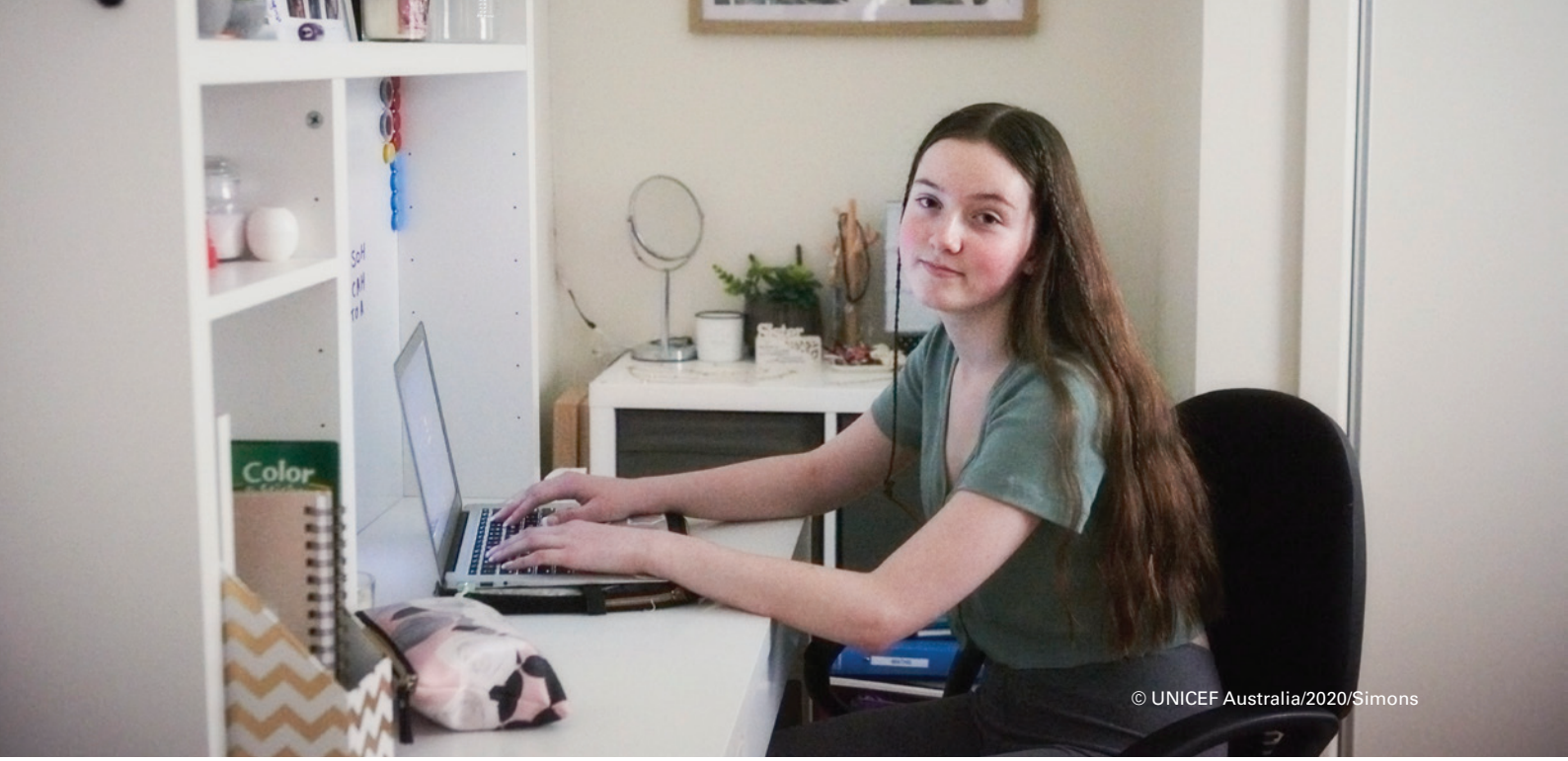
> *The voices of Aboriginal people are often marginalised in public policy conversations about Aboriginal children and families, particularly those families doing it tough to overcome the challenges they face and support their children to thrive.*

> *The dominant narrative is relatively straightforward. Aboriginal children are more likely to be reported at risk of significant harm, and are more likely to be removed from their families. Further, having been removed from their families, Aboriginal children tend to stay in care longer, and are less likely to be returned home. This deficit focus frames the conversation in terms of dysfunctional Aboriginal families and communities, requiring the desperate intervention of the state to rescue Aboriginal children from harm… Absec rejects this narrative. Our communities acknowledge the higher rates of poverty and disadvantage inflicted upon Aboriginal communities, and the impact this has on family functioning. However they also describe a system that, despite the clear lessons of past policies and practices, continues to be focused on intervention and removal, the exercise of statutory authority over families and the imposition of external, non-Aboriginal "solutions" that continues on ongoing cycle of harm."*

- ABSEC NSW, 2020, P5 (BOLD FORMATTING ADDED)

Children from remote communities are more likely to be the subject of a child protection substantiation. In addition, there is a strong discrepancy in child protection by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status both in use of any child protective services and in out-of-home care. This is the largest disparity across any measure in this report.

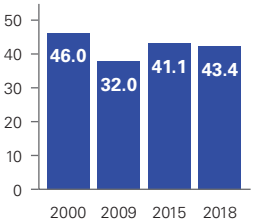
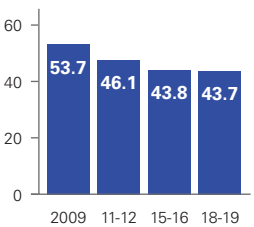
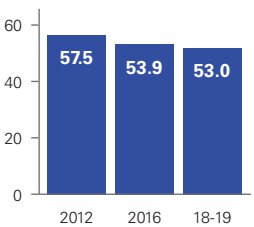
It is also worth noting that COVID-19 is likely to have an impact on child protection over the course of the pandemic. The 'child protection in the time of COVID-19' report from the AIHW lays out numerous findings around changes in child protection in 2020 (AIHW, 2021). Their main findings were that the number of children in out-of-home care was relatively stable during the period, but notifications to child protection services changed across the year, falling during the 'first wave' lockdown but then increasing after that. In addition, they point out that many risk factors for child abuse and neglect have increased during the pandemic

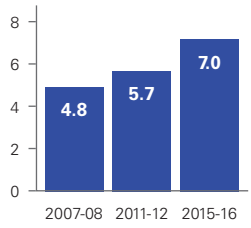
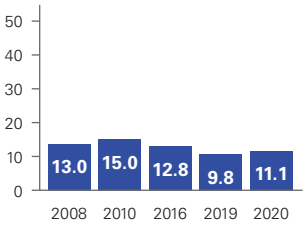
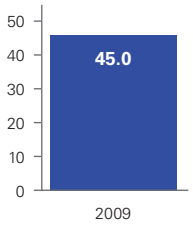
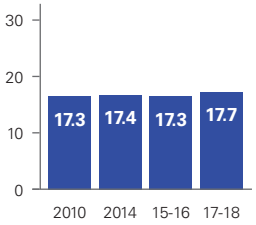
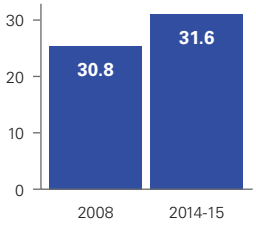
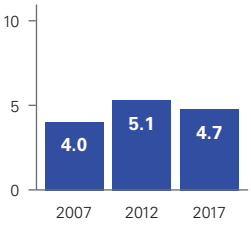
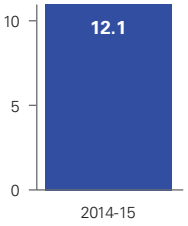
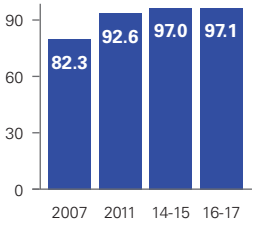


ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Material basics	Every child thrives and survives Every child has a fair chance in life Every child lives in a clean and safe environment

Children and young people who have access to material basics have the things they need. They live in suitable, secure, stable housing, with appropriate clothing, nutritious food, clean water, and clean air. They have access to transport, to required local services and to open spaces in nature. Their family has enough money for necessities. They have the material items needed to develop as an active member of society such as school supplies, suitable technology, or sporting equipment.

Headline Indicators

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Access to educational resources	15 yrs reporting less than four educational possessions (per 1,000)			21/34 (OECD rank 2009)	29/37 (OECD rank 2018)
Homelessness	% of all those accessing Specialist Homelessness Services in past year who were aged 0-24 yrs				

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Overcrowding	% families with dependent children in overcrowded housing				
Parental unemployment	% 0-14 yrs in jobless families			22/27 (OECD rank 2008)	29/32 (OECD rank 2014)
Child poverty	% 0-14 yrs in relative poverty (<50% national median income)			13/41 (OECD rank 2014)	15/41 (OECD 2018)
NB: for international comparisons, relative poverty is measured as under 60% of median income rather than the 50% which is used for the national statistics.					
Youth unemployment	% 15-24 (15-19 in 2007) yrs unemployed and seeking fulltime work			14/35 (OECD rank 2016)	16/34 (OECD 2019)
Information Technology and Internet	% of households with children under 15 with access to internet at home			12/31 (OECD rank 2014)	12/33 (OECD rank 2016)

What does this mean for children and young people?

Most children and young people in Australia have access to the material basics they need to thrive. Most children live in adequate, affordable housing; they have least one working parent; the majority have access to home internet; rates of hunger are low; and the percentage of young adults in education or employment is generally increasing (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021). However, inequitable conditions mean a small subset of children and young people experience profound deprivation, such as inadequate food, housing, and educational resources, and these disadvantages compound each other. Policy and practice need to target these inequitable conditions to enable all children and young people in Australia to thrive.

Most young people have access to the things they need. Access to technology is widespread and at a record high, with 97% of children aged under 15 years with access to internet and home. This is particularly important as the internet becomes more of an essential good (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when school may be online-only during lockdowns) (Horrigan, 2019). However, a significant proportion of children aged 0-18 years experience material deprivation with 16% deprived of two or more items considered essential. The deprivation extends to educational resources with about 43% of 15-year-olds reporting fewer than four educational possessions.

Housing is adequate and affordable for most children and their families. The rate of overcrowding is low, with 93% of families with dependent children living in housing that is not overcrowded. Housing is affordable for most families with approximately 4 in every 5 families spending less than 30% of their gross income on housing. This figure has remained stable over the last fifteen years. However, the rate of overcrowding has steadily increased over the last 10-15 years. Home ownership for young people however appears to be a challenge. Median house prices in Australia have risen 70.27% between 2011 and 2021 (Bellavance, 2021). Over 90% of homeowners are aged 35 years and above, and this has shown an increase over the last fifteen years.

While this trend may represent changes in the composition of the population (i.e., an aging population), young people are still under-represented amongst homeowners, as only 10% of homeowners were aged 15 - 34 years in 2018 despite constituting 28% of the population (ABS, 2019). Approximately 19,400 children (0.4%) aged 0-14 years were homeless on census night in 2016 (AIHW, 2020). A significant proportion of people accessing homelessness services are children and young people; about 44% are aged less than 25 years overall and about 53% are aged less than 25 years among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population seeking homelessness services.

Income indicators are mixed for children, young people, and their families. While most families live within an acceptable income range, poverty is very prevalent. About 1 in 6 children aged 0-14 years live below the national poverty line, defined as living off less than half the national median income. A very large proportion of families are below or only just above the poverty line, with more than 25% of children aged 0-14 years living off less than 60% of the national median income. Child poverty is more prevalent amongst Indigenous families with 3 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living below the national poverty line.

In Australia, child poverty is ultimately a product of income inequality, where national resources are inequitably distributed amongst the population. Compared to other wealthy countries, income inequality is moderate to high in Australia, which was ranked 23rd out of 37 OECD countries for income inequality in 2019. Income inequality is not just a matter of economic justice: it affects a variety of social indicators such as outcomes in health (Lynch, et al., 2004) or education (Papay, Murnane, & Willett, 2015). There has been no change in indicators of income inequality or poverty in the last decade.

Employment indicators have shown an overall improvement over the last decade with a few exceptions. The rate of joblessness in young families has steadily decreased aside from a small increase in 2020 which may be related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Presently 9 in every 10 families with children aged 0-14 years have at least one parent working. The rate is even higher for families with dependent students aged 0-24 years, although the trajectory is relatively stable rather than improving.

Most dependent young people aged 15-24 years are either in education or employment, and again this has shown steady improvement over the last decade aside from an increase in the context of COVID-19. This improving trajectory is also seen for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The percentage of dependent students in either education or employment sat at 88% in 2020, down from 91.6% the preceding year.

Aside from COVID-19, there are other challenges to employment for young people. Firstly, the rate of long-term employment for people aged 15-24 years has increased almost ten-fold since 2006 and was last measured at about 6% in 2014 (the most recent year for which data is available). In August 2021, total unemployment for people aged 15-24 years was 10.2%, much higher than the overall population rate at 4.5% (ABS, 2021). On an international scale, this puts Australia at 16th out of 34 comparable countries in 2019.

Lastly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face inequitable opportunities for employment. However, more young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are in education or employment than not, and the trajectory is increasing. The latest measure in 2015 showed 67.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were either in education or employment, up from 60% in 2011.

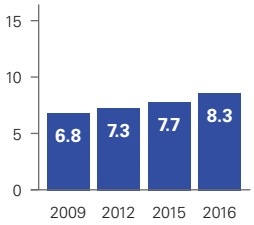
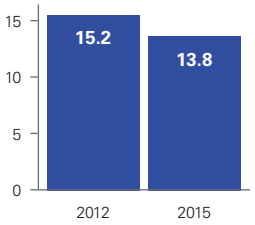
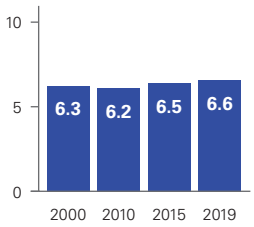
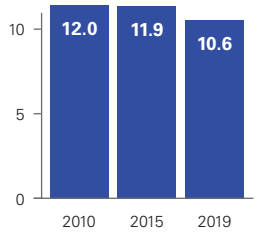
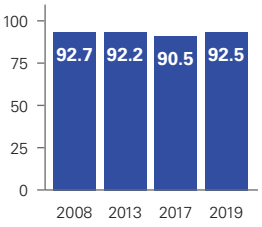
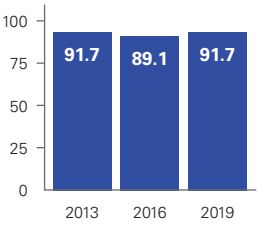
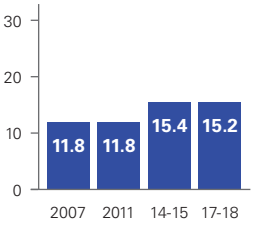
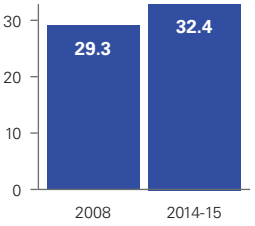
Access to material basics is a strength for most children and young people in Australia. However, a significant proportion of children and young people remain deprived of very basic needs including food, adequate housing, and educational resources. Relative poverty among families with younger children is high and our indicators suggest pressure on cost of living such as overcrowding. Adolescents and young adults face increasing rates of long-term unemployment and are under-represented regarding homeownership. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people also face more inequitable conditions, with higher rates of poverty and joblessness among families with dependent children and higher rates of unemployment for young people.

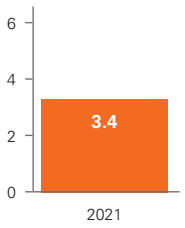
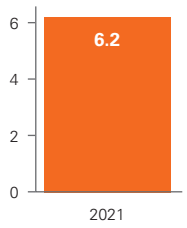
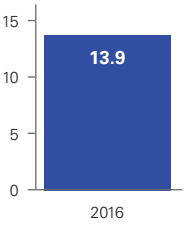
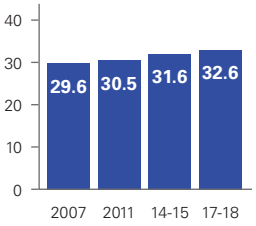
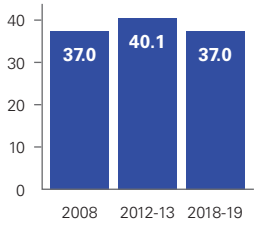
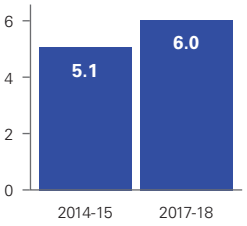
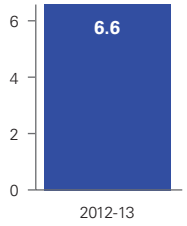
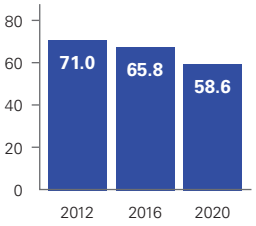
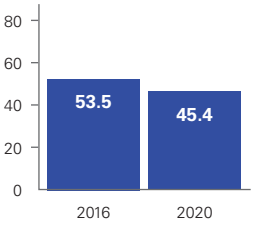
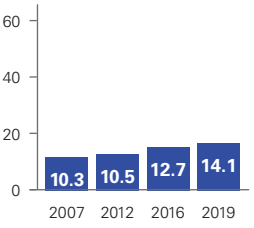
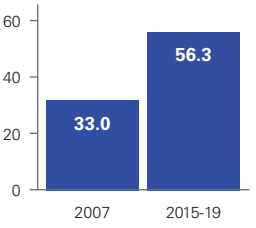
It is especially important to consider and address COVID-19 as an exacerbating factor. However, there are promising trajectories in several areas, including employment amongst young families and the proportion of young people in either education or employment seen in both the overall population and among ASTI young people. It is necessary to understand and amplify these trajectories whilst implementing strategies to address inequity in order equip all children and young people with the material basics they need to thrive.

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Healthy	Every child thrives and survives Every child lives in a clean and safe environment

Healthy children and young people have their physical, mental, and emotional health needs met. All their developmental health needs are provided for in a timely way and they receive appropriate health services, including preventative measures to address potential or emerging physical, emotional, and mental health concerns.

Headline Indicators

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Disability	% children with a disability 0-24				
Note: The age range for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics is 0 – 14 years old					
Health at birth	% of liveborn babies with low birthweight			14/39 (OECD rank 2009)	23/43 (OECD rank 2014)
Immunisation	% children fully immunised at age 2			29/34 (OECD rank 2009)	23/44 (OECD rank 2018)
Mental Health 18 - 24	% 18-24 yrs with high or very high psychological distress				
NB: The age range for the Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander statistics is 15-24 years old					

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Chronic condition	% 0-19 yrs with a long-term health problem				
Mental Health 4 - 17	% 4-17 yrs with any mental disorder				
Physical health	% 5-24 yrs overweight or obese			28/39 (OECD rank 2013)	28/36 (OECD 2016)
NB: The age range for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics is 2-14 years old					
Nutrition	% 2-17yrs meeting minimum recommended consumption of fruit and vegetables				
NB: The age range for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics is 5-17 years old.					
Subjective wellbeing	% 15-19 rating themselves as happy or very happy				
Suicide	15-24 yrs suicide rate (deaths per 100,000)			21/29 (OECD rank 2008)	23/37 (OECD rank 2012-13)

What does this mean for children and young people?

Our snapshot indicators show that most children in Australia enjoy good health, with many promising trends and some key areas that could be targeted to lift the health of children overall.

Key strengths start early in life, with increasing rates of women participating in early antenatal care and decreasing rates of maternal smoking over the last decade. Current figures indicate that 3 in every 4 women overall and 2 in every 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women access antenatal care before 14 weeks. Of note are the improvements in infant mortality and low birth weight among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women which have improved over the last decade compared to relatively consistent rates in the Australian population overall. Presently, approximately 95% of babies overall and 90% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies are not born at a low birthweight.

Another encouraging finding is high immunisations rates with 95% of children overall and 97% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 5 years being fully vaccinated (Australian Government Department of Health, 2021). These promising trajectories in antenatal care, maternal smoking, and low birth weight and infant mortality rates (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies) can be harnessed to address inequities in health outcomes and to lift the health of Australian children overall. For example, maternal smoking rates remain relatively high among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, with 4 in every 10 mothers smoking prior to 20 weeks.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies are also more likely to be born with a low birthweight. The link between maternal cigarette exposure and low birthweight infants is well-established (Kataoka, et al., 2018), therefore targeting a reduction in smoking among all mothers has the potential to positively impact inequities in low birthweight as well as reduce the rate of low birthweight overall. Given that pre-term and low birthweight complications is the leading contributor to the burden of disease in Australian children under age 5 years (AIHW, 2021), this is an important opportunity for intervention.

Disability rate among children and young people are variable depending on the age group. In young children aged 0-4 years, disability rates have remained stable over the last 20 years at a rate of about 3-4%. Older children aged 5-14 years show just a slight upwards trend over the last decade and presently sits at around 1 in every 10 children. Conversely, incidence of disability among adolescents and young adults aged 15-24 has increased by approximately 50% and sits at around 1 in every 10 young people. This may represent increasing awareness and diagnosis of disability rather than increased incidence.

The physical health indicators of Australian children show some important strengths and trends, although also demonstrate some key areas that need to be addressed. Most young people rate their health highly, with over 90% of children self-reporting their health as good or excellent. Injury deaths in children aged 0-14 are declining overall. Regarding nutrition, Australian children generally experience very low levels of hunger with approximately 97% of children having adequate access to food; increasing rates of children are meeting the daily recommended intake of fruit and vegetables; and most children fall within a healthy weight range.

However, there are some important caveats. Firstly, there are inequities in health outcomes, with injury deaths about three times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and this rate is not falling as it is in the general population. And although small, an important 3% of children report regularly going to bed hungry due to inadequate food supply at home. In a high-income country like Australia, our target should be zero.

On a larger scale, rates of fruit and especially vegetable consumption are presently inadequate. For example, almost 95% of children aged 2-18 years do not meet the daily recommended intake of vegetables. This is coupled with concerningly low rates of physical activity with more than half of young people aged 15-24 years reporting they are sedentary or engage in low levels physical activity, and just a quarter of children aged 10-14 playing sports outside of school on an almost daily basis. Although most children fall within a health weight range, rates of overweight children are climbing with approximately 1 in 3 children aged 5-24 years overweight or obese and slightly higher than this for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These indicators are alarming as they are risk factors for important diseases in adulthood such as coronary heart disease, the largest contributor to disease burden in Australia (AIHW, 2021).

In short, Australian children are experiencing large-scale, high-risk behaviours such as low intake of vegetables, sedentary lifestyle, and obesity, while subpopulations are

susceptible to important inequitable outcomes including increased rates of injury among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and hunger.

Fortunately, these factors are considered modifiable, and children and young people remain optimistic about their health. Policies and programs that enhance physical activity and improve diet among children and young people are critical to addressing their present and future health trajectory, while targeted interventions to address injury rates and hunger is also needed to reduce health inequities and brings all Australian children to optimal physical health.

Adolescent-specific health indicators particularly alcohol and drug use are stand out among young Australians on a global scale. Previous data (from 2014) ranked Australian rates of daily smoking among 18–24-year-olds and consumption of risky amounts of alcohol among 12–17-year-olds as the lowest in the developed world, with rates in both indicators continuing to decline. About 1 in every 8 young people aged 12-17 years have ever used illicit substances. However, inequitable health outcomes are present with rates of daily smoking around 3 times higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people ages 18-24 years.

We want children and young people in Australia to be thriving and in many ways, they are. Most infants in Australia are off to a good start in life, being born at a healthy birthweight with most mothers accessing early antenatal care. Rates of hunger are low, immunisation rates are high, and children and young people feel positive about their physical health and optimistic about the future. Young people continue to have low levels of cigarette and alcohol consumption among the lowest in the world.

However, there are some key opportunities for improvement. These include improving the physical activity and diets of children and young people and implementing evidence-based interventions that can address increasing rates of mental health problems and suicide. In addition, key areas of health inequities persist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people particularly around perinatal health, childhood injuries, and mental health outcomes.

However important gains have also been made among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, with increasing rates of babies being born a healthy birthweight, increased uptake of antenatal care, and declines in infant mortality, maternal smoking, and youth suicide. This represents an important opportunity to learn what works to improve health outcomes for children and young people. Capitalising on these strengths and addressing areas of improvement and inequity is needed to lift the health of children and young people in Australia overall.

Mental health

Children and young people in Australia are optimistic about their future despite a trend towards increased mental health concerns. More than 95% of children feel positive about their future. However, there has been trend towards increased rates of psychological distress, mental illness, and suicide over the last ten to fifteen years and the gap between mental health indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people remains high.

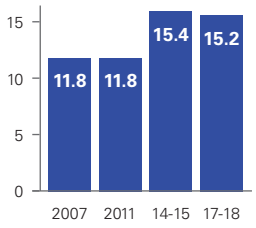
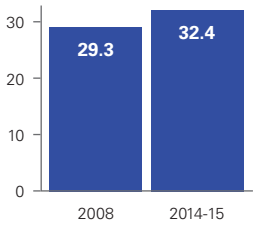
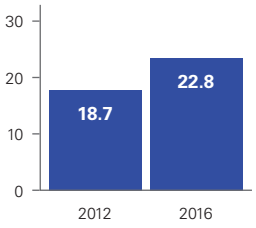
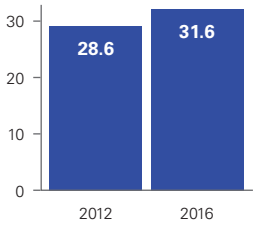
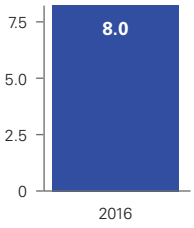
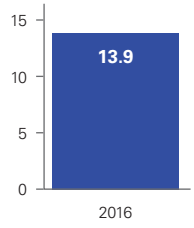
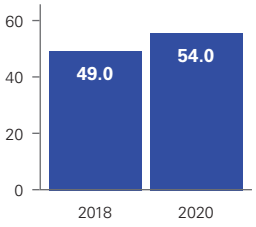
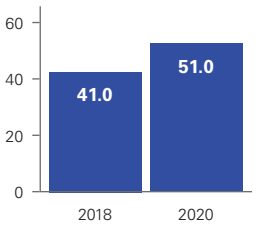
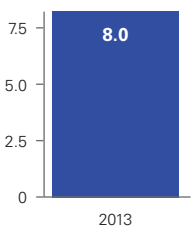
The incidence of probable serious mental illness for people aged 15-19 years is 1 in 3 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and 1 in 4 for the overall population of 15–19-year-olds. Suicide rates in similar age groups remain about 4 times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people despite a reduction in recent years not seen in the overall population.

Fortunately, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of fostering good mental health in recent years and improved understanding of risk and protective factors (Australian Government Department of Health, 2003). Experience of mental health also varies notably by gender and gender identity. Young women are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety disorders. They are also more likely to report high or very high psychological distress (AIHW, 2020). However, young men are more likely to be diagnosed with any mental health condition driven by much higher rates of behavioural disorders (particularly ADHD) (Lawrence, et al., 2015).

Transgender and gender diverse children and young people have severely worse mental health outcomes than their cisgender peers. Transgender and gender diverse people aged 14 to 25 are seven times more likely to have been diagnosed with depression, five and a half times more likely to have been diagnosed with anxiety; they are 15 times more likely to attempt suicide; and 90.2% of those aged 14 to 21 reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.

Many children report regular difficulties with sleep, with 12-16% of those in Years 4 to 8 reporting difficulty sleeping almost every day.

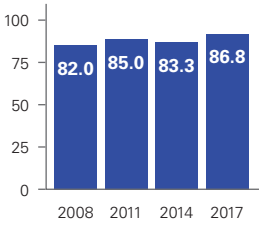
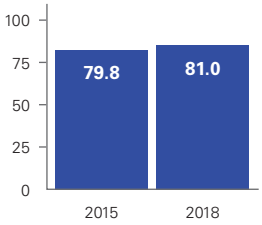
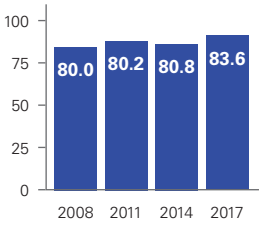
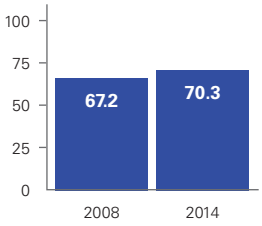
There are some indicators to suggest that COVID-19 may have worsened the mental health of young people. According to polling conducted by the Australian National University, COVID-19 was a serious stressor of youth mental health with 18 – 24-year-olds reporting the greatest fall in subjective wellbeing of any age bracket of adults between January 2020 and August 2021 (Biddle & Gray, 2021). In addition, 58% of parents and carers rated COVID-19 as having a negative impact on their child's mental health in 2021 (Biddle & Gray, 2021)..

Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
% 18-24 yrs with high or very high psychological distress				
NB: The age range for the Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander statistics is 15-24 years old				
% 15-19 yrs with probable serious mental illness				
% 12-17 yrs self-harming in previous 12 months				
% 4-17 yrs with any mental disorder				
% reporting lacking companionship some of the time / often				
Ability to carry out usual activities in past two weeks – % unable on at least one day				
% 12 -17 yrs who have self-harmed in past 12 months				

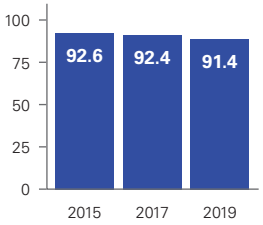
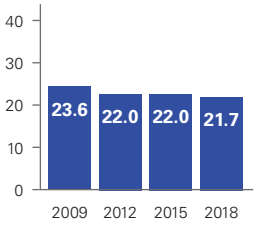
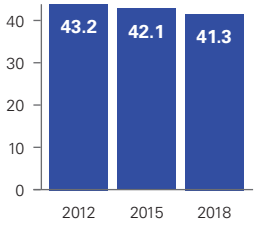
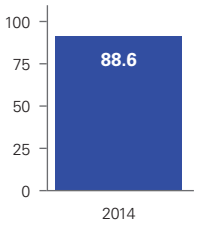
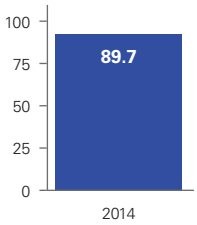
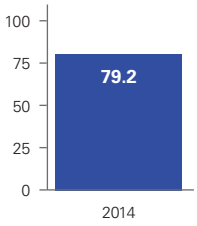
ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Learning	Every child learns

Children and young people learn through a variety of experiences within the classroom, the home, and the community in which they live. Their individual learning needs are addressed to allow them to realise their full learning potential. Families are engaged in their child's learning. Children and young people are supported and encouraged to learn in a wide variety of settings, including formal education. They have opportunities to participate in a breadth of experiences where their learning is valued and supported by their family and in the wider community.

Headline Indicators

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Early childhood education	% 4-5 yrs (who do not attend primary school) usually attending preschool			35/40 (OECD 2014)	29/48 (OECD 2019)
Parent engagement	% parents read from book or told story to child 0-2yrs in past week				

NB: For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children this data measured parents of 4–14-year-olds who read from a book, told child a story or listened to child read in last week

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
School attendance	% attendance for students in Years 1-10 in all schools				
School readiness	% children at first year of school developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain				
School satisfaction	% children reporting that school is a place where they feel happy - Year 4				26/34 (across all years)
	% children reporting that school is a place where they feel happy - Year 6				
	% children reporting that school is a place where they feel happy - Year 8				

What does this mean for children and young people?

The early years have become a key policy area due to its role in perpetuating or mitigating inequities, not just in educational outcomes but wellbeing more generally. Education particularly is an important social determinant of health. For most children, indicators around early childhood education are positive. More than 4 in every 5 children not in primary school attend preschool. Rates are similar for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children overall, and both cohorts have shown a slight upwards trend.

However, there is room for improvement. On an international scale, Australia performs in the middle with a rank of 29 out of 48 comparable countries regarding rates of preschool attendance. Preschool in the years before school is important for school readiness and is particularly beneficial for children who face challenges in other areas of their life (AIHW, 2015). In this sense preschool represents an important opportunity to reduce educational inequity.

Another factor which influences school readiness is parents engaging children in learning activities at home. Activities such as reading books, telling stories, singing, and cooking with young children help teach them foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. At present, about 4 in every 5 parents report reading or telling a story to their infant (age 0-2 years) in the last week, and about half of parents report that they often engage their child in early literacy and numeracy activities before starting school.

While these statistics show significant room for improvement, they also represent a very promising target for intervention. Supporting families to access quality preschool programs, and to sing, talk and play with their young children is not only a widely acceptable policy goal for parents and children, but is also an important step in lifting educational outcomes and thereby altering the trajectory of an important social determinant of health.

Developmental vulnerability as measured at school commencement considers both academic and non-academic elements of school readiness, incorporating measures of physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge (AEDC, 2021). Developmental vulnerability is important due to the associated risk of poorer educational outcomes in later schooling years.

For example, developmental vulnerability at school entry is associated with lower NAPLAN scores, lower subjective wellbeing, and increased risk of school disengagement and bullying from Years 3 and beyond (Evans-Whipp, Mundy, Miller, Canterford, & Patton, 2018). Developmental vulnerability is predictive of Year 7 educational performance, where almost half the children commencing school

developmentally vulnerable will not meet threshold performance levels for reading and numeracy in Year 7 (Evans-Whipp, Mundy, Miller, Canterford, & Patton, 2018). Importantly, the gap between developmentally vulnerable children and not-vulnerable children is enhanced throughout the school years, with developmentally vulnerable children about 2 years behind their peers by Year 7 (Evans-Whipp, Mundy, Miller, Canterford, & Patton, 2018).

While most children who commence school do not have developmental vulnerability, about 1 in 5 children overall and 2 in 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will be developmentally vulnerable in at least one or more domain by school entry. Addressing developmental vulnerability requires a coordinated approach beyond the education sector and is again an important avenue for addressing the growing inequity that presently occurs as children pass through the schooling system.

Indicators around schooling incorporate academic performance as well as non-academic outcomes and parental engagement in their child's learning. Current non-academic indicators are generally more positive for primary school years and tend to decline with age and especially on entry to secondary school.

Parent engagement is the exception, remaining relatively stable through the school years with about 85% of children reporting their parents make sure they set aside time for homework and ask them what they learned at school at least once a week, measured at Years 4, 6, and 8. Engagement through dialogue with teachers is lower and appears to show a decrease with age: about 68% of Year 4 children report their parents talk to their teacher at least once or twice a term, dropping off of 61% in Year 6 and falling heavily to 38% by Year 8. Two recent systematic reviews have shown that parental engagement is an important predictor of student success across both primary and secondary education (Evidence for Learning, 2021). No data is available regarding parent engagement indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Similar patterns are seen for other non-academic indicators including school attendance, school satisfaction, teacher support, and school pressure as reported by students. About 10-12% of students in Years 4, 6, and 8 miss school at least once a week. Year 8 students miss about 10% of school days overall, slightly above the 7-8% of school days missed by students in Years 4 and 6, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of the same age miss roughly twice the amount of school days. No data are available on trajectories of school attendance.

Both school satisfaction and teacher support are strengths, especially in the younger school years: about 90% of primary school children (measured in Years 4 and 6) report that school is a place they feel happy, dropping to about 80% in Year 8. About 80% of children in Years 4 and 6 report they have a teacher that really cares for them and who listens to them when they have something to say.

School pressure on the other hand shows some concerning trends, with about one third of students in Year 6 reporting feeling some or a lot of pressure from schoolwork, increasing to about half of students by Year 8. Importantly no data are available on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children regarding school satisfaction, teacher support, and school pressure.

The tendency for these non-academic indicators to decline between Years 4 and 8 has important policy and practice implications, as negative schooling experienced in the middle years have been identified as a predictor of lower academic performance in Year 7 (Evans-Whipp, Mundy, Miller, Canterford, & Patton, 2018). While developmental vulnerability at school entry remains a strong risk factor for poorer academic outcomes in Year 7, a recent longitudinal study of students through the middle years found that most students who did not meet reading and numeracy performance thresholds in Year 7 were not developmentally vulnerable at school commencement (Evans-Whipp, Mundy, Miller, Canterford, & Patton, 2018).

This implies that experiences in the middle years such as bullying, school disengagement, low wellbeing, and emotional and behavioural challenges can independently influence Year 7 academic outcomes. Despite the importance of non-academic outcomes on academic performance, data gaps remain including for all high school students (above Year 8) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all age groups.

Regarding higher school years, the Year 12 retention rate has been gradually increasing for students overall and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, aside from a slight dip in 2020 in both cohorts which may be related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Inequities persist with notably lower rates of Year 12 retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students than the overall population. Prior to 2020, the trajectory of Year 12 retention was improving at a much faster rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and represents an important learning opportunity about how best to support students in their higher school education.

Above: UNICEF Australia supports Indi Kindi, an inclusive and culturally-appropriate early childhood education program for children in remote communities. © Moriarty Foundation/Quilliam

International testing performance

Academic performance is closely monitored on a national and international scale. There are two major sets of internationally comparable standardised tests for assessing student learning across countries.

The first is PISA which is overseen by the OECD, it measures the performance of 15-year-old students across maths, science and reading. The second is the TIMSS/PIRLS program run by the IEA – an international non-profit. TIMSS focuses on maths and science while PIRLS focuses on reading, although they gather data on a much broader range of indicators than PISA including on educational context. Both TIMSS and PIRLS cover students in the equivalent of Australian Years 4 and 8.

Here we have included TIMSS/PIRLS for students in Year 4 to measure performance of students in this age range. Where PISA and TIMSS/PIRLS cover the same age group at Years 8 and 9, we have reported PISA results. This is because PISA allows for comparison with a broader group of countries, is reported more frequently, and results between the two correlate strongly (Swenson, 2017). In addition, while TIMSS/PIRLS changes to test how well students have learnt the local curriculum, PISA content is standardised.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Department of Education, 2019) made by all Australian Education Ministers, has two distinct but interconnected goals:

Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.

Goal 2: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

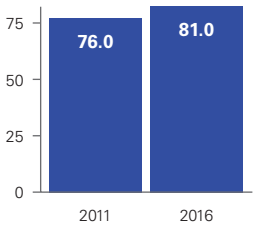
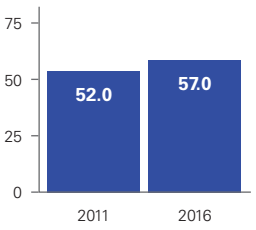
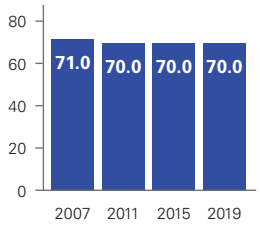
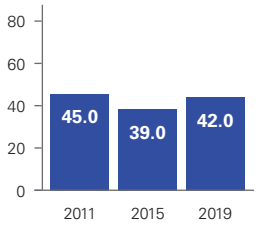
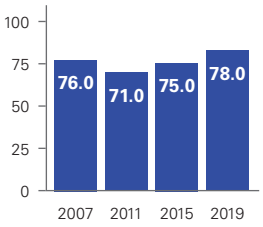
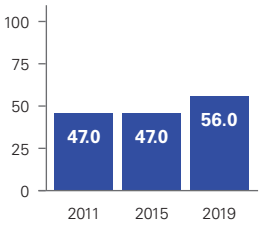
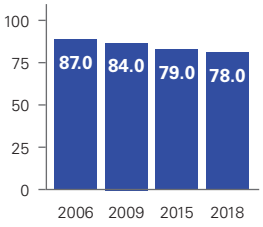
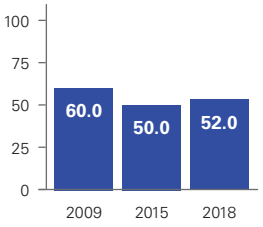
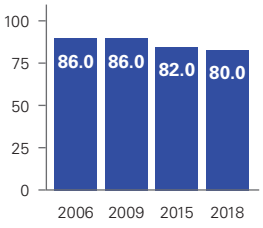
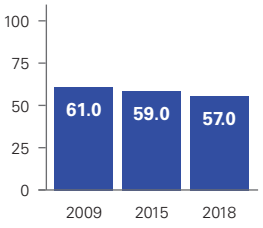
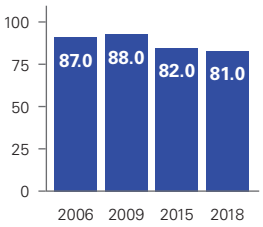
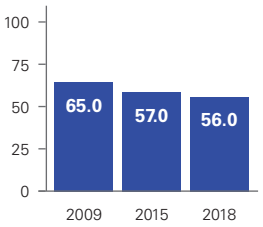
Meeting minimum educational thresholds is one measure of this. Most Australian students meet educational thresholds, with roughly 4 in 5 primary and secondary school students overall above the low benchmark for reading, mathematics, and science on international examinations. However, there are several concerning points arising from the data.

The first is the deeply inequitable outcomes faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who face about a 50% chance of scoring above the low threshold for each academic domain throughout high school and secondary school. This means that about half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students are not adequately supported to achieve sufficient skills in literacy, numeracy, and science to engage effectively in society. As a social determinant of health, this has implications beyond educational attainment. This calls for drastic policy and practice changes including and beyond education to learn how to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through their schooling.

The second concerning point is the trajectory of school performance in secondary school. The proportion of students meeting the minimum benchmark for reading, science, and mathematics has steadily declined over the last 10-15 years, with one exception: an improvement in the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students meeting the minimum benchmark for mathematics. Unpicking this finding represents an important opportunity to learn what works to improve academic outcomes.

Interestingly, the concerning trajectories in academic performance in secondary school are not reflected in academic performance in primary school, where the proportion of students above the low benchmark have either remained stable or improved over time. This is an interesting finding given the tendency for non-academic educational outcomes to decline upon high school entry and the growing understanding of the impact of non-academic outcomes on educational performance.

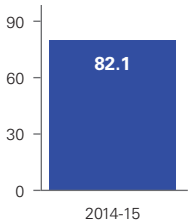
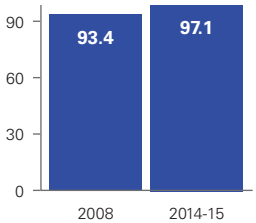
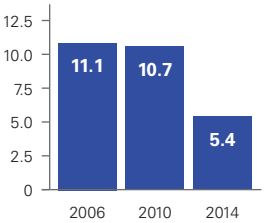
Taken together these trends in academic performance – particularly the discrepancy between primary and secondary school trajectories, and the improving trajectory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student performance in mathematics as an outlier among the remaining secondary school academic trajectories – and trends in non-academic outcomes across primary and secondary school years provide important clues as to how to best enhance educational outcomes for students.

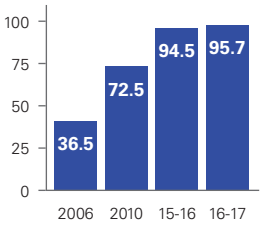
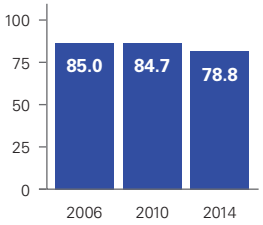
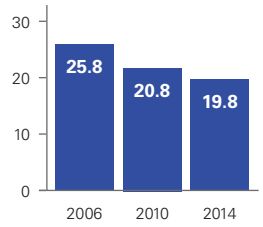
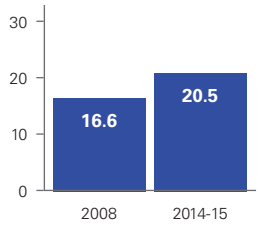
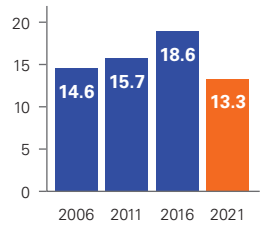
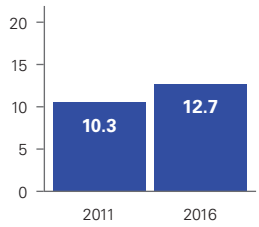
Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Performance in Reading, Maths & Science (Year 4)	% year 4 above the low benchmark for reading			19/24 (TIMMS PIRLS 2011)	28/50 (TIMMS PIRLS 2015)
Performance in Reading, Maths & Science (Year 4)	% year 4 above the low benchmark for maths			28/49 (TIMMS PIRLS 2015)	27/58 (TIMMS PIRLS 2019)
Performance in Reading, Maths & Science (Year 4)	% year 4 above the low benchmark for science			28/47 (TIMMS PIRLS 2015)	14/58 (TIMMS PIRLS 2019)
Performance in Reading, Maths & Science 15 yr olds (PISA)	% 15 yrs at level 2 and above for maths			25/57 (PISA 2015)	29/79 (PISA 2018)
Performance in Reading, Maths & Science 15 yr olds (PISA)	% 15 yrs at level 2 and above for reading			16/57 (PISA 2015)	16/77 (PISA 2018)
Performance in Reading, Maths & Science 15 yr olds (PISA)	% 15 yrs at level 2 and above for science			14/57 (PISA 2015)	17/79 (PISA 2018)

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Participating	Every child has a fair chance in life Every child thrives and survives

Participating is about children and young people having a voice, being listened to, and taken seriously within their family and community. It means having a say in decisions that impact them. It is being empowered to speak out and express themselves. Participating includes involvement with peers and groups through a variety of activities, including online communities. Participating means being an active member of society.

Headline Indicators

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Engagement in sport or recreation	% 15-24 yrs who have participated in sport or recreational physical activity in past year				
Civic engagement	% 18-24 yrs participated in groups in past year…civic and political groups				22/31 (OECD 2011 14)

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Engagement through technology	% 18-24 yrs spent time in Internet social activity in past 3 months				22/32 (OECD rank 2014)
NB: for 2014 – 15 national statistics, this measured social media use.					
Having a voice with friends and family	% 18-24 yrs feel able to have a say among family and friends on important issues all or most of the time				
Having a voice in the community	% 15-24 yrs feel able to have a say within community on important issues all or most of the time				
Volunteering	% 15-24 yrs who spent time doing unpaid voluntary work in the previous 12 months				5/35 (OECD rank 2006-15)

What does this mean for children and young people?

Indicators of participation consider engagement with technology, community participation, and having a voice, both amongst family and friends and within political systems. There has been a shift in the patterns of engagement, with the main pattern being a shift from community participation to engaging with online communities.

While young people generally have high participation in sporting and cultural activities and feel comfortable having a say among family and friends, there are notable limitations on their ability to have a say among their community and on civic and political issues. It is also noteworthy that there is a general lack of data on children's participation, with available data mainly focused on the 18-25 age range. Much more work is needed to identify indicators and data sources that adequately reflect this dimension.

Participation through technology is high and increasing for children and young people. Over 90% of people aged 14-17 years own a mobile phone, up from 80% 5 years earlier. Over 95% of young adults 18-24 years have spent time on internet social activity in the past 3 months, a figure that has almost tripled over the last 15 years.

Community participation has shown some mixed trends. Volunteering of young adults (18-24 years) was increasing, with the data in 2016 showing just over 1 in 6 young adults spent time doing unpaid voluntary work in the last 12 months. However, in the 2021 census, this fell likely due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic (Biddle and Gray 2022). Most young people participate in physical and cultural activities at least annually, with about 82% of people aged 15-24 years participating in a sport or recreational activity in the last year and about 94% involved in a least one organised cultural activity.

A single indicator of young people with disability shows high rates of community participation, with 95% of children aged 5-14 years with a disability report having engaged in a social activity away from home in the previous 3 months. Concerningly, participation within the neighbourhood appears to decrease significantly with age. While about 73% children in Year 4 report having lots of fun things to do in their neighbourhood, this decreases to 67% in Year 6 and 47% in Year 8.

Children and young people being able to have a say in issues that affect them is consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Most young adults feel able to have a say amongst family and friends, with about 4 in every 5 adults aged 18-24 years reporting feeling able to have a say among family and friends on important issues all or most of the time. Importantly, this has shown a slight decrease over time. Much lower are the figures for being able to have a say within community on important issues all or most of the time, with just 1 in 5 young people aged 15-24 years feeling able to have a say within community on important issues all or most of the time, with steady decrease since 2006. Interestingly, this contrasts with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the same age who are more likely to feel able to have a say amongst community and show an increasing trend over time (see Breakout box: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation).

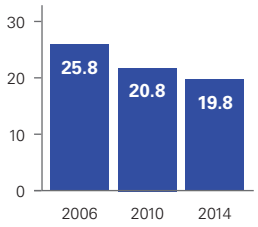
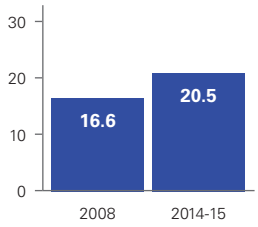
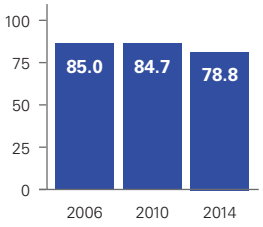
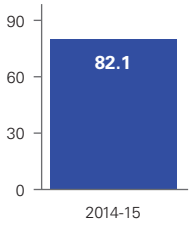
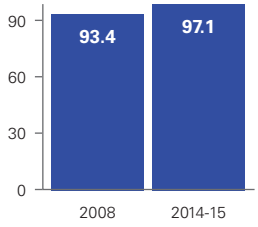
Limited indicators are available which detail political participation, but the data that is available suggests young people need much more support actively engaging in civic and political issues. Despite expressing concerns about highly political issues including the environment, discrimination, and mental health (Tiller, et al., 2020), participation in civic and political groups is at an all-time low: just 5% of people aged 18-24 years participated in civic and political groups in past year, a number that has halved in the last decade.

While voting participation is high on an international scale, this is very likely a function of mandatory voting in Australia – an arrangement which is uncommon internationally – and does not necessarily reflect meaningful participation within the democracy (OECD, 2020). Taken together, young people appear concerned and engaged about political issues but are either unable or unconvinced that their participation is meaningful. Young people have a strong vested interest in political decisions, including employment, education, and environmental issues, and have a right to have a say.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation

There are important lessons to be learned from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, who have very high and increasing rates of participation in sport or recreational physical activity compared to the overall population: in 2015, 97% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15-24 years participated in sport or recreational physical activity in the past year compared to 82% of young people overall, an increase from 93% in 2008. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young adults are also more likely to feel able to have a say within their community. Importantly this has shown an increase over time, unlike for young people in general whose ability to have a say among family and friends and within their community has been decreasing steadily since 2006.

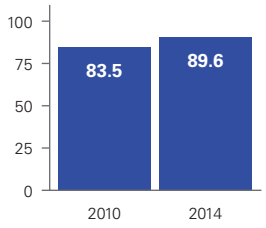
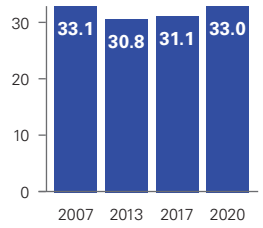
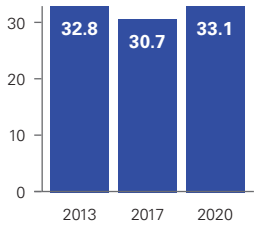
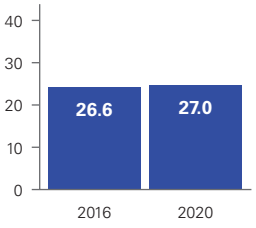
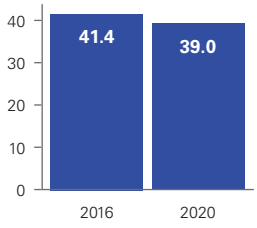
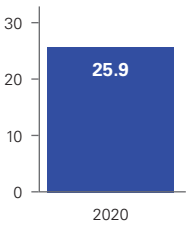
Above: Indi Kindi educator Deandra has been delivering inclusive and culturally-appropriate early childhood education in her remote community in the Northern Territory for over five years. © Moriarty Foundation/Lister

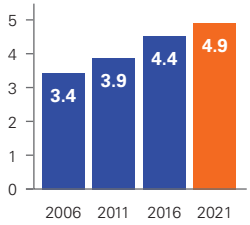
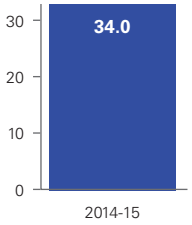
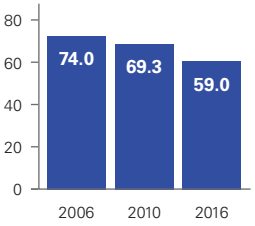
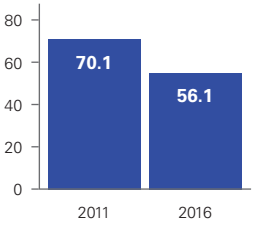
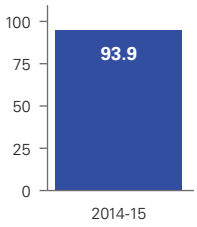
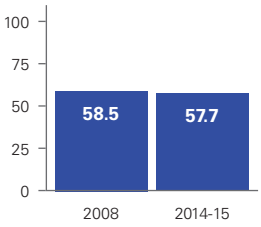
Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics
Having a voice in the community	% 15-24 yrs feel able to have a say within community on important issues all or most of the time		
Having a voice with friends and family	% 18-24 yrs feel able to have a say among family and friends on important issues all or most of the time		
Engagement in sport or recreation	% 15-24 yrs who have participated in sport or recreational physical activity in past year		

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Positive Identity & Culture	Every child has a fair chance in life Every child thrives and survives Every child learns

Having a positive sense of identity and culture is central to the wellbeing of all children and young people. This is important for all, regardless of background, but in Australia, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. It encompasses having spiritual needs met, a sense of cultural connectedness, belonging and acceptance at home and in the community – and confidence that their identity, culture, and community is respected and valued. It involves feeling safe and supported in expressing one's identity, regardless of gender, sexuality, culture, or language.

Headline Indicators

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Acceptance of other cultures	% 15-24 yrs who report being tolerant of society being comprised of different cultures				
Body image	% 15-19 yrs reporting that body image is an issue of personal concern				
Experience of discrimination	% 15-19 yrs who have experienced discrimination in past year				22/31 (OECD 2011 14)
Gender and sexuality	% 14 - 21 yrs who identify as LGBTQ+ and have told most of them/all of them… family				22/32 (OECD rank 2014)

Indicator	Measure	National Statistics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics	Previous rank	Current rank
Indigenous identification	% 15-24 yrs identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander				
	% 4-14 yrs who speak an Australian Indigenous language				
Religion	% 15-24 yrs identifying with a religious affiliation				
Engagement in cultural activities	% 15-24 yrs involved in at least one organised cultural activity in past year				

What does this mean for children and young people?

A variety of indicators describe elements of identity and culture expressed by children and young people in Australia. About 1 in every 5 people aged 5-24 years were born overseas and a similar proportion speak a language other than English at home. Both indicators have increased notably over the last decade, with the proportion of overseas born children approximately doubling between 2006 and 2016. Just under 5% of people aged 15-24 years identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander which has also increased slightly over the last decade (4.9% in 2021 up from 3.4% in 2006). Religious affiliation on the other hand has decreased, with about 60% of people aged 15-24 years identifying with a religious affiliation in 2016 compared to 74% in 2006. Similar proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 15-24 years identify with a religious affiliation at 56%.

Gender, sexuality, and body image are important elements of identity and indicators around this aspect of identity are mixed. Most sexually and gender diverse young people feel positive about this aspect of their identity, with 3 in every 4 people aged 16-27 years who identify as LGBTQI feeling 'pretty good' or 'great' about identifying as LGBTQI. Disclosure to friends was relatively common, with 96% having told a female friend, about 90% having told a male

friend, and 65% having told most or all their friends. Parents were also often aware with 77% telling their mum and 66% telling their dad.

However, widespread disclosure of LGBTQI identity among community groups was uncommon, with widespread disclosure among teachers and sports teammates the least common. Just under 11% of young people aged 14-21 years who identify as LGBTQI have told most or all their teachers and a similar proportion reported telling most of all their teammates. Disclosure to most or all their co-workers, classmates, and family was slightly more common and ranged from 15 to 26%. This apparent reluctance to disclose LGBTQI identity beyond trusted friends or family may stem from the very high rates of abuse, with about 7 in every 10 people aged 16-27 years who identify as LGBTQI report having experienced abuse because of their sexuality and/or gender identity. Many adolescents rate LGBTQI issues as one of the most important issues facing Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents: about 10% of people aged 15-19 years rate LGBTQI issues as one of the most important issues facing Australia and about 13% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the same age group. A significant proportion of young people report being concerned about body image, with 1 in 3 people aged 15-19 years reporting body image as an issue of personal concern.

Multiple indicators describe young people's experience of acceptance and discrimination. Equity and discrimination were the most common issue of national concern in the 2020 Mission Australia Youth Survey of Australians aged 15-19 years (Tiller, et al., 2020). However, the great majority of young people describe acceptance of multiculturalism with an increase over time. The latest data from 2014 indicates 90% of people aged 15-24 years report being tolerant of society being comprised of different cultures.

Happily, the proportion of people aged 15-19 years reporting discrimination as an issue of personal concern has declined since 2007 and presently sits at 8.6% (down from 13.5% in 2007) although this trend is not reflected for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people which has remained stable at just under 20% over the same timeframe.

The most frequently identified reasons for personal experience of discrimination for people aged 15-19 years overall in decreasing order were: gender, race/cultural background, mental health, age, sexuality, religion and ranged from about 4 to 11%. Frequency patterns were altered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15-19 years. Race/cultural background the most frequent reason for experience of discrimination followed by gender, mental health, age, physical health or ability and sexuality (equally common), religion and ranged from 9 to 23%. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth were about twice as likely to experience all forms of discrimination except for gender which was about 1.5 times more common.

Young people's sense of identity and culture is seriously affected by perpetration of crime and incarceration. Both stigmatise and limit the young person's ability to meaningfully participate in society.

Violent offending by youth is reducing, with indicators showing a reduction in rates of offence of acts intended to cause injury across all age groups from 10 to 24 years..

The detention of minors (aged 10-17 years) has also shown a steady decrease overall and within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Incarceration rates of young adults aged 18-24 years have not shown the same trends, with rates remaining approximately stable overall over the last decade and a slight upwards trend for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young adults.

While youth violence and incarceration are generally uncommon, inequities are visible through the high incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people sitting at about ten times the average rate within the same age group.

Another important point of consideration is the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR), with Australia's age of 10 years sitting well outside the international consensus of 14 years minimum. While some jurisdictions are legislating to change this, federally the Council of Attorneys-General deferred deciding on raising the MACR in July 2020 and gave no timeline for when the issue would be considered again.

Indicators of positive sense of identity and culture are more limited than other domains and tend not to capture the views and experiences of younger children. Of the available data, young people appear to be largely accepting of diversity, with tolerance of multiculturalism high and a general increase in willingness to disclose LGBTQI identity to peers over other social groups. Multiculturalism is increasing as is multicultural tolerance. There also appears to be a decreasing tolerance of discrimination seen in its prominence as an issue of concern despite a reduction in rates of personal experience of discrimination, perhaps a product of increasing awareness.

Conversely, religion appears to be playing a decreasing role in the lives of young people, with decreasing frequency of religious affiliation and religious reasons for discrimination being the least common among people aged 15-19 years. Important inequities are apparent in this domain with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experiencing about twice the rate of personal discrimination and ten times the rate of incarceration.

Australia's Global Performance

In understanding Australia's progress, it is useful to also look at how we stand compared to similar countries. While the body of this report presented several international comparisons, this appendix presents a broader range of indicators. These indicators give a sense of our standing in the world. The indicators where Australia is in the top third of the cohort in green, those where we are in the middle third in yellow and those where we are in the bottom third in red.

Most of the data here is drawn from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a group of 38 high-income countries which collects and publishes social and economic data on member countries. This report draws from international rankings made by the OECD, as well as a few other international rankings. In many of the comparisons, the OECD lacks sufficient data on all 38 member states so the denominator may be lower than 38. In other cases, there may be interesting comparisons with non-member countries, so the OECD has included more than 38 states in the ranking.

Comparable indicators within the time frame of this report that correspond to the domain of Positive Sense of Identity and Culture were severely limited; hence this domain is not covered in this section. More detail on these rankings including sources can be found in our Technical Report (ARACY and UNICEF Australia, 2021).

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Valued, Loved and Safe	Every child thrives and survives Every child is protected from violence and exploitation Every child lives in a clean and safe environment

Measure	Cohort	Ranking	Year
Percentage of 15-29 years who have relatives or friends they can count on	OECD	8/34	2006-2014
Percentage of youth (under 18) in the prison population	OECD	8/35	2016
The percentage of women married between 15 and 19 years	OECD	1/25	2014
Daily minutes spent with children	OECD	1/21	2013
Proportion of parents that are separated or divorced	OECD	19/33	2017
Percentage of 15-29 years declaring feeling safe when walking alone at night in the area where they live	OECD	22/34	2006-2014
Child homicide rate (deaths of children aged 0–19 by intentional assault per 100,000)	OECD	22/37	2010-2013
Year 4 students not experiencing bullying	PIRLS	47/58	2019
Percentage of the population declaring feeling safe when walking alone at night in the city or area where they live	OECD	27/36	2016-18

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS

Material basics

UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS

Every child thrives and survives
Every child has a fair chance in life
Every child lives in a clean and safe environment

Measure	Cohort	Ranking	Year
Percentage of 20-24 yrs who are not in education or employment	OECD	11/38	2015
Percentage of 15-year-olds who have accessed career guidance	OECD	3/16	2012
Percentage of 15–24-year-olds employed	OECD	4/35	2017
Percentage of 15-year-old students in bottom socio-economic quartile who first used a computer when they were 6 years or younger	PISA	10/46	2015
Housing expenditure as a percentage of gross adjusted disposable income	OECD	9/28	2012
Percentage reduction in the rate of child poverty due to social transfers	OECD	12/37	2014
Duration of paid maternity leave	OECD	11/39	2018
Duration of paid paternity leave	OECD	6/39	2018
Percentage of children aged 0–17 living in a household with income lower than 60 per cent of the median	OECD	15/41	2018
The poverty gap is the ratio by which the mean income of the poor falls below the poverty line. Recorded for the whole population	OECD	12/33	2014
Gini Coefficient	OECD	21/39	2020
Percentage of the youth labour force (aged 15-24 yrs) who are unemployed and seeking work	OECD	14/35	2016
Percentage of 15-19 yrs who are not in education or employment	OECD	18/33	2015
Percentage of youth (15-29) worried very much or to a great deal about losing their job or not finding one	OECD	7/15	2010-14
Percentage of all households having at least one working computer in their home	OECD	17/39	2020
Paternity leave replacement rate (% of gross earnings replaced by maternity benefit for average earners)	OECD	24/41	2014
Percentage share of children below the age of 15 living with a respondent who is food insecure	OECD	30/41	2014/15
Percentage of children (aged 0-14) in all households with no adult in paid employment	OECD	29/32	2014
Percentage of two-parent households with both parents working (full-time or part-time)	OECD	24/36	2014
Percentage of single parent households with at least one child under 14 who are working (part-time or full-time)	OECD	33/36	2014
Percentage of households who reported that they had access to the Internet.	OECD	26/39	2020
Use of paid paternity leave	OECD	10/11	2019
Maternity leave replacement rate (% of gross earnings replaced by maternity benefit for average earners)	OECD	38/41	2014

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS	UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS
Healthy	Every child thrives and survives Every child lives in a clean and safe environment

Measure	Cohort	Ranking	Year
The rate of deaths of children under 1 year	OECD	15/48	2018
Life expectancy at birth	OECD	6/44	2020
13–14-year-olds who have smoked in last 30 days	International	1/18	2014
13–14-year-olds who have been drunk in last 30 days	International	2/18	2014
Life satisfaction on scale from 0-10 for youth aged 15-29	OECD	10/35	2014/15
Percentage of liveborn babies who are low birthweight - under 2500grams	OECD	23/48	2018
Deaths in the first 28 days of life, per 1,000 live births	OECD	19/36	2015
Percentage of children at age 1 immunised against measles	OECD	20/38	2020
Percentage of children at age 1 immunised against DTP	OECD	21/38	2020
Percentage of children at age 1 fully immunised (measles, diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis)	OECD	23/44	2020
Suicide rates of adolescents aged 15–19	OECD	23/37	2012/13
Percentage of children experiencing one or more health complaints every day (headache, stomach ache, backache, feeling low, irritability or bad temper, feeling nervous, difficulties in getting to sleep, feeling dizzy)	OECD	13/35	2014
Measured overweight (including obesity) among children	OECD	28/39	2013
Teenage birth rate women aged 15-19	OECD	30/41	2015

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS | UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS

Learning | Every child learns

Measure	Cohort	Ranking	Year
Percentage above the low benchmark for science	TIMMS	14/58	2019
Percentage at level 2 and above for reading	PISA	16/77	2018
Percentage at level 2 and above for science	PISA	17/79	2018
Percentage of 15-19 yrs full-time and part-time students in public and private institutions	OECD	5/34	2015
Estimated percentage of people who will graduate from tertiary education over their lifetime	OECD	2/28	2015
Percentage 25-34 years with tertiary education	OECD	7/36	2016
Percentage of young people (16-29) in apprenticeship programmes	OECD	6/22	2012
Child-to-staff ratios in pre-primary education services	OECD	1/32	2014
Compulsory instruction time in general education (primary and lower secondary)	OECD	1/38	2017
Percentage of adult respondents agreeing that "university education is more important for a boy than for a girl"	OECD	2/17	2010-2014
Enrolment rate for 3-to-5-year-olds in pre-primary education or primary school	OECD	29/47	2018
Enrolment rate of children under the age of 3 in formal childcare	OECD	15/42	2018
Percentage above the low benchmark for maths	TIMMS	27/58	2019
Percentage at level 2 and above for maths	PISA	29/79	2018
Enrolment rate at age 18 in secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary programmes	OECD	17/43	2015
Estimated percentage of people who will graduate from post-secondary non-tertiary education over their lifetime	OECD	8/22	2015
Percentage of young people (16-29) with low literacy skills	OECD	9/22	2012
Percentage of young people (16-29) with low problem-solving skills	OECD	10/19	2012
Percentage of 15-year-old students familiar with, or knowing something about, five or more environmental issues	OECD	18/37	2015
Gender gap in low educational achievement: boys vs girls	OECD	14/39	2012
Average class size in educational institutions	OECD	21/36	2015

Measure	Cohort	Ranking	Year
Number of years 15-year-old students spent in early childcare education	PISA	42/48	2015
Percentage participating in organised learning (one year before official age for entering primary school)	OECD	36/37	2013/14
Percentage of children who feel they belong in their school	OECD	26/34	2012
Percentage of 13–14-year-old boys and girls reporting 'a lot' of school pressure	International	24/26	2014
Percentage of children aged 6 to 11 using centre-based out-of-school-hours (before and/or after school) care services during a usual week	OECD	26/34	2017
Percentage of young people (16-29) with low numeracy skills	OECD	15/22	2012
Childcare costs as a percentage of net family income for a couple with full-time earnings of 100+67% of average earnings	OECD	32/37	2020

ARACY'S NEST WELLBEING DOMAINS

Participating

UNICEF CHILDREN'S GOALS

Every child has a fair chance in life
Every child thrives and survives

Measure	Cohort	Ranking	Year
Voter turnout ratio for people aged 18-24 relative to people aged 25-50	OECD	3/31	2012/13
Percentage of youth (15-29) who volunteered time to an organisation in the past month	OECD	5/35	2006-15
Percentage of youth (15-29) reporting trust in others	OECD	10/35	2014
Percentage of youth (15-29) reporting confidence in national government	OECD	14/34	2014/15
Percentage of 15-29 yrs reporting that they are 'not at all interested' in politics	OECD	22/31	2012-14
Percentage of youth (16-24) engaging in social networking online	OECD	22/32	2014

Appendix 1 - Correspondence between ARACY and UNICEF Canada frameworks

This report has used the UNICEF Australia and ARACY's Nest framework. However, an alternative structure can be found in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being from UNICEF Canada which has nine dimensions, analogous to the Nest Framework's five areas. This appendix provides a guide to matching up the two structures to allow for international comparisons. It is important to note that there are not just differences in the organisation of ideas, but also differences in the coverage of the two frameworks. Several concepts are considered differently, for example, in the Nest framework, disability is itself a measure of well-being whereas the UNICEF Canada framework measures impact of this, particularly by asking about barriers to participating in activities and ability to access disability support payments. Perhaps the largest example is that while UNICEF Canada considers connection to the environment a dimension, the Nest framework as used in this report considers environmental connection as a lens to analyse each area. There are also numerous small differences in how measures are organised within dimensions/areas even when they are very similar at a high level. Table 1 presents a high-level summary of how The Nest areas correspond to the UNICEF Canada dimensions. The full list of best matches can be found in the technical report.

Note: Dimensions that best correspond to each area are highlighted in bold.

Table 1: Correspondence between nest areas and index of child and youth well-being dimensions

		Nest areas					
		Healthy	**Learning**	**Loved, safe and valued**	**Material basics**	**Participating**	**Positive Identity & Culture**
Index of Child and Youth Well-being dimensions	**No equivalent**			5	2	3	5
	Belong			**14**			11
	Free to play	7		4		4	
	Happy and respected	3					**12**
	Healthy	**31**					
	Learning		**48**				
	Participating				2	**7**	
	Protected	4		7			
	Secure	3			**11**	5	

Appendix 2 - Data sources and notes

This report drew in data from a variety of sources and technical details of the data can be found in the full technical report. This includes the headline indicators and supplementary indicators that were included in text or were just updated from ARACY's 2018 Report Card but not included in this document.

The data used in this report builds on the data collected for ARACY's Report Card in 2018 (https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018-02/apo-nid134246_3.pdf). These sources have been updated where possible and some new data has been added where improvements could be made. In addition, we have selected a new set of headline indicators. These indicators were chosen because they measure important concepts within the area. We also prioritised indicators that gave multiple years of data allowing for comparisons and which gave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data.

Where possible, data has been drawn from official sources including the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Where these are not available, we have used data from well-regarded non-government sources for example Mission Australia's annual youth survey. In a few cases we have had to draw data from non-representative sources (for example, there is no research that draws a representative sample of queer youth as this population is very hard to identify and recruit). In these cases, the data can give an indication of the experience of these groups, but they have been used cautiously.

Much of the data used for global rankings was out of date. This is because different countries release data at different times, and it is challenging to gather data on an indicator across many countries on a regular basis. International testing data is released at regular intervals and the OECD does report on several key indicators regularly (for example infant mortality). However, for the majority of datapoints used in this report, data was released infrequently or as a once-off. To give an up-to-date picture, any source that was more than ten years out of date was not used in this report (although these indicators can be found in the technical report).

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