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A PICTURE OF  
**Australia's children**  
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# Foreword

For more than a decade, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has played a leading role in national indicator development, monitoring and reporting on children's health, development and wellbeing. *A picture of Australia's children 2009* is the fourth comprehensive national statistical report on Australia's children produced by the AIHW. This 2009 report builds on previous work and on work undertaken more recently on the ministerially endorsed Children's Headline Indicators. The AIHW has also produced a summary, indicator-based report, *Making progress*, that focused on a subset of indicators for both children and young people.

The importance of the early childhood years in laying the foundations for future health and wellbeing is indisputable. Childhood, and early childhood in particular, is therefore central to the Council of Australian Governments' reforms to healthcare, education and in closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. Information that supports a better understanding of the key issues affecting children and their families is critical to the success of these reforms.

This AIHW report draws together the latest available information on child health, development and wellbeing on a broad range of indicators, including health status, risk and protective factors

influencing health and wellbeing, early learning and education, family and community environments, safety and security, and system performance.

The key message from this report is clear: most children in Australia are faring well, but significant areas of concern remain, together with some areas where there is just not enough information to tell. Of particular concern are the poorer health, developmental and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous children and children from remote and low socioeconomic status areas, and Australia's relatively poor performance on key international indicators such as infant mortality and teenage births. This suggests that a great deal remains to be done to ensure that all Australian children have the best possible start in life.

I would like to thank the National Child Information Advisory Group for their expert advice in the development of this report and the key national indicators, as well as the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing for largely funding this report.

**Penny Allbon**  
Director

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# Summary

*A picture of Australia's children 2009* is the fourth in a series of national statistical reports on children aged 0–14 years. This report provides the latest available information on how Australia's children are faring according to key national indicators of health, development and wellbeing. Drawing on the advice of the National Child Information Advisory Group, it brings together a broad range of indicators that cover health status, risk and protective factors, early learning and education, family and community environments, safety and security, and system performance. The indicators include ministerially endorsed Children's Headline Indicators, published for the first time in this report.

The report contains nearly all of the indicators with specific relevance to children agreed by the Council of Australian Governments for monitoring performance under the National Healthcare Agreement, the National Education Agreement and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. This report, however, provides a broader spectrum of indicators related to child health, development and wellbeing (see Box 2 for the indicator framework).

## KEY FINDINGS

Many Australian children are faring well, but there is much scope for further gains, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The table on the following page summarises recent achievements and concerns, and identifies important data gaps. This is followed by statistics on the key national indicators presented in this report for quick reference.

### The good news

- Large declines in death rates (mostly due to a decline in injury deaths).
- Declines in asthma hospitalisations and improved survival for leukaemia.
- Favourable trends in some risk and protective factors, such as immunisation coverage, teenage births and smoking rates among older children.

- Most children meet national physical activity guidelines and achieve national minimum standards for reading and numeracy.

### Things to work on

- Rising rates of severe disability, diabetes and, among 6 year olds, dental decay.
- Far too many children spend more than the recommended time in front of a video screen (including television and computers), are overweight or obese, are not eating recommended amounts of vegetables, are homeless or at risk of homelessness, or are victims of assault.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- are far more likely to be disadvantaged across a broad range of health and socioeconomic indicators—2–3 times as likely to die, be of low birthweight or have dental caries; 5 times as likely to be born to teenage mothers; 8–9 times as likely to be in the child protection system; and 24 times as likely to be in juvenile justice supervision.

### Children living in remote areas

- have higher death rates; higher rates of neural tube defects; lower rates of cancer survival; worse dental decay; and are less likely to meet minimum standards for reading and numeracy, than those in major cities.

## Summary table: achievements, concerns and the unknown

Indicator area	Achievements	Areas of concern	What we don't know
<b>Health status</b>	<p>Infant and child mortality rates halved between 1986–2006</p> <p>Asthma hospitalisations and general practice visits have declined</p> <p>Cancer survival continues to improve, especially for leukaemia</p>	<p>Poorer outcomes for Indigenous children in multiple areas (e.g. death rates 3 times as high)</p> <p>Infant and under 5 child mortality compares unfavourably with other OECD countries</p> <p>Incidence of diabetes and hospitalisations for diabetes increasing</p> <p>Prevalence of overall disability and severe disability increasing</p>	<p>Prevalence of mental health problems and disorders among children</p>
<b>Healthy child development</b>	<p>Dental decay among 12 year olds decreasing</p> <p>Almost three-quarters of children (9–14 years) meet physical activity guidelines</p>	<p>Dental decay among 6 year olds increasing</p> <p>Only one-third of children (9–14 years) meet guidelines for video screen viewing</p> <p>Most children do not consume recommended amounts of vegetables</p>	<p>How many infants are exclusively breastfed at 4 and 6 months</p> <p>How many infants are read to by an adult</p>
<b>Learning and development</b>	<p>Most children in Year 5 meet national minimum standards for reading and numeracy</p>	<p>Indigenous Year 5 students less likely to meet national minimum standards for reading and numeracy</p>	<p>How many children attend early childhood education programs in the 2 years before school</p> <p>Social and emotional development of children</p>
<b>Adverse factors</b>	<p>Teenage births and smoking among older children have declined</p> <p>Fewer children are exposed to tobacco smoke in the home</p>	<p>Teenage birth rate compares unfavourably with other OECD countries and 5 times as high among Indigenous women</p> <p>One in six women smoke and 60% consume alcohol during pregnancy</p> <p>Over one-fifth of children nationally are either overweight or obese</p>	
<b>Families and communities</b>	<p>Most parents of children rate their health as good, very good or excellent</p> <p>Most households with children have access to social support and perceive their neighbourhood to be safe</p>	<p>One-fifth of parents have poor mental health</p> <p>One-fifth of children live with a parent with disability</p>	<p>How many children live in healthy functioning families</p>
<b>Safety and security</b>	<p>Injury death rates fell by almost 40% over the decade 1997–2006</p> <p>Accidental drowning death rates almost halved between 1997 and 2006</p>	<p>Over one-third of child deaths are preventable as they are caused by injuries</p> <p>Almost 20,000 children are victims of physical or sexual assault</p> <p>Indigenous children overrepresented in child protection system (8–9 times as high) and juvenile justice supervision (24 times as high)</p> <p>Almost 65,000 children are homeless or at risk of homelessness, there are high unmet requests for SAAP accommodation for families with children</p>	<p>Prevalence of bullying in schools</p> <p>Prevalence of child abuse and neglect and whether this has changed over time</p>
<b>System performance</b>	<p>Immunisation coverage highest on record (93% for 2 year olds)</p> <p>Increased neonatal hearing screening</p> <p>Five-year relative survival for leukaemia has increased</p>	<p>Immunisation coverage at 6 years is lower than at 1 or 2 years of age</p>	<p>How quality child care should be defined</p>

## KEY NATIONAL INDICATORS OF CHILD HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

How healthy are Australia's children?		Value	Trend
<b>Mortality</b>	Infant mortality per 1,000 live born infants (2006) <sup>(a)</sup>	4.7	✓
	Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) deaths per 100,000 live births (2006)	24	✓
	Deaths per 100,000 children aged 1–14 years (2006)	13	✓
<b>Morbidity</b>	Percentage of children aged 0–14 years with asthma as a long-term condition (2004–05)	12	~
	New cases of insulin-dependent diabetes per 100,000 children aged 0–14 years (2006)	23	✗
	New cases of cancer per 100,000 children aged 0–14 years (2001–2005)	14	..
<b>Disability</b>	Percentage of children aged 0–14 years with severe or profound core activity limitations (2003)	4.3	✗
<b>Congenital anomalies</b>	Rate of selected congenital anomalies among infants per 10,000 births (1998–2003):		
	neural tube defects	4.5	..
	Down syndrome	11	..
	abdominal wall defects	4.4	..
	orofacial clefts	17	..
<b>Mental health</b>	Proportion of children aged 4–14 years with mental health problems (2004–05)	No recent data available	
	Proportion of children aged 6–14 years with mental health disorders (ADHD, depressive disorder, conduct disorder) (2004–05)	No recent data available	
How well are we promoting healthy child development?			
<b>Breastfeeding</b>	Percentage of infants exclusively breastfed at 4 months of age <sup>(a)</sup>	National data not available	
<b>Dental health</b>	Percentage of children decay-free (2002):		
	at age 6 years	53	~
	at age 12 years	58	✓
	Mean number of decayed, missing or filled teeth (DMFT) at 12 years (2002) <sup>(a)</sup>	1.0	~
<b>Physical activity</b>	Percentage of children aged 9–14 years (2007):		
	meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines	74	..
	not exceeding the screen time guidelines	33	..
<b>Early learning</b>	Proportion of children aged < 1 year old who are read to by an adult on a regular basis	National data not available	
How well are Australia's children learning and developing?			
<b>Attending early childhood education programs</b>	Proportion of children attending an educational program in the 2 years before beginning primary school <sup>(a)</sup>	Data not available	
<b>Transition to primary school</b>	Proportion of children entering school with basic skills for life and learning <sup>(a)</sup>	National data not available	
<b>Attendance at primary school</b>	Attendance rate of children at primary school, per cent (Year 5) (2007) <sup>(a)</sup>	85–95	..
<b>Literacy and numeracy</b>	Percentage of children in Year 5 who achieved at or above the national minimum standards (2008):		
	reading <sup>(a)</sup>	91	..
	numeracy <sup>(a)</sup>	93	..
<b>Social and emotional development</b>	Under development	Data not available	
What factors can affect children adversely?			
<b>Teenage births</b>	Age-specific birth rate per 1,000 15–19 year old women (2006) <sup>(a)</sup>	17	✓
<b>Smoking in pregnancy</b>	Proportion of women who smoked during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy <sup>(a)</sup>	National data not available	
<b>Alcohol use during pregnancy</b>	Percentage of women who consumed alcohol during pregnancy (2007)	60	✓
<b>Birthweight</b>	Percentage of live born infants of low birthweight (2006) <sup>(a)</sup>	6	~
<b>Overweight and obesity</b>	Percentage of children aged 2–12 years whose BMI score is above the international cut-off points for 'overweight' and 'obese' for their age and sex (2007) <sup>(a)</sup>	22	..
<b>Environmental tobacco smoke</b>	Percentage of households with children aged 0–14 years where someone smokes inside (2007)	8	✓
<b>Tobacco use</b>	Percentage of children aged 12–14 years who are current smokers (2005)	5	✓
<b>Alcohol misuse</b>	Percentage of children aged 12–14 years who have engaged in risky drinking on any one occasion (2005)	2.6	✗

What kind of families and communities do Australia's children live in?		Value	Trend
<b>Family functioning</b>	Under development	Data not available	
<b>Family economic situation</b>	Average weekly real equivalised disposable household income for households with children in the 2nd and 3rd income deciles (2005–06) <sup>(a)</sup>	\$347	✓
<b>Children in non-parental care</b>	Number of children per 1,000 aged 0–14 years in out-of-home care (2008)	7	✗
	Percentage of children aged 0–17 years in grandparent families (2006–07)	0.4	✓
<b>Parental health status</b>	Percentage of parents rating their health as 'fair' or 'poor' (2006)	13	..
	Percentage of children living with parents with disability (2003)	19	..
	Percentage of parents with mental health problems (2006)	21	..
<b>Neighbourhood safety</b>	Percentage of households with children aged 0–14 years where their neighbourhood is perceived as safe (2006)	86	..
<b>Social capital</b>	Percentage of households with children aged 0–14 years where respondent was able to get support in time of crisis from persons living outside household (2006)	94	~
How safe and secure are Australia's children?			
<b>Injuries</b>	Age-specific death rates from all injuries for children aged 0–14 years, per 100,000 (2006) <sup>(a)</sup>	6	✓
	Road transport accident death rate for children aged 0–14 years, per 100,000 (2007)	1.6	✓
	Accidental drowning death rate for children aged 0–14 years, per 100,000 (2006)	1.0	✓
	Assault death rate for children aged 0–14 years, per 100,000 (2006–07)	0.7	..
	Injury hospitalisation rate for children aged 0–14 years, per 100,000 (2006–07)	1,462	✓
	Assault hospitalisation rate for children aged 0–14 years, per 100,000 (2006–07)	20	✓
	Intentional self-harm hospitalisation rate for children aged 10–14 years, per 100,000 (2006–07)	41	✗
<b>School relationships and bullying</b>	Under development	Data not available	
<b>Child abuse and neglect</b>	Children aged 0–12 years who were the subject of a substantiation of a child protection notification received in 2007–08 <sup>(a)</sup>	7	✓
	Children aged 0–12 years who were the subject of care and protection orders, per 1,000 (2008)	7	✗
<b>Children as victims of violence</b>	Children aged 0–14 years per 100,000 who have been the victims of (2003):		
	physical assault	309	..
	sexual assault	187	..
<b>Homelessness</b>	Number of accompanying children aged 0–14 years attending agencies funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, per 1,000 (2006–07)	16	..
<b>Children and crime</b>	Number of children aged 10–14 years who are under juvenile justice supervision, per 1,000 (2006–07)	1.7	..
How well is the system performing in delivering quality health, development and wellbeing actions to Australia's children?			
<b>Neonatal hearing screening</b>	Proportion of children identified as requiring a hearing aid who are then fitted with a hearing aid by 6 and/or 12 months of age	Data not available	
<b>Childhood immunisation</b>	Percentage of children on the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register who are fully immunised at 2 years of age (2008) <sup>(a)</sup>	93	✓
<b>Survival of leukaemia</b>	Five-year relative survival rate for leukaemia in children aged 0–14 years (1998–2004) (per cent)	83	✓
<b>Quality of child care</b>	Under development	Data not available	
<b>Child protection resubstantiations</b>	Number of children aged 0–12 years who were the subject of a child protection resubstantiation in a given year, per 1,000	Data not available	

(a) Children's Headline Indicator.

Key: ✓ = favourable trend; ✗ = unfavourable trend; ~ = no change or clear trend; .. = no trend data presented.

