



## Chapter

# 4

## Children and young people

4.1 The policy context	87
4.2 Australian families	89
4.3 Education	94
4.4 The transition to independence	102
4.5 Social inclusion of children and young people	111
4.6 Safety	115
4.7 Recent data development issues	120
References	122

## 4 Children and young people

### Key points

- There were 3.7 million families with children in 2009–10: 2.8 million couple families with children and 0.9 million one-parent families.
- Almost half a million children and young people had a disability in 2009—accounting for 6.8% of the population aged 0–24 years.
- Around half (49%) of all children aged 0–14 years attended child care in 2009, with those aged 2–5 years the most likely to do so (59% of all children).
- Income appears to be linked with child care use patterns—in 2008, half of all children aged 0–12 years in couple families whose parents reported a weekly income of \$2,000 or more received formal or informal child care, compared to one quarter of those whose parents' weekly income was less than \$800.
- Certain groups of children and young people are more likely to be at risk of social exclusion—43% of homeless Australians were under 25 years in 2006; 7,300 young people were under juvenile justice supervision on any given day during 2009–10.
- In 2010, most students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were achieving at or above the minimum standards for numeracy and literacy (87–96%); however, students in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were less likely than those in *Metropolitan* areas to meet the minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy.
- The unemployment rate for 15–24 year olds in Australia was more than double that of all other age groups (10.6% in July 2010); and one-third of 'underemployed' Australians were aged 15–24 years. School leavers who did not finish Year 12 were twice as likely to be unemployed than those who did, and 9 times as likely to not be in the labour force.
- Apprenticeships are vital for young people living outside *Major cities*, with 29% of apprenticeships completed by those from *Inner regional* areas, and a further 24% from those living in *Outer regional* and *Remote/Very remote* areas.
- The rate of deaths due to injury among young people aged 12–24 years nearly halved between 1997 and 2007, from 45 to 25 deaths per 100,000 population.

## 4.1 The policy context

Most Australian children and young people live in safe, healthy, positive environments, with access to quality universal services such as child care, formal schooling and tertiary education. Australian children born in 2011 are expected to live longer than ever before, with infant mortality rates at an all-time low, along with steadily declining death rates due to injury. However, some children and young people are at risk of being socially excluded due to a lack of access to critical supports, both formal and informal. The Australian Government's focus has shifted in recent years to place more emphasis on access to early intervention support for children and their families most at risk, along with a renewed emphasis on education as a key factor in later life successes.

### Major policy frameworks for children and young people

Children and young people are central to the national policy agenda. The Australian Government describes its family policy as 'child-centred', noting that 'The best interests of children are a national priority, from the day they are born' (Macklin 2009). The current focus on national partnerships through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) includes a significant focus on a range of issues directly affecting the lives of children and young people. Over the past few years, COAG has formed several intergovernmental agreements; these set long-term agendas with specific targets, designed with an evidence-based focus for measuring outcomes. Major frameworks and initiatives recently implemented at a national level are highlighted in Box 4.1.

#### **Box 4.1: Major recent policy frameworks and initiatives relating to children and young people**

##### **Early childhood**

###### *National Early Childhood Development Strategy (2009–2020)*

The major goal of this strategy is improving outcomes for disadvantaged children (0–8 years), with a focus on a broad range of health, educational and safety issues.

###### *National Partnership on Early Childhood Education (2009–13)*

The major goal under this COAG partnership is universal access to preschool for 4 year olds by 2013.

###### *National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care (2010–14)*

This partnership will include the implementation of the first national system for the regulation and quality assurance of early childhood education and care services, including preschools, long family day care, and out-of-school-hours care.

###### *Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement (2009–14)*

This Agreement directly supports the Closing the Gap targets, with a focus on early learning; child care; family support; access to antenatal, teenage sexual and reproductive health programs; and access to maternal and child health services.

## **Box 4.1: Major recent policy frameworks and initiatives relating to children and young people**

### **Child and family safety**

*National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009–2020)*

This COAG-endorsed framework sets out a broad range of outcome measures with the long-term goal of 'a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect'.

*National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010–2022)*

This 12-year COAG initiative has a strong focus on primary prevention, improving service delivery and building the evidence base, with a long-term goal of 'Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities'.

### **Education**

*Educational reform*

A range of educational reforms were announced in 2009 for implementation over a number of years—including building of new school infrastructure; provision of new information and communication technology equipment for all secondary schools; and opening new trade training centres, to be attached to secondary schools. Significant new funding has also been announced under the *Smarter Schools National Partnerships*, with a focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes and national professional standards for teachers.

*National Curriculum*

In late 2010, education ministers endorsed Australia's first national curriculum from Foundation to Year 10 in the first four learning areas—English, mathematics, science and history. Further work remains and this will occur as a phased approach to cover other learning areas.

### **Young people**

*National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions (2009)*

This COAG Agreement focuses on 'learn or earn' initiatives with an aim to increase educational attainment and engagement at a national level. It contains a 'compact' with young Australians, which includes an entitlement to an education or training place for young people who meet the specified eligibility requirements.

*National Strategy for Young Australians (12–24 years)*

This includes eight broad priorities across a range of areas, including health, education, safety, participation, and community engagement.

*Sources:* COAG 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d; DEEWR 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011b, 2011c; FaHCSIA 2011.

## 4.2 Australian families

In 2009–10, there were an estimated 6.3 million families in Australia. Couples with children made up nearly half of these families (2.8 million, or 44%). Forty per cent (2.6 million) were couples without children; and 14% (0.9 million) were one-parent families (ABS 2011a). This chapter broadly focuses on the 58% of families in Australia with children. See Chapter 2 for further discussion of the composition of Australian families.

The typical composition of families has changed in recent decades (see Chapter 2). There has been a decrease in the proportion of couple families with dependent children, and an increase in the proportion of couple-only families, including 'empty nesters' and younger couples choosing not to have children (Hayes et al. 2010).

Fertility rates have remained below replacement rate (2.1 births per woman) since the late 1970s, and more women are having children later in life (Hayes et al. 2010) (see Chapter 1). Coinciding with this, the number of adoptions in Australia has declined considerably since the 1970s—from over 8,500 in 1972–73 to 412 in 2009–10. This large decrease is mainly due to a fall in adoptions of children born in Australia—over half (54%) of all adoptions in 2009–10 were intercountry adoptions, compared with 10% in 1984–85 (see *Adoptions Australia 2009–10* (AIHW 2010a) for further details). This section looks at the importance of the family environment, the use of child care, and the financial assistance that the government provides for families.

### Family environment

The family environment in which a child is raised plays a crucial role in shaping their health and wellbeing. Factors such as family functioning and parental involvement in early learning set the foundations for children's learning, behaviour and health over the course of their lives.

### Family functioning

Family functioning relates to a family's ability to interact, communicate, make decisions, solve problems and maintain relationships. Models of strong families usually describe those that are cohesive, flexible and communicate well (Olson & Gorall 2003). Changes in family circumstances; relationships between individual family members; the balance between parental work and family life; and other external stressors that affect the home environment can potentially influence how well a family functions. As a result, families can go through stages of strength and instability (Silberberg 2001). In these instances, resilience can often develop in children and adolescents. Research has shown that, regardless of the family structure, strong family relationships and communication positively influence adolescent sociability and academic achievement, and also reduce the incidence of substance misuse and risk behaviour among young people (AIHW 2011h).

There are currently no national data available on a single overarching measure of family functioning. National data are, however, available on specific components of family functioning, such as communication and closeness between family members as well as young people's satisfaction with their family (AIHW 2011h). For example, in 2008 almost nine out of 10 (89%) young people aged 15–24 years reported in the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey that they were highly satisfied with their relationship with their parents. An even higher proportion of parents (93%) reported the same level of satisfaction in their relationship with their children (AIHW 2011h).

## Parental involvement in early learning

High levels of parental involvement in the early learning and development of their children are associated with better outcomes for children, including increased educational engagement and achievement.

Learning and development in the early years often takes place in informal settings such as the family home. The ABS 2008 Childhood Education and Care Survey found that most children aged 0–2 years (92%) were involved in an informal learning activity, such as reading a book, with their parent in the previous week (ABS 2009a). Children aged 0–2 years were more likely to have parental involvement in a learning activity when at least one parent was employed (93%), than those without an employed parent (86%). Further, over half of children (52%) in couple families were involved in a reading activity every day, compared with 40% of children in one-parent families (see AIHW 2009a). See Chapter 4.3 for information on formal early childhood education.

## Child care

Child care is available in various forms to cater for the differing needs of families. It may be formal—including long day care, family day care, or occasional care—or informal, which is non-regulated and often includes care by other relatives. The policy emphasis on child care has shifted in recent years, with child care now viewed as a means to support labour force participation as well as a key form of early learning and development (DEEWR 2010c). The Australian Government has increased spending on early childhood education and child care from \$1.7 billion in 2004–05 to \$3.7 billion in 2008–09, and is expected to reach \$4.4 billion in 2012–13 (DEEWR 2010c).

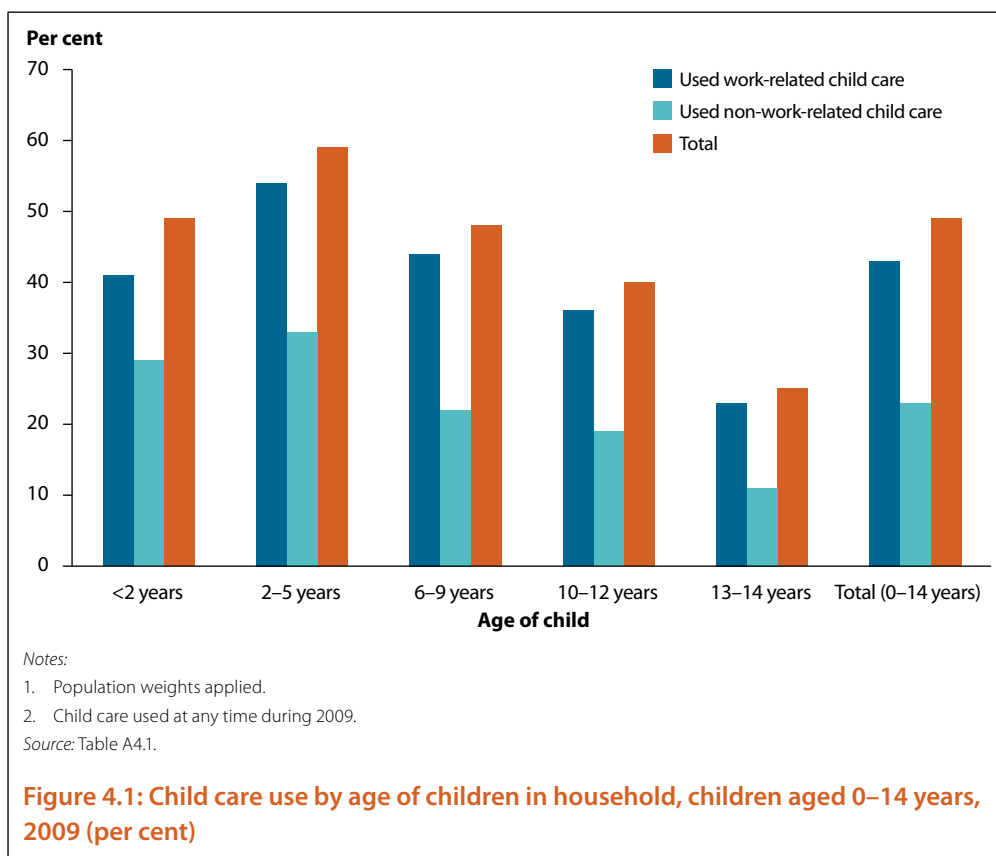
With the increased prevalence of two-parent working households, the demand for child care outside the home has risen. Women's labour force participation has also increased substantially over recent decades (see Chapter 3). Accompanying this trend, the number of children aged 0–11 years in approved child care in a given quarter increased from 256,000 in 1991 to 871,000 in 2009, which equates to more than 600,000 families (DEEWR 2010c). During 2009–10, over 1.1 million children used approved child care (DEEWR 2011e).

While child care services have the potential to benefit a child's cognitive, socioemotional and physical development, there are factors that almost certainly affect the extent to which these are realised (UNICEF 2010). These include carer–child ratios; the quality of facilities and available resources; and carer qualifications. Increased hours in care, exposure to low-quality care and multiple care arrangements can potentially be detrimental to outcomes of early childhood care. In December 2009, COAG signed an agreement to raise the quality of early childhood care and education: the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care. A National Quality Framework was developed which includes standards to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending services. For more information relating to potential positive and negative child care outcomes see *National outcome measures for early child development* (AIHW 2011g).

During 2009, almost half (49%) of all children aged 0–14 years attended child care, including after-school care (Figure 4.1). Younger children aged 2–5 years were the most likely age group to attend child care (59%). This may in some cases reflect parents using paid parental leave in the very early stages of child rearing, and then returning to work. In some age groups, the number of households that used work-related child care was double that of non-work-related child care

which indicates the relative demand of child care among working parents. Households are less likely to use child care as the age of children within the household increases—only one quarter (25%) of all children aged 13–14 years were users of child care in 2009.

Income appears to play a role in determining the use of child care among families. More than half (52%) of children whose parents' combined weekly income was \$2,000 or more had usual child care arrangements, compared with one-quarter (25%) of children whose parents had a weekly income of less than \$800 (Table 4.1). A high income may indicate that there are two working parents within the family and therefore more need to use child care. Children with parents who had a weekly income of \$2,000 or more were more likely than those earning less than \$800 to use formal (18% and 11%, respectively) and informal care (24% and 13%, respectively). Similarly low levels of child care arrangements existed in families earning \$800–\$999. This may suggest that cost is a barrier to child care, particularly for low-income families whose children may have the most to gain from high-quality child care in terms of supporting early learning and development of the child (AIHW 2011g).



**Table 4.1: Children aged 0–12 years in couple families, type of care usually<sup>(a)</sup> attended, by weekly income of parents, 2008 (per cent)**

	Less than \$800	\$800– \$999	\$1000– \$1199	\$1200– \$1399	\$1400– \$1999	\$2000 or more	Total
<b>Type of care</b>							
<i>Children with usual child care arrangements</i>	25	30	37	40	45	52	41
Children in formal care only	11	12	14	17	16	18	15
Children in informal care only	13	16	18	17	21	24	20
Children in both informal and formal care	*2	*2	5	6	7	10	6
<i>Children with no usual child care arrangements</i>	75	70	63	60	55	48	59

\* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

(a) 'Usually' refers to a child's typical attendance of child care, including hours and costs.

Note: Children with more than one source of child care are only counted once. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS 2009a.

## Government support and services

The Australian Government provides financial support (and other services) to families who require assistance. Payment rates and eligibility varies with the type of payment. For details on the number of families receiving payments from 2004–2010, see Table A4.2.

### Financial support

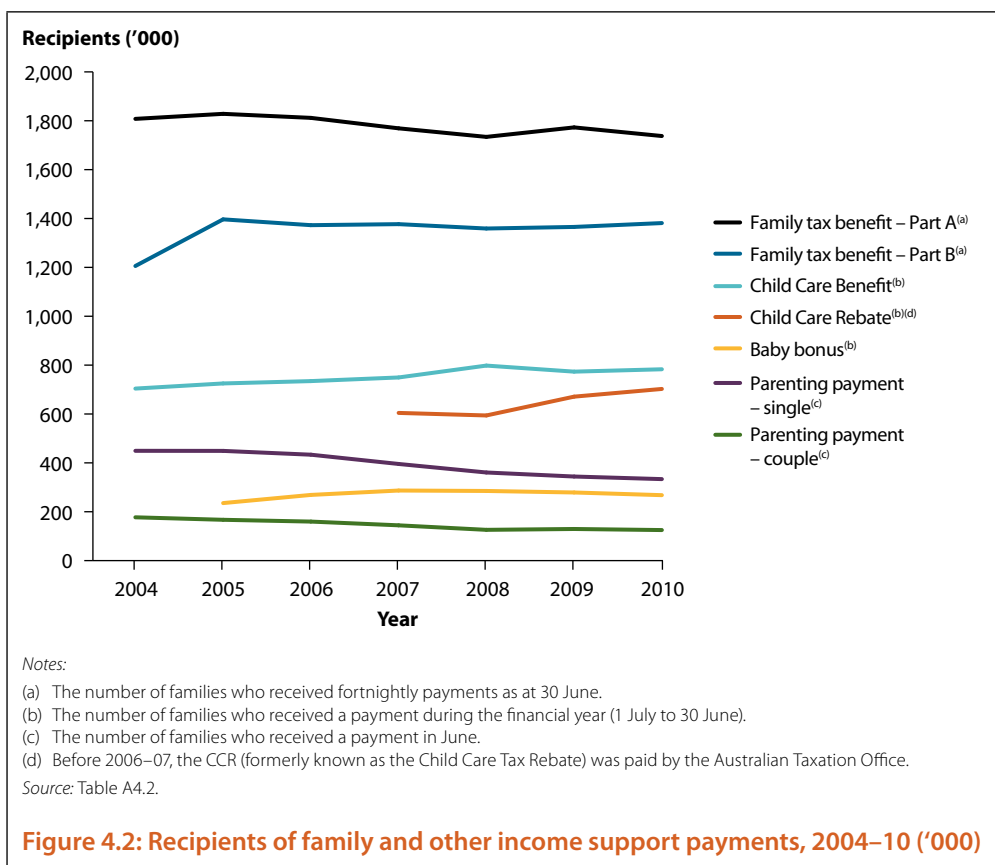
Family Tax Benefit A (FTB-A) and Family Tax Benefit B (FTB-B) help families with the cost of raising children. Payment amounts for FTB-A are dependent upon the age and number of children, as well as overall family income. Additionally, families receiving FTB-A may be eligible for Rental Assistance if paying private rent. Single-income families (sole or two-parent) with children aged under 16 years (18 years if full-time student) are also eligible for extra assistance through FTB-B (Centrelink 2011).

The number of families receiving FTB-A has remained relatively stable over recent years. In 2010, over 1.7 million families received the payment, a slight decrease from 2009. After an increase between 2004 and 2005, the number of families receiving FTB-B has also remained steady (approximately 1.4 million families) (Figure 4.2).

The Child Care Rebate (CCR) and Child Care Benefit (CCB) assist families with the cost of child care and support parental participation in the workforce. The payment rate of CCB varies depending on the type of care and the school status of the child being cared for. The CCR covers 50% of out-of-pocket expenses of approved child care services up to an annual cap of \$7,500 (per child), after which the rebate ceases. To be eligible for CCR, the parent/s should be eligible for CCB. CCR is not income-tested—parents eligible for CCB, but not receiving any CCB payments due to high income, are still eligible for CCR.

The number of families receiving CCB and CCR from the Australian Government has been generally increasing. In 2010, more than 780,000 families received the CCB (Figure 4.2). Over 700,000 families received the CCR, an increase from around 671,000 families in 2009. The out-of-pocket costs of child care have decreased for parents across all income brackets due to rebates and benefits such as these, using proportionally less of each family's disposable income (DEEWR 2010c).





Other benefits such as the Baby Bonus and the Maternity Immunisation Allowance are also important in easing financial pressure on families. The Baby Bonus is paid to help with the extra costs of a new baby or adopted child in 13 fortnightly instalments. A family income test determines eligibility (for details see Centrelink 2011). Since its inception in 2004, recipients of the payment have increased from 235,000 in 2005, peaking at 287,000 in 2007. Income eligibility was introduced in 2009 and there has been a corresponding decrease in those receiving the Baby Bonus to 268,000 families in 2010 (Figure 4.2).

Parenting Payment helps to fund the costs of raising a child. This income-tested payment is made to one parent only in a couple relationship with a youngest child aged under 6 years. For single parents, the payment rate is higher, and the youngest child must be under 8 years old (Centrelink 2011). In 2010, approximately 333,500 single parent families (a decline from 449,000 families in 2004) and 125,000 couple families (a decline from 177,000 families in 2004) received the payment (Figure 4.2).

Young people aged 16–20 years may be eligible for Youth Allowance. Full-time students and Australian apprentices up to the age of 24 years are also eligible (Centrelink 2011). Maximum fortnightly payments are dependent upon individual circumstances such as age, partner status, and whether the young person is living at or away from home. Parental income tests may also apply. Over 380,000 young people received this payment in 2010, an increase of almost 30,000 from 2009 (Table A4.2).

The Newstart Allowance is available to assist people aged above 21 years while they find employment, with the maximum payment rate also varying with individual circumstances. In 2010, over 550,000 people received this payment (see Table A4.2).

### Other support for families

The *Paid Parental Leave Act 2010* was introduced in January 2011. The Act aims to promote infant and maternal health by enabling working parents to spend more time caring for their newborn child. The labour force also benefits from greater participation of mothers, by maintaining their employed positions and status in the workforce (FaHCSIA 2010). Eligible recipients can choose to receive either paid parental leave or the Baby Bonus for each child.

*National Employment Standards (NES)* were introduced under the *Fair Work Act 2009* on 1 January 2010 to assist parents in maintaining employment while allowing time for family commitments. The NES mean that parents with children under school age, or children less than 18 years old with a disability, are able to request flexible working arrangements (Australian Government 2011b). Flexible working arrangements, including reduced working hours, split shifts and job sharing, have been used more in recent years, rising from 33% of families with children aged 0–11 years with at least one parent employed in 1999 to 43% in 2008 (ABS 2010c). Almost three-quarters (73%) of females in families used flexible working arrangements to help care for children, compared with 40% of males (ABS 2009a: Table 21).

## 4.3 Education

A young person's learning and development is integral to their overall health and wellbeing as well as their future productivity and contribution to society. The importance of early childhood education and starting school 'ready to learn' has been well established (Duncan et al. 2007). In the long term, learning is essential for securing a job, and participating in and connecting with the wider community. There is a link between intergenerational poverty and educational attainment—inadequate education and training is a common factor in Australia's most disadvantaged communities and may increase their risk of social exclusion (Vinson et al. 2007).

Compulsory schooling ensures children and young people receive a minimum amount of education, meaning they can acquire the essential knowledge and skills that will allow them to participate fully and productively in the community. All children in Australia are required to attend school from 6 years of age until they complete Year 10, and then to participate in full-time education, training or employment until they turn 17 (COAG 2009a). Additional education before and beyond these years is optional; however, the requirements and compulsory ages may vary across states and territories. A description of the key stages of education in Australia is provided in Box 4.2.

This section presents an overview of student participation and achievement at key points in their education. This includes: preschool attendance; the transition to primary school; school attendance; literacy and numeracy outcomes; completion of Year 12; and transition to further education and training.

## Early childhood education

The substantial and positive effects of quality early childhood education on children's social and cognitive development, especially children from disadvantaged families, are well established. Participation in formal early childhood education programs usually occurs a year or two before children start their preparatory year of schooling (see Box 4.2). Most Australian children access formal early childhood education programs through attendance at preschool, or a preschool program in long day care. Chapter 4.2 has further information on child care services and parental involvement in informal early learning.

### Box 4.2: Education in Australia

At present, each state and territory has its own curriculum, terminology and compulsory ages for schooling. Following is a broad overview of the key stages of education in Australia, although the details may vary across states and territories:

**Preschool**—non-compulsory early childhood education and development programs for children, prior to commencing full-time schooling. Preschool is generally attended by 3–4 year olds on a part-time basis, and may be known as kindergarten in some states and territories. Preschool programs may be delivered in government- or private-funded stand-alone facilities, or within schools or child care centres.

**Preparatory year**—although non-compulsory (in most states and territories), the preparatory year is the first year of full-time schooling, and is generally attended by 4–5 year olds. This year has varying titles across states and territories, including kindergarten, prep, pre-primary, reception and transition.

**Primary and secondary school**—there are 12 years of primary and secondary school. Year 1 is the first compulsory year of full-time schooling (in most states and territories), and is generally attended by 5–6 year olds. It is compulsory for children to attend school from age 6 until they complete Year 10, however many students complete Year 12.

**Further education**—following secondary school, young people may start an apprenticeship or commence studies at tertiary education institutions such as universities and technical and further education (TAFE) colleges.

Sources: DEEWR 2011a, 2011f.

The ABS Childhood Education and Care Survey found that in June 2008, among children aged 3–6 years who were not yet in school, 72% usually attended preschool (including long day care preschool programs), 8% attended long day care only (with no preschool program), and 21% did not attend either preschool or long day care (ABS 2009a).

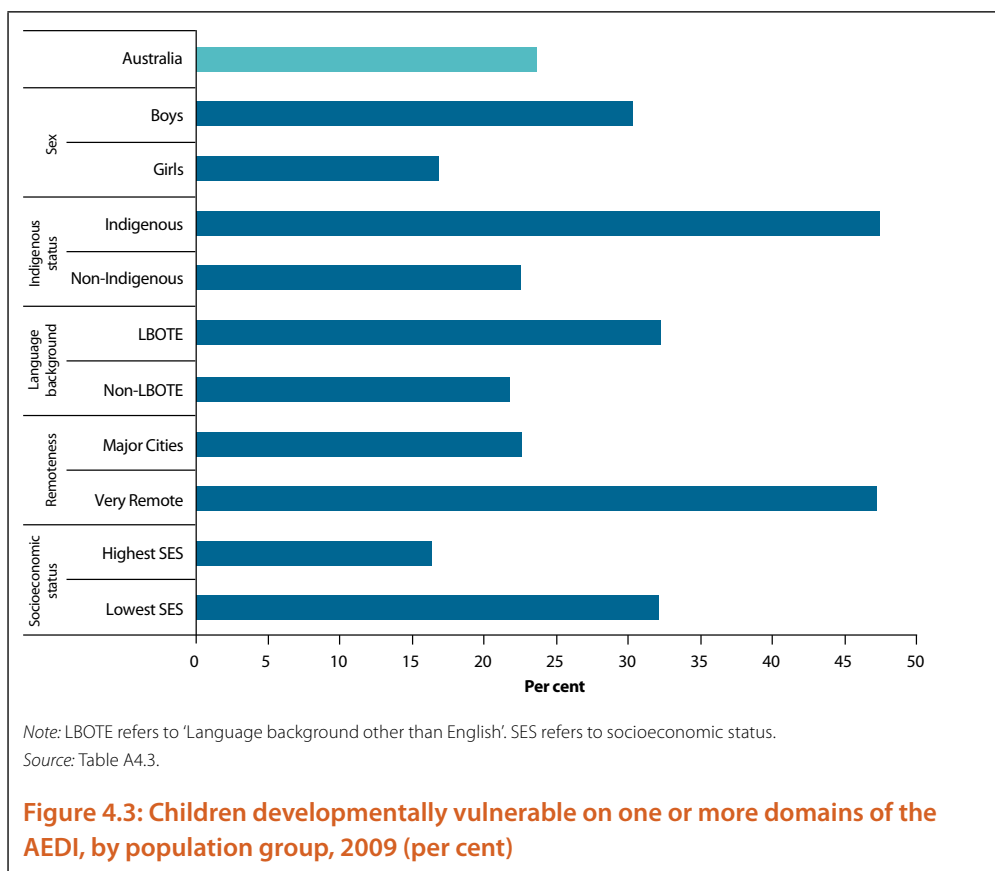
Preschool program attendance is lower for children in one-parent and jobless families. Children aged 3–6 years in couple families were more likely to usually attend a preschool program than children in one-parent families (72% compared with 66%). In couple families with both parents unemployed or just one parent employed part time, over half (57%) of children usually attended a preschool program, while in unemployed one-parent families the proportion was 61% (ABS 2009a). Enrolment of Indigenous children in preschool is discussed in Box 4.3.

The accessibility and cost of services may affect preschool program attendance. For children living in remote communities, access to preschools may be limited by the availability of a service in the area, the distance to the nearest preschool or a lack of transport options. In June 2008, among children aged 3–6 years who usually attended preschool (excluding preschool programs in long day care centres), nearly one in 10 (9%) had no cost associated with their attendance, after the Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR) had been taken into account. Around one-third (34%) had a usual weekly cost of \$20 or less, a further 28% paid \$20–59, and 24% had a weekly cost of \$60 or more, after the CCB and CCR were applied (ABS 2009a).

## School readiness

School readiness relates to emotional competence, capacity for engagement with others and resilience in meeting the demands of schooling (Farrar et al. 2007). COAG has endorsed the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) as a national progress measure of early childhood development in Australia. The AEDI collects information on five developmental domains at school entry, based on a teacher-completed checklist: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.

The majority of Australian children were doing well in 2009, with around three-quarters (76%) of children 'on track' across all AEDI domains at Year 1 entry. However, almost one-quarter (24%) of children were developmentally vulnerable (below the 10th percentile) on one or more domains, which suggests they may have difficulty in Year 1. Around one in eight children (12%) were vulnerable on two or more domains, and are considered to be at particularly high risk developmentally (CCCH & TICHR 2009). The proportion of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the five domains varied across population groups. Groups particularly likely to be developmentally vulnerable included boys (30%), children living in the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) areas (32%), those with a language background other than English (32%), Indigenous children (47%), and those living in *Very remote* areas (47%) (Figure 4.3).



## School attendance

School attendance helps children develop the basic building blocks for learning and educational attainment, and social skills, such as friendship building, teamwork, communication skills and healthy self-esteem. Children who are regularly absent from school are at risk of missing out during these critical stages of educational and social development. They may experience long-term difficulties with their learning, resulting in fewer educational and employment opportunities. Absenteeism can also exacerbate issues of low self-esteem, social isolation and dissatisfaction (DHS Vic 2007). School attendance is commonly measured in two ways: enrolments (that is, the children who have registered with a school) and attendance (the children who have registered and are regularly going to school)—the following data focus on the latter (AIHW 2011e). Data are not directly comparable across schools sectors, states and territories due to differing collection and reporting methodologies, but ranges have been presented below as an overview (for further information see MCEECDYA 2010).

Most children in Australia regularly attend school. In 2009, attendance rates across the six states and Australian Capital Territory, for all three school sectors (government, Catholic and independent), were 91–96% for primary school students (Years 1 to 6), and 85–96% for junior secondary school students (Years 7 to 10) (Table A4.4). Attendance rates in the Northern Territory were considerably lower (76–92% and 80–91%, respectively). This is likely to be related to the

high proportion of Indigenous students in the Northern Territory, who generally have lower rates of school attendance. Across the school sectors, states and territories, attendance rates were 52–98% for Indigenous students compared with 86–96% for non-Indigenous students (Years 1 to 10) (tables A4.5 and A4.6).

### **Box 4.3: Closing the Gap for Indigenous Australians—education**

The Closing the Gap strategy aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, and includes six targets in the areas of life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes. Progress against the three education-related targets is outlined below. Information on the other three targets can be found in the Prime Minister's report (Australian Government 2011a).

#### **Ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous 4 year olds in remote communities by 2013**

There are currently only limited data to inform this target. The National Preschool Census reports that, in 2009, 64% of Indigenous children were enrolled in preschool in the year before school compared with around to 70% of all children (Australian Government 2011a). Previous analysis indicates that growth in preschool enrolments among Indigenous 4 year olds occurred between 2005 and 2008—a 9% increase in preschool enrolments in metropolitan areas, 16% increase in provincial areas, and 31% in remote areas (Australian Government 2010). However, enrolment is not a sufficient stand-alone measure, as there is evidence to suggest Indigenous children enrolled in preschool attend less frequently than non-Indigenous children (Australian Government 2010). See 'Early childhood education' for further information on preschool attendance and affordability.

#### **Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievement rates for Indigenous children by 2018**

In 2010, Indigenous students were less likely to have achieved the reading, writing and numeracy minimum standards for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9—achievement was 18–30 percentage points lower than for non-Indigenous students (ACARA 2011). However, there are some positive signs—from 2008 to 2010 there was a steady reduction in the gaps for Year 3 reading and Year 7 reading and writing (gap closed by 4–6 percentage points) (ACARA 2008, 2011). See 'Literacy and numeracy' for further information on the national minimum standards.

#### **Halve the gap in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates for Indigenous young people by 2020**

One of the Closing the Gap targets is to halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020. The baseline for this target is the 2006 ABS Census of Population and Housing. In 2006, 47% of young Indigenous people aged 20–24 years had completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared to 84% of non-Indigenous young people in this age group (Australian Government 2011a). See 'Completion of Year 12' for further information on attainment rates.

## Literacy and numeracy

Literacy and numeracy skills acquired in the school years are essential for further educational attainment, social development and employment (Cope & Kalantzis 2000). A national education goal for every child leaving school is that they have attained an appropriate and adequate level of literacy and numeracy skills.

In Australia, national minimum standards have been developed for reading, writing, spelling, language conventions (grammar and punctuation) and numeracy for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Achievement against these standards is assessed on an annual basis through the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy. Students who achieve the minimum standards have demonstrated at least the basic understanding required for their year level.

**Table 4.2: Students achieving at or above the national minimum standards, 2010 (per cent)**

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
Reading	93.9	91.3	94.8	90.7
Writing	95.6	93.1	92.6	87.2
Spelling	91.0	91.9	92.9	89.6
Grammar and punctuation	92.0	92.2	91.5	90.8
Numeracy	94.2	93.6	95.0	93.1

Source: ACARA 2011.

In 2010, most students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were achieving at or above the minimum standards (87–96%, Table 4.2), similar to results in previous years (ACARA 2008, 2009). Higher proportions of female than male students were achieving at or above the national minimum standards for reading and writing (3–11 percentage points higher), while for numeracy the proportions were similar for males and females. While the percentages of students meeting the standards are generally similar across year levels for each of the tests, for writing the proportions declined with increasing years of schooling—in 2010, 96% of Year 3 students met the minimum standards for writing compared with 87% of Year 9 students (ACARA 2011). The academic performance of Indigenous students is outlined in Box 4.3.

Some groups of students do not perform as well against the minimum standards as other students. Students in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were less likely to meet the minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy than those in *Metropolitan* areas—in 2010, students in *Remote* areas were 6–16 percentage points lower, and those in *Very remote* areas were 35–49 percentage points lower than those living in *Metropolitan* areas (ACARA 2011).

Students whose parents had an educational attainment of Year 11 (or equivalent) or below were less likely to achieve the minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy (77–91%) than those whose parents had a bachelor degree or above (95–99%). Further, students with parents who had not been employed for the past 12 months were less likely to achieve the minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy (74–90%) than students with parents in senior management and qualified professions (95–99%) (ACARA 2011).

AIHW research indicates that children in the child protection system are particularly at risk of poor reading and numeracy outcomes. Between 2003 and 2006, children on guardianship/custody orders were considerably less likely to achieve the reading and numeracy minimum standards compared with all children, children with a language background other than English, and children living in *Remote* areas (AIHW 2011b).

## International comparisons

According to the Programme for International Student Assessment, Australia performs well on reading, mathematical and scientific literacy measures. In 2009, among 15 year old students, Australia's mean scores for reading (515), mathematics (514), and science (527) were statistically significantly higher than the reported averages for the 34 participating OECD countries (493, 496 and 501 respectively). Australia was ranked sixth overall for reading, ninth for mathematics, and seventh for science. Korea and Finland were the two top-performing OECD countries for reading and mathematics, while Finland and Japan had the best performance for science (OECD 2010).

## School retention

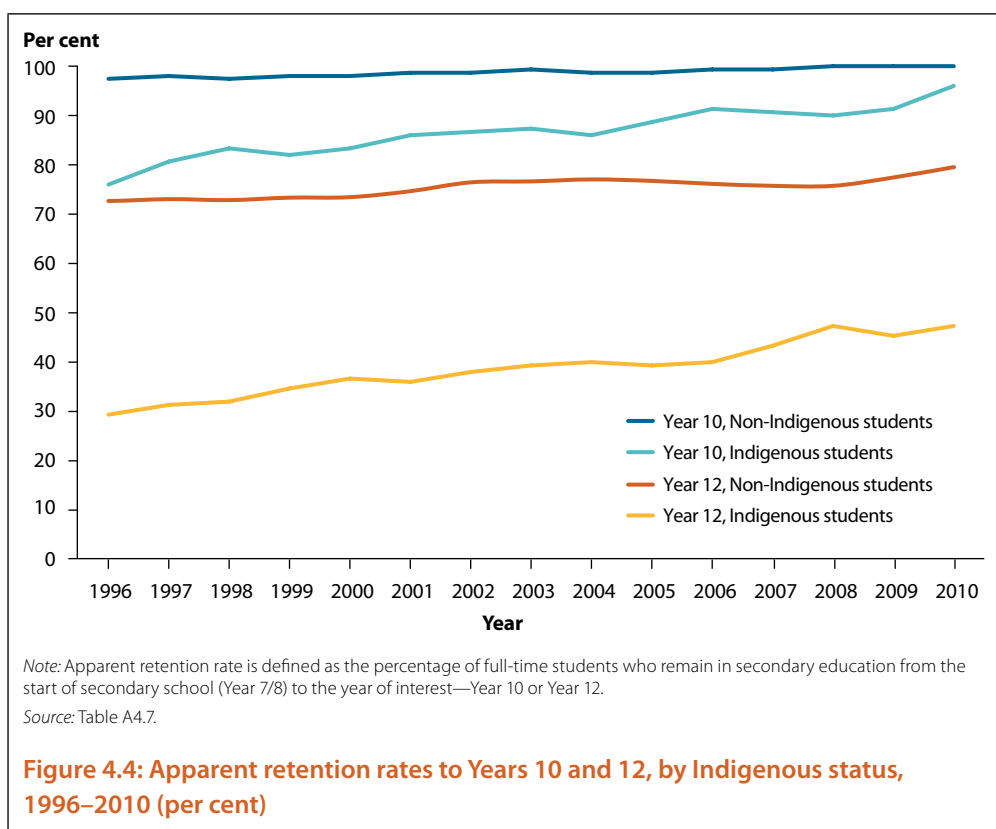
Remaining engaged in, and successfully completing, secondary school improves transitions into further study and employment. Students who fail to complete Year 12 may have fewer employment opportunities and are more likely to experience extended periods of unemployment than Year 12 graduates (Lamb et al. 2000).

One measure of secondary school engagement is the apparent retention rate to Year 12, defined as the percentage of full-time students who remain enrolled in secondary education from the start of secondary school (Year 7/8) to Year 12. The ABS *Schools, Australia* report (ABS 2011d) indicates that, in 2010, the Year 12 apparent retention rate was 78%, having gradually increased from 71% in 1996 (Table A4.7).

Females had a higher Year 12 apparent retention rate than males (83% compared with 73%), a pattern that has been consistent since 1996 (ABS 2011d). This is also consistent with other research showing that males are less likely than females to complete Year 12, and are more likely to undertake vocational programs or to find employment (Curtis & McMillan 2008).

The apparent retention rates for Indigenous students have been steadily increasing. The Year 12 retention rate for Indigenous students was 47% in 2010, up from 29% in 1996 (Figure 4.4). Similarly, the apparent retention rate to Year 10 was 96% in 2010, up from 76% in 1996.





## Completion of Year 12

While the apparent retention rate provides an estimate of the proportion of young people who stay at school, it is not a measure of successful completion of Year 12. Research indicates that completing Year 12 improves higher education and employment opportunities (Australian Government 2011a). In 2010, around seven in 10 school leavers aged 15–24 years had completed Year 12 (72%)—an increase from 68% in 2001 (ABS 2002, 2010h).

In 2009, the Australian Government set a target for 2015 of 90% of young people aged 20–24 years having attained a Year 12 certificate or Certificate level II or above. In 2010, 86% of 20–24 year olds had attained this target—an increase from 79% in 2001 (ABS 2010h). Attainment of Indigenous young people is discussed in Box 4.3.

Young people who have spent time in out-of-home care (for example, foster care and residential care) have been found to be about half as likely to complete Year 12 as the general population (35% compared with 74% in 2009) (Testro 2010). Those who have left out-of-home care services were also less likely than their age peers in the general population to undertake further education, and more likely to be unemployed. This reflects the history of disrupted living and schooling arrangements, and lower levels of academic performance that this group of young people experienced, and the challenges they faced in accessing educational and employment opportunities, particularly when making the transition from out-of-home care to independent living (Testro 2010).

Staying at school on a full-time basis is not the only option for young people after they complete Year 10. Some start an apprenticeship or commence studies at TAFE institutions. Information on apprenticeships and young people combining study with work is included in Chapter 4.4.

## Participation in further education

Changes in the Australian economy place early school leavers, particularly those without post-school qualifications, at greater risk of low income, unemployment and dependency on government welfare (Lamb et al. 2004).

The education participation rate measures participation in school and post-school studies for young people aged 15–24 years, including full- and part-time studies at school, TAFE, colleges and tertiary institutions. In 2010, the education participation rate was 76% for 15–19 year olds and 37% for 20–24 year olds, similar to rates in 2000 (76% and 33%, respectively). The higher rate among those aged 15–19 years reflects the compulsory schooling requirements, and that teenagers are less likely to be in full-time employment than 20–24 year olds (ABS 2000, 2010h). Many young people combine employment and study—this is discussed in Chapter 4.4.

Of the 15–19 year olds enrolled in a course of study, most were studying for a Year 12 qualification or below (67%), a bachelor degree (17%), or a Certificate level III or IV (10%) (Table A4.8). Most 20–24 year olds were studying towards a bachelor degree (59%), a Certificate level III or IV (17%), a diploma or advanced diploma (12%), or were undertaking postgraduate studies (6%). Management and commerce was the most popular field of study (21%), followed by society and culture (15%) and engineering and related technologies (13%) (ABS 2010h).

Indigenous young people aged 15–24 years were less likely to be studying for a qualification than all young people in 2008 (41% compared with 58%), with the pattern even more pronounced among 20–24 year olds (16% and 39%, respectively) (AIHW 2011h).

According to the ABS Survey of Education and Training, in 2009, almost one in 10 (9%) young people aged 15–24 years wanted to participate in study in the previous 12 months, but did not do so. The main reasons for not doing so included financial reasons (19%), having no time (18%), work-related reasons (16%) and personal or family reasons (12%). A further 19% cited course-related reasons such as lack of information, courses or places not available, did not have the prerequisites, or were not offered a place (ABS 2010g).

## Completion of further education

In 2010, 45% of 20–24 year olds had obtained a non-school qualification (that is, educational attainments other than those of pre-primary, primary or secondary education). Of these, most had obtained a Certificate level III or IV (35%), a bachelor degree (32%), or a diploma or advanced diploma (16%) (ABS 2010h). Indigenous young people aged 20–24 years were less likely than non-Indigenous young people to have a non-school qualification (30% and 46%, respectively in 2008) (ABS 2009b).

## 4.4 The transition to independence

Commencing employment after many years of education or while studying is a major milestone for young people. As well as providing an independent income, this transition can lead to an increase in self-confidence, greater involvement in the community and a sense of being valued. Alternatively, unemployment can become a barrier for young people who are trying to achieve

the personal and social identity that comes with employment, and gain responsibility and skills. It can also hinder the opportunity to make life decisions that comes with new-found independence (Muir et al. 2003). The various pathways from education to work make the transition to independence a complex process that can extend over long periods. This includes people taking 'gap years' to travel and/or work and subsequently return to education; individuals who choose to study part time and supplement this with employment; and those undertaking apprenticeships and other forms of on-the-job training.

This section presents an overview of trends in young people's living arrangements, family formation, labour force participation and associated issues; all of which are components of the transition to independence.

## Living arrangements of young people

Finishing school; finding paid employment; moving out of the family home; forming relationships; and starting a family are just some of many life transitions that young people experience, each with the potential to affect their living arrangements (ABS 2009c). With costs of moving out and establishing their own home increasing, young people are tending to delay both entering the rental market and purchasing their own home. While some trends in living arrangements for people aged 18–24 years have remained relatively stable, the number of young people in this age group living with their parents increased from 50% in 1997 to 57% in 2006–07. The proportion of young people choosing to live in group households decreased from 19% in 1997 to 11% in 2006–07 (ABS 2004; ABS 2006–07 Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey confidentialised unit record file). The latter most likely reflects the significant proportion of young people choosing to stay in the family home for longer.

## Young parents

For some young people, part of the transition to independence is starting a family. Although birth rates among young people have declined dramatically in recent years, beginning parenthood before the age of 25 is not uncommon in Australia; with almost 1 in 5 births (54,000 or 18%) being to mothers aged under 25 years (ABS 2010d). There are differing perceptions related to whether the trajectory from young parenthood is positive or negative. Parenthood in the teenage years in particular can potentially result in undesirable consequences including interrupted (and poor participation in) education, greater dependence on government assistance, increased problems in entering the labour market, and marital instability (Hoffman & Maynard 2008). In some instances, negative attitudes from the community and social isolation can characterise the life course of teenage mothers.

Paranjothy and colleagues (2009) noted the social and economic disadvantage that teenage mothers and their babies experience may simply be reflecting circumstances that were present before the pregnancy and birth. Further, young parents—especially those from a higher socioeconomic background—will not always experience negative consequences.

Of the 54,000 births to mothers under 25 years of age in 2009, 1,491 births were to females aged 16 years and below (Table A4.9). The fertility rate for 16–24 year olds has declined across all age groups between 1999 and 2005. This is particularly apparent among 24 year olds where the rate was 67.7 live births per 1,000 females in 2009, down from 108.2 births in 1990. The median age of fathers (33 years) was higher than mothers (30.6 years); and this trend is evident from an early age. In 2009, there were almost 3 times as many mothers as fathers aged 15–19 years (ABS 2010d).

The proportion of young mothers in certain populations is much higher than the general Australian population. In 2009, the Indigenous teenage birth rate (79 births per 1,000 females) for mothers aged 15–19 years was over 4 times the non-Indigenous rate (17 births per 1,000 females). For 20–24 year olds, the Indigenous birth rate was 152 births per 1,000 females compared with a non-Indigenous birth rate of 54 births per 1,000 females (ABS 2010d). Teenage births are also disproportionate in regional and remote areas. Teenage females who lived in *Remote/Very remote* areas in 2008 were more than 5 times as likely to give birth as their peers in *Major cities* (64 births per 1,000 females compared with 12 births per 1,000 females) (AIHW unpublished analysis of National Perinatal Data Collection).

## Participation of young people in education and employment

Although many young people aged 15–24 years are still completing secondary and tertiary education, a large number participate in paid employment, either in conjunction with education or independently. Of the 3.15 million people aged 15–24 years in 2011, 32% were in full-time employment, and 29% were in part-time employment (ABS 2010b; ABS 2011b). While this is a substantial proportion of young people, the same age group experiences unemployment at a higher rate than the rest of the population. During 2010, almost one-quarter (23%) of the unemployed population were aged 15–19 years and a further 16% were aged 20–24 years (AIHW analysis of ABS Labour Force Survey confidentialised unit record file).

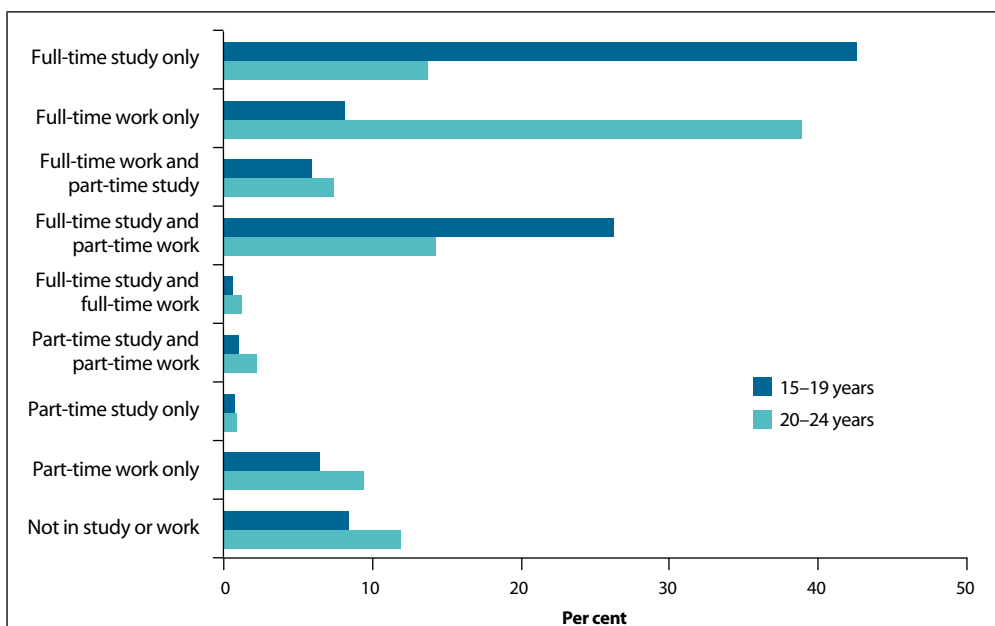
### Combining education and employment

In many circumstances, paid employment will begin in addition to secondary or tertiary education. Participation in paid employment assists with the acquisition of skills needed for long-term participation in the labour force. In 2010, over 595,000 young Australians aged 15–24 years were working part time while studying full time. Further, almost 10,000 young people aged 15–19 years who were enrolled full time in year 12 or below were also employed full time (ABS 2010h).

### Non-participation in work, education or training

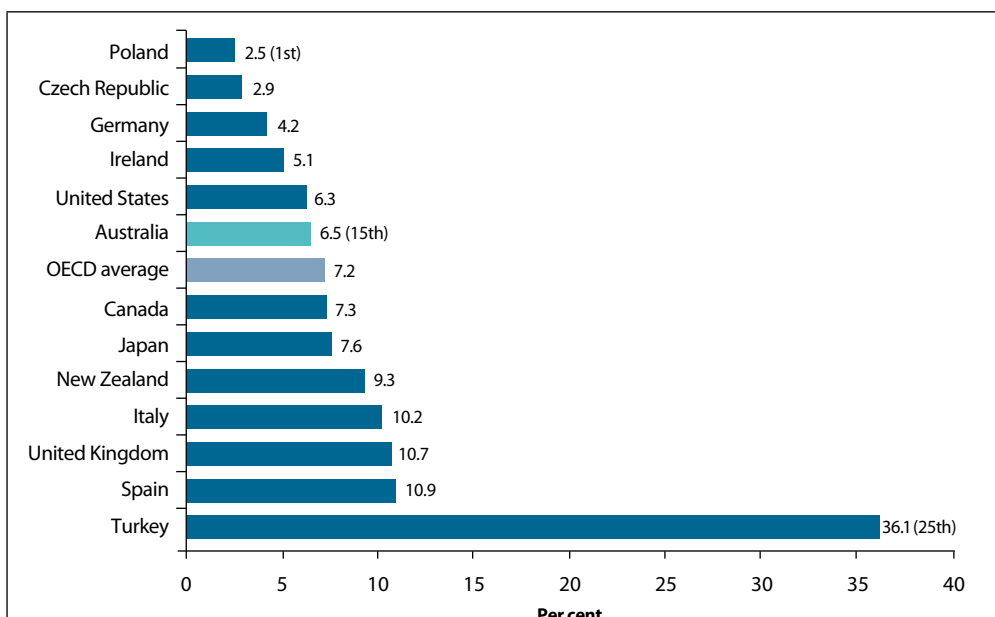
Non-participation in work or study has been linked to future unemployment, lower incomes and employment insecurity and can have an effect on a young person's standard of living (ABS 2010a). In 2009, 12% of 20–24 year olds were neither working nor studying, compared with 8% of 15–19 year olds (Figure 4.5). Differences between the age groups may be due to a significant proportion of the latter age group still being of school age, which gives them the option of participating in secondary schooling. For young people aged 20–24 years, the option of participating beyond secondary schooling may be limited.

According to OECD figures for Australia, in 2007 6.5% of young people aged 15–19 years old were not participating in education or employment. In terms of the percentage of young people not engaged in work and/or study, Australia ranked better than the OECD average of 7.2% (Figure 4.6), and better than Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Australia performed marginally behind the United States (6.3%), but was further behind Germany and Ireland (4.2% and 5.1%, respectively).



Source: Table A4.10.

**Figure 4.5: Participation in education and/or employment among young people aged 15–24 years, 2009 (per cent)**



Note: Based on the 25 participating OECD countries.

Source: Table A4.11.

**Figure 4.6: Young people aged 15–19 years not in education or employment, among selected OECD countries, 2007 (per cent)**

Data on specific groups within the population who are less likely to participate in work or study are unavailable. However, certain groups of young people are more vulnerable in relation to access to employment, educational and transitional opportunities. Young people who are in out-of-home care and care leavers are one such group that face many challenges. Testro (2010) noted the importance of ensuring that this vulnerable group can access the education and employment opportunities afforded by the Learn or Earn policy (below), while not disadvantaging them with conditions for accessing Youth Allowance.

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately represented among young people who are not fully engaged (that is not in full-time work, full-time education or in a combination of part-time employment and part-time study). In 2008, young Indigenous males were more likely than young Indigenous females to be fully engaged in work and/or study (60% and 48%, respectively). However, Indigenous persons aged 15–24 years in 2008 were still less likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to have been fully engaged in work or study (54% and 83%, respectively) (ABS 2010i). This finding was not limited to remote areas where fewer opportunities typically exist, but rather was Australia-wide. While young Indigenous people living in remote areas had low participation rates (41% of 15–24 year olds fully engaged), their peers living in non-remote areas had a higher but also relatively low proportion of full engagement (58% fully engaged) (ABS 2010i). It should be noted that the labour force participation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 15–24 years has improved over recent times, increasing from 47% in 2002 to 54% in 2008 (ABS 2010i).

### **‘Learn or earn’ strategies**

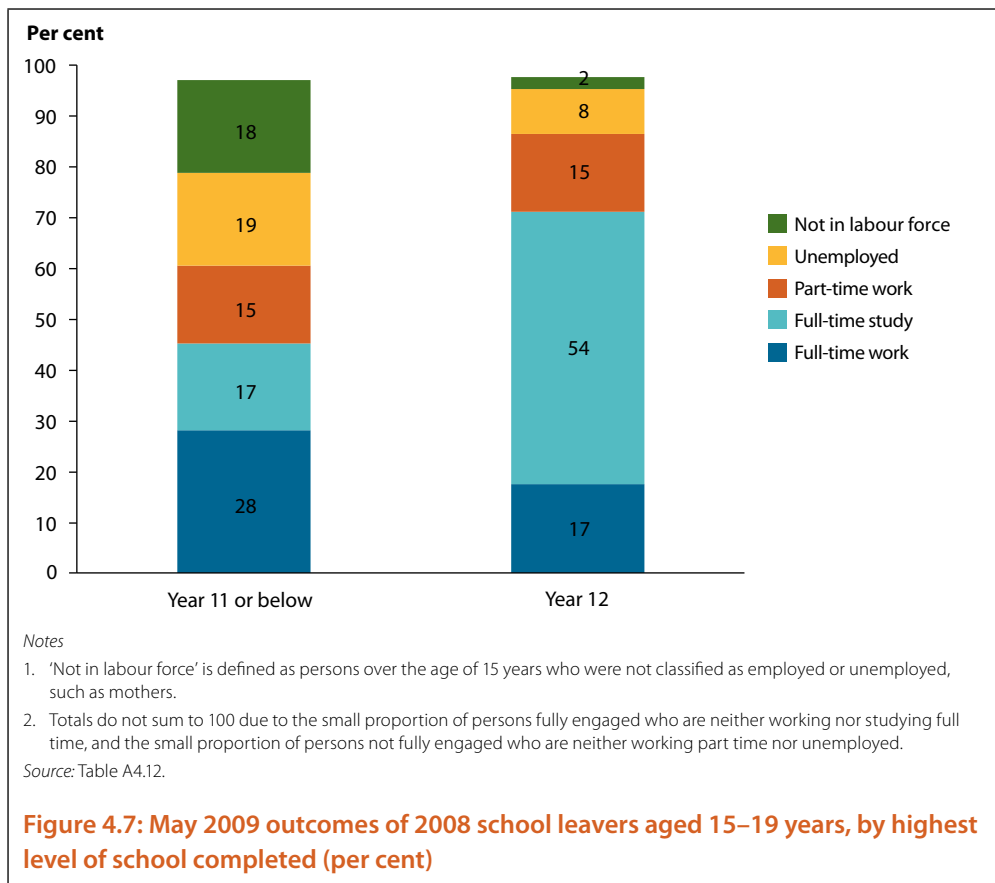
The Australian Government provides incentives for young people to be involved in either work or education. Introduced in July 2009, the *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions* (the Agreement) aims to increase the educational engagement and attainment of young people aged 15–24 years, in order to improve transitions from high school to further education, training or full-time employment. The Agreement also provides support for the achievement of a national Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rate of 90% by 2015 (DEEWR 2011d). The Agreement contains five main elements, one of which is the Compact with Young Australians. The Compact, which is commonly referred to as the ‘Learn or Earn’ initiative, introduced a youth participation requirement which requires young people to remain in school until they complete Year 10 and then participate in full-time education, training or employment (or a combination of these activities) until they turn 17 years old. Details of current Year 12 completion rates are discussed in Chapter 4.3.

The Learn or Earn initiative also introduced participation requirements for Youth Allowance (Chapter 4.2). In order to receive Youth Allowance, young people aged under 21 who have not finished Year 12 (or an equivalent Certificate level II qualification) must be studying or training until they attain such a qualification. This may be achieved through full-time study, or part-time study combined with paid employment or voluntary work (DEEWR 2009a). Financial support is discussed in Chapter 4.2.

### **School leavers**

Of the 300,000 young people who finished school in 2008, 72% completed Year 12. Two-thirds (66%) of all school leavers were fully engaged by May 2009, with 43% in full-time study, 20% in full-time work, and 2% working and studying part time (ABS 2010a). School leavers who did

not finish Year 12 were more than twice as likely to be unemployed than those who did (19% compared with 8%), and 9 times as likely to not be in the labour force (Figure 4.7). The greater likelihood of employment for Year 12 completers is maintained throughout the majority of the life course (ABS 2010a). This demonstrates the benefits of encouraging a high Year 12 completion rate.



## Underemployment

In addition to an unemployment rate which is well above average for young people, a large number of employed young people are considered to be 'underemployed'—meaning that they would prefer, and are available for, more hours of work than they currently have. According to the ABS Underemployed Workers Survey of 2010, there were 817,100 part-time workers who would prefer more hours (25% of all part-time workers) (ABS 2011e). Of these, one-third (33%) were aged 15–24 years, which makes them the age group with the highest incidence of underemployment among part-time workers.

During 2010, over one-quarter (27%) of underemployed part-time workers aged 15–24 years had been looking for more hours of work for one year or more. On average, underemployed young people spent 34–42 weeks seeking additional work hours. However, younger people tended to have a shorter duration of underemployment when compared to older people as the mean duration of underemployment increases with age (ABS 2011e).

## Apprenticeships in Australia

Apprenticeships are one way in which young people can acquire essential skills while also participating in the labour force. 'Insufficient work experience' is the most commonly cited reason that young people give for their unemployment (ABS 2010j) which makes the experience gained from an apprenticeship invaluable. Apprentices and trainees are important contributors to the labour market, making up 4% of the entire workforce in 2008. They also represented 25% of the 1.7 million students taking part in vocational education and training in Australia (Australian Government 2011c). Young people in particular often opt for this form of on-the-job training and employment, which generally lasts 3–4 years. Secondary students of working age may also choose to undertake a school-based apprenticeship which allows students to gain a formal qualification (for which they earn a wage for their time in the workplace), while simultaneously completing their school studies. In 2010, around 140,000 young people aged 15–24 years were currently undertaking apprenticeships, excluding school-based apprentices. Of these, 88% were males and 55% were aged 15–19 years (Table A4.13).

There is a greater variety (and thus availability) of apprenticeships in industries that are traditionally male dominated such as manufacturing, construction and other trades (Table A4.14). This may partially explain the differences in the proportion of females undertaking apprenticeships compared to males. Overall, the number of young people undertaking apprenticeships is increasing.

Although one-third (33%) of apprentices aged 15–19 years completed Year 12, almost two-thirds (65%) of 20–24 year olds had done so (Table 4.3). While 20% of 20–24 year olds had completed Year 10 or below as their highest year of schooling, 43% of apprentices aged 15–19 years had finished school at or before Year 10 (Table 4.3). School-based apprentices are excluded from this data, therefore no young people aged 15–19 year olds in this sample were still completing schooling.

**Table 4.3: Apprentices aged 15–24 years, highest year of school completed, 2009 (per cent)**

Highest year of school completed	15–19 year olds	20–24 year olds
Year 12	33	65
Year 11	24	15
Year 10 or below	43	20

Note: School-based apprentices are excluded from these data.

Source: ABS 2010 (unpublished data).

Fewer than half of all people who take up apprenticeships complete them (48%) which is a significant cost in terms of the resources used for on- and off-the-job training (Australian Government 2011c). Two reasons often cited for non-completion include issues with the employer and workplace; and low wages (which vary with year of apprenticeship, trade, and employer) (Australian Government 2011c).

An analysis of ABS data by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) showed a higher completion rate for apprenticeships undertaken in *Regional* and *remote* areas when compared to *Major cities*, highlighting the importance of such opportunities in non-metropolitan areas where there are fewer alternative work prospects (Australian Government 2011c). For example, out of all apprentice labourers, 29% of completions



were from *Inner regional areas*, and 24% were from *Outer regional* and *Remote/Very remote* areas (Australian Government 2011c). For details on work and study opportunities according to location, see Box 4.4.

As with unemployment, the number of apprenticeship commencements is particularly sensitive to economic downturn, as demonstrated by a marked decrease during 2008–09. However, this has since improved and increasing numbers of young people are choosing apprenticeships.

#### **Box 4.4: Opportunities for young people living in *Regional and remote* areas**

Geographical location can affect the opportunities available to young people. Young people who live in *Regional* or *Remote* areas face additional barriers regarding study and employment to those that their peers living in metropolitan areas experience. Barriers include the distance to training facilities, fewer training providers for post-school education, and fewer work opportunities within their area. Despite these challenges, apprenticeships and traineeships are well represented in *Regional* and *Remote* areas (Australian Government 2011c).

Deferral rates of tertiary education are much higher in non-metropolitan areas compared to major cities. Young people living in regional Victoria were around 2.5 times more likely to defer tertiary education than those in metropolitan Melbourne, which can be attributed to the need to move away from home and the substantial associated costs (Corrie & McKenzie 2009). This represents the interplay of location and financial circumstances affecting opportunity. Unemployment rates also affect young people differentially based on their geographic location. Unemployment was higher among 15–24 year olds living outside capital cities (13.0%) than for those living in capital cities (9.2%) in July 2010 (AIHW analysis of ABS Labour Force Survey).

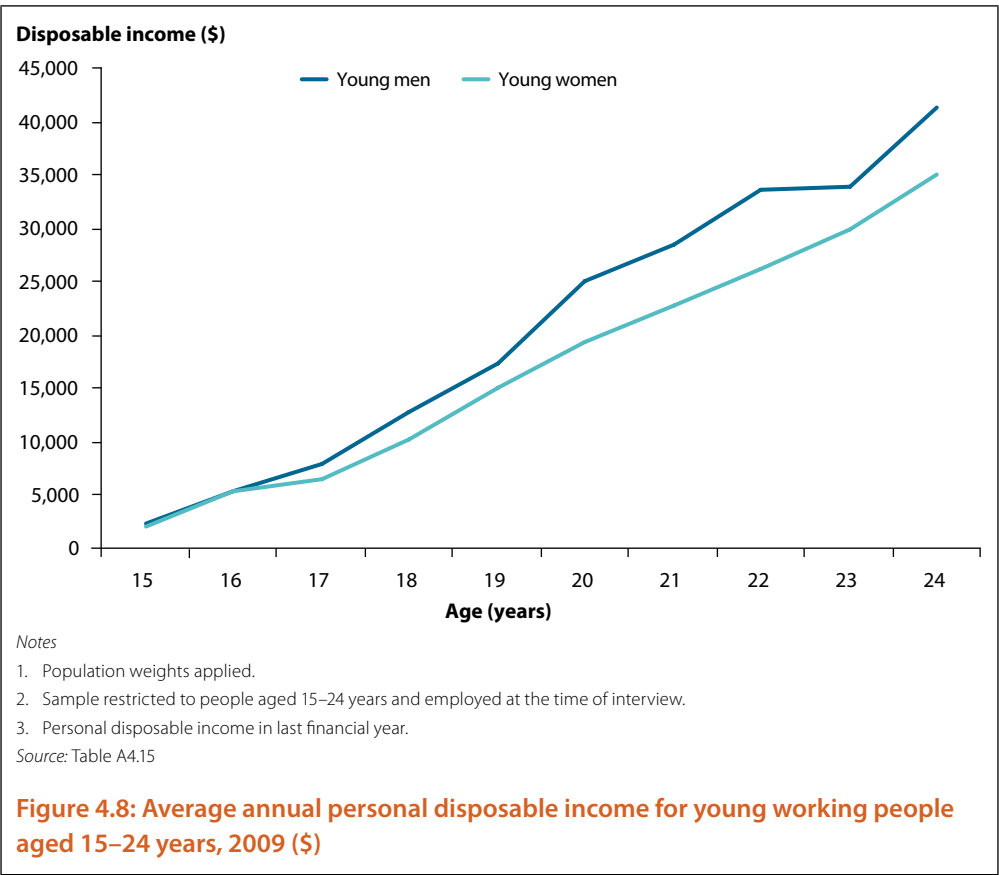
There is a substantial increase in opportunities in employment and education for young people who complete Year 12 relative to those who do not. In 2010, young adults aged 20–24 years living in *Major cities* were the most likely to have completed Year 12 out of all geographic areas (81%) (ABS 2010). The comparable figure was 67% for young people living in *Inner* or *Outer regional* areas, and 64% for those in *Remote* or *Very remote* areas.

*Source:* ABS 2010; AIHW analysis of ABS Labour Force Survey confidentialised unit record file; Corrie & McKenzie 2009.

### **Income of young people**

Given the substantially higher rate of unemployment and underemployment in young people, insufficient income can cause financial stress. An almost linear relationship exists between age and income between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Figure 4.8). At the age of 15 years, the average disposable annual income for young working males and females is just over \$2,000. By the age of 20, this income reaches almost \$20,000 for females and over \$25,000 for males. By the age of 24, income continues to increase however sex disparities become more apparent. In 2009, males earned on average more than \$41,000 compared with females who earned less than \$35,000. The relatively low incomes of young people tend to reflect their stage of life,

as well as education and employment trends. For example, the low disposable income of large numbers of 15–18 year olds is likely due to the proportion of workers who do part time hours while studying full time.



## 4.5 Social inclusion of children and young people

### Social inclusion in Australia

The Australian Government's social inclusion agenda aims to provide all Australians with the resources, opportunities and capability to learn, work, engage and have a voice (Australian Government 2011d). While the specified social inclusion principles are designed to improve the outcomes of all Australians, children and young people are the primary focus of two of the main priorities within the social inclusion agenda—helping jobless families with children, and supporting children at greatest risk of long-term disadvantage. This section focuses on the following 'at risk' groups—Indigenous children and young people; children and young people with a disability; homeless children and young people; and those involved in the criminal justice system (including prisons and juvenile justice).

### Jobless families with children

This social inclusion priority acknowledges that children are among the most vulnerable people in the community and recognises associations with negative outcomes for both parents and children in jobless families, including poverty, lower educational attainment and poor health (Whiteford 2009). The social inclusion agenda acknowledges the intergenerational effect of poverty in general and joblessness specifically. See 'Chapter 3 Economic participation' for a detailed discussion of jobless families.

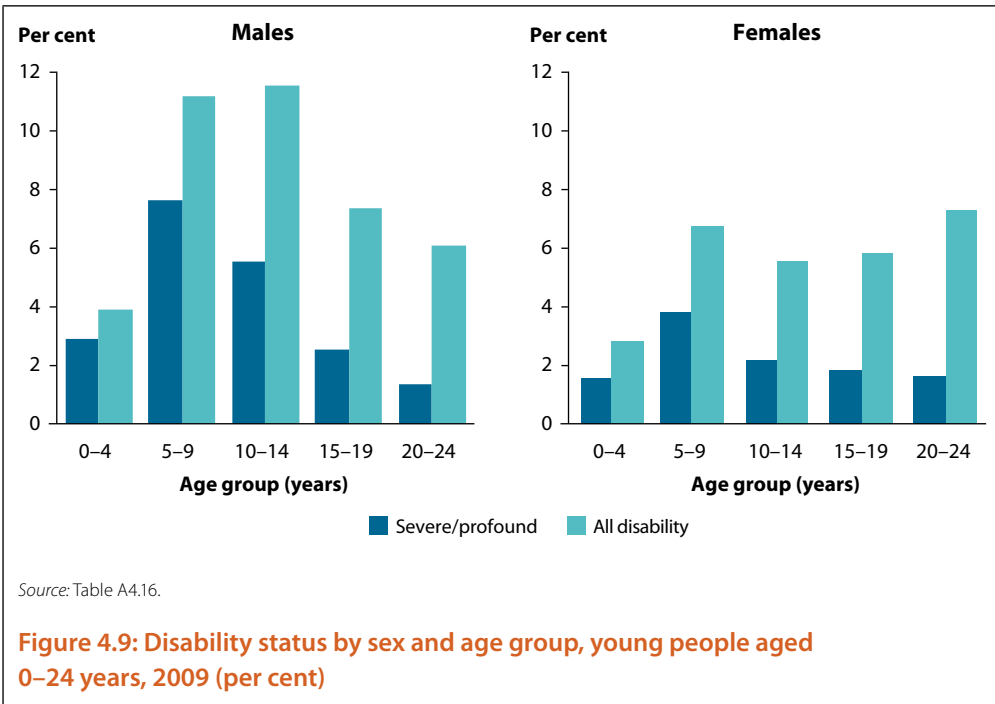
### Indigenous children and young people

The Closing the Gap initiative is a central feature of the social inclusion agenda, acknowledging the significant gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Australia on a range of outcome measures. The Australian Government has set ambitious targets with respect to Closing the Gap in a variety of areas; these are examined in relation to education in Box 4.3. Indigenous children and young people are over-represented in a range of areas, including juvenile justice (discussed in this section) and child protection (see Chapter 4.6).

### Children and young people with disability

Children and young people with disability can have diverse physical, sensory, intellectual and psychiatric impairments, which can restrict their full involvement in society (AIHW 2009b). This is particularly the case where people sometimes or always need assistance with one or more core activities of daily living (self-care, mobility or communication)—referred to as 'severe or profound core activity limitation' (see chapters 1 and 5 for further discussion).

In 2009, there were an estimated 492,500 children and young people aged 0–24 years (6.8%) with a disability—much lower than the overall population (18.5%) (see Chapter 1). Disability rates for children and young people were higher among males, particularly for those aged 5–14 years (Figure 4.9). The higher rates of both disability and severe/profound limitations for males in this age group are largely due to their higher rates of behavioural disorders (such as ADHD). Overall, the most common main disabling conditions reported in relation to children aged 0–17 years were intellectual and developmental disorders (2.5%); mental and behavioural disorders (1.2%); and asthma (0.5%) (ABS 2010f).



## Homelessness

### 4

Addressing the incidence of homelessness for all Australians is a key priority under Australia's social inclusion agenda. The factors contributing to homelessness are complex and are often more than simply the result of lack of access to affordable housing. Homelessness can also be the result of domestic violence, family or relationship breakdown, poverty or financial crisis, mental illness or lack of affordable housing. In 2006, an estimated 43% of the homeless population were children and young people aged 0–24 years (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008).

Specialist homelessness services deliver support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In 2009–10, there were 47,100 clients of the (former) Supported Accommodation Assistance Program aged 0–24 years. Along with these clients, there were 84,100 children aged 0–17 who accompanied their families, or one out of every 60 children in the Australian population (AIHW 2011c). See 'Chapter 8 Homelessness' for a detailed discussion of this issue.

## Young people and crime

A large body of research has demonstrated strong links between young people who are involved in the justice system and negative health and educational outcomes (AIHW 2011f). This group can therefore be considered to be particularly at risk of social exclusion. In all states and territories, a child is deemed to have criminal responsibility if they are 10 years or older. Young people accused of committing crimes are dealt with in either the juvenile justice system (up to 17 years) or the adult justice system (18 years or over), although this varies somewhat between the states and territories.

## Young people proceeded against by police

In 2009–10, around 180,000 young people aged 10–24 were proceeded against by police (4%). Offending rates for this age group ranged from 1.6% for those aged 10–14 to 5.8% for 15–19 year olds (Table 4.4). Young people had higher offending rates than all age groups 25 years and over. This means that police are more likely to process young people aged 15–19 years for the commission of a crime than members of any other population group. Most young people 'grow out' of crime, and offending rates fall dramatically in later age groups.

Although offending rates are higher among young people, this age group tends to commit relatively less serious offences—the most commonly reported crimes in 2009–10 were theft, acts intended to cause injury and public order offences.

**Table 4.4: Young people as offenders, 2009–10**

Age group (years)	Males		Females		Persons	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
10–14	14,942	2.1	7,333	1.1	22,319	1.6
15–19	65,894	8.5	21,665	3.0	87,658	5.8
20–24	58,479	7.0	13,360	1.7	71,965	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>139,315</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>42,358</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>181,942</b>	<b>4.0</b>

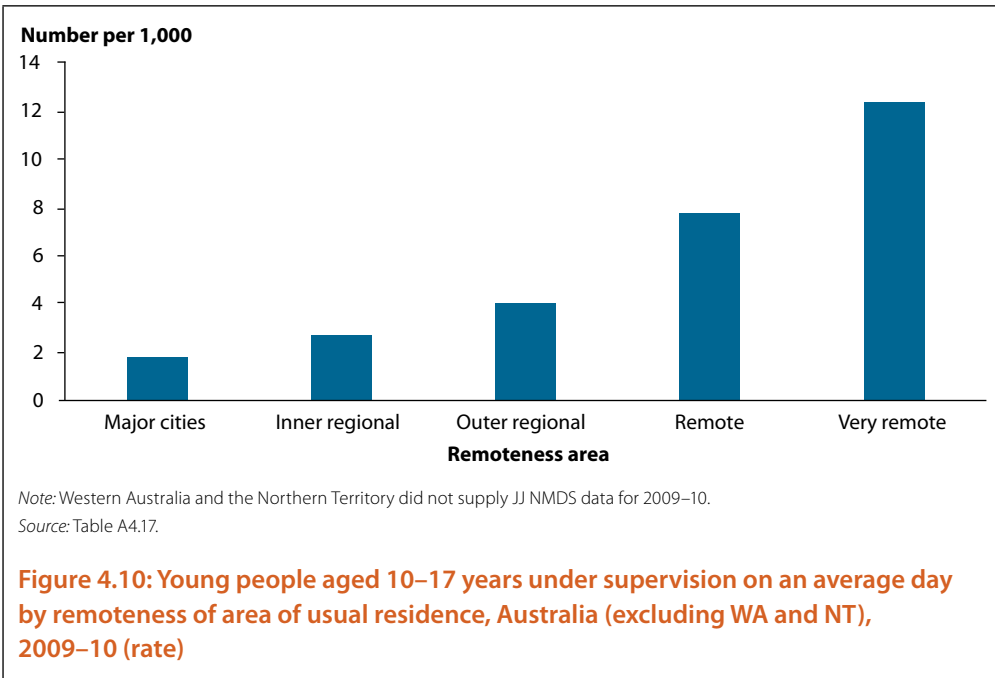
Source: ABS 2011c.

## Juvenile justice

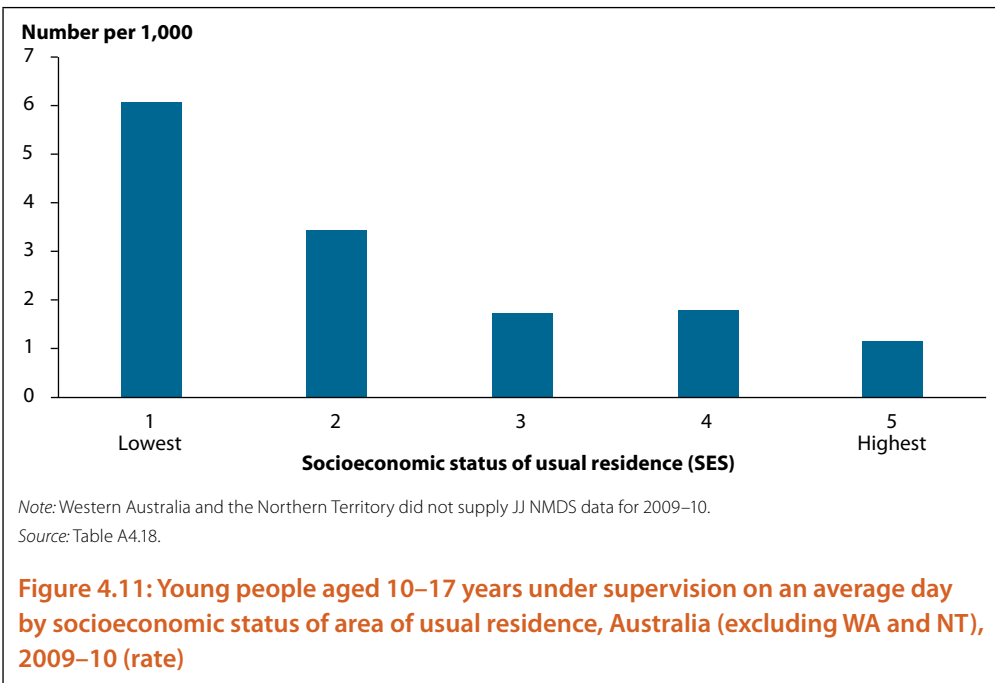
Juvenile justice is the responsibility of state and territory governments in Australia. On any given day in 2009–10, approximately 7,300 young Australians were under supervision (2.6 per 1,000 young people aged 10–17 years) (AIHW 2011f). Most (86%) of those under supervision on an average day were under community-based supervision, while the remaining 15% were in detention (an average of 1% of young people under supervision moved between community-based supervision and detention on the same day). Most young people under supervision were in the older age groups, with almost half of those under supervision on an average day aged 16 or 17 years (excluding Western Australia and the Northern Territory, who did not provide comparable data for 2009–10).

Indigenous young people are over-represented in the juvenile justice system—although only about 5% of young Australians are Indigenous, nearly 40% of those under supervision on an average day in 2009–10 were Indigenous. This over-representation was higher in detention, where almost half (49%) were Indigenous.

Although most young people under juvenile justice supervision were from cities and regional areas, those living in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were more likely to be under supervision on an average day than those from *Major cities* or regional areas (excluding Western Australia and the Northern Territory, for which data were not available) (Figure 4.10). On an average day, 7.8 out of every 1,000 young people aged 10–17 years living in *Remote* areas and 12.4 out of every 1,000 living in *Very remote* areas were under supervision, compared with 1.8 out of every 1,000 young people aged 10–17 years living in *Major cities*. This means that those from *Very remote* areas were around 7 times as likely to be under supervision on an average day as those from *Major cities*.



Young people aged 10–17 years from areas of low SES were more likely to be under juvenile justice supervision on an average day than those from an area of higher SES. Six young people out of every 1,000 aged 10–17 years who lived in the lowest SES areas were under supervision on an average day, which was almost double the rate of the next lowest SES areas, and 5 times the rate of those from an area of the highest SES (Figure 4.11).



These findings are influenced by the over-representation of Indigenous young people in *Very remote* geographical regions and in areas of low SES.

### Young people in prison

At 30 June 2010, there were around 5,800 young people aged 18–24 years in prison, a rate of 2.6 per 1,000 young people (ABS 2010k). Young people are over-represented in prison; the overall rate across all ages in 2010 was 1.7 per 1,000 population. Young people account for nearly 20% of the overall prison population.

## 4.6 Safety

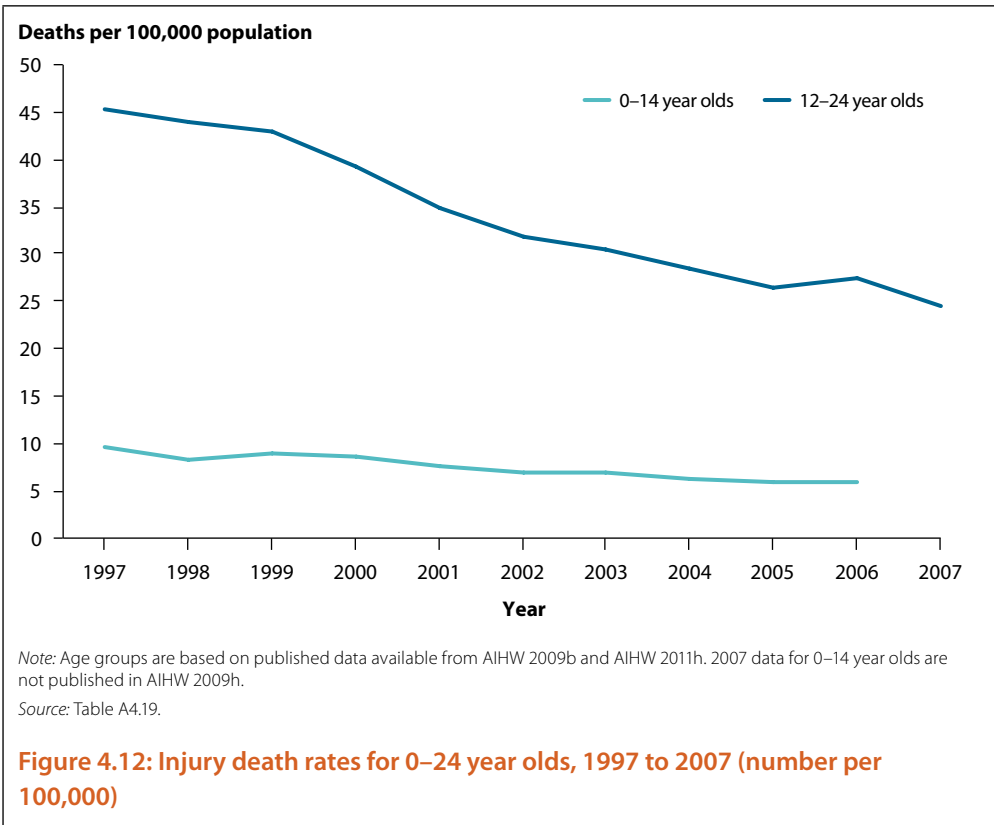
The safety of children and young people is related, in part, to the family and community environments in which they live. Safe families and communities can help to protect children and young people from physical and emotional harm and promote health and wellbeing across the lifespan (AIHW 2009b; COAG 2009d).

### Injuries

Injury is a leading cause of hospitalisation and death among children and young people. Injuries can cause a range of physical, cognitive and psychological disabilities that can seriously affect the quality of life of children, young people and their families. However, injury is preventable, and there are significant opportunities for reducing the burden of injury by implementing effective prevention strategies (AIHW 2010c).

Deaths due to injury among children aged 0–14 years have been decreasing over time—by 38% between 1997 and 2006, from 10 to six deaths per 100,000 children. The decrease is largely due to a reduction in deaths from land transport accidents and accidental drowning (AIHW 2009b). A similar pattern was found among 12–24 year olds—injury deaths have dropped by 46% over the period 1997–2007, declining from 45 to 25 deaths per 100,000 young people (Figure 4.12).

Periods of hospitalisation due to injury have fluctuated in recent years. Among 0–14 year olds, injury hospital separations declined by 4% between 1998–99 and 2006–07 (from 1,527 to 1,462 per 100,000 children) (AIHW 2009b). On the other hand, the injury hospital separation rate among 12–24 year olds increased by 6% between 1998–99 and 2008–09 (from 2,084 to 2,199 per 100,000 young people) (AIHW 2011h).



## Child abuse and neglect

Despite the ongoing child protection efforts of communities and authorities alike, some Australian children still experience maltreatment, often with wide-ranging impacts. The adverse effects of abuse and neglect include reduced social skills; poor school performance; impaired language ability; a higher likelihood of criminal offending; and mental health issues such as eating disorders, substance abuse and depression (Chartier et al. 2007; Gupta 2008; Zolotor et al. 1999). These effects can last a lifetime—poor health and welfare often continue into adulthood, and intergenerational cycles of child maltreatment are common (Lamont 2010). Children are particularly vulnerable to harm in families experiencing multiple disadvantages, such as housing instability; poverty; low education; social isolation; neighbourhood disadvantage; parental substance misuse; and mental health problems (Bromfield et al. 2010).

In Australia, statutory child protection is primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments. Departments responsible for child protection provide support and assistance to Australia's most vulnerable children and families. The broad processes for child protection are described in Box 4.5.



### Box 4.5: The child protection process in Australia

Children generally come to the attention of the state and territory departments responsible for child protection when concern for their wellbeing is reported by community members, professionals, organisations, the children themselves, their parent(s), or another relative. These reports may relate to suspected abuse and neglect, or to broader family concerns such as economic problems or social isolation. Child protection intake services screen such reports and those assessed as requiring further action are usually then classified as either a 'family support issue' or a 'child protection notification'.

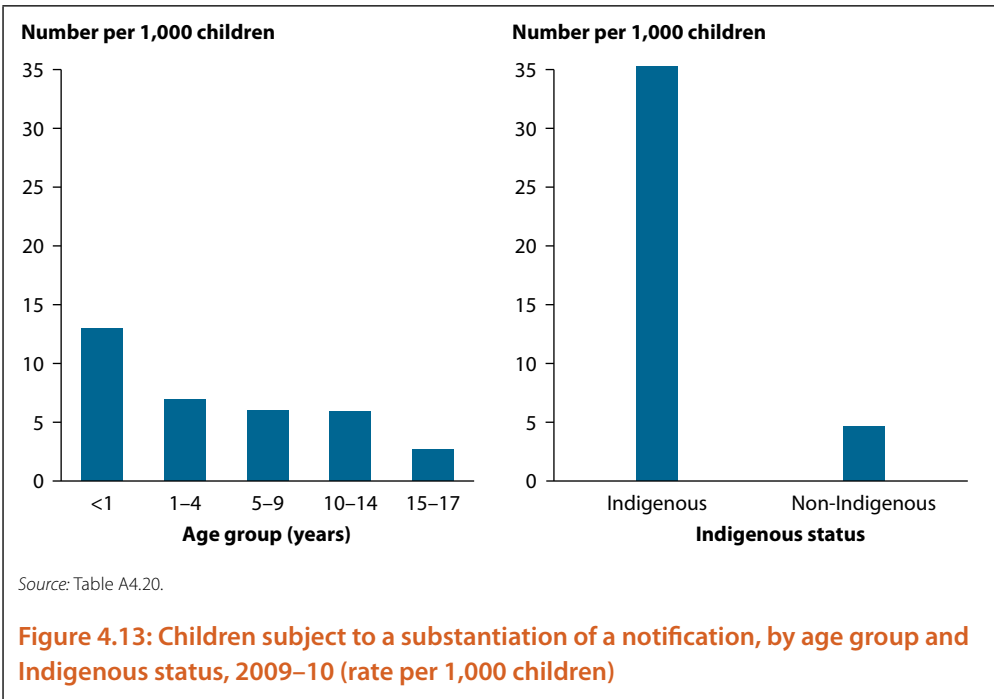
Child protection departments investigate these notifications and they are either 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated'. A substantiation indicates there is sufficient reason (following an investigation) to believe the child has been, is being, or is likely to be, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. An appropriate level of continued involvement by the child protection and family support services then occurs, including the provision of support and treatment to children and families. In situations where further intervention is required, the child may be placed on a care and protection order and/or in out-of-home care (including foster care and relative/kinship care). Children and families may be referred to family support services at any time during the child protection process.

National child protection data are based on reported cases and are therefore an unknown proportion of the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect across Australia.

For more information on child protection processes and data, refer to the annual *Child protection Australia* report (AIHW 2011a).

Across Australia during 2009–10, there were 31,295 children who were subject to a substantiation of abuse or neglect, a rate of 6.1 per 1,000 children. The number of children with substantiations has decreased by 8% since 2004–05 (from 34,046 children, or 7.1 per 1,000 children). In contrast, the number of children living in out-of-home care has increased by 51%—from 23,695 children in 2005 to 35,895 in 2010 (4.9 to 7.0 per 1,000 children) (AIHW 2011a).

Indigenous children and infants aged less than 1 year are two groups that are consistently over-represented in the Australian child protection system. In 2009–10, the substantiation rate for children aged less than 1 year (13 per 1,000) was around twice the rate for children in other age groups (Figure 4.13). Indigenous children were 7 times as likely to be the subject of a substantiation as non-Indigenous children in 2009–10 (35 and 5 per 1,000 children, respectively) (Figure 4.13).



The reasons for over-representation of these groups in child protection services are complex. Infants are particularly vulnerable to maltreatment due to their physical frailty and almost total dependence on others to meet their needs (Jordan & Sketchley 2009). Age is therefore one of the key factors taken into consideration when determining the urgency and type of response to a notification. Most jurisdictions have specific policies and procedures in place to protect younger children, and there has been an increased national focus on early intervention services to improve long-term outcomes and reduce the negative impacts of trauma and harm (COAG 2009d). Research suggests that for Indigenous children some of the underlying causes include the intergenerational effects of separation from family and culture (a legacy of past policies); and the relative socioeconomic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians (HREOC 1997; Stanley et al. 2003).

### Victims of violence

Being a victim of violence can have complex short- and long-term negative effects on the physical and psychological health of young people. Being victimised may lead to diminished educational attainment and social participation in early adulthood, or result in physical injury, poor mental health, and increased risk of re-victimisation (Arboleda-Florez & Wade 2001; Johnson 2005; Macmillan & Hagan 2004; Simon et al. 2002). Obtaining an accurate count of the number of young people who are victims of violence is difficult, as victims are often reluctant to report crimes to the police, and may feel intimidated if the perpetrator is known to them or in a position of power (for example, they may be older or an authority figure) (AIHW 2011h).

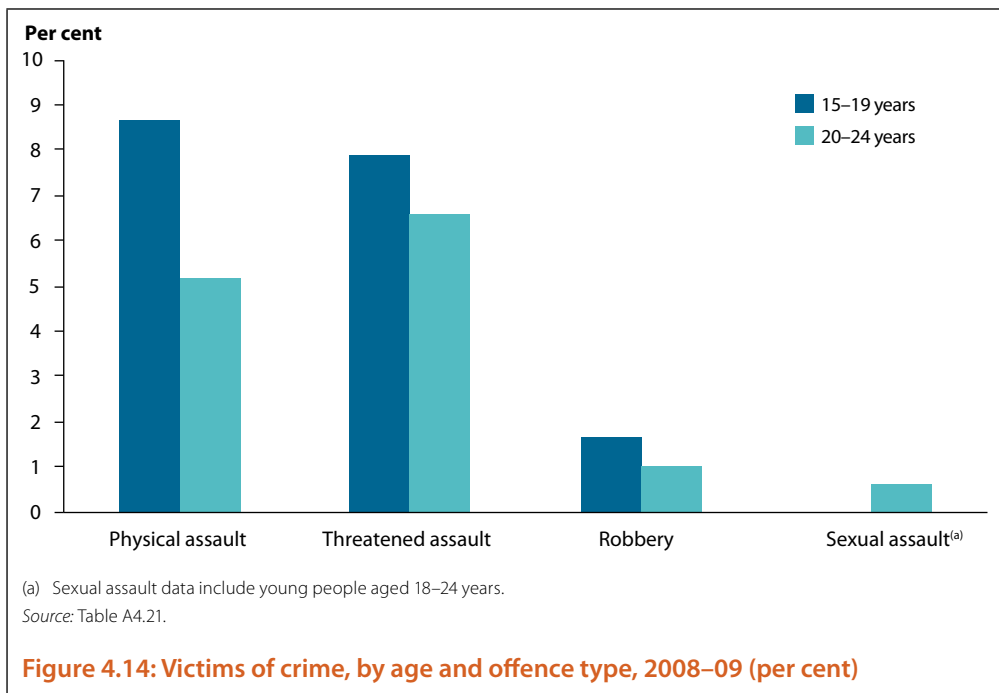
The ABS Crime Victimization Survey captures self-reported incidents occurring in the previous 12 months among people aged 15 years or older. In 2008–09, across all age groups, young people aged 15–24 years had the highest victimisation rates for physical assault

(7% of 15–24 year olds), threatened assault (7%), robbery (1%) and sexual assault (1%) (Figure 4.14; ABS 2010e).

Of the estimated 200,700 victims of physical assault aged 15–24 years, over half (55%) experienced physical injury, and nearly two-thirds (61%) knew the offender, yet only 39% of victims reported the assault to police. Males were more than twice as likely to experience physical assault as females (10% and 4%, respectively). The relatively high assault rates among this age group reflect the over-representation of young people among victims of alcohol- and drug-related violence (AIHW 2011h).

Indigenous young people aged 18–24 years were more likely to experience physical or threatened violence than all young people (33% compared with 24%, respectively, according to the ABS 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and the ABS 2006 General Social Survey). The disparity is even greater for young Indigenous females, where the rate of physical or threatened violence was twice that for all young females (34% and 17%, respectively) (AIHW 2011h). This may reflect the higher rate of family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations (AIHW 2006).

The ABS Personal Safety Survey captures self-reported cases of domestic violence. In 2005, an estimated 160,100 women (2%) aged 18 years and older had experienced violence from their current partner, and an estimated 1.1 million (15%) experienced violence from a previous partner. Over half (57%) of the women who experienced violence from their current partner had children in their care, and many of these women (59%) reported their children had seen or heard the violence (ABS 2006). Around three-quarters of women (78%) who experienced current partner violence were pregnant at some time during the relationship, and of these, one in seven (15%) reported that violence occurred during the pregnancy (ABS 2006).



Domestic and family violence is one of the most common reasons that clients gave for seeking assistance from homelessness services, particularly among females with children (48% of service support periods in 2009–10) and females under the age of 25 who presented alone (18%) (AIHW 2011d). Further information on homelessness is provided in Chapter 8.

## 4.7 Recent data development issues

Data sources relating to children and young people are many and varied. Much information can be gathered from general surveys and data collections with a focus on specific age breakdowns. There are also several large national data collections relating specifically to the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia, many of which are run on a long-term, ongoing basis, and several of which are longitudinal in nature. Previous AIHW publications have included detailed background information relating to a range of relevant data sources—see, for example, AIHW 2009b (Appendix 2); AIHW 2011e (Appendix 3); and AIHW 2011h (Appendix 2).

With a renewed emphasis on evidence-based policy, there is currently a range of new national data development issues being addressed across a variety of areas relating to the welfare of children and young people. Those of particular relevance to the topics addressed in this chapter are highlighted below.

### Education

#### *MySchool website*

The MySchool website, which allows the general public to examine a range of information relating specifically to all schools in Australia, was first launched in January 2010. Version 2.0 was launched in early 2011 and now includes the addition of a third year of results for the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy tests, which can be interrogated for any school in Australia. The site now also includes financial information relating to all government and non-government schools.

#### *Early Childhood Education and Care National Minimum Data Set*

The development of early childhood education data continues to be a priority for the government to support the COAG National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (see Box 4.1). The AIHW and ABS have developed a new national minimum data set to support six indicators to assess performance under this Agreement. The collection will be known as the National Early Childhood Education and Care National Minimum Data Set and will be an annual collection based on administrative state/territory and Commonwealth data.

### Closing the Gap

The Closing the Gap initiative (as discussed in Box 4.3) has brought with it a need to close the 'data gap', with a renewed emphasis on the quality of Indigenous data required to accurately measure the true gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and therefore progress against the various targets. Current projects include an audit within Australian hospitals to determine the quality of Indigenous data, and the establishment of a National Clearinghouse for Research relating to the Closing the Gap initiative.

## Children and Youth Information Development Plan

The ABS has developed a plan aimed at improving the collection and use of statistics relating to children and young people. The plan, developed in collaboration with the Children and Youth Statistics Advisory Group, takes its basis from 10 agreed key priority areas for data development, focusing on existing data and key data gaps. It also identifies a range of recommended actions for achieving improvements across the areas examined.

### Child protection

*The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009–2020)* currently includes 28 indicators of change, cutting across a broad range of areas. Several targeted projects are working in parallel towards developing selected indicators that cannot currently be measured using existing data sets, including ongoing educational measures; broad measures of safety and supportiveness of communities; and the development of a new NMDS in relation to treatment and support services.

National standards for supporting children and young people in out-of-home care were endorsed in late 2010. These standards will require dedicated measures to track their progress. Significant developmental work, including the implementation of a new national survey of children alongside an enhanced administrative national data set, will continue during the next few years to support these measures.

A child-level (unit record) data collection for child protection continues its development, with a pilot test completed in mid-2011. Once implemented, this collection will vastly improve the analytic power of the national child protection data collections—allowing users of the data to more accurately capture the experiences of children and young people through the system, both within and across years. Alongside this development is the production of a unit record-level module relating to carers of children within the child protection system.

### Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set

Following a review in 2009, the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set (JJ NMDS) was redeveloped to capture all supervised legal arrangements and orders for young people under supervision, not just the most serious legal arrangement or order. This redevelopment allows for a more complete analysis of the number and type of orders supervised by juvenile justice agencies. *Juvenile justice in Australia 2009–10* (AIHW 2011f) was the second report to contain data from the redeveloped JJ NMDS.

### Homelessness

The new specialist homelessness collection—implemented in July 2011—for the first time identified children as separate clients of these services. When these data are available, they will enhance the ability to separately assess the needs of these clients and their pathways through homeless services.

### Juvenile justice, child protection and homelessness data linkage

The AIHW is currently linking data on young people under juvenile justice supervision with information on young homeless people and available child protection data to investigate pathways between child maltreatment, homelessness and juvenile offending. This project will help policy makers design and implement early intervention policies and programs.

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