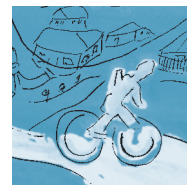


# 2 | Children, youth and families



## 2.1 Introduction

Australia's children and young people are today growing up in an environment of rapid social, economic and technological change. In recognising that children are the key to Australia's future, childhood, and particularly early childhood, has become a priority for governments and non-government organisations across Australia in recent years. The idea that what happens in childhood matters to how well children fare later in life is not new. What is relatively new is that there is a growing body of evidence that points to the importance of the early years of life (including the antenatal period) in setting the foundation of adult linguistic and social competence, coping skills, intelligence, physical and mental health, and the long-term benefits that can be gained by investing in a child's early years (McCain & Mustard 1999, 2002; Shore 1997). In recent years, the focus on early childhood brain development has been complemented by an increasing interest in brain development in childhood and adolescence (Dahl 2001; Giedd 2007; Paus 2005). The discovery emerging from recent work suggests that the brain is flexible and plastic, and that different parts of the brain mature at different times in a child's life.

The key policy responses to findings from brain development research are formulated around the relationships between the risks and protective factors that children and young people (or subpopulation groups of children) experience while growing up, and their health and wellbeing outcomes later in life (FaCS 2004). The main themes for most early childhood policies and initiatives in recent years are 'early intervention' and 'prevention', recognising that 'prevention' is socially and economically more effective in the long term than 'cure'. The ability to investigate these questions is limited by access to large-scale longitudinal studies. However, a number of recent initiatives, such as Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the development of the Australian Early Development Index and progress in data linkage are paving the way for future analyses and an improved evidence base.

There is a demonstrated relationship between the health and wellbeing of children and young people and the environment in which they grow up (McCain & Mustard 1999, 2002; Stanley et al. 2003). Over the last two decades there were major social and demographic shifts that have considerable impact on communities, families, children and young people. Falling birth rates, more families without children, a marginal increase in divorce rates, the growing number of one-parent families, increasing numbers of women in the workforce, and changes in the workplace are all having, and will continue to have, long-term effects on Australian children and young people. For instance, studies have shown that children and young people in one-parent families generally have fewer financial resources available to them (ABS 2005a) and are more likely to experience poorer outcomes (AIHW 2007a; Saunders & Adelman 2006). The role of grandparents in raising grandchildren and supporting families is also emerging as a critical issue. The need to support and strengthen families as a fundamental unit of society is another priority for governments.

One of the main social changes seen in the past 30 years is the introduction and expansion of quality child care services. The Australian Government first entered the child care field in 1972 with the introduction of the Child Care Act, and child care services developed slowly throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The mid-1980s saw the onset of a rapid expansion in the provision of child care services, from 46,000 Government-funded child care places in 1983 to 168,300 in 1991, and to over 600,000 in 2006. This expansion occurred with the introduction of changes to child care policy in relation to increasing the number of approved places and containing the costs of child care to families, as well as changes in labour market participation among women with young children (AIHW 1993). Child care services are now widely recognised as being of vital importance to society as they help parents to participate in work or study, help create social networks and provide children with opportunities to develop their social and intellectual skills (AIHW 2006a). Ensuring an adequate supply of good quality, affordable child care places is one of the policy priorities for governments, as is evidenced by the policy developments announced in the 2007–08 federal Budget.

Many Australian children have access to early education through formal early learning programs before they start school. Studies have shown that preschool or pre-compulsory education offers short-, medium- and long-term benefits to children (Goodman & Sianesi 2005; Schweinhart 2004; Sylva et al. 2004). School readiness is also emerging as a critical issue as it ensures that children start school on the best possible path for later life. At present there is no comprehensive nationally comparable collection of information on the use of preschool services or school readiness in Australia; however, the Australian Early Development Index tool has the capacity to provide further information relating to school readiness. A culturally appropriate tool is also being developed to assess the main aspects of Indigenous children's development.

Proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics is essential for day-to-day living, further educational opportunities and employment prospects. One predictor of early school leaving is poor literacy and numeracy skills (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2002). As the number of low-skilled jobs in the employment market decreases, the importance of trade or higher education qualifications increases. Since the 1980s, young people have increasingly participated in higher education rather than progressing directly from school to work, more young people are combining study and work, and the pathways from school to full-time employment are often extended and more varied. This trend has implications for when young people move out of the parental home, set up their own household or have children.

While most children and young people in Australia are doing well, a small group, such as homeless children, children in the child protection system and young people in the juvenile justice system, are in greater need of help and support. It is fairly common for this group and their families to experience multiple aspects of disadvantage, such as unemployment, poverty, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and drug and alcohol abuse, concurrently (Layton 2003; Tennant et al. 2003; Vic DHS 2002). These issues have different effects to different extents for subgroups of the population, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those living in regional and remote areas, and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Lack of access to adequate support and lost opportunities, particularly in education, can have a cumulative effect on children and young people, and this can transcend generations. Research has shown that children from low-income backgrounds are more likely to have lower educational attainment (Duncan et al. 1998); childhood poverty is also linked with teenage pregnancies and subsequent

adult social disadvantage (Hobcraft & Kiernan 2001). However, poor outcomes are by no means universal. What makes certain children or groups of children more resilient than others is of great policy interest, and one that may be informed by longitudinal studies.

This chapter provides a contemporary profile of Australia's children, young people and families in a context of change. It captures the dynamic and diverse nature of childhood, adolescence and family life. Section 2.2 begins with a sociodemographic overview of children and young people, and presents population projections to 2026. Section 2.3 describes the characteristics of Australian families. Sections 2.4 and 2.5 examine the transitions in a young person's life, from early childhood to child care, preschool, school, higher education and finally to employment. Section 2.6 considers some of the risks associated with growing up and their outcomes—child neglect and abuse, victimisation and homelessness. As child neglect is regarded as one of the strongest predictors of later youth offending, this section also examines young people's interaction with the juvenile justice system. Section 2.7 outlines some new national data development and information activities aimed at providing a better basis for future policy and planning. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key issues discussed in this chapter.

## Broad policy framework for children, young people and families

At the national level, the most important policies for early childhood and family support in the past few years have been the development of the National Agenda for Early Childhood, the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) new National Reform Agenda on Human Capital, and the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (2004–2009) (see Box 2.1).

Most states and territories have also developed their own child and family support policies (see Box 2.2). In addition, the Australian Government and most states and territories also have specific policies for young people (see Box 2.2). The common issues for young people across most policy initiatives are physical and emotional wellbeing (including safety), access to and participation in education and employment, engagement with the community and support for young people to achieve their full potential. Nationally, the Australian Government has published *Living choices*, a comprehensive guide to policies and programs related to the needs of young people (FaCS 2003). In 2002, representatives from the Australian and state and territory governments signed a declaration called *Stepping forward: improving pathways for all young people* that commits all jurisdictions to develop practical ways to increase the social, educational and employment outcomes of Australia's young people (MCEETYA 2002).

Other recent Australian Government initiatives of particular relevance to children, young people and families include Welfare to Work, which is designed to support and assist income support recipients to move off welfare and into paid employment. Initial research has suggested that Welfare to Work reforms may increase economic hardships for some families (ACOSS 2006; NATSEM 2005).

Another initiative is the 30% Child Care Tax Rebate designed to provide further support to parents with the cost of child care (ATO 2006; Australian Government 2006). This policy area was further strengthened in the 2007–08 federal Budget.

### Box 2.1: Recent policy initiatives for early childhood and family support

- In September 2001, the Australian Government established a Task Force on Child Development, Health and Well-being to develop a whole-of-government approach to the early years of life. A major responsibility of the task force was to lead the development of a **National Agenda for Early Childhood**. The National Agenda focuses on four key action areas: healthy families with young children; early learning and care; supporting families and parenting; and creating child-friendly communities. The Australian Government endorsed the National Agenda in December 2005 (FaCSIA 2007a).
- In February 2006, COAG agreed on a new **National Reform Agenda**, encompassing human capital, competition and regulatory reforms, aimed to lift the nation's productivity and workforce participation over the next decade in the face of Australia's ageing population. As a first step of human capital reforms, COAG has agreed that work will be undertaken in four initial priority areas, namely:
  - early childhood, with the aim of supporting families in improving childhood development outcomes in the first 5 years of a child's life, up to and including school entry
  - literacy and numeracy, with the aim of improving student outcomes on literacy and numeracy
  - child care, with the aim of encouraging and supporting workforce participation of parents with dependent children
  - diabetes, with the aim of improving health outcomes, focusing initially on diabetes and building on the national Chronic Disease Strategy and the Australian Better Health Initiative (COAG 2006a, 2006b).
- The **Stronger Families and Communities Strategy** (introduced in 2000 and renewed for 2004–2009) provides a framework for the Australian Government to support children, strengthen families and contribute to community capacity building. The renewed strategy has four streams:
  - Communities for Children
  - Early Childhood—Invest to Grow
  - Local Answers
  - Choice and Flexibility in Child Care (FaCSIA 2007b).

### Box 2.2: States and territories' policies for children, young people and families

The state and territory governments' policies for children and families include Families First Strategy (DoCS 2007a); Putting Families First (Queensland Government 2001); Early Years Strategy (WA DCD 2004); Our Kids Strategic Policy Framework (2002) and Our Kids Action Plan (2004–2007) (Tas DHHS 2003); ACT Children's Plan 2004–2014 (ACT DHCS 2004). In Victoria, children and family support policies are embedded in the following policies and legislation: Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond; A Fairer Victoria; the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety*

*Act 2005* (Children's Court of Victoria 2007; Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005; Victorian Government 2007). South Australia's Strategic Plan aims to improve and monitor the wellbeing and prosperity of South Australians (Government of South Australia 2007).

States' and territories' policy plans specifically for young people include: NSW Youth Action Plan (DoCS 2007b); Future Directions (Department for Victorian Communities 2006); Youth Action Plan 2005–2010 (Office for Youth 2006); Building a Better Future for Young Territorians (NT Office of Youth Affairs 2004); ACT Young People's Plan 2004–2008 (OCYFS 2004). Queensland has an Office for Youth; Western Australia, an Office for Children and Youth; Victoria, an Office for Children; and Tasmania, an Office for Children and Youth Affairs, to help advise, develop and coordinate policies, programs and services for young people in their states.

## 2.2 Australia's children and young people

This section describes Australia's child and youth population, in terms of its size, composition and growth as well as its regional distribution and cultural diversity. It provides a context for exploring many issues affecting the wellbeing of children and young people. Understanding the size and composition of this population group, including changing demographic trends, contributes to good policy decisions about the services required by children and young people, including schools, child care, and health and welfare services. In addition, parents' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics affect the health and wellbeing of children.

There are a number of ways to define children and young people, depending on particular data collections or legal requirements. Most commonly, children are persons aged 0–14 years and young people are those aged 15–24 years. These are the age groups generally used throughout this chapter; however, this does vary depending on the topic under discussion and constraints imposed by the data source.

### Population structure and change

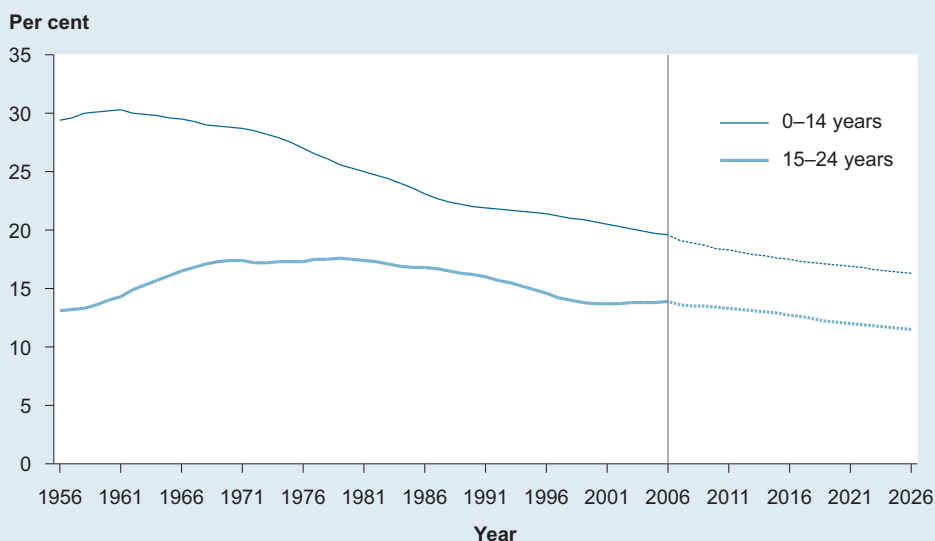
According to the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, there were approximately 4 million children aged 0–14 years and 2.9 million young people aged 15–24 years living in Australia, representing 20% and 14% of the total Australian population respectively (Table 2.1). When combined, children and young people (0–24 year olds) accounted for one-third of the Australian population, or 6.9 million people. The number of males in the child and youth population aged 0–24 years was slightly higher than the number of females (3.6 million males compared with 3.4 million females). This is a reflection of more males being born than females (106 males born per 100 females in 2005) (ABS 2006a). This pattern differed for older age groups, with the ratio of males to females similar for 30–69 year olds, but for those aged 70 years or over the ratio of females to males was substantially higher in 2005 (132 females per 100 males), reflecting the higher life expectancy of females compared with males (ABS 2006b).

**Table 2.1: Persons aged 0–24 years, 30 June 2006**

Age (years)	Males		Females		Persons	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
0–4	672,183	6.5	636,468	6.1	1,308,651	6.3
5–9	687,357	6.7	653,422	6.3	1,340,779	6.5
10–14	719,258	7.0	681,455	6.5	1,400,713	6.8
0–14	2,078,798	20.2	1,971,345	18.9	4,050,143	19.6
15–19	726,266	7.1	688,400	6.6	1,414,666	6.8
20–24	747,927	7.3	721,505	6.9	1,469,432	7.1
15–24	1,474,193	14.3	1,409,905	13.5	2,884,098	13.9
<b>Total (0–24)</b>	<b>3,552,991</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>3,381,250</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>6,934,241</b>	<b>33.5</b>
<b>Total population</b>	<b>10,290,338</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>10,411,150</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20,701,488</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: ABS 2007a.

Australia's population, like that of most developed countries, is ageing as a result of sustained low fertility and increases in life expectancy (see Section 2.3 and AIHW 2005a for further details on fertility patterns). As a result of these trends the proportion of children aged under 15 years in the population has fallen over the last four decades. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population projections, this downward trend is likely to continue over the next 20 years. From a peak of 30% in 1961, the proportion fell to 20% in 2006 and is projected to fall to 16% by 2026 (Figure 2.1). While the proportion of children in the population has been declining since the 1960s, the number of children



Note: Population projections (2007 onwards) are based on ABS Projection Series B. See ABS 2006c for the assumptions on which Projection Series B is based.

Sources: ABS 2006c, 2006d, 2007a.

**Figure 2.1: Children and young people as a proportion of the total Australian population, 1956 to 2026**

has increased from 3.2 million in the early 1960s to just over 4 million in 2006, with the number of children in 2026 expected to be similar to that in 2006 (4.1 million). A similar declining pattern has been observed for young people, although not to the same magnitude as for children. After reaching a low of 13% in the mid-1950s, reflecting the low levels of fertility during the Great Depression of the mid-1930s, the proportion of young people in the population reached a peak of 18% in 1979, and has since fallen to 14% in 2006 and is projected to fall to 11% in 2026. The number of young people has increased from 2.5 million in the late 1970s to 2.9 million in 2006, but is projected to be much the same in 2026 as in 2006 (2.9 million). Changes in the fertility rate over the last decade are likely to affect these projections.

Before 1998 the total fertility rate in Australia had been declining. However, between 1998 and 2004 the fertility rate remained relatively constant at between 1.75 and 1.77 births per woman, with the exception of 2001 when it was 1.73. In 2005, the fertility rate was 1.81 births per woman, indicating that the fertility rate has stabilised and may even be rising. The recognition that fertility rates have apparently stabilised is relatively recent. It is important to note that the demographic projections used in this chapter assume that the total fertility rate will decrease to 1.70 births per woman by 2018 and then remain constant. Therefore, based on the current fertility rate, many of the projected numbers may underestimate the proportion of children and young people in Australia in the 2020s and beyond.

## Geographical distribution of children and young people

In 2006, one-third of Australian children and young people lived in New South Wales, one-quarter in Victoria and one-fifth in Queensland (Table 2.2). While only 1% of children and young people lived in the Northern Territory, they accounted for 40% of the territory's total population. The relatively high proportion of children and young people in the Territory's population is partly explained by the younger age profile of the Indigenous population, which makes up over half of the population in the Northern Territory.

**Table 2.2: Distribution of children and young people across the states and territories, June 2006**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia <sup>(a)</sup>
	<b>Number</b>								
0–14 years	1,332,808	974,172	834,591	410,008	287,383	96,515	62,569	51,540	4,050,143
15–24 years	928,174	716,649	578,170	295,908	213,175	64,990	54,194	32,545	2,884,098
0–24 years	2,260,982	1,690,821	1,412,761	705,916	500,558	161,505	116,763	84,085	6,934,241
<i>Total population</i>	<i>6,817,182</i>	<i>5,128,310</i>	<i>4,091,546</i>	<i>2,059,045</i>	<i>1,568,204</i>	<i>489,922</i>	<i>334,225</i>	<i>210,673</i>	<i>20,701,488</i>
	<b>Proportion of state or territory population<sup>(b)</sup> (per cent)</b>								
0–14 years	19.6	19.0	20.4	19.9	18.3	19.7	18.7	24.5	19.6
15–24 years	13.6	14.0	14.1	14.4	13.6	13.3	16.2	15.4	13.9
0–24 years	33.2	33.0	34.5	34.3	31.9	33.0	34.9	39.9	33.5
	<b>Proportion of Australian population 0–24 years<sup>(c)</sup> (per cent)</b>								
0–24 years	32.6	24.4	20.4	10.2	7.2	2.3	1.7	1.2	100.0

(a) Includes 'Other Territories' comprising Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

(b) The denominator is the relevant total state/territory population.

(c) The denominator is the total Australian population aged 0–24 years.

Source: ABS 2007a.

The geographic distribution of children and young people was similar to that of all Australians in 2005. Around two-thirds of Australian children and young people lived in Major Cities and around one-third lived in Inner and Outer Regional areas (Table 2.3). Those living in Remote or Very Remote areas accounted for around 3% of the child and youth population. Young people aged 15–24 years were slightly more likely to live in Major Cities than children (69% compared with 64%), and were slightly less likely to live in regional areas and Remote or Very Remote areas. Of all children and young people living in Very Remote areas, the great majority lived in the Northern Territory (33%), Queensland (29%) and Western Australia (26%).

**Table 2.3: Distribution of children and young people aged 0–24 years across remoteness areas, June 2005 (per cent)**

Remoteness category	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Major Cities	71.6	73.0	52.5	70.0	71.2	..	99.8	..	65.8
Inner Regional	20.8	22.0	25.8	13.3	13.1	64.8	0.2	..	21.2
Outer Regional	6.9	4.9	17.8	9.3	11.6	33.2	..	50.5	10.2
Remote	0.6	0.1	2.5	4.6	3.1	1.6	..	20.7	1.7
Very Remote	0.1	..	1.5	2.8	1.0	0.4	..	28.8	1.1
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>2,228,348</b>	<b>1,645,382</b>	<b>1,372,409</b>	<b>686,603</b>	<b>490,504</b>	<b>161,532</b>	<b>114,173</b>	<b>81,728</b>	<b>6,781,802</b>

Source: AIHW, derived from ABS Statistical Local Area population estimates.

## Indigenous children and young people

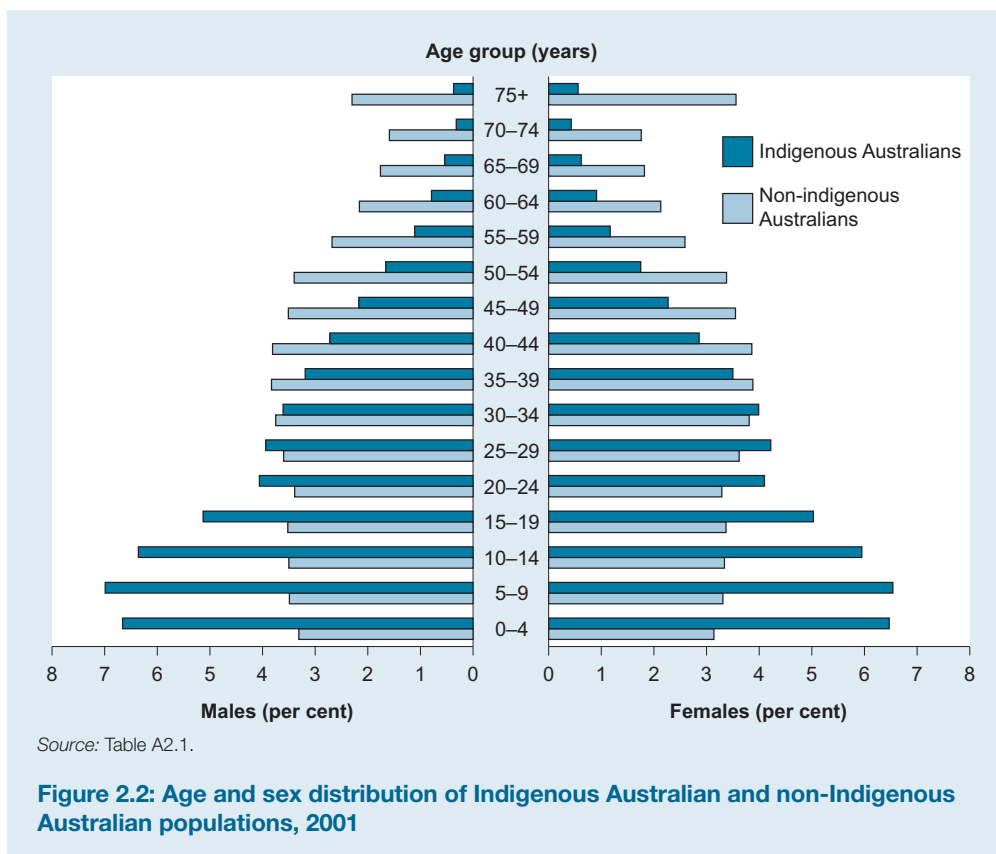
In 2001, there were approximately 262,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (178,700 Indigenous children and 84,000 Indigenous young people), accounting for 4.5% of all children and 3.2% of all young people in Australia. This number is projected to have grown to approximately 289,600 by mid-2007 (AIHW & ABS 2006).

The Indigenous population has a much younger age structure than the non-Indigenous population. In 2001, children made up 39% of Indigenous Australians, compared with 20% of non-Indigenous Australians (Figure 2.2). This reflects the relatively high fertility rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women compared with non-Indigenous women (2.06 births compared with 1.81 births per 1,000 women in 2005) and higher death rates, particularly in the mid-adult and older age groups, among the Indigenous population. Similarly, young Indigenous people accounted for a higher proportion of the Indigenous population than non-Indigenous young Australians (18% compared with 14%, respectively); however, these differences were not as marked as for children.

## Cultural and linguistic diversity

With almost one-quarter (24%) of the population born overseas, Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. The proportions of children (6%) and young people (16%) born overseas are considerably lower than for the population aged 25 years and over (31%) in 2006 (ABS 2007b). However, children born in Australia to overseas-born parents are not included in these figures.

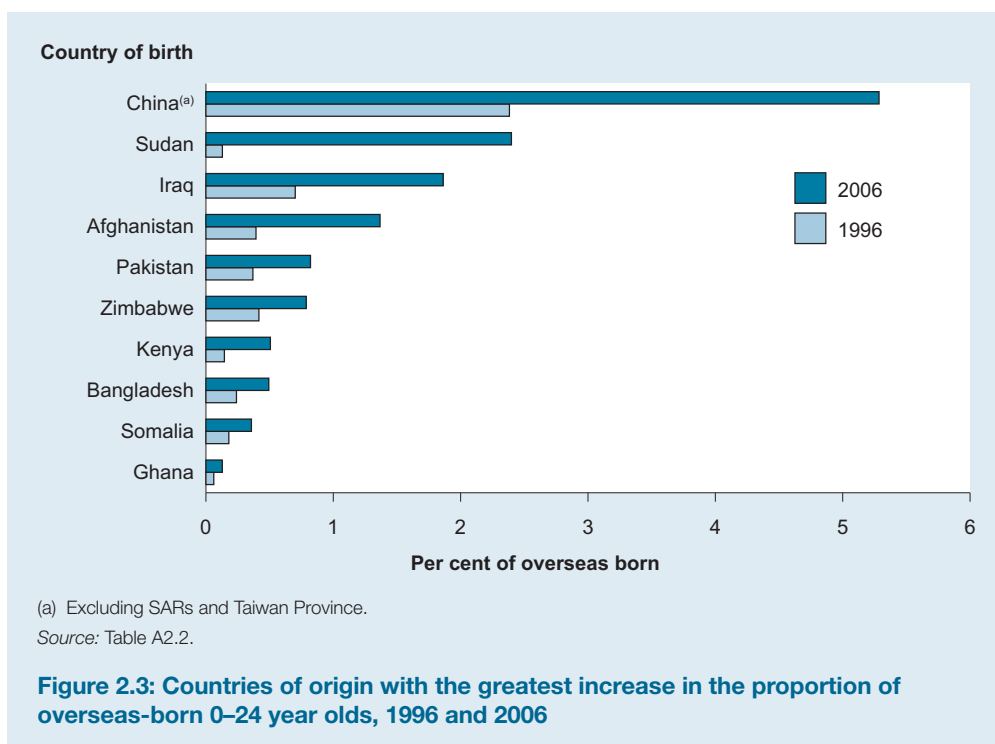




Most children and young people were born in Australia (90%, 6.2 million as at 30 June 2006), 6% were originally from mainly non-English-speaking countries (429,000) and 4% were from mainly English-speaking countries (248,600). Of the 677,600 children and young people (222,200 children and 455,400 young people) born overseas, the largest groups were born in New Zealand (17%) and the United Kingdom (12%).

The birthplaces of those born in mainly non-English-speaking countries were somewhat more diverse for young people than for children, due, at least in part, to overseas students living in Australia long term. Of children born in non-English-speaking countries, the largest groups were from India (9.0%), the Philippines (6.6%), China (excluding Special Administrative Regions (SARs) and Taiwan Province) (6.2%), Sudan (4.7%), Singapore (4.2%), Malaysia (3.7%) and Republic of South Korea (3.5%) in 2006. For young people from non-English-speaking countries, the largest groups were those born in China (excluding SARs and Taiwan Province) (9.3%), Philippines (6.8%), India (5.2%), Viet Nam (4.9%), Hong Kong (SAR of China) (4.5%), Malaysia (4.3%) and Indonesia (4.0%).

Over the last decade there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of Australian children and young people born in Sudan, from 0.1% of overseas born children and young people in 1996 to 2.4% in 2006 (Figure 2.3). There have also been considerable increases in the proportions of children and young people born in Kenya and Afghanistan (more than threefold increase), and those born in Iraq (almost threefold increase) over the same period. These changes in migration trends have implications for the provision of culturally sensitive and accessible health and welfare services, particularly for those from mainly non-English-speaking countries.



## 2.3 Australian families

Families continue to be the cornerstone of Australian society as they provide the environment in which children are cared for and young people are supported as they grow up. Research has shown that children who were brought up in stimulating and nurturing environments have better outcomes throughout their lives (McCain & Mustard 2002; Zubrick et al. 2000). In contrast, a low level of family cohesion is thought to be a risk factor during childhood and adolescent development, and has been associated with mental health problems, suicide and substance abuse (Sawyer et al. 2000; Silburn et al. 1996; Toumbourou & Gregg 2001). Many of the social, economic and technological changes occurring in society have direct effects on families. With changing social attitudes towards marriage and fertility choices, Australian families have changed markedly over the last 30 years (ABS 2003a). Children today grow up in a wider variety of family types, and young people often delay forming families until they are in their late 20s or early 30s. This section looks at the major trends for families in relation to family formation and composition, living arrangements, employment patterns, income and financial assistance from the government.

### Family formation and dissolution

Fewer Australians are entering a registered marriage, and those who do tend to marry at an older age. Over the past 20 years the crude marriage rate in Australia has been declining—in 2005 it was 5.4 per 1,000 population, compared with 7.3 per 1,000 population in 1985 (Table 2.4). Furthermore, between 1981 and 2001 there was a decline in first marriage rates for every age group (Table A2.3). The median age of both men and women at first marriage also increased by approximately 5 years between 1985 and 2005—from 25.4 years to 30.0 years for men, and from 23.2 years to 28.0 years for women (Table 2.4).

Cohabitation before marriage has become increasingly common, with the proportion of couples living together before marriage increasing from 29% to 76%, between 1980 and 2005 (ABS 2001, 2006e). The 2006 Population Census showed that 15% of people living as partners in couple relationships were de facto married, an increase from 8% in 1991 (ABS 2006f, 2007c). The 2001 Population Census found that most people who are de facto married had never been in a registered marriage (68%) and 28% were either separated or divorced (ABS 2006f).

While there has been a marginal increase in divorce rates (from 11.9 to 13.1 per 1,000 married males or females between 1981 and 2001), the proportion of divorces involving children under 18 years has decreased (from 61% to 51% between 1981 and 2001) (ABS 2002a). Family dissolution can also occur in de facto marriages—the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey estimated that, of people in de facto relationships in 2001, 10% were no longer in those relationships in 2003 (Headey et al. 2006).

Compared with the early 1960s, a smaller proportion of Australian women are having children, and those who do have children are having fewer babies. This resulted in a steady decline in Australia's total fertility rate, from 3.55 births per woman in 1961 to a record low of 1.73 in 2001 (ABS 2006a). However, this trend appears to have turned, as the total fertility rate has since increased to 1.81 births per woman in 2005. Data from future years will need to be monitored to see if this trend toward increasing fertility continues. In addition, the median age of mothers at birth has consistently increased over the past 20 years, from 27.3 years in 1985 to 30.7 years in 2005, the highest median age on record (Table 2.4).

The proportion of children born outside registered marriage has doubled in the past 20 years—from 16% in 1985 to 32% in 2005. Despite this, the proportion of all births where the father has not acknowledged the birth has decreased slightly over this period (Table 2.4). Children born outside registered marriage include those born in de facto marriages, as well as those born to single mothers; however, the national birth registrations data collated by the ABS do not distinguish between these categories (ABS 2006a). Estimates from the HILDA Survey indicate that, of children born in 2001, 11% were born to lone mothers and 18% were born to de facto couples (de Vaus 2005).

**Table 2.4: Selected marriage and birth indicators, selected years**

	1985	1995	2000	2005
<b>Marriages</b>				
Crude marriage rate (per 1,000 population)	7.3	6.1	5.9	5.4
Median age at first marriage—males (years)	25.4	27.3	28.5	30.0
Median age at first marriage—females (years)	23.2	25.3	26.7	28.0
<b>Births</b>				
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	1.92	1.82	1.76	1.81
Median age of mother (years)	27.3	29.1	29.8	30.7
Children born outside registered marriage (per cent)	15.5	26.6	29.2	32.2
Births where paternity is not acknowledged <sup>(a)</sup> (per cent)	4.9	4.4	3.5	3.2

(a) Births where the father has not signed the birth registration form.

Sources: ABS 2006a, 2006e.

In line with these trends in family formation and dissolution, there have been corresponding changes over the past decade in the types of families in Australia. Between 1996 and 2006, the proportion of couple families with co-resident children has declined, while the proportions of one-parent families and couples without children (including couples who have no children and those whose children have left home) have increased (see Table 8.24 in Chapter 8).

## Families with children

The ABS categorises families with children into two broad groups: *couple families*, which include intact, step and blended families (refer to the Glossary for definitions); and *one-parent families*. Families with children are not static, however, and may experience family breakdown and change. For example, a family type that begins as an intact couple family may become a one-parent family or, indeed, two one-parent families where care is shared, following relationship breakdown. A lone parent may choose to re-partner, thus forming a step family. When children are born to the new couple relationship, a blended family is formed (ABS 2004a). Although the composition and structure of families are clearly not static, the national ABS survey data capture these characteristics at one point in time. The longitudinal perspective is important in understanding Australian families—for example, findings from the HILDA Survey indicate that, among a cohort of 18 year olds, although only 5% were born to a lone mother, around 27% had lived in lone-mother families at some point in their lives (de Vaus & Gray 2003).

Data for this section were drawn from the ABS 2003 Family Characteristics Survey, as detailed 2006 Census data were not available at the time of writing. According to the Family Characteristics Survey, there were an estimated 2.5 million families with co-resident children aged 0–17 years in 2003, a 6% increase from 1992 (Table 2.5). In 2003, the majority of families were intact families (71%, down from 76% in 1992), and around

**Table 2.5: Types of families with children aged 0–17 years, 1992, 1997 and 2003**

	1992		1997		2003	
	Number of families	Per cent	Number of families	Per cent	Number of families	Per cent
<b>Couple families</b>						
Intact	1,815,200	76.3	1,741,100	72.1	1,775,500	70.7
Step	84,300	3.5	88,900	3.7	98,600	3.9
Blended	68,100	2.9	75,300	3.1	78,100	3.1
Other <sup>(a)</sup>	7,100	0.3	6,000	0.2	14,900	0.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,974,700</i>	<i>83.0</i>	<i>1,911,300</i>	<i>79.2</i>	<i>1,967,100</i>	<i>78.4</i>
<b>One-parent families</b>						
Lone mother	349,600	14.7	437,700	18.1	466,400	18.6
Lone father	53,400	2.2	65,200	2.7	76,100	3.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>403,000</i>	<i>16.9</i>	<i>502,900</i>	<i>20.8</i>	<i>542,600</i>	<i>21.6</i>
<b>Total families with children</b>	<b>2,377,800</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,414,300</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,509,600</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Includes 'other' couple families which are not classified as intact, step or blended, for example, grandparent couple families or families with only foster children.

Note: Numbers may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: ABS 2004a:29.

one in five were one-parent families (22%, an increase from 17% in 1992). The growth in lone-mother families from 15% to 19% accounts for most of the increase in one-parent families. The numbers and proportions of step and blended families have also slightly increased over this period. In 2003, couples in both step (56%) and blended families (39%) were more likely than those in intact families (8%) to be in a de facto marriage (ABS 2004a).

## Grandparents and families

Grandparent families are those in which grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Typically, grandparents take on the role of primary carers of their grandchildren because parents are no longer able to fulfil their parental responsibilities. The reasons for this often include parental substance abuse, the death of one or both parents, a parent's mental or physical illness, or the child's need for a more protective environment (COTA National Seniors 2003). While some are a type of formal kinship care arrangement (see 'home-based care' in the Glossary), grandparent families can also result from informal arrangements.

In 2003, there were 22,500 grandparent families raising 31,100 children aged 17 years or under (Table 2.6). These families represent around 1% of all families with children. In most grandparent families (73%), the youngest child was aged between 5 and 14 years, and in a further 15% of families, the youngest child was aged 0–4 years. Around one in ten (11%) families had three or more children in their care (ABS 2005b). Almost half of all grandparent families (47%) were lone grandparent families, and for 61% the younger partner or lone grandparent was aged 55 years or older (ABS 2004a, 2005b). Reflecting the age of grandparents, in two-thirds of grandparent families (66%) there was no grandparent employed (Table 2.6). In keeping with this, almost two-thirds (62%) of grandparent families relied on a government pension, benefit or allowance as their main source of income (ABS 2004a).

**Table 2.6: Grandparent families caring for children aged 0–17 years, 2003**

	Grandparent families		Children in grandparent families	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
<b>Age of youngest child (years)</b>				
0–4	*3,300	*14.8	*6,800	*21.9
5–11	8,400	37.4	11,500	36.8
12–14	8,000	35.8	9,800	31.5
15–17	*2,700	*12.1	*3,000	*9.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>22,500</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>31,100</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<b>Labour force status</b>				
One or both grandparents employed	7,600	33.8	10,100	32.5
No grandparent employed	14,900	66.2	21,000	67.5

Note: Numbers may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: ABS 2004a:40.

While grandparents were the sole guardian of children aged under 18 years in less than 1% of all families in 2003 (ABS 2004a), it is slightly more common for children to live in a household where grandparents reside. In 2001, around 2% of families with children (of any age) also had a grandparent living in the household (ABS 2003a).

Grandparents are also the largest providers of informal child care, providing informal care to 20% of all children aged 0–12 years (661,200 children) in 2005, a similar proportion to previous years, according to the ABS Child Care surveys. They provided an average of 12.4 hours of care per week per child and almost all grandparents (97%) did this at no cost to the parents. Over half of parents used this type of care for work-related reasons (52%), with a further 36% citing personal reasons such as study, shopping, appointments and social activities (ABS 2006g).

## Families with adopted children

Adoption is one of a range of options used to provide care for children who cannot live with their birth families. In Australia, each state and territory has responsibility for all aspects of adoption within its jurisdiction; however, the process is relatively similar across the jurisdictions. The data reported here were provided to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) by the state and territory community services departments (see the 'Adoptions Australia' series published by the AIHW).

### Trends in adoptions

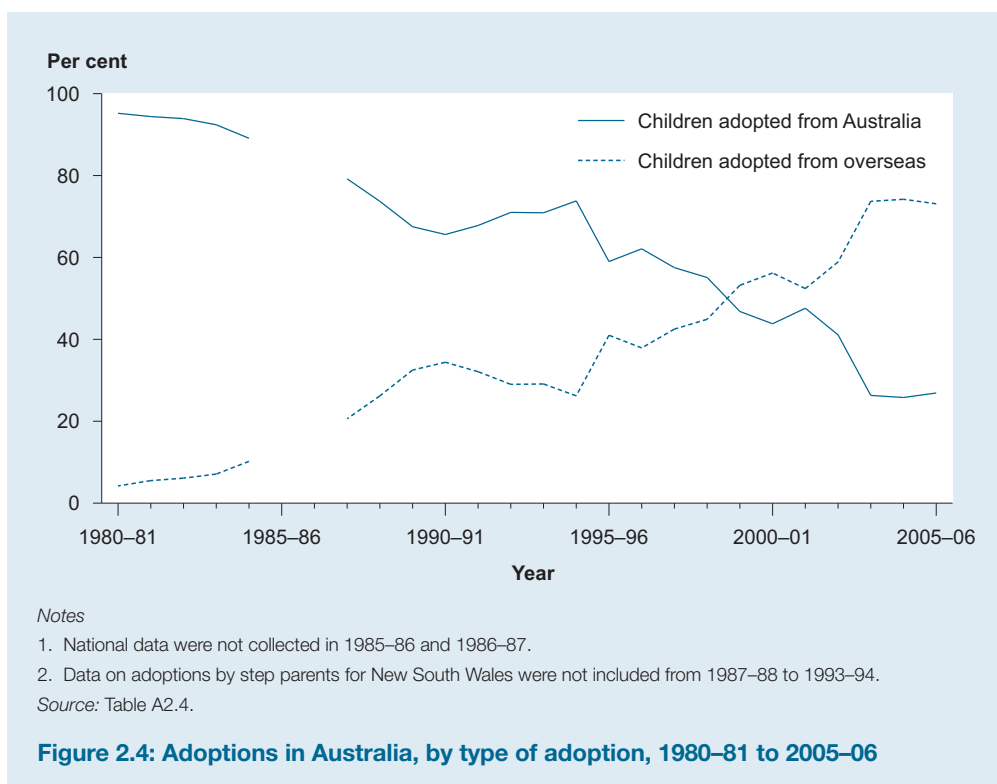
Since the 1970s, there has been a dramatic decline in the number of adoptions in Australia—from almost 10,000 in 1971–72 to 576 in 2005–06. This coincides with declining fertility rates and increasing social acceptance of raising children outside registered marriage (ABS 2006a). Since the mid-1990s, the number of adoptions has remained relatively stable. Of the 576 adoptions in 2005–06, 421 (73%) involved a child from another country (an intercountry adoption), 60 (10%) were local and 95 (16%) were 'known' child adoptions (AIHW 2006b) (refer to the Glossary for definitions).

The overall decline in the last 25 years can be attributed to the fall in the number of adoptions of Australian children (including local and 'known' child adoptions)—a decline from 2,872 to 155 adoptions between 1980–81 and 2005–06. However, over this period, the number of children adopted from overseas (that is, intercountry adoptions) has experienced a threefold increase, from 127 to 421 adoptions. Intercountry adoption has also clearly emerged as the dominant category of adoptions in recent years—in 2005–06, intercountry adoptions represented 73% of all adoptions, compared with 4% of adoptions in 1980–81 (Figure 2.4).

Similar trends in adoptions have also been found in other developed countries for which data are readily available. As in Australia, the total number of adoptions has also been falling over the last two decades in New Zealand, England and Wales, and Scotland. Furthermore, the number and proportion of intercountry adoptions has also been increasing in the United States, Ireland and Norway (AIHW 2006b).

### Characteristics of adopted children and their families

Of all adoptions in 2005–06, the majority of adopted children were aged under 5 years (76%), with more than half of these aged less than 1 year. More females than males were adopted (55% compared with 45%).



In 2005-06, nearly all children in local and intercountry adoptions were adopted by registered married couples (96%), around half (53%) were adopted into families with no other children, and 56% had adoptive parents aged 40 years and over. Almost three in every four 'known' child adoptions were by step parents (73%), with a further 22% by carers.

Of the total number of overseas children adopted since 1993-94, 28% have come from South Korea, 12% from China, and a further 11% each from Ethiopia and India. When children migrate to another country, there are a variety of social and cultural factors that influence their adaptation. Many of the adopted children from overseas have spent time in institutional environments, such as orphanages, in their country of origin. In addition to adjusting to new family environments, adoptive parents must facilitate the children's adjustment to a new cultural environment with different language, food and customs that may have previously been unknown (Linville & Lyness 2007; McGuinness 2000; Meese 2005).

### Living arrangements of children and young people

Most children and young people live in the family home. However, around one in seven (14%) young people aged 15-24 years lived in other accommodation in 2003. Of these, 65% lived in group households, 22% lived alone and 13% lived with other families (ABS 2004a:20).

Overall, the number of children aged under 15 years living in the family home increased slightly from 3.8 million children to 3.9 million between 1992 and 2003 (Table 2.7).

However, while the number of children in couple families actually fell by 4% over this period, the number of children living in one-parent families increased by 39% (Table A2.5). During this time, the number of dependent students aged 15–24 years living at home increased by 14% to just over one million. In contrast, there was a 10% decrease in the number of non-dependent young people aged 15–24 years living at home—the decrease was greater among those living in couple families (12% decrease) than those in one-parent families (2% decrease).

Despite these trends in the numbers of children and young people living in the family home, the proportions have remained fairly steady. In 2003, children aged under 15 years represented almost two-thirds (62%) of all children and young people living at home, while dependent students and non-dependent 15–24 year olds represented 17% and 13% respectively—differences of no more than 2 percentage points from 1992 (Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7: Children and young people living with their parents, 1992 and 2003**

	1992		2003		Change in number (per cent)
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	
Dependent children aged 0–14 years	3,805,000	63.8	3,889,500	62.3	2.2
Dependent student aged 15–24 years <sup>(a)</sup>	913,100	15.3	1,037,100	16.6	13.6
Non-dependents aged 15–24 years	864,900	14.5	779,700	12.5	–9.9
Non-dependents aged 25 years or over	381,500	6.4	538,400	8.6	41.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,964,500</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,244,700</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4.7</b>

(a) Only includes full-time students.

Note: Detailed 2006 Census data were not available for inclusion in this report, so the ABS Family Characteristics Survey has been used as the most recent data source.

Source: Table A2.5.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number and proportion of adult children remaining in the parental home. In 2003, there were 538,400 non-dependent adult children aged 25 years or over living with their parent(s), a 41% increase from 381,500 in 1992. One-parent families were more than twice as likely to have adult children living with them than couple families (15% compared with 7% in 2003). The largest increase occurred among lone-father families—the proportion of adult children aged 25 years or over who were living with lone fathers almost doubled during this period (from 14% to 20%, see Table A2.5).

Leaving the parental home is part of the transition to adulthood, and is closely associated with marriage, employment and education (Hartley 1993; Jordyn & Byrd 2003). Changing social trends towards staying in education for longer, delayed marriage and parenthood, and the rising cost of housing may partly explain the increase in the number of adult children living with their parents.

This type of living arrangement has implications for parental resources and family dynamics, including adjustments to retirement plans (Hartley 1993). Changes in the relationship between parents and children that generally occur during the transition from adolescence to adulthood (in relation to issues such as parental support, guidance and control) may be more difficult to achieve, with increased risk of conflicts. On the positive side, however, this type of living arrangement can provide mutual support, company and security (Hartley 1993; Setterste 1998).



## Non-resident parents

One of the consequences of family breakdown, whether through a de facto partnership ending or through separation and divorce, is that the children involved no longer live full time with both their natural parents, that is, they may live full time with just one of their natural parents or they may spend some time living with each parent in a shared care arrangement. In 2003, almost one-quarter (23%) of all children aged 0–17 years who lived at home had a parent living elsewhere (1.1 million children). The majority of these children lived with their mother (84%). Half of these children saw their other parent at least once per fortnight (50%), while 31% saw their other parent rarely (once a year, or less often) or never. Around 50% of children had overnight stays with their non-resident parent; however, only 12% stayed overnight for the equivalent of 3 or more nights per fortnight. Many non-resident parents had formed new relationships (42%), while 28% lived alone (ABS 2004a).

### Child support

Non-resident parents are required to make a financial contribution towards the cost of raising their children through child support payments (see Box 2.3), and they may also provide other forms of informal support.

Of all cases registered with the Child Support Agency at 30 June 2006, there were around 722,100 parents responsible for providing child support for over 1.1 million children. Around 61% of cases involved only one child, with a further 29% of cases involving two children. Most child support payers were male (88%), and around 8% had subsequent families with dependent children for whom they were a major or principal provider of care (CSA 2006).

In June 2006, the average child support payable (per case) was just under \$3,900 per year. However, less than two in five cases (37%) had a payable amount of more than \$4,000 per year. In 36% of cases, only the minimum annual payment was required—\$260 per year. The low levels of child support paid reflect the low incomes of child support payers—the median annual income of payers was only \$23,981. However, this was almost twice the median income of child support recipients (\$12,231) (CSA 2006).

### Box 2.3: Child support

Through the Child Support Scheme, non-resident parents are required to make a financial contribution towards the cost of supporting their children aged under 18 years. The Child Support Scheme is administered by the Child Support Agency, which is part of the Australian Government Department of Human Services. Following a substantial review (MTCS 2005), changes to the Child Support Scheme are being implemented in a three-stage approach between 2006 and 2008.

Child support assessments are based on each parent's income, the number of children and the level of care provided by each parent. Under current changes being made to the Child Support Scheme by the Australian Government, a new formula for calculating child support will be introduced on 1 July 2008.

Parents can make their child support payments in three ways: an entirely private arrangement between the parents, registration with the Child Support Agency but with payment made directly between the parents, or registration and collection by the Child Support Agency.

Source: FaCSIA 2007c.

According to the ABS 2006 General Social Survey, parents with children aged 0–17 years living elsewhere also commonly provided informal financial support—for example, providing or paying for clothing (46%), providing an allowance or pocket money (39%) and paying for education costs (32%) (Table A2.6). Driving the children places was also a common form of support provided by non-resident parents (41%).

## Young people as carers

The majority of care discussed in this chapter focuses on care provided for children and young people. However, a considerable number of children and young people also provide informal care to parents, relatives or other people with disability or long-term health condition (see the Glossary for a definition of ‘informal care’). Taking on a caring role may be rewarding; however, it can also significantly affect the life of a child or young person. Carers aged under 25 years may have a restricted social life, lower educational achievement, reduced education and employment potential, and increased stress compared with other children and young people, due to their caring responsibilities (Gays 2000; Mukherjee et al. 2002).

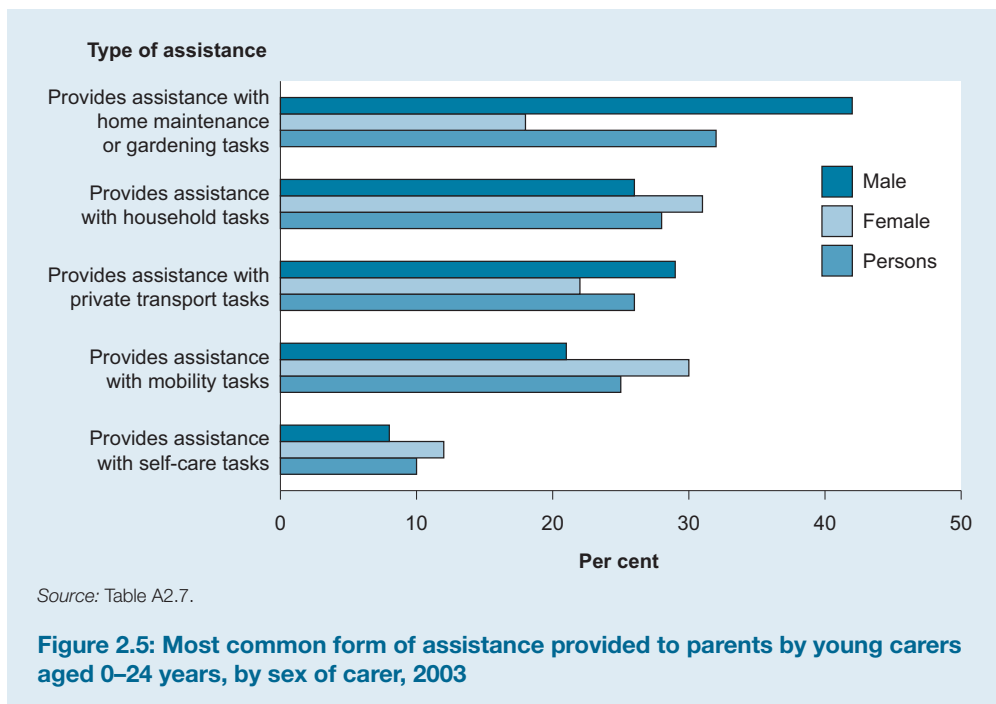
According to the ABS 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, approximately 300,900 people aged under 25 years (4.5% of all young people under 25 years) were caring for a household member with a long-term health condition or disability, or for an older household member. While most (68%) of these young carers were aged 15–24 years, almost one-quarter (23%) were aged 10–14 years. Around half (52%) of carers aged under 25 years were male.

Over half (54%) of children and young people in a caring role were caring for a household member who always or sometimes required assistance with core activities (self-care, mobility and communication). Only 5% of children and young people providing care to a household member were the primary carer; that is, they provided the most help or supervision with core activities. If unconfirmed primary carers are included, this figure rises to 8%. The majority (74%) of primary carers were aged 20–24 years, and 76% were female.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of carers aged under 25 years were caring for a parent in 2003. Having a parent with a chronic illness or disability may have a considerable impact on the needs of children and young people, particularly if the parent is unable to provide sufficient physical, emotional or economic support. Young people living in one-parent families where the parent has a chronic illness or disability may have greater caring responsibilities and less support than young people in couple families due to the lack of a fall-back carer. In 2003, 24% of lone parents with disability were being cared for by one or more of their children aged under 25 years; the comparable figure was 17% in couple families.

The adverse outcomes experienced by children and young people caring for a parent may vary according to the parent’s specific type of disability or health condition. For example, caring for a parent with a physical disability may result in muscle strain, fatigue and exhaustion (Gays 2000). On the other hand, young people caring for a parent with mental illness may experience greater social isolation as a result of the stigma attached to mental illness. In 2003, estimates based on all disabling conditions indicate that physical/diverse conditions were the most prevalent disability group reported by parents who were being cared for by a child aged under 25 years (81% of parents), followed by psychiatric (35%), sensory/speech (28%), and intellectual (21%) conditions. These findings are similar to the most common disability groupings reported for the Australian population aged 0–64 years (see Chapter 4).

The most common form of assistance provided by carers aged under 25 years to parents with a long-term health condition or disability was home maintenance or gardening (32%). Assistance with household tasks (28%), private transport (26%) and mobility tasks (25%) were other common forms of assistance provided to parents. One in ten carers under 25 years were assisting their parents with self-care tasks. Males were significantly more likely to provide assistance with home maintenance or gardening tasks than females (42% compared with 18%). The most common forms of assistance provided by females were assistance with household and mobility tasks (31% and 30% respectively) (Figure 2.5).



## Families and employment patterns

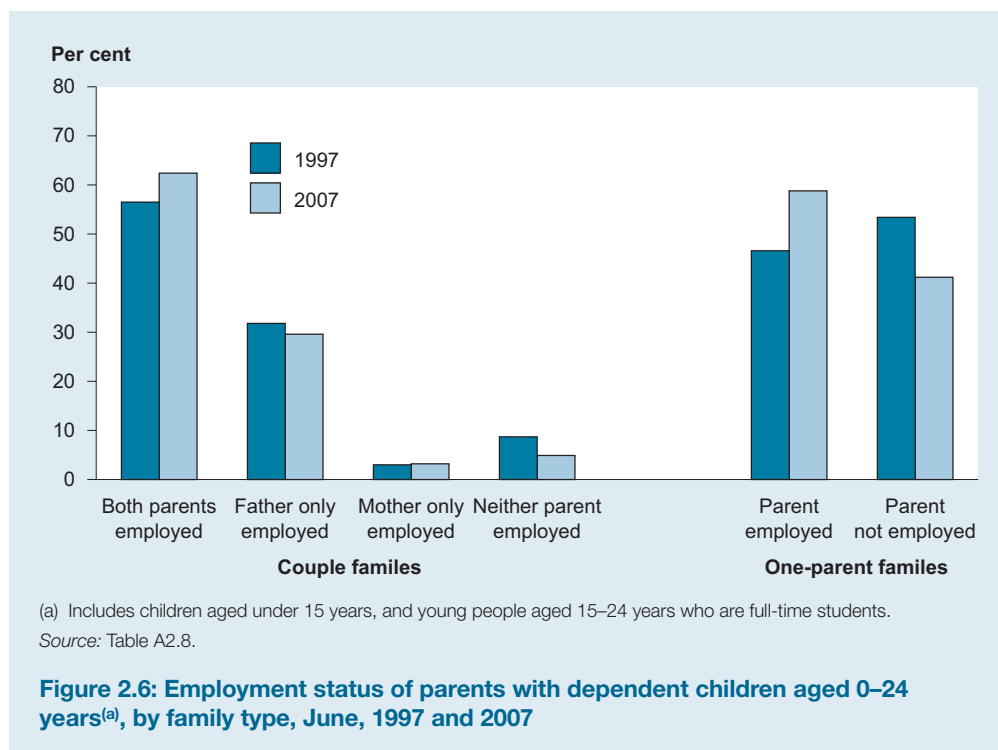
Parents' employment patterns have a significant impact on the financial wellbeing of the family. Children who do not have a parent in paid employment may be living in, or at risk of living in, economically disadvantaged households (ABS 2002b). In addition to increasing financial strain, parental unemployment may also create tension and hostility in relationships between parents and children, and reduce warmth and supportiveness in the home (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). Furthermore, employed parents may provide positive role models for their children in terms of work ethics and social responsibility (AIHW 2005b). Results from Wave 1 of Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children show that most employed parents were positive about the effects of their work on their family, with over 65% of employed parents in the survey agreeing that these responsibilities made them 'more well-rounded', gave their life more variety and made them feel more competent. In addition, more than 70% agreed that working helped them to better appreciate the time they spent with their children (AIFS 2006).

One of the target groups in the Australian Government's Welfare to Work initiative are parents and principal carers receiving the Parenting Payment (see Box 2.4 for more information on the Parenting Payment). Included in the Welfare to Work package in 2006 were increased child care places, child care fee support for parents through the Jobs, Education and Training program, child care fee assistance, and changes to Child Care Benefit eligible hours to enable more parents to take up paid employment (Australian Government 2006).

Over the past decade, the proportion of all families with dependent children aged 0–24 years that had at least one parent employed increased from 82% to 94% (between 1997 and 2007). This increase was greater among one-parent families over this period—the proportion of lone parents who were employed rose from 47% to 59%, compared with an increase from 91% to 95% of couple families with at least one parent employed (Figure 2.6). Despite this increase, employment rates are still consistently lower among one-parent families.

In 2007, the most common working arrangement among couple families was to have both parents working (62%, up from 57% in 1997), with a further 30% having the traditional 'male breadwinner' arrangement (Figure 2.6). Almost three in five (59%) lone parents were employed in 2007.

One of the most significant changes to family life over the past 25 years has been the increased participation of women in the labour force (ABS 2006h). The age of the youngest child in a family affects the working patterns of parents, particularly mothers, and changes to the employment status of mothers often begin at pregnancy. The 2005 ABS Pregnancy and Employment Transitions Survey estimated that, among Australian women with at least one child under 2 years of age, 63% worked in a job some time while pregnant. It also

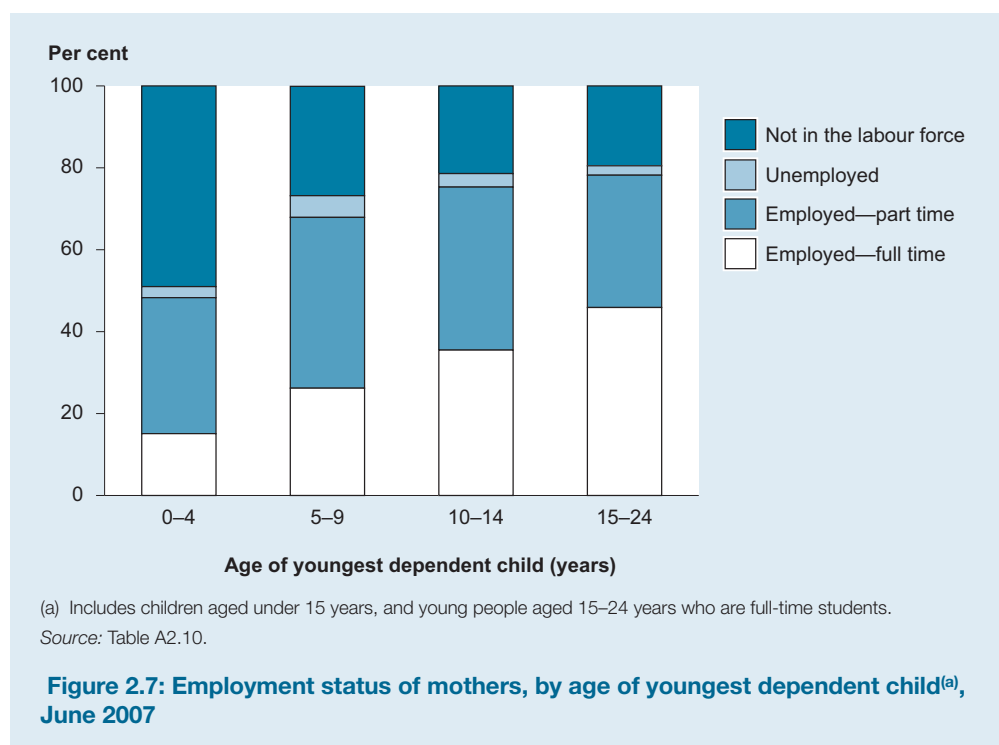


found that 39% of women with a child under 2 years of age had entered or returned to the workforce at the time of the survey—almost three quarters of these women cited ‘financial reasons’ as the main motive for starting work (ABS 2006i).

The ABS 2007 Labour Force Survey indicates that the traditional ‘male breadwinner’ arrangement was almost 3 times as common among couple families whose youngest child was aged 0–4 years than those whose youngest was 15–24 years (44% compared with 15% in 2007) (Table A2.9). This is likely to be due to a change in mothers’ employment status as the age of the youngest child increases—among couple families where the youngest child was aged 0–4 years, 51% of mothers were employed, compared with 74% and 80% among those whose youngest was aged 5–14 years and 15–24 years respectively. A similar pattern of increasing employment as the age of the youngest child increases was also seen among lone mothers (employment increased from 34% to 63% to 72% respectively) and lone fathers (employment increased from 55% to 70% to 80% respectively) (Table A2.9).

In particular, the proportion of mothers who worked full time increased steadily as the age of the youngest child increased (Figure 2.7). The proportion of women who worked full time was 3 times as high among those whose youngest child was aged 15–24 years than those whose youngest was aged 0–4 years (46% compared with 15%). Part-time work was the most common form of employment for women up until the youngest child reached the 15–24 year age group, at which point mothers were more likely to be working in full-time than part-time employment (46% compared with 32%).

In 2007, almost half of women whose youngest child was aged 0–4 years (49%) were not in the labour force, that is, not working or actively looking for work. This proportion decreased as the age of the youngest child increased, but levelled out once the youngest child was aged 10 years or older.



There is, however, a downside to employment, particularly for working mothers. Among working mothers, there is evidence to suggest that those who worked longer hours were more likely to report having problems coping and feeling rushed or pressed for time. Interestingly, this pattern was less pronounced among working fathers (AIFS 2006).

## Family income and financial stress

Children living in families without economic security are at a greater risk of poor outcomes in both the short and longer term. The immediate impact of economic hardship is evident. Having a low income limits parents' ability to purchase health- and welfare-related goods and services, such as better food, housing, recreation and health care. Socioeconomic disadvantage is also associated with higher morbidity and mortality rates, and it can affect health-related behaviours and psychosocial wellbeing (AIHW 2007a; Mayer 2002).

Income distribution is generally analysed using equivalised income. This enables a meaningful comparison of the incomes of families, adjusting for household size and composition. In 2005–06, according to the ABS Survey of Income and Housing, 17% of Australian families with dependent children aged 0–24 years had incomes in the lowest quintile (Table 2.8).

Compared with children living in couple families, children living in one-parent families generally have fewer financial resources available to them. In 2005–06, among families with dependent children, the proportion of one-parent households with incomes in the lowest quintile was 3 times that of couple households (40% compared with 13%) (Table 2.8). In line with this pattern, the median weekly income of one-parent families was less than half that of couple families (\$724 compared with \$1,637) (ABS 2007d:24). Furthermore, a much higher proportion of one-parent families than couple families relied on a government pension or allowance as their principal source of household income (51% compared with 7%). One-parent families tend to have less debt than couple families, but also far fewer assets (ABS 2006j). As a result, one-parent families had a mean net worth of \$228,000, compared with \$667,000 for couple families in 2005–06 (ABS 2007d:24).

**Table 2.8: Equivalised income quintiles for households with dependent children aged 0–24 years<sup>(a)</sup>, 2005–06 (per cent)**

	Equivalised disposable income quintile (per cent distribution)					Total
	Lowest	Second	Third	Fourth	Highest	
Couple family households	12.9	20.8	24.9	23.4	18.1	100.0
One-parent family households	40.4	30.0	16.7	8.0	4.8	100.0
<b>Total households with dependants<sup>(b)</sup></b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Includes children aged under 15 years, and young people aged 15–24 years who are full-time students.

(b) Excludes multiple family households—households containing two or more families. The vast majority of children in Australia (98%) live in one-family households.

Source: ABS 2007d:17.

One-parent families are more at risk of experiencing financial stress because of their low incomes. Among households with dependent children, one-parent families reported higher levels of financial stress than couple families, according to the 2006 ABS General Social Survey (Table 2.9). Among adults in one-parent households, around two in five (38%) reported they could not raise \$2,000 within a week for something important, more than one in five (22%) had sought financial help from family or friends in the past year, and 6% reported going

without meals because of cash flow problems. In comparison, these proportions were much lower among adults in couple families at 11%, 7% and 1% respectively.

**Table 2.9: Selected financial stress indicators for households with dependent children aged 0–24 years<sup>(a)</sup>, 2006 (per cent)**

Financial stress indicators	One-parent family	Couple family
Could not raise \$2,000 within a week	37.7	11.4
Sought financial help from families/friends	21.7	7.0
Sought assistance from welfare/community organisations	10.5	1.6
Went without meals	6.1	1.2
Was unable to heat home	4.4	*0.9
<b>Total number of households with dependent children<sup>(a)</sup></b>	<b>623,000</b>	<b>4,574,000</b>

(a) Includes children aged under 15 years, and young people aged 15–24 years who are full-time students.

Note: Families could be counted in more than one financial stress indicator.

Source: ABS 2007e:75.

## Assistance for families

The Australian Government provides support for families in the form of family assistance payments and income support payments (Box 2.4). Family assistance is designed to help families with the costs of raising children, including recognising the indirect costs of reduced workforce participation by some families with young children. Higher assistance is targeted to families with low incomes.

Most Family Tax Benefit recipients receive assistance through fortnightly payments from Centrelink: over two million people (91% of recipients) in 2004–05. Around 57,000 (3%) received Centrelink lump sum payments and another 139,000 (6%) were paid lump sums through the tax system (FaCSIA 2006a).

At June 2006, just over 1.8 million families with 3.5 million children received the Family Tax Benefit Part A as a fortnightly payment, a slight increase from 2001 (Table 2.10; FaCSIA 2006a). In all years from 2001 to 2006, more than half of these families were paid more than the base rate—62% in 2006, a slight increase from 58% in 2001 (Table A2.11).

Over 1.3 million families with 2.6 million children received Family Tax Benefit Part B at June 2006 (Table 2.10; FaCSIA 2006a). Almost half of those receiving the payment were sole parents—43% in 2006. The number of sole parents receiving the maximum payment increased by 6% between 2001 and 2006 (Table A2.11).

Around 223,000 families received the Maternity Immunisation Allowance in 2005–06, a much greater number than in previous years (Table 2.10). This payment is no longer income-tested for babies born on or after 1 January 2003.

Almost 269,000 families received the Maternity Payment in 2005–06, an increase of 14% from the previous financial year (Table 2.10). The Maternity Payment replaced the Maternity Allowance and Baby Bonus for children born on or after 1 July 2004; however, some families received the Maternity Allowance in 2004–05 for children born before this date.

## Box 2.4: Australian Government family payments and tax relief

**Family Tax Benefit Part A** is paid to low- and middle-income families with dependent children under 21 years and/or dependent full-time students aged 21–24 years. It is paid for each dependent child in the family. The payment is subject to an income test. The maximum rate is payable below a lower income threshold, and the payment rate reduces for income above this threshold. The maximum rate of payment varies with the age of the child, with the payments increasing for teenagers aged 13–15 years.

**Family Tax Benefit Part B** provides additional assistance to families with one main income, including single parents, with a child under 16 years or a child aged 16–18 years studying full time. Higher rates are payable where families have a child under 5 years. The payment is not income-tested for lone parents. For couple families, it is income-tested on the income of the partner with the lower income (secondary income).

**Maternity Immunisation Allowance** is a one-off lump sum payment for children aged 18–24 months who are fully immunised or have an approved exemption from immunisation.

**Maternity Payment** is a one-off, flat-rate non-taxable payment to the primary carer for each new baby, or adopted child under 2 years of age, born on or after 1 July 2004. The Maternity Payment is not subject to income or asset tests. Although generally paid as a lump sum, from 1 July 2007, it became mandatory for young people aged under 18 years who receive the Maternity Payment to be paid in 13 fortnightly instalments. Additional changes introduced from 1 July 2007 include that the Maternity Payment was renamed the Baby Bonus, and parents are now required to formally register the birth of their child as a condition of receiving this payment.

**Multiple Birth Allowance** is paid as part of the Family Tax Benefit Part A, if three or more children are born at the same time. It is paid at a higher rate for quadruplets or larger birth sets. This payment is currently available until the children turn 6 years old. However, from 1 January 2008, Multiple Birth Allowance will be paid until the children turn 16 years of age, or for full-time students, until the end of the calendar year in which they turn 18.

**Double Orphan Pension** is paid for children whose parents are both dead, or one parent is dead and the other cannot care for the child, and for refugee children under certain circumstances.

**Large Family Supplement** is an additional amount paid as part of the Family Tax Benefit Part A to families with three or more children (before 1 July 2006 only families with four or more children were eligible).

**Parenting Payment** is an income support payment for people on a very low income with responsibility for caring for a child. The two main streams are the Parenting Payment (single) paid to lone parents with no income or a low income and the Parenting Payment (partnered) paid to the primary carer in a couple family where both parents have no income or a low income. The Parenting Payment is subject to income and assets tests. As part of the Australian Government's Welfare to Work reforms, from 1 July 2006 the Parenting Payment will only be payable to the principal carer of a child under the age of 6 years if the carer is partnered, or under the age of 8 years if the carer is single. People receiving the Parenting Payment before 1 July 2006 will continue to receive payment until their youngest child turns 16, provided they remain otherwise eligible.

Sources: Centrelink 2007; DEWR 2006; FAO 2007a.



In 2006, the number of families receiving the Parenting Payment fell below 600,000 for the first time since 2001. The number of couple families receiving the Parenting Payment (partnered) continued to decline—a 22% decrease between 2001 and 2006. The number of one-parent families receiving the Parenting Payment (single) increased fairly steadily between 2001 and 2004; however, there was a small decrease in 2006 (3% decrease from 2005).

**Table 2.10: Recipients of family assistance, 2001 to 2006 ('000)**

Type of payment	Families					
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Family Tax Benefit Part A <sup>(a)</sup>	1,799.7	1,794.8	1,783.3	1,807.7	1,828.3	1,811.8
Family Tax Benefit Part B <sup>(a)</sup>	1,181.1	1,199.1	1,223.6	1,205.6	1,396.5	1,372.7
Maternity Allowance <sup>(b)</sup>	210.1	212.2	207.0	209.2	22.3 <sup>(c)</sup>	..
Maternity Payment <sup>(b)</sup>	..	..	..	..	235.4 <sup>(c)</sup>	268.8
Maternity Immunisation Allowance <sup>(b)</sup>	203.9	206.8	203.9	203.7	200.3	223.1
Parenting Payment (single) <sup>(d)</sup>	416.7	427.8	437.0	449.3	449.0	433.4
Parenting Payment (partnered) <sup>(d)</sup>	205.4	191.6	181.4	177.2	167.0	159.7

(a) The number of families who received fortnightly payments as at 30 June.

(b) The number of families who received a payment during the financial year (ending on 30 June in the year listed).

(c) The Maternity Payment replaced the Maternity Allowance and existing Baby Bonus from 1 July 2004. From 1 July 2007, the Maternity Payment was then renamed the Baby Bonus.

(d) The number of families who received a payment in June (not at 30 June).

Source: Table A2.11.

The most common type of financial assistance provided by the Australian Government directly to young people is Youth Allowance—an income support payment for young people who are studying, undertaking training or an Australian Apprenticeship, or looking for work (Centrelink 2007). In 2006, approximately 343,000 young people aged 15–24 years received Youth Allowance (representing 16% of all 15–19 year olds and 8% of all 20–24 year olds). Over three-quarters (77%) of these young people were full-time students (AIHW 2007a).

In addition to financial assistance for families, the Australian Government also provides funding for relationship support services. The Family Relationships Services Program, which was established in the early 1960s, currently funds community organisations to provide family relationships services such as education, mediation, therapy, family skills training and counselling (FaCSIA 2006a). In 2005–06, more than 129,000 people used a Family Relationships Service, and four out of five clients reported positive outcomes of the program, that is, at least good progress towards an improvement in their presenting relationship issue (FaCSIA 2006a).

## 2.4 Early childhood and school entry

The first major transition in life for an increasing number of Australian children is their entry into child care and early education. Entry of children into child care can also serve as an important transition point for many parents entering or re-entering the workforce. In 2005, almost half of Australia's 3.3 million children aged 12 years or under had used some form of child care in a school term reference week. Child care can be either formal or informal, and can be provided in a family home or community setting. Although the point of transition is different for each child, most children in Australia have experienced

some type of formal care before beginning full-time schooling—84% of 4 year olds used either formal child care or were attending preschools in 2005 (ABS 2006g). Preschool refers to educational and developmental programs for children in the year (or in some jurisdictions, 2 years) before they begin full-time schooling.

The demand for child care is influenced not only by the number and age of children in the population, but also by trends in social factors such as family structure, employment patterns and population mobility. Current trends in the participation in the labour force of parents in both couple families and one-parent families suggests there may be an expanding demand for child care services, particularly as children get older (refer to Section 2.3). Parents are also using child care services for a variety of other reasons, such as to pursue study options, for personal reasons, or because of the perceived benefits for the child (ABS 2006g).

Given the increasing number of children receiving some kind of formal child care and preschool education, the influence of government policies on the accessibility and affordability of services is increasingly being recognised as an important factor in the use of child care and preschool services (ABS 2006g). This section examines the use of informal and formal child care and preschool services and provides an overview of child care service outcomes in terms of accessibility, affordability, and quality.

## Policy context of provision of child care and preschool services

Under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs supports the provision of formal child care services through the Child Care Support Program (FaCSIA 2007b). The program incorporates a range of strategies to promote the supply, accessibility, flexibility and quality of child care services.

In addition to the funding that child care services receive under the Child Care Support Program, the Australian Government provides further support with the cost of child care. The majority of child care funding goes towards the payment of the Child Care Benefit (a means-tested payment to help families who use approved and registered child care) and the Child Care Tax Rebate. An overview of child care initiatives announced in the 2007–08 Federal Budget is presented in Box 2.5.

State and territory governments, as well as local governments, provide additional funding and support to child care services (McIntosh & Phillips 2002). State and territory governments are also responsible for providing preschools and the licensing of child care and preschool services, and provide information and support for service providers and parents. Local governments sometimes contribute land and administrative support to community centres.

## Australian Government-supported child care services

According to the Australian Government Census of Child Care Services, there were more than 10,100 Australian Government-supported child care agencies across Australia in 2004, an increase of 14% since 1999. Increases in the number of child care agencies have resulted in a substantial increase in the number of government-supported operational child care places, from 168,300 in 1991 to 616,100 in 2006. The largest growth was in places for outside school hours care (a sixfold increase in number of places), while a more moderate increase was seen for long day care centres (threefold increase) and family day care (almost twofold increase) (Figure 2.8) (see Glossary for definitions of child care services).

### Box 2.5: Recent Australian Government child care initiatives

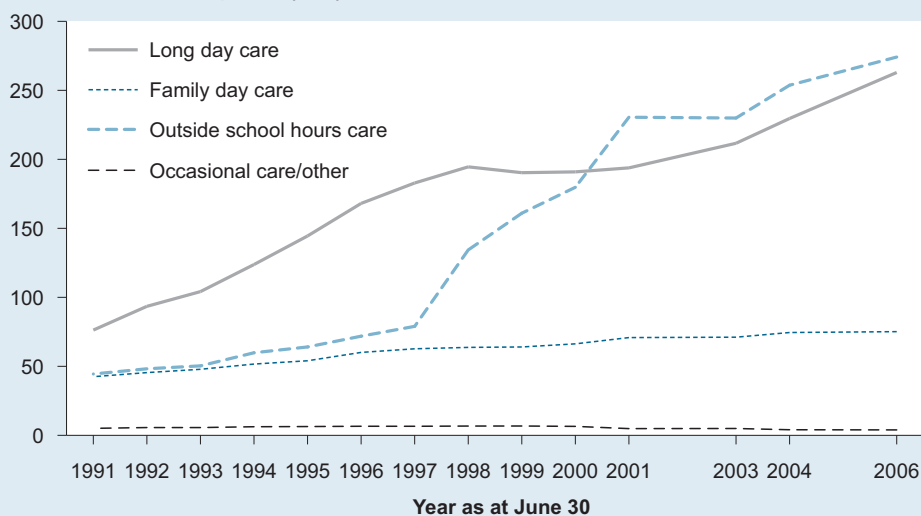
In the 2007–08 Budget, the Australian Government announced an additional \$2.1 billion in funding for child care, bringing the total to \$11 billion over the next 4 years. The most recent changes include:

- a 13% increase in the Child Care Benefit
- a change in the Child Care Tax Rebate which makes it available through the Family Assistance Office after the end of the year in which families have used child care, instead of having to apply through the tax system at the end of the following financial year. Changes also allow for parents with low or no income to claim the rebate
- additional funding to encourage parents on income support to enter or re-enter the workforce through the use of subsidised child care places
- the establishment of ‘child care service hubs’ in regional and remote locations with high Indigenous populations, and extension of funding to other forms of child care in regional and remote areas (for example capital funding, grants to start a family day care)
- an increase in the inclusion support subsidy for child care services in order for them to provide more places to children with special needs.

In addition, from January 2008 the Australian Government will implement the Child Care Management System, which is designed to provide improved data on child care supply and usage, and to improve efficiency and accountability across the child care sector.

Sources: FaCSIA 2006b, 2007d.

Number of child care places ('000)



Note: No data were available for 2002 and 2005.

Source: Table A2.12.

**Figure 2.8: Australian Government-supported child care operational places, 1991 to 2006**

The number of children using Australian Government-supported child care services is higher than the number of places available, as multiple children are able to use a single place over the course of a week if they do not require full-time care. One place, as defined for the purposes of the Child Care Benefit, is 50 hours of care per week. The increased availability of child care places has seen a greater uptake of services—the number of children using child care services more than doubled between 1991 and 2006, from 262,200 to 693,800 (Table 2.11). Particularly large increases occurred in outside school hours care (almost fourfold increase) and long day care centres (more than threefold) where the Australian Government has had a particular policy focus. In line with these trends, the use of vacation care services has also increased markedly (more than threefold increase since 1997). Eighty six per cent of children using Australian Government-supported child care attended long day care centres (61%) or outside school hours care (25%), and 13% attended family day care.

**Table 2.11: Number of children in Australian Government-supported child care services, 1991 to 2006**

Selected years	Long day care	Family day care	Outside school hours care	Vacation care	Other formal care <sup>(a)</sup>	Total <sup>(b)</sup>
1991	135,400	61,000	46,800	.	19,000	262,200
1994	227,300	88,700	63,900	n.a.	16,800	396,700
1997	294,700	85,000	99,500	31,000	n.a.	n.a.
1999	301,500	83,100	107,400	69,300	16,100	508,200
2002	367,100	97,100 <sup>(c)</sup>	148,000	103,600	11,600	623,900
2004	383,000	92,500 <sup>(c)</sup>	160,800	101,700	10,400	646,800
2006	420,100	87,600 <sup>(c)</sup>	173,800	107,200	8,600	693,800

(a) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services (MACS) and other multifunctional services for 1991 to 2004. In 2006 'other' includes Occasional Care Centres and Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS).

(b) Components may not add to totals due to rounding to the nearest 100.

(c) Includes in-home care.

#### Notes

1. These data measure occurrences of care and include some double-counting where children attend more than one service. Totals for 1999, 2002, 2004 and 2006 exclude children in vacation care, since many of these children would also have been attending before/after school care.
2. Figures for 1991–94 are estimates based on previous years Census data. Figures for 1995–97 are from the Child Care Census conducted in August of each year and are weighted for non-response. However, not all service types were surveyed in each of these years. Figures for 1999, 2002 and 2006 are from the Census conducted in May in each of those years and are weighted for non-response. Figures for 2004 are from the Census conducted in March 2004 and are weighted for non response.

Source: AIHW 2005a, FaCSIA unpublished data.

## Use of child care and preschool

### Formal and informal care

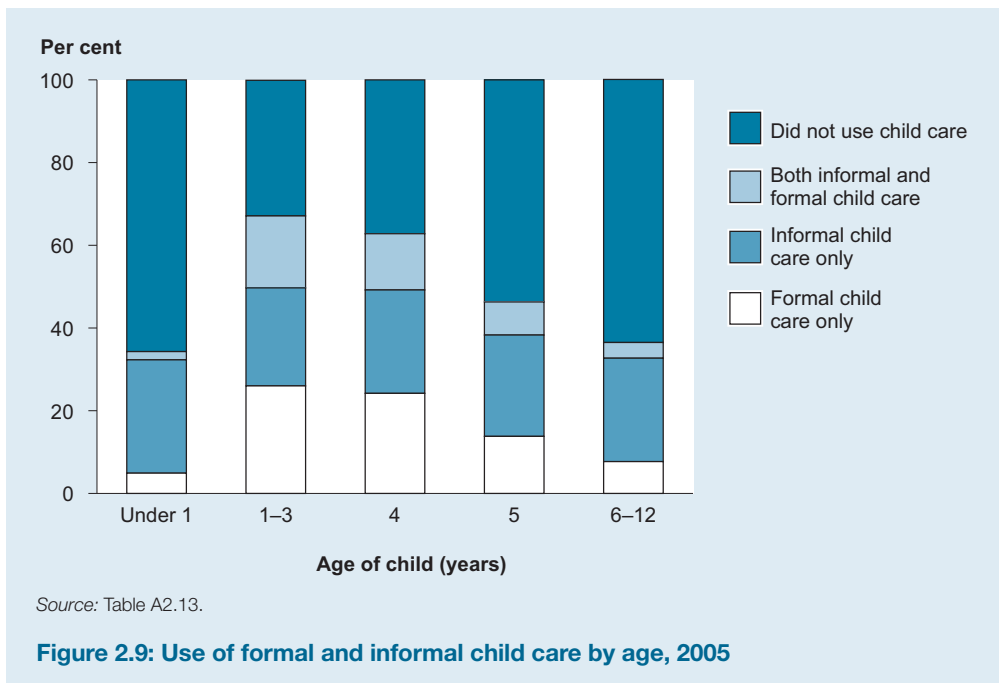
According to the 2005 ABS Child Care Survey, 1.6 million (46%) children aged 0–12 years used some form of child care during a school term reference week (ABS 2006g). Over half of these (54%) used 'informal care only', 29% used 'formal care only', and 17% used a combination of informal and formal child care. In the context of the child care surveys, informal care may be paid or unpaid, and the term is used to apply to care that is not

provided by a formal service provider (that is, long day care centre, outside school hours care, family day care or vacation care) (see Glossary for definition of ‘informal care’ and ‘formal care’).

Over the last decade the proportion of children aged 0–11 years using any form of child care has remained relatively stable at around 45%–48% (ABS 2006g). However, the proportion of children using formal child care has increased considerably from 14% to 23% between 1996 and 2005. The most notable increases have been in children attending long day care centres and outside school hours care (twofold increase in each), which may reflect the effects of government initiatives. The proportion of 0–11 year olds using ‘informal child care only’ has declined over this period, from 31% to 25%. This decline can largely be attributed to a fall in the proportion of children that had received informal care from a person unrelated to the family. Grandparents continue to be the main providers of informal child care (20% of children), with this proportion similar to that in previous years.

Age is an important factor in the types of child care that children use. While around one-quarter of children used ‘informal child care only’ across each age group, the use of ‘formal child care only’ varied with age (Figure 2.9). The use of ‘formal child care only’ ranged from 5% among those aged less than 1 year to 26% among children aged 1–3 years, and then declined to 14% by age 5 when many children have started preschool and school. The combination of informal and formal child care was greatest among 1–3 year olds (17%). Over half of the children (54%) aged 0–12 years did not use any type of child care in 2005, formal or informal, with these proportions highest among those aged less than 1 year and 6–12 years (66% and 64% respectively).

Patterns of use for formal and informal child care vary by family type and employment status of parents. Overall, children from one-parent families were more likely to use child care (especially informal child care) than children from couple families (56% compared with 44%). The proportions of children who use formal care only were similar across



both family types (around 13%), but children from one-parent families were more likely than those from couple families to use informal care only (30% compared with 24%). Furthermore, children from one-parent families were almost twice as likely as children from couple families to use a combination of formal and informal child care (12% compared with 7%). Informal care remains the most predominant form of care for children for both family types.

In 2005, 'work-related' was the main reason for the use of formal and informal child care (65% and 48%, respectively) (ABS 2006g). When taking into account employment status, the use of child care still remains higher among one parent families than couple families (74% compared with 54% in couple families where both parents were employed).

### **Attendance at preschool**

Preschool provides additional education and development opportunities for children in the year or two before commencing full-time schooling. Research has shown that children who attend preschool have significantly better academic achievement and a lower incidence of personal and social problems in later life such as school dropout, welfare dependency, unemployment and criminal behaviour (Gorey 2001). The intensity of the preschool service offered is also important, with full-day preschool services offering greater benefits to children who attend compared with the benefits received by children attending half-day preschool services (Robin et al. 2006). Full-day preschool services also allow mothers to work significantly more hours than the mothers of children in half-day services, a factor that is especially important to socioeconomically disadvantaged families (Robin et al. 2006).

According to the 2005 ABS Child Care Survey, 257,100 children in Australia were attending preschool during the school term reference week (not including children who were attending preschool programs provided by long day care centres) (ABS 2006g). In all, 62% of Australian children aged 4 years attended preschool. Of those children attending preschool, 32% attended for less than 10 hours per week, and around 60% spent between 10 and 19 hours per week at preschool. One-third of children attending preschool did so for 3 days per week, 37% for 2 days and 14% attended for 1 day. Quality/reputation and proximity to the home were the main reasons for choosing a particular preschool centre in 2005 (38% and 30% respectively).

### **Outcomes of child care services**

The aims and objectives of government support for child care are to provide services that are accessible, affordable and high quality, and that allow parents to participate in the labour force and undertake other activities. Service outcomes in terms of accessibility, affordability and quality are discussed in this section.

#### **Accessibility**

The accessibility of child care services is a major concern for both parents and governments. Unmet demand is an important indicator of accessibility. One direct measure of unmet demand comes from the 2005 ABS Child Care Survey; according to their parents, about 184,500 or 6% of children aged 0–11 years needed some or additional formal child care in the 4-week period preceding the survey (ABS 2006g). Of these children, 33% required some or additional before and/or after school hours care, 29% required long day care and 22% occasional care (Table 2.12).

**Table 2.12: Children under 12 years of age who required additional formal care, selected years (per cent)**

Main type of (additional) formal care required	1996	1999	2002	2005
Before and/or after school hours care	35.2	33.0	28.2	33.0
Long day care centres	16.2	23.9	27.3	28.6
Family day care	12.0	12.9	17.2	9.6
Occasional care	34.0	23.0	22.2	22.1
Other formal care	2.7	7.2	5.1	6.7
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total children who required (additional) formal care (number)</b>	<b>241,400</b>	<b>189,900</b>	<b>169,400</b>	<b>184,500</b>

*Note:* In surveys before 2005, the definition of 'formal care' included preschool. To enable comparisons over time, preschool has been removed from 'formal care' for all time periods shown in this table.

*Source:* ABS 2006g.

The overall level of unmet demand for child care has decreased since 1996, with the largest decreases seen in the unmet demand for occasional care (50%) and family day care (39%). However, unmet demand for other formal care and long day care has increased by 92% and 36% respectively since 1996. Unmet demand was higher among children aged 0–4 years (9%) than those age 5–11 years (4%) in 2005 (ABS 2006g).

Many of the reasons given for the unmet demand related to access. In 2005, around 62,800 children aged 0–12 years (33%) could not access services because places at the service were booked out, 30,700 children (16%) could not access services because of the expense of these services, and 19,500 children (10%) could not access child care services because there were no services available in the area (ABS 2006g).

Supporting the findings of the ABS Child Care Survey, analysis of the HILDA Survey showed that in 2003 more than two-thirds of all carers reported some level of difficulty in accessing child care due to its cost (Table A2.14). Another barrier was finding care for a sick child, with 31% of carers reporting a high level of difficulty for finding this type of care. Other difficulties reported were for finding care for the hours needed, finding the right person to care for the child and finding good quality care (64%, 59% and 58% of carers respectively reporting some level of difficulty).

Both surveys point to a number of areas where carers are encountering barriers to accessing child care. Even though accessibility is increasing, there are still many obstacles to overcome before all carers can access services to their satisfaction. The Australian Government has moved some way towards addressing these needs by providing extra places and removing the restrictions on the number of places in outside school hours care and family day care.

### Affordability

The cost of child care services is often mentioned by parents as a barrier to access as discussed above. Changes in the level of government funding and assistance to families influence the affordability of children's services. An analysis undertaken by the AIHW in 2005 showed that there was a gradual decline in the affordability of child care during the 1990s. The introduction of the Child Care Benefit in 2000 improved the situation for all

family types studied to various degrees. However, the declines in affordability were again apparent between 2000 and 2004, mainly attributable to child care fees increasing at a greater rate than average weekly earnings and the Child Care Benefit, which is indexed to the consumer price index (AIHW 2006a).

On 1 July 2006, the Australian Government introduced the 30% Child Care Tax Rebate where families could claim 30% of the out-of-pocket child care expenses incurred in the financial year, up to a limit of \$4,000 per child per year (FAO 2007b). Out-of-pocket expenses are total child care fees for approved care, less the family's actual Child Care Benefit entitlement. At the time, the rebate was provided as a non-refundable tax offset that reduced tax and, as such, not all families incurring child care costs were eligible. Furthermore, as the rebate can only be claimed at the end of the financial year, it did not make child care more affordable at the time of use, as families still paid the cost of child care upfront. The 2007–08 federal Budget announced further initiatives to make the rebate more accessible (see Box 2.5). As more Child Care Tax Rebate data become available, analysis of the rebate's effect on the out-of-pocket costs of child care for families will be possible.

## Quality

The importance of quality child care has been increasingly recognised, due to three main factors: a greater understanding of the significant development that occurs during the first 5 years of life, the increasing number of children being cared for outside their homes, and an increase in the average time children spend in care (NCAC 2007). Legislative regulations and accreditation systems are the two mechanisms for ensuring quality in the child care sector. The regulations specify the minimum standards that must be met in order for the service to operate. Accreditation processes, on the other hand, focus on measuring the quality aspects of the services that are delivered (NCAC 2007). This section provides information relating to the accreditation of child care. Another component relating to the quality of child care, staff qualifications and training, is discussed in the Human Resources for Welfare Services section in Chapter 7.

The Australian Government is responsible for accrediting all Australian Government-supported long day care centres, family day care schemes and outside school hours care services. It does this through the Child Care Quality Assurance systems administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council. The quality assurance systems include separate guidelines for long day care, family day care and outside school hours care; however, changes to the systems were announced in the 2006–07 federal Budget (see Box 2.6). To achieve accreditation, these services must progress through five steps, with an accreditation decision made on the final step. The services must participate in the relevant quality assurance system in order to be approved for Child Care Benefit funding as well as any other Australian Government funding (NCAC 2007).

The National Childcare Accreditation Council regularly publishes statistics on the accreditation status of long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services. In 2005–06, there was a high level of accreditation in each of the quality assurance systems (NCAC 2007). Of the 5,043 long day care centres that were registered as at June 2006, 4,308 had completed the five steps to accreditation and of these 4,187 (97%) were subsequently accredited. The proportion of accredited long day care centres has increased from 95% in 2004 to 97% in 2006, with a resultant decrease in the proportion of service providers not accredited (Table 2.13).



### Box 2.6: Integrated Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA)

The objective of the quality assurance systems is to ensure that children in care have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that will foster all aspects of their development. The aim is to provide a framework for reviewing, measuring and improving the quality of the work being done by approved child care providers, with a focus on quality outcomes for children.

Following the 2006–07 federal Budget, changes were announced to the quality assurance systems including the integration of the existing three systems (long day care, family day care and outside school hours care) into one streamlined system and the introduction of unannounced quality assurance validation visits and spot check visits. The implementation of these changes commenced during 2006–07.

The Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has been working in consultation with the National Childcare Accreditation Council and the broader community on draft standards for the integrated Child Care Quality Assurance system. The integrated system will be field tested before implementation, which is scheduled for late 2007 or early 2008.

Source: FaCSIA 2007e.

**Table 2.13: Accreditation status of approved long day care centres, 2004 to 2006**

	June 2004		June 2005		June 2006	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Accredited	3,845	95.2	4,001	96.5	4,187	97.2
Not accredited	194	4.8	146	3.5	121	2.8
<i>Total completed five steps to accreditation</i>	<i>4,039</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>4,147</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>4,308</i>	<i>100.0</i>
New services	432	9.7	600	12.6	735	14.6
<b>Total registered services</b>	<b>4,471</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,747</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,043</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NCAC 2007.

## 2.5 Education and employment

Education is important for the overall wellbeing of children and young people as well as the future productive capacity of society. The aim of education is to assist children and young people in developing skills that will allow them in the future to participate fully and productively within the community. Educational institutions also provide young people with opportunities for social contact and the development of broad support networks.

In Australia, children are required to attend school from the ages of 6 to 15 years (16 years in South Australia and Tasmania) (MCEETYA 2004). Compulsory schooling ensures that all children receive a minimum amount of schooling in which they can acquire essential knowledge and skills. Further schooling is optional. Since the 1980s, however, the proportion of young people that completed Year 12 has more than doubled.

The transition from education to employment has also become longer over time and may involve several steps. A large number of school-leavers now choose to combine further

study and work, while others combine intervals of work and study. In 2006, 68% of school-leavers aged 15–24 years had completed Year 12, 52% were in a course of study leading to a qualification and 60% were employed (ABS 2006k). Australia's open education system means that young people have many options available to them in terms of combining work and study, and moving from work back to study.

This section presents an overview of student achievement at different points in their education, retention and participation rates of children and young people in school and non-school settings, and employment patterns of young people.

## Education

### Literacy and numeracy

Proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics is essential for day-to-day living, for further educational opportunities and for employment prospects. Children's level of literacy and numeracy skills are affected by a number of factors, such as their home environment, their rapport with the school environment, and their attitudes to reading and mathematics. Factors within a child's home environment include the number of books in the home, the amount of time parents spend discussing books with their child, the highest qualification level of a parent, and the presence of study aids, such as a desk, computer and dictionary (OECD 2004; Zammit et al. 2002).

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs has established national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy for years 3, 5 and 7 students. A benchmark is a nationally agreed minimum standard of performance below which a student will have difficulty progressing satisfactorily at school. The performance of students across Australia is measured against these benchmarks.

Most students in Australia are achieving the minimum standard. From 2001 to 2005, the proportion of students meeting national benchmarks has fluctuated between 85% and 96%, generally hovering around 90%, except for numeracy among Year 7 students where proportions were around 82% (Table 2.14). Throughout this period, female students were more likely to meet the minimum standard for reading and writing than male students. There was no sex difference for numeracy.

**Table 2.14: Students in years 3, 5 and 7 meeting national benchmarks, 2001 to 2005 (per cent)**

	Reading			Writing			Numeracy		
	2001	2003	2005	2001	2003	2005	2001	2003	2005
<b>Year 3 students</b>									
Males	88.4	90.8	91.2	86.4	89.9	90.7	93.7	93.8	93.5
Females	92.3	94.3	94.4	92.7	94.7	95.1	94.3	94.7	94.7
<b>Year 5 students</b>									
Males	87.8	86.8	85.1	91.9	92.1	91.3	89.5	90.3	90.5
Females	92.0	91.6	90.1	96.2	96.1	95.4	89.8	91.4	91.2
<b>Year 7 students</b>									
Males	86.0	87.1	87.6	89.8	89.2	89.3	81.7	81.0	81.6
Females	91.0	91.9	92.2	95.6	95.2	95.2	81.9	81.6	82.0

Source: MCEETYA 2005.

Certain population groups are less likely to meet the national benchmarks than the overall population of students. These groups include students from a non-English speaking background who were slightly less likely to meet benchmarks, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students in very remote areas who were substantially less likely to meet the national benchmarks, and children under the guardianship of the states (see Section 2.6) (MCEETYA 2005; AIHW 2007b). As part of the 2007–08 federal Budget, the Australian Government announced the provision of tutorial vouchers for parents to help children who do not meet national literacy and numeracy benchmarks, and financial rewards for schools that improve literacy and numeracy outcomes.

In addition to national benchmarking, Australia participates in the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Programme for International Student Assessment, which measures the reading, mathematical and scientific literacy of students from OECD and non-OECD partner countries (41 participating countries in total) (Thomson et al. 2004). Australia's results were above the OECD average in each of the areas—four countries (Hong Kong–China, Finland, Korea and the Netherlands) scored significantly higher than Australia in mathematical literacy; three countries (Finland, Japan and Korea) outperformed Australia in scientific literacy and only one country (Finland) performed significantly better than Australia in reading.

The results from the Programme for International Student Assessment highlighted a number of areas of concern for Australia. Consistent with national benchmarking results, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students scored significantly lower than non-Indigenous students in each of the three areas, and significantly lower than the OECD average. Similarly, Australian students in regional and rural areas performed at a significantly lower level than students in metropolitan areas. While all OECD countries showed considerable within-school variance, it was particularly large in Australia—greater than the OECD average (OECD 2006). A number of countries that performed above the OECD average for mathematical performance showed far less between-school variance than Australia, demonstrating that it is possible for an entire education system to have high and consistent standards.

### **Apparent retention rates**

As the number of low-skilled jobs in the employment market decreases, the importance of trade and higher education qualifications increases. Students who fail to complete Year 12 have fewer employment opportunities and are more likely to experience extended periods of unemployment than Year 12 graduates (Lamb et al. 2000). In May 2005, 20% of school-leavers who had completed Year 12 were not fully participating in either study or work compared with 40% of Year 11 completers and nearly 50% of Year 10 or below completers (Dusseldorp Skills Forum & Monash University–ACER 2006).

One measure of Year 12 attainment among young people is the apparent retention rate to Year 12, defined as the percentage of students who remain in secondary education from the start of secondary school (Year 7/8) to Year 12. The calculation of the apparent retention rate does not include students who return to Year 12 at a later stage. It also does not take into account students repeating a year of education, migration and other changes to the school population.

The national apparent retention rate to Year 12 increased substantially, from 35% in 1980 to 75% in 2006 (see Figure 8.4). The proportion of young people remaining at school reached a peak of 77% in 1992 and 1993, during a period of high unemployment and fewer job opportunities. Between 2002 and 2006, the national apparent retention rate

has been relatively stable at around 75%. Throughout the period, apparent retention rates were consistently higher for females than for males, with the rate for females 12 percentage points higher than the rate for males in 2006. While apparent retention rates are generally high among young Australians, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people retention rates in 2006 are similar to the rates that were observed in the general student population in the 1980s. In 2006, Indigenous students were almost half as likely as non-Indigenous students to remain in school until Year 12 (apparent retention rate of 40% compared with 76% for non-Indigenous students) (ABS 2007f).

While most young people complete Year 12 at the end of their schooling before entering further study or the employment market, other young people may decide to complete Year 12 at a later stage. An alternative measure of Year 12 attainment is the proportion of young people aged 20–24 years who have completed Year 12. In 2005, 74% of 20–24 year olds had completed Year 12, an increase from 65% in 1996 (ABS 2006h:108).

### Education participation rates

Increasingly, young people are continuing their studies beyond compulsory schooling. In addition to the greater emphasis now placed on lifelong learning, non-school qualifications help young people compete in demanding labour markets. The 2007–08 federal Budget included several new measures to facilitate educational participation, including increased income support for university students from low income backgrounds, additional tax exemptions and vouchers towards course fees for eligible Australian Apprentices, and scholarships and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Education participation rates among young people have been steadily increasing over the last decade. These rates measure participation in school and post-secondary school studies for young people aged 15–24 years. They include full- and part-time studies at school, technical and further education, colleges and tertiary institutions. According to the ABS Survey of Education and Work, the education participation rate for 15–19 year olds was 77% in 2006, an increase from 73% in 1996. Since 1998 the rate has remained relatively steady at around 76%–77%. For 20–24 year olds the education participation rate has steadily increased from 30% in 1996 to 38% in 2005, with a slight decline to 36% in 2006 (Table 2.15).

**Table 2.15: Education participation rates for young people 1996 to 2006 (per cent)**

Age	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006
15–19 years	73.3	76.4	76.7	76.7	75.8	75.5	76.6
20–24 years	30.2	31.2	33.0	36.5	36.9	37.9	35.6

Source: ABS 2006k.

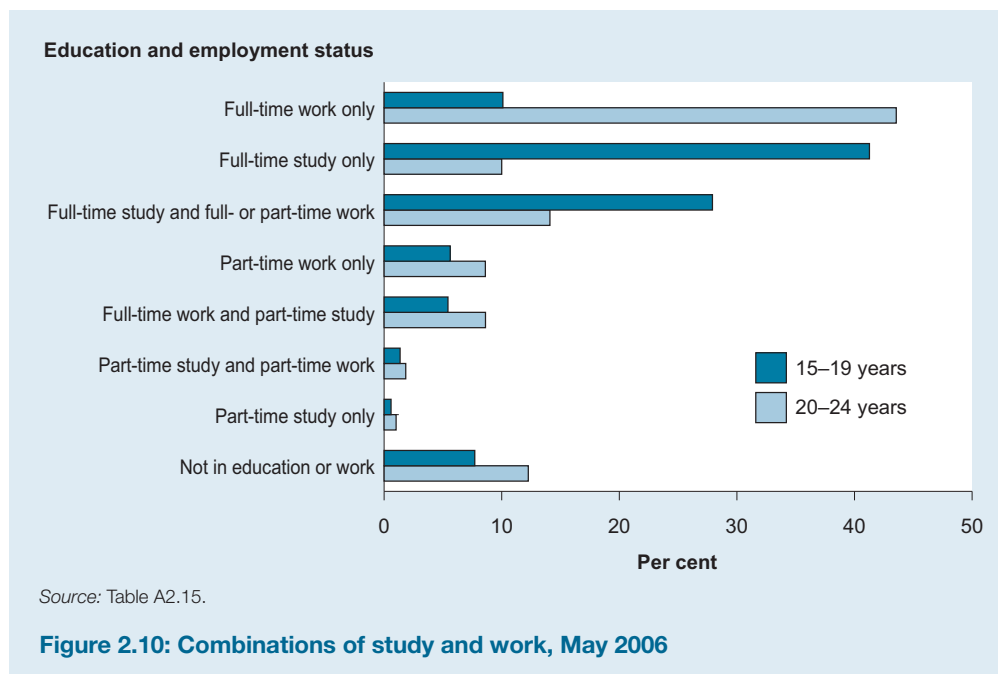
In 2006, young people aged 15–19 years enrolled in a course of study leading to a qualification were most likely to be studying for their Year 12 qualification or below (67% for males and 68% for females). Most young people aged 20–24 years who were enrolled in a course leading to a qualification were studying towards a bachelor degree (51% of males and 64% of females). Young females were more likely than young males to be studying towards a bachelor degree, while young males were more likely to be studying towards a certificate (ABS 2006k).

## Combining work and study

It is becoming increasingly common for young people to combine work and study, starting from their school days. Between 1998 and 2006 the proportion of young people aged 15–19 years studying full time and working part time increased from 24% to 27%, and the proportion of 15–19 year olds who were studying full time only decreased from 44% to 41% (ABS 2006k; AIHW 2005a).

Young people who are not in full-time work, full-time study or combined part-time work and part-time study are considered to be at risk of personal and social stresses and may have poorer long-term labour market outcomes than other young people (Dusseldorp Skills Forum & Monash University–ACER 2006). In 2006, 85% of young people aged 15–19 years and 76% of young people aged 20–24 years were participating full-time in education and/or work (Figure 2.10).

Over two-thirds (69%) of 15–19 year olds were in full-time education in 2006, including 28% who combined full-time education with full- or part-time work. Among this age group the combination of part-time work with part-time study was relatively uncommon, suggesting that either work or study takes precedence. These patterns change considerably as young people leave school and move into their twenties. Among 20–24 year olds, full-time employment becomes the dominant category, with over half (53%) in full-time employment, including 10% who combined full-time employment with full- or part-time study. A considerable proportion of 20–24 year olds were also engaged in full-time education (24%) in 2006.



## Participation in employment

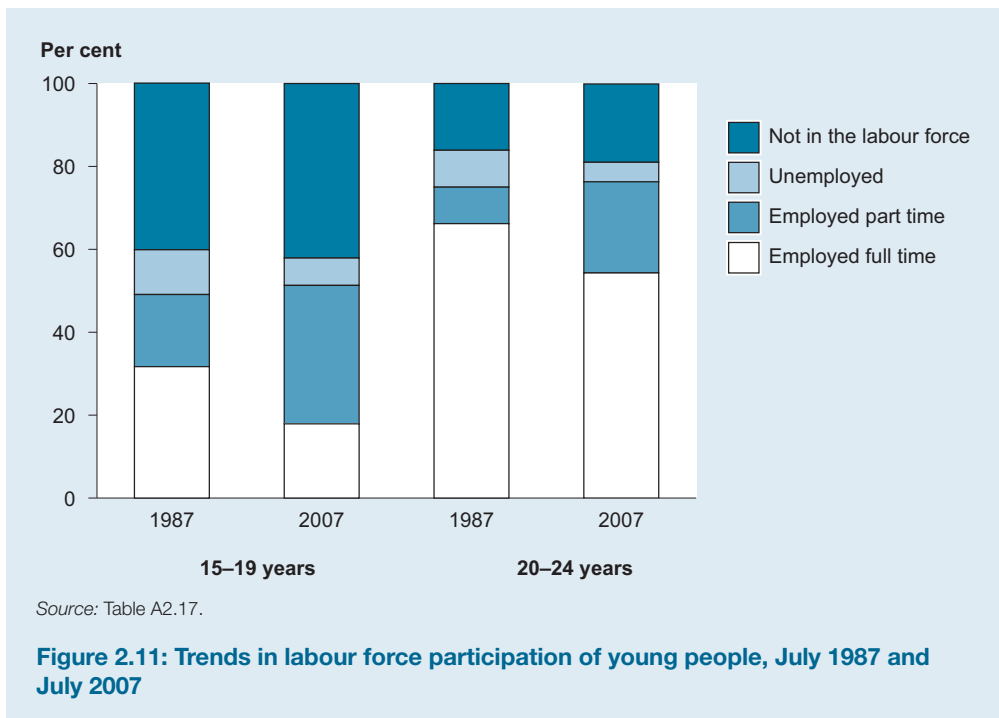
Secure and satisfactory employment offers young people not only financial independence but also a sense of control, self-confidence and social contact. Young people today are more likely to be employed than young people 20 years ago. Unemployment rates for young

people have shown a general decline over the last two decades, although there have been some fluctuations (Table A2.16). Between July 1987 and July 2007, the unemployment rate decreased from 18.0% to 11.4% for young people aged 15–19 years and from 10.6% to 5.8% for 20–24 year olds, according to the ABS Labour Force Surveys. Reflecting this favourable labour market the proportion of young people looking for work has fallen since 2002, particularly those looking for full-time work (ABS 2007g).

Despite the large declines, unemployment rates for young people have remained consistently higher than the national rate, which was 3.9% for persons aged 15 years or over in July 2007. The unemployment rates for young people aged 15–19 years and 20–24 years were 2.9 times and 1.5 times the national rate respectively. In July 2007, 22% of the unemployed population were aged 15–19 years and a further 16% were aged 20–24 years. Many unemployed young people, however, are engaged in either full- or part-time study—53% of unemployed 15–19 year olds and 26% of unemployed 20–24 year olds were attending full-time education in July 2007 (ABS 2007g).

While unemployment rates are declining among young people, part-time work is increasing (Figure 2.11). Between 1987 and 2007, the proportion of young people in part-time employment has increased from 17% to 33% for 15–19 year olds and from 9% to 22% for 20–24 year olds. Coinciding with this increase, there have been large declines in the proportion of 15–19 year olds in full-time employment (from 32% in 1987 to 18% in 2007) and a similar but smaller decline for 20–24 year olds (66% to 54%). Despite these substantial changes, the proportion of young people not in the labour force has remained much the same—40% and 42% for 15–19 year olds and 16% and 19% for 20–24 year olds in 1987 and 2007, respectively.

The increase in part-time work among young people reflects, in part, an increase in participation in education and a deferral of entry into the full-time, long-term labour



market. However, it may also be a reflection of the availability of full-time work for young people. An estimated 23% of young people not in full-time education in 2002, were working part-time only because they could not find full-time work (Dusseldorp Skills Forum & Monash University–ACER 2006).

A proportion of young people are underemployed, that is, they are currently employed, would like more work than they currently have and are available to do more work. Underemployment is an issue of concern from both social and economic perspectives, as it can have a significant affect on the financial, personal and social lives of young people. It is of particular interest in the current environment of record low unemployment levels. In September 2006, there were 174,000 young people aged 15–24 years who worked part-time but would prefer more hours (ABS 2007h). The underemployment rate for young people was higher than the rate for any other age group—10.9% and 7.8% for 15–19 and 20–24 year olds respectively, compared with the national rate of 5.0% (ABS 2007i).

As well as young people working, a considerable number of children participated in employment. The ABS Child Employment Survey indicates that in June 2006 there were 175,100 children aged 5 to 14 years who worked at some time during the previous 12 months, for example by delivering leaflets for an employer, or cleaning or gardening for non-household members for payment. This comprised 7% of all children in this age group—2% of children aged 5–9 years, and 11% of children aged 10–14 years. Of those children who worked, 33% worked in a family business or farm, 54% for an employer, and 16% for themselves. Most children usually worked 5 hours or less per week—this was the case for 59% of children who worked during the school holidays and 75% of children who worked during school terms. Children aged 10–14 years were more likely than 5–9 year olds to work 10 hours or more per week (26% compared with 13% during school holidays, and 11% compared with 6% during school term). For 12% of children who worked, the main reason they worked was to help in the family business. Four per cent also reported that they worked to supplement the family income (ABS 2007j).

## 2.6 Children and young people at risk

There is a demonstrated relationship between the health and wellbeing of children and young people and the environment in which they grow up (McCain & Mustard 1999, 2002; Stanley et al. 2003). Children who are raised in supportive, nurturing environments are more likely to have better social, behavioural and health outcomes. The reverse is also true (Tennant et al. 2003). Evidence from *Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* reveals a direct link between poorer parenting quality (such as parental hostility, lack of emotional warmth and low parental self-efficacy) and poorer development outcomes for infants and children (AIFS 2006). There are also well-acknowledged relationships between the welfare of a child and criminal offending later in life. In fact, parental neglect is considered to be one of the strongest predictors of later youth offending (Weatherburn & Lind 1997).

There are a number of family stressors that can place children at a higher risk of abuse and neglect. These stressors can include financial difficulties, limited social support networks, domestic violence, mental and/or physical disability, alcohol and substance abuse, health issues, and problems with unsafe, unsanitary or uninhabitable housing (Layton 2003; Tennant et al. 2003; Vic DHS 2002). Many of these factors are interrelated and therefore further exacerbate the problems faced by some families. Many of these same factors also play a role in the homelessness of some of Australia's children and young people.

This section discusses some of the risks associated with growing up and their outcomes—children and young people in the child protection system, homelessness, children and young people as victims of crime, and young people in the juvenile justice system.

## Child protection and out-of-home care services

Child protection services in each state and territory provide assistance for some of the more vulnerable children in society. Children's need for assistance may be due to child abuse or neglect, or the parent's inability to care for the child. The services may include the provision of advice, family support and/or out-of-home care. For more information about child protection processes, see *Child protection Australia 2005–06* (AIHW 2007c) and the *Report on government services 2007* (SCRGSP 2007:15.2).

This section examines trends in child protection services over the last 5 years, using data collected by the AIHW from state and territory departments responsible for child protection.

### Notifications, investigations and substantiations

In 2005–06, 167,433 children aged 0–17 years across Australia were the subjects of one or more child protection notifications (see Box 2.7 for definitions). The rates of notifications varied considerably across the states and territories and were between 6.3 and 56.8 notifications per 1,000 children (Table 2.16). In 2005–06, 75,604 children aged 0–17 years were the subjects of one or more finalised investigations (between 5.0 and 23.6 per 1,000 children) and 34,517 children were the subjects of one or more substantiations (between 1.9 and 11.4 per 1,000 children). The large variation in rates across the states and territories may be more a reflection of the different departmental policies and practices, definitions and data systems in each jurisdiction rather than a variation in the reported levels of child abuse and neglect (see Bromfield & Higgins 2005 for more information).

#### Box 2.7: Definitions of notifications, investigations and substantiations

**Notification:** Child protection notifications consist of contacts made to an authorised department by persons or other bodies making allegations of child abuse or neglect, child maltreatment or harm to a child.

**Investigation:** the process of obtaining more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification and the assessment of the degree of harm or risk of harm for the child. A finalised investigation refers to an investigation where an outcome has been reached (that is, where a notification is substantiated or not substantiated).

**Substantiation:** a notification will be substantiated where it is concluded after investigation that the child has been, is being or is likely to be abused or neglected or otherwise harmed. A decision would then be made regarding an appropriate level of continued involvement by the state or territory child protection and support services. This generally includes the provision of support services to the child and family and, in situations where further intervention is required, the child may be placed on a care and protection order or in out-of-home care.

Source: AIHW 2007c.



**Table 2.16: Children aged 0–17 years subject to a notification, finalised investigation or substantiation, 2005–06**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas <sup>(a)</sup>	ACT	NT	Total
<b>Number of children</b>									
Notifications	85,302	29,649	25,687	3,077	10,506	6,655	4,232	2,325	167,433
Investigations <sup>(b)</sup>	37,561	10,557	17,775	2,429	3,581	1,141	1,597	963	75,604
Substantiations <sup>(c)</sup>	12,682	7,288	10,177	926	1,463	652	865	464	34,517
<b>Number per 1,000 children</b>									
Notifications	53.6	25.5	26.2	6.3	30.5	56.8	55.9	38.9	34.7
Investigations <sup>(b)</sup>	23.6	9.1	18.2	5.0	10.4	9.7	21.1	16.1	15.7
Substantiations <sup>(c)</sup>	8.0	6.3	10.4	1.9	4.2	5.6	11.4	7.8	7.2

(a) Data relating to finalised investigations and substantiations in Tasmania for 2005–06 should be interpreted carefully due to a high proportion of investigations not finalised during 2005–06.

(b) Investigations refer only to children who are the subjects of finalised investigations for notifications received during 2005–06.

(c) Substantiations refer only to children who are the subjects of substantiations for notifications received during 2005–06.

#### Notes

1. Definitions of notifications, finalised investigations and substantiations are given in Box 2.7.

2. For further explanation about the calculation of rates, please refer to Appendix 2 of *Child protection Australia, 2005–06* (AIHW 2007c).

Source: AIHW National Child Protection Database.

Over the last 5 years the rates of child protection notifications, finalised investigations and substantiations have generally increased across the states and territories (Table A2.18). However, the trend data need to be interpreted with caution as increases may reflect more children requiring a child protection response, increased community awareness about child abuse and neglect, and/or more willingness to report problems to state and territory child protection support services. Furthermore, the data are basically a measure of the activity of the departments responsible for child protection and as such are sensitive to changes in child protection legislation and departmental policies, practices, resources and data systems (see AIHW 2007c for further details).

### Type of abuse and neglect

Substantiations are classified into one of four categories (physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or neglect) depending on the main type of abuse or neglect that has occurred. In 2001–02, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect each accounted for around one third of all substantiations in each state and territory (AIHW 2003). By 2005–06, emotional abuse had become the most prominent form of abuse identified in substantiations, accounting for 42% of all substantiations on average across jurisdictions (AIHW 2007c). This compared with 20% on average for physical abuse and 28% on average for neglect. The increasing number of substantiations being classified as emotional abuse may in part be due to the broadening legislative definitions of emotional abuse, which has also resulted in a wider range of circumstances covered under mandatory reporting legislation.

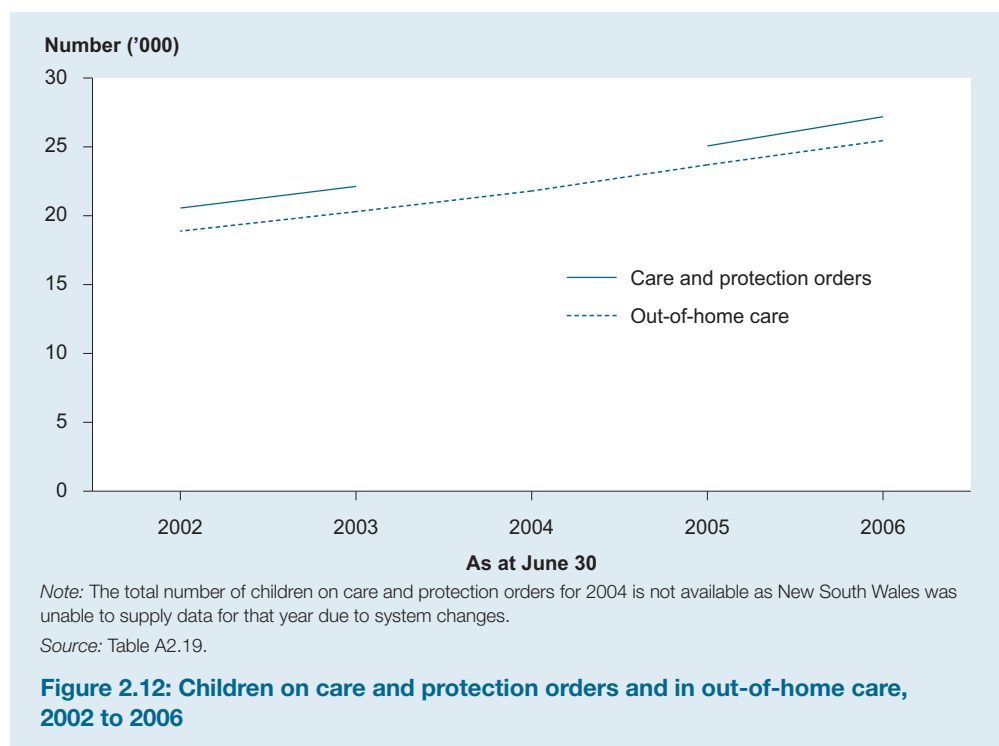
### Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

Although the departments responsible for child protection can apply to the relevant court to place a child on a care and protection order at any point in the child protection process, such action is usually taken only as a last resort in situations where the department believes that continued involvement with the child is warranted. This may occur in situations

where supervision and counselling are resisted by the family, where other avenues for resolution of the situation have been exhausted, or where removal of a child into out-of-home care requires legal authorisation. In 2005–06, 27,188 children were on care and protection orders and a majority of these children (23,584 or 87%) were also in out-of-home care (AIHW 2007c).

Between 30 June 2002 and 30 June 2006, there has been a steady increase in the number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care across Australia (Figure 2.12). The number of children on care and protection orders has increased by 32%, from 20,557 to 27,188. A similar increase (35%) was observed for children using out-of-home care services, from 18,880 to 25,454 over this period.

There are several reasons for this increase. It may partly reflect the increasing number of families that are considered unable to adequately care for children, but may also be due to changing community standards in relation to child safety. Some of the increases may be due to a flow-on effect from the increased number of cases being substantiated over the last 5 years. The increase may also partly be due to the accumulation of children in the system as children remain on orders or in out-of-home care for longer periods of time. The increased duration of care and protection orders and out-of-home care placements reflects the increasing complexity of family situations faced by these children (Layton 2003; Tennant et al. 2003; Vic DHS 2002).



### Living arrangements of children in out-of-home care

Out-of-home care provides alternative accommodation to children and young people who are unable to live with their parents. These arrangements can include foster care, relative/kinship care, residential or facility-based care, family group homes, and independent living arrangements (see Glossary under 'Out-of-home care' for definitions).

Of the 25,454 children in out-of-home care across Australia at 30 June 2006, 53% were placed in foster care, 41% in relative/kinship care, 4% in residential care and nearly 3% in other care arrangements (Table A2.20). Residential care is mainly used for children who have complex needs or for those who need to be placed with a group of siblings. Since 2002 there has been a slight decline in the proportion of children placed in residential care. This may reflect policies of placing children, particularly young children, in home-based care rather than residential care where possible.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle outlines preferences for the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children when they are placed outside their immediate family (Lock 1997:50). The effects of the principle are reflected in the relatively high proportions (ranging from 86% in New South Wales to 33% in Tasmania) of Indigenous children placed with Indigenous relatives or kin, with other Indigenous caregivers or in Indigenous residential care at 30 June 2006 (AIHW 2007c).

### Profile of selected characteristics

The child protection data indicate that some groups of children are over-represented in the child protection system. However, the complexity surrounding the interpretation of the data means that it is often not possible to pinpoint the exact reasons behind the over-representation.

#### Children under 1 year of age

In 2005–06, children aged less than 1 year accounted for between 10% and 16% of all substantiations across the jurisdictions—a rate of between 4.0 and 23.6 substantiations per 1,000 children aged less than 1 year (see Table 8.27). This single-year rate is higher than for other combined age groups, such as 2.3 to 14.9 substantiations per 1,000 children aged 1–4 years and 1.9 to 11.6 substantiations per 1,000 children aged 5–9 years.

Substantiations resulting from emotional abuse and neglect were much more common for those aged less than 1 year than those aged 10 years or over across most states and territories.

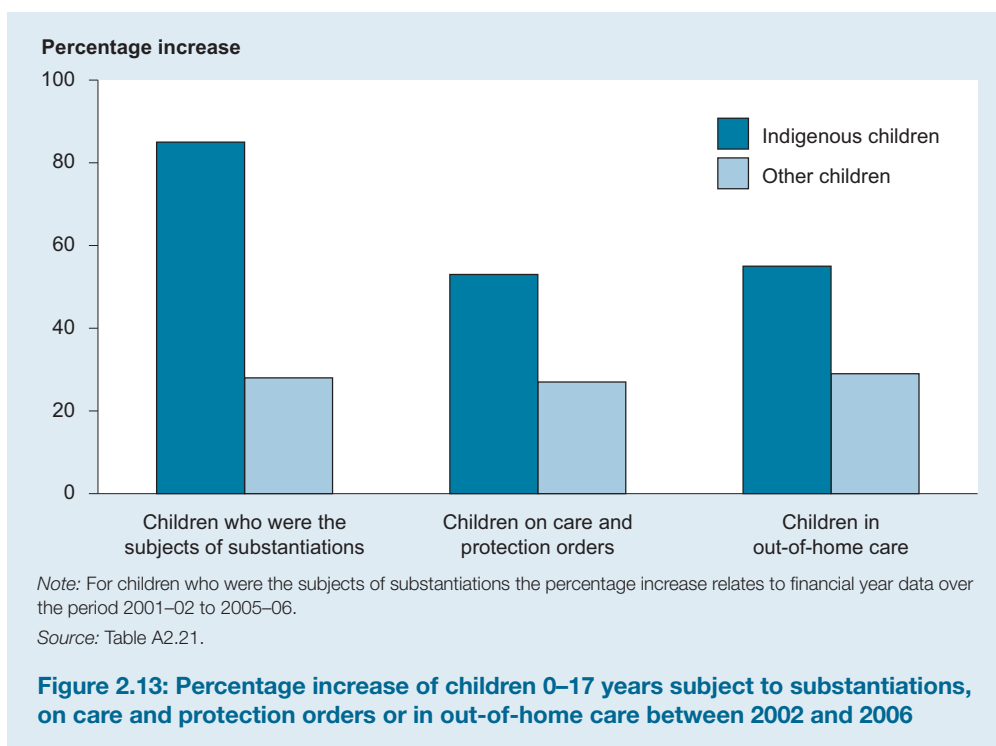
The higher proportion and rate of substantiations among infants than older children may reflect that infants are recognised in many states and territories as a population group needing extra care and protection. This could lead to an increased focus on early intervention (for example, see Vic DHS 1999).

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are clearly over-represented in the child protection system. Overall, Indigenous children aged 0–17 years were 4.5 times as likely to be the subjects of substantiations as other children in 2005–06, and were around 7 times as likely to be on care and protection orders or in out-of-home care at 30 June 2006 (AIHW 2007c).

Increases in the number of Indigenous children in all areas of the child protection system were much greater than for other children between 2002 and 2006 (Figure 2.13). For example, between June 2002 and June 2006, the number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders increased by 53%, compared with 27% for other children.

However, it should be noted that the quality of Indigenous data varies across jurisdictions and over time. Increases in the number of Indigenous children in the child protection system over time could be a result of improvements in Indigenous identification as well as increases in the actual numbers.



The prevalence of domestic violence and the generally lower socioeconomic status of Indigenous families are some of the factors in this over-representation (Stanley et al. 2003). A recent Australian Institute of Criminology study found that 42% of Indigenous respondents experienced male-to-female domestic violence, compared with 23% for all respondents (AIC 2001). The legacy of past policies of forced removal of children, intergenerational effects of previous separations and cultural differences in child-rearing practices may also contribute to this over-representation (HREOC 1997).

### Children from one-parent families

When compared with the distribution of family types across Australia, children from one-parent households are over-represented in the data on substantiations. For example, in 2005, of all families with children aged under 15 years, 19% were lone-mother households, 3% were lone-father households and 78% were couple households (ABS 2006l). In 2005–06, between 32% and 45% of substantiations involved children living in lone-mother households and a further 4% to 6% involved children living in lone-father households (AIHW 2007c). This compares with between 38% and 54% of substantiations involving children from couple households.

Lone parents may have an increased likelihood of experiencing family stressors such as social isolation and lack of social support, which have been found to be associated with child maltreatment (Coohey 1996; Loman 2006). A study by Saunders and Adelman (2006) found that 27% of all one-parent families experienced three or more forms of social exclusion (for example, being unable to afford to have friends or family over for dinner, take a short holiday, go out for a special meal, engage in a hobby or have a night out). This compares with 11%–13% for couple families with one or two children and 23%

for couple families with three or more children. This study and numerous other studies have shown that children and young people in one-parent families generally have fewer financial resources available to them and are more likely to experience poorer outcomes (AIHW 2007a; Saunders & Adelman 2006).

## Homelessness

Children and young people may experience adverse educational, social and health consequences as a result of being homeless. Homeless children and young people may experience emotional and behavioural problems such as depression, low self-esteem, anger and aggression, and often have disrupted schooling (Walsh et al. 2003). Parents in homeless families are also likely to be suffering from depression or stress, which may mean they are unable to give their children adequate attention or affection. A high proportion of homeless children may also have witnessed or experienced domestic violence. For example, in 2005–06 domestic violence was the most common main reason (nearly half of all support periods) for client groups with children seeking assistance from Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services (Table A2.22). Witnessing or experiencing domestic violence can have serious consequences for children (refer to Section 8.4), which would further exacerbate the effects of homelessness.

Clients with children represented more than a quarter (28%) of SAAP support periods in 2005–06. The substantial rate of family homelessness has meant a significant proportion of Australia's homeless population are children. In 2005–06, approximately 54,700 children aged 0–17 years accompanied a parent or guardian who sought assistance through SAAP services. This equates to 11.3 children per 1,000 in the general population. Of children (0–17 year olds) for whom age was known, almost half (44%) were aged less than 5 years, or 17.4 per 1,000. In comparison, the rate for 10–14 year olds was 7.5 per 1,000 (Table 2.17).

**Table 2.17: SAAP accompanying children, 2005–06**

Age group	Number	Number per 1,000 children
0–4 years	22,100	17.4
5–9 years	14,700	11.1
10–14 years	10,400	7.5
15–17 years	3,100	3.7
Missing age	4,500	..
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,700<sup>(a)</sup></b>	<b>11.3</b>

(a) Numbers do not add to total due to rounding.

Note: Figures for accompanying children have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: AIHW SAAP Client Collection.

Children and young people may also access SAAP services independently. In 2005–06, 36% (36,700) of all SAAP clients were aged 24 years or less, equating to a rate of 5.4 per 1,000 people aged 24 years or less in the general population. Around half (52%) of these SAAP clients were aged 15–19 years and a further 43% were aged 20–24 years (AIHW 2007d).

According to the AIHW SAAP Client Collection, the main reasons for children and young people seeking SAAP assistance were related to interpersonal relationships such as relationship/family breakdown, domestic/family violence and time-out from family/other situation (19%, 14% and 10% of SAAP support periods, respectively). For SAAP clients aged 25 years or over, the main reasons for seeking assistance were domestic/family violence

and 'other' financial difficulty, which excludes gambling, budgeting and high rent (26% and 12% of SAAP support periods respectively).

Although the SAAP data provide a valuable measure of homelessness, it is important to note that it is not able to count the homeless population with complete accuracy. Some people often move in and out of homelessness and may never be counted in official statistics, while some may never seek SAAP assistance or are turned away from SAAP services. For example, in 2004–05, the daily turn-away rate for accompanying children was 60% which indicates that their chance of receiving accommodation was around 2 in every 5 accompanying children (AIHW 2006c). The Australian Census of Population and Housing has attempted to fill some of this counting gap by counting homeless people who are temporarily staying with others, those in impoverished dwellings and those sleeping on the street (ABS 2003b). Estimates based on the 2006 Population Census were not available at the time of writing. However, based on the 2001 Census there were an estimated 9,941 homeless children under 12 years, accounting for 10% of the homeless population and 0.3% of all Australians aged under 12 years of age.

## Children and young people as victims

Victims of assault and sexual assault not only experience harm in the short term but are at risk of further harm or harming others later in life. A major concern is that children who are victimised are at a greater risk of later victimising others (Lauritsen et al. 1991; Weatherburn & Lind 1997). Other research suggests that victimisation can lead to diminished educational attainment, wide-ranging effects on socioeconomic attainment in early adulthood (Macmillan & Hagan 2004), suicidal ideation and behaviour (Simon et al. 2002), and depression (Arboleda-Florez & Wade 2001).

Victims of crime, especially violent crime, are often reluctant to report crimes to the police and therefore the actual level of crime experienced by children and young people is likely to be underestimated. Children and young people, in particular, may feel intimidated and reluctant to report personal crimes if the perpetrator is known to them or is in a position of power (perhaps because they are older or an authority figure).

While crime victim surveys are used to measure the extent of unreported or hidden victimisation, no Australian survey currently includes children aged under 15 years in their sample (ABS 2004b). The two main sources of information about criminal victimisation of children are administrative data sets: recorded crime statistics and substantiations of child abuse (discussed earlier). Since 1993, the ABS has published an annual report of recorded crime statistics collected by the police in each state and territory, according to standard offence classifications. These data are used here to present a picture of the victimisation of children and young people.

Children and particularly young people are generally more vulnerable than adults to being victims of violent crime (Table 2.18). Young people aged 15–24 years were 2–3 times as likely to be victims of assault and robbery as the general population. In 2003, assault was the most commonly reported crime for children and young people (57,300 children and young people or 853.6 per 100,000 persons). The rates of assault for children and young people increased with age, with rates among 15–24 year olds 5–6 times as high as among children aged 0–14 years. Reported sexual assault was much less common than assault; however, the rate of sexual assault for young females aged 15–24 years was 8 times as high as that for young males (370.6 compared with 45.2 per 100,000). The rates for sexual assault were around twice as high for 0–14 year old and 15–24 year old females as that for the general female population.

In 2006, a considerable number of children and young people were victims of robbery (7,400 children and young people or 108.6 per 100,000 persons). The rate for young males was nearly 4 times as high as that for young females. Rates of robbery were highest among the 15–24 year age group for both males and females.

While the proportions of children and young people that are victims of murder/attempted murder and kidnapping/abduction are relatively small, these types of violent crime affected 600 children and young people in 2006.

**Table 2.18: Victims aged 0–24 years by age and offence type, 2006**

Age group (years)	Murder/ attempted murder	Kidnapping/ abduction	Robbery	Blackmail/ extortion	Assault <sup>(a)</sup>	Sexual assault <sup>(a)</sup>
<b>Number</b>						
<b>Males</b>						
0–14	23	105	690	5	7,530	1,821
15–24	72	80	5,302	49	25,824	630
0–24	95	185	5,992	54	33,354	2,451
<i>Total population</i>	<i>372</i>	<i>270</i>	<i>10,846</i>	<i>244</i>	<i>90,688</i>	<i>3,255</i>
<b>Females</b>						
0–14	12	139	120	0	4,757	5,669
15–24	30	166	1,322	37	19,166	4,941
0–24	42	305	1,442	37	23,923	10,610
<i>Total population</i>	<i>141</i>	<i>447</i>	<i>3,760</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>66,445</i>	<i>14,892</i>
<b>Number per 100,000 people</b>						
<b>Males</b>						
0–14	1.1	5.1	33.7	0.2	368.8	89.2
15–24	4.9	5.5	361.5	3.3	1,851.2	45.2
0–24	2.7	5.3	170.6	1.5	970.4	71.3
<i>Total population</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>105.7</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>918.5</i>	<i>33.0</i>
<b>Females</b>						
0–14	0.6	7.2	6.2	0.0	245.3	292.3
15–24	2.2	11.9	95.0	2.7	1,437.6	370.6
0–24	1.3	9.2	43.3	1.1	731.0	324.2
<i>Total population</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>4.3</i>	<i>36.3</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>664.5</i>	<i>148.9</i>

(a) Data for assault and sexual assault are from 2003, as these are the most recent data for 0–24 year olds.

Source: ABS 2007k; AIHW 2005a.

## Juvenile justice

During childhood, some young people will have an encounter with the criminal justice system. Around 15%–17% of young Australians have been found to have at least one formal contact with police as juveniles (Skrzypiec & Wundersitz 2005; Stewart et al. 2005). For over 80% of these young people, this offending will be very low in frequency and transient in nature (Marshall 2006). A very small proportion of children have more serious interaction with the juvenile justice system, leading to outcomes such as community service orders or sentences involving detention in custody. It is these children who are most vulnerable to continued and more serious offending later in life (Makkai & Payne 2003).

Several welfare issues are consistently related to youth offending including low school attainment, poverty and poor parenting (Farrington et al. 2006); physical abuse and neglect (Stewart et al. 2002; Weatherburn & Lind 1997); and high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage (Lynch et al. 2003).

### Juvenile justice legislation

The juvenile justice system is responsible for dealing with young people who have committed or allegedly committed an offence while considered to be a 'juvenile' (see Box 2.8 for details on how the juvenile justice system operates). Juvenile justice is a state and territory responsibility and each has its own legislation that dictates the policies and practices of juvenile justice within its jurisdiction. While this varies in detail, the intent of the legislation is very similar across Australia. For example, the key principles of juvenile justice in all jurisdictions include diversion of young people from court where appropriate, incarceration as a last resort, victim's rights, the acceptance of responsibility by the offender for his or her behaviour and community safety.

One of the ways in which the legislation varies across states and territories is in the definition of a 'juvenile'. In the Australian Capital Territory, the juvenile justice legislation applies to young people aged 10 to 18 years at the time of the alleged offence and in Queensland to young people aged 10 to 16 years. However, in most jurisdictions those who were aged 10 to 17 years of age are included as juveniles. Victoria also has a sentencing option for adult courts which allows 18–20 year olds to be sentenced to detention in juvenile justice facilities where appropriate.

### Police

A young person's first contact with the justice system is usually with the police, and that contact may take various forms. Police may administer cautions and warnings to juveniles, which may be either formally recorded or informal, and may have voluntary or mandatory conditions attached, such as attendance at a program or community service.

Police apprehensions refer to instances where a person has allegedly committed an offence and been processed (action has been taken by police) for that offence. In 2003–04, the police apprehension rate for juveniles aged 10–17 years (3,023 per 100,000) was twice that for adults (1,685 per 100,000) in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland (AIC 2006). However, the police apprehensions rate for juveniles has decreased by 26% since 1995–96, compared with a 7% decrease for adults over the same period. Juvenile offenders are most commonly apprehended by police for property-related offences such as theft (AIC 2006).



### Box 2.8: How the juvenile justice system operates

The juvenile justice system in each state and territory comprises several organisations, each having a different primary role and responsibility in dealing with young offenders:

- the police, who are usually the young person's first point of contact with the justice system
- the courts (usually a special children's or youth court), where matters regarding the charges against the young person are heard. The courts are largely responsible for decisions regarding bail (and remand) and sentencing options if the young person admits guilt or is found guilty by the court
- the juvenile justice departments, which are responsible for the supervision of juveniles on a range of community-based orders and supervised bail. They are also responsible for the administration of juvenile detention centres.

#### Diversions

Diversions programs exist throughout the juvenile justice system: bail programs with intensive supervision; hostels for those with accommodation difficulties; programs which focus on rural areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, family relationships, employment and skills, arts, and drug rehabilitation.

#### Conferencing

Conferencing may occur at various stages of the criminal justice system, and be the responsibility of police, courts or the juvenile justice department. The restorative justice principles on which many conferencing models are based focus on a group of people coming together to discuss an offence and its effects, and to agree on sanctions or reparations. The attendees are the young offender (who must have admitted the offence) and their supporters (often including parents or guardians), the victim(s) and their supporters, a police officer and the conference convenor. Conferencing is designed to be less stigmatising and adversarial than the court system and to provide better opportunities for both the offender and the victim to discuss the offence and its effects.

## Juvenile justice supervision

The AIHW, in collaboration with the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators, has developed a national minimum data set for juvenile justice supervision. This new data source, which includes data from all states and territories in Australia, covers both community-based and detention-based supervision. Community-based supervision may include probation, community service orders and parole.

Each year, around 13,000 young people experience some form of juvenile justice supervision—13,254 young people in 2005–06. Of these 11,150 (84%) had community-based juvenile justice supervision, and 5,137 (39%) had detention-based supervision. Around 3,033 (23%) experienced both community-based and detention-based supervision at some time during the year (Table 2.19; AIHW 2007f).

**Table 2.19: Young people under juvenile justice supervision, number and average daily number, 2000–01 to 2005–06**

	2000–01 <sup>(a)</sup>	2001–02 <sup>(a)</sup>	2002–03 <sup>(a)</sup>	2003–04 <sup>(b)</sup>	2004–05 <sup>(b)</sup>	2005–06 <sup>(b)</sup>
	<b>Number</b>					
Community	10,813	11,039	11,056	11,093 (10,768)	10,807 (10,528)	11,150 (10,914)
Detention	5,483	5,113	5,135	5,213 (5,082)	4,800 (4,683)	5,137 (5,007)
All young persons	13,318	13,273	13,162	13,290 (12,953)	12,765 (12,475)	13,254 (12,999)
	<b>Average daily number</b>					
Community	5,172	5,017	5,212	5,318 (5,154)	5,145 (4,997)	5,185 (5,081)
Detention	881	886	836	838 (817)	785 (768)	816 (798)
All young persons	6,053	5,903	6,049	6,156 (5,971)	5,930 (5,766)	6,001 (5,879)

(a) Excludes the Australian Capital Territory for which data were unavailable for 2000–01 to 2002–03.

(b) Bracketed numbers exclude the Australian Capital Territory for which data were unavailable for 2000–01 to 2002–03.

Note: This table includes young people who have had at least 1 day of juvenile justice supervision during the collection year. The numbers for community and detention will not add up to the 'all young persons' figure, as some young people will have experienced both community and detention supervision during the collection year.

Sources: AIHW 2006d, 2007e, 2007f.

There is variation in the rates of young people aged 10–17 years under community-based and detention-based supervision across jurisdictions. For Australia overall in 2005–06, 5.0 per 1,000 young people had juvenile justice supervision—4.2 per 1,000 were in community-based supervision, and 2.0 per 1,000 were in detention-based supervision at some time during each year, with some young people in both.

During 2000–01 to 2005–06, there was an average of about 6,000 young people in juvenile justice supervision each day (Table 2.19). On an average day there were over 6 times as many young people in community-based supervision as in detention-based supervision in 2005–06.

Periods of community-based supervision are on average longer than periods of detention-based supervision, as reflected in the number of young people in each type of supervision on an average day. For example, of the 11,150 young people in community-based supervision during 2005–06, 47% (5,185) were under supervision on an average day. However, of the 5,137 young people in detention in 2005–06, only 16% (816) were in detention on an average day (Table 2.19).

Most young people are at least 15 years old when they first experience supervision by a juvenile justice department. Over half (55%) of young people began their first juvenile justice supervision when they were aged 15–17 years and only 4% of young people were aged 10 or 11 years (Figure 2.14).

Young people may experience detention at various points in the juvenile justice system. Pre-sentence detention may occur if a court has denied bail and remanded the young person in custody before their case has been heard, or before sentencing. Once matters have been finalised in court, detention may be a sentencing option.

In 2005–06, 44% of young people experienced pre-sentence or sentenced detention in their first supervision by juvenile justice (Table 2.20). Some young people experienced both. From the age of 12, the proportion of young people experiencing detention during their first supervision decreased as the age at first contact increased. In the younger age groups, detention in a first supervision was most often pre-sentence remand. Sentenced detention episodes in a first supervision were unusual, except for those aged 18 years or over.



Source: Table A2.23.

**Figure 2.14: Young people under juvenile justice supervision, age at first juvenile justice supervision, 2005-06**

**Table 2.20: Age at first juvenile justice supervision, by presence or absence of detention episodes in the first supervision period for young people, 2000-01 to 2005-06<sup>(a)</sup>**

	Age at first supervision									Total
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18+	
<b>Number of young people</b>										
First supervision period contained detention	54	204	481	1,160	2,050	2,751	3,178	2,278	826	12,982
Pre-sentence detention	54	197	470	1,146	2,026	2,684	3,100	2,165	318	12,160
Sentenced detention	1	17	40	97	127	201	216	219	535	1,453
First supervision period did not contain detention	43	172	367	1,095	2,188	3,414	4,460	3,742	1,141	16,622
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>2,255</b>	<b>4,238</b>	<b>6,165</b>	<b>7,638</b>	<b>6,020</b>	<b>1,967</b>	<b>29,604</b>
<b>Per cent of young people</b>										
First supervision period contained detention	55.7	54.3	56.7	51.4	48.4	44.6	41.6	37.8	42.0	43.9
Pre-sentence detention	55.7	52.4	55.4	50.8	47.8	43.5	40.6	36.0	16.2	41.1
Sentenced detention	1.0	4.5	4.7	4.3	3.0	3.3	2.8	3.6	27.2	4.9
First supervision period did not contain detention	44.3	45.7	43.3	48.6	51.6	55.4	58.4	62.2	58.0	56.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) This table includes all young people in the juvenile justice national minimum data set from 2000-01 to 2005-06.

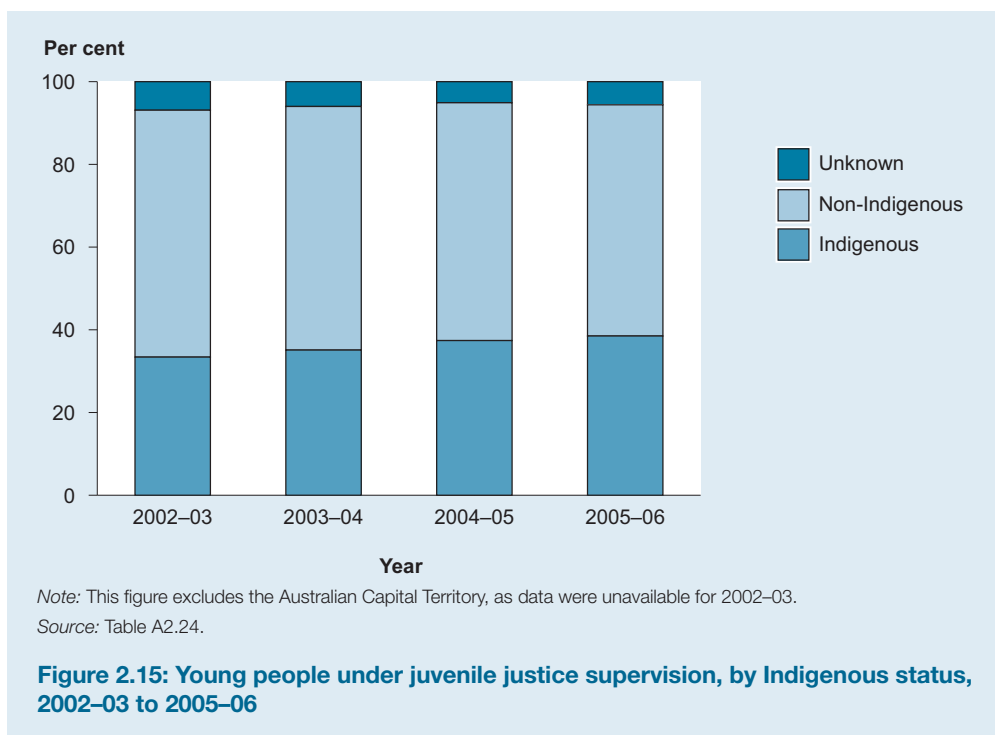
Notes

1. Excludes the Australian Capital Territory as data on date of first contact were unavailable.
2. The first supervision period for some young people contained both pre-sentence detention and sentenced detention.

Sources: AIHW 2006d, 2007e, 2007f.

## Indigenous rates

During the period 2002–03 to 2005–06, there has been a gradual increase from 33% to 39% in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people under juvenile justice supervision (Figure 2.15). This may be due to an actual increase in the proportion of young people under juvenile justice supervision who are Indigenous, and/or to increased identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders among this group. This increased identification may be partly due to improvements in data quality as the proportion of 'unknown' or 'not recorded' responses on this item has decreased over the period.



The rates of Indigenous juvenile justice supervision for young people aged 10–17 years show high levels of over-representation of Indigenous youth, relative to their population distribution, throughout the states and territories during 2005–06 (Table 2.21). Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were under juvenile justice supervision at a rate of 44.4 per 1,000, compared with 2.9 per 1,000 for non-Indigenous young people. Western Australia, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory had the highest rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people under juvenile justice supervision, while Victoria and the Northern Territory had the lowest (excluding Tasmania where there is a very high proportion of unknown/not recorded).

**Table 2.21: Young people under juvenile justice supervision aged 10–17 years, by Indigenous status, 2005–06**

Indigenous status	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
<b>Number of young people</b>									
Indigenous	1,091	159	1,171	1,539	287	68	41	236	4,592
Non-Indigenous	1,789	1,070	1,279	899	612	251	175	51	6,126
Unknown/not recorded	253	142	—	39	51	62	—	—	547
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,133</b>	<b>1,371</b>	<b>2,450</b>	<b>2,477</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>11,265</b>
<b>Number per 1,000 young people</b>									
Indigenous	34.7	23.8	39.8	106.6	51.4	17.7	44.2	21.2	44.4
Non-Indigenous	2.6	2.0	3.0	4.2	3.9	4.9	5.1	3.5	2.9
Unknown/not recorded	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>5.0</b>

*Notes*

1. The Department of Health and Human Services in Tasmania has reported that the Indigenous data for Tasmania may not be reliable due to limitations in the reporting capabilities of the information system.
2. Calculation of rates excludes unknown/not recorded.
3. Age is calculated as at first date of supervision during 2005–06.

Source: AIHW 2007f.

## 2.7 Data developments

Since 2005, substantial data development and information activities have been undertaken in the areas of child, youth and family services, significantly contributing to the evidence base in national welfare information. These activities relate specifically to child protection, child care services, juvenile justice and, more generally, child and youth health and wellbeing and families.

There are significant gaps in the current national data on child protection. Apart from the intensive family support services data, there are no other data at the national level on the support services used by children in need of protection and their families. Work is currently being undertaken by the National Child Protection and Support Services (NCPASS) data group to broaden the scope of the national data collection and to improve comparability. NCPASS, in collaboration with the AIHW, has undertaken developmental work on a draft national minimum data set for the National Child Protection Data Collection, with the aim of improving analytic potential and national reporting on children and young people in the child protection system. The feasibility of developing a national data collection for family support services in the context of child protection with the aim of identifying core data items and tables that could potentially be included in a national collection to complement the statutory child protection data currently published in *Child Protection Australia* is currently underway. The AIHW, in conjunction with NCPASS, will also develop a consistent set of data definitions and counting rules as a first step towards a national collection of aggregate data about foster carers, expanding on previous work undertaken on the feasibility of establishing such a data collection. In addition, the Australian Institute of Family Studies will undertake a data comparability project aimed at better identification of the reasons for differences in data between jurisdictions and within jurisdictions across time.

The AIHW, in collaboration with community services and education departments, has undertaken an innovative data linkage project involving interdepartmental linkage of administrative data across multiple jurisdictions, the first Australian study in the child protection field to have done so. The aim of this study is examine the educational outcomes of Australian children placed in child protection services, namely those on guardianship/custody orders. Stage 1 of the project, presenting a snapshot of the academic performance (in terms of reading and numeracy tests) of children on guardianship/custody orders in years 3, 5 and 7, has been completed and a report published on the findings. Work has begun on Stage 2 of the project, which is longitudinal in nature and assesses these children 2 years later, with the aim of identifying how the educational performance of children on guardianship/custody orders changes over a period of time.

The development of the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set has been completed with the publication of the final report in February 2007 (NCSIMG Children's Services Data Working Group 2007). The Children's Services NMDS, endorsed by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) in 2006, aims to provide nationally comparable and comprehensive data about the provision of child care and preschools services including information about the children who use the services, the service providers and their workers. Options for the implementation of the data set are now being examined.

The Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set has been implemented and three reports have been published. The first report, with data from 2000–01 to 2003–04, was published in February 2006 (AIHW 2006d). The second and third reports, covering the periods 2004–05 and 2005–06 respectively, were published in March and August 2007 (AIHW 2007e, 2007f). These reports draw on data held in the national database established by the AIHW and the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators. This database provides, for the first time, statistical information on all young people under juvenile justice supervision, including not only those on detention but also those under community-based supervision.

The AIHW is currently undertaking data linkage development work in community service areas by exploring the feasibility of linking data between the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set, SAAP data collections and the proposed Child Protection National Minimum Data Set. Initially, this analysis would aim to establish the extent to which young people are clients of both SAAP services and juvenile justice, and establish the identifying characteristics of these clients. This work could be further extended by linking child protection data with SAAP data, when unit record data for child protection become available. This cross-sectoral data linkage activity would enable the characteristics of young people who move between these three service sectors to be identified.

In 2005, the Australian Health Ministers' Conference and the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference approved a project to develop a set of agreed headline indicators to monitor the health, development and wellbeing of children in Australia and to facilitate ongoing data development and collection in these areas. After extensive consultations with state and territory government agencies and data committees, 19 priority areas (16 of which have specific Headline Indicators) were endorsed by Ministers in 2006 (see Table A2.25). A program to support the development and ongoing reporting of these indicators is being developed by the AIHW under the auspices of the Australian Population Health Development Principle Committee of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council.

The ABS, in conjunction with an expert steering group, has developed an information development plan aimed at improving the collection and use of statistics on children and youth. The plan is based on 10 agreed priority areas for statistical data development. It reviews existing data, reports on data gaps and identifies actions required by key agencies to achieve the identified improvements within each of the priority areas. The ABS has recently published an information paper outlining the plan. The paper also includes a comprehensive list of data currently available on children and young people, and identifies gaps in the existing data (ABS 2006m).

The ABS has started work on the development of an agreed framework to support the further development of national statistics about families. This framework will identify and define the important concepts of family and family statistics, drawing attention to the importance of measuring aspects of family structures, family transitions, family functioning, and transactions, or social exchanges, between the family and the wider community, as important elements of family wellbeing. The framework will then be used to guide data development activities in the area of families as well as associated research work.

The ABS is also reviewing the content of the national Child Care Survey and is concurrently developing an early years learning topic. They will be integrated into a single household-based survey called Childhood Education and Care, to be conducted in 2008. It is expected that the new survey will continue to provide information on the nature, use and cost of child care as well as data on children's learning activities and environments in their early years.

Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children was a study initiated and funded as part of the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The study is being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in collaboration with the ABS, with advice being provided by leading researchers throughout Australia. The study explores family and social issues, and addresses a range of research questions about children's development and wellbeing. Its longitudinal structure will enable researchers to determine critical periods for early intervention and prevention strategies in policies concerning children and identify the long-term consequences of new policies. The data from Wave 1 of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children were launched in May 2005; a small amount of additional data from the between-waves questionnaire was released in November 2006; and data from Wave 2 were released in August 2007.

The Australian Early Development Index is another promising vehicle to provide communities with information about children's development in the early years before school. The index is based on a teacher-completed checklist of children's development. It aims to provide communities with a basis for reviewing the services, supports and environments that influence children in their first 5 years of life. It also provides information for schools and the community to look ahead to the supports that need to be developed to enhance children's capacity to be successful once they reach school. The Australian Early Development Index: Building Better Communities for Children project is conducted by the Centre for Community Child at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, in partnership with the Telethon Institute for Child Health in Perth. The project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and supported by the Shell Company of Australia Limited.

Originally developed in Canada as the Early Development Index, the instrument has been adapted for use in Australia. Between 2004 and 2006 the Australian Early Development Index was trialled in 54 Australian communities over six states and territories on more than 30,000 children. The index is now available to all Australian communities. There are plans to implement stage two of the project, which will collect information from the same communities that implemented the 2004–2006 index, implement it in more disadvantaged communities, and develop and trial a culturally appropriate Indigenous index.

## 2.8 Summary

Over the last decade there has been increasing policy and public interest in the wellbeing of children, and a growing awareness that effective support for children, young people and families is vital for the stability and future productive capacity of society in a rapidly changing social, educational and economic environment. This chapter focuses on Australia's children, young people and families in a context of change—their demographic profile, the transitions in a young person's life from early education to employment, and those in greater need of help and support due to abuse and neglect, homelessness and juvenile offending.

In June 2006, there were approximately 4 million children aged 0–14 years and 2.9 million young people aged 15–24 years living in Australia. Children and young people together account for one-third of the Australian population.

Demographic change is one of the main drivers of changing demand for welfare services and assistance. Like that of most developed countries, Australia's population is ageing as a result of steady declines in fertility and increases in life expectancy experienced over past decades. As a result of these trends, the proportion of children aged under 15 years in the population has fallen from a peak of 30% in 1961 to 20% in 2006, and is projected to fall to 16% by 2026. However, the decline in the total fertility rate appears to have stabilised since the beginning of this century and may even have begun to turn. If the fertility trends have indeed changed, our current demographic projections, which were based on a decline in fertility until 2018, are likely to be an underestimate of the proportion of children and young people in Australia in the 2020s and beyond.

There is a clear relationship between the health and wellbeing of children and young people and the environment in which they grow up. Families continue to be the cornerstone of Australian society as they provide the environment in which children learn and develop and young people are supported as they move into adulthood. Trends in family formation and dissolution mean that children today are growing up in a wider variety of family types than 30 years ago. The available data indicate that in 2003 seven out of ten children live in intact families with both of their birth or adoptive parents; around one in five children live in a one-parent family and the rest in step or blended families. However, it should be noted that after families form, they may then experience change, breakdown and re-formation.

Changes in patterns of labour force participation continue to affect families. In 2007, 94% of all families with dependent children aged 0–24 years had at least one parent employed. The proportion of couple families where both parents were employed has increased over the last decade. It is now the most common employment arrangement among couple families. Although the traditional male breadwinner family type has generally declined, it remains a common employment arrangement when the youngest child in the family is under 5 years of age. The proportions of mothers that work, and that work full time,



increase steadily as the age of the youngest child increases. A similar pattern of increasing employment as the children get older was also evident among lone mothers and lone fathers. However, in spite of this similarity in the changes in employment patterns, children living in one-parent families still generally have fewer financial resources available to them than children living in couple families.

There has been minimal change over the last decade in the proportion of children using any form of child care, but the proportion using formal child care has increased. The biggest increases in formal care have been in long day care, and outside school hours care. Grandparents continue to be the main provider of informal child care, most of which is provided at no cost to parents.

There is strong evidence that most children and young people of school age fare well in both literacy and numeracy in national and international assessments. However, there is evidence that certain population groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from very remote areas, were substantially less likely to meet the national benchmarks than the overall population of students. In 2005, three-quarters of young people completed Year 12 and a considerable proportion were undertaking non-school studies.

The pathways that young people take in the transition from education to work are more varied and complex than in the past, and often extend over longer periods. It is increasingly common for young people to combine work and study. Associated with this trend is the growing number of young people who work part time, either in conjunction with their studies or because they could not find full-time work. These trends towards decreasing participation in full-time work and staying in education longer may in part explain the increasing numbers of adult children living with their parents.

While most children and young people in Australia are doing well, a small group are in greater need of support. Difficulties that arise are often associated with circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination, a shortage of adequate and affordable housing in the community, and problems such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, poor parenting, and relationship and family breakdown. Child protection services provide assistance for children who are abused, neglected or at risk of harm, or whose parents are unable to care for them. This is a dynamic area where the constant changes in policies and procedures make it difficult to interpret long-term trends in the data. However, it is clear that the number of children in the child protection system is increasing. Furthermore, some groups of children, such as Indigenous children and children from one-parent families, are over-represented. Children under 1 year of age are also over-represented in the child protection system but this may be due to the extra protection provided for this population group.

Homelessness can seriously affect educational, social and health outcomes of children and young people. A high proportion of cases of homelessness also involve other family stressors such as domestic violence and family breakdown. Domestic violence continues to be the main reason for nearly half of all support periods for client groups with children seeking assistance from SAAP services. Relationship/family breakdown was the most common main reason given by young people aged 24 years or less who accessed SAAP support independently.

During childhood and adolescence, some young people have an encounter with the criminal justice system. For most, this is usually for relatively minor and transient offences. A very small proportion of young people have more serious offending that results

in supervision by a juvenile justice department, which may include community service orders or detention in custody. Each year, around 13,000 young people experience some form of juvenile justice supervision, with community-based supervision far more common than detention-based supervision. Of serious concern, however, is the continuing over-representation of Indigenous people in the juvenile justice system.

Children, young people and families are areas that attract strong policy interest. A substantial number of data development activities have been undertaken in recent years, significantly contributing to the evidence base in these areas and paving the way for more analyses in the future.

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