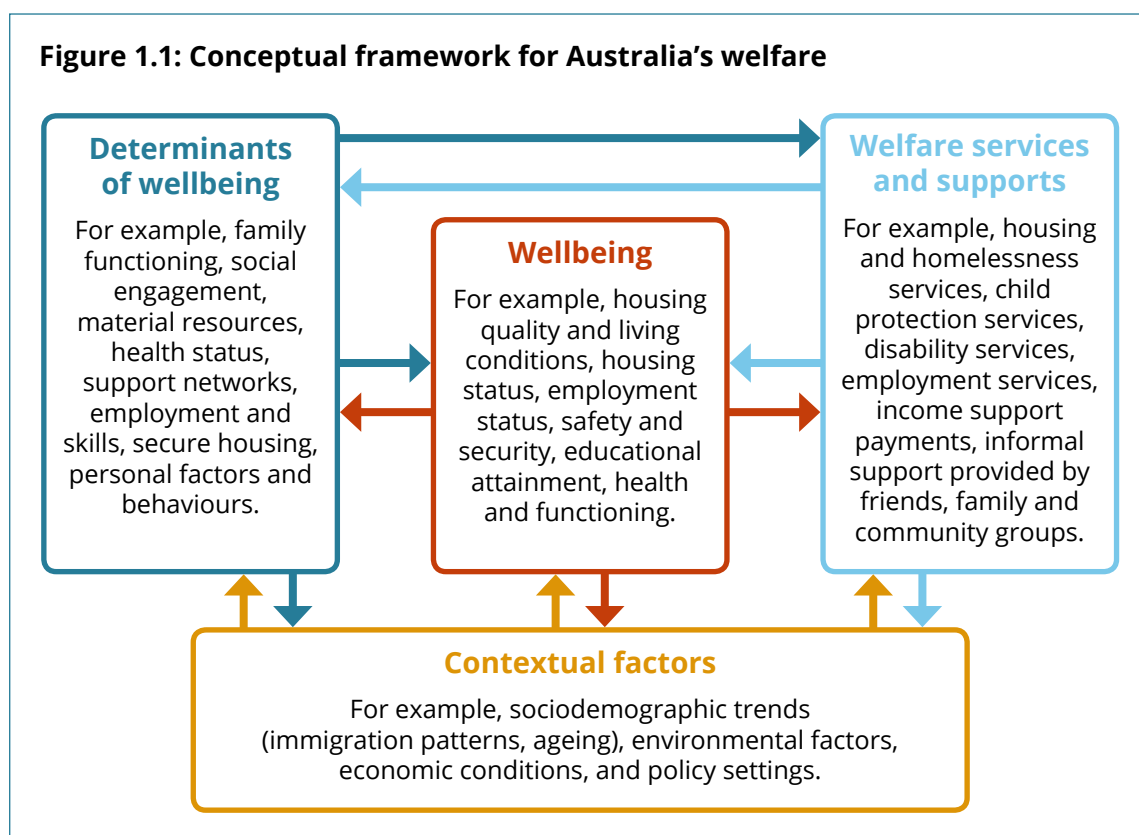# An overview of Australia's welfare

1

Understandings and perceptions about what 'welfare' is and what it means in the Australian context vary. There is the broad meaning of welfare that relates to 'wellbeing' (of individuals, families and communities) (Buckmaster 2009). A more specific meaning relates to 'welfare services and supports'—or the different welfare systems—including government programs, income support payments and assistance for people who experience hardship, are unable to participate in social and economic activities or excluded from them (Arthur 2015; Buckmaster 2009).

The AIHW understands welfare as a concept that extends beyond the welfare systems, and one that affects wellbeing—sometimes defined as the 'state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy' (Oxford University Press 2019). This perspective is illustrated in Figure 1.1, drawing from the conceptual framework for welfare information published in Australia's welfare 2001 (AIHW 2001). It recognises that the concept of welfare is complex and that interrelated factors affect wellbeing, including personal/individual determinants, broader contextual factors, and services and supports.

Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework for Australia's welfare

Determinants of wellbeing

For example, family functioning, social engagement, material resources, health status, support networks, employment and skills, secure housing, personal factors and behaviours.

Wellbeing

For example, housing quality and living conditions, housing status, employment status, safety and security, educational attainment, health and functioning.

Welfare services and supports

For example, housing and homelessness services, child protection services, disability services, employment services, income support payments, informal support provided by friends, family and community groups.

Contextual factors

For example, sociodemographic trends (immigration patterns, ageing), environmental factors, economic conditions, and policy settings.
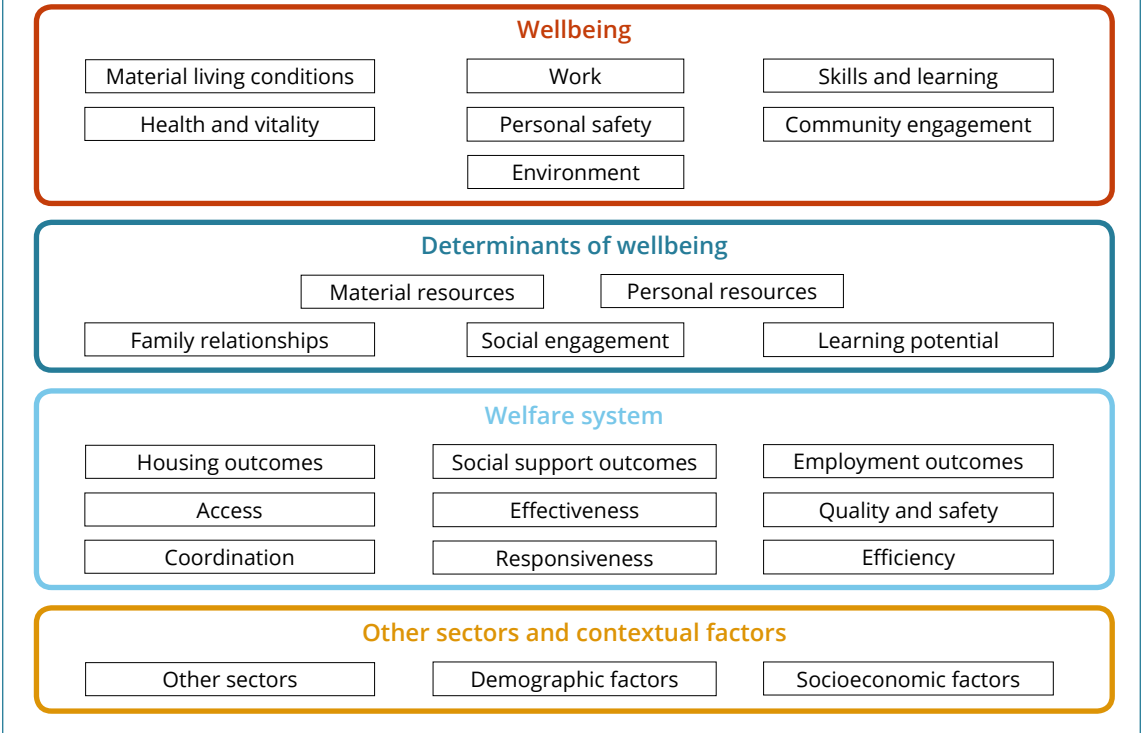
To understand the outcomes of the dynamic represented in this framework, data are essential. As a health and welfare statistics agency, the AIHW has a pivotal role in producing and reporting data to improve the wellbeing of Australians and, where possible, investigate the interrelationships.

This report explores some of the factors that contribute to, and affect, wellbeing. The discussions in this article look at Australia's welfare indicators, the social, cultural and economic contexts for welfare and wellbeing, the relationship between health and welfare, the data landscape and the role of the AIHW. After these broad explorations, it summarises the 7 other articles in the report that cover a range of welfare and social issues. The articles present focused discussions and analyses of the issues, data and evidence.

Australia's welfare indicators

The AIHW has reported welfare indicators since 2003 (AIHW 2003). Australia's welfare indicators summarise the performance of welfare services, track individual and household determinants of the need for welfare support, and provide insights into the nation's wellbeing more broadly. The AIHW developed an indicator framework for Australia's welfare (Figure 1.2) to define the scope of investigation and organise topics into a logical structure (AIHW 2015). The framework has 3 core domains—wellbeing, determinants of wellbeing, and welfare services and supports—and an additional domain for other sectors and contextual factors. Within each domain, indicators are grouped into broad topics. Results for 47 indicators (with a focus on trends over time) are presented online, in an interactive data tool, and can be viewed at www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/indicators/australias-welfare-indicators. Key findings drawing on most recent data where possible, are presented below.

Figure 1.2: Australia's welfare indicator framework

Wellbeing

Material living conditions	Work	Skills and learning
Health and vitality	Personal safety	Community engagement
	Environment	

Determinants of wellbeing

| Material resources | Personal resources |
| Family relationships | Social engagement | Learning potential |

Welfare system

Housing outcomes	Social support outcomes	Employment outcomes
Access	Effectiveness	Quality and safety
Coordination	Responsiveness	Efficiency

Other sectors and contextual factors

| Other sectors | Demographic factors | Socioeconomic factors |

How are we faring?

Based on the Australia's welfare indicators, we are faring well on many aspects of wellbeing:

- **More students are finishing year 12**. In 2018, 90.0% of people aged 20–24 had completed year 12 (or equivalent) or a non-school qualification at Certificate II level or above. This is up from 84.5% in 2009 (ABS 2018c).

- **Non-school qualifications are on the rise**. In 2018, 65.1% of people aged 25–64 had a non-school qualification at Certificate III or above. This is up from 54.9% in 2009 (ABS 2018c). Australia also ranks in the top third of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for proportion of people with a tertiary education (OECD 2019a).

- **Three-quarters of working-age people have a job**. In 2018, 73.8% of people aged 15–64 were employed (annual average). This was Australia's highest ever annual average employment to population ratio (ABS 2019e). Australia's employment to population ratio is above the OECD average (OECD 2019f).

- **Fewer people are working very long hours**. In 2018, 13.6% of employed people worked 50 hours or more per week (annual average). This is down from 16.0% in 2009 (ABS 2019d). Despite this downward trend, Australia has one of the highest proportions of people working long hours compared with other OECD countries (OECD 2019e).

- **Voter enrolment has increased**. In June 2019, 97.1% of eligible people were enrolled to vote. This is up from 89.7% in 2010 (AEC 2019).

- **More homes have internet access**. In 2016–17, 86.1% of households had internet access at home. This is up from 67% in 2007–08 (ABS 2009, 2018d). Australia ranks near the middle of OECD countries for internet access (OECD 2019b).

- **Most crime rates are down**. Between 2008–09 and 2017–18, the proportion of people who experienced physical assault decreased from 3.1% to 2.4% and the proportion of households that experienced malicious property damage decreased from 11.1% to 5.1% (ABS 2019a).

- **Fewer Indigenous households are overcrowded**. In 2016, 10.0% of Indigenous households required 1 or more extra bedrooms. This is down from 13.6% in 2006 (AIHW 2019).

However, a few aspects of our lives warrant closer attention:

- **More low-income households are experiencing housing stress**. In 2017–18, 43.1% of lower income rental households spent more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs. This is up from 35.0% in 2007–08 (ABS 2019c).

- **Repeat periods of homelessness are on the rise**. In 2017–18, 5.2% of homelessness services clients experienced homelessness more than once within the reporting year. This is up from 4.2% in 2013–14 (SCRGSP 2019).

- **1 in 4 unemployed people are long-term unemployed**. In 2018, 24.5% of unemployed people aged 15 and over had been looking for work for more than a year (annual average). This is up from 14.8% in 2009 (ABS 2019d). However, Australia fares better on this measure than other countries—the long-term unemployment ratio in Australia is lower than the OECD average (OECD 2019c).

- **1 in 9 families with children are jobless**. In 2017, 11.6% of families with children under 15 had no usually resident person in the family aged 15 and over who was employed. The proportion of jobless families has remained relatively stable between 2012 (12.2%) and 2017 (ABS 2016, 2017a).

Australia's welfare indicators also show interesting trends in:

- **Purchasing power**—between 2009 and 2018, Australia's net disposable income per capita, adjusted for inflation, increased by 0.7% per year. This compares with an annual increase of 2.8% between 1999 and 2008 (ABS 2018a).

- **Income inequality**—as measured by the Gini coefficient, income inequality increased from 0.306 in 2003–04 to 0.336 in 2007–08 but remained relatively stable to 2017–18 (0.328) (ABS 2019b). Australia ranks near the middle of OECD countries for income inequality (OECD 2019d).

- **Household income**—between 2007–08 and 2017–18, the average weekly income per household, adjusted for inflation, increased by 0.4% per year. This compares with an annual increase of 3.3% between 1996–97 and 2005–06 (ABS 2019b).

- **Partner violence**—in 2016, 1.3% of people aged 18 and over had experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a current or previous partner in the previous 12 months. The proportion of women who experienced partner violence in the previous 12 months remained relatively stable between 2005 (1.5%) and 2016 (1.7%). The proportion of men who experienced partner violence in the previous 12 months increased between 2005 (0.4%) and 2016 (0.8%) (ABS 2017b).

- **Homelessness**—on Census night in 2016, 49.8 people per 10,000 population were homeless. This equates to a 4.6% increase in the rate of homeless persons over 5 years, from 47.6 per 10,000 population in 2011 (ABS 2018b).

- **Youth unemployment rate**—in 2018, 11.8% of people aged 15–24 in the labour force were unemployed (annual average). Between 2009 and 2018, the annual average youth unemployment rate fluctuated between 11.4% and 13.3% (ABS 2019e). Australia's youth unemployment rate is close to the OECD average (OECD 2019g).

International comparisons are available for 18 of the Australia's welfare indicators and these are summarised in *International comparisons of welfare data* www.aihw.gov.au/ reports/australias-welfare/international-comparisons-of-welfare-data. Most of these data are sourced from the OECD Better Life Index (OECD 2019e), which describes wellbeing as a multidimensional concept. It focuses on 11 topics in the areas of material living conditions and quality of life, with several indicators for each topic. For more information see www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org.

What affects our welfare and wellbeing?

The conceptual framework for Australia's welfare (see Figure 1.1) acknowledges that wellbeing is affected by wider contextual factors. Social, demographic, cultural and economic changes can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Not only are people affected in a personal way, but government policies, services and programs often respond to major changes and developments to counter potential or actual adverse effects; for example, government policy responses to the global financial crisis. Furthermore, policy, legal and regulatory reforms play a role in how people interact with social support services and the wellbeing of individuals; for example, the principles of consumer-directed care are central to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aged care models.

Over the past 4 decades, structural changes to the economy as well as social changes have affected employment patterns—the proportion of part-time work has increased with more women entering the workforce; the composition of employment has changed with a greater proportion of jobs in the services sector; greater numbers of young people are balancing work with tertiary education; and more people are working past retirement age (Adeney 2018; Commonwealth of Australia 2018; Wooden 2017). These social and economic changes in turn affect patterns of income support receipt, as well as the types of services and supports available and used. Other factors that currently influence this dynamic are the level of wages growth, housing affordability, access to finance and credit, personal and household savings, opportunities for education and training, and changes in family structures and households. For example, changing social expectations about the role of informal care for children (and older people), coupled with changing work patterns, are connected to provision of services, government policies and work arrangements, all of which affect the decisions made by families.

Demographic and cultural changes have affected how governments and organisations delivering welfare services respond. Through shifts in cultural norms and attitudes, age structure and migration, Australia's population is one that is ageing, growing and becoming more socially and culturally diverse, and has higher levels of education. There is a strong public focus on issues such as family, domestic and sexual violence, institutional abuse of children, older people and people with disability, inequality in health and social outcomes, risks of unhealthy lifestyles/living, and how individuals and society engage with technology.

Government responses to social changes sometimes result in royal commissions to investigate matters of public importance and recommend improvements. Various royal commissions and government inquiries (Commonwealth and state and territory) have been established following increasing public awareness of, and outcry about, systemic failures in some areas. Royal commissions, in particular, draw public attention to a number of welfare issues and can result in further research, action and improvements, including calls for more meaningful data. See Box 1.2 (at the end of this article) for details about recent royal commissions and government inquiries.

The importance of data about welfare

Governments and non-government organisations (NGOs) delivering welfare services face challenges in meeting the needs and expectations of a changing and diverse society. Responding to the increasing demands for evidence-based policies or decisions requires data and information about a range of welfare areas. In Australia, the federal system of government has implications for the operational arrangements for different policy, program and service areas. The AIHW plays an important role in working with the states and territories to establish national data standards and national minimum data sets. However, some data are not comparable across jurisdictions, particularly in areas such as child protection where the legislation and service systems differ. It can also be challenging to address national data gaps and to observe individual pathways through the welfare systems. However, increasingly the technological means and platforms are available to do this through data linkage.

Having the data to understand how individuals engage with, and navigate, various welfare services assists those responsible for planning, implementing and delivering services and programs. The ability to see and understand the picture holistically is crucial. The aim is to use public data for public good; and the goal is to improve health and welfare outcomes for individuals and communities. The AIHW's people-centred data model (Figure 1.3) recognises the multiple policy and program areas that interact and that individual circumstances determine the level of support required. The model shows that the domains of housing, education and skills, employment and work, income and finance, health, social support, and justice and safety are all intricately connected. Achieving positive outcomes in one domain is likely dependent on positive outcomes in other domains. The AIHW uses this model to present the Australia's welfare snapshots—a collection of 41 web pages that present the latest facts on housing, education and skills, employment and work, income and finance, social support, and justice and safety. Australia's welfare snapshots can be viewed at www.aihw.gov.au/australias-welfare/snapshots.

Figure 1.3: People-centred data model

Understanding the links between health and welfare

A person's health and welfare are intricately linked and both play a key role in their ability to participate in work, education and training, as well as to engage with their community and social networks.

On many measures, Australians enjoy good health and welfare. Australia has one of the highest life expectancies in the world, which continues to rise, as do the years of life lived in full health. The majority of people rate their health and life satisfaction highly.

But disparities in outcomes exist for some. Several factors act together to either strengthen or undermine health and welfare. They are closely related and include:

- determinants of welfare and health, such as education, employment, income and adequacy of housing
- risk factors, such as tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, and inadequate consumption of fruit and vegetables
- social and personal factors, such as bullying, school truancy, poor family functioning and lack of social connectedness
- access to appropriate health and welfare services.

Some of Australia's health and welfare services are designed to support everyone while others act as a safety net for those in high need. The health systems play a role in the prevention and treatment of disease, and other ill health and injury. The welfare systems support individuals and families with a range of government payments, such as income support payments, family assistance payments and supplementary payments, and through the provision of a variety of programs and support services, which include child protection, disability support, housing and homelessness, and aged care services.

For the most part, welfare systems support people in immediate need. However, government services in general, including education and training, also focus on improving the social and economic outcomes for individuals over the longer term. This is often achieved by ensuring a good start in life for all children with extra support for families and children in need.
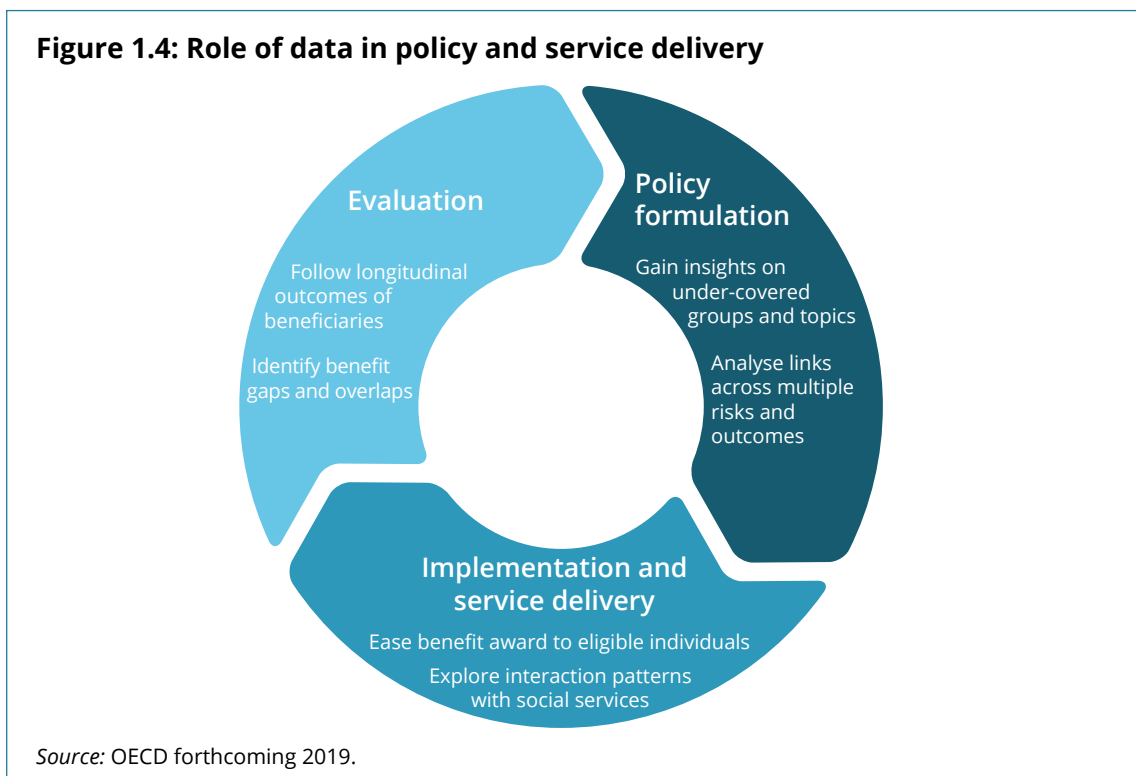
Changes to the age structure, composition and characteristics of the Australian population affect the type of health and welfare services people need, when they need them, for how long and how often. As noted earlier in this article, understanding current and emerging societal changes is key to targeting the delivery of efficient and effective services for those in need. Good-quality and timely data about people forms the evidence base needed to understand the experiences of the population and various cohorts within it. Data also provide insights into how different areas interact, and therefore inform future policy and service delivery.

Key population groups with immediate and possible future need for welfare services include:

- young children and families—to prevent the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage to vulnerable children and young people
- people with disability— the NDIS is a key service to this group but both NDIS recipients and the broader group of people with disability also require access to the full range of mainstream welfare services
- older people—of particular importance is how to provide services that allow people to remain in their homes for as long as possible
- those likely to experience economic and social hardship, including a disproportionate number of Indigenous Australians, refugees and prisoners
- those living in regional and remote Australia, where access to services can be more challenging
- long-term unemployed, young people not engaged in education, employment or training, and long-term welfare dependants
- people experiencing entrenched long-term disadvantage
- people experiencing intergenerational trauma.

Current state of welfare data

High-quality and comprehensive data are critical to inform policy and the delivery of services for those in need. Better data can help to improve services from policy formulation to delivery and evaluation (Figure 1.4), which can in turn improve outcomes.

Figure 1.4: Role of data in policy and service delivery

Evaluation
Follow longitudinal outcomes of beneficiaries
Identify benefit gaps and overlaps

Policy formulation
Gain insights on under-covered groups and topics
Analyse links across multiple risks and outcomes

Implementation and service delivery
Ease benefit award to eligible individuals
Explore interaction patterns with social services

Source: OECD forthcoming 2019.

The current data landscape is one where people have access to more data than ever before. This has been accompanied by an increased recognition of the importance of using public data as a strategic national resource to improve outcomes for the population while assuring the privacy and security of data. Commonwealth and state and territory legislation and governance arrangements are being adapted to support this evolving data landscape. This involves building public trust, even where there is acknowledgement of the value of using public data (AIHW 2017, 2018). However, governance frameworks and approaches to facilitate streamlined, safe, de-identified data sharing across governments and the research community are not well established, and this slows the generation of usable linked data. Similarly, while government, research and non-government bodies are rapidly developing capability in data linkage, analysis and use, challenges remain in building this capacity.

Within this broader context, there are some specific issues with the availability, quality and accessibility of welfare services data. These relate to comparability of data, data linkage, evaluation and measuring outcomes, and are described below.

There is a history of collating national data across certain service sectors, but data are not always comparable

Welfare services are provided by the Australian Government, state and territory governments and NGOs (both for-profit and not-for-profit). There is a long history of collating national data across certain service sectors (for example, disability, drug and alcohol treatment, child protection). However, where data are collected on the ground, they may not be collected consistently and therefore not be comparable over time or with other service providers. In some cases, they are not collated for analysis or are inaccessible for other reasons. This restricts the ability to evaluate outcomes for individuals who receive the services and the effectiveness of different services. By definition, such service data only relate to those people using the services and do not inform questions of unmet demand for services or barriers to access.

In addition to data from welfare services, Australia has a large and informative population survey program, predominantly delivered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Such surveys provide a wealth of cross-sectional information about the characteristics of potential welfare service users and their perceptions (for example, of barriers to service use).

Linking data across different services helps in understanding pathways and relationships between health and welfare

There is also a range of longitudinal welfare data sets in Australia. Over the past 20 years, a concerted effort has taken place to collect longitudinal data about the Australian population. Examples include the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). These 3 studies are managed by the Department of Social Services' National Centre for Longitudinal Data www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/national-centre-for-longitudinal-data.

While Australia has a good range of longitudinal surveys, the use of linked longitudinal administrative data is in its infancy. Data linkage combines information from multiple sources, while preserving privacy. It is a cost-effective and non-intrusive way to build de-identified longitudinal data assets, and the mechanisms to protect privacy continue to be enhanced. Although the amount of linked data continues to grow, the linkage of data across the different welfare services, and between health and welfare services, is limited. To link such data sets would help to better understand welfare pathways and the relationships between health and welfare. There is also currently limited linkage of data sets about welfare services and outcomes such as employment, education and income.

Evaluations of welfare programs and the measurement of progress against indicators, are necessary to understand and improve outcomes

A lack of high-quality evaluation presents challenges. Much of the evaluation work undertaken to date has been short term or piecemeal. This limits understanding of which programs work best to improve outcomes for persons most in need. Having better linked, enduring, longitudinal administrative data would facilitate better and more cost-effective evaluations.

Finally, measuring progress in welfare outcomes, particularly as they relate to health and welfare services, requires consistent measurement against agreed indicators over time. There are opportunities to embed policy evaluation in national plans and agreements that specify performance measures—see, for example, the *Review of the National Disability Agreement, study report* (Productivity Commission 2019:22). Given the development of linked and longitudinal data, there is potential to improve the indicators selected for these purposes so that they support more holistic, outcomes-oriented reporting.

It is worth noting that some outcomes are not observed or cannot be observed while a program is operating as they require longer term or generational change. Early childhood education is a good example—some of the main benefits of early childhood education are not apparent until participants are teenagers. It is possible to observe the subsequent impact of programs and policies through data linkage. The Chicago Longitudinal Study, for example, has demonstrated the impact of early childhood education by linking administrative data (University of Minnesota 2019). In Australia, individual states and territories are taking steps to improve the way they build and use data to improve the long-term outcomes for children. Examples include the New South Wales Government's Their Futures Matter www.theirfuturesmatter.nsw.gov.au and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute's Generation Victoria (GenV) project www.mcri.edu.au/genv—see also 'Chapter 8 An innovative linked data platform to improve the wellbeing of children—the South Australian Early Childhood Data Project'.

Major gaps in welfare data

Gaps exist where no national data are currently available or where data collected are not comprehensive. In the context of welfare data, these include gaps in:

- understanding of risk factors—for example, causes of homelessness
- incidence and prevalence data—for example, children who experience abuse and neglect, assessed need for support services
- measurement of demand for welfare services—for example, unmet demand for specific welfare services, people who 'fall through the cracks' in the welfare systems
- details about types of welfare services accessed—for example, supports provided under consumer-directed care models for aged care, services funded by NGOs
- pathways through the welfare systems—for example, education and employment experiences of vulnerable cohorts, referral pathways, how people transition between different services and across different 'systems'
- outcomes for people who receive welfare services—for example, outcomes of aged care, the relationship between recidivism and social assistance
- long-term effects on individuals and their families—for example, impact of discrimination against minority populations, tracking children from out-of-home care, intergenerational transmission of risk factors
- information about populations of interest—for example, Indigenous people using mainstream services, identifying people with disability and other vulnerable cohorts in data collections
- geospatial information—for example, information about remote Indigenous communities, locational variation in welfare services and outcomes.

The AIHW's role

The AIHW is Australia's leading health and welfare statistics agency. Our legislated role is to work with others to develop information standards and collections across health and welfare, and to publish statistics across these areas. We work closely with governments—including state/territory authorities with health and welfare responsibilities, the ABS and other research and statistics agencies—and with academia and the non-government sector to make this happen.

The AIHW collects and uses data from a range of sources—including administrative, census, survey, longitudinal and linked data—to present information on:

- characteristics of people and their needs, and how these change during their lives
- characteristics of the places where people live
- availability and accessibility of health and welfare services in those places
- how the characteristics of people, places and services change over time.

In addition to describing the current picture and trends affecting the health and welfare of the Australian population, a key focus of the AIHW's work is on comparing outcomes for different population groups, including Indigenous Australians, people living in remote areas, older people, people with disability, people with mental illness, children in the child protection and justice systems, and prisoners.

Data standards play a critical role in the meaningful use of data. The AIHW cleans, validates and standardises data to allow comparisons between different population groups and areas and over time.

The AIHW has a strong focus on the presentation of information at the local geographical level, where services and programs are delivered. The aim is to assist local decision makers with planning and policy decisions. The analyses highlight areas and groups where program and service delivery efforts should be focused.

In recognition of the importance of linked data sets in understanding the relationships between health and welfare and outcomes for people, the AIHW is working to expand the availability of longitudinal data by linking cross-sectional data and information about individuals that exist in different data sets and over time. This approach allows the study of the different pathways that people use to access services and can identify the most common pathways. It also allows an understanding of whether, and which, particular services improve outcomes over time. Furthermore, linkage may be useful to understand the early signs of vulnerability to a life of disadvantage.

All linked data sets used for analysis at the AIHW comply with legislative and regulatory standards, are securely stored and accessed, and meet ethical standards and community expectations. Protocols are in place to prevent privacy breaches or the unauthorised identification of individuals, and to ensure data security and restricted access to information.

AIHW provides accurate, reliable and comparable data for service providers to improve service delivery and outcomes for clients

The AIHW strives to makes its data and findings accessible to a range of audiences through the release of many products, including fact sheets, summary reports and detailed reports. The AIHW is improving the accessibility of its data holdings through interactive data visualisation and making data more available in accessible formats. Significant effort is also being dedicated to the creation of a more data-driven AIHW website (for example, GEN Aged Care Data www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au).

One of the key priorities is to build capacity and support service providers to understand and use health and welfare data. To this end, the AIHW provides accurate, reliable and comparable data securely to a range of service providers so they can use the data to improve service delivery and outcomes for their clients.

Finally, a key focus of the AIHW is to fill data gaps as they relate to health and welfare, working with data providers to enhance existing collections or create new ones. Increasingly, this is achieved through the creation of new linked data sets and facilitating access to linked or other unit record data in secure research environments. Through such activities, the broader pool of experts can access the data they need to answer the highest priority policy questions.

Box 1.1 presents a selection of current and recent projects that demonstrate the AIHW's roles in data collection, analysis and reporting or presentation in the context of welfare data.

Box 1.1: Selected recent examples of major AIHW projects involving welfare data

Open and accessible welfare data

AIHW's products and services make data and information about Australia's health and welfare open and accessible. This includes data-centred websites:

• GEN www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au, launched in August 2017, is a comprehensive website for data and information about aged care in Australia.

• Housing data www.housingdata.gov.au, launched in August 2019, presents housing and homelessness related interactive data visualisations, collating around 8 million data points from over 20 key national data assets.

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report (forthcoming).

The AIHW also facilitates researcher access to more granular data while protecting privacy. In addition to AIHW data collections, we also act as a release point for 2 of the Department of Social Services' researchable income support data assets: the Priority Investment Approach (PIA) data set and Data Over Multiple Individual Occurrences (DOMINO).

Value-added analysis of welfare data

The AIHW applies its capability in the health and welfare domains to turn data and information into knowledge and intelligence. Australia's welfare snapshots www.aihw.gov.au/australias-welfare/snapshots uses the people-centred data model to present a comprehensive picture of welfare in Australia. Other recent and forthcoming reports have adopted a similar structure to bring together data from multiple sources, including:

• A profile of Australia's veterans 2018 and 2020 (forthcoming)

• People with disability in Australia 2019

• Australia's children.

The AIHW's value-added analysis is also demonstrated in our collaboration with other organisations. For example, the Healing Foundation commissioned a series of reports about the Stolen Generations and their descendants:

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations and descendants: numbers, demographic characteristics and selected outcomes

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over

• Children living in households with members of the Stolen Generations.

Box 1.1 (continued): Selected recent examples of major AIHW projects involving welfare data

Welfare data improvements though linkage

The AIHW is able to respond to gaps in information and knowledge by linking health and welfare data. This includes enduring multisource data holdings. For example, the first version of the National Health Services Information Analysis Asset has been built. The asset contains de-identified data from 2010–11 to 2016–17 on admitted patient care services (in all public and, where available, private hospitals), emergency department services and outpatient services in public hospitals for all participating states and territories (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania). It also includes national data for the same period from the Medicare Benefits Schedule, Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme as well as Residential Aged Care data and National Deaths Index data.

The AIHW is also using DOMINO, a longitudinal researchable database on income support payments and characteristics, to examine the long-term welfare outcomes and transitions for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. For example:

• children who have experienced out-of-home care—by linking DOMINO with State and Territory out-of-home care data

• young people leaving youth justice supervision—by linking DOMINO with Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set.

Current issues in Australia's welfare

This article has explored the breadth of issues which relate to welfare services and data—recognising the interconnected nature of welfare and wellbeing to social, economic and cultural developments and changes, and gaps in the data landscape. The longer term trends based on indicators of Australia's welfare are useful to understand how we are progressing as a nation. The 7 articles that follow explore issues related to intergenerational disadvantage, income support, the future of work, disability services and data, elder abuse and child wellbeing.

The first 3 articles examine earnings, income support receipt and dependence.

Intergenerational transmission of disadvantage in Australia, by Deborah Cobb-Clark (University of Sydney), explores the transmission of socioeconomic disadvantage (and advantage) from one generation to the next. The article reviews the literature on earnings persistence and welfare receipt in Australia and identifies key data and knowledge gaps. Income inequality in Australia is higher now than it was in the 1980s (though with little change since the mid-2000s) and wealth is more unequally distributed than income. In this context, examining inequality (including income inequality) is important since, as Cobb-Clark notes, rising inequality reduces 'social mobility by making it harder for disadvantaged Australian children to avoid becoming disadvantaged adults'. However, measuring income inequality can be difficult. Intergenerational earnings elasticities—a measure of the extent to which parents' earnings determine children's earnings—are used by economists as indicators of the persistence of economic advantage, but constructing them presents data and methodological challenges. Cobb-Clark explores the methodologies and data used for estimates in different studies. While the Australian evidence for intergenerational earnings persistence has only been available for around 12 years, the Australian evidence for intergenerational welfare receipt first emerged in the 1990s. Intergenerational welfare receipt not only reflects a lack of income, but also low levels of wealth, poor health and inadequate housing. There is evidence of some continuation of social and economic positions from one generation to the next in this country, placing Australia somewhere in the middle in terms of social mobility for developed countries. Cobb-Clark concludes that the understanding of social mobility in Australia is evolving with longitudinal survey and administrative data sets. However, she notes that access to richer and more varied data overseas has allowed for a deeper understanding of intergenerational disadvantage. She concludes that the current Australian evidence is correlational and that to reduce the intergenerational transmission of inequality there needs to be a greater focus on causality so that governments can adopt more effective policy approaches.

In *Income support over the past 20 years*, the AIHW analyses patterns and trends in income support receipt in Australia between 1999 and 2018 for people aged 18–64. The article discusses patterns in income support receipt in relation to key factors that influence its demand and supply; in particular, changes in demographics, economic conditions and social policy. The analysis shows there has been a decline in income support receipt among people aged 18–64 over the past 20 years. Pathways through the system are also examined, focusing on the movement between different payment types. Analysis of a cohort of income support recipients in 2009 found that 56% had also been in receipt of income support in 2000 and 64% received income support in 2018. Understanding these pathways can provide a deeper understanding of how some people interact with the system. The AIHW is using income support data to gain a better understanding of the experiences of, and outcomes for, Australians.

The AIHW also analysed income support data to look at *Income support among working-age Indigenous Australians*. Around half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15–64 received an income support payment in 2016. This article includes detailed analysis of the characteristics of income support recipients, trends in receipt and income support reliance. The analysis of the degree of income support reliance finds that between 2002 and 2008, the mean income support reliance rate was around 70% for Indigenous Australians, increasing to around 77% in 2016. The article also examines long-term receipt of income support and movements between payment types. A group of Indigenous Australians who received income support payments in 2002 were tracked through the data, and just under one-fifth (19%) had left income support by 2014. The AIHW will continue this work on income support receipt and reliance for Indigenous Australians, expanding on the analysis in this article.

Work and paid employment are critical to the welfare (and wellbeing) of Australians.

The nature of work and employment is changing, and has been changing for a number of decades, with the shift in the structure of the economy to one that is increasingly service based. Some of this change relates to increasing automation in jobs. *The future of work: using skills data for better job outcomes*, by the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, looks at changes to job profiles and skills into the future. The article reviews international literature on automation, jobs and skills. It also explores how a granular skills approach using static and dynamic data can offer insights to answer some of the questions about the future of work. Rather than focusing on job loss through automation, the article argues that it is more beneficial to understand the likely changes to jobs and the necessary skills needed for Australia's future labour market and economy. The workforce will need to adapt to job changes and the creation of new jobs. The article notes that skills-based approaches will be helpful in responding to changing demand for skills as a result of technological changes. It explores skills analysis tools and data as means of assisting with job transitions.

The next 2 articles focus on social service areas that are undergoing change (disability services) and emerging as areas of concern (elder abuse).

In *Disability services and statistics: past, present and future*, Rosamond Madden and Richard Madden (University of Sydney) trace the history of disability services, policies and data in Australia. The article highlights the many changes, drivers and key developments from the early 20th century to the present day. The authors look at the interplay of ideas, policy and national data over this period internationally and in Australia. The thinking about disability and attitudes towards people with disability have changed over this period in many parts of the world. This change in the understanding of people with disability and their needs has also seen changes in

government policy on disability services. Support services for people with disability in Australia have evolved over time and culminated in the introduction of the NDIS in 2013. The authors note the opportunities presented by these changes to improve disability services data, in order to better meet the needs of people with disability. The article provides an illustration of how ideas and approaches to social services and policies evolve and change over time, affecting the type of services provided, the understanding of needs, and the need for data for improved services.

Elder abuse has recently come to public attention through media stories and the current Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and is also the focus of various government programs and initiatives, including the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023. The article by Briony Dow and Bianca Brijnath (National Ageing Research Institute), *Elder abuse: context, concepts and challenges*, explores the many issues around elder abuse, including approaches and attempts to address this problem. Elder abuse can include abuse that is financial, psychological, physical, sexual or social, as well as neglect. Dow and Brijnath note that a lot of elder abuse is undetected, especially neglect which can go unnoticed by health and welfare services. The authors explore the cultural dimensions of elder abuse, noting that perceptions, forms and responses to it are culturally mediated. There is a knowledge gap about how elder abuse is experienced cross-culturally, and this has implications for how countries with an ageing and multicultural society, like Australia, are able to respond to it. Risk factors for elder abuse are broad ranging and can include cognitive, physical, psychological and social factors, as well as financial and economic factors. Understanding these risk factors and how to deal with them means appreciating that responding to elder abuse is a complex policy area involving all jurisdictions—cutting across mental health, housing, aged care, banking, legal and substance abuse. Dow and Brijnath discuss some approaches for preventing or stopping elder abuse, but also acknowledge the complexities and that this is an evolving area. The authors note the critical knowledge gaps in this field and the work that is yet to be done, including definitional issues. While there is little in the way of data on elder abuse in Australia, preparation for a prevalence study is underway.

Having more data on disability services and elder abuse would improve our understanding of how best to address the needs of people with disability and people experiencing elder abuse. An example of how data, and especially linked data, can assist in understanding welfare issues and also improve services in these areas is the South Australian Early Childhood Data Project (SA ECDP).

An innovative linked data platform to improve the wellbeing of children—South Australian Early Childhood Development Project, written by a research team at the University of Adelaide, demonstrates the use and the potential of data linkage through the SA ECDP. The article discusses the importance of using public data for public good and illustrates this through the SA ECDP's linking of data sets across various areas to improve child wellbeing. It also looks at the importance of partnerships between governments, universities, researchers, services and communities to achieve these goals. In the past decade, governments in Australia have invested in internal capability to use data to inform policy and service delivery decisions. In 2018, the Australian Government introduced a range of policy and legislative measures to increase the use of public data. The authors write of the need to demonstrate public good in the use of public data, and note that a common theme from the Australian Government is 'enabling public benefit while preserving privacy and security, and building community trust'. Three case studies from the SA ECDP are used to illustrate the value of data linkage and its public good: a public health approach to child maltreatment; describing priority populations with high prevention potential; and redesigning a model of care. It is not just about gathering and analysing data, but about 'returning data to source'. This means giving priority to communicating research findings back to frontline workers who collect and input the data, and increasingly to community groups, where possible. This is essential to any data collection quality-improvement process. The authors also raise questions about how to move forward with partnerships and collaboration between researchers and government. They conclude by noting that a coordinated data infrastructure is required to achieve better child health and welfare outcomes.

These 7 articles highlight the somewhat patchy nature of data about welfare. They also draw to attention that the point is not just about having the data, but what is done with the data and how it can be used to improve health and welfare services for individuals and communities and thereby achieve better outcomes.

Box 1.2: Recent royal commissions and government inquiries

In recent years, royal commissions, government inquiries and reviews have been established to inquire into a range of social issues, including the treatment of people with disability, aged care services, financial services, child abuse and welfare, family violence, welfare dependence, changes in work and education.

Here, we list royal commissions and government inquiries/reviews that relate to issues of particular interest to Australia's welfare. However, this is not an exhaustive list.

Royal commissions

Many of these royal commissions have been high profile and, because of the subject of inquiry, received significant media, public and political attention.

• The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Commonwealth) was announced on 4 April 2019 (Commonwealth of Australia 2019c). It will cover all forms of violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability, in all settings and contexts. A final report is due by April 2022. disability.royalcommission.gov.au

• The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Commonwealth) was established on 8 October 2018 (Commonwealth of Australia 2019a). Its Terms of Reference include inquiring broadly into aged care services and their quality, safety, provision, delivery, sustainability and person-centred focus. The final report is due in April 2020. agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au

• The Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry (Commonwealth) was established on 14 December 2017 and the final report was submitted on 1 February 2019 (Commonwealth of Australia 2019b). financialservices.royalcommission.gov.au

• The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Commonwealth) was announced on 12 November 2012. The final report was submitted on 15 December 2017 (Commonwealth of Australia 2017a). The Royal Commission established a program of research to support its work, including primary research to fill evidence gaps, and more than 100 research projects were undertaken (Wright et al. 2017). Its findings and recommendations have implications for all jurisdictions in Australia. www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

• The Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory was established in August 2016 following a Four Corners investigation into the treatment of children in the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre. The final report was delivered to the Australian Government and Northern Territory Government on 17 November 2017 (Commonwealth of Australia 2017b). www.royalcommission.gov.au/royal-commission-detention-and-protection-children-northern-territory

continued

Box 1.2 (continued): Recent royal commissions and government inquiries

- The Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) was established in February 2015 to inquire into establishing best practice for the prevention, early intervention, support and accountability in relation to family violence (State of Victoria 2016). The final report was presented to the Victorian Government in March 2016. www.rcfv.com.au

Government inquiries and reviews

Inquiries and reviews conducted by parliamentary committees and government agencies do not always receive the same level of public attention as royal commissions. However, they also play an important role examining the effectiveness of laws, regulations and policies, and the impacts and outcomes for individuals and communities, and recommend ways forward.

- The House Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence was appointed on 24 May 2018 to inquire into, and report on, matters about welfare dependence of families and outcomes for children (Parliament of Australia 2019). The final report was submitted in April 2019. www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Intergenerational_Welfare_Dependence

- The Senate Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers was established on 19 October 2017 to inquire into, and report on, the impact of technological and other change on the future of work and workers in Australia (Parliament of Australia 2018). The final report was tabled on 19 September 2018. www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Work_and_Workers/FutureofWork

- The Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into elder abuse, 'Protecting the Rights of Older Australians from Abuse', was announced on 24 February 2016, to examine laws and frameworks that aim to safeguard and protect older persons (ALRC 2017). The final report was tabled on 14 June 2017. Recommendations for a national prevalence study and national plan by the inquiry are being implemented by the Australian Government—see 'Chapter 7 Elder abuse: context, concepts and challenges'. www.alrc.gov.au/inquiries/elder-abuse

Over the past 15 years, there have also been numerous inquiries and reviews (in all states and territories) into various aspects of child protection and child welfare systems, including out-of-home care, abuse, safety, vulnerability and Indigenous children.

Similarly there have been several inquiries and reviews over the past 10 years in most jurisdictions into abuse of older people covering various aspects of abuse.

The Productivity Commission also plays an important role in public inquiries and research studies requested by the government. It contributes by providing quality, independent advice and information to governments, and on the communication of ideas and analysis.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2009. Household use of information technology, 2008–09. ABS cat. no. 8146.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2016. Labour force, Australia: labour force status and other characteristics of families, June 2016. ABS cat. no. 6224.0.55.001. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2017a. Labour force, Australia: labour force status and other characteristics of families, June 2017. ABS cat. no. 6224.0.55.001. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2017b. Personal safety Australia, 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2018a. Australian national accounts: national income, expenditure and product, December 2018. ABS cat. no. 5206.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2018b. Census of Population and Housing: estimating homelessness, 2016. ABS cat. no. 2049.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2018c. Education and work, Australia, May 2018. ABS cat. no. 6227.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2018d. Household use of information technology, 2016–17. ABS cat. no. 8146.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2019a. Crime victimisation, Australia, 2017–18. ABS cat. no. 4530.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2019b. Household income and wealth, Australia, 2017–18. ABS cat. no. 6523.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2019c. Housing occupancy and costs, 2017–18. ABS cat. no. 4130.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2019d. Labour force, Australia, detailed—electronic delivery, Jan 2019. ABS cat. no. 6291.0.55.001. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2019e. Labour force, Australia, Jan 2019. ABS cat. no. 6202.0. Canberra: ABS.

Adeney R 2018. Structural change in the Australian economy. Bulletin—March 2018. Sydney: Reserve Bank of Australia. Viewed 12 June 2019, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2018/mar/structural-change-in-the-australian-economy.html>.

AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) 2019. National enrolment figures by state/territory. Canberra: AEC. Viewed 19 July 2019, <http://www.aec.gov.au/Enrolling_to_vote/Enrolment_stats/national/index.htm>.

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2001. Australia's welfare 2001. Cat. no. AUS 24. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2003. Australia's welfare 2003. Cat. no. AUS 41. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2015. Australia's welfare 2015. Australia's welfare series no. 12. Cat. no. AUS 189. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2017. Australia's welfare 2017. Australia's welfare series no. 13. Cat. no. AUS 214. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2018. Australia's health 2018. Australia's health series no. 16. Cat. no. AUS 221. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2019. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness. Cat. no. HOU 301. Canberra: AIHW.

ALRC (Australian Law Reform Commission) 2017. Elder abuse. Sydney: ALRC. Viewed 11 June 2019, <https://www.alrc.gov.au/inquiries/elder-abuse>.

Arthur D 2015. What counts as welfare spending? Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Services. Viewed 9 May 2019, <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/WelfareSpend>.

Buckmaster L 2009. Money for nothing? Australia in the global middle class welfare debate. Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Services. Viewed 9 May 2019, <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/ZRJT6/upload_binary/zrjt60.pdf>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2017a. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Viewed 15 May 2019, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2017b. Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Viewed 16 May 2019, <https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/royal-commission-detention-and-protection-children-northern-territory>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2018. Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers: hope is not a strategy—our shared responsibility for the future of work and workers. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Commonwealth of Australia 2019a. Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Terms of Reference. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Viewed 15 May 2019, <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/Pages/Terms-of-reference.aspx>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2019b. Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Viewed 15 May 2019, <https://financialservices.royalcommission.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2019c. Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Viewed 16 May 2019, <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) 2019a. Educational attainment and labour-force status (in OECD.Stat). Paris: OECD. Viewed 18 March 2019, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

OECD 2019b. ICT access and usage by households and individuals (in OECD.Stat). Paris: OECD. Viewed 15 May 2019, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

OECD 2019c. Incidence of unemployment by duration (in OECD.Stat). Paris: OECD. Viewed 9 May 2019, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

OECD 2019d. Income distribution and poverty (in OECD.Stat). Paris: OECD. Viewed 15 May 2019, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

OECD 2019e. OECD Better Life Index—edition 2017 (in OECD.Stat). Paris: OECD. Viewed 30 January 2019, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

OECD 2019f. Short-term labour market statistics (in OECD.Stat). Paris: OECD. Viewed 28 February 2019, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

OECD 2019g. Youth unemployment rate in OECD data (in OECD.Stat). Paris: OECD. Viewed 28 February 2019, <http://data.oecd.org>.

OECD (forthcoming 2019). OECD workshop: Harnessing new social data for effective social policy and service delivery, October 2019. Paris: OECD.

Oxford University Press 2019. Oxford living dictionaries: well-being. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Viewed 16 May 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/well-being>.

Parliament of Australia 2018. Future of Work and Workers. Canberra: Parliament of Australia. Viewed 15 May 2019, <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Work_and_Workers/FutureofWork>.

Parliament of Australia 2019. Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence. Canberra: Parliament of Australia. Viewed 15 May 2019, <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Intergenerational_Welfare_Dependence>.

Productivity Commission 2019. Review of the National Disability Agreement, study report. Canberra: Productivity Commission. Viewed 2 July 2019, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/disability-agreement/report/disability-agreement.pdf>.

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2019. Report on government services 2019. Canberra: Productivity Commission.

State of Victoria 2016. Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria). Melbourne: State of Victoria. Viewed 17 May 2019, <http://www.rcfv.com.au>.

University of Minnesota 2019. Chicago Longitudinal Study. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Viewed 20 July 2019, <https://innovation.umn.edu/cls/>.

Wooden M 2017. The changing nature of work and worker wellbeing. In: AIHW. Australia's welfare 2017. Australia's welfare series no. 13. Cat. no. AUS 214. Canberra: AIHW, 145–160.

Wright K, Swain S & McPhillips K 2017. The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Child Abuse & Neglect 74:1–9.