

Executive Summary

By presenting a range of relevant statistics, this report gives an indication of how well children and young people in Queensland are faring. It also allows us to make some observations about differences between groups of children. Data included in *Children and young people in Queensland: a snap shot 2002* revealed that Indigenous children's wellbeing did not match that of non-Indigenous children, and more recent data included in this year's report indicate that this is still the case.

Our scan of available data also reveals gaps around emergent issues such as obesity, and inconsistency in data on social issues such as drug use. While it is acknowledged that it is difficult to collect reliable data on some of these aspects of wellbeing, it is still important that efforts are made to do so, to enable evidence-based decision-making in policy and practice.

The report includes a section on key statistics which provides a list of indicators of the wellbeing of children and young people with short and long term comparisons between Queensland and national data, and with Queensland Indigenous children and young people. It also identifies some positive initiatives which will either increase the evidence base or reflect attempts to address identified issues.

Key findings

Population

- The population of people aged 0 to 17 is projected to increase from 0.9 million in 2001 to 1.1 million in 2051. However, due to the ageing of the population, the proportion of the population aged under 18 is expected to decrease from 26% to 17% over the fifty years.

From Census 2001:

- Indigenous children and young people in Queensland make up a large proportion of the Indigenous population, with Indigenous people aged 0 to 17 being 46% of the Indigenous population in 2001. In comparison, only 26% of the Queensland population was aged 0 to 17.
- Indigenous children and young people made up 6% of 0 to 17 year olds in Queensland.
- 6% of children under 15 had been born overseas.
- 25% of children under 15 had one or both parents born overseas.

Family

- While most children under 15 lived in intact couple families (71%) in 2001, 19% lived with single mothers, 2% with single fathers, and 8% in step or blended families.
- The proportion of children living with single parents has been increasing. In 1987, 12.7% of Australian children aged 0 to 14 were living in one parent families, but this increased to 20.5% in 2002.
- Nationally, estimated completed fertility decreased from an average of 2.8 children born per woman aged 40 to 44 in 1981 to 2.2 children in 2001. Looking only at women aged 40 to 44 who have had at least one child, the average completed fertility rate was 2.6 children per woman in 2001 (down from 3.1 in 1981).
- The total fertility rate (i.e. the average number of babies a woman would be expected to bear during her reproductive lifetime based on current fertility rates) was 1.8 in 2001 in Queensland, compared with the national rate of 1.7. The Queensland fertility rate has decreased from 1.9 in 1991.
- Almost one in five Indigenous babies were born to teenage mothers in 2001 (604 or 18% of Indigenous births), with a rate of one birth for every 13 Indigenous women aged 15 to 19 years. In comparison, 2,905 or 6% of births in the Queensland population were to teenage mothers, or a rate of one birth for every 44 women aged 15 to 19 years.
- Exnuptial births have been increasing steadily in recent years, although this is likely to have been linked to an increase in births to mothers in de facto marriages. In 2001 31% of births were exnuptial compared to 10% in 1981.
- 65% of Indigenous births were exnuptial in 2001. A proportion of these births will have occurred in de facto marriages, and for Indigenous women, some form of tribal or traditional marriage may have occurred.

Health

- The most common long term conditions experienced by children and young people in 2001 were asthma (12% of 0 to 6 year olds and 14% of 0 to 17 year olds), and hayfever and allergic rhinitis (3% of 0 to 6 year olds and 8% of 0 to 17 year olds).
- In 1998, 14% of boys 5 to 14 and 8% of girls 5 to 14 had a disability which may have restricted communication, mobility, self care, or schooling.

In 2001-02:

- The main injury-related hospitalisations for 0 to 4 year olds were for falls (697 per 100,000 population), poisoning (342 per 100,000) and burns and scalds (318 per 100,000).
- The main injury-related hospitalisations for 5 to 14 year olds were for falls (809 per 100,000 population) and transport accidents (384 per 100,000).
- The main injury-related hospitalisations for 15 to 24 year olds were for transport accidents (734 per 100,000 population), falls (389 per 100,000), assault (344 per 100,000) and intentional self-harm (293 per 100,000).

In 2001:

- 21% of Indigenous babies were born in remote or very remote areas, where access to medical facilities may be difficult.
- Around 7% of babies had a low birthweight (under 2,500g), and 8% were born before 37 weeks.
- 12% of Indigenous babies were born with a low birthweight.
- The World Health Organisation recommends exclusive breastfeeding of babies for the first six months. In Queensland, 41% of children aged 0 to 3 in 2001 were breastfed for less than six months or had not been breastfed.

Deaths

- Improvements in medical treatment, motor vehicle and pool safety, the availability of immunisation and in our understanding of factors which reduce SIDS, have seen mortality rates decreasing in recent decades.
- Indigenous mortality rates are about twice the rate for non-Indigenous children and young people. Due to under-reporting of Indigenous status, Indigenous mortality rates are likely to be underestimated.
- There were 21 stillbirths and deaths within the first 28 days of life (perinatal deaths) per 1,000 Indigenous births in 1998-2000 compared to 10 per 1,000 non-Indigenous births.
- In 2001 the infant mortality rate in Queensland was six deaths per 1,000 live births. Based on the three years to 2001, the Indigenous infant mortality rate was twice that of the general population, at 12 deaths per 1,000.
- The Indigenous mortality rate for 1 to 17 year olds was 0.48 per 1,000 population in the five years to 2001 compared to the non-Indigenous rate of 0.23 deaths per 1,000.
- Although deaths from SIDS have decreased since the late 1980s, they still made up 10% of all deaths of children under one year old in 2001.
- Young people aged 15 to 19 years are in one of the highest risk groups for deaths in transport accidents.
- Young men suicide at around four times the rate for young women.
- Indigenous young people had suicide rates at around six times that in the non-Indigenous population.

Child protection

- In recent years the key measures of child protection have shown large increases.
- Eight children per 1,000 aged 0 to 17 years had substantiated harm or risk of harm in 2001-02.
- 3,765 children were on protection orders on 30 June 2002, and 3,257 were in out-of-home care.

In 2001-02:

- Children in single parent, step or blended families or with young parents were at higher risk of child abuse or neglect.
- A quarter of all children with substantiated child abuse or neglect (25%) were also the subject of a second substantiation within 12 months.
- 3.8% of children in out-of-home care had substantiated abuse or neglect where the person believed responsible was the carer or another person living in the household.

Child care

In June 2002:

- At least half of children aged 2 to 4 years were in formal child care, with most of these in long day care centres or preschools (4 to 5 year olds).
- More than half of children in long day care used the care for less than 20 hours each week.
- 32% of children in long day care were there for 20 to 39 hours per week, and 5% were in care for 40 hours or more.
- At least a quarter of children were cared for by informal carers, particularly from grandparents. Around two thirds of children aged 1 to 5 years received some child care from their grandparents.
- There has been an increasing trend for mothers to return to work while their children are still young.

Education

In 2002:

- Apparent retention to Year 12 increased from 77% of high school students in 2000 to 81% in 2002.
- Indigenous students were less likely to stay at school until Year 12, with an apparent retention rate of only 56%.
- Indigenous students had lower mean scores than non-Indigenous students in the statewide literacy and numeracy tests in Years 3, 5 and 7. On average, rural students did not do as well as urban students, although the higher proportion of Indigenous students in rural areas would contribute to this result.
- An estimated 93% of Year 3 students and 83% of Year 5 students met the national reading benchmarks.
- An estimated 92% of Year 3 students and 89% of Year 5 students met the national numeracy benchmark standards.

Social

- 29% of secondary school students aged over 14 were in part-time employment in 2001, and 5% were looking for work.
- There were two fatal injury worker's compensation claims in 2001-02 for employees aged under 20 years and 133 claims for permanent/severe injuries.
- 22% of females aged 14 to 19 and 14% of males reported smoking daily in 2001.
- It was estimated that there were around 6,400 homeless young people aged 12 to 18 in Queensland in 2001.

In 2001-02:

- Assault victimisation of children and young people was higher for males than females and increased with increasing age.
- Females were more likely to be victims of sexual offences than males.
- For offending, male offending rates are much higher than for females, although female rates have been increasing more quickly than the male rate in recent years.
- Theft and shoplifting accounted for 31% of offences committed by juveniles (aged 10 to 16).
- 15% of juvenile offences were unlawful entry and 13% were property damage.
- 53% of offences committed by juveniles were dealt with in court proceedings and cautions were issued for 43%.
- At 30 June 2002, the Indigenous youth detention rate was around ten times the Queensland average, with a rate of 226 per 100,000 Indigenous population aged 10 to 17 compared to the Queensland rate of 22.7 per 100,000.