

# 1 Introduction

This report, the third in the Snapshot series produced by the Commission, is intended to provide an overview of the main aspects of and trends in the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland.

The first Snapshot report released by the Commission in 2002, explored the concept of indicators of health and wellbeing and the literature around this. It provided statistics on a range of issues relating to children and young people, as well as highlighting the difficulties of measuring general health and wellbeing, particularly the limitations and the usefulness of available administrative data. The second and this third report do not revisit that analysis. Following the first Snapshot subsequent reports focus on presenting available data and updates, and expand on the profiles in the first report.

This report has a number of purposes. First, by bringing together existing data, it provides a unique composite picture of the health and wellbeing of Queensland's children and young people. Secondly, additional data allow for comparisons over time, national and Queensland comparisons and comparisons with Indigenous children and young people – our most vulnerable group. These holistic insights can provide a basis for decision-making. Thirdly, by identifying gaps in data around significant issues, the report points the way for changes needed in data collection. Finally, information on complementary resources is included for those interested in more general community indicators, and on recent significant initiatives designed to meet identified needs either in data collection or service delivery.

Snapshot 2005 uses the most recently available information on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. However, not all information is updated annually, with key examples being the Census and survey data on health and child care. To ensure the report can be used as a 'stand alone' document that provides a comprehensive picture of children and young people, some information has been repeated from the previous Snapshot where more recent data is unavailable.

New sources of information included in this Snapshot fill some of the gaps identified in previous Snapshots – although in some cases the gaps have been filled using national data where Queensland data are unavailable. Some areas not covered in this report may be included in future Snapshots when suitable data are accessible – for example, the oral and mental health of children and young people. The report has been structured into chapters which focus on particular categories considered to be 'indicators' of wellbeing. It summarises available data and provides some analysis of trends in those areas.

Chapter 2, Key statistics, provides a list of indicators of the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the form of tables on: population and families; health and mortality; child care and education; and child abuse, crime and social problems. It focuses on significant areas of concern across all aspects of health and wellbeing and allows for short and long term comparisons on these indicators, and comparisons with Indigenous children and young people. The poor comparative health and wellbeing of Queensland Indigenous children and young people emerges very clearly from this data.

In this chapter, data from one and 10 years before are included as a comparison (where available) giving the reader an indication of trends. This also includes national data as a basis for comparison, whereas later chapters focus specifically on Queensland. The data in Chapter 2 will be updated in each subsequent Snapshot, and the gaps that exist in the current data are expected to be filled over time.

Chapter 3, Population, primarily uses information from Census 2001 to provide a demographic snapshot of children and young people in Queensland, covering various age profiles and cultural diversity. Maps produced from regional Census data illustrate the distribution of particular focus groups – young children, Indigenous children, and children in single parent families. In addition, projections of population change over the next 50 years allow us to consider the impact of the ageing population.

Chapter 4, Family, relies predominantly on births and divorce data released each year by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to examine the changing nature of family structures – in fertility rates, the age at which parents have babies and the prevalence of single parent or blended families.

Chapter 5, Health, draws on data from several sources. The sections on health and disability status rely on survey data which can only be updated periodically. Other sections look at injury-related hospitalisations, risk factors such as remote births, low birth weight and short gestation and protective factors such as immunisation and breast-feeding. Recently released national data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children have been added, with information on breastfeeding practices and levels of obesity in children.

Chapter 6, Deaths, considers trends in mortality rates by age and Indigenous status, and the leading causes of death in children and young people, particularly from external causes, such as drowning and transport accidents.

Children and young people at risk of child abuse or neglect are of particular concern to the Commission. Chapter 7, Child Protection, looks in detail at the characteristics of children and young people in the child protection system, rates of substantiated abuse and neglect, rates of re-substantiation, and the use of protection orders and out-of-home care. Information has been obtained from the Department of Child Safety and from national reports on child protection systems from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Productivity Commission.

The data in Chapter 8, Child Care, are based on the national Child Care Survey, and include the type of care provided, the ages of children in care, the hours spent in care, and the need for additional care. The Productivity Commission reports allow us to establish trends in the use of registered child care services and registered carers.

Data have been drawn from several sources for Chapter 9, Education, which includes statistics on participation and retention to Year 12, academic achievement as measured by statewide testing in Years 3, 5 and 7, and on disciplinary absences. As well as comparisons by sex, Indigenous status and language background have also been presented where available.

Chapter 10, Social, brings together available statistics on youth employment, the use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, homelessness, the use of Kids Help Line, victimisation and youth offending.

Many aspects of community wellbeing impact on the whole population, such as crime levels, access to services, feelings of safety, alcohol abuse, community cohesion or conflict, economic hardship and unemployment. These factors all contribute to the health and wellbeing of children and young people. However, only some are included in this report, as the more general community indicators can be found in other reports such as the *Priorities in Progress* series (Queensland Treasury), and national series such as *Australia's Health*, *Australia's Wellbeing* (both from the AIHW) and *Australian Social Trends* (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

The final chapter of this report looks at some of the positive moves underway to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people, and at areas where there are information gaps which need to be addressed.