

**Policy Environment Scan
February 2009**

Source	Topic	Content
Call for Response (i.e Submission, Discussion Paper, Consultation Paper, Review, Inquiry)		
National Centre for Education and Training of Addiction http://www.nceta.flinders.edu.au/projects/new_projects.html#RoleSchoolsAlcohol	<i>The Role of Schools in Alcohol Education project.</i> Responses close 3 April 2009	The National Centre for Education and Training of Addiction has been commissioned by the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to examine the role of schools in alcohol education. This project is part of the Australian Government's "National Binge Drinking Initiative" and intends to develop practical recommendations to support further work of alcohol education by schools based on comprehensive research and interviews with experts and key stakeholders. Public submissions are also being sought from relevant stakeholders to inform the review.
Australian Institute of Family Studies http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/consult.html	Research plan 2009-2012	The Australian Institute of Family Studies is currently developing a 2009-2012 Research Plan, which will guide the Institute's research activities over these years and replace the 2006-08 Research Plan, 'Families Through Life: Diversity, Change and Context'. Development of the 2009-12 Research Plan is being undertaken in consultation with a wide range of government departments at all levels, universities, peak bodies and community sector organisations. Online and face-to-face consultation is occurring. Online consultation closes 11 March 2009 and views are being sought in relation to the following topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children, young people and their families • family transitions and family law • families and work • violence, abuse and neglect, and • social inclusion.
Research Findings, Reports and Policy papers, etc		
Criminology Research Council http://www.criminologyresearchcouncil.gov.au/reports/200405-04.html	<i>Getting the story in forensic interviews with child witnesses : applying a story grammar framework,</i> Snow, P. and Powell, M. March 2007	<p><i>Abstract.</i> Increased rates of child abuse reporting over recent years have resulted in closer attention being paid to the interviewing techniques employed by police and human services staff to elicit the child's account of alleged abuse incidents. Such accounts are commonly elicited under Video and Audiotaped Evidence conditions and form a crucial component of a prosecution case against an alleged offender.</p> <p>Serious and pervasive problems with such accounts have been identified and key amongst these is the fact that interviewers seem to rely too heavily on specific questioning, in spite of the fact that best-practice international guidelines emphasise the importance of using open-ended questions that promote free narrative on the part of the child.</p> <p>The aim of this research was to evaluate a representative sample of child abuse interviews from the field using a narrative framework derived from the field of linguistics. The authors examine the concept of 'free narrative' from a linguistic, rather than an eye-witness memory perspective. They review relevant literature on the composition of a linguistically intact narrative, and examine the extent to which current police interviewing practices are successful at eliciting a narrative account that is linguistically coherent. Fifty-one de-identified transcripts of police interviews with children formed the basis of the analysis.</p> <p>Overall, there are three main recommendations arising from this work.</p>

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		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trainers need to increase awareness among investigative interviewers of the importance of eliciting story grammar and the role of open-ended questions in doing this 2. Police organisations need to work with experts to develop more effective training packages that optimise interviewers' ability to acquire and maintain an open-ended questioning style, and 3. Researchers should extend work in this area by investigating the relationship between different types of open-ended questions and the production of various story grammar elements across various age groups.
<p>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</p> <p>http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10682</p>	<p><i>Adoptions Australia 2007-08</i></p> <p>February 2009</p>	<p>'Adoptions Australia 2007-08', the 18th report in the series, presents data on the patterns and trends in adoptions in Australia. The report includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data on all finalised adoptions recorded by state and territory community services departments for the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 • data on the different categories of adoption in 2007–08, including the characteristics of adopted children and their adoptive families, and • data on the number of requests made for information about an adoption and the number of contact and information vetoes lodged for the same period are also presented. <p>Key findings from the report include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there were 440 adoptions in Australia—the lowest number of adoptions recorded since 1969–70, and a 23% decline from the previous year. • of the 440 adoptions in 2007–08, 61% were intercountry, 16% were local and 23% were 'known' child adoptions • the majority of intercountry and local adoptions were of children under five years whereas the majority of 'known' adoptions were of children 10 years and over • four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were adopted in 2007–08. All were adopted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. Only 96 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been adopted over the last 17 years, and • of the 440 adoptions in 2007-08, Queensland had 86 adoptions.
<p>National Child Protection Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Family Studies</p> <p>http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/</p>	<p><i>NCPASS comparability of child protection data Project report</i>, Holzer, P. and Bromfield, L.</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>The Australian Institute of Family Studies was contracted by the National Child Protection and Support Services (NCPASS) Data Group to undertake the Review of Data Comparability Project ("the Project"). The aims of the Project were to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine the rates of total notifications, investigations and substantiations, and the rates of children on orders and in out-of-home care for the period 2000–01 to 2005–06 • analyse the differences in rates <i>across</i> jurisdictions, and the differences in rates over time <i>within</i> jurisdictions, and • identify and assess factors that may explain differences in rates across jurisdictions and within jurisdictions over time. <p>The report summarises that the Queensland statutory children protection system on the whole increased over the past five years. Factors identified as likely to have contributed to the increases observed in the rates of total notifications, investigations and substantiations and the rates of children on orders and in out-of-home care between 2000–01 and 2004–05 included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prominent reviews of child protection and the Queensland Government's highly visible responses to the findings of such reviews (i.e., the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, and the Queensland Government's move to create a separate department responsible for child protection)

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • threshold differences arising from scrutiny of child protection practice, and • changes in recording practices. <p>The report also identifies that the rates in Queensland of total notifications, investigations and substantiations decreased in the 2005–06 reporting period. This decrease in comparison to the 2004–05 reported rates was largely attributed to changes in recording practices and investigation policy (i.e., in 2005–06 child concern reports were removed from the count of total notifications and a policy requiring all notifications to proceed to investigation was introduced).</p>
<p>Brotherhood of St Laurence</p> <p>http://www.apo.org.au/linkboard/results.chtml?filena me_num=258051</p>	<p><i>The Cottage service for highly disadvantaged children in Fitzroy</i> A review, Boese, M., Stanley, J., Baker, C., and Hughes, J.</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>This report evaluates the Cottage Centre for Families and Children (the Centre) in Melbourne prior to its restructure in November 2005. The Centre provided integrated services for some of the most disadvantaged families, focusing on the early years from infancy to school-age where there was concern about the child's development and/or behaviour. Parenting programs were also provided for families where parenting capacity was diminishing.</p> <p>The report identifies positive outcomes for children in all areas of development as well as improvements in the wellbeing and skills of parents. Overall, the Centre is identified as being unique in providing a holistic family support service for disadvantaged families and was an effective model for assisting families with complex needs.</p>
<p>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</p> <p>http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10522</p>	<p><i>Homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in SAAP 2006-07</i></p> <p>January 2009</p>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up a significant proportion of SAAP clients. This report takes a closer look at these clients including the reasons why they seek support, what they needed and received while supported, and what their outcomes were. Some of the findings from the report include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during 2006-07 37,800 Indigenous Australians attended a SAAP agency and of these, 20,100 were clients and 17,700 were accompanying children • a greater proportion of Indigenous clients were female (72%) than for non-Indigenous clients (59%) • Indigenous clients were generally younger than non-Indigenous clients, with a median age of 28 years compared with 30 years, and • domestic or family violence was the single main reason for seeking SAAP assistance.
<p>Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association Ltd (AICAFMHA)</p> <p>http://www.aicafmha.net.au/youth_participation/index.html</p>	<p><i>National Youth Participation Strategy in Mental Health Scoping Project Report</i></p> <p>2008</p>	<p>AICAFMHA received funding from the Australian Government under the National Mental Health Strategy (NMHS) to develop the National Youth Participation Strategy in Mental Health Scoping Project Report (the Project Report). The purpose of this project was to develop an effective and systematic process for the voice of young people to be heard in relation to programs funded under the NMHS and National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS). Outcomes of the project identified in the Project Report include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a charter to guide development of any model or mechanism of youth participation for programs under the NMHS or NSPS • a proposed 3 step model of youth participation and engagement incorporating concepts involving base level consultation, influence and negotiation through to youth involvement in decision making and leadership • introducing the concept of an 'information hub' coordinated by a central supporting organisation to facilitate and advance youth participation in mental health, and • identifying strategies for action at a national policy level, such as Australian mental health policy be cognisant of the unique needs of children and young people as carers of adult mental health service consumers.

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		<p>The AICAFMHA also received funding to work with <i>headspace</i> (the National Youth Mental Health Foundation) to develop the following related factsheets:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Benefits of youth participation 2. Challenges of youth participation 3. A-Z of encouraging youth participation 4. Guiding charter 5. Supports required for youth participation, and 6. Models and methods – how to involve young people.
<p>UNICEF</p> <p>http://www.unicef.org/sowc09/report/report.php</p>	<p><i>The State of the World's Children 2009</i></p>	<p>This report examines issues in maternal and newborn health and explores policies, programs and partnerships aimed at improving maternal and neonatal health. A key part of which is establishing a comprehensive continuum of care for mothers, newborns and children. This involves providing accessible and essential services in integrated packages at critical points in the lifecycle of mothers. As well as establishing a continuum of care, the report also identifies that improving maternal and neonatal health is underpinned by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a supportive environment • strengthening health systems, and • a collaborative approach. <p>The report also highlights the divide in maternal and newborn health between industrialised countries, developing countries and the least developed countries with a key focus on Africa and Asia. Together these two continents account for 95 per cent of maternal deaths and around 90 per cent of newborn deaths.</p>
<p>Australian Government</p> <p>http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/indigenous/closing_the_gap/closing_the_gap.pdf</p>	<p><i>Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage: The Challenge for Australia</i></p> <p>February 2009</p>	<p>This is the first Annual Report on <i>Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage: the Challenge for Australia</i> which was released on 26 February 2009 to mark the one-year anniversary of the National Parliament's apology to the Stolen Generations. The report details the Australian Government's approach to Closing the Gap and describes progress in the first year and sets out future priorities. The report details the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the challenge ahead for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage based on evidence • identifying that the gaps most visible are in the key areas of life expectancy, infant and child mortality, early childhood education, literacy and numeracy skills, school completion rates and employment outcomes • commitments made through COAG by Australian, state and territory governments to Close the Gap • consulting and partnering with Indigenous communities and community and corporate sectors to achieve targets to Close the Gap • priorities for 2009 include the Australian Government continuing a strong focus on the needs of remote Indigenous communities, improving health outcomes for Indigenous Australian, improving employment opportunities and the job readiness of Indigenous Australians, working with Indigenous Australians to establish a national Indigenous representative body and continuing to address the needs of the Stolen Generations and assist healing in the Indigenous community more generally.
<p>Family Law Web Guide</p> <p>http://www.familylawwebguide.com.au/news/pg/news/view/587</p>	<p><i>Child Custody, Access, and Parental Responsibility: The Search for a Just and Equitable</i></p>	<p>This paper analyses child custody and access policy in family law focusing on the new discourse which has emerged of 'parental responsibility' and the limitations of the dominant 'parental rights' discourse. The paper aims to shift the discourse to a responsibility-based framework focused on children's needs rather than the rights of the parents. The paper advocates for shared parental responsibility in instances where violence and child abuse is not present arguing that the policy of granting sole custody in cases where child abuse or violence is not present increases the risk of post-separation violence in families with</p>

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	<p><i>Standard,</i> Kruk, E.</p> <p>December 2008</p>	<p>no previous history of violence.</p> <p>The following four pillar approach to the shared parental responsibility model of child custody determination is proposed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Legal presumption of shared parental responsibility (rebuttable presumption of joint physical custody in family law) (harm reduction). 2. Parenting plans, mediation, and support/intervention in high conflict cases (treatment). 3. Shared parenting education (prevention). 4. Judicial determination in cases of established abuse; enforcement of shared parental responsibility orders (enforcement).
<p>Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse</p> <p>http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/</p>	<p><i>The idealised post-separation family in Australian family law: A dangerous paradigm in cases of domestic violence,</i> Hart, A. and Bagshaw, D.</p> <p>Journal of Family Studies Volume 14, Issues 2-3, October 2008</p>	<p>This article presents the findings of a research study which analyses 20 First Instance unpublished judgements in contested contact cases from the Adelaide registry of the Family Court where the Court acknowledged the presence of domestic violence.</p> <p>The qualitative research identified how Judges constructed children's best interests following the introduction of the <i>Family Law Reform Act 1995 (Reform Act)</i> even in cases where children had witnessed domestic violence.</p> <p>The key findings were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of Fathers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 46.6% of the judgements acknowledged that serious violence by the fathers towards the mothers had occurred - In all of the 20 judgements analysed, the Judges expressed concerns about the effects of the absence of the fathers on their children's lives - 35% of the Judges expressed sympathy for fathers 'disadvantaged', 'regrettable' or 'tragic' situations and for the 'much sorrow' and 'hurt' caused by mothers who were described as powerful in achieving 'unjust' and 'unfair outcomes' for violent fathers who had lost contact with their children, and - 65% of the judgements revealed that violent husbands were described as 'loving fathers'. • Role of Mothers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 75% of Judges' statements implied that they were critical of mothers' departures from a normative, gendered expectation that they should be compliant, self-sacrificing, loyal and responsible for family relationships. • Children's incompetence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children and those who are in their adolescence who opposed contact with their parent were constructed as being incompetent to know what was in their best interests. Their account of parent-child relationships in the violent families was often discounted, and - 62.5 % of the judgements only accepted children's wishes for no contact after social science 'experts' acknowledged the deterioration of the children's wellbeing from repeated attempts by the Court to successfully impose father-child contact orders. • Children's exposure to violence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children analysed presented with a wide range of non-age related social, emotional, learning and behavioural problems which were consistent with the criteria for Post Traumatic

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		<p>Stress Disorder (PTSD). These symptoms were not recognised or did not even alert the Judges and other professionals to the possibility that witnessing parental violence and/or spending time with a violent father may pose further risks to the children concerned</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Court, however, acknowledged that 45% of the children have at least witnessed or have been present in a violent event. 75% of these children were found to have been exposed to violence perpetrated by their fathers - Judges and social science professionals have made numerous references to the concept of childhood 'resilience', where children were expected to 'cope' or learn to 'deal with' the 'ramifications' of time spent with their violent fathers, or in one judgement with the violent mother, and - There was a failure to focus on the effects of children's exposure to domestic violence which meant that the children's lived experiences of violence were not effectively acknowledged or dealt with in the judicial determinations.
Events/Seminars		
<p>Australian Youth Forum</p> <p>http://www.youth.gov.au/ayf</p>	<p>youTHINK</p> <p>20 February 2009</p>	<p>The first Australian Youth Forum event, youTHINK, was held at 10 different locations throughout metropolitan and regional Australia hooked up by a nationwide satellite link. This event was hosted by the Minister for Youth, Kate Ellis, and enabled hundreds of young Australians aged between 15 and 24 to voice their views on 'violence and safety' and 'contributing to our democracy'. Those unable to attend youTHINK could contribute through the Australian Youth Forum website or host their own forum. The importance of communicating in ways which are accessible to young people in order to reach out to every young Australian was highlighted by forum participants. This included using digital media such as YouTube and Facebook.</p> <p>The following key points were provided from participants in the discussion about 'violence and safety':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need for better understanding between young people and authority figures like the police, through training • the need for awareness raising campaigns about violence and the links with alcohol abuse, and • because young people are more exposed to the media then ever before, they are also more exposed to violence and its impact. <p>Discussion about 'contributing to our democracy' included the following key points from participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making our democracy relevant and accessible for young people, including by learning more about it at school • involving young people in decisions about their shared future, as well as making our system of government more relevant and meaningful to them, and • improving the participation of young people in the electoral process such as through better enrolment process and lowering the voting age.
<p>Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission</p> <p>http://www.humanrightscouncil.com.au/</p>	<p>2009 Human Rights Conference</p> <p>16 and 17 March 2009, Melbourne</p>	<p>Participants will hear from human rights advocates and engage in discussions on protecting human rights. It is intended that participants will gain a broader understanding of human rights as it applies to Australians, particularly youth and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.</p>

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<p>Generation Next</p> <p>http://www.gennextseminars.com/index.html</p>	<p>A public seminar understanding the unique health and wellbeing challenges of Generations Y and Z and how these challenges can be met.</p> <p>5 September 2009, Brisbane</p>	<p>Generation Next is being conducted by Healthed (a Sydney-based provider of medical education conferences) in partnership with beyondblue. It is anew national seminar series exploring the unique pressures, needs and healthcare and sociological challenges facing Australian teenagers, adolescents, parents and anyone working with young people.</p> <p>The upcoming seminar will focus on topics relating to drugs and alcohol, cybersafety, mental health and sexuality.</p>
Media Releases/Speeches		
<p>The Honourable Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</p> <p>http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/indigenous_forum_30jan09.htm</p>	<p>Speech to the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (Indigenous forum)</p> <p>30 January 2009</p>	<p>In this speech the Minister announces the opening of the first of 22 safe places in the Northern Territory offering short-term crisis accommodation for women and children and men's cooling off places. The Minister also highlights the development of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children and the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.</p>
<p>The Honourable Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</p> <p>http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/community_child_health_16feb09.htm</p>	<p>Speech to the 2009 National Investment for the Early Years and Centre for Community Child Health Conference</p> <p>16 February 2009</p>	<p>In her speech, the Minister highlights that the new Family Support Program will replace the Communities for Children Program which currently provides early intervention and prevention approaches to child protection and development. It is proposed that the Family Support Program, through one-stop parent and child centres, will focus on combating social exclusion, building stronger families and providing earlier interventions for children at risk of abuse and neglect.</p>