

The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian provides this information as a service to stakeholders. The content or opinions are those of the contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission.

## CONTENTS

(click on Item No. to follow link)

### 1. Reports, Research Papers, Policy Initiatives etc

#### 1.1 Child Protection

- 1.1.1 Child deaths – fatal assault and neglect
- 1.1.2 Alcohol misuse and child maltreatment
- 1.1.3 Therapeutic residential care in Australia
- 1.1.4 Protecting children: Evolving systems
- 1.1.5 Child protection Australia 2010-11
- 1.1.6 National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children: Perspectives on progress and challenges

#### 1.2 Law and Youth Justice

- 1.2.1 Just Futures Strategy 2012 – 2015: Growing community, family, opportunity and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders
- 1.2.2 Exploring Indigenous and non-Indigenous sentencing in Queensland
- 1.2.3 Diverting young Indigenous people from the Queensland youth justice system: The use and impact of police diversionary practices and alternatives for reducing Indigenous over-representation

#### 1.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

- 1.3.1 Indigenous Child Placement Principle audit report 2010/11
- 1.3.2 The subjective wellbeing of Indigenous Australian adolescents: Validating the Personal Wellbeing Index-School Children

#### 1.4 Early Years

- 1.4.1 Promoting positive education and care transitions for children

#### 1.5 Education

- 1.5.1 Overcoming barriers to education: Peninsula Youth Connections evaluation stage 1 report

#### 1.6 Health and Wellbeing

- 1.6.1 The neurobiological effects of childhood mistreatment: An often overlooked narrative related to the long-term effects of early childhood trauma?
- 1.6.2 Reviewing the evidence on the effectiveness of early childhood intervention
- 1.6.3 Child deaths – suicide intent
- 1.6.4 Snapshot 2011: Children and young people in Queensland

#### 1.7 Society and Culture

- 1.7.1 Young carers: Social policy impacts of the caring responsibilities of children and young adults

### 2. Submissions Prepared by the Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians

- 2.1 Response to A National Children's Commissioner Discussion Paper

## 1. Reports, Research Papers, Policy Initiatives etc

### 1.1 Child Protection

**1.1.1 Child deaths – fatal assault and neglect.** Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Trends and Issues Paper 2, January 2012.

The Commission's second child death Trends and Issues Paper examines the issue of fatal assault and neglect in children and young people in Queensland. The Commission's research in this area has led to a revised categorisation system for assault and neglect deaths. Eight event categories are described: neonaticide; fatal child abuse; fatal neglect; domestic homicide; peer homicide; intimate partner homicide; acquaintance homicide; and stranger homicide. Data is examined for the 60 child fatal assault and neglect deaths recorded in Queensland between 2004 and 2011, showing fatal child abuse (33.3%) and domestic homicide (26.7%) to be the most common categories of assault and neglect death.

[http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/pdf/publications/papers/trends-and-issues/Issues-Paper-No-2-FAN-draft-5\\_design\\_DC.pdf](http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/pdf/publications/papers/trends-and-issues/Issues-Paper-No-2-FAN-draft-5_design_DC.pdf)

[Back to Contents](#)

**1.1.2 Alcohol misuse and child maltreatment.** Meredith, V. & Price-Robertson, R. National Child Protection Clearinghouse, December 2011.

This resource sheet discusses the guidelines for safe alcohol consumption for adults, the effects of alcohol on parenting behaviours, and the relationship between alcohol abuse and child maltreatment. About 13% of Australian children live with at least one adult who misuses alcohol, with Australian child protection agencies reporting alcohol abuse as an important contributor in many child protection cases.

While the National Health and Medical Research Council provides a set of guidelines for alcohol use and health risks for adults, more specific guidelines on what constitutes risky drinking in relation to actively parenting children are not available. The authors suggest that excessive alcohol consumption may negatively impact on parenting styles through mood swings and inconsistent parenting. Binge drinking or long-term alcohol misuse may also impair a parent's capacity to manage daily living skills, or support children's school attendance and academic performance, or meet their children's emotional needs.

The authors discuss research linking parental alcohol misuse with various types of maltreatment. Some findings include:

- The link between alcohol misuse and child maltreatment is not specific to particular socio-economic or cultural groups.
- Alcohol misuse features prominently in the physical abuse of children and is strongly associated with traumatic brain injuries in young children.
- Parental alcohol misuse is associated with psychological abuse with parents often failing to provide the emotional support needed by a child, or forcing children to take on responsibilities beyond their level of maturity.
- Parental alcohol misuse increases the risk of a child suffering physical and/or emotional neglect. Alcohol is a contributing factor in the chronic maltreatment of children who lack cognitive stimulation and emotional nurturing.
- Parents who consume excessive amounts of alcohol may fail to notice others' predatory behaviour towards their children, increasing their children's risk of sexual abuse.
- There is a strong association between alcohol misuse and domestic violence, which most often involves violence perpetrated by men against women, and occurs more often in couples with children.

The authors conclude that child maltreatment associated with alcohol misuse is a significant and under-reported problem in Australia. More research is needed on the impact of alcohol misuse on parenting capacity for adults from all walks of life, and to identify how best to respond to this problem.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs27/index.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

**1.1.3 Therapeutic residential care in Australia.** McLean, S., Price-Robertson, R., & Robinson, E. National Child Protection Clearinghouse, November 2011.

Therapeutic residential care (TRC) is becoming an increasingly relevant out-of-home care option for children and young people with multiple and complex needs. It is a new and developing approach in Australia, one aimed not simply at containment of the 'hard cases' – as is often the case in traditional residential care – but rather at actively facilitating

healing and recovery from the effects of abuse, neglect and separation from family.

In this issues paper, TRC is described and contrasted with other models of out-of-home care. The theory and evidence supporting the use of this form of care are examined and used to develop a set of key elements which, the authors argue, should guide the provision of TRC in Australia.

Key points highlighted in this issues paper include:

- TRC is a response to the unique population, geography, economic constraints and out-of-home care landscape that exist in Australia. While TRC is a new model of service provision, it does share a number of components with some other out-of-home care models that have been used internationally. Although it sits at the more 'intrusive' and support-intensive end of the continuum of out-of-home care, there are moves to position TRC as a mainstream placement option rather than simply a 'last resort' for the hardest cases.
- TRC is underpinned by a number of models that, taken together, serve to focus attention on staff and services being trauma-informed and providing consistent high-quality relationships. This kind of conceptual work has greatly facilitated the shift to viewing residential care as a potentially therapeutic form of support rather than a 'last resort'. However, these models and theories are often unable to produce concrete guidance for developing therapeutic interventions and there is currently limited evidence supporting the overall efficacy of TRC.
- The literature examining the efficacy of residential treatment care (which is similar in a number of ways to TRC) suggest that the success of residential care is related to characteristics of the child's needs, wider engagement with the child's supports and the provision of post-care support.
- A number of authors and practitioners in the broader field of residential care have argued that successful models should include a clearly thought-out philosophy of treatment or care, child-centred service provision and a commitment to providing staff support and opportunities for continuous learning.
- Despite the fact that program evaluation is an important aspect of the TRC model, there are often difficulties in integrating effective evaluation strategies into daily practice. While the frameworks and models for TRC are still evolving, there is an excellent opportunity to embed evaluation strategies in daily practice and develop common outcome measures.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues35/index.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

#### 1.1.4 Protecting children: Evolving systems. Higgins, D. Family Matters, Issue 89, December 2011.

The work of state and territory child protection systems has grown far beyond all expectations – over the last three decades reports of concern about children have grown dramatically. While the number of substantiated concerns has remained fairly consistent at around 1 in 5 concerns meeting the threshold for departmental intervention, the number of children taken from their families and placed into out-of-home care has risen sharply over the last two decades.

The causes of growth of the child protection system include:

- the introduction of mandatory reporting
- growth of risk-averse cultures and the expectation to quantify risk and mitigate it
- professionalisation of child protection work and systems
- expansion of the types of harm and severity of harm/risk of harm to which systems are expected to respond - especially for emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence (together these categories account for 63.8% of all substantiations, AIHW 2011), and
- the expectations and responsibility for supporting vulnerable families and keeping children safe shifting from communities to governments.

In 2009 the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (National Framework) was finalised, resulting in an agreement supported by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments along with a number of non-Government child and family peak organisations. The agreement aims to achieve a number of goals for children and families, such as improving universal supports; providing better targeted secondary services; addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and improving statutory child protection systems.

At this stage in the life of the National Framework there is no clear answer as to whether it has improved the safety and wellbeing of Australian children. A number of complex policy issues are discussed in relation to future directions for the National Framework and the evolution of child protection systems.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2011/fm89/fm89a.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.1.5 **Child protection Australia 2010-11.** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, January 2012.

This annual report on child protection in Australia, the fifteenth in the series, provides statistical information on state and territory child protection and support services. The key findings of the report include:

- *Notifications decreased while substantiations remained stable:* Since 2009–10, the number of children subject to a notification decreased by 13% from 187,314 to 163,767, while the number of children subject to a substantiation of a notification remained relatively stable from 31,295 to 31,527. Since 2006–07, the number of children subject to a substantiation of a notification has decreased by 7% from 34,028 to 31,527.
- *The number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care continues to rise:* Since 2009–10, the number of children on care and protection orders increased by 4% from 37,730 to 39,058, which is consistent with the trend over the last 5 years. The number of children in out-of-home care increased by 5% from 35,895 in 2010 to 37,648 in 2011. Since 2007, the number of children in out-of-home care rose by 33% from 28,379 to 37,648.
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in the child protection system:* In 2010–11, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were almost 8 times as likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse and neglect as non-Indigenous children (rates of 34.6 and 4.5 per 1,000 children respectively). At 30 June 2011, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders was over 9 times the rate of non-Indigenous children (rates of 51.4 and 5.4 per 1,000 children respectively), and the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care was 10 times the rate of non-Indigenous children (rates of 51.7 and 5.1 per 1,000 children respectively).

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737421016&tab=2>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.1.6 **National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children: Perspectives on progress and challenges.**

Babington, B. Family Matters, Issue 89, December 2011.

This article suggests that the first two years of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children has been an important scene-setting period that has been marked by growth in political and NGO support and by a consolidation of knowledge in areas such as supports for carers and the needs of young people transitioning from the out-of-home care system.

The National Child Protection Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 aims to make a substantial and sustained reduction in Australia's rates of child abuse and neglect. With the first three-year action plan under the National Framework nearing completion, this article notes that it is timely to ask about the effectiveness of the approach and to consider the challenges ahead.

There has also been a fostering of innovative practice, especially in the area of early identification of family and child needs. Much remains to be done, however, to complete successfully the first three-year action plan. In relation to the next action plan, greater emphasis needs to be placed on early intervention and prevention efforts, as well as on specific areas, including disability and responding to child sexual abuse. Finally, this article suggests that the National Framework requires meaningful targets, an independent accountability and performance monitoring mechanism and a significant boost in overall resourcing by all levels of government.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2011/fm89/fm89b.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 1.2 Law and Justice

### 1.2.1 **Just Futures Strategy 2012 – 2015: Growing community, family, opportunity and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.** Queensland Government, December 2011.

This new Indigenous Justice Strategy recognises that Queensland's Indigenous incarceration rate has worsened for adults and remains disproportionate for young people. It aims to improve safety in Indigenous communities and address the underlying causes of offending by targeting four key areas.

Two key areas are (i) prevention and early intervention for children and young people and (ii) improving education, training and employment opportunities. Actions to increase support for families, children and young people include:

- increasing kindergarten access and participation
- establishing new Turnaround Teams to improve school attendance in targeted communities
- providing parenting support to all Indigenous parents in prison or detention
- providing intensive case management support to all those at the youngest ages of criminal responsibility, i.e. 10–12 year olds

- offering parenting support to all parents or carers of Indigenous children and young people who come in contact with the criminal justice system
- having a case plan focusing on retention and career development for all Indigenous students from Years 9 to 12, and
- transitioning all offenders of compulsory school age from detention into continuing education.

Service delivery will focus effort on the 'hot spots' where most offending occurs, namely: Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, Rockhampton, Brisbane, and Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities.

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/atsis/government/programs-initiatives/just-futures-strategy.pdf>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.2.2 Exploring Indigenous and non-Indigenous sentencing in Queensland. Bond, C., Jefferies, S., & Loban, H. Queensland Government, January 2012.

This report is one of five research reports commissioned under the Indigenous Criminal Justice Research Agenda and released in conjunction with the launch of Queensland's new Indigenous justice strategy, *Just Futures 2012 – 2015*.

The report examines sentencing differences for Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders in Queensland's courts by analysing data obtained from administrative databases, judicial sentencing remarks, surveys of magistrates, judges and police prosecutors, and qualitative interviews and focus groups with members of community justice groups. Four questions are investigated.

According to the report, the results of the quantitative analyses indicate that there are few significant differences in sentencing outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders in the higher courts (children and adults) and the lower courts (adults only). Most baseline differences disappeared when features of the offender's case and social circumstance were taken into consideration. This finding received some support from the focus group interviews with community justice group members.

The disappearance or reduction of initial differences in sentencing outcomes when other factors are taken into account is considered as supporting the hypothesis that Indigenous offenders come to the courts with different types of offences, and different criminal and social histories. However, this conclusion is made with caution as there were significant data quality and access issues and the report notes some evidence of disparity, particularly for the Magistrates Court.

The report makes eight recommendations to government regarding the use of existing data, monitoring and research, improving access to existing court programs and sentencing options, developing new Indigenous specific criminal justice programs, and reviewing training of judicial officers and prosecutors.

<http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/publications/categories/reports/indigenous-criminal-justice.aspx>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.2.3 Diverting young Indigenous people from the Queensland youth justice system: The use and impact of police diversionary practices and alternatives for reducing Indigenous over-representation. Little, S., Allard, T., Chrzanowski, A., & Stewart, A. Queensland Government, January 2012.

Commissioned under the Indigenous Criminal Justice Research Agenda, this research report explores whether cautioning and referral to Youth Justice Conferences (YJC) are used differently with Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth and the factors which impact on the likelihood that Indigenous young offenders will be diverted. It also examines whether police diversion of young Indigenous offenders reduces recontact with the justice system or if alternative practices may have more impact.

Methodology included quantitative analyses using data from all young people born in 1990 who were cautioned, attended a conference, or attended court between the ages of 10 and 16 (n=8236); analyses of interviews conducted with police officers (n=29) and stakeholders (n=12), and a literature review focused on alternative front-end diversionary programs operating in Australia and overseas.

It was found that:

- Indigenous youth are less likely than non-Indigenous youth to be diverted to cautioning for their first contact with the youth justice system and half as likely to be diverted to conferencing for subsequent contacts.
- This disparity occurred despite the fact that similar factors were found to impact on the likelihood that Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth would be cautioned or conferenced rather than appear in court. Factors included no prior court appearance, fewer prior contacts with the justice system and no previous cautions.
- Other factors identified by interviewees as impacting on whether young people are diverted included the age of the young person, their most serious offence, whether they participated in interview, the young person's demeanour and the police officer's assessment of the young person's needs.

- Many Indigenous youth refuse to participate in interviews, thereby preventing the use of diversions. Police believed that refusal was often the result of legal representation, and police and legal practitioners agreed that refusal can be because of unfavourable attitudes towards the police.
- Youth cautioned or referred to YJC for the first time were less likely to have recontact and to have less frequent and less serious recidivist behaviour than those who appeared in court for the first time. However, when confounding factors such as age and gender were controlled for, cautioning proved to be most effective as it had the longest period of time-to-recontact.

<http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/publications/categories/reports/assets/diverting-young-people-from-the-justice-system.pdf>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

#### 1.3.1 Indigenous Child Placement Principle audit report 2010/11. Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, January 2012.

The Commission has a legislative responsibility to monitor the Department of Communities' compliance with section 83 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*. This prescribes a process that must be followed when making out-of-home care placement decisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to help maintain their connection to family, community and culture.

The audit is comprised of three components which together provide a comprehensive view of the administration of section 83 and what it can achieve for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care. This has involved auditing:

- the department's mechanisms supporting compliance with section 83
- the department's practice compliance with section 83, and
- the outcomes achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care.

The audit identified the following key findings:

- The Department of Communities has implemented 19 of the 28 recommendations made in the inaugural audit which were aimed at enhancing policies, practice and record keeping relevant to the application of section 83. The remaining nine recommendations are scheduled for completion in March/April 2012.
- Compliance with each step required by section 83 is quite good. However, when viewed together, complete compliance with all required steps was only achieved in 15% of the sample.
- Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care were found to be experiencing positive outcomes relevant to their contact with family and community and their opportunity to participate in cultural activities and events.
- Those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people placed with Indigenous carers tended to experience the same, or better, outcomes across every measure of family and community contact and experience greater opportunities to participate in cultural activities and events.

<http://www.ccyccg.qld.gov.au/resources/publications/icpp-2010-11.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

#### 1.3.2 The subjective wellbeing of Indigenous Australian adolescents: Validating the Personal Wellbeing Index-School Children. Tomy, A., Norrish, J. & Cummins, R. Social Indicators Research 101(3), 405-418, December 2011.

This paper details the results of a study testing the psychometric properties of the Personal Wellbeing Index for School Children (PWI-SC) in a sample of 519 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents recruited from a national program for young people at risk of disconnecting from education or training. The study also compared data on the PWI-SC to normative data for the Australian general adult population as measured on the parallel Personal Wellbeing Index for Adults (PWI-A). The PWI-SC is a general population measure of subjective wellbeing comprising seven domains – standard of living, health, life achievement, relationships, safety, community and future security.

The authors report that the PWI-SC showed sound psychometric properties in their sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents, producing the same seven domain structure that is found in the general adult population and having a moderate to strong correlation with scores on the General Life Happiness scale (GLH; a measure of life satisfaction).

The sample's average scores on the PWI-SC were consistent with the general adult population norms on the PWI-A, despite their 'at risk' status and their poorer performance on objective measures of wellbeing (e.g. employment, education retention). This finding is consistent with the Homeostatic Theory of subjective wellbeing that contends that

levels of subjective wellbeing in a given population tend to be maintained around a narrow set point. While the sample's average PWI-SC score was consistent with the general adult population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents showed lower satisfaction with the domains of living standings, life achievement, and future security compared to the general adult population but higher satisfaction with the domains of safety and community connection. The proportion of young people with a 'high risk' PWI-SC score (3.7%), an indicator of possible depressive illness, was also almost twice as high as the proportion seen in the general adult population (6.9%).

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/l3q2308j77743r3n/fulltext.pdf>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.4 Early Years

**1.4.1 Promoting positive education and care transitions for children.** Rosier, K. & McDonald, M. Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, November 2011.

This resource sheet is a review of research regarding children's transition from home to early childhood education and care services, and then to school, with a specific focus upon both children's and parents' experiences of these transitions. Factors that influence a child's ability to adapt to school are considered and case studies of promising transition programs are provided.

Key points highlighted in this resource sheet include:

- The transitions from home to early childhood education and onto school are important milestones for both children and families. The transition into school is especially significant as 'readiness' for schools is predictive of long-term academic and occupational achievement.
- A child's ability to transition successfully to school depends upon their own personal characteristics (e.g. temperament and personality), parental characteristics (e.g. attitudes to school and maternal education) and community characteristics (e.g. accessibility and quality of local services).
- In Australia, the transition to school is likely to be more challenging for children from financially disadvantaged families, Indigenous families, families with children who have a disability and culturally and linguistically diverse families. Children from these backgrounds are also less likely to attend an early childhood education and care service before they start school.
- For children, successful transitions into and from the early learning environment can be facilitated by a range of approaches such as assisting children to understand the routines and practices of settings they are transitioning into.
- During the transition to both early learning environments and school, a partnership between parents and educators/institutions can help parents effectively manage this period of change.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/rs/rs5.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.5 Education

**1.5.1 Overcoming barriers to education: Peninsula Youth Connections evaluation stage 1 report.** Bond, S. Brotherhood of St Laurence, December 2011.

Operating in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region south-east of Melbourne, Peninsula Youth Connections (PYC) is a partnership between the Brotherhood of St Laurence and TaskForce. Funded by the Australian Government, PYC provides regular and intensive case management program for up to two years for those who are at high risk of disengaging from school or who have been disengaged from school.

The purpose of the evaluation is to identify the unmet needs which act as barriers to young people's participation in education, signal the broader systemic factors which impede young people's learning, and use the PYC as a case study to reflect on the Youth Connection model's advantages, constraints and opportunities for development.

Stage 1 includes a literature review, analysis of available client data and interviews with 24 school and community youth professionals working in the area.

Some of the critical barriers that were identified from the interviews include:

- a lack of personal support
- a lack of family stability or a sense of belonging to the broader community
- low access to material resources due to neighbourhood and family disadvantage
- unmet health needs, and
- a lack of decent affordable housing.

Systemic barriers identified in the evaluation include:

- culture shock as a result of the different environments of primary and secondary school
- perception of schools as authoritarian systems where conformity to rules is a prerequisite for the opportunity to learn, and
- the lack of system flexibility to include students with different needs or caring responsibilities.

[http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Bond\\_Overcoming\\_barriers\\_to\\_education\\_Peninsula\\_Youth\\_Connections\\_stage\\_1\\_report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Bond_Overcoming_barriers_to_education_Peninsula_Youth_Connections_stage_1_report_2011.pdf)

[Back to Contents](#)

## 1.6 Health and Wellbeing

### 1.6.1 **The neurobiological effects of childhood mistreatment: An often overlooked narrative related to the long-term effects of early childhood trauma?** Delina, J. & Vimpani, G. Family Matters, Issue 89, December 2011.

This paper discusses research on the impact of child maltreatment on the ante- and post-natal development of the brain and the resulting physical, cognitive, emotional and environmental consequences. The authors argue that some current societal dysfunction may have been overlooked as a significant consequence of childhood maltreatment, through its associated traumatic effect on brain development. Further, they suggest that knowledge of the impact maltreatment has on the developing brain is essential to determine how best to advocate for the child, and provide for their effective care and protection.

The paper includes a review of research on the neurobiological effects of childhood maltreatment and discusses the resulting structural and functional brain changes and the biological mechanisms linking maltreatment with specific behavioural, physical and mental health outcomes. It includes discussion of normal brain development, methods of assessing brain injury, the effects of chronic stress on brain development, the specific outcomes of a range of types of maltreatment including substance misuse and dependence, physical and sexual abuse and neglect, and childhood exposure to violence. The authors also discuss the role of neuroplasticity in facilitating resilience to brain injury from maltreatment.

The presented evidence demonstrates that maltreatment which involves severe, prolonged and uncontrolled life stressors activates a prolonged biological stress response which results in structural and functional brain changes. Consequently, chronic stress results in a range of behaviours including poor self-regulation, increased impulsive behaviours, and emotional responses such as high levels of anxiety, aggression and suicidal tendencies, and in some people, learned helplessness from the constant impairment of self-regulation. Further, the child's learning capacity and executive cognitive functioning is impaired, resulting in the inability to achieve the academic functioning and the skills necessary to underpin adult functioning.

The extent of the subsequent effects of maltreatment on cognitive and behavioural development is dependent on the age of first exposure and the duration of the maltreatment.

The authors conclude that the early identification of affected children will permit the implementation of remedial social supports, education and behavioural treatments to enhance the modifying mechanism of neuroplasticity to reduce the functional neurobiological effects of child maltreatment. Such interventions may then mitigate many of the adverse behavioural, learning and cognitive effects of maltreatment.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2011/fm89/fm89e.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.6.2 **Reviewing the evidence on the effectiveness of early childhood intervention.** KPMG, Australian Government, December 2011.

This report, commissioned by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), examines the current evidence base on the effectiveness of early childhood intervention (ECI) for children with a developmental disability.

It also explores the use of thresholds and assessment tools for determining ECI eligibility and the cost implications of expanding current federal government funding for ECI services, with particular focus on the Better Start for Children with Disability initiative.

The report broadly concludes that:

- functional assessment processes would allow ECI services to be more appropriately targeted than the current diagnostically-based approach
- the current approach to assessment reflects a view of ECI services as discrete, rather than as supports that build families' skills in managing their needs, and
- the current role of parents in identifying and accessing appropriate supports can significantly contribute to the challenges families face in meeting their child's needs.

The report puts forward three reform options, of increasing scope, for the government's consideration:

1. Incrementally refining the eligibility criteria for the Better Start for Children with Disability initiative by adding conditions where there is evidence of the effectiveness of interventions – in particular chromosomal conditions and microcephaly.
2. Streamlining federal and state and territory government support for children and their families by establishing more integrated, coherent pathways into ECI across all government-funded service providers – with work particularly identifying opportunities for Better Start to complement existing state and territory systems.
3. Substantively reforming ECI nationally by working within the context of establishing the proposed National Disability Insurance Scheme which identifies ECI as a priority and involves the development of a nationally consistent assessment methodology and framework for co-ordinating supports at the local level.

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/pubs/policy/early\\_intervention\\_review/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/pubs/policy/early_intervention_review/Pages/default.aspx)

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.6.3 **Child deaths – suicide intent.** Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Trends and Issues Paper 1, November 2011.

The Commission's first child death Trends and Issues Paper examines the issue of suicide intent in children and young people in Queensland. Research by the Commission has shown that many children and young people state or imply their intent prior to suiciding. This intent may be communicated either verbally (in person via telephony technology) or over social media (such as email, texting or social networking sites). Between 2004 and 2011 the deaths of 131 young people were classified as suicides in Queensland; in 65 of those cases (49.6%) intent to suicide was stated or implied by the young person prior to their deaths. The Commission's evidence shows that suicidal intent is most commonly communicated to family members or friends. The paper emphasises the need for all threats of intent to suicide to be taken seriously.

<http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/about/news/2011/november/Trends-and-Issues-Paper-released-Child-deaths-suicide-intent.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.6.5 **Snapshot 2011: Children and young people in Queensland.** Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, December 2011.

The *Snapshot 2011: Children and Young People in Queensland* report, which collates information from various sources, showed that Queensland children are generally healthy and provided with a broad range of educational and developmental opportunities. Topics included in *Snapshot 2011* are: demographics; health; early childhood education and care; education; deaths; child protection system; and criminal justice system.

The report highlighted that while it is promising to see that positive outcomes are being achieved, there is still much work to be done in some areas. The report shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to fare poorly on a range of safety, health, education and social measures compared to their non-Indigenous peers.

Also highlighted was that the number of children placed in out-of-home care continues to rise, with a particular growth in the number of Indigenous children in out-of-home care and the overall number of young people living in residential care.

<http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/resources/publications/snapshot/snapshot11.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 1.7 Society and Culture

### 1.7.1 **Young carers: Social policy impacts of the caring responsibilities of children and young adults.** Social Policy Research Centre, December 2011.

In 2003, there were 348,600 young people aged up to 24 years providing care in Australia, however these numbers are considered an underestimate, since some young people are reluctant to reveal caregiving within their families or do not see themselves as carers. This project sought to identify emerging themes, theory and evidence relating to young carers through a number of research processes including:

- a literature review
- quantitative analysis of ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006
- interviews and group activities with young carers and people receiving care from a young person
- focus groups with policy makers and service providers, and
- an audit of policies and services relevant to young people who provide care.

## Key findings include:

- Young carers are more likely live in lone parent, low resource households, regional and remote areas, and a higher rate of caring is found in young people from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Young carers are usually proud of what they do, hope to receive recognition and respect for their caring, usually come from close-knit families and often manage well with their additional responsibilities.
- Negative impacts from caring roles include difficulties in school retention and attainment which may compromise opportunities for further education, training and employment, as well as impacting on social integration, physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Young women are generally more likely to be carers than young men in all states and territories in Australia and in both age groups.
- Support services for young carers are insufficient, particularly for 18-25 year olds, culturally and linguistically diverse young carers, Indigenous young carers, children of parents with problematic drug use or mental illness, and young carers in rural and remote areas.
- In Australia, the vast majority of services specifically designed for young carers focus on providing support and/or addressing negative outcomes rather than preventing them from occurring. These findings highlight the need to place greater emphasis on an early intervention and prevention approach for young carers with the provision of adequate, appropriate and affordable services.

[http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/Young\\_Carers\\_Report\\_Final\\_2011.pdf](http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/Young_Carers_Report_Final_2011.pdf)

[Back to Contents](#)

## 2. Submissions Prepared by the Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians

### 2.1 **Response to A National Children's Commissioner Discussion Paper.** Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG), December 2011.

The ACCG submission to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' (FaHCSIA) Discussion Paper *A National Children's Commissioner* supported a national commissioner having a specific rights advocacy focus on Commonwealth policy and legislation and national children's rights promotion and protection.

The ACCG submission identified specific priority areas for a national commissioner, including family law and immigration detention as well as any matters requiring national and international coordination. Clarity of roles and functions is necessary to avoid duplication of the work of existing state and territory Children's Commissioners and Guardians.

<http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/resources/submissions.html>

[Back to Contents](#)