

Call for response (consultation papers, reviews, inquiries, discussion papers etc)

An R18+ Classification for Computer Games - Public Consultation

The Australian Government has released a discussion paper titled, *'Should the Australian National Classification Scheme include an R 18+ classification category for computer games?'*, summarising the key arguments for and against an R 18+ classification for computer games. Submissions are sought on whether the Australian National Classification Scheme should include an R 18+ classification category for computer games. Submissions are due by **28 February 2010**.

<http://www.ag.gov.au/gamesclassification>

A Flying Start for Queensland Children Discussion Paper, Queensland Government Public Consultation

The Queensland Government has launched a discussion paper on the future of education as part of its plan to provide all Queensland children with a flying start in life. The discussion paper seeks the views of Queenslanders about how we can best give children, whether they attend a state, Catholic or independent school, a flying start to prepare them for the transition to primary school and then into secondary school.

The discussion paper outlines the following objectives and measures to achieve them:

- improving children's development, wellbeing and school readiness by:
 - introducing a kindy year for all children
 - encouraging families to read to their children, and
 - enlisting volunteers as Queensland Ready Readers in primary schools
- improving transitions from primary to secondary school and supporting adolescent development by:
 - equipping schools with well-prepared teachers and great facilities
- improving school discipline and the quality of teaching and setting high performance standards for all schools by:
 - having high expectations of students, teachers, schools and our system of education and ensuring they get the support they need.

Submissions are due by **30 June 2010**.

<http://deta.qld.gov.au/aflyingstart/community.html>

Indigenous Education Action Plan 2010-2014 - Consultation

The Federal Ministers for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs are calling for submissions on a draft national Indigenous education action plan designed to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

The Chair of MCEECDYA, the Hon Jane Lomax-Smith, Minister for Education in South Australia, said "Ministers see this consultation process as an important part of their continued commitment to consult with Indigenous Australians, educators and other stakeholders on policy developments that will help governments improve Indigenous student outcomes." The draft plan outlines activities that will be undertaken at the national, state and local level to close the gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

It focuses on action across six areas that evidence shows will have the most impact on closing the gap:

- readiness for school
- engagement and connections
- attendance
- literacy and numeracy
- leadership, quality teaching and workforce development, and
- pathways to real post-school options.

The draft plan has been developed with significant input from education systems and some prominent Indigenous educators.

An initial draft of the Plan was circulated to Indigenous education consultative bodies and a number of leading Indigenous educators for preliminary comment prior to public release. The purpose of this draft is to seek comment from a wider range of stakeholders to inform the development of the final version.

The public consultation process on the draft Indigenous Education Action Plan closes on **28 February 2010**.
http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/indigenous_ed_action_plan_2010-2014_consultation,29978.html

National Standards for Out of Home Care – Consultation Paper

The development of the National Standards for Out of Home Care is a key part of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, which was endorsed by COAG on 30 April 2009. Advisory firm KPMG has been engaged to work on developing the national Standards.

The Consultation Paper is designed to stimulate conversations and generate ideas ahead of a call for submissions and national consultations starting in February 2010.

The Consultation Paper seeks views on:

- the drivers for optimal health and well-being outcomes for children and young people
- where and how the out-of-home care system can impact on outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care and how to influence these drivers, and
- what possible standards should be included in the National Standards for out-of-home care and how they should be measured and reported.

Submissions are due by **26 March 2010**.

<http://www.nationalstandardsforoutofhomecare.com/>

Reports, research papers, policy initiatives etc

Child safety

Improving outcomes for teenage pregnancy and early parenthood for young people in out-of-home care: A review of the literature, P. Mendes *Youth Studies Australia*, Volume.28, No. 4, December 2009

Young people leaving out-of-home care are overrepresented among teenage parents. This paper examines the research literature and identifies key factors that contribute to early pregnancy and parenthood for care leavers, the challenges of early parenting and the positive effects of early parenting. The implications for out-of-home care policy and practice are outlined, and supports and programs that may contribute to better outcomes are identified.

The author suggests that the high rate of early pregnancy and parenthood can be attributed to a range of before-care, during-care and after-care experiences. For example, young women who experienced sexual abuse before entering care may have a limited understanding of sex, sexuality and interpersonal relationships; while negative experiences of being in care can lead to outcomes such as low educational achievement and involvement in crime and/or substance misuse, which appear to be associated with early sexual activity and pregnancy.

This paper describes a range of challenges of early parenthood among care leavers, including:

- limited access to further education, training and employment opportunities and associated poverty
- limited access to affordable, secure and appropriate housing
- social isolation from friends and family, and
- possible child protection intervention with their own children.

Research suggests, however, that there are also a range of positive outcomes for parenting care leavers if they are provided with consistent, adequate and ongoing personal and financial support, for example, young mothers described parenthood as a life-changing event that turned them towards a more positive and settled lifestyle and many express pride in being able to provide the care their own parents failed to provide. Being a mother also seems to fill an emotional void.

The author makes the following recommendations:

- stability and continuity in care
- teenage pregnancy-prevention programs including sexual education and distribution of contraceptives
- flexible and gradual transitioning out of care based on levels of maturity and skill development rather than age, and
- after-care programs and support to assist care leavers who become young parents.

Further research to identify the needs of care leavers experiencing pregnancy and early parenthood, the effectiveness of current services in meeting these needs, and potential new service directions such as peer

mentoring models, is required.

http://www.acys.info/journal/issues/2009_v.28_n.4

Parental intellectual disability and child protection: key issues Lamont, A., & Bromfield, L. Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse Issues, No. 31, November 2009

Parents with intellectual disabilities are overrepresented in child protection and legal proceedings. Discrimination, prejudice and lack of understanding and support services have contributed to these heightened rates. This paper examines parental intellectual disability and the common risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect in order to understand if and why parents with intellectual disability are at a heightened risk of abusing or neglecting their children.

Factors commonly associated with child abuse and neglect, and which research suggests are often experienced by parents with an intellectual disability, include:

- social isolation
- parental stress
- past histories of being abused or neglected as children
- demographic characteristics such as limited parental income, education, and employment status, and
- physical and mental health problems.

There is, however, little research concerning the two most common risk factors for child abuse and neglect in the general population - domestic violence and parental substance abuse - among parents with an intellectual disability. There is also limited research on the interplay between a child's characteristics and abuse and neglect by parents with an intellectual disability.

The author makes a number of research and practice recommendations throughout the paper, including:

- individual assessment with consideration given to risk and protective factors
- evidence-based information and training for practitioners that focuses on practical issues, tips and guidance for conducting assessments and providing interventions for parents with an intellectual disability
- early provision of services to prevent the over-representation of parents with intellectual disability in the child protection system. Research suggests that optimal services for parents with an intellectual disability are family-centred, provided over the long-term, focused on strengths rather than deficits, home based, feature participatory rather than relational elements of practice, and performance rather than knowledge based, and
- further research which focuses on how the child protection system can better accommodate the needs of parents with intellectual disability so that their children are provided with the best care and protection. Particular attention should be directed at making assessments, establishing case plans and agreed parent actions, and identifying appropriate support services and interventions for parents with intellectual disabilities involved in the child protection system.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/>

Child Protection Australia 2008- 09. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010. Child welfare series no. 47. Cat. no. CWS 35. Canberra: AIHW. 21 January 2010

This report provides comprehensive statistical information on state and territory child protection and support services, and some of the characteristics of the children within these systems. It also describes trends in child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations, children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care.

Nationally the evidence in this report shows that:

- the number of children subject to a notification of child abuse or neglect; the number of children under care and protection orders; and the number in out-of-home care are all rising. Over the past year, the number of children on care and protection orders and the number of children in out-of-home care increased by almost 10%. In 2008 there were almost 35,500 children on a care and protection order and just over 34,000 children in out-of-home care, the majority of whom were either in foster care (47%) or living with relatives (45%). It is important to note that although there appears to have been a real rise in children needing protection, other factors may have played a part. These include greater community awareness of child abuse and neglect issues, a broadening in what some jurisdictions define as child abuse or neglect, and changes in child protection policies and practices, and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in the child protection system; with the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care over nine times the rate of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were more than eight times as likely to be on a care and protection order. The reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander children in the child protection system are complex and include the legacy of past policies of the forced removal of some Aboriginal children from their families, the intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture, and poor socioeconomic status.

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10859>

Childrens Court of Queensland – Annual Report 2008 - 2009

This is the sixteenth annual report of the Children’s Court of Queensland. The President of the Court is required to report annually to the Parliament on the operation of the court in the preceding financial year.

The report shows that there has been an overall decrease in the number of juveniles whose case was disposed of in Queensland. In the District Court there was a 14.3 per cent decrease in the number of young people appearing before the court. There has been an overall decrease in the number of charges against young people.

Download the report from <http://is.gd/87VVn> (PDF) or via a link on the Children’s Court of Queensland webpage: <http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/4429.htm>

Youth Justice

Views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland’s youth detention centres, Indigenous Law Bulletin, December 2009

A paper by the Commission, detailing the views and experiences of Indigenous young people in Queensland’s youth detention centres, has been published in the November/December 2009 edition of the Indigenous Law Bulletin.

The paper details the responses from 66 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who took part in the Commission’s latest Views of Young People in Detention Centres Survey.

The paper highlights some areas in the operation of Queensland’s youth detention centres that are positive and some areas that could be improved. It is reported that:

- Most Indigenous young people in detention feel safe and are participating in a range of developmentally appropriate programs and activities, however
- Only half believe they would be taken seriously if they raised concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

The paper also provides information that can help build a youth justice system that is responsive to the needs of Indigenous young people. Based on the Indigenous young people’s responses to the survey, the paper argues that Indigenous young people are likely to feel safer in detention when:

- staff take a supportive ‘mentoring’ approach
- there are Indigenous staff in the centre
- they have contact with friends in the centre and family members
- there are harmonious relationships between detainees, and
- periods of isolation are minimised.

The paper also suggests that Indigenous young people are more likely to engage in therapeutic post-release programs if those programs include a significant practical component such as sporting, employment and training and mentorship activities.

<http://www.ccyrcg.qld.gov.au/about/views-and-experiences-of-ATSI-in-youth-detention-centres.html>

Law

Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms, Australian Institute of Family Studies, December 2009

In 2006, the Federal Attorney-General and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) to undertake an evaluation of the impact of the 2006 family law reforms. The three year long evaluation is the largest examination of the family law and service system yet undertaken, and examines how families and children fare through the system when families break-up.

The evaluation looks at the impact of changes which included:

- introducing a presumption of shared parental responsibility into the Family Law Act 1975
- requiring separating parents to attend family dispute resolution before going to court, with some limited exceptions, including where there were issues relating to family violence, and
- establishing Family Relationship Centres to provide information, advice and assistance to families with

relationship difficulties.

The evaluation involved the collection of data from some 28,000 people involved in the family law system and the results indicate that overall, there is more use of relationship services, a decline in filings in the courts in children's cases, and some evidence of a shift away from an automatic recourse to legal solutions in response to post-separation relationship difficulties. A significant proportion of separated parents are able to sort out their post-separation arrangements with minimal engagement with the formal system. There is also evidence that FDR is assisting parents to work out their parenting arrangements.

While the evaluation reports that the majority of parents in shared care arrangements believed they were working well, there were concerns where ongoing fear of violence existed. Many separated families are affected by issues such as family violence, safety concerns, mental health problems and substance misuse issues, and these families are the predominant users of the service and legal sectors. In relation to these families, resolution of post-separation disputes presents some complex issues for the family law system as whole, and the evaluation has identified ongoing challenges in this area. In particular, professional practices and understandings in relation to identifying matters where FDR should not be attempted require continuing development. This is an area where collaboration between relationship service professionals, family law system professionals and courts needs to be facilitated so that shared understandings about what types of matters are not suitable for FDR can be developed and so that other options can be better facilitated.

Key findings from the evaluation include:

- 71 per cent of fathers and 73 per cent of mothers say they've sorted out their care arrangements
- 39 per cent of parents who used family dispute resolution reported reaching an agreement
- 78 per cent of Family Relationship Centre staff and 86 per cent of family dispute resolution staff say that family dispute resolution is inappropriate due to family violence for up to a quarter of parents they see
- 16 per cent of children are in shared care-time arrangements (i.e., where 35-65 per cent of time is spent with both parents)
- More fathers than mothers propose equal time arrangements when going to court - 10 per cent of mothers and 27 per cent of fathers
- A majority of separated parents were in friendly or cooperative relationships (just over 60 per cent)
- Just under one fifth of separated parents reported their relationship to be full of conflict or fearful, with mothers twice as likely as fathers to report a fearful relationship
- Around one in five parents reported safety concerns with ongoing contact with the child's other parent
- 26 per cent of mothers and 17 per cent of fathers reported their partner had physically hurt them before or during separation.
- While communication in relation to privileged and confidential disclosures made in assessment and FDR processes raises some complex questions, investigation of how such communication could potentially occur may be an avenue for achieving greater coordination and ensuring expeditious handling of these matters.
- Currently, much relevant information may be collected by family relationship service professionals in screening and assessment processes, but this information is not transmissible between professionals in this sector and professionals in the legal sector, or between other agencies and services responsible for providing assistance
- Effective responses to families where complex issues exist should ensure that the parenting arrangements put in place for children in families with complex issues are appropriate to the children's needs and do not put their short or long-term wellbeing at risk. Further examination of the needs and trajectories of families who are unsuitable for FDR would assist in identifying what measures are required to assist these families
- The evidence of poorer wellbeing for children where there are safety concerns—across the range of parenting arrangements, but particularly acutely in shared care-time arrangements— highlights the importance of identifying families where safety concerns are pertinent and assisting them in making arrangements that promote the wellbeing of their children
- While the legislation sought to place more emphasis on the importance of identifying concerns about family violence and child abuse, other aspects of the legislation were seen to contribute to a reticence among some lawyers and their clients about raising such concerns (including the obligation of courts to make a costs order against a party found to have “knowingly made a false allegation or statement” in proceedings and a requirement for courts to consider the extent to which a parent has facilitated the other parent's relationship with the child)
- There is evidence that many parents misconstrue equal shared parental responsibility as allowing for “equal” shared care time. This sometimes can make it challenging to achieve child-focused arrangements in cases in which an equal or shared care-time arrangement is not practical or not appropriate. Legal sector professionals in particular indicated that in their view the legislative changes had promoted a focus on parents' rights rather than children's needs, obscuring to some extent the primacy of the best interests principle. Further, they indicated that, in their view, the legislative framework did not adequately facilitate making arrangements that were developmentally appropriate for children

- While the reforms introduced legislative principles for conducting child related proceedings, the court that handles most children’s matters, the Federal Magistrates, did not have change its case management approach
- The new substantive parenting provisions tend to be seen by lawyers and judicial officers to be complex and cumbersome to apply in advice-giving and decision-making practice. Because of the complexity of key provisions, and the number of provisions that have to be considered or explained, judgment-writing and advice-giving have become more difficult and protracted. There is concern that legislation that should be comprehensible to its users—parents—has become more difficult to understand, even for some professionals, and
- A majority of lawyers perceived that the reforms have favoured fathers over mothers and parents over children. The evaluation indicates a majority of parents are able to sort out their post-separation parenting arrangements quickly and expeditiously; however, there is also a proportion whose post-separation arrangements appear to be informed by a “bargaining” rather than “agreeing” dynamic. For these parents, it appears the reforms have contributed to a shift in the bargaining dynamics. This is an area where further research is required.

AIFS proposes that beyond effective screening, possible ways forward include:

- continued development of protocols for the sharing of information within the family relationship service sector and between the sector and other critical areas, such as child protection
- development of protocols for cooperation between family relationship service professionals and independent children’s lawyers
- development of protocols for cooperation between family relationship service professionals and lawyers acting as advocates for individual parents
- a considerably improved capacity in courts to solicit or provide high-quality assessments that will assist them to make safe, timely and child-focused decisions, especially at the interim stage, and
- consideration of whether (and if so how) information already gained via sometimes extensive screening procedures within the family relationship service sector can be used by judicial officers or by those providing court assessments to assist in the process of judicial determination.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/familylawevaluation/>

Improving responses to family violence in the family law system: An advice on the intersection of family violence and family law issues, Family Law Council, December 2009

This report considers family violence in the context of family law and examines how there can be wider dissemination of generally accepted expert opinion about family violence and its impact in the broad family relationship and family law systems. It examines how family violence is dealt with in family law disputes and makes recommendations on how the family law system’s responses to family violence can be improved, including the early identification of family violence. It further considers the practical application of this knowledge to promote better outcomes for people affected by family violence.

The report recognises prior research relevant to the family law system, including *Time for Action*, the report of the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

The report makes the following recommendations:

- the definition of “family violence” in the Family Law Act be widened to include a range of threatening behaviour.
- that the Attorney General establish an expert panel under the direction of the Australian Institute of Family Studies to create an easy-to-understand “common knowledge base” on the known patterns and effects of family violence. This easily accessible information will assist to provide common and
- up-to-date information to all those involved in the family relationship and legal systems, including parents, relatives, counsellors, mediators, FRCS, legal aid officers, lawyers and courts.
- the Law Council of Australia and the Family Law Council co-operate to revise the booklet “Best Practice Guidelines for Lawyers Doing Family Law Work” to incorporate detailed information on family violence.
- a number of reforms take place to improve co-ordination and collaboration between the state and territory child protection agencies, and the federal Family Law Act, including: the transportability of state family violence injunctive orders; the establishment of a national register of family and violence orders ; and the establishment of a network data base which records family violence orders, and a residual family court power to require state Child Protection Agencies to become parties to Family Law Court proceedings about children.
- a further report be prepared on whether FDRP should be required to provide a report to the Family Law Courts or other bodies in some or all structure where family violence is admitted or suspected.
- the forms notifying the Family Law Courts about family violence be simplified.

- consideration be given on how to educate the Australian public about certain widespread misunderstandings of the Family Law Act including:
 - a. recurrent gossip that notification of family violence may lead to a judicial perception that the notifier is an “unfriendly parent”
 - b. widespread perception that each parent now has a “starting right” to equal time (50/50) with children
 - c. common belief that a parent will receive both substantial time with a child, and equal shared parental responsibility, (similar to historic “guardianship”), despite a history of poor communication and hostility between parents; and despite the long term health and emotional consequences for children as casualties on such parental battlefields.

The report acknowledges that these recommendations will need to be amalgamated with the various reports on family violence, including the review undertaken by Professor Richard Chisholm, of the laws, practices and procedures that apply in the family law courts in the context of family violence and the Australian Institute of Family Studies’ evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms.

http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/FamilyLawCouncil_Publications_ReportstotHeAttorney-General_FamilyViolenceReport

Family Courts Violence Review, A report by Professor Richard Chisholm, 27 November 2009

Professor Richard Chisholm, former Justice of the Family Court of Australia, was appointed by the Federal Attorney-General to undertake a review of the practices, procedures and laws that apply in the federal family law courts in the context of family violence. His report considers whether improvements could be made to ensure that the federal family law courts provide the best possible support to families who have experienced or are at risk of violence and in particular, whether the practices and procedures of the courts encourage victims to disclose family violence and support ‘best practice’, whether appropriate support is provided for families who have experienced violence, and whether information disclosed by litigants is appropriately shared within the courts. While not directly relating to shared parenting or shared care, all aspects of family law and court practice and procedures were considered to the extent they impact on the federal family law courts’ response to the needs of families affected by family violence.

A recurrent theme throughout the review was that family violence must be disclosed, understood, and acted upon. This theme seems helpful whether thinking of a lawyer interviewing a client, a dispute resolution practitioner dealing with a new case, the work of a counter clerk at a family court, or of a judicial officer. The family law system, and each component in it, needs to encourage and facilitate the disclosure of family violence, ensure that it is understood, and act effectively upon that understanding. This theme underpins many of the recommendations in this report.

The report makes the following recommendations:

- whatever the structural future of the courts is to be, it is important that children’s cases are dealt with by judicial officers and court staff who are experienced and expert in the area of family law. Even if the more difficult and complex cases go to the superior court, or the superior tier of the one court, it is unlikely that it would be ‘best practice’ to continue as now, with each court having its own distinctive approach, rather than both courts having the same approach, which would however have the flexibility necessary to provide for the different demands of different cases.
- under the Rules of court, parties are obliged to file a Notice of Abuse or Family Violence where allegations of violence or abuse have been made. Experience has shown that this system is not working. This Report suggests that because of this, and because issues of family violence and other risks factors are so common in parenting cases brought to the courts, it would be better to have a system of risk identification and assessment that applies to all parenting cases. This approach would reflect the best available thinking about these issues, and would reinforce a lot of measures that are already being taken by the courts to identify and deal with issues of violence as early as possible.
- the ‘friendly parent’ provision should be amended so it recognises that parents sometimes need to take action to protect children from risk; that the specific and separate costs provision dealing with knowingly false allegations and statements should be replaced by a simple reference to the giving of knowingly false evidence in the provision that deals with costs (s 117); and that the information that advisers are required to provide should reflect not only the importance of parental involvement but also the importance of safety for children.
- it would be useful to reconsider the set of provisions dealing with parental responsibility and the guidelines for determining what is in the child’s best interests. In particular, many people seem to have wrongly assumed that the amendments created a presumption that children should spend equal time with each parent (except in cases of violence or abuse). Again, the weight to be attached to particular circumstances is not now determined simply by their importance for the child in the circumstances of each case, but by whether each circumstance falls within the class of ‘primary’ consideration, or is merely an ‘additional’ consideration, a question which will often require the parties to work out whether particular events fall within the legislative definition of ‘family violence’.

- working out what is best for children is hard enough without having to get involved in such technical distinctions. The tangle of legal technicality that resulted from the 2006 amendments may well have distracted parties and those advising them from focusing on what arrangements are likely to be best for the children in the circumstances of each case. It may have led to parties thinking about their own entitlements, rather than what is best for their children.
- the notion of parental responsibility needs to be clearly separated from the question of what parenting arrangements should be made.
- instead of suggesting that any particular outcome is likely to be best for children ('one size fits all'), the recommended changes would simply require the court to consider which of the available options in each case would be best for the child. The proposed guidelines would continue to emphasise the importance of parental involvement and safety for children, but would remove the artificial distinction created in the present Act between 'primary' and 'additional' considerations. The court would instead be encouraged to take all matters into account, and give them the weight that is appropriate in the circumstances of each case.
- these proposed changes would mean that family violence would cease to be an artificial category that has special consequences in determining what is best for the child. Under the present wording of the Act, there seems to be a common view that the court is required to order that the children spend equal or near-equal time with each parent except where there is family violence (one of the two 'primary considerations'). While violence would of course continue to be taken into account, the focus would be on its potency and seriousness in each case, and it would be taken into account along with all other matters, not singled out as 'primary'. For this reason, debates about the definition of family violence would cease to be of such importance.
- the removal of the idea of family violence being a 'primary' factor (competing with the other primary factor, parental involvement) may also help the parties focus on children's interests rather than their own entitlement, because the artificial prominence given to the two factors under the present law seems to reflect ideas about parental entitlements: it can be seen as reflecting the main arguments addressed to the parliamentary committees in the course of what has been called the 'gender wars', and may also reflect the idea that spending equal time with the child is the right of a parent, forfeited only if the parent has been violence or abusive.
- If so, the proposed change might help the parties, and the courts, engage in a calm and undistracted examination of all the matters that need to be assessed to work out what is best for each child.
- this report also proposes that if these recommendations are not adopted, and thus the Act continues to speak of two 'primary' considerations, the provisions on family violence would need to be strengthened. A technical review of Part VII is also recommended so that the law can be clarified and simplified.
- the report also discusses a number of other matters, mainly arising in connection with support provided to families who have experienced violence, the sharing of information disclosed by litigants, and legal representation in cases with issues of family violence. Most of these issues require more extensive research and consideration, especially in relation to resources, than has been possible in this review. The discussion and recommendations deal particularly with safety at court, legal representation, and education and training.

The report is currently being considered by the Attorney-General.

[http://www.ema.gov.au/www/agd/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/\(3273BD3F76A7A5DEDAE36942A54D7D90\)~Chisholm_report.doc/\\$file/Chisholm_report.doc](http://www.ema.gov.au/www/agd/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/(3273BD3F76A7A5DEDAE36942A54D7D90)~Chisholm_report.doc/$file/Chisholm_report.doc)

Health and wellbeing

Australian Social Trends, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 10 December 2009

This report series utilises a range of ABS and other agency data to provide a snapshot of Australian society. It covers social issues of current and ongoing concern, population groups of interest, and changes in these over time. *Australian Social Trends* reports are now released quarterly, with each report providing unique insights into several topics, while adding to the more general social landscape described throughout the series.

The December 2009 release featured six topics:

- jobless families
- living alone
- smoking, risky drinking and obesity
- preschool attendance
- patterns in work
- international comparisons

Topics which are relevant to children and young people are described in further detail below.

Jobless families

- there were 266,000 families in Australia with at least one child under 15 years with no employed parents in 2007–08, representing 12% of all families with at least one child under 15 years. This was lower than the rate of 18% experienced in 1997–98
- 44% of one-parent families with at least one child under 15 years had no employed resident parents (down from 54% in 1997–98)
- more than 500,000 children aged under 15 years lived with no employed parent. In 47% of jobless families, the youngest child was aged less than 5 years
- in 22% of jobless families, there were 3 or more children aged under 15 years, and
- caring for a young child may have been a reason for not working in single-parent jobless families. One-half (47%) of jobless single-parent families had the youngest child under 5 years, compared with one-quarter (25%) of employed single-parent families.

Smoking, risky drinking and obesity

- fewer than one in ten (9%) young men aged 15–17 in Australia were current smokers in 2007–08, compared with one in twenty (4.5%) young women
- one in 14 (7.2%) children aged under 15 years were exposed to passive smoking and associated health risks by living in a household where a daily smoker reportedly smoked indoors
- young male risky drinkers (15–24 years) were more likely to drink spirits and alcopops than older drinkers (aged 25 years and over)
- two thirds of adult drinkers reported first drinking alcohol when under 15 years (27%) or aged 15–17 years (40%) of age, and
- one-quarter of all Australian children aged 5–17 years were overweight or obese in 2007–08.

Preschool attendance

- research shows the importance of early childhood education in later-life development
- data from the *Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2008* report showed that around 395,000 of the approximately 750,000 children aged 3–5 years in Australia attended preschool or a preschool program in long day care (about 50%). A further 30% attended school, while 20% did not attend preschool or school
- 72% of 3–5 year olds not attending school usually attended preschool or long day care preschool programs (85% of 4 year olds and 57% of 3 year olds)
- 30% of children who usually attended preschool (or long day care preschool programs) in 2008 attended for less than 10 hours per week, 47% attended for 10-14 hours per week, with 23% attending for 15 or more hours per week
- cost of preschool programs to parents (after benefits and entitlements) was
 - \$19 or less per week for 34% of children,
 - between \$20 and \$59 for 28% of children, and
 - over \$60 per week for 24%.
- children in major cities attended more hours of preschool and paid more than children living in outer regional or remote areas
- 72% of children in couple families attended preschool, compared with 66% of children from single-parent families
- 86% of parents whose children attended preschool were satisfied that the preschool teacher was informing them well or very well in terms of their child's learning progress
- 94% of children who attended preschool (or preschool programs) reportedly made a good adjustment to school, compared with 88% of children who did not attend preschool
- 28% of children aged 3–5 years were not attending preschool in 2008. The main reason for non-attendance was that parents were not working and preferred to look after their child (36%). Other reasons included: child too young/old; parental preference for alternative form of care; and, cost, and
- almost one-half (49%) of Indigenous children aged 3–5 years who were not yet attending school did not attend preschool in 2008. The majority of parents of carers of Indigenous children reported informal learning activities such as reading activities, watching TV, singing and/or dancing, drawing/writing, and playing games/sport.

International comparisons

- three-in-ten (30%) children aged 0–2 years in Australia participate in formal childcare, which is comparable to the OECD average (28%). However the Australian proportion is considerably lower than Nordic countries like Denmark (70%), Iceland (53%) and Sweden (44%) where childcare is publicly funded and mothers have high participation rates in paid employment, and
- Australian 0–2 year olds who attend formal childcare spend 18 hours per week in care, which is somewhat lower than the OECD average (30 hours), and considerably lower than the Nordic countries (Iceland – 36 hours, Finland – 34 hours, Denmark – 34 hours).

<http://www.census.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4102.0Dec%202009?OpenDocument>

National Survey of Young Australians 2009: Key and emerging issues, Mission Australia, 25 November 2009

This report presents the findings of the 2009 Mission Australia eighth annual survey of young Australians. The primary focus of the survey was to identify the values and issues of concern to young people in Australia. Responses were received from 47,735 young people aged 11 to 24. Five percent of respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 19.7% of respondents were from Queensland. The report provides data at a national level and also for each state/territory. It also compares responses from Indigenous and non Indigenous respondents.

Some of the key findings from the survey show that:

- the top three items valued by young people were family relationships, friendships and being independent
- the top three issues of concern for respondents were drugs, suicide and body image. Drugs were the main issue of concern for 11 to 14 year olds. Males were much more likely (27.6%) than females (19%) to identify alcohol as a significant concern, while females were much more likely (27.5%) than males (17%) to identify physical/sexual abuse as a concern
- the top issues of concern for Indigenous young people were alcohol, body image and drugs
- bullying/emotional abuse, suicide and family conflict were all of concern to about a quarter of Indigenous and non Indigenous respondents, and
- the top three forms of advice and support for Indigenous and non Indigenous respondents were friends, parents and relative/family friend.

The report provides an overview of priority issues evolving from the survey which require a response, for example:

- skilling parents, other family members and friends to openly communicate with young people, including through times of family stress and change. Early intervention strategies that work to avoid conflict escalating are also important
- reviewing current drug education
- early intervention, including supporting those who young people are most likely to turn to when they have a problem is critical, and
- the ongoing development of integrated and youth-friendly mental health services is required.

http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/document-downloads/cat_view/132-annual-mission-australia-youth-survey

Give kids a chance: No-one deserves to be left out Wesley Mission, 20 November 2009

This Report presents the findings of a survey conducted with 1200 people aged 18 to 44 which investigated the long-term effects of bullying. It showed that bullying among school-aged children is a major problem faced by thousands of individuals. The Report outlines the effects of bullying, with victims reporting significant levels of withdrawal and isolation which inhibit their social skill development and lead to insecurity in adult life. Some of the key findings outlined in the Report include:

- pack bullying occurred mainly in high school, happened more frequently and went on for longer than bullying by individuals. Victims scored lower than the generally acceptable level of self-esteem in comparison with those who were bullied by individuals
- females victims reported more emotional bullying than males
- 85% of respondents reported that school-time bullying had affected the way they had developed as adults. Low self-esteem, a lack of assertiveness and difficulties building relationships of trust were the primary negative effects in adult life
- some respondents noted positive effects of bullying, including becoming more assertive; having more self-esteem or self-confidence; becoming more understanding and empathetic
- there were a number of bullies who reported genuine remorse for their actions and the intention to refrain from such behaviour
- victims who are parents took care to build positive social skills in their children at a young age, and
- advice was mainly sought from a professional; however, some respondents felt the advice exacerbated the bullying.

The Report makes the following recommendations to protect children from the damaging effects of schoolyard bullying:

- improved identification of bullying
- more programs to build up social skills in children in the early years
- clear line-of-sight reporting regime in schools
- accredited anti-bullying and resilience programs at primary and secondary school

- the introduction of funding for children suffering from abuse
- tailored family therapy programs, and
- support programs for adults who are suffering from the effects of childhood bullying.

<http://www.wesleymission.org.au/News/Research/Kids/Report.asp>

Australia's Mothers and Babies 2007, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 10 December 2009

This annual report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is part of the Perinatal Statistics Series. The Report provides national information on the pregnancy and childbirth of mothers, and the characteristics and outcomes of their babies. Data is recorded on a myriad of dimensions from all states, with the 2007 Queensland data provided by Queensland Health, and previously published in 2009 in *Perinatal statistics Queensland 2007*.

Some of the key data featured in the Report relating to Queensland include:

Mothers:

- in 2007, 59,228 mothers gave birth to 59,827 live births, including 3170 Indigenous births. There were a total of 417 foetal deaths (including 39 Indigenous)
- the mean age of mothers was 29.1 years
- most women who gave birth resided in major cities (59.6%), with one-fifth (20.1%) in inner regional areas, 16.1% in outer regional areas, and with one in twenty five residing in remote (2.5%) or very remote (1.6%) areas
- 40.1% of babies born were the first-born to their mother. One-third (32.2%) of mothers had one child, with 16.2% having two previous children. 11.5% of mothers had given birth three or more times previously
- one in five (19.7%) of mothers who gave birth in 2007 smoked during their pregnancy, and
- one-third (33.1%) of births were by caesarean section – 12.7% had caesarean section with labour and 20.4% without labour.

Babies:

- of the 59,827 live births in 2007, 30,800 (51.5%) were male and 29,021 (48.5%) were female (sex was not stated in 6 births)
- the mean gestational age was 33.2 weeks, with 8.7% of births being pre-term (i.e. under 37 week gestation)
- the average birthweight was 3385 grams, with 6.3% of babies having low birthweight (i.e. under 2500 grams). Indigenous babies were more likely to have low birthweight (11.2%), and
- 1.1% of babies born in 2007 had Apgar scores less than 7 at 5 minutes after birth indicating they could have some developmental and health difficulties as they grow.

Perinatal mortality:

- there were 417 foetal deaths (at least 20 weeks gestation or 400 grams) and 202 neonatal deaths (in the first 28 days after birth), representing a perinatal death rate of 10.3 deaths per 1000 live births.

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10972>

The Impact of Puberty on Aggression/Delinquency: Adolescence to Young Adulthood. Jake M. Najman, J.M., Hayatbakhsh, M.R., McGee, T.R., Bor, W., O'Callaghan, M.J. & Williams, G.M. The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology Volume 42, Number 3, December 2009.

This article examines immediate and longer term gender specific changes in aggressive/delinquent behaviour as these are independently associated with the age of onset of puberty and pubertal stage adjusted for age. Results were obtained from the Mater–University of Queensland Study of Pregnancy, a prospective prebirth cohort involving 2,784 respondents.

The study found that both males and females had similar increased levels of aggression/delinquency with more advanced pubertal stage at the 14-year follow-up. For females, early age of onset of puberty was additionally associated with more symptoms of aggression/ delinquency at the 14-year follow-up. For males, by the 21-year follow-up those who had experienced early age of onset of puberty no longer had higher levels of aggression/delinquency. For females, only early and late age of occurrence of puberty were associated with longer term evidence of aggressive/delinquent behaviour.

Progression through puberty is associated with increased levels of aggressive/delinquent behaviour for both males and females, and of about a similar magnitude. Female rates of aggressive/delinquent behaviour may have increased over time to match those observed in young males. For females only, there is evidence of a long-term sustained effect of early and late puberty on increased levels of aggressive/delinquent behaviour.

<http://www.atypon-link.com/AAP/toc/acri/42/3>

Modifiable Determinants of Youth Violence in Australia and the United States: A Longitudinal Study

Hemphill, S.A., Smith, R., Toumbourou, J.W., Herrenkohl, T.I., Catalano, R.F., McMorris B.J. & Romaniuk, H. The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology Volume 42, Number 3,

Youth violence is a global problem. Few studies have examined whether the prevalence or predictors of youth violence are similar in comparable Western countries like Australia and the United States (US). In the current article, analyses are conducted using two waves of data collected as part of a longitudinal study of adolescent development in approximately 4,000 students aged 12 to 16 years in Victoria, Australia and Washington State, US. Students completed a self-report survey of problem behaviours including violent behaviour, as well as risk and protective factors across five domains (individual, family, peer, school, community). Compared to Washington State, rates of attacking or beating another over the past 12 months were lower in Victoria for females in the first survey and higher for Victorian males in the follow-up survey.

Preliminary analyses did not show state-specific predictors of violent behaviour. In the final multivariate analyses of the combined Washington State and Victorian samples, protective factors were being female and student emotion control. Risk factors were prior violent behaviour, family conflict, association with violent peers, community disorganisation, community norms favourable to drug use, school suspensions and arrests.

<http://www.atypon-link.com/AAP/toc/acri/42/3>

Parks and open space: for the health and wellbeing of children and young people, Wood, L. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) 2009

This report summarises the evidence and knowledge gaps relating to the contribution that parks and open space can make to the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Access to, and use of parks and open space, is linked to physical, social and mental health benefits, and is increasingly important for current generations growing up in a world with more structured 'play', smaller backyards, higher density housing and rising levels of sedentary behaviour, childhood obesity and depression.

The mere presence of a park or open space does not, however, mean that it is enticing or appropriate for children, and in general parks and open space are often underused or undervalued. The evidence surrounding the nexus between parks and open space and children has been somewhat scattered to date. This report seeks to consolidate what is currently available. There is a diverse array of sectors, agencies, community groups, researchers and policy makers to whom this issue is pertinent; including many whose core business may not be children and youth per se, but whose role impacts on the built and natural environment. There is considerable scope for further communication and collaboration among these players, and untapped synergies between parks and open space that make good design sense, foster a sense of community and help to enhance the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia.

<http://www.aracy.org.au/>

Australian Government releases *Investing in Australia's young people*, a comprehensive listing of services available to Australian youth

The Office for Youth has published *Investing in Australia's young people: A stocktake of Australian Government initiatives for young people*. This 251-page report is a detailed listing of the 'programs, services, payments and policies' available to Australia's 3.5 million young people aged 12–25. Large and small-scale programs 'to support young Australians to maximise their educational opportunities and participate productively in the workforce' are listed. They range from petrol-sniffing prevention programs in remote areas of Australia to the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative to the Community Street Soccer program. Those who work with youth, young people themselves, policymakers and the wider community will find the report a useful resource.

<http://www.youth.gov.au/Documents/InvestingInYoungPeople.pdf>

Australian Government, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australian Institute of Family Studies – *Growing Up in Australia*, The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children 2008-2009 Annual Report

Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is a study designed to identify policy opportunities for improving support for children and their families and to inform intervention and prevention strategies. This longitudinal study involves two representative cohorts of children – approximately 5,000 infants aged approximately 0 to 1 years (B or infant cohort), and 5,000 children aged 4 to 5 years (K or child cohort), when the families agreed to take part in 2004. In 2008–09, the infant cohort were now 4–5 years old and the child cohort were 8–9 years old.

- The study addresses a range of key questions about children's development and wellbeing. Information was collected on the children's physical health and social, cognitive and emotional development, as well as their experiences in key environments such as the family, community, child care, preschool and school

settings.

- The third data collection wave was completed in 2008–09, which included 8718 interviews with primary caregivers (86% of the original Wave 1 sample and 89% of the eligible Wave 3 sample). Non-responding families were more likely to speak a language other than English at home, be Indigenous, and have a lower parental income. About one-fifth of the families in the infant cohort and the child cohort were from Queensland (22.0% and 20.8% respectively).
- Some interesting findings from Wave 3 data collection include:
 - Almost one-half of mothers with children from both age groups were working part-time.
 - Two-thirds (66%) of children living with both parents saw their maternal grandparents at least once a month. Over one-half (57%) saw their paternal grandparents at least once a month.
 - 88% of the infant cohort reportedly enjoyed school, preschool or child care always or very often, with the majority (84%) often or very often eager to learn new things.
 - More than one-third (36%) of children in the child cohort reported other kids sometimes, often or always picking on them. One in six (18%) stated that other kids sometimes, often or always hit them.
 - Approximately one-third of parents had volunteered in their child's class or helped with an excursion in the last year.
 - More than one-half (54%) of children aged 4–5 years were read to by their parents almost every day (an additional 26% were read to 3 to 5 days a week).
 - 89% of parents reported that their child was in excellent or good health
 - 30% of 8–9 year olds had been diagnosed with asthma, while only half (52%) of those diagnosed had taken medications in the past 12 months.
 - According to Body Mass Index measurements, more than one-fifth of 4–5 year old and 8–9 year old children were overweight (17.3% and 17.4% respectively) or obese (5.5% and 6.2% respectively).
- In addition, the annual report featured three sections which were edited extracts from individual research papers based on LSAC data that were released in 2008–09:
 - Breastfeeding and infants' use of time.
 - How well are Australian infants and children aged 4 to 5 years doing?
 - Stress and psychosocial distress in mothers of infants.

http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/lisac_report_2009/Pages/default.aspx

Australian Social Work – *Perspectives of Young People in Care About their School-to-Work Transition*, Tilbury, Clare, Buys, Nicholas and Creed, Peter (2009)

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of the school to work transition from the perspectives of young people who are in care or who have been in care, and the factors that influence their thinking about future study and work, including perceived barriers and supports.

In-depth interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of 14 young people (care leavers and in-care youth). They were recruited with assistance from the statutory agency responsible for child protection in Queensland and from Create. There were 9 male and 5 female participants, whose ages ranged from 14 to 20 years. Three young people were no longer in care at the time of their interviews, with the maximum period out of care being 2 years. The length of time in care differed: some entered care as infants, others were older, but all of them stayed in care until their late adolescence.

The initial coding scheme for each transcript was based on nine areas covered in the interview protocol: aspirations, expectations, influences, barriers, supports, current issues, environmental issues, school and work. As a range of personal and social factors that influence career development were identified, facilitators and constraints were then categorised as either personal or social factors. Personal factors were self-efficacy, expectations and aspirations. The social factors were those related to placement, school, work experience, and relationships with family, carers, caseworkers and teachers.

This exploratory study with a small sample found the following:

- For individual children in care, more intentional case planning and transition from care planning aimed at encouraging further education and establishing pathways to future work is warranted.
- Collaboration between education and child protection agencies is required to encourage young people in care to achieve during and following the completion of their school years.
- It is vital for caseworkers, foster carers, teachers and others to encourage young people in care from an early age to develop work goals that match their skills and interests.
- What the young people in this study spoke about specifically was the importance of having optimism, personal confidence and determination; supportive relationships; someone to believe in them and encourage them; opportunities to pursue their goals; avenues to gain information about how to get desired jobs; positive school experiences (both academically and with peers); and stability in other aspects of life including placement.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03124070903312849>

Indigenous issues

Draft National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework, Standing Committee of Attorneys-General Working Group on Indigenous Justice, 6 November 2009

The National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework provides a national approach to addressing the serious and complex issues that mark the interaction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait people and the justice systems in Australia. The Framework seeks to build a sustainable whole of government and community partnership approach to law and justice issues to reduce the levels of disadvantage that are directly related to adverse contact with the justice systems. It provides government agencies and service providers with a framework from which to identify the most appropriate responses to specific issues at the local, regional, state or territory level.

The Framework has five inter-related goals:

1. improve all Australian justice systems so that they comprehensively deliver on the justice needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a fair and equitable manner
2. reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders, defendants and victims in the criminal justice system
3. ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel safe and are safe within their communities
4. increase safety and reduce offending within Indigenous communities by addressing alcohol and substance abuse, and
5. strengthen Indigenous communities through working in partnership with governments and other stakeholders to achieve sustained improvement in justice and community safety.

Some of the key strategies outlined in the Framework and which are relevant to children and young people include:

- address the barriers that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from accessing services relevant to civil, criminal, family and child protection law systems
- improve support for vulnerable Indigenous children and youth, including through an increase in the number of and access to culturally competent targeted support for vulnerable children and youth in partnership with Indigenous communities
- implement a comprehensive response to sexual abuse where it occurs in urban, regional and remote settings, including through an increase in the number of and access to effective early intervention programs to protect at risk children and youth from sexual abuse
- provide a holistic response to child abuse and neglect in urban, regional and remote settings
- increase community-based interventions to reduce alcohol and substance abuse, including through an increase in early intervention and education services for children and youth at risk of developing alcohol and/or substance abuse problems
- work with offenders and individuals at risk to identify and address alcohol and substance abuse, including through an increase in access to community based Indigenous specific alcohol and substance abuse programs for offenders and young people
- eliminate discriminatory attitudes, practices and impacts where they exist within police, youth justice, courts and corrective services and other justice related agencies
- expand and implement the range of diversionary options and other interventions for Indigenous adult and youth
- implement a holistic response to address the factors leading to over-representation in the criminal justice system of Indigenous youth, and
- increase the capacity of youth detention centres to prevent re-offending.

http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Consultationsreformsandreviews_DraftNationalIndigenousLawandJusticeFramework

A Framework of Practice for Implementing a Kinship Care Program, Final Report July 2009 (released Dec 2009) Report for the Benevolent Society by the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales. Author: Marilyn McHugh

The aim of this study is to provide a framework to guide the implementation of statutory kinship services by the Benevolent Society. The countries included in the study are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, United Kingdom and United States of America.

In the first stage of the study the key focus was on consultations with stakeholders and reviewing the literature on models and tools exemplifying 'good', 'best' or 'promising' practice in kinship care. Given the lack of an evidence base around many of the models and tools discussed in this report the advantages and disadvantages of most models and tools, is at this stage speculative. The emphasis in the report therefore is on

promising practices and key messages from the field.

The second stage of the study involved four focus groups with kinship carers. The aim of the groups was to obtain the perspectives of kinship carers in relation to a number of specific aspects of kinship care. The main aspects of kinship care reviewed in the literature, and considered by stakeholders and carers in the focus groups, included family group conferencing, carer assessment, carer training, financial and non-financial carer support, contact and access and carer support groups. Attention was also paid in the study to research around birth parents of children in kinship placements, children in kinship care, and training for workers in kinship care.

The author acknowledges one limitation of the study is that the perspectives of children and young people were not included, however, the Benevolent Society plans to consult with young people in kinship care at a later date.

<http://apo.org.au/research/framework-practice-implementing-kinship-care-program>

AMA Indigenous health report card 2009 - The Health of Indigenous Males Building Capacity, Securing the Future, Australian Medical Association (AMA) 10 November 2009

This report provides a collation of data documenting the health of Indigenous males in Australia. The Report also provides an overview of the factors contributing to the poor health of Indigenous males, as well as key factors that promote and sustain good health and long life. Data highlighting health concerns specific to male Indigenous children and young people include:

- Indigenous boys are 1.4 times more likely to die in the first year of their lives than Indigenous girls, and nearly twice as likely to die as other infants in the general population
- Indigenous boys who survived their first year were more likely to die up to the age of 4 than Indigenous girls, and were 2.6 times more likely to die than non-Indigenous boys aged 1-4 years
- in all age groups below 18 years, Indigenous boys and teenage males died at higher rates than their non-Indigenous counterparts
- Indigenous boys and teenagers experience higher rates of certain health conditions than their non-Indigenous counterparts, including diseases of the ear and hearing loss, respiratory diseases, trachoma, skin conditions and parasitic diseases such as scabies
- Indigenous male children are more likely to be hospitalised for dental care and injuries, and Indigenous boys aged 5-14 are more likely to be hospitalised for mental and behavioural disorders
- younger Indigenous males (15-24 years) were nearly three times more likely to die from preventable causes than their non-Indigenous counterparts
- Indigenous males in all age groups experience high or very high levels of psychological distress and, in 2004-2006, were more than twice as likely to be hospitalised for mental and behavioural disorders than non-Indigenous males
- the WA Aboriginal child health survey found that more than one-quarter of Indigenous males aged four to 17 years were at high risk of clinically significant emotional and behavioural difficulties - a rate 1.7 times higher than for non-Indigenous males of this age. Research suggests that these emotional and behavioural difficulties are caused by low self-esteem, quality of parenting and family dysfunction
- the same survey also reported that 12% of Indigenous males aged 12-17 years had thought about ending their lives in the previous 12 months, and 4% had attempted to do so in this period, and
- Indigenous males aged 10-17 years are 28 times more likely to be in juvenile detention than non-Indigenous males, and almost 10 times more likely than Indigenous females.

The Report outlines the AMA's proposals to improve the health of Indigenous males through primary health care services and workforce, quality care in all Australian health services, local community capacity building, health promotion and chronic disease prevention, strategies to keep Indigenous males out of prison, a focus on social and emotional wellbeing, and promotion of economic engagement and entrepreneurial opportunities

<http://www.ama.com.au/node/5114>

Progress of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Child Health Check Initiative: update on results from the Child Health Check and follow-up data collections, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing 4 December 2009

This final progress report on the Child Health Check Initiative (CHCI) provides information on the health conditions identified at the Child Health Check (CHC) under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and the extent of follow-up services provided to Indigenous children in prescribed areas. Specifically:

- of 16,259 children aged 0-15 years in the prescribed areas, 65% had at least one valid CHC between 10 July 2007 and 30 June 2009 for which the AIHW received data. Additional checks were provided under the Medicare Benefits Schedule, but these data not included

- about 97% of children had at least one health condition or risk factor identified and 99% received some form of management for their health conditions
- The most common health conditions were oral health problems (43%), ear disease (30%) and skin problems (30%)
- Over three quarters (76%) of children who had a CHC lived in households where a smoker was present
- Among children who had a CHC, 70% received at least one referral for a health condition
- The most common referral types were primary health care (39%) and dental (35%)
- There were 3,517 children who received an audiology check and 54% had some hearing loss, and
- There were 3,355 children who received a dental check and 54% had treatment for untreated caries.

Follow-up services have been provided to a large number of children and the extent of audiology and dental service delivery has more than doubled since December 2008. There is, however, a continuing need for health services among these children, particularly in the areas of dental, primary health care, audiology and ENT services.

Comparisons of the data over time show that most health conditions had fairly high to reasonable recovery rates. The appearance of new cases of common conditions in the target population after the first CHC, however, indicates that these conditions continue to be highly prevalent among these children. This reinforces the knowledge that improving health outcomes for Indigenous children requires not only short-term treatment of health conditions, but also longer term initiatives to address underlying causes of ill health such as socio-economic disadvantage, housing conditions and education levels. These findings will inform an evaluation of the Child Health Check Initiative to be completed by June 2010.

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10793>

Early Education and Care

A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia – Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) National Report 2009. Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Australian Government, December 2009

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) provides information about how communities have supported the development of their children before school. Between May and July 2009, the AEDI was completed for 261,203 Australian children in their first year of full-time school from every state and territory (52,191 were in school in Queensland). The initial results provide communities around Australia with information about how local children have developed by the time they start school, across five areas of early childhood development: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based), communication skills and general knowledge.

Some of the key findings from this national snapshot are:

- there is diversity in the languages spoken by children with 246 languages other than English spoken in the home
- in the year before entering full-time school, 92.7% of all Australian children were in some form of non-parental care and/or educational programs
- there are 11,486 (4.4%) children with reported chronic physical, intellectual and medical needs (special needs status)
- the majority of children are doing well on each of the five AEDI developmental domains
- overall in Australia, 23.4% of children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain/s
- there are higher proportions of children living in the most socio-economically disadvantaged communities and in very remote areas of Australia who are developmentally vulnerable on each of the AEDI domains
- the majority of Australian Indigenous children are developmentally on track on the AEDI domains, with the exception of the language and cognitive skills domain
- children who are proficient in English and speak another language at home are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable on most of the AEDI domains compared to all other children, and
- there are children in Australia who only speak English, but are reported as not proficient in English. These children are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on all the AEDI domains.

The AEDI results will be reported at the community level in March 2010. Communities can use the results to develop and evaluate their efforts to improve outcomes for children.

<http://maps.aedi.org.au/>

Preschool Education in Australia, *Policy Briefs*. Dowling, Andrew and O'Malley, Kate 22 December 2009

Early childhood education (ECE) in Australia will soon experience a 'radical makeover.' In 2008, all Australian governments made a commitment through COAG that by 2013, all children in the year before formal schooling will have access to high quality early childhood education programs delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers, for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks of the year, in public, private and community-based preschools and child care. This policy brief summarises the current structure of preschool in Australia in contemplation of this major policy shift. It describes the context in which the COAG commitment will be implemented, including the:

- current organisation of, and participation in, preschool education in Australia
- different regulations governing different types of preschool in Australia
- apparent under-supply of degree-qualified ECE teachers in Australia
- contentious debate over curriculum and assessment that is currently occurring amongst preschool practitioners, and
- urgent need for better data about preschools in Australia.

http://research.acer.edu.au/policy_briefs/1/

Queensland Government - Kindergarten Delivery Models 2010

In 2010 long day care services are being funded to deliver approved kindergarten programs. This is part of the government's plan to deliver universal access to kindergarten and heralds a new approach to how kindergarten programs are delivered in Queensland.

Long day care services are in a unique position to deliver kindergarten programs while continuing to meet the child care needs of parents. More than half of Queensland's kindy-age children attend long day care in Queensland, but only about seven per cent are taking part in a kindergarten program delivered by a qualified teacher.

One-hundred and forty-one (141) long day care services will participate in the [2010 Kindergarten Pilot Program](#). The feedback from this pilot will shape the ongoing roll-out of kindergarten programs in long day care services across the state.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?u=784&id=627664>

Early Years Learning and Development Literature Review, University of Oxford, November 2009
Maria Evangelou, Kathy Sylva, Maria Kyriacou and Mary Wild and Georgina Glenny (for UK DCSF)

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families announced in June 2008 a review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for 2010; the purpose of this current report was to provide part of an evidence-base to inform this review.

Specific objectives were:

- To identify and review evidence in respect of the process of development for children from birth to age five. Studies of cognitive, social, emotional and brain development were the principle foci.
- To identify and review evidence of findings pertaining to the distribution of children's development at the end of the academic year in which they turn five years old.
- To review the evidence that identifies the best supportive contexts for children's early learning and development. This will have a focus on interaction and relationships as well as physical surroundings.
- To identify, where appropriate, international comparative evidence in relation to objectives 1-3.
- To identify, where appropriate, substantive gaps in relation to objectives 1-3.
- To link the findings and the conclusions of objectives 1-5 to the Early Learning Goals and the areas of learning within the EYFS.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR176.pdf>

Education

National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy, Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 18 December 2009,

Ministers with responsibility for schooling have released the full set of results from 2009's national literacy and numeracy tests (NAPLAN) that were conducted across Australia in May. The NAPLAN involves all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 being assessed using common tests nationwide.

The report includes results for Indigenous students, students with a language background other than English and students living in metropolitan, country and remote areas. The comparative performance of girls and boys is also reported as well as a breakdown of student results by parental occupation and parental education. The NAPLAN Summary Report, released on 11 September 2009, had provided the overall results

http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/naplan_2009_report,29487.html

Children's rights

Advocacy Strategies Training Manual - General Comment No.10: Children's Rights in Juvenile Justice, Volz, A. Defence for Children International (DCI)

This Manual aims to provide users with some practical tips for conducting advocacy for children's rights in juvenile justice. The Manual adapts and makes best use of the good practices already developed for child rights advocacy and illustrates how they can be used to ensure follow-up to the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No.10 on Children's Rights in Juvenile Justice.

http://www.defenceforchildren.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=74&Itemid=63

Social exclusion

Housing the Homeless: Report on the inquiry into homelessness legislation, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, 26 November 2009

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth Committee has tabled the report of its inquiry into homelessness legislation. The Report considers the rationale for new homelessness legislation before examining options for the development of an Act that builds on the strengths of the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act*, while recognising the new policy and funding context. It also examines the case for new homelessness legislation to be founded on principles of human rights and social inclusion, as well as issues associated with broader legislation that impacts disproportionately and may discriminate against people who are homeless. The Report also examines legislative and non-legislative strategies for improving the quality of services used by homeless people and those at risk of homelessness and includes consideration of a broad range of issues associated with the development and implementation of a national standards and accreditation framework for services. The Report makes 16 recommendations concerning the introduction of homelessness legislation.

The Report states that a number of submissions provided during the consultation identified additional challenges experienced by certain vulnerable and marginalised groups, including young people and children and people leaving care or institutions. The Committee therefore recommends that that new legislation gives some recognition to the needs of especially vulnerable groups.

To prevent cycling in and out of homelessness, the Committee believes that continuing assistance to support transitions from homelessness into adequate and sustainable housing is essential. Improved access to long term case management for vulnerable population groups, including young people in the 14–18 year age group, is an important aspect of continuing support. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the commitment to prevention and early intervention, to the provision of adequate crisis accommodation and to continuity of support, should be included under the objective of new homelessness legislation.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/homelessness/report.htm>

Media and communications

Cyber-safety for children, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth - ARACY eBulletin - 12 February, 2010

Minister for Broadband and Communications, Stephen Conroy; Minister for Education, Julia Gillard; Australian Communications and Media Authority.

Safer Internet Day was held this week, promoting the need for safe use of technology by children and young people, with Minister Conroy encouraging people to "think before you post" ([read more](#)). A national pilot will be launched through 164 schools to address cyber-safety. The pilot aims to improve the cyber-safety curriculum, increase teacher skills and student awareness of the issues ([read more](#)). And ACMA has released a report investigating developments in internet filtering and looking at other cyber-safety initiatives ([read more](#)).

http://www.aracy.org.au/index.cfm?pageName=Home_Page

Submissions prepared by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

Response to inquiry into the high levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system

The Commission provided a joint response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in relation to this inquiry on behalf of all Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians. The response is available on the Commission's website:

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

The inquiry focuses on prevention and early intervention in order to identify strategies to assist in reducing the number of Indigenous Australians involved in the criminal justice system. The joint submission recommends that:

- the Australian Government, through COAG, set criminal justice targets—including youth justice—to be integrated into the Closing the Gap agenda
- new and innovative approaches to youth justice be supported across government, developed in collaboration with Indigenous people, with a strong focus on integration and holistic responses
- approaches to crime prevention extend to early protective factors, including by providing long-term investment in culturally appropriate maternal health and early childhood services
- sport and recreation activities be provided for Indigenous children and young people, particularly in regional and remote communities
- culturally appropriate education programs be made available to Indigenous young people to improve school attendance, retention and attainment at school
- support is provided to Indigenous parents and communities to assist them in providing leadership to ensure the optimum development of their children and young people
- crime prevention strategies be implemented in Indigenous communities that encompass concurrent and multiple interventions to address complex problems.
- there be an increased focus on crime prevention, diversions, intensive interventions and rehabilitation for serious and repeat offenders (and those at high risk of becoming serious and repeat offenders), with a strong emphasis on very young offenders
- meaningful consultation and participation with Indigenous children and young people become a standard approach in future planning for the youth justice system
- police be encouraged to maximise the use of cautioning and diversion wherever appropriate
- more efforts be made to improve the relationship between Indigenous young people and police
- a commitment be made to support community owned and operated diversion programs for Indigenous children and young people that are sustainable, based on need and subject to evaluation
- accommodation options be established across the country, particularly in regional and remote communities, to enable children and young people to be safely housed when they are eligible for bail and have nowhere else to go/no responsible adult
- bail conditions are age, location, and culturally appropriate and do not present a child or young person with unreasonable or unworkable challenges
- Indigenous young people in custody have access to a range of programs and services that are specific to their cultural needs
- therapeutic and practical supports follow Indigenous young people on their release into the community to encourage successful transition from detention, and
- 'Justice Reinvestment' be explored as a new approach for the youth justice system in Australia.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/sentencing/index.htm>

Events/conferences

The 11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, *Sustaining Families in Challenging Times*, will be held at the Melbourne Convention Centre from 7-9 July 2010.

The conference will focus on the six major themes that shape the Institute's current Research Plan – Economic wellbeing of families, Families and work, Social inclusion, Violence, abuse and neglect, Family transitions and family law, and Children, young people and their families.

The biennial AIFS Conference is an important means by which the Institute promotes research that identifies and raises understanding of factors affecting family wellbeing in Australia. The Conference also provides an opportunity for policy-makers in government, service providers and practitioners, researchers and community organisations to meet and exchange knowledge.

Find out more about the Conference including the call for submission of abstracts for a paper at:

<http://conference.aifs.gov.au/>