

**Policy Environment Scan
November/December 2008**

Source	Topic	Content
Senate, Parliament of Australia	<i>Inquiry into the provision of child care</i>	<p>The Senate enquiry seeks written submissions as to the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the financial, social and industry impact of the ABC Learning Centres Limited collapse on the provision of child care in Australia; • alternative options and models for the provision of child care; • the role of governments at all levels in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ funding for community, not-for-profit and independent service providers, ○ consistent regulatory frameworks for child care across the country, ○ licensing requirements to operate child care centres, ○ nationally-consistent training and qualification requirements for child care workers, and ○ the collection, evaluation and publishing of reliable, up-to-date data on casual and permanent child care vacancies; • the feasibility for establishing a national authority to oversee the child care industry in Australia; and • other related matters.
Smith Family and the Australian Institute of Family Studies	<i>Home-to-school transitions for financially disadvantaged children</i>	<p>The report identifies that 40 percent of Australian children in financially disadvantaged families experience five or more risk factors negatively impacting their life chances, compared with just 14 percent of children in non-financially disadvantaged families. The report identifies the risk factors which negatively affect a child's readiness for school, their ability to achieve at school and their chances of success later on in life. These risk factors include where the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child is read to on fewer than three days per week and is exposed to high TV viewing • child is exposed to hostile and inconsistent parenting style, low parenting warmth and low use of parental reasoning • child is male and has a less persistent temperament • mother is unemployed, attained less than a Year 12 qualification, was less than 22 years when gave birth, is of an Indigenous background, or birthplace is outside of Australia • father is absent in child's life • family residence is in a disadvantaged area.
Des Semples and Associates in conjunction with the Attorney General's Department via Australian Policy Online	<i>Future governance options for federal family law courts in Australia: striking the right balance</i>	<p>The Report considers proposals for improvements to the corporate governance, judicial case management and structure for the Family Court system within existing resource levels. Corporate governance and judicial case management need to be improved to ensure more effective outcomes for Family Law litigants. The Report finds that improvements can be made within existing resource constraints. It proposes a single administrative and corporate service structure for the total federal family law system designed to meet the requirements of litigants and their families. It recommends that existing Federal Magistrates be offered commissions to the General Division of the Family Court which would become a lower tier of that Court and existing Family Court Judges would constitute an upper tier of the Family Court.</p>

<p>Australian Childhood Foundation and Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia</p>	<p><i>The cost of child abuse in Australia</i></p>	<p>The report explores the financial cost of child abuse in Australia. Key aims of the report are to explain the significance of child abuse for the whole community and to advocate for a higher profile of the impact of child abuse in government policy and funding. In 2007, an estimated 177,000 children under the age of 18 were abused or neglected in Australia. This figure could be as high as 666,000 children. Based on these numbers, the best estimate of the actual cost of child abuse incurred by the Australian community in 2007 was \$10.7 billion, and as high as \$30.1 billion. The cost to each Australian adult in 2007 of government spending on health services, special educational assistance, crime, child protection programs because of child abuse and neglect was close to \$150 and as high as \$420.</p>
<p>Authored by Fiona Buchanan and published by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse</p>	<p><i>Mother and Infant Attachment Theory and Domestic Violence: Crossing the Divide</i></p>	<p>The paper explores how abuse by a father or a father figure at the time of birth and during infancy can impact on early mother and infant attachment patterns, and considers the implications for practitioners working with women and infants. Domestic violence is known to directly compromise infant health with negative developmental, social, emotional and behavioural consequences. At a time of rapid neurological growth, an infant's development may be compromised by exposure to ongoing violence, whether or not they are the target of the violence. Infants have symptoms of PTSD, including sleep disturbances, night terrors, separation anxiety, aggressiveness, hyperactivity, emotional detachment and construction. The negative effects on an infant's behaviours and development could contribute to difficulty for the mother in caring for or feeling bonded with the infant, so that the infant then finds the mother's availability becomes less predictable.</p>
<p>Australian Institute of Family Studies</p>	<p><i>Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) 2007-2008 Annual Report</i></p>	<p>The 2007-2008 <i>Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)</i> has just been released. The Report is based on data gathered from a mail-out survey to families undertaken between the Wave 2 (2006) and Wave 3 (2008) assessment of children. The report findings are based on information from about 6500 completed survey forms which asked questions on children's engagement with media and technology, children's developmental progress, their child care experiences, family stressful life events, parents' employment status and work-related issues, and child support arrangements (for separated parents). Findings are reported under the following headings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's use of technology • Child care trends over time • Working patterns and attitudes • Shared parental responsibility • Parents' involvement in children's education • Child care quality, and • Long work hours and fathering.
<p>Selina Tually and others / Office for Women, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</p>	<p><i>Women, domestic and family violence and homelessness</i></p>	<p>This report investigates the support and accommodation needs of women and children affected by domestic and family violence. It finds that there is no one solution to domestic and family violence related homelessness. There is also no easy to roll out solution. This is because there is no one pathway into homelessness for all women affected by domestic and family violence and many women cycle in and out of homelessness and crisis accommodation.</p>

Mission Australia	<i>National Survey of Young Australians 2008 – key and emerging issues</i>	<p>The primary purpose of the survey was to identify both the values and issues of concern to young people. 45,558 young people aged 11 to 24 participated in the survey. The survey consisted of 15 questions and was kept brief in order to encourage a large response from a diversity of young people. Seven questions sought views on a variety of issues such as what they value, their issues of concern, who they turn to for advice and support, what activities they are involved in, and who they admire. The remaining questions collected demographic data including age, gender, state/territory location, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification and disability status. This report summarises the responses at the national level and for each state/territory. It also compares responses from Indigenous and non Indigenous respondents. Each of the chapters contains a breakdown of the key data by age and gender.</p>
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre	<i>Report Card 8 – The Child Care Transition</i>	<p>Drawing on academic and governmental expertise, Report Card 8 proposes ten benchmarks to monitor progress and compare early childhood education and care settings across the OECD countries. The league table compares 23 OECD countries according to its proposed benchmarks. Australia achieved 2 of the 10 benchmarks and was ranked 21st. Benchmarks that Australia did not achieve include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minimum entitlement to paid parental leave of one year at 50% salary • A national plan with priority for disadvantaged children • A minimal level of training for all staff • A minimal level of public funding of 1.0% of GDP spent on early childhood services <p>The closing statement of the report emphasises the point that there is a clear danger that the potential benefits of quality early childhood education will be reserved for children from better off and better educated families while the potential for harm will be visited mainly on children from disadvantaged homes.</p>
ARACY Update	<i>Action for Young Australians – An ARACY Initiative</i>	<p>The ARACY Action for Young Australians program focuses on identifying the gap between what is known (i.e. what published literature says works and what practitioners/policy makers say works) and what is done to address key problems affecting the wellbeing of children and young people. Once a gap is identified, change can be promoted. The first two issues to be addressed in the program are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risky Drinking (discussing major health issues associated with risky and high risk drinking by young people as well as evidence-based solutions for addressing these issues), and • Parks and Open Spaces (discussing how parks and open spaces can contribute to the wellbeing of children and young people). <p>The program involves a staged process with three components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a draft report discussing the extent of the issue and current evidence on solutions • Reviewing the draft report and discussing the evidence presented in the draft report, and • Considering the final report and developing a plan of identified actions to be implemented in practice.
South Australian Health Minister Medial Release	<i>Let's talk – Doctors helping Teens communicate</i>	<p>A new State Government funded training program has been launched to assist GPs to keep young people healthy by covering a wide range of issues from stress and depression, to drugs and alcohol, as well as pregnancy, relationships and eating disorders. Once trained, GPs will be accredited and placed on a web-based register to help young people find their local youth friendly GP. A core group of accredited GPs will also go to schools to talk to students about their services, and how they can care for themselves and avoid illness.</p>

Victorian Minister for Education Media Release	<i>Confectionary off the menu in Victorian Schools in 2009</i>	Under the Brumby Government, chocolates, lollies and other sugar-rich foods will be banned from canteens and vending machines in Victorian government schools from the start of 2009. Research shows that around 37 per cent of a child's total energy intake is consumed at school and together with statistics which show that almost 25% of children aged 2-16 are overweight or obese, it is vital to make these significant changes to ensure children can make valuable food choices.
South Australian Premier Media Release	<i>Child restraint laws toughened to protect kids</i>	<p>The Rann Government will adopt new nationally approved changes to come into effect next year for the use of child restraints in motor vehicles. The new laws will require children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to the age of six months to be restrained in a rear facing child restraint (e.g. infant capsule) • from six months until the age of four to be restrained in either a rear or forward facing child restraint (i.e. child safety seat) and • from four years until the age of seven to be restrained in either a forward facing child restraint or booster seat restrained by a correctly adjusted and fastened seatbelt or child safety harness. <p>The new laws also deal with the issue of children sitting in the front seat of a vehicle and provide that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children aged between four and seven will not be permitted to sit in the front seat, unless all other seat positions are already occupied by children under seven. • children up to four years must be restrained in the rear of the vehicle (where the vehicle has two or more rows of seats). <p>The new laws will ensure a child is not required to use a restraint unsuitable for their size and weight. For example, a child who is too tall or heavy for the restraint must use a restraint for the next age category.</p>
South Australian Education Minister Media Release	<i>Teachers bound for country schools</i>	The South Australian Government has introduced scholarship schemes that financially assist people to train as teachers, with a guaranteed job in a country school at the end of their studies. A total of 49 teachers will participate in the scholarship scheme.
Queensland Minister for Health Media Release	<i>Under-16 car smoking ban laws introduced</i>	New laws banning smoking in cars carrying children under the age of 16 were introduced in State Parliament on 12 November 2008 by the <i>Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008</i> . The Bill, once enacted, will also give councils the power to regulate smoking in malls and at public transport waiting areas, including bus stops.
Tasmanian Department of Health Media Release	<i>Tasmania officially 'Baby Friendly'</i>	All Tasmanian maternity facilities are now fully accredited under the UNICEF/World Health Organisation 'Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative' meaning that all babies are born in breastfeeding-friendly facilities which follow international best practice standards.