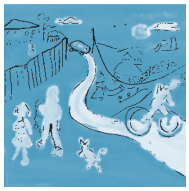
8 Indicators of Australia's welfare



8.1 Introduction

Welfare is a difficult concept to define, and views surrounding welfare are coloured by political, cultural and sociological factors. In the context of this chapter, 'welfare' refers to individual and societal wellbeing, not merely services provided by government to the least advantaged members of society. Many aspects of wellbeing are intricately related to each other (for example education, financial status and health), and are influenced by personal and environmental factors as well as the system of formal welfare interventions.

In accordance with the conceptual approach developed in earlier volumes of *Australia's welfare*, in the context of this chapter welfare is considered to comprise three main components (AIHW 2001, 2003; AIHW: Bricknell et al. 2004):

- healthy living—representing the basic needs for water, food, shelter, good health and freedom from harm
- autonomy and participation—representing the human needs for self-determination and freedom to participate in the social, recreational and economic aspects of life
- social cohesion—representing the reality that people exist and flourish in relationship with each other, through both individual associations and, more broadly, as members of society (Figure 8.1).

Promoting welfare, in this sense, involves improving and maintaining high standards of healthy living, autonomy and participation among society's members, and having a cohesive community. In countries like Australia, government interventions are more or less aimed at achieving this end, targeting specific areas perceived as important contributors to welfare. A key step in this process is periodically assessing the welfare of individuals and communities, by asking the following questions:

- How does Australia measure up against various components of wellbeing?
- In which aspects of life do Australians enjoy a relatively high degree of wellbeing?
- What areas of Australians' lives fail to meet standards in a way that may be detrimental to their overall welfare?
- Is wellbeing evenly distributed throughout the population? If not, who experiences lower levels of wellbeing than the general population, and in which aspects?
- Have any components of Australia's welfare changed significantly in recent years?
- How does Australia compare with other societies? What can be learned from the differences?

No attempt is made here to produce a single summary measure of welfare or wellbeing, although this has been addressed elsewhere (Australian Unity 2006; UN 2006). Instead, this chapter will present national data on 13 indicator topics related to the three main components of welfare (Figure 8.1), building on previous volumes of *Australia's welfare*

(AIHW 2001, 2003, 2005). The indicators detailed here are not exhaustive and do not exist in isolation. Rather, they were chosen for their ability to provide sensitive, reliable, robust and readily understood statistical information that reflects issues of importance to the Australian population (AIHW: Bricknell et al. 2004). Statistics on some similar areas are included in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) *Measures of Australia's progress* (ABS 2007a); however, the scope of the ABS publication goes beyond the welfare framework dealt with here.

On each of the 13 indicator topics, the following measures are presented (where available):

- measures of average or level (for example, the percentage of the population enrolled in a course of study)
- measures of distribution or inequality (for example, participation in education across age groups or population groups)
- measures of disadvantage or social exclusion (for example, the percentage of the population that has not completed high school).

Within society there exist broad groups that may have different experiences from the wider population in many aspects of welfare—groups such as young people, people living in rural and remote areas, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities. While the relative disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal

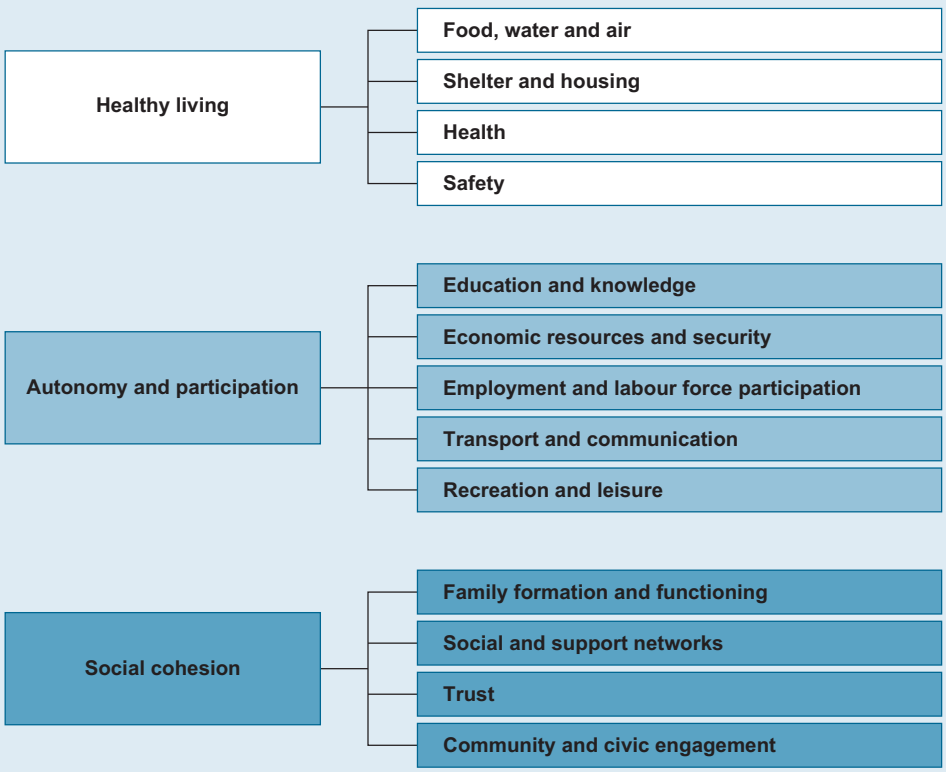


Figure 8.1: Welfare components and related indicator topics

and Torres Strait Islander people in many areas of life is well known, new and updated data are available for a number of the indicator topics discussed here. Therefore, in this volume of *Australia's welfare*, the welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is described for each indicator topic, where possible. A separate report on the health and welfare of Indigenous people is due for release in 2008 (ABS & AIHW forthcoming). In order to provide some context to the Australian experience international comparisons are also made in a number of areas, where the availability of data permits.

The welfare of Australians, how it has changed and how it is distributed throughout society are continual and important topics of community discussion. Issues currently being debated in the public sphere include:

- How have changes in society's values, norms and structures affected the way Australians relate to each other—within families and as communities?
- What are the economic resources of individual Australians?
- How do Australians participate in education, employment and the community, and how has the nature of these engagements changed?
- Do Australians enjoy balance in their lives—that is, are they able to participate in work, education, family life, leisure activities and engage with their communities?

This chapter attempts to contribute to these discussions by presenting current national data on a diverse array of topics related to Australia's welfare.

8.2 Healthy living

Healthy living represents the basic necessities of everyday living, such as nutritious food, clean air and water, appropriate shelter and positive feelings of safety. All of these factors play an important role in the promotion and maintenance of physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

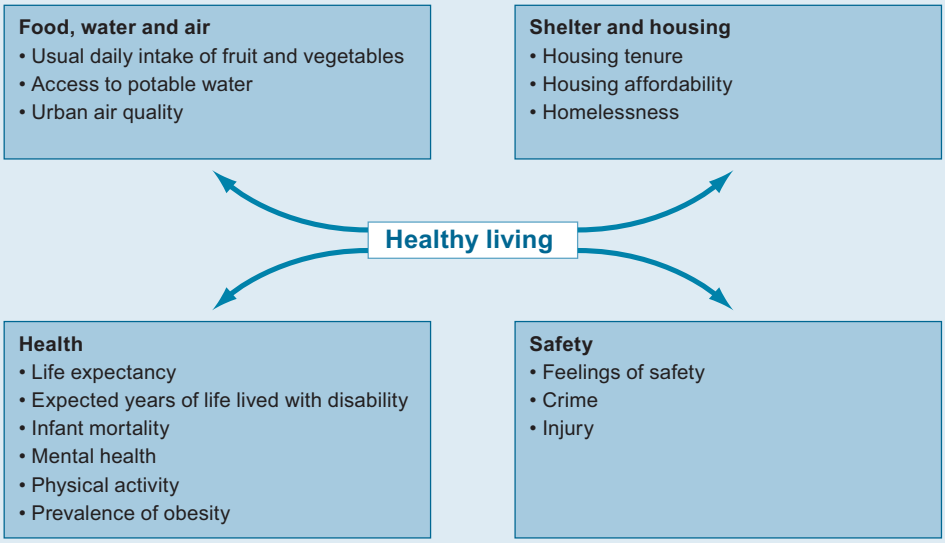


Figure 8.2: Indicators of healthy living

Food, water and air

Living in an environment free from harmful levels of pollution, with access to safe drinking water and nutritious food, are fundamental needs of healthy living. These basic requirements greatly influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The indicators presented in this section represent key issues relating to the opportunities, constraints and choices that face Australians as they seek to lead healthy lives.

Usual daily intake of fruit and vegetables

Daily consumption of fruit and vegetables plays an important role in maintaining good health across the life span. Consumption of fruits and vegetables has been shown to contribute to the prevention of coronary heart disease, hypertension, stroke, various types of cancer, overweight and obesity, and Type 2 diabetes (WHO 2003). The Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults recommend that men and women eat at least two serves of fruit and at least five serves of vegetables per day (NHMRC 2003a; see Glossary for the definition of a serve of fruit or vegetables). The Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia recommend that children aged 4–7 years consume one serve of fruit and two serves of vegetables per day; children aged 8–11 years eat one serve of fruit and three serves of vegetables per day; and 12–18 year olds eat three serves of fruit and three serves of vegetables each day (NHMRC 2003b).

According to self-reported data, in 2004–05, slightly more than half (54%) of all Australians aged 12 years or over ate two or more serves of fruit per day, while fewer than one in seven (14%) ate five or more serves of vegetables daily (Table 8.1). Fruit and vegetable consumption was related to age, with older people (55–64 years and above) being generally more likely to eat two or more serves of fruit, or five or more serves of vegetables, than younger people. Females were more likely than males to consume the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables in almost all age groups. The proportion of Australians who eat the recommended amount of vegetables increased slightly since 2001, while fruit intake remained about the same (ABS 2002a). While many people enjoy a healthy diet,

Table 8.1: Self-reported usual daily intake of fruit and vegetables, persons aged 12 years or over, by age group and sex, 2004–05 (per cent)[(a)]

Age group (years)	Two or more serves of fruit			Five or more serves of vegetables		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
12–14	53.9	58.0	56.0	7.3	8.1	9.9
15–24	41.4	51.9	46.5	8.4	9.2	8.8
25–34	39.4	53.6	46.5	7.7	13.5	10.6
35–44	42.6	56.0	49.4	11.5	14.6	13.1
45–54	50.1	61.5	55.8	13.3	19.4	16.4
55–64	56.2	70.4	63.3	16.4	22.8	19.6
65–74	60.7	68.3	64.7	12.7	15.8	19.9
75 or over	61.9	70.0	66.5	17.2	14.5	15.6
Total	**47.9**	**59.8**	**53.9**	**12.1**	**15.8**	**13.9**

(a) Percentage of the population within each age group.

Note: Data are not available for children aged less than 12 years.

Source: ABS 2006a:Table 29.

a considerable number does not consume sufficient fruit and vegetables. Possible barriers to healthy eating include lack of knowledge, cost and quality of fresh produce, lack of time to prepare vegetables and personal food preferences.

Selected dietary habits of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were investigated in the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey. In non-remote areas, 42% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 12 years or over usually ate two or more serves of fruit per day and 10% usually ate five or more serves of vegetables. Indigenous people living in non-remote areas generally ate less fruit than non-Indigenous people, but had similar vegetable intake (ABS 2006b). People in remote areas were not asked to specify how many serves of fruit or vegetables they ate most days. However, the survey found that one in five (20%) Indigenous people living in remote areas had no usual daily fruit intake, compared with one in eight (12%) living in non-remote areas. Indigenous people living in remote areas were also less likely to eat vegetables, with 15% reporting no usual daily intake, compared with 2% of Indigenous people in non-remote areas (ABS 2006b).

Access to potable water

Access to a reliable supply of clean water is essential to good health and is important for the prevention of disease and sickness. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines indicate acceptable standards for drinking water, in terms of both health-related and aesthetic qualities (NHMRC & NRMMC 2004). Not only should water be free from contaminants (such as bacteria and pesticides) and safe to drink, it should also be clear and taste- and odour-free.

In Australia, the responsibility for implementing water quality guidelines lies with each state and territory. Water authorities in each jurisdiction are required to regularly monitor and report on the quality and safety of the water they distribute. The National Performance Report for Urban Water Facilities found that compliance with the guidelines was high in 2005–06. All major water utilities supplying water to capital cities reported 100% compliance with microbiological and health-related chemical standards (Water Services Association of Australia 2007). Outside capital cities, two major utilities (supplying water to more than 50,000 properties) and six non-major utilities (with between 10,000 and 50,000 connected properties) reported less than 100% (93.2%–99.8%) microbiological compliance, measured in terms of the percentage of the population where microbiological compliance was achieved. A number of utilities reported incomplete chemical compliance in a minority of water supply zones.

The Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs surveys provide data on access to water in Indigenous communities. In 2006, information was collected for 1,187 discrete Indigenous communities with a combined reported usual population of 92,960 (ABS 2007b). Almost all (94%) of these communities were in remote or very remote areas. The majority (58%) of communities reported bore water as their main source of drinking water, while 18% reported a town water supply and 1% (nine communities) had no organised water supply. The number of communities with no organised water supply fell from 21 in 2001. In 2006, 164 communities that were not connected to a town water supply had their drinking water sent away for testing during the year. Of these, water from 48 communities (with a combined population of 12,059 people) failed testing. In 2001, 56 communities (with a combined population of 17,028 people) had water that failed testing, out of 169 communities tested (ABS 2002b).

Urban air quality

Air quality in Australian cities is generally good, although some localised problems still occur as a result of bushfires or industrial pollution (Beeton et al. 2006). While environmental regulations have reduced ambient levels of a number of air pollutants, three pollutants remain of particular concern (DEH 2004). These are airborne particulate matter of 10 µm in diameter or less (PM_{10}), particulate matter of 2.5 µm in diameter or less ($PM_{2.5}$) and photochemical oxidants (as ozone). Levels of these pollutants are measured in terms of the number of days per year that the average concentration exceeded the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure (AAQ NEPM).

Adverse health effects resulting from air pollution are well established. Exposure to PM_{10} is associated with increased hospitalisation caused by asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other respiratory illnesses (Brunekreef & Forsberg 2005), and mortality due to lung cancer (Abbey et al. 1999). Finer $PM_{2.5}$ are able to be inhaled deep into lung tissue, and may even penetrate the bloodstream, resulting in increased cardiovascular disease risk, among other effects (Miller et al. 2007). Ground ozone, the main component of smog, is formed when pollutants react with sunlight. Ozone exposure is associated with reduced lung function, airway inflammation, coughing and pain, and exacerbation of symptoms of respiratory diseases such as asthma (Folinsbee 1992).

PM_{10} concentrations have fluctuated over the period 2000–05 (Table 8.2). Between 2000 and 2003 there was an apparent increase in the number of days where PM_{10} concentration exceeded 50 µg/m^3 in most major capital cities; however, this fell or remained stable in 2004 and 2005. The peaks in Sydney in 2002 and Melbourne in 2003 may have been due to severe bushfires and dust storms (ABS 2005a); even taking these into account particle levels were generally higher in larger cities. Perth was the only major city not to exceed the maximum allowable days of high PM_{10} concentration (that is, 5 days per year) over the 6-year period.

Table 8.2: Number of days per year when concentrations of PM_{10} and ozone exceeded the AAQ NEPM standard levels, in major capital cities, 2000 to 2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number of days when concentration of PM_{10} exceeded 50 µg/m^3 (over 24 hours)[a]						
Sydney	2	5	17	10	2	2
Melbourne	0	2	6	13	11	9
Brisbane	0	1	7	2	2	2
Perth	0	1	2	1	1	3
Adelaide	n.a.	n.a.	1	6	4	6
Number of days when concentration of ozone exceeded 0.10 ppm (over 1 hour)[b]						
Sydney	4	9	2	4	7	6
Melbourne	1	0	0	2	1	0
Brisbane	0	0	2	0	0	0
Perth	0	0	0	0	1	0
Adelaide	n.a.	n.a.	0	0	0	0

(a) The maximum allowable exceedence is 5 days per year, to be achieved by 2008.

(b) The maximum allowable exceedence is 1 day per year, to be achieved by 2008.

Sources: AIHW 2005a; NEPC 2006, 2007.

In 2005, Sydney was the only capital city to exceed the AAQ NEPM for ozone concentration of 1 day per year over 10 ppm (Table 8.2). It remains the only major capital city that consistently failed to meet this standard. All other recorded capital cities show evidence of maintaining low levels of ozone over the period 2000–05.

In 2003, the AAQ NEPM was amended to include monitoring of $PM_{2.5}$. The concentration of these particles in 2005 exceeded 25 μg/m^3 in Sydney on 7 days, on 3 days in Melbourne and Perth, and did not exceed this level in Brisbane and Adelaide (NEPC 2007).

Shelter and housing

Access to adequate shelter and housing is recognised as a basic human need. As well as providing protection from environmental elements and access to facilities such as heating and sanitation, housing gives people a place to enjoy privacy and recreational activities, keep their possessions, spend time with friends and family, and express their identity (ABS 2001a). Housing equity is also a major component of personal wealth (see 'Economic resources and security' in Section 8.3).

In this section, three indicators are presented to describe the housing circumstances of Australians. Housing tenure relates to the issues of security and stability; home ownership also gives autonomy and a form of social insurance to owners. Housing affordability affects the broader economic and social wellbeing of individuals and communities. Homelessness indicates housing deprivation, but as it is influenced by a wide range of social issues (such as mental health and family breakdown) it also provides a gauge of more general social dysfunction (ABS 2001a). For further analysis of housing issues in the welfare context, see Chapter 5.

Housing tenure

In 2003–04 there were more than 7.7 million households in Australia (Table 8.3). The majority (70%) owned their home, while 21% were private renters and 5% were renting from a public housing authority. Among home owners, there were similar numbers of mortgagees and outright owners (2.7 million households in each category).

Tenure type varied considerably according to household composition. More than half (52%) of couple-only households and 41% of lone-person households owned their homes outright, compared with 18% of households comprising couples with dependent children. This partly reflects age effects—home ownership rates increase with age, and many couple-only households comprise older couples whose children have left home, while many lone persons who own their home outright are older people whose partners have died.

Trends in housing tenure are driven by a multitude of factors. Some of these include changes in household structure, cost, supply, expectations of future economic security, investment decisions, personal preferences and lifestyle choices. Between 1994–95 and 2003–04, the percentage of households that owned their home (either as outright owners or as mortgagees) was stable, at around 70%–71%, while the proportion of renter households grew from 26% to 28% (ABS 2006c). Over this period the proportion of outright owners fell by 7 percentage points while the proportion of mortgagees rose by 6 points. The trend away from outright home ownership was even more marked for younger age groups. Declining home ownership rates among young people appears to be associated with delayed marriage and family formation (McDonald & Baxter 2005). Another factor in the move away from outright home ownership is the number of recent home buyers. Almost 1.2 million households, accounting for 15% of all households, purchased their dwelling in the 3 years

before 2003–04. About two-thirds (66%) of these recent home buyers were existing home owners (ABS 2006d). In comparison, 13% of households were recent home buyers in 1994 (ABS 1995). Home owners may also draw on their housing equity to finance the purchase of other assets, fund household expenditure or repay other debt. In 2004, an estimated 7% of households made a net withdrawal of housing equity, excluding those engaged in property transactions (Schwartz et al. 2006).

Table 8.3: Tenure type and composition of households, 2003–04 (per cent)

	Owner		Renter		Total[a]	
	Without a mortgage	With a mortgage	Public[b]	Private landlord	Per cent	Number
Couple-only households	52.3	28.5	2.2	14.0	100.0	2,019,000
Couple family with dependent children households	17.8	60.8	1.5	16.2	100.0	2,096,400
One-parent, one-family households with dependent children	10.8	28.6	17.4	37.8	100.0	526,000
Other one-family households	44.8	33.4	3.4	15.8	100.0	804,500
Lone person	40.8	19.2	9.0	25.6	100.0	1,964,900
Group households	11.4	15.4	**1.2	67.7	100.0	247,500
Total (per cent)[c]	**34.9**	**35.1**	**4.9**	**21.2**	**100.0**	**—**
Total (number)[c]	**2,702,900**	**2,713,800**	**376,400**	**1,638,400**	**—**	**7,735,800**

(a) Includes other renters and other tenure type.

(b) Renting from a state or territory housing authority.

(c) Includes multiple family households.

Note: Columns and rows may not add up to totals due to rounding.

Source: ABS 2005b:Table 11.

Changes in the size and nature of housing also affects trends in tenure type. Over the period 1994–95 to 2003–04, the average number of bedrooms per dwelling rose from 2.9 to 3.0 (ABS 2006d). At the same time, average household size decreased from 2.7 to 2.5 persons as the proportion of all households comprising a lone person increased by 3 percentage points—a continuation of a long-term trend.

Indigenous households were less likely than the general population to own their homes. In 2002, 30% of Indigenous households were outright owners or mortgagees (Table 8.4). More than one in five (23%) Indigenous households were renting from a state or territory housing authority, and a further 15% were renting from Indigenous and mainstream community housing organisations. The high rate of public or community housing among Indigenous households may be due, in part, to the prevalence of land tenure arrangements in remote communities, which tend to result in community, rather than individual, ownership of dwellings (ABS & AIHW 2003).

Table 8.4: Tenure type of Indigenous households, 2002

		Renter				
	Home owner/ purchaser	State/territory housing	Indigenous/ community housing	Private/other landlord	Other	Total
Number	50,400	37,700	24,500	46,700	6,200	165,700
Per cent	30.4	22.8	14.8	28.2	3.7	100.0

Source: ABS & AIHW 2005:Table 4.2.

Housing affordability

A widely used indicator of housing affordability is the percentage of households that spends more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Data are also presented on the proportion of households spending more than 50% of their income on housing costs—an indicator of severe risk of housing stress. These measures are restricted to lower income households, that is, households whose equivalised disposable income is ranked between the bottom 10% and bottom 40% of income distribution. The ABS excludes households in the bottom 10% from the lower income household group:

> Studies of income and expenditure reported in the 2003–04 ABS Household Expenditure Survey (HES) have shown that [some] households in the bottom income decile and with negative gross incomes tend to have expenditure levels that are comparable to those of households with higher income levels, indicating that these households have access to economic resources, such as wealth or that the instance of low or negative income is temporary, perhaps reflecting business or investment start up (ABS 2006d).

In 2003–04, almost one in five (19%) lower income households would be classified as being in housing stress, including 4% of households that spent more than 50% of their gross income on housing costs (Table 8.5). About one in five lower income households with a mortgage and two in five private renters spent more than 30% to 50% of their income on housing costs; around one in 10 of each household type spent more than 50%. Comparing housing affordability between renters and purchasers is difficult as they represent different measures and are subject to data limitations. In particular, purchasing a house provides an asset to the households, and households may choose to experience higher levels of housing stress than necessary to reduce future expenses. Paying rent does not involve asset accumulation or enable flexibility in meeting current and future housing costs. Some housing costs may be reimbursed, but this information is not collected in the ABS Survey of Income and Housing. For example, recipients of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance scheme tend to be private renters who may also receive other government benefits. Additionally, some housing costs not included in the scope of the survey, including repairs, insurance and body corporate fees, are more likely to be incurred by home owners than renters (ABS 2006d).

Table 8.5: Lower income households[a] that spent more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs[b], by tenure type, 2003–04 (per cent)[c]

	Proportion of gross income spent on housing costs	
Tenure type	**More than 30% to 50%**	**More than 50%**
Owner without a mortgage	n.p.	—
Owner with a mortgage	20.8	10.3
Renter—state/territory housing authority	*3.6	—
Renter—private landlord	41.8	8.9
All tenure types (per cent)[d]	**14.3**	**4.2**
All tenure types (number)	**328,400**	**96,500**

(a) Lower income households are defined as those with an equivalised disposable household income that is between the bottom 10% and bottom 40% of the income distribution.

(b) Housing costs include major cash outlays on housing, that is, mortgage repayments and property rates for owners, and rent. Housing costs here do not include outlays such as repairs, maintenance and dwelling insurance.

(c) Per cent of all lower income households.

(d) Includes other renters.

Source: ABS 2006d:Table 5.

Over the period 2000–01 to 2003–04, the proportion of lower income households that spent more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs remained stable, at around 19%. However, there was a notable decline in this measure among lower income households that rent privately, from 59% of households to 51%.

For detailed analyses of factors contributing to housing affordability problems, and housing assistance provided by governments, see *Australia's welfare 2001* (AIHW 2001) and Chapter 5.

Homelessness

Homelessness refers not only to the absence of conventional accommodation (for instance, people sleeping rough, squatting in derelict buildings or living in cars or makeshift dwellings), but also to people with transient accommodation, such as those staying with friends or relatives, using Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services and living in boarding houses. The measurement of homelessness can vary with different cultural understanding of homelessness, especially in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Estimates of homelessness in Australia, derived from the ABS Census of Population and Housing, are based on three groups (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003): people without conventional accommodation ('primary homelessness'); people staying with friends or relatives and who have no other usual address, and people in SAAP services ('secondary homelessness'); and people living in boarding houses, both short- and long-term ('tertiary homelessness'). However, these categories are neither straightforward nor uncontested. See Chapter 6 for further discussion about counting the homeless.

On census night in 2001 almost 100,000 people in Australia were estimated to be homeless (Table 8.6). About half (49%) were staying with friends or relatives, almost a quarter (23%) were living in boarding houses and 14% were accessing SAAP services. The number of homeless people in 2001 was smaller than in 1996, largely due to a drop in the number of people who were counted in the primary homelessness category. This is likely to be a result of changes to the counting rules between 1996 and 2001 concerning improvised dwellings in remote Indigenous communities (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

Table 8.6: The whereabouts of homeless people on census night, 1996 and 2001

	1996		2001	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
SAAP accommodation[a]	12,926	12	14,251	14
Boarding house	23,299	22	22,877	23
Friends/relatives	48,500	46	48,614	49
No conventional accommodation[b]	20,579	20	14,158	14
Total homeless	**105,304**	**100**	**99,900**	**100**

(a) Provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

(b) Includes improvised dwellings, tents and sleepers out. Counting rules in the 1996 Census included any dwelling which did not have a working bath/shower and toilet as an improvised dwelling. This methodological approach was not taken in 2001, to account for those Indigenous households who used bathroom and toilet facilities in properly constructed amenity blocks.

Sources: Chamberlain 1999; Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

For the 2006 Census, the ABS developed the Homeless People Enumeration Strategy, aimed at obtaining more accurate homelessness data by addressing social and cultural barriers to counting homeless people (ABS 2006e). However, the 2006 census-based estimates of homelessness were not available at the time of publication.

Health

Health has been defined as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity' (WHO 1946). As a part of the welfare framework, good health represents quality of life in terms of longevity, functioning and participation, all of which play an important role in everyday living. In this section six indicators are presented that represent different aspects of health. Other indicators of important determinants of health were presented in the 'Food, water and air' section. A more thorough investigation of these indicators and other determinants of health is provided in *Australia's health 2006* (AIHW 2006a).

Life expectancy

Life expectancy is a well-established and widely accepted indicator of the general health of a population. It is defined as the average number of years of remaining life a person at a given age can expect to live, assuming death rates do not change (AIHW 1996). Life expectancy at birth estimates the average life span of a newborn, providing an indication of population mortality at a given time, while life expectancy at older ages (such as 65 years) is an indicator of mortality among older people.

In 2003–05, the life expectancy at birth in Australia was 78.5 years for males and 83.3 years for females (ABS 2006f). The life expectancy for females was greater than males throughout the 20th century, although the gap is closing. For both sexes, life expectancy in Australia in 2003–05 was the highest in the nation's recorded history.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have significantly lower life expectancy than the general population. During the period 1996–2001, Indigenous life expectancy at birth was estimated to be 59.4 years for males and 64.8 years for females—about 17 years less than the corresponding life expectancies for all Australians at a similar time (ABS & AIHW 2005). While unreliable data on Indigenous people in several states means it is not possible to analyse long-term trends at the national level, good quality data spanning four decades in the Northern Territory are available. Between 1967 and 2004, the life expectancy at birth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people increased by about 8 years for males, and 14 years for females in the Northern Territory (Wilson et al. 2007). Over the same period, life expectancy at birth for the Australian population as a whole rose by about 10 years for males and 9 years for females.

In 2000–05 Australia had the third highest life expectancy in the world for both males (behind Iceland and Hong Kong at 79 years) and females (behind Japan and Hong Kong at 85 years). Global life expectancy at birth is estimated to be 63.9 years for males and 68.3 years for females (UN 2007).

Expected years of life lived with disability

Indicators of health and functioning provide insight into the quality of life of Australians across the life span. Expected years lived with disability is an estimate of how many years an individual can expect to live, on average, with disability. In this context, disability refers to the presence of one or more impairments, limitations, restrictions or disabling conditions that have lasted, or are expected to last, 6 months or more, and which restrict

everyday activities (see Chapter 4 for further detail about the concept of disability). This indicator is a reflection of the health status of the Australian population, rather than a prediction of any individual's experience.

In 2003, Australians could expect to live about one-quarter of their life with some form of disability—18.6 years (24%) for males, and 20.7 years (25%) for females (AIHW 2006b). Years lived with disability include an average of 5.4 years (males) and 8.3 years (females) with a severe or profound core activity limitation—that is, sometimes or always needing assistance with mobility, self-care or communication. Disability is strongly related to age, so most of the years lived with disability are expected to occur at older ages.

Between 1988 and 2003, life expectancy at birth grew by 4.7 years for males and 3.3 years for females. These gains were accompanied by rises in expected years of life with disability—an extra 3.9 years for males, and 4.7 years for females. Expected years lived with disability increased as a proportion of total life expectancy over this period; however, most of this was due to an increase in the expected number of years lived with less severe disability (AIHW 2006b).

Data on expected years of life lived with disability at age 65 are included in Chapter 3.

Infant mortality

Most childhood deaths (68%) occur in the first year of life (AIHW 2006a). Infant mortality is defined as the number of deaths of children aged under 1 year in the same calendar year (ABS 2006f). Infant mortality is covered comprehensively in *Australia's health 2006* (AIHW 2006a), with key data provided here.

In 2005 there were 5.0 infant deaths per 1,000 live births—1,300 deaths in total (ABS 2006f). Almost half (43%) occurred within the first day of birth. The mortality rate was slightly higher for boys (5.4 per 1,000) than girls (4.7 per 1,000). The leading cause of infant mortality over the period 1997–2001 was sudden infant death syndrome, accounting for 10% of infant deaths (AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit 2004).

The overall infant mortality rate fell dramatically throughout the last century, from 81.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1905. More recently, the rate has halved from 9.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1985.

While complete and reliable national data on infant mortality among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not available, data from three jurisdictions (Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory) show that rates were generally higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous infants, ranging from 5 to 27 deaths per 1,000 live births over the period 1991–2003. Generally, there has been a reduction in Indigenous infant mortality over recent years (ABS & AIHW 2005).

In 2005, Australia's infant mortality rate ranked 8th highest out of 27 countries in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) for which data were available. The lowest rates (2.3 deaths and 2.4 deaths per 1,000 live births) were in Iceland and Sweden, respectively (OECD 2007a). Australia's infant mortality rate was lower than the estimated global average (53.9 in 2006) by a factor of more than 10 (UN 2007).

Mental health

Mental health problems can cause considerable suffering and may contribute to individuals experiencing social isolation, poor quality of life and higher mortality rates, as well as having negative effects on families and the wider community (WHO 2006a). In 2004–05, there were approximately 2.1 million Australians of all ages living with a long-term (that

is, lasting or expected to last 6 months or more) mental or behavioural condition, based on self-reported survey data—about 11% of the population (ABS 2006a). This percentage had increased from 6% in 1995, perhaps partly due to more people being willing to report mental health problems as the stigma associated with mental illness diminishes.

Complementing data on the prevalence of mental health conditions, levels of psychological distress were determined in the National Health Survey based on respondents' answers to questions about their emotional state over a 4-week period. More than 0.5 million adults in Australia (4%) were considered to have very high levels of psychological distress, while an additional 1.4 million (9%) had high levels of psychological distress. Females were more likely than males to have very high levels of psychological distress in most age groups (Table 8.7). Similar levels of psychological distress were reported in 2001 (ABS 2006g).

Selected questions about emotional wellbeing and psychological distress were included in the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over reported generally feeling happy (71%), calm and peaceful (56%) and/or full of life (55%). A small proportion felt nervous (9%), without hope (7%) and/or so sad that nothing could cheer them up (7%) all or most of the time during the 4 weeks before the survey (ABS 2006b).

Additional detailed statistics relating to mental health issues in Australia include data on psychiatric disability (Chapter 4), mental illness among homeless SAAP clients (Chapter 6), hospitalisation and mortality due to mental or behavioural disorders (AIHW 2006a), and mental health care provided by a range of services (AIHW 2007a).

Table 8.7: Prevalence of very high levels of psychological distress[(a)][(b)], persons aged 18 years or over, by age group and sex, 2004–05 (per cent)[(c)]

Age group (years)	Males	Females	Persons
18–24	3.3	3.5	3.4
25–34	2.3	3.5	2.9
35–44	3.4	5.1	4.3
45–54	4.0	5.5	4.8
55–64	4.6	4.3	4.4
65 or over	2.9	3.5	3.2
Total (per cent)[(d)]	**3.3**	**4.3**	**3.8**
Total (number)	**246,000**	**325,800**	**571,300**

(a) Based on the Kessler 10 scale of psychological distress, where persons with scores of 30 to 50 are rated as having very high levels of psychological distress. See ABS 2006a.

(b) Based on self-reported data.

(c) Per cent of the population in each age group

(d) Total is age-standardised and includes 'not stated' responses.

Source: ABS 2006a:Table 14.

Physical activity

Regular physical exercise plays an important role in preventing many chronic diseases including Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, some cancers and musculoskeletal disorders, and can also provide social and mental health benefits (WHO 2006b). The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians recommend adults undertake at least 30 minutes of moderate to high intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week in order to receive health benefits (DoHA 1999).

Based on reported details of exercise undertaken for recreation, sport or fitness, in 2004–05, an estimated one in three Australians had sedentary levels of exercise—that is, less than 100 minutes over 2 weeks (Table 8.8). Exercise levels varied between age groups, with young people aged 18–24 years least likely to be sedentary (29%) and people aged 75 years or over most likely (56%). Additionally, 33% of men and 39% of women reported low exercise levels (between 100 and 1600 minutes over a 2-week period). The proportions of people reporting sedentary or low levels of exercise were similar between 1995 and 2004–05 (ABS 2006h).

About three out of every four (75%) Indigenous Australians aged 15 years or over who lived in non-remote areas reported sedentary or low exercise levels in 2004–05—an increase of 5 percentage points since 1995 (ABS 2006b).

Table 8.8: Persons aged 18 years or over reporting sedentary levels of exercise[a], by age group and sex, 1995 and 2004–05 (per cent)[b]

	Males		Females		Persons	
Age group (years)	**1995**	**2004–05**	**1995**	**2004–05**	**1995**	**2004–05**
18–24	24.4	24.9	28.1	32.3	26.2	28.6
25–34	30.8	26.3	30.1	29.4	30.5	27.9
35–44	35.8	34.4	34.1	32.1	35.0	33.3
45–54	38.7	36.5	34.7	32.9	36.7	34.7
55–64	38.6	38.5	36.8	31.5	37.7	35.0
65–74	35.6	31.9	43.7	40.5	40.0	36.3
75 or over	44.9	51.5	54.0	58.6	50.5	55.6
Total[c]	**35.0**	**33.6**	**35.4**	**34.4**	**35.3**	**34.1**

(a) Sedentary exercise level is defined as less than 100 minutes (including no exercise) in the 2 weeks before interview relating to sport, recreation or fitness.

(b) Proportion of the population within each age group.

(c) Total is age-standardised, standardised to the estimate resident population on 30 June 2001.

Source: ABS 2006a:Table 23.

Prevalence of obesity

The health consequences of obesity include increased risk of Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and some cancers (WHO 2000). Obesity in adults is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or more, while people with a BMI of 25 to less than 30 are classified as overweight but not obese.

In 2004–05, excluding those for whom BMI could not be derived, 18% of the Australian population aged 18 years or over were obese and a further 33% were overweight but not obese, based on self-reported height and weight data (ABS 2006a). Males (19%) were more likely than females (17%) to be obese. Between 1995 and 2004–05 the proportion of the adult population that was obese rose considerably, from 11% to 16% (AIHW 2006a).

In 2004–05, 24% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over were classified as obese, based on self-reported height and weight data (ABS 2006b). A further 23% were overweight but not obese. In non-remote areas, Indigenous people were more likely than non-Indigenous people to be obese across all age groups (Table 8.9). Between 1995 and 2004–05, after adjusting for non-response, the proportion of Indigenous people living in non-remote areas that was overweight or obese rose from 48%to 56%; however, this increase was not statistically significant.

Table 8.9: Prevalence of obesity: persons aged 15 years or over, by Indigenous status, age group and sex, 2004–05 (per cent)

	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
Age group (years)	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
15–24	12	12	12	5	6	6
25–34	22	28	25	17	13	15
35–44	33	30	31	21	15	18
45–54	29	34	32	23	18	21
55 or over	30	33	32	18	18	18

Note: Non-response rates were generally higher for Indigenous persons than non-Indigenous persons.

Source: ABS 2006b:Table 21.

Safety

Safety is an important component of both physical and mental wellbeing. The idea of safety includes perceptions as well as protection from actual harm. Experiences of crime or injury can be seriously detrimental to feelings of safety, not only for those directly affected but also for those who witness these events or are involved through family, friendship or community ties. In this section, three indicators of safety are presented: perceptions of personal safety, experience of crime and occurrence of injury (including intentional self-harm).

Feelings of safety

Feelings of safety are commonly measured in terms of whether people feel safe in selected situations when they are alone. In this sense, safety refers to individuals' perceptions of their vulnerability to or protection from personal harm, rather than, for example, national security.

In 2005, most people aged 18 years or over felt safe when at home alone during the evening or night (ABS 2006i). More men (95%) felt safe than women (83%). Almost one in three women (31%) did not walk alone in their local area after dark because they felt unsafe, and one in five (19%) did not use public transport alone after dark because of safety fears. In contrast, around 5% of men avoided these situations because they felt unsafe. Of those men and women who did use public transport alone after dark, or walked in their local area alone after dark, more than two-thirds felt safe when doing so. Between 1996 and 2005, the proportion of women who felt safe in each of these situations increased by 5–8 percentage points. Comparable trend data are not available for men.

Lone parents, people living in capital cities and people aged 65 years or over were less likely than average to feel safe or very safe when at home alone, either after dark or during the day (ABS 2006j).

Crime

In order to capture an accurate picture of crime statistics in Australia, data are collected from two main sources: household surveys and police reports. This multiple source approach is taken as some crimes are not reported to police, nor are all incidents recorded as actual crimes. Examining data from two different perspectives reflects a more complete account of crime in Australia. It should be noted, however, that nationally consistent data are not yet available for all categories of crime. In particular, drug offences, antisocial behaviour, fraud and cyber crime are not covered here.

An estimated 488,200 households (6%) were victims of a break-in, attempted break-in and/or motor vehicle theft in 2005 (ABS 2006j). About 259,800 households (3%) experienced at least one break-in, 205,400 households (3%) experienced at least one attempted break-in, and 74,800 households (1%) had at least one motor vehicle stolen. In 2002, 9% of all households experienced one or more of these crimes.

In 2005, 5% of people aged 15 years or over (770,600 people) were victims of an assault crime, while fewer than 1% (58,900 people) were victims of a robbery. Additionally, around 44,100 people aged 18 years or older were victims of sexual assault. Data on children and young people as victims of crime are included in Chapter 2.

Police data on recorded crime show that the highest victimisation rates in 2006 were associated with theft (excluding motor vehicles), unlawful entry with intent, and motor vehicle theft (Table 8.10). Males were more likely than females to be victims of murder, attempted murder, robbery and blackmail/extortion. On the other hand, females were more likely to be victims of kidnapping/abductions (ABS 2007c).

Between 1996 and 2006, the victimisation rates of a number of crimes decreased significantly.

Table 8.10: Victims of recorded crime by offence category, all ages, 1996–2006 (number per 100,000 persons)

	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
Murder	1.7	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.3	1.4
Attempted murder	1.8	2.1	2.1	2.0	1.5	1.2
Manslaughter	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Driving causing death	1.9	1.5	1.4	1.1	1.2	n.a.
Kidnapping/abduction	2.6	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.5
Robbery	89.4	127.1	121.8	106.9	82.2	83.9
Blackmail/extortion	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.8	1.9	2.1
Unlawful entry with intent	2,196.2	2,319.5	2,281.3	2,007.9	1,536.6	1,271.2
Motor vehicle theft	671.4	702.7	725.2	577.7	437.8	364.6
Other theft	2,850.0	3,008.9	3,556.8	3,466.7	2,731.8	2,511.8

Notes

1. Refers to incidents of victimisation that came to the attention of, and were recorded by, police in each calendar year.
2. The definition of a victims varies according to the offence category. See ABS 2007c for more information, including differences in categorisation of crimes between jurisdictions.
3. National data on assault and sexual assault are not available due to differences between jurisdictions in recording practices for these offences.
4. Robbery includes armed and unarmed robbery. Unlawful entry with intent includes both incidents where property was taken and where no property was taken.

Sources: ABS 2006k, 2007c:Table 1.

The rates of motor vehicle theft and other theft fell to their lowest level since national reporting for these crimes began, in 1993 and 1995, respectively (ABS 2007c). The victimisation rate of unlawful entry with intent was at its lowest in a decade. National data on assault and sexual assault were not available due to differences in recording practices between jurisdictions. In 2006, assault victimisation rates were higher than in 2005 in most states and territories, which may in part be related to new police reporting procedures related to domestic violence, while there was no clear trend in victimisation rates of reported sexual assault across jurisdictions.

The most recent available data on crime victimisation rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are from 2002, when 24% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years or over reported having been the victim of a violent crime (ABS 2004). The age-standardised rate of crime victimisation was twice as high for Indigenous persons (20%) aged 18 years or over than for non-Indigenous persons (9%).

Further information about individuals' experience of violence, harassment and stalking is contained in the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (ABS 2006i). In 2005, 11% of men and 6% of women aged 18 years or over had experienced one or more incidents of violence in the past year. Males were more likely than females to experience physical violence (threat or assault), but less likely to experience sexual violence (Table 8.11). Almost one in five women (19%) and 12% of men experienced some form of harassment, such as obscene phone calls, indecent exposure, unwanted sexual touching or inappropriate comments about their body or sexual life. Additionally, as many as 3.7 million men (50%) and 3.1 million women (40%) had experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some time since the age of 15, and more than half of all women (56%) had experienced harassment (ABS 2006i).

Table 8.11: Individuals' experience of harassment, stalking or violence in the past 12 months, persons aged 18 years or over, by sex, 2005

	Males		Females		Persons	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Harassment	864,300	11.6	1,459,500	19.0	2,323,800	15.3
Stalking	110,700	1.5	195,400	2.5	306,100	2.0
Physical threat and/or assault	779,800	10.4	363,000	4.7	1,142,700	7.5
Sexual threat and/or assault	46,700	0.6	126,100	1.6	172,800	1.1

Source: ABS 2006i:Tables 1 & 6.

Injury

This section presents data on 'community injury'— that is, injuries due to complications of surgical or medical care are excluded (Berry & Harrison 2006). This definition of injury includes poisoning and drowning as well as 'intentional injury'—homicide and intentional self-harm. There is some relationship between injury and other indicators in the welfare framework. For example, homicide rates affect peoples' feelings of safety, and intentional self-harm can be viewed as an indicator of social detachment or exclusion.

Injuries are responsible for a great deal of suffering and economic cost in Australia. In 2003–04, there were more than 370,000 hospital stays due to injury, accounting for 5% of all inpatient episodes (Berry & Harrison 2006). More than one in three (36%) were due to unintentional falls; 14% were associated with transport-related injuries. Injuries resulted in 1.4 million patient days at an average of 4.1 days per episode. Injury has chronic as well as acute dimensions. Many people experience permanent disability as a result of injury. An estimated 16% of the population aged 15 years or over (2.1 million people) had a long-term condition resulting from injury in 2004–05 (ABS 2006a). Furthermore, chronic health conditions such as osteoporosis are risk factors for injury.

Injuries accounted for 9,924 deaths (7% of all deaths) in 2003–04 (Henley et al. 2007). After adjusting for differences due to age, males (66.8 deaths per 100,000 population) were 2.1 times as likely as females (31.6 per 100,000) to die as a result of injury. One-quarter of all people who died from injuries were aged 20–39 years. Injury is the most common cause of death in the age group 1–44 years (AIHW 2006a).

The most common causes of injury death in 2003–04 were unintentional falls (30%), intentional self-harm (22%) and transport-related injuries (17%) (Henley et al. 2007). Falls were strongly age-related, with mortality rates of less than 2 per 100,000 under the age of 50 years, less than 10 per 100,000 in the age range 50–69 years and thereafter rising rapidly to about 550 deaths per 100,000 people aged 85 years or over. The mortality rates were not significantly different for males and females. The age-adjusted death rate due to intentional self-harm in 2003–04 was 10.8 per 100,000. The rate among males (17.4 per 100,000) was almost 4 times the female rate (4.6 per 100,000). Intentional self-harm rates peaked around 16–17 deaths per 100,000 in the age group 25–44 years and declined in middle age before rising to 13–14 deaths per 100,000 among people aged 75 years or over (Henley et al. 2007).

Mortality rates due to injury and poisoning halved between 1955 and 2004 (AIHW 2006a). More recently, age-adjusted mortality rates fell for both males (by 19%) and females (by 17%) over the period 1997–98 to 2003–04; however, it is not clear to what extent this may have been affected by data quality issues related to possible undercounting of injury deaths (Henley et al. 2007).

Injury mortality rates are generally higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than other Australians. Over the period 1997–2000, Indigenous people living in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory were 2.8 times as likely to die from injury-related causes as other people in these jurisdictions, after adjusting for age differences (Helps & Harrison 2004). Indigenous mortality rates due to intentional self-harm and transport-related injuries were 1.6 times and 2.3 times as high as those for the rest for the population.

8.3 Autonomy and participation

Autonomy and participation are considered to be essential indicators of welfare, and reflect the very human and personal aspects of individuality, and workplace and community interactions that are vital to positive wellbeing. Data relating to autonomy—the capacity to have freedom of opportunity and choice in daily living—and participation in the community provide information on personal and environmental factors that make up welfare.

This section presents five facets of autonomy and participation: education and knowledge, economic resources, employment, transport and communication, and recreational use of time. These indicators not only identify our individual resources and our national employment patterns, but also reflect the ways in which Australians interact within society.

Education and knowledge

Education and knowledge help to empower individuals and allow them to become more autonomous within society. Education is increasingly viewed as a lifelong process by which both individuals and their communities benefit from the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Education relates to many other facets of society, including employment, health and participation in the civic, cultural and social life of communities.

Data concerning three major indicators of education and knowledge are presented here: participation, attainment and literacy. The focus is largely on non-school education, as education of children and youth, including pre-school education, is described in detail in Chapter 2.

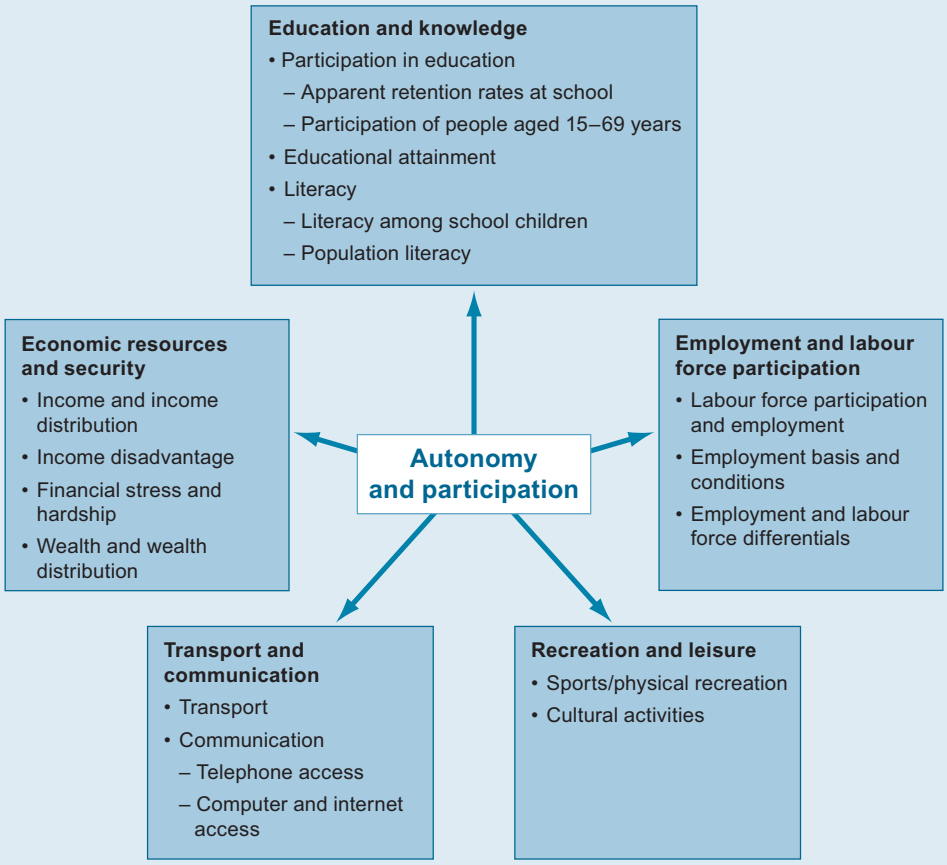


Figure 8.3: Indicators of autonomy and participation

Participation in education

Apparent retention rates at school

Students who stay in secondary school until the final year are more likely to continue their education and training. Higher levels of education are positively correlated with labour market participation and employment prospects, future earnings and other social advantages (Fullarton et al. 2003).

Apparent retention rates reflect the proportion of students in a given cohort considered to be continuing students. For the data presented here, this represents students who remain at school until Year 12. The retention rates are considered 'apparent' as the figures do not account for mature-age, part-time or repeating students, or students who move to a different schooling jurisdiction. It should also be noted that retention to Year 12 does not indicate successful completion of secondary schooling.

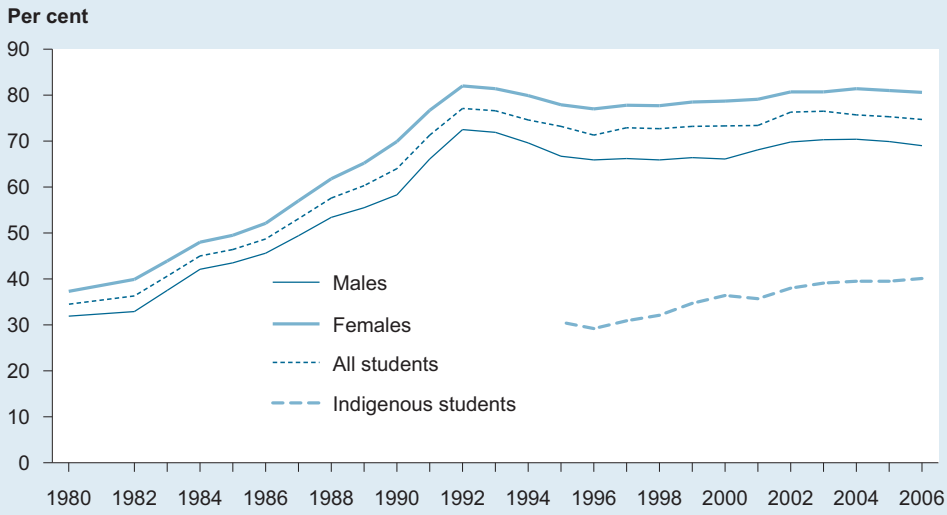
In 2006, the national apparent retention rate to Year 12 was 75%—higher for females (81%) than males (69%). Retention rates more than doubled throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, peaking at 77% in 1992 (Figure 8.4). However, there has been little change since. Changes in apparent retention rates over time are driven by a number of factors.

Chief among these are labour market conditions, particularly the availability of full-time jobs for teenagers (Ryan & Watson 2003)—the peak in national retention rates occurred at a time of high unemployment.

National data are available on apparent retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 1995, when 31% remained in school until Year 12, compared to 73% of the Australian cohort as a whole (Figure 8.4). In 2006, Indigenous students (apparent retention rate 40%) were about half as likely as students in the wider population to remain in school until Year 12, but the gap appears to be narrowing. Patterns of retention among Indigenous students are affected by a number of interrelated factors. Some of these are comparatively low literacy and numeracy skills, high levels of absenteeism, family and household structure including crowding and poorly maintained housing, involvement with the juvenile justice system, and cultural and historical experiences shaping Indigenous people's perceptions of and attitudes to education (Schwab 1999).

Participation of people aged 15–69 years

In 2005, about 2.7 million people aged 15–69 years, or 19% of the population in this age group, were studying for a qualification (ABS 2006l). An additional 0.4 million people (3% of the population) were enrolled in courses that did not lead to a qualification as their only course of study, such as bridging, recreational and personal enrichment courses. Females (24%) were more likely than males (21%) to participate in education. More than one in four people studying for a qualification (26%, or 0.7 million people) were enrolled at Year 12 level or below, while 37% were studying for a diploma, advanced diploma or certificate, 24% were studying for a bachelor degree, and 9% were enrolled in a postgraduate course.



Note: The apparent retention rate to Year 12 is the percentage of students who remain in secondary education from the start of secondary schooling to Year 12. To calculate the apparent retention rate in Year 12 in 2006, the total number of full-time students enrolled in Year 12 in 2006 is divided by the number of full-time students who were in the base year—Year 7 in NSW, Vic, Tas and the ACT in 2001, and Year 8 in Qld, SA, WA and the NT in 2002.

Source: Table A8.1.

Figure 8.4: Year 12 apparent retention rate, by sex and Indigenous status, 1980 to 2006

Participation in education was highest among people aged 15–24 years, largely due to the strong retention rate to Year 12. Around 61% of people in this age group were studying for a qualification, including 26% enrolled in Year 12 or below and 17% enrolled in a bachelor degree (ABS 2006l). The proportion of the population studying for a qualification fell with each successive age group, from 17% of 25–34 year olds to 3% of those aged 55–69 years. People aged 55–69 years were most likely of all age groups to be enrolled only in a course that did not lead to a qualification (4%, or 122,000 people).

The educational experience of people aged 65–69 years was included in the ABS Survey of Education and Work for the first time in 2005. As a result, trend data are not available for the broad 15–69 years age group. However, between 1995 and 2005, there was no statistically significant change in the proportion of people aged 15–64 years participating in education (ABS 2005c).

In 2004–05, 19% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years or over were enrolled in an educational institution (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) analysis of 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey). The broad participation rate is similar to that of the overall Australian population; however, this is related to the younger age structure of the Indigenous population—43% of Indigenous students aged 15 years or over were enrolled at school. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in non-remote areas were more likely than those in remote areas to be enrolled at all types of educational institutions in 2004–05. Between 2002 and 2004–05 there was a small increase in the percentage of Indigenous persons enrolled in educational institutions (from 18% to 19% of those aged 15 years or over), due to higher rates of participation in secondary school.

Educational attainment

Attainment of non-school qualifications (see Glossary) improves employment prospects and potential earning capacity. People who graduate from higher education institutions have higher rates of labour force participation and lower rates of unemployment than people with no non-school qualifications (Lamb 2001). Completion of vocational and other training courses increases the rate of full-time employment among former students, and employees are more likely to receive a pay rise and/or permanent employment after completing a course (Ryan 2002).

This section presents data on the highest level of formal education completed by Australians. Since many people aged 15–24 years have not yet completed their formal education, the main focus here is on the 25–64 years age group. See Chapter 2 for detailed analysis of the 15–24 years age group.

In 2006, almost one in four (24%) Australians aged 25–64 years had a bachelor or higher degree (Table 8.12), while slightly more (28%) reported a certificate or diploma as their highest educational attainment. Generally, educational achievement was negatively correlated with age. People in the 25–34 years age group were most likely to have a bachelor or higher degree (29%), whereas people aged 55–64 years were least likely (18%). The proportion of people aged 55–64 years whose highest reported educational attainment was Year 10 (40%) was almost 3 times as high as those aged 25–34 years (14%). This indicates that educational attainment has increased over successive age cohorts. The trend has continued in recent years. Between 1996 and 2006 the proportion of Australians aged 15–64 years with a bachelor or higher degree rose by 8 percentage points, from 13% to 21%, while the proportion with no non-school qualifications fell 9 percentage points, from 58% to 49% (Figure 8.5).

Table 8.12: Level of highest educational attainment[a], persons aged 25–64 years, by age group, 2006 (per cent)[b]

Age group (years)	Bachelor degree or above[c]	Certificate or diploma[d]	Year 12	Year 11	Year 10 or below
25–34	29.2	27.5	23.3	5.2	13.7
35–44	24.1	28.6	15.1	7.5	23.4
45–54	22.6	28.5	13.0	6.3	28.3
55–64	17.9	25.3	10.7	4.9	39.5
Total 25–64 years (per cent)	**23.8**	**27.6**	**15.8**	**6.1**	**25.4**
Total 25–64 years (number)	**2,523,100**	**2,924,300**	**1,675,000**	**641,900**	**2,686,900**

(a) The levels of education are not necessarily listed in order from highest to lowest.

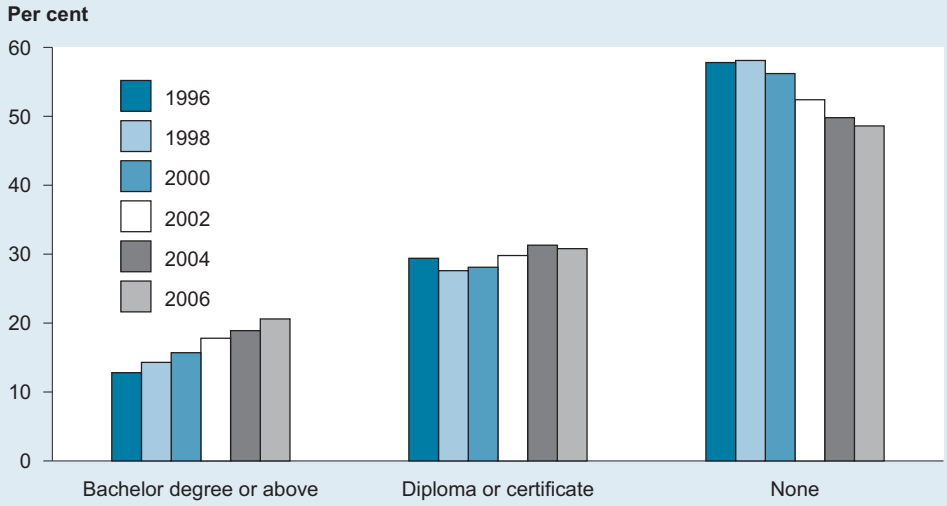
(b) Percentage of the population within each age group.

(c) Includes bachelor degree, graduate diploma or graduate certificate, and postgraduate degree.

(d) Includes Certificate I, II, III or IV, certificate not further defined, diploma and advanced diploma.

Note: Categories do not add to 100% as the level of highest educational attainment could not be determined for some people, and some people never attended school.

Source: ABS 2006m:Table 14.



Source: Table A8.2.

Figure 8.5: Highest non-school qualification of persons aged 15–64 years, 1996–2006)

Educational attainment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has historically been lower than the general Australian population. This is due to a number of factors, including comparatively low retention to Year 12 (see above), literacy and numeracy skills, attitudes to education, lack of access to educational institutions in some areas, and financial disadvantage (ABS & AIHW 2005). In 2004–05, 21% of Indigenous persons aged 18 years or over had a non-school qualification at the Certificate III level or above, compared with 44% of non-Indigenous persons (SCRGSP 2007:Table 3A.4.15). Educational attainment is related to age, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a younger age structure than the non-Indigenous population. However, even among the age groups 18–24 years and 25–34 years, the proportion of non-Indigenous persons with a Certificate III or above was more than twice that of Indigenous persons.

Literacy

Literacy among school children

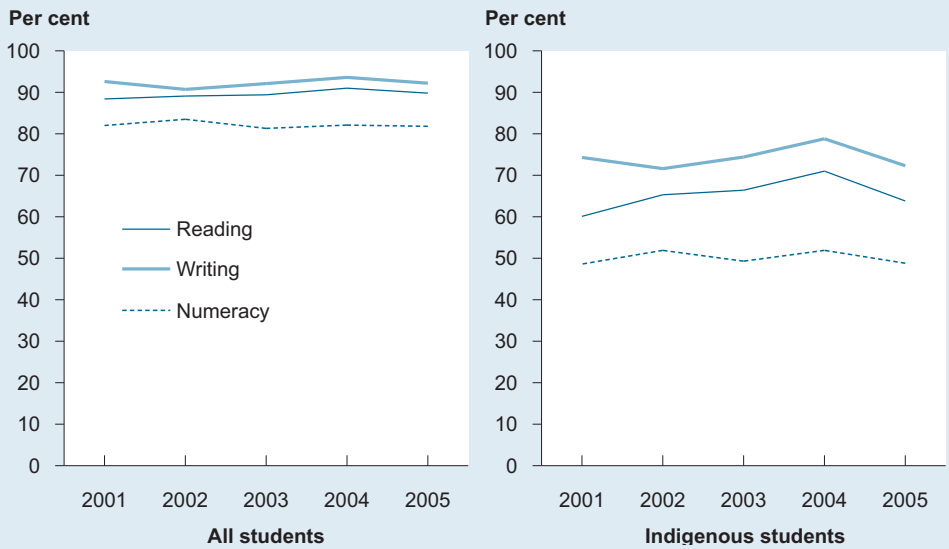
In 1999, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed a set of national educational goals for schooling. A key goal was that 'every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level' (MCEETYA 1999). To monitor progress towards this goal, students in Years 3, 5 and 7 have been assessed annually against a set of national benchmarks that represent nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards of reading, writing and numeracy (MCEETYA 2007).

The majority of Year 3, 5 and 7 students have consistently met the benchmarks in each of the three areas tested. Of the three skill areas, more students fail to meet the numeracy benchmarks than reading or writing. Across all three grades, slightly higher proportions of girls than boys met the reading and writing benchmarks, while no sex difference was apparent in numeracy skills.

In 2005, 90% of Year 7 students met the national reading benchmarks and 92% met the writing benchmarks. Significantly fewer (82%) met the numeracy benchmarks. There have been only marginal changes in the proportion of students meeting each of the benchmarks since 2001 (Figure 8.6).

Low literacy levels have been identified as a key barrier to overcome in order to improve the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Schwab & Sutherland 2004). The percentage of Indigenous students meeting the benchmarks in 2005 was significantly lower than the national rate for all three subject areas and in each grade. In the area of reading, the gap between Indigenous students and all students increased from 15 percentage points in Year 3 to 26 points in Year 7. Similarly, the difference in proportions of students meeting the numeracy benchmark was significantly higher among Year 7 students (33 points) than Year 3 students (14 points). In the area of writing, the gap (19–20 points) was similar for students in all grades. Between 2001 and 2005 there was no obvious trend towards greater proportions of Indigenous students meeting the benchmarks (Figure 8.6).

For further analysis, including detailed results for students in Year 3 and Year 5, and international comparisons of student performance in key learning areas, see Chapter 2.



Note: The data represent students who have achieved the benchmark as a percentage of the students participating in the state and territory testing, including students who were formally exempted (these students are reported as below the benchmark). Students who were absent or withdrawn by parents/caregivers from the testing, and students attending a school not participating in the testing, are not included in the data.

Source: Table A8.3.

Figure 8.6: Year 7 students achieving national educational benchmarks, by Indigenous status, 2001 to 2005

Population literacy

The concept of literacy in developed countries has evolved from a threshold of basic reading ability to a term that describes how people use various forms of written information to function in society. The findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey, bringing together data collected in 23 countries throughout the 1990s, reported that literacy 'is a necessary ingredient for citizenship, community participation and a sense of belonging' (OECD 2000).

The literacy skills of Australians were measured in the 1996 Survey of Aspects of Literacy, conducted as part of the International Adult Literacy Survey. Among Australians aged 15–74 years, the pattern of distribution of skills on the prose, document and quantitative literacy scales were similar (ABS 1997a). Fewer than one in five (16%–18%) people had good or very good skills as measured against each of the three scales. Between 46% and 48% of Australian adults did not attain Skill Level 3 on each of the three scales, the level considered by most experts as a suitable minimum level for coping with the demands of the emerging knowledge society and information economy. These adults could be expected to experience at least some difficulty in using printed materials found in daily life and work. Young people tended to have higher levels of literacy than older people, and females generally had higher skill levels than males. Indigenous Australians, and people whose first language was not English, had significantly lower levels of literacy than the general population.

Literacy skills among the Australian population were in the mid-range of countries participating in the International Adult Literacy Survey. Australia was ranked (by average score) 9th out of 23 on the prose scale, 11th on the document scale, and 12th on the quantitative literacy scale (OECD 2000).

More recent information on the literacy of Australian adults is expected to be available in late 2007, based on the results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey conducted in 2006.

Economic resources and security

The material standard of living enjoyed by individual Australians primarily depends on their command of economic resources, both in the immediate and long term. Economic factors are related to all aspects of the welfare framework, including health, education, employment and social networks. In this section, a number of indicators are presented to describe the economic wellbeing of Australians. While income data are the most commonly reported measures of economic status, an individual's income can fluctuate dramatically across different life stages, and alone does not determine material quality of life. Other factors are the extent to which income is 'buffered' by accumulated wealth, and the amount of economic resources needed to fulfil different financial commitments. Therefore indicators of wealth and financial hardship are included alongside income data. As there is some degree of relativity by which material standard of living is judged within societies, indicators of income and wealth distribution are also presented.

Income and income distribution

The indicators presented here in relation to income are based on equivalised disposable household income. Disposable income is gross income minus income tax and the Medicare levy (where applicable). Income data are reported at the household level because, while income is usually received by individuals, it is generally shared between co-resident family members and, to a lesser extent, other household members who benefit from economies of scale. Equivalence scales are applied to account for different income levels required by households of different size to achieve a similar standard of living. Data presented here are standardised to the equivalent income requirements of a single-person household (ABS 2007e:Appendix 2).

In 2005–06, the median weekly equivalised disposable household income was $563 (Table 8.13). Real median income increased by 34% between 1995–96 and 2005–06; the relative increase was 31% for low-income households (those in the second and third income deciles) and 40% for high-income households (those in the top income quintile). The mean equivalised household income in 2005–06 was $644. The mean was higher than the median due to the asymmetrical nature of household income distribution—most households report low or middle incomes, while a relatively small number report high incomes.

Table 8.13: Weekly equivalised disposable household income[a], by quintile, 2005–06 (dollars)

	Weekly household equivalent disposable income quintile[b][c]					All households
	Lowest	Second	Third	Fourth	Highest	
Median income	274	415	563	743	1,073	563
Mean income	255	414	565	746	1,239	644

(a) In 2005–06 dollars, adjusted using changes in the Consumer Price Index.

(b) The modified OECD equivalence scale has been used to facilitate comparisons of income levels across different household types. Data have been standardised to the income requirements of a single-person household.

(c) Quintiles have been calculated by ranking persons on the basis of weekly equivalised disposable household income and allocating an equal number of persons to each quintile.

Source: ABS 2007f:Table 6.

Income distribution may be assessed by various different measures. Some of the most widely used indicators are illustrated in Table 8.14. A number of methodological improvements were introduced to the ABS Survey of Income and Housing in 2003–04, making it difficult to identify long-term trends. However, the extent of income inequality in 2005–06 does not appear to be significantly different to that in 1995–96.

Table 8.14: Trends in income inequality measures, 1995–96 to 2005–06

	1995–96	1997–98	2000–01	2002–03	2003–04[a]	2005–06
Share of total income received by persons in low-income and high-income households (per cent)						
Low income[b]	11.0	10.8	10.5	10.6	10.8	10.6
High income[c]	37.3	37.9	38.5	38.3	37.6	38.5
Income ratio						
P80/P20[d]	2.58	2.56	2.63	2.63	2.50	2.55
P90/P10[e]	3.74	3.77	3.98	4.00	3.75	3.92
Summary measure						
Gini coefficient[f]	0.296	0.303	0.311	0.309	0.297	0.307

(a) A number of changes were introduced to the survey methodology in 2003–04. See ABS 2006m for details.

(b) Persons in the second and third income deciles after being ranked by their equivalised disposable household incomes.

(c) Persons in the top income quintile after being ranked by their equivalised disposable household incomes.

(d) The income at the top of the 80th percentile divided by the income at the top of the 20th percentile.

(e) The income at the top of the 90th percentile divided by the income at the top of the 10th percentile.

(f) The Gini coefficient provides a measure of the distribution of income. A value of 0 represents absolute equality, that is, all persons have the same income. A value of 1 represents absolute inequality—one person has all the income.

Source: ABS 2007f:Table S5.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tend to have lower incomes than non-Indigenous Australians. In 2004–05, Indigenous adults were twice as likely as non-Indigenous adults to be in the lowest gross equivalised household income quintile (41% compared with 20%), and almost one-quarter as likely to be in the highest quintile (6% compared with 23%) (SCRGSP 2007: Figure 3.6.3). Between 1994 and 2004–05 the median equivalised gross household income of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years or over rose by 6% in real terms, while the mean rose by 16%. The household circumstances of Indigenous people may be affected by a number of differences between family size and composition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations; however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were also disproportionately represented in the lower quintiles of the gross individual income distribution (SCRGSP 2007: Figure 3.6.5).

Income disadvantage

Income disadvantage can be thought of in absolute or relative terms. Measures of absolute income disadvantage define an income level below which the basic necessities of life (such as food, clothing and housing) may be unaffordable. However, the placement of such a 'poverty line' is controversial, as beliefs about what constitutes material necessity vary widely. Alternatively, measures can focus on people or households whose incomes are relatively low, compared with the overall population, and who may therefore experience comparatively lower material living standards than society's norm. A commonly used measure is the proportion of households whose equivalised disposable income is below 50% of the national median. As this figure may be particularly sensitive to small changes

in income support payments, two additional measures are presented here—one based on a broader definition of relatively low incomes (below 60% of the median), and one more narrowly defined (below 40% of the median).

In 2005–06, more than 2.2 million Australians (11% of all persons) lived in households with a reported equivalised weekly disposable income below 50% of the national median—that is, about $282 per week or less (Table 8.15). According to other measures of relatively low income, 20% of Australians (3.9 million people) lived in households with a reported equivalised weekly disposable income below 60% of the median (about $338 per week), and 4% of the population (0.9 million people) lived in households with reported equivalised weekly disposable income below 40% of the median (about $225 per week).

Between 1995–96 and 2005–06, there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of Australians living in households with weekly equivalised disposable income below 50%, or below 60%, of the median (Table 8.15). However, due to methodological changes introduced to the ABS Survey of Income and Housing in 2003–04, it is not possible to ascertain whether these differences represent a real increase in relative income disadvantage over the past decade.

Table 8.15: Australians living in households with reported weekly equivalised disposable income below 40%, 50% and 60% of the median for all households, 1995–96 to 2005–06[a]

	1995–96	1997–98	2000–01	2002–03	2003–04[b]	2005–06
				Number		
Below 40% of median	856,200	856,900	989,700	988,600	816,600	868,000
Below 50% of median	1,580,200	1,549,400	2,062,100	2,178,500	1,969,900	2,246,500
Below 60% of median	3,334,400	3,427,600	3,883,400	3,912,400	3,854,600	3,947,400
				Per cent		
Below 40% of median	4.8	4.7	5.2	5.1	4.2	4.4
Below 50% of median	8.8	8.5	10.9	11.3	10.0	11.3
Below 60% of median	18.7	18.8	20.6	20.3	19.7	19.8
Median income[c]	421	442	475	485	522	563

(a) A number of methodological changes were introduced to the Survey of Income and Housing in 2003–04, which may impact on the comparability with estimates from previous years. See ABS 2006m for details.

(b) Estimates for 2003–04 have been revised to include salary sacrificed income not already included in wages and salaries, in line with 2005–06 estimates. As a result, revised data may differ slightly from that published in ABS 2005b.

(c) In 2005–06 dollars, adjusted using changes in the Consumer Price Index.

Sources: ABS Surveys of Income and Housing, 1995–96, 1997–98, 2000–01, 2002–03, 2003–04 and 2005–06 (unpublished data).

Financial stress and hardship

Measures of economic wellbeing may also examine whether individuals experience material deprivation or hardship due to shortage of money. The General Social Survey collects information on the incidence of certain cash flow problems, such as being unable to pay particular bills on time, having pawned or sold a possession because cash was needed, seeking financial assistance, and going without meals. In 2006, most people (82%) aged 18 years or over reported that they did not experience cash flow problems in the previous 12 months (ABS 2007g). Almost 6% had experienced three or more cash flow problems in the last 12 months. The most common cash flow problem was an inability to pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time, reported by 11% of people surveyed.

Experiences of cash flow problems varied with different household types. Of selected household types, one-parent households with dependent children were most likely to report having experienced three or more different types of cash flow problems in the last 12 months, followed by lone persons aged less than 35 years (Table 8.16). More than one in three (34%) one-parent families and one in four (26%) young lone-person households reported being unable to pay a utility bill on time. In addition, many people in these households experienced frequent difficulty in paying bills—9% of one-parent families and 8% of lone persons aged less than 35 years reported having difficulty paying bills 10 or more times in the last 12 months (ABS 2007g). See Chapter 2 for further details of financial stress in families.

In 2002, more than half (54%) of all Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over were living in households where the household spokesperson reported that they would be unable to raise $2,000 in a week for something important (ABS 2004a). This is 4 times as high as for non-Indigenous persons (14%).

It is important to note that measures of income disadvantage do not strongly correlate to financial stress. Cash flow problems were reported by about one in four households whose equivalised gross household income were in the two lowest quintiles in 2006; conversely, many households in the highest income quintile (around 8%) reported one or more cash flow problems in the last 12 months (ABS 2007g). This reflects the reality that, to some extent, the experience of financial stress is a function of spending and money management habits, and not just income received.

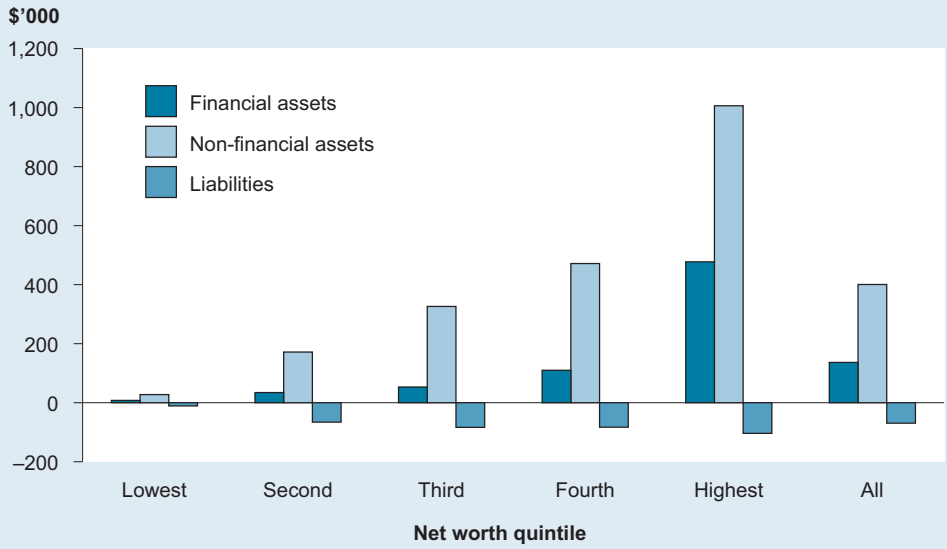
Table 8.16: Proportion of households reporting three or more different types of cash flow problems in last 12 months, by household composition, 2002 and 2006

	2002		2006	
Household composition	**Number**	**Per cent**	**Number**	**Per cent**
Couple-only household (reference person aged under 35)	45,500	5.7	53,400	5.9
Couple-only household (reference person aged 65 or over)	1,200	**0.1	n.p.	n.p.
Couple-family household with dependent children	292,600	6.3	297,300	6.5
One-parent household with dependent children	137,300	21.8	124,600	20.0
Lone person (aged under 35)	52,800	15.4	48,800	16.9
Lone person (aged 65 or over)	5,200	*0.8	6,300	*0.9

Sources: ABS 2003:Table 31; ABS 2007g:Table 38.

Wealth and wealth distribution

In 2003–04, Australian households had an average of $537,100 each in assets (Figure 8.7)—25% of which were financial assets (including shares, superannuation, and savings), and 75% non-financial assets (including property and the value of vehicles and home contents). Property (60%) and superannuation (12%) comprised the largest asset components. The average household debt was $69,400, resulting in a mean net worth of $467,600. The median net worth of Australian households was $294,700 (ABS 2006n). The large difference between the mean and median net worth indicates an uneven distribution of wealth throughout the population. The wealthiest 20% of households (that is, those in the highest net worth quintile) had assets valued at 42 times those of the least wealthy 20%, and liabilities 10 times as high.



Note: Financial assets include the value of children's assets and loans to persons not in the same household.
Source: Table A8.4.

Figure 8.7: Components of household wealth, by net household worth quintile, 2003–04

The distribution of wealth among Australian households in 2003–04 was less equitable than income distribution. The wealthiest 20% of households accounted for 59% of total household net worth, while the least wealthy 20% owned 1% of national household net worth. By comparison, the shares of total income received by the households with the highest and lowest disposable income quintile were 37% and 8%, respectively (ABS 2005b, 2006n).

Distribution of wealth is not directly correlated with income. Many households, particularly those comprising younger people, had high incomes but relatively little wealth, while some of the wealthiest households had very low or nil income. This observation reflects the way in which wealth is usually acquired over an individual's working life, and then drawn upon in retirement (ABS 2006n). It also reinforces the point, made above in the discussion of financial hardship, that income alone is not necessarily a sufficient indicator of economic wellbeing.

Components of wealth varied substantially between net worth quintiles. The wealthiest 20% of households were more likely than the average to have assets in their own incorporated businesses (12%), shares (5%) and trusts (3%). The least wealthy 20% of households, on the other hand, had a greater than average percentage of their assets in home contents (46%) and vehicles (16%), and a much lower ownership of property (16% of total asset value, compared with the national average of 60%).

Employment and labour force participation

Employment provides avenues for income and as such is a major factor influencing material wellbeing. In addition, employment is strongly related to other aspects of the welfare framework. It is recognised as an integral part of adult participation in society, providing individuals with opportunities for personal development and social interaction.

Lack of work is associated with crime, poor health, and decreased social cohesion, in addition to reduced financial wellbeing (Borland and Kennedy 1998 cited in ABS 2006o). The relationships between these factors are complex, as is the extent and direction of causality.

In the context of the welfare framework, describing employment is not simply a matter of counting the number of people participating in paid work. Stability of employment, the basis and conditions under which people are employed and hours worked all affect the way in which work relates to Australians' sense of autonomy and participation.

Box 8.1: Labour force terms

Employed person Person aged 15 years or more who, during the reference week of the labour force survey, worked for one hour or more for pay, profit or commission.

Labour force underutilisation rate The unemployed plus the underemployed, as a percentage of the labour force.

Labour force All employed and unemployed persons.

Part-time worker Employed person who usually worked more than one but less than 35 hours per week.

Underemployed person Employed person working less than 35 hours per week who is willing and available to work more hours.

Unemployed person Person aged 15 years or more who was not employed during the reference week but who had actively looked for work or was currently available for work.

Source: ABS 2007h.

Labour force participation and employment

The labour force comprises all people who are employed as well as all people who are looking for work and available to start work in the reference week, whether or not they receive unemployment benefits. In 2006–07, the labour force participation rate (that is, the proportion of all persons aged 15 years or over that was in the labour force) was 65% (Table 8.17). The rate was higher for males (72%) than females (58%). The overall participation rate rose only marginally over the last decade, from 63% in 1996–97. However, trends in participation rates are affected by changes in the age structure of the population, as population ageing results in increasing numbers of older people who have retired from the workforce. When persons aged 65 years or over are excluded, there has been considerable growth in labour force participation among the working age population (15–64 years), from 71% in 1996–97 to 76% in 2006–07 (ABS 2007i).

Between 1996–97 and 2006–07, men's participation in the labour force fell by 1 percentage point overall. Participation rates decreased for all age groups up to 44 years, but increased among men aged 45 years or over. Over the same period, the participation rate among women rose by 4 percentage points, with increases observed in all age groups. The trend towards greater participation of women in the labour force has been ongoing for more than 25 years, with the most rapid increase occurring in the mid- to late 1980s (ABS 2007i).

In 2005, Australia's labour force participation rate (64%) ranked 10th highest in the OECD, well above the average of 60%. International comparisons are confounded by differing statistical practices across countries, such as the treatment of defence force personnel and people in institutions, paid maternity leave and missing data for some age brackets. The Productivity Commission has calculated that, after adjusting for some key differences in statistical practices, Australia's overall participation rate ranked 5th highest in the OECD in 2005 (Abhayaratna & Lattimore 2006). However, the participation rate of some population groups—particularly males aged 25–54 years, females of child-bearing age and persons nearing retirement—remained lower than in countries with broadly similar social, cultural and institutional characteristics to Australia.

In 2006–07, 4.5% of the labour force was unemployed (Table 8.17). Unemployment had fallen substantially since 1996–97, when the rate was 8.3%. The proportion of the labour force who were unemployed for 12 months or more (defined as long-term unemployed) had also fallen significantly over the preceding decade, from 2.3% in 1996–97 to 0.8% in 2006–07. Unemployment rates fell in more than two-thirds of OECD countries between 1996 and 2006. Australia experienced one of the largest declines, both in absolute and relative terms. In 2006, Australia's standardised unemployment rate (4.8%), was 12th lowest out of 27 OECD countries, well below the OECD average of 6.0% (OECD 2007b).

Table 8.17: Employment and labour force indicators, persons aged 15 years or over, 1996–97 to 2006–07

	1996–97	1998–99	2000–01	2002–03	2004–05	2006–07
			Number ('000)			
Labour force size	9,169	9,379	9,674	10,004	10,367	10,824
			Per cent			
Participation rate[a]	63.4	63.1	63.4	63.6	63.9	64.8
Employed persons[a]	58.1	58.4	59.3	59.7	60.6	61.9
Unemployment rate[b]	8.3	7.4	6.4	6.1	5.2	4.5
Long-term unemployment rate[b]	2.3	2.2	1.5	1.3	1.0	0.8
Labour force underutilisation rate	13.8	13.0	10.9	12.1	11.1	9.8
Part-time workers[c]	25.2	26.1	26.8	28.6	28.4	28.5
Employees without leave entitlements[c]	26.1	26.9	27.3	27.3	27.7	26.9
Persons working 50 hours or more per week[d]	24.3	24.9	24.0	24.4	23.8	21.6
			Hours			
Average hours worked (full-time workers)	41.0	41.1	40.6	41.0	40.6	39.4

(a) Per cent of the total population aged 15 years or over.

(b) Per cent of the labour force.

(c) Per cent of all employed persons.

(d) Per cent of full-time workers.

Note: Reference periods are annual averages for the year ending 30 June, except for employees without leave entitlements (August) and labour force underutilisation (September).

Source: ABS 2006c, 2007j, 2007i:Data cubes LM8, EM1 and UM2.

Employment basis and conditions

In 2006–07, 29% of all workers were employed on a part-time basis (Table 8.17). A higher percentage of females (45%) worked part time than males (15%). Part-time employment rates are strongly related to age, with two-thirds (67%) of employees aged 15–19 years and half (52%) of employees aged 65 years or over working part time in 2006–07 (ABS 2007i). In contrast, one-quarter (25%) of workers aged 20–64 years were employed on a part-time basis. Over the past decade, the part-time workforce has grown from 25% of all employees in 1996–97 to 29% in 2006–07. The increase in take-up of part-time work was seen in both sexes, albeit at a greater rate among males than females, and in all age groups, most markedly among people aged 20–24 years and 60–64 years. Recent trends in employment of young people (15–24 years) are discussed in detail in Chapter 2, while Chapter 3 covers work patterns of older people and the transition to retirement.

For the purpose of international comparisons, part-time workers are considered to be employees aged 15 years or over who usually work less than 30 hours per week. Using this definition, Australia's part-time workforce in 2005 was 27%, the second highest in the OECD behind the Netherlands (OECD 2007c). The OECD average was 16%.

In 2006–07, 27% of all employees were not entitled to paid sick leave or holiday leave, and are considered to be casual workers for statistical purposes (Table 8.17). Females (29%) were more likely than males (20%) not to have paid leave entitlements, which is largely related to the higher proportion of females in part-time employment. More than half (56%) of all part-time employees did not have paid leave entitlements, compared with one in ten (11%) full-time employees. The proportion of the workforce without leave entitlements has remained at slightly more than one-quarter (26%–28%) over the past decade.

Average weekly hours worked by full-time employees in 2006–07 was 39.4 hours per week (Table 8.17). More than one in five (22%) full-time employees worked 50 or more hours per week, with men (26%) being more likely than women (14%) to work very long hours (ABS 2007i). Among full-time employees, average hours worked and the proportion of people working very long hours had both fallen slightly since 1996–97.

Part-time employees worked an average of 16 hours per week in 2006–07, compared with 15 hours per week in 1996–97 (ABS 2007i). According to the 2006 Underemployed Workers Survey, about one in five (20%) part-time employees preferred to work more hours (ABS 2007j). Many of these are considered to be underemployed workers (see Glossary). The labour force underutilisation rate (combining unemployed and underemployed persons) provides a broader measure of extra labour force capacity. In September 2006 the rate was 10% of the labour force, down from 14% a decade earlier (Table 8.17). Since individuals differ in the number of hours, or extra hours, they would like to work, another measure of labour force underutilisation quantifies the hours of available labour that are unutilised. A discussion of 'volume measures' of labour force underutilisation is provided in ABS 2007h.

Employment and labour force differentials

Labour force participation is strongly related to life cycle. In 2006–07, 60% of young people aged 15–19 years were in the labour force—similar proportions of males and females (ABS 2007i). Participation rates rose sharply after the age of 20, in line with the transition of a large cohort from mainly educational settings to the workforce. For males between 20 and 54 years of age, participation rates were 85% or higher. Female participation rates in this age range were somewhat lower, between 73% and 78%, with a dip in the 30–34 years age group associated with child bearing. An ongoing trend over recent years has seen this dip

in female participation rates become shallower, but broader (Figure 8.8). This reflects the greater likelihood of women with children remaining in the workforce, or returning to the workforce sooner, than in the past, as well as the increase in average maternal age. In 2006–07, the female participation rate peaked in the 45–49 years age group, whereas in the past participation was highest among women aged 20–24 years. Patterns of employment among women with children are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Labour force participation rates for both sexes fell with each age group after 55 years, although as many as 8% of people aged 65 years or over remained in the workforce in 2006–07. A key trend over the last 10 years has been a strong rise in participation rates of people aged 55–64 years. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Unemployment rates also varied with age. At all age groups above 24 years, the unemployment rate was less than 5% in 2006–07 (ABS 2007i). About 6.3% of people aged 20–24 years who were in the labour force were unemployed. The unemployment rate of the 15–19 years age group (13.9%) was almost 3 times as high as the overall rate (4.5%). Due to the combination of high rates of unemployment and relatively low labour force participation, just over half (51%) of young people aged 15–19 years were employed in 2006–07, compared with around 80% of people aged 20–54 years. The experiences of young people in the labour force are examined in more detail in Chapter 2.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally have lower rates of labour force participation, and higher rates of unemployment, than non-Indigenous Australians. After adjusting for differences in the age structure of the two populations, 59% of Indigenous persons aged 15–64 years participated in the labour force in 2004–05 compared with 78% of non-Indigenous persons (SCRGSP 2007). Further, the age-standardised unemployment rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (12.9% of the labour force) was almost 3 times as high as for non-Indigenous people (4.4%). Nationally, about one in ten Indigenous people were participants in the Community Development Employment

Source. Table A8.5.

Figure 8.8: Labour force participation rates, all females aged 15 years or over, by age group, 1986–87, 1996–97 and 2006–07

Projects (CDEP) program, accounting for one-fifth of all Indigenous people classified as employed (Table 8.18). This Australian Government-funded program provides opportunities for Indigenous people to develop work skills and move into employment. CDEP participants are classified as employed for statistical purposes (SCRGSP 2007).

Employment rates and CDEP participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons varied considerably with remoteness, although labour force participation rates were similar (Table 8.18). In 2004–05, the unemployment rate was lower for Indigenous people living in remote areas than those in non-remote areas, while CDEP participation was much greater in remote areas. More than one-quarter of Indigenous people aged 15–64 years living in remote areas participated in the CDEP program, compared with 4% in non-remote areas. Overall employment rates were similar between remote and non-remote areas due to a greater involvement in non-CDEP employment in non-remote areas. Between 2002 and 2004–05 the unemployment rate fell from 23% to 16% nationally while among employed people there was a shift towards greater participation in non-CDEP employment (Table 8.18).

It is noted that these data trends will be affected by recent policy changes, including the phasing out of CDEP in the Northern Territory from September 2007.

Table 8.18: Labour force indicators, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons aged 15–64 years, by remoteness, 2002 and 2004–05

	2002			2004–05		
	Remote	Non-remote	Total	Remote	Non-remote	Total
			Number			
Labour force size	44,200	124,400	168,600	44,300	124,500	168,800
			Per cent[a]			
Participation rate[b]	60.6	63.3	62.6	58.4	60.6	60.0
Employed persons[b]						
CDEP	34.2	4.7	12.7	28.8	4.3	10.9
Non-CDEP	20.2	41.2	35.5	22.7	46.2	39.8
Total employed	*54.5*	*45.9*	*48.2*	*51.4*	*50.4*	*50.7*
Unemployment rate[c]	10.2	27.6	23.0	12.0	16.8	15.5

(a) Percentages are not age-standardised—differences between data presented here and elsewhere in the text may be due to the younger age structure of the Indigenous population compared with the non-Indigenous population.

(b) Per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population aged 15–64 years.

(c) Per cent of the labour force.

Source: Unpublished analysis of 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey provided to the AIHW by the ABS.

Transport and communication

Transport and communication are fundamental to autonomy and participation. Having access to reliable transport allows people to participate and interact with the community. Reliable transport can not only enhance social wellbeing but can also broaden access to jobs, which in turn may increase financial security.

Access to means of communication is also beneficial to many aspects of welfare. The rapid increase in communication technologies is making interpersonal communication more accessible through mobile phones and over the Internet. This enables greater access to many more educational and social resources.

Transport

Most Australians use private motor vehicles to get around. In 2006, 80% of people aged 18 years or over mainly used a private vehicle to travel to work or study, while 14% took public transport and 6% walked or cycled (ABS 2006p). Fewer than one in five (18%) drivers took passengers. A slightly higher proportion of people used public transport to get to work or study than in 1996 (12%).

Among those people who did not take public transport to work or study, the most commonly given reasons for their choice were that no service was available (28%) or that no service was available at the right/convenient time (25%). The most common reason given for not walking or cycling was that the distance was too far (70%).

Private motor vehicles were also strongly favoured in day-to-day trips—92% of trips other than to work or study involved a private vehicle, 20% involved walking or cycling and 15% involved public transport.

In 2006, 86% of people aged 18 years or over reported having access to a motor vehicle to drive (Table 8.19)—a similar proportion to 2002 (85%). Access was higher for males than females at all ages, and peaked in the age group 35–44 years. Fewer than one-third (32%) of all people aged 85 years or over had access to a motor vehicle to drive, with females in this age group much less likely than males to have access.

Table 8.19: Persons aged 18 years or over with access to motor vehicles to drive, by age group and sex, 2006 (per cent)

	Age group (years)								
	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75–84	85 or over	Total
Male	82.3	89.8	93.4	93.1	93.1	92.5	83.2	63.7	90.2
Female	73.7	87.6	91.2	89.8	87.9	71.9	55.3	*14.2	82.2
Persons	78.1	88.7	92.3	91.4	90.5	82.0	67.8	32.0	86.1

Source: ABS 2007g:Tables 2–4.

Most Australians are able to travel around the community with little trouble (Table 8.20). In 2006, 84% of people reported being able to get to places needed easily. People aged 35–44 years were most able to get around easily (89%), compared with about three-quarters of people aged 18–24 years (77%) or those aged 75–84 years (76%), and less than two-thirds (65%) of people aged 85 years or over. Ease of travel was related to income—people in the lowest quintile of the equivalised gross household income distribution were most likely to have difficulty often, or be unable to get where they needed to go (10%), compared with 1% of people in the highest quintile (ABS 2007g). Similar patterns were observed in 2002.

Table 8.20: Ease of getting to places needed, persons aged 18 years or over, by age group and sex, 2006 (per cent)

	Age group (years)								
	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75–84	85 or over	Total
Can easily get to the places needed	77.3	84.1	88.5	86.2	86.2	84.6	75.5	65.1	84.1
Cannot get, or often has difficulty getting, to the places needed	4.0	3.5	2.7	4.5	3.7	4.4	9.9	*16.7	4.3

Note: Not all categories are shown.
Source: ABS 2007g:Tables 2–4.

Taking different age structures of the populations into account, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced more transport difficulties than non-Indigenous people. In 2002, 71% of Indigenous people could easily get where they needed, and 12% often had difficulty or could not get to places needed (ABS 2004). Indigenous people living in remote areas were almost twice as likely as those in non-remote areas to report being unable to get to places they needed to go. This may be related to greater access to motor vehicles in non-remote areas—48% of Indigenous people in remote areas aged 18 years or over, compared with 64% in non-remote areas, had access to a motor vehicle to drive.

Communication

Communication involves sharing knowledge and information, and developing and maintaining social ties. Advances in communication technologies allow people to maintain independence while still remaining in contact with families and the community. Computers and Internet technology are becoming an increasingly important means of finding information and staying informed.

Telephone access

In June 2005, there were approximately 11.5 million fixed line services in Australia, down from 11.7 million 1 year earlier (ACMA 2005). In contrast, the use of mobile phones continued to grow. There were 18.4 million mobile phone services in June 2005, compared with 16.5 million in June 2004. The number of services more than doubled between 2000 and 2005.

Both the number of payphones in operation and the number of sites where payphones were provided decreased by 5% in the 12 months to 30 June 2005 (ACMA 2005). In June 2005 there were about 23,500 Telstra-operated payphone sites remaining nationwide.

Australia's mobile phone coverage in 2005—90 phone subscribers per 100 people—was higher than the OECD average of 80, but 21st overall out of 30 countries. Luxembourg, with 157 subscribers per 100 people, had the highest mobile phone usage in the OECD (OECD 2007d).

In 2002, 71% of Indigenous Australians had access to a working telephone in the home—82% in non-remote areas and 43% in remote areas (ABS 2004). In remote areas, public telephone access may substitute for telephone connections in the home. About 53% of discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (630 communities) reported public telephone access in 2006, up from 49% in 2001 (ABS 2007b). Government initiatives aimed at improving telecommunications access to remote Indigenous communities include the Community Phones Program of the Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities, which began in 2004–05, and the Extended Mobile Phone Coverage in Regional Australia program, targeting new or improved mobile phone coverage to 17 remote Indigenous communities (ACMA 2005).

Computer and internet access

Internet use, both for social and business communication purposes, has increased rapidly over recent years. In 1998, 44% of households had a home computer, and 16% had Internet access at home. By 2005–06 these proportions were 70% and 60%, respectively (ABS 2006q).

Having a computer and/or Internet access at home was strongly related to household income. Among households in the lowest equivalised income quintile, fewer than half (44%) had a home computer and one-third (33%) had an internet connection in

2005–06. In comparison, 87% of households in the highest equivalised income quintile had a computer and 81% had Internet access. Households in metropolitan areas (63%) were more likely to have access to the Internet at home than households outside metropolitan areas (54%). About half (51%) of all people aged 15 years or over who had access to the Internet at home reported having broadband service, while 47% had dial-up service, and 2% had both or didn't know what type of access they had. The proportion of households with broadband internet access was considerably higher in metropolitan areas (58%) than non-metropolitan areas (37%).

Almost all (97%) people aged 15 years or over who accessed the Internet at home in 2005–06 reported using it for personal or private purposes (ABS 2006q). Additionally, almost half accessed the Internet for work or business purposes (49%) or educational/study purposes (48%). Between 2004–05 and 2005–06 the proportion of people aged 18 years or over who accessed the Internet for work or study purposes increased slightly. (People aged 15–17 years were not included in the 2004–05 survey.) Almost 1.5 million children aged 5–14 years accessed the Internet at home in 2006. The most common reported purposes for children accessing the Internet were for school or educational activities (82%), playing online or Internet-based games (51%), emailing or messaging (48%) and leisure (46%).

Home internet use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was lower than for the Australian population generally. In 2005–06, 31% of Indigenous people aged 15 years or over reported using the Internet at home, compared with 57% of non-Indigenous people (ABS 2006vq).

In 2005, Australia ranked 10th highest out of 30 countries in the OECD in terms of the proportion of households with access to a home computer, and 11th in terms of home internet access (ABS 2006q). Australia's use of broadband internet technology (19.2 subscribers per 100 people in December 2006) was higher than the OECD average (16.9 subscribers per 100 people) (OECD 2007e). Proportionally more of Australia's broadband subscriptions were to DSL (digital subscriber line) connections (78%, compared with the OECD average of 62%). Denmark, with 31.9 subscribers per 100 people, has the highest broadband internet use in the OECD.

Recreation and leisure

Participation in recreational and leisure activities contributes to overall wellbeing through benefits to physical and mental health, and by providing opportunities for social interaction and community engagement. The importance of leisure time is recognised by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that 'Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays without pay' (UN 1948).

Previous volumes of *Australia's welfare* have presented information from the ABS Time Use surveys, which showed that Australians spent an average of 268 minutes per day on recreational and leisure activities in 1997. As the most recent data on the daily allocation of time are 10 years old, this section will instead present new data concerning the numbers of Australians who participate in various recreational and leisure activities. These are broadly divided into sports/physical recreation and cultural activities.

Sports/physical recreation

In 2005–06, about 10.5 million Australians aged 15 years or over (66%) participated in sports and other physical recreation, excluding time spent coaching, refereeing and performing other official roles (ABS 2007k). Of these, 4.7 million people (29% of the population aged

15 years or over) participated at least twice per week throughout the year—hereafter referred to as 'regularly participating'. More than one-quarter of the population (28%) had been involved in physical recreational activities organised by a club, association or some other group (4.4 million people).

While males and females were equally likely to participate in physical activities over the year, more females (32%) than males (27%) were regular participants (Table 8.21). Participation rates also varied by age group. People aged 15–17 years (75%) and 25–34 years (75%) had the highest rates of overall participation, while people aged 65 years or over had the lowest (49%). However, regular participation was most commonly reported by people aged 55–64 years (32%).

Table 8.21: Participation in sports and physical recreation, persons aged 15 years or over, by age group and sex, 2005–06 (per cent)[(a)]

	Regularly participating[(b)]			Total participating		
Age group (years)	**Males**	**Females**	**Persons**	**Males**	**Females**	**Persons**
15–17	33.4	23.5	28.3	77.3	72.1	74.6
18–24	26.9	26.1	26.5	78.3	71.8	72.6
25–34	26.3	33.0	29.7	76.3	74.0	75.1
35–44	26.4	35.0	30.7	66.7	69.1	68.0
45–54	27.1	33.9	30.6	63.5	65.7	64.6
55–64	27.1	37.1	32.1	60.4	64.6	62.5
65 years or over	26.6	26.4	26.5	50.8	48.2	49.4
Total (per cent)	**27.1**	**31.7**	**29.4**	**66.0**	**65.7**	**65.9**
Total (number)	**2,134,200**	**2,573,100**	**4,707,300**	**5,205,700**	**5,336,400**	**10,542,100**

(a) Percentage of the population within each sex and age group.

(b) Regular participation is defined as more than twice a week.

Source: ABS 2007k:Table 5.

There may be a number of motivators for participating in sports and physical recreation. The most commonly reported reasons for participating were health and fitness (reported by 82% of people who participated in activities 13 times or more in a year), enjoyment (54%) and wellbeing (41%). People who did not participate in any activity, or participated 12 or fewer times over a year, cited insufficient time due to work or study (23%), lack of interest (19%) and age (17%) as the most common reasons for non-participation or low-level participation (ABS 2007k).

Cultural activities

In the 12 months prior to survey in 2005–06, 85% of Australians aged 15 years or over (13.6 million people) attended at least one cultural venue or event (ABS 2007l). The most commonly attended venues were cinemas (attended by 65% of people), zoos and aquariums (36%), libraries (34%) and botanic gardens (34%). Attendance rates were higher for females than males (Table 8.22), and negatively correlated with age. Almost all (97%) people aged 15–17 years attended at least one venue or event in 12 months, compared with 59% of people aged 75 years or over.

The rate of attendance at different events was associated with an individual's employment status and income (ABS 2007l). Relatively more unemployed (48%) than employed people (31%) visited a library, while employed people had higher attendance rates at classical and

popular music concerts, theatre performances, and musicals and operas than people who were unemployed or not in the labour force. Generally, people with higher gross household incomes had higher attendance rates at all venues and events, except libraries.

Table 8.22: Attendance at selected cultural venues and events in the previous 12 months, persons aged 15 years or over, by sex, 2005–06

	Males		Females		Persons	
	'000	Per cent	'000	Per cent	'000	Per cent
Cinemas	4,934.5	62.5	5,496.9	67.7	10,431.4	65.2
Zoological parks and aquariums	2,656.1	33.7	3,043.7	37.5	5,699.8	35.6
Botanic gardens	2,447.0	31.0	2,943.9	36.3	5,390.9	33.7
Libraries	2,108.7	26.7	3,345.8	41.2	5,454.5	34.1
Popular music concerts	1,955.1	24.8	2,080.8	25.6	4,035.9	25.2
Museums	1,713.6	21.7	1,898.3	23.4	3,611.9	22.6
Art galleries	1,570.6	19.9	2,060.2	25.4	3,630.7	22.7
Other performing arts	1,166.1	14.8	1,488.8	18.3	2,655.0	16.6
Theatre performances	1,033.1	13.1	1,690.1	20.8	2,723.2	17.0
Musicals and opera	944.7	12.0	1,669.2	20.6	2,613.9	16.3
Classical music concerts	643.8	8.2	864.3	10.6	1,508.1	9.4
Dance performances	546.5	6.9	1,078.5	13.3	1,625.0	10.2
At least one venue or event	**6,502.1**	**82.4**	**7,072.1**	**87.1**	**13,574.1**	**84.8**

Source: ABS 2007l:Table 3.

8.4 Social cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the interrelatedness and unity between the individuals, groups and associations that exist within society. This unity is established through social relationships based on trust, shared values, feelings of belonging and the expectation of reciprocity. However, given the diversity of values and relationships that exist in a pluralist society, a high degree of unity between some individuals and groups may result in the mistrust or exclusion of others. Therefore inequalities and exclusion (of self or others) are to be minimised for society as a whole to be truly cohesive.

Family formation and functioning

Families are the core unit of society in which people are supported and cared for and social values are developed. The role of each member within a family can be affected by changes in family situations and changes in the formation of the family itself. How well families function is a key factor in their ability to nurture personal wellbeing and serve as the basis for a cohesive society.

Family formation

The structure of Australian families has undergone considerable transformation over recent years, reflecting wider social, demographic and economic changes. In this section, social marriage status, family composition and age-specific divorce rates are presented as indicators of family formation and dissolution. Together, they illustrate some of the main ways in which the concept of family continues to develop and change.

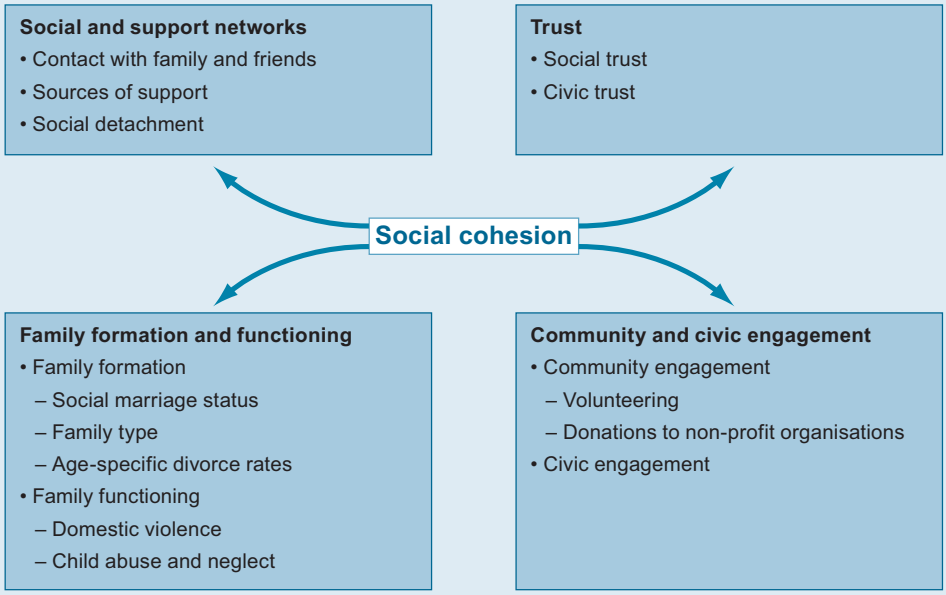


Figure 8.9: Indicators of social cohesion

Social marriage status

In 2006, half of all Australians aged 15 years or over were in a registered marriage, 9% were in a de facto marriage (including same-sex couples) and 41% were not married (Table 8.23). Social marriage (either registered or de facto) was strongly related to age, with the majority of people aged 15–24 years or 85 years or over unmarried. De facto marriage rates were highest among people aged 25–34 years (19%) while people aged 55–64 years were most likely to be in a registered marriage (70%).

Over the period 1996–2006 there was an overall trend towards increased de facto marriage rates, with a corresponding fall in the proportion of registered marriages. However, different patterns emerged within selected age groups. In 2006, people aged 15–64 years were more likely to be unmarried than 10 years previously, while those aged 65 years or over were less likely to be unmarried (Table 8.23). Among the older age group, the proportion in registered marriages was considerably higher in 2006 than in 1996. This is likely to be largely due to rises in life expectancy, which has the effect of reducing the number of older people who would otherwise have been widowed.

Family type

For statistical purposes, a family is defined as two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who usually live in the same household and are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering. In the context of family statistics, 'children' can refer to people of any age (ABS 2006r). In 2006 there were approximately 5.2 million families in Australia (Table 8.24). Just under half (45%) of all families comprised a couple living with children, while 37% were couples with no children. One-parent families accounted for 16% of all families in 2006.

Table 8.23: Social marriage status of Australians aged 15 years or over[a], by age group, 1996, 2001 and 2006 (per cent)

Age group (years)	Registered marriage			De facto marriage[b]			Not married		
	1996	2001	2006	1996	2001	2006	1996	2001	2006
15–24	6.1	4.2	3.5	6.9	7.2	8.1	87.0	88.5	88.4
25–34	51.4	45.4	42.2	11.9	15.3	18.5	36.7	39.3	39.2
35–44	70.3	66.0	63.2	6.7	8.6	11.0	23.0	25.4	25.8
45–54	74.4	70.5	66.9	4.3	5.9	7.5	21.3	23.7	25.6
55–64	74.4	72.5	69.9	2.1	3.2	4.6	23.5	24.2	25.5
65–74	65.6	66.6	67.2	0.9	1.3	1.9	33.6	32.1	30.9
75–84	47.4	50.0	52.3	0.4	0.6	0.8	52.2	49.3	46.8
85 or over	25.5	27.7	29.8	0.2	0.5	0.7	74.2	71.8	69.5
Total (per cent)	**54.1**	**51.9**	**50.4**	**6.0**	**7.3**	**8.8**	**39.9**	**40.7**	**40.8**
Total ('000)	**6,874.2**	**7,012.6**	**7,158.7**	**763.7**	**989.2**	**1,242.8**	**5,075.5**	**5,497.5**	**5,788.6**

(a) Excludes 'Persons in non-classifiable households', 'Persons in non-private dwellings', 'Persons in migratory, off-shore or shipping CDs', and 'Persons who are visitors (from within Australia)'.

(b) Includes same-sex couples.

Source: ABS 2007m.

In 32% of lone-parent families and 18% of couple families with children, only non-dependent children were living with the family (ABS 2007n)—see Glossary for definition of dependent and non-dependent children. Young people who had not moved out of the family home account for some of these families, while others comprise one or more adults living with elderly parent(s).

Changes in family composition in Australia are due to a number of factors. Most important among these, in recent years, are decreased family size and increased longevity. Between 1996 and 2006, couples without children increased as a proportion of all families while the proportion of couples with children fell (Table 8.24). These changes are related to population ageing, which results in increasing numbers of older couples whose adult children no longer live at home ('empty nesters'), as well as the growing number of couples who do not have children, or have children later in life. The proportion of one-parent families increased slightly over the past decade.

Table 8.24: Composition of Australian families[a], 1996, 2001 and 2006 (per cent)[b]

	Couple with no children	Couple with children	One-parent family	Other family[c]	Total
1996	34.1	49.6	14.5	1.8	4,655,900
2001	35.7	47.0	15.4	1.8	4,936,800
2006	37.2	45.3	15.8	1.7	5,219,200

(a) Excludes 'Persons in non-private dwellings' and 'Persons in migratory, off-shore and shipping CDs'.

(b) Per cent of all families.

(c) 'Other family' is defined as related individuals living in the same household, who do not belong to a couple or one-parent family, e.g. two siblings living together, neither of whom is in a spouse/partner, lone-parent or child relationship.

Sources: ABS 1997b, 2006r, 2007n.

Age-specific divorce rates

In 2006, about 51,400 divorces were granted, equating to a crude divorce rate of 2.5 per 1,000 people (ABS 2007o). The number of divorces granted peaked in 2001 (55,300 divorces), and has fallen each year since. Age-specific divorce rates in 2006 were highest for men aged 40–44 years and for women aged 35–39 years (Table 8.25). The median duration of marriages that ended in divorce in 2006 was 12.5 years—a slight increase from 11.0 years in 1996 (ABS 2007o).

Over the period 1996–2006, the overall divorce rate fell slightly from 2.9 per 1,000 to 2.5 per 1,000 estimated resident population. However, while age-specific divorce rates fell among people aged less than 40 years, rates generally rose among older people, particularly those aged 50–64 years (Table 8.25). In 2006, divorces were more likely than 10 years earlier to be filed jointly (30%, versus 22% in 1996). This represents a continuation of a long-term trend—in 1986, 7% of divorces applications were filed jointly. Wives were more likely than husbands to lodge individual applications for divorce throughout the last two decades.

Table 8.25: Age-specific divorce rates[a], by age group and sex, 1995, 2000 and 2005

	Age group (years)										
	< 24[b]	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45–49	50–54	55–59	60–64	65 or over	All ages
Husbands											
1996	0.8	8.0	13.0	13.8	13.0	11.6	9.1	6.1	3.9	1.5	2.9
2001	0.5	6.2	12.4	13.6	13.3	12.1	9.9	6.8	4.4	1.5	2.9
2006	0.4	4.2	9.1	11.2	11.6	11.2	9.5	6.9	4.7	1.6	2.5
Wives											
1996	1.9	12.2	14.4	13.5	12.3	9.9	6.9	3.9	2.4	0.6	2.9
2001	1.3	10.0	14.4	13.9	12.8	10.6	7.4	4.7	2.5	0.6	2.9
2006	0.9	7.1	11.1	12.1	11.9	10.3	7.6	4.9	2.9	0.6	2.5

(a) Per 1,000 estimated resident males and females respectively, at 30 June for each year shown.

(b) Males under 18 years and females under 16 years are excluded from this population.

Source: ABS 2007o:Table 1.

Family functioning

Family functioning is concerned with whether the interpersonal relationships within a family unit are largely positive, enhancing wellbeing, or negative. In a sense it is a form of social cohesion that exists within the confines of the family. Positive family functioning can be viewed as good communication skills between family members with greater unity through stressful times. The following indicators reflect the negative facets of family functioning by focusing on incidence and prevalence of domestic violence and child abuse/neglect. These two indicators provide insight into family discord and, in the case of child abuse/neglect, clear evidence of adverse wellbeing.

Domestic violence

National data on the experience of domestic or intimate partner violence inflicted on both women and men are available for the first time in the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (ABS 2006i). In the context of this survey, violence refers to both threats and assaults, whether physical and/or sexual in nature. It does not include emotional or financial abuse.

In 2005, 1% of men (68,100 men) and 2% of women (160,100 women) aged 18 years or over reported having experienced violence by their current partner at some time since

the age of 15 (Table 8.26). Additionally, 367,300 men (5%) and 1.1 million women (15%) had experienced violence by a previous partner. There was a small overlap between these groups—more than 5,000 men and 15,000 women reported violence by both a current and a previous partner (ABS 2006i).

Table 8.26: Experience of violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15, persons aged 18 years or over, by age group and sex, 2005

	Males		Females	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Current partner				
18–34 years	*11,200	*16.5	33,600	21.0
35–44 years	*16,900	*24.7	38,300	23.9
45–54 years	*22,200	*32.5	46,000	28.7
55 years or over	*17,900	*26.3	42,200	26.4
Total	**68,100**	**100.0**	**160,100**	**100.0**
Previous partner				
18–34 years	82,200	22.3	265,500	23.3
35–44 years	114,900	31.3	287,900	25.4
45–54 years	94,700	25.8	273,700	24.1
55 years or over	75,500	20.6	308,300	27.2
Total	**367,300**	**100.0**	**1,135,500**	**100.0**

Source: ABS 2006i:Tables 20–21.

Almost one in five (19%) women who had experienced current partner violence described the most recent incident as sexual in nature, including 17% who suffered sexual assault. In addition, 28% of women and 6% of men who experienced violence by their previous partner were the victim of sexual threat or assault in the most recent incident. More than half of all women (54%) and three-quarters of men (74%) who had suffered violence by their current partner said that there was only one incident. However, about two-thirds (66%) of those who experienced threats or abuse by a previous partner reported that violence occurred on multiple occasions.

Experiences of violence can have severe negative consequences for victims. One in five (20%) women and one in twelve (8%) men who had experienced current partner violence reported feeling fear or anxiety in the last 12 months. This includes 13,000 women (8% of those reporting current partner violence) who felt fear or anxiety every day. However, most (84%–85%) people who experienced current or previous partner violence reported not feeling anxiety or fear in the last 12 months. Men were more likely than women to be free from fear and anxiety despite their experience (ABS 2006i).

Research shows that psychological trauma, manifesting in emotional and social problems, educational difficulties and poor health, are common problems among children who have witnessed domestic violence (Lundy & Grossman 2005). In 2005, almost half a million people who experienced violence by a previous partner, and 60,700 people who experienced violence by their current partner, reported that violence was witnessed by children in their care (ABS 2006i). Women who suffer intimate partner violence during pregnancy have increased risk of pregnancy complications, including perinatal death (Janssen et al. 2003). Of the 1.1 million women who experienced violence by a previous partner,

21% (239,800 women) reported that violence occurred during a pregnancy. For about half (51%) of these women, violence occurred for the first time when they were pregnant (ABS 2006i).

Many people, especially women, seek crisis accommodation as a result of domestic violence. In 2005–06 domestic violence was given as the main reason clients sought assistance through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in 36,500 (22%) support periods (Table A2.22). The rate was higher for women accompanied by children (45%).

Child abuse and neglect

Data relating to child abuse and neglect are commonly reported in terms of numbers of children who were the subject of a child protection substantiation. A substantiation means that an investigation into a child protection notification concluded that there was reasonable cause to believe that the child had been, was being, or was likely to be abused, neglected or otherwise harmed.

Rates of children in child protection substantiations in 2005–06 varied considerably between states and territories (AIHW 2007b). In part, these differences may be attributable to different child protection policies and practices, and data systems across jurisdictions. Substantiation rates generally decreased with age (Table 8.27). Children aged under 1 year were over 3 times as likely as 15–16 year olds to be the subject of a child protection substantiation. To some extent, this may be related to the recognition that younger children are more vulnerable, and so early intervention measures are in place in many jurisdictions to identify and respond to these cases.

Table 8.27: Children who were the subject of a child protection substantiation, by age group, Indigenous status, and state/territory, 2005–06 (number per 1,000 childern)

Age group (years)	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Under 1	19.5	15.3	23.6	4.0	13.0	10.2	20.1	19.1
1–4	9.3	7.3	12.3	2.3	5.9	6.0	14.9	9.8
5–9	7.9	6.3	10.9	1.9	4.6	4.5	11.6	8.0
10–14	7.8	6.0	9.9	2.0	3.2	5.0	10.9	6.9
15–16	4.1	3.9	5.2	0.7	1.3	4.0	6.3	1.8
All children	**8.4**	**6.7**	**10.9**	**2.0**	**4.5**	**6.1**	**12.0**	**8.1**
Indigenous	**44.2**	**67.7**	**23.0**	**10.9**	**32.3**	**4.4**	**56.8**	**15.2**
Other Australian children	**6.9**	**6.0**	**10.1**	**1.4**	**3.5**	**6.2**	**10.9**	**3.2**

Notes

1. Data from Tasmania should be interpreted carefully due to the high proportion of investigations not finalised by 31 August 2006, and a lower rate of recording Indigenous status at the time of the substantiation compared with other jurisdictions.
2. Other Australian children includes children whose Indigenous status in unknown.

Source: AIHW 2007b:Tables 2.7–2.9.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were more likely than other children to be the subject of a child protection substantiation, in all jurisdictions except Tasmania (Table 8.27). A number of factors may contribute to the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system, including lower socioeconomic status, cultural differences, and the effects of past separations from family and culture, including forced removal (HREOC 1997).

Chapter 2 contains further data relating to child protection issues in Australia.

Social and support networks

Social and support networks are the connections between individuals and groups. In the context of this section, these networks refer to the informal relationships people have with family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and other members of their community. Support networks can act in a variety of ways, such as provision of information or emotional, practical or financial support, and these in turn provide individuals with a sense of belonging.

Contact with family and friends and sources of social support are presented here as indications of the positive aspects of social networks. Data relating to social detachment provide indications of people who may lack social and support networks, and may miss out on the sense of belonging that other community members feel.

Contact with family and friends

In 2006, most (79%) Australians aged 18 years or over reported having face-to-face contact with family and friends living outside the household in the past week (ABS 2007g). Males and females of all ages were essentially equally likely to have social contact. Including other forms of social contact, such as by mail, telephone, email or SMS, 96% of adult Australians reported having social contact with family or friends with whom they did not live in the past week. This represents a small but statistically significant increase since 2002 (95%).

Sources of support

In 2006, most (93%) people aged 18 years or over felt that they can ask people not living with them for small favours. Further, a similar proportion of people (93%) reported feeling able to ask for help in a time of crisis. The same results were reported in 2002. People are more likely to seek help from informal support networks, such as family members or friends, than formal services (Table 8.28). Almost half (49%) of all people aged 18 years or over reported that they provided unpaid assistance (including emotional support, providing transport, domestic work and child care) to someone living outside their household in the previous 4 weeks (ABS 2007g).

Table 8.28: Sources of support in times of crisis, persons aged 18 years or over, by sex, 2006 (per cent)

	Males	Females	Persons
Family member	78.4	81.0	79.7
Friend	66.7	66.8	66.8
Neighbour	32.2	33.5	32.8
Work colleague	23.7	20.0	21.8
Community, charity or religious organisation	11.2	13.8	12.5
Health, legal or financial professional	8.6	9.6	9.1
Local council or other government services	5.1	5.2	5.2
No support outside the household	7.5	5.8	6.7

Notes

1. Categories of sources of support are not mutually exclusive.
2. Types of crisis support include advice on what to do; emotional support; help when experiencing a serious injury or illness; help in maintaining family or work responsibilities; and provision of emergency money, accommodation and/or food.

Source: ABS 2007g:Table 25.

Social detachment

Being removed from support networks can have significant negative effects, particularly for people who are already experiencing some degree of social exclusion. Two indicators of social detachment are the rate of suicide in a population, and the number of people experiencing homelessness (see the sections on 'safety' and 'shelter and housing' in this chapter). People in prison may also be disengaged from support networks, and have difficulty rejoining society. Along with incidence of crime (discussed above in the context of healthy living), imprisonment provides a third indicator of social detachment.

At 30 June 2006, there were 25,790 prisoners held in adult custody throughout Australia (ABS 2006t). Of these, 22% were unsentenced (see Glossary). Most prisoners (70%) were aged 20–39 years. The vast majority (93%) were male while 7% were female. The charge or offence accounting for the most prisoners in 2006 was 'acts intended to cause injury' (18%), followed by 'unlawful entry with intent' (12%).

In the decade prior to 2006 the number of male prisoners increased by 39% (from 17,299 in 1996 to 23,963 in 2006), while the number of female prisoners almost doubled (from 964 in 1996 in 1,823 in 2006)). The Indigenous prisoner population in 2006, 24% of all prisoners, was the highest in 10 years.

Between 2000 and 2006 the age-standardised rate of imprisonment for non-Indigenous persons remained fairly stable, at 120–130 persons per 100,000 population (Table 8.29). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons were imprisoned at a rate 10–13 times that of non-Indigenous persons over the same period, although there was significant variation between states—from a 3-fold higher imprisonment rate in Tasmania to an 18-fold difference in Western Australia. The apparent increase in imprisonment rate between 2000 and 2006 should be interpreted with caution, as it may be partly due to changes in collecting and recording Indigenous information, and/or in increased willingness of Indigenous people to self-identify (ABS 2006t).

According to international data, Australia's prison population (including pre-trial detainees and remand prisoners) was 120 persons per 100,000 population in 2004, which is below the OECD average of 132 per 100,000 population. The United States, with 725 prisoners per 100,000 population, had the highest imprisonment rate in the OECD (OECD 2007f).

Table 8.29: Rates of imprisonment in adult custody, by Indigenous status, 2000 to 2006 (number per 100,000 population)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indigenous prisoners	1,264.5	1,287.8	1,283.1	1,368.4	1,413.9	1,560.9	1,668.2
Non-Indigenous prisoners	128.0	123.4	121.8	124.8	126.7	128.8	129.8

Notes

1. Data were collected on all persons remanded or sentenced to adult custody on the night of June 30 of each reference year, based on administrative records held by corrective services in each Australian state and territory. Data exclude persons held in juvenile facilities, psychiatric custody, policy custody, home detention programs and immigration detention centres.
2. Persons remanded to adult custody are aged 18 years or over, except in Queensland where 'adult' refers to persons aged 17 years or over.
3. Rates are per 100,000 population and are age-standardised. They were derived using resident and estimated populations for each year, based on the 2001 Census of Population and Housing.
4. Data differ from those presented in *Australia's welfare 2005* due to recalculation of historical age-standardised rates by the ABS.

Source: ABS 2006t:Table 16.

In 2005–06 there were 13,254 young people under juvenile justice supervision throughout Australia, 83% of whom were male (AIHW 2007c). The rate of juvenile justice supervision for people aged 10–17 years was 5.0 per 1,000 population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 10–17 years (44 per 1,000) were more likely to be under juvenile justice supervision than non-Indigenous young people (3 per 1,000).

Trust

Trust lies at the heart of all positive relationships, whether between individuals or groups, and as such is a key dimension of social capital. People's trust in others is often described with reference to the type of relationship: interpersonal trust refers to individuals well known to them, social trust refers to casual acquaintances or strangers, and civic trust refers to public or high-profile institutions.

Social trust

In 2006, just over half (54%) of all respondents to the ABS General Social Survey agreed that 'most people can be trusted' (ABS 2007g). Fewer than one in three respondents disagreed with the statement. Levels of trust were similar for males and females, and highest among people aged 75–84 years (59%).

A slightly different measure of trust asks respondents to choose between two statements: 'most people can be trusted' or 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people'. According to this measure, 39% of respondents to the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AUSSA) expressed social trust in 2003 and 2005 (AUSSA 2003 and 2005, unpublished analysis). Australians may be less socially trusting than in the past. The World Values Survey found that 40% of Australians agreed 'most people can be trusted' in 1995, compared with 46% in 1981. The extent of social trust in societies similar to Australia's at the end of the 20th century varied considerably. In surveys conducted between 1998 and 2000, 48% of New Zealanders expressed social trust, compared with 38% of Canadians, 36% of people in the United States, and 29% of people in Great Britain (World Values Survey, unpublished analysis).

Civic trust

Civic trust in populations is often measured by levels of confidence held in various institutions. Australians tend not to express confidence in civic institutions—the majority of the population expressed confidence in 5 of 12 selected institutions in the 2005 AUSSA (Table 8.30). The highest levels of confidence were held in the armed forces (80%), the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC; 72%) and the police force (69%). Less than one-third of the population expressed confidence in banks and financial institutions (28%), the legal system and trade unions (both 30%), and the public service (31%).

Men and women expressed similar levels of confidence in most institutions. However, men were more likely than women to have confidence in major Australian companies (44% compared to 38%), while women (63%) were more likely than men (56%) to have confidence in charities (unpublished AIHW analysis of AUSSA 2005).

Generally, the 2005 AUSSA produced similar results to the 2003 survey. Notable differences were greater proportions of the population expressing confidence in churches and religious institutions (an increase of 7 percentage points) or the ABC (6 percentage points).

Table 8.30: Levels of confidence[a] in selected institutions, 2003 and 2005 (per cent)

	'A great deal' or 'Quite a lot'		Not very much		None at all	
	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005
Armed forces	80	80	16	16	2	2
Australian Broadcasting Corporation	66	72	24	19	4	4
Police[b]	70	69	23	25	5	5
Universities	64	63	23	24	5	4
Charities	58	59	28	29	9	7
Major Australian companies	40	41	44	43	11	11
Churches and religious institutions	33	40	36	34	25	20
Federal government/parliament	39	38	44	43	14	16
The public service	31	31	50	52	16	15
Trade unions	27	30	45	45	23	19
Legal system	29	30	46	46	24	22
Banks and financial institutions	25	28	44	44	29	26

(a) In the text, 'confidence' refers to the responses 'A great deal' or 'Quite a lot'.

(b) The question relates to police in the respondent's own state or territory.

Sources: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2003 and 2005, unpublished analysis.

Community and civic engagement

Community and civic engagement can be expressed in various ways, such as being involved in the community or political life, or through volunteering. Community and civic engagement not only allows individuals to have a say in the future direction of their communities but also promotes a cohesive network of people from various backgrounds.

The networks formed within the confines of civic engagement are often seen as more formal than those that exist through family and friends. Due to the nature of these formal bonds, the community ties may not be as strong as informal bonds, although they may be more far-reaching. That is, while individuals may not have overly strong relationships that are established through community and civic engagement, more diversity and understanding is established throughout the community through the socialisation of people from various backgrounds who may not otherwise communicate or interact.

Community engagement

Volunteering

In 2006, 34% of Australians aged 18 years or over (more than 5.2 million people) had been engaged in voluntary work in the previous 12 months (ABS 2007g). People aged 35–44 years were most likely to be volunteers (43%) while people aged 85 years or over were least likely (14%). Many people volunteered a great deal of their time—more than one in three volunteers reported working 100 or more hours in the last 12 months.

While it is difficult to analyse trends in rates of volunteering due to differences in survey methodologies, there appears to have been a considerable increase in the proportion of the population that engaged in voluntary work over the period 1995–2006 (Table 8.31). In 1995, less than one-quarter of all people aged 18 years or over were volunteers. By 2006, this had risen to more than one-third (35%). Rates of volunteering were higher for women than men across the surveys.

Table 8.31: Participation in voluntary work in last 12 months, persons aged 18 years or over, by sex, 1995, 2000, 2002 and 2006 (per cent)

	1995	2000[a]	2002	2006[b]
Males	22.9	30.5	33.7	32.8
Females	24.4	33.0	35.1	38.0
Persons	**23.6**	**31.8**	**34.4**	**35.4**
Number ('000)	**3,189.4**	**4,395.6**	**4,989.0**	**5,418.7**

(a) Voluntary work for the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games is excluded from the data and thus does not account for the higher rate of volunteering in 2000 compared to 1995.

(b) The 2006 General Social Survey excluded from its definition of volunteer persons who were required to do unpaid community work (such as the Work for the Dole program, work under a Community Service Order or a student placement) from voluntary work estimates. This group is included in the estimate presented in the table to enable comparison with previous surveys; however, the figures quoted in the text refer only to those who voluntarily undertook unpaid community work.

Sources: ABS 1996, 2001b, 2003, 2007g.

Donations to non-profit organisations

According to the ABS General Social Survey, an estimated three in four Australians aged 18 years or over (77%, or 11.8 million people) donated money to non-profit organisations in 2006 (ABS 2007g). This proportion is slightly higher than in 2000 (74%). Rates of giving peaked among people aged 45–54 years (83%), and were lowest at the extremes of the age spectrum. Still, the majority of people aged 18–24 years (62%) and 85 years or over (72%) made at least one donation over a 12-month period. Of selected broad groupings, community and welfare organisations were most likely to receive donations (61% of adult Australians gave money to such organisations), followed by hospitals and health organisations (32%), schools (19%) and research organisations (18%).

Other recent research has estimated that 87% of Australians aged 18 years or over donated $5.7 billion to non-profit organisations in the 12 months before January 2005, with a median donation of $100 per donor (FaCS 2005). Additionally, around $2 billion was provided by support for fundraising events and 'charity gambling' such as raffles, lotteries and art unions. The *Giving Australia* report calculated that, between 1997 and 2004, donations by individuals increased by 58% in real (inflation-adjusted) terms, due to larger amounts being given per donor as well as a greater proportion of the population making donations (FaCS 2005). These figures should be interpreted with caution, as the *Giving Australia* survey had a high non-response rate, and the authors noted the likely exaggeration of donations reported due to positive endorsement of giving following the Asian tsunami appeals (although donations to these appeals were specifically excluded from the data).

Civic engagement

Almost one in five Australians aged 18 years or over (19%) actively participated in civic and political groups in 2006 (ABS 2007g). Participation was generally highest among people aged 45–54 years (24%), with some notable exceptions. For example, participation in welfare organisations was highest among people aged 65–74 years, while those aged 25–34 years were more likely than other age groups to be involved in environmental or animal welfare groups. Active participation in a political party was among the least popular forms of civic engagement (Table 8.32).

Table 8.32: Participation in selected groups in the last 12 months, persons aged 18 years or over, 2006

	Per cent
Trade union, professional or technical association	7.3
Welfare organisation	6.6
Service club	5.8
Environmental or animal welfare group	5.0
International aid and development	4.1
Emergency services	3.2
Human and civil rights group	2.2
Political party	1.3
Consumer organisation	1.0
Number of persons aged 18 years or over	**15,307,000**

Source: ABS 2007g:Table 29.

Many people may participate in civic and political life without belonging to a formal organisation. In 2006 almost one in four Australians aged 18 years or over boycotted products or made specific purchases for political, ethical or environmental reasons, and more than one in five (23%) signed a petition—the most commonly reported types of civic activity (Table 8.33). Participation was highest among people aged 45–54 years or 55–64 years for most of the civic activities specified.

Despite there being numerous avenues through which Australians can, and do, participate in civic life, many people still feel disconnected from public discussion. In 2006, fewer than one-third (29%) of all people aged 18 years or over felt able to have a say in the community on important issues all or most of the time, whereas almost half (46%) felt they were able to contribute little or never (ABS 2007g).

Table 8.33: Type of civic activity participated in over the last 12 months, persons aged 18 years or over, 2006

	Per cent
Community consultation/public meeting	7.8
Contacted local councillor/territory government member	13.8
Contacted member of parliament	5.8
Signed petition	22.5
Attended protest march/meeting/rally	5.2
Wrote letter to the editor of a newspaper	3.5
Participated in a political campaign	2.0
Boycotted or deliberately bought products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	24.6
Number of persons aged 18 years or over	**15,307,000**

Source: ABS 2007g:Table 29.

8.5 Summary

Healthy living

In general, Australians enjoy fairly healthy lives. Male and female life expectancies are among the highest in the world, and infant mortality rates are low. People living in major capital cities are exposed to relatively low levels of air pollution. Most people have access to housing, with about 70% owning or in the process of owning their house. Feelings of safety and freedom from harm enhance physical and mental wellbeing.

Despite these positive outcomes, the results of a number of indicators linked to poor physical and psychological health are a cause for concern:

- More than four out of five Australians aged 12 years or over consume insufficient vegetables to maintain optimal health, and almost half do not eat enough fruit.
- One in three Australians aged 18 years or over are sedentary.
- Almost one in five people aged 15 years or over are obese, and the obesity rate continues to increase.
- Close to one in five low-income households are susceptible to housing stress.
- Up to 100,000 people may experience some form of homelessness, including more than 14,000 people with no conventional accommodation.
- Almost one in five women and one in twenty men do not feel safe when alone at home at night.
- Robbery, physical assault or sexual assault directly affects about 5% of people aged 15 years or over each year.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience poorer outcomes against a diversity of indicators of healthy living. Compared with the overall population, Indigenous Australians have lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality and death due to injury, higher rates of obesity, and are more likely to be victims of crime. Differences also exist between Indigenous people living in remote and non-remote areas. For example, Indigenous adults in remote areas are less likely to consume sufficient fruit and vegetables, and about 12,000 people living in remote communities had drinking water supplies that did not meet quality standards.

A number of trends are emerging in some areas related to healthy living. These are summarised in Table 8.34. Readers should note that a directional change in a measure, as signalled by the arrows in the table, does not necessarily imply improved or reduced wellbeing.

Table 8.34: Trends in selected indicators of healthy living

Indicator	Measure	Time period	Trend
Fruit and vegetable intake	Persons aged 12 years or over who usually ate sufficient vegetables (per cent)	2001 to 2004–05	↑
	Persons aged 12 years or over who usually ate sufficient fruit (per cent)	2001 to 2004–05	~
Access to potable water	Number of discrete Indigenous communities not connected to a town water supply whose drinking water failed testing	2001–2006	↓
Urban air quality	Number of days on which air pollution (PM10 and ozone particles) exceeded AAQ NEPM standard levels	2000–2005	~
Housing tenure	Households that own their home (per cent)	1994–95 to 2003–04	~
	Households that own their home outright (per cent)	1994–95 to 2003–04	↓
Housing affordability	Lower income households that spend 30% or more of their gross income on housing costs (per cent)	2000–01 to 2003–04	~
Life expectancy	Life expectancy at birth (all Australians)	1967–2004	↑
	Life expectancy at birth (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; Northern Territory only)	1967–2004	↑
Expected years of life lived with disability	Expected years lived with disability (per cent of total life expectancy)	1988–2003	↑
Infant mortality	Infant deaths (rate per 1,000 live births)	1985–2005	↓
Mental health	Persons aged 18 years or over reporting a long-term mental or behavioural condition	1995 to 2004–05	↑
	Persons aged 18 years or over reporting very high levels of psychological distress (per cent)	2001 to 2004–05	~
Physical activity	Persons aged 18 years or over reporting sedentary or low levels of exercise (per cent)	1995 to 2004–05	~
Prevalence of obesity	Persons aged 18 years or over who were obese (per cent)	1995 to 2004–05	↑
Feelings of safety	Women who felt safe alone in various situations (per cent)	1995–2005	↑
Crime	Victims of recorded crime: murder; attempted murder; robbery; motor vehicle theft; other theft; unlawful entry with intent (rate per 100,000 persons)	1996–2006	↓
	Victims of recorded crime: kidnapping/abduction; blackmail/extortion (rate per 100,000 persons)	1996–2006	↑
Injury	Deaths due to injury and poisoning (rate per 100,000 persons)	1955–2004	↓

Note: The indicators singled out here are those for which reasonably reliable trend data are available. A directional change in any measure does not necessarily imply improved or reduced wellbeing. Key:

↑ An increase against the measure was observed over the time period specified.

↓ A decrease against the measure was observed over the time period specified.

~ No significant change in the measure was observed over the time period specified, or no consistent trend could be determined.

Autonomy and participation

This collection of indicators suggests that many Australians have access to the tools necessary for independence, ability to exercise choice, and participation in different aspects of society. Around three million people participate in education beyond compulsory schooling, and the proportion of the population with tertiary qualifications continues to rise. The majority of schoolchildren meet national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy. Median household income has risen considerably over a decade, and most people do not experience financial hardship. Labour force participation is high and rising, particularly among women, while the unemployment rate has fallen steadily over the last decade. The nature of work is also changing, becoming more diverse. Much of the recent growth in employment is related to an expansion of the role of part-time workers in Australia's labour force. Most people are able to move around the community as needed, and communication is enhanced by increasing access to current telephone and internet technology. Balancing work and study, almost all Australians are able to enjoy recreational and leisure activities of various kinds.

Areas of particular concern, highlighted by the indicators presented in this chapter, include:

- Fewer than one in five adult Australians have good or very good literacy skills.
- Lone-parent families, and young people aged under 35 years living alone, are more likely than other households to experience frequent or multiple kinds of cash flow problems in a year.

Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the indicators show:

- Indigenous Australians are less likely than the broader population to remain in school until Year 12.
- Indigenous adults are less likely than non-Indigenous adults to have a non-school qualification at the level of Certificate III or above.
- Literacy among Indigenous school children is well below the national average.
- Indigenous households are over-represented in the lowest income quintile.
- Unemployment rates are higher than for the general population, both in remote and non-remote areas, although there has been considerable improvement in non-remote areas in recent years.
- Indigenous Australians are less likely than the general population to have access to communication technologies, including the Internet.

Trends in a number of indicators of autonomy and participation are illustrated in Table 8.35.

Table 8.35: Trends in selected indicators of autonomy and participation

Indicator	Measure	Time period	Trend
Retention rates at school	Apparent retention rates to Year 12: all students	1995–2006	~
	Apparent retention rates to Year 12: Indigenous students	1995–2006	↑
Participation in education	Persons aged 15–64 years enrolled in a course of study (per cent)	1995–2005	~
	Indigenous Australians aged 15 years or over enrolled in a course of study (per cent)	2002 to 2004–05	↑
Educational attainment	Persons aged 15–64 years with a non-school qualification (per cent)	1996–2006	↑
Literacy among schoolchildren	School students who met the national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy	2000–2005	~
Income	Median weekly equivalised household income (CPI-adjusted)	1994–95 to 2003–04	↑
	Income inequality (several measures)	1994–95 to 2003–04	~
Income disadvantage	Households with weekly equivalised disposable income below 40%, 50% and 60% of the median for all households (per cent)	1995–96 to 2003–04	~
Labour force/ employment	Participation in the labour force by women (per cent)	1996–97 to 2006–07	↑
	Participation in the labour force by men (per cent)	1996–97 to 2006–07	~
	Unemployment rate	1996–97 to 2006–07	↓
	Long-term unemployment rate	1996–97 to 2006–07	↓
Employment basis and conditions	Employees who work part-time (per cent)	1996–97 to 2006–07	↑
	Employees without leave entitlements (per cent)	1996–97 to 2006–07	~
	Full-time employees working 50 hours or more per week (per cent)	1996–97 to 2006–07	↓
	Average hours worked by full-time employees	1996–97 to 2006–07	↓
Employment differentials	Labour force participation rate of Indigenous Australians	2002 to 2004–05	~
	Unemployment rate of Indigenous Australians	2002 to 2004–05	↓
Transport	Persons aged 18 years or over who mainly used public transport to travel to work or study (per cent)	1996–2006	↑
	Persons aged 18 years or over with access to a motor vehicle to drive (per cent)	2002–2006	~
	Persons aged 18 years or over who can easily get to places needed (per cent)	2002–2006	~
Communication	Number of fixed line phone services in operation	2004–2005	↓
	Number of mobile phone services in operation	2000–2005	↑
	Households with a home computer (per cent)	1998 to 2005–06	↑
	Households with home internet access (per cent)	1998 to 2005–06	↑

Note: The indicators singled out here are those for which reasonably reliable trend data are available. A directional change in any measure does not necessarily imply improved or reduced wellbeing. Key:

↑ An increase against the measure was observed over the time period specified.

↓ A decrease against the measure was observed over the time period specified.

~ No significant change in the measure was observed over the time period specified, or no consistent trend could be determined.

Social cohesion

The majority of Australians belong to informal support networks, making regular contact with family and friends and feeling that they can rely on others in times of need. More than one in three adult Australians contribute to the wider community by participating in volunteer work, and around three-quarters donate money to charities and non-profit organisations. While a minority of people engage in civic society through participation in formal groups, more undertake private civic actions. Generally, Australians express low levels of confidence in civic institutions. However, some key institutions in society (such as the armed forces) enjoy the confidence of most people.

Significant changes have occurred in the Australian population over recent years (Table 8.36). Most notably, the concept of family has broadened, as the percentage of 'traditional' couple families with dependent children has declined, while couples without children and one-parent families have become more common. The number of couples in de facto marriages compared to registered marriages is also increasing steadily—a trend that is driven by particularly high de facto partnership rates in younger people.

Some Australians are still unable to fully enjoy social cohesiveness, both within their immediate family and in the context of the wider community. More than one in 20 people aged 18 years or over feel unable to get support in a time of crisis from someone living outside their household. Domestic violence is responsible for more than one in five

Table 8.36: Trends in selected indicators of social cohesion

Indicator	Measure	Time period	Trend
Social marriage status	Persons in a registered marriage: 15–64 years (per cent)	1996–2006	↓
	Persons in a registered marriage: 65 years or over (per cent)	1996–2006	↑
	Persons in a de facto marriage: all age groups (per cent)	1996–2006	↑
Family type	Families comprising a couple with no children (per cent)	1996–2006	↑
	Families comprising a couple with children (per cent)	1996–2006	↓
	Families comprising one parent with children (per cent)	1996–2006	↑
Divorce rates	Crude divorce rate	1996–2006	↓
	Age-specific divorce rates: persons aged less than 40 years	1996–2006	↓
	Age-specific divorce rates: persons 50–64 years	1996–2006	↑
Social and support networks	Persons who had recent contact with friends or family living outside the household (per cent)	2002–2006	↑
	Persons who felt they would have sources of support in a time of crisis (per cent)	2002–2006	~
Social detachment	Age-standardised rates of imprisonment: non-Indigenous persons	2000–2006	~
	Age-standardised rates of imprisonment: Indigenous persons	2000–2006	↑
Community engagement	Persons aged 18 years or over engaged in voluntary work (per cent)	1995–2006	↑

Note: The indicators singled out here are those for which reasonably reliable trend data are available. A directional change in any measure does not necessarily imply improved or reduced wellbeing. Key:

↑ An increase against the measure was observed over the time period specified.

↓ A decrease against the measure was observed over the time period specified.

~ No significant change in the measure was observed over the time period specified, or no consistent trend could be determined.

occasions of emergency accommodation assistance through SAAP services. Between 2 and 12 children per 1,000 are the subjects of child protection substantiations, and the rate is substantially higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Indigenous Australians are also 10–13 times as likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Australians. As was discussed above in the context of 'healthy living', peoples' experience of crime and feelings of vulnerability may impact negatively on social cohesion. And, despite many avenues through which Australians can participate in civic life, almost half feel that they have little or no say in the community on important issues.

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