

# **Australia's mothers and babies 2002**

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The AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU) is a collaborative unit of the AIHW, and was established in 1979. The NPSU is a formally affiliated institution of the University of New South Wales and is linked to the Faculty of Medicine, School of Women's and Children's Health. The NPSU is located at the Sydney Children's Hospital. The NPSU aims to improve the health of Australian mothers and babies by monitoring reproductive and perinatal health. The NPSU is also involved in perinatal data development activities and epidemiological research. The NPSU maintains national data collections on perinatal health, maternal deaths, birth anomalies and assisted conception.

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# **Australia's mothers and babies 2002**

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# Preface

*Australia's Mothers and Babies 2002* is the twelfth report in the annual series prepared by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU). It is a collaborative effort of the NPSU and states and territories in providing national information on the pregnancy and childbirth of mothers and their babies. As in past years, readers will find an accessible report drawn from the National Perinatal Data Collection, a data collection that provides reliable health statistics on mothers and their babies.

This report updates the information presented in *Australia's Mothers and Babies 2001*, maintaining comparability with previous reports while incorporating improvements. Two special features are also included in this year's report: a chapter on homebirths and birth centre births, and a chapter on births from assisted reproductive technology (ART). The latter reports on all ART births for the year 2002 and shows the continual increase in the proportion of all births that arise from ART.

In addition, an appendix containing information on state and territory pre-existing and pregnancy-related medical conditions and labour complications data has been included. These data are not complete, but this is the first step in gaining national consistency and promoting discussion about these important pregnancy-related conditions and complications.

This report covers several areas where historically there have been data gaps by reporting available national or state and territory data. The number of mothers with a history of previous caesarean section and their current method of birth is reported, as is type of anaesthetic for operative deliveries. These new data are filling the gaps in the perinatal collection and answering the challenge of providing comprehensive and reliable information.

The *Australia's Mothers and Babies* reports provide a snapshot of the quarter of a million women who give birth annually, summarising selected characteristics of the mothers and their babies. With the continuing trend in delaying childbearing and declining birth rates, it is important that the community has a reliable report to which it can refer.

Richard Madden

Director

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

# Acknowledgments

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU) is a formally affiliated institution of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and is linked to the School of Women's and Children's Health. We would like to acknowledge the support of NPSU by the School of Women's and Children's Health, UNSW and the Sydney Children's Hospital.

The NPSU highly values the time, effort and expertise contributed by all states and territories in the collection and provision of the data used in this report. We would like to acknowledge the staff members of the state and territory health authorities who provided data and reviewed the tables for this report:

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Deborah Donoghue, Coordinator at the Australian and New Zealand Neonatal Network, provided data for the chapter on babies in neonatal intensive care units.

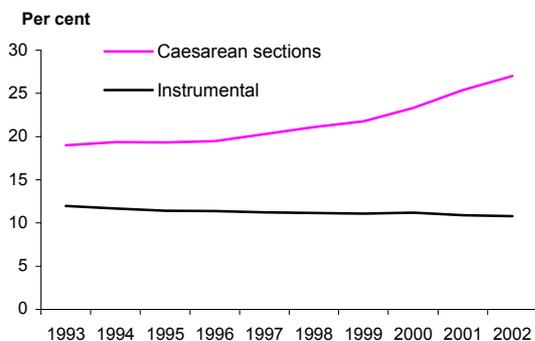
The following NPSU staff members made valuable contributions: Narelle Grayson reviewed the report and provided assistance with preparing Appendix A; Jishan Dean provided data and assistance with Chapter 6.

# Highlights

*Australia's Mothers and Babies 2002* is the twelfth annual report on pregnancy and childbirth of women in Australia. This section provides an overview of the main findings of the report.

## Mothers

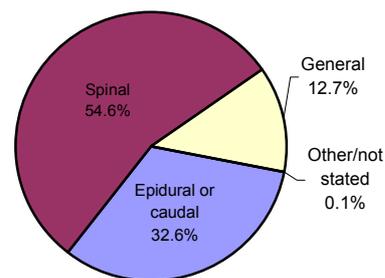
- In 2002, 255,095 babies born to 250,758 mothers were notified to perinatal data collections in the states and territories.
- The average age of all mothers in 2002 was 29.4 years, and 27.6 years for those having their first baby, continuing the upward trend seen in maternal age in recent years.
- In 2002, 27.0% of deliveries were by caesarean section. State and territory caesarean section rates ranged from 21.4% to 29.5%. Over the last 10 years, instrumental deliveries have decreased and caesarean sections have increased. Caesarean section rates were higher among older mothers and those admitted to private hospitals.



### Proportion of caesarean section and instrumental deliveries, 1993–2002

- Of all mothers giving birth in 2002, 12.8% had previously had a caesarean section. Mothers with a history of caesarean section were likely to have another caesarean section in 2002 (79.4%), while 16.6% had a spontaneous vaginal delivery, and 3.7% had an assisted vaginal delivery.

- Of mothers having an operative delivery (caesarean section, forceps or vacuum extraction) in 2002, at least 38.6% had an epidural or caudal anaesthetic administered, and at least 40.0% had a spinal anaesthetic. A general anaesthetic was administered for 9.3% of operative deliveries. Proportions of mothers having spinal and general anaesthetics were higher for caesarean section deliveries than for assisted vaginal deliveries.



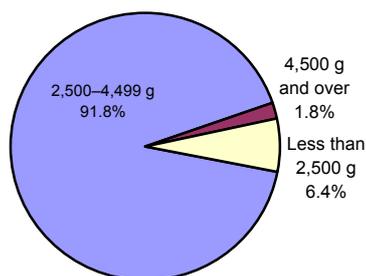
### Type of anaesthetic for caesarean section deliveries, 2002

- There were 8,822 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mothers, representing 3.6% of all mothers in Australia in 2002. Over one-third (38.4%) of births in the Northern Territory were to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mothers.
- Caesarean section deliveries occurred in 21.9% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mothers in 2002, compared with 27.4% of other mothers. The proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mothers who had previously had a caesarean section was 14.4%, compared with 12.8% for other mothers.

- The proportion of mothers who were born in a country other than Australia was 22.1% in 2002.
- Multiple pregnancies accounted for 1.7% of all confinements and included 4,178 twin pregnancies and 81 triplet or higher order pregnancies.

## Babies

- Of all births in Australia in 2002, 20,071 (7.9%) were preterm (less than 37 weeks gestation).
- Low birthweight (less than 2,500 grams) occurred in 16,230 (6.4%) liveborn babies in 2002. The proportion of liveborn babies of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mothers that were low birthweight was 12.9% compared with 6.2% of babies of other mothers.



**Birthweight, live births, 2002**

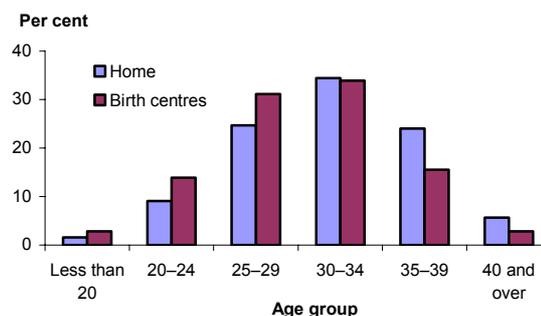
- The median length of stay in hospital for babies born in hospital was 4.0 days in 2002. Two-thirds of babies stayed in hospital for less than 5 days.

## Special topics

- In 2002, there were 637 planned homebirths reported, representing 0.3% of all confinements. The mean age of mothers giving birth at home was 31.4 years. Liveborn babies born at home had a mean birthweight of 3,631 grams.
- There were 5,379 confinements in birth centres in 2002, representing 2.1% of all

confinements. The mean age of mothers giving birth in birth centres was 29.7 years. Liveborn babies born in birth centres had a mean birthweight of 3,564 grams.

- Of mothers giving birth at home, 29.7% were aged 35 years or older, compared with 18.3% of mothers giving birth in birth centres.



**Age distribution of mothers giving birth at home and in birth centres, 2002**

- Of babies born in 2002, 2.3% were following the use of assisted reproductive technology (ART). These babies had a lower average birthweight compared with all Australian babies, with 20.9% of pregnancies being preterm. Almost half of the ART confinements were delivered by caesarean section (49.4%). Mothers of babies born following ART were, on average, 4.3 years older than all Australian mothers, with a mean age of 33.7 years.
- In 2002, 5,383 babies were admitted to level III neonatal intensive care units in Australia. Of these babies, 49.0% had a gestational age of less than 32 weeks and 41.2% had a birthweight of less than 1,500 grams.
- In 2002, using state and territory perinatal data, the fetal death rate was 6.7 per 1,000 births; the neonatal death rate was 3.1 per 1,000 live births; and the perinatal death rate was 9.8 per 1,000 births.