

# Part XI

## DATA GAPS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Timely, accurate, and comprehensive information on children's health, development and wellbeing is essential for monitoring the progress of Australia's children, and is critical for the development of evidence-based policy. *A picture of Australia's children 2009* aims to do this, by presenting the latest and most reliable information on key national indicators of children's health, development and wellbeing, and the contributing social, community and economic influences.

The previous report, *A picture of Australia's children* (2005), identified data gaps within the indicator framework and the existing indicators. At that time, there was a notable lack of specific indicators to monitor the performance of systems and services that are available to children and their families. There was also a lack of recent objective national data on risk and protective factors such as overweight and obesity, physical activity, early learning, breastfeeding, smoking and substance use during pregnancy, social and emotional development; and specific conditions among children such as mental health and Type 2 diabetes.

Since 2005, there have been considerable data development and information activities in the areas of children's health, development and wellbeing, increasing the available information for a number of indicators, and filling some of the data gaps identified in the 2005 edition. The 2009 edition includes system performance indicators as well as additional indicators in the following areas: congenital anomalies, physical activity, early learning, transition to and attendance at primary school, teenage births, alcohol use during pregnancy, school relationships and bullying, children in grandparent families, neonatal hearing screening, quality child care, and child protection resubstantiations. The ministerially endorsed Children's Headline Indicators are included for the first time in this report as a subset of the key national indicators.

*Part XI* of this report highlights:

- data gaps in existing indicators
- new data developments relevant to children.

## 45 Data gaps

The indicator framework in this report has been broadened from previous editions, reflecting the key issues facing the health, development and wellbeing of Australia's children today, as well as the availability of additional data sources. However, as with previous editions, there are still a number of indicators for which there is a lack of national data or a lack of recent data.

Table 45.1 identifies where data gaps exist in the national monitoring of children's health, development and wellbeing in Australia. As is evident from Table 45.1, there are eight indicators (shaded) where considerable indicator and data development are required in order to report on these indicators. Further information on these data gaps and indicator developments can be found in the preceding chapters.

Even for those indicators that have a defined measure and recent available data, presenting this information by subpopulations of Australian children, such as

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children living in geographically isolated areas or those from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, was not possible for all of the indicators presented in this report.

While there has been much progress in collecting information on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children over the last decade, many logistical, analytical and conceptual challenges still remain. This is due partly to varying levels of identification of Indigenous people in administrative records and partly to the statistical and practical challenges of surveying a population that is relatively small. As a result, there are many areas considered integral to child health, development and wellbeing where, at the national level, there is not sufficiently robust information to show how well Indigenous children are faring, or how they compare with non-Indigenous children (see *Part IX* for further information).

**Table 45.1: Data gaps in national indicators**

Indicator	Data limitations and gaps	Data availability
Disability	The most recent national data are from the ABS 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. ABS will be conducting the next survey in 2009.	Data expected to be available 2010/2011
Mental health	No recent national data are available on the mental health of children aged 0–14 years. The most recent data for this indicator are from the 1998 Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing.	Data not available
Breastfeeding	No national data are currently available on <i>exclusively</i> breastfed infants. The Australian Government is planning to conduct an Australian National Infant Feeding Survey in 2009, which has the potential to address this indicator.	Data not available
Early learning (infants read to by an adult on a regular basis)	Further development is required to identify and clarify measurement components (such as terms 'regular' and 'adult'). No national data are currently available to address this indicator; however, information has been presented from Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children on parents reading to children aged 2–3 years.	Indicator development required
Attending early childhood education programs	No national data are currently available on children attending an early education program in the 2 years before beginning formal schooling. Information is available from ABS Child Care Surveys on attendance at preschool or long-day care centres. However, these data will overestimate the number of children attending an early educational program. The ABS 2008 Childhood Education and Care Survey will enable improved identification of children attending an early educational program.	Data expected to be available mid-2009
Transition to primary school	Information in this report has been presented from 60 communities across Australia which had implemented the AEDI in 2004–2007. The national implementation of the AEDI from 2009 has the potential to address this indicator.	Data available following national implementation
Social and emotional development	No national data currently available due to definition and measurement difficulties.	Indicator development required
Smoking in pregnancy	Currently no national data are available on women who smoked during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy (defined measure for this Headline Indicator). Information has been presented on women who smoked at any time during pregnancy.	Data expected to be available in 2010
Family functioning	No national data are currently available for families with children. Information has been presented from state-based surveys.	Data not available
School relationships and bullying	Currently no defined measure or national data source for this indicator, due to difficulties in defining and measuring bullying.	Indicator development required
Neonatal hearing screening	No national data are currently available. Information has been presented on children fitted with hearing aids.	Data not available
Quality child care	No national data currently available due to definition and measurement difficulties.	Indicator development required

## 46 New data developments relevant to children

In recent years, there have been a number of new national data development activities relevant to children, significantly contributing to the evidence base in national information on the health, development and wellbeing of Australia's children. Those of particular relevance for this report are described below. Further information on a number of other data development and information activities relevant to children can be found in *Australia's welfare 2007* (AIHW 2007a:63).

### **AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION SURVEY**

This survey was conducted in 2007 by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the University of Adelaide, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the Australian Food and Grocery Council. The survey collected comprehensive information on overweight and obesity, physical activity and nutrition from more than 4,000 children aged 2–16 years. The survey data can be measured against Australia's Nutrient Reference Values, the Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines. The results of the survey will inform research and government policy, and influence the promotion of good nutrition and healthy lifestyles in Australia.

### **GROWING UP IN AUSTRALIA: THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN (LSAC)**

This study was initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs as part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, and is being undertaken in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, with advice provided by a consortium of leading researchers. The study has a broad, multidisciplinary base, exploring family and social issues

relevant to children's development, including family functioning, health, non-parental child care and education.

The LSAC follows two cohorts of children—infants aged 3–19 months and children aged about 4–5 years at Wave 1 (2004)—with data collection occurring every 2 years. Data from Waves 1, 1.5, 2 and 2.5 are currently available, enabling the longitudinal nature of this study to be utilised. A key benefit of this type of longitudinal study is that it allows investigation of how children's outcomes are interlinked with their environment.

### **FOOTPRINTS IN TIME: THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN (LSIC)**

This study was initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and is guided by the LSIC Steering Committee. The study aims to improve understanding on how Indigenous children develop resilience and what helps to improve their wellbeing and future, and to recognise links between early childhood experiences and later life outcomes.

The LSIC follows two cohorts of children—infants aged 6–18 months and children aged 3–4 years. Wave 1 data was collected in 2008, and is expected to be publicly released in August 2009. The long-term objective of the study is to enable the development of practical and effective policies and programs to close the gap of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous families (FaHCSIA 2009).

### **AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT INDEX: BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN (AEDI)**

The Australian Early Development Index is a population measure of how young children prior to school age are developing in different Australian communities. It aims to provide communities with a basis for reviewing the services, supports and environments that

influence children in their first 5 years of life (CCCH & Telethon Institute of Child Health Research 2007).

The AEDI is managed by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, in partnership with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The AEDI will be implemented nationally for the first time in 2009. It has previously been successfully piloted in 60 communities across Australia between 2004 and 2007.

## AIHW DATA DEVELOPMENTS

### National Child Protection Data Collection

The AIHW, in collaboration with the National Child Protection and Support Services data group, has undertaken developmental work on a draft national minimum data set for the National Child Protection Data Collection, with the aim of improving analytic potential and national reporting on children and young people in the child protection system. The AIHW will be working with the jurisdictions in developing and implementing a National Child Protection Unit Record Collection.

### Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CSNMDS)

Development of the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set has been completed with the publication of the final report in February 2007 (NCSIMG 2007). The CSNMDS, endorsed by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council in 2006, aims to provide nationally comparable and comprehensive data about the provision of child care and preschool services including information about the children who use the services, the service providers and their workers. The AIHW has examined the feasibility of implementing the CSNMDS and found that most states and territories have not incorporated the CSNMDS data items into their collections, primarily due to cost and feasibility issues. However, all jurisdictions felt that the data items in the CSNMDS would be useful if there was an agreement to establish a national collection.

The AIHW and the ABS are currently working together to develop national data standards for the performance indicators of the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. Data standards in the CSNMDS will be used as the basis for this work.

### Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set (JJ NMDS)

The JJ NMDS has been implemented, and four reports have been published between 2006 and 2008. These reports draw on data held in the national database established by the AIHW and the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators. This database provides, for the first time, statistical information on all children and young people under juvenile justice supervision, including not only those on detention but also those under community-based supervision.

To further investigate the pathways between child maltreatment, homelessness and juvenile offending, the AIHW is undertaking a project to link the JJ NMDS, the SAAP data collection and available child protection data. The linked data will enable analysis of the characteristics of young people who are involved in more than one of these sectors, which will help inform the development of early intervention and social inclusion policies and programs (AIHW 2008k).

## ABS DATA DEVELOPMENTS

### Childhood Education and Care Survey

This survey was conducted by the ABS in June 2008, covering child care and early years' learning. The survey results, to be released in mid-2009, will provide improved information about the number of children participating in preschool programs in both dedicated preschools and as part of preschool programs conducted in long day care centres. This survey has replaced the former Child Care Survey, with the new survey integrating the overlap between education and care arrangements. The Childhood Education and Care Survey will continue to provide information on the nature, use and cost of child care as well as data on children's learning activities and environments in their early years.

## Family framework

The ABS has started work on the development of an agreed framework to support the further development of national statistics about families. This framework will identify and define the important concepts of family and family statistics, drawing attention to the importance of measuring aspects of family structures, family transitions, family functioning, and transactions—or social exchanges—between the family and the wider community, as important elements of family wellbeing. The framework will then be used to guide data development activities in the area of families, as well as associated research.

## Children and Youth Information Development Plan

The ABS, in conjunction with the Children and Youth Statistics Advisory Group, has developed an information development plan aimed at improving the collection and use of statistics on children and youth. The plan is based on 10 agreed priority areas for statistical data development. It reviews existing data, reports on data gaps and identifies actions required by key agencies to achieve the identified improvements within each of the priority areas. The ABS published an information paper outlining the plan in 2006, and has released annual updates in 2007 and 2008 (ABS 2006f).