

The Wellbeing of Young Australians - 2018 Report Card

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The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has released its third report card on the health and wellbeing of Australian children.

This follows reports in 2008 and 2013. The report shows how our children are faring and provides international comparisons showing where we are doing well and where we need to improve.

The Nest

The Nest is a framework to align and support the efforts of children, young people, parents, service providers and policy makers in improving the wellbeing and prospects of children and youth.

The Nest areas are:

1. Loved and Safe
2. Material Basics
3. Healthy
4. Learning
5. Participating
6. Positive Sense of Identity and Culture.

The report reveals that in many indicators we are heading in the wrong direction and that young Indigenous Australians face extra obstacles.

Overall

There is, however, good news; Year 12 retention rates for Indigenous Australians has improved.

“Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are more than three times more likely to commit suicide.”

The 2018 Report also shows Australia leading the world on some indicators, such as low smoking rates among young people, and improvement in areas such as rates of alcohol abuse and illicit drug use. Nevertheless, we are still on average only middle of the pack by international comparisons, and some outcomes have worsened since the last Report Card.

Child immunisation rates are of particular concern, with rates falling from 92.6% to 90.5% in the last decade. Australia is ranked

near the bottom of OECD countries for immunisation against measles and whooping cough.

Mental health is a growing concern. Young Australians suffering from high psychological distress has risen from 11.8% in 2011, to 15.4% in 2014.

Mental illness is even higher amongst Indigenous youth; with a third having a probable mental illness. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are more than three times more likely to commit suicide.

“Australia leads the world in the amount of time parents spend with their children...”

Indigenous Australian children also suffer higher rates of educational disadvantage. They are also almost ten times more likely to be in out-of-home-care and more than four times more likely to die of injury before age 14. Rates of teen pregnancy is six times higher than the national level.

The International Picture

Australia is one of 35 member nations of the OECD; which includes most of Europe, North America, and advanced Asian, Latin America and Oceanic economies.

Overall, Australia performs moderately in relation to child health and wellbeing indicators compared with other OECD countries.

- Australia is ranked in the top third for about one-third of indicators. Australia leads the world in the amount of time parents spend with their children and life expectancy at birth.
- Australia is ranked in the middle third of countries for just over a third of indicators. This includes paid paternity leave and year 4 performance in maths and science.
- Australia is ranked in the bottom third of countries for about a third of indicators, including bullying, food insecurity, immunisation rates and cost of childcare.

Learning

Australia trails the OECD in preschool attendance, ranked 35 out of 40 nations. The percentage of 4-5 year olds who usually attend preschool has fallen from 85% in 2011 to 83.3% in 2014.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to suffer educational disadvantage from year 4 onwards as evidenced in every reading, writing and science indicator under TIMMS, PIRLS and PISA.

- 70% of year 4 students are above the low benchmark for maths - 39% for Indigenous students.
- 81% of year 4 students are above the low benchmark for reading - 57% for Indigenous students.
- 75% of year 4 students are above the low benchmark for science - 47% for Indigenous students.

These results place Australia in the middle third, internationally.

Between 2011 and 2017, Indigenous year 12 retention rates increased from 48.7% to 62.4%

Helping parents be part of their kids' education is a cost-effective way to improve outcomes. Research shows it can equate to two to three years of extra education.

80.8% of parents read to their children (aged 0-2) in the past week - 70.3% for Indigenous families.

55% of year 8 girls and 47.1% of boys reported feeling some or a lot of pressure from schoolwork. Australia is ranked 24 of 26 on this indicator.

Australia ranks in the bottom third of countries for children feeling school is a place they feel happy and for pressure from homework.

“72.3% of students who identify as LGBTQI report experiencing abuse because of their sexuality or gender identity.”

Percentage of children feeling some or a lot of pressure from homework:

- Grade 6 girls - 34.2%
- Grade 6 boys - 33.3%
- Grade 8 girls - 55%
- Grade 8 boys - 47.1%



Other Indicators

31.1% of 15 - 19 year olds reporting that body image is a personal concern - 30.7% of Indigenous youth. However, both figures have fallen a few points in recent years.

89.6% of 15-24 year olds say they are tolerant of society being comprised of different cultures.

72.3% of students who identify as LGBTQI report experiencing abuse because of their sexuality or gender identity.

12.9% of 12 - 17 year olds have used illicit drugs - 4.5% for Indigenous youth.

5.4% of 2 - 18 year olds meet the minimum recommended consumption of vegetables - 8.1% for Indigenous children.

31.6% of 5 - 24 year olds are overweight or obese - 40.1% of Indigenous youth.

17.4% of children live in relative poverty - 31.6% of Indigenous children.

40.1% of adults had children in their care while experiencing violence from a partner. ■

Source: Report Card 2018 - The Wellbeing of young Australians.