



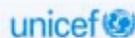
REPORT CARD

The Wellbeing of Young Australians



Australian Research Alliance
for Children & Youth

Working together to enhance
the wellbeing and life chances of
children and young people



The Allen Consulting Group

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) was founded by a group of experts and organisations who were concerned by trends in the wellbeing of

Australia's children and young people. ARACY promotes cross-disciplinary research into these areas, and advocates for such research to be harnessed in policy and practice.



report card

The wellbeing
of young Australians

**“There can be no keener
revelation of a society’s soul
than the way in which it treats
its children.”**

Nelson Mandela

Childhood and youth are the periods during which prevention and early intervention programs are most effective. Good data on the situation of children and young people can help governments and policy makers to identify the areas where such programs are most needed, and to anticipate future social, health and economic problems.

This Report Card presents a comprehensive summary of the wellbeing of Australia’s young people, including the most recent international comparisons available. It provides an international perspective and sets a baseline for future monitoring of the wellbeing of young people.

The Report Card has eight domains that affect the health and wellbeing of young people:

- material wellbeing
- health and safety
- education, training and employment
- peer and family relationships
- behaviours and risks
- subjective wellbeing
- participation
- environment

Each domain contains several different areas of focus, referred to as ‘indicators’. Each indicator has at least one measure and, where available, trend data are provided to compare the Australian average, the Indigenous Australian average and international or OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) performance. Due to lack of internationally comparable data, some indicators presented in this report may lack trend data, be presented over different years, or simply be absent.

Full details of all 42 measures, results and data sources can be found in the companion technical report, which is available from www.aracy.org.au/reportcard.



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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Material wellbeing

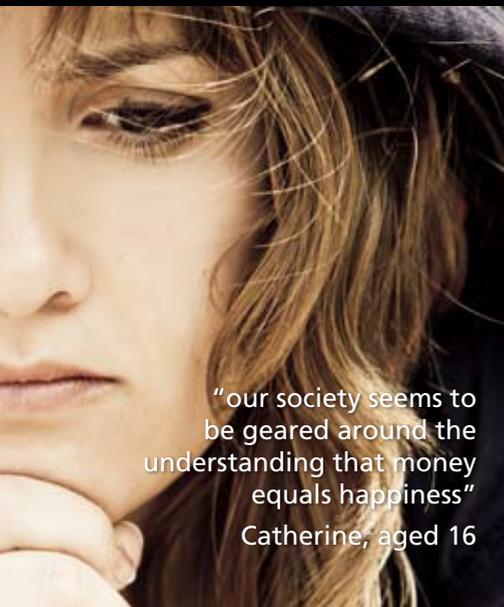
The domain 'material wellbeing' examines poverty and deprivation — circumstances that significantly affect the wellbeing of

children and young people. Poverty limits a family's ability to buy essentials, and strains family relationships.

For all of the indicators in this domain, Australia's results are worse than the best international result. Indigenous Australians have a higher rate of reported deprivation than the rate for the total Australian population. Out of the OECD countries where data are available, only Mexico and Turkey have worse levels of reported deprivation than Indigenous Australians. Data were not available for Indigenous Australians for the measures of poverty and joblessness.

In 2006, 7.2% of Australian children reported having fewer than 11 books in their home.

Deprivation is getting worse, especially for Indigenous Australians, with a rate third worst in the OECD.



"our society seems to be geared around the understanding that money equals happiness"
Catherine, aged 16

Relative income poverty

Children who experience poverty early in life are at risk of ongoing disadvantage.

Joblessness

Unemployment can cause family stress, and increases the likelihood of poverty.

Reported deprivation

Lack of educational resources is one way that poverty may be linked to poor educational achievement.

OECD ranking:

Australia:

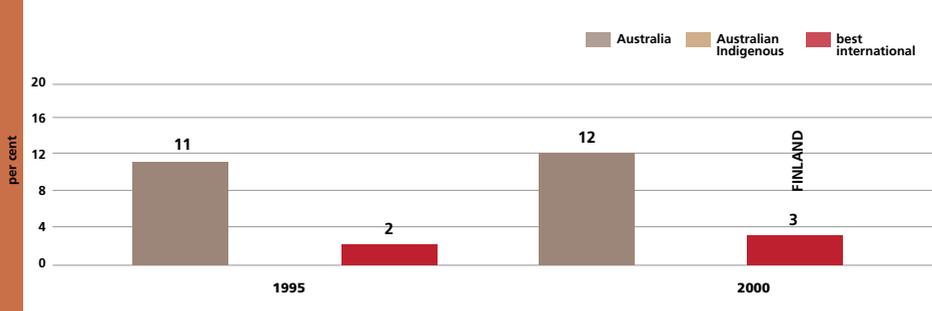
10/30

Indigenous Australia:

29/31

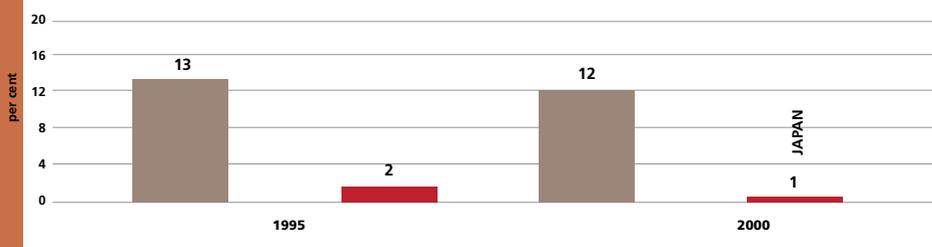
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH INCOME < 50% OF MEDIAN

Australian Indigenous n/a

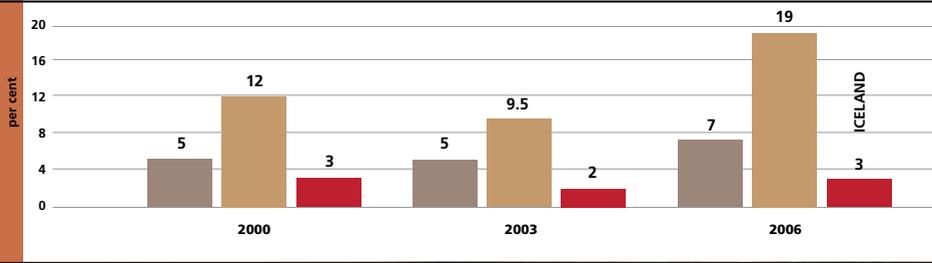


PERCENTAGE OF JOBLESS HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN

Australian Indigenous n/a



PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO REPORT HAVING FEWER THAN 11 BOOKS IN THEIR HOME



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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Health & safety

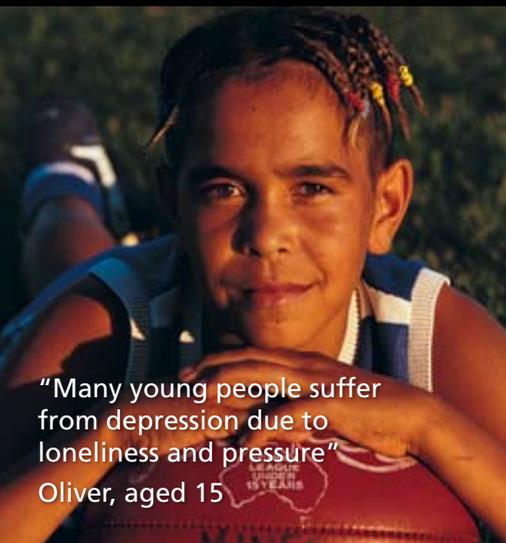
The health and safety of children is a strong indicator of the value a society places on children. Health and safety have a direct relationship with a child's wellbeing, and are basic human rights.

For all of these indicators, the health and safety of Australian children compares unfavourably with the best international result. Breastfeeding was suggested as an additional indicator for this Report Card, but was not included because data from Australia and other countries are inconsistent and incomplete. Indigenous Australians have significantly higher rates of infant mortality and low birth weight than the total Australian population.

For infant mortality, Australia is in the bottom third of OECD countries. The infant mortality rate for Indigenous Australians is more than double the non-Indigenous rate.

Indigenous Australian babies have the lowest birth weight in the OECD.

Indigenous Australians have a rate of death from self-injury that is second only to Finland.



“Many young people suffer from depression due to loneliness and pressure”

Oliver, aged 15

Infant health

An infant's health at birth is significantly related to their health and wellbeing in later life. Measures of infant health, such as infant mortality, also demonstrate the quality and accessibility of the health care available to pregnant women and infants.

OECD ranking: Infant mortality

Australia: 20/27

Indigenous Australia: 26/28

OECD ranking: Low birthweight rate

Australia: 7/18

Indigenous Australia: 19/19

Immunisation

High immunisation rates demonstrate a commitment to the provision of primary health services to children, and indicate that children are protected against preventable diseases.

OECD ranking:

DTP: Australia: 13/18

Indigenous Australia: 15/19

Measles: Australia: 9/18

Indigenous Australia: 11/19

Polio: Australia: 23/30

Indigenous Australia: 30/31

Mental health

Mental health is an essential component of wellbeing: good mental health means that young people are more likely to have fulfilling relationships, adapt to change and cope with adversity.

OECD ranking:

Australia: 13/23

Indigenous Australia: 23/24

Accidental injury

Safe physical and social environments are crucial to promoting children's emotional wellbeing and healthy development.

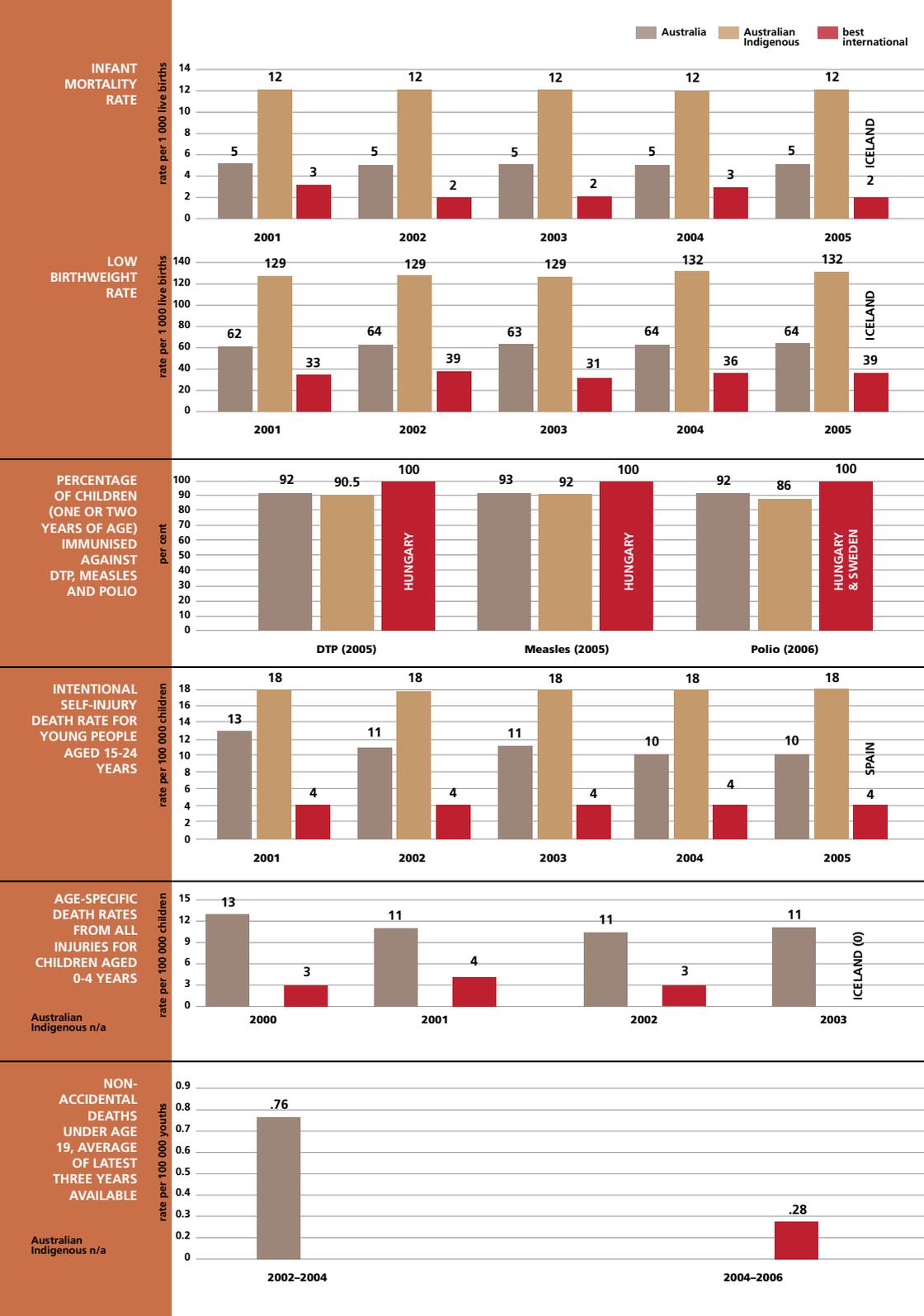
OECD ranking:

Australia: 7/8

Indigenous Australia: not available

Child abuse & neglect

Children who are exposed to unsafe, abusive environments are at risk of adverse consequences such as long-term poverty, poor physical and mental health, shorter lifespan and homelessness.



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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Education, training & employment

From early childhood education through to secondary education and the transition to employment, education has a strong influence on the future outcomes of children and youth.

Australia overall performs fairly well for school achievement – but Indigenous Australians are not so fortunate, with ratings better only than Turkey and Mexico.

For transition to employment, Australia is not performing well against OECD countries – too many young Australians are in neither work nor study.

School achievement

Children with low literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to leave school, and more likely to experience unemployment later in life.

OECD ranking:

Reading:	Australia: 6/29	Indigenous Australia: 29/30
Maths:	Australia: 8/30	Indigenous Australia: 29/31
Science:	Australia: 5/30	Indigenous Australia: 29/31

Transition to employment

The transition from education to employment is a critical milestone in the lives of young people.

OECD ranking:

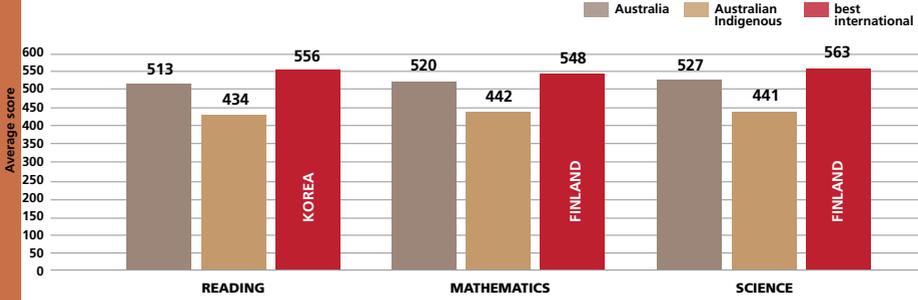
Australia: 17/25	Indigenous Australia: not available
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“Knowledge is power: children have the right to be empowered”

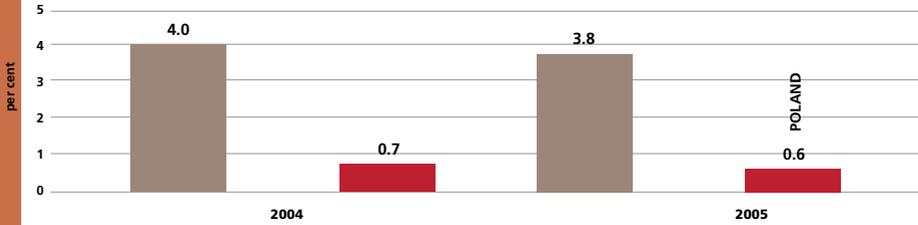
Meredith, aged 16



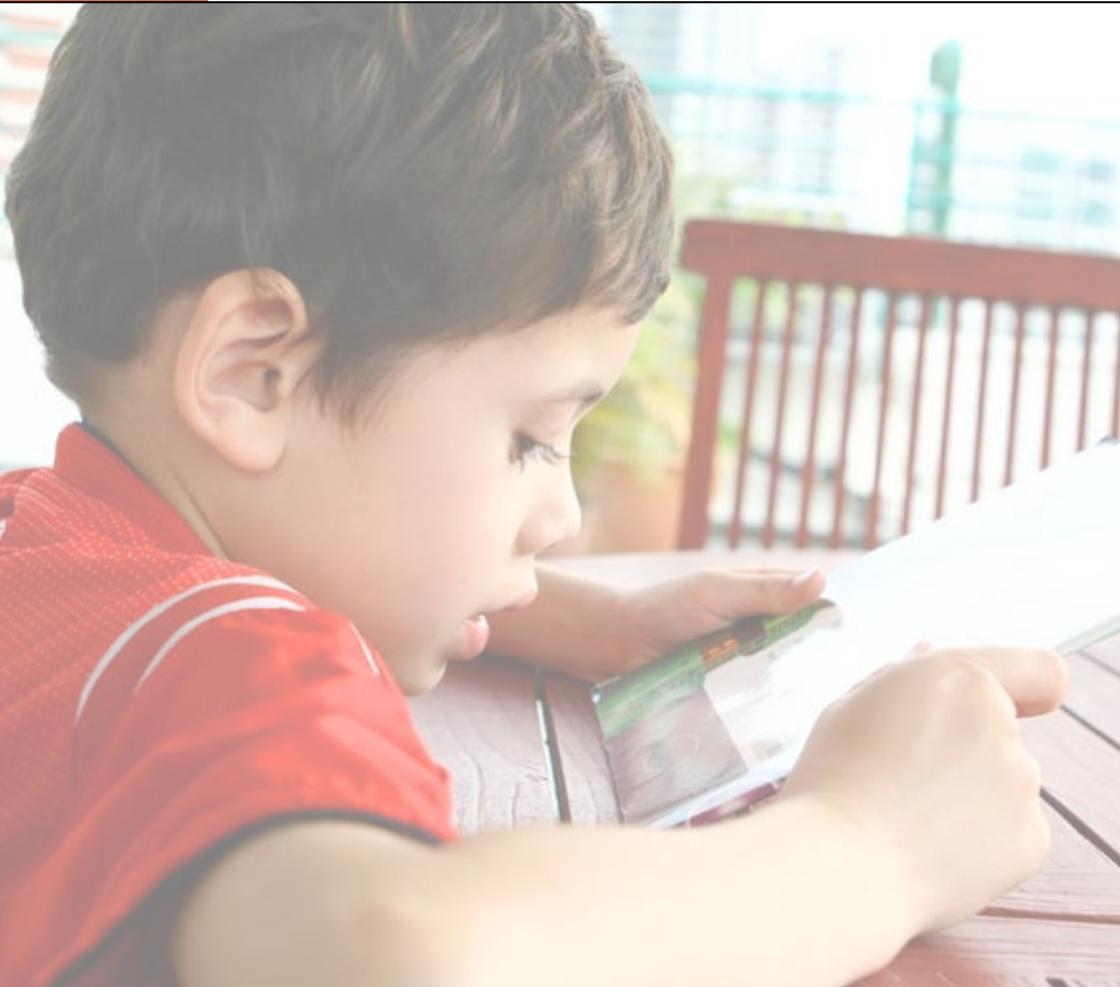
AVERAGE ACHIEVEMENT IN READING, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE FOR STUDENTS AGED 15 YEARS (2006)



PERCENTAGE OF YOUTHS AGED 15-19 YEARS NOT IN EDUCATION, TRAINING OR EMPLOYMENT



Australian Indigenous n/a



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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Peer & family relationships

Caring family relationships have a lasting effect on a child's development and social and emotional wellbeing.

Healthy relationships with families and peers help children to develop strong social skills, resilience and self-esteem.

Australian children report weaker family relationships than the best international results. In this area, however, the results for Indigenous children compare well with the Australian average. At age 15, Australian young people, particularly Indigenous young people, are more likely to report feeling awkward and out of place at school than young people from many other OECD countries.

Australian children do not spend as much time eating meals with their family as most other OECD countries – particularly Italy.

In a survey of Australian 15-year-old students, only 51% agreed that their parents spent time 'just talking' to them more than once a week – compared with 89% for Hungary.

Family relationships

For most children and young people, families are the fundamental social unit.

OECD ranking: Children eating main meal of the day with parents several times per week

Australia: 21/27

Indigenous Australia: 24/28

OECD ranking: Children reporting parents spend time 'just talking' with them more than once per week

Australia: 18/27

Indigenous Australia: 17/28

Sense of belonging

Children's feelings about school reflect their interactions with peers, and their wider social environment.

OECD ranking:

Australia: 11/29

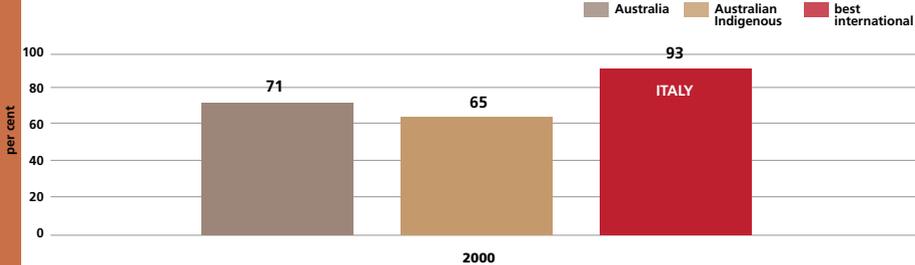
Indigenous Australia: 29/30



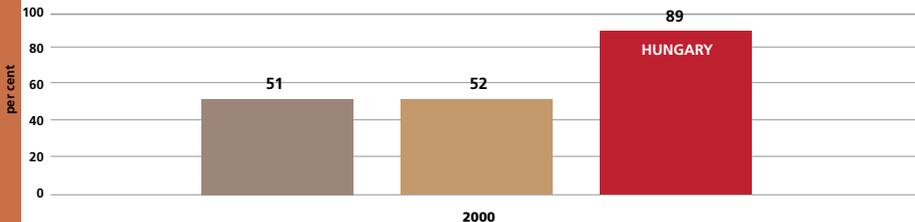
"it's human nature to be wanted"

Miranda, aged 17

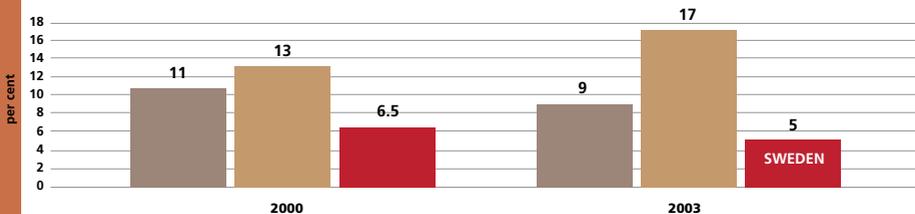
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO REPORT EATING THE MAIN MEAL OF THE DAY WITH PARENTS



PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO REPORT THAT PARENTS SPEND TIME 'JUST TALKING' TO THEM



PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AGED 15 YEARS WHO FEEL AWKWARD AND OUT OF PLACE AT SCHOOL



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What are the most important things that need to change to improve wellbeing for young people in Australia?

"discrimination (against) race... disability, gender...needs to stop"

Elyse, 16

"education in life skills...because some parents are unable to teach their children these skills"

Isobel, 16

"need (for) more quality teachers who haven't lost their passion"

Jessica, 16

"closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous quality of life and reducing the number of homeless and disadvantaged youth"

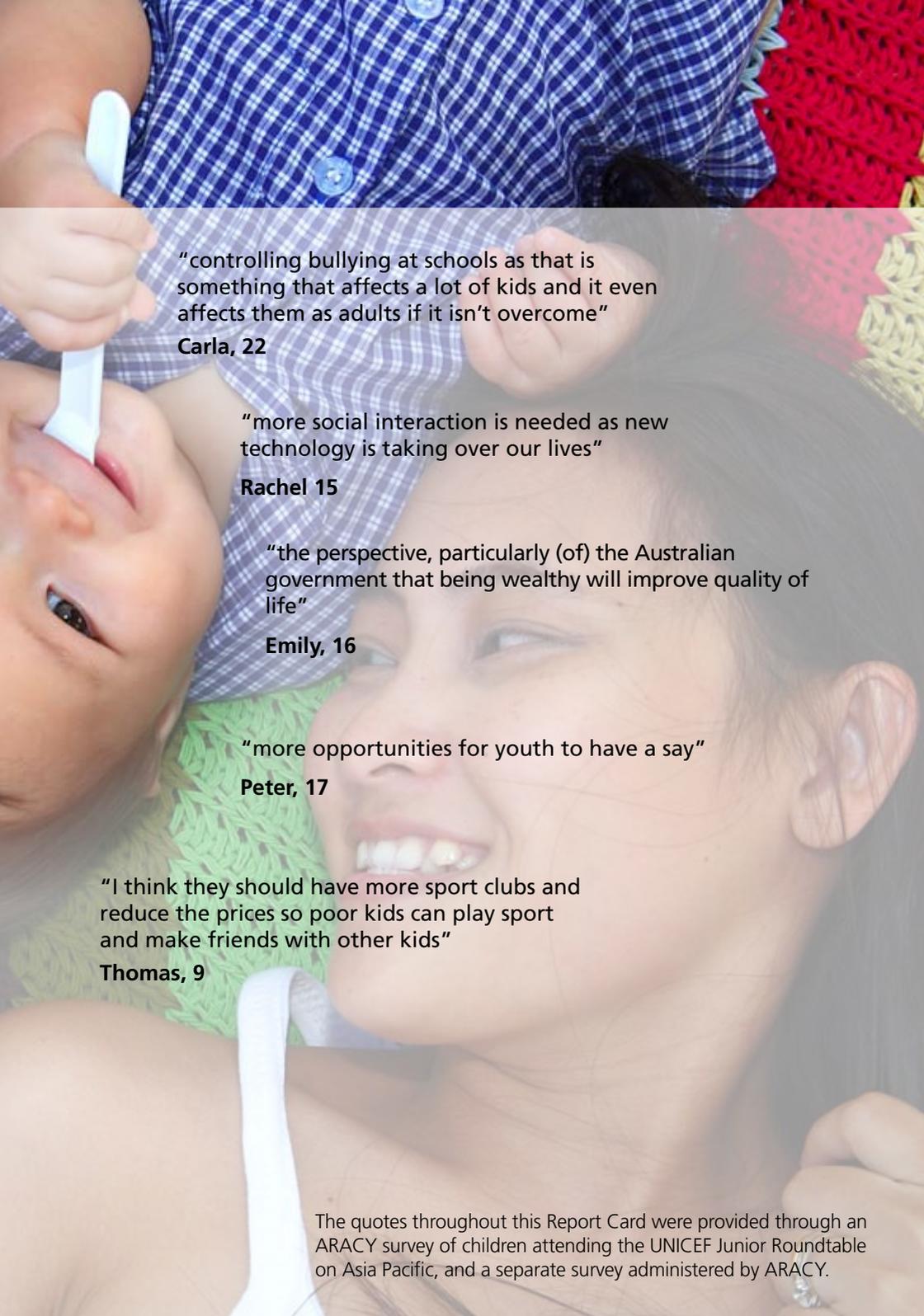
Vanessa, 15

"social expectations – young people are increasingly afraid of failing and therefore are more anxious and worried than any previous generation. This is evidenced by teen depression rates"

Lesca, 16

"stop promoting images in media that make young people believe their physical appearance isn't good enough"

Minjee, 16



“controlling bullying at schools as that is something that affects a lot of kids and it even affects them as adults if it isn’t overcome”

Carla, 22

“more social interaction is needed as new technology is taking over our lives”

Rachel 15

“the perspective, particularly (of) the Australian government that being wealthy will improve quality of life”

Emily, 16

“more opportunities for youth to have a say”

Peter, 17

“I think they should have more sport clubs and reduce the prices so poor kids can play sport and make friends with other kids”

Thomas, 9

The quotes throughout this Report Card were provided through an ARACY survey of children attending the UNICEF Junior Roundtable on Asia Pacific, and a separate survey administered by ARACY.

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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Behaviours & risks

Healthy behaviours, such as eating well and exercising, contribute to young people's health. In contrast, risky

behaviours, such as misuse of alcohol or other drugs, may have a negative effect on their health and wellbeing.

For indicators relating to cigarette smoking and teenage fertility, young Australians, particularly Indigenous young Australians, do not fare as well as children from many other OECD countries. In 2006, Indigenous Australian females aged 15-19 were more than four times as likely to give birth than females of the same age in the total Australian population.

Compared to children from many other OECD countries, young Australians are more likely to misuse alcohol, use illicit drugs, and die in road accidents. Note that different definitions of harmful alcohol use make international comparisons difficult.

The rate of youth justice supervision for young Indigenous males is 8 times higher, and for young Indigenous females 10 times higher, than the Australian average.

The teenage fertility rate for Indigenous females is 5 times the Australian average, and worse than Mexico.

The prevalence of obesity in Australian children and young people is among the highest in the world and is also increasing at one of the fastest rates.

"the whole obesity epidemic would be lessened if kids had more time to play sport and get outside"

Emily, aged 16

Obesity

Young people who are obese are more likely to develop health problems than children of a healthy weight. Obesity is also linked to psychosocial problems including social isolation, discrimination and low self-esteem.

Cigarette smoking

Smoking has both immediate and longer term effects on a person's health.

Teenage fertility

Teenage mothers often have their education interrupted at a critical time, and have a lower participation in education, employment and training.

OECD ranking:

Australia: 21/30

Indigenous Australia: 31/31

Crime

Young people under juvenile justice supervision are at increased risk of injury, assault, suicide and self-harm.

Illicit drug use

Many young people experiment with substances that can cause serious health problems; for some, this can lead to an ongoing pattern of addiction.

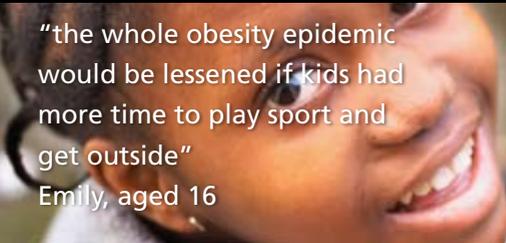
Road deaths

Road death is the main cause of hospitalisation and death of young people.

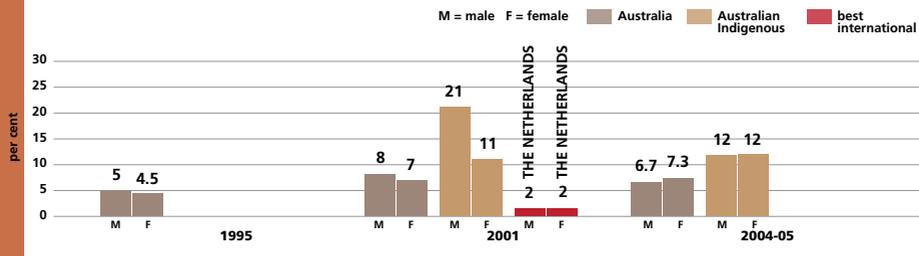
OECD ranking:

Australia: 20/23

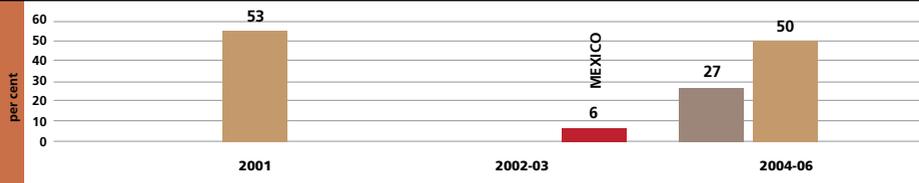
Indigenous Australia: not available



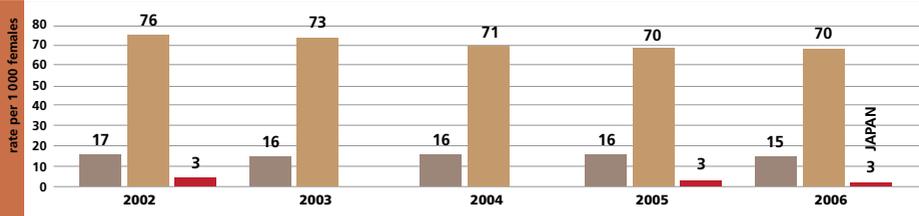
PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH AGED 18-24 YEARS WHO ARE 'OBESE' FOR THEIR AGE AND SEX



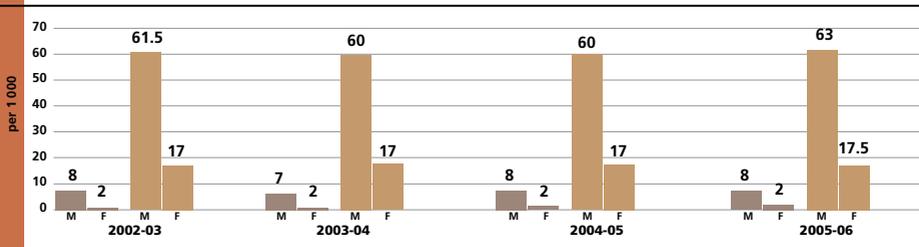
% OF YOUNG PEOPLE 18-24 WHO SMOKE CIGARETTES DAILY



AGE SPECIFIC FERTILITY RATE FOR FEMALES AGED 15-19 YEARS



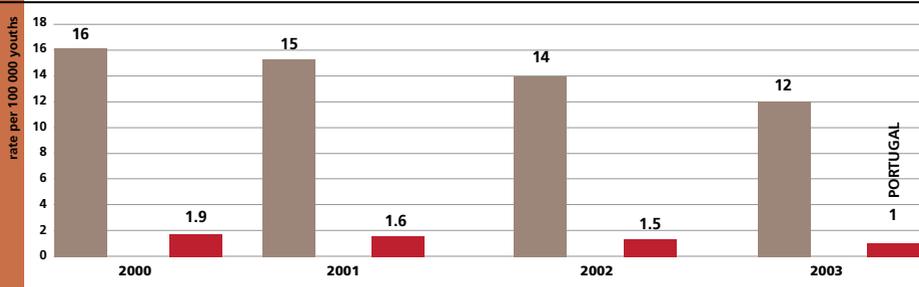
RATE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 10-17 YEARS IN JUVENILE JUSTICE SUPERVISION



PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH AGED 16 YEARS WHO HAVE USED ILLICIT DRUGS



RATE OF DEATHS FROM ROAD ACCIDENTS FOR YOUTHS AGED 15-19 YEARS



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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Subjective wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing is how children and young people feel about themselves and

their health, and is an indication of their personal resources.

The proportion of Australian young people satisfied with their health compares well with other OECD countries. For personal wellbeing, no international data were available, but most young Australians aged 18–24 report being satisfied with their health.

Compared to other OECD countries, Australia ranks fourth out of 15 countries for which there is data on how satisfied young people are with their health.

“Wellbeing means good health, both mentally and physically, and feeling comfortable and safe”

Chloe, aged 15

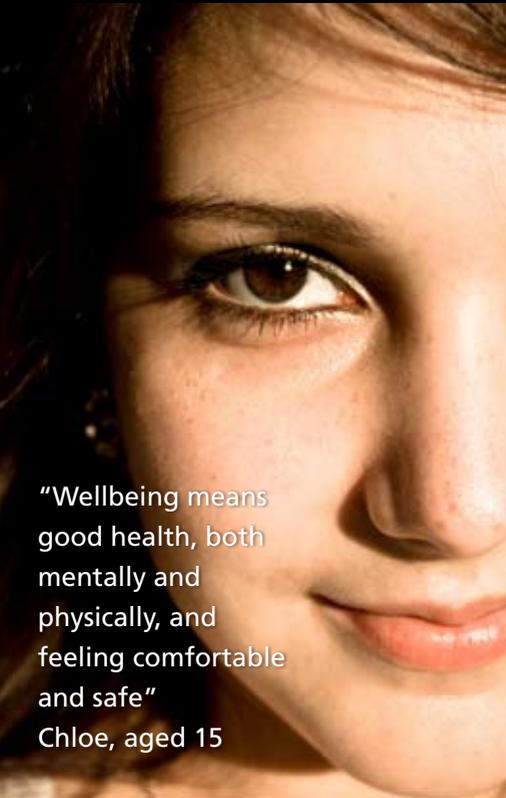
Self-reported health

Self-reported health is a simple measure of how young people perceive their overall health status, which complements other data on health.

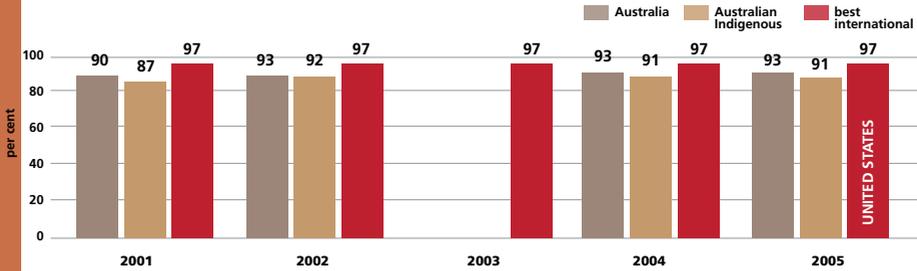
OECD ranking:

Australia: 4/15

Indigenous Australia: 8/16



PERCENTAGE
OF YOUNG
PEOPLE AGED
15-24 YEARS
SATISFIED WITH
THEIR
HEALTH



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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Participation

Participation in civic activities provides opportunities for children and young people to learn

new skills, build community networks, and express their opinions.

Australia ranks fourth out of 28 countries for the percentage of youth participating in voluntary activities.

In 1999, one third of Australia's young people participated in voluntary activities.

Community participation

Participating in community activities helps children and young people to build community networks that build self esteem and confidence.

International ranking:

Australia: 4/28

Indigenous Australia: not available

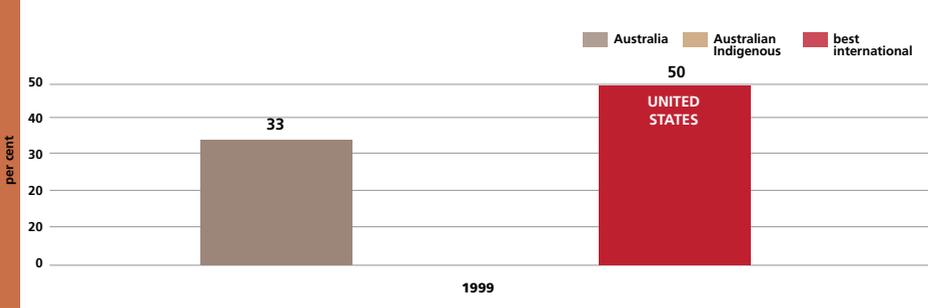


"I like knowing that even though there is injustice in the world, I can do my little bit to help out"

Michaela, aged 16

PERCENTAGE
OF YOUTH
AGED 14 YEARS
PARTICIPATING IN
VOLUNTARY
ACTIVITIES

Australian
Indigenous n/a



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The wellbeing of young Australians

> Environment

Environmental
degradation
affects children

through health
and socioeconomic
impacts.

Australia is not performing as well as the best international results for any of the indicators in this domain. We have the third worst greenhouse gas emissions out of 30 OECD countries for which data are available.

Research has shown that children have a high level of anxiety about climate change.

Australia is one of the worst performing countries in the OECD in terms of greenhouse gas emissions per capita.

In terms of biodiversity, 13% of bird species in Australia are threatened with extinction (equal 6th with 4 other countries).

Climate change

Climate change will impact the health, safety and prosperity of the children of today as they become adults, and the children of the future.

OECD ranking:
Australia: 28/30

Biodiversity

Conservation of biodiversity is an important part of sustainable development, for current and future generations.

OECD ranking:
Australia: 6/30

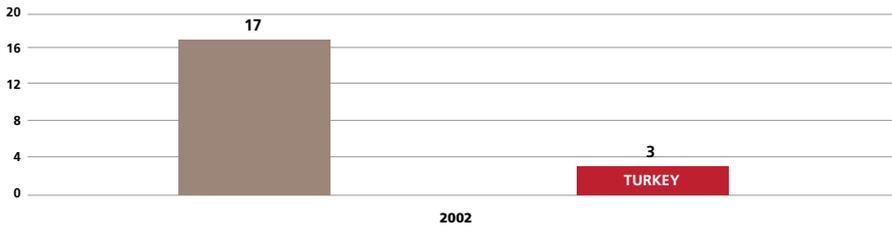


“It’s so important right now,
and the responsibility has fallen
onto our generation”

Nathan, aged 15

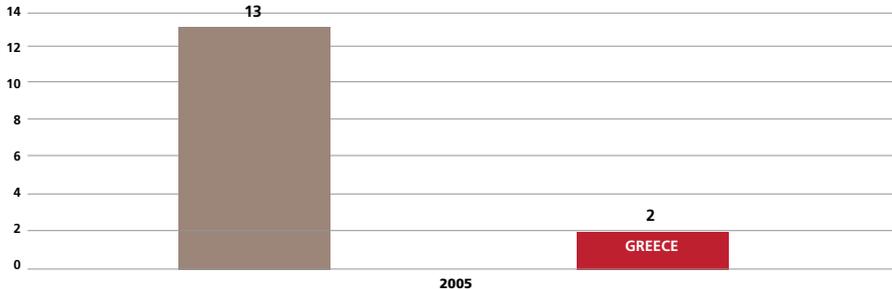
TOTAL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

total greenhouse emissions per capita



% OF THREATENED BIRD SPECIES

per cent



report card

The wellbeing of young Australians

> Where to from here?

This Report Card shows that, despite our economic prosperity, Australian children do not perform as well on indicators of health and wellbeing as children from other countries. In particular, Indigenous Australian children and young people are significantly disadvantaged.

Australia is known as the 'lucky country', but in our national pursuit of wealth and success, have we forgotten about our children?

The international comparisons presented here are a wake-up call to the Australian community: from governments to families, from businesses to parents, we all need to do more.

We need to create a society where childcare workers earn more than carpark attendants, where the role of parents is valued, and where misuse of alcohol is unacceptable.

We need to change the attitudes that make it possible for children to fall through the cracks.

We need to invest in the next generation of Australian workers and leaders, starting with their health and wellbeing.

We need to act now.

**For more information on how you can
be involved with the Australian Research
Alliance for Children and Youth**

Visit: www.aracy.org.au

Post: PO Box 25, Woden ACT 2606

Phone: (02) 6232 4503

Email: enquiries@aracy.org.au





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The wellbeing of young Australians

Key data for the Report Card come from the following sources:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD)
- International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civics Education Survey (CIVED)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
– including the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)
- World Health Organization
– including Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC)
- UNICEF

ARACY wishes to thank representatives of the following organisations for their participation in the ARACY Report Card Reference Group:

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)
Australian National University (ANU)
Centre for Community Child Health, University of Melbourne (CCCH)
Centre for Developmental Health, Curtin University
Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW (SPRC)
Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland (ISSR)
The Smith Family
University of Adelaide
UNICEF Australia



© ARACY 2008
ISBN 978-1-921352-42-3

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