

Snapshot 2008

Key data:
Children and Young People in Queensland



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian



Commissioner's introduction

The status of children and young people, especially those most vulnerable, needs to be taken into account in social policy planning in Queensland.

Our report, *Snapshot 2008*, pulls together diverse data on the status of children and young people throughout the state. I believe this will help government and the community find better ways to respond to the needs of those under 18, and improve their safety and wellbeing.

This easy reference guide provides key data from the *Snapshot* on issues affecting children and young people.

I hope this will be a helpful tool for those committed to improving the safety and wellbeing of our children and young people.



Elizabeth Fraser

**Commissioner for Children and Young People and
Child Guardian**

Summary

Snapshot 2008: Children and young people in Queensland is the sixth *Snapshot* report published by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

This report draws together a range of data which paints a picture of the status of and changes to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland.

This data can inform planning of policy, program and service initiatives to meet the needs of the children and young people they target.

The information includes widely-used indicators of children and young people's safety and wellbeing.

It has been sourced from different organisations for evaluation and reporting purposes.



Population and family profile

Queensland's families are changing both in composition and size.

Women are generally having fewer children, later in life. More people in de facto relationships are having babies, and more children are living in single-parent or blended families.

After a long period of decreases, the total fertility rate had a slight turnaround to be at 1.831 babies per woman in 2006 (ie. the average number of babies a woman could expect to bear in her lifetime at current fertility rates).

However, increased life expectancy and the overall decline in fertility rates in recent decades mean we have an ageing population, so children and young people make up a declining proportion of the overall population.

In the Queensland population (at June 2007):

- 24.5% of the total population was under 18
- 552,689 children were 0 to 9 years old
- 470,275 young people were 10 to 17 years old.

Children and young people under 18 made up 45.8% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

At August 2006:

- 33,100 Indigenous children were 0 to 9 years old
- 25,400 Indigenous young people were 10 to 17 years old
- 6.0% of all 0 to 17 year olds in Queensland were Indigenous, although Indigenous people make up only 3.3% of the population

Teenage births (for females aged 15 to 19)

- decreased from 25.6 per 1000 in 1997 to 19.7 per 1000 in 2006
- were three times higher among Indigenous teenagers than the Queensland average – at 60.9 births per 1000 compared with 19.7 per 1000 in 2006

Families (2007)

- 20.6% of all children aged under 15 were living in single parent families

Refugees (2006–07)

- more than half of the 1464 refugee and humanitarian program settlers to Queensland were under 20 (54.4%)
- 26.4% were aged 0 to 9 years



Health

Breastfeeding

- only a small proportion of babies are breastfed exclusively for the recommended six months (3.1% at five months)

Immunisation

- 91.4% of children are fully vaccinated by 15 months of age
- 87.6% of children are fully vaccinated by 6 years of age

Overweight and obesity

- 16.2% of children and young people aged 5 to 17 years were overweight and 4.9% are obese

Nutrition and physical activity

- while most children's energy intake is in the recommended ranges, many children's diets are deficient in vitamin C, iron, calcium and potassium
- about 10% of children and young people engage in physical activity daily, while a significant proportion engage in sedentary activities (eg. television watching or computer games) for more than the recommended two hours per day

Sexual health

- notification rates have increased in recent years, due in part to increased use of and improvements in testing
- the most common sexually transmissible infection (STI) is chlamydia, which is highest in females aged 15 to 24 years

Drug use

- self-reported drug use by 16 to 17 year olds nationally continues to decline:
 - 5.7% smoke tobacco daily
 - 17.8% drink alcohol weekly
 - 15.0% used cannabis in the last 12 months
- about one-third of young people drink alcohol at levels that put them at risk of alcohol-related harm
- issues of concern include:
 - an increased risk of child abuse and neglect where parents use drugs
 - children who provide care for parents using drugs, and
 - the limited availability of age-appropriate treatment.

Child deaths

Child mortality rates are generally declining, despite increases for infants and 15 to 17 year olds in 2005–2007.

The decreases are in line with improved medical treatment, more stringent motor vehicle and swimming pool safety requirements and increased immunisation rates.

	1991–1993*	2004–2006*
Infant mortality	<i>Deaths per 1000 live births</i>	
Under 1 year	7.5	5.4
SIDS under 1 year	1.2	0.4
	1995–1997*	2005–2007*
Mortality 1–17 year olds	<i>Deaths per 100,000 population</i>	
1–4 years	40.1	26.9
5–9 years	18.1	11.5
10–14 years	20.2	10.9
15–17 years	51.9	34.0
Drowning 0–4 years	7.4	4.6
Transport 15–17 years	19.7	12.9
Suicide 15–17 years	9.2	7.3

* Rate averaged over 3 years.

SIDS mortality rates have generally declined despite recent slight increases. This could be due to increased public awareness of risk factors and improved identification of non-SIDS causes.

Drowning has declined in Queensland – partly because of mandatory pool fencing since 1992.

Transport-related deaths have generally decreased – but young males continue to be at particularly high risk.

Youth suicide occurred most often in the 15 to 17 year age group, although there were also suicides among 10 to 14 year olds.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have much higher mortality rates than the general population:

- the **infant mortality** rate (11.8 per 1000) is twice the state average – reducing the number of pre-term Indigenous births would significantly reduce the high Indigenous infant mortality rate
- **SIDS** deaths among Indigenous infants are high
- 31.6% of youth **suicides** under 18 years were Indigenous children in 2006–07.



Child abuse

Key measures of child abuse decreased in 2006–07, but are higher than a decade ago. Changes in child protection system processes make it unclear whether there has been a real change in child abuse rates:

- **notifications** of harm stood at 24,102 children or 23.7 per 1000 aged 0 to 17 years (up from 14.5 in 1997–98)
- cases of **substantiated harm** stood at 8845 children – 8.7 per 1000 (up from 5.6 in 1997–98)
- children on **protective orders** on 30 June 2007 stood at 6156 – 6.1 per 1000 (up from 3.6 in June 1997).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be more likely to be in the child protection system than non-Indigenous children. Rates of children who have suffered substantiated harm or are in alternative care are consistently several times higher for Indigenous children.

- 1736 suffered substantiated harm in 2006–07 – 27.7 per 1000 children aged 0 to 17 years.

Risk factors can be linked to personal, family or social issues, including:

- parents being abuse victims as children
- substance abuse
- teen pregnancy
- domestic violence
- criminal history of parents
- mental health diagnosis of parents
- marital conflict
- limited family support, and
- low incomes.

The risk of child abuse and neglect is higher in single-parent, step or blended families than in intact couple families and for children with young parents.

Effective prevention and early intervention programs are important to protect children from harm.

The **Referral for Active Intervention** (RAI) initiative funds intensive early intervention services for families with children under ten who have had contact with the child safety system, but are not identified as needing protection.



Alternative care

On 30 June 2007, 5972 Queensland 0 to 17 year olds were in funded **alternative care** and an additional 521 were in unfunded care (eg. hospitals, youth detention centres).

Of those in funded care:

- 34.9% were with relatives or kin
- 59.3% were in foster care, and
- 5.8% were in residential care.

Rates of Queensland children in funded care per 1000 increased from 2.9 in June 2000 to 5.9 in June 2007. The national rate was 5.8 per 1000 in June 2007.

Serious long-term effects of child abuse and neglect include impacts on physical and emotional wellbeing, including:

- poorer health outcomes
- an elevated risk of death
- lower literacy and numeracy rates, with children in care much less likely to meet national benchmarks compared with the general school population, and
- an increased risk of youth offending.

The Commission's 2008 *Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care* showed most respondents:

- are happy in their care situation
- feel safe and well treated, and
- are better off since coming into care.

However, *issues of concern* included:

- not being able to do things their friends not in care can do
- multiple placement changes for some, and
- the desire for more contact with family.

Similarly, the *Views of Young People in Residential Care* showed most young people surveyed:

- feel safe and happy in their placement
- have sufficient privacy, and
- are well treated.

Potential improvements include greater independence (ie. more say in decisions) and improved facilities.



The early years

Early childhood is critically important in a child's development. Early relationships and experiences affect growth and development and impact on children's future health, wellbeing and competence.

Quality early childhood education and care influences a range of outcomes in later life, particularly for those disadvantaged or in vulnerable circumstances. In 2005:

- the proportion of children in **formal child care** under three years increased to 36.9% (up from 25.8% in 1999)
- 54.1% of mothers with children aged under 5 years were in the labour force, and
- working mothers were more likely than fathers to adopt flexible working arrangements including flexible hours, part-time work and working from home.

The **Queensland Early Years Strategy** (Department of Communities) focuses on children from birth to eight years, and aims to build on existing child and family support services.

Prevention and early intervention services are provided by Queensland Health, the Australian Government and funded non-government services such as Save the Children, Mission Australia, Playgroup Queensland and Family Planning Queensland, and include:

- health services for pregnant women, infants, children and families
- nurse home-visiting and domestic violence programs for families at risk
- parenting education and support programs
- child care and family support hubs
- a reading to children program
- health checks for children during Prep Year
- community development that supports and values young children and their families
- supported playgroups
- education programs to promote children's protective behaviours, and
- a specialist infant mental health program.

Early Years Centres will be 'one-stop-shops' where early childhood education and care, support and health services will be available to families expecting a child or with children up to eight years of age.

School

Changes to schooling in Queensland in recent years affect the early and senior years of schooling, including:

- a new play-based Prep Year of schooling before Year 1
- the school entry age for Year 1 increased by six months to 5.5 years
- the school leaving age increased to 16
- participation in school, training or full-time work made compulsory until the age of 17, and
- the Queensland Certificate of Education replacing the Senior Certificate in 2008, to recognise the wider range of learning options now available to senior students.

National benchmarks are agreed minimum standards in reading, writing and numeracy. Students performing below these standards are likely to find school difficult.

- in 2006, 85.6% of Year 7 students met the **reading** benchmark and 79.8% met the **numeracy** benchmark
- in 2007, Queensland's Year 12 **retention rate** was 78.5%

For **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:**

- school participation, Year 12 retention and achievements are well below non-Indigenous students. On average, Indigenous students are performing two years below the level of non-Indigenous students.

Barriers include:

- lack of family support
- negative influence of peers
- low teacher expectations
- students' own low expectations
- poor knowledge of and limited access to further education facilities and job opportunities
- disadvantages in remote areas, and
- little or no English language before starting school.

Strategies to help overcome disadvantage among Indigenous students include:

- targeted language programs for students with little English
- respecting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in schools
- incentives to attract and support teachers in rural and remote schools, and
- subject selection and career advice in secondary schools.

Crime

Victims of crime

In 2006–07, males up to 17 years were more likely than females to be victims of offences such as assault and robbery, whereas young females were more likely to be victims of sexual assault:

- 2488 male and 2029 female victims of assault (23.5% of all assault victims)
- 651 male and 2469 female victims of sexual offences
- 267 male and 68 female victims of robbery
- victimisation of children and young people decreased marginally, with 8.3 male and 11.2 female victims per 1000, no change for males and down from 11.9 female victims in 2005–06.

Youth offending increased in 2006–07:

- **offences against property increased** to 63.0 offenders per 1000 from 61.6 in 2005–06
- the **most commonly** committed offences were ‘other theft’ (stealing and shoplifting), unlawful entry and property damage
- **around one third** of all other theft, unlawful entry and property damage offences in Queensland were by youths

- **a smaller proportion of violent offences** against the person were committed by youths than adult offenders – ie. 1.8% of homicides and 17.4% of assaults.

In **youth detention*** in Queensland at 30 June 2006:

- there were 125 males and 12 females – a youth detention rate of 29.9 per 100,000
- almost three-quarters (101) were remanded in custody awaiting trial or sentencing, with 36 serving sentences
- **Indigenous young people** were over-represented, with the Indigenous youth detention rate almost 15 times the non-Indigenous rate – ie. 71 of the 137 were Indigenous.

The Commission's 2008 **Views of Young People in Detention Centres** revealed that:

- the majority feel safe in their detention centre
- about half feel better off since coming into detention
- 54.7% feel that the programs are helpful in preventing re-offending, and
- the programs identified as most helpful are schooling, counselling and sporting activities.

* Twenty-seven 17-year-olds were in prison after being sentenced as adults for offences committed at 17.



Vulnerable children

The *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000* states the Commission must give priority to the needs and interests of vulnerable children, ie. those who:

- are in, or may enter **alternative care**:
 - at 30 June 2007, 3532 children aged 0 to 9 were in care, and
 - 2961 aged 10 to 17.
- are in, or may enter, **detention**:
 - at 30 June 2006, 137 children were in youth detention
 - 71 Indigenous children were in youth detention, and
 - twenty-seven 17 year olds in prison.
- have **no appropriate person to act on their behalf**
- are **not able to protect their own rights**, interests or wellbeing
- are disadvantaged because of a **disability**:
 - in 2003–04, there were 8900 children aged 0 to 4 with a disability in Queensland, and
 - 52,000 children aged 5 to 14 with a disability.

- are disadvantaged because of **geographic isolation**:
 - in 2006, 31,091 children lived in remote or very remote areas
 - of these, 10,530 Indigenous children lived in remote or very remote areas
- are disadvantaged because of **homelessness**:
 - in 2006–07, 11,000 accompanied children used SAAP services, and
 - 2600 unaccompanied children used SAAP services.
- are disadvantaged because of **poverty**:
 - 63,974 children lived in disadvantaged areas in 2006
 - 9771 Indigenous children lived in disadvantaged areas.

Indigenous disadvantage

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland continue to experience high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, family and community violence and alcohol abuse compared with the general population.

Safety, health, education and social outcomes for many remain poor – Indigenous children and young people:

- have **perinatal and infant mortality rates** around twice those of the general population in Queensland
- are more likely to have a **low birthweight**
- are three times more likely to be born to **teenage mothers**
- have a significantly **higher mortality rate due to SIDS** compared with non-Indigenous infants
- are significantly **over-represented in youth suicides** with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people making up almost one-third (31.6%) of suicides under 18 years
- are significantly **over-represented in the child protection system**
- have poorer **oral health** than non-Indigenous children
- are **more likely to have significant ear and hearing problems** – nationally, 10% compared with 3% of non-Indigenous children

- are **less likely to meet national literacy and numeracy** benchmarks
- generally **perform at a level two years below** that of non-Indigenous students
- are **over-represented in the criminal justice system**, and
- have a **youth detention rate almost 15 times higher** than non-Indigenous youth.



Outlook

In 2008–09 the Commission will:

- engage with vulnerable children and young people by:
 - Community Visitors regularly visiting children and young people in foster and residential care and youth detention
 - surveying young people on their views of living in residential care
 - surveying young people on their views of being in detention
 - providing child-friendly summaries of survey findings to children and young people in foster care, residential care and youth detention.
- gather data on the Child Guardian’s Key Outcome Indicators to improve reporting on outcomes for children and young people in the child safety and youth justice systems. These will focus on:
 - case planning
 - services for children with challenging behaviours
 - contact with siblings, family and community, and
 - children’s ability to have a say in decisions about them.

- research matters arising from the findings of the surveys of children and young people in care and detention
- finalise research projects relating to:
 - youth suicide
 - fatal assault and neglect, and
 - rural deaths.
- report on the wellbeing of children and young people through the Commission's reports, including:
 - *Snapshot*
 - *Views of Young People in Residential Care*
 - *Views of Young People in Detention Centres*
 - *Child Guardian Report*, and
 - *Child Deaths Annual Report*.

Further information on issues, trends, and data limitations,
together with full references, can be found in
Snapshot 2008: Children and young people in Queensland.



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This publication is available on
the Commission's website at
www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au

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Commission for
Children and Young People
and Child Guardians

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