



*Valuing Children*

INITIATIVE

**ARE CHILDREN AT THE  
FOREFRONT OF OUR  
CONSIDERATIONS?**

A SYNOPSIS OF THE VALUING  
CHILDREN INITIATIVE BENCHMARK  
SURVEY: 2016

PART A – October 2016

*The Valuing Children Initiative was established by Centrecare (Inc.) and Parkerville Children and Youth Care (Inc.) in January 2016.*

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# VALUING CHILDREN INITIATIVE

## INTRODUCTION

The ambitious vision of the Valuing Children Initiative is to inspire Australians to value all children, promote understanding that a child's wellbeing is the shared responsibility of the entire community, and ensure children are at the forefront of our considerations.

It is a vision shared by hundreds of organisations, thousands of individuals and all levels of government in Australia, who are committed to the wellbeing of children. Despite that commitment and what we know makes for a healthy, safe and supportive childhood, far too many children on a diverse range of indicators, are not faring as well as they should be.

The Valuing Children Initiative believes that in looking for better outcomes for all children, far more attention must be given to our attitudes towards children and the priority we give their needs.

In May 2016, the Valuing Children Initiative commissioned a baseline survey by Essential Research to better understand attitudes to children in Australia.

A synopsis of the Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 Part A considers the data relevant to the vision of ensuring children are at the forefront of considerations.

### **Are children at the forefront of our considerations?**

#### **Survey Highlights**

86% of Australians considered looking after the interests of children to be important to them personally.

80% of Australians say they are concerned about the health and happiness of future generations of Australians.

Only 48% believe that children in Australia all have a fair and equal opportunity to flourish, and to maximise their potential.

Almost half (48%) of Australians believe that it is more challenging to be a child today than when they were a child.

A significant proportion (38%) described children as 'vulnerable'.

Less than one in five (16%), believe that Australia is a safer place today than when they grew up.

Almost half (46%) believe that governments give too little consideration to children.

# VALUING CHILDREN INITIATIVE

## ARE CHILDREN AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR CONSIDERATIONS?

*86% of Australians said that looking after the interests of children is important to them.*

The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 (the survey) asked Australians a range of questions about their perception of childhood today, how important the interests of children were to them personally, and if they believed children's interests were given enough consideration.

Among adults nationwide, the overwhelming majority (86%) agreed that looking after the interests of children was an issue of personal importance to them.

This encouraging personal commitment to the interests of children came with considerable pessimism about life for children in Australia today. Almost half of those surveyed (48%), expressed the view that it is more challenging to be a child today than when they were growing up. Less than half of those surveyed (48%), believe that children in Australia have fair and equal opportunities to flourish and maximise their potential.

When asked to choose words to describe children today, 38% described children as 'vulnerable'. Significantly, less than one in five (16%) believe that Australia is a safer place today than when they grew up.

*The majority (55%) of Australians said they would support the appointment of a Minister for Children and Future Generations.*

Pessimism about children's lives today appears to be even greater for future generations of Australian children, with 80% of those surveyed expressing concern about the health and happiness of future generations.

When asked about the role of Government in protecting children's interests, nearly half (46%), believe that governments give 'too little' consideration to children. 43% believe that Governments should consider not only the needs of the current population in decision and policy making, but also those of Future Generations.

A majority (55%) of Australians supported the appointment of a Federal Minister for Children and Future Generations.

*Only 48% believe that children in Australia all have a fair and equal opportunity to flourish, and to maximise their potential.*

*The Valuing Children Initiative has called for the creation of a Ministerial portfolio for Children and Future Generations to ensure children are at the forefront of considerations and that issues of concern about children, wherever they occur, are brought to the attention of the Cabinet. A dedicated Minister would play a role in countering short term and crisis driven responses, which are particularly detrimental to children, by encouraging high level engagement in futures thinking and planning. A Minister should lead the development of a plan for children, and establish and oversee a cabinet subcommittee to ensure better integration, and continuity, of policies across portfolios with responsibility for children.*

*The Valuing Children Initiative has also called for the instigation of a rigorous and transparent process to ensure that all policy, legislative and decision making processes actively considers the impact on children and future generations. This would ensure that children, who cannot vote and are excluded from influencing the political process, will have their interests explicitly considered. Consideration of the impact on children should be considered integral to sound decision making. This process should include the views of children whenever possible, risk analysis for vulnerable children and should be evaluated and reported on.*

*The Valuing Children Initiative recommends the establishment of a set of measurable goals and outcomes for all children in Australia, determined by independent experts and with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals, to guide policy development, and against which outcomes are measured every two years.*

## VALUING CHILDREN INITIATIVE

Survey respondents highlighted health issues such as child obesity and mental health, as being areas of concern for the health and happiness of future generations. Less than one in three (30%) of those surveyed said they would describe children today as ‘happy’.

Respondents expressed their concerns about the high expectations placed on children today, and pressure from society and peers. Too much access to technology was also raised as a challenge faced by the present generation of children, with social media being singled out as a key issue.

WHAT RESPONDENTS SAY	WHAT CHILDREN SAY	AUSTRALIAN DATA
“Children don’t seem to be as active, there is also a change in diets, pollution and living conditions to previous generations.”	75% of overweight children report dissatisfaction with their body size. <sup>i</sup>	An estimated 1 in 4 Australian children (25%) are overweight or obese. <sup>ii</sup> For the first time children in affluent countries like Australia are predicted to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents, ‘...simply because of obesity and the chronic diseases that result from that.’ <sup>iii</sup>
“More and more people seem to suffer from depression especially the younger generation.”	It is important to raise awareness about “...Suicide and self-harm. Kids are being put under so much pressure from themselves, other students, their family and the media. Year 10 student, VIC. <sup>iv</sup>	Almost one in seven (13.9%) 4-17 year-olds were assessed as having mental disorders in a period of 12 months. (2012-2013) <sup>v</sup> 1 in 5 calls to Kids helpline for counselling were about mental health concerns (2015). <sup>vi</sup>
“With social media pressures expectations are higher.”	“Please keep protecting children’s rights and please make sure you are keeping a track on bullying and cyber bullying to help and support these kids.” Frankie, 10, TAS. <sup>vii</sup>  “When looking at like, stuff online, I see lots of pressures from other people to do what they’re doing, be like them.” Teresa, 16 <sup>viii</sup>	Australian data shows victimisation rates for cyberbullying ranging from around 6 per cent to over 40 per cent of young people. <sup>ix</sup>
“Much more is expected of children today. They are expected to excel in every aspect of their lives.”	“Teenagers have been described as still growing children, but sometimes adult responsibilities are expected of them. In a society that’s really focused on self-image, I think it’s really hard for teens to feel safe and grow up. In the future I worry about the next generation – will they have to go through a worse situation than us?” Year 12 student, VIC. <sup>x</sup>	Research shows adults underestimate how worried kids are about a number of life issues, with the BtN Happiness Survey 2015 finding 43 per cent of children worry about their future most or all the time.  Only 1 in 5 would speak to someone about their worries. <sup>xi</sup>

# VALUING CHILDREN INITIATIVE

## Research methodology

The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 was an online poll of n=1002 Australians aged 18+ and was in the field from 31 May to Monday 6 June 2016. This data was weighted after quotas were placed on age, gender and location.

The target population for this research was the Australian population aged 18+. Participants were drawn from the ResearchNow online survey panel.

The survey was designed by Essential Research in conjunction with the client (The Valuing Children Initiative).

The survey fieldwork was conducted by ResearchNow and data tables were prepared by Essential Research. Weighting was prepared by ResearchNow. The analysis of this data was conducted by Essential research. SPSS and Excel and were used to analyse the results. Open-ended questions were analysed manually using a code frame developed by Essential Research.

This data was weighted to ABS for age, gender and location. Soft quotas were placed on age, gender and location.

## Survey Reliability:

Overall the confidence level was set at 95%.

## To cite this report:

A Synopsis of The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey 2016 – Part A October 2016.

## Data Source:

The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016.

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The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 was funded by Centrecare Inc, Parkerville Children and Youth Care (Inc) and the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.



Commissioner for Children and Young People  
Western Australia



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