



Submission to A new approach for families and their children

December 2025



Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Australian Government Department of Social Services' (DSS) Discussion paper, "A new approach to programs for families and children."

It is commendable that the federal government is preparing to significantly shift how services supporting families and vulnerable children and young people are contracted and delivered in future.

In particular, the key foundations of the new proposal are favourably noted: the intention for longer term 5-year funding cycles, consistent data reporting against shared outcomes into the Department for Social Services Data Exchange (DEX), and the option for service providers to opt in for relational contracts. Each of these initiatives are important to support program and workforce stability, stronger evaluative and learning frameworks, and better partnerships between government, service providers and communities. All these factors will positively influence how well services can meet the needs of children, young people and families.

As South Australia's newly appointed Commissioner for Children and Young People my mandate under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* (the Act) is to advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia. It is also my role to ensure that the State, at all levels of government, satisfies its international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Under the UNCRC children and young people have a right to develop healthily and live a full life (Article 6), to feel safe and protected from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19), to be heard and considered in matters that affect them (Article 12), to play and to participate in community and culture (Article 31), and to live in a clean environment (Article 24) free from the dangers and risks that environmental pollution poses, including from climate change.

The Convention also recognises that parents/carers should be the main people who are responsible for the child (Article 18) and that they should not be taken from them unless they are not being 'properly looked after' (Article 9). Governments also have a responsibility to support families facing financial disadvantage through monetary support (Article 26) and with providing food, clothing and a safe place to live (Article 27).

For children and young people to thrive it is imperative that services complement and enhance Australia's legal and policy protections ensuring children and their families are given the right support at the right time.

I have made several recommendations in this submission that draw on the large body of work developed by the Inaugural Commissioner for Children and Young People in SA, through her extensive engagement with children and young people across our state. In addition, prior to this role, I have contributed to significant system change initiatives

across government and the human services sector focused on optimising social impact through systems integration and partnership models between government and non-government service providers, including leading evaluations of programs in financial counselling and wellbeing, social isolation and community connection, family support services, homelessness, child protection and domestic family violence.

The prevalence of children and young people in national data sets across these areas of disadvantage and societal challenge, and the growing numbers of children and young people presenting to crisis services for support, confirm that they must be our primary concern in the reform of critical services and family support systems.

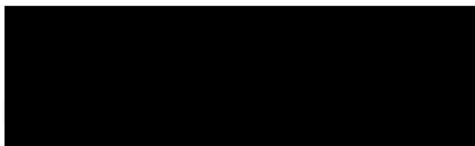
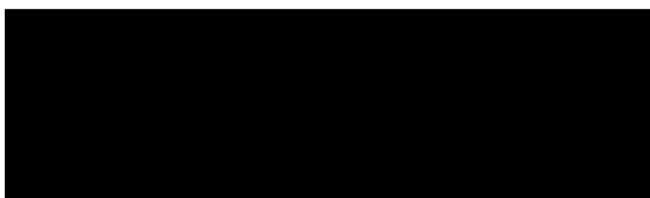
In light of this, the submission makes the following recommendations.

1. The vision for DSS's new national approach to families and their children should instead align with the National Framework vision;
2. The key outcomes for children and young people include reference to safe, nurturing environments as rights and the importance of connection and belonging across the lifespan.
3. DSS work with other federal departments to tackle systemic poverty as a primary mechanism for supporting parents, caregivers, and families to raise healthy resilient children and young people.
4. The development of wrap-around supports (Connected, Integrated, Co-located services).
5. Greater consideration for the support requirements of young people aged between 12-18 to ensure targeted support and inclusion in a national program focused on building parenting and family systems.
6. Children and young people be active participants, involved in any co-design process, being listened to and valued and children being seen as clients in their own right.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide any clarification or further information and look forward to ongoing contribution to this important area of human services reform.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact this office.

Yours sincerely,



Key Reflections & Considerations

The following key factors are highlighted for further consideration in the next phases of program development before DSS re-commissions its new national approach to programs supporting families and their children.

Aligning the Current Vision

The DSS vision for a national approach to supporting families and their children is that “All children and young people are supported by strong families who have the skills and confidence to nurture them.” Importantly, this reflects the vital role played by families in the development of healthy and resilient children, however, it does not emphasise that children and young people have a right to be safe and nurtured by their family.

The vision also falls below the aspirations outlined in [Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031](#). The National Framework vision is “that children and young people in Australia have the right to grow up safe, connected and supported in their family, community and culture. They have the right to grow up in an environment that enables them to reach their full potential.”

In the families support program area, it is equally important for children and young people to feel safe, connected and supported within a broader community and culture as articulated in the National Framework.

It is recommended that the Vision for DSS’s new national approach to families and their children should instead align with the National Framework vision, which is more aspirational, captures the importance of community and culture in children’s lives, and has been developed and endorsed across all Australian jurisdictions.

Aspirational Outcomes

The two key outcomes outlined in the new approach could also be more aspirational. The current framing in relation to ‘resilience’ again falls short of the National Framework commitment to children and young people being supported to reach their potential.

The common definition for resilience includes the ability “to recover easily and quickly from unpleasant or damaging events”¹ or “able to be happy, successful, etc. again after something difficult or bad has happened”.² It would be far more powerful to have outcomes for children and young people that result directly from having parents and caregivers who can successfully provide nurturing environments, for example, confident children who feel safe, have a strong sense of belonging and are well-equipped with the tools to thrive.

The primary role of families and the communities who support them could also be specifically included as part of the outcomes to reflect the importance of multiple partners and the extended ‘village’ that can surround and support children and young people.

Shifting children and young people away from contact with systems requires greater investment in families and the communities that support them – it is well evidenced that

strong connections to culture, Country and community for First Nations children in particular is the best form of prevention.

This may lead to a further honing of focus in the key outcomes from health needs (given these may not be directly impacted by the programs in scope) to the vital importance of connection and belonging throughout the lifespan of children and young people at each stage of development from birth to early adulthood.

It is recommended that the key outcomes for children and young people include reference to safe, nurturing environments as rights and the importance of connection and belonging across the lifespan.

Achieving the Reform Vision and Outcomes

It is unlikely that the vision and outcomes articulated for this new approach to programs supporting families and their children will be realised through the restructuring of services for families alone: empowered parents and caregivers; healthy, resilient children; growth of children into healthy resilient adults. Structural and systemic change needs to occur at a foundational level so all children and their families can live in dignity with their basic rights upheld.

Alongside integration and outcomes-driven reform of early intervention programs, there is a pressing need for a national approach to tackling systemic poverty and the widening inequality that underpins and exacerbates societal and familial disconnect and breakdown.

According to the Child Poverty in Australia 2025 Report³ there are a projected 4.1 million people in Australian living in income poverty, equating to 14.8 per cent of the population.⁴ Single parent households are the worst off, with one in five children (21.8 per cent) in these households living in significant poverty, and nearly one in ten (9.2 per cent) living in severe poverty. By comparison, only around one in fourteen (7.1 per cent) children in couple households are living in significant poverty and around one in twenty (4.9 per cent) are living in extreme poverty.

This increase in child poverty can be attributed to the increasing cost of living, and the growing disparity between the top 20 per cent (who own 64 per cent of the wealth) compared to the lowest 60 per cent (who hold less than 17 per cent of the wealth) has also resulted in an increase of children living in poverty in Australia.⁵

However, child poverty fell during the COVID epidemic - due to the government policies put in place to increase social security payments and a relaxation of commitments around these payments - it has since risen sharply from 13 per cent in 2020-21 to 15.6 per cent in 2022-23.⁶ There are now 236,000 more children nationally who have fallen into poverty in just four years—a 33% increase, with 950,000 children projected to live in poverty by 2025.⁷

The disproportionate impacts of poverty on children and young people require particular attention and action, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, those living with a disability, young people leaving care, young carers and children escaping domestic

and family violence. The prevalence of poverty amongst single-parent families impacted, also highlights the need for prioritisation of some family groups in earlier interventions and prevention support as well as targeted resourcing support to address immediate needs.

What Children and Young People have Told Us

The South Australian Commissioner's office has surveyed, consulted and listened to thousands of children and young people about the impacts of poverty and their concerns in relation to the rising cost of living. Most want to see broad-based change, rather than symptomatic redress, to enable all children to thrive. These responses can be reviewed in the Inaugural Commissioner's Report, *Leave No-One Behind*.⁸

Children and young people emphasise the impacts of poverty on their relationships and sense of belonging, as well as their opportunities to have fun, be independent and participate in their community. These impacts are reflected in Australian research that recognises the relational, opportunity and material dimensions of child poverty.⁹

"Poverty is often stigmatised in our society so it is imperative that it is humanised to tell stories behind the statistics."

– 15 year old, female

"Living in poverty can make a young person want to give up because they don't think that they belong."

– 14 year old, male

Children and young people describe how the pressures of having 'no food', 'no water' or 'no electricity or gas' can lead to 'less connection with their family', whether due to parents being stressed or needing to work constantly. It also affects friendships, with children being too embarrassed to have friends over due to the state of their home.

Children and young people report that 'being poor at school is experienced as a social issue'. Beyond impacts on learning, poverty also has impacts on how young people see themselves in the present as well as their aspirations for the future. Not having clothes, toys, digital devices or access to the internet or period products, sets them apart from their peers and are significant barriers to their participation at school, in social outings and extracurricular activities.

Going to the dentist, doctor or accessing mental health care is virtually inaccessible for children and young people in poverty, 'even when they can be the most needing of that support'. They emphasise the impacts of not having access to sufficient – let alone healthy – food, and not being able to 'take good care of yourself' when you don't have soap or toothpaste or clean clothes.

Young people also describe the impact of 'poverty stigma' when people make assumptions about their family and poverty that make them feel judged, blamed or embarrassed. This extends to how they are treated by their friends' parents, by teachers, coaches and other community members, including health professionals, police or others in the justice system.

“You cannot live poor. You can survive, but that’s not living.”
– 21 year old, female

“It feels like schools punish you for being poor – having to stay in class during school breaks so you can use the school’s technology to get your work done, feels like a punishment rather than a support.”
– 15 year old

Children and young people have told the Commission that they want decision makers to do more to help their peers who are experiencing financial disadvantage. A country that prides itself on the national values of a fair go and justice for all, must act to ensure children and young people in Australia have adequate nutritious food, their own bed, suitable shoes and clothing, and opportunities to participate in school and sporting activities. As one young person clearly articulates, ‘Poverty is not a choice, it is a societal failing.’ (Female, 18).

Direct Impact on outcomes for Children, young people and families

The voices of children and young people are supported by national and international research revealing the adverse health, economic and social outcomes for children experiencing poverty. We also know that poverty has a direct impact on children’s physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

Research has found that:

- Poverty negatively affects infant brain growth.¹⁰
- Childhood poverty translates to increased risks of poorer socioemotional functioning, school failure, chronic disease, mental illness, reduced economic opportunity, and intergenerational adversity.^{11 12}
- The most recent AEDC data (2024) shows that those children living in poorer areas are more developmentally vulnerable in all five domains (physical health and wellbeing; social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills; communication skills and general knowledge) than they were in 2021.¹³
- Children living in the poorest Australian suburbs starting school are twice as likely to be vulnerable in one or more AEDC domains (34.7 per cent versus 16.2 percent respectively) and three times more likely to be vulnerable on two or more domains (20.3 per cent versus 7.6 per cent respectively).¹⁴

Two recent national reports, Child Poverty in Australia 2025 (Curtin report) and The State of Australia’s Children 2025 (UNICEF) have again evidenced the direct connection between poverty, other areas of developmental and social disadvantage, and the overall wellbeing of children and families. Poverty is not just about income, children face food insecurity, poor housing, and limited access to education and healthcare.¹⁵ Further, the recent 2024 AEDC data has shown a significant and concerning downturn in the school readiness of young children¹⁶

Both reports make clear that the wellbeing of Australia’s children is at a critical tipping point. Across the population, there is a range of emergent challenges that, if not addressed, will lead to worsening lifelong outcomes for children and young people. Every

policy, program reform and investment decision has the potential to impact children and young people. Conversely, inaction can affect them disproportionately.

Systemic Poverty Reform

While low family income is one of the most common denominators of poverty, the factors contributing to low income vary. Inadequate social security payments or low paid insecure work may be a cause, while other contributing factors include children or family members living with disability or chronic illness, unaffordable housing costs, family and domestic violence, are carers, or being part of a family that has complex needs. Addressing poverty therefore demands multi-sector and community-based solutions as well as increased income support.

Addressing these issues requires a structural and system transformation that addresses the drivers behind the challenges we are now facing. The role of family support programs that are universal, through to secondary and tertiary services that can divert a downward trajectory for vulnerable children and their families, play a vital role but are only one part of the support puzzle. Collaboration and connection between education, health and human services is required to combat the entrenched and multi-dimensional nature of inequality.

The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians have recently [called](#) on governments, both State and Federal, to take urgent action in response to rising rates of poverty particularly amongst children and young people by:

- Addressing the root causes of inequality: poverty, housing stress and systemic racism.
- Providing wraparound supports for families at risk including parenting support, income support, housing support and access to early childhood support.
- Investing in mental health and wellbeing programs for children and young people;
- Embedding children's participation in policy-making through co-designed programs with young people from diverse backgrounds. (Media release 24 November (ACCG).

Each of these actions are directly relevant to the reform of programs that support families, who in turn provide the foundational environment for children and young people to be safe, grow, develop and thrive.

Addressing the Root Causes

Although per capita Australia is the second wealthiest nation on the planet, we have the lowest unemployment payments in the OECD¹⁷

One of the most impactful ways the government can address the root causes of poverty is through a national approach to the eradication of poverty: increasing social security payments, providing a 'safety net' to ensure all children have a roof over their head, food on the table, and are able to access education, health and community services.¹⁸ We also need a concerted whole of government effort to move past current discourse that stigmatises families living in poverty and depending on social security payments¹⁹ and look

to the evidence of what works to ensure children and young people feel safe and supported within their family, education and the community.

Research shows that money invested in the early years offers the best economic and social return.²⁰²¹²² While the mechanisms are complex, increased household income benefits children's directly through better food, stable housing, and healthcare (the 'investment' model), and indirectly through improved parent mental health and capacity (the 'family stress' model).²³

Globally, governments in high-income countries are increasingly understanding the problems of poverty and inequitable policy. "Public expenditure incurred to correct the consequences of childhood poverty throughout a person's life is significantly higher than the necessary investments to improve their life chances by supporting them during childhood"²⁴ (European Commission).

It is therefore imperative that as part of reform of family support programs the government seriously consider the findings made in the DSS commissioned research that there are broad benefits of raising JobSeeker to 90% of the Age Pension. This research has found that for every \$100 invested delivers a \$24 social return, improving health outcomes, reducing justice system interactions, and lowering long-term welfare dependence. Importantly, the efficiency savings outweigh any potential reduction in job search intensity.²⁵

It is recommended that DSS work with other federal departments to tackle systemic poverty as a primary mechanism for supporting parents, caregivers, and families to raise healthy resilient children and young people.

Immediate Actions - Wrap-Around Supports (Connected, Integrated, Co-located)

While systemic approaches to tackling poverty may be beyond the immediate focus of DSS's new approach to family support programs, there are ways that greater coordination and integration could be enabled across complementary or 'adjacent' programs.

The following are suggested for consideration:

- The current scope of programs included in this national approach will enable closer integration between universal family supports delivered in communities, and more intensive services for mental health and domestic, family and sexual violence. However, in future, **it is recommended that programs that address families' immediate financial crises, building financial wellbeing, confidence and capability are included in the future scope of a national approach to supporting families and their children.** For example, the recently contracted DSS-funded financial counselling, Money Hubs, Gambling support, and broader mental health programs targeting young people.

- In the shorter term, embedding a priority resourcing allocation or giving access priority to children and young people across DSS-funded programs would ensure that prevention and earlier intervention for families is being supported within other complementary service areas. **It is recommended that DSS prioritise resource allocations and service access for children and young people across all funded programs as the best form of prevention and early intervention and support for families.**
- Within regions, in addition to place-based assessment of children's and young people's needs, DSS could consider current state or territory and local government resourcing of programs supporting families, as well as established community initiatives. Integration across state and federal programs would enable better leveraging of existing funding and community assets as part of each commissioning round.
- In relation to the proposed program structure, it is not entirely clear how a service provider may be able to provide multiple services streams across the intervention points from universal to secondary and tertiary supports. There is a strong emphasis within the reform on partnership and external collaboration across providers, which is essential to the success of place-based approaches. However, this needs to be balanced by a recognition that there are significant benefits for families and their children when there is a continuity of care from a trusted provider across the continuum of services and support.
- DSS could provide information on the breadth of services available across a region, including 'adjacent' or complementary community activities like playgroups. **It is recommended that DSS seek to integrate across federal, state and local government funding in each region for a place-based approach that reduces duplication, minimises service gaps, builds knowledge and awareness of other service providers, and leverages community-led programs and assets.**
- **It is recommended that DSS ensure there is adequate time in the commissioning process to allow for the development of meaningful partnerships, potential consortia bids and identification of co-location opportunities that may not have been explored before, e.g., schools.**
- Evaluate the operation of different hubs across jurisdictions to build a national picture of what is working well and can be up-scaled and expanded, e.g. Integrated Hubs in South Australia, Child and Parent Centres in Western Australia, Family and domestic violence 'one stop' hubs in multiple jurisdictions, and Regional Family Support Hubs.

Prioritising Investment – Gap for Young People

A key outcome of the revised national approach is to ensure that children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults. However, the focus of the programs included in the national approach are primarily on younger children and their families leaving a gap for

children over 12 years of age, and the transition years between teens and young adulthood.

Recent surveys of young people have demonstrated that they have significant concerns about their financial wellbeing and cost of living, are experiencing reduced hope in the future for secure housing, mental health concerns, and a sense of social isolation and lack of belonging. There is also an increasing lack of faith in decision-makers who are not actively engaging with the views and perspectives of young people.²⁶

The only inclusion of a priority focus on young people under 25 years in the programs within scope of the new national approach is centred on their role as parents or caregivers rather than as young people in their own right, and activities for youth are only specified in the specialised Family Violence Services.

It is recommended that the support requirements of young people aged between 12-18 are given greater consideration for targeted support and inclusion in a national program focused on building parenting and family systems, particularly as these years are often when conflict can arise and lead to youth homelessness, unsafe behaviours and disconnection from schooling.

Children and Young People at the Centre

The South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence²⁷ led by Natasha Stott-Despoja recommended that the South Australian government fund the establishment and ongoing operation of a non-government central entry-point crisis and information service for any person experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence in South Australia. This includes developing an innovative help seeking pathways for children and young people via a co-design process with children and young people (Recommendation 44). It also recommended the need for law reform to remove parental consent as a barrier to seeking help and accessing services for children and young people. The parental consent review must include an examination of children and young people's access to statutory and legal services, health services, homelessness services and domestic, family and sexual violence services (Recommendation 100).

The Royal Commission also talked directly to young people with lived experience in relation to family and domestic violence which is outlined in its Silence and Inaction Report. The report outlines young people's lived experience in trying to seek help when living with family and domestic violence. Young people described a system that was often inaccessible, disjointed and difficult to navigate without an adult to support them. The report also found that disclosures young people made were not followed up, there was no clear entry point for children to seek help, a fragmented coordination between services, children under 16 were unable to access critical services without a parent or guardian, difficulties in navigating systems and seeking support and long waitlists and geographic barriers, especially in rural and remote areas.²⁸

Well, you know, a little boy of 13 here, something like that happened ... you will be scared ... You don't even know who to turn to. You don't even know who you report to. (Ben, 17-year-old male, experienced violence from age 10)

A lot of people, their services are to support people 16 and above. So, I wonder what will happen to the people below 16. So, I think we should get that ... We should not be excluded because of that [age] ... because all of us have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. So, I will say we should look to consider the age range, and services should not be limited. (Max)

Specifically, a number of young victim-survivors described being:

- Turned away from crisis housing because they were under 16 years old,
- Denied mental health support unless a parent provided consent, and
- Unable to receive income assistance or material aid without proof of guardianship.

All programs and systems reforms must centre and elevate the views and perspectives of children and young people, as valued members of our communities and as unique clients of support services. This is essential for this reform process to *respond well to community need*.

Contracted services should be required to safely screen children and young people for compounding issues and create environments that support them to voice their perspectives, reflect on their own experiences and have some influence within their own families as well as their broader environments and communities.

Young people in particular need to be involved in creating solutions to challenges within their families – giving them the resourcing and scaffolding to decide on tangible outcomes – not just express their concerns repeatedly.

It is recommended that:

- **children's participation and the views of young people from diverse backgrounds is embedded in the co-design and delivery of this new national approach;**
- **service providers be required to listen to and value children and young people's felt experiences as essential indicators of program function, data reporting, and to inform ongoing evaluation and delivery improvement;**
- **Concerted efforts are made to ensure that children and young people are treated as clients in their own right, with contracted service providers being required to have expertise in delivering therapeutic supports tailored to children and young people, including universal services and support provided to families in community settings.**

A Final Note on Outcomes Measurement & Relational Commissioning

To ensure services are working for children:

- Outcomes for children and young people need to be measured and monitored across systems and relevant data points within funded programs and departments including universal services like health checks, immunisation registers, early childhood access, schooling attendance and engagement. A shared data

platform would enhance monitoring, reporting and connection of family support programs to early childhood education, health and wellbeing, homelessness support and mental health services particularly for young people.

- Establish Measurement and Evaluation frameworks across each jurisdiction from the outset that includes system outcomes (partnership pulse checks for example) to create a baseline and measure progress over time in relation to outcomes for children and families:
 - <https://clearhorizon.com.au/vichealth-learning-partnership/>
 - https://dhs.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/128557/Social-Impact-Framework_2021_V6.pdf
 - https://dhs.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/131434/Social-Impact-Framework-Tool.pdf
- Agree on clear roles and responsibilities of government and providers
- Build relationships and continuity of contract management, with KPIs for both parties to create a sense of shared accountability and contribution to outcomes

¹ Collins Dictionary Online. Accessed at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/resilient>.

² Cambridge Dictionary Online. Accessed at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/resilient>.

³ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre and Valuing Children Initiative. Child Poverty in Australia 2025. Accessed at <https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2025/11/BCEC-VCI-Child-Poverty-Report-2025-FINAL.pdf>

⁴ FN3.

⁵ Australian Council of Social Services. Inequality in Australia. Accessed at <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/inequality/>.

⁶ Bessell, Sharon. 2022. Rethinking Child Poverty. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 23. Available at https://cpc.weblogs.anu.edu.au/files/2021/10/The-MOR-for-Children-Framework_Discussion-Paper_2021.pdf.

⁷ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre and Valuing Children Initiative. Child Poverty in Australia 2025. Accessed at <https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2025/11/BCEC-VCI-Child-Poverty-Report-2025-FINAL.pdf>

⁸ See, for example Commissioner for Children and Young People. Leave No One Behind: What children and young people have said about living in poverty. Accessed at <https://www.ccyp.com.au/publications/leave-no-one-behind-2019/>; Why investing in school camps, field trips and excursions is good for students – Anti-Poverty Week. Accessed at <https://www.ccyp.com.au/publications/why-investing-in-school-camps-field-trips-and-excursions-is-good-for-students-anti-poverty-week/>; Missing Voices; Cost of living pressures as described by primary school children. Accessed at <https://www.ccyp.com.au/publications/missing-voices-cost-of-living-p pressures-as-described-by-primary-school-children/>.

⁹ Bessell, Sharon. 2022. Rethinking Child Poverty. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 23. Available at https://cpc.weblogs.anu.edu.au/files/2021/10/The-MOR-for-Children-Framework_Discussion-Paper_2021.pdf

¹⁰ Hanson JL, Hair N, Shen DG, Shi F, Gilmore JH, Wolfe BL, et al. Family Poverty Affects the Rate of Human Infant Brain Growth. PLOS ONE. 2016;10(12):e0146434. Accessed at <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0080954>.

¹¹ Shonkoff J, Garner A, Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, and Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. Accessed at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22201148/>; Siegel B, Dobbins M, Earls M, Garner A, McGuinn L, Pascoe J, Wood D. The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. Pediatrics. 2012;129(1):232-46. Accessed at <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/129/1/e232/31628/The-Lifelong-Effects-of-Early-Childhood-Adversity?autologincheck=redirected>.

- ¹² B [REDACTED]rinkman S, Gregory T, Harris J, Hart B, Blackmore S, Janus M. Associations between the early development instrument at age 5, and reading and numeracy skills at ages 8, 10 and 12: a prospective linked data study. *Child Indicators Research*. 2013;6(4):695-708. Accessed at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-013-9189-3>.
- ¹³ Australian Early Development Census. AEDC National Report 2024. Early childhood development in Australia. Accessed at https://www.aedc.gov.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/aedc_national-report-2024_da7-409a37b9d-95ce-43e7-af00-51aa604cf0b3.pdf?sfvrsn=b56015ba_1.
- ¹⁴ Australian Early Development Census. AEDC National Report 2024. Early childhood development in Australia. Accessed at https://www.aedc.gov.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/aedc_national-report-2024_da7-409a37b9d-95ce-43e7-af00-51aa604cf0b3.pdf?sfvrsn=b56015ba_1.
- ¹⁵ UNICEF. Child Poverty. Accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty/>.
- ¹⁶ Australian Early Development Census. AEDC National Report 2024. Early childhood development in Australia. Accessed at https://www.aedc.gov.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/aedc_national-report-2024_da7-409a37b9d-95ce-43e7-af00-51aa604cf0b3.pdf?sfvrsn=b56015ba_1.
- ¹⁷ FN 3 at p13.
- ¹⁸ This is in-line with findings and recommendations made by the Community Affairs References Committee in The extent and nature of poverty in Australia, Interim Report 2023. Accessed at https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000081/toc_pdf/TheextentandnatureofpovertyinAustralia.pdf. Also the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee: 2025 Report to Government. 2025. Accessed at <https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/documents/2025-04/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2025-report.pdf>.
- ¹⁹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Stigma in government services. Literature review. October 2025. Accessed at <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-10/beta-stigma-government-services.pdf>.
- ²⁰ The Front Project. A Smarter Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic Analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia. Accessed at <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf>.
- ²¹ Moore T, Arefadib N, Deery A, West S, Keyes M. The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper. Murdoch Children's Research Institute. 2017. Accessed at <https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccchdev/CCCH-The-First-Thousand-Days-An-Evidence-Paper-September-2017.pdf>.
- ²² The Australia Institute. Ending child poverty in Australia. Accessed at <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/PI523-Ending-child-poverty-in-Australia-Web-2.pdf>.
- ²³ Cooper K, Stewart K. Does Household Income Affect Children's Outcomes? A Systematic Review of the Evidence. *Child Indicators Research*. 2020;14:981 - 1005. Accessed at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-020-09782-0>.
- ²⁴ European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Addressing Child Poverty – Breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Accessed at https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/social-protection-social-inclusion/addressing-poverty-and-supporting-social-inclusion/investing-children/addressing-child-poverty-breaking-cycle-disadvantage_en.
- ²⁵ Australian Council of Social Services and University of New South Wales. Poverty in Australia 2025 Overview. October 2025. Accessed at https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Poverty-in-Australia-2025-Overview_print-v2.pdf.
- ²⁶ Monash University. The 2025 Australian Youth Barometer. Accessed at https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/The_2025_Australian_Youth_Barometer/30184270?file=59645255.
- ²⁷ Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Domestic Violence. Accessed at <https://www.royalcommissiondfsv.sa.gov.au/>.
- ²⁸ Dr Kate Fitz-Gibbon. Silence and inaction: Children and young people's experiences of violence and systemic failure in South Australia. Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (SA). Accessed at https://www.royalcommissiondfsv.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1167458/Silence-and-Inaction-Report-2025-Final.pdf.