

Australia's Welfare 2017

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) have drafted the next edition of *Australia's Welfare*, a biennial report required through legislation and tabled in Parliament. In the contents relevant to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, several data gaps have been noted. This document contains a list of noted data gaps.

Chapter 1.6 Pathways into, through and out of persistent disadvantage

This article provides an overview of the extent of persistent disadvantage in Australia; examines a range of contributing individual, family and other factors; and discusses the policy implications for addressing persistent disadvantage.

- No data gaps were noted.

Chapter 2.5 A stable and secure home for children in out-of-home care

This article presents facts relevant to approximately 46,500 out-of-home care for children who are unable to live in safety and security with their parents.

Reporting on permanency-related concepts for children and young people in out-of-home care could be enhanced by the development of:

- nationally standardised definitions of permanency
- reportable data on adoption disruption and dissolution
- data to support comparisons of outcomes between children who have different experiences of out-of-home care and those who have never entered care
- standardised data on the life course of young people exiting care at 18
- a follow-up survey of children in out-of-home care, including qualitative components, increasing consistency of methodology across jurisdictions
- national data on the specific reasons children are placed in out-of-home care, including family characteristics
- national data on the types and levels of family support services provided.

Chapter 2.7 Family, domestic and sexual violence

This article provides an overview of the available data and research on family, domestic and sexual violence where the violence involved a female victim and a male perpetrator.

The article notes that there is no single source of truth on the prevalence of violence. Although the ABS PSS provides detailed information on specific incidents of violence (and is collected in a sensitive manner) every four years, there is little information about the experiences of Indigenous Australians, persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI), older people (elder abuse), and people with a disability.

Other key data gaps identified include:

- risks and drivers of family, domestic and sexual violence (such as mental health, drug and alcohol use),
- characteristics of victims and perpetrators, and
- outcomes of specialised services and interventions for victims, perpetrators and children.

Chapter 7.1 The welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

This article provides some contextual information about the Indigenous population and Indigenous community functioning, and then goes on to discuss housing and homelessness, income, and employment.

The Indigenous estimated resident population is determined using information from the Census, birth and death registrations, and migration data. These data collections rely on people identifying themselves and/or their family members as Indigenous. Changes in identification rates between Censuses can affect population counts and the statistics derived from them.

Comprehensive and complete information on the use of housing assistance among Indigenous Australians is not currently available. One key issue is the availability and quality of Indigenous status information—for example, there is a high level of missing information about Indigenous status in some housing assistance data (Indigenous status was missing for 25% of households in public housing in 2015). Another key issue is the incomplete coverage of some data collections (for example, data on Indigenous households living in mainstream community housing in the Northern Territory are not available). Finally, some households living in social housing are also eligible to receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA); however reliable data on the number of households receiving assistance from either social housing or CRA (that is, removing the overlap) are not available.

If successful programs are to be put in place to address the myriad factors underlying and perpetuating Indigenous disadvantage, more information about the effectiveness of existing or newly implemented programs is needed. There has been relatively little robust evaluation of the performance and effectiveness of Indigenous programs and policies (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2009; Productivity Commission 2015). Rigorous evaluation of policies, programs and interventions can provide the evidence for ‘what works’ and ensure that future efforts are directed at strategies that produce positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Chapter 7.2 Indigenous Australians: community safety

This article provides information on Indigenous Australians’ contact with the child protection, youth and adult justice systems, and experiences of violence.

Children and young people who have had contact with the child protection system or the youth justice system, or who are homeless, are often very vulnerable. Indigenous Australians are over-represented in all 3 of these groups. The AIHW has recently linked data from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) and the Juvenile Justice NMDS to analyse the circumstances of clients accessing homelessness services who were also involved with the youth justice and/or child protection systems. It found that these clients

experienced multiple levels of disadvantage and were more likely than homelessness-only clients to report substance use issues, mental health issues, and domestic violence. They were also more likely to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Gaining a better understanding of the circumstances of these clients will allow systems to better identify and meet their needs and improve outcomes for some of Australia's most vulnerable young people.

The prevalence of violence is difficult to determine as not all incidents are reported to police or other authorities. Incomplete identification of Indigenous Australians in relevant data collections also reduces the accuracy of estimates of violence among Indigenous Australians. Determining the prevalence of domestic or family violence is further complicated by the fact that even when incidents are reported, the victim may not disclose that the incident was perpetrated by a family member. For the hospital separations data on non-fatal assault cited in this snapshot, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim was recorded in only 51% of cases. Where this was recorded, however, the perpetrator was a family member in the majority of cases where the victim was a female or an Indigenous male.

The AIHW is developing an ongoing reporting capability in the form of a national family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) data clearinghouse. The clearinghouse would coordinate national reporting, provide a platform for improving data quality, identify data gaps and priority data developments, conduct data linkage, and facilitate researcher access to data.

Chapter 7.3 Indigenous Australians: Use of disability and aged care services

This article provides the latest location and age-specific data on use of the disability and aged care services by Indigenous Australians.

Information presented in this chapter from the AIHW National Aged Care Data Clearinghouse relate to the use of mainstream residential aged care by Indigenous Australians. However, in addition to mainstream care, flexible models of care are also provided under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program. As at 30 June 2015, 31 aged care services were funded to deliver 802 aged care places through this programme (Department of Health 2015).

- There is missing information on Flexible Aged Care Program.

Chapter 7.4 Factors affecting Indigenous wellbeing

This article focuses on psychological wellbeing, stressors, experiences of discrimination, self-harm and suicide amongst Indigenous Australians.

- No data gaps were noted.

Chapter 7.5 Closing the gap in education

This article covers early childhood and schooling, including vocational and tertiary education, amongst Indigenous Australians, and provides data to measure progress against the 4 COAG Closing the Gap targets relating to education.

The Closing the Gap agenda and its early learning and education measures have helped to substantially improve our understanding of the early onset of the gaps in child development and

learning outcomes for many Indigenous children. Family background, school characteristics and remote locations play important contributing roles. Much less is known, however, about the origins and trends in the development of non-cognitive skills of Indigenous children. The child development literature stresses that both cognitive and non-cognitive skills work together to produce successful adult outcomes, and that one type of skills help develop the other skills. Further analyses are required on how Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) children from disadvantaged backgrounds can be helped to acquire the non-cognitive skills, such as perseverance, motivation and self-esteem, that are also vital in producing successful adult outcomes, including in education and cognitive skills.

Chapter 9.1 The Australia’s welfare indicator framework

This chapter presents indicators that assess the performance of policies, programs or services, and to meet accountability and transparency requirements. Data were reported against four of the five domains in the new indicator framework of the 2015 edition of Australia’s welfare.

Conceptual integrity is important in the development of any indicator framework; however, inevitably there will be some compromise between the selection of a set of ideal indicators and those that are reportable in practice. In the Australia’s welfare indicator framework, data gaps have been kept to a minimum and proxy indicators have been selected in some instances. Remaining data gaps are outlined in Table 9.1.3 and further explored below.

Table 9.1.3: Data gaps—Australia’s welfare indicator framework

Domain/ sub-domain	Indicator no.	Indicator (summary form)	Rationale for inclusion	Comment
Wellbeing: Skills and learning	7	Lifelong learning	Reflects a society that promotes and provides infrastructure for further learning, which is associated with greater wellbeing.	No indicator defined.
Determinants: Material resources	18	Housing security	The ability to maintain tenancy in housing of a satisfactory standard contributes directly to wellbeing, and reflects adequate financial resources.	No data; no proxy.
Welfare system performance: Welfare outcomes	38	Safe return home for children in out-of-home care	For some children placed in out-of-home care, the best long-term outcome is for them to return home after their parents’ skills and capacity to care for them have improved.	No data; no proxy. This indicator could be complemented by an indicator for stable permanent placement
Welfare system performance: Efficiency; sustainability	44	Management expense ratio (by sector)	The administrative costs associated with delivering services are a measure of efficiency—and to some extent indicate sustainability— with the aim being to minimise such costs so that more of the available budget can be directed to service delivery.	No data are available, because for most programs the administrative costs are spread out over program components, and not separately reportable.
Welfare system performance: Coordination	50	No indicators found		

Housing security

When considering how to develop an indicator for housing security, it is necessary to delve into several areas such as housing tenure (e.g. home owners; renters), homelessness, and housing mobility (AIHW 2010). Information about housing tenure is presented in Indicator 58 and homelessness in Indicators 28, 41 and 49.

An indicator on housing mobility could be considered as a proxy for housing security. Existing data show that renters are more than 6 times as likely to have moved at least 4 times in the last 5 years than home owners (with or without a mortgage), and those in private rental accommodation are twice as likely to have moved at least 4 times in the last 5 years as those living in state/territory housing.

While this could provide some useful information, not moving from a residence does not mean that the residence is satisfactory—there could be issues with housing condition, overcrowding (see Indicator 3) or personal safety. More work is needed to define this indicator.

Safe return home for children in out of home care

There are no data currently available to report on safe return home for children in out of home care. However, work has been undertaken to facilitate future reporting. The AIHW, in consultation with state and territory departments responsible for child protection, have developed indicator specifications for reporting on the number of children who return home or for whom alternative permanent care arrangements have been provided. A field test was undertaken as part of the 2015–16 national child protection data collection. Data are expected to be reported under the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care, following an assessment of data availability/quality and subject to approval.

Management expense ratio by sector

Management expense ratios aim to measure inputs in relation to outputs, and are a measure of efficiency. The Report on Government Services (RoGS) includes several efficiency output indicators in its community sector performance indicators: for example, *Cost per service output by sector*, and *Administrative expenditure as a proportion of total recurrent expenditure* in the disability services sector, *Expenditure per head of target population* (aged care services), *Expenditure per placement* and *Cost per child in out of home care* (child protection services). However, each sector has different measures and within sectors, there are data comparability issues due to different policies in states and territories.

The Australia's welfare indicator framework includes the efficiency indicator *Cost per service output by sector*, which is reportable. At this stage, AIHW plan to continue reporting on this indicator only. Refer to the RoGS website for further information on efficiency output indicators by sector (<http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2016/community-services>).

Welfare system performance: Coordination

This remains a data gap in the framework, but its importance is highlighted in many sectors. For example, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) highlighted the need for better integration of services, including among the justice sector (police, courts), health services, homelessness services, victim support services, and so on. More work is required to define 'coordination' and explore indicators that might measure this concept.

Lifelong learning

An indicator for *Lifelong learning* in the Wellbeing domain was not able to be defined. Although no single indicator seems to adequately measure the complex and expansive concept of lifelong

learning, readers are directed to the results of various indicators in the *Australia's welfare* framework—such as Year 12 attainment, Post school qualifications, Volunteering, Access to the internet, and Work–life balance—to gain insight into factors that contribute to and reflect aspects of lifelong learning.

Chapter 9.2 Indicators of Australia's Welfare

This chapter provides assessments on all the indicators from the framework discussed in Chapter 9.1. It presents trends and commentary with reference to earlier years' data where possible. These sentinel indicators providing high-level information include four domains –

- *Wellbeing – summarising national satisfaction and contentment with our lives and is the product of many influencing factors including the fundamental support provided by welfare services*
- *Determinants – focusing on factors that influence demand for welfare services*
- *Welfare system performance – reporting on the extent to which the major services, supports, payments and interventions contribute to achieving better welfare outcomes for Australians, and*
- *Other sectors – recognising the contribution of other sectors to the demand for and outcomes of welfare services and to wellbeing more generally.*

In addition, indicators providing contextual information that may have an impact on welfare demand (for example – population size and growth, ageing and dependency, and immigration patterns) were also included.