




Australian Research Alliance  
for Children & Youth

## Transforming Australia for our children's future: Making prevention work



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ARACY Board Chair



## Overview

1. About ARACY
2. How are Australia's children & young people faring?
3. What are the 'causes of the causes'?
4. What needs to happen to improve child and youth wellbeing? The case for prevention

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## About ARACY

We work to improve the wellbeing of children and young people, by advancing collaboration and evidence-based action.

- We focus on prevention
- We focus on life-pathways
- We work across sectors and disciplines
- We provide a neutral space for organisational collaboration
- We value add to our members work
- We progress sustainable, evidence-based action

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## How are Australia's children & young people faring?

**Data availability:**

- What indicators?
- Available for subgroups?
- Ability to map?
- Analyses over time?
- Link to enable analyses of cause?
- Comparisons to benchmark us internationally?

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## Some common findings: Australia

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>doing relatively well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• material wellbeing             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- parent joblessness</li> </ul> </li> <li>• school achievement</li> <li>• some behaviours / risks:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- smoking, illicit drug use</li> </ul> </li> <li>• subjective wellbeing</li> <li>• participation</li> </ul> | <p>doing relatively poorly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal wellbeing overall</li> <li>• material wellbeing:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- households with income below 50% of median</li> </ul> </li> <li>• health &amp; safety:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- infant mortality, overweight, diabetes, disability, immunisation, intentional self injury death rate, accidental injury 0-4 years, non-accidental deaths under 19</li> </ul> </li> <li>• transition to employment</li> <li>• family / peer relationships</li> <li>• child maltreatment             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• doubling of substantiations over 9 years</li> </ul> </li> <li>• some behaviours and risks:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- teenage fertility, road deaths, depression, aggression</li> </ul> </li> <li>• increasing inequity in many outcomes</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

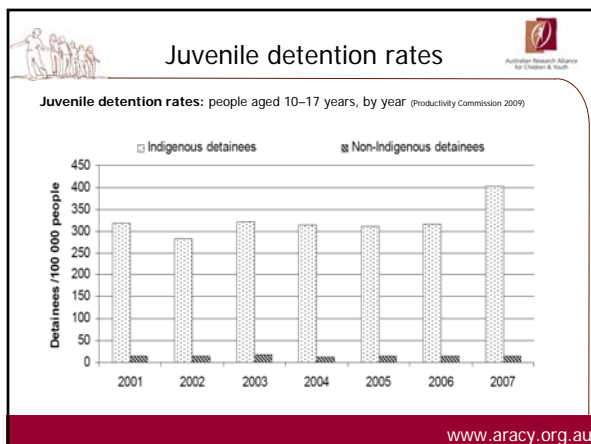
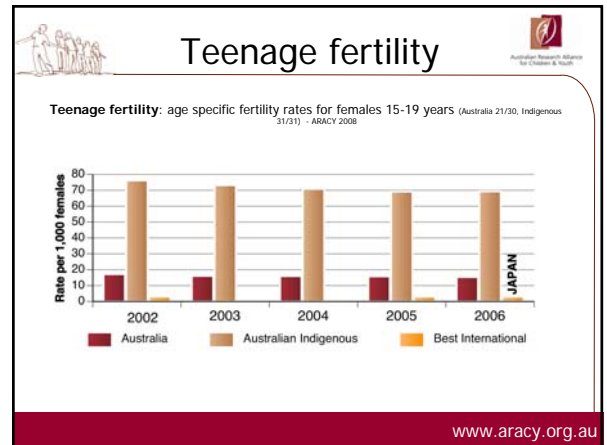
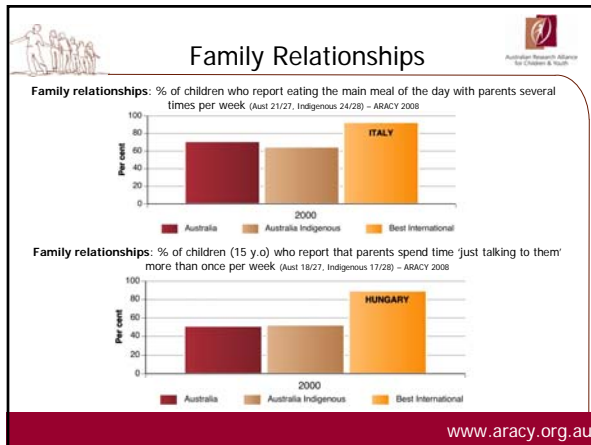
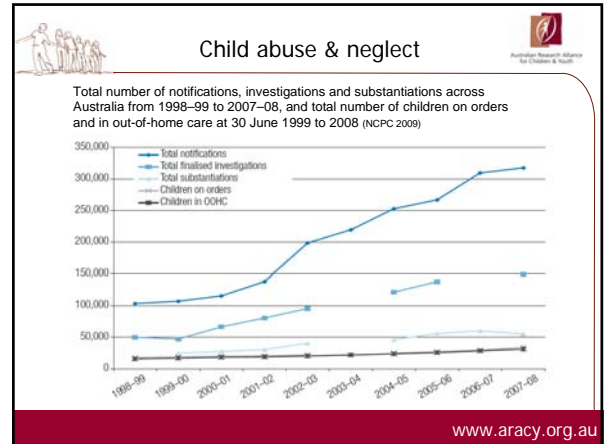
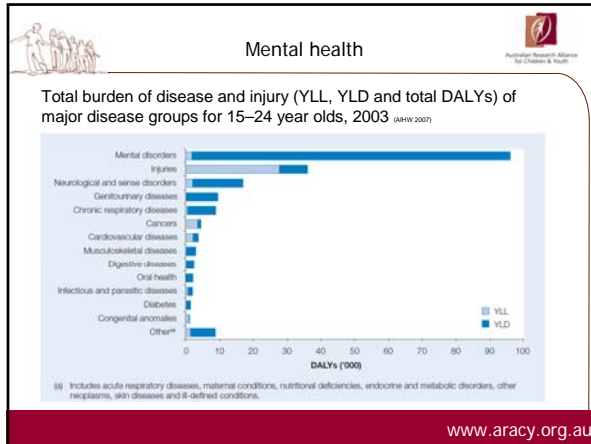
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## Complex problems on the rise

- "Wicked problems"
- Greatest challenge – Aboriginal disparities
- Increasing levels of behavioural, developmental, health and social problems
- Problems are more complex and difficult to treat
- Affects everyone:
  - costs continue to rise with excessive focus on crisis end
  - reduces social, economic and civil participation
  - highest in disadvantaged BUT across all of society
- Demand a preventive whole of population approach

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### Australia's International ranking?

- Average results for Young people:
  - ARACY Report Card: 16/30 OECD
  - UNICEF data analysis by Heshmati et al: 17/33 OECD
- Below average results for early years:
  - UNICEF child care transitions: 23/25 OECD

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What are the 'causes of the causes'?

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### Risk and protective factors

Relationship between risk factors and protective factors. Shaded area: cost of doing nothing.

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### Social determinants of child and youth health

**Civil society**

- Equality/diversity
- Trust, care
- Collective good
- Valuing parents
- Valuing childhoods
- Prevention more than cures
- Protected environments
- Safe places for all
- Effective use of helpful technologies
- Children's needs as well as adults'

**Uncivil society**

- Accepting of: Inequalities
- Fear, violence
- Priority for material wealth
- Parents not valued
- Fast tracking childhoods
- Cures more than prevention
- Environmental degradation
- Safe places for the few
- Excessive use of damaging technologies
- Adults' needs more than children's

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### Causes of the causes?

Antecedents of complex problems affecting children and young people are common: they begin with our (societal) values

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### What if our international Olympic ranking was the same as our international child / youth wellbeing ranking?

**Olympic ranking**

- United States
- Great Britain
- Germany
- Australia**
- Japan
- Italy
- France
- Netherlands
- Spain
- Canada
- Poland
- Hungary
- Norway
- Czech Republic
- Slovakia
- New Zealand
- Denmark
- Switzerland
- Mexico
- Turkey
- Finland
- Belgium
- Portugal
- Sweden
- Greece
- Austria
- Ireland

**Child / youth wellbeing ranking**

- Netherlands
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Spain
- Iceland
- Finland
- Norway
- Greece
- Italy
- Poland
- Switzerland
- Czech Republic
- France
- Japan
- Canada
- Ireland
- 17. Australia**
- Portugal
- Hungary
- Malla
- Germany
- Israel
- Belgium
- Croatia
- Latvia
- Slovenia
- Austria

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### What if our international prosperity ranking was the same as our international child/youth wellbeing ranking?


**LEGATUM PROSPERITY INDEX TABLE 2008**

- defines prosperity holistically
- Includes factors that promote economic competitiveness and improved livability
- "drivers & restrainers of prosperity"
- Australia from 1 / 104 .... to middle of OECD

- Netherlands
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Spain
- Iceland
- Finland
- Norway
- Greece
- Italy
- Poland
- Switzerland
- CzechRep
- France
- Japan
- Canada
- Ireland
- 17. Australia**
- Portugal

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Do we value our possessions more than our children & young people?



Award wage for Cleaner = \$15.89 p/hr

Award wage for ChildCare worker (teacher) = \$14.65 p/hr

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We are not alone ...

For example:

Children's Society (UK) \* ... *We identified a common thread in these problems, which is excessive individualism in our culture...*

Sir Michael Marmot (Chair of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health): \* *It begins with values ...*

USA Dr David Korten ([Positive Futures Network](#), [Business Alliance for Local Living Economies](#), International Forum on Globalization etc...) \* *corporations have to invest billions of dollars in advertising to manipulate our psyches to convince us that consumption is the path to happiness, I think tells us a lot about what our natural inclination is, because if we were really as materialistic and greedy and so forth as it appears, they wouldn't have to spend all that much on advertising ...*


A rising tide does not raise all ships

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Attitudes to children & young people

Initial findings from qualitative research on attitudes to children & young people

- Low awareness of problems
- Young people are seen as being powerful and capable
- Children and young people **are** the problem
- Children and young people have it easy
- External factors are making parenting harder than ever before



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The case for prevention

What needs to happen to improve child and youth wellbeing?

- To thrive, children need to be valued
- Increasing the value placed on children helps create the conditions in which their wellbeing can be improved
- Requires a major shift in how we all think, feel and behave
- Need to create an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable society is one which values children

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What needs to happen to improve child and youth wellbeing?

Large scale innovative social change / communication and primary prevention strategy to:


- promote the value of children and young people
- shift social norms and attitudes towards putting children in the centre and a shared sense of responsibility for children's wellbeing
- reduce fragmentation of services and programs
- foster a climate that supports government initiatives for children and young people.

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Whole of nation strategy



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## Valued children thrive

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- Increasing the value placed on children helps create the conditions in which their wellbeing can be improved
- This increased value generates community support for implementation of evidence-informed policy and programs
- Requires a major shift in how we think, feel and behave

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## Outcomes for Community and Government

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- Greater return on investment from strengthened programs and reduced fragmentation (eg. *beyondblue*)
- Prevention on national and state agendas
- Greater public support for the Government's agenda, and for the COAG agenda on early childhood education, child protection and human capital

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## Conclusion

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- Shifting the mediocre outcomes for children & young people will not occur by continuing to do what we have always done.
- A major change in whole of community attitudes & behaviors toward children is required.
- Too many of our responses are 'too little too late'
- Prevention responses to wicked problems are both cost effective and humane

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## *Population Prevention:*

- ***Radical***
- ***Powerful***
- ***Appropriate***

(Geoffrey Rose 1992)

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