



Families Australia publishes *National Family News* (NFN) ten times per annum. NFN contains information about latest major developments in national family policy, services and research.

Changes to carer payment

12 September: Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, announced that carers of children with severe intellectual, psychiatric or behavioural disabilities that result in challenging behaviour may be eligible for Carer Payment. The changes, to take effect from 1 July 2006, will benefit some parents who currently receive Parenting Payment and under the Welfare to Work package would otherwise be expected to undertake part-time work when their youngest child reaches the age of six.

More at: www.facs.gov.au

Domestic violence and homelessness

28 September: Domestic violence is a major factor contributing to homelessness in Australia, particularly for women, according to an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *Female SAAP clients and children escaping domestic and family violence 2003/04*. In 2003/04, approximately 33% or 32,700 of the 100,200 clients accessing the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) were women escaping domestic violence. Of the 52,700 accompanying children accessing SAAP, 66% or 34,700 were children accompanying women escaping domestic violence.

More at: www.aihw.gov.au

Welfare to work

21 September: The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the Hon. Kevin Andrews MP, announced that parents with special family circumstances can seek temporary exemptions from the need to look for a job or mutual obligation activities when Welfare to Work changes come into effect from 1 July

2006. Special family circumstances that may be taken into consideration in determining exemption from participation requirements include primary carers who are registered foster carers, recognised home schoolers and registered distance educators. They will also include primary carers with four or more school aged children as well primary carers of school aged children who are disabled or ill.

More at: www.dewr.gov.au

Impact of child care costs

19 September: The Department of Family and Community Services released Policy Research Paper No. 25: *Effects of child care demands and policies on household labour supply in Australia*. The findings suggest that non-parental child care costs in Australia are low on average, mostly because a significant amount of the care is informal with zero monetary cost.

More at: www.facs.gov.au

Chronic diseases amongst children

2 September: Asthma is the most common chronic disease among Australian children aged 0-14 years, according to an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *Selected chronic diseases among Australia's children*. The report discusses the incidence, prevalence and trends for three major chronic diseases among children: asthma, diabetes, and cancer. Asthma is a common cause of school absences: 24% of children suffering from asthma missed a day of school within the last two weeks, compared with 16% of children without asthma. Diabetes is on the rise among Australian children, although the total number of cases is relatively small.

More at: www.aihw.gov.au

Mentor marketplace: Phase II applications open

9 September: The Department of Family and Community Services is seeking applications for funding under Phase II of the Mentor Marketplace Program from eligible organisations to provide up to 15 new mentoring services for young people aged 12 to 25 years, particularly those at greatest risk of disconnection from their family, community, education, training and the workplace.

More at: www.facs.gov.au

Family relationship centres update

2 September: The Commonwealth Government has established a taskforce to provide advice on how best to implement the 65 new Family Relationship Centres. The taskforce will advise on the performance framework and practitioner standards for the Centres, and on the interface between the Centres and the Family Courts, the Family Relationship Services Program, and the child support system.

More at: www.ag.gov.au

Overseas born residents: latest figures

20 September: Almost a quarter of Australia's resident population at 30 June 2004 were born overseas, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This proportion (24%, or 4.8 million people) is the highest recorded since Federation. People born in the United Kingdom made up the largest group of overseas-born with 1.1 million people (or 6% of the total Australian population). Almost half of the overseas-born population in Australia (49%, or 2.3 million people) were born in Europe.

More at: www.abs.gov.au

Child protection: help sheet

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse issued a 'help sheet' on minimising child abuse risks in organisations in its *Child Abuse Prevention Newsletter* (Winter 2005). The *Newsletter* also contains a review of training issues in relation to statutory child protection work, and a model for working with families in need.

More at: www.aifs.gov.au

Population growth 1.1% pa

22 September: Australia's population increased to 20.3 million in March 2005, according the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In the year ended March 2005, Australia's population increased by 230,300 people, an annual growth rate of 1.1%.

More at: www.abs.gov.au

Petrol sniffing

12 September: The Commonwealth Government announced \$9.5 million in funding to tackle petrol sniffing in Central Desert Indigenous communities. On 23 September, the Commonwealth Government also announced that the Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services had been appointed to deliver the \$1 million Youth Wellbeing Project over three years to Indigenous communities in the Top End. A new information kit to help educate Indigenous communities about the harm caused by petrol sniffing was released.

More at: www.health.gov.au

*****SPECIAL FEATURE*****

Women's health

14 September: The Commonwealth Government released research from the ten-year Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, the most comprehensive study ever conducted on the health of Australian women, involving 40,000 women across the country. When completed in 2016, it will provide information on the health of Australian women over a period of 20 years.

At the halfway point, the study has already yielded evidence on trends and issues in the lives of Australian women of all ages. For example, the study found that:

- More than 90 per cent of younger women surveyed wanted to be mothers by 35, with 96 per cent of them wanting to combine work and mothering;
- The high rate of relationship breakdown among middle-aged women impacts on income levels and living arrangements. Over the study period, the middle-aged group has shown an increase in hours of paid work, and this has coincided with an improvement in their health indicators;
- For the older group, who are mostly in their 80s, hypertension and arthritis are the most common conditions suffered; and
- Women living in urban areas have better access to female doctors and higher rates of bulk billing than women living in rural areas.

More at: www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/wha/Reports/achievements_reports.html

*****SPECIAL FEATURE*****

Indigenous health and welfare

30 August: The 5th edition of *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, a joint publication by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, provided an overview of the health and welfare of Australia's Indigenous population.

Key findings were:

- Between 1996-2001, life expectancy at birth for Indigenous Australians was estimated at 59.4 years for males and 64.8 years for females, compared with 76.6 years for all males and 82.0 years for all females for the period 1998-2000, a difference of approximately 17 years for both males and females;

- Hospitalisation rates were 12 times higher for Indigenous Australians than for other Australians for care involving dialysis, and twice those for other Australians for both respiratory diseases and injury;
- The prevalence of disability among Indigenous people was higher at all ages. In 2002, over two-thirds of people aged 55-64 years, and one-half of people aged 45-54 years had a disability or long-term health condition;
- The average age of Indigenous mothers who gave birth in 2003 was 25 years, compared with an average age of 31 years for other mothers;
- For the period 2000-02, 78% of Indigenous mothers who gave birth were aged under 30 years, compared with 49% of other mothers;
- Indigenous people continue to experience lower employment levels (and higher unemployment levels than non-Indigenous people, with Indigenous adults in 2002 being more than twice as likely to be unemployed (13%) as non-Indigenous adults (4.6%);
- Indigenous people were about half as likely as non-Indigenous people to have a non-school qualification in 2002 (32% compared with 57%);
- Indigenous students continue to be under-represented in the higher education sector, accounting for only 1% of the total higher education population in 2003;
- Between 1996-2004, there were steady increases in Indigenous primary and secondary school enrolments and in apparent retention rates; and
- In the period 1994-2002, the proportion of Indigenous people aged 18-64 years in mainstream employment rose from 31% to 38% and the unemployment rate fell from 24% to 13%.

More at: www.aihw.gov.au

