

# RESEARCH SUMMARY

## Children's health and wellbeing in Hobsons Bay

**Our health is determined by much more than genes and lifestyle decisions. It is determined by the circumstances in which we are born, grow, live, work and age.**

Through its various functions, local governments play a major role in protecting, improving and promoting the health of its residents. As the closest level to the community, local governments work to understand the populations they serve and ensure all residents are provided with an environment which allows everyone to equally achieve the best personal health and wellbeing possible.

This research summary is aimed at providing information about the social and environmental conditions that affect the health and wellbeing of Hobsons Bay residents.

### **How do our early years impact on our health and wellbeing?**

Children's healthy development depends upon a range of elements, including growing up in an environment which has an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

A person's social and economic circumstances may affect their health throughout their life. It is well-documented that social and economic factors can have the most detrimental effect in our early life from prenatal to age 11, setting the foundations for our adult health (World Health Organisation, 2003).

While all parents want the best for their children, not all parents have the same resources to help their children grow up healthy. Parents' education and income levels

can create (or limit) opportunities to provide their children with nurturing and stimulating environments and to adopt healthy behaviours for their children to model (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008).

Research tells us that a child's experiences within the family and community have a lasting effect on whether they will make friends, enjoy school, form stable relationships and make healthy lifestyle choices (Najman et al, 2004). In particular, early childhood experiences contribute to a child's academic ability and performance and can influence their adult life.

Those who have poor experiences in early life are at greater risk of poorer emotional and physical health into adult life, which can lead to shorter life spans and experiences of disadvantage.

## What do we know about children living in Hobsons Bay?

### Population Characteristics

Data from the 2016 Census<sup>1</sup> shows that children aged between zero and 11 years make up 15.4 per cent of the Hobsons Bay population. This is similar to the percentage of children in this age group in Greater Melbourne.

**Table 1: Percentage of children aged zero to 11 years in Hobsons Bay (ABS, 2016)**

Age	Number	Proportion (per cent)
0 to 4	6,062	6.8
5 to 11	7,609	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,671</b>	<b>15.4</b>

Twenty per cent of Hobsons Bay children live in Altona Meadows, which also has the largest share of the municipality's total population. Seventeen per cent of children live in Newport, 16 per cent in Williamstown and 14 per cent in Altona North.

Over the coming decade, an increasing number of children will be living in Altona North (+798 children), Spotswood-South Kingsville (+301), Laverton (+264) and Williamstown North (+206). However, the number of children living in Seabrook is expected to fall by 158, as families in this neighbourhood mature. A similar trend is also expected in Altona Meadows (forecast.id, 2017).

There are 102 children in Hobsons Bay who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, an increase from 89 in 2011. An estimated 2.6 per cent of children aged zero to four have a disability, equating to around 157 people (ABS, 2015). A further 8.8 per cent of children aged

five to 14 are estimated to have a disability, equating to around 905 people.

One-third of households in Hobsons Bay are made up of couples with children, marginally higher than the rate across Greater Melbourne (32 per cent). In Hobsons Bay, 85 per cent of children aged zero to four years live in a two parent family, while nine per cent live with one parent. As children grow, they are slightly more likely to live in a single parent household, with 80 per cent of children aged five to 11 years living with two parents and 15 per cent living with one parent.

Between 2012 and 2016, Hobsons Bay experienced a 10 per cent increase in birth notifications. This rate of growth is slightly higher than Metropolitan Melbourne (8.6 per cent) and Victoria (7.1 per cent) over the same period. In 2017-18, there were 1,299 birth notifications, a marginal increase of four babies over the previous year (Hobsons Bay City Council, 2018).

### Health

Attendance at Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services, which are available from birth until three and a half years, is important to a child's developmental needs and for supporting mothers and families. Participation trends show MCH visits peak at four weeks of age and tend to decline before children reach three and a half years.

According to 2016-17 data, Hobsons Bay had a participation rate of 100 per cent for the initial home consultation and the four week visit. (Statistics for Victorian Communities, 2018a). The rate reduced to 86 per cent for the 12 month visit and to 67 per cent for the 24 month visit. Participation in the four week and 12 month visits had both improved over the

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, statistics in this section are sourced from ABS, 2016 Census of Population and

previous five years, while the 24 month visit remained steady.

According to the Commonwealth Department of Health, breastfeeding provides babies with the best start in life and is a key contributor to infant health. The most recent data from 2014-15 showed that 56.6 per cent of infants in Hobsons Bay were full breastfed at three months, and 42.9 per cent were fully breastfed at six months (Department of Education and Training, 2018). Both rates were higher than the Victorian averages (51.8 per cent and 34.9 per cent respectively).

Immunisation is important to protect children against disease and illness. Children in Australia receive immunisation up until four years of age. In 2017-18, immunisation rates in Hobsons Bay were as follows: 12 to 15 months (94 per cent), 24 to 27 months (90 per cent) and 60 to 63 months (95 per cent) (Hobsons Bay City Council, 2018).

The benefit of good dental health in adulthood is established in the early years. In Hobsons Bay, data for children who attend public dental health services show positive results in comparison with state averages (Dental Health Services Victoria, 2016). Children aged zero to five years have fewer decayed, missing or filled teeth, when compared to the average for Victorian children of the same age group (19 per cent vs 31 per cent). The rate for Hobsons Bay children aged from six to eight years is on par with Victoria (57 per cent), while the rates for children aged nine to 12 and 13 to 17 are slightly lower than for Victoria (61 per cent vs 64 per cent and 61 per cent vs 70 per cent respectively).

Additional data provides further insight into the health status of children in the Western Metropolitan Region (WMR).<sup>2</sup> In 2014, just over 60 per cent of children in Year Five ate the

minimum recommended serve of fruit. However, just 2.3 per cent ate the minimum recommended serve of vegetables.

Participation in physical activity influences many aspects of a child's healthy development, including promoting growth, weight control and cardiovascular fitness. In 2013, 56 per cent of children aged five to 12 years in the WMR undertook the recommended amount of physical activity every day, less than the Victorian rate of 62.2 per cent.

In 2013, around 9.5 per cent of children in the WMR (up to the age of 12 years) had asthma, lower than the Victorian rate of 11.3 per cent. Additionally, approximately 16.7 per cent of children aged zero to 12 in the WMR were exposed to second hand tobacco smoke in their homes, also lower than the Victoria rate of 18.5 per cent.

Finally, just over one-quarter (27.7 per cent) of family violence incidents reported in Hobsons Bay during 2014-15 occurred where children or young people were present, lower than the Victorian rate of 34.5 per cent.

## Development

Children benefit from kindergarten as it aims to develop social, emotional, intellectual, physical and language abilities, encourages family involvement, and helps prepare for the transition to school.

Between 2009 and 2015, participation rates in four year old kindergarten in Hobsons Bay improved from 91.1 per cent to 98.4 per cent (Statistics for Victorian Communities, 2018b). This improvement reflects a broader trend across Victoria, where the rate increased from 90.5 per cent to 96.9 per cent over the same period.

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<sup>2</sup> Data for the remainder of this section is drawn from ...  
All regional data is adapted from DET, 2018

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) measures how children in prep are progressing in relation to their health and wellbeing, social skills, emotional ability, language, communication skills and general knowledge. These are known as domains.

In Hobsons Bay, 19.5 per cent of children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains, similar to the Victorian rate of 19.9 per cent. A total of 8.7 per cent are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains, slightly below the Victorian rate of 9.9 per cent (AEDC, 2015).

**Table 2: Percentage of Hobsons Bay Children who are vulnerable on each AEDC domain compared to Victoria (AEDC, 2015)**

Domain	Hobsons Bay	Victoria
Physical health and wellbeing	6.2	7.9
Social competence	9.4	8.7
Emotional maturity	6.4	8.0
Language and cognitive skills	5.0	6.3
Communications skills and general knowledge	7.6	7.6

Table 2 shows the percentage of Hobsons Bay children who are vulnerable in each domain, compared to Victoria. Fewer children in Hobsons Bay are vulnerable in the domains of 'language and cognitive skills', 'emotional maturity' and 'physical health and wellbeing', when compared to Victoria. Conversely, slightly more children are vulnerable on the domain of 'social competence'.

Table 3 shows that children in Altona Meadows, Spotswood/South Kingsville and Altona North/Brooklyn are more developmentally vulnerable compared to children in other neighbourhood areas. In all

cases, the rate of vulnerability across two or more domains in these neighbourhoods was higher than the Victorian rate (AEDC, 2015).

**Table 3: Vulnerability across one and two or more domains (AEDC, 2015)**

Local Community	Vulnerability across domains (%)	
	One or more domains	Two or more domains
Altona/Seaholme	14.2	5.5
Altona Meadows	27.9	15.7
Altona North/Brooklyn	26.8	11.8
Laverton	Not available	
Newport	14.4	3.9
Spotswood/Sth Kingsville	17.5	14.0
Williamstown/Williamstown North	14.5	4.8
<b>Hobsons Bay</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>8.7</b>
<b>Victoria</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>9.9</b>

## What government policies relate to children?

### International

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) sets out the basic rights of children and the obligations of governments to fulfil those rights. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by Australia in 1990. The Convention defines a child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years'.

### Commonwealth

The Australian Government has responsibility for funding child care, family support services, and national curriculum directions.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) is an agreement between all Australian governments to work together to provide better educational and developmental outcomes for children using education and care services. As part of this, the National Quality Standard mandates that all providers are required to improve services that impact on a child's development and safety, and to provide families with information to assist their choices. Recent changes also provide for minimum requirements for caregiver qualifications and lower staff to child ratios.

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-20 represents a long-term approach to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children. It aims to deliver a substantial and sustained reduction in levels of child abuse and neglect over time.

The Universal Access to Early Childhood Education program ensures that a quality, early childhood education program is available for all children in the year before full-time school. The program is delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher for 15 hours per week.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was established to investigate how institutions like schools, churches, sports clubs and government organisations have responded to allegations and instances of child sexual abuse. In December 2017, the Royal Commission presented its final report to the Governor-General, including 409 recommendations which aim to make institutions safer for children. In June 2018, the Australian Government released its response, which includes the creation of the National Redress Scheme.

## State

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* aims to:

- promote children's best interests, including a focus on children's development
- support a more integrated system of effective and accessible child and family services, with a focus on prevention and early intervention
- improve outcomes for children and young people in the Child Protection and out of home care service system

Victorian Children's Services (defined as services providing care or education for four or more children under the age of 13 years) must meet the requirements of the *Children's Services Act 1996* and the *Children's Services Regulations 2009*.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework focuses on the learning and development of professionals who work with children from birth to eight years.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards establish minimum compulsory standards for organisations providing services for children to help protect children from all forms of abuse. The standards formed part of the Victorian Government's response to the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry, which took effect from 1 January 2016.

The Commission for Children and Young People was established through the enactment of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012*. The Commission reports directly to Parliament and is independent of government.

The Victorian Government has amended the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* so that early childhood education and care services cannot confirm enrolment of a child unless the parent/carer has provided documentation that shows the child is fully vaccinated for their age, is on a recognised catch-up schedule or has a medical reason not to be vaccinated. This so-called 'No Jab, No Play' legislation came into effect in January 2016.

## Local

Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2014-18 acknowledges the common needs of children and young people, while focusing on the specific issues particular to each life stage. It sets out Council's commitments in relation to the children and young people who live, study, work and recreate in Hobsons Bay.

### What is Council's role in relation to children's early years?

The role of local government is to provide services and infrastructure for the local community and plan for future needs. Council has a long tradition in providing direct services to children and families, particularly in the form of MCH and childcare.

Council also arranges kindergarten services and currently has four year old community kindergarten programs operating from Council owned facilities and managed under licence by community committees or not for profit agencies.

In addition, Council builds and maintains play grounds, open space and gardens, sporting facilities, bike paths and other child friendly infrastructure to support active participation of children within the community.

Through its social planning function (and supported by the Children and Young People's Plan 2014-18), Council is ideally placed to advocate for the needs of children, particularly when it comes to improvements to service provision in areas of need.

In response to the Victorian Child Safe Standards, Council is also a child safe organisation, committed to protecting children and preventing and responding to child abuse. This is embedded in the everyday thinking and practice of all Councillors, employees, contractors and Council volunteers.

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