



Australian Government

Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare

# Australia's welfare

# 2023

in brief





Australia's welfare

**2023**  
in brief



**The AIHW is a Corporate Commonwealth entity producing authoritative and accessible information and statistics to inform and support better policy and service delivery decisions, leading to better health and wellbeing for all Australians.**

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This publication is part of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Australia's welfare* series. A complete list of the Institute's publications is available from the Institute's website [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au).

ISBN 978-1-922802-91-0 (Online)

ISBN 978-1-922802-92-7 (Print)

ISSN 2651-9801 (Online)

### **Suggested citation**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) *Australia's welfare 2023 in brief*, catalogue number AUS 245, AIHW, Australian Government.

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Published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of data in this report. Please check the online version at [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au) for any amendments.



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# About Australia's welfare 2023

Australia's welfare 2023 is the AIHW's 16th biennial welfare report. It consists of 3 products:



## *Australia's welfare 2023: data insights*

This is a collection of 9 original articles on selected welfare issues, including homelessness and housing affordability, employment and income support following the COVID-19 pandemic and measuring quality in aged care. It is available as a printed report and online as a PDF.



## **Australia's welfare: topic summaries**

This is a collection of 42 web pages that present key facts on welfare in Australia, housing, education and skills, employment and income, social support, justice and safety, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



## *Australia's welfare 2023: in brief*

This presents key findings and concepts to tell the story of welfare and wellbeing in Australia. It is available as a printed report and online as a PDF.

All products can be viewed or downloaded at:  
[www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/australias-welfare](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/australias-welfare)

# At a glance: Profile of Australians



**Almost 26 million** people lived in Australia at 30 June 2022, with the population projected to be **30.8 million** by 2033–34



There were around **984,000** First Nations people at 30 June 2021, **an increase of 23%** (185,600 people) from 2016



**29% of Australia's population** were born overseas at 2021, **up from 23%** in 2001



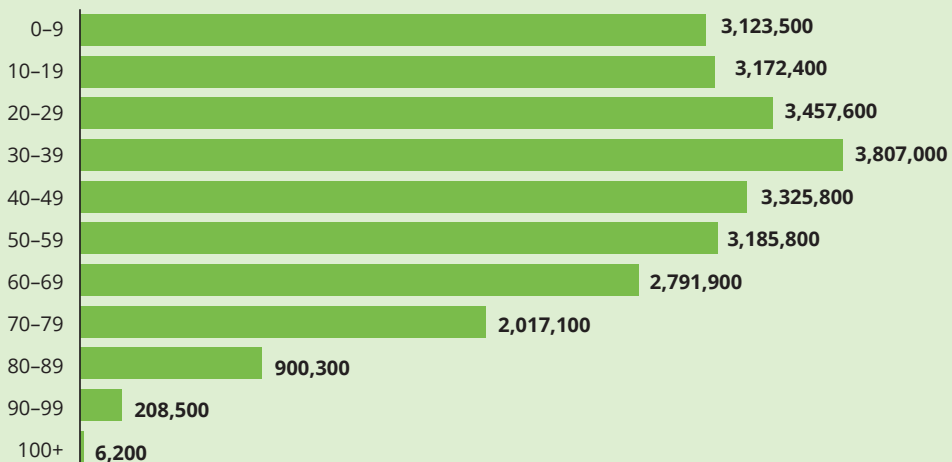
**2 in 3 (67%)** Australians lived in the 8 capital cities at 30 June 2022, **up from 65%** at 30 June 1992



**Australians are getting older**, with the median age increasing from 32.7 years at 30 June 1992 to 38.5 years at 30 June 2022

## People aged 20–49 made up a large share of Australia's population in 2021–22

Age group





# At a glance: Australia's welfare



**663,000 people**

were employed in the welfare workforce in 2022



**\$212.4 billion**

was spent on welfare-related services and payments by Australian and state and territory governments in 2021–22



**5.0 million people**

received an income support payment as at 31 March 2023



**178,000 children**

aged 0–17 were in the child protection system in 2021–22



**573,000 people**

were active participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme as at 31 December 2022



**4.4 million people**

were estimated to have some form of disability in 2018



**2.6 million people**

received Age Pension as at 31 March 2023



**Over 800,000 people**

aged 65 and over used home support services during 2021–22



**272,700 clients**

were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services in 2021–22



**3.8 million people**

aged 18 and over were estimated to have experienced physical and/or sexual family and domestic violence since the age of 15 in 2021–22



**2.1 million people**

aged 15–74 were enrolled in non-school qualifications in May 2022



**24,000 First Nations**

students were enrolled in university, at 2021

1

## What is welfare and wellbeing?



Broadly, welfare refers to the wellbeing of individuals, families and the community. The terms welfare and wellbeing are often used interchangeably.

Our welfare, or wellbeing, can be influenced by environmental, social and economic factors including housing and living arrangements, education, employment, income, safety, and social networks and connection.

Everybody needs support, but some people will need extra help at different times in their lives. This support might come from:



**family, friends and the community**  
(informal assistance)



**government and non-government organisations**  
(formal assistance).

**Supports can include:**

- government-funded income support payments such as Age Pension and JobSeeker
- welfare services such as employment services, child protection services and social housing
- tax offsets.

Health can positively, or negatively, affect a person's wellbeing. For example, a person who is in poor health may experience loneliness and social isolation. Good health may benefit a person's wellbeing by allowing them to be active socially and earn an income that supports them living independently.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Welfare in Australia](#)

# How much do governments spend directly on welfare?

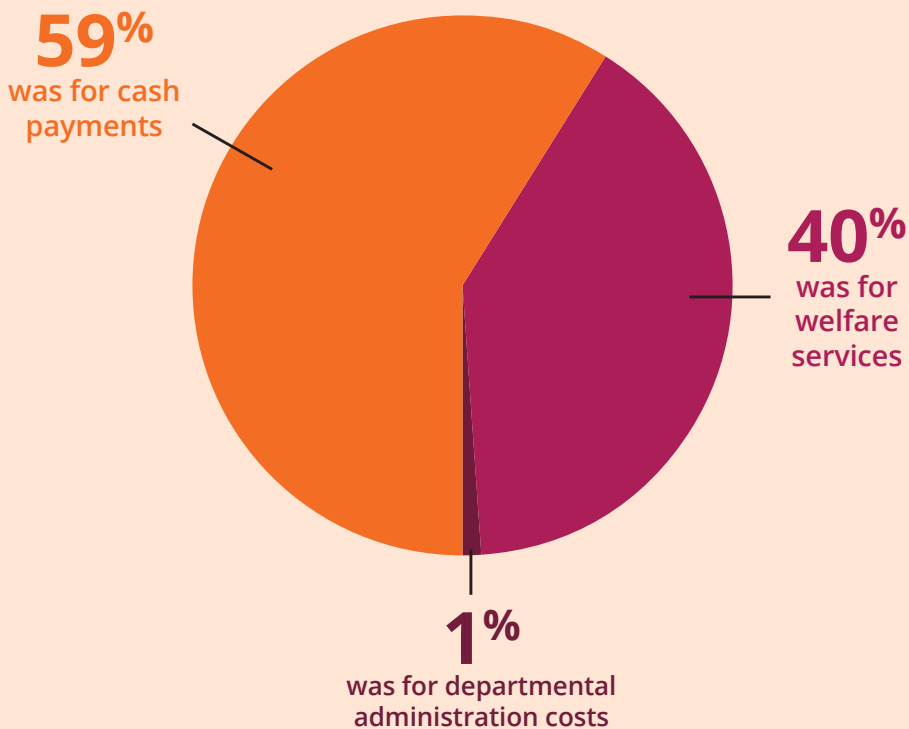


More than \$212 billion was spent on welfare in 2021-22

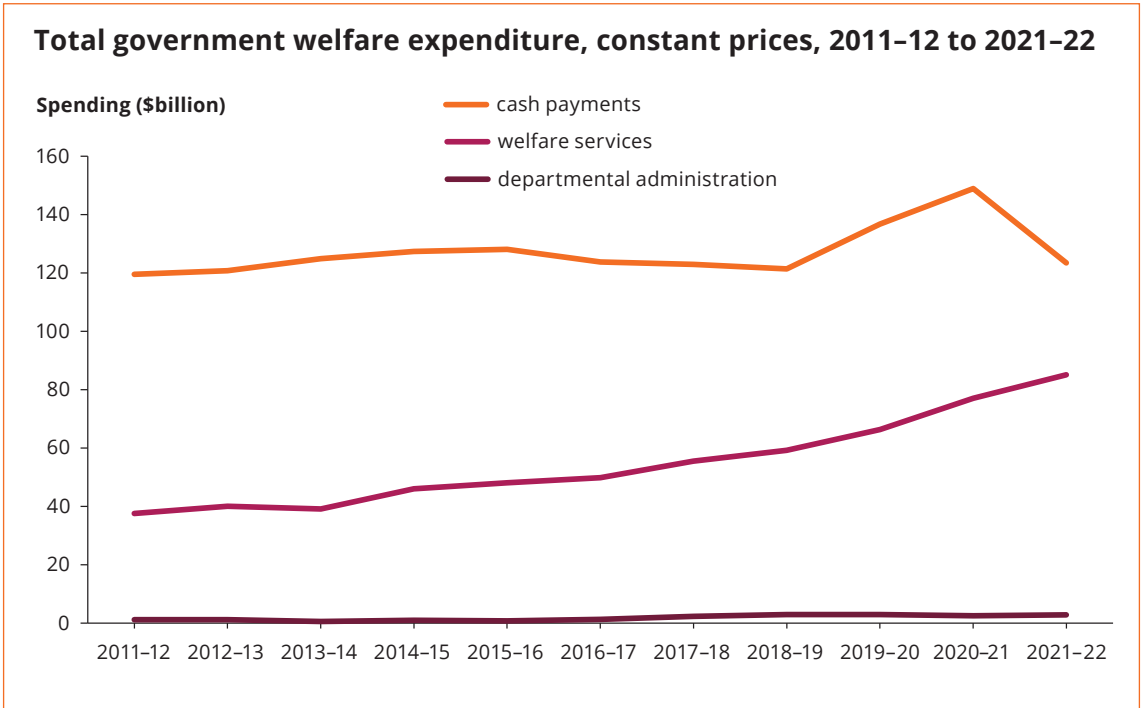
Welfare spending is designed to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the population. It includes spending on measures such as income support and social/economic employment related programs and services.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments spent an estimated **\$212.4 billion** on welfare-related services and payments in 2021-22.

Of this:



Following high rates of recent growth, welfare spending decreased by 8% (\$18.6 billion) between 2020–21 and 2021–22. The main driver of the decrease was likely the phasing out of economic measures implemented by the Australian Government in 2019–20 and 2020–21 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



For more, see Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Welfare in Australia](#)

## What does the welfare workforce look like?

Australia's welfare workforce includes people in paid employment who directly provide welfare-related services, such as child care, aged care or care for people with disability. A wide range of welfare-related services are provided through both public and private organisations. In 2022, almost 663,000 people were employed in the welfare workforce, making up 4.9% of total employment.

### Profile of welfare workers (based on the latest available data)



**4 in 5 (83%)**  
were female



**1 in 2 (49%)**  
work part time in the  
welfare workforce



**40.7 years**  
average age



**1 in 3 (32%)**  
had a bachelors degree  
or higher



**2.3%**  
First Nations people



### The welfare workforce is growing faster than total employment

Since 2012, the welfare workforce has increased by 65%.  
Over the same period, the total workforce grew by 20%.

For more, see Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Welfare in Australia](#)

## Volunteers and informal carers



**Volunteers contribute an estimated 489.5 million hours to the community over a 12-month period**

Volunteers substantially benefit their communities through providing important services to others. One in 4 (25%) Australians aged 15 and over participated in unpaid voluntary work through an organisation or group in 2020. Volunteering rates – which fell notably during the COVID-19 pandemic – were already declining prior to the pandemic; see Chapter 2 for more information on volunteering rates during the pandemic.

**In 2020, the most common types of organisations where people volunteered were:**



**31%**  
sports and recreation



**19%**  
education and training



**23%**  
religious groups



**16%**  
community/  
ethnic groups

Informal carers are another important source of help and assistance. They provide care to those who need it within the context of an existing relationship, such as a family member, a friend or a neighbour. The majority of informal carers are unpaid. In 2018, an estimated 2.65 million people provided informal care in Australia.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Social support](#)

## Giving contributes to our wellbeing

Charitable giving and philanthropy improve the wellbeing of Australians. It is important to charities and not-for-profit organisations as it provides a source of income, and people who give may do so for many reasons, including to 'give back', helping others and for personal satisfaction.



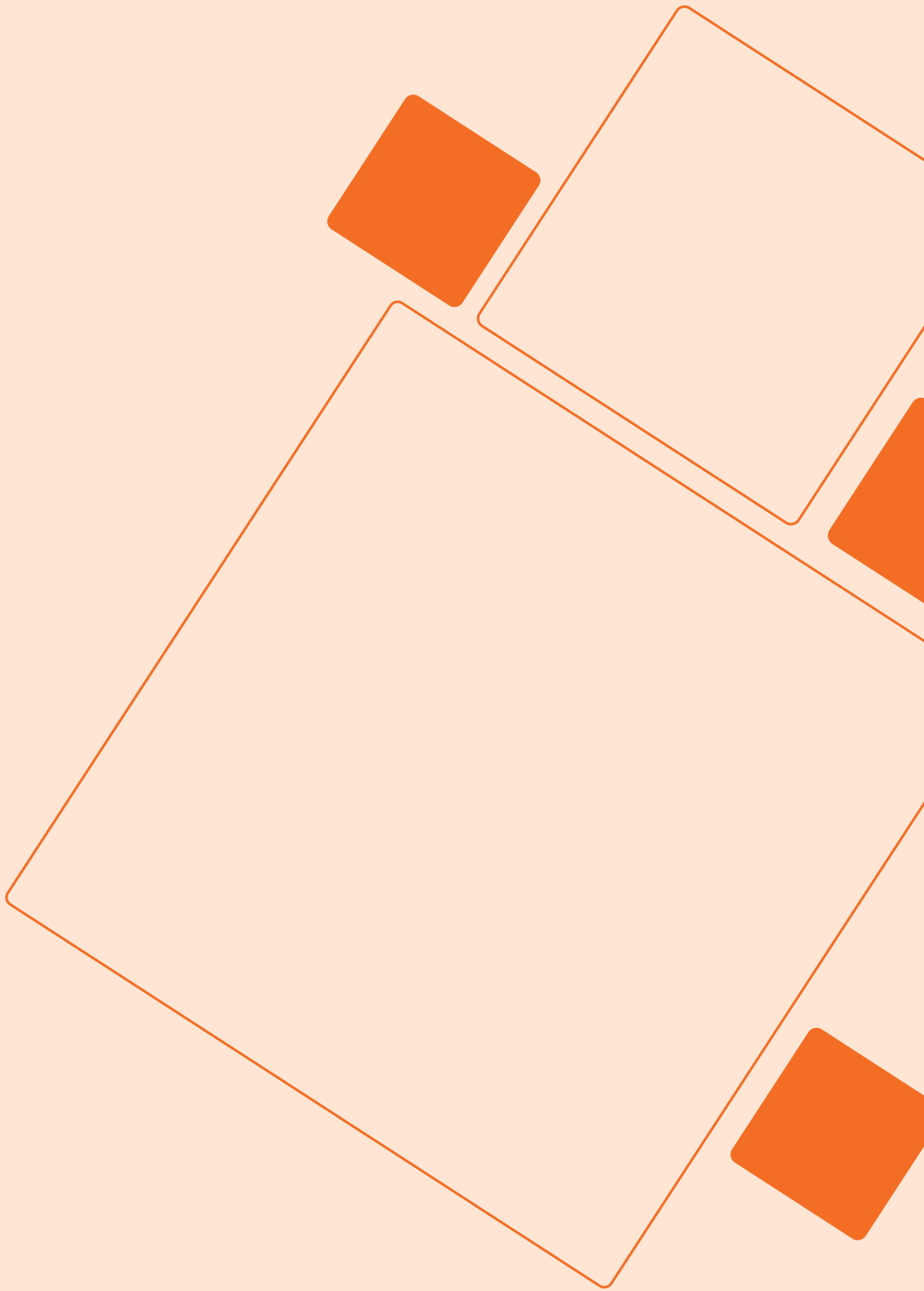
**3 in 5 Australians donated to a charity and among 119 countries, Australia ranks as the fourth most generous (based on the 'World Giving Index score' that takes into account the proportion of people donating, volunteering and helping strangers)**

The Australia Giving 2019 study reported the top 3 reasons why people gave to charity:

- they care about the cause (54%)
- want to help people less fortunate than them (41%)
- want to make a difference (33%).

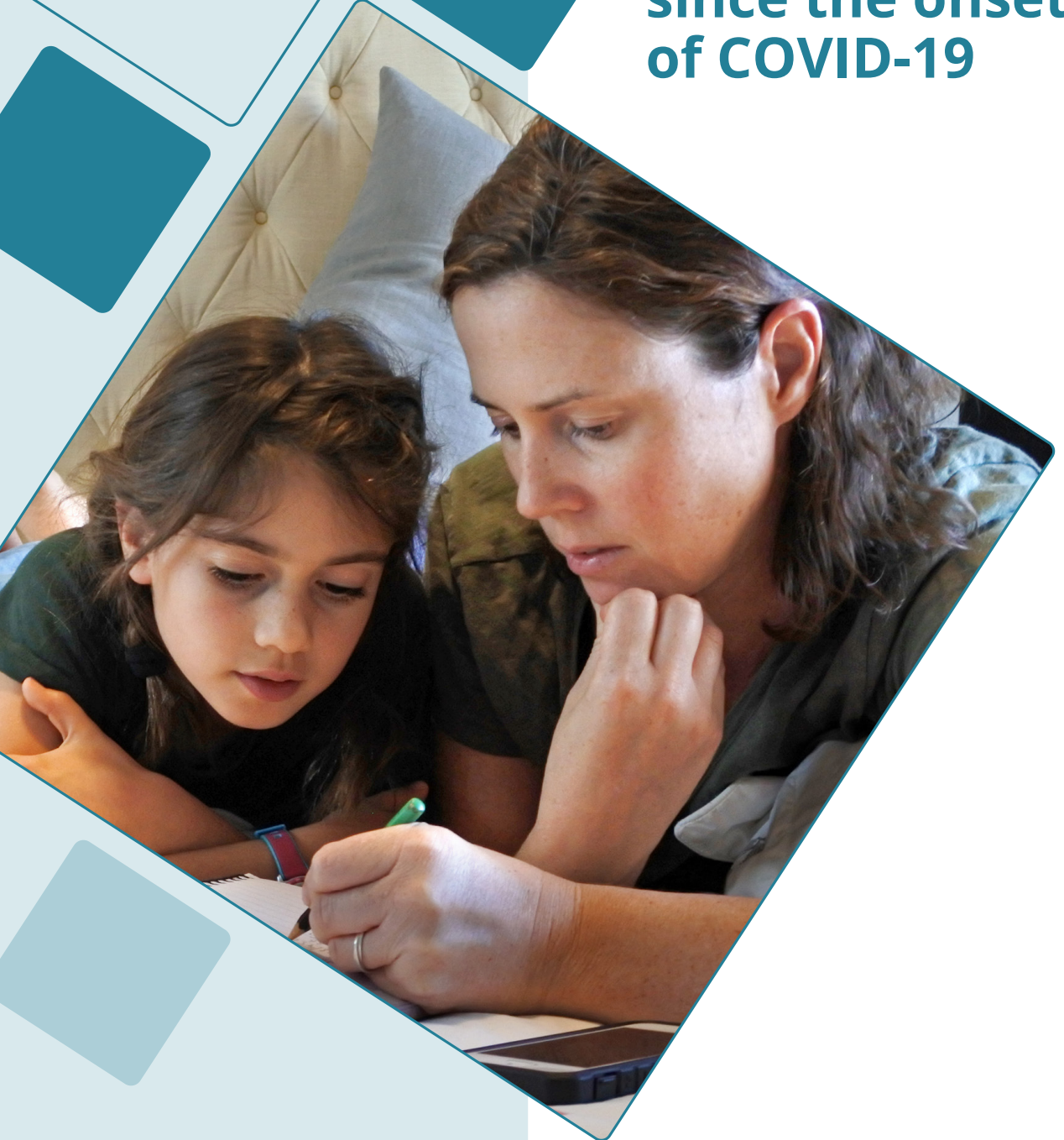
**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Welfare in Australia](#)





# 2

## Changes and challenges since the onset of COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a renewed focus on issues which impact the health, welfare and wellbeing of Australians. From early 2020, a range of public health interventions were put in place to help contain the spread of COVID-19. While many of these interventions have since been relaxed or removed entirely, lasting impacts continue to be felt across different aspects of our lives.

This chapter explores some of the key trends, changes and challenges that have emerged in Australia since the onset of the pandemic. The topics covered in this section reflect topical issues or measures that are especially useful for looking at changes in welfare and wellbeing during or since the pandemic at a national level; they are not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of changes across all aspects of welfare and wellbeing in Australia.



### The impact of COVID-19 on population growth

Australia's population growth has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to limit the spread of the disease. Following the easing of international border restrictions and the return of overseas migration in late 2021, Australia's population growth recovered to 1.2% in 2021–22, from a historical low of 0.1% in 2020–21.



Longer-term trends present prior to the pandemic continue to affect the size and distribution of the population, such as the declining fertility rate, the decline in the rate of internal migration, and the slower rate of mortality improvement observed in recent years.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Welfare in Australia](#)

Information in this chapter is drawn from various sources. In particular, ANUPoll data come from the [ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods](#) and the [ANUPoll Dataverse](#).

Reports sourced include: [Taking stock: Wellbeing and political attitudes in Australia at the start of the post-COVID era, January 2023](#); [Mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 period in Australia](#); [Hangovers and hard landings: Financial wellbeing and the impact of the COVID-19 and inflationary crises, August 2023](#).

## Our health

### Has COVID-19 led to more deaths than expected?

In Australia since the start of the pandemic, a total of 18,012 people have died with or from COVID-19 (registered by 31 May 2023). Of these, COVID-19 was the underlying cause of death for 79% (14,289).

#### What is excess mortality?

Excess mortality shows the difference between the actual number of deaths and the expected number of deaths (based on previous trends) in a defined time period.

While death patterns do naturally vary within and across years, the number of observed deaths in a given time period are expected to fall within a certain range. The number of deaths referred to here are those that fall outside the expected range and include both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 associated deaths, reflecting both the direct and indirect impact of the pandemic.

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw fewer deaths from all causes than we would expect in a typical year. There were decreases across key causes – most notably, deaths from respiratory disease including influenza.

However, by the third year of the pandemic (January–December 2022), Australia had recorded 10,587 more deaths than expected compared to the historical average. Of these, COVID-19 accounted for a high proportion of the higher than expected (excess) deaths.

Excess mortality continued for the first quarter of 2023 but was lower than the same period in 2022.

## Compared with historical trends:

2020	There were <b>5,228</b> fewer deaths than expected overall in Australia.	↓	However, taking statistical variation into account there were <b>1,955 fewer deaths than expected</b> (1,946 fewer in net terms).
2021	There were <b>2,378</b> more deaths than expected overall in Australia.	↑	However, taking statistical variation into account there were <b>355 more deaths than expected</b> .
2022	There were <b>18,634</b> more deaths than expected overall in Australia.	↑	However, taking statistical variation into account there were <b>10,587 more deaths than expected</b> .
Early 2023 January – March	There were <b>3,280</b> more deaths than expected overall in Australia.	↑	However, taking statistical variation into account there were <b>1,180 more deaths than expected</b> .

From the start of the pandemic to March 2023, there were **a net total of 10,176 excess deaths** in Australia (after taking into account deaths above and below usual variation).



Since the beginning of the pandemic Australia has had one of the lowest excess mortality rates compared with other countries with available data. Australia has had lower excess mortality than the United States, United Kingdom and most European countries, similar excess mortality to Canada and higher excess mortality than Japan and New Zealand (based on cumulative deaths compared to projected deaths based on past trends).

In the United Kingdom and the United States, life expectancy fell during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not the case in Australia based on the latest official life expectancy data to 2021.

**For more, see** [ABS Measuring Australia's excess mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic until the first quarter 2023](#); [ABS Provisional mortality statistics](#); [ABS COVID-19 mortality in Australia: Deaths registered until 31 May 2023](#); [Our world in data](#); [Public Health England: Health profile for England 2021](#); [Vital statistics rapid release: Provisional Life Expectancy Estimates for 2021](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## COVID-19 has caused considerable disease burden

One way to understand the impact of diseases and injuries on a population is to assess the burden of disease. This measure combines the years of healthy life lost due to living with ill health (non-fatal burden) with the years of life lost due to dying prematurely (fatal burden).

In 2022, COVID-19 was the eighth leading cause of total disease burden and accounted for:



151,400 years of healthy life lost



2.7% of the total burden

The burden from COVID-19 was predominantly fatal (73%) owing to the greater number of premature deaths caused. The burden was higher in males and highest in those aged 75–84 years.

These estimates include the direct impact of COVID-19 on years of healthy life lost in the Australian population. They do not include the impact of COVID-19 on other diseases (the risk of developing other diseases or the severity of existing conditions).

In 2022, COVID-19 was the:



5th leading cause of fatal burden (contributing 4.1% of the fatal burden)

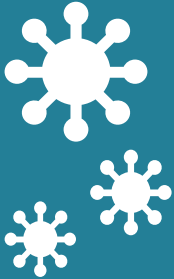


21st leading cause of non-fatal burden (contributing 1.4% of the non-fatal burden)

**For more, see** [Australian Burden of Disease Study](#)

## Long COVID is an emerging health issue

While there are limited data currently available, it is estimated 5% to 10% of COVID-19 cases in Australia result in the development of long COVID.



### What is long COVID?

According to the World Health Organization, long COVID describes COVID-19 cases with the continuation or development of new symptoms 12 or more weeks after the initial SARS-CoV-2 infection, with symptoms lasting for at least 2 months with no other explanation.

Around 1 in 5 (22%) people with long COVID report they have limitations in their daily activities and a reduced quality of life. Persisting symptoms can impact on workforce participation, including delays in returning to work, and ongoing residual difficulties that impact the ability to perform the same duties or limit working hours.

Research into long COVID is important to improve associated health and wellbeing outcomes and to provide evidence to inform policy and clinical guidance.

**For more, see [Long COVID in Australia – a review of the literature publication](#)**

### Have deaths by suicide increased during the pandemic?

While there was a rise in the use of mental health and crisis services during the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic was not associated with a rise in deaths by suicide in 2020 and 2021. Preliminary national mortality data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that the age-standardised rate of death by suicide in Australia was lower in 2020 (12.1 per 100,000 population) and 2021 (12.0) than in 2019 (13.1).

**For more, see [Suicide self harm monitoring website](#)**

# Our welfare and wellbeing

## Life satisfaction is lower than before the pandemic

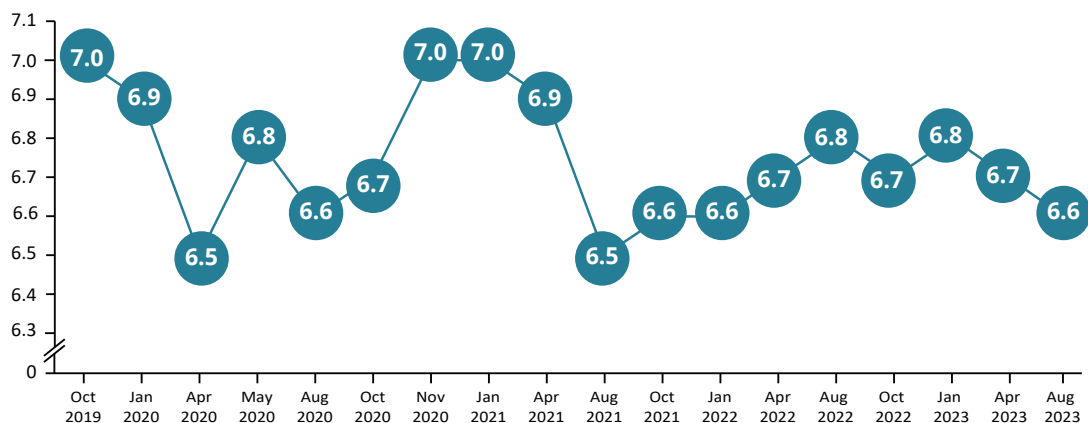
Information about life satisfaction – how satisfied people feel about their life in general – in Australia before and during the COVID-19 pandemic come from a number of sources and these may not be directly comparable.

Between 2001 and 2018, the average level of life satisfaction in Australia was fairly stable based on analysis of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. The ABS General Social Survey shows average life satisfaction pre-pandemic was 7.5 out of 10 in 2019 (and 7.6 in 2014) and was lower during the pandemic (7.2 in 2020) except for those aged 70 and over.

This finding is further supported by the ANUPoll survey that found average life satisfaction fell during the early stages of the pandemic (from 6.9 out of 10 in January 2020 to 6.5 in April 2020), rising again as infection rates and lockdown conditions eased (6.8 in May 2020). Over the pandemic period, average life satisfaction varied: the highest level was reported in November 2020, and the lowest in April 2020 and August 2021. Average life satisfaction increased from August 2021, with a slight decline between January 2023 and August 2023 (from 6.8 to 6.6). However, it remains lower than in late 2020, early 2021, and pre-pandemic.

### Life satisfaction fell early in the pandemic, and as at August 2023, it remains lower than it was pre-pandemic

Average life satisfaction



Note: The life satisfaction question asks how satisfied you feel about life in general, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel 'not satisfied at all' and 10 means 'completely satisfied'.

Source: ANUPoll.

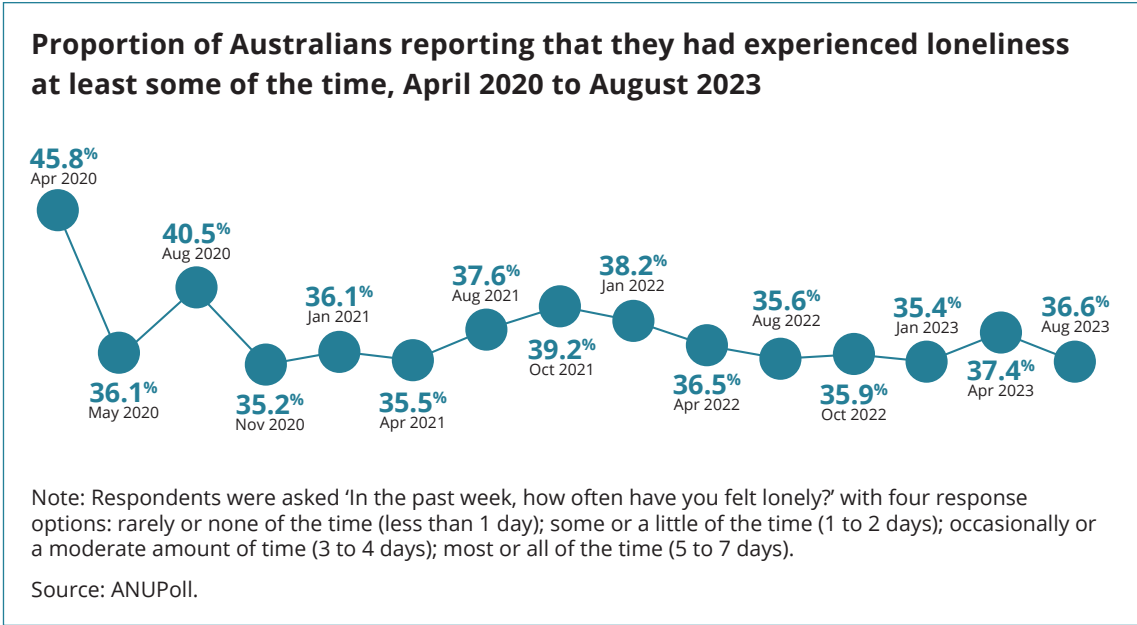
For more, see [ANUPoll](#); [ABS General Social Survey](#) and the [HILDA Survey: statistical reports](#)



## A lower proportion of people are feeling lonely compared with early in the pandemic

Loneliness among Australians was already a concerning issue prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the HILDA survey show that from 2001 to 2019 about 1 in 5 Australians agreed with the statement 'I often feel very lonely'; falling slightly from 21.2% in 2001 to 18.6% in 2019.

Data from the ANUPoll, which asked respondents 'In the past week, how often have you felt lonely?', showed that there were very high levels of loneliness in the early months of the pandemic, but these soon declined. In April 2020, 46% of Australians reported feeling lonely at least some of the time – the highest level recorded during the pandemic. In the 3 years since, levels of loneliness initially declined, then have fluctuated slightly. As at August 2023, 37% of Australians reported having experienced loneliness at least some of the time in the week prior to the survey.



## Frequency of social contact has fallen

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, levels of social contact with friends and relatives had been declining in Australia. Results from HILDA show that between 2001 and 2019, the average frequency of social contact (in-person and online) decreased from 4.65 to 4.32 on a scale of 1 (less often than once every 3 months) to 7 (every day).

Frequency of social contact has been declining across all age groups in Australia for at least 2 decades, with data from the HILDA survey showing a decline of 13% overall from 2001 to 2021.

The proportion of Australians who had face-to-face contact at least once a week with family and friends outside their household dropped markedly in 2020 (42%, compared with 68% in 2019), based on the ABS General Social Survey.

**For more, see** [ANUPoll](#); [HILDA Survey: statistical reports](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## Average levels of psychological distress have not returned to pre-pandemic levels

Looking at the average levels of psychological distress before and during the pandemic can provide insight into the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on our wellbeing.

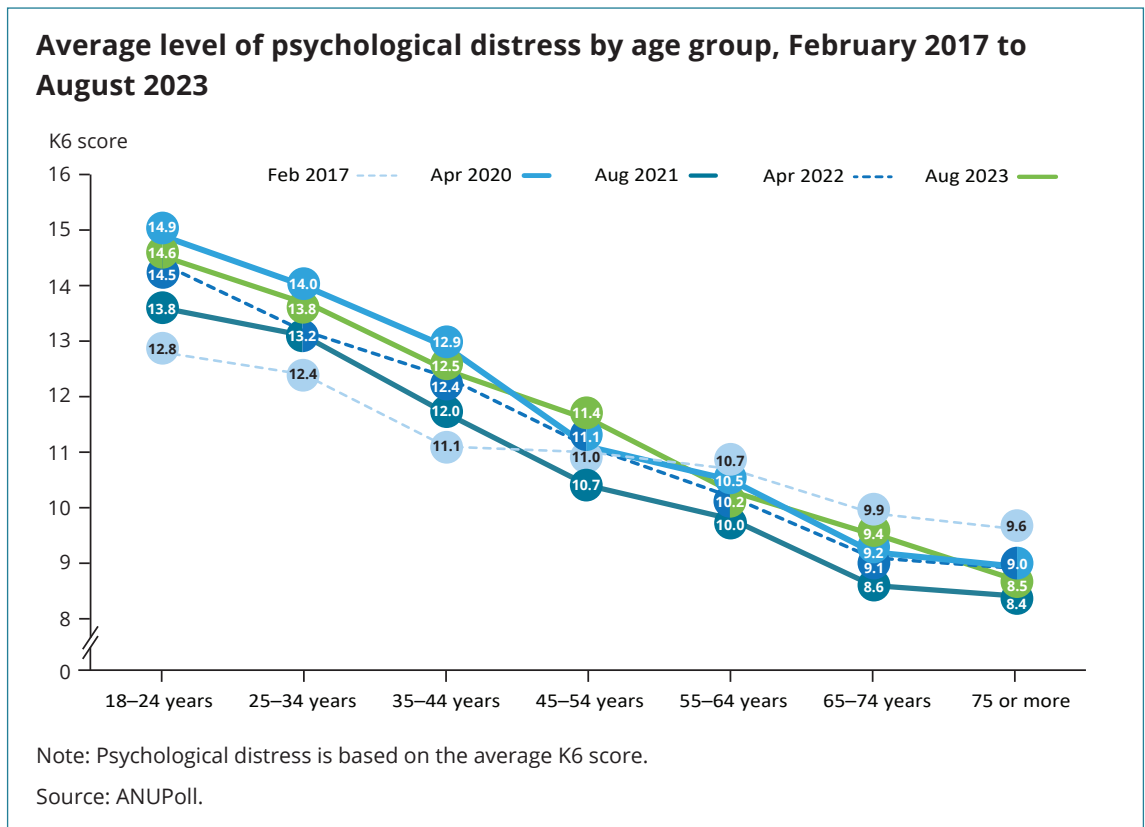
The ANUPoll, collected during the pandemic, shows there have been some notable changes to the average psychological distress score:

- **Pre-pandemic** (February 2017), the average level of psychological distress for adults was 11.2.
- **In the early months of the pandemic** (April 2020), the average level of psychological distress had increased to a high of 11.9, before declining to 11.1 in April 2021.
- **Between August and October 2021**, the average level of psychological distress increased from 11.3 to 11.7.
- **From January to April 2023**, the average psychological distress score rose from 11.3 to 11.8 (also 11.8 in August 2023) – above pre-pandemic levels and similar to the peaks in April and October 2020 (11.9 and 11.8, respectively).

## Average levels of psychological distress rose for younger people

Compared with older adults, younger adults (aged 18–44) have higher levels of psychological distress and their level of distress increased during the pandemic:

- **Younger adults (aged 18–44):** average levels of psychological distress were higher from 2020 to 2023 than pre-pandemic. The greatest increase was seen for those aged 18–24, from an average level of 12.8 to 14.6, between February 2017 and August 2023.
- **People aged 55 and over:** there were improvements in the average level of psychological distress overall, since the start of the pandemic.



**For more, see ANUPoll and The use of mental health services, psychological distress, loneliness, suicide, ambulance attendances and COVID-19**

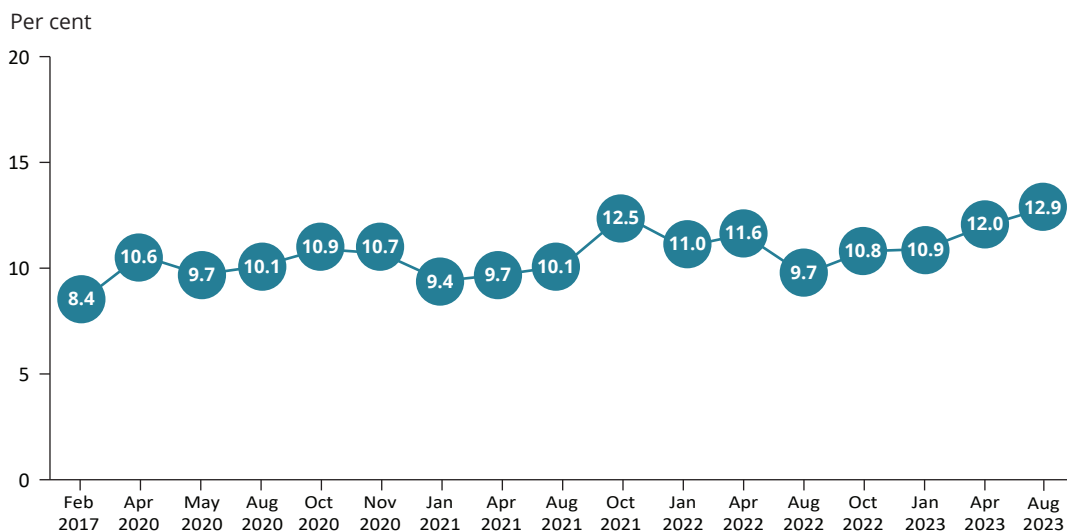
## Rates of severe psychological distress remain above pre-pandemic levels

There are a number of sources of data about levels of psychological distress in Australia and these may not be directly comparable.

Data from the ABS National Health Survey (NHS) show that prior to the pandemic, there was no consistent trend in the proportion of adults (aged 18 and over) experiencing high or very high levels of distress from 2004–05 to 2017–18, as measured by the Kessler 10 scale. Data from the 2020–21 NHS are not comparable to earlier years due to a break in series.

The ANUPoll shows the proportion of adults experiencing severe psychological distress (as measured by the Kessler 6 scale) increased at the start of the pandemic and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In April 2020, 10.6% of adults were experiencing severe psychological distress, a notable increase from pre-pandemic (8.4% in February 2017). As of August 2023, the proportion of people reporting severe psychological distress (12.9%) remained above the rate in 2017, similar to the peak in October 2021 (12.5%).

### Adults experiencing severe psychological distress, February 2017 to August 2023



Note: The K6 scale has been used to categorise those survey respondents experiencing 'severe' psychological distress.

Source: ANUPoll.

## Rising inflation has led to declines in the real value of wages

### What is the CPI?

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures changes in the price of a 'basket' of goods and services which account for a high proportion of expenditure for urban households.

Consistent with the experience in other OECD countries, annual inflation accelerated in 2022. The CPI grew by 6.1% over the year to June quarter 2022, which at the time was the fastest increase since June 2001. Annual growth in the CPI peaked at 7.8% over the year to the December quarter 2022 and has subsequently moderated to 6.0% over the year to the June quarter 2023.

Inflation is forecast to fall, with the CPI forecast to grow by 3 1/4% over the year to the June quarter 2024, according to the 2023–24 Federal budget.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, average weekly ordinary time earnings (AWOTE) for full-time employees grew at an average annual rate of 2.5% from November 2012 to November 2019 in nominal terms. In the 6 months to May 2020, AWOTE for full-time employees increased steeply by 3.3% (to \$1,714). The sharp rise reflects compositional changes in the structure of employment in the early months of the pandemic, in particular the loss of relatively low paid jobs led to a rise in average earnings. From May 2020 to May 2023 AWOTE for full-time employees grew at an average annual rate of 2.4%.

The growth in AWOTE has been slower than the rise in inflation, resulting in declines in the real value of wages. After adjusting for changes in the CPI, real AWOTE for full-time employees has been falling in annual terms since May 2021. Real AWOTE fell by 4.1% over the year to November 2022, and by 2.0% over the year to May 2023. This compares to annual increases of 0.4–1.4% from November 2017 and November 2019.

### **A similar pattern of declines in real wages can be seen using the Wage Price Index (WPI).**

The WPI can be used to examine changes in wage rates and is not affected by compositional shifts in employment (that would affect the above-mentioned earnings measure).

While the WPI had the fastest annual growths in over a decade to the March and June quarters 2023 (3.7% and 3.6%, respectively, compared with 2.2% annual growth between June 2013 and June 2020), the WPI has not kept pace with inflation. As a result, the real value of the WPI has been falling in annual terms since the June 2021 quarter. Over the year to the June 2023 quarter the real value of the WPI fell by 2.3%.

## Changing patterns of growth in household income through COVID-19

While wages data provide important information on changes in living standards, many families do not solely rely on income from wages. For that reason, it is also important to look at changes in household income and how this has changed at different points of the income distribution.

### **The ABS has produced estimates of household income, wealth and consumption:**

- Before the onset of the pandemic, equivalised (equivalised income adjusts for household, size and composition) gross disposable household income was growing fastest for households in the highest and lowest quintile of the income distribution both in nominal and real terms. Real household income for the highest and lowest quintiles, after adjusting for inflation using the ABS Households Final consumption expenditure implicit price deflator, grew at an average annual rate of 2.3% and 2.2%, respectively, between 2003–04 and 2019–20. This compares with growth of 1.5–1.8% in the other quintiles over the same period.
- From 2019–20 to 2020–21 the fastest increases in real equivalised gross disposable income per household were experienced by households in the lowest quintile of the income distribution (5.8% increase, compared to 3.0–4.7% increases for other quintiles). This reflects the COVID-related government economic support packages, such as the introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement for working-age income support recipients.
- From 2020–21 to 2021–22, households in the lowest and second lowest income quintiles saw their real income fall (by 2.2% and 0.6%, respectively), in line with the unwinding of some economic support measures. This compares to slight increases of 0.9–1.2% in other quintiles.
- Over the two-year period from 2019–20 to 2021–22, real household income grew at an average annual rate of 1.7% for households in the lowest income quintile, compared with growth of 2.0–2.3% for other quintiles.
- Over the whole period from 2003–04 to 2021–22, real incomes grew across the income distribution with the fastest growth experienced by households in the highest and lowest income quintiles (2.3% and 2.2% growth, respectively).

## Changes in household income across the income distribution

The standard approach for adjusting changes in income for changes in prices is to create real estimates that use overall price indexes, such as the CPI. While this approach is sound, it does not take into account that different households may face different financial pressures (such as mortgage cost increases being higher in 2022 than increases in rental costs). The ANU has constructed a living cost index that accounts for different prices faced at different points of the income distribution. The following are based on estimates from ANU's microsimulation model, PolicyMod, prepared for this report by the Centre for Social Research and Methods:

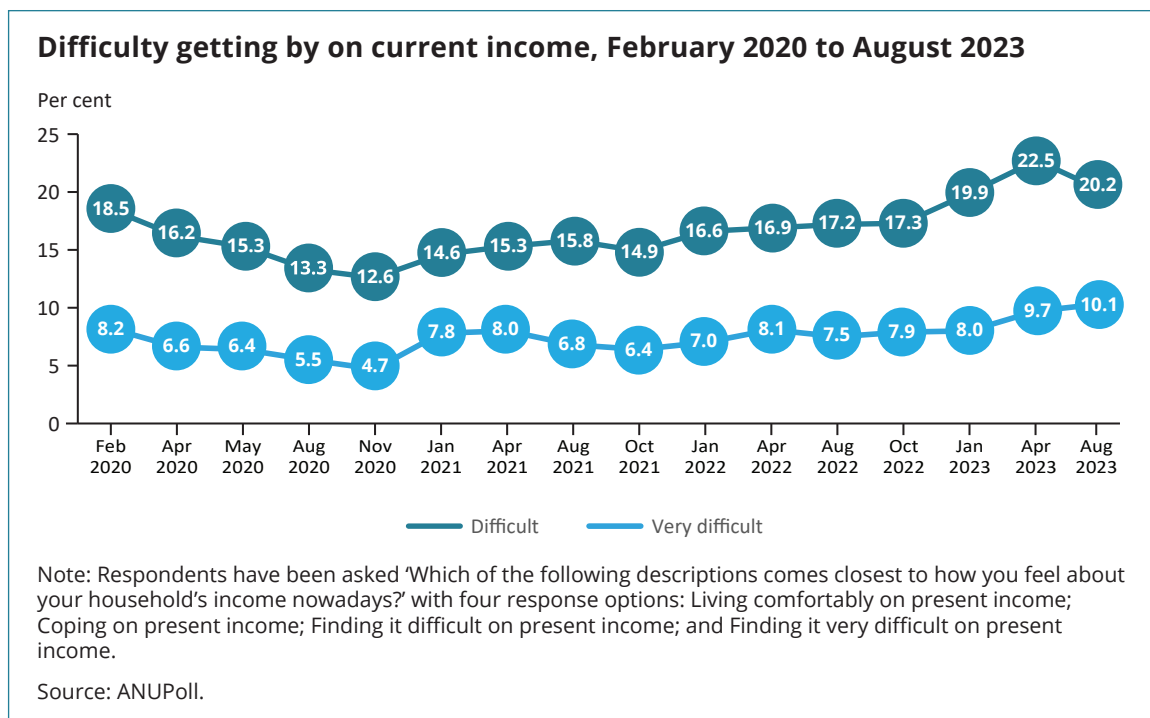
- In 2022, nominal income growth differed across the income distribution. The lowest income quintile (quintile 1) is estimated to have growth in equivalised nominal disposable income of 4.6% compared with the highest income households (quintile 5) of 3.8%. The stronger growth of nominal income for quintile 1 is driven by the indexation of welfare payments by the CPI which, in 2022, grew more strongly than wages.
- In the 12 months to December 2022, the largest falls in estimated real equivalised disposable household income were experienced by households in the middle-income quintiles (6.5% and 6.7% decline in quintiles 3 and 4), compared with declines of 3.2% and 4.5% in the lowest and highest quintiles, respectively.
- Over the period, 2019–2022, the third and fourth quintiles experienced modest declines in household income (1.6% and 1.8%, respectively), compared with increases in all other quintiles (0.6%, 0.1% and 2.0%, for lowest, second and highest quintiles, respectively).

These estimates do not take account of changes announced in the 2023–24 Federal Budget nor increases to the minimum and award wages that took effect on 1 July 2023. In addition, inflation is forecast to fall. According to the 2023–24 Federal Budget the CPI is forecast to grow by 3 1/4% over the year to the June quarter 2024 after growing by 6% over the year to the June quarter 2023.

**For more, see** ABS Australian National Accounts: [Distribution of Household Income, Consumption and Wealth & National Income, Expenditure and Product](#) and Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Employment and income](#)

## Financial stress is on the rise

Based on the ANUPoll, Australians are more financially stressed now than at any other time during the pandemic. In August 2023, 30% of Australians reported finding it difficult or very difficult to live on their present income (10.1% found it very difficult) – above the levels reported before and during the pandemic (27% in February 2020 falling to 17% in November 2020). Increases in financial stress are related to recent rises in inflation.



ANUPoll data show that not all Australians are experiencing the same levels of financial stress.

People who rented their home had higher levels of financial stress than people with a mortgage: in August 2023, 41.3% of people renting reported finding it difficult or very difficult on their present income – an increase from 33.3% in October 2021. However, over the same period from October 2021 to August 2023, people with a mortgage experienced the greatest change in financial stress, with the proportion of those finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income doubling (from 15.2% to 30.9%).

In August 2023, those who live in households with relatively low incomes were considerably more likely to report that they are experiencing financial stress: around half of those in the lowest income quintile (51.5%) were finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Employment and income](#), and [ANUPoll](#)



## Changes to income support



Income support receipt rose during the height of the pandemic, but Australians returned to a declining reliance on income support by September 2022.

Over the last 2 decades, the proportion of the Australian population aged 16 and over receiving income support payments (such as unemployment, disability, parenting and age-related payments) has been falling, from a high of around 29% (between June 2001 and 2003) to 24% in June 2019, the lowest level in 20 years.

In March 2020, 24% of people aged 16 and over were receiving income support payments. This rose to 28% between March 2020 and June 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Income support receipt then gradually declined from June 2020 and by June 2022 had returned to pre-pandemic levels, remaining relatively stable to March 2023.

## Financial pressures — cost of housing

House prices have risen across Australia over the decade to 2023. The median transfer price for established houses in major cities and across most non-major cities areas increased substantially. For example, the median house transfer price in Sydney increased from around \$615,000 in the first quarter of 2013 to around \$1.2 million at the start of 2023. Throughout 2020, conditions were more favourable for people to buy a home.



Interest rates for housing loans during 2020 were the lowest since the 1960s which led to record lending for owner-occupied housing, peaking around May 2021.

Two cohorts of home owners with a mortgage may be at risk of being unable to meet housing loan costs as interest rates rise: people who do not have the income to accommodate increases in interest rates beyond a certain level, and people who started a fixed interest rate for a fixed period of time and face large increases in repayments when these terms finish.

Given the sharp rise in housing loan interest rates during the second half of 2022 and into 2023, the value of non-performing loans will provide critical insights into whether households can continue to meet their housing loan repayments. However, household savings accumulated during the pandemic may have an impact on the risk profile among home owners with a mortgage.



The cost of rental accommodation has also increased markedly over recent times, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Advertised rents are important to understand potential barriers faced by people seeking a new rental lease. Over the 12-months to June 2023, median advertised rents increased by 11.5% in capital city areas; Sydney, Melbourne and Perth increased by 13%. Canberra (-2.8%) was the only capital city area where advertised rents fell over the period. Vacancy rates were also very low during this period at around 1.1% in capital city areas and 1.5% in regional areas.

Rental affordability is broader than advertised rents. Rents paid by existing and new tenants (CPI data) are important to understand housing affordability in context with other cost of living pressures, describing the broader experience of cost changes compared with advertised rents.



Across Australia, rents paid increased by 2.5% in the June quarter 2023 and 6.7% annually; the largest annual rise since 2009. Among the capital cities, Brisbane (8.9%), Perth (8.2%), and Sydney (7.3%) had the largest annual increases, while Hobart (2.9%) had the smallest increase.

These data demonstrate that rents more broadly are rising at a notably slower rate than advertised rents, however, with continued low vacancy rates rents may not have yet peaked. Also, at 6.7% over the year to the June quarter 2023, rents are rising at a faster rate than the overall CPI (6.0%).

While rents have risen, housing costs as a share of income have risen considerably faster for households with a mortgage than for households that rent since 2021, due to rises in interest rates.

For information on rental stress for those receiving rent assistance, see page 45.

**For more, see** [ABS Consumer price index](#); [ABS Australian national accounts](#); [ABS Lending indicators](#); [ABS Total value of dwellings](#); [Core Logic rental market update](#); [Reserve Bank of Australia Interest rate and yields](#); [Australian Prudential Regulation Authority Quarterly authorised deposit-taking institution statistics](#); [ANU Housing Cost Trends and Projections: Research Note](#) and [Australia's welfare topic summaries: Housing](#)

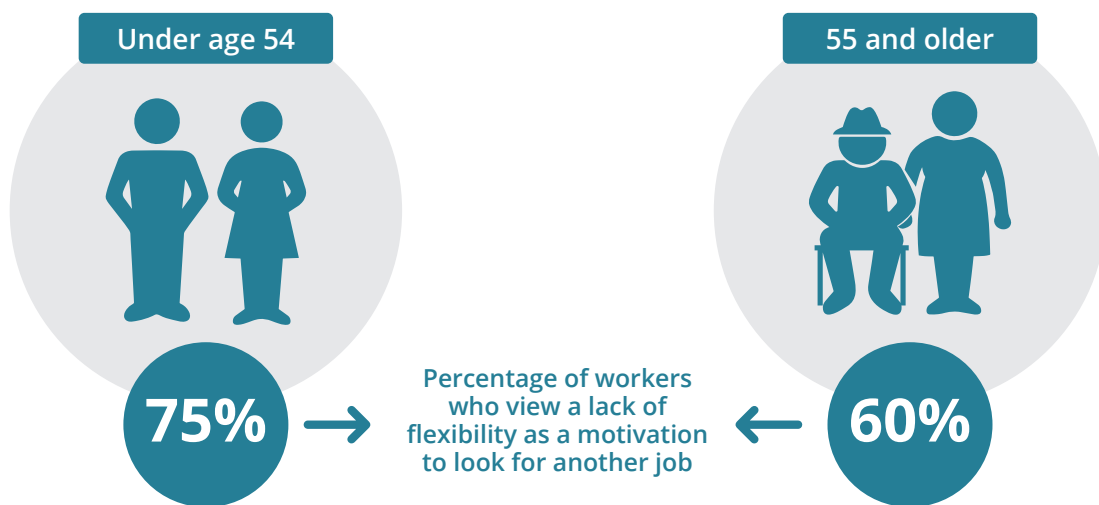
## Lasting impact of COVID-19 on our working arrangements

Many changes to working arrangements, such as working from home, were accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and show no signs of reverting back.



More than twice as many people aged 18 and over with a job are now working from home most days – increasing from 13% of people prior to the pandemic (before 1 March 2020) to 30% in April 2022, according to the ABS Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey.

**Access to flexible work is important for worker retention, especially among younger age groups.**



Based on 2023 State of the future of work

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Employment and income](#) and [Work future's 2023 State of the future of work](#)

## Volunteering remains below pre-pandemic levels

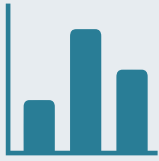


Data from the ABS General Social Survey show that in 2006 and 2010, more than 1 in 3 people aged 18 and over reported undertaking unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in the last 12 months (34% and 36%, respectively). This declined in subsequent years, prior to the pandemic; falling to 31% in 2014 and 29% in 2019. The decrease continued throughout the pandemic, with 1 in 4 people undertaking voluntary work through an organisation in the last 12 months in 2020 (25%).

ANUPoll data, collected more frequently since the onset of the pandemic shows in April 2023, 33% of people had undertaken voluntary work in the previous 12 months – which was lower than before the pandemic (36% in late 2019), but higher than in April 2022 (27%).

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Social support](#) and [ANUPoll](#)

## The role of data during the pandemic



The availability of a range of data sources has been critical in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic because governments have needed ongoing analysis and timely information to make swift, evidence-based decisions to prevent the spread, and minimise the impact, of COVID-19.

This also includes the use of data to help understand the indirect impact of the pandemic on other areas such as employment, mental health, education and housing.

From the start of the pandemic, the availability and use of data have been at the forefront of public discussion in Australia. More than any other recent event, COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for timely and reliable data. The daily count of new COVID-19 cases quickly became one of the main news stories every day and data-based terminology such as ‘flattening the curve’ became a part of everyday conversation. The demand for rapid and close to real-time data since the onset of COVID-19 has been notable and is a lasting consequence of the pandemic.

The pandemic propelled health, welfare and wellbeing data into the spotlight, highlighting some gaps in the information we have, but opening the door to innovation and transformation of the health information landscape.

**For more, see [Australia’s welfare 2023: data insights](#)**

# 3

## Welfare, welfare services and supports



Information about people's welfare and the support services they use are critical for understanding the population's wellbeing, measuring progress and working to improve outcomes for all Australians. Many aspects of life are important for wellbeing including education and skills, employment and income, housing, social support, and justice and safety.

## How many Australians are participating in education and training?

Education has been shown to have an overall positive effect on people's wellbeing. Higher levels of education are associated with an increased likelihood of being employed, improved income and better health.



Almost 3 million people aged 15–74 (16% of 15–74-year-olds) were studying in May 2022. Of these, 2.1 million were enrolled in non-school qualifications such as a university degree, certificate or diploma.

In May 2022, 63% of Australians aged 15–74 (or 12.0 million people) had completed a non-school qualification. This is an increase from 56% in 2013.

Of those with a non-school qualification in May 2022:

- 6.1 million people (32% of people aged 15–74) had a non-school qualification at the bachelors degree level or higher.
- 5.6 million people (30%) had a certificate, diploma, or advanced diploma as their highest non-school qualification.



### **The number of apprentices and trainees is increasing**

At 30 June 2022, 415,200 apprentices and trainees were training in Australia; up 22% since June 2021.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Education and skills](#)

**See also** Welfare of children, younger adults and people 65 and over on pages [51–63](#)

## How many Australians are employed?

Having a job helps people to support themselves, their families and their communities, and employment underpins our economic output as a nation.

In July 2023, the seasonally adjusted:



employment rate (for people aged 15–64) was  
**77.5%**



unemployment rate was  
**3.7%**

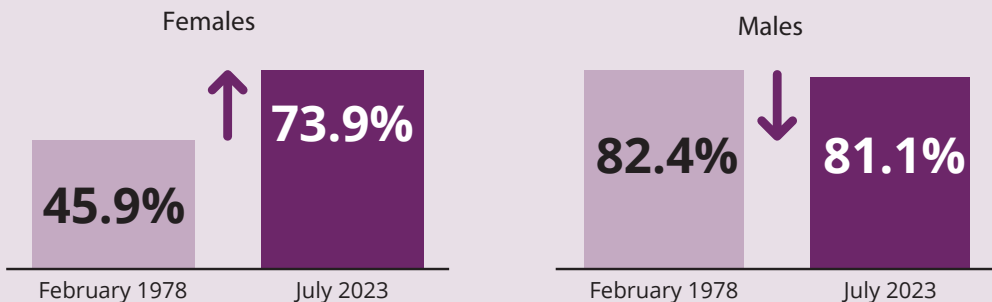


underemployment rate was  
**6.4%**

Australia's employment rate has been steadily increasing over time, from 64% in February 1978. This is despite recessions (early 1980s and 1990s), the 2008–09 Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic we saw:

- the largest ever monthly fall in employment (a drop of 583,300 employed people aged 15 and over in April 2020)
- the lowest employment rate observed in almost 20 years (at 69.5% in May 2020)
- the employment rate recover within one year (74.8% in March 2021) and continue to improve, reaching a record high in November 2022 (77.7%).

The growth in employment rates (for people aged 15–64) over the last 45 years has been driven by females





## Changes to full- and part-time employment



Full- and part-time employment has been steadily increasing since the late 1970s, but the number of people in part-time employment declined faster during COVID-19 than in previous recessions or economic downturns.

The share of employed people in part-time employment decreased from 32% in March 2020 to 30% in April–May 2020, similar to the share in 2013. It returned to 31–32% for most months from June 2020 until March 2022, then stabilised around 30% until July 2023.

## Higher education and employment

Educational qualifications other than those attained in school are associated with improved employment status.



### **Employment rates increase with higher educational attainment**

In May 2023, the employment rate of people (aged 15 and over) with a postgraduate degree as their highest level of educational attainment was 83%, for people with a Bachelor degree it was 79%, and for people with Year 12 or equivalent it was 68%.

## People accessing employment services

The Australian Government funds employment services so people receiving income support have access to support that will help them find and keep a job. The number of people registered with the main employment services programs were:

- 645,600 in mainstream employment service programs (including Workforce Australia Services, Workforce Australia Online and Transition to Work) as at 31 March 2023
- 273,600 in Disability Employment Services (DES) program as at 31 March 2023
- 79,600 in ParentsNext as at 31 March 2023
- 33,900 Community Development Program participants as at 30 September 2022.



The number of people in mainstream employment services has **declined by 25%** between June 2005 and March 2023 (from **856,200** to **645,600** people)



The number of DES participants more than doubled between June 2011 and June 2022, from **145,400** to **296,500**

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Education and skills & Employment and income](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## Who receives income support?



**5.0 million Australians received income support as at 31 March 2023 (or almost 1 in 4 (24%) people aged 16 and over)**

Australia's social security system aims to support people who cannot, or cannot fully, support themselves, by providing targeted payments and assistance. Where this is a regular payment that helps with the everyday costs of living, it is referred to as an income support payment.

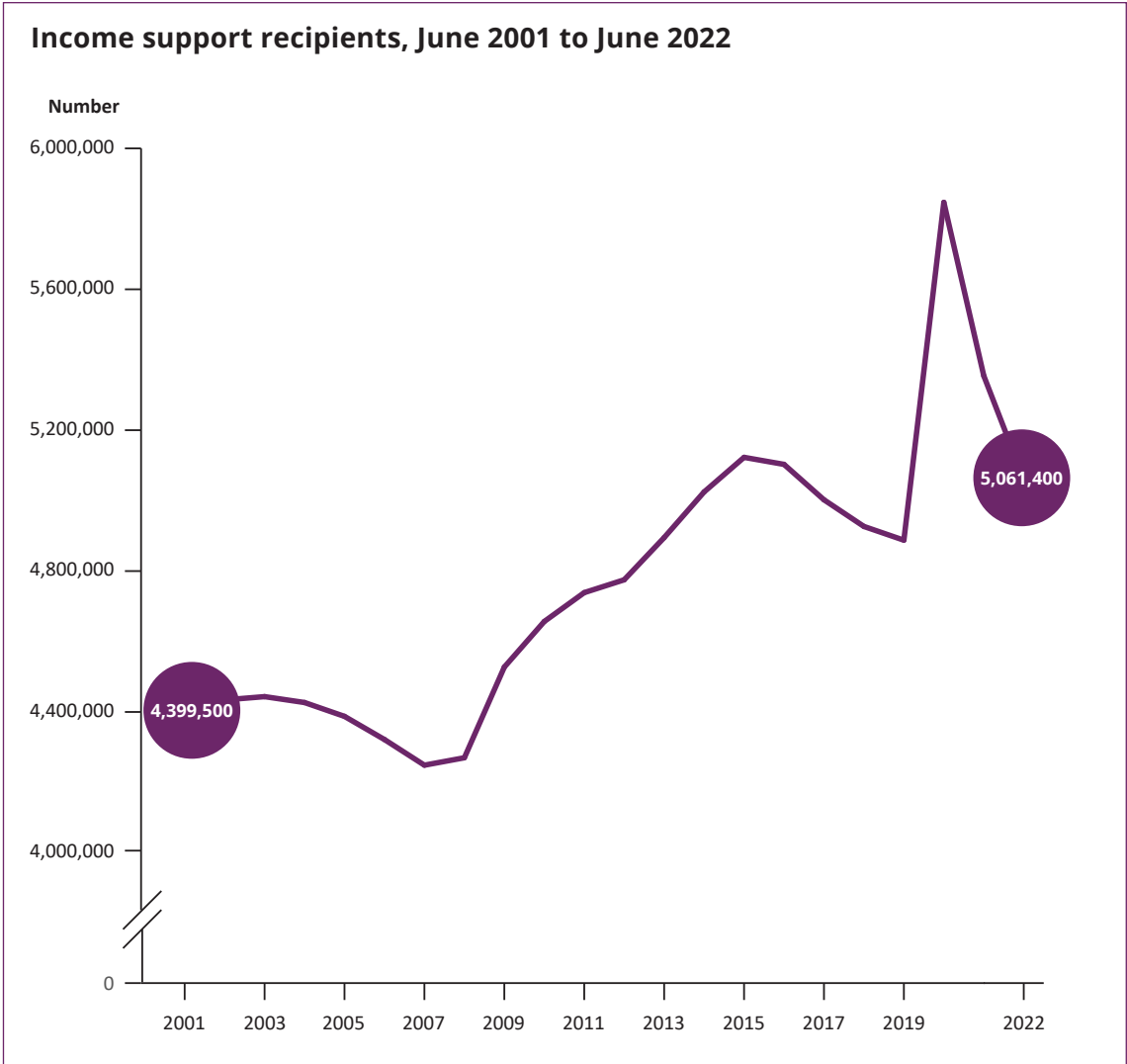
Of the 5.0 million people aged 16 and over receiving an income support payment as at 31 March 2023:

- 52% (2.6 million people) received Age Pension
- 16% (809,700) received unemployment payments (JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance (other))
- 16% (769,300) received Disability Support Pension.

**Before March 2020**, the proportion of people (aged 16 and over) receiving income support payments had been generally falling, reaching its lowest level in 20 years in June 2019 (24% compared with 28–29% in 2001–2005). This reflected, in part, labour market conditions as well as changes to the social security system.

**During the COVID-19 pandemic**, reliance on income support increased steeply following the introduction of social distancing and business-related restrictions. Increases were mostly driven by the number of people receiving unemployment payments, which doubled from 886,200 to 1.6 million between March and June 2020.

**More recently**, overall income support receipt had returned to pre-pandemic levels by June 2022 and remained relatively stable to March 2023 (24% of the population aged 16 and over). The proportion of the population aged 16 and over in receipt of unemployment payments had returned to pre-pandemic levels by June 2022 (4.3%), before falling further to 3.8% by March 2023 (76,500 fewer people than in March 2020).



**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Employment and income](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## Income and other support for people with disability



**Around 4.4 million Australians (18% of the population) had some form of disability in 2018**

Not all people with disability need or use formal and informal assistance. For those who need formal support, specialist services are available to assist participation in all aspects of everyday life. At 31 March 2023, there were around:

- 769,300 people receiving Disability Support Pension
- 345,000 people receiving other income support payments who – due to an impairment – had a work capacity of fewer than 30 hours per week
- 273,600 participants in the Disability Employment Services (DES).

During 2021–22, DES achieved about 107,000 employment placements, a 6% increase from 2020–21 (when the number of placements was around 102,000).

At 31 December 2022, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) had more than 573,000 active participants with approved plans.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Social support & Employment and income](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## How affordable is housing?



**Over recent times, the price of housing has increased for those wanting to purchase a home and for people renting a home**

Measuring housing affordability is not straightforward and can include a range of factors. Measures often focus on people with low-to-moderate incomes because they may be less likely to be able to respond to financial-related shocks (such as unexpected job loss).



**Rents increased by 6.7% over the year to the June quarter 2023, the largest annual rise since 2009**

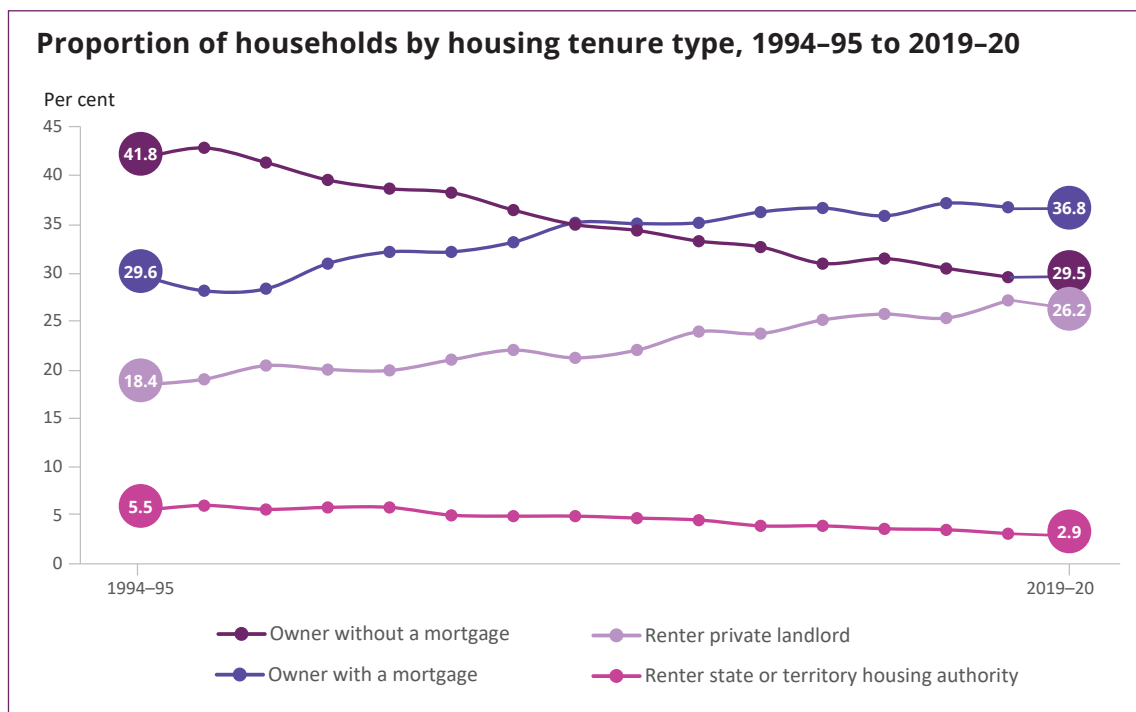
Among low-income households, those in the private rental market were more likely to be in housing stress than homeowners.

## How many Australians are homeowners?



According to the Census, in 2021, 6.2 million Australian households were homeowners; more than double the households that were renting (2.9 million)

ABS Survey of Income and Housing data show that in the 25 years to 2019–20, the proportion of households owning their home without a mortgage has decreased and the proportion of households renting through private rental agreements increased.



Census data shows that while home ownership rates have remained at around 67–70% since the early 1970s, the rates have varied markedly for different age groups over time. Between 1971 and 2021, there have been decreases in home ownership rates for:

- 25–29-year-olds: from 50% to 36%
- 30–34-year-olds: from 64% to 50%
- 50–54-year-olds: from 80% to 72%.

For more, see Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Housing](#)

## People receiving housing assistance

Many people cannot afford to rent or buy a home, so government support programs provide Australians with housing assistance. The programs available are diverse, ranging from financial support to government-owned public housing.

Australians on low or moderate incomes renting through the private rental market may be able to receive government assistance with the cost of housing.



**1.3 million income units (individuals or families) received Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) as at the end of June 2022; down from 1.7 million in 2020**

In 2022, around 582,400 (44%) income units were considered to be in rental stress after receiving CRA. An extra 372,600 income units or almost three-quarters (72%) of all income units would have been rental stress without receiving CRA in 2022.

In 2021–22, around 815,500 people were living in social housing:

- 67% were in housing managed by state and territory governments or public housing
- 27% were in housing managed by community-based organisations
- 6% were in state owned and managed Indigenous housing.

Social housing households represent a decreasing share of total Australian households – steadily declining from 4.7% in 2008 to 4.1% in 2022.



**174,600 households are waiting for public housing; around two-fifths of these are 'greatest needs' households**

Social housing targets specific vulnerable groups, such as people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In 2021–22, 82% of newly allocated public housing dwellings were provided to households in greatest need; up from 74% in 2013–14.

## How many people experience homelessness?



**2.2 million Australians have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives**

People experiencing homelessness, and those at risk of homelessness, are among Australia's most socially and economically disadvantaged. On Census night in 2021, around 122,500 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness in Australia – an increase of 6,000 people since 2016. The rate of homelessness has fluctuated between 51 people per 10,000 population in 2001 and 48 in 2021. The rate fell between the last 2 Census collections; from 50 people per 10,000 in 2016 to 48 in 2021.

People experiencing homelessness may be staying temporarily with other households, sleeping rough or living in supported accommodation. Living in severely crowded housing is the most common type of homelessness (39% of people experiencing homelessness).

## Who receives homelessness services?



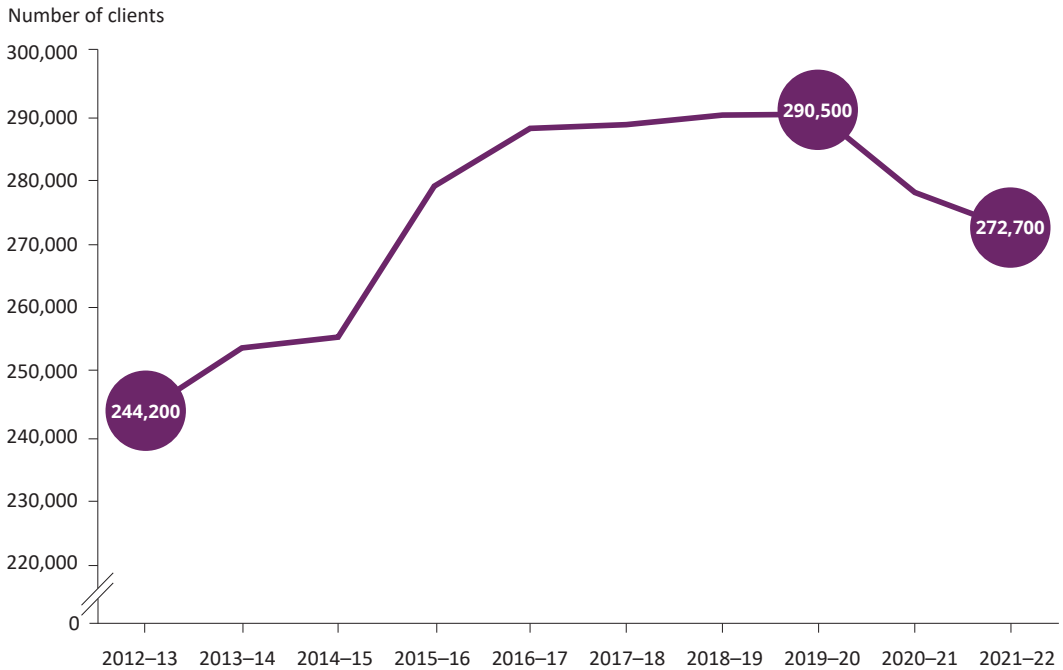
**Over half of people receiving specialist homelessness services are at risk of homelessness**

Across Australia, Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) agencies provide services aimed at prevention and early intervention, crisis and post-crisis assistance to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The number of people assisted by SHS agencies decreased from about 288,300 to 272,700 between 2016–17 and 2021–22. People seeking support from SHS agencies accounted for 1.1% of the Australian population in 2021–22.



## Number of SHS clients, 2012–13 to 2021–22



Financial difficulties was one of the most common reasons for seeking assistance throughout 2011–12 to 2021–22 (a reason for around 40% of clients). The most common **main reason** for seeking assistance was family and domestic violence (27%).

In 2021–22, SHS agencies assisted around 108,000 clients who had experienced domestic and family violence. Of these clients, most (76%) were female.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Housing](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## How common is family, domestic and sexual violence?



**An estimated 3.8 million adults (20% of the population) reported experiencing physical and/or sexual family and domestic violence since the age of 15, at 2021–22**

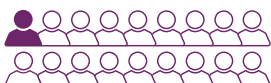
Family, domestic and sexual violence occurs across all socioeconomic, demographic and age groups, but predominantly affects women and children.

In 2021–22, it is estimated that:



**1 in 6 women**  
17% or 1.7 million

and



**1 in 18 men**  
5.5% or 527,000

have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15



**1 in 4 women**  
23% or 2.3 million

and



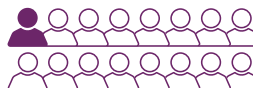
**1 in 7 men**  
14% or 1.3 million

have experienced emotional abuse by a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15



**1 in 5 women**  
22% or 2.2 million

and



**1 in 16 men**  
6.1% or 582,000

have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15

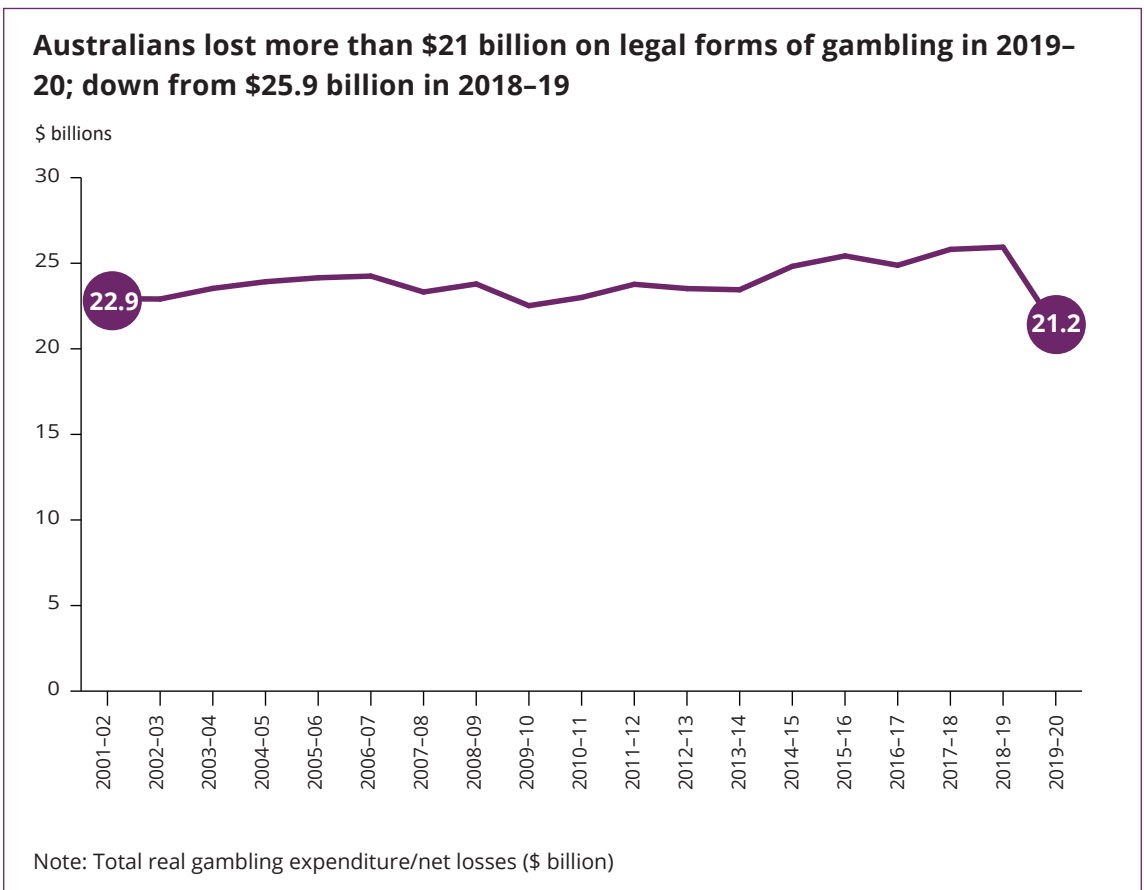
**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Justice and safety](#)

## Gambling in Australia

Gambling is a major issue in Australia, affecting the health and wellbeing of individuals and families in a range of ways. In 2022, an estimated:

- 3 in 4 (73%) Australian adults gambled in the past 12 months, with lotteries/scratchies the most common products.
- 2 in 5 (38%) Australian adults gambled at least weekly; higher for men (48%) than women (28%).

Almost half (46%) of Australian adults who gamble are at risk of, or are already experiencing, gambling harm, at 2022.



**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Social support](#)

## How many Australians are in prison?



**The prison population increased from 29,380 at 30 June 2012 to 40,591 at 30 June 2022 (or an increase from 167 to 201 per 100,000 adults)**

People in prison are some of the most vulnerable people in society and often come from disadvantaged backgrounds. They may experience higher rates of homelessness, unemployment and mental health disorders. In 2018:

- More than half (54%) of prison entrants reported they were unemployed during the 30 days before prison.
- 2 in 5 (40%) prison entrants reported a previous diagnosis of a mental health disorder, including alcohol and drug misuse.



**Almost 3 in 4 (73%) prison entrants had been in prison before, and almost half (45%) of prison entrants had been in prison within the previous 12 months**

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Justice and safety](#)

# Welfare of children

Childhood is an important time for healthy development, learning and establishing the foundations for future wellbeing. Most Australian children are safe and doing well. However, childhood can also be a time of vulnerability. A child's outcomes can vary depending on where they live and their family's circumstances.



## At a glance



334,400 children aged 4 or 5 were enrolled in a preschool program in 2022, down 1.3% since 2021



48% of children aged 0–5 and 33% of children aged 0–12 used Australian Government subsidised child care (such as centre-based day care and outside school hours care) in the March quarter 2022



3.7% of children aged under 5 had disability, in 2018



92,400 children aged under 7 had an approved NDIS plan, at 31 December 2022



There were 208 finalised adoptions in Australia, in 2021–22



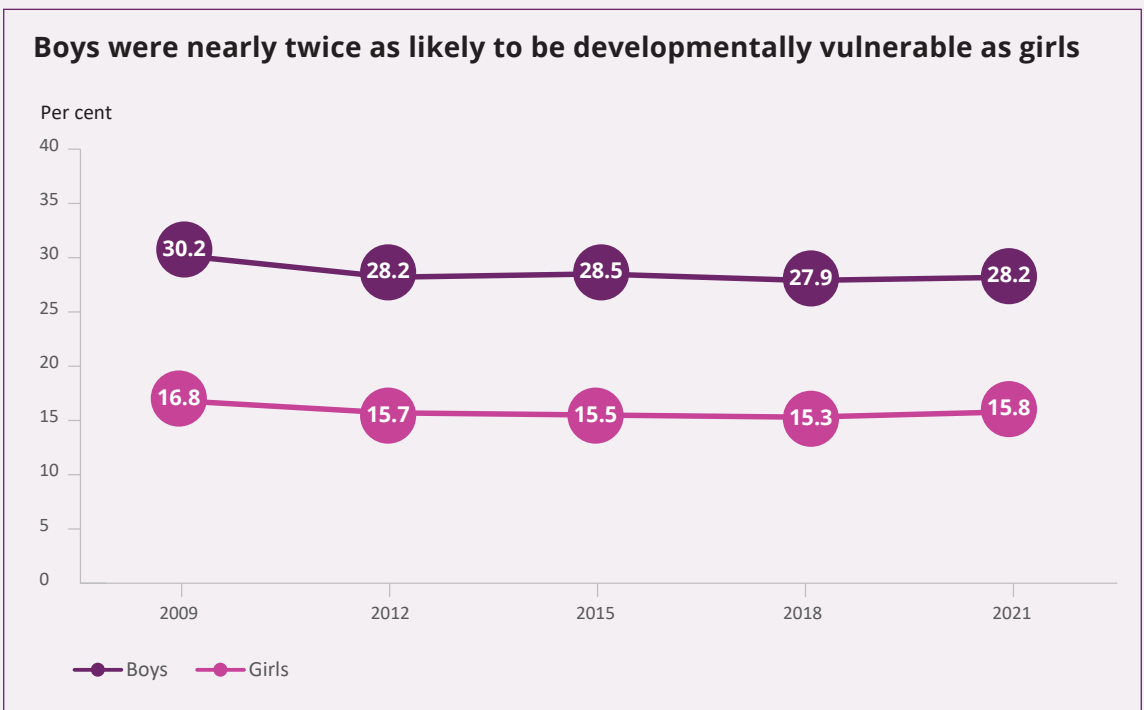
On an average day, 4,500 people aged 10 and over were under youth justice supervision in 2021–22, a decrease from 4,700 in 2020–21

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Education and skills](#), [Social support & Justice and safety](#)

## How many children are developmentally vulnerable?

The early childhood years are a time when children begin to learn to communicate and get along with others, as well as adapt their behaviour, emotions and attention. Based on data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), the proportion of children in their first year of school who are classified as developmentally vulnerable has remained relatively stable since 2012.

Overall, between 2009 and 2018, there was an increase in the percentage of children who were on track on all 5 AEDC domains, from 50.7% to 55.4%. However, the percentage of children who were on track on all 5 AEDC domains decreased slightly in 2021 (54.8%), the first decrease since 2009.



## NAPLAN scores have shown some improvement

Since its inception in 2008, national average achievement in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores have remained stable or modestly improved.

Between 2008 and 2022, the average achievement scores have risen for:

- year 3 students in reading, spelling and grammar
- year 5 students in reading, spelling and numeracy.

### There were some improvements in NAPLAN average scores between 2008 and 2022

Domain	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
Reading	↑	↑	—	—
Spelling	↑	↑	—	—
Grammar and punctuation	↑	—	—	—
Numeracy	—	↑	—	—
Writing*	—	—	—	—

↑ Statistically significant increase from base year

— No significant change

\* Writing comparison is for 2011 and 2022

From 2023, changes were made to the timing of NAPLAN testing and how NAPLAN results are reported. Data presented on this page cannot be compared with [2023 results](#).

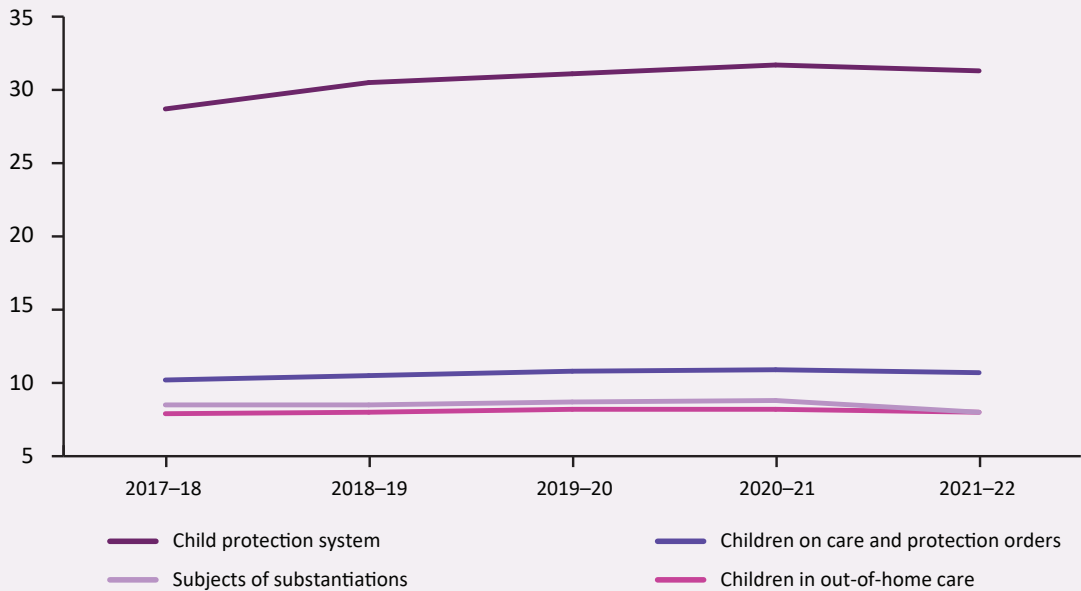
**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Education and skills](#)

## The rate of children in the child protection system has increased

In 2021–22, around 178,000 children (aged under 18) were in the child protection system. This includes children who were subjects of investigations, on care and protection orders and/or in out-of-home care. The rate of children in the child protection system increased between 2017–18 and 2021–22, from 29 to 31 per 1,000 children.

**Number of children in different components of child protection, 2017–18 to 2021–22**

Rate (per 1,000 children)



At 30 June 2022, 45,400 children (aged under 18) were in out-of-home care placements. Of these, the majority (90%) were in home-based care, mostly living with relative or kinship carers (54%).

**Children who have been abused or neglected may be at greater risk of interacting with the youth justice system and homelessness services:**

- almost 5,000 people (aged 10 and over) under youth justice supervision during 2020–21 interacted with the child protection system in the previous 5 year period
- 7,900 people (aged under 18) on care and protection orders were clients of Specialist Homelessness Services during 2021–22.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Justice and safety](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)



## Children living in social housing



**1 in 5 public and community housing occupants are children**

Social housing is rental housing made available to Australians on low incomes who cannot afford to rent through the private rental market. Social housing plays an important role in assisting families in greatest need.



**In 2021–22, 20% of public and community housing occupants were children aged 0–14.**

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Housing](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

# Welfare of younger adults

Young adulthood (ages 15 to 25) is a critical period in a person's life. It is a time for finishing school, pursuing further training and education, entering the workforce, becoming more independent and forming relationships. The foundations for future wellbeing, as well as health, are also laid down at this time.



## At a glance



43% of 20–24-year-olds and 23% of 15–19-year-olds were enrolled in a non-school qualification, in May 2022



66% of people aged 15–24 were employed, in June 2023



4.8% (138,100) of 16–24-year-olds received a student payment, such as Youth Allowance, as at 31 March 2023



39,300 15–24-year-olds presented alone to, and received support from, Specialist Homelessness Services in 2021–22



101,600 income units (individuals or families) with people aged 24 and under (or 7.5%) received Commonwealth Rent Assistance, at June 2022

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Education and skills](#), [Employment and income](#) & [Housing](#)

## Student pathways after leaving school

Participation in secondary school enables people to develop their skills and knowledge, increasing their productivity and often leading to higher personal earnings and improved health and wellbeing outcomes. One of the major pathways after completing school is further education and training.



**People aged 15–24 are 3 times as likely to be engaged in tertiary education compared with 40 years ago**

More than half (55%) of people aged 15–20 who left school in 2021 were enrolled in non-school study in May 2022:

- 39% were in higher education
- 13% were in TAFE
- 4% were in another type of study institution.



**Another major pathway after leaving school is entering the labour force**

In May 2022, 1 in 3 (32%) 2021 school leavers were employed and not enrolled in study; 18% were in part-time employment and 14% employed full time.

Employed 15–24-year-olds were particularly affected by loss of work compared with other age groups during COVID-19-related lockdowns/restrictions, as they were more likely to be working in industries hit hardest by social distancing measures.

There was a steep decline in employment rates for people aged 15–24 between March and May 2020 – from 60% to 51%; but employment rates for this age group recovered by early 2021.



**Of all people aged 15–24, two-thirds (66%) were employed at June 2023. Most (53%) were employed on a part-time basis**

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Education and skills](#) & [Employment and income](#)

## Not engaged in education, employment or training

About 7.6% of people aged 15–24 were not engaged in education, employment or training (referred to as NEET) in May 2022. NEET is an indicator of how smooth the transition from education into work is for young people. Not participating in work or study can contribute to future unemployment, lower incomes and employment insecurity.

**The proportion of young people (aged 15–24) not involved in education, employment or training has declined**



**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Employment and income](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## Gambling can affect the health and wellbeing of young adults and their families

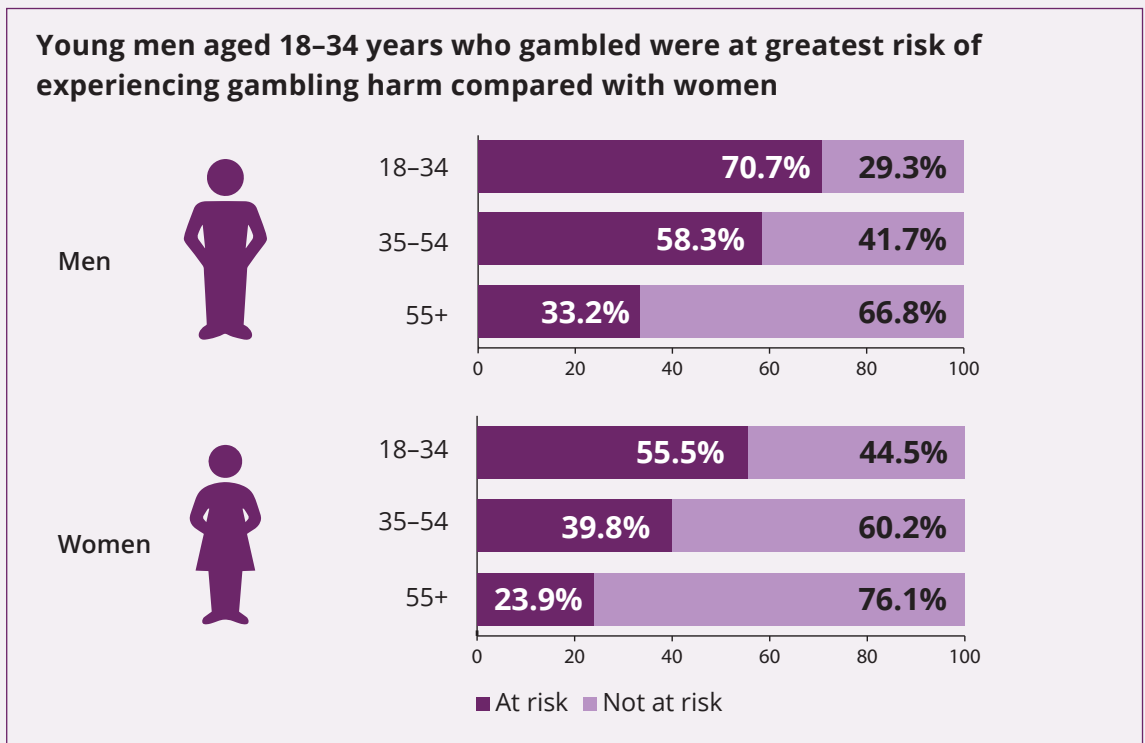
Emerging trends in gambling, such as video gaming and gambling through products (including simulated gambling games, loot boxes, and in-game purchases), may be appealing to younger people.



**1 in 6 (16%) people aged 16–17 years participated in underage gambling over a 12-month period**

In 2018, 46% of people aged 18–19 reported spending money on any form of gambling.

At-risk gambling (for example, difficulty limiting money and/or time gambling) was highest among those aged 18–34 as at 2022.



**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Social support](#)

# Welfare of people aged 65 and over

Australians aged 65 and over are a diverse group, with different experiences, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and lifestyles. These factors can affect their wellbeing and health as they age.



## At a glance



17% of Australians were aged 65 and over at 30 June 2022, up from 11% at 30 June 1992



15% of people aged 65 and over were employed in June 2023 up from 4.6% in June 1993



50% (1.9 million) of people aged 65 and over had disability in 2018



28% of people aged 70 and over and 25% of those aged 55–69 participated in unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in 2020



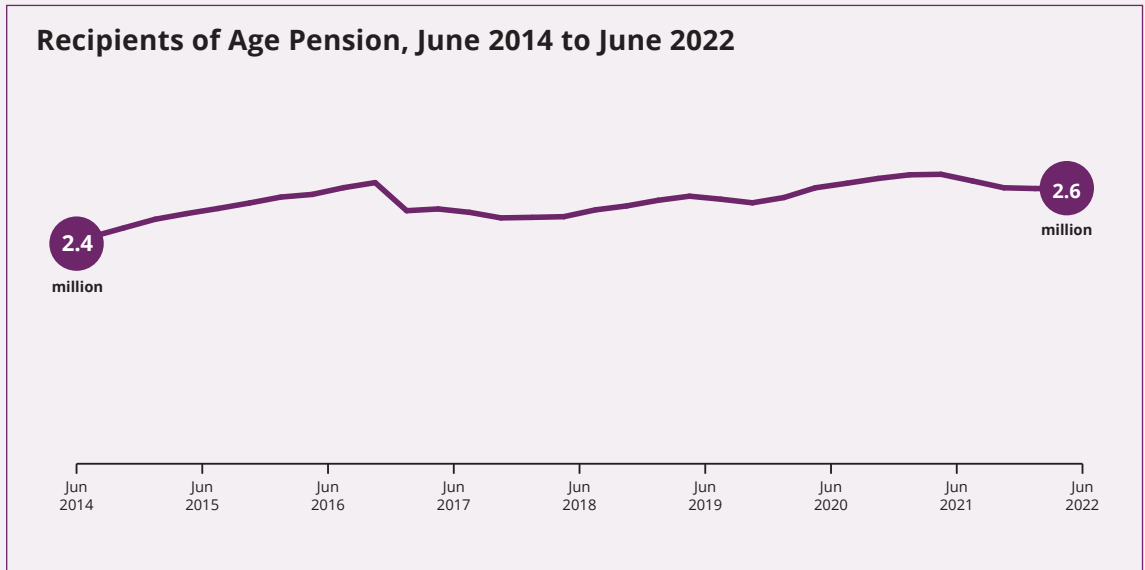
363,500 (27%) income units (individuals or families) receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance had a main recipient aged 65 and older, at June 2022

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Welfare in Australia & Social support](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

## 3 in 5 people aged 65 and over receive Age Pension

The most common income support payment for people aged 65 and over is Age Pension. As at 31 March 2023, 2.6 million people received Age Pension.

The **number** of people receiving Age Pension has increased by 6% between June 2014 and June 2022.



However, the **proportion** of the population aged 65 and over receiving Age Pension has declined over this period, from 70% to 58%. Some of this decline reflects increases to the qualifying age for Age Pension from 65 in 2017 to 67 by 2023 (depending on year of birth). For the population aged 70 and over who meet the age eligibility requirements, the decline in receipt of Age Pension over this period was not as steep (from 76% to 69%).

These increases to the qualifying age for Age Pension have led to people aged 65 and over commencing or remaining on income support payments other than Age Pension. In recent years, there have been increases in the number of people aged 65 and over receiving payments such as Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment and Newstart Allowance/JobSeeker Payments (from 107,700 in September 2017 to 228,200 in March 2023).

An increasing number of people receiving Age Pension and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) are considered to be in rental stress (that is, households who are spending more than 30% of their gross household income on housing costs). Around 63,000 income units (individuals or families) receiving Age Pension and CRA were considered to be experiencing rental stress in 2013, rising to over 113,000 in 2022 (from 28% to 37% of income units over this period).

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Employment and income](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

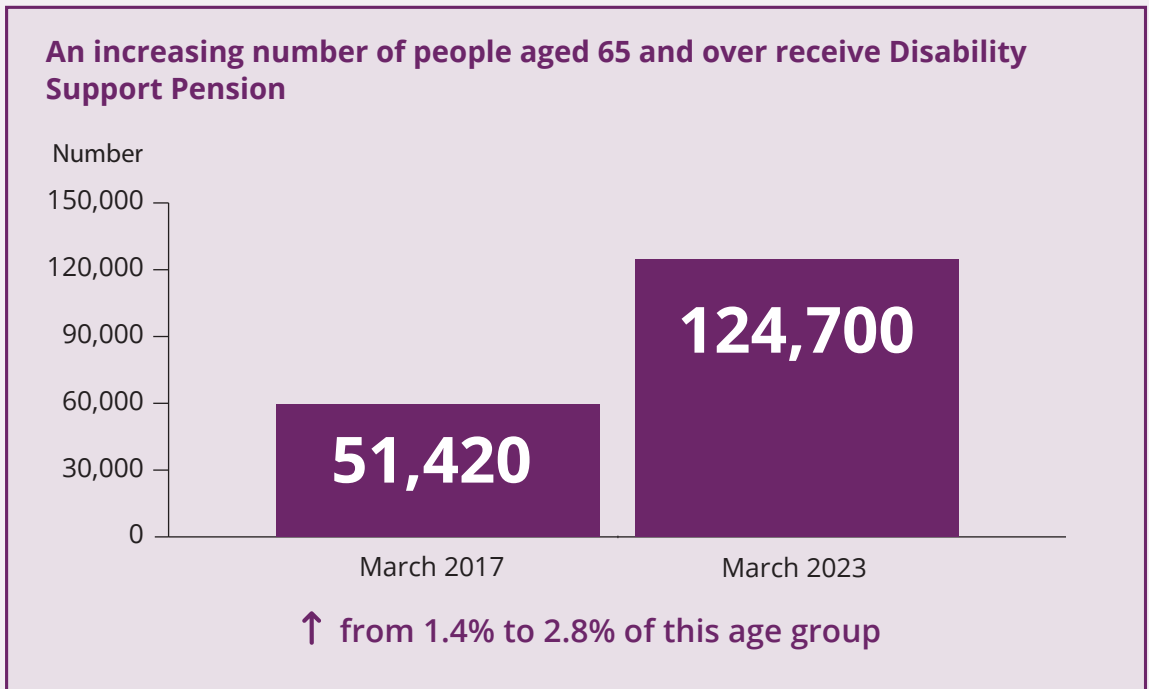
## Disability and disability supports

The prevalence of disability (proportion of the population with disability) increases with age.



**Around 1 in 4 (27%) people aged 60–64 had disability, compared with 3 in 4 (78%) of those aged 85 and over**

Almost 1 in 10 (8.3%) people aged 55–64 received Disability Support Pension (DSP); making up one-third (33%) of those receiving DSP, as at 31 March 2023.



These increases are driven by those aged 65–69, suggesting that this is likely the result of the increases to the eligibility age for Age Pension and people receiving DSP later or for longer before transitioning to Age Pension.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Social support & Employment and income](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)



## More people are using aged care

Aged care services provide support to a large and growing number of people aged 65 years or over. As people get older, they will likely experience escalating care needs that require different care types.

Aged care is often provided to people in their homes, including:

- entry-level home support services – used by over 800,000 people aged 65 and over during 2021–22
- home care services for people with greater needs – used by 213,000 people aged 65 and over, as at 30 June 2022.



The number of people using home care services has tripled in the 5 years since the Increasing Choice in Home Care reforms commenced in 2017. These reforms support more people with complex care needs to live independently in their own homes for longer

At 30 June 2022, 185,000 people aged 65 and over were accessing residential aged care. There were significant challenges for residential aged care during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first year of the pandemic (to 5 March 2021), 75% of all COVID-19-related deaths occurred among people living in residential aged care.

### People entering aged care



65+

In 2021–22, 245,000 people aged 65 and over entered residential care and home care.



under 65

Of all people entering residential and home care in 2021–22, 1.0% were aged under 65.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Social support](#) and [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)

# 4

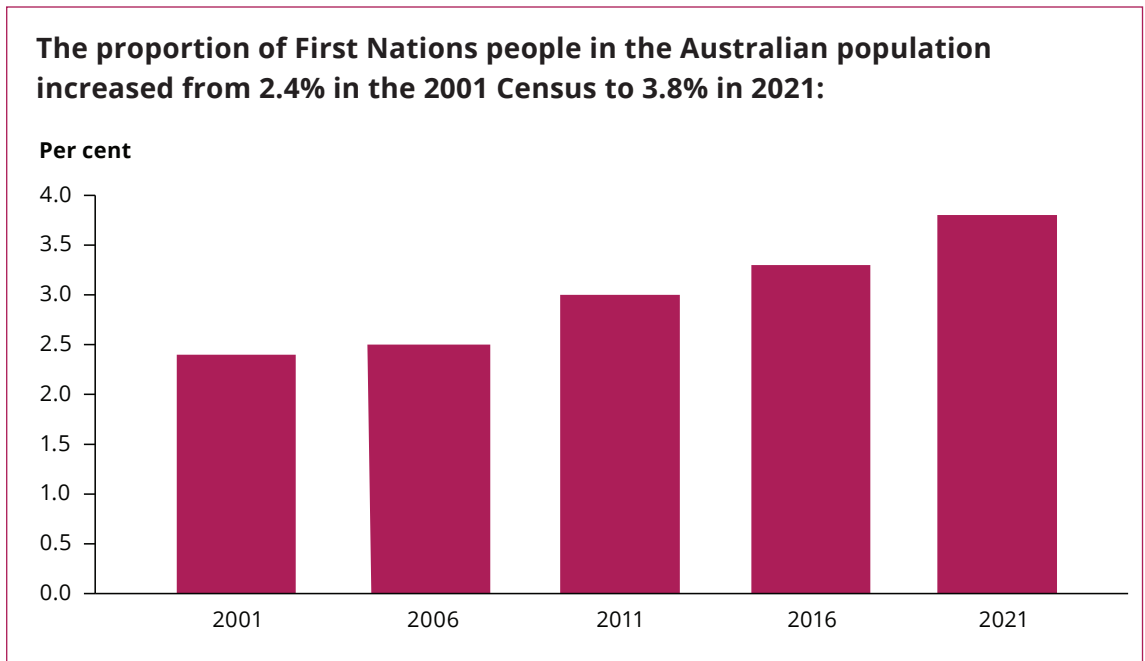
## Welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people are the first peoples of Australia. They are not one group, but rather comprise hundreds of groups that have their own distinct set of languages, histories and cultural traditions. The welfare and wellbeing of First Nations people can be positively influenced by a range of factors such as connection to Country and caring for Country, knowledge and beliefs, language, self-determination, family and kinship, and cultural expression.

## Population profile

As of 30 June 2021, there were an estimated 984,000 First Nations people, an increase of 23% (185,600 people) from the 30 June 2016 estimate of 798,400.



Increases in the size of the First Nations population can be explained by a combination of demographic factors such as births, deaths and migration as well as non-demographic factors such as changing identification in the Census.

In 2018–19, among First Nations people aged 18 and over, an estimated:

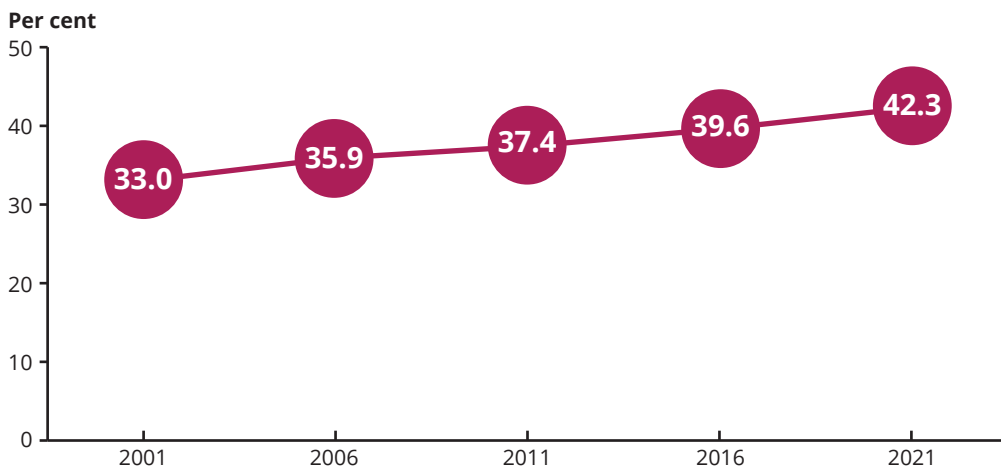
- 74% (357,800 people) recognised an area as a homeland/traditional country
- 65% (314,200 people) identified with a tribal group, language, clan, mission or regional group
- 27% (130,500 people) lived on their homeland.

First Nations people are more likely to live in urban and regional areas than remote areas, though the proportion of the total population who are First Nations increased with remoteness, from 1.9% in *Major cities*, to 32% in *Remote and very remote* areas.

## Housing

More than half of First Nations households were renters (56%), while 42% were home owners (with or without a mortgage), in 2021. The home ownership rate has increased over time.

**Change over time in home ownership for First Nations people, 2001 to 2021**



In 2021, 81% of First Nations people were living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing.

The proportion of First Nations people living in overcrowded housing fell between 2001 and 2021, from 31% to 19%.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#)

## Education and skills

In 2021, 34% of First Nations children were assessed as developmentally on track on all 5 domains of the Australian Early Development Census.

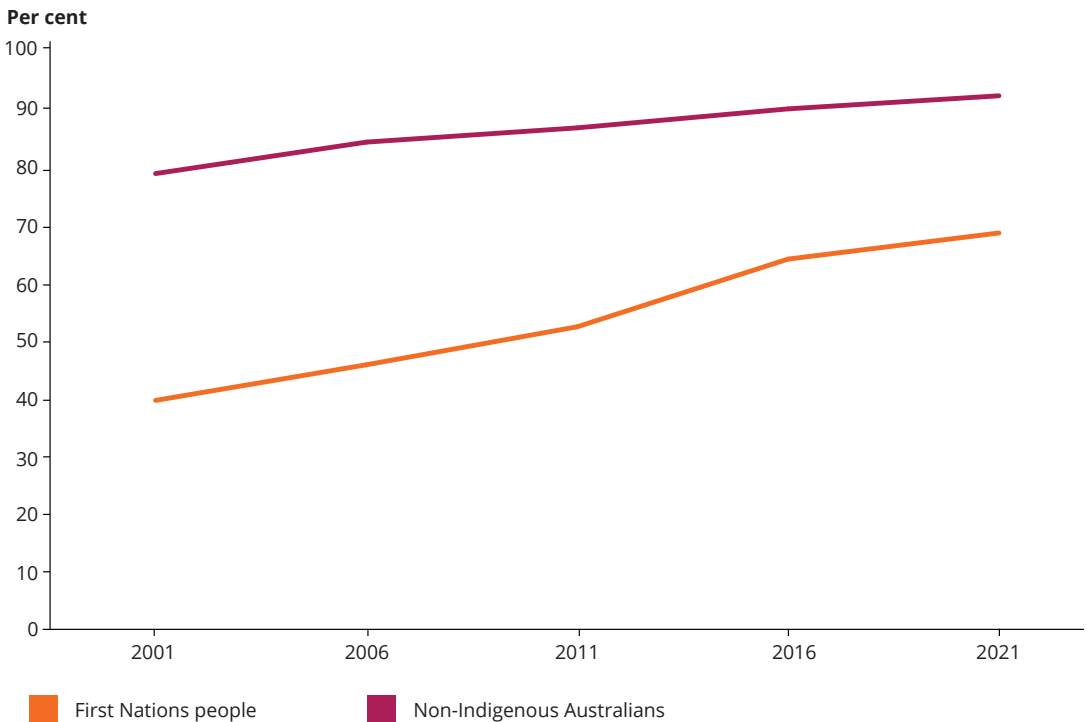


The percentage of First Nations children enrolled in early childhood education in the year before full-time schooling increased by more than 20 percentage points, from 77% to 99% over the period 2016 to 2022.

Improvements have been made in educational attainment for First Nations people in recent years. Between 2011 and 2021:

- university enrolments doubled, from 11,800 to 24,000 students
- Year 12 or equivalent attainment increased for those aged 20–24 – from 52% to 68%.

### The gap in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates for First Nations people and non-Indigenous Australians narrowed over the decade to 2021



The proportion of First Nations people aged 25–34 who had attained a tertiary qualification at Certificate III or above more than doubled between 2001 and 2021.

## Employment

The proportion of First Nations people aged 25–64 (the age group specified in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap) who were employed was 56% in 2021.

The employment rate for First Nations people aged 15–64 increases with higher levels of education. In 2021, the employment rate relative to the highest level of education was:



85% for those with a Bachelors degree or above



72% for those with Certificate III or IV



23% for those with secondary year 9 and below.

The percentage of First Nations people not in the labour force increased with increasing remoteness; 61% in *Very remote* areas compared with 35% in *Major cities*.

## Income and finance



The median weekly equivalised household income (inflation-adjusted) for First Nations households was \$830 in 2021.

Between 2016 and 2021, the median weekly equivalised household income (inflation-adjusted) for First Nations households grew by over 18%, compared with a growth of 11% for Other households.

On 24 June 2022, 48% of First Nations people aged 16 and over received income support. First Nations people made up 5.6% of all people receiving income support, at June 2022.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#)

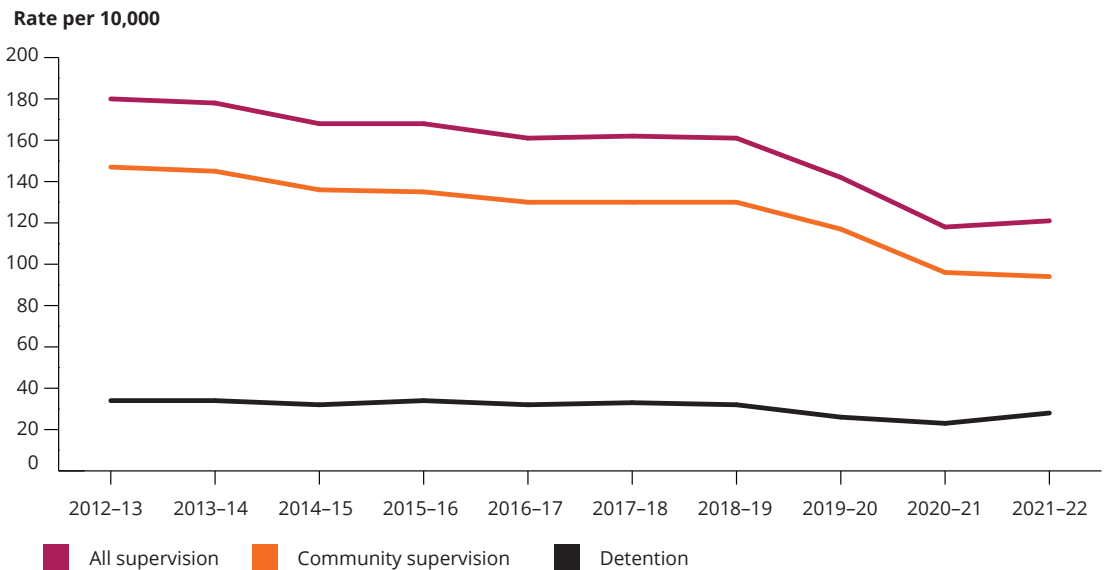
## Community safety

Many factors influence community safety for Australia's First Nations people. Stronger connections to culture and Country, amongst other positive cultural determinants, improve outcomes for community safety. Factors that contribute to unsafe situations in communities include long-term social disadvantage, and intergenerational trauma from dispossession and past forced child removal policies. These factors lead to breakdowns in traditional cultural and kinship practices.

Most First Nations people feel safe in their communities and do not experience negative outcomes. However, First Nations people tend to experience higher rates of hospitalisation and death as a result of violence, than the wider community. Among First Nations females aged 15 and over in 2018–19, 8.4% had experienced physical harm and/or threatened face-to-face physical harm in the last 12 months where the perpetrator was a family member.

As at 30 June 2021, 19,480 First Nations children were in out-of-home care (a rate of 58 per 1,000). Almost two-thirds (63%) were placed with First Nations or non-Indigenous kin or with another First Nations carer. First Nations people are over-represented in Australia's child protection, youth justice and adult justice systems.

### The rate of First Nations people aged 10–17 under supervision on an average day declined from 180 to 121 per 10,000 between 2012–13 and 2021–22



## Disability support

The number and proportion of First Nations National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants increased over time – from around 19,200 people (or 6.2% of NDIS participants) in September 2019 to 42,600 people (or 7.4%) in December 2022.

**At 31 December 2022, active First Nations NDIS participants in:**



*Remote and very remote* areas received the highest average annualised support amounts across remoteness areas, of \$105,000.



the Northern Territory received the highest average annualised support amounts across states and territories, of \$152,000.

In December 2022, 58,500 First Nations people were receiving the Disability Support Pension, making up 7.6% of total recipients.

## Aged care

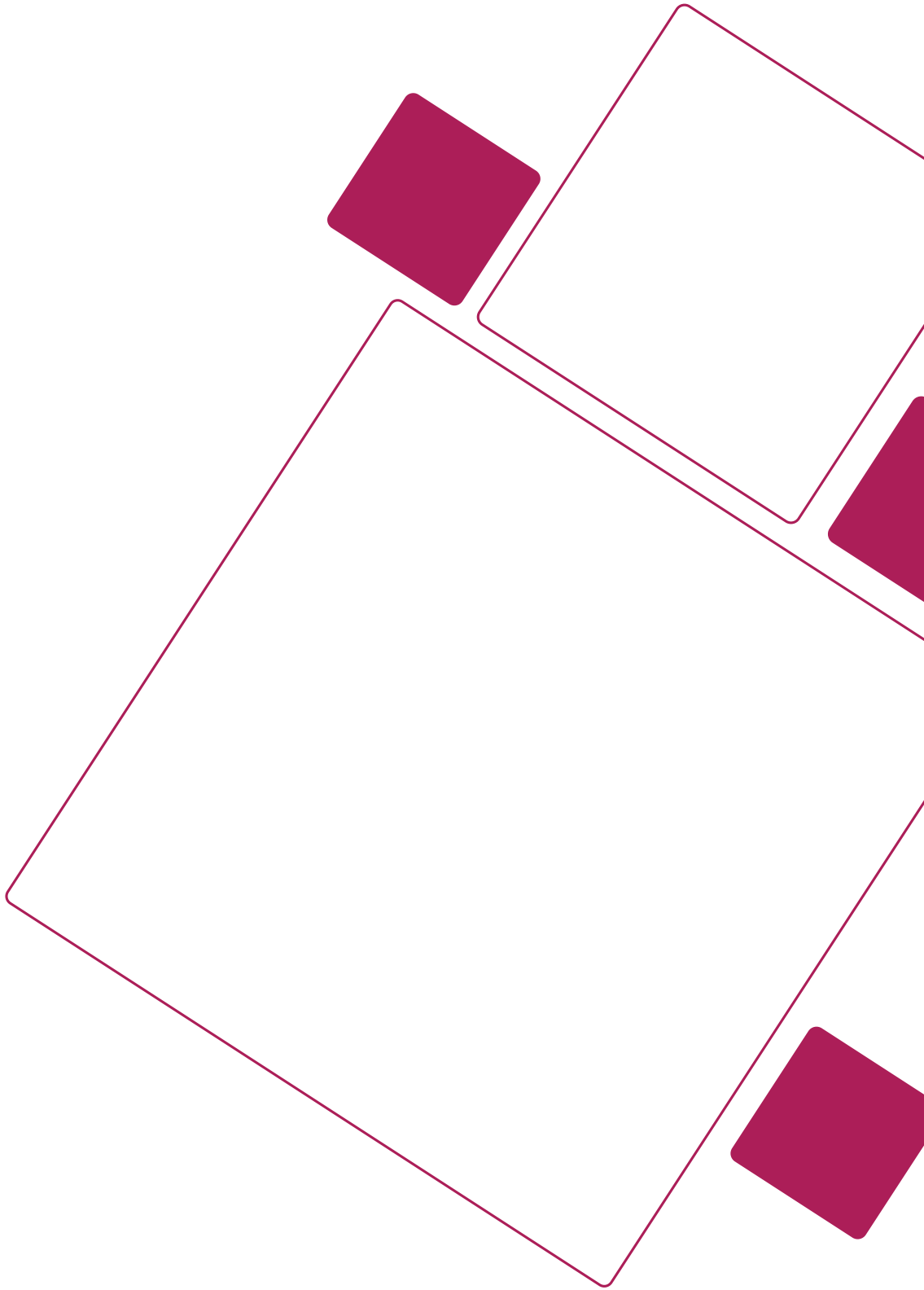


**Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the number of First Nations people aged 50 and over:**

- using home care increased from 3,300 to 5,800 people (a rate increase from 25 to 36 per 1,000)
- in residential aged care rose from 1,700 to 2,100.

**For more, see** Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#)





5

## How do we compare internationally?



Comparing welfare and wellbeing data between Australia and the other member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) helps to inform our policy, planning and decision-making. Australia performs well against many measures of welfare and wellbeing, including housing, jobs, community, education, life expectancy and life satisfaction.

For example (based on the latest year of available data):



**Australia ranks fifth highest for quality of support networks out of all 38 OECD countries.**



**Half (50%) of Australians aged 25–64 had completed a tertiary education, ranking Australia eighth highest out of 38 OECD countries.**

However, there is also room for improvement.

For example (based on the latest year of available data):



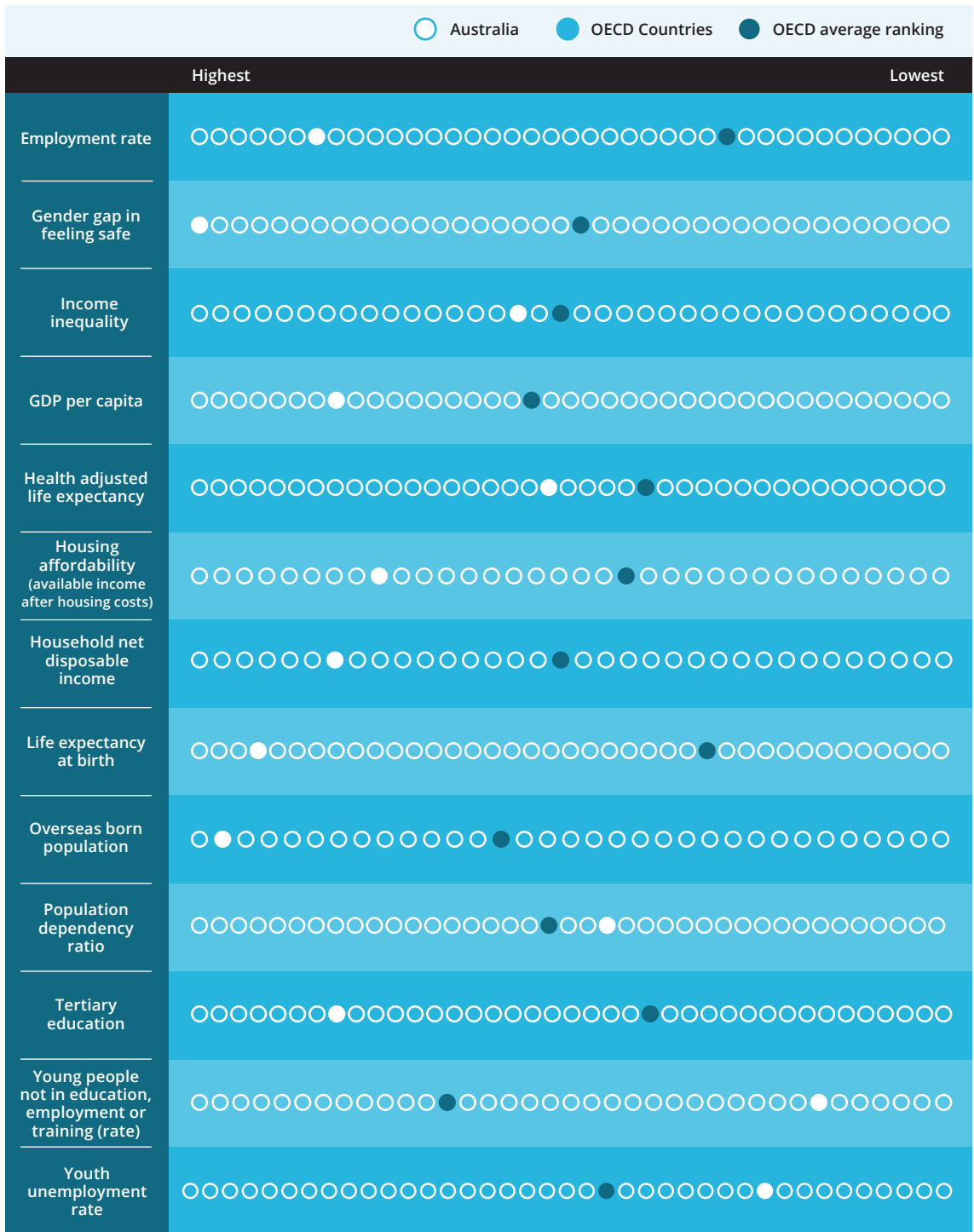
**Australia has one of the highest proportions of employed people working long hours, ranking seventh highest out of 36 OECD countries.**



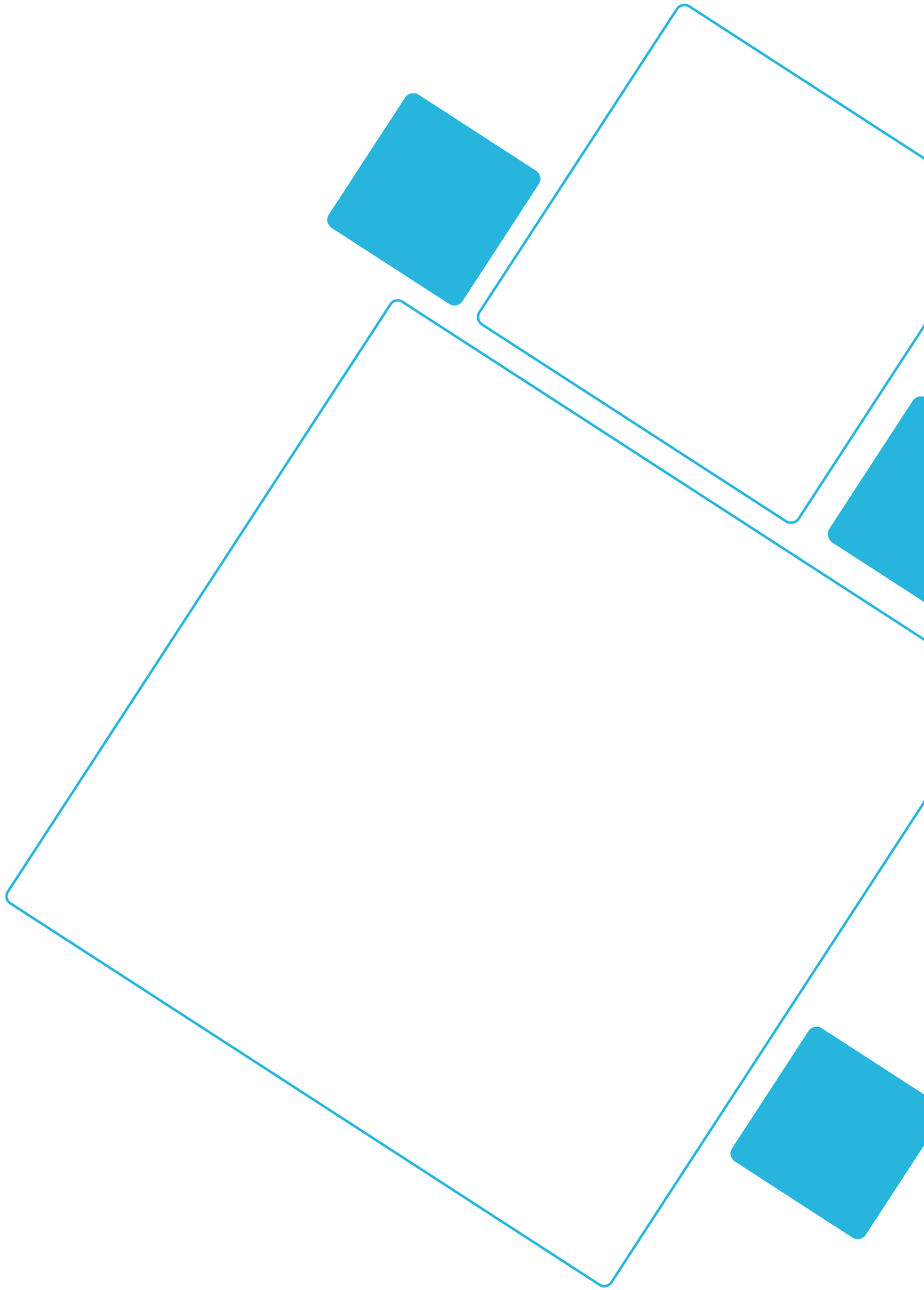
**In Australia, a lower proportion of women (50%) feel safe walking alone at night than men (80%). The gap (the difference between men and women feeling safe) of 30 percentage points is the largest of 37 OECD countries. Six OECD countries had less than 50% of women reporting they feel safe walking alone at night – meaning Australian women had the seventh lowest rate.**

# How does Australia compare?

## Australia's ranking based on the latest year of available data



For more, see Australia's welfare topic summaries: [Welfare in Australia](#)



# 6

## The importance of welfare data in Australia



The development and collection of welfare data are hugely valuable and represents an important investment by public and private organisations.

When used well, these data can provide reliable information on the quality of people's lives, and how wellbeing is changing over time, both within and across different population groups. Welfare data can also inform our understanding of the impact of policies and programs, enabling better decision-making and improved outcomes for Australians across a range of areas including housing, education and skills, employment and income, social support, and justice and safety.

## The value of linked data

Data linkage brings together data from multiple sources to better understand complex interactions Australians have with health and welfare services. Through linkage, it is possible to understand how services operate and how people interact with multiple services over time. This in turn provides information to government and researchers for example, on the interface between those services.



The AIHW has a long history in managing data linkage safely and securely. We are committed to protecting personal data and safeguarding your privacy. This commitment is underpinned by law.

Data linkage is increasingly being used to link across health and welfare data sets. By linking available data, some information gaps can be filled, and new insights can be gleaned about people and how they use multiple services.

### National Disability Data Asset

The National Disability Data Asset (disability data asset) will bring together data about people with disability from Commonwealth and state and territory government agencies to give a more complete picture of people with disability. This linked data asset will provide a better understanding of how people with disability interact with support services and programs. These insights will inform improvements to provide better outcomes and experiences for people with disability.

The AIHW is designing and delivering the technical aspects of the disability data asset in partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), with the project being led by the Department of Social Services.

For more information about the National Disability Data Asset, visit [www.ndda.gov.au](http://www.ndda.gov.au)

The AIHW and ABS are working with the states and territories to implement the national linkage and integration infrastructure that will underpin the establishment of the National Disability Data Asset: the Australian National Data Integration Infrastructure (ANDII). ANDII includes a national spine and linkage model and supporting Information Communications Technology platform along with data governance and streamlined data sharing arrangements.



The ANDII has a huge amount of potential and can provide a genuine national approach to data linkage in Australia. Importantly it will facilitate the linkage of data across sectors to get a better understanding of how people use services across different policy areas and allow more detailed insights than are possible by looking at areas in isolation.

## Data linkage can't solve all data issues



The use of data linkage can not fill all data gaps nor solve all data issues. Where available data provide an incomplete national picture, other data development activities can help.

For example, for family, domestic and sexual violence data, issues of comparability across data collections can result in an incomplete national picture. In some cases, data are available across states and territories but they are collected differently due to reporting requirements. Consistent and comparable data are essential to understand the extent, nature and impact of family, domestic and sexual violence.

The AIHW is developing a prototype administrative data collection for specialist family domestic violence crisis services.

A large component of the project is devoted to the understanding of:

- what data are collected
- the systems used to collect and store the data
- current reporting by states/territories and/or service providers
- information priorities for the collection.



Data standards assure and improve the quality of welfare data. They establish agreed ways to define and collect data, which creates consistency, comparability and reliability. For example, the AIHW is working with the Department of Health and Aged Care to develop a set of data standards for aged care. These will apply to a core set of aged care data variables and play a key role in improving the quality of aged data over time, helping inform choices about services, care provision, and monitoring outcomes.

## AIHW's role in creating and reporting welfare data

The AIHW's role is to work with others to develop information standards and collections across health and welfare, and to publish statistics across these areas. The AIHW works closely with governments – including state and territory authorities with health and welfare responsibilities, the ABS, and other statistics agencies – and with the academic and non-government sectors to make this happen.

The AIHW releases information drawing on national major health and welfare data collections, including our own. We hold a range of data – for example on housing assistance, homelessness services, child protection, cancer, disability, hospital activity – and bring together both AIHW and non-AIHW data to present information on:



the characteristics of people and their health and welfare needs, and how these change during their lives



how the health and welfare needs of people differ depending on where they live

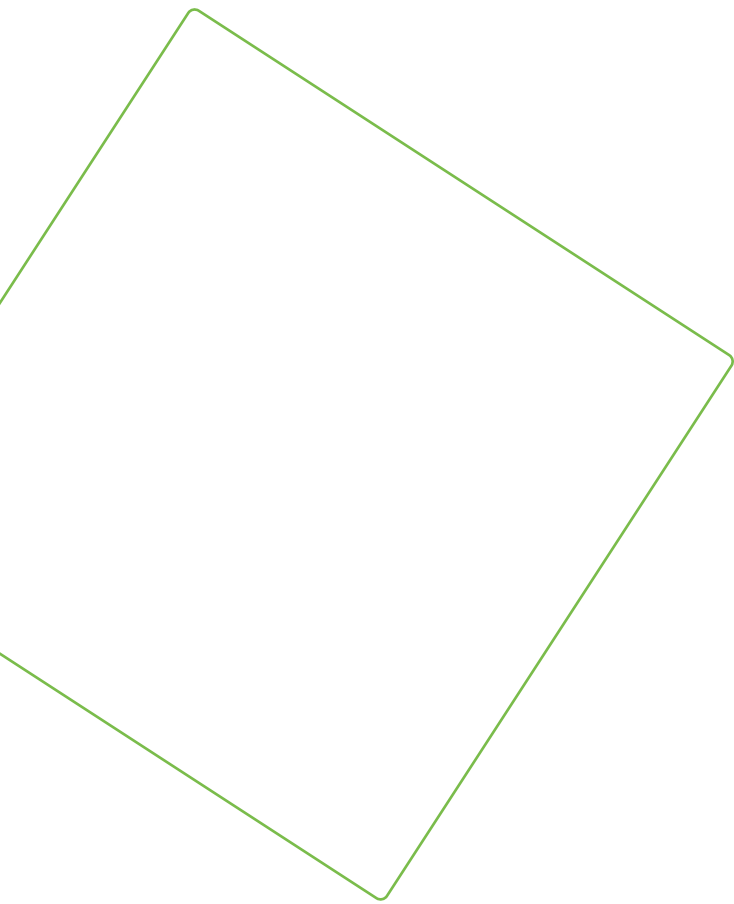


the availability and accessibility of health and welfare services in those places



how service use changes over time.

**For more, see** [Australia's welfare 2023: data insights](#)





*Australia's welfare 2023: in brief* presents a holistic summary of welfare and wellbeing in Australia with key findings on housing, education and skills, employment and income, social support, and justice and safety.

*Australia's welfare 2023* is the 16th biennial welfare report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Access our product suite at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/australias-welfare>, including:

- *Australia's welfare 2023: data insights*
- *Australia's welfare: topic summaries*
- *Australia's welfare 2023: in brief*



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Stronger evidence,  
better decisions,  
improved health and welfare