

Children's well-being report captures Australia's growing inequality

March 15 2013, by Reema Rattan



Australia ranks 26th out of the 34 OECD countries for child poverty. Credit: Anne Roberts

Around one in six Australian children live below the poverty line, according to a report released today by the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY). While the rates have improved since the [first such report](#) was released in 2008, Australia ranks 26th out of the 34 OECD countries for this measure.

The [wellbeing of young Australians report card](#) is the result of a national consultation of 3,700 people, including workers in the child and youth sectors.

Perinatal and pediatric epidemiologist Fiona Stanley said the report aimed to benchmark Australian [children](#) and young people against the rest of the world.

"If you want to have a future that is secure, successful and productive, you must invest in healthy mothers, healthy children and young people because then they will grow up to be people who can participate in civil society," she said.

Professor Stanley said increased inequality and low participation in early childhood education were worrying. "We rank very low compared with the rest of the OECD on the very investments that are going to make a difference to inequality and people – what they call increasing their capacity to perform even if they are from a marginalised population."

Professor of Public Health Rob Moodie, who is on the board of ARACY, said the children's poverty ranking was one of the more concerning aspects of the report.

"Even though we're doing very well on our gross national product, the national wealth it just not evenly distributed and the level of inequality could be growing rather than diminishing," he said. "That also will be reflected in the nation's health status. Those with the lowest social and economic capacity will have the worst health outcomes."

"A lot of that results from inter generational issues because the children of unemployed parents may well have a much higher probability of ending up unemployed themselves. And the same goes for those with major health problems – their parents are much more likely to have

health problems themselves. So where you live and where you're born, will to determine your health."

The [report](#) also noted Indigenous Australians faced some of the worst social, educational and [health](#) outcomes.

"While that's not a surprise, I think that it is – to me – an ongoing source of anguish," said Professor Stanley.

"Take the Aboriginal population in Western Australia, where I'm from. There are 85,000 Aboriginal people – 30% of them are aged under 15 or so and 50% of them are aged under 20. That's not a lot of people, is it? So how come we, as a very wealthy and competent nation, we can't effectively deliver services that are closing the gap here?"

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