

# Western Australia's Children and Their Health

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE TELETHON INSTITUTE FOR CHILD HEALTH RESEARCH AND THE WA HEALTH AND WELLBEING SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM



## MIDWEST AND MURCHISON HEALTH REGION - POPULATION PROFILE

### A Profile of Western Australian Children



This report is the first in a series of reports about WA's children and their health. The series is being prepared by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, primarily using indicator data collected by the WA Department of Health.

The purpose of the series is to provide health care decision makers in Health Areas/Regions with a profile of indicators of the health needs of children who live within their departmental boundaries. This information is intended to be an aid to program planning and resource allocation.

A challenge for health care decision makers is to respond fairly, effectively and efficiently to health care needs of the populations they serve. This responsibility is complex and no single approach in isolation offers a wholly adequate solution. Rather, health care decision makers must make judgements about community health needs by taking into account a variety of information. While the sources and foci of such information are likely to be diverse, a core set relates to the broad characteristics of the population being served. This includes general parameters such as population size, location, and so on.

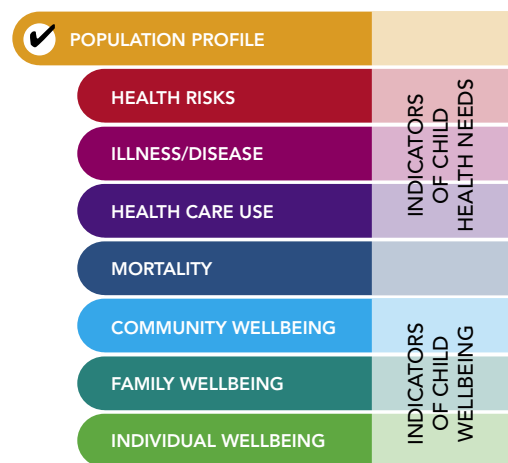
Because broad measures of population are central to any assessment of health needs, this category of indicators is the first focus area in the series. In characterising the population of WA children aged between 0-15 years within each Health Region, an attempt has been made to place children in a context of the family and household settings in which they live.

Subsequent papers in this series will continue to explore health needs indicators within themes that are relevant to decision making.

### Future Papers on Western Australian Children and Their Health

Future papers in this series will focus on the following topics:

- 1. A healthy start to life**  
Pregnancy, birth and early caring behaviours.
- 2. A healthy home life**  
Parenting and the home environment.
- 3. Health care needs**  
Chronic health conditions.
- 4. Health care services**  
Service utilisation.
- 5. Health behaviours**  
Risk and protective behaviours.



▲ **Indicator:** A statistic chosen to describe (indicate) a situation concisely, help assess progress and performance, and act as a guide to decision making... (AIHW 2006)

Indicator	Description of indicator	MMHR % (95% CI)	State % (95% CI)	Source
<b>Population</b>	Proportion of total population of WA children 0-4	3	100	2001 Census
	Proportion of total indigenous population of WA children 0-4	7	100	2001 Census
	Proportion of total population of children 0-4 that is indigenous	15	6	2001 Census
	Proportion of total population of WA children 0-15	3	100	2001 Census
	Proportion of total indigenous population of WA children 0-15	8	100	2001 Census
	Proportion of total population of children 0-15 that is indigenous	16	6	2001 Census
<b>Children born in Australia</b>	Proportion of total population of children 0-4 born in Australia	98.7 (96.3-100)	97.2 (96.0-98.4)	2002-5 HWSS Data
	Proportion of total population of children 0-15 born in Australia	97.8 (96.2-99.5)	93.5 (92.6-94.4)	2002-5 HWSS Data
<b>Children living in financially stressed households</b>	Proportion of children 0-4 living in households that spend more than they earn	4.0 (0.0-9.0)	5.3 (3.0-7.8)	2002-5 HWSS Data
	Proportion of children 0-15 living in households that spend more than they earn	3.8 (1.3-6.4)	4.8 (3.7-5.9)	2002-5 HWSS Data
<b>Children living in sole parent households</b>	Proportion of children 0-4 living in sole parent households	10.3 (3.3-17.3)	7.2 (5.6-8.7)	2002-5 HWSS Data
	Proportion of children 0-15 living in sole parent households	10.2 (6.6-13.9)	11.7 (10.6-12.7)	2002-5 HWSS Data
<b>Parents born overseas</b>	Children 0-4 who have one parent who was born overseas	15.6 (7.2-24.0)	38.2 (35.1-41.4)	2002-5 HWSS Data
	Children 0-4 who have two parents who were born overseas	2.1 (0.0-5.2)	12.2 (9.9-14.6)	2002-5 HWSS Data
	Children 0-15 who have one parent who was born overseas	19.7 (15.0-24.4)	43.0 (41.2-44.7)	2002-5 HWSS Data
	Children 0-15 who have two parents who were born overseas	2.8 (0.9-4.6)	14.9 (13.6-16.2)	2002-5 HWSS Data

### Why childhood is an important focus for healthcare decision makers...

In recent years, childhood has become a policy focus for most State and Commonwealth Governments. Vimpani, Patton and Hayes 2002 have outlined several reasons for this, including:

- Worsening of indicators of developmental health and wellbeing among children;
- Recognition that health problems in later life often have roots in early environments and experiences; and
- Evidence that childhood is often a more cost effective time for intervention to address health problems.

## Population Density 0-4 Year Olds

### The data indicate that...

- The MMHR is home to one in thirty of the State's children and youth aged between 0-15 years.
- One in six of the Region's children and youth are indigenous Australians.
- One in twelve of the State's indigenous children and youth live in the MMHR.
- Population densities of children and youth in the Region are extremely low, which poses a range of challenges for health care provision.
- The Region is remote from the State's major population centre.
- Most 0-15 year old children living in the MMHR were born in Australia and few have an overseas-born parent.

Distribution of Children Aged 0-4 by Towns and Health Boundaries Western Australia



Compared with the State as a whole, Indigenous children and youth are significantly over-represented in the MMHR catchment. The AIHW (2005) has highlighted that Australian Indigenous children die at more than twice the rate of their non-Indigenous counterparts. The AIHW have also identified a 23% higher rate of hospitalisation among Indigenous children. Rates of some reasons for hospitalisation differ quite markedly between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

For instance, assault and burns/scalds are much more common causes of hospitalisation among Indigenous children (AIHW, 2005).

In light of its remoteness, significant Indigenous population and low population density, delivery of appropriate and effective health care in the PGHR presents a range of challenges.

## Australia's Children - Did you know that...

Approximately 4 million 0-14 year old children live in Australia. This comprises 20% of the Australian population.

- Two in three (64%) children live in major cities.
- Indigenous children comprise 4.5% of all children.
- One in seventeen (6%) Australian children were born overseas.
- Most common countries of birth for overseas born Australian children are New Zealand and England.
- Most common countries of birth for Australian children born in countries where English is not the main language are the Philippines, India, China, South Korea, Indonesia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam. (AIHW, 2006)

## About the Data...

The WA Health & Wellbeing Surveillance System (HWSS) is a continuous data collection system using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) to survey 550 people throughout Western Australia every month. The system began in March 2002 and up to July 2006, 27,000 interviews had been conducted.

People are asked questions on a range of indicators related to health and wellbeing. Topics include chronic health conditions, lifestyle risk factors, protective factors and socio-demographics. Since the surveillance system began, response rates have been between 78-80 percent of all the people contacted.

**Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning early in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early childhood.**

(Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000, p.6).

## Health Regions with a similar population profile...

For child and youth health policy and planning purposes, the MMHR appears to belong to a cluster that includes the following Health Regions:

1. Goldfields
2. Midwest and Murchison
3. Pilbara-Gascoyne

## References

1. AIHW (2005). *A picture of Australia's children*. AIHW Cat. No. PHE 58. Canberra: AIHW.
2. AIHW (2006). *Australia's health 2006*. AIHW cat. No. AUS 73. Canberra: AIHW.
3. Shonkoff, J.P. and Phillips, D.A. (eds) (2000), *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC.
4. Vimpani, G., Patton, G., and Hayes, A. (2002). *The relevance of child and adolescent development for outcomes in education, health and life success*, in Sanson, A. (ed) *Children's Health and Development: New Research Directions for Australia*. Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.