



Families and communities: The context in which Australian children are growing up

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The aim of this presentation is to provide information on family and community contexts in which Australian children aged 0–14 years are growing up and, where data permit, to show how these may influence their health and wellbeing. The wellbeing of children depends not only on factors that directly influence their health, but also on wider environmental influences such as the social, emotional, physical and economic wellbeing of their families and the strength of the communities in which they live. This is recognised in the National Agenda for Early Childhood, which identified family and community capacity as an important area to monitor in relation to how Australian children are faring. Australian families have changed considerably over the last 30 years largely due to changes in social attitudes towards marriage, co-habitation and fertility choices. The resulting diversity of family types in which Australian children are growing up, including children in out-of-home-care, have implications for family functioning (i.e. how families relate, communicate, make decisions, solve problems, care for children and maintain relationships) and ultimately for the wellbeing of children. Family functioning can be affected by internal stressors, such as parental illness or disability, or external stressors, such as economic security. Economic hardship in particular has an immediate impact on a child's health and wellbeing. In addition, there is growing evidence suggesting that neighbourhood influences, including social capital, can impact on children's physical and social development. We will present national data on indicators in each of these areas. By providing information on the social and economic factors affecting children and their families, we can further our understanding on how they can influence children's health and wellbeing outcomes.