

# THE VALUING CHILDREN INITIATIVE SURVEY 2023

EXPLORING AUSTRALIAN ADULTS'  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN FOR A  
BETTER FUTURE

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*All children are valuable, and every  
childhood is precious.*

Valuing Children Initiative, 2023



Valuing Children  
— INITIATIVE —

*We acknowledge we are situated on Noongar land, and that Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land, and continue to practice their values, languages, beliefs, and knowledge. We pay our respects to the traditional owners of the lands on which we live and work across Western Australia and Australia.*



## Acknowledgements

We extend our gratitude to the respondents of this nationwide survey for their invaluable contributions to the research. Your insights and perspectives have been instrumental in shedding light on this critical issue. We would also like to express our appreciation to the *Valuing Children Initiative* for commissioning this survey. Your commitment to advancing the well-being of children and your support in conducting this research have been indispensable. Finally, this project would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of our research team. We would like to acknowledge everyone who provided guidance, feedback, and support throughout this project. Your encouragement and expertise have been invaluable. Together, we hope that this research contributes towards fostering a society that truly values and supports the well-being of our children.

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# Foreword

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Once upon a time, children were only meant to be seen and not heard. While some may laugh at this prospect in a nostalgic way, it can and has had a detrimental impact on the way children understand themselves and the world around them. Afterall, children are better communicators than adults, particularly when it come to their feelings, so why have we silenced them for so long?

The Valuing Children Initiative has one job, and that is to ensure adults value children, and remind them that children have rights and a voice. We as adults who create and manage systems, must honour those rights. The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of a Child, all 54 of them, give children a platform to exercise those rights, not by waiting until children become adults, but now while they are children. Children are fun and playful, curious and think very differently to adults. Let's harness that creativity into our world, because children deserve a say as much as anyone else.

During our conversations with people about the question of valuing children, often people have two looks on their face. Firstly, they are indignant, that of course, we must value children and we do, don't we? But when we point out that children are still being harmed, exploited, abused, unheard and decisions get made about them without any consideration to their wellbeing and agency, that look quickly turns to a strained realisation, that maybe we don't value children enough and we must do better. But how?

This attitude survey provides a pathway to action to value children. By understanding how adults see children, we can challenge or amplify those ideas with information campaigns and mechanisms such as the Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tool that empower children in our decision-making processes. This ensures that we construct their world 'with them', not 'to them'.

It has been pleasing to see adults' attitudes about children change from 'lazy, selfish and dishonest' in our 2016 survey, to 'fortunate, tech savvy and valued' in this current survey. When it comes to issues like climate change, child protection, social media and universal access to quality education, children have a lot to say – it's time for us to listen. The Valuing Children Initiative will be using this research to build a pathway to better understanding the needs of children here and now and encourage everyone who also values children, to do the same.

My deep gratitude and thanks go to the researchers and authors of this paper, Associate Professor Stephan Lund (The University of Western Australia [UWA]), Dr. Madeleine Dobson (Curtin University), Catherine Archer (Edith Cowan University [ECU]), Ruth Wallace (ECU), Stina Frantzich-Gardiner, Kate Fitzgerald (UWA), Erin Kelty (UWA), and Dina Harahap (UWA). I would also like to thank my predecessor, former Valuing Children Initiative Development Executive, Maddie McLeod for commissioning this important work. It is an honour to be part of such a smart group of people who care so much about giving children a voice and making the world better for them and ultimately for everyone.

Sarah Quinton

Development Executive

The Valuing Children Initiative



# Executive Summary

## Background

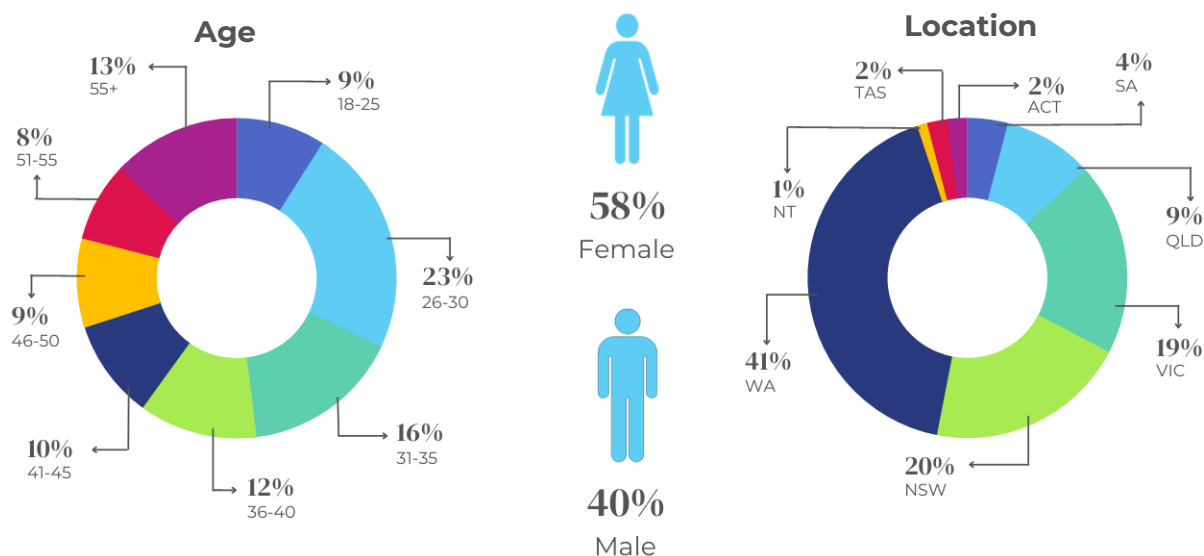
Societal attitudes and the culture of a society are pivotal to children's wellbeing. However, this important part of the picture is frequently missing from discussions and is not well captured in research. Understanding adult attitudes towards children is essential as these attitudes influence how children are treated, the priority given to their needs and wellbeing, and form the foundation for policies and services that directly impact children. This research aimed to further our understanding of societal attitudes towards children and young people, through the repeat of a benchmarking survey originally commissioned in 2016 by the Valuing Children Initiative (VCI).

## Methodology

This research was undertaken by VCI in collaboration with researchers from the University of Western Australia, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, and Murdoch University. The self-administered survey was based on the 2016 benchmark survey, consisting of quantitative and open-ended qualitative questions, and was distributed electronically. A comprehensive analysis encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was completed, which resulted in an in-depth understanding of adult attitude towards children and how they've changed since 2016.

## Respondent Characteristics

Between March 2022 and March 2023, a total of 1008 Australian adults aged 18 years or over completed the survey.

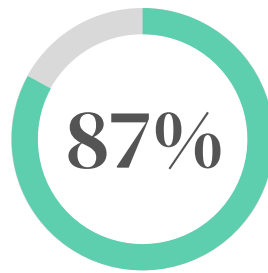


## Quantitative Results

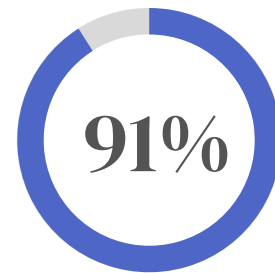
A substantial majority of respondents expressed a strong conviction regarding the importance of prioritising the interests of children. Respondents also placed significant importance on addressing issues such as climate change and management of the economy. The notable ranking of these issues implies a lingering concern that the well-being of future generations may be at risk of being overlooked.



Respondents who felt that looking after the interests of children was important to them.



Respondents who felt that addressing climate change was important to them.



Respondents who felt that management of the economy was important.

The study also highlighted prominent challenges faced by both children and their parents today. The major issues facing children most commonly identified as 'important' included mental health issues, family issues, education and drug or alcohol issues. Parents cited financial pressures, mental health issues, housing affordability and social media as major hurdles in caring for their children. A majority of adults believed that the Australian government fails to give adequate consideration to children when making policy decisions compared to other groups, such as large businesses or the unemployed.



Respondents who believe the Australian government gives too little consideration to children when making decisions about policies.

Significant changes were observed in how respondents described Australian children between 2016 and 2023, marked by a substantial increase in the use of positive descriptors coupled with notable reductions in the utilisation of negative terms such as 'lazy', 'selfish', and 'dishonest'. The most common words used to describe Australian children in 2023 included:



## Qualitative Results

The thematic analysis resulted in the identification of three overarching themes:

- Diverse conceptualisations of children and childhood
- Pressures, paradoxes, and priorities
- Taking action for a better future

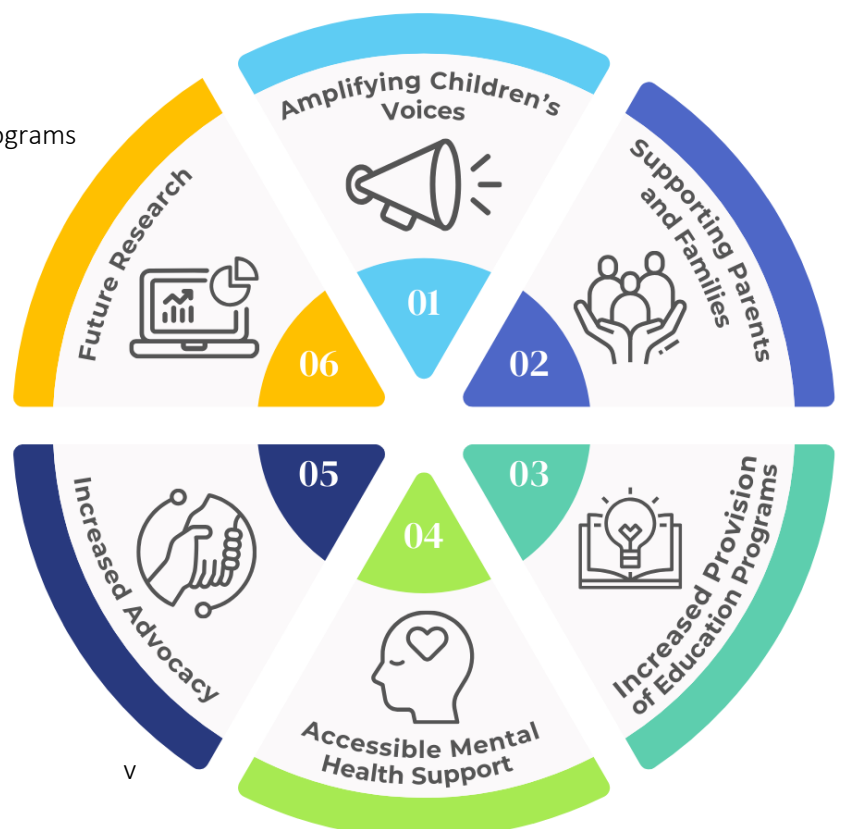
Overall, the data revealed a diverse range of perspectives concerning children and childhood. The data indicates that children are valued members of society, however, the extent to which children are valued does not necessarily translate to meaningful action. Key concerns included:

- Children are experiencing increasing and unprecedented pressures.
- Social media and technology are acknowledged as potentially helpful resources, but are also identified as posing significant challenges and risks to children.
- The education system places stress and pressure on children.
- Children and young people have experienced heightened stress throughout the pandemic, the effects of which are lingering.
- The climate crisis and the lack of action in this regard are viewed as a critical challenge which children will feel the impact of most significantly.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, six recommendations have been identified:

1. Amplifying Children's Voices
2. Supporting Parents and Families
3. Increased Provision of Education Programs
4. Accessible Mental Health Support
5. Increased Advocacy
6. Future Research





# Background

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Children constitute a unique demographic within society, existing within a developmental phase marked by distinct needs and rights (UNCRC, 2003). As a result of their limited knowledge and life experience, children rely on the nurturing and guidance provided by adults as they progress toward adulthood. Due to their inability to participate in the voting process, children's voices are often overlooked in the realm of policy making. This dynamic perpetuates a paternalistic perspective that regards children as possessions of their guardians, placing them in a vulnerable position (Cohen, 2005).

Furthermore, the wellbeing of children is often perceived as being confined within the private sphere, with the accepted norm of child-rearing primarily enacted within the boundaries of family care. An approach that focuses on child-rearing as a private and family-centric matter, limits the ability of local communities to express concerns about inappropriate treatment or behaviour involving children (Jack & Gill, 2010).

Established in 2016, The Valuing Children Initiative (VCI) aims to promote the notion that the wellbeing of children is a collective community responsibility. Following the commissioning of the initial *Australian Attitudes to Children: The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey* in 2016, VCI commissioned a second survey in 2022 to further explore how society values children. This subsequent survey aimed to uncover how adults prioritise the interests of children, and to ascertain whether there have been attitudinal shifts in relation to children since 2016.

Children are unique individuals with their own inherent rights. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), adopted in 1989, has become a global landmark, emphasising the specific rights that should be universally afforded to every child. The UNCRC entails four core principles for upholding the rights of children: (1) the right to live without discrimination, (2) prioritisation of the best interests of the child, (3) the right to survival and development, and (4) respecting the views of the child (Fairhall & Woods, 2021; UNCRC, 2003). The UNCRC recognises that children's rights are guaranteed under the state's statutory, and that children's interests must be at the forefront of considerations in decision-making. The UNCRC was signed by Australia in September 1990 (ratified in December 1990), meaning that Australia officially accepted the obligations and commitments outlined in the treaty at this time (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d). Moreover, this global agreement also recognises the multifaceted roles of children within society as social, economic, political, civil, and cultural actors.

With the UNCRC highlighting the concept of individualisation of children, a substantial body of literature emerged exploring the evolving trends related to children's autonomy and right to participation (Reynaert et al., 2009; Such & Walker, 2005).

The emphasis within academic literature has largely centered on children's perspectives regarding various issues affecting their lives, as well as the extent to which adults provide safe environments that allows children to exert their active agency capacities. Brighthouse (2003) claimed that children's views only carry weight in a consultative manner. While Archard and Skivenes (2009) disputed this notion, arguing that it is not enough to treat children's opinions as merely advisory, rather they should be regarded with the utmost importance. Numerous scholars agree that it is imperative to consider the child's perspective when making decisions that directly impact their lives (Fairhall & Woods, 2021; Kennan et al., 2018; Lansdown, 2005).

However, when it comes to honouring children's rights to express their views, some of the existing research highlights contrasting conditions. When children were asked about their perceptions of how they are valued in various social settings, they expressed feeling heard and having some influence in their home environment, in comparison to school. (Bjerke, 2011; Lansdown, 2005), This discrepancy arises from the perception that school staff may not recognise children's capacity for meaningful participation (Bjerke, 2011; Lundy, 2007b).

Lundy (2007b) proposed a new model based on Article 12 of the UNCRC, which aimed to ensure the rights of children to have their voices heard on issues that relate to them. The author argued that it is insufficient to merely allow children to express their views, rather, it is essential to ensure that their ideas are genuinely heard. In order to achieve this, the model outlined four key elements that should be facilitated by adults: (1) Space - which refers to the importance of creating an environment which encourages children to share their views; (2) Voice – which emphasises the need to assist children in articulating their views without imposing restrictions due to their level of maturity; (3) Audience – which focuses on channelling children's views to the appropriate individuals or decision makers who can act upon them effectively; and (4) Influence – which underscores the need to give due weight to children's views, avoiding tokenism (Lundy, 2007a).

The literature demonstrates that failing to provide children with their right to expression can adversely impact their wellbeing. Child development goes beyond the boundaries of home life, it requires active engagement and participation in various social settings, such as school and the local community. By exercising their active agency roles, children can develop to their full potential.



## The Wellbeing of Australian Children

The poor wellbeing of children is a pressing policy concern as it can negatively impact the healthy development of young people (Redmond et al., 2016). A growing body of research has highlighted the importance of incorporating measures of subjective wellbeing for children. (Redmond et al., 2016; Saunders & Brown, 2020). Subjective wellbeing incorporates indicators derived from children's own assessments and perceptions of their lives and circumstances (Saunders & Brown, 2020). This understanding of wellbeing is based on the notion that children are experts of their own circumstances, their perspectives are inherently valuable and often hold greater relevance than those expressed by adults on their behalf (Saunders & Brown, 2020). Fernandez (2011) argues that in order to obtain a complete picture of child wellbeing both objective and subjective measures need to be considered.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) released the 2023 Australian Children's Wellbeing Index. The Nest, Australia's research-driven framework for child and adolescent wellbeing, was used to organise the data. The report proposes six interrelated domains of wellbeing for children and young people. These domains encompass: feeling valued, loved and safe; having access to material basics; maintaining physical and mental health; engaging in learning; actively participating; and possessing a positive sense of identity and culture (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023). In order to achieve optimal wellbeing, it essential that children are supported across all six domains.

Overall, many Australian children experience a strong sense of wellbeing; however, ongoing challenges mean that a considerable number still do not (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023). The Australian Children's Wellbeing report revealed that Australian children are faring well in several domains, such as high immunisation rates and preschool attendance (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023). However, there are domains

in which Australian children are not doing well, for example, poverty, the rates of mental illness among children, and concerns relating to child safety and protection (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023). There are also various societal factors, including socioeconomic status, technological advancements, family composition and climate change, which influence the wellbeing of children.

## **Poverty**

One in six Australian children are currently living below the national poverty line (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023). Studies indicate that children from low-income families experience significantly poorer outcomes (Alaimo et al., 2001; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997) as a result of the long-term impacts of poverty (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Low socio-economic status has been associated with long- and short-term negative impacts on children's physical and psychological health, as well as social development (Poulain et al., 2020). Additionally, children from low socio-economic families have low rates of school readiness compared to peers from more affluent families, negatively impacting academic and social outcomes (Sanson & Stanley, 2010).

## **Mental illness**

Australian children are experiencing increasing rates of mental illness. According to the First Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being conducted in 1998, one in seven children aged 4–17 years experienced deterioration in mental health (Sawyer et al., 2001). Additionally, a more recent study conducted during 2013–2014 reported similar results, with the prevalence of mental health disorders among children under 18 years reported at 14 percent (Lawrence et al., 2016). Major depressive disorders are a significant contributor to the overall burden of mental disorders in older children (Ford et al., 2017; Lawrence et al., 2016). The rates of mental illness amongst children and young people has been further exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19, with studies reporting significant increases in mental illness and suicidality post-pandemic (Hertz & Barrios, 2021; Li et al., 2022).

## **Child Safety**

Child safety and protection continue to pose a significant threat to the wellbeing of many Australian children. In 2015 it was estimated that 8.9% of Australian children experienced physical abuse, 8.6% experienced sexual abuse, 8.7% experienced emotional abuse, and 2.4% experienced neglect (Moore et al., 2015). Australia has consistently high rates of children who are involved with the child protection system (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately represented in issues of child safety and protection; they are 7 times more likely to be placed in out of home care compared to non-Indigenous children (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023).

## Family composition, technological advancements, and climate change

Several emerging social issues have introduced new challenges to the well-being of Australian children. These include shifts in family compositions, advancements in technology, and the impact of climate change. Children's mental health disorders are found to be more prevalent in the single-parent household, families living in rental homes, and when only one or both parents are employed (Lawrence et al., 2016). Furthermore, the issue of climate change has resulted in significant concern amongst children and young people (UNICEF & ARACY, 2023) with growing anxiety over unsafe environments and the burden of responsibility to address the climate crisis in the future (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2020).

Increasing rates of youth mental health issues are often associated with technological advancements and social media usage. However, more recent research has indicated that while a small correlation exists between technology use and depression and anxiety in young people, the way in which young people utilise technology has changed (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Evidence suggests that social media often provides children and young people with social support, connectedness and improved access to mental health services (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Despite the potential benefits technology provides children and families, there are safety concerns around the impact of exposure to harmful online activities, such as cyberbullying, which are closely associated with negative impacts on wellbeing (Kwan et al., 2020). Although it remains pivotal to understand the negative consequences of rapidly increasing screen time, future research and policy should focus on enhancing and tailoring existing platforms to safeguard improve the wellbeing of children.



## The Valuing Children Initiative Survey 2023

Examining how adults view children and childhood provides a critical means by which to assess whether the community has taken steps to value children and uphold their rights. When children are valued by adults within the community, they can effectively respond to the needs of children and respect their voice, including situations when children require protection.

There is a significant correlation between neighbourhoods with a high level of community cohesion and children's wellbeing (Wright, 2004). Since children are largely dependent on adults for care and protection, the study of attitudes toward children can provide guidance for resource allocation and policy development aimed at promoting children's wellbeing. This involves creating a nurturing environment that embraces the potential of children and sets them up for success into the future. Additionally, it creates opportunities to better understand how to cultivate social capital, such as networks, communication, trust, and a sense of collective responsibility, which can contribute to the development of more cohesive communities (Wright, 2004). However, much of the existing literature examining how children are perceived by adults focuses primarily on parental attitudes toward their own children, with limited exploration of societal attitudes more broadly (for example: Cheah & Chirkov, 2008; Holden & Buck, 2002; McCarthy et al., 2017).

Adults' perspectives on children have been found to have a direct impact on how children are treated and their wellbeing at the family level. Negative or hostile attributions may result in the parent perceiving the child's behaviour to be intentional or malicious. For example, if a child misbehaves while completing a specific task, the parent may assume that the behaviour is due to a lack of effort rather than the difficulty of the task. Parents' negative attributions have been found to predict symptoms of depression in adolescent females (Chen et al., 2009). Furthermore, other studies have indicated that negative parental attitudes and hostile attributions toward children are correlated with a higher likelihood of engaging in abusive behaviour or maltreatment towards children (Berlin et al., 2013; McCarthy et al., 2017). Conversely, cultivating positive parental perceptions of children serves to decrease instances of parental maltreatment (Milner et al., 2017). This finding is particularly relevant in light of the most recent Australian Child Maltreatment study, which identified that 62.2% of Australians have experienced at least one form of child maltreatment (Haslam et al., 2023). Domestic violence was reported as the most common form of child maltreatment experienced in Australia (Haslam et al., 2023).

Despite the limited literature focusing on adult attitudes toward children in the broader societal context, a recent study investigated the substantial variation in adult cognition and behaviour towards

children using an attitudinal scale (Wolf et al., 2023). The study differentiated affection and stress to determine attitudes towards children and found they are strongly related to adults' behaviours towards children (Wolf et al., 2023). Positive attitudes indicated by affection promoted a broad sense of optimism, such as motivational and emotional tendencies to care for and protect children. In contrast, negative attitudes led to emotional avoidance and a tendency to perceive children as unruly and disruptive, resulting in less care-taking behaviour (Wolf et al., 2023).

By broadening our understanding of adults' attitudes towards children we can determine the underlying factors influencing how children are treated within society. This enables us to challenge negative perceptions of children, and to create and sustain a society which prioritises and protects the wellbeing of children. Given that children represent the future of our nation, their wellbeing serves as an indicator of Australia's onward wellbeing. Moreover, childhood serves as the foundation upon which adulthood is built. By investing in children and providing them with the optimal conditions to thrive, the rewards are realised not only at the individual level but also benefit society as a whole.

In line with this perspective, the 2023 VCI Survey aimed to generate a more in-depth understanding of adults' views towards children within the broader societal context. These findings have the potential to enhance the level of social capital within Australian society by tapping into the shared beliefs among adults concerning children's rights and the impact of their realisation on children's wellbeing. VCI and its associated stakeholders were focused on assessing our current position and trajectory regarding the shared values within the community. Their objective was to apply the findings with a focus on shifting negative attitudes towards children and advocating for a more favourable perception of children and childhood.



# Methodology

## Aims and Objectives

This research aimed to explore societal attitudes towards children, through the repeat of the benchmark VCI survey originally conducted in 2016. The 2016 *Australians' Attitudes to Children* research project surveyed 1000 adults regarding their attitudes towards children. The objectives for the current research were as follows (Figure 1):

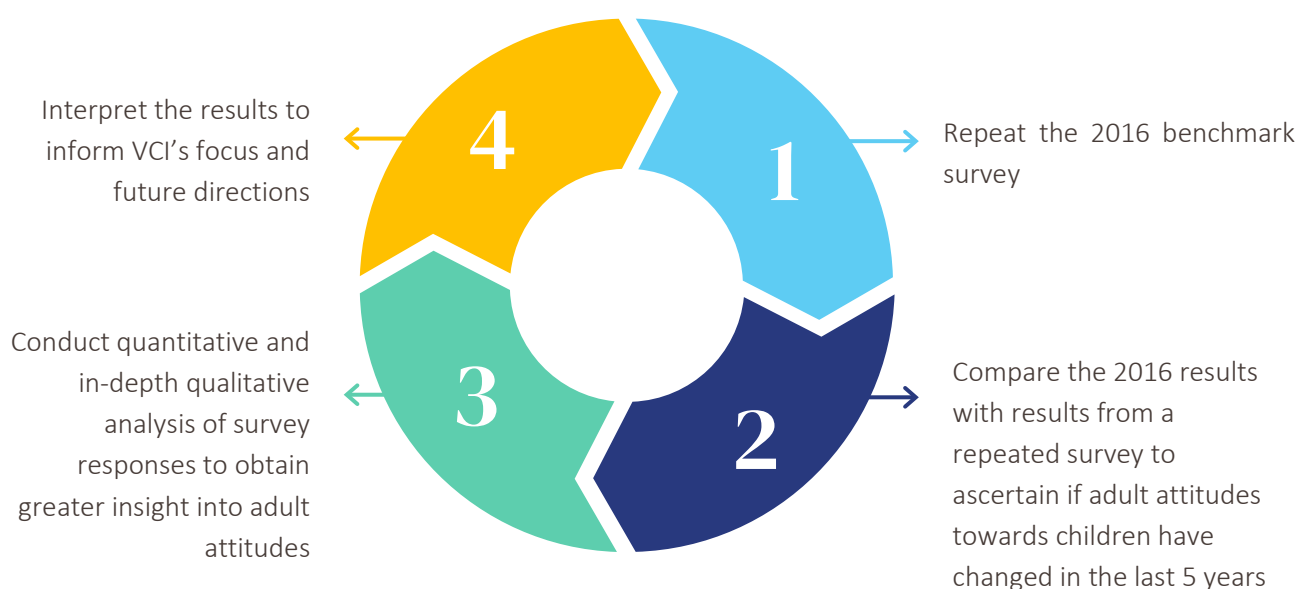


Figure 1: Research objectives

## Procedure

This study utilised a mixed methods approach to gain a more complete understanding of adult attitudes towards children. This approach allowed for the quantitative results to be compared to those gathered in 2016, but also allowed data to be explored more fully, giving a voice to respondents, and ensuring that the findings are grounded in the respondents' own lived experiences.

A self-administered mixed methods survey, consisting of quantitative and open-ended qualitative questions was distributed electronically. The survey was based on the survey that was used in the 2016 research with several additional questions to explore some of the key themes in the 2016 survey in greater detail (see appendix 1). The survey took respondents approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Recruitment and data collection took place over a period of 12 months between March 2022 and March 2023. To recruit respondents, details of the study were advertised widely across Australia through the research team's existing professional networks, using social media platforms, organisational e-newsletters and sending emails to a wide range of organisations, community groups, and libraries across Australia. Respondents were provided with a brief outline of the study and a participant information letter and were invited to complete the anonymous online survey via the Qualtrics platform. In addition, survey respondents were invited to enter a draw to win one of five \$50 shopping vouchers as an incentive for their participation. Respondents who chose to enter the draw were invited to enter their email address and phone number in a separate online survey form to ensure anonymity.

## Sample

The sample consisted of adults aged 18 years or over who usually resided in Australia. Respondents were sought across a range of age groups, gender, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and education levels to gather as diverse a sample as possible. Non-probability convenience sampling was utilised to select survey respondents as it was not possible within the time and cost constraints of this study to use a randomised probability sampling method.

A total of 1,110 surveys were completed between 9/03/2022 and 14/03/2023. However, nine responded "no" to consenting to participate, 55 did not answer the consent question, and 38 respondents had substantial amounts of missing data. These respondents were excluded from the study, leaving 1,008 respondents.

## Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data was summarised using weighted counts and percentages. Survey responses were weighted based on age group, sex, and state/territory of residence, using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (31010do002\_202209 National, state and territory population, Sep 2022). Weights were used so that the results better reflected the whole population, accounting for over/under representation of groups within the survey sample.

Comparisons between 2016 and 2023 responses were performed using univariable logistic regression for binary outcomes and chi-squared tests for categorical outcomes. Results for 2016 data may vary from previous reports due to differences in the weightings used. Statistical analysis was performed by a biostatistician using Stata MP version 17, using a p-critical value of 0.05.

## Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data was explored through thematic analysis, with coding undertaken via NVivo and synthesis occurring via Miro. Four members of the research team collaborated to analyse the data, with regular meetings to discuss emerging themes. Throughout the coding and theming, focus was afforded to credibility and dependability, with the research team working across the dataset and engaging in ongoing dialogue and reflection to ensure intercoder agreement (Guest et al., 2012).



# Results

## Respondent Characteristics

A total of 1,008 participants completed the questionnaire. Women, Western Australian residents, and parents were over-represented in the study cohort, although the study captured participants with a wide range of sociodemographic characteristics. A summary of respondent characteristics is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Characteristic of survey respondents.*

Characteristics	N (%)
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	397 (39.4%)
Female	588 (58.3%)
Other/not specified	23 (2.3%)
<b>Age</b>	
18 – 25	89 (8.9%)
26 – 30	234 (23.2%)
31 – 35	156 (15.5%)
36 – 40	122 (12.1%)
41 – 45	100 (9.9%)
46 – 50	90 (8.9%)
51 – 55	76 (7.5%)
56 – 60	53 (5.3%)
61 – 65	34 (3.4%)
66 – 70	27 (2.7%)
71 – 75	14 (1.4%)
75+	6 (0.6%)
Unspecified	7 (0.7%)
<b>State/territory</b>	
New South Wales	197 (19.5%)
Victoria	191 (19.0%)

Queensland	90 (8.9%)
South Australia	44 (4.4%)
Western Australia	416 (41.3%)
Tasmania	24 (2.4%)
Northern Territory	14 (1.4%)
Australian Capital Territory	21 (2.1%)
Missing	11 (1.9%)
<b>Relationship with children</b>	
Biological parent	675 (67.0%)
Adoptive parent	47 (4.7%)
Step-parent	66 (6.6%)
Guardian parent	26 (2.6%)
Foster parent	35 (3.5%)
Work with children	197 (19.5%)
None of the above	127 (12.6%)
<b>Marital status</b>	
Married	596 (59.1%)
De facto/partnered	148 (14.7%)
Divorced/separated	83 (8.2%)
Single	145 (14.4%)
Widowed	11 (1.1%)
Not answered	25 (2.5%)
<b>Employment status</b>	
Full-time (permanent)	484 (48.0%)
Part-time (permanent)	187 (18.6%)
Casual ( $\geq 30$ hrs per week)	29 (2.9%)
Casual ( $< 30$ hrs per week)	51 (5.1%)
Self-employed	59 (5.9%)
Contract	39 (3.9%)
Home duties	24 (2.4%)
Retired	36 (3.6%)
Unemployed and looking for work	31 (3.1%)
Unemployed and not looking for work	12 (1.2%)

Other/no answered	56 (5.6%)
<b>Household</b>	
Couple only	161 (16.0%)
Couple with children	518 (51.4%)
Person living alone	113 (11.2%)
Single person with children	81 (8.0%)
Group/share household	76 (7.5%)
Other/no answer	59 (5.9%)
<b>Household income</b>	
Less than \$30,999	73 (7.2%)
\$31,000 – \$45,999	83 (8.2%)
\$46,000 – \$60,999	71 (7.0%)
\$61,000 - \$75,999	100 (9.9%)
\$76,000 – \$100,999	148 (14.7%)
\$101,000 – \$120,999	147 (14.6%)
\$121,000+	261 (25.9%)
No income/no answer	125 (12.4%)
<b>Education</b>	
Year 11 or below	24 (2.4%)
Year 12 or equivalent	71 (7.1%)
Trade certificate or apprenticeship	53 (5.3%)
Diploma, certificate etc	162 (16.1%)
Bachelor or honours degree	338 (33.5%)
Post-graduate qualification	339 (33.6%)
Not answered	20 (2.0%)
<b>Culture</b>	
Australian	695 (69.0%)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	48 (4.8%)
British	157 (15.6%)
European	129 (12.8%)
Asian	97 (9.6%)

## Quantitative Results

### Looking after the interests of children

Of all respondents, 90.1% felt that looking after the interests of children was important to them (Table 2) and this was the fourth highest ranked issue. Women were significantly more likely to indicate that looking after the interests of children was important to them compared with men (OR: 2.61, 95%CI: 1.40, 4.86,  $p=0.002$ ). There was also considerable variability in the importance of the interests of children in terms of the age of respondents, ranging from 84.6% in respondents aged over 70 years to 95.9% in respondents 41 to 50 years. Respondents living with children were more likely to report that looking after the interests of children was important to them compared to respondents living without children (OR: 1.99, 95%CI: 1.05, 3.74,  $p=0.034$ ).

Table 2: Response to question 5 “How important are the following issues to you personally?”

	Important total	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	I haven't really thought about it
Addressing climate change	<b>87.3%</b>	55.8%	31.5%	9.1%	3.3%	0.3%
Management of the economy	<b>91.1%</b>	45.8%	45.4%	7.3%	1.2%	0.4%
Looking after the interest of children	<b>90.1%</b>	66.1%	24.0%	5.4%	3.3%	1.3%
Looking after the interests of older Australians	<b>86.8%</b>	52.6%	34.2%	8.5%	4.3%	0.5%
The quality of the Australian health system	<b>90.9%</b>	70.0%	20.9%	7.1%	1.3%	0.7%
Australian jobs and protection of local industries	<b>87.0%</b>	41.6%	45.4%	8.7%	4.0%	0.3%
Housing affordability	<b>86.6%</b>	56.0%	30.6%	9.0%	4.0%	0.4%
Security and the war on terrorism	<b>71.5%</b>	35.2%	36.2%	20.6%	6.6%	1.3%
A quality education system	<b>92.2%</b>	70.3%	21.9%	5.6%	1.8%	0.5%
A fair taxation system	<b>88.8%</b>	53.0%	35.7%	7.5%	3.5%	0.3%

“Mental health issues” and “Family issues” were most commonly identified as “Important” or “Very important” issues faced by children and young people today (Table 3), followed by “Education” and “Drug or alcohol issues”. While “Exercise and sport” and “Climate change” were least commonly deemed important, more than 80% of respondents still deemed these issues either important or very important.

*Table 3: Response to question 7 “Please rate some of these major issues faced by children and young people today”.*

	Important total	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	I haven’t really thought about it
Climate change	<b>85.4%</b>	56.1%	29.3%	10.5%	3.8%	0.4%
Mental health issues	<b>92.5%</b>	60.5%	23.1%	4.7%	2.7%	0.1%
Social media	<b>86.2%</b>	53.4%	32.8%	10.7%	3.1%	0.0%
Housing affordability	<b>86.2%</b>	54.7%	31.5%	10.9%	2.6%	0.3%
Education	<b>89.9%</b>	70.1%	19.9%	7.1%	2.7%	0.3%
Employment	<b>87.4%</b>	52.3%	35.0%	7.3%	5.2%	0.2%
Family issues	<b>90.6%</b>	60.3%	30.4%	6.1%	3.0%	0.3%
Peer pressure	<b>86.8%</b>	46.0%	40.8%	9.4%	3.3%	0.6%
Drug or alcohol issues	<b>88.6%</b>	46.9%	41.7%	8.4%	2.4%	0.6%
Safe public places	<b>87.2%</b>	51.2%	35.9%	9.7%	2.7%	0.5%
Exercise and sports	<b>82.4%</b>	41.8%	40.6%	12.4%	4.4%	0.8%
Body image	<b>85.7%</b>	47.4%	38.2%	8.3%	5.4%	0.7%
Discrimination	<b>87.2%</b>	52.1%	35.1%	9.0%	2.5%	1.3%
Equality	<b>87.3%</b>	55.3%	31.9%	7.4%	4.4%	0.8%

“Financial pressures” was most commonly identified as the main challenge faced by parents, carers, and society in raising/caring for children, with 91.8% of respondents reporting this challenge was “Very important” or “Somewhat important” (Table 4). Followed by “Mental health issues” (90.3%) and ‘Housing affordability” (89.7%).

Table 4: Response to question 8 “Please rate some of these main challenges faced by parents/carers/ society in raising/ caring for children”.

	Important total	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	I haven’t really thought about it
Social media	<b>89.0%</b>	53.1%	35.9%	9.1%	1.9%	0.0%
Influence of peers	<b>87.5%</b>	43.6%	43.9%	9.1%	3.3%	0.1%
Mental health issues	<b>90.3%</b>	72.1%	18.2%	5.9%	3.3%	0.5%
Drug or alcohol issues	<b>86.3%</b>	49.5%	36.8%	8.5%	4.8%	0.5%
Lack of extended family support	<b>86.3%</b>	44.0%	42.3%	9.5%	3.1%	1.1%
Financial pressure	<b>91.8%</b>	54.0%	37.9%	5.4%	2.6%	0.2%
Work/life balance	<b>89.4%</b>	52.0%	37.4%	5.6%	4.1%	0.9%
Housing affordability	<b>89.7%</b>	55.3%	34.5%	7.1%	3.0%	0.2%
Generational changes in parenting standards	<b>79.5%</b>	38.2%	41.4%	16.3%	3.2%	1.0%
Generational differences	<b>77.1%</b>	27.1%	50.0%	17.0%	4.7%	1.3%

More than half of respondents felt that when making policy decisions, the Australian government gave too little consideration to the impact on children and young people (Table 5). This response was higher than for other groups, including older Australians, people with disabilities or chronic health conditions, and people on low or fixed incomes. Women were substantially more likely compared with men to respond that children were not given enough consideration (OR: 5.77, 95%CI: 3.81, 8.75,  $p < 0.001$ ), with 76.0% of women responding that children were not given enough consideration compared with 35.4% of men. There was variability by age group in the response to this question, with more than 80% of respondents reporting children were not given enough consideration for those aged 41-50, 51-60, and 61-70 years, but less than 22.1% for respondents aged 26-30 years. Interestingly, 50.4% of respondents with children felt that children were not given enough consideration, compared with 61.3% of respondents without children (OR: 0.64, 95%CI: 0.44, 0.93,  $p = 0.018$ ).

Table 5: Response to question 9 “When making decisions about policies, do you believe governments in Australia give enough, too much or too little consideration to the impact on the following groups?”

	Give too much consideration	Give enough consideration	Give too little consideration	I haven't really thought about it
Older	17.1%	38.3%	42.4%	2.2%
Children (0-17 years)	13.9%	28.7%	56.6%	0.8%
Parents	11.9%	42.4%	44.1%	1.6%
Working adults	14.9%	52.7%	30.8%	1.5%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	16.5%	32.5%	48.4%	2.6%
People from refugee backgrounds	12.3%	28.1%	55.5%	4.2%
People from CaLD backgrounds	12.7%	32.8%	41.2%	13.3%
People with disabilities	11.0%	33.6%	53.1%	2.3%
People with chronic health conditions	11.9%	31.2%	53.4%	3.5%
People who are unemployed or underemployed	11.8%	32.8%	52.9%	2.6%
People with diverse gender and sexuality identities	17.0%	38.5%	40.7%	3.8%
People on low or fixed incomes	9.3%	36.6%	51.4%	2.8%
Small businesses	16.7%	48.9%	31.0%	3.4%
Large businesses	55.6%	32.1%	8.8%	3.5%

When asked to rank their agreement regarding a series of statements about children and childhood (Figure 2), a majority of respondents agreed that the opinions of children should be considered just as important as those of adults (67.2%) but that a child's word is less likely to be believed than that of another adult (75.1%). Respondents also indicated that they believed that the best interests of children should always be considered in all decisions made by adults (75.2%).

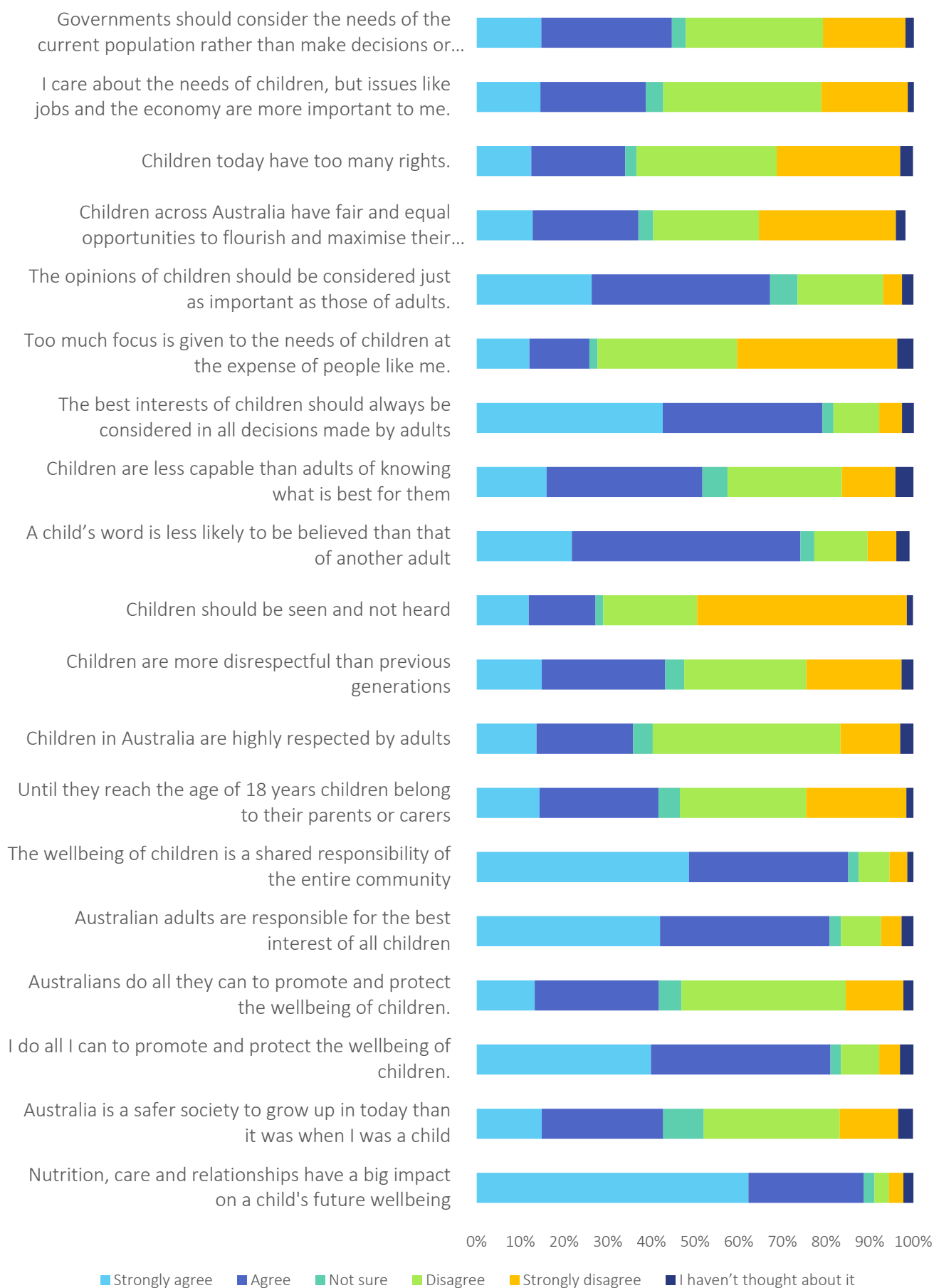


Figure 2: Statements about children - level of agreement

When asked about where responsibility lay for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of Australian children, parents were ranked first by a majority of respondents (66.8%). There was acknowledgment that everyone in the community should be responsible, and governments and teachers were also ranked highly as holding responsibility (Figure 3).

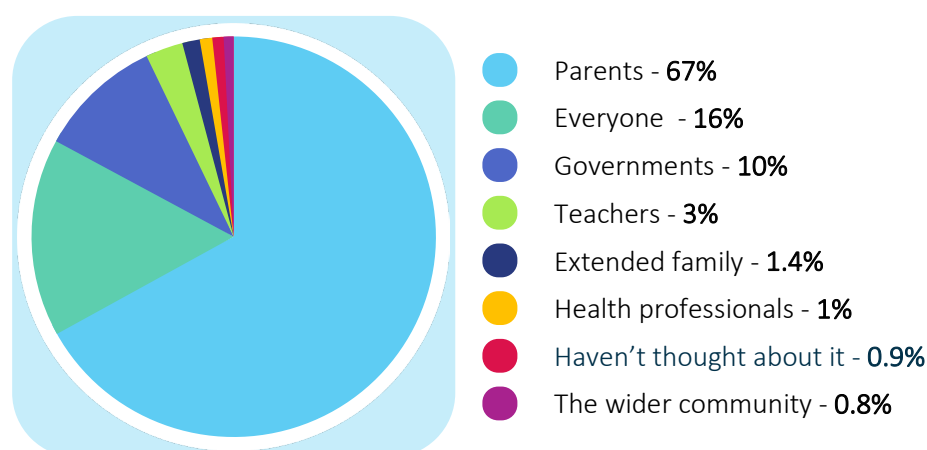


Figure 3: What groups are responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children in Australia today?

## Description of children

The top five words selected to describe children in Australia today were largely positive, with more than 40% of respondents describing children as “fortunate”, “tech savvy”, “valued”, “safe” and “active” (Table 6). Interestingly, the term “vulnerable” was also rated very high, presenting a paradox as it seems to contradict the positive nature of the other top choices.

Table 6: The percentage of respondents that selected each key word to describe children in Australia today.

Rank	Word	Percentage	Rank	Word	Percentage
1	Fortunate	57.7%	=12	Respected	24.0%
2	Tech savvy	54.9%	14	Well behaved	20.6%
3	Valued	44.7%	15	Ignored	19.3%
4	Safe	42.5%	16	Unhappy	16.0%
5	Active	41.7%	17	Spoilt	13.1%
6	Vulnerable	41.6%	18	Mistreated	12.1%
7	Caring	36.5%	19	Deprived	11.2%
8	Happy	35.9%	20	Selfish	10.5%
9	Honest	35.1%	21	Lazy	9.6%
10	Innovative	29.4%	22	Uncooperative	6.4%
11	Appreciated	28.8%	23	Unpleasant	4.7%
=12	Trustworthy	24.0%	24	Dishonest	4.4%

Many respondents expressed the belief that being a child in today's world is more challenging compared to their own childhood experiences, as indicated in Table 7. This perception was often linked to concern around technology and the increasing pressure on children today. Increased access to technology and social media, while at times beneficial, raised safety concerns, highlighting the complexity of childhood in today's world. The qualitative analysis delves deeper into the multifaceted reasons behind this perception, offering valuable insights into the evolving nature of childhood experiences and the factors that shape them.

Table 7: Response to questions 17 to 41.

	Percentage
<b>In your opinion, is it easier to be a child today than it was when you were a child?</b>	
Much easier	17.2%
A little easier	18.0%
About the same	14.9%
A little more challenging	19.2%
A lot more challenging	29.0%
I've never really thought about it	1.7%
<b>In your opinion, are children in Australia today valued more, less, or the same as when you were a child?</b>	
Much more valued	22.4%
A little more valued	33.3%
About the same	26.9%
A little less valued	9.0%
A lot less valued	4.3%
I've never really thought about it	4.2%
<b>In your opinion, do children in Australia today have more, less, or the same rights as when you were a child?</b>	
Too many rights	11.7%
More rights	56.1%
About the same	23.4%
Fewer rights	3.4%
Too little rights	2.4%
I've never really thought about it	2.9%
<b>In your opinion, do children in Australia today have more, less, or the same as when you were a child?</b>	
Too many privileges	13.1%

More privileges	54.6%
About the same	24.9%
Fewer privileges	3.6%
Too few privileges	1.9%
I've never really thought about it	2.0%
<b>Do you consider the opinions of children more, less or just as important as those of adults?</b>	
Much more important	15.0%
A little more important	20.9%
About the same	43.2%
A little less important	17.4%
A lot less important	2.7%
I've never really thought about it	0.8%
<b>Would you consider the word of children more, less or just as believable as those of adults?</b>	
Much more believable	13.7%
A little more believable	25.5%
About the same	44.4%
A little less believable	12.4%
A lot less believable	2.7%
I've never really thought about it	1.4%
<b>How concerned are you for the health and happiness of future generations of Australians?</b>	
Very concerned	54.0%
Somewhat concerned	31.6%
Not very concerned	8.0%
Not at all concerned	4.0%
I've never really thought about it	2.4%
<b>In your opinion how committed is Australian society to protecting and prioritising the needs of children?</b>	
Very committed	17.5%
Committed	43.2%
Not sure	5.2%
Not very committed	29.2%
Not at all committed	4.8%
<b>Would you support or oppose the appointment of a federal Minister for Children and Future Generations to ensure that their rights and needs are at the forefront of considerations?</b>	
Strongly support	46.3%
Support	30.7%

Neither support nor oppose	15.6%
Oppose	2.9%
Strongly oppose	1.8%
Not sure	2.6%
<b>Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Child wellbeing is a collective community responsibility</b>	
Agree	90.3%
Disagree	5.5%
I don't know	4.2%
<b>Do you think that children should be valued less, more, or just as much now and in the future?</b>	
Much more valued	42.4%
A little more valued	31.6%
About the same	19.3%
A little less valued	2.3%
A lot less valued	2.7%
I've never really thought about it	1.8%
<b>From the scale below, please indicate how you feel about children: - Your own children</b>	
Very positive	60.2%
Positive	26.1%
Indifferent	4.0%
Negative	3.5%
Very negative	0.0%
I've never thought about it	6.1%
<b>From the scale below, please indicate how you feel about children: - All Australian Children</b>	
Very positive	37.0%
Positive	45.5%
Indifferent	8.3%
Negative	5.0%
Very negative	0.0%
I've never thought about it	4.3%
<b>Have you heard of "The Valuing Children Initiative"?</b>	
Yes	42.3%
No	54.0%
I don't know	3.1%

## Comparison of 2016 and 2023 results

Compared with results collected in 2016, there was no significant difference between the percentage of respondents who ranked looking after the interests of children “very important” or “important”. Significant increases were only observed for “addressing climate change”, while all other items declined in importance (Figure 4).

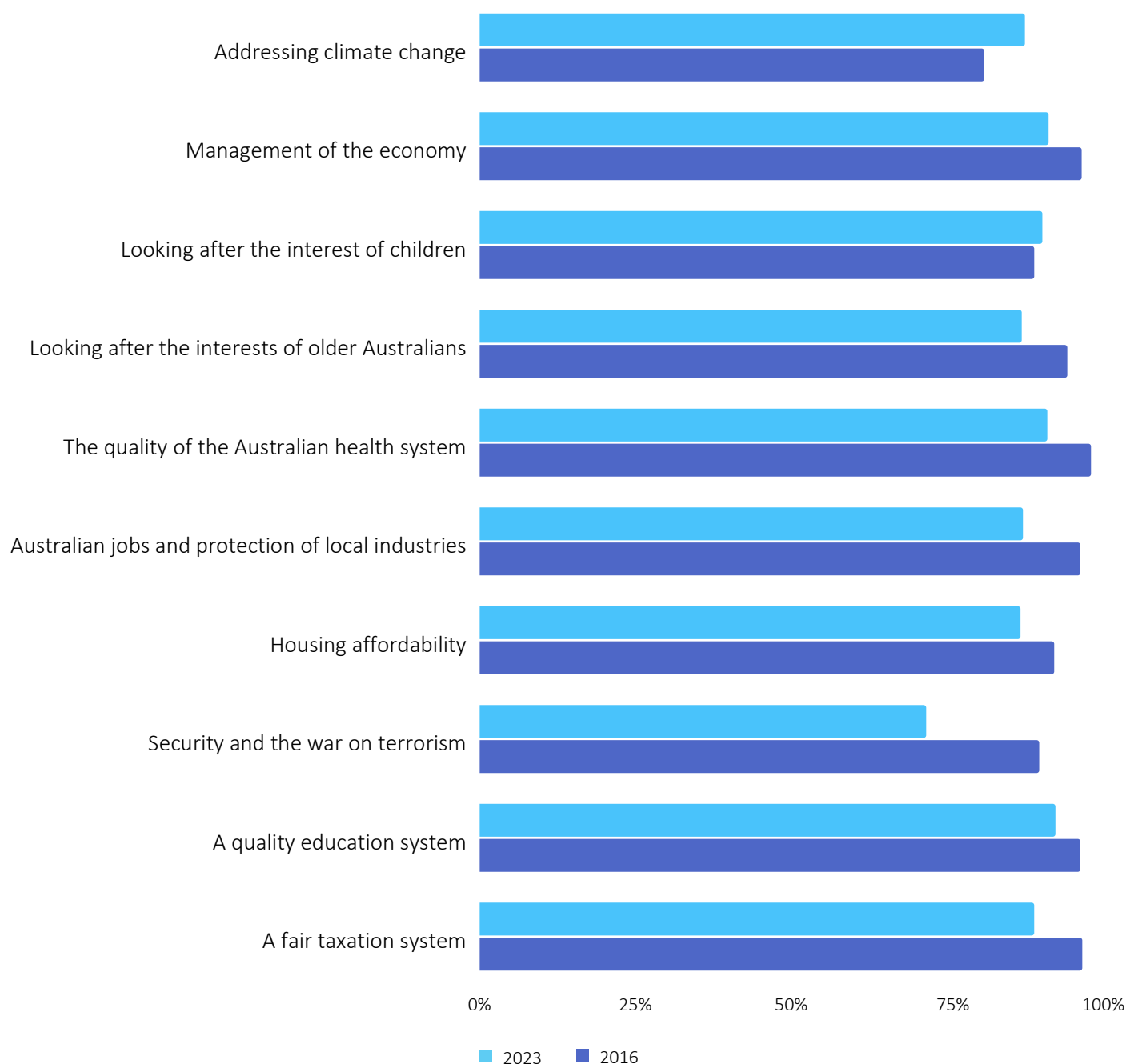


Figure 4: Comparison of participants that responded “very important” or “somewhat important” in the 2023 and 2016 survey in responses to question 5 “How important are the following issues to you personally?”

Between 2016 and 2023, changes were observed when respondents were asked to reflect on how much consideration the Australian government gives to different groups when making policy decisions (Figure 5). In 2016 40.8% of respondents felt that children were given enough consideration, which decreased to only 28.7% of respondents in 2023. Additionally, there were significant changes observed across various views relating to children and childhood (Table 12). For example, the percentage of respondents who felt that economic issues were more important than the needs of children, had decreased between 2016 (51.1%) and 2023 (38.7%).

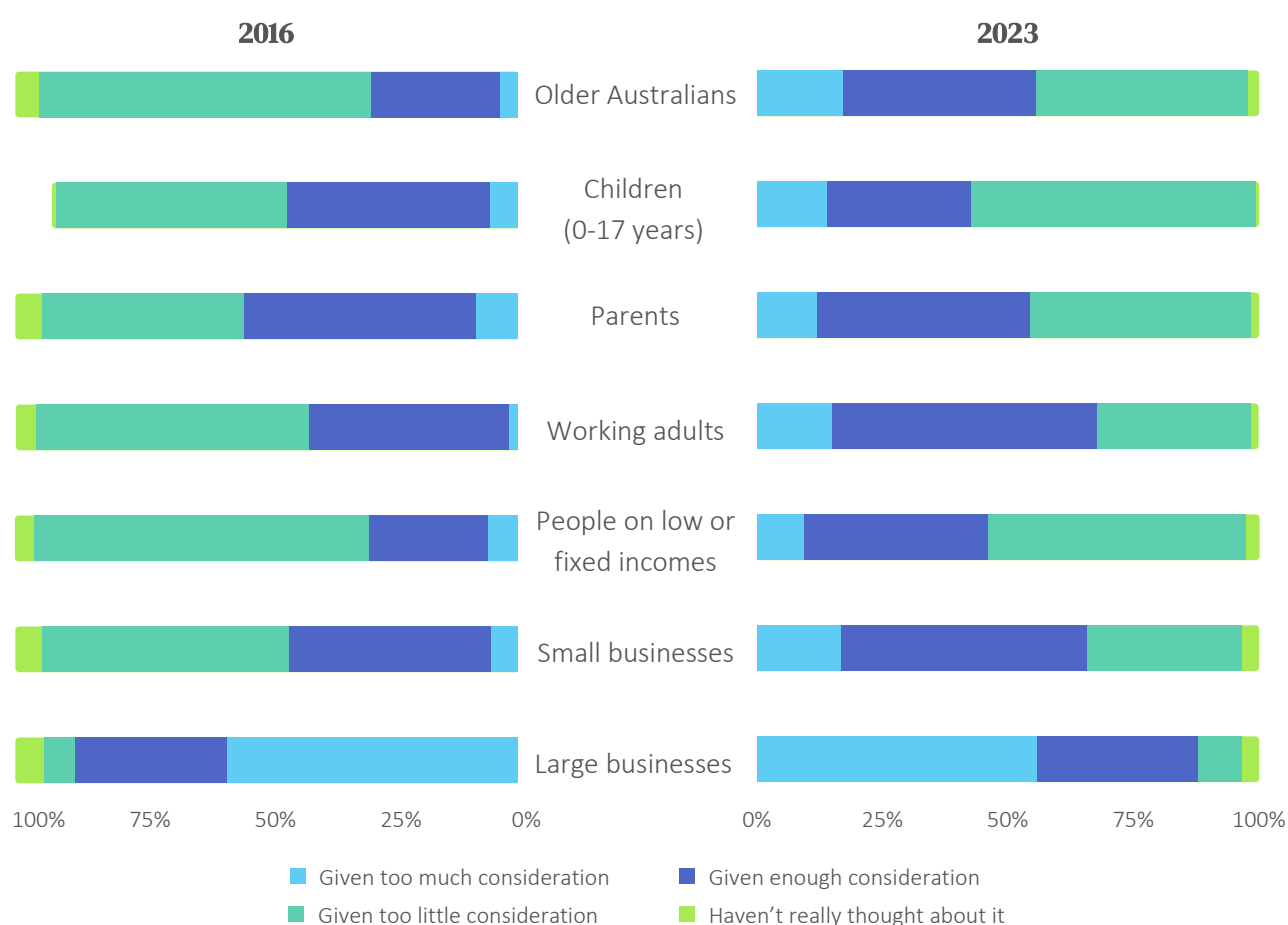


Figure 5: Comparison of 2023 and 2016 response to question 9 “When making decisions about policies, do you believe governments in Australia give enough, too much or too little consideration to the impact on the following groups?”

Table 8: Comparison of the percentage of participants who responded “strongly agree” or “agree” in response to the following statements (question 12) in the 2023 and 2016 survey.

	2023	2016	OR (95%)	p-value
Governments should consider the needs of the current population rather than make decisions or policy in the interests of future generations.	44.6%	43.0%	1.07 (0.86, 1.33)	0.563
I care about the needs of children, but issues like jobs and the economy are more important to me.	38.7%	51.1%	0.60 (0.48, 0.75)	< 0.001
Children today have too many rights.	34.1%	50.1%	0.52 (0.41, 0.64)	< 0.001
Children across Australia have fair and equal opportunities to flourish and maximise their potential.	36.9%	48.9%	0.61 (0.49, 0.76)	< 0.001
The opinions of children should be considered just as important as those of adults.	67.2%	57.0%	1.55 (1.22, 1.96)	< 0.001
Too much focus is given to the needs of children at the expense of people like me.	25.8%	24.7%	1.06 (0.83, 1.34)	0.636
The best interests of children should always be considered in all decisions made by adults	79.2%	81.3%	0.87 (0.66, 1.15)	0.339
Children are less capable than adults of knowing what is best for them	51.7%	59.7%	0.72 (0.58, 0.90)	0.004
A child’s word is less likely to be believed than that of another adult	75.1%	63.9%	1.70 (1.34, 2.16)	< 0.001
Children should be seen and not heard	27.3%	16.2%	1.94 (1.50, 2.49)	< 0.001
Children are more disrespectful than previous generations	43.2%	78.2%	0.21 (0.17, 0.27)	< 0.001
Children in Australia are highly respected by adults	35.8%	30.6%	1.26 (1.01, 0.59)	0.044
Until they reach the age of 18 years children belong to their parents or carers	41.6%	70.0%	0.31 (0.24, 0.38)	< 0.001
The wellbeing of children is a shared responsibility of the entire community	85.2%	74.7%	1.94 (1.47, 2.57)	< 0.001
Australian adults are responsible for the best interest of all children	80.8%	72.7%	1.58 (1.22, 2.04)	< 0.001
Australians do all they can to promote and protect the wellbeing of children.	41.7%	48.7%	0.75 (0.60, 0.94)	0.012
I do all I can to promote and protect the wellbeing of children.	81.1%	78.5%	1.17 (0.89, 1.54)	0.262
Australia is a safer society to grow up in today than it was when I was a child	42.8%	15.2%	4.17 (3.25, 5.34)	< 0.001
Nutrition, care, and relationships have a big impact on a child's future wellbeing	88.6%	89.1%	0.95 (0.66, 1.36)	0.765

Substantial changes were observed in terms of the way in which respondents described Australian children between 2016 and 2023 (Table 9). Notable increases in the use of positive descriptors such as “valued”, “safe” and “caring” were observed, while the use of negative words such as “lazy”, “selfish”, and “dishonest” were markedly reduced.

*Table 9: Comparison of the percentage of respondents that selected each word to describe children in Australia today in the 2023 and 2016 survey.*

Words	2016	2023	OR (95%CI)	p-value
Fortunate	47.3%	57.7%	1.52 (1.22, 1.89)	< 0.001
Valued	24.5%	44.7%	2.49 (1.97, 3.15)	< 0.001
Vulnerable	38.3%	41.6%	1.15 (0.92, 1.44)	0.227
Active	27.2%	42.7%	1.91 (1.52, 2.41)	< 0.001
Safe	16.8%	42.5%	3.65 (2.86, 4.65)	< 0.001
Happy	29.9%	35.9%	1.31 (1.04, 1.66)	0.022
Caring	12.2%	36.5%	4.13 (3.17, 5.37)	< 0.001
Active	41.7%	34.3%	1.91 (1.52, 2.41)	< 0.001
Appreciated	16.2%	28.8%	2.08 (1.59, 2.72)	< 0.001
Honest	13.0%	35.1%	3.60 (2.77, 4.67)	< 0.001
Trustworthy	7.6%	24.0%	3.84 (2.80, 5.26)	< 0.001
Respected	10.6%	24.0%	2.65 (1.98, 3.55)	< 0.001
Well behaved	9.0%	20.6%	2.63 (1.91, 3.64)	< 0.001
Spoilt	57.1%	13.1%	0.11 (0.09, 0.15)	< 0.001
Ignored	13.4%	19.3%	1.55 (1.16, 2.08)	0.003
Unhappy	14.6%	16.0%	1.11 (0.82, 1.51)	0.490
Deprived	8.9%	11.2%	1.30 (0.89, 1.90)	0.174
Mistreated	11.2%	12.1%	1.09 (0.79, 1.51)	0.611
Selfish	44.9%	10.5%	0.14 (0.10, 0.21)	< 0.001
Lazy	44.8%	9.6%	0.13 (0.09, 0.18)	< 0.001
Uncooperative	29.6%	6.4%	0.16 (0.11, 0.24)	< 0.001
Unpleasant	16.3%	4.7%	0.25 (0.16, 0.39)	< 0.001
Dishonest	14.3%	4.4%	0.28 (0.18, 0.44)	< 0.001

\*Innovative and tech savvy were not included in the 2016 survey.

The comparison between the 2016 and 2023 survey results reveals significant shifts in attitudes towards children. In 2016, a higher percentage of respondents believed that it was much easier to be a child today compared to their own childhood, a perception that notably decreased in 2023. This change reflects evolving views on the challenges and complexities children today face. Additionally, the 2023 results indicated a slight increase in concerns regarding the health and happiness of future generation. Notably, the 2023 results demonstrated a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who strongly supported the appointment of a federal Minister for children and future generations, highlighting a growing recognition of the importance of advocating for children's rights and needs at the highest levels of government. Overall, the 2023 results suggest a positive shift in attitudes towards children, with a heightened focus on taking action to prioritise their needs and well-being. These findings are summarised in Table 10.

*Table 10: Comparison between 2023 and 2016 survey responses.*

	2023	2016	p-value
In your opinion, is it easier to be a child today than it was when you were a child?			
Much easier	17.2%	20.8%	< 0.001
A little easier	18.0%	13.0%	
About the same	14.9%	12.2%	
A little more challenging	19.2%	21.0%	
A lot more challenging	29.0%	27.5%	
I've never really thought about it	1.7%	5.6%	
In your opinion, are children in Australia today valued more, less, or the same as when you were a child?			
Much more valued	22.4%	9.9%	< 0.001
A little more valued	33.3%	19.5%	
About the same	26.9%	44.1%	
A little less valued	9.0%	13.2%	
A lot less valued	4.3%	3.3%	
I've never really thought about it	4.2%	10.1%	
How concerned are you for the health and happiness of future generations of Australians?			
Very concerned	54.0%	31.2%	
Somewhat concerned	31.6%	48.5%	
Not very concerned	8.0%	12.0%	
Not at all concerned	4.0%	1.7%	

I've never really thought about it	2.4%	6.6%	
<b>In your opinion how committed is Australian society to protecting and prioritising the needs of children?</b>			
Very committed	17.6%	7.5%	< 0.001
Committed	43.2%	51.4%	
Not sure	5.2%	16.5%	
Not very committed	29.2%	23.5%	
Not at all committed	4.5%	11.7%	
<b>Would you support or oppose the appointment of a federal Minister for Children and Future Generations to ensure that their rights and needs are at the forefront of considerations?</b>			
Strongly support	46.3%	18.8%	< 0.001
Support	30.7%	36.1%	
Neither support nor oppose	15.6%	26.0%	
Oppose	2.9%	5.8%	
Strongly oppose	1.8%	3.2%	
Not sure	2.6%	10.2%	
<b>From the scale below, please indicate how you feel about your own children</b>			
Very positive	60.2%	50.4%	< 0.001
Positive	26.1%	28.2%	
Indifferent	4.0%	8.3%	
Negative	3.5%	3.1%	
Very negative	0.0%	0.3%	
I've never thought about it	6.1%	9.7%	
<b>Have you heard of the "Valuing Children Initiative"?</b>			
Yes	42.3%	3.5%	< 0.001
No	54.0%	91.2%	
I don't know	5.4%	3.7%	

## Qualitative Results

Overall, the data reflected that there was a diversity of views apparent regarding children and childhood, that there were key concerns relating to how children are currently experiencing childhood, and that respondents possessed a range of ideas regarding what more should be done to support children and young people.

This section explores the three overarching themes which emerged:

- Diverse conceptualisations of children and childhood
- Pressures, paradoxes, and priorities
- Taking action for a better future

### Conceptualisations of children and childhood: *“Remarkable little humans...”*

Across the dataset, it was evident that respondents held varied and diverse views regarding children and childhood. Children were conceptualised in a multitude of ways; these are captured in Figure 6.

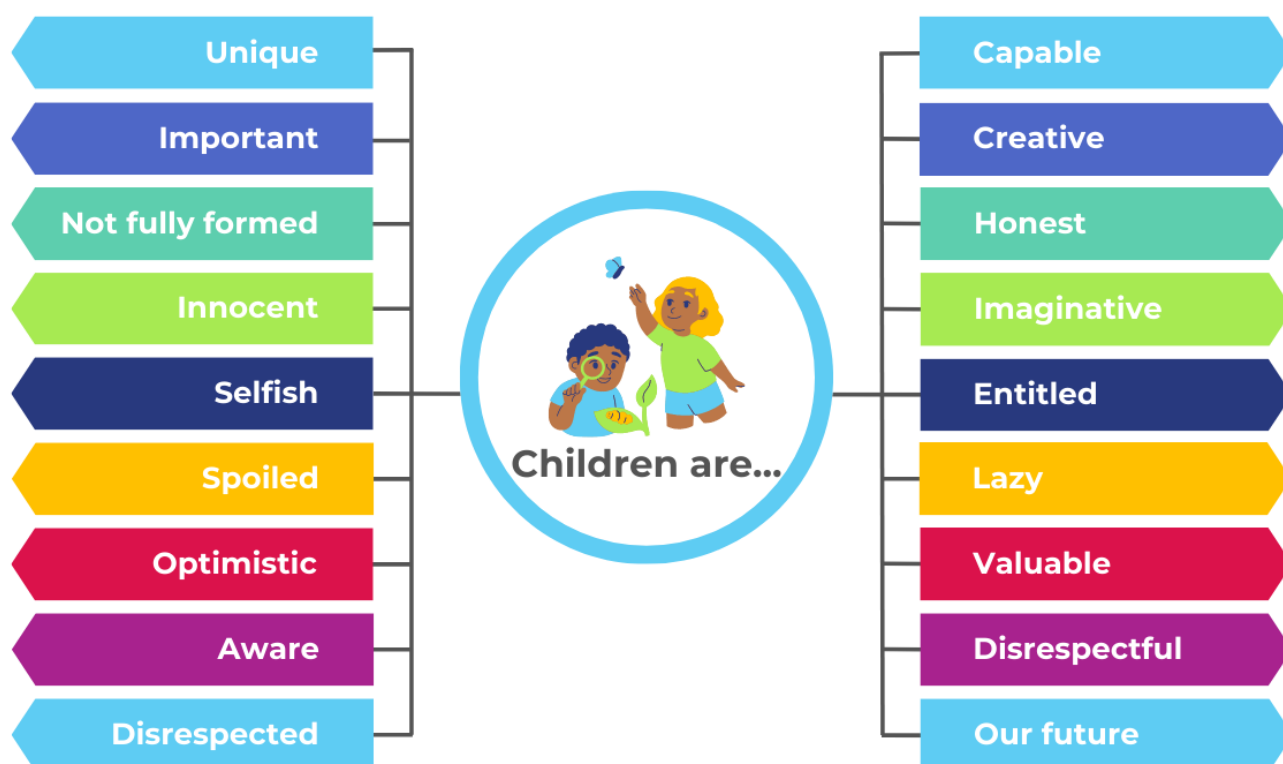
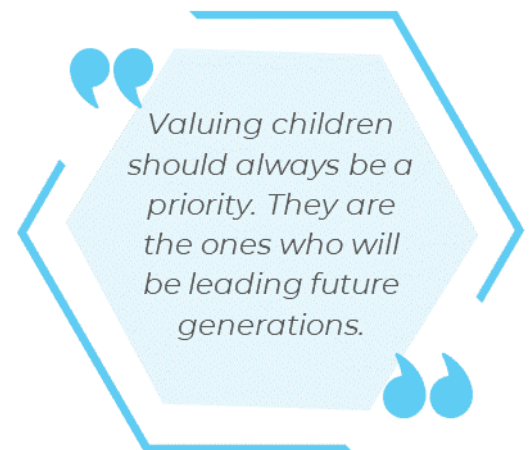


Figure 6: Diverse conceptualisations of children

There were several conceptualisations which were more prominent. These included: children are the future; children as vulnerable; and children as important. A prevalent sentiment among respondents was the acknowledgement that children represent the future, emphasising the need to protect, nurture, and support their development. It was evident that respondents felt that investing in children's wellbeing and development was crucial for the future of society and upcoming generations. Additionally, respondents highlighted the intergenerational aspect, recognising that the care and support provided to children now would positively impact on the quality of life for current adults as they age, creating a reciprocal relationship of mutual benefit and support within society.



*Valuing children should always be a priority. They are the ones who will be leading future generations. What we have not done right in the past is still causing issues today. If we want to improve the outcomes for future generations, we need to start with the children who will be leading future generations.*

*Respecting them and understanding that they are the future - without them we won't have the services we need in the future.*

There was also recognition that children are real people with their own identities and perspectives. For instance, respondents often reflected that children were not a homogenous community and that they were important people in their own right:

*Every child's situation is different.*

*It means seeing them as people and valuing their input and not squishing their own uniqueness into our cultural norms.*

*Our children are unique but for too long too many assumptions have been made that they don't need to be seen as individuals with their own needs.*

*Valuing children means seeing them as real people, equal to adults. It means seeing them as future adults, and that the investment we make in children is directly connected to the adults they become. Valuing children means treating them with respect, giving them the tools they need to be able to problem solve independently, and confidently forge their way in life. Children are all unique, and seeing their uniqueness also requires us to value them fully, and not measure them against each other.*

At times, respondents were more dismissive of children, particularly in terms of their capabilities, behaviours, and rights. There were deficit perspectives apparent in responses that raised children's perceived immaturity and irresponsibility. For example:

*They don't quite understand the "way the world works" as much as someone with years of experience.*

*Children have little to no concept of repercussions or penalties. They openly lie knowing the worst they will get is their internet privileges withdrawn for a day. There is no penalty for lying or being dishonest.*

*They have no life experience, even young adults have never experienced inflation or high interest rates, what do they know about the world? All they care about is themselves and their social media profile.*

*[Children are] exposed to far more complex life issues, social issues and world crisis issues than was ever available before. So much being told to them that they don't need to know yet.*

*I value children, I just think we are too soft on them and give them too much in Australia. Many kids are ill mannered and spoilt.*

*I don't particularly like children, I find them annoying and dirty and disrespectful.*

*I am generally disgusted at the little or no respect many children today show to the adults with whom they come into contact.*

These perspectives were often linked in with innocence narratives, wherein the ideal childhood was positioned as inherently innocent. For example:

*I would not let my child watch or hear the news - they don't need to hear so much suffering and worrying.*

*Sometimes more information is not better children and young people have access to more information than ever before meaning they have more to absorb from such as young age.*

*My ignorant childhood was a simpler time. We were blissfully unaware.*



Respondents frequently reflected on the treatment of children, whether at a personal level (e.g., treatment by family members), a local level (e.g., treatment by friends, their school community), or a broader level (e.g., treatment by the community at large, by the government). Common points of focus are captured in Figure 7.

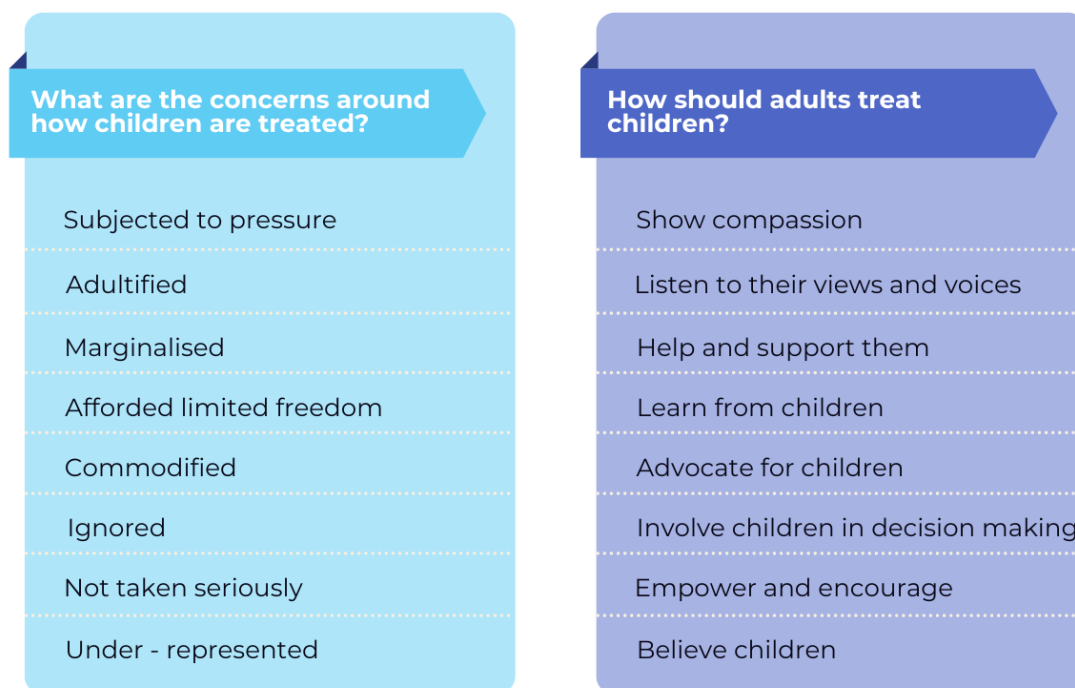


Figure 7: Reflections on the treatment of children

Often, concern was expressed regarding the time, attention, respect, or consideration afforded to children, which was perceived as lacking. For example:

*I think little attention is given to children and I believe there are some children we should be giving more time and attention to. I also believe we do not do enough currently to protect our children and set them up for the future.*

*Children are treated like second class citizens currently, and this needs to stop.*

*Children do not vote and are therefore unheard; we need to value their opinions, wants and needs.*

*I think they face different challenges while adults impress on them that they have it easier.*

*The younger generation is passionate about their beliefs but are brushed off as immature by the ones in charge.*

*A child's word is less likely to be believed, but that should not be the case.*

There were extensive responses relating to child safety and child protection. It was evident that this was a significant point of focus, with themes emerging relating to the recognised importance of safety and protection for all children, the perception that there were increased hazards and threats with which to contend, and the need to continue investing in resourcing relating to child safety and child protection.

*The government should be doing everything it can to ensure children have a safe space at home, school or other public places.*


*I believe communities should learn how to work together for our children. We all have a responsibility to protect and support children, including their care givers if appropriate. That way, children are protected and have connections ongoing.*

*Valuing children involves acknowledging their rights to safety, nutrition, shelter, health and education.*

*Valuing children means giving them all the basic human needs from housing, food, stability, access to education, health, arts, culture and creativity. Valuing children means listening to them, protecting them from harm and abuse and addressing in justice and inequality.*

*[We need] better laws protecting children from paedophilia, abuse, and neglect. We are getting better but still have a lot of work to do.*

*Society is increasingly becoming more aware of the importance of children's best interests, and the need for them to be heard but there is still a long way [to go]. Child protection awareness is increasing but not perfect.*



*The wellbeing of humankind is everyone's responsibility; child wellbeing even more so.*

Discussions of child safety and child protection often integrated perspectives around who holds responsibility in caring for children. Predominantly, respondents felt that the responsibility for caring for children was a collective responsibility – the sentiment of ‘it takes a village’ was prevalent. Emphasis was often placed on a greater affordance of resources for families, or more support for parents/carers, including access to learning regarding child health and wellbeing.

*We are all responsible for each other and our children.*

*The wellbeing of children is a collective responsibility - parents can't do this job alone in a society that throws hurdles in their way. Australia does a lot to promote children's health and wellbeing and protect children, but there is always more that we can do and I think we can focus more of our political decision-making around the impact they may have on future generations.*

*We can't always rely on one or two people to be responsible for children - there are stakeholders not only in the family but also through health, education etc that hold some responsibility.*

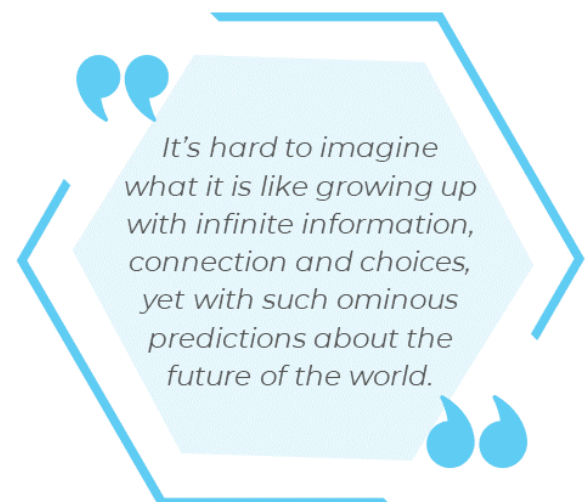
*"It takes a village"... everyone bangs on about it, but no-one really seems interested in creating villages.*

Overall, there was a strong sense that more could be done for children, whether by parents/carers, educators, the government, or the community as a collective. In particular, respondents shared concerns about children and contemporary childhoods, which they perceived as under threat in a multitude of ways.

**Pressures, paradoxes, and priorities:** *"Today's children carry the burden of the country's future."*

When reflecting on children and childhood, and the challenges apparent, key narratives which emerged related to unprecedented and increasing pressures on children, paradoxical views regarding their experiences, needs, and status as citizens, and priorities for consideration.

Across the dataset, one of the key concerns that emerged related to children experiencing increased pressure and more complex childhoods. Often, respondents voiced that they worried about the impact of this pressure on children's development, learning, and wellbeing. It was common for the pressure experienced by today's children to be positioned as unprecedented, unfair, and unhealthy. For example:



*The pressure on kids today is terrible.*

*The pressures that children face in this new era are greater than when I was a child.*

*There is much more pressure on children to achieve than when I was a child.*

*Kids these days have a lot more to deal with.*

*I think they face a more complex, fast changing world, with more awareness of the brokenness of our society.*

*The world is a harsher and more challenging place.*

*I wasn't a child too long ago, but never have I seen so much dread for the future within a generation.*

*Children today have to deal with a lot more external pressures and high demands and expectations than any other generation before.*

*The whole world is literally in a child's hands. It's a lot of information, opportunity, temptation and pressure to carry from a young age, often without the boundaries and guidance needed to navigate it.*

*Kids now have the issues with social media, climate change, global unrest.*

*Young people struggle with physical and mental health issues due to a toxic education system, poor government policies, parents are generally stressed and struggling with even keeping a roof over their heads. The climate crisis overlays all of this. It's a deeply challenging time to be a young person.*

Specific pressures and complexities were identified. These were many and varied, though predominantly respondents focused on issues relating to education, social media, and the climate crisis. With regards to education, this was frequently noted as a system which places pressure on children and where a range of issues are apparent. For example:

*The pressures on children today are much more than I ever experienced. Standardised testing in schools, reduced play times, curriculums jam packed with content well above what they should be learning.*

*Change the education system. Less testing and more engaging learning activities across a wider range of learning styles.*

*I think we place too much pressure on structuring kids time, demanding academic results over developing other valuable habits and behaviours.*

*Kids had more room to just be. Less pressure to achieve and perform for their parents' pride than now.*

*We penalise kids for things that are out of their control. Have in school suspensions rather than sending kids home it does nothing and sets them up for [a] lifetime of disappointment [and] disengagement.*

*Early education for children is too test focused. Education for children across the board does not focus on their wellbeing enough.*

*There is a lot of pressure on kids to do a lot of extra-curricular activities, and do well at school. There is so much jam-packed into the primary school curriculum that it boggles the mind.*

*Young people struggle with physical and mental health issues due to a toxic education system.*



There were extensive concerns raised around social media and its impact on children and young people. At times, respondents reflected on the affordances and opportunities of media and technology, including social media platforms, but more often the reflections were negative or fearful. In particular, social media was perceived as a key contributing factor with regards to mental health outcomes.

*Social media has a negative and pervasive impact on child wellbeing.*

*I don't like social media & believe it has led to a lot of issues in all ages; children included.*

*The access and availability of social media can really impact a young person's view of themselves and the world, especially before they have developed a strong sense of self, respect, and critical analysis.*

*Safety has been compromised due to the introduction of social media. Psychologists need to be consulted by the government to form policies on how to tackle this issue.*

*The addition of social media and technology have added so many more social pressures and addictions than when I was a child. Online bullying, dangers of online predators add so much more stress to children and their families.*

*Young people are exposed to more through the digital networks amplifying issues even louder to when we were kids. They can't escape the social media world. Even not having a phone or data leads to distress of missing out or being socially isolated.*

*Social media has impacted childhood in a very negative way.*

On the subject of mental health, this was significantly linked to social media, but also other pressures including issues with the education system, peer pressure and bullying, the pandemic, and awareness of issues such as the climate crisis. Respondents reflected on the perceived causes of mental health issues and expressed concern for children and communities now and into the future:

*The rise of mental health issues and the negative impact that technology has on the current generations does make me concerned for future generations.*

*A lot of Australian children are more at risk of mental health issues due to social media and more pressure to look a certain way or 'be cool'.*

*Technology has created so much more complexity to young people today and has exposed them to so much so young that their brains and bodies are not ready for and this is causing increasing mental health issues.*

*They have very complex mental health issues now, which has been really devastating for me.*

*I think COVID has really shone a light on mental health issues experienced by the youth, which were already exacerbated by social media.*

*Many [children] are unhappy or worried due to COVID/imminent war/climate change (etc.), and this means many of them are vulnerable-to mental health issues.*

*I believe stress and mental health issues will become a bigger and bigger issue.*



Respondents also raised concerns about the climate crisis and environmental issues, which they discussed as a key issue for today's children and young people to contend with now and into the future:

*Climate change is devastating for many children.*

*At present [children] don't believe they are valued at all, due to the lack of action on climate change.*

*Climate change is a problem they are going to be left to deal with.*

*Imagine having no choice but to watch your elders destroy your future for profit and power.*

*Never have I seen so much dread for the future within a generation.*

In exploring the pressures on children and young people, and the complexities apparent in contemporary childhoods, paradoxical perspectives began to emerge across the dataset. For instance, children were positioned as 'the future' and often charged with responsibility for key issues, such as

environmental issues. There were also instances in which children were positioned as helpless, or as deserving of innocence or ignorance in order to experience a happy and healthy childhood. There were often points raised regarding limitations to children's freedom – especially where children were constrained in terms of outdoor play or accessing their local communities – but in contrast, child safety was flagged frequently as a major concern. These types of contradictory sentiments were often tied in with nostalgia and naivety regarding the past. Respondents often expressed a sense of nostalgia when reflecting on their own childhoods, perceiving them to be simpler and happier, in contrast to the complexities of modern-day childhood experiences. Concerns were raised about access to information and increasing pressures resulting in the 'adultification' of children and childhood being compromised or lost.

*I feel like I had a 'childhood' and things were much 'simpler' in regards to technology etc. this made us more innocent. Children now seem more adultified however they still don't have the maturity that comes with this, I know my own children act entitled at times and compare themselves to their friends with the latest tech, shoes ect and they expect this instead of 'earning' or saving for it.*

*There are too many problems that children have to deal with at an earlier age i.e., climate change, education. i felt like my childhood was carefree and this is how it should be for all children. let adults take the burden of worry so that children can have happy and content lives. i would not let my child watch or hear the news - they don't need to hear so much suffering and worrying.*

*My childhood was simple, school, friends, limited tech, close community. Felt safe outside playing. Now for my children, I'm worried and scared they may be taken, injured or abused when outside or at other people's houses, or even in school.*

*I think modern children are more willing to challenge rather than accept that adults are somehow always right - this may come across as disrespectful but isn't necessarily a bad thing.*

*Again, children represent the future and they need support to create a better world then the one we currently have. They also just deserve to be happy and to not have to deal with the discrimination, cost and lack of opportunity that many today deal with. We should want better for every future human than we had for ourselves.*

At times, it was apparent that there was a perception that mental health issues have greatly increased and have become far more complex, which linked in with nostalgic – and at times naïve – perspectives about the past:

*When I was a youth we didn't have many worries at all. We didn't know about climate change, drugs weren't a big issue, and mental health issues were not something that we were aware of.*

*It was unheard of a child seeing a psychologist/counselling for mental health issues.*

*Life was simpler, if often more physically challenging... depression, anxiety, and suicide were almost non-existent.*

*Mental health issues seem to have increased these days.*

There were also many respondents who acknowledged the importance of awareness, resourcing, and support around mental health. This shaped up as a key priority; of which there were many that emerged across the dataset:

*Children's mental health needs to be valued.*


*Consider the research, do further research and act accordingly.*

*Serious action on climate change will help secure a stable future for children and young people, and also help ease some of the mental health issues that are currently prevalent among these generations.*

*Keep kids engaged with education. Help children to have a voice and take them seriously. Address climate change.*

*Children have different views, and in the face of extreme adversity, often have more hope than adults have. They see different solutions and are often more creative.*

Many of the priorities articulated represent calls to action for adults, with respondents often expressing that there is a need to take further action regarding significant societal issues.



*Provide better access to services - mental health in particular. Listen to the voices of children and young people and include them where possible when making decisions that will impact them. Ensure that their families receive adequate financial support and have access to stable housing.*

**Taking action for a better future: “We can always do more to ensure positive outcomes for children.”**

Although the data indicated that overall children were regarded as valued members of society, respondents felt that this sentiment often failed to translate into meaningful action. In particular, respondents expressed concern regarding the lack of government initiatives and policies aimed at safeguarding and prioritising children’s welfare. Many perceived that the government seemed more preoccupied with serving large businesses and pursuing profit rather than protecting the interests of vulnerable groups, including children.

*Resource allocation is a wicked problem. Politicians are incentivised to pitch policies to people and groups who are engaged with the political process through voting and lobbying, which undervalues minorities and people restricted from voting like children and young people.*

*Emotionally children are valued highly by a lot of the population, but this needs to be reflected practically by the community and government.*

*We value children but we now need to listen to what's best for them and act on it.*



Another common narrative was that while society had come a long way in some regards, there was much more to be done. For example:

*There is more support for neurodivergent children than there was when I was a kid (but still not enough), and more awareness of childhood sexual abuse than when I was a kid (but still not enough).*

*We have come a long way as far as identifying, acknowledging and treating childhood trauma and are continuously introducing practices such as Child Safe standards to improve upon protecting all children. But I feel there is SO much more we could be doing in terms of government funding and programs to support a better future for our young people of tomorrow.*

*There is plenty of research around childhood development that is not disseminated, in the public or actioned by policy-makers and politicians.*

*I think children are valued, just not in the policy development space.*

*If children were really valued more, then this should translate into less poverty, deprivation, and abuse and increase equal opportunity for all children.*

*Emotionally children are valued highly by a lot of the population but this needs to be reflected practically by the community and government.*

*Marginalised groups continue to get inadequate attention and while this is a function of democracy, it contradicts the idea and definition of the neediest in society.*

Respondents often shared visions for how our society could function; often with a focus on caring for each other and working collectively to build healthy and happy communities. Often, there was a call to prioritise people and communities – for instance, one respondent wrote that we should be “a society first and an economy second”, which reflected the thoughts of many respondents who shared concerns that in recent years, there has been too strong an emphasis on economic health and that greater focus ought to be placed on equity, community-building, and social justice. For example:

*There has been an over emphasis on economic issues and policies that favour big business. The economy should foster social outcomes. Social justice should be the priority.*

*We are a privileged society. We should be sharing what we have.*

*As a society we should start with our most vulnerable and plan policy around them first.*

*There is a need to provide specific consideration for minority and disadvantaged individuals and populations for our society to do well. People make community stronger.*

*I believe that addressing discrimination and equality is important so that future generations grow up fully empowered and able to embrace society.*

*I believe wealth, advantage, and strength gives us obligations to protect and empower those with less, not to take advantage of them.*

Other visions for society revolved around feelings of safety, experiences of belonging, and working in a future-focused way to support children and young people. For example:



*The hope is to create prosperous and equitable cities where children live in healthy, safe, inclusive, green and prosperous communities.*

*If children and young people don't feel safe within their communities and have the opportunities to thrive in every aspect of their lives then it is a failing by all of us. A strong community at all levels who places the needs of children and young people at the centre of everything we do is essential to growing happy and healthy future populations that are equipped to care for each other, the Earth and all its occupants.*

*A good government would create schemes which would be both immediately beneficial and hold long-term benefits which would help children as they grow.*

In reflecting on what society should be and how it might be re-envisioned to better care for and support children, a common point of discussion and reflection was the need to listen to children. Many respondents firmly emphasised the importance of attentively listening to children's voices, recognising, and valuing their unique perspectives and advocating for their ability to communicate their own needs. For example:

*Talk to them - they are agents in their own right. They are often quite lucid when speaking about their wants and needs, and governments should listen to them more.*

*I think the world would be a better place. Children have different views, and in the face of extreme adversity, often have more hope than adults have. They see different solutions, and are often more creative.*

*Valuing [children] means listening to what they say and actually hearing them.*

*I want to hear from a diverse community of voices which includes children's voices.*

Furthermore, many respondents strongly advocated for the inclusion of children in decision-making processes, especially when the outcomes directly affected them. It was recognised that not only are children capable of providing input, but their insights also hold genuine value.

*Adults often think children are incapable of making decisions that best suit them. If children were included in decision making processes and actually had their voices listened to, it would become apparent that they have valuable contributions. While parents / caregivers have the responsibility of caring for children under 18, I do not consider children 'belonging' to them. Yes, guiding is required to ensure boundaries are put in place to keep children safe, however this should be done as a protective mechanism. Parents / caregivers should work alongside their children.*

*Children are people, the same as adults and they should have a say in what is important to them and adults should be taking onboard what children say and think.*

*Making children a part of decisions gives them pride in a task and themselves.*

The involvement of children in decision-making was often qualified by respondents with regards to the age and/or perceived maturity of children – for example:

*While I do believe the opinions of children should be considered in decision-making, ultimately adults are responsible for a child's wellbeing and so a child's opinion on a matter cannot always be given the same weight or consideration as an adult's.*

*Children don't have the same understanding of risk and therefore should not be given the same sway as adults. This is entirely proper until they have matured.*

*Children have ideas about rights but sometimes have not learned about paired responsibilities. Children should be encouraged to be active community members. Parents have a part to play in this.*

*While children have their own values and beliefs and I think these are just as valid, they might understand less of the practicalities involved.*

Ultimately, there was a prevailing sense that more could be done to involve and empower children and young people in action for the good of the community. Progress in this space was seen to hinge on recognising and respecting children's capabilities and contributions, whilst also supporting and helping them as needed. There were many recommendations posed which related to how adults could facilitate children's involvement:

*They have thoughts and feelings and opinions like adults but are still learning to navigate them. Supporting them is important.*

*Celebrating their individual qualities and providing them with experiences and opportunities to discover learn[ing]. We should respect their ideas, their rights, and opinions.*

*Hearing, seeing, empowering them. Recognising and honouring their agency!*

*Listening to them and their needs and wishes, being available to support mine and any other children I can. Being their advocate when one is needed, empowering them to be their own when I can.*

*Caring about their wellbeing, protecting them from harm, educating them to lead and empowering them to look after each other.*

*Creating a safe and welcoming space for children to learn and grow. Encouraging them to advocate for themselves and others. Showing children they are valued through words and actions. Investing in products and businesses that are not detrimental to the future of our environment and being environmentally aware.*



*They have a voice. We must listen, reflect, and make change.*

# Conclusion

This study employed a mixed methods methodology to achieve a comprehensive insight into adult attitudes towards children in Australia. This approach facilitated a meaningful comparison between the current results and those collected in 2016. The overarching conclusion of this study is that children are valued and respected members of the community who deserve a voice and an active role in decisions concerning their own lives and futures. Adults surveyed overall believe that children have an essential role to play in shaping the future of society. However, the extent to which children are valued does not necessarily translate into meaningful action, with much opportunity to expand support and resourcing that would enrich children's lives and safeguard their futures.

The comparative analysis between the 2016 and 2022 surveys reveals a notable shift in public perception towards issues of importance, with climate change emerging as a significantly heightened concern, a concern likely to escalate for future generations. Social media was also noted as an emerging issue, with some respondents recognising its benefits, but a prevailing sense of concern and apprehension regarding its potential negative impact on children's mental health. These findings suggest that climate change and social media may be a pivotal priority area for policy and advocacy in order to safeguard children's wellbeing in the foreseeable future. Children today face an array of multifaceted challenges which contribute to a more complex childhood experience compared to previous generations, according to respondents. It becomes evident that a more concerted effort is required to provide children with adequate support to face these challenges. In particular, the survey results point to a call for governments to better prioritise children in policy formulation and resource allocation.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, six key recommendations have been identified, each with far-reaching implications for policy, community engagement, and improving the wellbeing of children (Figure 8):



Figure 8: Key recommendations

1. **Amplifying Children's Voices:** Inclusive mechanisms, such as Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tools, should be established at all levels to empower children to actively participate in decision making processes. Not only in matters that directly impact them, but also in shaping broader policies ensuring that children's interests are systematically integrated into various sectors and prioritising a child-centric perspective.
2. **Supporting Parents and Families:** Increased support for parents and families, including programs and initiatives that provide parenting education and support to foster healthier families and equip parents to guide their children's development.
3. **Increased Provision of Education Programs:** Schools and education settings should implement programs that focus on equipping children with the skills and knowledge required to navigate

the complex challenges they face, including social media and online safety, mental health awareness and critical thinking.

4. **Accessible Mental Health Support:** Ensuring children have access to mental health support which is tailored to their individual needs. Including increasing youth mental health services both within educational settings and the broader community.
5. **Increased Advocacy:** Increasing advocacy to protect children's rights and ensure that the issues affecting children, such as climate change, remain at the forefront of public discourse.
6. **Future Research:** Engaging in ongoing research to gain a greater insight into the evolving issues impacting children is critical. This has the potential to inform adaptive policies and interventions that continue to meet the needs of children, young people, and their communities. The current study utilised a survey methodology to understand the attitudes of Australian adults. Future research could extend beyond the survey methodology; for example, the research team intend to initiate a future phase involving in-depth interviews with survey participants to further explore their perspectives. Future studies could extend across a range of contexts and embrace a focus on tracking how attitudes to children are shaping and evolving over time.

## Limitations and Future Directions

This study, while offering valuable insights, possesses certain limitations and opportunities for future research. Firstly, the nature of online surveys inherently introduces bias, as participation relies on access to technology, sufficient literacy and often a predisposed interest in the subject matter. Nevertheless, the sample demographics indicate a diverse cohort, including diversity across age, gender, and geographic location. Secondly, the study's primary focus on quantitative data limits the depth of understanding regarding nuanced perspectives and experiences. While the research team had initially planned to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews alongside the survey, this was hindered due to considerable time and budget constraints. Future research should prioritise qualitative methods to provide a deeper understanding of attitudes towards children. Thirdly, the survey design captures attitudes at a single point in time, with comparisons to the 2016 benchmark survey offering some insights into changes over time. However, given the rapid evolution of issues such as social media, technology, and climate change, future research should continue tracking the ongoing evolution of attitudes to provide a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of this critical subject

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## Appendix 1: Survey Questions

### Q1. Do you identify as:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Gender fluid
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

### Q2. What is your age?

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-35
- ☐ 36-40
- ☐ 41-45
- ☐ 46-50
- ☐ 51-55
- ☐ 56-60
- ☐ 61-65
- ☐ 66-70
- ☐ 71-75
- ☐ 75+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

### Q3. Where do you live?

- ☐ Sydney
- ☐ Regional NSW
- ☐ Melbourne
- ☐ Regional VIC
- ☐ Brisbane
- ☐ Regional QLD
- ☐ Adelaide
- ☐ Regional SA
- ☐ Darwin
- ☐ Regional NT
- ☐ Perth
- ☐ Regional WA
- ☐ Hobart
- ☐ Regional TAS
- ☐ ACT
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

### Q4. Do any of the following describe you?

- ☐ I am a biological parent
- ☐ I am an adoptive parent
- ☐ I am a foster parent
- ☐ I am a stepparent (or someone who lives with a partner with a child)
- ☐ I am a guardian to a dependent child
- ☐ I am a professional who works with children
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Prefer not to say

### Q5. How important are the following issues to you personally?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	I haven't really thought about it
Addressing climate change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Management of the economy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Looking after the interests of children (0-17yrs)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Looking after the interests of older Australians	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The quality of Australia's health system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Australian jobs and protection of local industries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing affordability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Security and the war on terrorism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A quality education system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A fair taxation system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q6. Please comment on why you ranked 'Looking after the interests of children' where you did**

**Q7. Please rate some of these major issues faced by children and young people today.**

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	I haven't really thought about it
Climate change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing affordability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Peer pressure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drug or alcohol issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safe public places	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exercise and sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Body image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discrimination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Equality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q8. Please rate some of these main challenges faced by parents/carers/ society in raising/ caring for children?**

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	I haven't really thought about it
Social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Influence of peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health issues (children or parents)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drug or alcohol issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Lack of extended family support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial pressure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work/Life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing affordability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generational changes in parenting standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generational differences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q9. When making decisions about policies, do you believe governments in Australia give enough, too much or too little consideration to the impact on the following groups?**

	Give too much consideration	Give enough consideration	Give too little consideration	I haven't really thought about it
Older Australians	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children (0-17yrs)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working adults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People from refugee backgrounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People from CaLD backgrounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People with disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People with chronic health conditions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People who are unemployed or underemployed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People with diverse gender and sexuality identities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People on low or fixed incomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small businesses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Large businesses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q10. Please comment as to why you chose certain groups over others in the previous question.**

**Q11. What can governments do to help/support children and young people's needs and wellbeing?**

**Q12. Please respond to the following statements by selecting your response on the scale.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Haven't really thought about it	Have thought about it, but I'm not sure
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Governments should consider the needs of the current population rather than make decisions or policy in the interests of future generations.	o	o	o	o	o	o
I care about the needs of children, but issues like jobs and the economy are more important to me.	o	o	o	o	o	o
Children today have too many rights.	o	o	o	o	o	o
Children across Australia have fair and equal opportunities to flourish and maximise their potential.	o	o	o	o	o	o
The opinions of children should be considered just as important as those of adults.	o	o	o	o	o	o
Too much focus is given to the needs of children at the expense of people like me.	o	o	o	o	o	o
The best interests of children should always be considered in all decisions made by adults	o	o	o	o	o	o
Children are less capable than adults of knowing what is best for them.	o	o	o	o	o	o
A child's word is less likely to be believed than that of another adult.	o	o	o	o	o	o
Children should be seen and not heard.	o	o	o	o	o	o
Children are more disrespectful than previous generations	o	o	o	o	o	o
Children in Australia are highly respected by adults.	o	o	o	o	o	o
Until they reach the age of 18 years children belong to their parents or carers.	o	o	o	o	o	o
The wellbeing of children is a shared responsibility of the entire community	o	o	o	o	o	o
Australian adults are responsible for the best interest of all children	o	o	o	o	o	o
Australians do all they can to promote and protect the wellbeing of children.	o	o	o	o	o	o
I do all I can to promote and protect the wellbeing of children.	o	o	o	o	o	o
Australia is a safer society to grow up in today than it was when I was a child	o	o	o	o	o	o

Nutrition, care and relationships  
have a big impact on a child's  
future wellbeing

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

**Q13. Please provide any comments about your responses to the previous question**

**Q14. What groups are responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children in Australia today?  
Please rank in order of 1 = most responsibility to 8 = least responsibility**

- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Governments
- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Health professionals
- ☐ Extended family
- ☐ The wider community
- ☐ Everyone (including people like myself)
- ☐ Haven't really thought about it

**Q15. Which words would you use to describe children in Australia today? Please select all that apply.**

- ☐ Fortunate
- ☐ Safe
- ☐ Valued
- ☐ Honest
- ☐ Active
- ☐ Respected
- ☐ Appreciated
- ☐ Caring
- ☐ Happy
- ☐ Trustworthy
- ☐ Well behaved
- ☐ Spoilt
- ☐ Vulnerable
- ☐ Mistreated
- ☐ Dishonest
- ☐ Lazy
- ☐ Ignored
- ☐ Deprived
- ☐ Selfish
- ☐ Unhappy
- ☐ Uncooperative
- ☐ Unpleasant
- ☐ Innovative
- ☐ Tech savvy
- ☐ None of these

**Q16. Why have you chosen these words (above)?**

**Q17. In your opinion, is it easier to be a child today than it was when you were a child?**

- ☐ Much easier
- ☐ A little easier
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ A little more challenging
- ☐ A lot more challenging
- ☐ I've never really thought about it

**Q18. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.**

**Q19. In your opinion, are children in Australia today valued more, less, or the same as when you were a child?**

- ☐ Much more valued
- ☐ A little more valued
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ A little less valued
- ☐ A lot less valued
- ☐ I've never really thought about it

**Q20. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.**

**Q21. In your opinion, do children in Australia today have more, less, or the same rights as when you were a child?**

- ☐ Too many rights
- ☐ Fewer rights
- ☐ More rights
- ☐ Too little rights
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ I've never really thought about it

**Q22. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.**

**Q23. In your opinion, do children in Australia today have more, less, or the same privileges as when you were a child?**

- ☐ Too many privileges
- ☐ Fewer privileges
- ☐ More privileges
- ☐ Too few privileges
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ I've never really thought about it

**Q24. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.**

**Q25. Do you consider the opinions of children more, less or just as important as those of adults?**

- ☐ Much more important
- ☐ A little less important
- ☐ A little more important
- ☐ A lot less important
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ I've never really thought about it

**Q26. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.**

**Q27. Would you consider the word of children more, less or just as believable as those of adults?**

- ☐ Much more believable
- ☐ A little less believable
- ☐ A little more believable
- ☐ A lot less believable
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ I've never really thought about it

**Q28. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.**

**Q29. How concerned are you for the health and happiness of future generations of Australians?**

- ☐ Very concerned
- ☐ Not at all concerned
- ☐ Somewhat concerned
- ☐ I've never really thought about it
- ☐ Not very concerned

**Q30. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.**

**Q31. In your opinion how committed is Australian society to protecting and prioritising the needs of children?**

- ☐ Very committed
- ☐ Not at all committed
- ☐ Committed
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Not very committed

Q32. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.

Q33. Would you support or oppose the appointment of a federal Minister for Children and Future Generations to ensure that their rights and needs are at the forefront of considerations?

- ☐ Strongly support
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Neither support nor oppose
- ☐ Oppose
- ☐ Strongly oppose
- ☐ Not sure

Q34. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.

Q35. Do you agree or disagree with this statement:

‘Child wellbeing is a collective community responsibility.’

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ I don't know

Q36. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.

Q37. Do you think that children should be valued less, more, or just as much now and in the future?

- ☐ Much more valued
- ☐ A little more valued
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ A little less valued
- ☐ A lot less valued
- ☐ I've never really thought about it

Q38. Please comment as to why you responded as you did to the previous question.

Q39. From the scale below, please indicate how you feel about children:

	Very Positive	Positive	Indifferent	Negative	I've never thought about it	N/A
Your own children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All Australian Children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q40. Most Australians say that they value children. In practice, what does valuing children actually mean to you?

Q41. Have you heard of ‘The Valuing Children Initiative’?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

**Q42. If you have any final comments you would like to make on any issues raised in this survey please feel free to do so below.**

**Q43. Are you:**

- ☐ Married
- ☐ De Facto or Partnered
- ☐ Divorced or Separated
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**Q44. Which of the following best describes your employment status:**

- ☐ Permanent, full-time
- ☐ Permanent, part-time
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Casual (30+ hours per week)
- ☐ Casual (less than 30 hours per week)
- ☐ Contract
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Home duties
- ☐ Unemployed and looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed and not looking for work
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**Q45. What is the composition of your current household?**

- ☐ Person living alone
- ☐ Single person with children
- ☐ Couple only
- ☐ Couple with children
- ☐ Group/share household
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**Q46. What is the total gross annual income from all sources – including pensions and allowances – your family receives? Please note; if you live in a group/share household please answer for yourself only.**

- ☐ Negative income
- ☐ No income
- ☐ Less than \$30,999 (less than \$595 per week)
- ☐ \$31,000 to \$45,999 (\$596 - \$883 per week)
- ☐ \$46,000 to \$60,999 (\$884 - \$1172 per week)
- ☐ \$61,000 to \$75,999 (\$1173 - \$1460 per week)
- ☐ \$76,000 - \$100,999 (\$1461 - \$1941 per week)
- ☐ \$101,000 - \$120,999 (\$1942 - \$2325 per week)
- ☐ \$121,000 + (\$2326+ per week)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**Q47. What is the highest level of education you have attained?**

- ☐ Year 11 or below
- ☐ Year 12 or equivalent
- ☐ Trade certificate or apprenticeship
- ☐ Diploma, certificate etc.
- ☐ Bachelor or Honours degree
- ☐ Post-graduate qualifications
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**Q48 What cultural backgrounds do you identify with? Please select all that apply to you.**

- ☐ Aboriginal
- ☐ Torres Strait Islander
- ☐ Australian
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Middle Eastern
- ☐ African
- ☐ North American
- ☐ South American
- ☐ European
- ☐ British
- ☐ New Zealand
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Māori
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

## Appendix 2: Supplementary Data

Table 11: Response to question 12 “Please respond to the following statements by selecting your response on the scale”.

	Agree total	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I haven’t thought about it
Governments should consider the needs of the current population rather than make decisions or policy in the interests of future generations.	<b>44.6%</b>	14.8%	29.9%	3.2%	31.4%	18.9%	1.9%
I care about the needs of children, but issues like jobs and the economy are more important to me.	<b>38.7%</b>	14.6%	24.1%	4.0%	36.2%	19.8%	1.4%
Children today have too many rights.	<b>34.1%</b>	12.5%	21.5%	2.6%	32.1%	28.3%	2.9%
Children across Australia have fair and equal opportunities to flourish and maximise their potential.	<b>36.9%</b>	12.8%	24.2%	3.4%	24.2%	31.4%	2.2%
The opinions of children should be considered just as important as those of adults.	<b>67.2%</b>	26.3%	40.9%	6.3%	19.5%	4.4%	2.6%
Too much focus is given to the needs of children at the expense of people like me.	<b>25.8%</b>	12.1%	13.7%	1.9%	31.9%	36.7%	3.7%
The best interests of children should always be considered in all decisions made by adults	<b>75.2%</b>	42.6%	36.6%	2.5%	10.5%	5.2%	2.7%
Children are less capable than adults of knowing what is best for them	<b>51.7%</b>	16.0%	35.7%	5.7%	26.2%	12.3%	4.1%
A child’s word is less likely to be believed than that of another adult	<b>75.1%</b>	21.8%	52.3%	3.2%	12.2%	6.6%	3.0%
Children should be seen and not heard	<b>27.3%</b>	11.9%	15.3%	1.8%	21.5%	48.0%	1.4%

Children are more disrespectful than previous generations	<b>43.2%</b>	14.9%	28.3%	4.3%	28.0%	21.8%	2.7%
Children in Australia are highly respected by adults	<b>35.8%</b>	13.7%	22.1%	4.5%	43.0%	13.7%	3.0%
Until they reach the age of 18 years children belong to their parents or carers	<b>41.6%</b>	14.4%	27.2%	4.9%	28.9%	23.0%	1.6%
The wellbeing of children is a shared responsibility of the entire community	<b>85.2%</b>	48.6%	36.5%	2.4%	7.0%	4.1%	1.4%
Australian adults are responsible for the best interest of all children	<b>80.8%</b>	42.0%	38.8%	2.6%	9.2%	4.7%	2.7%
Australians do all they can to promote and protect the wellbeing of children.	<b>41.7%</b>	13.3%	28.4%	5.2%	37.6%	13.2%	2.3%
I do all I can to promote and protect the wellbeing of children.	<b>81.1%</b>	39.9%	41.1%	2.4%	8.8%	4.7%	3.1%
Australia is a safer society to grow up in today than it was when I was a child	<b>42.8%</b>	14.9%	27.8%	9.3%	31.1%	13.4%	3.4%
Nutrition, care and relationships have a big impact on a child's future wellbeing	<b>88.6%</b>	62.2%	26.4%	2.5%	3.3%	3.3%	2.3%

Table 12: Comparison of 2023 and 2016 response to question 9 “When making decisions about policies, do you believe governments in Australia give enough, too much or too little consideration to the impact on the following groups?”

	Year	Give too much consideration	Give enough consideration	Give too little consideration	I haven’t really thought about it.	p-value
Older Australians	2016	3.5%	25.6%	66.2%	4.7%	< 0.001
	2023	17.1%	38.3%	42.4%	2.2%	
Children (0-17 years)	2016	5.4%	40.4%	46.1%	0.8%	< 0.001
	2023	13.9%	28.7%	56.6%	0.8%	
Parents	2016	8.2%	46.2%	40.3%	5.3%	< 0.001
	2023	11.9%	42.4%	44.1%	1.6%	
Working adults	2016	1.7%	39.8%	54.4%	4.0%	< 0.001
	2023	14.9%	52.7%	30.8%	1.5%	
People on low or fixed incomes	2016	5.9%	23.7%	66.7%	3.8%	< 0.001
	2023	9.3%	36.6%	51.4%	2.8%	
Small businesses	2016	5.3%	40.1%	49.2%	5.4%	< 0.001
	2023	16.7%	48.9%	31.0%	3.4%	
Large businesses	2016	57.8%	30.2%	6.3%	5.7%	0.081
	2023	55.6%	32.1%	8.8%	3.5%	

Table 13: Response to question 14 “What groups are responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children in Australia today? Please rank in order of 1 = most responsibility to 8 = least responsibility”.

	Ranked 1 <sup>st</sup>	Median rank	IQR
Parent	66.8%	1	1, 2
Governments	9.9%	3	2, 5
Teachers	3.0%	4	3, 5
Health professionals	1.0%	5	4, 6
Extended family	1.4%	4	2, 5
The wider community	0.8%	6	5, 6
Everyone (including people like myself)	16.2%	7	3, 7
Haven't really thought about it	0.9%	8	8, 8

Table 14: Comparison of participants that responded “very important” or “somewhat important” in the 2023 and 2016 survey in responses to question 5 “How important are the following issues to you personally?”

	2023	2016	OR (95%CI)	p-value
Addressing climate change	87.3%	80.8%	1.64 (1.19, 2.26)	0.003
Management of the economy	91.1%	96.4%	0.39 (0.25, 0.59)	< 0.001
Looking after the interest of children	90.1%	88.8%	1.14 (0.78, 1.68)	0.503
Looking after the interests of older Australians	86.8%	94.1%	0.41 (0.28, 0.59)	< 0.001
The quality of the Australian health system	90.9%	97.9%	0.21 (0.12, 0.36)	< 0.001
Australian jobs and protection of local industries	87.0%	96.2%	0.27 (0.18, 0.40)	< 0.001
Housing affordability	86.6%	92.0%	0.57 (0.40, 0.81)	0.002
Security and the war on terrorism	71.5%	89.6%	0.29 (0.22, 0.39)	< 0.001
A quality education system	92.2%	96.2%	0.47 (0.29, 0.76)	0.002
A fair taxation system	88.8%	96.5%	0.29 (0.18, 0.45)	< 0.001

