THE VALUING CHILDREN INITIATIVE SURVEY

2023 SNAPSHOT REPORT

BACKGROUND

Societal attitudes and culture are pivotal to the wellbeing of children. 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 adult attitudes towards children and young people, through the repeat of a benchmarking survey originally commissioned in 2016 by the Valuing Children Initiative (VCI). The research objectives were:

- Conduct Australia wide repeat of 2016 benchmark survey
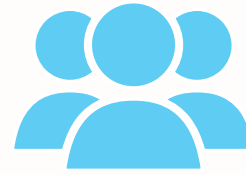
- Undertake quantitative and qualitative analysis

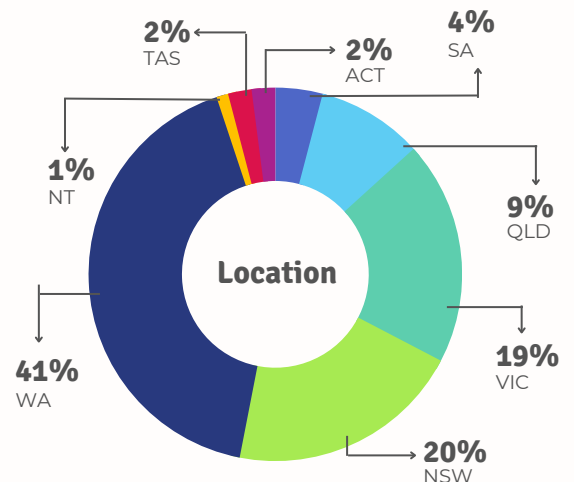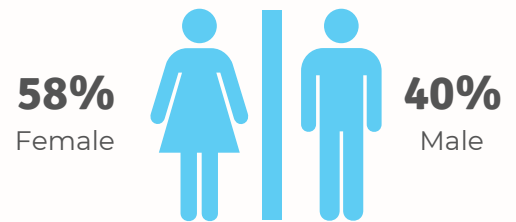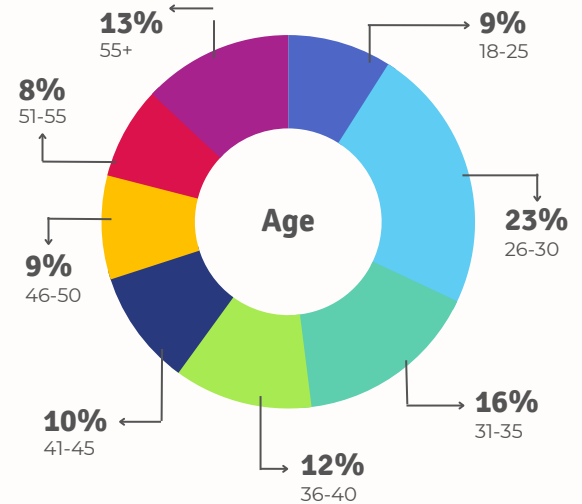- Compare 2016 and 2023 results to assess how attitudes have evolved

- Interpret the results to inform VCI's focus and future directions

WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?

1008 Australian adults participated in the survey

Age

- 9% 18-25
- 23% 26-30
- 16% 31-35
- 12% 36-40
- 10% 41-45
- 9% 46-50
- 8% 51-55
- 13% 55+

58% Female   **40%** Male

Location

- 2% TAS
- 2% ACT
- 4% SA
- 1% NT
- 41% WA
- 9% QLD
- 19% VIC
- 20% NSW
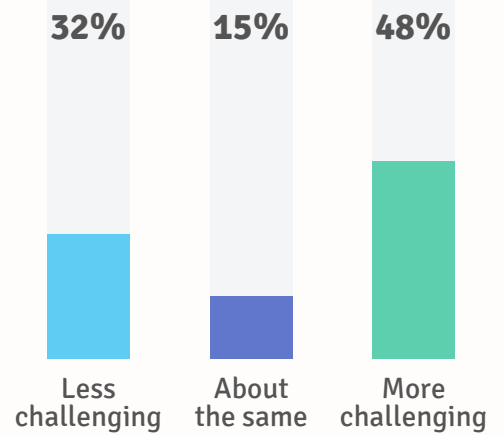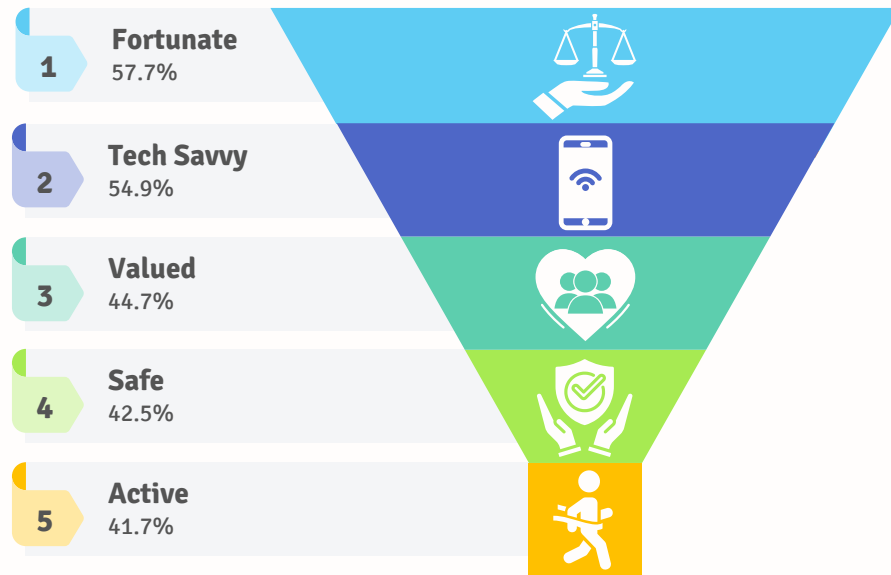
CONCEPTUALISING CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

The top five key words used to describe Australian children were largely positive. Almost half of respondents also expressed the belief that being a child in today's world is more challenging compared to their own childhood experiences. This perception was often linked to concern around technology, safetey, and increasing pressures on children. Increased access to technology and social media, while at times beneficial, raised safety concerns, highlighting the complexity of childhood in today's world.
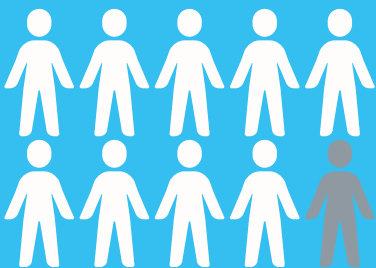
Children today have to deal with a lot more external pressures and high demands and expectations than any other generation before.

Top five key words used to describe children today:

1	**Fortunate** 57.7%	
2	**Tech Savvy** 54.9%	
3	**Valued** 44.7%	
4	**Safe** 42.5%	
5	**Active** 41.7%	

32% — Less challenging

15% — About the same

48% — More challenging

Is it less challenging to be a child today than it was when you were a child?

LOOKING AFTER THE INTERESTS OF CHILDREN

90% of respondents felt that looking after the interests of children was important to them.

Almost all respondents felt that children's needs should be prioritised. The results indicated that overall children were regarded as valued members of society, however respondents felt that this sentiment often failed to translate into meaningful action. Respondents expressed concern regarding the lack of government initiatives and policies aimed at safeguarding and prioritising children's welfare. Concerns were also raised about the impact of social media on children and young people, often highlighting negative or fearful perceptions, particularly in relation to its influence on mental health outcomes. Predominantly, respondents felt that the responsibility for caring for children was a collective responsibility – the sentiment of 'it takes a village' was prevalent.

> *Australian governments are focussed on productivity and growth and give far too much consideration to large corporations in comparison to marginalised groups.*

57%

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

Major Issues faced by children today

92.5%
Mental Health Issues

90.6%
Family Issues

89.9%
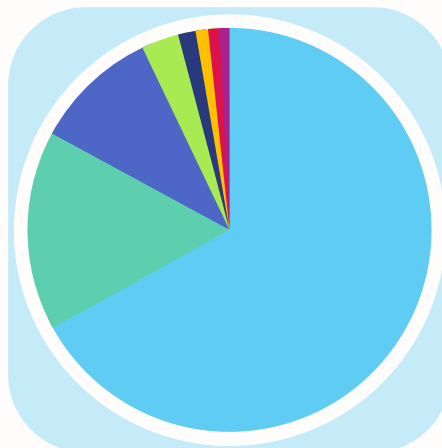Education

88.6%
Drug or Alcohol Issues

86%

Respondents who believe social media is an important issue facing children and young people today.

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

90%

Respondents who agree that child wellbeing is a collective community responsibility.

What groups are responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children?

- Parents **67%**
- Everyone **16%**
- Governments **10%**
- Teachers **3%**
- Extended family **1.4%**
- Health professionals **1%**
- Haven't thought about it **0.9%**
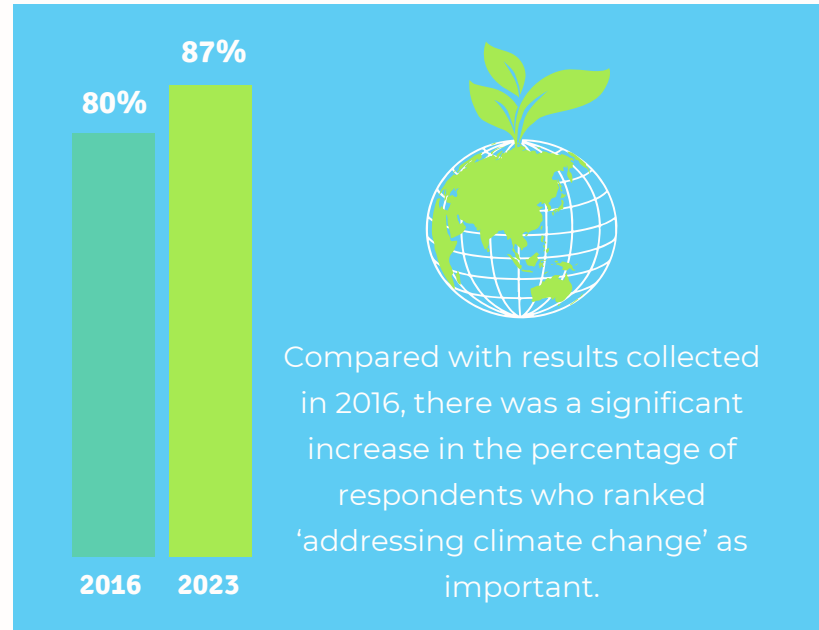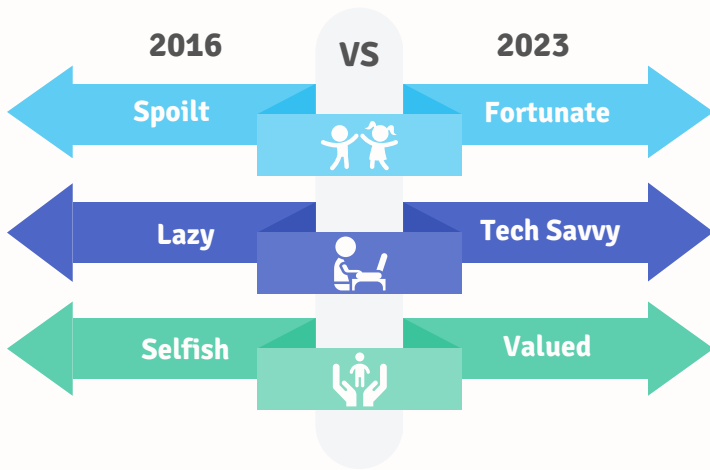- The wider community **0.8%**

COMPARISON OF 2016 AND 2023 RESULTS

2016 19%
2023 46%

Respondents who strongly support the appointment of a federal Minister for Children.

The comparison between the 2016 and 2023 survey results suggests an overall positive shift in attitudes towards children. The 2023 findings demonstrate a heightened focus on taking action to prioritise children's needs and well-being, now and in the future.

Difference in how children were desrcibed:

2016 **VS** 2023

Spoilt	Fortunate
Lazy	Tech Savvy
Selfish	Valued

80% (2016) 87% (2023)

Compared with results collected in 2016, there was a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who ranked 'addressing climate change' as important.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
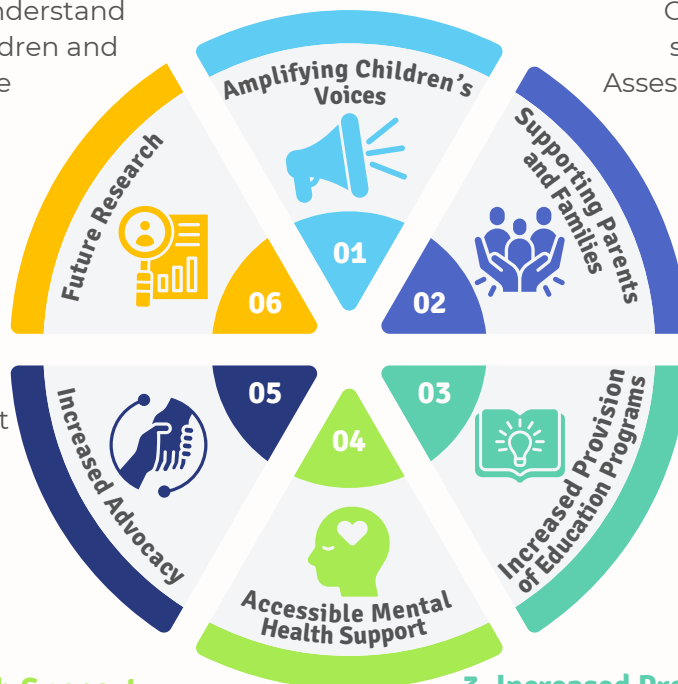
6. Future Research
Ongoing research is vital to understand evolving issues impacting children and shape adaptive policies. Future studies, extending beyond surveys, will involve in-depth interviews to explore different contexts and track evolving attitudes towards children over time.

1. Amplifying Children's Voices
Creating inclusive mechanisms, such as Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tools, to enable children to engage in decision-making, including shaping policies that systematically prioritise their interests across various sectors.

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.

2. Supporting Parents and Families
Enhanced support for parents through programs and initiatives that offer parenting education, guidance, and resources to promote healthier family dynamics and facilitate children's development

(Wheel diagram: 01 Amplifying Children's Voices, 02 Supporting Parents and Families, 03 Increased Provision of Education Programs, 04 Accessible Mental Health Support, 05 Increased Advocacy, 06 Future Research)

4. Accessible Mental Health Support
Ensuring children have access to tailored mental health support, including increasing youth mental health services within schools and the wider community.

3. Increased Provision of Education Programs
Schools should introduce programs that empower children with skills to address modern challenges, including online safety, mental health awareness, and critical thinking.