



# Director's report

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Accurately tracing the pathways that people take through life requires looking at the same individuals across time—a longitudinal research approach. Such research provides the method of choice for understanding both what stays the same, as well as what changes, over the course of life. Longitudinal studies also serve to highlight the similarities and differences between people and how these relate to background characteristics, social circumstances, and life opportunities and experiences. Australia now has a set of national longitudinal studies that are a very valuable resource for researchers, policy-makers, those who provide services and supports, and the community at large. Importantly, these now include the first major longitudinal study of the development, health and wellbeing of Indigenous children—Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). Developed and conducted by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), LSIC is a ground-breaking initiative.

## The Institute's increasing focus on longitudinal research

The Institute is increasingly involved in longitudinal research, including studies evaluating the effects of policies and programs. The flagship study is *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC), which is conducted in partnership with FaHCSIA and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). LSAC has just completed the fieldwork for Wave 5 data collection from families with children aged 8–9 years and 12–13 years. The papers in this edition of Family Matters have been drawn from the December 2011 combined LSAC/LSIC conference.

Other studies include the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families; Stronger Families in Australia, which focuses on evaluating the effects of place-based initiatives under the Family Support Program; and the Australian Temperament Project, which is conducted collaboratively with colleagues from the

University of Melbourne and Deakin University. This last study commenced in 1983 with a sample of 2,443 Victorian infants and their families who have been followed to the present. It is one of Australia's lighthouse longitudinal studies.

In addition, the Institute is a partner in the New South Wales Government's project, Pathways of Care: The Longitudinal Study of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care in New South Wales. Conducted by the NSW Department of Families and Community Services, this study is following a cohort of all children and young people who entered care for the first time by way of a final Children's Court order, across an 18-month period from May 2011. The Institute is partnering with the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney and the University of Adelaide to draft the survey instruments, manage the data and prepare analytical reports. A complementary study, the Longitudinal Study of Leaving Care, is being undertaken by the Institute under contract to the Victorian Department of Human Services. It will provide very valuable data on what happens to young people after they leave care.

The Institute's latest partnership is with the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, to manage Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Survey of Humanitarian Migrants. The study aims to trace the settlement journey of 1,500 humanitarian migrant families, living in a range of communities around Australia, in order to better understand the factors that influence their settlement processes. The development phase involves consultation with an extensive range of stakeholders and preliminary questionnaire testing with relevant community groups. Fieldwork is expected to commence in October 2013.

## Cross-national comparisons

Harmonising longitudinal data sets across countries is gaining prominence. For example,

the Institute has been working with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to promote cross-national comparisons using LSAC data. The first collaboration involved a five-country comparison study of the influence of maternal employment in the first year of a child's life and children's development. The LSAC team is also participating in the OECD's collaborative study, Education and Social Progress, which involves comparative analyses of longitudinal data from ten countries. The project will examine the role of cognitive and non-cognitive skills in fostering wellbeing and social progress in OECD countries, and identify how such skills can be better developed in formal and informal learning environments, including family, school and the community. Data from LSAC will be one of the key bases for these analyses. Finally, the Institute is a partner on a grant to the US National Institute of Child Health and Development to begin a new cohort of the US National Longitudinal Study of Youth. If successful, it will involve consultation about how to best harmonise measures collected in LSAC with this new US initiative.

### **Cardiovascular and respiratory health at age 11–12**

New research will focus on the cardiovascular and respiratory health of 11–12 year old children in LSAC to help understand the complex origins of the common causes of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases in adults, which are among the leading causes of death in Australia. However, disparities in the patterns of development of these aspects of childhood health are not well understood, nor how early-life physical and mental health, or socioeconomic and health care circumstances might explain these disparities. Key evidence gaps relate to there being limited childhood physiological data from population studies that explore antecedents of adult disease. This new work, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, will be led by Professor Melissa Wake from the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute. It will also involve contributions from AIFS and FaHCSIA.

### **Other projects**

#### **Young Parents and Their Children in Australia**

The Institute has commenced a study about young parents and the communities in which they live—Young Parents and Their Children in Australia (YPCA). The purpose of YPCA is to provide baseline data for the Department

of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' Helping Young Parents (HYP) measure. In addition to information on the education and labour market participation of young parents, YPCA also includes information on the psychosocial outcomes of young parents and their children.

#### **Indigenous Justice Programs Evaluation**

A project to evaluate four Indigenous youth criminal justice prevention, early intervention and diversion programs, from different parts of Australia, is nearing completion. The study is funded by the Attorney-General's Department. Undertaken in partnership with the Australian Institute of Criminology, the study has involved qualitative data collection and analysis of administrative data. Its purpose is to explore whether and how the programs divert Indigenous youth from entering or re-entering the Australian criminal justice system. Data analysis and interpretation is currently underway, with a final report expected at the end of 2012.

### **Dissemination news**

#### **Changing Places: Success, scale and sustainability of place-based intervention**

A seminar and a policy forum to raise discussion about overcoming place-based disadvantage were held in Canberra on 1–2 November.

The invitational events were convened by the Institute in partnership with five Australian Government departments: Prime Minister and Cabinet; Employment Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR); Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA); Human Services (DHS); and Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport (RALGAS).

Speakers at the events included: Professor Mark Greenberg, Director, Prevention Research Centre for the Promotion of Human Development, College of Human Development and Family Studies, Pennsylvania State University; and Professor Shane Houston, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Strategy and Services, University of Sydney

The seminar featured a panel of four departmental secretaries: Glenys Beauchamp PSM (RALGAS), Gill Callister (Victorian Department of Human Services), Kathryn Campbell CSC (DHS), and Finn Pratt PSM (FaHCSIA), who presented their perspectives

on the policy and service priorities related to place-based initiatives.

During the forum, Professor Greenberg, Dr Ben Edwards from AIFS, Brian Bumbarger from the Prevention Research Centre at the Pennsylvania State University, and Dr Lisa O'Brien, CEO of the Smith Family, provided presentations that stimulated discussion of a range of the key challenges and promising solutions to some of the problems of extending the scale and sustaining the benefits of place-based interventions. An edited volume covering the key issues discussed is planned for publication.

### **The Fifth International Community, Work and Family Conference**

Jointly organised by the Centre for Work + Life, Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia; the Women and Work Research Group, Business School, University of Sydney; and the Institute, this event will take place on 17–19 July 2013 at the University of Sydney. The conference will focus on how the rapid changes and transitions in society present challenges and opportunities for families, communities and organisations, with a special focus on work, families and communities in a globalising world. The past decade has seen significant changes in social policy in Australia and the surrounding region, including universal paid maternity leave in Australia and New Zealand, new rights to request flexibility, and changes in industrial law. Changing patterns of immigration, care and work in the Asian region are also of international interest. The conference will bring together social scientists and practitioners from a wide range of countries and disciplines, including emerging industrial nations of the Asia-Pacific region. Information on the event is available at <[www.aomevents.com/CWFC2013](http://www.aomevents.com/CWFC2013)>.

### **Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) information exchange**

Use of the CFCA information exchange continues to increase, with more than 1,900 subscribers to its fortnightly e-alert, more than 500 likes/followers on social media channels, and more than 4,500 visitors to *CFCA-Connect*, its interactive blog.

### **Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA)**

The ACSSA Seminar Series enables stakeholders to participate in discussions about key issues in policy and practice in the sexual assault field. A seminar titled *Understanding False Allegations in Sexual Assault: Implications for*

*Practice* was presented by Professor Liz Kelly, London Metropolitan University, in September. This often contentious issue was discussed and debated among more than 80 attendees drawn from sexual assault counselling services, police, researchers and crown prosecutors from around Australia.

### **Closing the Gap Clearinghouse**

The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Seminar Series, starting in December, will focus on the wellbeing of children. The topics will include:

- Promoting accessible early childhood services for Indigenous Australian (presented by Dr Daryl Higgins);
- Effectiveness of parenting and home visiting programs for Indigenous families (presented by Robyn Mildon, Director, Knowledge Exchange and Implementation, Parenting Research Centre); and
- Early learning programs that promote children's development and educational outcomes (presented by Associate Professor Linda Harrison).

### **Concluding thoughts**

As the year draws to a close, the Institute is already well advanced in framing its research programs consistent with the *AIFS Directions 2012–15*. There is continued growth in the research program with our involvement in new longitudinal studies, a continuing emphasis on program evaluation, and an extension of the range and reach of the Institute's dissemination activities. Planning is underway for two conferences next year, the Fifth International Community, Work and Family Conference, in July; and the next LSAC/LSIC Conference, in November; as well as the 13th AIFS Conference, in 2014.

Subject to the passage of the National Gambling Reform Bill 2012, planning for the Australian Gambling Research Centre, to be housed within the Institute, will commence soon, with a view to having the centre operational from July next year. This major new venture for AIFS will involve undertaking and commissioning research focused on the effects of problem gambling on individuals, their families and their communities, including identifying measures that may be undertaken to reduce harm, and increasing research capability and capacity in this area. This is indeed an important opportunity to contribute the expertise of the Institute to an area of great social policy priority.

