Over the life course, Australian families undergo many transitions and are influenced by many social and economic factors.

The variety of influences on the wellbeing of Australian families is reflected in the breadth of the Institute’s evolving program. The Institute provides a valuable service by delivering sound, objective evidence for policy-makers, researchers, community practitioners and the Australian community.

New gambling research centre

The Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) was announced in November, and has been established, as a part of the Institute, under the *National Gambling Reform Act 2012*. It commenced operation on 1 July 2013.

The AGRC will complement the work of a range of research organisations engaged in gambling research. It is a mechanism for drawing together the evidence and identifying gaps in current knowledge and directions for future research.

The research agenda will be geared towards creating tangible outcomes for the Australian community. The centre will aim to provide research findings to inform policy and program development designed to:

- assist people affected by problem gambling; and
- help prevent problem gambling.

The AGRC will also undertake research focused on:

- the harm caused by gambling to “problem gamblers”, the families and communities of problem gamblers, and those at risk of experiencing that harm;
- measures that may be undertaken to reduce that harm; and
- recreational gambling.

In addition, the centre will work to increase the capability and capacity of researchers working in this field.

The Institute will be assisted in framing the research directions for the AGRC by an Expert Advisory Group, chaired by Professor Richard Chisholm AM. The members include:

- Professor Max Abbott, Director, Gambling and Addictions Research Centre, Auckland University of Technology;
- Mr Ashley Gordon, Manager, NSW Aboriginal Safe Gambling Services, and an Aboriginal gambling research consultant for the Centre for Gambling Education and Research, Southern Cross University;
- Rev. the Hon. Professor Brian Howe AO, Professorial Associate in the Centre for Public Policy, Melbourne University, and Chair of the AIFS Advisory Council;
- Dr Ralph Lattimore, Assistant Commissioner, Productivity Commission;
- Professor Alison McClelland, part-time Commissioner with the Productivity Commission, and Adjunct Professor at La Trobe University, joining the group in her private capacity;
- Ms Cheryl Vardon, Chief Executive, Australasian Gaming Council; and
- Dr Mark Zirnsak, Director of the Justice and International Mission Unit, Uniting Church in Australia Synod Office (Victoria and Tasmania), and the Uniting Church’s representative on the Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce, joining the group in his private capacity.

The Expert Advisory Group will also have representatives from the Commonwealth and state/territory governments as observers.

National Apology for Forced Adoptions

A national apology to people affected by forced adoption or removal policies and practices was delivered by the then Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, on behalf of the Australian Government, on 21 March 2013 in Canberra.

This links closely to the Institute’s 18-month research project into the needs of people affected by past adoption practices. The report,
Past Adoption Experiences: National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices, was published in August 2012 and helped to inform the national apology. The study revealed some key issues for people affected by forced adoption, including:

- lifelong, ever-present effects on mothers and adopted individuals, and the far-reaching ripple effects experienced by fathers, adoptive parents, grandparents, spouses, siblings, children and other family members;
- the need for specialised workforce training and development for primary health carers, mental and broader health and welfare professionals;
- the need for improved access to information through the joining of state and territory birth records; and
- having improved access to mental, behavioural, and physical health services.

For people affected by closed adoption, the national apology is a starting point for acknowledging the past and seeking improved support and services. The lessons of the past also have implications for people involved in inter-country adoption, donor conception and surrogacy.

I welcome the appointment of Professor Nahum Mushin to chair the Australian Government’s Past Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group, which is charged with helping to deliver on the commitment to providing better support to those affected. The Institute looks forward to any opportunities to contribute to the working group.

Australian Temperament Project 30th birthday celebrations

The Australian Temperament Project (ATP) celebrated 30 years of research with the launch of a commemorative publication at an event at the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital on 19 May 2013, highlighting the value of continued involvement in the study.

The ATP is Australia’s longest running longitudinal study. It has followed children’s psychosocial development from infancy to adulthood, and investigated contributions of personal, family, peer and broader environmental factors to adjustment and wellbeing. Commencing in 1983, this internationally renowned study has so far collected 15 waves of data across the first 28 years of life.

The ATP has investigated the development of problems such as learning difficulties, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, anxiety and depression, as well as positive development, including social competence, supportive family and peer relationships and civic participation. Last year marked the next exciting phase in the development of the ATP, with the Australian Research Council providing funding to undertake the Generation 3 study. This study will collect information not only on the initial sample of parents and their children, but also on the children’s children. This makes the ATP one of the few studies with the capacity to explore child development, health and wellbeing, across three generations.

Stability and Change in Risky Driving From the Late Teens to the Late Twenties

Increasingly, ATP research is influencing policy and practice. Its most recent publication—the product of a collaborative partnership between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Transport Accident Commission of Victoria and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria—uses data from the ATP to examine patterns of risky driving from the late teens to the late twenties, and to identify factors associated with persistence and change in risky driving tendencies.

It found that rates of risky driving remained fairly stable between the ages of 19–20 and
23–24 years, but significantly decreased by 27–28 years. While there was a general trend for levels of risky driving to decrease, considerable variability was found in the risky driving patterns of individuals over this period. Antisocial behaviour appeared to be strongly linked to the persistence of risky driving, adding support to the view that risky driving may form part of a broader underlying propensity to engage in problematic behaviour.

A new legal frontier?

AIFS has released a research report, *The Role of Communication Technologies in Experiences of Sexual Violence: A New Legal Frontier?* The work on which this report was based was supported by a grant from the Victorian Legal Services Board and conducted by the members of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA), in consultation with key stakeholders, including police, counsellors, judges and other court staff, academics, policy-makers, educators and allied health practitioners. Young people’s engagement with emerging communication technologies (such as social networking and mobile phone technology) has become a central method of socialisation. The research suggested that, given the constant online access offered by these technologies and the blurring between online and offline social spheres, such emerging communication technologies afford diverse opportunities for the perpetration of sexual violence and facilitate sexually violent acts, before, during and after an offence.

Growing Up in Australia: The latest annual “statistical” snapshot

The *Annual Statistical Report 2012* from *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC) was released in June, highlighting a range of important factors that influence children’s outcomes and social and emotional wellbeing, including family functioning after separation, participation in after-school sporting activities and intergenerational joblessness.

Since 2004, LSAC has been following the development and wellbeing of 10,000 children and families across Australia, providing valuable insights into the experience of growing up in Australia.

Children, Families and the Law

The Institute is producing a substantial publication exploring diverse perspectives on the broad topic of children, families and the law. It will include theoretical perspectives, summaries of empirical data and reflections on policy and practice.

*Children and Families and the Law: Selected Policy, Legal and Practice Issues* will include contributions from a number of specialist authors and will be organised into four key parts:
Diverse family formation: Identity, recognition and law;
Legal and statutory responses to families in difficulty;
Separation and divorce and family policies and practices; and
Social science and policy and practice developments

The publication is intended for policy-makers in government and the court system, as well as managers and practitioners in welfare agencies and the court system, and tertiary students.

We expect to release of the volume later in 2013.

New and updated research projects

Cradle to Kinder

A project to evaluate the Victorian Government’s Cradle to Kinder and Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder programs has recently commenced. The programs offer intensive family and early parenting support services to vulnerable young mothers and their children. The supports commence during pregnancy and continue until the child turns four. The initial phase of the project is to develop the evaluation framework and consult with key stakeholders, with fieldwork commencing in July 2013.

Pathways of Care

This project is a longitudinal study of children and young people entering out-of-home care for the first time. Data are being collected from carers, birth parents, caseworkers, teachers and the children themselves. The study will also use administrative data. The analysis report of the first wave of data will be delivered in October 2013. While some features of the out-of-home care context are unique to NSW, it is expected that, at a general level, the results of the study would apply to other states and territories, and internationally.

Beyond 18

This project is a longitudinal study of young people leaving care in Victoria. It is intended to inform government policy in supporting more effective transitions for young people from out-of-home care. In particular, it will provide insights into the critical success factors associated with transitioning from out-of-home care and propose ways of improving the time that young people spend in care, their transition from care, and what happens to them post-transition.

The study is being undertaken by the Institute for the Victorian Department of Human Services. The findings will have some features unique to Victoria; however, the results are very likely to have value for other states and territories.

Conferences and seminars

Community Work and Family Conference

17–19 July 2013, University of Sydney

This conference intends to stimulate debate and cross-national research on current issues, controversies and development related to community, work and family and the links between them.
The program of speakers has been released and is available on the conference website <www.aomevents.com/CWFC2013/Program_Speakers>.

**Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Conference**

13–14 October 2013, Melbourne

The Institute continues to very extensively draw on data from the HILDA survey. The next HILDA Conference will be held from 13 to 14 October, in Melbourne. The conference attracts a range of leading researchers and policy professionals from a diverse set of areas of specialisation.

**LSAC–LSIC Research Conference**

13–14 November 2013, Melbourne

Three keynotes speakers have been announced for the next Growing Up in Australia and Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) research conference. Captain Steven Hirschfield (from the US National Children’s Study), Associate Professor Susan Morton (from Growing Up in New Zealand) and Dr Maggie Walter (from the School of Social Sciences at University of Tasmania) will head the program.

For the second time, the two datasets (LSAC and LSIC) will be highlighted in a combined conference. This approach proved popular and informative in 2011. The conference program is in development and will be released through the conference website in August. For further information, see page 87 or visit the LSAC conference website <www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au/conf.index>.

**LSAC Data Users Workshop**

12 November 2013, Melbourne

The next LSAC Data Users Workshop is scheduled to precede the LSAC–LSIC Research conference. The workshop will assist current and prospective LSAC data users, as well as people who are interested in learning more about the LSAC data and understanding and navigating the LSAC datasets.

The training covers a range of topics designed to give a comprehensive overview of the conduct of the study, the dataset and the supporting documentation. It will include information regarding study methodology, LSAC datasets, data analysis (e.g., confidentiality, weighting and clustering), variable naming, and user resources such as the data dictionary.

**Advancing Australian social policy**

AIFS and the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) share a birth year (1980), though not a birth date! With intersecting interests, it is hardly surprising that our two organisations have developed and maintained close links in a range of areas of social policy research. In addition to involvement in collaborative research, we support each other’s activities, including active involvement in our biennial conferences, which occur in alternate years (with this year’s SPRC-hosted Australian Social Policy Conference being held at the UNSW from 16–18 September).

It was at one of the SPRC conferences, in 2007, that the then Director, Professor Ilan Katz, convened a meeting that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Australian Social Policy Association (ASPA) two years later. With a prime concern to foster social policy research, practice and education, the advent of the ASPA represents an important milestone in the field. Under the leadership of the current president, Professor Peter Saunders FASSA, one of Australia’s pre-eminent social policy scholars, ASPA grows both in membership and the range of its activities. This edition of Family Matters includes information about ASPA and the benefits of joining (on page 87) and I commend membership of the association to all those with an interest in social policy.

**Concluding thoughts**

With major new developments, such as the establishment of the Australian Gambling Research Centre, and a growing suite of research and dissemination initiatives, the Institute is well-positioned to embrace an exciting future. Much effort is again being focused on preparing for the 2014 AIFS Conference (to be held in Melbourne from 30 July to 1 August). Given that 2014 marks the 20th anniversary of the first International Year of the Family, next year’s event will be a very fitting opportunity to celebrate this milestone in worldwide recognition of the importance of families, their many vital contributions and varied forms, across a culturally diverse world.

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