

Foreword

This Discussion Paper represents the first formal publication from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) – a landmark study initiated and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services as part of its Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

The study aims to provide the database for a comprehensive understanding of Australian children’s development in the current social, economic and cultural environment, and hence to become a major element of the evidence base for policy and practice regarding children and their families.

As outlined in this paper, LSAC will deliver the first-ever comprehensive, national Australian data on children as they grow up. Longitudinal data are essential to answer many of the questions facing policy makers and researchers today. We know that the roots of many problems in adolescence and adulthood can be found in early childhood. The study will provide data tracking children over time, to help researchers to understand how, why and when children embark on pathways to adaptive and maladaptive outcomes, and where the opportunities are to help children move onto better pathways.

I am delighted that the Australian Institute of Family Studies is leading the consortium which is implementing this study. The Institute has a long history of research on a range of policy-relevant issues concerning children and their families. The LSAC consortium, which includes nine leading Australian institutions, has expertise across the broad array of areas which the study will examine – children’s experiences within their families, child care settings, schools and communities, and how these impact on all aspects of children’s development. These areas of development include children’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive functioning. The Institute, and the consortium, will be working in partnership with the Government to ensure the study is relevant to current policy concerns, and that the data are widely available to researchers.

This study will also rely on the cooperation and involvement of thousands of families across Australia. The LSAC consortium intends to make the families’ involvement in the study a rewarding experience, and we hope they will take pleasure and pride in knowing that they are contributing to a ground-breaking study which will benefit present and future generations of Australians.

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