

# Introduction

This paper presents a discussion of the data management policy and procedures for *Growing Up in Australia* - the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). *Growing Up in Australia* is a major study funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) as part of the Australian Government's *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*. The Australian Institute of Family Studies is leading a consortium of nine eminent Australian research institutions in the development of this study, which will track the development of two cohorts of young children for at least 7 years.

*Growing Up in Australia* is one of the largest and most complex studies of this nature that has ever been undertaken in Australia. The study aims to provide the data for a comprehensive understanding of Australian children's development in the current and future 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. *Growing Up in Australia* is now also part of the Government's move towards the development of a national agenda for early childhood.

This paper discusses key data management issues associated with the project; namely:

- Data management principles
- File structure
- Data confidentialisation and access
- Data security
- Data imputation
- Outliers
- Weighting of data
- Respondent tracking
- Data linkage
- Software implementation

This paper presents principles to guide policy and procedure, and in many cases outlines our currently preferred options. During the months before receipt of Wave 1 data these will be further considered and refined. We welcome comment from readers, including future users of the data and other stakeholders. These comments will be taken into consideration when finalising the approaches to be taken.

In taking a comprehensive approach to each of these issues, the paper outlines best practice to ensure the integrity of data management of *Growing Up in Australia* for the duration of the project. Issues such as imputation, confidentialisation and weighting will be further discussed in future technical papers.

Some of the paper content is drawn from similar publications – in particular the University of Melbourne's Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Project Discussion Papers 1/01, 2/01, 3/01 and 3/02. For some issues, this longitudinal study has already established procedures that are appropriate for LSAC. In other instances differences in study design limit the extent to which common strategies can be adopted in these two longitudinal projects.

