

Australian Institute of Family Studies
ANNUAL REPORT 2004–2005

Board of Management
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Contact Officer for 2004–2005 Annual Report

Deputy Director, Corporate and Strategy
Australian Institute of Family Studies
300 Queen Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia
Telephone (03) 9214 7888 Facsimile (03) 9214 7839
Website www.aifs.gov.au/

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The cover shows detail from art featured on the
covers of the 2004–2005 editions of the Institute's
research journal, *Family Matters*.

Annual Report 2004–2005
Indexed by Kerry Biram
Designed by Double Jay Graphic Design
Printed by CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd

ISSN 7726–9870



Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies

30 September 2005

Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson
Minister for Family and Community Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

It is with pleasure that I present to you the twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in accordance with Section 9(1) of Part 3 of the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*.

The report relates to the period 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Gibson', written in a cursive style.

Dianne Gibson
Presiding Member
Board of Management

VISION STATEMENT

The Australian Institute of Family Studies will achieve eminence as a centre of excellence for research and information on family wellbeing.

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YEAR IN REVIEW



YEAR IN REVIEW

Appointment of new Director

On 29 July 2004, the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, announced the appointment, for five years, of Professor Alan Hayes to the position of Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Professor Hayes took over the Directorship on 9 September 2004.

In announcing the appointment, Senator Patterson thanked the acting Director, Dr Ann Sanson, for her dedication to the Institute during the 18 months in which she led the Institute. The Minister's good wishes were echoed in farewell events held by staff and the Board. Dr Sanson returned to the University of Melbourne in early August 2004. Her association with the Institute continues through her role as Project Director of *Growing Up in Australia*, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

Ms Denise Swift acted as Director during August 2004.

I am pleased to report that the year 2004–2005 was an extremely productive one for the Institute: projects were completed, new contracts were won, and the first data from the landmark *Growing Up in Australia*, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, were released.

It was a year marked by high quality publications, staff presentations in a range of national and international settings, a successful Institute conference, and extensive media coverage of the Institute's research.

A series of organisational reviews and strategic planning activities, designed to reinvigorate and position the Institute for the next three years, was undertaken. A new Strategic Plan, Research Plan and organisational structure will be implemented in the first half of the next financial year.

In this Annual Report, Institute effectiveness is measured by a number of criteria including feedback and more formalised accounting measures related to the budget and financial outcomes. The Institute's performance measures are outlined in the Strategic Plan 2002–2005. As information presented in the following chapters confirms, in 2004–2005, the Institute achieved outcomes which can be measured very favourably against all these indicators.

Highlights of the year

In 2004–2005, the Institute delivered a range of quality services and products for its stakeholders, as well as responding flexibly to changing priorities. Our research activities have continued to flourish and to be of considerable interest to policy makers, the research community, service providers and the media.

The year 2004–2005, the final year of the Institute's current research triennium, saw significant progress on the Institute's research projects, continued work on long-term contracts, and work on a number of short-term research contracts.

Research

Growing Up in Australia continued to be a major project for the Institute. During 2004, data were collected from more than 10,000 families. On 16 May 2005, the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, launched the first Annual Report from the study at the Melbourne Museum. Also released on that day, was the dataset from the first Wave of the study. This is a major achievement and makes a unique dataset about Australia's children available to researchers, for the first time.

The *Fertility Decision Making Project* was conducted in collaboration with the Australian Government Office for Women (formerly the Office of the Status of Women), Department of Family and Community Services. The project sought to explain how a range of factors contributing to decisions about having children interact to help shape fertility trajectories. The outcomes of the project were reported to the Office for Women in November 2004. This work was also published by the Institute as AIFS Research Report No. 9, *It's not for lack of wanting kids: A report on the Fertility Decision Making Project*. Analysis of the data from this project will be ongoing, as researchers continue to explore fertility decision-making issues of relevance to policy and practice.

Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support

On 16 August 2004, the former Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Larry Anthony, announced the terms of reference and membership of a Ministerial Taskforce and Reference Group to examine Australia's Child Support Scheme.

Membership of the taskforce included Institute Research Fellow Bruce Smyth, the Institute's past Director, David Stanton (as Deputy Chair of the Taskforce), and the Institute's Deputy Director, Research, Matthew Gray.

To support the work of the taskforce, in December 2004, the Department of Family and Community Services commissioned the Institute to conduct a national survey of attitudes to child support in Australia. This study sought to inform the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support in its review of the functioning of the Child Support Scheme, and, with the permission of the taskforce, was published as AIFS Research Report No.13, *A snapshot of contemporary attitudes to child support*.

Parliamentary submissions

The Institute made a substantial submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services *Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family*. The submission drew on data from the *Fertility Decision Making Project*, unpublished Australian Bureau of Statistics data related to employment outcomes as well as pressures and supports for mothers and fathers, and data from the Institute's recently completed *Family and Work Decisions Study*, focusing on the extent to which mothers understand their entitlements to government payments and their inter-connection with paid employment.

Issues related to formulating decisions and how to combine paid and unpaid work, including when mothers return to paid work after having a child, and how families divide their labour between them over the course of their working lives, were also highlighted in the submission. In addition, Institute research was cited in more than 20 of the 140 submissions received by the Inquiry.

Other submissions were prepared by Institute researchers and submitted to various government bodies. These included: a joint submission by the Institute's Ethics Committee and senior Institute researchers to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) on the first draft of the *National Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*; a submission to the Attorney-General's Department in relation to the Discussion Paper *A new approach to the family law system: Implementation of reforms*; a submission from the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) to the Special Projects Unit of the Office of Ombudsman Victoria/Office of Police Integrity in response to the Inquiry into *Improving Responses to Allegations Involving Sexual Assault*; and a number of submissions by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC) to various government departments and agencies commenting on draft legislation on a range of topics and for a number of jurisdictions.

Publishing and dissemination

Over the course of the year, Institute research continued to be widely disseminated through Institute publications – both print and online – and in external refereed journals. In particular, our refereed research journal *Family Matters*, one of the Institute's main dissemination mediums, continued to publish our research findings, as well as a diverse range of perspectives and analyses of family research and policy options from other Australian and overseas researchers. As reported in Chapter 5 of this report, the three editions of the journal published during the year generated a pleasing amount of media and other attention.

An especially successful Institute publication this year was the substantial 352-page *Diversity and change in Australian families: Statistical profiles* – a book providing a detailed statistical picture of family types and family change over the last three decades. Extensively reported in the media at the time of its release, the book continues to provide media, policy makers and commentators with the most definitive family facts and figures available in a single location.

In addition to published works, staff presented many papers at national and international conferences, workshops, seminars and other gatherings. Staff publications and presentations are detailed under each research program area in Chapter 3 of this report.

Institute conference

The Australian Institute of Family Studies 9th Conference, held in Melbourne on 9-11 February 2005, was another outstanding success. It was extremely well attended and included a pleasing representation from other countries. Papers presented received extensive coverage in the national media, and the feedback on the standard of presentations and the organisation of all aspects of the conference was very positive.

The Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard, sent a message of welcome to delegates, and the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, opened the conference. The Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs, the Hon. Sussan Ley also participated.

Senior staffing

Ms Denise Swift, who acted as Director in August 2004, rejoined the Institute in the February 2005 as Deputy Director, Corporate and Strategy.

Dr Alison Morehead, who was with the Australian Institute of Family Studies since May 2004, first as Senior Research Adviser and then for six months as Deputy Director, Research, returned to Canberra at the end of April 2005 to take up an Assistant Secretary position within the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

Dr Matthew Gray was the successful applicant for the position of Deputy Director, Research, and commenced on 11 July 2005. Matthew is no stranger to the Institute, having been an AIFS Principal Research Fellow heading the Family and Society Program from November 2000 to May 2004, before leaving to join the staff of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University as a Research Fellow.

Dr Daryl Higgins commenced as Senior Research Fellow and Manager of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse in August 2004. Dr Higgins is a psychologist who was previously Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology at Deakin University.

Ms Helen Cheney commenced as Senior Research Fellow and Manager of the Community and Family Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) in June 2005. (Until 30 June 2005, the Clearinghouse was called the Stronger Families Learning Exchange.)

Strengthened overseas links

The Institute has continued to develop an improved understanding of family-related trends and issues shared by, or unique to, countries in the Asian region, and to establish links, or strengthen existing connections, with countries in the region regarding research on family relationships and wellbeing. This work has involved collaboration with the International Branch of the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), and with key stakeholders in the Asian region, participating in relevant conferences, and coordinating some of the visits by delegations from the region. As reported in Chapter 4 of this report, the Institute strengthened links with Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The establishment of the New Zealand Families Commission has added a new dimension to the Institute's involvement with New Zealand. A delegation from the Commission led by the Chief Commissioner, Dr Rajen Prasad, visited the Institute in February 2005 and participated in the 9th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, presenting a workshop on the Commission, and participating in the panel discussion on family policy in the Asia Pacific region. Already, the Institute is sharing some of its research management tools with the Families Commission, and discussions are under way with a view to formalising a collaborative arrangement.

The Institute was honoured to host a consultative meeting on child support, organised by Institute Research Fellow Bruce Smyth following an approach by the United Kingdom House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee. On 16 October 2004, eight members of the UK Parliament and their staff met with a panel of academics, judicial officers and bureaucrats involved with the establishment and current operation of the Australian Child Support Scheme. The Institute was pleased to have the opportunity to facilitate this exchange of ideas and experiences, and we hope that this will assist the Committee in formulating recommendations for reform of the UK scheme.

Whole of government linkages

Families are affected by policies initiated across government. For example, government changes after the 2004 Federal Election saw a number of programs shifted from the Family and Community Services portfolio to Employment and Workplace Relations and the newly created Department of Human Services. While the Institute continued to enjoy very close working relationships with several areas within the Department of Family and Community Services, maintaining and strengthening linkages across government agencies has also been a particular priority during the reporting period.

In early April 2005, the Institute was pleased to host a visit by the Attorney-General, the Hon. Philip Ruddock, his wife Heather Ruddock, and two members of his staff. The Minister was interested in ways in which the Australian Institute of Family Studies could contribute strongly to the research effort in the area of family relationships and the support of families in forming and strengthening their relationships and coping with difficulties.

Over its 25-year history, the Institute has always had close working relationships with the Attorney-General's Department, and welcomes opportunities for strengthening the relationship and enhancing its contributions in this vital area of Australian social policy. Already the Institute has a number of significant collaborative projects and seeks further opportunities to contribute.

The Institute is working closely with the Department of Family and Community Services and the Attorney General's Department in developing the program for an International Forum on *Family Relationships in Transition: Legislative and Policy Responses*, to be held in Canberra in December 2005.

Securing the Institute's future

With the Institute entering its 25th year, I and the Board commenced a comprehensive planning process aimed at strengthening the Institute's position as a research centre of excellence in family studies for Australia and the region. This is to ensure that Institute research continues to connect to the needs of families and communities, and to the work of those who frame policy and deliver the many services that support and strengthen families.

A comprehensive internal review of operations and priorities was undertaken as a lead-in to the development of the 2005–2008 Strategic and Research Plans. As part of the process, I commissioned a review of the alignment of Institute activities with its charter, and convened a Strategic Advisory Group involving external members to provide advice on all aspects of Institute operations and strategic priorities. Following the report of the Strategic Advisory Group in May 2005, two staff working groups were established to develop strategies for the implementation of the Strategic Advisory Group recommendations. As we move into 2005–2006, an organisational restructure is being established, with the new structure due to take effect in October 2005. As part of the restructure, expressions of interest in voluntary redundancy were called for in June 2005.

The second stage of the planning process involves the development of new three-year Strategic and Research Plans. To this end, the Institute will hold research

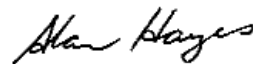
consultations in all capital cities, and a selection of regional venues, to receive input from key stakeholders as part of the process of developing its Research Plan.

The Institute is using *Families Through Life* as the organising framework for the 2005–2008 Research Plan. The framework has several advantages. For example, it allows Institute research to cover variation and diversity at a single point in time as well as variability across time – and across space (for example, rural/urban). The framework enables the Institute’s current research to be integrated conceptually, and also gives cohesion to the overall program. The relevance to policy of each Institute research initiative is a key concern in framing the next Research Plan. By adopting the above framework, the aim is to contribute research data to assist in the development of policy that is responsive to demographic and other changes confronting Australian families.

The framework also enables the Institute to focus on non-normative transitions such as unemployment, and on parenting (including negotiation of work and family balance) at different stages of family life trajectories, including post-separation parenting. In addition, the framework will help the Institute to integrate macro- and micro-level research and will allow for the examination of contextual factors affecting (and being affected by) families across the lifespan, such as welfare reform, industrial conditions of work, neighbourhood effects, and broader community changes including attitudes and values. As always, multidisciplinary perspectives will be adopted, wherever appropriate.

It is imperative that the Institute gains a sense of the varied priorities and needs, across the nation, in order to address in an effective and timely fashion those that fall within our capacity. As far as possible, the Institute aims to be positioned to anticipate the future needs of policy makers and practitioners, while reflecting accurately the current concerns of Australian families and communities. The consultation process starts in mid August 2005 and will be completed by the end of October 2005.

The Institute is well positioned to continue the contributions to Australian society that have been the hallmark of its first quarter century. Families are the foundation of any country, and understanding their characteristics, capacities and challenges is vital to the nation and its future prospects. I believe that the Australian Institute of Family Studies has a rare privilege and a great responsibility to provide the best possible information to guide policy and practice to the benefit of all Australian families. As we enter our next quarter century we renew our commitment to discharge these obligations to the best of our ability.



Alan Hayes
Director