

## Launch of Growing up in Australia study

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11/02/2004

Melbourne Museum  
**Melbourne**

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Ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you Professor Sanson for your introduction.

It's a pleasure to be here this morning to mark the beginning of the first data collection wave for the Government's landmark Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

This project is one of the most important pieces of research ever undertaken into Australian children.

As a result the Howard Government has committed \$20.2 million over 9 years.

Nothing on this scale has ever been done before in this country by a Government.

Called Growing up In Australia, the study is being conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and a consortium of leading researchers from eight other universities and research institutions around Australia.

And we've also had enthusiastic support from a whole range of organisations and people with an interest in early childhood development.

Filling the research gap

This study reflects the Government's commitment to children.

It reflects the Government's belief that the kind of experiences children have early on

- what they learn, how they are treated and what opportunities they are given

affects the quality and happiness of their lives.

It continues our investment in families over the last eight years.

- Around \$20 billion in family assistance
- \$10 million in early childhood intervention and prevention projects through Stronger Families and Communities
- \$900,000 for the Centre for Community Child Health to undertake validation of the Early Development Instrument
- Between 2001 and 2004, the Australian Government will allocate some \$45 million to Australian primary schools under the Grants to Primary School Libraries program to help them build up their stocks of books by Australian authors or books which have been published in Australia.
- For 2003 alone, \$11 million was provided for primary school libraries across Australia.
- After the final round of funding in 2004, the Australian Government will have enabled primary schools across Australia to purchase around 3 million extra books, equivalent to almost 330 books per school.

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Existing overseas research has found that critical brain development occurs before the age of three.

This means children are vulnerable from an early age and that it is extremely important that we find out what happens in their lives in those first few years.

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But until now we haven't had comprehensive research about children's development from a very young age through to their primary school years, in an Australian, national, context.

This new study will fill the gap by gathering Australia-wide data on all the parts of a child's life

- their experiences within their families and communities and at child care, their health, and in their early years of education.

Data will be collected from 5000 babies and 5000 four-year olds and their development will be followed for several years.

This study will tell us what about their cognitive development, mental and physical health, social development, and literacy and numeracy.

People who play a significant role in the child's life, such as parents, carers, and pre-school and school teachers, will also be interviewed.

We already have some preliminary data to this point in time, involving about 500 children and their families in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

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This data shows:

- 96% of parents rated their child's health as being 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent'
- 96% of four year olds are read to by someone in their family at least once a week, with 59% reporting that this happened daily
- 89% of parents of four year olds who have educational or child care arrangements for their child, reported satisfaction with these arrangements
- 82% of parents rated their neighbourhood as either a 'good' or 'very good' place to raise children
- 59% of four year olds spend time with their grandparents weekly or more frequently.

As the longitudinal study continues over the years, we will continue to use the results to develop early childhood policies.

Establishing a solid evidence base will ensure our future policies continue to be targeted, effective and practical.

The idea is to use the research to develop quality early intervention programs which can improve the life chances of young children as they grow up, especially children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In this way, the new Longitudinal Study will assist our National Agenda for Early Childhood.

A first for this country, the Agenda is a long-term initiative designed to bring together and coordinate the substantial investments already made in early childhood by Australian governments.

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I would like to congratulate everyone involved in getting this study up and running.

I look forward to the exciting information that will flow from this ground-breaking work.

And on behalf of this Government I am delighted now to officially launch the Wave 1 data collection for Growing up in Australia our first, national, Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

Thank you.

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