

A young Indigenous Australian child with curly brown hair and a joyful expression, wearing a green t-shirt with an orange Aboriginal dot painting of a person. The child is standing outdoors in a sandy area with lush green trees in the background. Their hands are raised in a gesture of welcome or play.

UNICEF Australia Domestic Impact Report 2023

Creating an Australia where every child is
healthy, educated, protected, respected
and involved in planning their future



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Acknowledgement of Country

UNICEF Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country of the land and communities in which we and our partners work throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to their lands, waters, and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Building a better future for all Australian children



Foreword by Nicole Breeze, Chief Advocate for Children and Director of Australian Programs

UNICEF Australia has a vision where every child across the country is healthy, educated, protected, respected and involved.

As a stable and prosperous nation, all the conditions exist in Australia for it to be one of the best places in the world for a child to grow up. While many children are thriving, sadly that is not the case for all. Data tells a sobering story of growing inequality, stagnant poverty and increasing mental health concerns for children and young people in Australia. Globally, children and young people are also being confronted with enormous challenges – all of which are taking a heavy toll on their safety, development and wellbeing.

While 2023 has been a challenging year with the worsening effects of climate driven disasters as well as the cost-of-living crisis, we are

proud of the contribution we have made through our advocacy, research and partnership work to improve the lives of Australian children.

We played an important role in influencing generational reforms in early years policy through our contributions to the National Early Years Strategy, whilst also engaging Australia's leading employers to improve their family friendly policies and better support working parents, caregivers and their children.

We have responded to emerging challenges to safety and wellbeing that children face in the digital world through helping shape new online privacy and safety codes. We have also worked hard to ensure that the specific needs of children affected by natural disasters are well understood and that they receive the support they need.

Throughout 2023, UNICEF Australia has been a voice for children whose rights and future opportunities are being seriously limited by pushing

for reforms in areas including youth justice, access to better services in regional and remote communities, and the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children.

Our work through the National Children's Wellbeing Index has continued to help shape important decisions about children at the national level. While we have seen positive shifts in some areas of child wellbeing, unfortunately inequality is worsening and too many Australian children are not being adequately supported to realise their potential.

This year we have continued to create opportunities for young Australians to shape the national conversation on issues of major significance. Together with the Uluru Youth Dialogue, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, we supported 100 young people to step into their critical leadership roles within their families and communities to influence the establishment of a Voice to Parliament in Australia. UNICEF Australia actively supported the yes vote and remains strongly committed to upholding the Uluru Statement of the Heart and strengthening our partnerships with First Nations organisations to address the disparities which are experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We will continue to do all we can to amplify the voices and wisdom of First Peoples – particularly young people.

This report is a summary of how UNICEF Australia in 2023 sought to address the key drivers of inequality, deprivation and barriers to children's wellbeing and development. Ensuring that children become and remain a national priority for all.

2023 Highlights

Raising the voices of youth



2,427

consulted on issues that affect them



39,400

participating in school based activities for World Children's Day



We have enabled the engagement of young leaders to influence major social issues, most significantly the Voice to Parliament via Hands on Heart, and Climate Change and COP 28 via hosting LCOY in 4 cities

Shaping the conversation about children in Australia



15 million +

people in Australia reached through our advocacy messaging that has been published by the media



7

new publications to guide better policies and programs for children

Measuring What Matters: National Children's Wellbeing Index



Thematic deep dive into the data about the physical and mental health of Australian children to publish *Healthy Children, Healthy Futures*

Creating better policies for children



23

policy submissions



2

public hearings

Collaboration with the private sector



122

companies are certified as Family Friendly Workplaces embedding policies and practices that reach 912,000 employees

Protecting, Preparing and Prioritising children affected by climate change and disasters



Designed and delivered a needs assessment to understand the impacts of the 2023 floods in Fitzroy Crossing on children and families

Deepening our engagement with First Nations communities



15

regional and remote First Nations communities across Australia are supported through our partnerships

How we work in Australia

UNICEF Australia is working to create an Australia where every child is healthy, educated, protected, respected and participating in planning their future.

In 2023, UNICEF Australia had the following strategic areas of focus, which included:

- **Investing in the Early Years** - Addressing disadvantage in the early years so that infants and young children get the best start in life
- **Child and Youth Participation** - Children and young people are participating and influencing decisions about their lives and future.
- **Child Protection and Safeguarding** - Protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation
- **Children in Crisis and Emergencies** - Rapid response and prioritisation of the needs of children and families in crisis

through advocacy with governments and targeted programs.

- **Children and Climate Change** - Putting children at the centre of the response to climate change
- **Making Children a Priority in Australia** - Ensuring children's rights and wellbeing are a priority in Australia for the government and decision makers.

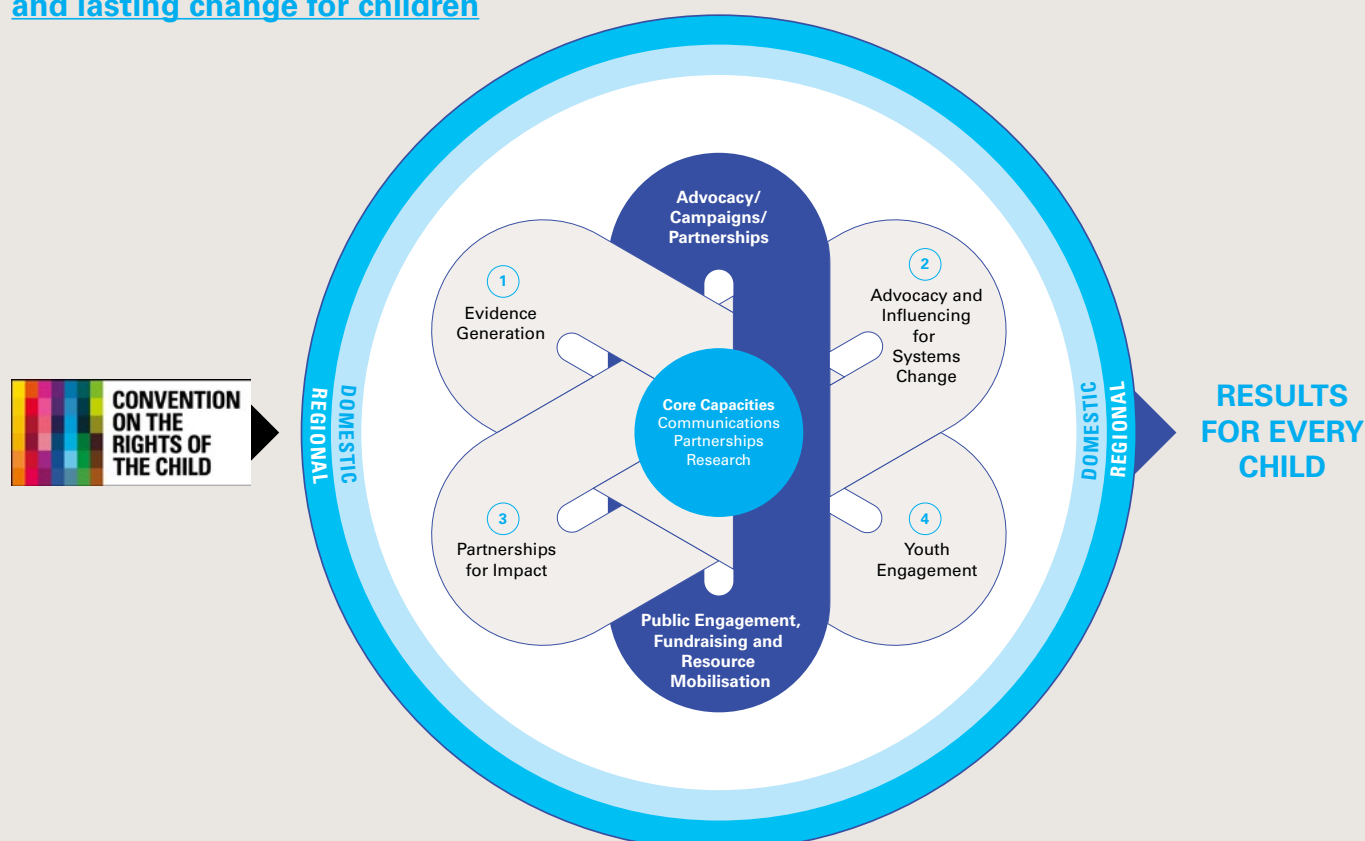
How does UNICEF Australia achieve results for children in Australia?

To achieve results for children we adopt the following key strategies:

- **Advocacy with Governments** to address inequality and chronic child rights deprivations in Australia. We work in partnership with all governments across Australia to strengthen policies and drive positive systems change for children.

- **Partnering for impact** to address inequality and disadvantage. Together with our partners we address critical gaps and needs of the most vulnerable children in Australia and help drive greater investment in strategies that work for children, especially the most disadvantaged.
- **Connecting with children and young people, and elevating and listening to their voices** so they can have a say in policies and programmes that shape their lives now and in the future.
- **Creating ground-breaking knowledge, data and evidence** on the situation of children and young people in Australia.
- Shaping the public conversation and **influencing through thought leadership** through our research and insights and as a strong voice in the media.

How we work to create positive and lasting change for children



Our Impact for Children and Young People 2023

Our intended outcomes

Engaged and influential young leaders	Adoption of policy, practice, legislation and budgets that support children's rights	Evidence-based policy and programs for children	Direct benefits for children, families and communities	Increased public support for children
 <p>2,427 children and young people's voices elevated and consulted on global and local issues important to them</p>	 <p>7 policies, legislation and funding commitments for children that UNICEF Australia played a role in advocating for</p>	 <p>7 knowledge, data and evidence pieces generated about children and young people</p>	 <p>4,358 children and 850,816 caregivers that directly benefited through domestic partners for action</p>	 <p>66.4 million social impressions of UNICEF Australia published content and a reach of over 15 million for our advocacy messaging that has been published by Australian media outlets</p>
 <p>118 influential young people advocating for change with government officials and decision makers</p>	 <p>\$4.2 million committed by the Australian government to better support children and youth that UNICEF Australia played a role in advocating for</p>	 <p>1 evidence-based program for families supported by UNICEF Australia and scaled by the Australian Government</p>	 <p>31 disaster and crisis affected communities and 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia supported through domestic partners for action</p>	 <p>\$814, 531 contributed to directly support the work of UNICEF Australia and our partners in Australia</p>



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Early years

UNICEF Australia is working to ensure that all children have the very best start in life with equal access to critical early years services and support.



22% of children (or 1 in 5) were developmentally vulnerable in 1 or more domains at school entry. These rates are higher in regional areas and more than twice as high in very remote areas (Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)).

Although 98% of children under the age of five have been registered with a civil authority, birth registration rates are much lower within particular populations, including Indigenous Australians. An analysis of birth data in Queensland shows that approximately 15-18% of births to Indigenous mothers were not registered compared to 1.8% of births to non-Indigenous mothers. (Queensland Ombudsman, 'The Indigenous Birth Registration Report').

Our vision is for every child - no matter their background, where they live, or the income of their parents - to have access to all the supports needed to enable them and their family to thrive, from before birth to their first day of school and beyond.

Key achievements

Influencing the Federal Government's new Early Years Strategy

Our advocacy on the generational early years reforms taking place in Australia employed a combination of robust policy work, strategic government engagement as well as high impact media. With the Federal Government now committed to developing a new Early Years Strategy, our advocacy and impact included:

- Attendance by UNICEF Australia's Chief Advocate for Children at the Early Years Summit in Parliament House in Canberra, alongside key political decision makers and experts to inform the creation of an equitable early years strategy.
- Influencing via thought leadership through a policy submission to the Early Years Strategy with key recommendations focused on creating a truly universal early years system and embedding equity in the system.
- Engagement and driving awareness of the gaps and needs of children with the Australian public through print and digital media tied in with our appearance at the Early Years Summit.
- New evidence and data creation - refresh of the National Children's Wellbeing Index and co-launching the Index with the Minister for the Early Years, drawing the links between the data and the role it has to play in the Early Years Strategy.

There has also been a \$199.8 million investment in addressing entrenched disadvantage including the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children announced in the 2023 Federal Budget



CASE STUDY

UNICEF Australia's Chief Advocate for children, Nicole Breeze said "Removing or radically adjusting the activity test, which requires a family seeking a subsidized early childhood care place to show they have a certain amount of work or study, would be an easy way to quickly boost the number of children getting care."

Achieving universal birth registration in Australia

Birth registration is a fundamental right, helping to ensure that every child is counted and able to access basic services such as health, education and child protection.

In a high-income, small-population nation like Australia it could be assumed that every birth is recorded and registered. Yet many Australian young people, including thousands of First Nations children, haven't got a birth certificate, compounding and complicating their childhood experience of disadvantage.

In 2023, UNICEF Australia launched its first ever public advocacy campaign in support of achieving universal birth registration. Key achievements from the 'Certify Hope' campaign include:

- Eliminating the barriers that First Nations people face when obtaining a birth certificate or registering a birth. Working in partnership with

Pathfinders we have provided free birth registrations and certificates in eight communities across NSW and the ACT resulting in 483 applications by parents and caregivers for themselves and their children.

- Deepening engagement through consultations with Aboriginal communities to better understand the causal factors and proposed solutions to address the issue.
- Generating new data and evidence - working with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to create a national dataset helping us understand the true extent of the issue in Australia.
- Shaping the public conversation and driving awareness of this critical child rights issue with the Australian public and governments through our birth registration campaigning across digital and media platforms.



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≈18%

of First Nations births
go unregistered*

≈2%

of non-Indigenous births
go unregistered*

CASE STUDY

Aimee, who lives in small town in NSW with her husband and three young children, has encountered considerable difficulties getting her son Anton into day care, pre-school and local sporting groups, all of which require proof of identity.

Aimee said, "I ended up having to get a birth certificate for Anton so he could get into pre-school. So now we need to get my two younger kids their certificates for day-care and sport."

UNICEF Australia's community partner Pathfinders delivers the National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program in NSW and the ACT, helping to eliminate the barriers that parents like Aimee are facing. Pathfinders recently conducted a number of community birth registration days through the support of UNICEF Australia.

Aimee also registered for her own birth certificate last years ago in a move. For many Australians, obtaining birth certificates can be a complex and costly process. While registration is free in Australia, birth certificates aren't automatically issued and come with a price tag.

Other families who came along relayed similar experiences, reporting that most schools in the area don't accept children without birth certificates, leaving limited opportunities for little ones to access quality education.

*2018 Queensland birth data

Making Australia Family Friendly: The Family Friendly Workplace Program

Engagement with the private sector through the Family Friendly Workplaces (FFW) program continued to grow as we seek to improve children's wellbeing and development by making it easier for parents and carers to balance work and life through family friendly policies and practices.

Key achievements from the program in 2023 include:

- 181 workplaces have been benchmarked so far in 2023 (and 501 workplaces in total) against the minimum National Work + Family Standards, with a significant uptake by small to medium size businesses.
- 122 workplaces have integrated child rights policies and practices, which has benefits for more than 912,000 parents and carer and thus their families.
- Established the FFW Advisory Committee chaired with representation from Commonwealth Bank, Deloitte, Karitane, Randstad, QBE Insurance and independent experts.
- Refreshed and modernised the National Work + Family Standards to be more inclusive and relevant for the present corporate context by the University of Western Sydney.
- FFW Champions presented at numerous speaking events and industry roundtables to build awareness and promote the Family Friendly Australia agenda around Australia.

CASE STUDY

122 organisations are FFW certified reaching 912,000 employees

Working parents can struggle to find caring arrangements during the school holidays, making them leave work early or feel disconnected from their children. TPG Telecom has created a family friendly workplace by supporting family wellbeing and childcare in collaboration with KidsCo.

Elvin is a Senior Fraud Analyst and working dad at TPG - "My son, Xavier is 8 years old and loves the different themes and activities KidsCo offers throughout the school holidays. His favourite theme was Gladiator day where he got to dress up as a spartan. Having the ability to take my son out to lunch on KidsCo days makes me far more motivated and productive – it's the highlight of my day where I can spend quality time during lunch where he tells me about his day and the activities he's been up to."



© Parents At Work

Support for Early Childhood – The Indi Kindi Program

UNICEF Australia continued its strong partnership with the Moriarty Foundation. This initiative supports the successful Aboriginal and locally-led early years program, Indi Kindi — an innovative 'Walking Learning' program that unlocks the learning potential of children in their first 1000 days of life.

Key achievements of the program:

- Delivering the Indigenous Early Years program on Country by the Indi Kindi teams in four communities – Tennant Creek, Mungkarta, Borroloola and Robinson River.
- Start with driving awareness of the importance of holistic and culturally appropriate First Nations led early years programs. A key highlight of this work was the community visit with Australian cricket captain Pat Cummins in May which generated a total of 5.7 million social media impressions.

CASE STUDY

Pat Cummins' visit to Borroloola with UNICEF Australia

"I've been so lucky to see the amazing work the Indi Kindi team deliver in remote Australia." Pat Cummins



© UNICEF Australia

As a UNICEF Australia Ambassador, Pat is passionate about how early education can build a better future for every child.

As part of his ambassadorship with UNICEF Australia, Pat spent three days in the Northern Territory, travelling to the remote community of Borroloola to see the Indi Kindi program in action.

"Education has always been huge in my life. My mum was a teacher, and we were lucky with the opportunities we had. But many children in remote Indigenous communities across Australia are growing up without adequate access to the quality education, support and health care they need to get the best start in life. For the past two years as a UNICEF Australia Ambassador, I have supported Indi Kindi, which operates in remote Australian communities." Pat Cummins

42.3%

In 2021, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) reported that 42.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were considered to be developmentally vulnerable.

80%

Indi Kindi reaches 80 per cent of Indigenous children in four remote communities while local mothers are offered employment opportunities and training.



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Child and Youth Participation

UNICEF Australia is working to ensure that all children and young people are empowered, participating and influencing decisions about their lives and future.



Two out of three (64%) young Australians aged 13-17 say that they are rarely or never consulted nor given opportunities to participate in important issues that affect them (UNICEF Australia).

Early in the pandemic, 3 in 4 young people felt that children and young people had not been considered in the pandemic response and want to have a say in their future (UNICEF Australia).

Child and youth participation is critical to all of UNICEF Australia's work. We consult and engage with young people across Australia, enabling them to become drivers of social change by strengthening platforms for participation, empowering them to create solutions to key issues as well as ensuring their voices are heard by decision-makers.

Key achievements

2023 Young Ambassador Program

In July 2023 we welcomed 9 new Young Ambassadors to the program: Cyril (QLD), Peta (NSW), Luke (ACT), Jewoseydi (Vic), Jorja (Tas), Denzel (SA), Aston (SA), Abbi (WA) and Jules (NT). This year the Young Ambassadors will be learning about advocacy in action focusing on core policy topics of their choosing: Climate Change, Digital Wellbeing, and First Nations Social Justice.

The aim of the program is for the Young Ambassadors to be exposed to policy processes, advocacy campaigns and learning how to drive change with decision-makers. They will also consult with children and young people across Australia over the next 18 months to understand and highlight areas of concern, needs and solutions.

Hands on Heart National Youth Voice Conference – Learning about the Voice to Parliament

In support of the Voice to Parliament referendum, UNICEF Australia wanted to ensure that young people were equipped with the right tools to make an informed decision at the voting polls. Partnering with Uluru Youth Dialogue, the only grassroots

youth-led Yes campaign organisation, Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) as well as Australia and Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), we wanted to create a space where young people from diverse backgrounds across the country could come together, learn from experts and connect with each other. In partnership we:

- Delivered a 3-day youth conference for over 100 young people with the aim to educate, activate and connect advocates from across Australia. Attendees were also able to hear from experts in the space, including Professor Megan Davis and Aunty Pat Anderson on the creation and importance of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.
- The youth advocates co-created a declaration on the Voice to Parliament and the importance of it to share with the Australian public.
- Post-event, young people were encouraged to educate and drive awareness on the topic through social media and events which they had planned.

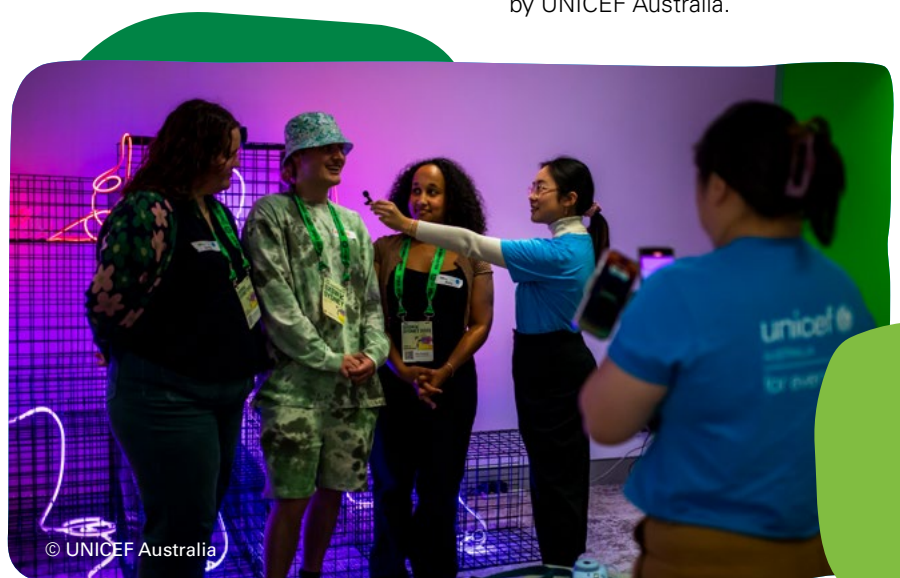
Thank you to our partners Uluru Youth Dialogue, MYAN Australia and AYAC, as well as Lendlease and International Towers for supporting the conference and enabling this unique experience for young people across Australia.

SXSW Sydney – Innovative new spaces for engagement

UNICEF Australia participated at the SXSW Sydney event as part of the "We the Future" partnership with the UNICEF Office of Innovation. Through this work we sought to amplify the voices of the next generation of thought leaders and innovators in shaping their digital future. This is the first partnership between UNICEF and a major technology and arts event.

UNICEF Australia was involved at a number of sessions with a focus on science and technology initiatives designed for young people. These included:

- 2050 Unveiled: Opening event. A youth's vision of the future.
- Tech & Innovation Expo: Week-long virtual reality experience in the technology expo hall.
- NxtWave Futures Lab: youth-only event to design the digital future. This was a great opportunity for 50 young people to share their experiences and collaborate with their ideas forming part of a manifesto to be presented at the UN General Assembly at the Summit of the Future in 2024.
- Datafied from birth: Gen Z's reckoning with the Information Age. A youth-designed panel of youth experts speaking on the emerging threats and opportunities for young people in the digital age, moderated by UNICEF Australia.



"A Minute of Loudness" in celebration of World Children's Day

To celebrate World Children's Day on 20 November, UNICEF Australia launched the "A Minute of Loudness" campaign for Australian primary schools, inviting every child to speak up about the issues they care about and be loud about what matters to them. Key activations for the initiative included:

- Provision of school packs with free teacher lesson plans and age-appropriate classroom activities for Kindergarten to Year Six on this year's theme – Climate Change – giving students the opportunity to explore the issue and express their perspectives on environmental awareness and the changes they want to see in their community.



- About 39,400 students from 173 schools from every state and territory took part in the "A Minute of Loudness" celebration.
- Teachers shared student's creations from climate change classroom activities with UNICEF Australia which included designs, mission statements and advocacy posters.



Credit – West Coast Eagles

CASE STUDY

Effie, a young Indigenous leader, has emerged as a beacon of hope and inspiration within the Binar Program

Effie's story is not just one of personal growth but also a testament to the transformative power of mentorship. His journey exemplifies the Binar way: "Each one, teach one." A philosophy deeply ingrained in Binar's youth leadership program. Not only has he benefited from the opportunities Binar has given him; he now contributes to the growth of those coming through the program, moulding them into future leaders.

"I love watching the growth of some of the kids that I have mentored and watching them develop into young leaders. It makes me feel proud that they are stepping up and becoming their own leader." Effie, Binar Youth Leader.

Knowing that the kids look up to him, he strives to make positive choices, both on and off the court. This accountability has a positive effect on his confidence and sense of purpose. As Effie puts it, "I feel more confident, and it makes me feel special that the kids are looking up to me."

By being positive role models to not only Aboriginal but non-Aboriginal youth, young leaders like Effie promote reconciliation and respect for Aboriginal people amongst the community on and off the sporting field. Effie also helps to empower other young Aboriginal leaders to become the future leaders of Binar.

Transforming young people's lives through leadership programs and sports for development Binar Futures

In 2023, UNICEF Australia partnered with Binar Futures to increase the social and emotional wellbeing of at-risk Aboriginal youth and build the capacity of youth leaders.

The program addresses many of the underlying social determinants of wellbeing for Aboriginal youth including:

- Strengthening cultural identity and participation and promoting reconciliation.
- Responding to genuine community needs.
- Providing young people with meaningful sports and youth programs not just diversionary activities.
- Listening to and empowering youth to lead and teach us and act as role models.
- Being inclusive by offering everyone a place to belong: an extended family outside of home.
- Bringing groups from different locations together to exchange ideas and culture, create new friendships and strengthen existing ties.

Youth Skills Development and Education: Sprints Passport

Since 2021, UNICEF Australia has partnered with the Community Spirit Foundation to empower and enable young people to access the support, skills and education they need to realise their full potential.

The Sprints Passport Program empowers First Nations young people aged 15 to 19 years old in Woorabinda - a remote community in Central Queensland - to transition from secondary school to further education, work and a future of their choosing.

The program supports young people through their education journey with practical tools and mentoring.

Community Spirit Foundation staff also work with young people and their families to obtain identification

and other documentation needed for employment and to access essential services.

As a result of its success, the program is being replicated and scaled into Palm Island in 2023.

58%

of First Nations youth aged 15 – 24 were fully engaged in employment, education or training in 2021.

47

First Nations youth building skills and confidence in remote Woorabinda to gain employment.

CASE STUDY

Young people in the Sprints Passport program in remote Woorabinda have been empowered to become new lifeguards for their community

Michael Choolburra-Singho, Gerald Jacob and Rex Jacob have all begun their jobs as the community's newest lifeguards and are inspiring other young people to follow in their footsteps.

"As the weather warms up across much of Australia and many of us look forward to hitting the beach, four Woorabinda young people have their sights set on making the water safe for others. The young people are working towards their Bronze Medallion and spent the day learning about emergency care and resuscitation, personal safety and managing rescues. The training was run by Royal Life Saving Queensland."



© Community Spirit Foundation



Protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation



Ninety-nine per cent of young people aged 15–17 years are online, making this age group the highest users. They spend an average of 18 hours per week online (Australian Institute of Family Studies)

1 in 4 children aged 8–12 years have experienced unwanted contact and content while online (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)

In 2019, just over 1 in 5 (21%) young people aged 15–19 reported experiencing bullying in the previous 12 months (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

UNICEF Australia seeks an online world that is safe and contributes to the healthy development and wellbeing of children. Unfortunately, the digital world has both great potential but also great risks which we are seeking to mitigate through our work with young people and governments.

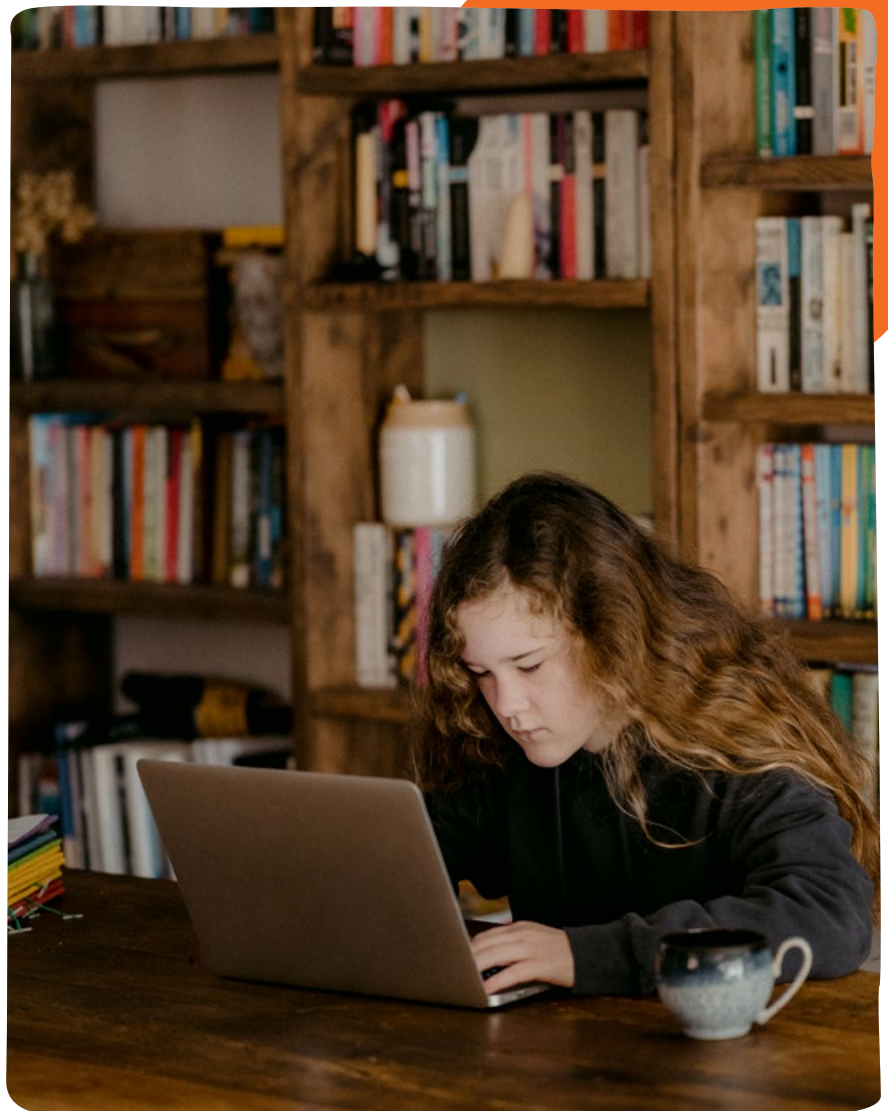
Key achievements

Digital Safety and Wellbeing for Children

Australia is a relative world-leader in this space and we continue to recognise and support the good work the country is doing led by the eSafety Commissioner. However, a challenge remains to broaden our view beyond just focusing on the risks that children face online. This will ensure a more holistic understanding of an online world and actively contribute to the positive development and wellbeing of children and young people.

We continue to see success from our policy and advocacy work across a variety of areas relevant to digital policy for children in Australia. Leveraging our strong international research, we have localised it for the Australian context and used it to drive change across several initiatives which include:

- Successful advocacy on the Online Safety Codes which prevented inadequate industry-drafted codes from being accepted into law, which would have left children poorly protected against the most severe forms of content. We utilised robust policy work, targeted government engagement, public media, and aligned advocacy with sector partners.
- Thought leadership and successful advocacy on the Privacy Act, securing Government commitment to a Children's Online Privacy Code. Another combination of



- strong policy work, government engagement, and high impact media, saw a Government announcement followed by our timely support in the media to focus the public conversation on the positives for children. We did so with a media reach of over 2 million.
- Raising the unique needs of children in online environments through the Big Tech Senate inquiry, including giving evidence at a public hearing.

“Leveraging our strong international research, we have localised it for the Australian context and used it to drive change across several initiatives.”



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Children Impacted by Disasters and Emergencies

Ensuring the needs of children and young people impacted by disasters and emergencies are prioritised in response, recovery and resilience programs as well as policy design.



**As a result of the summer of 2019-20
(UNICEF Australia and Royal Far West)**

2 in 5 children and young people were personally impacted by bushfires

3 in 10 children were personally impacted by drought

almost 25% of children were personally impacted by floods

In Australia we are seeing the devastating impacts of climate change driven disasters and emergencies – the record-breaking heatwaves, savage bushfires, droughts and devastating floods of recent years. As the effects of these disasters grow, the situation for communities will only worsen. Children are uniquely vulnerable to these impacts, yet they remain largely voiceless and forgotten in resilience, response and recovery programming. UNICEF Australia is therefore working hard to place children at the heart of government disaster response policies, actions and investments here in Australia.

We want every jurisdiction to have a child-centric disaster framework that responds effectively to the needs of children in the face of increasingly frequent and intense shocks and hazards.

Key achievements

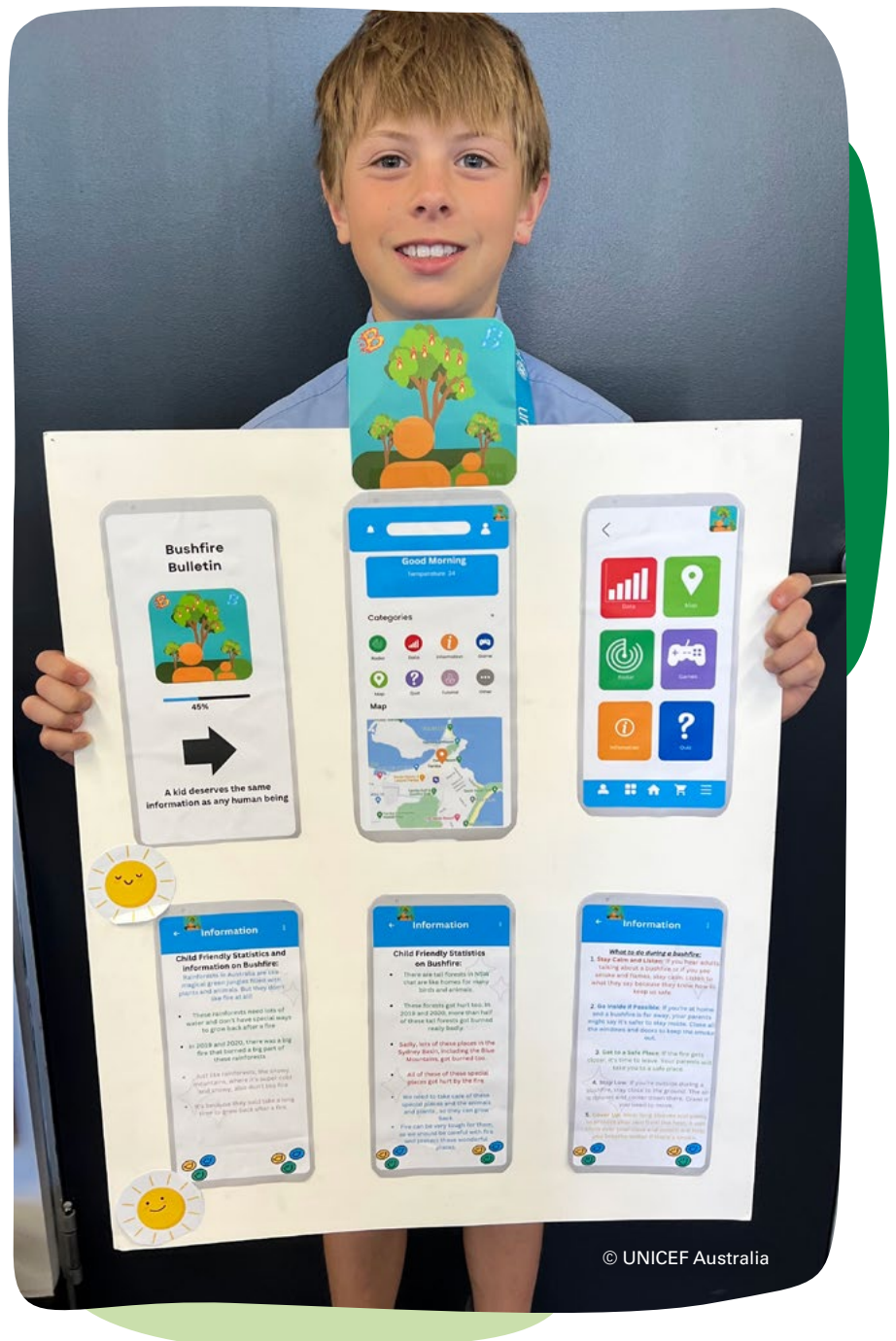
Lifting the voices of young people: Redlands School

UNICEF Australia partnered with Redlands educational team led by Dr Liz Green, teachers and Year 6 students to investigate natural hazards and disasters and child rights. Through a series of workshops with the students we explored the role of UNICEF as a humanitarian organisation responding to natural disasters in our region. Students were led through an exploration of UNICEF work in the region and at home here in Australia anchored in the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Students were then tasked to create a prototype for UNICEF Australia on how to best engage and support young people impacted by disasters such as bushfires or floods.

In response 120 Redlands students and their teachers presented their solutions and ideas which included:

- **Fire Fit:** An app designed to uphold Article 31, the right to play and rest, by offering offline videos of games



© UNICEF Australia

that can be played even without toys. Ensuring that children can find moments of joy even in the toughest times.

- **Ludere** (Latin for play): A concept that repurposes shipping containers to be rapidly deployed in Melbourne's Botanic Gardens, providing children with play therapy and upholding Article 24, the right to care when you are sick by considering the mental health of young people in the wake of a disaster.

- **QR Code Adventure:** Leveraging QR codes on Kellogg's cereal boxes to take children all around the country to a website designed to capture their stories and artworks about their disaster experiences. Article 12, the right to share your ideas and be listened to on things that impact you by empowering children to share their perspectives and feelings.



Ensuring the needs of children are prioritised in a disaster: Fitzroy Crossing Flood Disaster Response

Fitzroy Crossing, a town in Western Australia's (WA) Kimberley region, experienced record-breaking flooding in early 2023 due to ex-tropical Cyclone Ellie. This one in a century flood was described as the worst ever flood in WA.

In response, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre (MWRC), a local Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, invited UNICEF Australia and Royal Far West to undertake a community consultation to understand the unique and ongoing needs of children and

young people following the disaster. This work builds on our previous community consultations with Royal Far West in response to the Northern NSW and Southeast QLD floods.

Six months after the floods in Fitzroy Crossing, we visited flood impacted communities and spoke with over 40 stakeholders (of which about 40% identify as Aboriginal) with the purpose of:

- Deepening our understanding of the impacts of the floods on children, young people and families in Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding communities.
- Understanding the social, emotional and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal children and identifying

the priorities for their recovery and healing as identified by their families, educators and local support services.

- Creating community and evidence informed recommendations to highlight the type of support required to meet these needs into the future.

Professor Pat Dudgeon - a Bardi woman from the Kimberley - and her research team at the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia are providing expertise on the use of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing model for this work. The community consultation outcomes will be released in early 2024.

Influencing and advocating for children and young people impacted by disasters and emergencies

A key goal of UNICEF Australia's disaster advocacy work is that by mid-2024, at least two State governments have developed clear, tangible, and effective child-focused disaster response, recovery, and resilience-building plans, encompassing the needs of particularly marginalised children and young people.

UNICEF Australia has focused on New South Wales and Western Australia because we have done context-specific work with children

and communities in each of these states, and both experienced significant disasters in the last few years. Highlights from our work in this space include:

- Generating an evidence base for change, through consultations in both states working with over 47 communities since 2020;
- Contribution to policy processes through submissions to the Inquiry into Australia's Disaster Resilience and the Inquiry into Commonwealth Disaster Funding;
- Engaging with key Government decision-makers including the NSW Reconstruction Authority and the WA State Emergency Management Coordinator;
- Building stronger relationships with key sector partners such as the National Infant and Child Disaster Mental Health Committee (NICDAC);
- Incorporating key advocacy messages into our public responses to floods, bushfires, and heatwaves through the year across all UNICEF Australia communication platforms;
- Policy reforms currently underway in NSW, including a rewriting of the NSW Reconstruction Plan, to which UNICEF Australia has contributed.





Children and Climate Change

UNICEF Australia is committed to fostering an Australia that protects, prepares, and prioritises children in response to the climate crisis.



In Australia, children born in 2020 can expect to experience four times as many heatwaves, three times as many droughts, as well as 1.5 times as many bushfires and river floods, under current trajectory of global emissions.

78% of Australian young people are concerned or extremely concerned about climate change. 68% of young people believe Australia is not doing enough to reduce carbon emissions. 83% of young people believe there is a connection between climate change and natural hazards.

Source: The Australian Institute Disaster Resilience

Climate change is changing childhood. Over the past year we have been working to ensure that mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building laws, policies, and practices are explicitly sensitive to the needs of children and young people.

Key achievements

Australian Local Conference of Youth (LCOY)

UNICEF Australia was invited by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Youth Constituency alongside the Monash Sustainable Development Institute to host the 2023 Australian Local Conference of Youth. The conference aims to raise child and youth voices and facilitate greater coordination and collaboration amongst the Australian youth climate movement.

Key findings and a statement from LCOY will feed into the Global Youth Climate statement which is to be submitted at 2023 United Nations Climate Conference (COP28) and will also be presented to the Australian Government.

Co-led and co-designed by 8 incredible youth climate change-makers, we supported 75 overall events across Australia. Overall, 100 young people participated in the events and contributed their voices to the Australian Child and Youth National Statement on Climate Change 2023.

A big thank you to our LCOY Leadership Council for their huge efforts: Amelia, Ane, Denzel, Hayley, Izzy, Luke, Neekhil and Peta!

Conference of Parties (COP) 28

Over the past year we advocated for increased youth participation at global multilateral forums such as COP 28. As a result, for the first time in years the Australian Government has allocated funding to enable young people to participate as observers at COP 28 – this includes two UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors.

UNICEF Australia will also host an event at COP 28 aimed at showcasing our research and policy work on the impacts of climate change on children in Australia, whilst also elevating youth voices at the conference itself.





Creation of Children's Climate Indicators with the Young and Resilient Centre at Western Sydney University

UNICEF Australia partnered with The Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University to develop child-centered indicators for climate justice - an Australian first.

Working with children and young people aged 10-18 years from three regions across NSW, this project:

1. Documented and co-analyses children's experiences of climate change and climate action so that their insights can be channeled into Australian policy, advocacy and programing.

2. Developed practical child-centered indicators to measure the impacts of climate strategies based on children's own experiences.

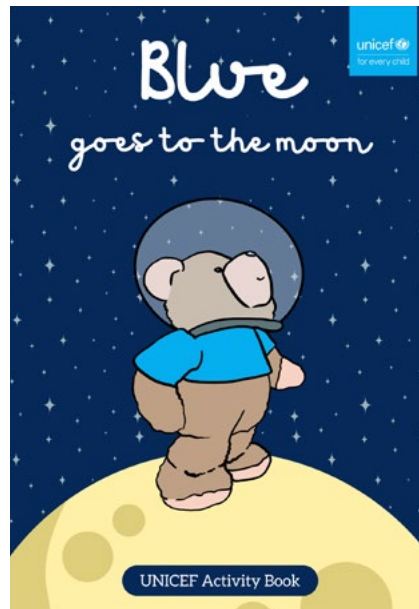
The project draws on the Young and Resilient Research Centre unique co-research methods and innovative child-centered indicator processes which have been tested and applied in 79 countries. These amplify Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to ensure that children and young people's voices are at the center of policy decision-making.

Climate Innovation Project with University of Technology students

UNICEF Australia partnered with the University of Technology Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation and engaged 6 young people in a climate-focused project. In just 12 weeks, they put forward an innovative solution to the complex question – how can Australians better understand the needs and perspectives of children and young people in the face of impending climate disasters?

The students produced a prototype activity book for children aged 6-9 years old to utilise post natural disaster. The book uses the narrative of Blue the Bear going to the Moon as a way for children to safely explore the emotions which they may be feeling, what supports may help them and who they can reach out to within their networks.

A big thank you to William, Caterina, Imogen, Khayla, Ariana, and Amelia for your incredible commitment and passion with the project. We look forward to exploring options with Blue into the future!



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We currently live in one of the hardest hit climate regions in the world, where children already bear the brunt of climate shocks. UNICEF Australia is dedicated to supporting a climate-resilient Asia Pacific region, where every child has their right to a sustainable environment realised.

We welcome the Government's commitment in late 2023 to rejoin the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the world's major global climate finance fund, so that Australia can fuel the scale of change required to prepare, protect and prioritise children in the climate crisis. The GCF remains the fifth-largest source of climate finance in our region that helps developing countries limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Further, the Lowy Institute found that for every dollar Australia contributed to the fund, it unlocked up to \$1.60 in additional global climate finance.

We also welcome the Government's investment in expertise to support Pacific governments accessing climate finance.



© Binar Futures

Making Children a Priority in Australia

UNICEF Australia's key mission is to ensure children are a national priority. We do this by advocating for investment in comprehensive data led programming, improved planning across government and closer attention to protracted child's rights issues.



First Nations children are 10.9 times more likely to enter out-of-home care and 26 times more likely to enter youth detention, compared with non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Family Studies)

1 in 7 children/young people experience mental health issues (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)

On average in 2019-20, one in six children lived below the poverty line (Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney)

Key achievements

The National Australian Children's Wellbeing Index

Australia currently lacks a national dataset which tracks the holistic wellbeing of children. At a time when the Australian Government is taking a welcome approach to expanding the scope of budgets beyond purely economic means - through the Measuring What Matters budget initiative - the need for a comprehensive national data set tracking the wellbeing of children is more urgent than ever. A simple proposition is – you cannot fix what you can't measure or count.

In response, UNICEF Australia in partnership with ARACY created the Children's Wellbeing Index in 2021, which is a tool that uses data to track the holistic wellbeing of children and young person aged 0 - 24.

This Index provides an important accountability tool to help focus our attention. Over time we will be able to see clearly where we are making progress and where progress is stagnating.

Key achievements in 2023:

- The refreshed Index was publicly launched by Minister Amanda Rishworth and MP Sally Sitou in Sydney. The launch received significant media attention across online, print and radio stations nationally reaching more than 12 million people in Australia.
- The Children's Wellbeing Index is helping to shape the Australian Government's own approach to developing its first ever definition of children's wellbeing.

- Invited to participate in consultations by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) about a data linkage project about the Index.
- Released a deep dive into the Healthy domain of the Index that incorporates recent research and the voices of young people.
- Held a webinar panel with former Young Ambassador Emily Unity and Tithi from Reach Out about the Healthy paper and a discussion about peer-to-peer mental health solutions. The webinar and paper assists sector-based experts with over 110 attendees from civil society and the public sector.



UNICEF's work is anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that is, to shape a better world for all children in Australia, no matter what.



Safeguarding children: Using a child rights impact assessment to improve our laws and policies

In partnership with the National Children's Commissioner and the Australian Human Rights Commission, the *Safeguarding children: Using a child rights impact assessment to improve our laws and policies* report was launched on 25 October 2023.

A Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) tool was developed to assist governments and service providers to assess how children's rights and wellbeing are affected by any new law, policy or program. The 18-question checklist can be used to measure the anticipated impact of a new law or policy, and whether it supports the best interests of children and their families in Australia.

UNICEF Australia will continue to advocate for a national CRIA to be adopted by all state, territory and federal policymakers. This would allow us to respond consistently across the country, in areas like education, public health, youth justice or emergencies such as a global pandemic or a disaster.



CASE STUDY

Measuring What Matters

With the Australian Government embarking on a project to redefine our federal budget process by focusing on measures beyond pure economics, UNICEF Australia identified an opportunity to ensure that children were prominent in the process. Through a combination of policy work, sector collaboration, targeted government engagement, and public media, we were able to successfully secure 3 indicators focused on children in the newly announced budget framework. Our advocacy included:

- Policy submission to the Measuring What Matters consultation, spotlighting our National Children's Wellbeing Index
- Contributing to sector roundtables to help influence the direction of sector-based advocacy
- Targeted government engagement, including meeting with the Federal Treasury at their request to delve deeper into the analysis outlined in our policy submission
- Public media timed with the release of the Measuring What Matters framework, maintaining the emphasis on the need to centre children in the process.

We look forward to continued strong engagement with the government on this important process.

Shaping the Public Conversation as a Voice for Children

Contributing to shaping the public conversation about children throughout the year in topics that include climate change, making them a national priority, calling for early years reform, advancing birth registration, and family friendly policies.

Overall, our content has been published by Australian media outlets with an approximate reach of over 15 million and these are some examples:



Race to give children new human right as 'high risk' threat looms ([yahoo.com](https://www.yahoo.com))



Extreme weather warning prompts concern for Aussie kids: 'We need to be prepared' ([yahoo.com](https://www.yahoo.com))



'Obliged to help': David Gyngell sounds alarm over mental health crisis in Northern Rivers ([smh.com.au](https://www.smh.com.au))



Thousands of children will need intensive support after the 2022 floods, Royal Far West and UNICEF find - [ABC News](https://www.abc.net.au)



EXCLUSIVE: Pat Cummins, UNICEF Indi Kindi visit | [The Australian](https://www.theaustralian.com.au)



Children will be safer online under promised privacy overhaul with less data collected and targeted ads | [The West Australian](https://www.thewestaustralian.com.au)



Measuring wellbeing of children will enable future success ([womensagenda.com.au](https://www.womensagenda.com.au))



Wellbeing budget markers an ongoing quest | [The Canberra Times](https://www.thecanberra.com.au) | [Canberra, ACT](https://www.canberra.act.gov.au)



Aussie kids facing disadvantage, inequality: report | [The Canberra Times](https://www.thecanberra.com.au) | [Canberra, ACT](https://www.canberra.act.gov.au)



Childcare needs 'bold, ambitious' reforms to give kids best start ([smh.com.au](https://www.smh.com.au))



UNICEF and Pathfinders offer free birth certificates – [NBN News](https://www.nbnnews.com.au)



UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador - [Behind The News](https://www.behindthenews.com.au) - [abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au)

Policy Submissions, Statements and Appearances



We're making submissions to Parliamentary and government inquiries, public statements and appearances at Senate Committees on issues relating to child rights in Australia.

Submissions:

- Productivity Commission inquiry into ECEC
- National Survey into Disaster Risk Reduction through NEMA
- AHRC Review into Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform
- National Health and Climate Strategy
- Consultation on safe and responsible AI Governance
- Inquiry into the influence of international digital platforms (Big Tech)
- Consultation on the Measuring What Matters framework
- Inquiry into Australia's Disaster Resilience
- Inquiry into national trend of school refusal
- Consultation on the Early Years Strategy
- 2nd round consultation on the Online Safety Codes
- Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework
- Inquiry into Commonwealth Disaster Funding
- 6x submissions via the Australian Child Rights Taskforce including on family law amendments, review of the Privacy Act, Online Safety Codes, Human Rights Framework, and review of Australia's OPCAT implementation.
- Closing the Gap Draft Report – Productivity Commission
- Federal Budget Pre Budget-Submission 2023/24
- Development Policy Submission with PPD
- Consultation on the Government's Youth Engagement Strategy
- NSW Budget Pre Budget Submission 2023/24
- Duty of Care and Intergenerational Equity Bill 2023/2024

Appearances at:

- Public hearings of the Senate inquiry into the influence of international digital platforms (Big Tech)
- The National Early Years Summit

Statements:

- Hands on Heart National Youth Voice Conference Declaration
- Australian Local Conference of Youth: Child and Youth National Statement on Climate Change

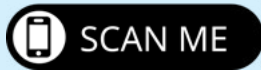
Our Publications

We create and publish research and insights about children and young people in Australia to inform and guide decision-makers.

In 2023, this work included

- Australian Children's Wellbeing Index (refreshed with Census data)
- Healthy Children, Healthy Futures - A review of Australian children and young people's health
- CERTIFY HOPE Birth certificates for every child in Australia
- Safeguarding Children: Using a child rights impact assessment to improve our laws and policies.

→ Scan the QR code to read our knowledge, data and evidence pieces and reports on our publications site.



Our Enablers

Example: Developing our understanding of what Australian children feel about the big issues in the world

We consulted Australian children to better understand how they feel about the big issues here in Australia and overseas and how best we might be able to engage and support them on these issues.

Over 1000 children aged 6-17 years old were consulted through a national research survey and online task board. Key themes that emerged were that children and young people are well educated on the big issues facing children such as cost of living, climate change and poverty, but feel overwhelmed by how many issues there are, and don't feel a great deal of confidence that real change is being made. We heard they need reassurance and hope, and it's important to connect with them in a way that feels positive and uplifting.

The research is being used to refine how we communicate with young people to ensure we connect with them in a meaningful way to meet their needs.

We have invested in capabilities, systems and processes to equip us to be a more effective partner for children and young people.

Key achievements in 2023:

- Set up a Children's Strategy Champion network.
- Asked Australian children what they feel about the big issues in Australia.
- Included child and youth engagement principles as part of all new staff onboarding.
- Developed a staff intranet site with new resources: Capability Guide to help staff grow their child & youth engagement capability, Child and Youth Engagement Handbook, research and best practice examples.
- Provided opportunities for staff to participate in youth events, co-facilitate with child engagement

experts, and recruitment of Young Ambassadors and interns.

- Supported staff to be able to develop more child-friendly resources and involved them in the design of the new UNICEF Youth webpages.
- Provided more opportunities for our staff to hear directly from young people.
- Reviewed our approach to young people's voice in our own decision making with a focus on broadening young people's involvement and scaling up research and feedback opportunities.
- Established an MOU with Young and Resilient Centre, Western Sydney University and utilised their expertise to ensure child-friendly and appropriate research and surveys of children and young people.



Thank you to our Partners and Supporters

Only with the support of the Australian public, our partners and collaborators are we able to see real change and impact for children and young people. Thank you.

At UNICEF Australia, we know that partnerships are fundamental to achieving impact at scale and better outcomes for children and communities. We would like to thank each of our local community, academic and research, and private sector partners for working with us this year.



One of the world's most trusted organisations, UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) has been working tirelessly for 75 years to support the health, nutrition, education and protection of the world's children. UNICEF teams are working in more than 190 countries with local partners – including local and national governments – to deliver life-saving help and to create sustainable change. UNICEF is non-partisan and its cooperation is free of discrimination.