



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of  
Family Studies



**SENATE ESTIMATES | OPENING STATEMENT**  
**COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES (AIFS) | TUESDAY 30 MAY 2023**

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) continues to ensure that its research agenda provides evidence to inform the Government's well-being policy priorities and the emerging challenges experienced by Australian families in all their forms, intersectionalities and locations.

AIFS' 70 researchers with its corporate and communication support are also mandated to evaluate policies and programs and to provide best practice support to family and children's services providers.

**National Strategies engagement**

The key national strategies we are currently contributing to include: The National Strategy for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children; Measuring What Matters; The National Mens Health Strategy, Family Law Reform; The National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians; The Royal Commission into Veterans Suicides; The National Early Years Strategy; the Close the Gap Report and the APS Capability Reinvestment Strategy.

**The Early Years Strategy**

AIFS has been providing evidence of the determinants of healthy, well-adjusted 0 to 5 year olds to inform the new National Early Years Strategy. This evidence includes that from the more than 3000 research reports which have focussed on 0 to 5 year olds in our Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). AIFS has also helped identify ongoing research gaps in the understanding of early years development, including the need for nationally consistent data collected by service providers, effectively monitored, and evaluated services provision and more effective strategies to overcome inequitable ECE and child services access.

**Providing research evidence to support Family and Children Service Providers.**

AIFS continues to be a trusted source of information for 45,600 subscribers to a fortnightly newsletter supporting family and children's service providers. Over the last 9 months over 1.5 million viewed the resources provided by AIFS Children, Families, Community, Australia Information Exchange (CFCA) including newsletters, webinars, help desks and articles.

The Emerging Minds program continues to support children's mental health workers, including providing resources related to CALD communities, children in out of home care and to assist fathers in parenting.

### **Family Law Reform**

AIFS has long been providing research evidence to the Attorney General's Department about the harms perpetuated by some Family Court processes when dealing with partners and children experiencing family violence and where there are few family assets to divide. This has helped to focus the Court on the best interests of the child.

AIFS is now evaluating the performance of the Children's Contact Services to determine if they are adequately regulated, child focussed, safe, culturally sensitive and supporting families experiencing violence and/or disadvantage.

### **Settlement Challenges and Humanitarian Migrants**

At this time of national workforce shortages and the focus on the well-being of families, AIFS 10 year old longitudinal study of refugee resettlement experiences (the BNLA) is providing evidence of the persisting challenges many Humanitarian Migrants experience.

For example, in the BNLA sample 16% of all the humanitarian migrant arrivals had university, technical or trade qualifications, but only 17% of this number had secured partial or full recognition of their qualifications five years on. 73% of refugee men had been employed at some point before coming to Australia. The impacts of pre settlement trauma persisted for many, as did difficulties with English language learning. More evidence on the protective or negatively impacting influences on successful settlement, including location, gender and disability will be further developed from the latest wave of interviews currently being conducted.

### **Australia's Gambling Harms**

Our research has shown three out of four Australians have gambled in the last 12 months and some half of those could be classified as at risk of gambling harms. This evidence strongly supports the new measures the Government is taking to minimise gambling harms. AIFS Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) has provided evidence of a causal link between playing simulated gambling and loot box games during adolescence and the later development of gambling harms. These findings support the introduction of mandatory classification ratings of M and R18+ for simulated gambling products. The AGRC also identified the proportion of Australians who gamble online and who use credit cards and are then more inclined to chase losses and impulse bet.

AGRC's survey of the general community showed widespread support for an outright ban on gambling advertising across all platforms and types. The recent tag line changes and consideration of other gambling promotion regulation is thus strongly supported by the survey evidence. AGRC has also used data linkage and integrated data from LSAC and the 7000 respondents in the AIFS longitudinal study of Men's Health (Ten to Men), building the evidence of the social and economic determinants of high-risk gambling behaviours. (The longitudinal study: Ten to Men is the oldest and largest tracking boys to men's health in the world.)

### **Elder Abuse**

AIFS is partnering with the National Ageing Research Institute to evaluate the National Plan to respond to the Abuse of Older Australians 2019-2023. This should be delivered in July 2023.

### **Defence Family Studies**

Extensive AIFS research has helped build the understanding that families play a critical role in supporting ADF members during service, when deciding to terminate service, and when transitioning to civilian life. A study with Flinders University is identifying the mental health challenges for veteran women transitioning to civilian life. It will be completed in mid-2023.

I thank the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for the opportunity to present some of our work to you, and I and my colleagues look forward to answering any questions.

All the best,

Dr Sharman Stone

30.05.2023

**Dr Sharman Stone**

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The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the traditional Country throughout Australia on which we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all traditional custodians, their Elders past, present and emerging, and we pay our respects to their continuing connection to their culture, community, land, sea and rivers.