



## **Senate Estimates Statement. Australian Institute of Family Studies**

### **Community Affairs Legislative Committee**

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Parliament House.**

The Family Law Act 1975 established the Australian Institute for Family Studies (AIFS) to provide the evidence for new family related policies and services, the Government needed to promote the wellbeing of all Australian families and children. Forty years on AIFS continues to produce independent government research to the most rigorous and ethical standards. Our core competencies are delivered by some 70 specialists in social science, psychology, family law, infant, child and adolescent development, criminology, demography, health economics, statistics, survey design and evaluation. We are one of the government's seven accredited Data Linkage integrating authorities. We also upskill children's services professionals, conveying the latest evidence through a wide range of media.

We welcome the government's new Public Service Reform agenda, in particular its intention to build capability to replace reliance on external consultants. As an Institute with limited appropriations, we depend on competitively commissioned work from a number of Government Departments, including Department of Social Services (DSS), Health, the Attorney General's Department, Defence, Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), Home Affairs and Education. We are therefore well placed to assist with the development of the new in-house consulting model and to offer capability reinvestment and uplift for Departments in data use, program logic and evaluation.

AIFS research is currently informing the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians 2019-2023; the National Plan to end Violence Against Women and Children; The National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030, the National Early Years Strategy; The Closing the Gap National Agreement; The Royal Commission into Veterans Suicides and the 2023 Family Law reform proposals.

AIFS expanded its focus beyond Family Law more than forty years ago, however it continues to be Australia's pre-eminent research provider in this critical area. For example, AIFS evidence has helped inform the proposals to make court proceedings more trauma informed and child centred. AIFS findings provided evidence to support placing the safety of children above the presumed rights of both parents to equal or shared parenting arrangements.

AIFS research identified the prevalence and impacts for the (mostly) women in abusive relationships whose partners weaponized the Family Law system by vexatious, repeated, or prolonged litigation, including by direct cross examination, usually with no victim safeguards in place. AIFS found that in a sample of families involved in parenting order breaches (often involving abusive relationships) one third of the children were caught up in family law proceedings for 5 to 9 years and 6% were caught up in proceedings for more than 12 years. AIFS has also identified improved ways to manage contraventions of parenting orders after finding two thirds of a sample of these cases were dismissed, withdrawn, or struck out. Our findings about the difficulties of women obtaining a fair share of small family assets through the Family Law system has helped lead to new more efficient processes. We are also currently collating evidence on better engaging fathers and their contribution to better child mental health.

AIFS has a strong focus on intergenerational disadvantage and the determinants of different harms and abuse across the life course, taking intersectionalities into consideration. This includes its seminal work: the National Elderly Abuse Prevalence Study. For the first time we established the prevalence and different types of abuse across Australia, the characteristics of perpetrators and the responses and impacts on the victims. More work needs to be funded to identify the needs of the elderly in institutions,

in CALD and Indigenous communities. This also requires new ways to engage vulnerable stakeholders in gathering and interpreting data.

AIFS research into the wellbeing of serving and veteran defence families includes the issues of family violence, but we also provide data about the influence of family on individual decisions to leave the Forces. This research is important given separations outnumber new enlistments. AIFS work provides clear evidence of the support needed for families given the impact on them of communications, childcare, housing, deployment, and relocation policies. We can also provide new evidence on ways to address transitioning to civilian life challenges, including mental health factors.

The Commonwealth Gambling Measures Act 2012 added the Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) to AIFS responsibilities. It is now the nation's foremost investigator into the determinants and prevalence of the harms associated with Australia's huge spend on gambling in all its forms.

AIFS AGRC is shortly to release new findings on community attitudes about betting promotions and the impact of advertising on gambling participation and harms. We have also established a link between early online simulated gambling game playing and young men's graduation to cash-based gambling harms.

One of the great advantages of being a multidisciplinary and closely integrated institution is that the data from one research program can inform another. For example, the social determinants of harmful gambling can be investigated by the AGRC at one point in time and this can then be informed by the data collected about gambling from the 7000 participants in the ten-year-old Ten to Men longitudinal study. We can then identify causalities, intergenerational impacts, and associations with employment, income, education, physical and mental health. This data can be enriched by linking it to Medicare records and potentially in the future to other administrative datasets around social security, justice, and housing.

The value of AIFS three longitudinal studies, into men's health (Ten to Men); humanitarian or refugee settlers (the BNLA) and Growing up in Australia (LSAC) can be measured in part by the number of researchers registered to access the data for further analysis. For example, there are 134 researchers registered to use data from the men's health longitudinal study, (Ten to Men). 104 of the 134 come from Australian universities, 9 from international universities, and 18 are from AIFS. The Victorian Dept of Health also accesses the data. Over the lifetime of LSAC there have been 2,930 data users, with 333 approved data access licenses for the period 2020-2021.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies continues to be the trusted family and gambling research and evaluation provider for the government. We look forward to ongoing collaboration, co-design and partnership with our research commissioning agents.

I am providing links below to some of our most recently released research reports. Please refer to [www.aifs.gov.au](http://www.aifs.gov.au) for all publications & webinars. I and my colleagues look forward to answering any further questions.

Dr Sharman Stone



Director

## Recently Released Research Reports

### Family Law System

- [AIFS Compliance with and Enforcement of Family Law Parenting Orders Project](#)  
(Study: Nov 2022)
- [Parenting orders: Research on compliance and enforcement and insights from practice](#)  
(Webinar: Nov 2022)
- [Evaluation of the Lawyer-assisted Family Law Property Mediation: Legal Aid Commission Trial](#) (Research Report: Nov 2022)
- [Australian child protection legislation](#) (Resource sheet: Aug 2022)
- [Intersecting systems and the needs of families: Family law, child protection and domestic violence](#) (Webinar: June 2022)

### AIFS Research on Elder Abuse

- [Elder Abuse National Research Project \(All Publications\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia - prevalence: Findings from the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study - research snapshot. \(Aug 2022\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia: Physical abuse \(Aug 2022\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia: Psychological abuse \(Aug 2022\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia: Financial abuse \(Aug 2022\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia: Sexual abuse \(Aug 2022\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia: Neglect \(Aug 2022\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse \(CALD\) Australians \(Aug 2022\)](#)
- [Elder abuse in Australia: Wills, powers of attorney and family agreements \(Aug 2022\)](#)

### AIFS Research on Gambling

- [Please note new Research Snapshots will be released shortly.](#)
- [Australian Gambling Research Centre \(AGRC\) \(All Publications\)](#)
- [Gambling participation and harm among Australian men: Chapter 1 | Ten to Men \(Oct 2022\)](#)
- [What is the link between video gaming and gambling?: Snapshot Series - Issue 7 | Growing Up in Australia \(Sept 2022\)](#)

- [Raising the stakes: how Australians are gambling during COVID-19 \(Oct 2020\)](#)

## AIFS Research on Defence and Veteran Families

- Current research includes the [2022 ADF Families Survey](#), the [Australian Military and Veteran Families Study](#) and [Strengthening and protecting veteran family relationships](#)
- [Defence and Veteran Family Research](#) (All Publications)
- [Vietnam Veterans Family Study: Spouses and partners of veterans](#) (Dec 2021)

## Families and Society

- [Child Care Package Evaluation: Final report | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [Child wellbeing during the COVID pandemic: Parental concerns | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [Grandparents and childcare | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [Financial support between family members | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)

## AIFS Longitudinal Studies

- **[Building a New Life in Australia \(BNLA\). The Longitudinal Study Humanitarian Migrants.](#)**

Visit the website [here](#).

- [How young people from humanitarian backgrounds are settling in Australia | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [Recently arrived humanitarian migrants | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [The Building a New Life in Australia \(BNLA\) Dataset: A Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants in Australia | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- **[Ten to Men \(TTM\). The Australian Longitudinal study on Male Health.](#)**

Visit the website [here](#).

- [Recent natural disasters in Australia: Exploring the association with men's mental health and access to health care | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)

- [Gambling participation and harm among Australian men | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [Illicit substance use among adult males in Australia, 2013/14–2020/21 | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [Mental health care needs and access among Australian men: A data linkage study | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- **[Growing Up in Australia. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children](#)**

Visit the website [here](#).

- ['Invisible people' - policy makers urged to consider the needs of 20-somethings who moved back home during the pandemic | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](#)
- [Landmark AIFS research provides a snapshot of Australian gambling behaviour and harm | Australian Institute of Family Studies](#)
- [Adolescents combining school and part-time employment: Snapshot Series - Issue 6 | Growing Up in Australia](#)