



# Children

## City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

The early years provide the foundation for long-term health, development and wellbeing. The first 1,000 days (the period from conception to the end of the second year) are particularly important. Young children thrive when they have safe and secure housing, adequate nutrition, secure relationships with adult caregivers and high-quality learning opportunities. More recently, the middle years (8 to 11 years old) have been recognised as an important time of development. Overall, most children in Port Phillip are doing well and perform better against key indicators than the Victorian average. However, some children are at a higher risk of experiencing inequitable health outcomes.

### Who lives in our municipality?

Children aged 0 to 11 years make up about 10 per cent of the resident population of Port Phillip (ABS, 2016). While the number of children in Port Phillip is forecast to grow steadily, children will represent a relatively smaller proportion of the population in the future. Over the past five years, birth rates in the City of Port Phillip have declined (Port Phillip 2020).

Almost 10 per cent of children residing in Port Phillip are born overseas, with the United Kingdom, India and the United States of America being the most common overseas birthplaces. Compared with Greater Melbourne, a higher proportion speak only English at home.

Almost two thirds of children live in households with incomes in the highest quartile for Victoria, however, almost eight per cent (659 children aged 0 to 11 years old) live in households with incomes in the lowest quartile. In 2016, just less than 90 per cent were in households with an internet connection (slightly below the Greater Melbourne average).

Approximately 10 per cent of children aged 0 to 11 live in one-parent households. Compared with Greater Melbourne, a much higher proportion of children aged 0 to 11 are living in dwellings that are either fully owned or privately rented. This group is much more likely to be living in medium or high-density housing compared to their Greater Melbourne counterparts.

### How are children in our municipality tracking?

- 13.4 per cent of children were recorded as developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains in the first year of school in 2018 (Department of Education and Training, 2018). This



is lower than the Victorian average of 19.9 per cent. 5.9 per cent were recorded as particularly developmentally vulnerable children (children vulnerable on two or more domains), lower than the Victorian average of 10.1 per cent (Department of Education and Training, 2018).

- More than 87 per cent of eligible children participate in one or more 4-week “Key Age and Stage Visits” at Council’s maternal and child health services (Port Phillip 2020). This is higher than the Victorian average. The proportions of infants fully breastfed at three and six months of age are higher than the Victorian average (Department of Education and Training, 2019)
- At 82.6 per cent, participation in a kindergarten program in the year before school is lower than the Victorian average (Department of Education and Training, 2019). However, according to prep teacher reports, a much higher proportion have attended a formal preschool or kindergarten program in the year before school. (Department of Education and Training, 2018)

Childhood immunisation rates for children 12 to 15 months are consistent with the Victorian average, however there is a growing gap as children get older with older Port Phillip children less likely to be vaccinated than the Victorian average.

### How do outcomes vary for different population groups?

Children’s health and development are strongly shaped by the social, economic and environmental conditions into which they are born and grow. Children who experience disadvantage are more likely to experience health inequities that compromise their future health and wellbeing. The impact of poverty in an advantaged community may be even more damaging than the impact in a disadvantaged community because there is a higher chance of social isolation (Centre for Community Health, 2019). Single parent families, the unemployed and those who do not own their own homes are at the highest risk.

- Developmental outcomes for children are not equally distributed across the municipality. Children attending school in South Melbourne, St Kilda and St Kilda East are more likely to experience one or more developmental vulnerabilities in their first year of school compared with children attending schools in Middle Park, Albert Park and Port Melbourne (Department of Education and Training, 2018).
- Children exposed to **family violence** are more likely to have a range of health, developmental and social problems, both during childhood and later in life (Ayre, On, Webster, Gourley, & Moon, 2016). 733,900 women in Australia who have experienced violence by a previous partner had children in their care during the violence; for 77 per cent of these women, the children witnessed the violence (Cox, 2016).
- **Families from diverse cultural backgrounds** who have arrived in Australia on skilled work visas are unable to access federal government subsidies to attend early education and care services.
- **Aboriginal children** are at a higher risk of developmental or behavioural problems. Among urban communities, 32 per cent of children are at high risk, 28 per cent at moderate and 40 per cent at low/no risk of poor developmental outcomes (Chando, et al., 2020). More support for Aboriginal community-driven programs to improve detection and facilitate support for early intervention is needed.



### How has COVID-19 affected outcomes for children?

Restrictions implemented to control the immediate health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly disrupted the traditional education and care supports in place for children and exacerbated family stresses such as job loss and mental health concerns. The long-term impacts of this on children are uncertain.

### Why is supporting children important for our community?

Improving the early lives of children experiencing factors associated with disadvantage is the most effective form of prevention and provides a high economic return on investment.

### What is the role of Council in contributing to outcomes for children?

Children's services operate in a complex and highly regulated environment. Federal, state, and local government all have important roles in the regulation, funding and delivery of children's services. Over the last ten years, both the Commonwealth and Victorian government have increased their investment in early childhood services and there have been a range of legislative changes designed to improve quality and accessibility of early education and care services.

Victorian local governments are required to:

- Provide immunisation services
- Provide universal and enhanced maternal child health services
- Support planning for kindergarten and school provision
- Meet Child Safe obligations.

In addition to mandated responsibilities, over the next three years Port Phillip has the opportunity to make a more substantial contribution to outcomes for children in the municipality by:

- Implementing the fifteen commitments in the *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy*
- Continuing programming and funding to improve outcomes for middle years including adventure playgrounds
- Providing family support services
- Ensuring that public spaces are conducive to children's participation and safety.

Whilst universal service systems, that offer differential support according to level of need, are a critical method in reaching vulnerable families, specifically targeted programs are also required. Consequently Port Phillip has the opportunity to develop and implement additional services that meet the needs of children located in disadvantaged pockets of the municipality.



## Who are our partners?

In order to facilitate a comprehensive, consistent and whole of community approach to ensuring equitable outcomes for all children, Council partners with community organisations and other levels of government to deliver community interventions. Some of our key partners include:

- Community early education and care providers
- Community kindergartens
- Private early education and care providers
- Toy libraries and community playgroups
- Victorian Department of Education and Training
- Star Health
- Local primary schools

## What may change over the next five years?

- Introduction of two years of funded kindergarten in the two years before school
- Immediate impacts of educational disruption in 2020 may become apparent

## References

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