



**South Australian  
Commissioner  
for Children and  
Young People  
2025**

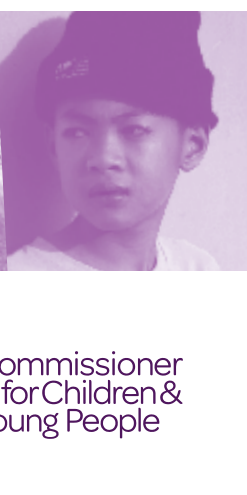
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# Missing out

**Systemic discrimination of children  
and young people in South Australia**

PROJECT REPORT NO. 47 | APRIL 2025



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### The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016. The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people. This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation. The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda including ways in which children and young people can have input into the design and delivery of policies, processes, services and practices that affect their lives.

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### Acknowledgements

Thank you to the thousands of children and young people who have shared their lived experiences over the past eight years (May 2017 to April 2025), particularly those on whose situations and challenges this report is focused on most. Their insights have formed the basis of this report and have enabled the Commissioner to identify where children and young people are missing out. The recommendations and actions needed by government contained in this report, are based on their strong voices and commitment to seeing the lives of others who may face similar situations improved.

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# Commissioner's Foreword

In 2017, when I was first appointed South Australia's inaugural Commissioner for Children and Young People, I prioritised engaging with as many of our state's children and young people as I possibly could – I needed to hear what they wanted from their Commissioner to ensure my advocacy work was aligned with their needs and based on their voices and experiences; not my own assumptions.

As their Commissioner, it is my responsibility under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016*, to promote and advocate for the rights and interests of all South Australian children and young people; not just some. To be able to do this, I need to understand the complexity of their lives and the differences that exist between them – not just view them as one large homogenous mass.

This also means ensuring that I promote children and young people's opportunities to participate in decision making that directly affects their lives, particularly those whose views are least likely to be sought or heard. I have been making recommendations to government (and interested others) over the last eight years in relation to the systemic shortfalls and failings I have observed firsthand to be impacting the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australian children and young people.

My work is guided by the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC); the core international treaty established in 1989 to which Australia is a signatory. This important agreement sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children around the world. My aim is to ensure South Australia plays its part in

upholding Australia's international obligations under this Convention for the benefit of all South Australian children and young people.

The UNCRC outlines the rights of children under 18 years to be free from discrimination (Article 2); to have their best interests upheld (Article 3); to be able to express their views in all matters affecting them (Article 12); to have an adequate standard of living and living conditions (Article 27); to have the best standard of health (Article 24); to have access to education (Articles 28 and 29); and to have access to play and recreational activities (Article 31).

To this end, I have travelled to every corner of the state to talk and interact face-to-face with tens of thousands of South Australian children and young people from all backgrounds and situations. I have visited preschools, primary schools, high schools, and alternative education settings that include flexible learning options and hospital schools. I've visited youth justice settings, childcare centres, children's centres, out-of-school hours care (OSHC), youth centres, community and recreational centres, sports clubs, and Scouts and Girl Guides groups. I've engaged with children and young people at events held in campsites, in bowling alleys, at family fun days, in the Art Gallery of South Australia and at the Adelaide Zoo. I've conducted consultations

at services and not-for-profit organisations and community groups, as well as with Youth Advisory Committees (YACs) and social groups.

My work has seen me sitting on the floor with children, engaging in drawing and creative activities, conducting interactive workshops, and facilitating focus groups. I've interacted with children and young people at forums, summits and other major and small-scale events, many of these organised by me and my team.

With the support of educators and interpreters, I've engaged with children and young people who have low or limited vision and/or hearing, as well as those using alternative communication systems. During the Covid lockdown periods, I used Zoom to continue my direct engagement with children and young people throughout the state.

Across the years I've also used surveys, polls, and my Student Voice Postcards and Early Years Postcards initiatives to engage with more children and young people than it would have been possible for me to meet and talk with in-person.

From this extensive engagement it is clear to me that many South Australian children and young people are faring well. They're attending school, they're developing at the rates expected, and they are part of a loving, caring family with connections to friends, their schools, and others within their community through participation in sports, arts and cultural activities.

It is also clear from what I have heard and seen throughout this time, that there are many South Australian children and young people for whom this is not the case. For these children and young people there are significant systemic challenges that will continue to impact on their lives now and in the future, unless structural changes are made now.

My role as Commissioner has been eye-opening. I have learnt that many children and young people in the state are missing out on what others their age are able to take for granted. I have come to

understand that often there is very little being done at a legislative level to address this. The lack of effort to provide supports and make systemic change to benefit these children and young people should be front page news. Instead, these children and young people are virtually invisible. Worse still, they are often demonised and held responsible for their disadvantage.

With my team, I have had eight years to consider South Australia's children and young people from all angles. I have chosen to focus this report on South Australian children and young people who I see are being shut out, left out and missing out.

They are the SA children and young people who:

- are experiencing participation poverty
- are living with chronic illness
- are living with disability
- have a parent in prison
- have carer responsibilities
- are experiencing homelessness.

These are children and young people I have advocated for from my first year as their Commissioner, and while there have been some modest changes made for some of these groups, there has been little substantial change achieved for most.

All these groups of children and young people are being systemically discriminated against by omission. Often it feels as though I am the only person at an oversight level who is paying any attention to advocating for their rights. While these children and young people are often hard to reach, even with focused effort, this does not mean they should be ignored.

You'll see from this report that there is much diversity within each group and that these children and young people are so much more than just the experiences you will read about in this report. Each child and young person has the right to have their experiences acknowledged and heard. They need to be listened to in terms of what changes need to be made to improve their situations and have these respected and validated.

At the same time, we can't just treat these experiences as individual cases or anomalies, as this approach would hide the fact that there are many children and young people who are having the same or similar experiences – often on a daily basis.

These similar experiences include being overlooked, being misunderstood, missing out on school, and missing out on recreational and fun activities others their age enjoy. Some are also likely to have experienced significant housing, health, and family issues. In some cases, children and young people may fit into one or more of these groups, which can make them particularly vulnerable to systemic disadvantage and invisibility. This is why I have chosen to bring them together into this one report.

The invisibility many of these groups of children and young people experience is often exacerbated by another sinister element – they are often encouraged to keep their experiences secret. This can relate to the shame they may experience, or the ways in which they may be viewed by others. For example, if they have a parent in prison, if they are experiencing homelessness and/or poverty, somehow this is made to seem like their fault.

If they are young carers or have an invisible chronic illness, others may use these conditions to pigeonhole or limit them. Some may worry about institutional responses where, rather than listening to children and young people to help improve their lives, authorities will step in and change the family structure, sometimes dramatically, with potential to cause lifelong trauma.

It is unclear how many South Australian children and young people are being overlooked across our legal, policy and service systems, or the extent to which this is occurring. While numbers are important to determine scale and the level of resources needed, we mustn't lose sight of the children and young people who sit behind these figures, or the circumstances and experiences in their lives that have contributed to them missing out.

It is not inevitable that these children and young people will continue to fare poorly now or in the future. What is needed is bold leadership to implement whole-of-government approaches that will ensure the rights and needs of the children and young people in these groupings are no longer ignored. Clear actions for change are outlined throughout the report – both interdepartmental actions and individual department actions.

Additional actions are also needed at the level of schools, local government, community services and not-for-profit organisations, with the leadership and responsibility coming from the South Australian government.

Systemic change can be challenging, but it doesn't mean we should act as if it's impossible to achieve. The stakes are too high.

All South Australian children and young people have the right to be able to fully participate in the cultural, recreational, academic, economic, and social aspects of our community. It is unfair that some cannot, and it is our responsibility to change this.

Ensuring that the groups of children identified in this report can fully participate in school, their community and the economy is a stated priority for South Australia. It is time to move from statement to meaningful action. This starts with commitment to acquiring a deeper understanding of who these children and young people are, and what their unique challenges and circumstances consist of at the individual level.

It is about understanding the systems that currently operate and whether these are helping or hindering these children and young people. It involves adjusting – or sometimes completely overhauling – the systems currently in place to ensure they deliver to these children and young people what they say they need – not what we think they need. It is possible for their challenges to be addressed. What is required is the will to address them.

As I finish my term as South Australia's inaugural Commissioner for Children and Young People my hope is that all children and young people in South Australia are being supported to reach their full potential, and that the barriers limiting their access, participation and achievement can be completely removed in the shortest timeframes.

This can only happen if the response is system wide, and if state services reduce rather than reinforce disadvantage. In principle this means upholding every child's right to thrive. In practice it means

taking action to prioritise connection and community, fostering kindness and collaboration, and promoting creativity, empathy, inspiration, imagination, and agency for all our kids – not just some.



**Helen Connolly**

Commissioner for Children and Young People,  
South Australia

**“ All South Australian children and young people have the right to be able to fully participate in the cultural, recreational, academic, economic, and social aspects of our community. It is unfair that some cannot, and it is our responsibility to change this.”**

Commissioner Helen Connolly

# Context

The role of South Australia’s Commissioner for Children and Young People is to promote and advocate for the rights and interests of all children and young people across the state. This involves considering children and young people’s lives holistically. The Commissioner can only make recommendations to government. The Commissioner does not have the formal authority or legal mechanisms to enforce or create whole-of-government change.

In comparison, the work of government is often done in silos, where separate departments are tasked with focusing on addressing separate issues. There needs to be an overarching government response to children and young people in South Australia. Often the children and young people who are missing out most need coordinated actions from multiple departments. Without coordinated actions these children and young people are at risk of becoming and remaining invisible.

Further, South Australia does not have adequate mechanisms for working with groups of children and young people rather than working with individuals or on a case-by-case basis. Structural and systemic barriers are stopping us from seeing the full picture.

There needs to be high level government thinking and cross-departmental communication and accountability if we are going to succeed in meeting

the rights and needs of South Australian children and young people who are being shut out, left out and missing out. Currently, there is no Minister with responsibility for all children and young people throughout the state. This needs to change.

This report focuses on six groups of South Australian children and young people who are often invisible to policymakers and about whose daily lives there is very little known. Across each of the six groups identified in this report there are gaps in data, services, policy and voice, which are similar yet specific, to each group.

There is no clear definition of who these disadvantaged children and young people are, where they live, or how they manage. There is little data and information available in relation to their day-to-day situations, and even less knowledge or understanding of their daily or long-term lived experiences.



Even accounting for the fact that much of the data available is an underestimate and that there is an under-reporting of these groups, there are many South Australian children and young people in each. The paradox being, that there are too many children and young people in each group to ignore, yet not too many it seems, to warrant taking any action!

Making systemic change based on the rights and needs of these six groups of children and young people will have a positive impact on all South Australian children and young people. Without structural and systemic change, we will continue to have groups of children and young people who the system overlooks, ignores, excludes and discriminates against.

While there is piecemeal action bringing about small change, it is unlikely this will have a comprehensive or long-lasting effect. There are system gaps in our understandings of, and approaches to, all children and young people whose situations are discussed in this report. These system gaps are the barriers that exist to action being taking. They serve to reinforce each other so that nothing is changed.

If we don't have data, it's hard to design services. If there's no policy in place, there's unlikely to be any services, and if children and young people don't have a voice, we can't know what's needed in terms of broad-based or individual supports.

In other words, unless we find out more about the South Australian children and young people who are being systematically discriminated against, effective change at the systemic level cannot be achieved.

If, however, we were to take an overarching approach that starts with appointing a South Australian Minister for Children and Young People, we would be able to bring together and extend existing frameworks and services to ensure South Australia is implementing a holistic approach to the rights and needs of all children and young people from birth to 18 years.

There is important work being done, and much of it is well intentioned and helpful, but if it is to achieve lasting change it must be joined up. Although separate strategies and responses to some of these groups do exist, there is a clear need for a multi-agency statewide framework to be established to cover the rights and needs of all groups of vulnerable children and young people in South Australia. Despite plans for one in 2012, such a framework has never been implemented! This framework needs to be developed and implemented now, and not be left to let the disadvantage continue to grow exponentially in the ways we've seen it do so up until now.



# Impacts of missing out

Every child and young person in South Australia has the right to grow up being able to participate fully in their communities. A good childhood is more than just subsistence, it is about being able to experience the full range of educational, social and cultural rights.

## Children and young people experiencing participation poverty

Children and young people consistently raise the impact of cost-of-living pressures on their own lives, the lives of their family members and the lives of other children and young people they know. They emphasise that the experience of poverty is not just about material possessions or financial stress. They talk about the need to feel included and have strong relationships, and about social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Participation poverty means missing out on things like school excursions and being excluded from leisure and social activities because they and their families can't afford the costs involved. Children and young people want to feel hopeful about the future and to have these financial barriers to their participation removed.

## Children and young people living with chronic illness

Children and young people living with chronic illness often face difficulties in their daily lives not only due to their illness, but by how they are understood and treated by other people. Chronic illness is often invisible and misunderstood. This has implications for the availability of support for children and young people living with chronic illness and their participation across a range of activities.

Despite the different kinds of chronic illness and the different terms and language being used, many children and young people living with chronic illness report having several common experiences. Many of these children and young people are likely to be missing out on school, which impacts on their identity and their relationships with others, makes them feel different, reduces their autonomy and means they rely more on school staff who understand their situations and needs.<sup>2</sup>

## Children and young people living with disability

While children and young people living with disability are often talked about, this tends to be with a focus on diagnoses and the provision of services and therapy. Their experiences of childhood are rarely considered. Of particular concern is the systemic exclusion of children and young people living with disability from education settings. We need to have a children/young people first focus, rather than a disability services first focus.

Children and young people living with disability experience social exclusion, high rates of suspensions and exclusions and fewer post-school opportunities. They are often excluded from school or community activities due to behaviours or circumstances which form part of their disability/ies.

## **Children and young people who have a parent in prison**

Children and young people with incarcerated parents are often the innocent and invisible victims of the adult justice system. They are impacted by many agencies and departments that are not systematically identifying, understanding or responding to their individual rights and experiences.

Children and young people who have a parent in prison often feel isolated and punished as they try and deal with the stigma and emotional, educational, social and financial impacts of parental incarceration. Having a parent in prison can affect children and young people in terms of their development, behaviour, physical health, mental health and education.<sup>3</sup>

## **Children and young people with carer responsibilities**

While often invisible, some children and young people provide significant amounts of care to people in their lives. This is often care for a parent and/or sibling but can also be for a grandparent or other family member and/or person.

Although young carers often emphasise that there are positive aspects relating to their caring role, research indicates that there are social, academic and psychological impacts relating to being a young carer that can be negative.<sup>4</sup>

Children with caring responsibilities told their Commissioner that their carer role impacts their whole life – their friendships, school attendance and engagement with their education, as well as their capacity for community involvement and participation in recreational and social activities.

## **Children and young people experiencing homelessness**

Children and young people make up a high proportion of people experiencing homelessness in South Australia, but they are frequently being overlooked. They are often homeless for different reasons to adults, including more often due to trauma and family issues, including family violence.

This diverse group of children and young people need to be seen and heard – whether they are living in tenuous housing or motels with their parent(s), couch surfing, or leaving care settings and unable to secure rentals.

Children and young people experiencing homelessness are likely to face significant challenges in relation to education, health and wellbeing, recreation and participation, security and safety, now and in the future. They are also likely to experience increased vulnerability due to being homeless.

# By the numbers

In South Australia there are, or there are likely to be:

## 75,785

children (0–14-year-olds) experiencing participation poverty according to the Child Social Exclusion Index<sup>5</sup>

## 15,157\*

children who have ever experienced having a parent in prison<sup>8</sup>

## 47,485\*

children (0–12-year-olds) who have been hospitalised with a chronic condition<sup>6</sup>

## 4,600 | 18,000

0–14-year-olds | 15–24-year-olds who were carers in 2018<sup>9</sup>

## 30,990

children and young people (0–18-year-olds) registered as active participants in the NDIS (at 31 December 2024)<sup>7</sup>

## 5,194

children and young people (0–17-year-olds) who presented to homelessness services in 2023–24<sup>10</sup>

\*Estimated numbers as no accurate data exists



# Recommendations

South Australia needs an overarching vision for all children and young people throughout the state and this vision must take a rights-based approach. This means moving away from the current deficit or needs-based model and instead developing a clear strategy for action that is focused on taking a whole-of-government approach with measurable indicators and mechanisms that enable adequate resource allocation for full implementation built-in from the outset and with feedback opportunities that produce continuous improvement.

This needs to happen while still acknowledging that regardless of this vision and its implementation some South Australian children and young people (and their families) will always need more support than others. If we are to succeed in bringing about real change at the systemic level for all children and young people in South Australia, we must see bold leadership taken.

To achieve the systemic changes needed this report advocates that the South Australian government take the following large-scale actions:

## 1

### **Create a Minister for Children and Young People in South Australia.**

South Australia previously had a Minister for Youth but has never had a holistic Minister for Children and Young People. This role is not the same as that of Minister for Child Protection or Minister for Education.

We need a Minister for Children and Young People who has overarching responsibility and accountability for all children and young people throughout the state, including knowing who they are and ensuring their rights are being met. This should be enacted into legislation with the Minister responsible for the following:

- Creating a state-wide interagency framework, with services that are fully resourced, to ensure children and young people who need it get the right support at the right time.
- Collecting comprehensive data on children and young people across South Australia, including in relation to those who are often invisible and vulnerable, and sharing and using this data with relevant departments and organisations.
- Funding research to monitor outcomes for children and young people across the state.

Victoria, Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory all have some form of Minister for Children and Young People. At the national level there are similar ministerial roles in New Zealand, Scotland, England, Ireland, Wales, Canada and Norway.

## 2

### **Introduce a Human Rights Act in South Australia.**

Discussions are already underway in South Australia in relation to the need to introduce a Human Rights Act. Putting a strong human rights framework in place will improve the realisation of children's rights throughout South Australia and raise the responsibility of governments to ensure all children and young people have what they need. Not having a Human Rights Act contributes to children and young people being overlooked and becoming and remaining invisible.

I aspire to a South Australia where leaders, decision makers, organisations and service providers across all sectors proactively consider children's rights as core business rather than as an afterthought. A rights-focused legal framework would create a much-needed culture of human rights awareness and accountability across government, thereby helping to ensure all South Australians are able to access their basic human rights. Currently, there are very few formal legal mechanisms in place that ensure human rights are being considered and protected in a consistent and systemic way.

A Human Rights Act for South Australia should acknowledge and seek to address the multi-dimensional impacts of poverty on the realisation of children's rights. A Human Rights Act would ensure all levels of governments have a duty to establish and be accountable to key child poverty reduction measures, indicators and targets.

A Human Rights Act would support children's participation rights, recognising children and young people as active citizens who contribute to society and whose involvement in decision making about those things that affect their lives will lead to positive improvements.

## 3

### **Introduce a Future Generations Act in South Australia to consider the impact of decisions on future generations, and to strengthen human rights protections for future generations of South Australians.**

All children and young people in South Australia have the right to a high standard of living, education and health. The federal government is currently debating the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill 2025. South Australia needs its own Future Generations Act to ensure the best for all future generations in the state.

In the reactive political world in which we live, introducing a Future Generations Act is one way of helping to ensure decision makers build collective capacity for long term planning that brings outcomes that are best for the state of South Australia and its citizens. The Future Generations Act would obligate today's decision makers to fully consider the interests of future generations of South Australian children and young people, placing their interests front and centre.

## 4

### **Introduce a Child Poverty Act in South Australia which establishes key child poverty reduction measures, indicators and targets.**

South Australia needs a Child Poverty Act, similar in scope to New Zealand's *Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018*. This legislation would establish a shared vision for children and young people's wellbeing, set targets against key income and non-income measures, and focus governments and communities on developing policies and strategies that actively achieve significant and sustained reduction in child poverty.



Poverty is so entrenched in South Australia that it can appear to be inevitable. The structural factors that create and perpetuate poverty are often overlooked, with blame placed on individual children, young people and their families. Poverty underpins, or at least has a significant impact on the lives of many of the children and young people discussed in this report – it impacts education, health, housing, family relations, and participation in social and recreational activities. It links to homelessness and/or participation poverty, with financial impacts also being felt in relation to circumstances, such as being a young carer and/or having a parent in prison, or being a child or young person who is living with chronic illness and/or disability.

## 5

### **Develop an Equity Impact Assessment Tool for Department for Education policies, guidelines, practice manuals and action plans.**

The last four national education agreements have included equity as one of the goals for education. However, according to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), equitable outcomes in Australia have been deteriorating. The goals appear to be aspirational only as stakeholders grapple with how they can be achieved.

We know who the groups of children and young people are that require extra support to ensure they are supported to achieve their full potential. These groups are more likely to be those who start from behind on their very first day of school with the gap just widening from there.

According to OECD PISA 2022 Results, Australian students' outcomes are steadily worsening over time, with the socio-economic gap widening further between 2018 and 2022.<sup>11</sup> It is essential therefore to create an authorising environment and comprehensive policy framework that incorporates equity and inclusion.

The Department for Education needs to develop an Equity Impact Assessment Tool to review core Strategies and Frameworks to ensure policies promoting equity are embedded in all areas of education and schools. An equitable and inclusive policy framework should prioritise implementation of Equity Impact Assessment in school environments to highlight the importance of fostering student wellbeing alongside achievement.

## 6

### **Introduce an independent appeals mechanism for when children and young people are discriminated against in education settings.**

Children, young people and their families, need to be able to appeal to an independent position or body when their right to education is significantly impeded. This includes in relation to unfair exclusions and suspensions, and any other issues that impact on their right to attend school. It also includes the lack of reasonable adjustments being made to enable children and young people to participate fully in their education.

In South Australia  
there are likely to be

**75,785**

children (0–14-year-olds)  
experiencing participation  
poverty according to the  
Child Social Exclusion Index.<sup>12</sup>

# Children and young people experiencing participation poverty

There are large numbers of children in South Australia who are missing out on basic housing and health services. However, these children and many more are also experiencing participation poverty, where financial barriers lead to social exclusion and missing out on things like education, school excursions, and leisure and social activities.<sup>13</sup>

Many children and young people may have their basic physical needs met, but lack the resources needed for full participation in social, economic and community life. Digital poverty, lack of access to affordable transport and lack of access to things like period products all contribute to participation poverty.

When the Commissioner commenced her role in 2017, she asked thousands of children and young people across South Australia to tell her the ‘one thing’ they wanted her to do as their Commissioner. Tackling poverty and ‘helping poor kids’ was a top area of concern, second only to ‘listening to kids’.

Children and young people describe the impact of ‘poverty stigma’ where people make assumptions about their family and poverty that makes them feel judged, blamed, or embarrassed.

A report drawing on data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) found that children living in monetary poverty also experience deprivation on indicators that include relationships with friends, enjoyment in exercise, mental health, school attendance, learning at home and involvement in extracurricular activities like sport.<sup>14</sup>

The UNCRC enshrines children’s rights across a broad range of areas. This includes the right to participation in education (Articles 28 and 29), where primary education is free (Article 28.1) and secondary education is available to all, including it being free

or making financial assistance available when this is needed (Article 28.2).

All children also have the right to play and to enjoy recreational activities with the need for there to be equal opportunities to participate in these (Article 31). More broadly, Article 26 outlines the right of every child to have access to social security where needed.

The final report on the federal inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia, includes a chapter on child poverty.<sup>15</sup> It calls for an official measure and monitoring of child poverty, along with both a national commitment and national framework to reduce child poverty. However, the recommendations are more modest, and do not clearly outline how child poverty, including in relation to participation poverty, should be addressed.

A shift in thinking about poverty is needed, including in thinking about participation poverty. Poverty must no longer be viewed as an individual or family level issue, and instead needs to be considered as a systemic issue that governments therefore have responsibility to address.

Addressing the structural factors and systemic failures that create and perpetuate poverty is key to protecting children’s rights and to ensuring the prosperity of the South Australian community is maintained. In South Australia, missing out due to poverty is not an inevitability.

## Key messages:

- There is no dedicated Act or policy addressing child poverty in South Australia.
- Measures of poverty differ and there is no comprehensive data on children and young people experiencing poverty in South Australia, including participation poverty.
- The poverty rate for children in Australia is consistently higher than for adults.
- More than 1 in 6 South Australian children aged 0–14 years are living in poverty, which equates to 52,443 children across the state. There are even more children who are experiencing participation poverty (missing out in relation to education and leisure activities).
- 1 in 4 South Australian children aged 0–14 years were the ‘most excluded’ on the 2021 Child Social Exclusion Index, which equates to 75,785 children.
- Participation poverty limits involvement in education, recreational and social activities.
- Most costs associated with schooling aren’t school fees, and there’s often little to assist families with these ‘additional’ costs. The cumulative ‘additional’ costs associated with schooling means some children and young people miss out altogether or miss out on key activities.
- Digital poverty, lack of access to affordable transport, and lack of access to period products due to affordability, contributes to participation poverty.
- Children and young people who are regularly missing out due to participation poverty are rarely asked about their experiences.

## Who are the children and young people experiencing participation poverty?

**There are many different definitions and measures of poverty. Child poverty is often measured using a household income-based definition of poverty, although there are also differences in which income level or proportion of income is considered to entail poverty.**

While low family income is one of the most common denominators, the reasons for low family income vary. Inadequate social security payments or low paid insecure work may be a cause, while living with disability, chronic illness, high housing costs, or being part of a family that has complex needs, may all be contributing factors.

Poverty disproportionately impacts on different groups of children and young people, with detailed data showing high levels of poverty for those living in one parent families.<sup>16</sup> Poverty is also more likely to be experienced by children and young people living with disability and/or chronic illness, who are migrants or refugees and/or who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. It also disproportionately impacts those who are leaving care, who are leaving youth justice and/or who are young carers.

Participation poverty, as in including more people than subsistence poverty, is harder to define and quantify. Missing out on education, recreation and leisure activities, transport, digital access, and period products due to financial reasons can all be overlapping indicators of participation poverty.

Rather than focusing on when a household income falls below the poverty line (ie poverty), the Child Social Exclusion (CSE) Index uses a broader and more complex measurement focusing on social and material disadvantage that create barriers to participation and inclusion. The CSE uses multiple

factors of disadvantage in the domains of connectedness, access to housing, health and community, and environment.<sup>17</sup>

Measures of poverty differ and there's no comprehensive data on children and young people experiencing poverty in South Australia, including participation poverty.

The child poverty rate in Australia is consistently higher than the rate for adults.<sup>18</sup>

More than 1 in 6 (17.3%) South Australian children aged 0–14 years live in poverty.<sup>19</sup> This equates to 52,443 children.<sup>20</sup> In some areas of South Australia, more than 1 in 2 children live in poverty.<sup>21</sup>

More than 1 in 4 (26.2%) South Australian children and young people aged 0–19 years were estimated to be living in the most disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances in 2022, equating to 108,800 children and young people. This is higher than the national average of just under 1 in 5.<sup>22</sup>

1 in 4 (25%) South Australian children aged 0–14 years were the most excluded on the Child Social Exclusion Index in 2021, compared to the national average of 1 in 5. This equates to 75,785 children.<sup>23</sup> In some areas of the state this increased to more than 1 in 3 children.<sup>24</sup>

Almost 1 in 3 (32.2%) South Australian government school students received School Card assistance in 2020. This was approximately 57,000 students.<sup>25</sup>

## What do we know about children and young people experiencing participation poverty?

### Cumulative costs of education

Children and young people have consistently raised with the Commissioner concerns about the high costs of going to school. Seemingly small on their own, hidden or incidental costs associated with being able to fully participate in school life quickly accumulate. One estimate suggests that costs additional to school fees make up 90% of the costs of sending a child to a government school in Australia.<sup>26</sup>

Estimates also suggest that for a child starting school in 2025, a government school education in Adelaide will cost \$114,678 over 13 years of schooling. Attending Catholic and independent schools are estimated to be much higher (\$185,548 and \$302,387 respectively).<sup>27</sup> Costs for attending schools in regional South Australia are estimated to be lower but still significant.

The Commissioner's *Becoming a More Cost-Friendly School* and *Spotlight on the True Cost of Going to School* highlight the cumulative costs of education including:

- the annual materials and services charge
- books, stationery and other curriculum-related resources and equipment
- uniforms for school and sport, including shoes
- school bag
- lunches and snacks
- digital equipment, data and reliable access to the Internet
- transport to and from school

- school excursions, including school camps
- costs associated with extracurricular activities, such as sport, music, drama, dance and theatre, including uniforms, equipment and participation fees
- school photographs and school magazines/yearbooks
- Year 6 and Year 12 t-shirt or windcheater
- formals, graduation events and discos
- fun events and initiatives, such as dress-up days and casual days, cake sales and other fundraising events, festivals, Book Week, school musicals and drama productions.

While the costs of some events and activities are officially considered optional, they are actually all essential as they allow for full and enriching participation in all aspects of school life. These costs can place extra financial pressure on many families and unintentionally isolate students who are unable to participate due to cost barriers. They can also lead students to stay home from school on certain days to avoid any embarrassment.

We know that hands on learning opportunities provided on field trips or excursions improve outcomes for students in a range of ways, including higher test scores, better attendance and better performance in class.<sup>28</sup> However many schools in disadvantaged and regional communities across South Australia are unable to offer their students the same opportunities as other schools, meaning that students attending these schools miss out on activities like school camps and excursions. This is a particular issue in rural and remote areas where costs of travel to activities can be prohibitive.

Students living in poverty who are falling behind in their schoolwork, or who are trying to get ahead, are also unlikely to be able to afford academic tutoring outside of school. While there are some free programs, these may not be accessible or available to all.

## High costs of recreational and social activities

Regular participation in sport and extracurricular activities is associated with a range of positive health, social and academic outcomes. Research shows it is children from low-income families who are likely to benefit most from extracurricular activities.<sup>29</sup> Yet many research studies show that children from low-income families participate at much lower levels than children from middle and high-income families.<sup>30</sup>

Children and young people have described to the Commissioner how living in poverty means their family becomes entirely focused on the necessities of life, and that activities viewed as fun or additional are considered to be luxuries that are generally not available to them.

The Commissioner's *More than a Game* report showed that having access to reliable and affordable transport, facilities and infrastructure in their local community or at school, significantly influences children's and young people's ability to participate in sport. Many young people reported that they would have stayed involved in sport for longer, and enjoyed sport a lot more, if greater financial support had been made available to cover the costs involved.

Children and young people identified one of the worst things about sport as the cost of playing and the difficulty getting to and from sport commitments. They described costs that went beyond participation fees, to include uniform, shoes and equipment costs, plus transport to and from training and games. They also spoke about the expectation from clubs that families will also contribute to fundraising activities. Some young people said their families could not afford sport, while older young people with some level of financial independence, described struggling to balance the costs of sport with other living costs.

The Commissioner's *My Suburban Life* report highlights the very different experiences primary school children have depending on their local areas. It is clear the socio-demographic status of a child and their family, impacts significantly on their capacity to participate in a wide range of recreational and social activities.

## Digital poverty

The Commissioner's *My Digital Life* report found that the top five things children and young people use their data, devices and digital access for are contacting family, doing schoolwork or homework, chatting with friends, applying for jobs, and using services or booking appointments.

Children and young people talk about the embarrassment and isolation that having limited or no access to devices and data has, including how it makes them feel 'left out' and 'out of touch' with their peers and other people, but also with news, social conventions, and memes.

Without adequate and reliable digital access, young people report that it is nearly impossible for them to complete their homework, fully participate in shared projects, or communicate with their teachers and peers online. Financial barriers to digital access also make it difficult for young people to find information and services, apply for jobs, or meet entry-level job requirements that relate to the knowledge and skills required to navigate software and operate devices.

Starting in early childhood, digital devices are continuing to be embedded in formal learning. In some cases, the expectation is that children under five will know how to interact with smart whiteboards, large touch screens, or iPad type devices. They may be required to log into a digital roll or record the completion of a learning outcome. For children who have had no digital access, and who have not acquired these skills at home, they may be unable to immediately engage with the

content, as they must first learn how to use the device. If an early years setting or school is the only place in which a child can practice digital skills on a device, this can impact their enjoyment and learning from an early age as they struggle to keep up with their peers.

### Lack of access to transport

The Commissioner's *Safe and Sound* report on transport highlighted that affordable and accessible public transport underpins children and young people's capacity to engage in their education, employment, sport and other hobbies and recreational activities. It offers a way for children and young people to travel without needing a driver's license and access to a car or having to rely on parents/carers and friends for their transport needs.

When transport is unaffordable, it has a disproportionate impact on the quality of a child or young person's life, limiting their capacity to maintain important connections to their schooling, employment and friends.

According to the 2023 *Benchmarking Adelaide* report, Adelaide has the lowest proportion of people living in walkable neighbourhoods compared to similar cities around the world, with high levels of car dependence.<sup>31</sup> Those living outside of Adelaide are likely to be even more car dependent having to travel longer distances between home, school, work and recreational or social activities.

The Commissioner frequently hears that children and young people in the northern and southern suburbs of Adelaide, as well as those further away, rarely or in some cases never visit Adelaide city because neither their parents/carers or school can afford to take them.

### Period poverty

In the Commissioner's *Leave No One Behind* report, one of the issues identified by children and young people was the impact that affordability and accessibility to period products has on school attendance. The follow-up report, *Menstruation Matters*, found that access to period products is a significant issue affecting many students in schools across South Australia.

In *Menstruation Matters*, many survey respondents described having access to free period products as being critical to their health, dignity, hygiene and ability to attend school, go to work and participate in recreational and social activities. Most young people reported missing out on participating in a range of activities they enjoyed when having their period. Reasons given included not having period products, and financial barriers to obtaining them.

A significant number of young people have reported missing days of school because they can't afford to purchase or access period products. The Commissioner's audit of period product supply to school students in South Australia found that 11% of schools reported issues with access to period products impacting school attendance. The schools where this is more likely to happen are in rural regions and/or an area of concentrated disadvantage.

In *Menstruation Matters*, children and young people consistently spoke about the importance of making period products free and accessible to those who need them. Responses highlighted that period products were currently unaffordable, leaving many to experience the shame and exclusion commonly associated with 'going without'. More than 1 in 4 (27%) of those who reported they had problems accessing period products explained this was because they were too expensive.



## What's missing in relation to children and young people experiencing participation poverty?

**Poverty is a systemic issue, brought about by system failings. As such, there needs to be a joined-up approach to combating participation poverty and poverty more broadly in South Australia. South Australia needs a Child Poverty Act which establishes key child poverty reduction measures, indicators and targets. Part of this would focus on participation poverty.**

We need more data on who children living in poverty are and what they're missing out on. By considering participation poverty (as broader than subsistence poverty), many more children and young people are missing out on opportunities and experiences that would benefit their lives now and in the future.

While there are already some measures in place in South Australia which may contribute to addressing participation poverty, these are often piecemeal and do not go far enough. The aim must be to eradicate participation poverty and provide equity in opportunity for all children and young people across the state.

So that South Australia's education system is not unknowingly exacerbating exclusion, isolation and disengagement, government schools need to be aware of, and able to respond appropriately to, the impact of poverty on their students. There's currently significant variation across how government schools do this, which suggests policy responses should not be left solely to individual schools.

The Commissioner commends the Department for Education's Digital Strategy, which includes measures to enable students from low-income families to have access to devices and the internet at home.<sup>32</sup>

While the School Card Scheme provides crucial support to a significant number of families, it only covers 'essential items and services' as itemised in the materials and services charge, as well as access to a digital device for students in Years 7 and 10 at participating schools.<sup>33</sup> It does not include many of the other cumulative costs related to a child's education and it does not automatically roll over annually, meaning families must reapply each year. Further, there are families whose gross income is just above the eligibility threshold for the School Card Scheme who miss out on this vital support. Individual principals may waive or reduce the materials and services charge for other students, but this is done at their discretion and does not include all the other cumulative costs of a child's education.<sup>34</sup>

Free public transport is available to primary school students on excursions in metropolitan Adelaide, however, this is only available within regular school hours, which limits the time that students can spend at their destination.

Initiatives such as the Sport Vouchers Plus Program are useful but they are only a small part of addressing participation poverty and do not bring systemic change. Even as it is, the program needs to offer more money and cover a broader range of activities for more students and their families.

The program currently entitles children and young people from Reception to Year 9 to access two \$100 vouchers per year for 'sport, active recreation and music fees'.<sup>35</sup> Prior to 2025, each student was entitled to one \$100 voucher and the scheme had a more narrow focus on sport. There were well over 200,000 Reception to Year 9 students in South Australia in 2024.<sup>36</sup> If each student used their two vouchers a year this would equate to 400,000 vouchers. However, just under 100,000 vouchers were provided in 2024.<sup>37</sup>

According to the AusPlay survey from 2022, the median amount spent on sport-related activities for 0–14-year-olds was \$650 for girls and \$565 for boys. For non-sport-related activities it was \$600 for girls and \$240 for boys.<sup>38</sup> Children and young people from low-income families need to be particularly targeted to take up initiatives such as the Sport Vouchers Plus Program, making sure that the vouchers will cover the whole costs of the activities and any associated costs such as transport.

Poverty is often considered too sensitive a topic to discuss with children and young people. When it is discussed, it is usually in the context of what is being experienced in low-income countries rather than in communities across South Australia. However, the Commissioner's work, and that of others in Australia, highlights that money and poverty are often key concerns to children.<sup>39</sup> They need to be asked about their lives, what they're missing out on and what can be done to ensure their full inclusion.

## Actions needed:

- Introduce a **Child Poverty Act** which establishes key child poverty reduction measures, indicators and targets, including in relation to participation poverty.
- Promote **Anti-Poverty Week** opportunities and continue to work toward halving child poverty in South Australia by 2030.
- Collect more **reliable data** on the number of children and young people living in poverty in South Australia, including participation poverty, and find out more about these children and their circumstances.
- Collect and publish **data on the true cumulative cost of education** to provide financial assistance where it is most needed, with Department for Education, schools and parent/carer groups working collaboratively to achieve this.
- Expand eligibility criteria for students and their families to receive financial assistance via the **School Card Scheme** including increasing financial support being made available to these students through provision of free public transport to and from school, free school and sports uniforms and subsidised excursions and extracurricular activities.
- Invest in a **school fund** to ensure all students attending Category 1 and 2 schools can participate in activities, events and excursions such as civics excursions, workplace experiences, and outdoor camps, covering transport, accommodation, and other associated costs.
- Address **cost barriers to students' participation** in recreational activities such as sport, arts and culture, including lowering costs and allowing non-branded or second hand uniforms, providing travel vouchers, and extending access to fee relief schemes.
- Expand the scope of the **Sport Vouchers Plus Program** to benefit all children and young people from low-income families (from birth to Year 12) and to cover the costs of non-sporting activities.
- Expand **free, high quality public Wi-Fi services** to include all education settings, public transport, public buildings and council buildings such as libraries, youth and community centres.
- Provide **free access to services and equipment in local councils** through grants, loans, or in-kind support, that includes free access to council facilities including gyms, sports centres and swimming pools, and loan of musical instruments, bicycles and sports equipment.
- Expand the current piecemeal provision of **period products** to develop a free, accessible and non-stigmatising supply and distribution scheme for a range of period products that all children and young people who menstruate can access easily in education settings (government and non-government), sport and recreation clubs, and designated public places such as community centres, youth facilities, libraries and chemists.

In South Australia  
there are likely to be

**47,485**\*

children (0–12-year-olds)  
who have been hospitalised  
with a chronic condition.<sup>40</sup>

# Children and young people living with chronic illness

Illnesses and conditions which have long-term impacts on children and young people's lives are diverse. It can be difficult to understand and advocate for these children and young people due to differing definitions and understandings of chronic illness, chronic pain, chronic conditions, chronic disease, non-communicable diseases and other long-term conditions.

These children and young people may be attending school but need adjustments and flexibility built-in to their learning curriculum, or they may be absent from school due to being unwell or being in hospital. They also miss out on a range of social activities and peer to peer experience. They may also be facing challenges around maintaining their physical and mental health.

Children have the right to receive the best standard of health and facilities required for treating chronic illness. This right is enshrined in Article 24 of the UNCRC.

Many of the rights in relation to children living with disability (Article 23) are also relevant to children with chronic illness.

Currently children and young people living with chronic illness are missing out. Their illnesses are often misunderstood by those around them, including at school, in the medical system, and sometimes also at home. While their chronic illness may sometimes directly limit them, they are not receiving enough support to be able to engage in life as fully as they could be.

## Key messages:

- There is currently no dedicated health policy or model of care for children and young people in South Australia.
- There is no clear data on the number of children and young people living with chronic illness in South Australia, and key national datasets don't agree on who's included in these groupings.
- An estimate suggests that nearly 1 in 5 Australian children aged 0–12 years have been hospitalised with a chronic condition, which would equate to nearly 47,485 South Australian children.
- Children and young people may have more than one chronic illness or condition impacting their daily lives.
- Some children and young people have a chronic illness which is undiagnosed or difficult to define.
- Half of all Australian children and young people aged 0–17 years have some kind of long-term health condition.
- Chronic illness is often categorised and understood differently to disability, meaning supports are often not available.
- Children and young people living with chronic illness often experience isolation and a lack of support and connection with others who have (or who have had) similar health experiences.
- Many children and young people miss days, weeks, or sometimes months of school due to chronic illness, but this reason for their absence is not currently being noted in their attendance records and therefore not being addressed in ways that enable them to stay connected to their school, education and peers.
- For children and young people living with chronic illness who are not physically able to be at school, there are few alternatives to ensure these students are fully included academically and socially.
- When physically present at school, children and young people living with chronic illness are often unable to fully participate in activities due to a lack of understanding, flexibility and suitable adjustments being made.
- Children and young people living with chronic illness are rarely asked about their experiences.

## Who are the children and young people living with chronic illness?

**Chronic illness refers to health conditions that last for a long period of time with various symptoms and severity. Symptoms are often invisible and may vary from day to day. This means that children and young people living with chronic illness may not look 'sick' but their capacity for engaging in daily activities, including school, sport and recreational and social activities, varies according to changes in symptoms.**

Chronic illness includes many conditions, such as asthma, endometriosis, chronic fatigue syndrome, Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes and arthritis. It can also include mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression. Chronic illness can also include a range of experiences that do not have a formal diagnosis, or that can be difficult to define. Children and young people may be living with multiple chronic illnesses.

Chronic illness is often categorised and understood differently to disability, impacting on the supports (including financial) that are being made available.<sup>41</sup> This also impacts on the ways in which data is collected.

Due to differing understandings and terms, there is no clear known number of children and young people living with chronic illness throughout Australia. There is even less known about those living with chronic illness in South Australia. Figures are likely to be higher than those currently estimated due to the under-reporting of chronic illness more broadly, and the difficulty collecting data relating to children and young people who do not have a formal diagnosis.

While some chronic illnesses may impact only a small number of children and young people, adding these together shows there is a relatively large number of children and young people in South Australia who are living with a chronic illness of some kind.

There's no clear data on the number of children and young people living with chronic illness in South Australia, partly due to differing terms and definitions.

An estimate suggests that throughout Australia nearly 1 in 5 (18.2%) children aged 0–12 years have been hospitalised due to a chronic condition.<sup>42</sup> This equates to nearly 47,485 South Australian children in this age group.<sup>43</sup>

Asthma is the highest burden of disease (loss of healthy life) for children in Australia, with 1 in 10 children aged 0–14 years living with asthma.<sup>44</sup> In 2023, more than 1 in 10 (10.9%) South Australian children and young people aged 2–17 years had been diagnosed with asthma and had symptoms/treatment in the last 12 months.<sup>45</sup>

Half (49.8%) of all Australian children and young people aged 0–17 years have at least one current long-term health condition, with over 1 in 4 (27.4%) experiencing at least two.<sup>46</sup>

## What do we know about children and young people living with chronic illness?

### Different illnesses and impacts, including for families

The impact and trajectory of each chronic illness varies greatly between children and young people. Some chronic illnesses are life-threatening and/or degenerative, while others are not. Some require short or long term stays in hospital or other healthcare units, while others can generally be managed from home. Some require lifelong management, or have symptoms that come and go. Some involve potential for relapse. Children and young people living with chronic illness can experience variances in symptoms and severity that can change from day to day and from person to person.

Respondents to the Commissioner's chronic illness survey emphasised that there cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach taken to supporting children and young people who are living with chronic illness, because the type, severity and impact varies too greatly. Understanding the varied ways in which chronic illness impacts children and young people physically and mentally is vital to developing ways that will protect, promote and support the overall health and wellbeing of children and young people living with chronic illness, including tailoring support for participation in, and wherever possible completion of, their formal education.

Having a child with chronic illness can impact the whole family. Parents/carers often need to invest considerable time and effort in managing their child's care and education. This includes informing others about what is needed with little support to manage medical and education systems as they intersect.<sup>47</sup>

As a result, children and young people's families can also be impacted financially due to the need for a parent/carer to reduce their involvement in paid work while also somehow managing significant medical and other costs relating to their child's chronic illness.<sup>48</sup>

Siblings of children and young people living with chronic illness are also impacted. Several studies have highlighted that some siblings experience negative psychological impacts at school, record a decrease in school attendance and academic functioning, and impacts on peer and teacher interactions.<sup>49</sup> They may also experience trauma related to seeing their sibling going through their chronic illness, which for some children and young people and their families, includes managing the emotional and financial toll of frequent hospitalisations and operations.<sup>50</sup>

### Isolation and mental health issues

Children and young people living with chronic illness may experience additional psychological and cognitive stresses. Experiencing chronic illness can be very isolating for many young people. Many of those who completed the Commissioner's survey reported feeling embarrassed and misunderstood. They were frustrated by their peers' judgemental attitudes at school citing examples such as needing to sit out of physical activity or being granted an extension on an assignment being seen as some kind of 'special treatment' or a form of favouritism. Others felt very lonely and often invisible due to their chronic illness, making it hard for them to attend social events, play or hang out with peers at lunch time, or develop and maintain their social relationships over the short or long term.

Some children and young people living with chronic illness are grieving the loss of a 'normal life', needing to make significant adjustments to accommodate their health and coming to terms with limitations and impacts on schooling and other aspects of their lives.



A lack of understanding of the nature of chronic illness often makes these children and young people feel misunderstood or isolated. These educational, extracurricular and social challenges are all additional stressors for children and young people living with chronic illness.

Children and young people living with chronic illness can often lack connections with others with similar experiences, leaving them feeling even more isolated.

### **Barriers to participation and engagement in education**

Young children with chronic illness have an increased risk of being developmentally vulnerable on all domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) when starting school.<sup>51</sup> This leaves them at a disadvantage when they are just beginning their schooling.

Chronic illness has a clear impact on children and young people's ability to be involved in school. However, a lack of understanding and tailored responses from schools arguably has even more of an impact, where more supports and flexibility would mean many of these children and young people would be able to be more engaged academically and socially.

The Commissioner's chronic illness survey shows that the South Australian education system, schools and teachers, are not well equipped to support children and young people living with chronic illness. When at school, many respondents reported feeling pressure from teachers to continue activities even after telling a teacher they were feeling unwell, being unable to negotiate deadlines, and/or having teachers fail to follow up with them on an agreed support plan. Some were denied access to medication or other important health equipment or support while at school. Students also worried that staff would not be able to assist in a medical emergency relating to their chronic illness.

In the survey, 4 out of 5 respondents had missed out on school altogether due to their chronic illness. In some cases, respondents reported that their illness-related absences were treated as absenteeism or school avoidance rather than as a genuine health disruption to their education. This made students feel unsupported and punished for having a chronic illness.

There's very little data on how chronic illness impacts school attendance. The ABS National Health Survey 2022 found that 42.4% of 0–14-year-olds with asthma had time away from school/study in the past 12 months due to their asthma.<sup>52</sup> Considering the high rates of asthma amongst children, this equates to a large number of children missing school.

Academic outcomes can also be lower for children and young people living with chronic illness. A study focusing on NAPLAN test results found that those children who had been in hospital with a chronic condition prior to the test were more likely to perform below the national standard in literacy and numeracy.<sup>53</sup> This increased with the number of times a child was in hospital and by how long they had spent in hospital.

## **What's missing in relation to children and young people living with chronic illness?**

**There's currently no dedicated health policy or model of care for children and young people in South Australia. The Commissioner remains concerned that South Australia lacks an overarching vision for children and young people's health.**

At the federal level, there's a National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions, although mention of children and young people is primarily focused on the prevention of chronic conditions.<sup>54</sup>

The National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020–2030 includes children and young people living with chronic conditions as a priority area.<sup>55</sup> This includes increasing support for these children and young people.

The final South Australian Women’s, Child and Youth Health Plan 2021–2031 was expected to be launched in 2022 following consultation throughout 2021, but this has not occurred. In South Australia, while there’s a Youth Mental Health Services Model of Care, there’s still a lack of mental health services for children and young people with serious mental health conditions.

The South Australian Department for Education released practice guidance for government education staff relating to learners with additional needs, including those with chronic pain and epilepsy. This provides information about these chronic illnesses and adjustments that may be needed, while highlighting the need to listen to individual learners.<sup>56</sup>

The Department also has a growing number of resources relating to specific health conditions, including in relation to anxiety, asthma, cystic fibrosis, depression, diabetes, and seizures or epilepsy.<sup>57</sup>

The Commissioner commends the Department for producing these resources, but they are not having enough of an impact at the school level to improve the lives of children and young people living with chronic illness.

Without a systematic way to address the impact of chronic illness on South Australian children and young people, smaller changes are unlikely to have a broad and lasting impact. A key issue is the way in which chronic illness and other related terms are understood and defined. Meaningful data on chronic illness needs to be collected, which maps out the prevalence amongst children and young people in South Australia, as well as impacts, such as school attendance and completion.

The experiences of children and young people living with chronic illness are rarely sought. Due to the varied chronic illnesses and different symptoms and impacts, support in settings such as education needs to be tailored to the individual’s situation and circumstances.

Crucially, it can be problematic to consider school attendance as being physically present at school.<sup>58</sup> On the one hand, children and young people living with chronic illness may be at school but are not able to participate fully due to their illness and/or due to the lack of supports and adjustments made.

On the other hand, they may be able to complete schoolwork and engage in lessons from home when needed, but this is not always available to students. While online schooling during COVID-19 showed the possibilities for external learning, this is not being used in a way in which children and young people living with chronic illness are able to not only complete academic work but remain socially connected to their classmates.

Hospital school and online open access school may be available to some children and young people living with chronic illness, but these can be isolating and temporary experiences and can require lengthy approval processes. Most children and young people living with chronic illness, and their families, will need to navigate the mainstream schooling system.

There also need to be better mechanisms for recording school absence due to chronic illness. Currently these students are invisible unless the school is informed by the student or parent/carer.

## Actions needed:

- Create a dedicated **health policy** for children and young people in South Australia, including detailed consideration of those with chronic illness.
- Collect and share **data** on chronic illness prevalence, impacts, and outcomes for children and young people at a South Australian level.
- **Increase knowledge** amongst teachers and school staff, as well as students, about chronic illness and the impact on children and young people's lives.
- Provide **better training** for teachers, school staff and students to respond to emergency situations relating to chronic illness.
- Improve **school absence and attendance data** by being able to record and monitor when a child or young person is absent from school due to a chronic illness, and then following this up with supports.
- Increase positive school experiences and attendance by allowing **flexibility and adaption of school routines**, providing quiet rooms and spaces, and tailoring workloads and delivery to better cater to children and young people living with chronic illness, including through individual support plans which are followed and reassessed when needed.
- Increase **options to study from home**, including online, when needed, ensuring that students are able to remain connected both academically and socially.
- Provide dedicated **mental health services** for children and young people with serious mental health conditions.

In South Australia there are

**30,990**

children and young people  
(0–18-year-olds) registered  
as active participants in the  
NDIS (at 31 December 2024).<sup>59</sup>

# Children and young people living with disability

Children and young people living with disability are a diverse group. A range of factors shape the extent to which their sensory, emotional, behavioural and physical accessibility needs are met and understood at school and in the community. This includes their relationships with peers, family and trusted adults, their connection to the community, the type of disability/ies they have and the support they may need to participate in daily life.

The final report of the Australian Government’s Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission) was released in September 2023 and made 222 recommendations. Key findings and recommendations relevant to children and young people relate to improving data collection, providing inclusive education and employment, and eliminating restrictive practices.

The South Australian government has not done enough in responding to the recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission and is not taking enough action to make a fully inclusive education system in the state.

While the South Australian Department for Education has introduced some reforms and guidance around children and young people living with disability, much more needs to be done to ensure that these children and young people are receiving the best possible education experiences and outcomes. One promising area is the work done for children and young people living with autism, including the establishment of the Office for Autism, which includes consideration of education.

Children and young people living with disability have the same rights as all children. They share many of the same interests, concerns and aspirations as children and young people without disability. They also have particular experiences, which are shaped by the way society views their disability.

The rights of children and young people living with disability are the focus of Article 23 of the UNCRC. This Article highlights the rights of these children to a full life and explicitly mentions the right to education. Article 2 covers the rights of children outlined in the UNCRC to be enacted without discrimination, including in relation to disability.

Australia is also signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, where Article 7 enshrines the rights of children living with disability as equal with other children, that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions, and that children living with disability have a right to express their views on all matters affecting them.

The rights of children and young people living with disability are embedded in South Australia’s *Disability Inclusion Act 2018* (the Act), which emphasises that children with disability should be considered a priority group who have different needs and vulnerabilities. Amendments to the *Disability Inclusion Act 2018* (SA) require the State Disability Inclusion Plan and Disability Access and Inclusion Plans to address the rights and needs of children with disability.

Despite the high prevalence of disability among children and young people in South Australia, there continues to be a lack of know-how and capability in how early years settings, schools and communities can promote meaningful participation.

## Key messages:

- Gaps and inconsistencies in data definitions and reporting limit our understanding of the experiences of children and young people living with disability, including in education settings.
- There were an estimated 25,900 children aged 0–14 years and 23,800 young people aged 15–24 years in South Australia living with disability in 2018.
- 30,990 children and young people aged 0–18 years were registered as active participants in the NDIS in South Australia (at 31 December 2024).
- 3 in 10 students enrolled in South Australian schools received adjustments due to disability in 2024.
- Gatekeeping practices and other forms of discrimination can be systemic barriers to early years settings and school enrolment and attendance for children and young people living with disability from a young age.
- Children and young people living with disability make up high proportions of students who are suspended and/or excluded from government schools in South Australia. Data relating to disability are not publicly available and there's no independent appeal mechanism.
- There are no child-focused safeguarding mechanisms to protect children living with disability from restrictive practices, including in education settings.
- Children and young people living with disability are less likely than those without disability to complete school and are less likely to be employed.
- Children and young people living with disability interact with a range of systems and services, but their views are rarely sought or considered.

## Who are the children and young people living with disability?

**Children and young people living with disability are diverse. Some children and young people may have more than one disability. Some forms of disability are less visible than others. Not all children and young people living with disability identify as having one. Their experiences are often different to adults living with disability and they are required to navigate the formal and social aspects of school.**

Children with disability are diverse in all sorts of other ways too, such as their age, gender, cultural and religious backgrounds, living arrangements, levels of access to resources, personalities, and so on.

Children and young people living with disability experience varying levels of complexity and impacts. Their disability may be intellectual and learning, sensory (ability to hear and see), neurological and/or physical (mobility).

The most common forms of disability amongst children and young people vary depending on data sources, as do the definitions/categories of disability. However, categorising disability into fixed types can hide the diversity within disability, and reinforce a medical and deficit-based model rather than a social model. This also makes it even more important to ask children and young people living with disability about their experiences.

In South Australia, some groups of children and young people are more likely to be living with disability. This includes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people as well as those from a non-English speaking background. It also includes children and young people in care.<sup>60</sup> Children and young people living with disability are also over-represented in the youth justice system.<sup>61</sup>

Gaps and inconsistencies in data definitions and reporting limit our understanding of the experiences of children and young people living with disability.

There were an estimated 3,300 children 0–4 years old, 22,600 children 5–14 years old and 23,800 young people 15 to 24 years old reported as living with disability in South Australia in 2018. As a proportion of all children and young people, this was 3.4% of 0–4 year olds, 10.9% of 5–14 year olds and 11.1% of 15–24 year olds.<sup>62</sup>

South Australia has a higher proportion of children and young people 0–18 participating in the NDIS than the national average.

30,990 children and young people 0–18 years old were registered as active participants in the NDIS in South Australia (at 31 December 2024). This includes 6.5% of 0–8-year-olds, 9.3% of 9–14 year olds, and 7.5% of 15–18 year olds.<sup>63</sup>

3 in 10 (30.3%) students enrolled in South Australian schools in all sectors received adjustments due to disability in 2024, according to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD). This is higher than the national proportion of 25.7%.<sup>64</sup>

Nearly all (95.1%) students with disability enrolled in government schools in South Australia attended mainstream schools in 2023, mostly in mainstream classes.<sup>65</sup>

## What do we know about children and young people living with disability?

### Discrimination and social exclusion

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) reports show that many children living with disability have been refused enrolment in a school or early childhood education and care setting and/or have been limited in the number of hours they can attend.<sup>66</sup> CYDA surveys also highlight the discriminatory experiences children and young people experience in education settings in Australia.<sup>67</sup>

In the Commissioner's *From Checkbox to Commitment* report, children and young people living with disability highlighted a range of ways they were excluded in education settings. They spoke about the impact on identity that comes from being spoken to in disrespectful ways, and that they had experienced this disrespect from teachers, school support staff, parents and classmates.

Too many children and young people living with disability said that their school and social environments highlighted their differences and levels of ability, rather than focused on supporting them to feel included and empowered.

Young people attended a variety of education and service settings ranging from mainstream classrooms to segregated special education units to specialised support settings. Consequently, their experiences and expectations are diverse.

Children and young people living with disability who were attending mainstream education settings felt they were always being compared to their non-disabled peers and that this highlighted their 'difference' and 'otherness'. For many children

and young people this led to feelings of disconnection and being unsupported in their struggle to develop an identity as a young person living with disability.

By contrast, in more segregated settings, young people living with disability said they were expected to just 'fit in with everyone else' and they said it could be challenging to celebrate and acknowledge their individuality in a positive way when this was the case.

In more specialised settings, children and young people said they were more often surrounded by peers with disabilities and who have similar daily life experiences. In these settings many said they were less likely to be treated differently.

### High rates of suspension and exclusion

The independent Graham inquiry into suspension, exclusion and expulsion processes in South Australian government schools report highlights the significant issue that children and young people living with disability are much more likely to be suspended and/or excluded than children without disability from primary and secondary schools.<sup>68</sup> Children living with disability are also being suspended and excluded from preschool and childcare settings, but there's no overarching collection of this data in South Australia.<sup>69</sup>

Data provided to the Commissioner by the Department for Education shows that students with disability receiving funding through the IESP made up 7.5% of total primary school enrolments, but 30.6% of the total number of primary students who received a take-home, suspension and/or exclusion in 2023.<sup>70</sup>

Students with disability counted in the NCCD (which includes IESP students) made up 33.1% of total primary school enrolments in 2023 but accounted for 75.6% of the total number of primary school students who received a take-home, suspension and/or exclusion.<sup>71</sup>



Data on the proportion of suspensions and exclusions of students in Reception to Year 12 who are receiving disability adjustments is not consistently reported upon publicly. According to the most recent data available, reported in the Graham inquiry, over half of suspensions in 2019 were of students receiving disability adjustments and over two thirds of exclusions were of students receiving disability adjustments.<sup>72</sup>

Nationally, over a quarter of NDIS participants had ever been suspended from school by Year 10, with over 11% having experienced suspension by Year 2 and nearly 18% by Year 6.<sup>73</sup>

The Department for Education's revised procedure for take-home, suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students came into effect in 2024. The revised procedure includes students with disability as a priority group 'at higher risk of exclusionary responses' and requires decision makers to consider what 'adjustments' have been made to support the 'access and inclusion' of students with disability.<sup>74</sup>

Limited data is reported publicly in relation to students with disability attending Catholic schools and it is not reported in relation to independent schools. In late 2024, Catholic and independent school leaders agreed to report annually to the South Australian Minister for Education on how often students with disability are suspended, excluded or refused enrolment, in response to the Disability Royal Commission.<sup>75</sup>

### **Restrictive practices and seclusion**

The Commissioner remains concerned that there's no independent safeguarding or oversight mechanism in place to protect children and young people living with disability from the use of restrictive practices across education, health, residential care and youth justice settings.

The Disability Royal Commission included a number of recommendations in relation to restrictive practices. However, South Australia's legislation regulating restrictive practices remains limited to those applied to NDIS participants by registered NDIS service providers.<sup>76</sup>

The Commissioner's *Blame Game* report highlights many informal exclusion practices in schools that involve seclusion and isolation, many of which are likely to be experienced by children and young people with disability.

CYDA research also highlights concerning restrictive practices and seclusion, with 25% of children and young people living with disability having experienced restrictive practices in an education setting and an additional 19% experiencing seclusion at school in the past year.<sup>77</sup>

### **Lower rates of school completion**

At an Australia-wide level, available data shows that young people living with disability are much less likely to complete Year 12 or equivalent than those without disability.<sup>78</sup> In 2018, 21.3% of people in Australia 15–64 years old who had acquired a disability before age 15 left school before age 16, compared to 8.9% of those without a disability.<sup>79</sup>

The South Australian Department for Education's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan contains actions to develop and provide programs which support learning by children and young people living with disability, with an overall target to increase the number and percentage who achieve their SACE.<sup>80</sup> However, there is no clear plan for how to do this.

The SACE Board does not collect data on the number of students living with disability who completed SACE, but does collect data on the number of students completing SACE by studying at least one modified subject. In 2023, 457 students completed SACE by studying at least one modified subject.<sup>81</sup>

Some studies suggest that lower rates of school completion amongst young people living with disability is connected to the higher rates of school suspensions.<sup>82</sup>

In *From Checkbox to Commitment*, many children and young people living with disability had doubts about the opportunities that would be available to them when they became adults. They had experienced limitations throughout their schooling in response to their disability, and therefore wondered if this would continue to limit them in their goals in the future. They suggested more support at school in planning and preparing for post-school life would be valuable, as would more work experience opportunities.

People living with disability are much less likely to be employed than those living without disability. Australia-wide statistics from 2018 show that 47.8% of people 15–64 years old living with disability were employed, compared to 80.3% of those without disability.<sup>83</sup>

## What's missing in relation to children and young people living with disability?

**The Commissioner is concerned that there's so much attention given to services and therapy for children and young people living with disability, that there is little consideration being given to their systemic exclusion from education settings.**

There are few mechanisms to support the engagement and participation of children and young people living with disability in decision-making at the school, community, and systemic levels. When there are opportunities, these are often limited to focus on their disability rather than on other aspects of their lives they themselves are interested in pursuing.

The recommendations made by the Disability Royal Commission in relation to data, education and restrictive practices impacting people living with disability have not been taken seriously enough in South Australia.

Data related to children and young people living with disability varies across data sources. This is due to differences in the definition of disability and the differences in age groups used for reporting purposes. There are also challenges in tracking data over time due to inconsistency and irregularity in terms of what data is made publicly available, particularly regarding children with disability who are not NDIS participants. These issues exacerbate the systemic exclusion that children and young people living with disability face daily and over the course of the childhoods.

The Disability Royal Commission highlighted several areas where data is lacking across settings or jurisdictions, including in relation to school experiences and post-school trajectories of children and young people living with disability. The National Disability Data Asset Council may help with some types of data, but this is only available at a national level.

Of particular concern to the Commissioner is the lack of publicly available data relating to South Australian children and young people living with disability in terms of education participation, school completion, school suspensions and exclusions, and restrictive practices and seclusion in education and other settings.

Although a high proportion of children and young people living with disability are being suspended or excluded from South Australian primary and secondary schools, there is little being done to address this at the systemic level.

The Commissioner remains concerned that there is no independent appeals mechanism in place for children/young people with disability and their families to challenge school suspensions and

exclusions, as well as other potentially discriminatory treatment. She is also concerned that there are no child-focused safeguarding mechanisms to protect children and young people living with disability from exclusionary and restrictive practices being applied.

The Commissioner reiterates the need for all government departments to be informed about, and to be operating inclusively in relation to, children and young people who are living with disability. All government Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPS) should be updated to include the following sections specific to children and young people:

- Children and young people living with disability should be informed and consulted about decisions that affect them.
- Participation by children and young people living with disability must go beyond physical accessibility and include access to meaningful social connections, to information they can understand, and to enabling them to feel safe and respected by being valued, accepted, listened to, and taken seriously in all situations and settings.
- Provide public sector staff with specific DAIP responsibility with training in child-specific disability awareness and engagement, so that they can provide more appropriate individual and systemic responses.
- Develop and implement meaningful engagement processes for children and young people living with disability with actionable and specific goals, measures, and timeframes.
- Develop child-focused feedback and complaint mechanisms that support children and young people living with disability (and their families) to readily raise issues of concern, ensuring their issues are acted upon and/or monitored over time by a suitable oversight mechanism.

## Actions needed:

- Introduce an **independent appeals mechanism**, including for suspensions and exclusions from school and restrictive practices in education and other settings.
- Review **Disability Access and Inclusion Plans** for each department and body in South Australia to include more information specific to children and young people living with disability.
- Improve and increase **data** relating to children and young people, including in education settings and post-school trajectories, as outlined in the Disability Royal Commission, in ways which is available and reported on publicly in de-identified forms.
- **Increase knowledge** amongst teachers and school staff, as well as students, about disability and the experiences of children and young people living with disability.
- **Address discrimination and increase facilitation of social inclusion** at school, in extracurricular activities and in other areas of life.
- **Reduce take-homes, suspensions and exclusions** amongst children and young people living with disability and publicly report de-identified data on the numbers and proportions of students with disability who are suspended or excluded from school.
- **Improve school completion and post-school opportunities** for all children and young people.
- Resource opportunities for children and young people living with disability to participate in **decision-making**.





In South Australia  
there are likely to be

**15,157**\*

children who have ever  
experienced having  
a parent in prison.<sup>84</sup>

\*Estimated numbers as no accurate data exists

# Children and young people who have a parent in prison

Children and young people who have a parent in prison are an isolated group. They often don't know other children or young people who have parents in prison, and understandably they think they're the only one experiencing this. They are also encouraged to keep it a secret and may be reluctant, therefore, to tell others about their situation for fear of involvement by statutory authorities and/or being treated as 'guilty' or 'criminal' by association.

These children and young people are likely to face instability and uncertainty regarding important issues, such as who they'll live with, housing stability and finances. They may also be placed in out-of-home care. Their education, health and wellbeing, along with their participation in social and recreation activities, are also likely to be heavily impacted. Having a parent in prison can have long-lasting effects on a child or young person's life, including if or when their parent is released.

The UNCRC outlines the rights of children who are separated from their parents due to imprisonment, including the right to participate in proceedings and share their views, have direct contact, and have information about the location of their imprisoned parent (Article 9). Yet, in decision making and policymaking across the state and federal aspects of the Australian justice and corrections system, children and young people's views and experiences are often only considered as an afterthought, if at all.

Increasing the visibility of children at the earliest possible stage of a parent's contact with the justice system is essential to be able to plan for and mitigate the impacts of incarceration on a child or young person's rights.

Recent parliamentary inquiries into children affected by parental incarceration in New South Wales and Victoria demonstrate the negative impacts having a parent in prison has on children and young people. Both inquiries offer extensive recommendations, including reducing parental incarceration in the first place where children are involved, and creating better processes for when a parent is imprisoned, including in relation to supports for children and parents as well as child-parent contact.<sup>85</sup>

The responses from both the Victorian and New South Wales governments to the recommendations made in these reports has been underwhelming, with little change appearing to have been made to date. No similar inquiry has been undertaken in South Australia.

## Key messages:

- There's no dedicated policy outlining interdepartmental responses and support for children affected by parental incarceration.
- The number of South Australian children and young people with a parent in prison is unknown. No comprehensive data is routinely collected.
- Calculations estimate that at least 1 in 20 children in Australia will experience having a parent in prison during their lifetime. This would equate to 15,157 children in South Australia.
- Having a parent in prison is often viewed as a shameful secret, increasing the invisibility of these children and decreasing opportunities for support.
- Relationships between children and parents are impacted by imprisonment and more support is needed to improve visits and maintain connections, including when (or if) a parent is released.
- Children and young people with a parent in prison can experience instability and issues relating to housing, finances, health, wellbeing, education and social participation.
- Having a parent in prison can impact children and young people's attendance, participation and achievement at school.
- There are few supports and resources targeted directly towards children of prisoners.
- Children of prisoners are rarely asked about their experiences.



## Who are the children of prisoners?

**Children of prisoners describes the broad group of children and young people who have a parent in prison. The limited data available in relation to this group indicates that the experience of having a parent in prison, at least once during an Australian child's lifetime, is more common than most people think.**

ABS data shows that there have been roughly 3,000 adults in prison each year in South Australia over the past decade, with these numbers fluctuating from year to year and increasing to a high of 3,346 in 2024.<sup>86</sup>

Most adult prisoners are men, with very little attention given to the parenting status of these men. While women make up a smaller proportion of the adult prison population, the number of South Australian female prisoners is growing at a rate greater than the number of male prisoners.<sup>87</sup>

The South Australian Department for Correctional Services' next Women's Framework and Action Plan consultation paper has a 'portrait of a woman in the correctional system', which states that 'up to 50% have at least 1 child'.<sup>88</sup>

As the prison population grows, the number of children and young people with parents in prison is also likely to increase. Nationally it has been estimated that 41,000 children have a parent in prison on any given day.<sup>89</sup> However, it should be noted that this figure is likely to be an underestimate given reliable data is unavailable.

While they have the shared experience of having a parent in prison, there is likely to be much diversity amongst these children and young people. This includes which parent is in prison, the different ages they are when a parent goes to prison (including being born to someone in prison), the length of time their parent is in prison, the nature of the parent-

child relationship prior to the justice system becoming involved, and whether a parent is in prison multiple times.

Experiences may also vary according to the nature of the offence, including the extent to which the child or young person was a victim of the parent's offending. The reason(s) why the parent is in prison may influence a child's support needs and their wishes regarding contact. It also impacts on the length of time spent visiting a parent in prison, including what possibilities there are for visiting.

There is very little known about the demographics of children of prisoners. A recent Australian survey of 95 caregivers who were caring for dependent children with a parent in prison indicates that children of prisoners are often aged 0–9 years.<sup>90</sup>

Australia disproportionately imprisons Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, meaning more children from these families will experience having a parent in prison. A quarter of all prisoners in South Australia's gaols are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>91</sup>

Australia also disproportionately imprisons people who are living in poverty. This means that children and young people from families experiencing poverty are more likely to have a parent in prison.

The number of children with a parent in prison in South Australia or Australia is unknown.

Calculations estimate that at least 1 in 20 children in Australia will experience having a parent in prison during their lifetime.<sup>92</sup> This would equate to 15,157 children in South Australia.<sup>93</sup>

2 in 5 (40%) prison entrants in Australia reported having dependent children in 2022.<sup>94</sup>

A small number of children are born to women in prison.<sup>95</sup> 7.0% of women entering custody during 2021 were pregnant.<sup>96</sup>

## What do we know about children of prisoners?

### Difficulties surrounding visits and maintaining connections

Children who are separated from their parents due to parental imprisonment are a significantly vulnerable group. Being able to maintain contact with their parent in prison is a protective factor for these children.<sup>97</sup> Recent studies suggest that the immediate impact of parental incarceration can be minimised when children know where they will be living, have a supportive carer, and are aware of their parent's location, including when they can visit.<sup>98</sup>

A literature review of children and young people's experiences of having a parent in prison reveals that studies have often found that it is difficult for children to maintain a relationship with their parent during the period of their parent's incarceration, that they are likely to experience stigma for having a parent in prison, and that their overall wellbeing suffers.<sup>99</sup> The review also indicates that parental incarceration can have a long-term impact on family relationships after the parent is released from prison.

In the Commissioner's *Join the Dots* report, children and young people in South Australia reported that their experiences of visiting their parents in prison was difficult, and that there was minimal support and accommodation for them when they did visit. Having to travel long distances can be a barrier to children visiting their parents in prison, as can the inability to get to the prison, a lack of access to

public transport, or the financial capacity to make the journey. Travel distances can have a negative impact on the visiting experience due to stress and tiredness from the journey or can interrupt other important activities in children and young people's lives, such as school and commitments to extracurricular activities such as sport.

In South Australia, the experience for children and young people visiting a parent in prison varies drastically between prisons, both in terms of the type of visit (contact or non-contact) and the time slots made available for visiting. The ways in which visits can be booked also impacts on possibilities for maintaining connections between children and their imprisoned parent.

### Unstable housing and changes to care arrangements

As reported in *Join the Dots*, many children and young people described how 'everything changes' when a parent goes to prison, including where they live, how much money they have, and how much they eat, sleep or participate in their education, recreational, social and extracurricular activities.

The growing numbers of women entering the prison system has implications for children's care arrangements. When their father goes to prison, most children are typically cared for by their mother. When mothers are imprisoned, however, children are more likely to need alternative care arrangements to be put in place.<sup>100</sup> There is little known about children of prisoners with same-gender parents.

An Australian survey of caregivers of children with a parent in prison found that over half to more than two thirds reported experiencing multiple financial difficulties relating to paying for food, rent/mortgage, utility bills, transport to and from visiting imprisoned parents, and meeting the costs of sending their children to school and participating in other activities.<sup>101</sup>

## Limited opportunities for activities and participation

In *Join the Dots*, children and young people told the Commissioner they often experience financial hardship when a parent goes to prison, particularly when the parent is the family's primary or sole income earner. They highlighted that because of this, financial support was needed for them to be able to continue to participate in the range of activities they had done so before their parent was imprisoned. These included playing sport or other physical and creative activities. These extracurricular activities not only encourage socialising for these children, they are also considered essential to ensuring children who are already at risk of social exclusion are not further marginalised or excluded.

## Barriers to participation and engagement in education

It is difficult to find any data on the school enrolment and attendance or school completion of children of prisoners in South Australia. However, having a parent in prison means there are many out-of-school factors likely to be barriers to a child's school attendance and completion.

An Australian survey of caregivers of children with a parent in prison found that around half of the children were often absent from school. Children were often reluctant to attend school or other activities due to feeling anxious and experiencing bullying. This survey also found that school suspensions and exclusions were higher amongst this group of children.<sup>102</sup>

In *Join the Dots*, children and young people spoke about how their experience of having a parent in prison significantly affected their attendance, participation and achievement at school. They reported that their 'grades went down' and that they had 'trouble' at school while they dealt with overwhelming emotions, stress and disruption to their daily and weekly routines.

Some young people described how their school 'didn't care' or didn't respond appropriately, while others wished their school would have 'let me have time' or worked with them to ensure their response 'matched the situation'.

Despite having had negative experiences at school, children and young people felt that it was important for teachers and schools to know about students who are affected by parental incarceration, so they can be more supportive and help them to keep connected to their school and learning, as well as provide support for them to better manage their stress and emotions.

## What's missing in relation to children of prisoners?

**There are currently few avenues for children and young people to be listened to in relation to their parents' incarceration. Rarely are they given enough information about what is happening to their parent during this process, let alone the opportunity to say what they need or to share what they're experiencing.**

*Join the Dots* is the only South Australian study to date to have explored the views and experiences of children of prisoners. There is also limited research in this area in other states throughout Australia.

Data is not routinely collected and published on the number of children and young people with an incarcerated parent in any state or jurisdiction in Australia. Consequently, the number of children and young people being affected is unknown. While some jurisdictions appear to collect some data at the state level, this is not collected or made available in South Australia or Australia wide.

The lack of data on the number of prisoners who have children has been well documented by those who have taken the time to look. The fact that the parental status of a prisoner and where their children are during their incarceration is not being routinely collected, indicates that those with the means to collect this data do not see it as being critically important.

This lack of data leads to the absence of policy and little or no focus on the services and support needed by the children and young people impacted. In addition, agencies working to support prisoners are not necessarily funded to also work with their children.

There is no cross-department policy or process specifically focused on children of prisoners. Such a policy is needed to outline how different departments need to work together to ensure the best outcomes for children of incarcerated parents and their families. This includes consideration of the roles of the Department for Correctional Services, Department for Education, Department for Child Protection, South Australia Police, Centrelink Services Australia, SA Housing Authority, and Department of Human Services.

To adequately address the stigma and secrecy surrounding incarceration a new policy framework must include services informed by those with lived experience. It must also include services that are supportive of keeping families together. There is also a need for dedicated and age-appropriate information aimed specifically at children and young people about:

- how, when and why decisions are made, including the potential impacts of these decisions
- what support is available to them and how to access it
- where their parent is being incarcerated, and what life is like for their parent; and
- what to expect regarding contact with their incarcerated parent, including prison visits, transport options, and telephone calls, or other communication options.

## Actions needed:

- Create a dedicated interdepartmental **policy** focused on children of prisoners.
- Adopt a **child-focused approach** to adult-focused justice services in all interactions where children are present, or where children are directly impacted. Children's rights should be actively considered in the administration of justice, including decisions regarding parent arrest, bail and sentencing.
- Increase **interdepartmental responses** to children of prisoners, as well as accountability and communication between departments. More specifically, the Department for Education, SA Health, Department for Child Protection and Department of Human Services be tasked with identifying children of incarcerated parents as a priority access group for government support services and develop and implement protocols for frontline staff.
- Provide **dedicated information and support services** directly to children and young people who have a parent in prison, ensuring they are informed of what's happening to their parent and supporting them where needed, including financially. Provision of comprehensive information tailored to the needs of different age groups is essential.
- Collect more reliable **data** on prisoners who have children, who these children are, and what is happening to these children, using this data to inform policy and service provision.
- Increase **public facing information and supports** for children of prisoners (eg on websites) which are co-created with children and young people who have lived experience of a parent in prison.
- Provide **initial automatic and immediate reach-out and support** to children and young people when a parent is first arrested.
- Provide **therapeutic and community support**, including possibilities for connections with other children of prisoners.
- Facilitate **meaningful family connections**, including in relation to children and young people visiting their parent in prison, training for staff, and parenting programs for fathers as well as for mothers. This includes providing **positive visiting environments** and other connections that are meaningful, safe and positive.
- Provide **supports for parents and carers** who are caring for children of prisoners.

In South Australia

**4,600**

0–14-  
year-olds &

**18,000**

15–24-  
year-olds

were carers in 2018.<sup>103</sup>

# Children and young people with carer responsibilities

Too often, young carers remain unidentified and unsupported. They may not realise they are a carer, or they may be reluctant to tell anyone about their role due to stigma or a fear of coming under government scrutiny.

Negative effects are exacerbated by the lack of professional support currently being made available to young carers.<sup>104</sup> When young carers do have access to professional support, they are more likely to experience higher levels of wellbeing and school attendance and a greater capacity to study at home.<sup>105</sup>

In the Commissioner's *Take Care* report, many South Australian children and young people with carer responsibilities have told the Commissioner that the dealings they have at their school are less than ideal. This indicates that the education system is not meeting their needs and that their best interests are not being considered in some situations and settings. Too many young carers are experiencing discrimination, have inadequate support, and are not being asked for their views or opinions.

If children and young people with caring roles are to take advantage of the opportunities the education system offers them, there needs to be a better understanding of the life circumstances they face daily. While many of life's domains can be affected by caring responsibilities, young carers invariably talk about their experiences in relation to school. These experiences are diverse with some young carers describing school as a sanctuary, while others describe it as a source of major distress.

Our education system is best placed to respond to and support whole-of-life outcomes for children and young people with caring responsibilities, but it must be tailored to individual needs and guided by what young carers themselves say they want and need.

The UNCRC outlines the rights of all children in many different aspects of their lives including their right to an education. Importantly for young carers, the UNCRC also highlights the importance of family, and a child's right to know and be cared for by their parents (Article 7). It also outlines how a child should not be separated from their parents against the child's will (Article 9). This means that more supports are often needed to maintain family structure, rather than remove young carers from their families.

The role that children and young people play as carers was recognised in the federal inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers and the subsequent National Carers Strategy 2024–2034.<sup>106</sup> More needs to be done to provide support to young carers, as well as their families, to reduce the responsibility of their caring roles wherever this is possible.

## Key messages:

- Young carers may not view themselves as carers, or they may wish to keep it quiet due to worry they have about external intervention in their family's situation.
- There is no clear data on the number of young carers in South Australia, and those who are aged 0–14 years are often not included in detailed statistics on carers.
- There were 4,600 children aged 0–14 years and 18,000 young people aged 15–24 years identified as carers in South Australia in 2018.
- Young carers are most likely to be caring for a parent or sibling, but may be caring for a grandparent, other family member and/or other person.
- Young carers may be caring for more than one person.
- Young carers are more likely to be living with disability themselves, be female and/or be living in families with one parent.
- Young carers miss out on recreational activities and school, and experience isolation.
- Young carers are rarely asked about their experiences.



## Who are the children and young people who are young carers?

**Children and young people with caring responsibilities provide care for family members who may be living with either one or a combination of physical disability, chronic illness, mental health conditions, terminal illness and/or drug and alcohol dependence.**

Young carers are most likely to be providing care for parents (or step-parents) or siblings but also for grandparents, other family members and/or other people who are connected to the family in some way. Several young carers are providing care for more than one person.<sup>107</sup>

Children and young people with caring responsibilities are a diverse group undertaking varied roles that include practical tasks, managing medication, and providing interpreting services for their loved one and the medical staff and others. They may also be providing companionship and emotional support, as well as supervision and assistance to attend health appointments.

The group 'young carers' tends to refer to young people under 25 years of age. This can make it difficult to get a complete picture of the caring responsibilities and experiences of younger children and teenagers who are carers. In particular, the caring roles of primary school-age children are often invisible.

Young carers are more likely to be living with disability themselves, and females, rather than males, are more likely to be young carers.<sup>108</sup> Young carers are also more likely to be living in families with one parent.<sup>109</sup>

From the Commissioner's in-depth engagement with children and young people across the state, she knows there are many children and young people who are caring for family members but for a range of reasons they don't tell anyone that this is what they do – not their friends, teachers or neighbours. Ultimately this means they are not being adequately supported to live their best life.

There's no clear data on the number of young carers in South Australia, and those aged under 15 years are often not included in detailed statistics.

4,600 (1.5%) children aged 0–14 years, and 18,000 (8.4%) young people aged 15–24 years were identified as carers in South Australia in the Disability, Ageing and Carers survey in 2018.<sup>110</sup>

1 in 20 (5.0%) young people aged 15–19 years in Australia had provided unpaid assistance to a person with disability, long-term health condition or old age in the last two weeks prior to the 2021 Census being conducted.<sup>111</sup>

According to LSAC data, 39% of young people aged 14–15 years provided some kind of care to another person, with 6% specifically assisting someone living with them with core activities such as personal care, mobility or communication.<sup>112</sup>

Another Australian study indicates that 16.4% of Year 11 students were carers for someone with a long-term health condition or chronic illness.<sup>113</sup>

## What do we know about young carers?

### Secrecy due to fear of intervention

The *Take Care* report highlighted the fact that the caring roles many children and young people undertake are not known to others. This can be due to previous negative family experiences with government systems, including a fear of intervention that will not be supportive of keeping families together.

Young carers may often be reluctant to seek support as they fear that, rather than receive this support, they may be removed from their families, or that their family structure will be changed in some way. Some spoke about the fear of being taken away, or of their family member getting into trouble.

Some live with the worry of people at school finding out about their carer responsibilities. They fear that their privacy will not be considered and that they will face intrusive questioning if they ask to see the school counsellor. Others do want adults to find out about their caring responsibilities and to take actions that will support them.

Children and young people's fears may be exacerbated when the reasons for caring involve parents with mental health conditions and/or drug and alcohol dependence. Rather than providing support for these families, responses for these families may focus on interventions that separate family members.

### Limited opportunities for activities and participation

The *Take Care* report highlighted that young carers are missing out on many of the activities being enjoyed by other young people their age, including for example playing a team sport, learning an instrument, or joining a social club. Young carers spoke about having less time to engage in social and recreational activities than their peers.

Other studies highlight the difficulties that young carers face in relation to participating in social activities, partly because they are needed at home, and partly because they have no way of getting to and from events.<sup>114</sup> For many this reality is compounded by financial hardship, particularly as many of the children and young people who are carers are living in one parent families.

### Barriers to participation and engagement in education

In the *Take Care* report young people caring for others shared that they have missed school because of their caring responsibilities. Many young people with caring responsibilities have said that school attendance can be difficult and that they don't feel acknowledged for the efforts they make getting to school after juggling the needs of their family member/s at home. They also worry about not having the time to complete homework because of all the other demands on their time.

Other studies emphasise that a young carer's school attendance and capacity to complete schoolwork at home are heavily impacted by their caring responsibilities. While there are no official statistics on school attendance for young carers, an Australian study found that more than one in five young carers missed school at least once a week because of their caring responsibilities.<sup>115</sup>

In the *Take Care* report young carers shared that they are not being given enough flexibility or assistance to manage their school workload in recognition of the heavy workload they bear on the home-front, which can often include domestic duties in addition to their carer responsibilities.

While they're at school some young carers say they worry about their family member at home and can be distracted during lessons. Sometimes they talk about not having friends or having friends that don't understand their situation and therefore put them under pressure to participate in activities they don't have time for.

The Commissioner heard many times that young carers feel singled out for uniform breaches and lateness. Given how difficult it can be for young carers to get to school at all, these seem like minor things to be pulled up on.

It is no surprise that being a young carer also impacts on academic achievement. LSAC data shows substantial impacts on NAPLAN scores for those providing care for core activities and other forms of care more broadly.<sup>116</sup>

Another study highlights that young carers aged 15–24 years were less likely to be in employment, education or training compared to non-carers, and that young carers aged 20–24 years were less likely to have completed Year 12.<sup>117</sup>

## What's missing in relation to young carers?

**There's a clear service gap in relation to young carers and their families. There's often limited or no support available. At the school level, more needs to be more done to identify young carers and to provide support for school attendance, as well as allow for flexibility while at school.**

Young carers may need support not only for themselves, but also for the person they are caring for. If their family member had more supports when they needed them, this would prevent the young person from having inappropriate or extreme caring roles that undermine their ability to participate in education, leisure and/or social activities.

The limited data and knowledge on the prevalence of carer roles amongst children and young people can hide the need for support services, particularly amongst younger children. Currently, data is often collected for children aged 0–14 years and young people aged 15–24 years as a group, but this means there is very little known about older teenagers who are likely to still be at school. Also, the Disability, Ageing and Carers survey does not acknowledge that children under 15 years may also be primary carers.

The *Take Care* report highlighted that most teachers (over 80%) didn't know how many young carers they currently taught. More than half the teachers asked were only 'slightly confident', or 'not at all confident' they could identify young carers in their classroom.

More attention to the experiences of young carers is needed, as well as the availability of co-created resources to improve information and connection for young carers. Due to the often secret and invisible contexts of children and young people caring, these crucial connections are often missing.

The South Australian Department for Education has information for staff in the department (including government school teachers) to provide extra attendance support for young carers, although this is only available via the intranet.<sup>118</sup> Their attendance policy also outlines that caring for a family member is a 'prescribed reason for non-attendance in an approved learning program'.<sup>119</sup> More needs to be done, however, to ensure young carers are not missing out on learning opportunities, even when caring is considered a valid reason.

## Actions needed:

- Provide better **broader supports for families** to reduce the responsibility of children and young people to provide care for family members.
- Collect and share **data** on young carers in South Australia aged under 18 years, including those who are primary-school age.
- Develop a dedicated education department **policy** focused on identifying and supporting young carers.
- Develop and implement **school-based supports** for students with significant caring roles to improve their educational, social and community inclusion and learning outcomes.
- Identify a **young carer champion** at each school site to act as a single point of contact who reviews students' needs on a weekly basis, and acts as an internal advocate, thereby developing capacity in the students, educators, and school.
- Resource carer support agencies to work with young carers to co-design and develop easy to access, localised **information and resources** that will support educators and school leaders who provide support to young carers at school.
- Increase **supports and funding** to enable young carers to participate in recreational activities.
- Recognise the role of young carers under 15 years of age and provide tailored **support** to these children and young people.



A young man's profile is shown in silhouette against a bright yellow background. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid. The man has short, dark hair and is looking towards the right.

In South Australia

**5,194**

children and young  
people (0–17-year-olds)  
presented to homelessness  
services in 2023–24.<sup>120</sup>

# Children and young people experiencing homelessness

Being homeless doesn't just mean sleeping on the street. Children and young people experience homelessness in many different forms, and these are often invisible. Many children and young people the Commissioner has engaged with do not consider themselves to be homeless and are missing out on possible supports and services available to them.

Providing support to children and young people who are experiencing homelessness, and creating broader structural change to reduce homelessness, cannot be addressed by the homelessness sector alone. Homelessness is a result of much earlier system failings. Data about young people presenting to homelessness services on their own shows they may need a broad range of services and assistance types. These can include accommodation provision, assistance to sustain housing tenure, mental health support, family services, legal and financial services, drug and alcohol services, immigration and cultural services, and/or disability services.<sup>121</sup>

Every child and young person has the right to a safe place to live. UNCRC Article 27 outlines the right to an adequate standard of living and living conditions, including in relation to housing. Housing itself is a fundamental right and relates to many other rights, such as health, education and safety.

## Key messages:

- There's no dedicated homelessness policy or plan for children and young people in South Australia or Australia.
- There are not enough targeted services for children and young people experiencing homelessness, including those under 15 years of age and living in rural areas.
- Children and young people often do not see themselves as homeless, and so are not made aware of the supports that may be available to them.
- There is no comprehensive data on the number of children and young people experiencing homelessness in South Australia.
- Rates of homelessness among children and young people aged 0–18 years in South Australia are rising.
- Nearly 3 in 10 of the South Australians experiencing homelessness in the 2021 Census were aged 0–18 years, for a total of 2,181 – but this is an underestimate.
- Nearly 3 in 10 homelessness services clients in South Australia in 2023–24 were aged 0–17 years (nearly 5,194 children and young people), with more than 3 in 20 being children aged 0–9 years.
- Children and young people experience many forms of homelessness. This may be with their families or on their own.
- There are higher rates of homelessness for children and young people who are experiencing domestic and family violence, are in care or leaving care, are leaving the youth justice system, are LGBTQIA+, are Indigenous, and/or are in one parent families.
- Homelessness for children and young people is more likely to be caused by trauma and family issues, with earlier supports needed.
- Homelessness exposes children and young people to more forms of vulnerability, such as violence and abuse.
- Children and young people experiencing homelessness are more likely to have poorer health, education and employment outcomes.
- Children and young people experiencing homelessness are rarely asked about their experiences.



## Who are the children and young people experiencing homelessness?

**Children and young people may experience homelessness with their families, or as individuals. Homelessness may be short term or temporary, or homelessness may be a long-term issue. Children and young people may move in and out of homelessness throughout their childhood.**

Of the data that is available, it shows children and young people make up a high proportion of people experiencing homelessness in South Australia, as well as those accessing state-based homelessness services. It also shows that some children and young people are more likely to experience homelessness than others.

Children and young people leaving care or leaving the youth justice system are more likely to experience homelessness. Homelessness experienced with family members or alone may also be related to significant events, such as a parent/carer going to prison, or a parent/carer being seriously unwell or passing away.

There are higher rates of homelessness for children and young people experiencing domestic and family violence, in care or leaving care, leaving the youth justice system, who are LGBTQIA+ and/or Indigenous, and/or who are in one parent families.<sup>122</sup>

There's no comprehensive data on the number of children and young people experiencing homelessness in South Australia.

Nearly 3 in 10 South Australians experiencing homelessness counted in the 2021 Census were aged 0–18 years for a total of 2,181.<sup>123</sup>

1 in 3 South Australians living in 'other marginal housing' in the 2021 Census were aged 0–18 years for a total of 1,735.<sup>124</sup>

Nearly 3 in 10 (27.8%) homelessness services clients in South Australia in 2023–24 were children and young people aged 0–17 years for a total of 5,194.<sup>125</sup>

More than 3 in 20 (15.8%) homelessness services clients in South Australia in 2023–24 were children aged 0–9 years.<sup>126</sup>

Nearly 2 in 3 (63.2%) homelessness services clients in South Australia in 2023–24 aged 15–17 years presented to these services alone.<sup>127</sup>

## What do we know about children and young people experiencing homelessness?

### Family violence is a key reason for homelessness

Children and young people may experience homelessness with their family. This can be due to intergenerational homelessness and poverty, or when they leave home with one parent (often their mother) due to domestic and family violence. Some experience homelessness when they leave home on their own, which also often relates to family violence.<sup>128</sup>

Children and young people are more likely to experience homelessness due to family issues and violence compared to adults. In South Australia, over a third (34.5%) of all children aged 0–9 years were seeking specialist homelessness services in 2023–24 due to domestic and family violence.<sup>129</sup>

Mission Australia's Youth Survey in 2023 shows that young people aged 15–19 years who were experiencing homelessness were much more likely to report experiencing domestic/family violence (23.5% compared to 5.0% of those not experiencing homelessness) and family conflict (47.8% compared to 11.1%).<sup>130</sup>

### Poorer health and wellbeing

Children and young people experiencing homelessness are likely to have much poorer health and wellbeing than others their age. They are particularly likely to experience poorer mental health.

Children and young people may already have a mental health issue when presenting to specialist

homelessness services. Data shows that in South Australia in 2022–23, 13.7% of young people aged 10–14 years and 32.0% of young people aged 15–17 years presented to homelessness services with a current mental health issue.<sup>131</sup>

A South Australian linked data study found that young people who had contact with specialist homelessness services at 16–17 years of age were three times more likely to present to hospital and twice as likely to present to an emergency department. These young people made up 16% of hospitalisations and 13% of emergency department presentations for all 16–17 year olds.<sup>132</sup>

### Barriers to participation and engagement in education

Homelessness clearly has a significant impact on schooling, with teachers often required to take on the role of a first responder. What teachers know about homelessness, and how they act when their students confide in them, has the potential to make a real difference to the life of a child or young person who is experiencing homelessness.

Remaining connected to school can be important for children and young people experiencing homelessness, contributing to their outcomes now and later in life. However, homelessness is often disruptive to education due to the difficulties children and young people experiencing homelessness face. Experiencing homelessness can result in low levels of school attendance and poorer school experiences, as well as increased disengagement in class and poorer academic achievement over the long term.<sup>133</sup>

There is limited data available on the school enrolment and attendance of children and young people experiencing homelessness. Most available data is focused on secondary school-age young people and suggests about a third of young people experiencing homelessness are not attending school.<sup>134</sup>

Data from ROGS shows that in 2023–24 nearly a quarter (23.2%) of all homelessness services clients aged 12–18 years in South Australia were not enrolled in formal study/training, with this number slightly increasing after support was provided by these services.<sup>135</sup>

## What’s missing in relation to children and young people experiencing homelessness?

**The Commissioner hears from stakeholders that more children and young people are experiencing homelessness than are reported in statistics. While these children and young people can be hard to identify, more can be done to get a better big picture of this group.**

There’s also little information on who children and young people experiencing homelessness are. While we know some groups of children and young people are more likely to experience homelessness, this data isn’t collected in a uniform way. It also often doesn’t allow for consideration of the multiple groups that children and young people may fit into.

Specific data is needed on the following:

- Children and young people who are couch surfing, as they are likely to be recorded as ‘visitors’ to a particular household on Census night.
- Children and young people who are experiencing homelessness with their families compared to those who are unaccompanied.
- Children under 15 years experiencing homelessness alone, without their families.
- Children and young people living in motels with their families, sometimes when leaving unsafe homes.

- Parents who present to homelessness services who may require support to gain or share custody of a child or children.

At the federal level, despite extended discussion and development of a new National Housing and Homelessness Plan (which was expected to be released in 2024), calls for more attention to children and young people experiencing homelessness have been ignored, including the need for a separate Homelessness Action Plan for children and young people.<sup>136</sup>

Children and young people are rarely asked about their experiences of homelessness, particularly younger children. Listening to these children and young people is crucial, not only to reduce homelessness but to understand its impact on their lives. The experiences children and young people who are homeless have at school, and their suggestions for how schools can better support them while they’re experiencing short or long-term homelessness, are particularly important.

This means co-designing services with children and young people who are experiencing homelessness, so that these services reflect their actual experiences and meet their identified needs. This includes providing information about what services exist to support them before they become homeless. That way if they do become homeless, they know where support can be found.

The South Australian Department for Education has information for staff in the department (including government schoolteachers/educators) to provide extra attendance support for children and young people experiencing homelessness, although this is only available via the department’s intranet.<sup>137</sup> The Commissioner supports the advice from the Department for Education for teachers to help in identifying and supporting students who are experiencing homelessness.<sup>138</sup>

## Actions needed:

- Create a dedicated homelessness **policy/plan** for children and young people in South Australia, promoting early preventative responses and a joined-up approach across departments.
- Provide **early wrap-around services and supports** for families before they are homeless, or at serious risk of homelessness, focusing on family relationships and poverty.
- Provide **interdepartmental responses** to ensure education, health care, youth justice, mental health and child protection services are all working together to formally plan and respond to the needs of children **aged under 15 years** who are at risk of homelessness or ongoing homelessness, including increasing supports and services when this is needed.
- Collect more comprehensive and reliable **data** on children and young people experiencing homelessness, making this publicly available in de-identified forms, including whether they are with their families or alone, and who these children are (eg age, gender, etc), extending the current available data from homelessness services (Homeless2Home).
- Provide **tailored approaches for different experiences**, including whether children and young people are with their families or alone, the age of the children and young people being impacted and the reasons they are experiencing homelessness.
- Develop **school-based early inter-vention approaches** for young people at risk of family breakdown and conflict, and disengagement from their education, keeping them connected to school, family and the community to prevent them leaving home early and experiencing homelessness.
- Increase capacity of **family-formed reconnection supports** to promote favourable pathways back home for more young people, and provide youth-focused housing when returning home is not possible or appropriate.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1.

### SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSIONER'S WORK RELATING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING PARTICIPATION POVERTY

South Australian children and young people experiencing participation poverty (missing out on participation in education and activities due to poverty) has been of ongoing concern to the Commissioner since her appointment in 2017. Her work in this area over the past eight years includes the following:

#### Extensive engagement with children and young people:

- Conversations and engagement with children and young people in different settings who are missing out on participating in education and activities due to poverty.
- School visits across the state, including with children attending the poorest schools in Port Augusta, Murray Bridge, and the northern suburbs of Adelaide.
- Surveys of children and young people relating to poverty, public transport, sport, digital access, periods and play.
- Commissioner's Student Voice Postcards – hearing from South Australian children in the 8–12 year age group in relation to their concerns about poverty, including participation poverty for themselves, their families, and other children.

#### Major project report:

- *Leave No One Behind: What children and young people have said about living in poverty* (2019). Drawing on the views, ideas and opinions of over 2,000 South Australian children and young people who either completed a survey, attended a series of workshops or lived experience focus groups, or participated in a poverty summit attended by students in years 10, 11 and 12 who shared their understanding and observations of poverty and its impact.

#### Additional major project reports covering participation poverty in relation to neighbourhoods, public transport, sport, digital access, period products and play:

- *My Suburban Life* (2025)
- *Safe and Sound: Views and experiences of young people on public transport* (2023)
- *More than a Game: What do children and young people think about sport?* (2022)
- *My Digital Life: Understanding the impact of digital poverty on children and young people* (2021)
- *Menstruation Matters: The impact of menstruation on wellbeing, participation and school attendance* (2021)
- *Press Play: Activating young people's health and wellbeing through play* (2020)

#### Briefs and guidelines:

- *Becoming a More Cost-Friendly School* (2025)
- *Anti-Poverty Week Statement: Why investing in school camps, field trips and excursions is good for students* (2023)
- *Public libraries: Time to increase our investment in local libraries as cool, safe places for children and young people* (2023)
- *Becoming a Child Friendly Sports Club* (2022)
- *Spotlight on the True Cost of Going to School* (2021)
- *Sanitary Product Supply to School Students in South Australia* (2019)

**Submissions and letters, including in relation to government planning, education, transport, human rights, arts and culture, digital access and obesity:**

- Submission to the Inquiry into Sharing the Benefits of Economic Growth with All South Australians (June 2024)
- Submission to the Inquiry into Civics Education, Engagement, and Participation in Australia (May 2024)
- Submission to the Northern Adelaide Transport Study (February 2024)
- Submission on the potential for a Human Rights Act for South Australia (February 2024)
- Submission on a new cultural policy for South Australia (January 2024)
- Submission to the South Australian Government on Creating a More Child Focused Budget 2024/25 (December 2023)
- Submission on the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan (October 2023)
- Submission to the Chief Information Officer on Digital Connectivity (September 2023)
- Submission on the Purpose of Public Education (March 2023)
- Submission to the Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty (February 2023)
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into School Refusal and related matters (December 2022)
- Submission on the proposed Code of Conduct for teachers in South Australia (October 2022)
- Submission to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement (June 2022)
- Submission on the draft National Obesity Prevention Strategy 2022-2032 (November 2021)
- Submission on the Department of Education's new Digital Strategy (June 2021)
- Submission on the Adequacy of Newstart (September 2019)
- Submission to the Select Committee on Poverty in South Australia (August 2018)

**Annual monitoring:**

- *Keeping Our Promises* – Wellbeing Promise #2 Support Children to Move and Play More
- *Keeping Our Promises* – Citizenship Promise #2 Engage and Empower Digital Learning Experiences
- *Keeping Our Promises* – Citizenship Promise #3 Increase Digital Access and Inclusion
- *Child Rights Progress Reports* – Education focus on children living in poverty

**Key roles:**

- State Co-Chair, Anti-Poverty Week (2019–2024)
- Chair, Swallowcliffe Children's Precinct Committee (2024 – present)

**Additional work:**

- Established the Period Justice Working Group
- Facilitated the 2030 SDG Action Plan by South Australian Young People
- Offered grant funding programs (from 2017 to 2024) including Civics in the City Grants, Period Justice Grants and Youth Voice Grants
- Supported SA SRC Campaigns *Fitness for Free* and *Free Fares for Our Future*
- Increased free digital accessibility via the Commissioner's Digital Challenge (CDC)
- Provided centralised access to civics resources via the Civics and Citizenship website

## Appendix 2.

### SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSIONER'S WORK IN RELATION TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

The disadvantage and discrimination being faced by South Australian children and young people living with chronic illness has been of ongoing concern to the Commissioner since her appointment in 2017. Her work in this area over the past eight years includes the following:

#### Extensive engagement:

- Conversations and engagement with children and young people living with chronic illness in different settings.
- Dedicated engagement with groups relating to cancer, diabetes, and hospital school.
- Dedicated survey of young people living with chronic illness.
- Surveys and engagement relating to period-related chronic illness, such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).
- Commissioner's Student Voice Postcards – hearing from children aged 8–12 years across the state about chronic illness, including mental health conditions.

#### Project report:

- *South Australian children and young people's experiences of living with chronic illness* – Issue Brief. The Commissioner conducted a survey which received 95 responses from young people living with chronic illness aged 13–21 years.

#### Additional major report:

- *Menstruation Matters: The impact of menstruation on wellbeing, participation and school attendance* (2021). The Commissioner heard from young people living with menstruation related illness such as endometriosis and PCOS.

#### Briefs and guidelines:

- *Developing a 'Fit for Purpose' mental health crisis care system for 21st century children and young people* (2023)
- *Missing Voices: Mental health challenges as described by primary school children* (2023)
- *Health Hub: Ideas for creating more child and youth friendly health services* (2021)

#### Submissions and letters including in relation to endometriosis, mental health and suicide, and education:

- Submission to the Inquiry into Sharing the Benefits of Economic Growth with All South Australians (June 2024)
- Submission to the Parliament of South Australia's Select Committee on Endometriosis, with the Period Justice Working Group (May 2024)
- Submission on the Purpose of Public Education (March 2023)
- Submission on the draft Youth Mental Health Services Model of Care (SA) (February 2023)
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into School Refusal and related matters (December 2022)
- Submission on the proposed Code of Conduct for teachers in South Australia (October 2022)
- Submission to the Review of the *Mental Health Act 2009* (SA) (September 2022)
- Submission to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement (June 2022)
- Submission on South Australia's next Suicide Prevention Plan 2022–2025 (April 2021)
- Addendum to 2021 Submission on the National Child Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Children with chronic illness (February 2021)

**Annual monitoring:**

- *Keeping Our Promises* – Health Promise #2 Positive Mental Health Outcomes
- *Keeping Our Promises* – Health Promise #3 Reduce Deaths by Suicide and Suicide Attempts
- Annual reports – ongoing attention to ‘Lack of systemic mental health supports for primary school aged children’

**Additional roles and work:**

- Member of the Suicide Prevention Council (2023–2025)
- Work around menstruation and creating the Period Justice Working Group (which includes youth advocacy relating to endometriosis, PCOS, and other menstruation related chronic illnesses).
- Feedback on Adolescent Transition Care to improve the transition from child to adult healthcare services for children and young people with chronic illness.

## Appendix 3.

### SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSIONER'S WORK IN RELATION TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITY

The disadvantage and discrimination being faced by South Australian children and young people living with disability has been of ongoing concern to the Commissioner since her appointment in 2017. Her work in this area over the past eight years includes the following:

**Extensive engagement with children and young people:**

- Conversations and engagement with children and young people living with disability, such as education and community settings, including mainstream and special schools and classes, and school leaver and transition programs, as well as disability youth groups, social groups and support services.
- Including an option to disclose disability on a broad range of surveys.
- Commissioner's Student Voice Postcards – hearing from children aged 8–12 years living with disability attending mainstream and special education schools across the state.

**Major project report:**

- *From Checkbox to Commitment: What children and young people with disability said about identity, inclusion and independence* (2022). The Commissioner undertook a targeted listening project with more than 30 individual sessions (online and face to face) with children and young people aged 9–22 years in a range of education and community settings.

**Additional project reports:**

- A focus on the disproportionate number of children and young people living with disability who are suspended or excluded from school, including in *The Blame Game* (2020)
- *What Young People Living with Disability Told Us About... Periods, Relationships, and their Sexual Health Education* (2021)
- *Conversations with children and young people with a disability* (2020)

**Briefs and guidelines:**

- *Health Hub: Ideas for creating more child and youth friendly health services* (2021)



**Submissions and letters, including in relation to the Disability Royal Commission, education, living in care, accommodation, state government departments' Disability Access and Inclusion Plans, the state Autism Strategy, the federal Autism Strategy and the NDIS:**

- Submission to the Inquiry into Sharing the Benefits of Economic Growth with All South Australians (June 2024)
- Submission on the potential for a Human Rights Act for South Australia (February 2024)
- Submission to the Northern Adelaide Transport Study (February 2024)
- Submission on the Purpose of Public Education (March 2023)
- Submission to the Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty (February 2023)
- Submission on South Australia's Autism Strategy (February 2023)
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into School Refusal and related matters (December 2022)
- Submission on the proposed Code of Conduct for teachers in South Australia (October 2022)
- Submission to the Social Development Committee Inquiry into NDIS participants with complex needs living in inappropriate accommodation (August 2022)
- Submission to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement (June 2022)
- Submission on draft DHS Accessible and Inclusive Toolkits – Engagement and Consultation Toolkit (July 2021)
- Feedback on the Disability Inclusion (Restrictive Practices-NDIS) Amendment Bill 2020 (January 2021)
- Submissions to state government departments and agencies on their draft Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIP) (2020)
- Submission to the Disability Royal Commission (December 2020)
- Submission to the Review of the Disability Standards for Education (September 2020)

- Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Autism (July 2020)
- Submission on the Draft Education and Children's Services Regulations (April 2020)
- Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (October 2019)

**Annual monitoring:**

- *Child Rights Progress Report – Disability*

**Additional work:**

- Support for government agencies to meaningfully engage with children and young people living with disability
- Supporting SA SRC Campaign Seeing Ourselves

## Appendix 4.

### **SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSIONER'S WORK IN RELATION TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE A PARENT IN PRISON**

The disadvantage and discrimination being faced by South Australian children and young people who have a parent who is imprisoned has been of ongoing concern to the Commissioner since her appointment in 2017. Her work in this area over the past eight years includes the following:

**Extensive engagement with children and young people:**

- Conversations and engagement with children and young people in different settings who have a parent in prison, including young people in care.
- Dedicated engagement with children and young people with a parent in prison, including consultations at the Adelaide Women's Prison and with support groups.

**Major project report:**

- *Join the Dots: Considering the impact of parental incarceration on children and young people.* The Commissioner conducted family fun days and focus groups with 66 children and young people aged 10–22 years who were impacted by parental incarceration, and heard from 74 incarcerated parents about the challenges they faced and the support they needed.

**Submissions and letters, including in relation to the Department for Correctional Services' next Women's Framework and Action Plan, a submission to the Victorian parliamentary inquiry, and submissions relating to education:**

- Submission to the Inquiry into Sharing the Benefits of Economic Growth with All South Australians (June 2024)
- Submission on the Department for Correctional Services' next Women's Framework and Action Plan (May 2024)
- Submission on the Purpose of Public Education (March 2023)
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into School Refusal and related matters (December 2022)
- Submission to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement (June 2022)
- Submission to the Inquiry into children affected by parental incarceration (Victoria) (April 2022)

**Annual monitoring:**

- Annual reports – ongoing attention to 'Policy and system oversight of the rights and needs of children of incarcerated parents'

**Key roles:**

- Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Group: Strong Foundations and Clear Pathways implementing the Women Offender Framework and Action Plan (2024/25)

**Additional work:**

- Hosting an undergraduate intern to research support and resources for children of prisoners in South Australia, Australia, and internationally

## Appendix 5.

### SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSIONER'S WORK IN RELATION TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE CARERS

The disadvantage and discrimination experienced by children and young people who are carers has been of ongoing concern to the Commissioner since her appointment in 2017. Her work in this area over the past eight years includes the following:

**Extensive engagement with children and young people:**

- Conversations and engagement with children and young people in different settings who are carers, including in relation to projects about poverty and the hopes and dreams of children and young people living in regional areas.

**Major project report:**

- *Take Care: What can be done at school to support children and young people with caring responsibilities at home* (2020). This report draws on many consultations with young carers, where 150 children and young people told the Commissioner about their lives and experiences. This included the Commissioner running focus groups in diverse locations, attending camps and school holiday programs, and being involved in training programs and workshops. The report also summarises the views of primary and secondary teachers in schools across the state about their confidence in identifying and supporting students with caring responsibilities and any strategies their school has in place.

**Annual monitoring:**

- *Keeping Our Promises* – Education Promise #5 Support Young Carers in their Role
- Annual reports – ongoing attention to ‘Policy and system oversight of the rights and needs of young carers’

**Submissions and letters, including in relation to unpaid carers, education, poverty, and mental health and wellbeing:**

- Submission to the Inquiry into Sharing the Benefits of Economic Growth with All South Australians (June 2024)
- Submission to the Inquiry into the Recognition of Unpaid Carers (August 2023)
- Submission on the Purpose of Public Education (March 2023)
- Submission to the Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty (February 2023)
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into School Refusal and related matters (December 2022)
- Submission on the Proposed Code of Conduct for Teachers (October 2022)
- Submission to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement (June 2022)
- Feedback on The National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (February 2021)
- Submission to the Select Committee on Health Services in South Australia (February 2019)

## Appendix 6.

### SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSIONER’S WORK IN RELATION TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Children and young people experiencing homelessness has been of ongoing concern to the Commissioner since her appointment in 2017. Her work in this area over the past eight years includes the following:

**Extensive engagement with children and young people:**

- Conversations and engagement with children and young people in different settings who are experiencing homelessness, including those who are couch surfing and/or living in motels.
- Commissioner’s Student Voice Postcards – hearing from children aged 8–12 years from across the state about their views on homelessness, housing, cost of living, and related issues including domestic violence.

**Project report:**

- *What SA Kids Have Told Us About... Youth Homelessness* – study with YouthInc (2021). Young citizen researchers interviewed young people with personal experience of couch surfing and other young people for their views on youth homelessness.

**Additional reports relating to issues relating to homelessness, including safety, violence and poverty:**

- *Teenagers and Safety: Views and experiences of South Australian young people in relation to safety* (2024)
- *Postcards snapshot for South Australia’s Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence* (2024)

- *Leave No One Behind: What children and young people have said about living in poverty* (2019)

**Briefs and guidelines:**

- *Missing Voices: Domestic and family violence as described by primary school children* (2024)

**Submissions and letters, including in relation to the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, human rights, poverty, education, health and housing more broadly:**

- Submission to South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (October 2024)
- Submission on the potential for a Human Rights Act for South Australia (February 2024)
- Submission to the Review of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1995* (SA) (February 2023)
- Submission to the Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty (February 2023)
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into School Refusal and related matters (December 2022)
- Submission on South Australia's Housing and Homelessness Strategy (September 2019)
- Submission to the Select Committee on Health Services in South Australia (February 2019)

**Annual monitoring:**

- *Keeping Our Promises – Safety Promise #1 Prevent Youth Homelessness*
- Annual reports – ongoing attention to system shortfalls relating to 'Lack of options for young people under 15 years of age who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, and who are not receiving the attention, resources and support they need' and 'Lack of bail accommodation options for young people leading to unnecessary periods in custody'.

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251 Morphett Street, Adelaide SA 5000  
08 8226 3355 | [commissionercyp@sa.gov.au](mailto:commissionercyp@sa.gov.au)  
CPSN PR0340-2025-02-49

 @ccyp\_sa  
 /ccypsa  
 [ccyp.com.au](http://ccyp.com.au)

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