



The State of Bendigo's Children Report

2024



Communities
for Children
Bendigo



Acknowledgement of Country

C4C Bendigo acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live, work and play. We pay our respects to leaders and elders past, present and emerging. We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land and our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing. We commit to working respectfully to honour their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to this country and hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

Publisher

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1 Introduction

Communities for Children (C4C) Bendigo is a whole-of community approach to strengthening the health and wellbeing of families and the development of young children. Communities for Children Bendigo has a strong focus on the first years of a child's life, from conception to age five.

Communities for Children Bendigo has commissioned this report to act as a needs assessment – helping to identify what is working well, what the challenges and areas for focus are for children in Bendigo, and to help inform decisions about strategic priorities. A needs assessment is a systematic process that provides information about social needs or issues in a place or population group and determines which issues should be prioritised for action. Social issues, or 'needs', can include health-related topics such as the increased prevalence of poor mental health in a population or high smoking rates, or issues such as low levels of literacy or child development. A social need or social issue is something that can be addressed by service providers, or community members in a community development initiative (Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), 2019).

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has developed a vision and key outcomes for the health and wellbeing of children and young people. ARACY consulted with children, young people and the community and asked people to describe the elements of 'a good life' and developed a wellbeing framework for children and young people aged 0 to 24 years called the Nest. When many people talk about 'wellbeing' they are often referring to certain aspects only, such as mental health or social-emotional learning. While these are crucial elements, we need to ensure everyone working with, and for, children and young people, understands that 'wellbeing' refers to all six domains of the Nest, not just one or two. All areas

need to be seen as a priority by all the adults in our children's community.

This report draws on the Nest Framework (ARACY, 2014) to develop a data snapshot of the needs and experiences of Bendigo children and young people. The Nest Framework closely aligns with the domains used in previous State of Bendigo's Children reports, commissioned by the First Quarter Leadership Group Bendigo in 2011 and 2013. The Nest conceptualises wellbeing as six interconnected domains that support each other to help children reach their potential. To have optimal wellbeing, a child or young person needs to be adequately resourced in all six domains.

The six domains are as follows:

- Valued, loved, and safe
- Material basics
- Healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Positive sense of culture and identity.

These domains and the accompanying descriptions and indicators provide a clear and agreed upon description of 'what should be'. Needs can then be defined as the gap between the current conditions in the lives of children and young people and the ideal condition as described by ARACY (ARACY, 2021).

This State of Bendigo's Children report summarises data collected by Communities for Children Bendigo in assessing community needs, drawing on a wide range of quantitative data from multiple sources. There are however gaps in this data collection. Some of the accessible data is 10 years old, and in some domains – including participation and a sense of culture and identity – quantitative data alone has limitations and qualitative data is needed to assess these domains. The COVID pandemic has also had a significant impact on communities across Australia that needs to be considered in relation to all data collected. This report summarises the data collected by Communities for Children Bendigo using the ARACY framework and domains with a focus on early years.

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2 Executive Summary

This State of Bendigo's Children report examines key factors associated with the wellbeing of children and their families. It uses specific indicators to understand how Bendigo is faring compared with the Victorian average.

This report has used the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Nest Framework and domains to assess where children in Bendigo are doing well and areas that need improvement. It summarises the Communities for Children Bendigo Needs Assessment, a quantitative data review carried out in 2023, and acknowledges data gaps, in particular gaps in the domains of positive sense of culture and identity and in participation and the lack of contemporary data in key areas.

While this report shows that Bendigo's children are doing well in many ways, there is work to be done in other areas, and areas that require further analysis and consideration. Over the past few years, we have experienced the COVID pandemic, and while this report does not seek to deeply assess the impact, we know that family violence incidents increased, children's participation in school decreased, developmentally children fell behind and housing affordability in Bendigo decreased significantly. The State of Bendigo's Children draws heavily from the most recent data available, the 2021 Census, which was conducted at the height of the COVID pandemic, and therefore the data and report needs to be considered within this context.

In summary, a child in Bendigo is less likely to be 'on track' developmentally particularly in the areas of fine motor skills, social competence and language and literacy, and more likely to have challenges with negative emotions, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems. They are also more likely to experience family violence, more likely to experience disadvantage and vulnerability and more likely to live in families that are experiencing higher levels of stress compared to other children across Victoria. They are also more likely to be fully immunised, more likely to attend maternal child health, kindergarten and attend primary school regularly, and more likely to see a speech pathologist if they have speech concerns.

In terms of demographics and population, Bendigo is growing. Between 2016 and 2021 the population grew by 10,993 people. Bendigo also has a larger population of babies, pre-school, and primary school aged children, compared to the Victorian average. In 2021, 9.7% of people in Bendigo were born overseas, compared to 12.4% in Regional Victoria and 30.0% in Victoria. Bendigo has a higher population of people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and a higher percentage of younger families and children.

In analysing and summarising the data collected by Communities for Children Bendigo, the following are key areas where children in Bendigo are doing well, areas for further improvement and areas that require further consideration. These areas are further summarised in the body of this report.

executive summary

Where are we doing well?

- Children in Bendigo have a higher than state average attendance rates for Maternal Child Health, in particular the 3.5 years key age and stage visit.
- A high rate of immunisations compared to the Victorian and National average.
- Bendigo children have a high attendance rate for kindergarten.
- From Prep to year 2, there were fewer school absences in Bendigo compared to the Victorian average, apart from prep in 2018 and 2019 when there was parity between Bendigo and Victoria.
- More pregnant women in Bendigo attended antenatal care within the first 10 weeks of pregnancy compared to Victoria and Australia.
- Of children who do have speech challenges, more children in Bendigo visited a Speech Pathologist in 2020 compared to the Victorian average.
- In the 2021 Census, more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Bendigo were attending preschool, primary school and vocational education when compared with the Victorian and Australian average.

Areas for further improvement

- Despite the strong focus on language, literacy and development over the past decade, children in Bendigo are still behind in language, literacy, and development.
- More parents in Bendigo report concerns about their child's speech and/or language development, compared with the Victorian average.
- There was a decrease of children being on track across most domains from 2015 to 2021, including physical health, social competence, language, literacy, and communication skills, and an increase in vulnerability in these same domains.
- Children in Bendigo are more likely to have challenges with negative emotions, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems.
- Between 2015 and 2021 the number of children in Bendigo experiencing vulnerability increased whereas in Victoria and Australia there was little change.
- Children aged 0 to 4 in Bendigo are more likely to have disabilities compared to Victoria.
- More children in Bendigo are obese compared to children across Victoria.
- Only half the children in Bendigo and Victoria have seen a dentist.
- Children in Bendigo are more likely to be a witness to family violence and be a victim of crime.
- In 2022 there were more children in Bendigo from low-income and/or welfare dependent families.
- In Bendigo 16.11% of children aged under 15 live in poverty.
- In 2023 housing affordability dropped 39.1% compared to a 4.5% drop Victoria wide.
- Some communities in Bendigo are considered advantaged including Strathfieldsaye and Maiden Gully. In comparison some of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia are located within Bendigo including Long Gully, West Bendigo and Ironbark, communities with deep disadvantage include California Gully and Eaglehawk. Overall, Bendigo was listed as one of the forty most disadvantaged locations in Victoria.
- In 2021 families in Bendigo reported a high level of family stress, in areas including alcohol and drugs, mental health, history of abuse and being a witness to violence.

Areas for further consideration

- Bendigo has the second largest Aboriginal population in Victoria. The Aboriginal population in Bendigo is also younger than both the Victorian and the Australian average.
- It has been recommended that due to the lack of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community controlled early parenting services across Victoria, these services should be considered for the cities of Mildura, Geelong, Bendigo and Shepperton.
- Bendigo has a larger population of babies and preschoolers (age 0-4), primary schoolers (5-11), and secondary schoolers (12-17) compared to the Victorian average.
- Between 2011 and 2021 the number of people in Bendigo who speak another language other than English at home has doubled from 3.1% to 6.5%.
- In 2021 it is estimated that there are 3,000 people of Karen ethnicity residing in Bendigo, as well as 250 people from Afghanistan and 150 people from South Sudan.



This report has been developed as a tool for the community to improve children's wellbeing, however, this is only part of the picture. As highlighted above, further data collection is required, both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data referenced here draws heavily from the 2021 Census undertaken during COVID and is not necessarily representative of the current situation for children in Bendigo. Qualitative data, to better assess and understand some of the domains including culture, identity and participation is also necessary to obtain a complete picture of how children in Bendigo are doing and to inform strategic priorities for Communities for Children.



demo-

graphics

3 Bendigo Demographics



The Dja Dja Wurrung are the traditional owners and custodians of lands and waterways in and around Bendigo. The Djarra people continue to perform age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation, and renewal. We acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.

Bendigo is located in north central Victoria almost at the geographical centre of the state, and has a land area of approximately 2,999 square km. Bendigo is the fourth largest inland city in Australia and the 19th-largest city by population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021a). In the 2021 Census Bendigo had a population of 121,470 people, with the population forecast to grow to 155,175 people by 2036 (.id informed decisions, 2022c).

Bendigo has a larger population of babies and pre-schoolers (age 0–4), primary schoolers (5–11), and secondary schoolers (12–17) compared to the Victorian average, and a lower percentage of people aged 18–49. The number of children aged 0 to 17 has grown between 2016 and 2021 (.id, 2022h). In 2021 the fertility rate in Bendigo was 1.75 (average number of children a woman will have in her lifetime). This is higher than the Victorian average (1.52) and the Australian average (1.70) (ABS, 2021b). While women in Bendigo are having more children than the Victorian and national average, our birth rate dropped to 1.75 during the COVID years (2020 and 2021). This does not reflect the Australian average where the fertility rate dropped in 2020 but increased in 2021 (ABS, 2021b). Thus, Bendigo did not have a COVID baby boom, as was widely predicted.

OF NOTE

- In 2006 the largest population group in Bendigo was young people aged 15 to 19 years (7.5%) (.id, 2022b).
- In 2021 the largest population group in Bendigo was young adults aged 25 to 29 years (6.5%) (.id, 2022i).
- The number of children aged 0 to 17 has grown between 2016 and 2021 (.id, 2022h).
- In 2021 Bendigo had a higher proportion of children and young people than Regional Victoria (.id, 2022b).
- Bendigo has a younger population (aged 0–44). Of note is the number of young workforce (25 to 34) and parents and homebuilders (35 to 49). This is important as in Australia in 2019 34.2% of first-time new mothers were aged 30 – 34 years, and 30.5% were aged 25 to 29. Hence, Bendigo has a larger population of people who may become parents/are parents compared to Regional Victoria (ABS, 2021a; .id, 2022h, 2022i; Qu, Baxter & Carroll, 2022).



Bendigo has the second largest Aboriginal population in Victoria (ABS, 2021c; 2022a). In 2011 0.2% of the population in Bendigo identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, in 2021 the percentage was 2.2% compared to Victoria at 1.0%. The Aboriginal population in Bendigo is younger than both the Victorian and the Australian average (ABS, 2021c).

In 2021, 9.7% of people in Bendigo were born overseas, compared to 12.4% in Regional Victoria and 30.0% in Victoria (.id, 2022k). It is also estimated that there are 3,000 Karen people residing in Bendigo, as well as 250 Afghans and 150 South Sudanese (City of Greater Bendigo [CoGB], 2021). The 2021 Census shows that in Bendigo 87.8% of people spoke English only, and 1.2% spoke another language and English not well or not at all, compared with 67.2% and 4.4% respectively for Victoria (.id, 2022L).



OF NOTE

- **The median age for Aboriginal people in Bendigo is 22**, compared to the state and national average of 24.
- **11.3% of Aboriginal people are aged 0–4**, compared to Victoria (10.7%) and Australian (10.6%).
- **24.8% of Aboriginal people are aged 5 – 14**, compared to Victoria (21.4%) and Australia (22.1%) (ABS, 2021a).



OF NOTE

- **42.6% of residents have an English background**, 40.8% have an Australian background, 13.7% have an Irish background, 11.8% have a Scottish background, and 4.4% have a German background.
- **Bendigo has a larger population of all these groups compared to the Victorian average.** For example, 40.8% of people living in Bendigo report an Australian ancestry, compared with Victoria (27.2%) (.id, 2022j).
- **Bendigo has a smaller Chinese population (1.4%) compared to the Victorian average (6.6%).**
- **An emerging group are Burmese people at 1.3% of the population**, compared to the Victorian average of 0.3%. An assumption is that many of these people are Karen.
- **In 2021 91 people (0.07%) identified their ancestry as Hazara.** In 2016 no resident identified as Hazara.
- **Between 2011 and 2021 the number of people in Bendigo who speak another language other than English at home has doubled** from 3.1% to 6.5% (.id, 2022m).





4 Valued, loved, and safe

Being valued, loved, and safe means having loving, trusting relationships with family and friends. It involves a child or young person feeling valued by teachers and other adults in their life and knowing that they are important to others and that others are caring and supportive of them.

It involves feeling safe at home, in the community and online. Safety also means feeling safe about their future, which includes the knowledge that the environment and climate are a priority and are being protected (What's in the Nest? Exploring Australia's Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People. ARACY, Canberra; 2021).

Family violence, child neglect and family stress all have an adverse impact on children, and their sense of feeling safe, valued, and loved.

Children in Bendigo are more likely to experience the impact of family violence compared to other children in Victoria. In March 2023 11.4% of affected family members were children aged 0-17. During the COVID pandemic in 2021 family violence incidents increased across the state and significantly more so in Bendigo (Crime Statistics Agency [CSA], 2023a).

Child Wellbeing and Child Protection is another indicator relevant to this domain, yet data specific to Bendigo has not been accessible. Data included is from 2015 and suggests that children in Bendigo are more likely to be reported to Child Protection, and abuse is more likely to be substantiated. Data from 2021 included in relation to family stress levels also suggest that children in Bendigo are more likely to experience abuse (Victorian Government 2022b; O'Connor, Skouteris, Hatzikiriakidis, 2021).

In 2021, families and children in Bendigo also report higher level of family stress:

- Alcohol or drug related problem in family 5.6 % compared to 3.5% Victoria
- History of abuse to parent 7.4% compared to 5.2% Victoria
- History of abuse to child(ren) 3.0% compared to 1.9 Victoria
- Child witness to violence 4.2% compared to 3.2% Victoria
- Gambling problem in family 0.6%- same statewide
- History of mental illness of parent 14.8% compared to 9.3% (Victorian Government, 2022b).
- Children in Bendigo also reported more incidents of bullying compared with those in the wider Victorian community, both in primary school and secondary school (Victorian Government, 2022b).

4.1 Family violence

The potential impact of family violence on the health and wellbeing of infants, children and young people is now well understood. Domestic and family violence affects children’s physical and mental wellbeing, development and schooling, and is the leading cause of children’s homelessness in Australia.

The rate of Family and Domestic Violence is significantly higher in Bendigo than the state average, there has also been a significant increase in incidents in the year ending March 2021 (the first COVID year).

Greater Bendigo Family Incident Rate compared to Victoria per 100,000 population, year ending

	Greater Bendigo	Victoria
Year ending March 2019	1,528.8	1,243.9
Year ending March 2020	1,683.5	1,300.5
Year ending March 2021	1,946.0	1,420.2
Year ending March 2022	1,964.1	1,371.4
Year ending March 2023	1,930.5	1,377.7

Referrals to The Orange Door also highlight an increase in family violence incidents over the past three years. (L17 referrals are family violence incidents where police have attended).

L17 referrals to The Orange Door	Number
2020-2021	963
2021-2022	1309
2022-2023	1457
2023- 31/12/23	724
L17’s with children under 5 years	693
L17’s children 6-10 years	769

Source: Anglicare Victoria internal data, The Orange Door, Loddon. March 2024.



OF NOTE

- In both Bendigo and Victoria, **6 in 10 family violence incidents occurred between current or former partners.**
- The percentage of children who witness family violence is higher in Bendigo.** A significant percentage of children and young people are affected by family and domestic violence in Bendigo. As seen in Table 34, in the year ending March 2023 11.4% of effected family members are children aged 0-17 and rising to 12.2% for young people aged 18-24 years.
- From the year ending March 2019 to 2023 **the offence of breaching a family violence order is consistently in the top five committed offences in Bendigo.** Apart from in 2022 (the second COVID year) rates have continually risen in Bendigo from 584 cases in 2019 to 742 in 2023.
- Less Family Violence Safety Notices were issued** by Victoria Police in Bendigo.
- Slightly more incidents occur in a residential location in Bendigo.**
- The top 4 types of abuse are the same across Bendigo and Victoria** (CSA, 2023a).
- In Bendigo the 5th most common type of abuse was social abuse,** where the perpetrator tries (or threatens) to cut the victim/s off from family, friends, or the victim survivors’ community. In Victoria it is threats.

4.2 Child Wellbeing

It is well known that child abuse is associated with a diverse range of negative health and wellbeing outcomes across the lifespan.

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study has recently demonstrated that child maltreatment is associated "...with substantially higher rates of health risk behaviours and conditions, including substance misuse, self-harm, and suicide attempts" (Lawrence et al, 2023, p.s34).



OF NOTE

The most recent available data is from 2015, and shows the highest rates of child protection involvement across all three variables was in regional Victoria, and out of 79 Victorian LGAs Bendigo was ranked:

- **10th for completed child protection investigations**, with rates significantly higher than the state average,
- **33rd for substantiated child protection investigations**, with rates higher than the state average, and
- **30th for Child FIRST assessments**, with rates significantly higher than the state average (O'Connor, Skouteris, Hatzikiakidis, 2021).

FURTHER

- After an investigation was substantiated, **more children in Bendigo were placed on a child protection orders in 2010 compared to the Victorian average.**
- As well as more children being placed on a child protection order in 2010, **more children in Bendigo were placed into Out of Home Care (OOHC) compared to the Victorian average from 2008 to 2012** (Victorian Government, 2022a).

4.3 Bullying

"From a life course perspective, important insights about how social determinants of health operate can be gained by analysing the various forms that social climate can take in different life periods. For children, a critical aspect of social climate is exposure to bullying. Bullying can serve as a proxy for power imbalance and social exclusion analogous to adult social climate of discrimination and racism,"

(ZHANG, PADILLA & KIM, 2017, P. 42).

"Engaging in and being the target of bullying is a significant risk factor for future criminal behaviour and poor mental health, making bullying a significant threat to an individual's long-term psychological and personal development," (Parada, 2006, p. xiii).



OF NOTE

Children in Bendigo, in 2017 and 2018, are reporting more incidents of bullying compared with those in Victoria, both in primary school and secondary school (Victorian Government, 2022a).

4.4 Family Stress

In 2021 families reported the following:

- Families experiencing high or very high stress during the month prior to the survey- 10.6% to 8.8% Victoria.
- Alcohol or drug related problem in family 5.6 % compared to 3.5% Victoria.
- History of abuse to parent 7.4% compared to 5.2% Victoria.
- History of abuse to child(ren) 3.0% compared to 1.9 Victoria.
- Child witness to violence 4.2% compared to 3.2% Victoria.
- Gambling problem in family 0.6%- same statewide
- History of mental illness of parent 14.8% compared to 9.3% Victoria (Department of Education & Training Victoria, 2021).

4.5 Alcohol and Other Drugs

Alcohol and other drug (AOD) misuse poses significant health risks to families, in particular the essential parent-child emotional connection “...is most readily undermined by parental substance use,”

(EMERGING MINDS, 2023.)



OF NOTE

- The Victorian School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ) asks parents whose children are about to start school if there is a AOD problem in the family. **In 2020 and 2021 families reported AOD was a problem at a significantly higher rate than the Victorian average** (Victorian Government, 2022b).
- Even though there are more AOD-related ambulance attendances in Bendigo than the Victorian average, **there are fewer hospital admissions in Bendigo compared to the Victorian average.**
- In examining rates of hospitalisations in Bendigo between 2012 to 2021 by substances, by all ages, **there are two substances that result in hospitalisations in Bendigo that are above the state average - Antipsychotics and Pharmaceutical Drugs** (Turning Point, 2022a, 2022b).
- While Bendigo does not have higher than average rates of car crashes related to alcohol, AOD related deaths, or assaults related to alcohol compared to the Victorian average, **our rates of family and domestic violence attributable to alcohol is significantly higher than the state average** (Turning Point, 2022b).

4.6 Crime

“Children can be exposed to crime as victims or witnesses within their home or the broader community. In a small number of cases, children may also be offender,”

(AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE [AIHW], 2022A).

Any form of exposure to crime at a young age can have potentially detrimental impacts on a child’s health and wellbeing. Some impacts are short-term, but others can cause long term developmental, mental, physical, and social problems. For example, children exposed to crime, especially violent crime or crime involving weapons, may have:

- increased likelihood of depression
- suicidal ideation and behaviour
- psychopathology and other psychological disorders
- future victimisation and offending
- homelessness (AIHW, 2022a).

OF NOTE

- There are **more child victims of crime in Bendigo compared to the Victorian average** (Victorian Government, 2022a).
- Compared to adults aged 25 years and over, **young people and children who are victims of crime in Bendigo are more likely to experience high harm**. Crimes that cause high harm include murder, attempted murder, accessory or conspiracy to murder, manslaughter, driving causing death, serious assault, rape, indecent assault, incest, sexual offences against children, abduction, slavery, aggravated robbery, extortion, and aggravated burglary (CSA, 2022).

“Children who are themselves offenders are more likely to have diminished educational attainment and social participation, interpersonal difficulties and are at higher risk of future offending,” (AIHW, 2022a).

OF NOTE

- **More young people were convicted and placed on a community order in Bendigo compared to the Victorian average** (Victorian Government, 2022a).





5 Having material basics

Children and young people who have material basics have the things they need. They live in suitable, secure, stable housing, with appropriate clothing, nutritious food, clean water, and clean air. They have access to transport, to required local services (e.g., plumbing) and to open spaces in nature. Their family has enough money for necessities. They have the material items needed to develop as an active member of society such as school supplies, suitable technology, or sporting equipment

(WHAT'S IN THE NEST? EXPLORING AUSTRALIA'S WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. ARACY, CANBERRA; 2021).

In 2023, housing affordability in Bendigo dropped 39.1% compared to a 4.5% drop Victoria wide (Victorian Government, 2023). There are more families in Bendigo (7.6%) renting social housing (all social housing forms) compared to Victoria (4.6%) and Australia (7%) (Public Health Information Development Unit [PHIDU], 2021c).

While affordability reduced across Victoria, the drop is significant in Bendigo, for example when looking at 3 bedrooms homes again it is a drop of 39.1% in Bendigo from 2019 to 2023, compared to a 4.5% drop across Victoria (Victorian Government, 2023).

In 2022, there were more children in Bendigo from low-income, welfare-dependent families (14.4%) than in Victoria (10.6%) and Australia (12.0%) (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023). In Bendigo 16.11% of children aged under 15 live in poverty (Victorian Council of Social Service [VCOSS], 2023).

In terms of advantage, or disadvantage, within Bendigo there is considerable variation. Some communities are very advantaged with Rural East having a percentile of 83, Strathfieldsaye 82 and Maiden Gully 72. In comparison, some of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia are located within Bendigo, with North Bendigo/California Gully having a percentile of 8 and Long Gully/West Bendigo/Ironbark having a percentile of 5. Overall, Bendigo was listed as one of the 40 most disadvantaged locations in Victoria. Then in identifying communities with deep disadvantage, California Gully/Eaglehawk was listed as one of the 24 Victorian locations with eight or more indicators in the top 5% (.id, 2022r).

material basics

5.1 Housing

“Access to appropriate, affordable, and secure housing can limit the physical and mental health risks presented by factors such as homelessness and overcrowding. Evidence also supports a direct association between poor-quality housing and poor physical and mental health (Baker et al. 2016). Young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with long-term health conditions or disability, people living in low-income housing, or people who are unemployed or underemployed are at greater risk of living in poor-quality housing,”

— (AIHW, 2022C).



OF NOTE

In viewing the residences of two-parent families with children aged less than 15 years,

- **65.1% live in owned housing.** This is less than the Victorian average, but more than the Australian average.
- **33% live in rental accommodation,** which is more than the Victorian average, but less than the Australian average.
- **There are more families in Bendigo (7.6%) renting social housing** (all social housing forms) compared to Victoria (4.6%) and Australia (7%).
- **Fewer families living in crowded dwelling in Bendigo compared to the Victorian and Australian average.** This is particularly significant regarding severe overcrowding (PHIDU, 2021c).
- In 2016 **far fewer single-parent families in Bendigo lived in owned dwelling** (34.7%) compared to the Victorian (43.9%) and Australian (38.5%) average.
- **More single parent families in Bendigo lived in rental accommodation** (63%) compared to the Victorian (53%) and Australian (59%) average.
- **There are more single parent families in Bendigo (21.4%) renting social housing (all social housing forms) compared to Victoria (17.2%),** but slightly less than the Australian average (22.1%).

- While fewer single-parent families in Bendigo live in crowded dwellings compared to the Victorian and Australian average, this dramatically changes when examining severely crowded dwellings. **In 2016 100% of single parent families in Bendigo lived in severely crowded dwellings,** compared to Victoria (33.4%) and Australia (43.4%) (PHIDU, 2021c).

FURTHER

- **There has been a reduction of social housing in both Bendigo and Victoria between 2011 and 2021, however the reduction is larger in Bendigo (1%) compared to Victoria (0.6%).**
- From March 2019 to March 2023 the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis is noticeable. **In March 2019 58.8% of 3-bedroom homes in Bendigo were affordable, compared to only 19.7% in March 2023.** Whilst affordability reduced across Victoria, the drop is most noticeable in Bendigo, for example when looking at 3 bedrooms homes again it is a drop of 39.1% in Bendigo from 2019 to 2023, compared to a 4.5% drop across Victoria (PHIDU, 2021c).

5.2 Income

Families that are solely/largely dependent on government for their income have the lowest incomes and fewest resources.

Children from these families are likely to be deprived of items considered essential by Australian standards, including access to medical and dental treatment, a substantial meal once a day, school activities/outings, secure housing, and warm clothes/bedding. The lack of these resources means children from very low-income households are more likely to face lower achievement in education, have worse economic prospects and have poorer health outcomes. In addition, children in welfare dependant families are more likely to get caught in a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and welfare dependency (AIHW, 2022d).

In June 2022 there was a slightly larger percentage of people in Bendigo receiving Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance short-term (for six months or less), compared to Victoria and Australia [Table 1]. However, this changes considerably when looking at long-term receipt of Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance (longer than six months) (PHIDU, 2023). In 2022 there was a considerably higher percentage of people who were long term income support receivers in Bendigo (5.9%) compared to Victoria (4.2%) or Australia (4.9%) [table 2]. As well as a higher percentage of people in Bendigo in receipt of Youth Allowance and Newstart long term, a higher percentage of women in Bendigo are in receipt of the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) compared to Victoria and Australia. In 2022 there were more children in Bendigo from low-income, welfare-dependant families (14.4%) than in Victoria (10.6%) and Australia (12.0%) (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023).

Table 1: People (aged 16 to 64) receiving an unemployment benefit short-term, Bendigo compared to Victoria and Australia, June 2022

People receiving Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance short-term (for six months or less)	June 2022
Bendigo	0.8%
Victoria	0.5%
Australia	0.7%

(Source: Public Health Information Development Unit, 2023)

Table 2: People (aged 16 to 64) receiving an unemployment benefit long-term, Bendigo compared to Victoria and Australia, June 2022

People receiving Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance long-term (longer than six months)	June 2022
Bendigo	5.9%
Victoria	4.2%
Australia	4.9%

(Source: Public Health Information Development Unit, 2023)



OF NOTE

- 16.11% of children aged under 15 live in poverty.
- More women (13.08%) live in poverty than men (11.78%).
- 25.74% of lone parents with dependent children live in poverty.
- 47.09% of people living in public rentals live in poverty. The state average is just over 50%. Public housing should offer a social safety net, providing people with a secure and affordable home and keeping people out of poverty, but this demonstrates this is not the case.
- 26.95% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people live in poverty. This is more than the state average of 24.1%.
- 29.24% of people with a disability live in poverty. This is slightly less than the state average of 31.9% (VCOSS, 2023).

5.3 Advantage/Disadvantage

“In some communities, there are groups of people who have a disproportionate need for welfare support, including successive generations of individual families. This entrenched disadvantage is often associated with significantly worse health and wellbeing...Households experiencing intergenerational disadvantage tend to experience limited mobility across income distribution ranges. They remain in the lowest income levels. This persistent and recurrent poverty, especially in families with long-term parental unemployment, can impact the health and wellbeing of adults and children, and risks entrenching the disadvantage,”

— (VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 2018).

Census data can be used to create Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) which measure the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage and/or advantage. Two SEIFA indexes are the:

- Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD). A high IRSD score means a lower level of disadvantage, and a lower score means a higher level of disadvantage and
- Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD). The IRSAD contains indicators of disadvantage as well as additional indicators of advantage (e.g., professional occupations, high income, higher education levels, high rent, large dwellings)



OF NOTE

● Bendigo sits mid-range between the highest score (least disadvantaged local government area, or LGA, in Victoria) and the lowest score (most disadvantaged LGA in Victoria). Within Bendigo there is considerable variation. Some communities are very advantaged with Rural East having a percentile of 83, Strathfieldsaye is 82 and Maiden Gully is 72. In comparison some of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia are located within Bendigo with North Bendigo/California Gully having a percentile of 8 and Long Gully/West Bendigo/Ironbark being 5. In comparison the Victorian average is 65 and the Australian average is 60 (.id 2022r).

● Overall, Bendigo was listed as one of the 40 most disadvantaged locations in Victoria. Then in identifying communities with deep disadvantage, California Gully/Eaglehawk was listed as one of the 24 Victorian locations with eight or more indicators in the top 5% (Tanton et al, 2021).



6 Healthy

Healthy children and young people have their physical, mental, and emotional health needs met. All their developmental health needs are provided for in a timely way. They receive appropriate health services, including preventative measures to address potential or emerging physical, emotional, and mental health concerns

(WHAT'S IN THE NEST? EXPLORING AUSTRALIA'S WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. ARACY, CANBERRA; 2021).

Children in Bendigo have high rates of attendance at Maternal and Child Health services and high rates of immunisation compared to children statewide (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023). However, children in Bendigo are more likely to be obese at an early age, they are also more likely to be behind developmentally compared to children across the state (PHIDU, 2021a). From 2013 to 2021 the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) indicates that there has been a significant deterioration in the percentage of Bendigo children who are developmentally "On Track" in all domains (AEDC, 2022b).



AEDC Domain results over time for Greater Bendigo (AEDC, 2022b).

healthy

6.1 General Health

General Health 2021	LGA %	Non Metro %	Vic %
Children reported to be in excellent or very good health	83.3	85.2	84.3
Children reported to have allergies	8.1	8.8	9.0
of the children above, those with an allergy action plan at school	30.8	29.9	34.5
Children reported to have been told by a doctor they have asthma	12.0	11.8	9.6
of the children above, those with an asthma action plan at school	59.5	61.6	62.3

Source: Victorian Government, Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS), 2022a.

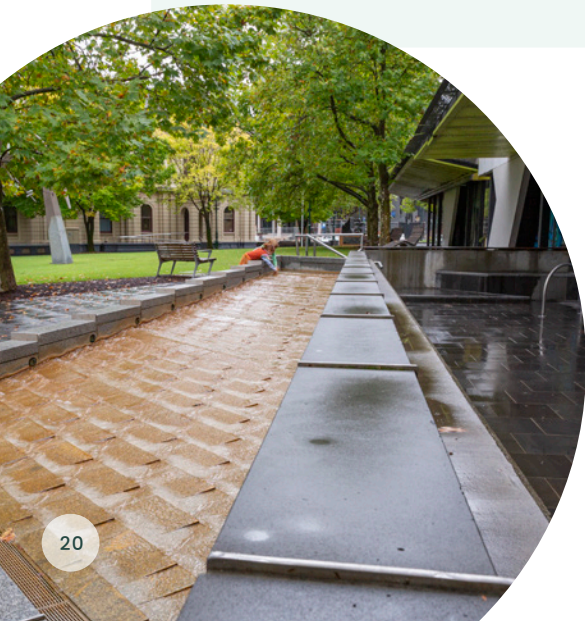


OF NOTE

- More children in Bendigo aged 2 – 17 years of age are obese compared to the Victorian and Australian average, whereas the number of children in Bendigo who are overweight is similar to the Victorian and Australian average (PHIDU, 2021a).

FURTHER

- The most significant chronic condition reported for 0–14-year-olds in Bendigo was Asthma, which at 8.3% is higher than Victoria (6.4%).
- Whilst asthma is still a significant condition reported by 15–24-year-olds, the most significant condition experienced by this population is mental health. 16% of people aged 15–24 in Bendigo report that their doctor or nurse had advised them that they had a chronic mental health condition, compared to Victoria (10.6%).
- Children and young adults in Bendigo also experience more conditions collated in the “Other” category compared to the Victorian average.
- More boys (18.6%) aged 0 to 14 experience asthma compared to girls of the same age (11.7%).
- However, this reverses for young adults, with more young women experiencing asthma (13.5%) compared to young men (11.5%).
- While boys and girls aged 0 to 14 experience similar rates of poor mental health, young women (24.5%) experience poor mental health at a much higher rate than young men (12.7%).
- More boys (11.1%) aged 0 to 14 experience other conditions compared to girls (7.7%).
- However, this reverses for young adults, with more young women experiencing other conditions (8.7%) compared to young men (6.3%) (ABS, 2021a).





6.2 Mother and Baby Health and Wellbeing

“Health and wellbeing during the perinatal period can have lifelong implications for mothers and babies,”

(AIHW, 2023B)

Motherhood for women under the age of 20 can be a positive and maturing experience, they “... are also a vulnerable population group, who may experience lower education and reduced employment”. This may increase the risk of socioeconomic disadvantage for both child and mother. Children of vulnerable young parents are also at risk of becoming teenage parents themselves. Teenage motherhood is also associated with poorer health and wellbeing outcomes (AIHW, 2022b).

The importance of the early years is now well known throughout Australia and the rest of the world. These years are a time when the brain develops and much of its ‘wiring’ is laid down. The experiences and relationships a child has, plus nutrition and health, can effect this enormously. Positive experiences help the brain to develop in healthy ways. Seriously negative experiences such as neglect and abuse, on the other hand, affect brain development in more harmful ways, and contribute to emotional and behavioural problems later in life. The experiences a child has in the early years can either support learning or interfere with it (Likhar, Baghel & Patil, 2022).

OF NOTE

- **Between 2008 and 2012, far more young women in Bendigo gave birth compared to the Victorian average** (Victorian Government, 2022a).
- **During 2017–2019 there was a higher percentage of low birth-weight babies in Bendigo** compared to Victoria and Australia.
- **During the same period, significantly more pregnant women smoked** in Bendigo than Victoria and Australia.
- **More pregnant women in Bendigo attended antenatal care within the first 10 weeks of pregnancy** compared to Victoria and Australia in 2017 – 2019.
- **Fewer babies were breast feed in Bendigo between 2014 and 2015.**
- **More babies ate soft, semi-solid or solid food before the age of 4 months** in Bendigo compared to the Victorian average, but less than the Australian average (PHIDU, 2023).
- **Children reported to have attended a Maternal and Child Health Centre for their 3 ½ year old check- 75.8% compared to 69.9% Victoria** (Victorian Government, 2022a).
- **More young children are immunised in Bendigo**, compared to the Victorian and national average (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023).

healthy

6.3 Oral Health

It is recommended that children should first see a dentist when they are one year old, or when their first tooth comes through, whichever happens first. Then they should have a check-up every 6 to 12 months

(RAISING CHILDREN, 2022).

The Victorian School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ) asks parents/carers if the child has seen a dentist in the previous 12 months.



OF NOTE

- In 2020 the percentage of children in Bendigo having seen a dentist in the previous year was similar to the Victorian average. However, only half of all children had seen a dentist. This rate deteriorated in 2021, more so across Victoria, which is likely a direct impact of COVID lockdowns (Victorian Government, 2022b).
- In examining the rate of hospital admissions for acute dental conditions from 2018 to 2019, significantly fewer children aged 0 to 14 residing in Bendigo had a hospital admission compared to both the Victorian and Australian average (PHIDU, 2021a).



6.4 Mental Health



OF NOTE

- Mental health is one of the three most significant long-term conditions experienced by children and young people in Bendigo. In 2021, 8% of the population aged 0 to 24 in Bendigo reported poor mental health (ABS, 2021a). As the data is self-reported (in the case of children, parent-reported) this may be an undercount as it is estimated that around 13.6% of Australian children aged 4 to 11 are experiencing a mental health disorder (Black Dog Institute, 2021).



6.5 Development

“Early childhood is a time frame from conception to eight years of age. The earliest years of a person’s existence are thought to be the most crucial for his or her development. What happens to the child in the early years is crucial to the child’s life course and developmental trajectory,”

— (LIKHAR, BAGHEL & PATIL, 2022).

From 2013 to 2021 (based on the Australian Early Childhood Development Census [AEDC]) there has been a significant deterioration in the percentage of children “On Track” across all domains. The most significant deterioration is in the Social Competence domain with:

- A deterioration from 92% to 73% in Bendigo, and
- A deterioration from 92% to 77.8% in Victoria (AEDC, 2022a).

Children at high risk of behavioural and emotional problems 2021	LGA	Non Metro	Vic
	%	%	%
Emotional symptoms	9.1	8.7	7.1
Conduct problems	14.6	14.1	11.2
Hyperactivity	11.9	13.0	9.7
Peer problems	10.6	9.4	8.9
Pro social	2.6	2.7	2.9
Total difficulties (score in the 'high risk' range)	9.6	9.8	7.1

Behavioural and emotional wellbeing 2021	LGA	Non Metro	Vic
	%	%	%
Parents concerned about the behaviour of their child	17.4	18.8	15.7

OF NOTE

- There was a decrease of children being on track in the physical health domain, and an increase in the number of children being vulnerable in this domain.
- There was a decrease in the number of children being on track in the social competence domain. Between 2018 and 2021 there was an increase of children being vulnerable in this domain, which may be an outcome of COVID 19 restrictions.
- There was a decrease of children being on track in the emotional maturity domain, and an increase in the number of children being vulnerable in this domain.
- There was a decrease of children being on track in the language and cognitive skills domain, and an increase in the number of children being vulnerable in this domain.
- In communication skills and general knowledge there was a decrease in children being on track, and an increase in children being vulnerable during this time frame. Once again this may be an outcome of COVID 19 restrictions.
- In looking closely at the sub-domains of physical health and wellbeing, the deterioration in fine motor skills amongst children in Bendigo between 2015 and 2021 is the most significant.
- The percentage of children at high risk of developmental or behavioural problems is similar between Bendigo and Victoria,
- Children in Bendigo are more likely to have challenges with negative emotions, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems.
- Prosocial behaviour is similar between Bendigo and the Victorian average (AEDC, 2022a, 2022b).

healthy

The AEDC has two summary indicators to measure vulnerability across all domains and help identify groups of children who are most vulnerable. These two indicators are:

- Developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) (DV1).
- Developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (DV2).



OF NOTE

- **Between 2015 and 2021 the number of children in Bendigo experiencing vulnerability on two or more domains increased (11.8% to 13.3%)** whereas in Victoria and Australia there was little movement in this category. This is similar for DV1.
- **In 2021 the communities where children were most vulnerable for the ≥ 2 domain resided in California Gully, Huntly surrounds and Heathcote.** Across the 6 communities with the greatest need in Bendigo, between 2015 and 2021 needs has generally increased considerably. For example, in California Gully in 2015 14.6% of children were vulnerable on two or more domains. This rose to 36% in 2021.
- **North Bendigo/California Gully has an Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) of 8%** (meaning 93% of communities in Australia are more advantaged), and yet children's vulnerability across ≥ 2 domains increased 21.4% between 2015 and 2021 (AEDC, 2022a).

From 2013 to 2021, across all domains there has been a significant deterioration in the percentage of children "On Track" across all domains. The most significant deterioration is in the Social Competence domain with:

- A deterioration from 92% to 73% in Bendigo, and
- A deterioration from 92% to 77.8% in Victoria (AEDC, 2022b).

FURTHER

There is a strong relationship between education and health outcomes, particularly for the health and wellbeing of children born to poorly educated parents, particularly mothers. "A lack of successful educational experiences of parents may lead to low aspirations for their children; and may be related to parents' attitudes, their ability to manage the complex relationships which surround a child's health and education, and their capacity to control areas of their own lives," (PHIDU, 2021b).

- **In Bendigo more mothers have a low educational attainment compared to both the Victorian and Australian average** (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023).



6.6 Disability

Disability can be complex to define. A comprehensive definition of disability appears in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA). It can be summarised as "an impairment of a physical, sensory, intellectual and cognitive and psychiatric nature". People can have a permanent or temporary disability and it can be present from birth or something that is acquired later in life. The Traditional or medical model defines disability as a health condition and focuses on what they can or can't do. There is a place for this medical model view of disability but to get real change and inclusion we must move to a more social model perspective. This model sees disability as 'the result of the interaction between people living with a disability and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers,'

____ (CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO, 2015, P. 8).



OF NOTE

- **The number of people needing assistance from 2016 to 2021 is growing.** In the 0-to-4-year age group it grew by 21 persons, in the 5 to 9 age group it grew by 155 persons and in the 10 to 19 age group it grew by 363 persons.
- **The growth in the number of people aged 10 to 19 with disabilities is the second largest cohort with a growth in numbers,** second to 20- to 59-year-olds. Of note, the 20-to-59-year age group contains 39 years, whereas the 10-to-19-year cohort only contains 9 years.
- **Young children (age 0 to 4) in Bendigo in 2021 are more likely to have disabilities (1.8%)** compared to the state average (1.3%).
- **Children (aged 5 to 9) in Bendigo in 2021 are more likely to have disabilities (6.3%)** compared to the state average (4.3%).
- **Children and young adults aged 10 to 19 in Bendigo in 2021 are more likely to have disabilities (6.5%)** compared to the state average (3.9%) (.id 2022w).
- **Mental health is one of the three most significant long-term conditions experienced by children and young people in Bendigo.** In 2021 8% of the population aged 0 to 24 in Bendigo reported poor mental health. As the data is self-reported (in the case of children, parent-reported) this may be an undercount as it is estimated that around 13.6% of Australian children aged 4 to 11 are experiencing a mental health disorder (ABS, 2021a).

FURTHER

- **From 2011 to 2021 more people reported they needed assistance with core activities of self-care, communication and mobility due to disability,** with a growth of 1.5% in Bendigo and 1.1% in Victoria (.id, 2022w).

7 Learning

Children and young people learn through a variety of experiences within the classroom, the home, and the community in which they live. Their individual learning needs are addressed to allow them to realise their full learning potential. Families are engaged in their child's learning. Children and young people are supported and encouraged to learn in a wide variety of settings, including formal education. They have opportunities to participate in a breadth of experiences where their learning is valued and supported by their family and in the wider community

(WHAT'S IN THE NEST? EXPLORING AUSTRALIA'S WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. ARACY, CANBERRA; 2021).

Children in Bendigo have high attendance rates for both 3- and 4-year-old Kindergarten and a high rate of attendance at Primary school (Victorian Government, 2022a). However, children in Bendigo have a higher rate absenteeism from grade 3 compared to Victoria and are also behind in reading and numeracy compared to children across Victoria (Victorian Government, 2022a). Parents in Bendigo report higher levels of concern for their children regarding their speech and language development, however, children in Bendigo are more likely to access speech therapist compared to Victoria (Victorian Government, 2022b).



7.1 Language and Literacy



OF NOTE

➤ **More parents in Bendigo report concerns about their child’s speech and/or language development, compared with the Victorian average.**

Of children who do have challenges, more children in Bendigo were seeing a Speech Pathologist in 2020 compared to the Victorian average. This reversed in 2021. There was a decrease of children being on track in the physical health domain, and an increase in the number of children being vulnerable in this domain (Victorian Government, 2022b).

- **Between 2015 and 2021 nationwide there was a deterioration in the number of children on track in all developmental domains, but the deterioration was more significant in Bendigo (5.8%)** compared to Victoria (2.1%) and Australia (2%). Nationwide there was an increase in the number of children at risk and developmentally vulnerable. In terms of vulnerability the change from 2015 to 2021 was more significant for Bendigo (3.2%), compared to Victoria

(0.9%) and Australia (0.8%). Overall Bendigo is performing worse than Victoria and Australia, (AEDC, 2022b).

- **In 2021 the communities where children were most vulnerable in this domain resided in California Gully, Long Gully/ West Bendigo/Ironbark and Kennington.** Kennington is an unusual result as it’s Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) is 47 (mid-range) and there was a significant deterioration between 2018 and 2021, (AEDC, 2022b).
- **In the area of communication skills and general knowledge, again in 2021 Bendigo has more children developmentally vulnerable (9.4%)** compared to Victoria (7.4%) and Australia (8.4%). Between 2015 and 2021 whilst across Victoria and Australia more children were assessed as being on track, in Bendigo the number of children on track decreased from 79.3% in 2015 to 76.7% in 2021, (AEDC, 2022b).



Learning

7.2 Kindergarten

Kindergarten has been shown to develop children’s social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and language abilities, encourage family involvement in learning and help prepare for the transition to school. In the long term it has been linked to improved literacy and numeracy, higher self-esteem, better employment prospects and improved health outcomes.

A child who has attended two years of a quality kindergarten program will, on average, have better cognitive, social and emotional skills when they start school (including better development in

language, pre-reading, early number concepts, non-verbal reasoning, independence, concentration and social skills)(Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2015)



OF NOTE

- **In the 2021 Census, more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Bendigo were attending preschool, primary school and vocational education** when compared with the Victorian and Australian average (ABS, 2021c).
- **In 2019, 96.1% of eligible children were attending Kindergarten compared to 91.8% across Victoria.** This is an increase from 2015 which was 95.8% (ABS, 2021c).

7.3 Primary education

“Literacy and numeracy are fundamental building blocks for children’s educational achievement, their lives outside school and engagement with society, and their future employment prospects. Literacy and numeracy skills have been positively associated with educational attainment in adulthood. Weak literacy and numeracy skills can lead to disadvantage in terms of limited access to desirable employment opportunities or unemployment).

_____ (OECD, 2017, IN AIHW, 2023G).



OF NOTE

- **Bendigo year 3 students were consistently achieving a lower standard than their Victorian peers.**
- **This difference did not close by year 5,** in fact it widened a little. In 2019 the difference was 2.2% for year 3 students, and 2.7% for year 5 students.
- **Preliminary results for year 5 reading indicate that nationally 94.9% of students achieved minimum standards, which was the same result as 2018.** Thus, the Victorian average is above the national average, but children in Bendigo are performing below the Victorian and national averages.
- **by year 5 in 2019 the gap between Bendigo and Victoria had almost closed.** Preliminary results for year 5 numeracy indicate that nationally 95.6% of students achieved minimum standards, which was a similar result to 2018 (95.7%). Thus, children in both Bendigo and Victoria were performing below the national average (Victorian Government, 2022a).

7.4 Secondary education



OF NOTE

- **The gap between students in Bendigo and the Victorian average seen in primary school in achieving national minimum standards in literacy, does not close**, in fact it grows, with the gap between Victorian and Bendigo year 9 students in 2019 being 5.5% (Victorian Government, 2022a).

FURTHER

- In high school the gap between students in Bendigo and the Victorian average being absent from school, also does not close, in fact it grows considerably particularly in year 8, 9 and 10 (Victorian Government, 2022a).
- Less young people in Bendigo aged 16 were engaged in full-time education in 2016 and 2021 compared to both the state and national average (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023).
- Between 2010 and 2014, consistently fewer young people in Bendigo aged 19 years had obtained their year 12 certificate or equivalent compared to the Victorian average (Victorian Government, 2022).
- Outcomes for early school leavers in Bendigo are poorer compared to their peers state-wide. As seen in Table 3, from 2014 early school leavers in Bendigo were more likely to be unemployed 6 months after leaving school compared to the Victorian average (Victorian Government, 2022a).
- Between 2016 and 2021 fewer young people in Bendigo were either learning or earning, when compared with the peers state-wide (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023).
- In 2021, 9.5% of 15- to 24-year-olds in Bendigo were disengaged with employment and education, compared to 7.5% in Victoria. This is a reduction from the 2016 census where 10.9% of 15- to 24-year-olds in Bendigo were disengaged with employment and education, compared to 8.2 % in Victoria (PHIDU, 2022n).
- Fewer Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Bendigo were attending high school compared to the Victorian and Australian average. There were fewer Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Bendigo attending university when compared to the state average (ABS, 2021c).

Table 3: Percentage of early school leavers who are unemployed 6 months on after leaving school, Bendigo compared to Victoria, 2011 to 2015 (Victorian Government, 2022).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Bendigo	16.4%	9.4%	16.5%	23.3%	18.2%
Victoria	16.2%	15.0%	17.4%	16.9%	15.6%

8 Participation

Participating is about children and young people having a voice, being listened to, and taken seriously within their family and community. It means having a say in decisions that impact them. It is being empowered to speak out and express themselves. Participating includes involvement with peers and groups through a variety of activities, including online communities. Participating means being an active member of society

(WHAT'S IN THE NEST? EXPLORING AUSTRALIA'S WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. ARACY, CANBERRA; 2021).

There is limited data available to assess participation. What we do know is children in Bendigo in 2015, felt more disconnected from their school compared to Victoria, and even less connected in secondary school (Victorian Government, 2022a). In 2015, only 53.8% of students in Bendigo felt connected, compared to 62.3% in Victoria. Also, fewer young people in Bendigo aged 16 were engaged in full-time education in 2016 and 2021 compared to both the state and national average (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023).



8.1 Education and Employment

Formal education helps people develop a sense of themselves and others and fosters a creative and innovative culture. Success at school is also associated with economic and social success and offers a route out of disadvantage through better jobs, higher incomes, and enhanced social welfare.

The Census enables an analysis of how many young people were disengaged from either education or employment, and in 2021 9.5% of 15- to 24-year-olds in Bendigo were disengaged with employment and education, compared to 7.5% in Victoria. This is a reduction from the 2016 census where 10.9% of 15- to 24-year-olds in Bendigo were disengaged with employment and education, compared to 8.2% in Victoria (id, 2022o).



OF NOTE

- **Fewer young people in Bendigo aged 16 were engaged in full-time education in 2016 and 2021** compared to both the state and national average (PHIDU, 2021a, 2023).
- **Between 2010 and 2014, consistently fewer young people in Bendigo aged 19 years had obtained their year 12 certificate or equivalent** compared to the Victorian average (Victorian Government, 2022a).
- **In the 2021 Census, more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Bendigo were attending preschool, primary school and vocational education** when compared with the Victorian and Australian average (ABS, 2021c).
- **However, fewer Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Bendigo were attending high school compared to the Victorian and Australian average.** There were fewer Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Bendigo attending university when compared to the state average (although more compared to the national average) (ABS, 2021c).

FURTHER

- **From Prep to year 2, there were fewer school absences in Bendigo compared to the Victorian average,** apart from prep in 2018 and 2019 when there was parity between Bendigo and Victoria.
- **Then, from year 3, this reversed with students in Bendigo having more absences than the Victorian average.** By year 6 in 2019 Bendigo had an average of 19.1 absences compared to the Victorian average of 17.3.
- **In high school the gap between students in Bendigo and the Victorian average being absent from school, also does not close,** in fact it grows considerably particularly in years 8, 9 and 10 (Victorian Government, 2022a).

participation

8.2 Social Connections

People are by nature social creatures. Social connections are important for our survival. Our relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and community members can have a major impact on our health and well-being. When people are socially connected and have stable and supportive relationships, they are more likely to make healthy choices and to have better mental and physical health outcomes. They are also better able to cope with hard times, stress, anxiety, and depression,”

— (CENTRES FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [CDC] 2023A).



OF NOTE

- **From 2011–2014 year 5 and 6 students in Bendigo generally felt more connected with peers compared to the Victorian average**, although in 2015 this reversed with children in Bendigo feeling less connected than their Victoria peers (65.9% vs 69.4%).
- **In year 7–9 the rate of social connectedness significantly drops from year 5–6 levels** for both Bendigo and Victoria.
- **The drop in connectedness in year 7 to 9 is more significant for students in Bendigo.** Not only did students in Bendigo feel less connected from 2011 through to 2015, but they were significantly less connected than their Victorian peers. In 2015 only 45.1% of students in year 7 – 9 in Bendigo felt connected to their peers, compared to 54.6% in Victoria.
- **Children in Bendigo felt more disconnected from their school compared to their state peers.**
- **The gap between Bendigo and Victoria in years 5–6 is not large, and in fact in 2011 and 2013 Bendigo children felt slightly more connected to their school.** However, children in Bendigo felt less connected once in high school.
- **High school students in Bendigo felt less connected than the state average**, and the difference was significant. In 2015 only 53.8% of students in Bendigo felt connected, compared to 62.3% in Victoria (Victorian Government, 2022a).





9 Positive sense of culture and identity

Having a positive sense of identity and culture is central to the wellbeing of all children and young people. This is important for all, regardless of background, but in Australia, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

It encompasses having spiritual needs met, a sense of cultural connectedness, belonging and acceptance at home and in the community – and confidence that their identity, culture, and community is respected and valued. It involves feeling safe and supported in expressing one’s identity, regardless of gender, sexuality, culture, or language (What’s in the Nest? Exploring Australia’s Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People. ARACY, Canberra; 2021).

This domain is significant for the wellbeing of children, currently there is a lack of data available to assess and analyse how children experience a sense of culture and identity.

10 Data

This report summarises and analyses data collected by Communities for Children, August 2023.

11 References

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