



## UNICEF Australia Pre-Budget Submission 2021-22 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2021-22 Budget will be delivered amid a global pandemic that has caused huge economic and social disruption to Australian children and families. Although children have been insulated from the worst physical effects of COVID-19, the pandemic has indirectly affected their mental health and wellbeing. The pandemic follows on from other natural disasters (such as drought and bushfires) that have significantly impacted children - compounding many of the effects of earlier disasters<sup>1</sup>.

The unprecedented economic and social support provided by the Australian Government has saved lives and protected livelihoods. The JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments have prevented thousands of families and children falling into poverty. However, whilst economic data is looking increasingly positive and recovery is underway, the International Monetary Fund cautions “exceptional uncertainty” remains around economic projections and recommends economic support should not be prematurely withdrawn<sup>2</sup>.

While many children and young people in Australia enjoy a good quality of life, prior to the pandemic, too many children lived in poverty and inequality between different groups of children was growing<sup>3</sup>. We know that the pandemic has deepened existing inequalities and widened disadvantage<sup>4</sup>.

UNICEF’s global report *Supporting Families and Children Beyond COVID-19: Social Protection in High Income Countries* revealed Australia to be a world leader in providing support packages designed for families and children. However, with the unwinding of some of those support packages, we risk losing the significant investment already made in bringing Australian families out of poverty.

Whilst Australia had higher than average social spending on families and children, the overwhelming majority of fiscal support flowed to the private sector<sup>5</sup>. Global evidence demonstrates that the most effective way to mitigate the worst impacts of these multiple crises on children and families is to increase social spending<sup>6</sup>. Strengthening social protection systems now has the potential to reduce significant expenditure in more intensive intervention down the line and also builds resilience and insulates against future crises.

In the same way that the Australian Government has used evidence to inform its response to the pandemic, UNICEF Australia (UA) encourages the Government to apply the same rigorous dedication to data and evidence to inform its investments in children and recovery. Investments in children not only leads to good outcomes for them but also helps drive economic recovery. There is a risk that if social spending reduces, not only will children’s health, education and wellbeing suffer but the country’s economic recovery may inadvertently stall.

Now is the time for the Australian Government to build upon its successes and maintain critical support for children and families so that it can ensure children not only survive these multiple crises but go on to thrive through the recovery and lead healthy, productive and fulfilling lives. UA is encouraging the Australian Government to:

- Invest in children throughout the lifecycle – from the early years through to adolescence

- Make targeted and tailored investments towards some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Australia and overseas
- Strengthen support systems – the most meaningful way to achieve this in the short term is to ensure children, child poverty, child well-being and equality are built into the heart of COVID-19 recovery responses

This submission is informed by the Australian Children and Young People's Knowledge Acceleration Hub, a new initiative by ARACY and UNICEF Australia, to ensure that the impacts of COVID-19 on children in Australia are fully understood and communicated to decision-makers at all levels<sup>7</sup>. It draws upon data from Australia and international comparators, the latest research and analysis of COVID-19 and its impacts on children and families and related research with applicable lessons for the known and anticipated impacts of COVID-19 and their potential mitigation.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Support economic recovery and strengthen systems

- ✓ Permanently raise Job Seeker, Youth Allowance and other benefits
- ✓ Increase access to affordable, high quality early education and care (ECEC)
- ✓ Prioritise additional employment support and programs targeted at young people to improve opportunities for secure and sustainable employment
- ✓ Build on improved funding and supports for children and their parents impacted by family violence
- ✓ Enhance the child protection system to develop preventative approaches and better links with related systems
- ✓ Support the mental health and wellbeing of new parents

### Protect against deepening and widening inequalities

- ✓ Reduce the digital divide through greater investment in access to technology for children and young people, and the necessary infrastructure to support technology
- ✓ Build on investment in a learning recovery package
- ✓ Develop a National Housing Strategy to ensure safe, affordable housing of mixed tenure
- ✓ Respect cultural leadership and strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) to improve wellbeing of children and families
- ✓ Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

### Promote resilience and mental wellbeing

- ✓ Update the National School Reform Agreement to include student wellbeing as an outcome for the education system
- ✓ Fund a model of integrated child and family care that brings together a multidisciplinary team including child and youth psychiatrists, paediatricians, psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, and social workers
- ✓ Routinely offer evidence-based parenting programs to parents and carers at key developmental milestones for their child

### Foster citizenship and fight disempowerment and disengagement

- ✓ Ensure information is presented and made widely available in formats appropriate to children and young people, for example through children's only news conferences on issues of importance to children
- ✓ Engage young people more meaningfully in all formal political processes and design participation mechanisms that are suited to young people
- ✓ Improve the collection and reporting of racially motivated incidents and attacks in Australia

## Maintain increased investment in foreign aid and development with a focus on poverty alleviation and supporting children and families

- ✓ Accelerate global efforts to end the pandemic for all by continuing to demonstrate global Leadership on ACT A and ensuring vaccine equity; and further global contributions to vaccine procurement as required.
- ✓ Invest in tackling the secondary impacts of COVID 19 and protect development gains by addressing secondary health impacts and strengthening health systems; and leading an inclusive economic recovery in our region and protecting those without safety nets.
- ✓ Maintain or increase UNICEF's flexible, Regular Resource funding in the 2021-22 Federal Budget.
- ✓ Invest in humanitarian crises facing a double or triple disaster due to COVID 19 by providing Australia's fair share of global humanitarian funding and provide multiyear funding to protected crisis in the Middle East.
- ✓ Rebuild the Australian Government's standing as a leading bilateral donor to the Global Partnership for Education, committing to a replenishment of \$70m per year for the next five years (in total \$350m from 2021-2025).

## INVESTMENTS IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

### Protection and Safety: Ensuring every child thrives and survives and is protected from violence

COVID-19 has resulted in substantial increases to the stress experienced by some families. The pandemic has resulted in positive family dynamics for some, while for others they have worsened. For example, the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that during the pandemic, the majority of parents spent more time helping with children's learning and a substantial proportion also reported increased levels of other activities with children<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, research has also indicated some parents have felt isolated and unsupported throughout the pandemic<sup>9</sup>.

Even more concerning is the upsurge in family violence during the pandemic, declared as a "shadow pandemic" by the United Nations. This has been demonstrated through several research studies, for example by the Australian Institute of Criminology<sup>10</sup> and Monash University<sup>11</sup>. Research conducted prior to the pandemic, from the perspective of children and young people themselves, highlights the negative impacts of family violence people and the coping mechanisms used<sup>12</sup>.

Additional funding, for example by the NSW<sup>13</sup> and Victorian<sup>14</sup> governments, towards improving domestic violence support services will go a long way to supporting those families affected. These efforts need to be sustained, alongside improvements to the child protection system to support children and young people affected by family violence.

Of particular concern are children affected by domestic and family violence who do not meet criteria for a child protection response. The ANROW's project PATHways and Research In Collaborative Inter-Agency Practice (the PATRICIA Project) identified that children who experience domestic and family violence but do not screen in for child protection intervention currently miss out on critical services<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, the NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team Report 2017-2019 noted that in lieu of a child protection intervention, children who experience domestic and family violence typically received no support or counselling in response to their trauma as no single agency presently coordinates this.<sup>16</sup>

**Recommendation 1:** Enhance the child protection system to develop preventative approaches to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, by taking a holistic approach to wellbeing and implementing a stronger prevention focus in the successor plan to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

**Recommendation 2:** Build on improved funding and supports for children and their parents impacted by family violence, and specifically consider the response to children who are affected by domestic and family violence but do not meet child protection criteria or receive a child protection service.

**Recommendation 3:** Support the mental health and wellbeing of new parents to ensure children are well supported from the early years, as recommended by the Productivity Commission in their Inquiry Report into Mental Health, June 2020<sup>17</sup>.

### Health: Ensuring every child thrives and survives and lives in a clean and safe environment

The health of children and young people is essential to the ongoing prosperity and cohesion of Australian society as this determines and impacts the future social and economic position and connectedness of our community.

For the most part, evidence suggests that children have been insulated from the worst direct physical effects of the COVID-19 virus. While they can contract and transmit the virus, infection generally has fewer and weaker physical effects<sup>18</sup>. There is some evidence of a potential link between infection and heart and/or multi-system inflammation for a minority of children<sup>19</sup>.

For children, then, the most significant health effects of the pandemic have been indirect. Fear for family members, the effects of lockdowns, and the general impacts of lost income, parental stress, and family upheaval are expected to be the greatest pandemic burden on children's health.

There is compelling evidence<sup>20, 21</sup> that shows that poor mental health can start early in a child's life which can strongly affect long term individual health outcomes. As such all Australian governments should be praised for the development of strategies such as the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People<sup>22</sup>.

However, it is critical to note that there needs to be a strategic focus on prevention points across the life cycle beyond intervention junctures. The capacity of the mental health system in Australia remains strained and geographically inequitable<sup>23</sup>. Governments should be commended for their increased investment in child and youth mental health following the pandemic, but the system remains oversubscribed and underfunded.

The resilience of children and young people was demonstrated by research cited in our July digest<sup>24</sup>, which found positive trends in mental health since the relaxation of physical distance measures (prior to Melbourne's second lockdown). For example, the YouthInsight study in May suggested that there had been an increase in positive feelings, and a decrease in negative ones compared to earlier surveys<sup>25</sup>. This was supported by longitudinal research by the ANU which highlighted that there had been improvements to youth mental health between April and May<sup>26</sup>. However, despite recent improvements, rates of distress are still substantially higher than pre-COVID-19 levels<sup>27</sup>.

For example, UNICEF Australia found that the pandemic added another layer of stress and anxiety that contributed to a lack of confidence in the support services outside of the family<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, efforts to enhance the health and wellbeing of children and young people need to be cohesive and coordinated and should entail both a universally proportionate and life course approaches that work to reduce health risks and inequalities at the point at which they are most likely to occur<sup>29</sup>.

The draft National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy recommends the use of a model of integrated child and family care, which the authors suggest could address multiple objectives across the Strategy at individual, service, and system levels<sup>30</sup>.

The integrated model brings together a multidisciplinary team including child and youth psychiatrists, paediatricians, psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, and social workers. All of these disciplines can play a role in the assessment and treatment of a child mental illness.

Having the model deployed at multiple locations around the country would create a network of skilled service providers. By offering services via a combination of face-to-face, phone and video, the model would have the capability to support a large swathe of communities.

Children and families could be referred by a GP or another primary care clinician for assessment and, if necessary, treatment. Consistent with another recommendation of the Strategy, staff could also identify parents and carers who are struggling with their own mental health and connect them with support.

**Policy recommendation 1:** Include responsibility for wellbeing as a core part of the purpose and role of schools by updating the National School Reform Agreement to include student wellbeing as an outcome for the education system, as recommended by the Productivity Commission in their Inquiry Report into Mental Health, June 2020

**Policy recommendation 2:** Fund a model of integrated child and family care that brings together a multidisciplinary team including child and youth psychiatrists, paediatricians, psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, and social workers.

**Policy recommendation 3:** Routinely offer evidence-based parenting programs to parents and carers at key developmental milestones for their child, as recommended in the draft National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (December 2020)

### **Material Basics: Ensuring every child thrives and survives and every child has a fair chance in life**

As a result of COVID-19, more families are experiencing stress across different domains, in most cases driven by financial insecurity that then leads to other major problems. This is demonstrated in ARACY's *To Have and To Have Not* report<sup>31</sup> which highlights that parental unemployment negatively impacts child wellbeing in all Nest dimensions through areas such as relationships with friends, food and home security and (a lack of) participation in extracurricular activities. Many families are coping with this stress for the first time.

#### *Poverty*

The UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti report *Supporting Families and Children Beyond COVID-19: Social Protection in High Income Countries* revealed Australia to be a world leader in providing support packages designed for families and children. However, with the unwinding of some of those support packages, we risk losing the significant investment already made in bringing Australian families out of poverty.

Strengthening the social protection systems now has the potential to not only reduce significant expenditure in more intensive intervention down the line, but also to build resilience and insulate against future crises. The most meaningful way to strengthen systems in the short term is to ensure that children, child poverty, child well-being and equality are built into the heart of COVID-19 recovery responses.

Modelling commissioned by the Australia Institute<sup>32</sup> provides a distressing outlook on the projections of the rate of unemployment in 2021. The anticipated increase to around 10 percent from 7.4 percent in June 2020<sup>33</sup> will push low-income families into poverty, with long-lasting impact on their children.

Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds observes that the links between family poverty and child wellbeing has been missing from the national conversation. "We know that the financial circumstances of a family have an impact on the wellbeing of children. The stress experienced by parents because of their economic insecurity and trying to put food on the table every day ... that affects the wellbeing of children."<sup>34</sup>

Deloitte Access Economics was commissioned by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) to model the impact of raising the rate of Newstart and other allowances by \$75 per week. Their analysis showed that by 2020-21, the policy change would result in \$3.3 billion worth of extra spending by consumers, with 12,000 new jobs added.

The benefits of the policy change would overwhelmingly flow to low-income households. The lowest income quintile would receive twenty-eight times the relative boost to its disposable incomes compared to the highest income quintile, with the biggest relative benefit felt in regional Australia. This

would go a long way to mitigating current disparities and increasing the prospects of our most vulnerable children.

### *Youth unemployment*

Young people, particularly young women, have been disproportionately affected by job losses and unemployment resulting from COVID-19, as noted in our [June](#) and [October](#) digests. The Commonwealth Government recognised this in the October 2020 Budget with the introduction of JobMaker<sup>35</sup>, a hiring credit program designed to boost employment for young people with experience of unemployment. JobMaker is a strong start, but more needs to be done to ensure this investment is not lost past the initial subsidy period of 12 months.

Youth unemployment was a national concern before the pandemic, which has now been exacerbated, and evidence from the Global Financial Crisis and other crises indicates that beginning a career in these circumstances can cause lifetime “economic scarring” for young people<sup>36</sup>.

The Mitchell Institute argues in its paper *Averting an Escalating Labour Market Crisis for Young People in Australia: A Proposed National Job Cadet Program (2020)*<sup>37</sup> that for a similar level of wage subsidy as already provided by the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy, a subsidised cadetship program would offer additional employment opportunities to young workers who risk long term economic scarring at the beginning of their careers<sup>38</sup>. The OECD estimates the cost to the Australian economy of young people not being in education, training or employment is about 1% of GDP, or about A\$40,000 per person per year<sup>39</sup>.

### *Social housing*

Leading researchers and practitioners in Australia and overseas have emphasized that access to safe, stable and adequate housing is a fundamental determinant of the wellbeing of children as it acts as a safe base from which children can engage in social interactions, enhance self-esteem and maintain self-identity<sup>40</sup>. Despite access to safe and stable housing being codified in a number of international human treaties to which Australia is a signatory, the stark reality is that many children and young people still experience housing stress and homelessness.

The Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) estimates that Commonwealth funding of \$7.7b over 4 years, backed by state/ territory contributions, would enable not-for-profit community housing organisations to deliver 30,000 social housing units and support 14,000-18,000 jobs per year over the four years (Community Housing Industry Association, 2020).

**Policy recommendation 1:** Increase assistance to low-income families by permanently raising JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and other welfare payments for families

**Policy recommendation 2:** Prioritise employment programs targeted at young people to improve their employment prospects when the economy recovers, focusing on high quality and sustainable employment that counters the negative effects of ‘the gig economy’, insecure work and underemployment

**Policy recommendation 3:** Develop a National Housing Strategy that explores the ‘housing need model’ to meet Australia’s identified shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable homes, as recommended by the Australia Together alliance<sup>41</sup>

- Develop a new funding agreement for Remote Indigenous Housing at levels at least commensurate with previously negotiated agreements
- Support the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP)

### **Education: Ensuring every child learns**

#### *Educational opportunity*

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and deepened existing inequalities for students (see [June](#), [July](#), and [November](#) digests). Students living in greater levels of disadvantage are more likely to have fewer learning supports at home and reduced access to technology, making learning challenging

during lockdown periods<sup>42,43,44</sup>. These periods of reduced access to school could have significant impacts on lifelong learning if students do not receive greater levels of supports, especially for those living in greater levels of disadvantage<sup>45</sup>.

Australia's longstanding "digital divide" was thrown into relief, with students in remote and rural areas or from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to have appropriate devices or adequate data to engage in learning. A report commissioned by the Australian Education Union noted that poverty and family instability are key factors. Among families in the bottom third of incomes, 9 per cent of public school students had no home internet, compared to 1% in the highest third. Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 21% have no access at home, rising to 45% in the Northern Territory<sup>46</sup>.

To lessen the impact for long-term educational outcomes, significant investment needs to be made to ensure that students have the opportunity to "catch up" on lost schooling, especially for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Without substantial intervention, inequalities that were already present prior to the pandemic will continue to widen, reducing the opportunities children and young people have to reach their potential.

State and Territory governments have taken this advice on board, with several jurisdictions investing in catch-up support for children's education. For example, the Victorian<sup>47</sup> and NSW<sup>48</sup> governments have both announced multi-million dollar packages of tutors and learning support to be deployed across schools in 2021 to ensure no student is left behind.

The Grattan Institute modelled the economic benefit of their recommendations for a catch-up package in the report *COVID catch-up: helping disadvantaged students close the equity gap*<sup>49</sup>. Based on an investment of \$1.25 billion, the projected economic benefits of the recommended reform package vastly outweigh the costs; delivering an estimated \$3.5 billion in extra future earnings for disadvantaged students.

#### [Access to early education and care](#)

Early in the pandemic period, the Australian Government introduced the Early Education and Care Relief Package, to provide relief for Australian families with young children and to better support the early education sector during the pandemic. By providing free childcare for eligible families, the policy ensured that parents could afford to continue sending children to early education and care (ECEC) centres, maintain their employment, and prevented ECEC closures<sup>50</sup>. Most importantly, continued access to early childhood education and care provided children in the early years with a consistency in routine and an opportunity for learning and development opportunities.

The government should be highly commended for putting forward this policy response to support families doing it tough, ECEC centres, and the wider economy. However, its suspension in July, as well as the fact that there was very little in the 2020-21 Budget to support families in accessing ECEC<sup>51</sup>, will not only impact children's access to learning, but will also have wider implications for economic growth, workforce participation and gender equality.

National surveys by The Parenthood, Goodstart Early Learning and KU released prior to the end of free ECEC in July 2020 indicated that almost half of all families accessing ECEC have lost work or income since COVID19. Roughly a third of those families indicated that with the return of pre-COVID19 fees they would either reduce the days their children attend services or remove them altogether. There is limited data currently available on how many families have actually reduced their use of ECEC, although the Australian Institute of Family Studies reported in their *Families in Australia Survey: Life during COVID-19 Report no. 1: Early findings* that during COVID-19, 64% of families used parent-only care compared to 30% prior to COVID-19<sup>52</sup>.

Economic modelling by KPMG<sup>53</sup> has estimated that the annual benefit to gross domestic product (GDP) from increasing the federal government childcare subsidy (CCS) to a near fully funded 95 percent of the current hourly rate cap could exceed the additional CCS expenditure (net of additional income tax receipts) by almost 40 percent. The additional CCS expenditure (net of additional income

tax receipts) is estimated to be \$5.4 billion, and the annual GDP benefit is estimated at up to \$7.5 billion.

**Recommendation 1:** Significant investment in a learning recovery package as described and recommended by the Grattan Institute<sup>54</sup>:

- Small group tuition for struggling students (also supports tutors with employment)
- Investment in successful literacy and numeracy programs

**Recommendation 2:** Reduce the digital divide through greater investment in access to technology for children and young people

**Recommendation 3:** Increase access to affordable, high quality early education, by:

- Increasing affordability and access to early learning by lifting the taper rate for low income households from 85% to 95% and removing the activity test for families
- Providing free early learning to families with a healthcare card
- Simplifying access to Additional Child Care Subsidy benefits for children at risk
- Continuing the provision of two days of free preschool/kindergarten for children aged four
- Transitioning to provision of two days of free preschool/kindergarten for children aged three

### **Participation: ensuring every child has a fair chance in life**

The pandemic has highlighted the lack of agency children and young people feel in having a say on the things that matter to them (see [June](#), [September](#) and [October](#) digests). For example, UNICEF Australia found that early in the pandemic, 3 in 4 young people felt that children and young people had not been considered as equal stakeholders in the pandemic response<sup>55</sup>. These sentiments may result in children and young people disengaging from both the media, which tends to misrepresent and stereotype young people<sup>56</sup>, and political discourse.

More than half the young people surveyed for the UNICEF Australia *Living in Limbo* report in April 2020 felt there had not been enough effort put into communicating effectively with children and young people, although this improved slightly from 51% in April to 46% by the second survey in July/August 2020. Worryingly, 43% felt confused due to the volume of conflicting information. However, trust in parents, teachers and Chief Medical Officers and Health officials at the federal and state levels was high. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has also sought to directly address the concerns and questions of children through segments on children's news program *Behind the News* and podcast *Squiz Kids*.

The community, as well as governments, have a responsibility to ensure that children and young people are included in decision-making processes, particularly on issues that affect them. Governments throughout Australia should be commended for strategies to engage young people in policy decisions, such as the National Youth Policy Framework<sup>57</sup>.

However, we need a more sustained and consistent approach to ensure that children and young people's voices are heard. Given that young people have a diverse set of experiences, they have highly valuable contributions to make in their communities. Taking these views into consideration will have benefits for both children and young people themselves, and the general community.

**Recommendation 1:** Continue to conduct children's only news conferences, as have taken place in New Zealand and Denmark, on issues of importance to children

**Recommendation 2:** Engage young people more meaningfully in all formal political processes and design mechanisms for consultation and participation that are suited to young people

### **Fostering a positive sense of culture and identity: ensuring every child has a fair chance in life**

The response by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership to COVID-19 was rapid, comprehensive and effective<sup>58</sup>. However, COVID-19 again laid bare existing inequalities that have been widened and deepened by the effects of the pandemic. To prevent widening disparities, achieve the aims of the Closing the Gap strategy, and improve outcomes for our First Nations children and

families, there needs to be both increased support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and effective leadership on ensuring First Nations voices are heard and respected.

Sustained efforts to increase the capacity of Aboriginal-controlled organisations will ensure that **more** Indigenous families can access the benefits of services such as high quality, affordable early education and care. The explicit valuing of Aboriginal culture, heritage and expertise, for example through new roles such as a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, will protect First Nations children from increased disparities due to COVID in the short term, and over the long term promote better community cohesion and support reconciliation<sup>59</sup>.

Culturally adapted and owned support systems have proven before and during the pandemic that they are key to ensuring positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families. For example, a report by SNAICC highlights the evidence that loss of cultural connection and a positive sense of self-identity are contributing factors to high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth suicide along with the intergenerational trauma experienced<sup>60</sup>, as noted in the [October](#) and [November](#) digests. Supporting Aboriginal-controlled organisations to increase their capacity will in turn enable better and more culturally appropriate and safe support to children and families.

Many children and young people from multicultural backgrounds experienced a rise in racist behaviour and racist attacks because of the pandemic. Early on, Australians of Asian background experienced a significant increase in racial attacks, both verbal and physical, during the pandemic. The ABC asked readers to share their personal experiences of racism during the coronavirus pandemic and received hundreds of submissions detailing racially-charged incidents occurring throughout the lockdown period<sup>61</sup>. The Australian Human Rights Commission reported more complaints under the Racial Discrimination Act in February 2020 than at any time over the previous 12 months<sup>62</sup>.

Later research by the Australian National University and (ANU) and Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) examined experiences of racism during the COVID-19 pandemic and impacts on the lives of Australian young people aged 16-25<sup>63</sup>. It found that young people in Victoria from multicultural backgrounds had experienced the effects of a "racism pandemic" and feared returning to public life for fear of racial discrimination. Of the 376 young people surveyed, 85% reported at least one direct experience of racial discrimination, with 32% having more than six experiences. The direct experiences included name calling, hitting, being excluded from activities, being threatened, experiencing poor service and unfair treatment.

**Recommendation 1:** Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as recommended by SNAICC and the Family Matters campaign<sup>64</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** Respect cultural leadership and strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) to improve wellbeing of children and families as recommended by the Australia Together campaign<sup>65</sup>

- Provide a minimum entitlement of 30 hours of 95% subsidised care per week for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as an ongoing measure to Close the Gap in ECEC attendance and Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) outcomes
- Provide regional intermediary support services to build capacity on community-controlled early childhood services

**Policy recommendation 3:** Improve the collection and reporting of racially motivated incidents and attacks in Australia.

**[Maintaining increased investment in foreign aid and development: a focus on poverty alleviation and supporting children and families](#)**

UNICEF Australia a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and we endorse their 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission.

UNICEF values DFAT's active engagement, under the DFAT-UNICEF Strategic Partnership Framework (2015-2021), around shared priorities such as gender equality, disability inclusion, humanitarian assistance and accountability to affected populations.

Under the Framework, DFAT makes its commitment to providing AUD 21 million per year to UNICEF Regular Resources (RR). "RR" is funding without restrictions, to be used flexibly for children where and when the need is greatest. With the support of RR, UNICEF can: pioneer new ideas for children; work across the entire childhood from birth through adolescence; scale up proven solutions globally; prepare and respond rapidly in emergencies and to rebuild thereafter; and most importantly given our sustained presence across 190 countries around the world, achieve the greatest impact for children.

UNICEF Australia welcomes the Australian Government's strong commitment to supporting our neighbours in the region respond to the health and economic crises caused by COVID-19. The transformation of the development program through Partnerships for Recovery; the support for the COVAX Facility; the commitment of \$500m over three years to support the introduction of a vaccine against COVID-19 in the Pacific and Southeast Asia and the establishment of a COVID-19 Recovery Fund will make a huge difference to helping address the economic and social costs of the pandemic and underpin our region's stability and economic recovery.

UNICEF is a leading agency in the procurement and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine globally, including low- and middle-income countries. UNICEF Australia welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to ensuring equitable access to the vaccine for Pacific and Southeast Asian countries.

UNICEF Australia appreciates DFAT support to UNICEF, particularly the AUD 10.5 million provided to countries in the region to assist them in COVID-19 response activities, such as risk communications, procurement of personal protective equipment, training of frontline health workers, and cash transfers, as well as other essential supplies and technical assistance. This support has been invaluable in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in communities across the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia.

Almost 95 per cent of RR to UNICEF goes to UNICEF Country Offices for Direct Programme Assistance. RR was invaluable at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in addressing immediate needs in the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste among others. Funding was used to swiftly purchase much needed supplies, scale up risk communication campaigns and to advise and support governments on best global practices to reduce transmissions.

Within these efforts, it is imperative that we do not let one health crisis come at the expense of another. Vaccination, nutrition and health services in the region and beyond are under enormous strain. UNICEF is urging all governments to ensure the urgency of implementation of COVID-19 vaccines and other tools does not divert focus and resources from essential health services for mothers and children. UNICEF continues to call for the protection and enhancement of resources which ensure the continuity and revitalisation of routine vaccination and other essential health programs to save children's lives and enable children to flourish beyond the pandemic.

Furthermore, education, child protection and social protection services and systems have all come under considerable pressure during the pandemic. Continued investment in global partnerships provides one mechanism to deliver a strategic, coordinated approach to supporting these systems which are so essential to social and economic recovery. For example, the Global Partnership for Education was able to quickly reallocate funding to COVID-19 education emergency responses around the world, ensuring that countries in our region and beyond were able to pivot to remote learning and ensure timely and safe return to school as appropriate, minimising lost schooling time for students of all ages.

As UNICEF and DFAT embark on a review of the Strategic Partnership Framework and plan for the next iteration, UNICEF Australia would like to emphasise how valuable and essential DFAT's contributions to UNICEF Regular Resources are to children in the region and to recommend that RR levels be maintained at AUD 21 million or increased from 2022 onward.

## Humanitarian Funding

In the launch of its global Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal in December 2020, UNICEF identified US\$410 million in global resource needs in 2021 to support preparedness and delivery across the ACT-A pillars, including a buffer of US\$142 million to support vaccine delivery in humanitarian settings to ensure no vulnerable population is left behind. Further, UNICEF estimates a funding gap of US\$133 million to cover in-country vaccine logistics and the required cold-chain equipment for the poorest 92 countries<sup>66</sup>.

Whilst engaging fully in the ACT-A partnership, and supporting its critical objectives, UNICEF strongly urges the Australian Government to maintain and increase support in other programme areas and humanitarian support. Ultimately, the world cannot solve one problem – COVID-19 – while neglecting the other challenges we face. In 2021, UNICEF's total humanitarian funding requirement is US\$6.4 billion – our largest appeal ever – to assist more than three hundred million vulnerable children and their families and caregivers around the world.

**Recommendation 1:** Accelerate global efforts to end the pandemic for all by continuing to demonstrate global Leadership on ACT A and ensuring vaccine equity; and further global contributions to vaccine procurement as required.

**Recommendation 2:** Invest in tackling the secondary impacts of COVID 19 and protect development gains by addressing secondary health impacts and strengthening health systems; and leading an inclusive economic recovery in our region and protecting those without safety nets.

**Recommendation 3:** Maintain or increase UNICEF's flexible, Regular Resource funding in the 2021-22 Federal Budget.

**Recommendation 4:** Invest in humanitarian crises facing a double or triple disaster due to COVID 19 by providing Australia's fair share of global humanitarian funding and provide multiyear funding to protected crisis in the Middle East.

**Recommendation 6:** Rebuild the Australian Government's standing as a leading bilateral donor to the Global Partnership for Education, committing to a replenishment of \$70m per year for the next five years (in total \$350m from 2021-2025).

## ABOUT UNICEF

UNICEF is a multilateral organisation that works in over 190 countries to promote and protect the rights of children. UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, clean water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and HIV. UNICEF is unique among world organisations for our rights based and participatory approach to working with children and young people. UNICEF Australia is a national committee of UNICEF which advocates for the rights of all children and works to improve public and government support for child rights and international development.

## UNICEF FOCAL POINT

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