



Children

City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

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

Who lives in our municipality?

As of 2021:

- Children aged 0 to 11 years make up 9.3 per cent of the resident population of Port Phillip, a slight decrease from 10 per cent in 2016.
- Almost two thirds of children in Port Phillip live in households with incomes in the highest quartile for Victoria, however, almost eight per cent (659 children aged 0 to 11 years old) live in households with incomes in the lowest quartile. Just less than 90 per cent were in households with an internet connection, slightly below the Greater Melbourne average.
- Approximately 11 per cent of children aged 0 to 11 live in one-parent households. Compared with Greater Melbourne, a much higher proportion of children aged 0 to 11 are living in dwellings that are either fully owned or privately rented. However, this group is less likely to be living in a home under a mortgage compared to Greater Melbourne. This group is much more likely to be living in medium or high-density housing compared to their Greater Melbourne counterparts.
7.5 per cent of children aged 0 to 4 years in Port Phillip were born overseas, compared to 5.4 per cent for Greater Melbourne. India (1.3 per cent of all birthplaces), the United Kingdom (1.2 per cent) and the United States of America (1 per cent) were the most common overseas birthplaces respectively.
- 11.9 per cent of children aged 5 to 11 years were born overseas, compared to 12.6 per cent for Greater Melbourne. The United Kingdom (1.9 per cent of all birthplaces), India (1.4 per cent) and the United States of America (1.4 per cent) were the most common overseas birthplaces respectively (.id, 2023).

Future forecasts:



- While the number of children in Port Phillip is forecast to grow steadily, with current predictions expecting an extra 4,429 by 2041, children will represent a relatively smaller proportion of the population in the future. Current forecasts only predict a 0.02 increase in birth rates in Port Phillip between 2021 and 2041 (.id, 2023).

How are children in our municipality tracking?

Data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) indicates that:

- 14.6 per cent of children were recorded as developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains in the first of year of school in 2021, a slight increase from 13.4 per cent in 2018. This is lower than the than the Victorian average of 19.9 per cent. The domains were physical, social, emotional, language and communication. 5.3 per cent were recorded as particularly developmentally vulnerable children (children vulnerable on two or more domains) in 2021, a slight decrease from 5.9 per cent in 2018. This is lower than the Victorian average of 10.2 per cent (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

As of 2020, more than 87 per cent of eligible children participate in one or more “Key Age and Stage Visits” at Council’s maternal and child health services. This is higher than the Victorian average.

Data from the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS) indicates that:

- The proportions of infants fully breastfed at three and six months of age are higher than the Victorian average.
- As of 2019, the rate of participation in a kindergarten program is 83 per cent, lower than the Victorian average of 91.8 per cent.
- Childhood immunisation rates for children 12 to 15 months are consistent with the Victorian average, however there is a growing gap as children get older with older Port Phillip children less likely to be vaccinated than the Victorian average (Victorian Government, 2023).

How do outcomes vary for different population groups?

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

- Australian Early Development Census data indicates that as of 2021, developmental outcomes for children are not equally distributed across the municipality, with rates of children experiencing one or more developmental vulnerabilities in their first year of school varying across suburbs. For example, these rates are much higher in South Melbourne (25.8 per cent), Albert Park (19 per cent) and Port Melbourne (16.3 per cent), than in Balaclava/Ripponlea (6.7 per cent), Middle Park (9.3 per cent) and St Kilda (10.8 per cent) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).



- Children exposed to **family violence** are more likely to have a range of health, developmental and social problems, both during childhood and later in life (Ayre, On, Webster, Gourley, & Moon, 2016). 733,900 women in Australia who have experienced violence by a previous partner had children in their care during the violence and for 77.5 per cent of these women, the children witnessed the violence (Cox, 2016).
- **Families from diverse cultural backgrounds** who have arrived in Australia on skilled work visas are unable to access federal government subsidies to attend early education and care services.
- **Indigenous children** are at a higher risk of developmental or behavioural problems. Among urban communities, 32 per cent of Indigenous children are at high risk, 28 per cent at moderate and 40 per cent at low/no risk of poor developmental outcomes (Chando, et al., 2020). More support for Indigenous community-driven programs to improve detection and facilitate support for early intervention is needed.

Current impacts on children?

While traditional education and care supports for children have now been reinstated with the full opening of schools and childcare centres post COVID-19 restrictions, the ongoing impacts of their previous closures and restrictions are now being felt. While research into this is developing and ongoing, anecdotal evidence suggests that some children may have fallen behind academically due to COVID-19 disruptions. These children have to 'play catch up' to achieve the standards that is expected of them at their grade levels.

Additionally, waitlists for childcare services are extensive. This can have potentially negative impacts if parents or guardians are unable to provide sufficient care during business hours due to their work commitments. Or, it results in parents or guardians not being able to work and thus having less finances and resources for the child's development.

As of 2023, the Victorian government has recently made both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs free for the public. This has increased the community's access to quality early childhood education and care. As this has only just come into effect, other current impacts are difficult to determine. However, it is hoped that this policy change will result in an increase in kindergarten enrolments and better educational outcomes for children.

Why is supporting children important for our community?

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

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

Children's services operate in a complex and highly regulated environment. Federal, state and local government all have important roles in the regulation, funding and delivery of children's services. Over the last ten years, both the Commonwealth and Victorian government have



increased their investment in early childhood services and there have been a range of legislative changes designed to improve quality and accessibility of early education and care services.

Victorian local governments are required to:

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

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

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

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

Who are our partners?

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

- Community early education and care providers
- Community kindergartens
- Private early education and care providers
- Toy libraries
- Community playgroups
- Victorian Department of Education and Training
- Better Health Network (formerly Star Health)
- Local primary schools

What may change over the next five years?

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Research that is currently under development may provide further insight into the impacts on educational outcomes as a result of COVID-19 related disruptions since 2020. This could affect children's progress as they go through school and alter how teachers and the education system approach learning and the curriculum.

The Victorian government's early childhood education reforms will significantly change the current system. Over the next decade, kindergarten for 4-year-olds is set to transition 'pre-prep' – a universal 30-hour a week program of play-based learning for all 4-year-old children in Victoria. In addition, 50 Victorian government-owned and affordable childcare centres will be established. These are to be built in areas that have unmet demand and will make it easier for families to access childcare. The first of the centres will be available in 2025. It is unknown whether the City of Port Phillip will be included in this, as it is not currently in the 30 sites already announced. The opening of one in Port Phillip would help to reduce the long waitlists that continue to plague the childcare system. The opening of other sites that are close to Port Phillip could also have a positive flow-on effect to easing demand in the city, albeit any impact would likely be to a lesser extent. Overall, these reforms are likely to have a significant impact on the early development of children.

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