

Media Release

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What the public thinks

Kids worse off, and political leaders aren't listening, poll finds

Most Australians think that compared to when they were growing up, quality of life for children today is no better or worse across a range of indicators including mental health, safe neighbourhoods and opportunities for employment.

And our pessimism extends into politics, with 47 per cent of Australians saying that no political party leader represents their views about the wellbeing of children and teenagers.

The Director of the [Australian Child Health Poll](#), paediatrician Dr Anthea Rhodes, said that in an era in which discussions about resourcing were dominated by the needs of older Australians, the findings were an unexpected call to action.

"Despite great advances in medicine, public health, communication, and technology, most Australian adults believe life for children and teenagers today is no better, and in many aspects worse, than when they were growing up," said Dr Rhodes.

"And when it comes to whether our politicians are doing enough for children, the answer is a resounding 'no'. Almost 50 per cent of people believe federal politicians neither understand nor represent the interests of children and young people today, and 76 per cent agree that they should take more action on issues relating to children's wellbeing."

Dr Rhodes said the overwhelming perception that politicians lack an understanding of what is important for children was reported across all states and territories and by people of all ages.

"And it's not just parents of young children who are calling for more action. 70 per cent of people without children indicated politicians should take more action on child health issues.

"However, on the eve of a federal election, this poll reveals that people don't know where to turn with almost half of those surveyed saying that no political leader represents their perspective on the wellbeing of children and teenagers," Dr Rhodes said.

"The poll findings suggest that the Australian public wants to see a stronger focus and renewed investment from political leaders and politicians on issues relating to child health and wellbeing."

Dr Rhodes said the public backed government intervention to tackle child health issues.

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"Problems such as childhood obesity and mental health problems are on the rise, and what's clear from the Child Health Poll is that children's health issues are very much a priority for voters," Dr Rhodes said.

"Australians have indicated their strong support for policies targeted at tackling rising obesity rates including a tax on sugary drinks, compulsory daily physical activity in schools, and a gradual ban on junk food advertising aimed at children and teenagers.

"We hope these findings give our politicians confidence they have the public's support on difficult policy interventions," Dr Rhodes added.

Other key findings from the third Australian Child Health Poll show that:

- More than half of Australians think children and teenagers today are no better off when it comes to physical and mental health than when they were children
- The majority think that children today are worse off than when they were kids when it comes to neighbourhood safety and 40 per cent think the environment and climate are worse
- Despite a strong perception of better education, almost half of Australians think employment opportunities for today's young people are worse than when they were growing up
- Almost half of all adults think life is no different when it comes to family violence for children today compared to generations past, and almost a third think it is worse
- Less than 20 per cent of Australians think that politicians in federal parliament represent the interests of Australian children and teenagers
- The majority of Australians, regardless of age, income, and parental status, support funded interventions to tackle child health issues including a tax on sugary drinks, compulsory daily physical activity in schools and a gradual ban on junk food advertising
- Almost 70 per cent of people support government funded fulltime childcare or kindergarten for four-year-olds and a change to funding of welfare workers in schools

For more information, including media material, see www.childhealthpoll.org.au

Data Source

The third RCH Australian Child Health Poll is a survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 2,100 adults aged 18 years and older. The survey is conducted by an independent research agency on behalf of The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. Each sample is subsequently weighted to reflect the latest Australian population figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.