Preface

The Victorian Government’s Best Start project aims to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of all children between the ages of 0 and 8 years across Victoria, from pregnancy through transition to school.

The Best Start Atlas is a compilation and analysis of a range of characteristics about Victorian children 0 to 8 years of age. These characteristics have been identified jointly by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), with consideration given to a number of factors, including relevance to the project, reliability of the data and the identification of data that were not previously available in the public domain.

The first Best Start Atlas, released in 2005, was intended for use by those with an interest in establishing a benchmark for future comparison of important characteristics about children between the ages of 0 and 8 years at local government, metropolitan, regional and state levels of geography. Best Start Atlas second edition is the first tool to begin comparing against the benchmark data. There are some differences between the two editions including a number of improvements to data analysis and the inclusion of indicators that were unavailable for release in the first edition atlas. Any limitations to comparisons between this atlas and the first issue are described in the introduction. The Best Start Atlas aims to assist DEECD with an evidence base for use in developing child health policy, program development and evaluation.
The ABS and the National Statistical Service

The ABS has contributed to the Best Start project as part of their ongoing commitment to assist and encourage informed decision-making, research and discussion within governments and the community generally and, more specifically, in terms of support for the State Government of Victoria.

The National Statistical Service (NSS) is the community of government agencies, led by the ABS as Australia’s national statistical organisation, which are building a rich statistical picture for a better informed Australia.

The objectives of the NSS are to:

- deliver a high quality, up-to-date, comprehensive, coherent statistical picture of the economy, society and the environment to assist and encourage informed decision making, research and discussion within governments and the wider community;
- provide a world class official statistical service that retains the confidence and trust of the Australian society as both providers to, and users of, the resultant official statistics;
- maximise the use for official statistical purposes of data available within government administrative systems by government agencies and instrumentalities;
- minimise the burden of statistical reporting at all levels of the Australian community;
- document and retain, as an enduring national resource, key statistical outputs and their underlying data sources.

Since involvement in the first Best Start Atlas process, DEECD and the ABS have been engaged in a numbers of activities aimed towards developing and enhancing the use of survey and administrative data collections for the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS). The ABS has provided support to the VCAMS project through investigation into statistical standards, statistical approaches to quality control and arrangements for data sharing.

Best Start indicators are a sub-set of VCAMS, so as a result of this work there has been significant progress made in the coordination and use of administrative data.
Foreword

There is overwhelming evidence that giving children the best possible start in life improves their educational, social and economic prospects. The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, released in 2008, sets a new agenda for everyone involved in the care and education of children. It renews our commitment to high quality services with an emphasis on fostering partnerships – with parents and families, local communities and businesses – to ensure that every Victorian child has every opportunity to thrive, learn and grow.

The Best Start program demonstrates this Government’s commitment to families, service providers and communities working together for our children’s future. It enables local communities to draw together a range of services, including kindergarten, playgroups, maternal and child health services and schools to meet the evolving needs of local communities and families.

Building on the successes of the Best Start program, the Best Start Atlas provides a profile of children, where they live, the families they belong to and indicators of their wellbeing. These population data allow for more effective planning of services, and ensure children and their families can gain access to the support they need.

The first Best Start Atlas was published in 2005. It provided Victorian local government authorities and communities with a strong evidence base for use in developing child health policy, program development and evaluation. I welcome this updated edition, which incorporates information gathered in the 2006 census and includes new data on labour force participation, housing, education and learning.

Analysis of the data contained in the Best Start Atlas is a valuable tool that further informs work by the Government and its partners in their efforts to strengthen services and support for local communities and families. I commend the second edition of the Best Start Atlas to you and trust that it provides a valuable resource to plan improvements to the health, learning and wellbeing of Victoria’s children.

Maxine Morand
Minister for Early Childhood Development
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Introduction

The Best Start project aims to improve the overall health, development, learning and wellbeing of Victoria’s young children and their families. The Best Start Atlas series assists in this commitment by establishing a benchmark with the first edition that allows for changes over time to be measured in subsequent editions following each ABS Census. This second edition contains time series information over a 5 year period for both Census and administrative data where available. The atlas can be used as a basis for informed policy interventions, program innovations and measuring the effectiveness of changes to service provision in improving outcomes for young children.

The atlas contains a series of maps illustrating a suite of indicators that are determinants of early childhood health, development, learning and wellbeing outcomes based on data extracted from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, ABS Estimated Resident Population data and non-ABS data sources. A commentary accompanying each map briefly summarises the characteristics of each indicator and highlights the main features.

Data
The data are presented under the following two sections.

Section 1:
Section 1 of the atlas contains data from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing and 2006 Estimated Resident Population. The Census includes all people in Australia on census night, with the exception of foreign diplomats and their families. Australian residents out of the country on census night are out of scope of the Census. The Best Start Atlas counts people in Australia, excluding visitors and tourists, whose usual residence is in Victoria.

For the Best Start Atlas, data from the 2006 Census have been grouped into four major measures: population, family composition, socioeconomic environment, and physical environment.

Section 2:
Section 2 of the atlas uses non-ABS data, including data provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria. The indicators in this section are a subset of the 150 indicators that form the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS). The Best Start indicators described in this atlas can be grouped into two major domains:

- children – to inform child health, development, learning and wellbeing
- services – to inform the access, inclusiveness, responsiveness and quality of early years services.
Where necessary, indicators in Section 2 of the atlas have been mapped against the relevant estimated resident population (ERP). This will enable more frequent comparisons to benchmarks.

**Statistical boundaries**

For both sections of the atlas, Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries are defined by the *Australian Standard Geographical Classification 2006* (ABS cat. no. 1216.0) and are classified as geographic areas under the responsibility of an incorporated local government council. In Victoria, in 2008 there are 79 LGAs.

The Yarra Ranges LGA consists of the Statistical Local Areas of Yarra Ranges Shire Part A and Part B. Yarra Ranges Shire Part A is located in the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) and Yarra Ranges Shire Part B is located in the balance of Victoria.

For the purposes of the *Best Start Atlas*, the whole of the Yarra Ranges LGA has been incorporated into the MSD.

Census data for the LGA ‘Unincorporated Victoria’ have been suppressed due to confidentiality and are generally not available for administrative data collections (see Glossary under ‘data suppressed or not available’ for further information).

In October 2002, the Shire of Delatite was divided to create two new LGAs: Benalla Rural City and Mansfield Shire. This will need to be taken into account when making comparisons against 2001 data reported in the first *Best Start Atlas*.

**Map layout**

The atlas provides information at the LGA level. The geography used in the atlas was chosen with regard to user preference, particularly for communities and provider organisations within the health, welfare and education sectors.

Maps 1.1a, 1.1b, 2.1a and 2.1b present the distribution of the population across LGAs; all other maps present the characteristics relative to the population within each LGA, which are expressed as percentages, rates or whole numbers.

Each map title explains the characteristics of the population of interest (numerator) and total population it has been measured against (denominator).

For example, the number of all couple families with children aged 0 to 8 years within each LGA is calculated as a percentage of the total number of all families with children aged 0 to 8 years in each LGA:

**Couple** families with children aged 0 to 8 years, within each LGA in Victoria as a percentage of all families with children aged 0 to 8 years within each LGA.

**Map legend**

The map legend identifies the colours used to shade each class on a map, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Shade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89.5 or more</td>
<td>▢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88.8 to 89.5</td>
<td>▢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.3 to 88.8</td>
<td>▢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.5 to 87.3</td>
<td>▢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 85.3</td>
<td>▢</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For simplicity, the ranges are shown as ‘85.5 to 87.3’, ‘87.3 to 88.8’ and so on. These should be read as, for example, ‘from 85.5 to less than 87.3’. Individual values appear in one range only. A white colour palette indicates that the data are either suppressed (for confidentiality and privacy reasons) or unavailable.

Class interval

Selecting appropriate class intervals for each map is a key aspect of representing statistical data. For each map, five classes have been used so that the reader is able to distinguish each class clearly. Class intervals which reflect the distribution of the data were calculated using the Dalenius-Hodges algorithm\(^1\). The aim of this clustering algorithm is to group LGAs with similar values in the same class. Therefore, the number of LGAs in each class will vary, depending on the population of interest being mapped.

Data notes, limitations and comparability with the previous Best Start Atlas

A general introduction is provided for each indicator in sections 1 and 2 where information about the data source, limitations or time series comparability issues are noted. Further information is also available under the relevant subject in the Glossary.

For a number of indicators in the family and socioeconomic chapters, the populations used for deriving percentages have been reviewed and are therefore not comparable with 2001 data by LGA in the first edition Best Start Atlas. However, direct comparisons can generally be made at the state, regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne level, which have been incorporated in section introductions.

Comparability with the previous atlas for some administrative data in section 2 is affected due to changes in methodology or revisions. The limitations in time series analysis are noted for each indicator and change over time is incorporated using the revised or comparable data where available.

There are also additional indicators, which were not in the first edition of the Best Start Atlas including ‘need for assistance’, new to the 2006 Census; school attendance; reading levels; child protection re-notifications and; adequate family housing.

There is no correlation between map numbers in the first Best Start Atlas and the second edition. The map numbering system has been updated so that regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne maps on the same topic are differentiated by an ‘a’ and ‘b’ respectively.

In section 1, comparisons between introduction commentary and flowcharts containing similar census data, may show some minor discrepancies. This is due to ‘introduced random error’, adopted for the 2006 Census, to ensure that no data are released which could risk the identification of individuals in the statistics. Please see the Glossary under ‘introduced random error’ for further information.

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