

## 2.4.2 Socioeconomic factors

*“Social and economic status is a significant determinant of health and well-being at the population level. There are striking health and developmental disparities associated with socio-economic disadvantage, and the lower placed individuals are on the socio-economic gradient, the more likely they are to suffer from physical and mental ill-health.”*

*Strategic Policy Framework for Children’s and Young People’s Health 2002-2007<sup>4</sup>*

Evidence shows that health is linked to socioeconomic position, with the socioeconomically disadvantaged having higher mortality rates for most major causes of death. Their morbidity pattern indicates they experience more ill health<sup>28</sup> and their use of healthcare services suggests they are less likely to act to prevent disease or to detect it at an asymptomatic stage.<sup>99</sup> Socioeconomic indicators for children are reported in this section and build on those reported in section 1.4.2 in the *Whole of population* chapter.

### Income

The weekly income of a quarter (25.3%) of Queensland families was less than \$500 per week in 2001 (Table 2.10), where 27% of these families were one-parent families and 30% were couple families with children. In 2001, the median gross weekly income of one-parent households was \$386 and the median gross weekly income of ‘couple with dependents’ households was about two and a half times higher (\$933).<sup>100</sup>

**Table 2.10: Weekly family income received (percentage) and numbers of families by type of family in occupied private dwellings, Queensland 2001**

	Couple family with children	Couple family without children	One parent family	Other family	Total
Number of families	353,854	315,837	133,162	15,111	817,964
Family income (\$ weekly)					
<300	1.4	2.7	13.6	7.7	4
300-499	7.4	29.5	37.9	26	21.3
500-999	34.2	29.8	35.1	37.8	32.7
1000-1499	28.3	19.5	9.6	18.8	21.7
1500+	28.7	18.4	3.8	9.7	20.3

Source: ABS Census of population and housing 2001

The link between poverty and poor health is well established. Those with lowest incomes are more likely to experience the highest rates of illness and premature death. Both poverty and income inequality have increased in Australia over the last decade.<sup>26</sup> Australian data have shown that children from low income families have significantly more chronic illnesses than children from high income families.<sup>101</sup> Children aged 0-4 years in low income families were more likely not to have been breastfed for at least three months.<sup>101</sup> Boys aged 2-6 years in low income families were nearly three times more likely not to be immunised against measles than boys in high income families.<sup>101</sup> Girls (but not boys) in low income families had significantly fewer dental visits.<sup>101</sup>

### Pensions and disability support

Almost half of all Queensland children aged under 16 years (48.2%) lived in families receiving income support payments in 1996 (Table 2.11). Income support payments include age, disability, Newstart allowance, sickness and special benefits, youth training allowance, sole-parent pensions and family allowance payments.<sup>20</sup> The proportion of children in families receiving income support payments was generally higher in Brisbane than in most other capital cities in Australia, while Queensland’s non-metropolitan areas were similar to non-metropolitan areas in other states. The number and proportion of dependent children in families receiving an income support payment in Brisbane increased in the period 1989 to 1996. Unskilled and semi skilled workers and early school leavers were significantly more likely to receive support payment. In contrast, high-income families, managers and administrators, and professionals were less likely to receive support payment.<sup>20</sup>

The percentage of older people on an aged pension and the percentage of people on a disability support pension in Queensland in 2001 were similar to Australia (Table 2.12). In 1997-98, government payments were the main income source of a greater proportion of Queensland households of couples with dependent children and one-parent families than comparable households in Australia (Table 2.12).<sup>42</sup>

**Table 2.11: Percentage of dependent children living in a family receiving income support, Queensland and Australia 1989, 1996**

	Queensland	Australia
<b>1996</b>		
Capital city	43.7	39.2
Other major urban centres	48.4	44.0
Rest of State	52.5	51.4
Whole of State	48.2	43.5
<b>1989</b>		
Rest of State	41.0	37.8

Source: A Social health atlas of Australia 1999

**Table 2.12: Selected income support indicators, Queensland and Australia, 2001**

	Queensland	Australia
Aged on aged pension (%)	65.3	67.8
Disability support pensioners (% of persons 15+ years)*	4.1	4.1
Single parent payment (% of all persons in families in occupied private dwellings)*	3.3	3.6
Main income source from government payments (%)** (of couple with dependents households)	12.2	11.1
Main income source from government payments (%)** (of one parent households)	66.5	64.6

Source: ABS Australian social trends 2002

\*Calculated by QH \*\*1997-98

## Literacy and numeracy

*“...the central purpose of schooling in Queensland should be to create a safe, tolerant and disciplined environment within which young people prepare to be active and reflective Australian citizens with a disposition to lifelong learning.”*

2010 A Future Strategy, Education Queensland<sup>102</sup>

In Queensland in 2000, 92.6% of children in Year three reached the national reading benchmark and 91.4% reached the numeracy benchmark, which were similar to Australian figures (Table 2.13).<sup>42</sup>

In 2000, for reading skills in Year three, Queensland girls had slightly higher reading scores than boys, and urban students had better reading scores than rural students.<sup>103</sup> Indigenous children had a lower mean reading score than non-Indigenous children. Children where the main language spoken at home was not English, had similar reading scores to children with an English speaking background.<sup>103</sup> For children in Year five, the patterns were similar, although the disparities between the groups had increased slightly, and by Year seven the same patterns were evident but with even wider disparities.<sup>103</sup>

For numeracy (specifically number skills) in Year three, Indigenous children in Queensland recorded lower mean scores than non-Indigenous children. Boys had slightly higher mean number scores than girls. Rural students had lower mean number scores than urban students. As with literacy skills, the disparity between Indigenous children and non-Indigenous children increased with age.<sup>103</sup>

Literacy and numeracy are basic skills needed to function in the workplace and in every day life. Children with poor literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to be unemployed as adults.<sup>42</sup> Performance in literacy and numeracy is associated with a number of social and demographic factors such as sex, geographical area of residence, cultural and family background, personal attitude and school attended.<sup>42</sup> Socioeconomic status is a major predictor of achievement, with students from areas with greatest disadvantage recognised as scoring lower on reading literacy.<sup>42,104</sup> High levels of social communication with parents, supportive school environments and positive attitudes also positively influence student outcomes.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 2.13: Percentage of children in Year 3 reaching benchmark by State and Territory, 2000**

State or Territory	Reading (%)	Numeracy (%)
Australian Capital Territory	95.1	95.7
New South Wales	93.1	93.2
Northern Territory	65.3	81.4
Queensland	92.6	91.4
South Australia	86.8	85.3
Tasmania	91.2	92.8
Western Australia	95.8	90.5
Victoria	93.0	96.5
All students	92.5	92.7

Source: ABS Australia social trends 2002

## Unemployment

In Queensland in 2002, the percentage of couple families with children aged 0-14 years, where both parents were employed, was 55.4%, similar to the national percentage of 57.1%.<sup>41</sup> However, the percentage of one-parent families with children aged 0-14 years where that parent was employed was 42.3% in Queensland in 2002, compared to 46.2% nationally. The percentage of children aged 0-14 years where no parent was employed was 20.5% in Queensland in 2002, compared to 17.9% nationally.<sup>41</sup>