I’m Megan Mitchell, the National Children’s Commissioner.  

My job is to protect the rights of all children in Australia and make sure you get the help you need to be safe and healthy.  

In 2019 I wrote a report to the Australian Government telling it how we can do a better job looking out for children and young people.  

You can read the main things I said in the report here.

Did you know there are around **5.5 million** children (everyone under 18) in Australia? That’s a lot of you!
Who are Australia’s children?

Most of you live in large cities (71%), some live in regional areas (27%) and a small number of you live in remote places (2%).

29% of you are 0-4 years old
29% are 5-9 years old
26% are 10-14 years old and
16% of 15-17 years old.

6% are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Most children live with both their parents, but quite a few live with one parent, and some live with other families.

About 1 in 10 children and young people were born overseas.

There are over 300 different languages spoken in Australian homes.

Around 43,000 children can’t live with their parents and are living with relatives, foster carers or in residential care. This is more than ever before.

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There are over 300 different languages spoken in Australian homes.
Did you know that we all have human rights?

We have these rights because we are human beings. Our human rights are the things that we all need to have a good life. They also make sure we are kind and fair to each other.

Children’s rights are written down in a document called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is important that you get to know what it says in the Convention, because it belongs to you!

Children have special rights because their needs are different from adults.

These are just some of the rights you have. Australian governments have promised to make sure that all the children living in Australia get all their rights.
There is a special group of people called the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child who watch out for children all over the world and tell governments how they can better protect children’s rights.

In 2019, the Committee looked at what life is like for children in Australia and told the Australian Government what it could do to make things better.

To help them, I told the Committee what I had found out about children’s rights in Australia.

I told them that most children in Australia have their rights met and are growing up safe and well, but that many children are not having their rights protected enough—like children with disabilities, children in care, children in remote and rural Australia, children from different cultural backgrounds and LGBTI children.

Too many children:
☆ are being treated unfairly
☆ are not getting the education they need
☆ can’t live with their parents and families
☆ are not as healthy as they could be
☆ are worried and depressed
☆ do not have homes
☆ are in trouble with the law and need help
☆ are locked up
☆ experience violence at home, at school and in the community.

‘LGBTI’ is used to talk about people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex. It celebrates all the different ways people can experience their gender identity and love each other.
What did children and young people say?

I wanted to make sure the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child heard what children and young people thought too. So, I travelled around Australia talking to children and young people about their rights, what they loved about growing up in Australia and where we could do better.

Some of the things children and young people said they liked about growing up in Australia were:

- their families and friends
- controls on guns
- our weather
- our beaches, rivers, bush, animals and plants
- free education and good health care
- our many cultures.

Adults sometimes think kids don’t know things and ignore their ideas
10 year-old

Growing up in Australia is good because I can have my say and I get to participate in sport and things I like
10 year-old

We are very lucky that our country is in a safe place, we should accept more refugees and educate our people about their needs
11 year-old

I don’t think the Australian government should keep children in detention centres
10 year-old

I think Australia should do more to help the young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children ... to get a better education and have the rights to feel safe wherever they are
12 year-old

The government needs to help stop children being abused and domestic violence
17 year-old
Some of the things that they said needed to change were:

- more respect for culture and language
- stopping racism
- different ways to help kids learn in school
- helping poorer children and families
- making sure every child has a home to go to
- stopping people hitting and hurting children
- more help with mental health
- being kinder to refugees and asylum seekers
- letting kids have more of a say
- looking after the environment.

It should be compulsory for all children to learn about Aboriginal culture.
9 year-old
Nearly **23,000** children and young people also took part in a survey about their rights. Children helped to design the questions.

Here’s what they said about which rights were most important to them, which were most true for them and which were least true:

**Rights most true for children**
1. I can breathe clean air and drink clean water
2. I can be cared for and have a home
3. I can get an education

**Rights least true for children**
1. I can have a say about things that are important to me
2. I am treated fairly
3. I can get accurate information when I need it

**Top three rights chosen by children**
1. To feel safe
2. To be cared for and have a home
3. To be able to breathe clean air and drink clean water

**Do you think all children have these rights?**
- 26% Don’t know
- 36% No
- 38% Yes

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Children are strong people and they deserve to be heard.

10 year-old

It’s not just about feeling safe, it’s about feeling included.

Top three statements children said YES to
1. Breathe clean air and drink clean water
2. Get an education
3. Eat healthy food

Do you think Australia does enough to help children?

Top three statements children said NO to
1. Be treated fairly
2. Have a say about things that are important to them
3. Get accurate information when they need it
The main ideas

After listening to children, and to adults who care about children, I wrote down my main ideas for making sure all children get their rights. I put these ideas in a report called *In Their Own Right: Children’s Rights in Australia*. I sent this to the Parliament of Australia. I said that Australia should:

- have a BIG plan to make sure children get their rights and are safe and healthy, and collect better information to find out how children are going
- have a Minister who works for children and young people
- educate children and adults who work with children about children’s rights
- not lock up refugee or asylum seeker children
- change laws so children under 14 cannot be treated as criminals, and make sure children in trouble are treated fairly
- do more to make sure children with disability can go to school and are treated with respect
- do more to help children have good mental health
- make sure children can have a say in decisions made by governments and other people
- help more children stay with their families
- keep children safe from violence
- report back on what the Australian Government is doing about these ideas.

And heaps more!

You can also read the full version of *In Their Own Right: Children’s Rights in Australia* at [https://bit.ly/3aLCiBj](https://bit.ly/3aLCiBj)
Young people can now access and control their own health information online with ‘My Health Record’ from the age of 14.

Some children live in families where it is hard to afford food and other things (about 17%).

On any day, about 1000 children are locked up for breaking the law. More than half of these are waiting for a court to decide whether they are guilty and what should happen to them.

94% of Australian children are fully immunised at the age of 1.

Some facts about Australian children and young people

About 16,000 children under 12 years old don’t have a home to go to or are in really crowded houses.

63% of children play sport or are active outside school at least once a week.

25% of children and young people are overweight.

96% participate in a cultural activity outside school, and 79% enjoy reading.

Almost 1 in 7 children have mental health problems. Young people aged 15–19 say that mental health is their top issue.

99% of Australian children and young people help out at their schools and homes, and 97% contribute to their local communities (Kids Contribute Survey).

97% of families with children under 15 can use the internet at home.

At least 2,700 children who have come to Australia seeking protection don’t know if they will be allowed to stay. Some children who have come to Australia alone are not allowed to have their families join them here.
What the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child said

After hearing from all of us and the Australian Government, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child told us what they thought about children’s rights in Australia. They said that the Australian Government does a lot of good things for children and young people, but needs to do much more.

The Committee agreed with my main ideas, and also said that Australia should:

- make it the law that children and young people can get their rights and that they have a voice
- teach children about human rights at school and teach teachers about them too
- make sure businesses have to say what they are doing to protect children’s rights
- make sure trade deals with other countries cover children’s rights
- give more support to people working with children on climate change
- give more help to asylum seeker and refugee children
- make 18 the age that people can marry and let children know why
- change the laws to stop adults hitting children
- be more careful about giving drugs to children who have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
- let children raise concerns directly with the United Nations, like adults can already do.

You can find out what other things both the Committee and I said about Australia in my Children’s Rights Scorecard at https://bit.ly/37HYri4
What will I do now?

I am working with the Australian Government to make sure children and young people are safe, well and have their rights met in all the places they go, now and into the future.

As well, I will let everyone know about how I think we can make things better for children and young people in Australia.

What can you do now?

Spread the word about children’s rights – in your families, schools, neighbourhoods, churches and clubs.

You can have your say about your rights, any time! If you want to talk to me about something, you can:

- email me at kids@humanrights.gov.au
- find me online at www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights

If you feel unsafe or worried about anything, it is important to speak up and ask for help. You can talk to someone you trust, like a family member, friend, teacher or school counsellor.

You can talk to Kids Helpline:

- on the phone on 1800 55 1800
- online at www.kidshelpline.com.au

You can also talk to headspace:

- face-to-face at a headspace centre
- online at www.eheadspace.org.au
- on the phone on 1800 650 890.

If you think you are in immediate danger, you can call the police by dialling 000.
Things children and young people think are good about Australia...

- Having fun and laughing
- Cultural background is key to feeling like you belong to something more
- We have freedom
- Safe, good education, free healthcare
- Good
  - So much opportunity and so many options for people growing up in Australia eg sport, careers, education
As a young person, I enjoy living and being in Australia due to the freedoms and rights that I am enable to. I go to school everyday without a fear and am comfortable doing activities by myself. I am happy and proud to live here and I am so blessed and lucky to have the life I do.
Things children and young people want something done about...

- Improving education in remote areas
- Racism prevention
- Mental health in teens
- Bullying is a major issue

Young, single mothers to have more support, more financial help, proper, safe housing, support to young fathers – programs for them

More support for families

NOT SO GREAT

- Mental health in teens
- Bullying is a major issue
The stigma surrounding young people (<18) being ‘incapable’ of making informed decisions about their own health & education

Everybody deserves a home

The expectation to take on such larger responsibilities at a young age eg criminal responsibility age (10)

Not enough benefits for transport for kids in school

Poverty
Know your rights exercise

This is what children and young people said keeps them safe.

What do the first letters in each of the blue boxes spell?

[Blank spaces for letters]

Why not make your own charter in your classroom or club? Together you can use the headings to work out what will help to make you feel safe, happy and well, ask people to sign up to it and put it up on the wall for everyone to see!
How much do you remember?

Try this crossword puzzle to test what you’ve learned about Australian children and their rights!

**Down**

1. 9% of Australian children were born where? ( _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ )

2. Human rights are the things that we all need to have a good life. They make sure we are kind and _ _ _ _ to each other.

3. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child said that children should be taught about their rights at _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ .

**Across**

4. It is the National Children’s Commissioner’s job to protect children’s _ _ _ _ _ _ 

5. In the *Kids’ Rights Survey*, what was the Number 1 right chosen by children? (To feel _ _ _ _ )