Appendix A—Background to the study

Commencing in 2008, *Footprints in Time* data has been collected on an annual basis from up to 1,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. The study collects important information about:

- the children—their physical and mental health, how they develop socially and cognitively, their place in their family and community, and significant events in their life
- the children's families and households—their health, work, lifestyle, and family and community connectedness
- the children's communities—facilities, services, and social and community issues
- services—child care, education, health and other services used by the child's family.

Study Objective

The main objective of the study is to collect high quality quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to provide a better insight into how Indigenous children's early years affect their development. It is hoped that this information can be drawn upon to help close the gap in life circumstances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The *Footprints in Time* study has five key research questions, formulated under the guidance of the Steering Committee, which were designed to achieve this objective. These are:

- What do Indigenous children need to have the best start in life to grow up strong?
- What helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to stay on track or get them back on track to become healthier, more positive and strong?
- How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children raised?
- What is the importance of family, extended family and community in the early years of life and when growing up?
- How can services and other types of support make a difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

The study provides information for individuals, families, communities, service providers, researchers and governments. It aims to improve the understanding of, and policy response to, the diverse circumstances faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and communities.

Study methodology

Footprints in Time employs an accelerated cross-sequential design, involving two cohorts of Indigenous children aged from 6 months to 2 years (the younger cohort also previously known as the Baby cohort, or B cohort) and from 3½ to 5 years (the older cohort also previously known as the Child cohort, or K cohort) in Wave 1. The design allows data covering the first nine or ten years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's lives to be collected in six years. The two-cohort design also facilitates the comparison of the cohorts from Wave 4 onwards when their ages overlap, allowing the detection of changes due to different social conditions and policy initiatives.

Footprints in Time uses a non-random purposive sampling design from which eligible families were approached and voluntary consent obtained. The study focuses on 11 sites chosen, in part, to cover the range of socioeconomic and community environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live. The sample is not nationally representative; however, it reflects the distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged between 0 and 5

years across Australia in 2008 (except the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania) and among urban, regional and remote areas.

Study informants

Wave 5 interviews collected data from:

- primary carer—the parent or carer who knows the study child best. In most cases this is the child's biological mother. Research Administration Officers (RAOs) undertake an extensive interview with the primary carer of every study child, asking questions about the study child, the primary carer and the household. It is a face-to-face interview.
- dad—the primary carer's male partner or another adult who has a father-like relationship with the study child. In most cases this is the biological father, but stepfathers are also common. In Wave 5, Dads Surveys were completed for 180 children.
- study child—the main focus of the study. Data is collected through direct assessments such as vocabulary assessments, practical exercises (Who am I?, the Progressive Achievement Test–Reading and the Matrix Reasoning Test) and child height and weight. The children also answer face-to-face interview questions.
- teachers and child care workers—complete written or online questionnaires that include their observations of the study children. In Wave 5, 473 children had a teacher complete the survey.

The survey is designed so that each child in the study is tracked and interviewed during each wave. However, the other informants may change depending on family and situational relationships.

For more detailed information about the study refer to the reports for Wave 1 and Wave 2 in this series of reports.