Introduction to this report

Footprints in Time is the name given to the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, an initiative of the Australian Government. The study is conducted by the Department of Social Services (DSS) (previously the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)) under the guidance of the *Footprints in Time* Steering Committee, chaired by Professor Mick Dodson AM. The study 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.

This report is the fifth in a series of reports produced for each wave of data collection. The report provides a selection of research findings, predominantly from Wave 5 but covering all waves. The range of topics covered in this report showcases both the richness of the data and the potential for further research. Interested researchers are encouraged to apply for the data.

Further information about the study, including the fieldwork methodology and attrition rates, is available in the appendices. Readers may also wish to refer to earlier reports for more details about the development phase of the study and for results from the first four waves.

Important notes on reading this report

Analysis for this report is based on the beta, or preliminary, version of the Wave 5 dataset. Using the official release of the dataset may provide slightly different results.

The report has been primarily written by non-Indigenous analysts from DSS. While every effort has been made to interpret the data within Indigenous contexts, there may be instances where a greater understanding of Indigenous cultures might aid interpretation. We strongly encourage potential data users to draw on the strengths of an interdisciplinary approach with Indigenous collaborators.

Throughout the report, short boxed stories describe some of the experiences of the Research Administration Officers (RAOs), the *Footprints in Time* interviewers.

As a longitudinal study, *Footprints in Time* provides a unique opportunity to follow the development of a group of children and examine the factors contributing to their individual and collective outcomes. The children are divided into two cohorts. Previously, these have been referred to as the 'B cohort' and the 'K cohort'. For ease of comprehension, this report uses the terms 'younger cohort' and 'older cohort' respectively. The younger cohort consists of children born in 2006, 2007 and 2008 and the older cohort consists of children born in 2003, 2004 and 2005. In Wave 5, most children in the younger cohort were 4½ to 6 years old (88.5 per cent), and in the older cohort were 7½ to 9 years old (88.5 per cent). The mean ages of the two cohorts were 61 and 96 months respectively.

Due to the cross-sequential design of the study, in Waves 4 and 5 the younger cohort are the same age the older cohort were in Waves 1 and 2 respectively. This allows data to be pooled across cohorts to examine a larger sample of 3½ to 6 year-olds.

In Wave 5, 728 children and their primary carers were interviewed for the younger cohort and 530 children and their primary carers were interviewed for the older cohort, bringing the total study sample to 1,258. Unless otherwise stated in this report, only those children

interviewed for Wave 5 of the study are referred to. There are 909 children about whom data has been collected in all five waves.

The majority of information was collected by Indigenous interviewers from the primary carer, who was the person with primary responsibility for the care of the child. The term 'primary carer' has a broader meaning than 'parent'. Information was collected about both the child and the family context in which they live. Where possible, interviewers go back to the same primary carer each year. However, sometimes the parent or carer is not available, has limited time or is no longer living with the study child, and a different carer is interviewed about the study child. About 4 per cent of children had different primary carers from the previous interview. Although 91.6 per cent of children had a primary carer who was either their birth mother or their father, some children had grandparents, foster parents or other relatives as their primary carers.

The primary carers are predominantly women (97.6 per cent) with an average age of about 34.5 years, looking after young children. Although all the children are Indigenous, 17.5 per cent of primary carers in Wave 5 are not.

Although *Footprints in Time* is not designed to be representative, it does provide a sizeable sample of Indigenous children in two age groups and their families. In 2011, the year of the last census, the children were around 4 and 7 years old. *Footprints in Time* includes 4.2 per cent of all 4 year-old Indigenous children in Australia and 3.2 per cent of all 7 year-old Indigenous children in Australia.[1] The study contains children from different states as well as all different levels of remoteness, reflecting the diversity of the Indigenous population. In Wave 5, 28.4 per cent of the sample lived in urban areas, 48.7 per cent in areas of low isolation, 13.8 per cent in areas of moderate isolation and 9.1 per cent in areas of high or extreme isolation.

Unless specifically stated, percentages provided in this report are based on the numbers of responses and do not include participants who refused to answer a question or responded that they did not know. For most variables, the number of missing responses was very low (less than five). The number of respondents is provided in cases where the number of missing responses may make a significant difference.

The term 'average' in this report has been used instead of 'mean' but has the same meaning.

The term 'significant' may be understood to mean the same as 'statistically significant'. Significance tests have been applied where appropriate and, unless otherwise stated, it may be assumed that the term 'significant' means at the 95 per cent confidence level ($p<0.05$). A brief definition of this and other statistical terms used in this report is available in Appendix B.

[1] Calculated using 2011 Census data on ABS Table Builder (30/8/2014).