

Australia

Distinctive Features: Along with New Zealand, Australia has a comprehensive social security system without social insurance. There are debates as to whether or not its complex income testing and means testing place it among the minimalist, residual welfare states, or represent efficient humane targeting. The national government carries responsibility for income transfers, the states for social services. There is an important private sector, largely non-profit.

Maternity / Parental Leave

Benefit	Job-protected parental leave
Eligibility Criteria	12 months of continuous employment, all parents. Also for adopted children. Parents may share.
Duration of Leave	52 weeks
Compensation Rate	Unpaid. However, public employees also entitled to 12 weeks paid maternity leave (Commonwealth) or 6-12 weeks (states) and some private sector employees also have paid leaves.

Early Childhood Education and Care

Age Group Served	Little publicly financed or sponsored care for the under-3s (31 percent coverage; mostly in private arrangements or with relatives). Publicly financing for preschoolers, mostly part-day (66 percent), and public preschool or kindergarten for 74 percent of the 5s (typically 3 hours). Some publicly-subsidized long-day care in family day care and centers with public subsidy.
Funding Strategies	Main public contribution is by income-related help with fees via (a) child care assistance paid directly to centers for low to middle class families and (b) child care rebate covering up to 30 percent of costs for children in registered care.

Family and Child Allowances

A new family support system A two-part system composed of "Family Tax Benefit and Childcare Benefit." "Family Tax Benefit A" is means-tested (but 85% are eligible with the level of benefits determined by number and ages of dependants. "Family Benefit B," also means-tested, is targeted at single-income families, and age of youngest child determines payment level. "Child Care Benefit," also means-tested, is paid to centers on behalf of parents.

Child Support

A child support agency applies a standard formula to assess support by the non-resident spouse and helps with assuring compliance. No advanced maintenance (child support assurance).

Tax Benefits

Tax Deductions/ Relief	Low-income people receive a refundable tax benefit, with payments every two weeks. There is a similar lone-parent rebate which takes the form of an extra tax credit. Single-earner couples with children receive a higher tax deduction than couples without children.
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Other Child-Conditioned Income Transfers

Benefits	A complex array of means-or income-tested benefits and supplements, several intertwined with the tax system: Family Allowance Supplement (also for social security beneficiaries with children in their care); double orphan pension; Sole Parent Pension; Child Disability Allowance;
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The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth and Family Policies
at Columbia University

Parenting Allowance chosen by one member of an unemployed couple as alternative to unemployment benefit; child dependent supplement to Temporary Disability Benefit.

Child Health

Access to Coverage

The universal health care system (Medicare) offers free government-operated service but also the option of using the extensive private sector systems with partial government reimbursement, full direct payment, and several variations. There are fee-concessions for low-income people. When children have been fully immunized at 18 months, there is eligibility for a Maternity Inoculation Allowance. Good infant health indicator results.

Housing Benefits

Benefit

Little public owned housing. But because of apparent consensus that people should pay no more than 20-25 percent of their family incomes for housing, there is a Rent Assistance program, a non-taxable supplement for many of moderate and low incomes. Payments to families with children come out of the family allowance system, students with financial aid are eligible.

School-Age Children Policies

Compulsory School

Compulsory ages 6-16. Most students in elementary school by 5. Some 90 percent attend 6-16.

Youth Policies

Distinctive Features

Unemployed men and women, 16 and 17, covered by a special Youth Training Allowance. No duration limit. Taxable, where there is other income. The Commonwealth Youth Bureau offers a multi-purpose ambitious website, "The Source."

Reconciling Youth and Family Life

Given the ECCE and leave gaps, the predominant way of reconciling work and family life (where two parents work) is to have the mother work part time. That is also the pattern for the comparatively low portion of young single mothers in the work force.

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