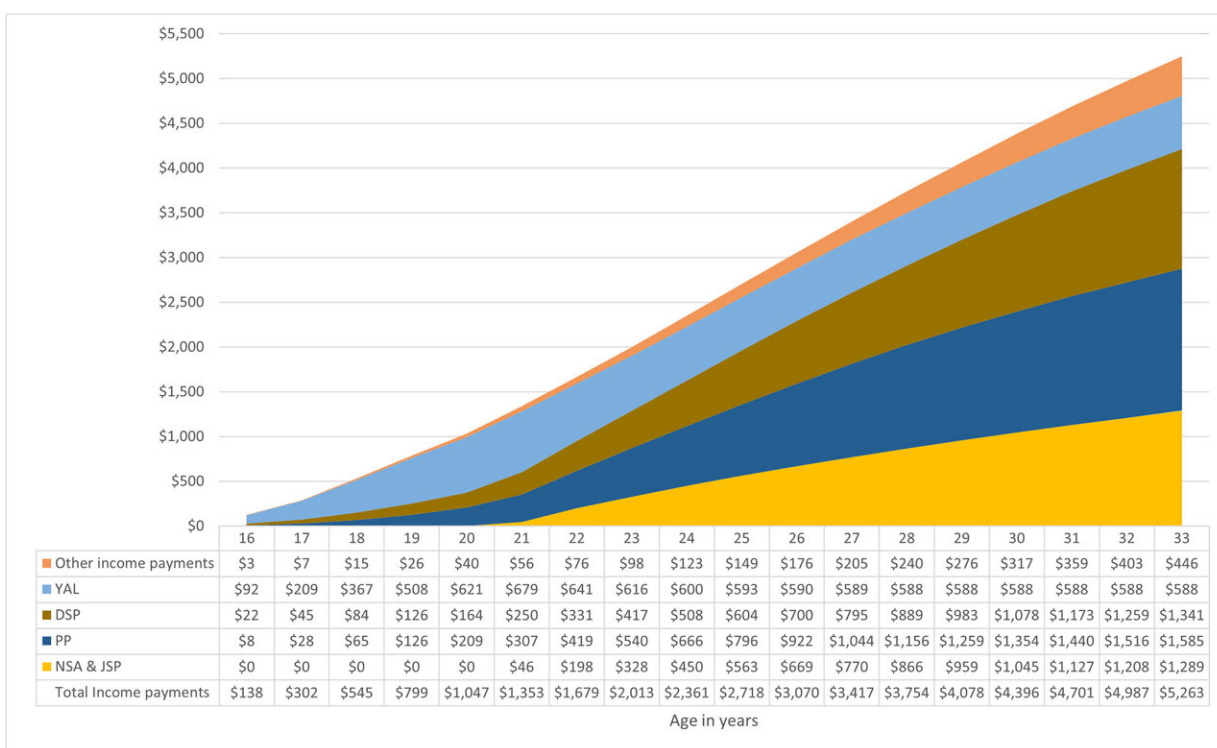


Protect the child, save the adult: An opportunity to cut Australia's welfare costs by nearly 40%

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Cumulative excess income support payments at June 2020 Australian population levels (in AU\$ millions). Credit: *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106925

New research from the University of South Australia shows that people

who have suffered child abuse or neglect are three times more likely to access government income support payments in early adulthood, underlining the costly and long-term effects of adverse early life experiences.

Linking child protection records with national welfare [incomepayment](#) records, researchers found that the extra costs associated with child protection contact added 39% to the national income support budget. The study is [published](#) in the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect*.

Specifically, the study found that individuals involved with child protection were:

- Five times more likely to receive unemployment payments (Jobseeker or Youth Allowance)
- Five times more likely to receive long-term disability payments
- Three times more likely to receive parenting payments (with dependents under eight years and meeting income and assets tests).

For the 339,411 individuals in the study, cumulative income support payments (age 16 to 33 years) were \$181,743 for individuals who had been placed in out of [home care](#), compared to \$38,570 for those with no child protection contact).

These large downstream costs of child abuse and neglect (related to income support) reflect reduced employability (associated with lower education attainment), difficulties with relationships, and physical and mental health conditions.

Researchers say the high budget costs present a strong case for effective preventative and protective measures to halt [child maltreatment](#) and its longer-term outcomes.

"It's well-established that child abuse and neglect have a wide range of negative consequences across life," UniSA's Dr. Emmanuel Gnanamanickam says.

"We have previously estimated the costs to the public hospital system, but this is the first time globally, that the excess costs to government income support payments (associated with child protection contact) have been reported.

"By quantifying the relationship between child protection and income support payments, we're able to see some of the longer-term effects of child abuse and neglect (and associated [adverse childhood experiences](#)), and their bearing on the national budget.

"Our study shows that people who have had contact with child protection agencies are three times more likely to receive welfare payments as they get into early adulthood, which when extrapolated to the Australian population equates to more than \$5.2 billion of the Federal Government's income support budget."

In Australia, an estimated 1 in 7 (or 2.1 million) people have experienced childhood abuse.

Senior researcher, UniSA's Professor Leonie Segal, says that the dollar figures amplify the imperative to invest in prevention.

"By highlighting the burden associated with maltreatment, we're providing a budgetary impetus to invest in preventive interventions and to support children and young people experiencing maltreatment to change their life trajectories," Prof Segal says.

"Children affected by child abuse deserve to grow into young adults who can successfully navigate and ideally heal from their maltreatment

experience. They deserve to be able to fully participate in society and the economy, and to do so without persevering disadvantage.

"We know that adverse early-life experiences can have life-long impacts. We know that not enough is being done to prevent [child abuse](#) and neglect or minimize the harm.

"Putting a dollar figure on the longer-term burden of child maltreatment may be the only way that we can ramp up investment in prevention and better [support](#) children involved in [child protection](#) and their families."

More information: Emmanuel S. Gnanamanickam et al, Receipt of parenting, disability, unemployment, and other income support payments in persons aged 16 to 33 years – the associations with child maltreatment, *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106925](#)

Provided by University of South Australia

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