



NEW SURVEY: CONCERNS OF A WIDENING GAP BETWEEN AUSTRALIA'S 'HAVES' AND 'HAVE-NOTS' – AND THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

The Big Giveback campaign launches nationally this month to raise much-needed funds for young Australians in need through The Smith Family's education support programs

A new survey commissioned by children's education charity The Smith Family has revealed two-thirds (63%) of Australians are concerned about the gap between Australia's 'haves' and 'have-nots', with around half (48%) of Australians believing this gap has widened since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

A third (33%) of respondents said their own financial situation is worse since the pandemic hit, with reports of financial stress highest among younger Australians.

The survey of more than 1,000 Australians also found:

- One in four people (26%) said they feel under financial stress (18%) or significant financial stress (8%), while 39% said they can manage household bills but struggle to afford anything extra.
- One in three people (35%) said they have changed their preferred eating habits in the past 12 months to reduce food bills, 13% have been unable to meet payments on credit cards or other loans, and 10% have been unable to meet rent or mortgage payments.
- Among those with dependent children, one in five (21%) said they have been unable to afford school excursions or extracurricular activities, such as after-school sports or music lessons, while one in eight (12%) have been unable to afford school essentials, such as uniforms, books, a computer or internet access.

Judy Barraclough, The Smith Family's Acting CEO, said while the findings highlight the concerns and impacts felt in the broader community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the charity is seeing firsthand some of the biggest challenges facing those in our most disadvantaged communities.

"We see every day the struggles of families in severe financial stress and the effects these can have on children's education – and the latest lockdowns in many parts of the country have caused significant upheaval again in people's lives.

"We're yet to see the full repercussions of the hardship caused by COVID-19, but we are very worried that economic instability and cost-of-living concerns exacerbated by the pandemic are pushing some families deeper into poverty.

"As an education charity, we are particularly concerned about children who don't have the resources they need to learn at home. Among the families we support, there are children who can't do homework or take part in remote learning because they don't have a computer or internet access – a significant problem with major consequences for a child's educational attainment," Ms Barraclough said.

The confronting findings have been released to coincide with the launch of **The Big Giveback** campaign across Australia this month, which aims to raise \$1m+ in total.

The national campaign will support young people, with 10 cents from the sale of non-alcoholic drinks made by Asahi Lifestyle Beverages (formerly Schweppes Australia) donated to The Smith Family. More than **10,000** convenience stores, service stations and major chains across Australia are participating, including Bunnings, Ampol/Caltex sites, Fitness First gyms and Noodle Box stores, to raise funds.

Concern for children and young people

The launch of **The Big Giveback** comes as the Smith Family survey also revealed many Australians are concerned about the social and educational impacts of the pandemic on children and young people, with the largest majority (80%) of respondents concerned about 'families not being able to afford school essentials or activities for children' and 'children struggling at school or disengaging from their learning due to financial stress at home.'

Ms Barraclough said these were very real challenges facing many young Australians living in poverty, even before the pandemic hit, and support is needed now more than ever to ensure all children have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive at school and beyond.

“Every child in Australia deserves the chance to reach their full potential. But not every child gets an equal start in life and this can have long-term impacts on their future.

“Providing targeted education support for a child during their schooling years is critical to help them stay on track. It’s not just about easing the financial pressures but providing additional learning and mentoring support where it’s needed, to help children and young people who are experiencing disadvantage stay engaged in their learning and see a brighter future ahead,” Ms Barraclough said.

Reaching more young Australians in need

Asahi Lifestyles Beverages CEO Nigel Parsons said: “The survey confirms in stark detail how the pandemic has challenged all of the community over the past 18 months, but it has been particularly confronting for vulnerable families and children who desperately want to continue their education.

“**The Big Giveback** is a simple way for Australians to directly help these families via our flagship partner The Smith Family. We will announce additional activities relating to **The Big Giveback** in coming weeks.”

Australians can get behind **The Big Giveback** during the month of August at participating stores or by making a donation. For more information, visit the campaign website at thebiggiveback.com.au.

All funds received by The Smith Family will go to its *Learning for Life* program, which currently supports the education of almost 58,000 students experiencing disadvantage across Australia.

The program helps these young Australians in three distinct ways:

- Providing financial support for school essentials, like uniforms and books.
- Providing access to additional learning programs before and after school – tailored to each child’s individual needs.
- Providing personal support from a dedicated team member at The Smith Family to help them stay motivated at school, complete their education and go on to further training or work.

Ms Barraclough said: “The Smith Family appreciates the generous support of the community and our national corporate partner Asahi Lifestyle Beverages, in helping to raise much-needed funds at this critical time. This support can make all the difference in a young person’s life, helping them persevere through the toughest of circumstances to continue their education and create a better future for themselves.

“Together, through campaigns like **The Big Giveback**, we can help even more young Australians in need.”

EDITOR’S NOTES

The Smith Family is a children’s education charity that helps young Australians experiencing disadvantage to succeed at school, so they can create better futures for themselves. Visit thesmithfamily.com.au

The Big Giveback is an Asahi Lifestyle Beverages initiative. Participating brands include Schweppes, Cool Ridge water, Solo, Pepsi Max, Gatorade and Lipton Iced Tea. For more information on participating products and retailers, visit thebiggiveback.com.au

The survey was conducted online from 16-20 June 2021 by Essential Research with data provided by Qualtrics and is based on 1,087 respondents.

The Smith Family’s Acting CEO Judy Barraclough is available for interview.

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