

BEYOND GROWING PAINS: A CALL TO ACTION ON KIDS AND ADOLESCENTS' CHRONIC PAIN IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

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Background/Purpose:

Chronic pain affects one in five Australian children and adolescents, yet their experience remains invisible. The 2025 National Kids in Pain Report is the first national survey to capture the voices of children, adolescents and families living with chronic pain, revealing its profound impact on childhood, adolescence, schooling, family life and productivity.

Approach:

Two anonymous online surveys were conducted between July and August 2025, one for parents of children and adolescents aged 6 – 18 years and a dedicated adolescent survey for young people aged 14 – 18 years. Of the 229 responses, 176 came from parents (91% were parents of adolescents) and 53 came directly from adolescents, offering firsthand insights into their lived experiences. Responses were analysed using descriptive statistics exploring demographics, pain experiences, healthcare access, educational impacts and economic consequences.

Outcomes/Impact:

Findings show that 84% of children and adolescents experience disrupted sleep, 83% miss school due to pain and 83% report mental health impacts. Diagnosis is often delayed with 65% waiting over three years. Neurodivergent conditions are common (73%) complicating care. Families, especially mothers, bear the economic burden – 46% adjusted work hours, and 19% resigned. The estimated annual productivity loss exceeds \$15 billion. Gender and identity disparities were evident, with adolescent girls and LGBTQIA+ youth disproportionately affected and often dismissed. Adolescent respondents described feeling isolated, misunderstood and excluded from both clinical and educational support systems.

Innovation and Significance:

This report marks a critical shift in recognising adolescent pain as a public health and equity issue. It calls for systemic reform: recognising chronic pain as a distinct condition, expanding paediatric and adolescent pain services and embedding pain education in health and school systems. The inclusion of adolescent voices adds urgency and authenticity, demanding belief, flexibility and compassionate care.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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