How Australians Live

For
Jessica & Holly
and
Konrad, David & Wanda

How Australians Live

Social Policy in Theory and Practice

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Preface

In the past two decades, developments in social policy have moved rapidly, both in Australia and throughout the Western world. Changing economic conditions have been accompanied by spectacular advances and retreats in purposive policy and provision. Every advance and every retreat, every innovation and every change have produced winners and losers. The welfare state, battered by changing fortunes, has sailed through turbulent seas, changing course from time to time as it has listed sometimes to the left and sometimes to the right. It has never had plain sailing, but whichever course it has set, or whichever way it has been blown, it has had a profound effect on its citizens. This book documents the theories that have set the welfare state on course, the processes by which the theories are put into effect, and their outcomes. In short, it examines the welfare state in theory and practice, and in so doing describes how Australians live.

Although not always in the same organisation or city, the authors have worked together since 1972, most intensively however from 1980 to 1985, when both were at the Social Welfare Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. It was in this period that the shape of this book took place. The book follows the Centre's research agenda at that time and draws heavily on the statistical and analytical work the authors conducted at the Centre. Contemporary sources (most notably ABS sources) have been used to update the data. We are deeply indebted to our SWRC colleagues for the intellectual environment that spurred our analytical endeavours and for their contributions which are reflected in some parts of the book.

While the book focuses mostly on policies relating to income support and direct services for most Australians, the authors are aware that there are gaps both in population groups covered (for example, no specific chapters on Aboriginal Australians or on people with disabilities) and in policy areas (for instance, no specific analyses of housing policy or health policy). We feel, however, that the choice of policy issues and population groups gives a broad overview of how Australians live. For readers wanting more detail on the areas not covered, materials produced by the SWRC and by other researchers are readily available.

Preparation of any book is invariably a team effort and we are enormously grateful for the support of Kathy McInerney in Adelaide who typed and retyped most of the manuscript and for the assistance of Jane O'Brien and Jacklyn Comer in Sydney who played their part in completing this work.

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