

# Finder's Parenting Report



A report on family trends and finances  
October 2021

# Contents

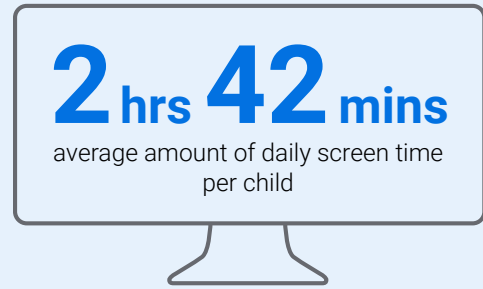
|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Key statistics                 | 3  |
| Introduction                   | 4  |
| Home life                      | 5  |
| Financial education            | 7  |
| Planning for children          | 10 |
| Childbirth                     | 12 |
| Time off work                  | 15 |
| The cost of children           | 17 |
| Insights from Finder's parents | 20 |
| References                     | 21 |
| Methodology                    | 21 |
| Contact                        | 22 |

## Key statistics



**1 in 3**

children under 12  
have a smartphone



**2 hrs 42 mins**

average amount of daily screen time  
per child



**\$9.80**

average weekly pocket  
money



**7%**

of children under 12  
have a share  
trading account



**1 in 10**

parents have no savings  
before starting a family



**29%**

of parents switch to  
part-time employment  
after giving birth



**2 in 3**

parents give birth  
through the public  
health care system



**13%**

of mothers return to  
work within 7 days of  
maternity leave  
payments ceasing



**3.5 hrs**

average amount of time  
parents spend driving their  
child around per week



**8%**

of families have had to  
go without food in the  
past 12 months

## Introduction

The world of parenting in 2021 looks quite a bit different compared to even just a few years ago. Smartphones are becoming a bigger part of our kids' lives, and a growing number of children have savings accounts and even share trading accounts. As a result of the pandemic, many Aussie parents have had to try their hand at homeschooling.

There's no doubt the past 18 months have been no easy feat. In addition to changing our parenting habits, new data is beginning to suggest the pandemic is responsible for a baby boom in Australia. Researchers from the Medical Journal of Australia predict there have been 11,000 more babies born in the third quarter of the 2020–21 financial year compared to the previous year.<sup>1</sup>

Finder's Parenting Report 2021 explores the data and trends underpinning family finances. We surveyed over 1,000 Australian parents of children under 12 to find out how they manage their budgets with children, how they teach their kids about money and how they navigated pregnancy and birth, among other insights.

Finally, Finder's experts – who also happen to be parents – offer their words of experience on everything from how to choose a mobile phone for your child to how much money you should save before starting a family.



# Home life

## Smartphones

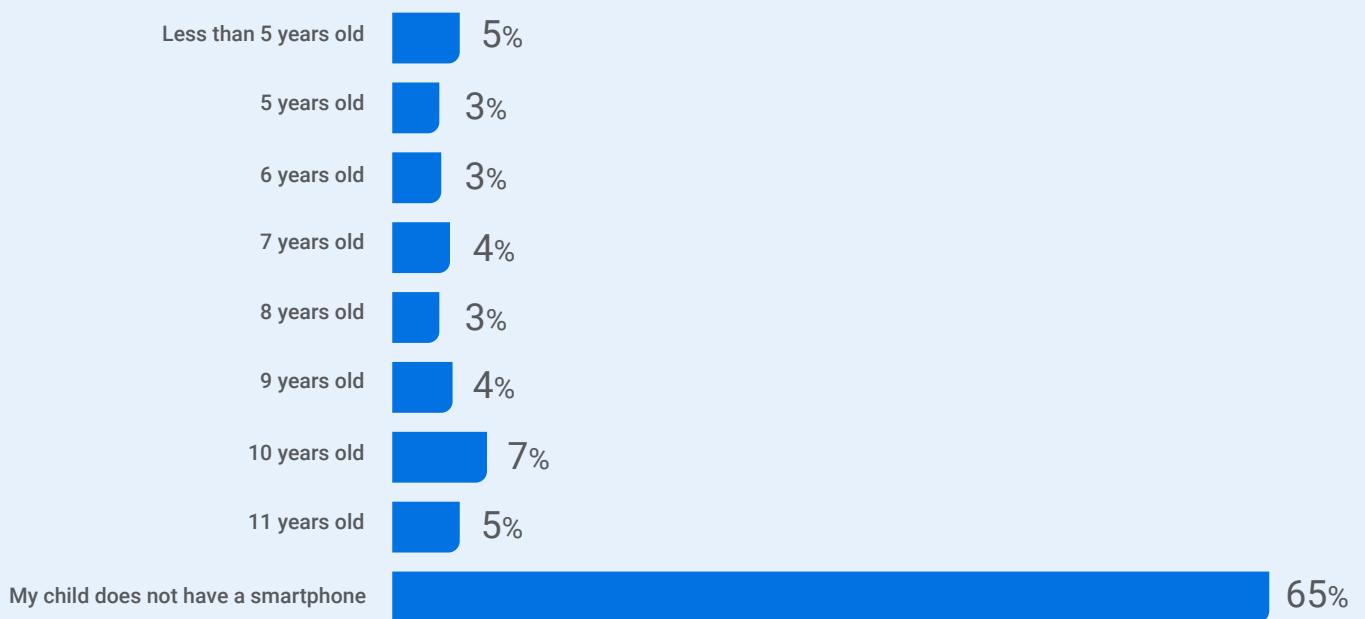
Smartphones have become the port of call for everything from social media to paying for dinner. Today's generation of children are the first to be born into a smartphone-dictated world from day one. While the potential downsides to excessive smartphone use – such as issues with emotional and behavioural adjustment – have been well-researched, research also suggests healthy smartphone use can help to improve self-sufficiency and digital literacy in children.<sup>2,3</sup>

Finder's survey found more than 1 in 3 children under 12 (35%) have a smartphone. This is a substantial increase from 22% in 2018, when Finder asked the same question. Of those under 12 who have a smartphone, the average age for receiving it was 7.7 years old.

Children from New South Wales are the most likely to be digitally connected, with 45% of children under the age of 12 owning a smartphone, compared to just 23% of South Australian children.

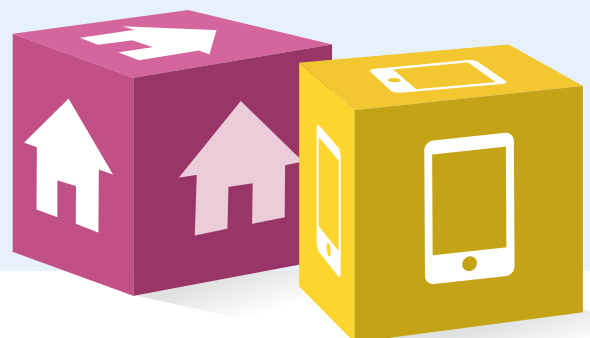
The data shows children with smartphones from the cities receive their phone at a slightly earlier age (7.6 years old) than those from regional areas (8.2 years old).

### At what age did your child get their first smartphone?



Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

**Finder tip:** You don't need to buy your kids the latest iPhone or even a brand new phone – giving them a hand-me-down could spare you the extra cash. A prepaid plan is another great way to cut costs and avoid any unexpected bills at the end of the month. Most prepaid plans allow unlimited calls and texts. If you're concerned about them spending hours scrolling endlessly, you can choose a plan with a lower data allowance.



## Screen time

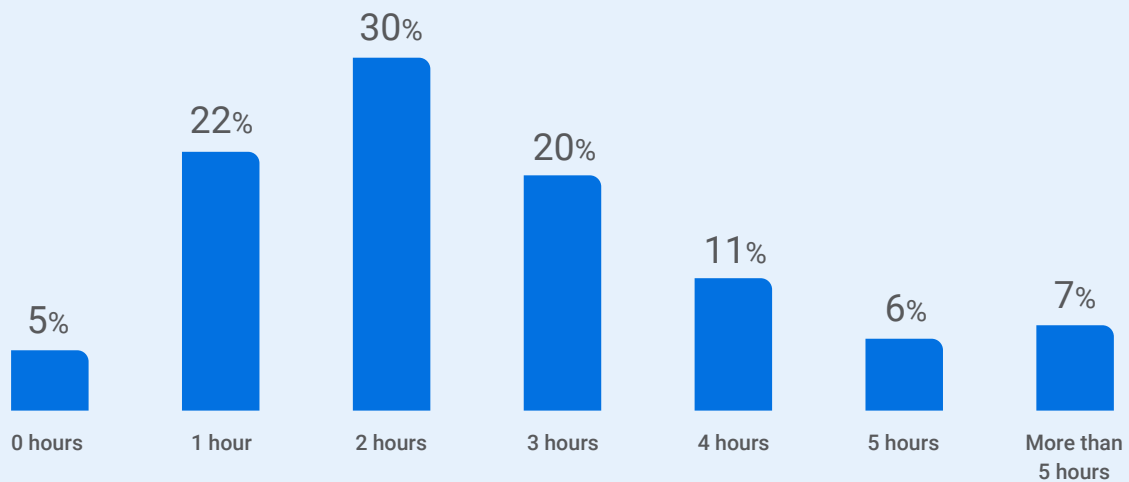
There's no doubt that technological advances have made Australians increasingly reliant on devices. Finder's research found Australian children spend an average of 2 hours and 42 minutes on screens every day, excluding any screen time used for schooling or homework. That is the equivalent of 41 full days per year spent in front of devices.

For reference, the Australian Government Department of Health recommends no more than 2 hours of sedentary recreational screen time per day for kids aged 5 to 17, no more than 1 hour for those aged 2 to 5 and no screen time for those under 2.<sup>4,5</sup>

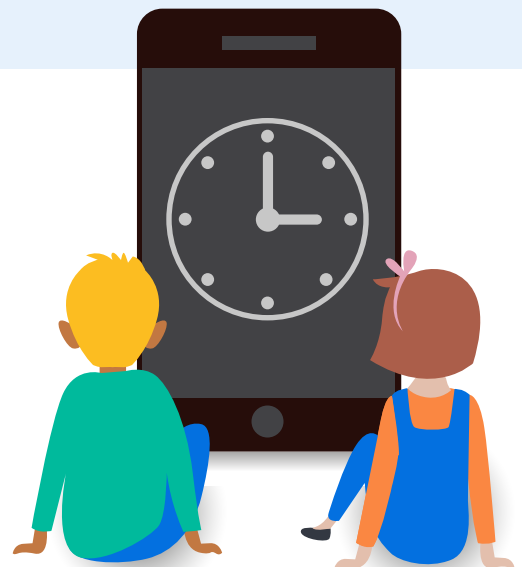
The data shows boys (2 hours 49 minutes) are allowed slightly more screen time than girls (2 hours 35 minutes) on average.

Alarming, 1 in 4 children (24%) are getting 4 or more hours of screen time daily.

### How many hours per day does your child have screen time (excluding homework/studying)?



Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021



# Financial education

## Pocket money

One of the easiest ways to introduce kids to the concept of money from a young age is through pocket money. Finder's survey found nearly half (49%) of children under 12 receive pocket money, with the average weekly allowance sitting at \$9.80.

One in 4 (25%) receive between \$5 and \$10 per week, while 8% receive between \$11 and \$20. A further 7% receive more than \$30 per week from their parents.

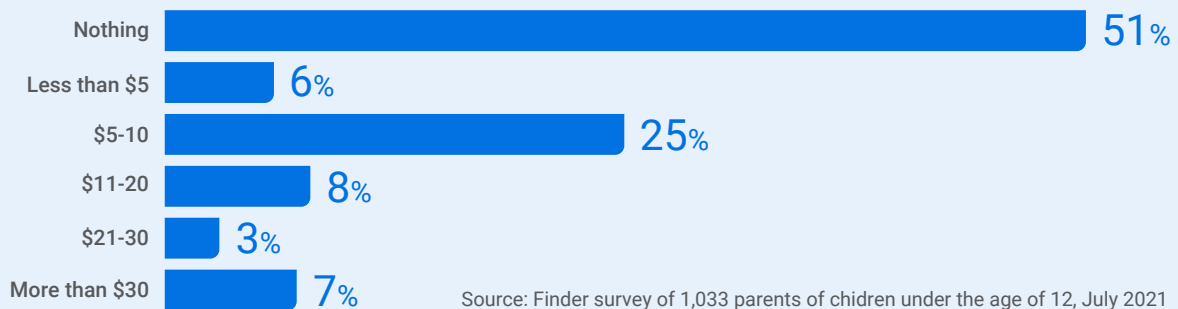
The data shows boys (\$10.30) receive more pocket money on average than girls (\$9.30) – a weekly

difference of \$1 per week, or \$52 per year, between the genders.

The survey found those aged between 9 and 11 receive a weekly allowance of \$14.10, compared to \$9.90 for those aged between 6 and 8.

Kids from Victoria are the nation's top-earning children, with an average weekly allowance of \$12.10, followed by New South Wales (\$11.35) and Western Australia (\$9.30).

### How much pocket money does your child receive per week?



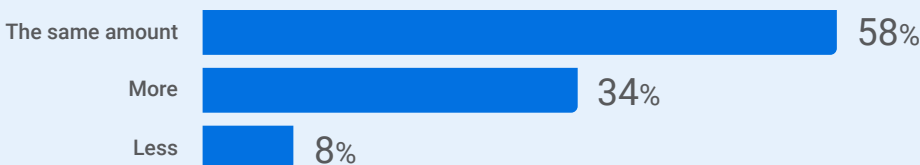
Of the children who receive pocket money, the survey found 1 in 3 (34%) have received an increase in pocket money in the past 12 months.

More than half of children (58%) are receiving the same amount of pocket money as they were 12 months ago, while 8% are receiving less.

One in 3 millennial parents (35%) have given their child a raise in the past year, compared to 29% of gen X parents.

Nearly half of South Australian children (46%) have received a pocket money pay bump in the past year, compared to 31% of those from New South Wales.

### Are you giving your child more, less or the same amount of pocket money as you were 12 months ago?



**Finder tip:** These days most of us pay by card or by tapping our phone. This can make it difficult for children to understand the concept of money. Pocket money can help children to understand how transactions work and teach them how to save from an early age. At the same time, try to introduce the concept of budgeting to your kids – teach them that it's okay to spend some of their money, as long as they're saving a portion too.

## Chores

Of the children under 12 who receive pocket money, 2 in 3 (67%) only earn it if they do their chores. The remaining 33% receive pocket money regardless of whether they do their chores.

### Does your child need to do any chores to earn pocket money?

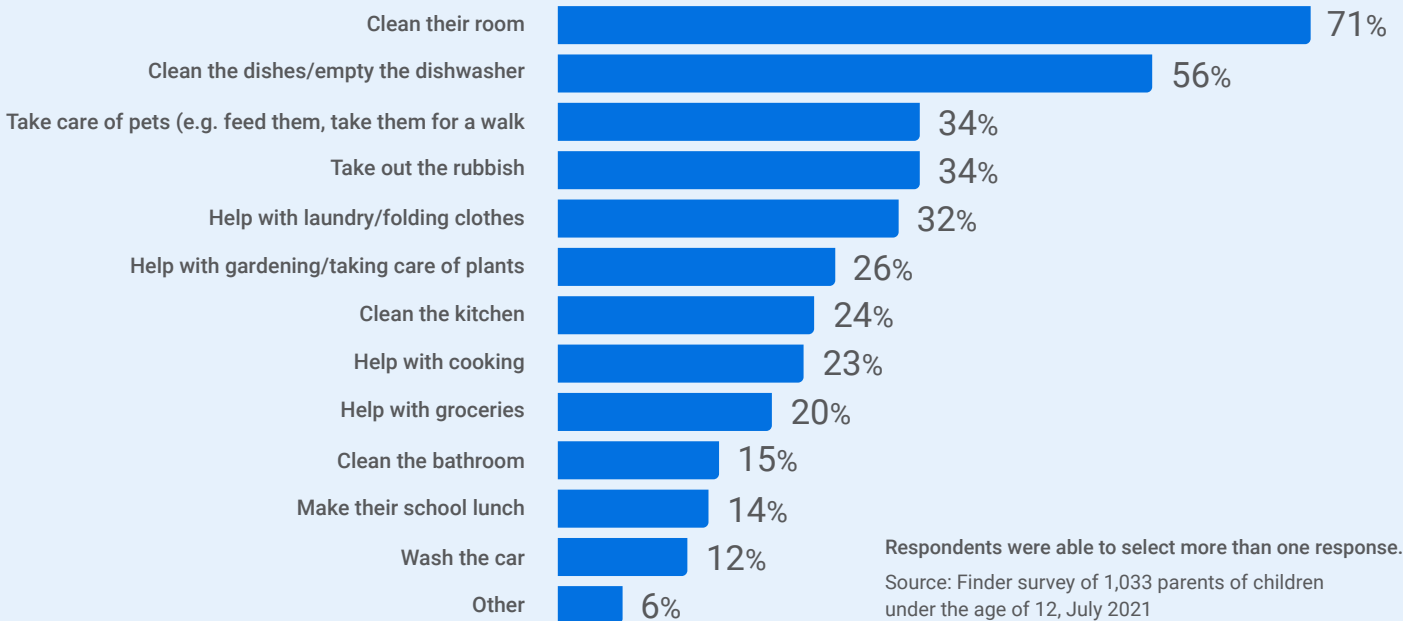


Source: Finder survey of 503 parents of children under the age of 12 who indicated they give their children pocket money

Of the children who need to do chores to earn pocket money, cleaning their room ranks as the number one chore (71%). Cleaning the dishes or emptying the dishwasher came in second place (56%), followed by taking care of pets and taking out the rubbish (both 34%).

One in 3 (32%) help their parents with the laundry, while 1 in 4 (26%) help with gardening or taking care of plants.

### Does your child need to do any chores to earn pocket money?



The survey found girls are more likely to take care of the pets (37% compared to 32% of boys), clean the kitchen (26% compared to 22%) and make their school lunch (19% compared to 10%).

Boys are more likely to take out the rubbish (41% compared to 25% of girls), help with gardening (32% compared to 19%) and wash the car (15% compared to 8%).

Parents from New South Wales are the most likely to give out pocket money regardless of whether their children do their chores (39%), compared to 29% for parents from Queensland and Western Australia.



## Savings accounts and credit cards

The research found a significant number of parents are setting up financial accounts for their children at a young age. More than half of respondents (58%) said their child has a savings account.

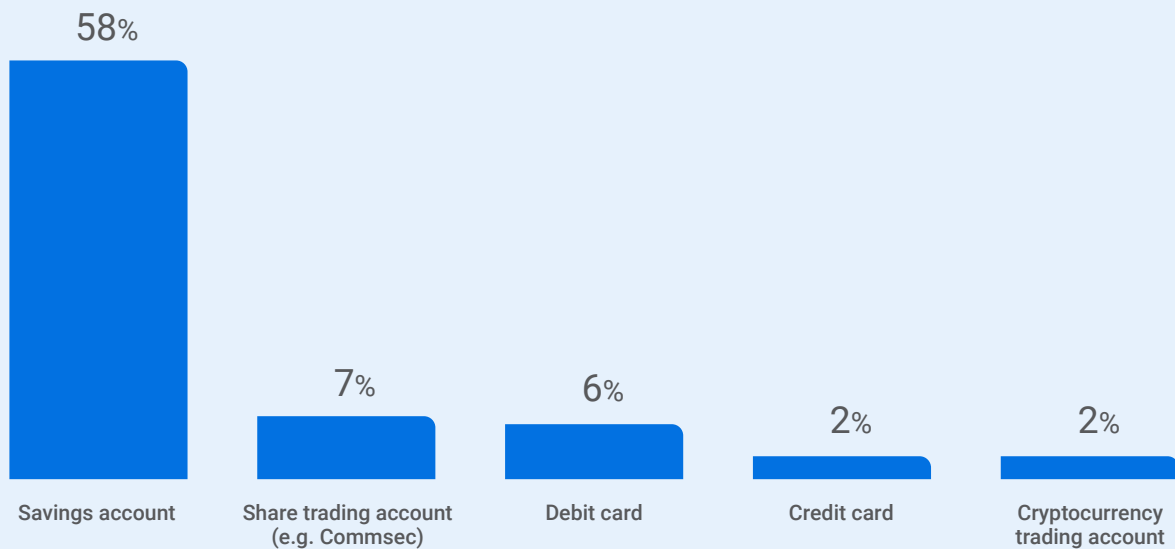
The survey also found 7% of children under 12 have a share trading account and 2% have a cryptocurrency trading account.

Children of gen X parents are the most likely to have a savings account (66%), compared to those of gen Z parents (53%). Meanwhile, children of gen Z parents

are more likely to have a share trading account (8%) or cryptocurrency account (3%) than those of gen X parents (5% and 1% respectively).

Finder's research found 6% of children under 12 have a debit card and 2% have a credit card. Of those children who have a debit or credit card, parents said their children were allowed to spend \$91 per month on average.

### Does your child have any of the following?



Respondents were able to select more than one response.

Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

**Finder tip:** Time is money's best friend. Setting up a savings account for your child early on and helping them to make regular contributions is a great way to build up their funds, while also teaching them about money and the importance of saving. There are plenty of children's savings accounts that offer bonus interest for small balances or for meeting certain criteria.

# Planning for children

## Milestones

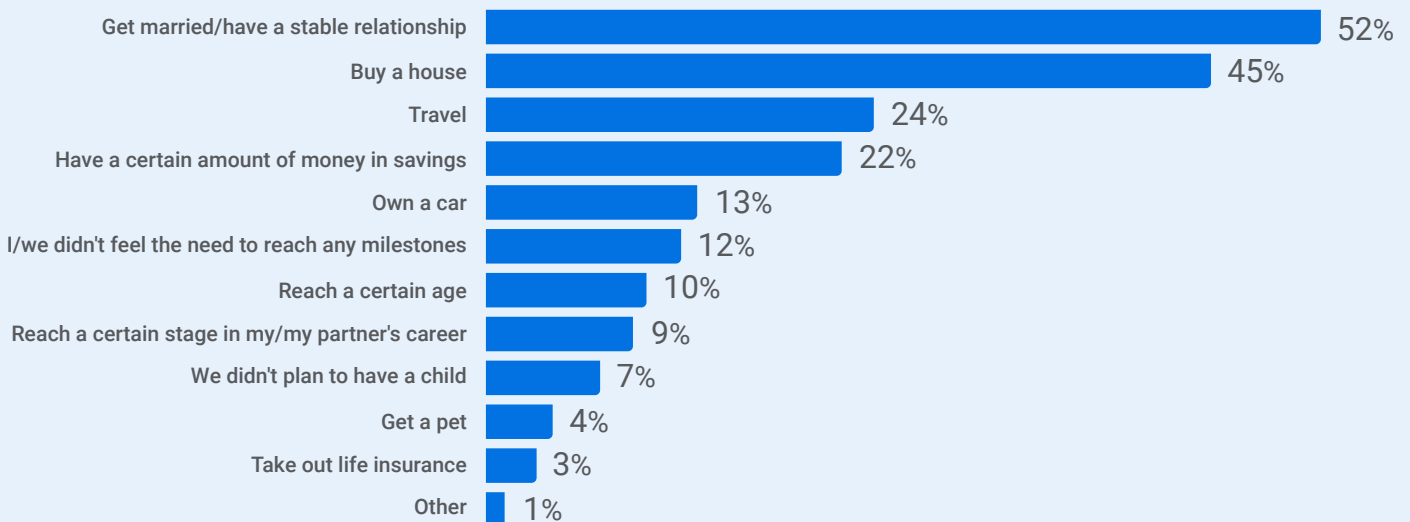
More than 4 in 5 (81%) parents surveyed said they had key milestones they wanted to reach before having their first child.

The survey found that topping the bucket list is getting married or having a stable relationship (52%). In second place came buying a house, with 45% of Aussie parents listing this as one of their milestones. Just 3% of respondents say taking out life insurance was a top priority before having children.

The data shows 1 in 4 Aussie parents (24%) prioritised travel before starting a family, while 13% aimed to own a car. One in 8 parents (12%) say they didn't have any milestones before having their first child, while 7% say their firstborn was unplanned.

Gen X parents are the most likely to say getting married or having a stable relationship was a top priority before having children (57% compared to 35% for gen Z). On the other hand, gen Z parents are more likely to have prioritised having a certain amount of money in savings (33% compared to 19% of gen X).

## What were the most important milestones for you before you decided to have your first child?



Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

## Saving before starting a family

Finder's research found 1 in 10 parents (10%) have no money in savings before starting a family. A further 28% of parents-to-be have \$5,000 or less in savings – less than a year's worth of living expenses for one child.

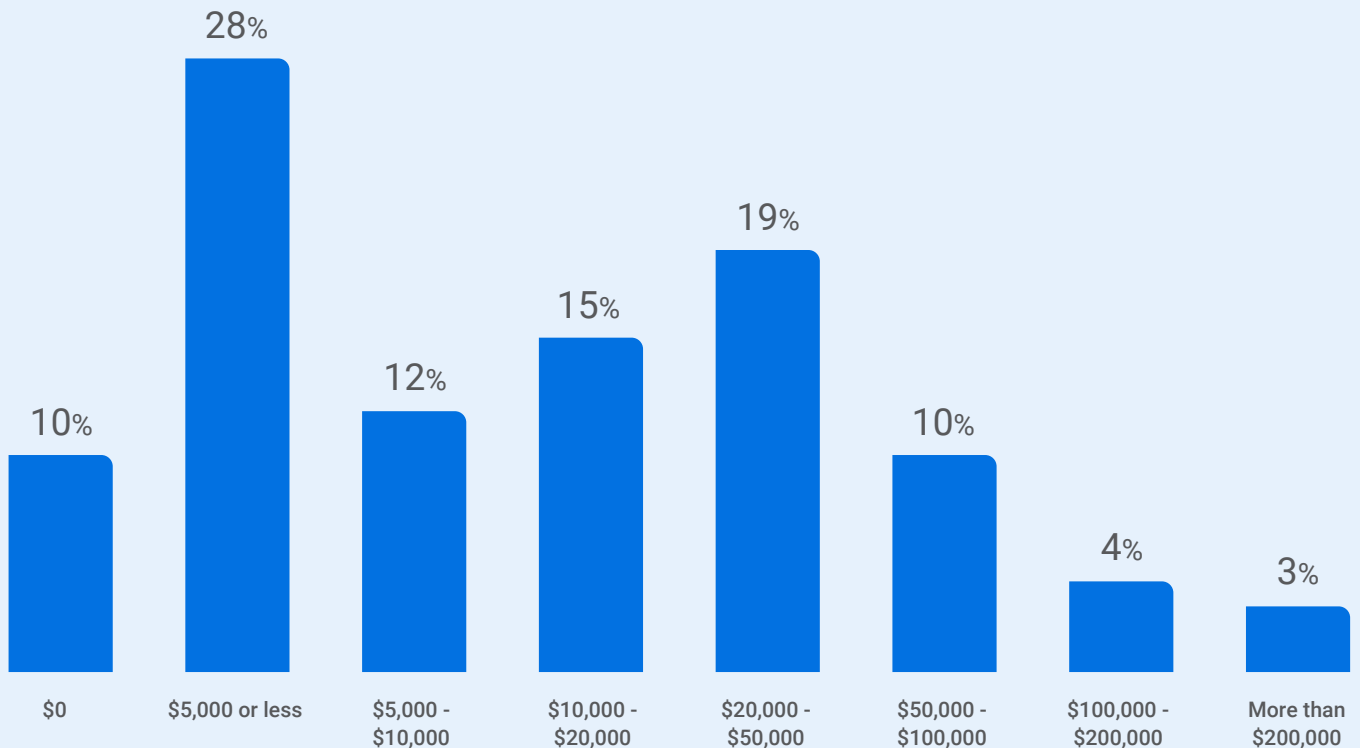
A 2018 study by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found it costs low-paid families around \$170 per week to raise a child.<sup>6</sup> That's equivalent to \$8,840 per year, or \$159,120 over 18 years. However, it is estimated that the average family would end up spending more money than this. Finder's research places this estimate at \$18,255 per year (refer to page 17).

The survey found parents had \$43,164 in savings on average before having their first child.

The data shows gen X parents had double the amount in savings (\$51,206) as gen Z parents (\$25,798) before starting a family.

Respondents from New South Wales had the most amount of money before having their firstborn (\$57,994), followed by those from Victoria (\$46,005) and Queensland (\$36,919).

## How much money did you have in savings before having your first child?



Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

**Finder tip:** The timing to start a family will probably never be perfect, but it's still important to plan financially. Try to budget what the first year will look like with the baby, including pregnancy and childbirth costs, living off reduced income and buying baby supplies like a pram and cot. It's also a good idea to pay off any outstanding debts – such as your credit card – before the baby arrives. Becoming first-time parents can be stressful enough as it is without being worried about how you'll make your mortgage repayments or afford groceries.



# Childbirth

## Healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth

The choice between public and private healthcare for expectant parents can be a difficult one. Finder's survey found more than 2 in 3 parents (69%) gave birth through the public healthcare system, while 28% chose private care. A further 3% said they used both systems in the same pregnancy.

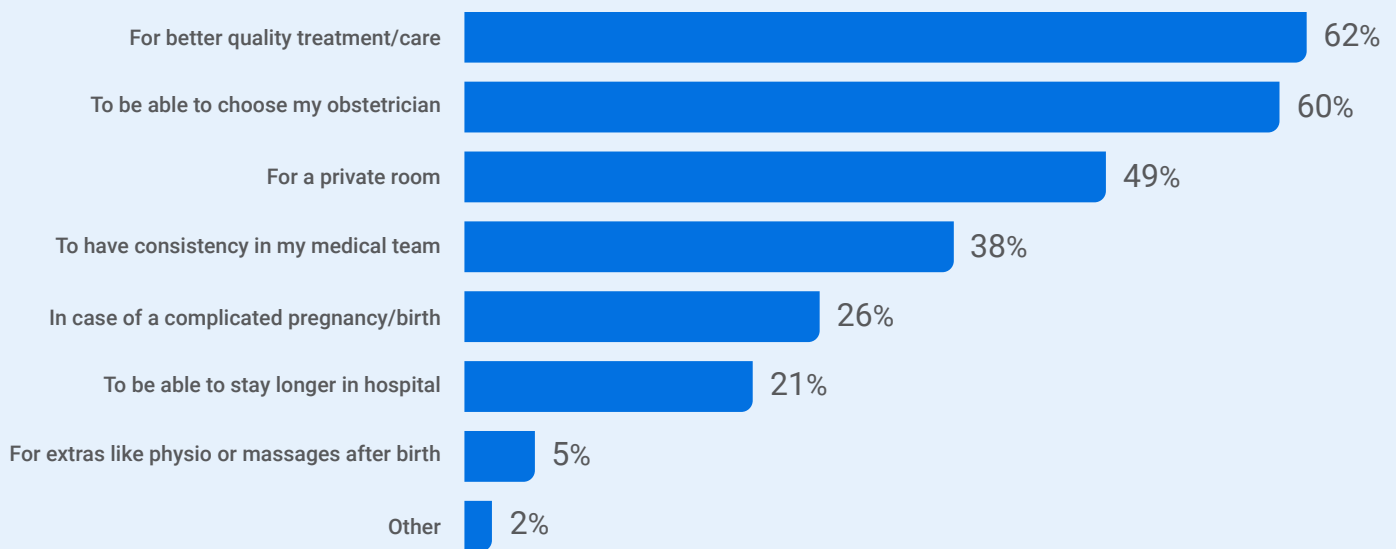
However, if given another chance, a slightly smaller number (59%) would choose the public system, while nearly a third (32%) would choose private care. One in 10 (9%) aren't sure which they would choose.

Interestingly, women (29%) are less likely than men (35%) to say they would go private if they were to have another child.

The top reason parents would go private for their next birth is for better-quality treatment or care (62%). This was closely followed by the ability for parents to choose their own obstetrician (60%). Half of parents (49%) would want to have a private room, while 26% would choose private care in case of a complicated pregnancy or birth.

Gen X parents are more likely to want a private room (57%) or to stay longer in hospital (21%) than gen Z (40% and 10% respectively). Meanwhile gen Z parents are more likely to opt for private care in case of a complicated pregnancy or birth (45%) than gen X (25%).

## Why would you choose the private system?



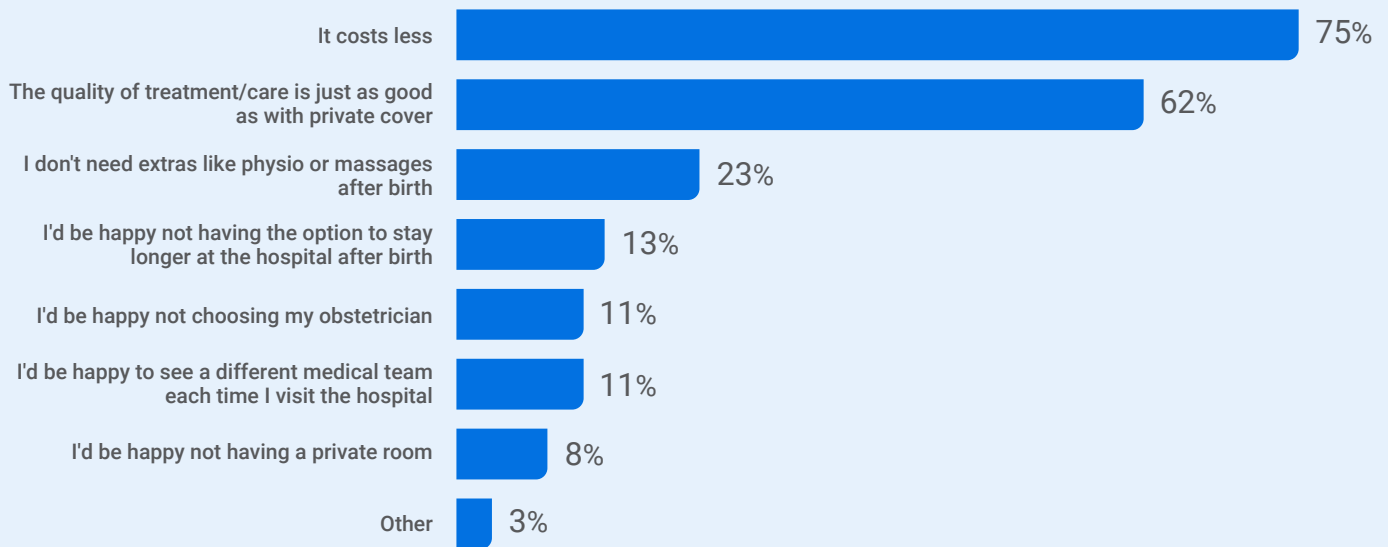
Respondents were able to select more than one response.

Source: Finder survey of 329 parents of children under the age of 12 who indicated they would choose private care if they were to have another child

Of those who said they would choose public care if they were to have another child, 3 in 4 (75%) would do so because it costs less. This is followed by 62% who say the quality of care is equally as good in the public system as in the private system. One in 10 (11%) would be happy not choosing their obstetrician, while 8% say they don't need a private room.

Those with a household income under \$50,000 are the most likely to say they would choose the public system if given another chance (72%), compared to 46% of those earning above \$150,000.

## Why would you choose the public system?



Respondents were able to select more than one response.

Source: Finder survey of 613 respondents who indicated they would choose the public system if they were to have another child

**Finder tip:** The decision whether to choose private care depends on your individual preferences, whether you have any pre-existing conditions and your financial situation. Some parents truly value consistency of care in their medical team. Having an obstetrician who understands your medical history – and may have delivered your previous children – can make parents feel more at ease.

On the other hand, many parents have very positive experiences with the public system, so there's no reason to assume you need private care to have a smooth pregnancy and birth. If you do choose private care, just make sure you're on your selected policy before you get pregnant as you won't be able to switch once you're expecting.



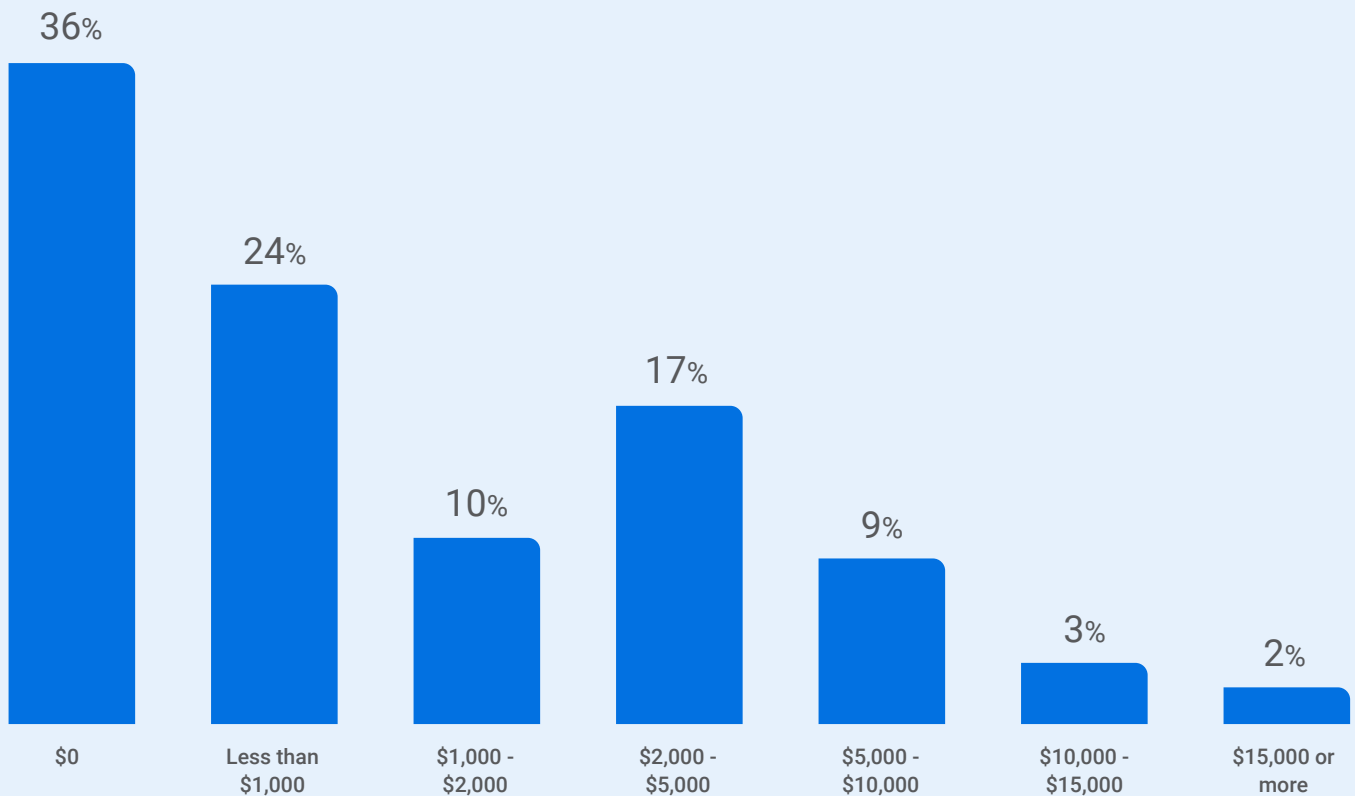
## Out-of-pocket costs

The survey found 64% of parents faced out-of-pocket costs for their most recent birth. The data shows 1 in 4 (24%) paid less than \$1,000 in additional costs, while a further 27% paid between \$1,000 and \$5,000. One in 7 parents (14%) faced out-of-pocket costs upwards of \$5,000, including 2% who spent more than \$15,000 for their most recent birth.

Just over a third of parents (36%) faced no out-of-pocket expenses for their most recent birth.

Nearly three-quarters of parents (74%) with a household income exceeding \$150,000 faced out-of-pocket costs, compared to 50% for those earning less than \$50,000.

### How much "out-of-pocket" were you after your most recent birth (medical expenses only?)



Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

**Finder tip:** It can be challenging to predict exactly what the cost of your birth will be ahead of time. If you're going through the public system, you can expect to pay a maximum of \$2,000, depending on personal circumstances, and often nothing at all. However if you have specialist care needs after a complicated birth, this can lead to more costs, especially if you're using private services. If you choose to go private, try to budget for at least \$5,000 out of pocket.

# Taking time off work

## Staying home with children

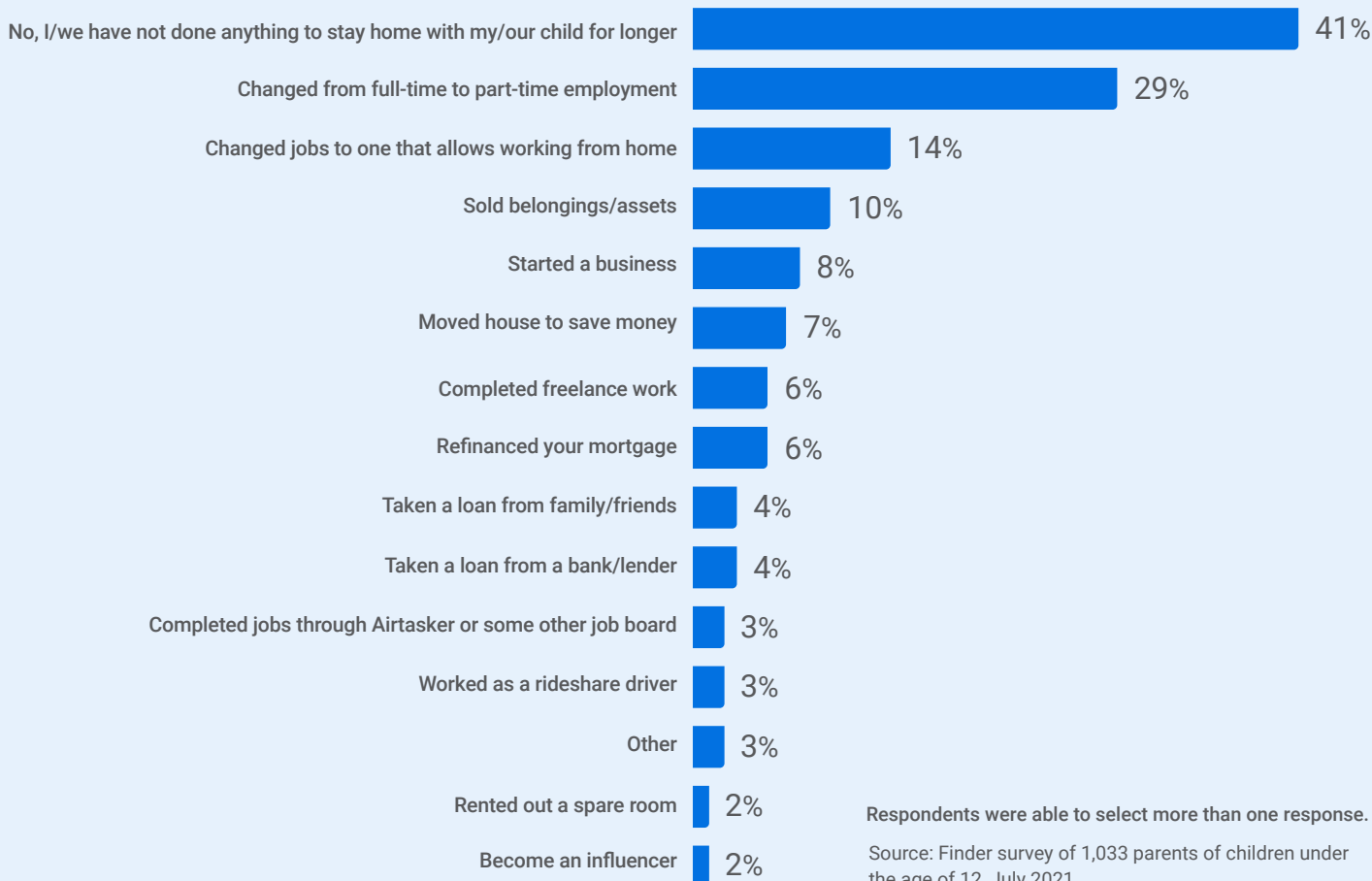
Finder's survey found more than half of parents of children under 12 (59%) have taken on extra work or saved money to be able to stay home with their child for longer.

Close to a third of respondents (29%) reported changing from full-time to part-time employment. Other money-saving activities parents have taken on include switching to a job that allows for working from home (14%); selling belongings or assets (10%); or starting a side hustle (8%) to bring more money in.

Mothers (32%) are more likely than fathers (27%) to have cut down to part-time work. The data also shows that 7% of parents took the extraordinary step of moving house to save money, in order to fund them staying home with their child for longer.

Those from Western Australia are the most likely to have moved house to save money (10%), while Victorians are the most likely to have refinanced their mortgage (11%).

## Have you/your partner done any of the following to stay home with your child for longer?



**Finder tip:** Moving house or changing jobs are huge decisions that can be disruptive – particularly with a new baby in tow. There are simpler ways to increase your cash flow after the birth of your child that consume less time or energy. For instance, Finder analysis found that shaving

just 0.5% off your home loan interest rate from 3.5% to 3% could save \$137 per month on repayments on a \$500,000 loan, equivalent to \$1,644 per year. Start with the small switches first and if need be you can move on to the more drastic changes.

## Maternity leave and financial stability

Australian mothers are entitled to at least 18 weeks' paid maternity leave, with some employers offering paid leave beyond this. On average, Finder's research found Australian mothers take 22 weeks of extra leave after their paid maternity leave has run out.

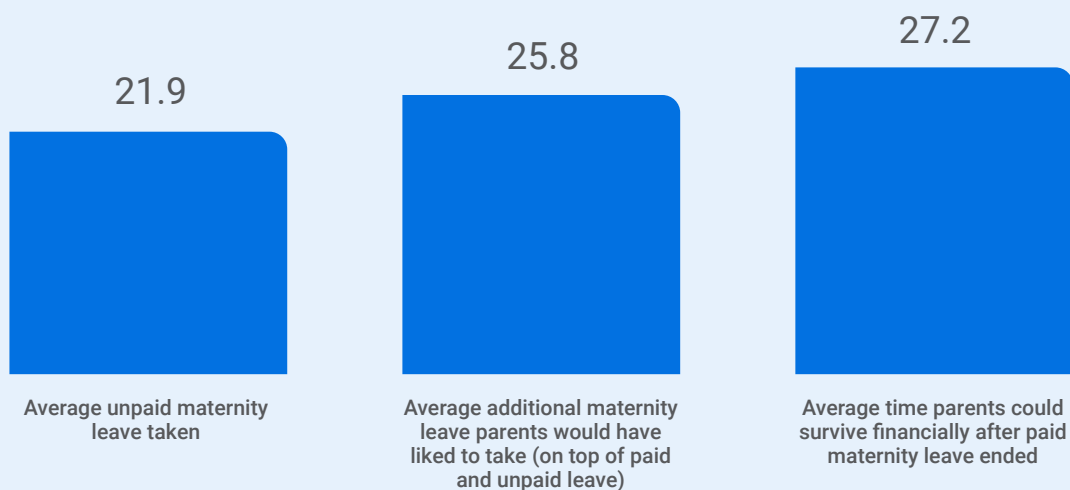
More than 2 in 3 Australian mothers (69%) returned to work within 12 months of maternity leave payments running out, including 13% who returned to work within 7 days of their maternity leave payments running out.

The survey found 14% of mothers didn't return to work after having a baby, choosing to live off one income, including 6% of couples who lived off one income even before having a baby.

Those earning a household income below \$50,000 took an extra 16 weeks on average, while households earning beyond \$150,000 took 27 weeks.

More than a third (37%) of gen Z mothers returned to work within 4 weeks of their paid maternity leave ending, compared to 25% of gen X.

### How much maternity leave mothers took, would have liked to take, and could afford to take (weeks)



Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

**Finder tip:** Taking time off work can be a stressful situation for many new parents. For some couples, surviving off a single income can be challenging. To prepare for this, budget as much time off work as you can afford. Try to work out how much money you'll need each week to survive, as well as some "fun" money to get you through the tough early stages of parenthood.

By budgeting to take 6–12 months off work, you'll take the pressure off yourself to return as soon as possible – you can always go back sooner if you want.



# The cost of children

## The cost of children

Having children is an extremely costly endeavour. Finder's research found parents of children under the age of 12 can be expected to fork out \$18,255 per year on basic expenses like food and education, alongside discretionary items like technology and holidays.

For a family with two children, that's \$36,510 per year, which is more than a year's worth of mortgage repayments for the average homeowner.

Childcare is the biggest money drainer, with parents spending \$4,349 per year to have their children cared for. This is followed by food (\$3,635), clothing (\$1,794) and private school fees (\$1,584).

| Category                        | Average annual cost |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Childcare                       | \$4,349             |
| Food                            | \$3,635             |
| Clothing                        | \$1,794             |
| Private school fees             | \$1,584             |
| Additional petrol costs         | \$1,519             |
| Healthcare and medicine         | \$1,391             |
| Tutoring                        | \$1,230             |
| Holidays                        | \$862               |
| Pocket money                    | \$509               |
| Sports                          | \$431               |
| Technology (e.g. phone, laptop) | \$392               |
| Music/dance/drama lessons       | \$322               |
| Back-to-school supplies         | \$237               |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>\$18,255</b>     |

Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

However, because the analysis takes into consideration the average parent, the average annual spend among only those who use childcare services is actually \$10,546. Similarly, private school fees average \$7,059

for parents who send their children under 12 to private schools. The table below shows the "true" cost of select kids' expenses, among only those who use those services.

| Category                  | Average annual cost excluding non-users |
|---------------------------|---|
| Childcare                 | \$10,546                                |
| Private school fees       | \$7,059                                 |
| Tutoring                  | \$4,261                                 |
| Music/dance/drama lessons | \$656                                   |
| Sports                    | \$650                                   |

Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

\* Excludes respondents who answered 0 in each category

## Driving costs

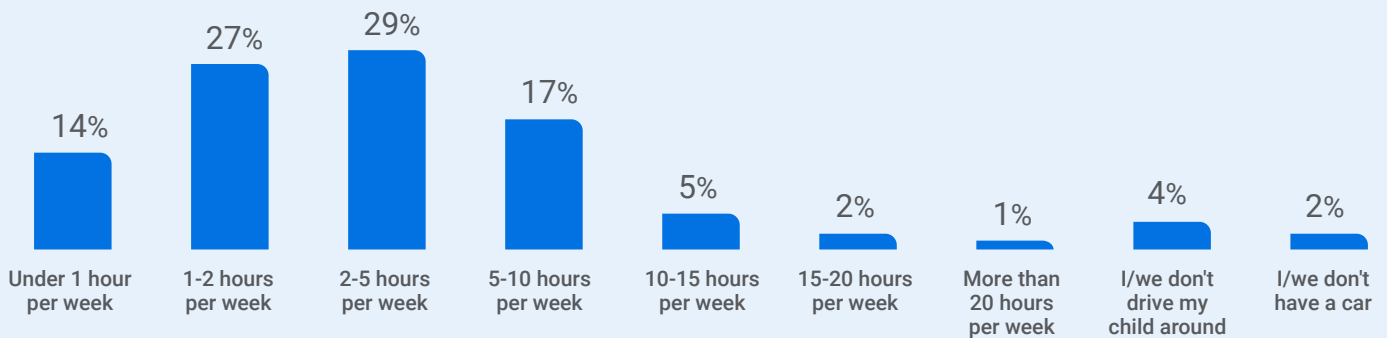
Finder's research found Australian parents spend 3.5 hours a week on average driving their children around. That amounts to 182 hours, or more than 7 days on the road each year.

Based on the average hourly earnings of Uber drivers, parents are collectively providing \$19.9 billion worth

of free rides per year, which is substantially larger than Australia's rideshare industry.

One in 6 parents (17%) spend 5–10 hours a week driving their children around, while 8% drive 10 hours or more a week.

## How many hours do you and/or your partner spend driving your child around in a typical week?

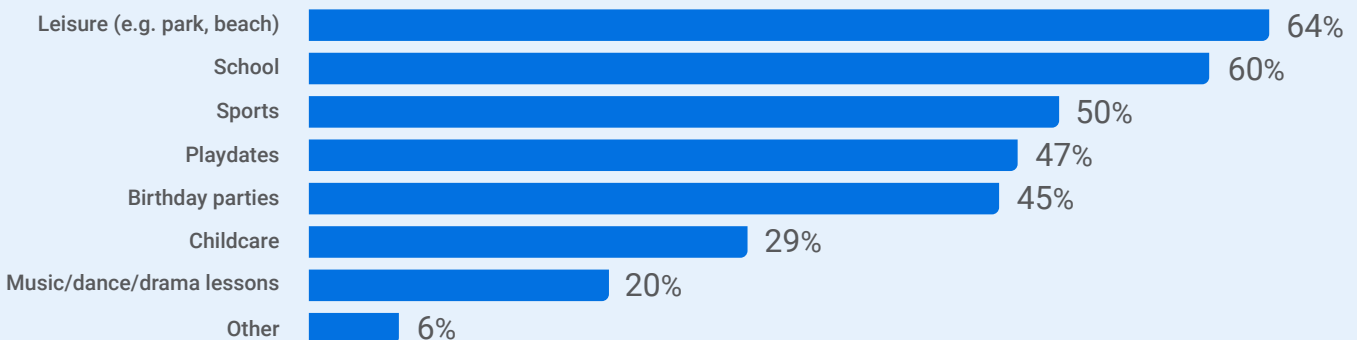


Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

The survey found leisure activities (64%), school (60%), sports (50%), playdates (47%) and birthday parties (45%) are the most common activities parents drive their children to.

Parents in Western Australia spend the most time per week driving their children around (3.8 hours), followed by Queensland (3.7 hours).

## Where do you drive your child to?



Respondents were able to select more than one response.

Source: Finder survey of 978 parents of children under the age of 12, who indicated they drive their children around

**Finder tip:** Spending hours every week driving your children around can become expensive, with petrol costs and vehicle wear and tear. Once you start a family, it's a good idea to check your car insurance policy and switch if you're not getting a good deal. And if possible, swap some car journeys for a walk – it's free and helps your children stay active.

## Families going without

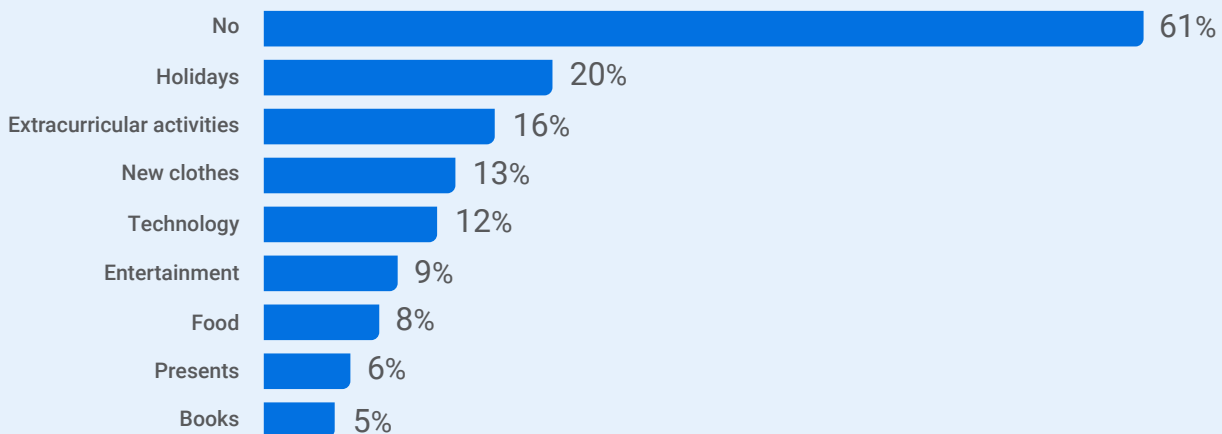
Over the past 2 years, the pandemic has resulted in lost income for some of Australia's most vulnerable communities. Finder's research found more than a third of parents (39%) say their children have had to go without basic necessities and treats in the past 12 months due to cost.

For 1 in 5 families (20%), holidays were off the cards because of cost, while 16% have had to forgo extracurricular activities for their children. The survey found 13% of families have had to give up new clothes in the past year, while 6% were not able to afford presents for their kids.

Worryingly, 8% say their children have had to go without food, equivalent to approximately 260,000 families struggling to put food on the table.

Modelling from the Australian National University predicts that child poverty rates are set to increase to 41% for single-parent families with the cessation of the coronavirus supplement – more than double the rate during the peak of COVID-19, and higher than pre-pandemic levels. The research estimates child poverty in couple families will reach 13%.<sup>7</sup>

### Has your child had to go without any of the following in the last 12 months due to cost?



Respondents were able to select more than one response.

Source: Finder survey of 1,033 parents of children under the age of 12, July 2021

**Finder tip:** Many families end up in financial hardship because of factors outside of their control -- such as a pandemic – but there are things you can do to safeguard your family. For instance, if you don't think you'd be able to scrape together money for a sudden medical expense, it might be time to start making small contributions to an emergency fund aiming to save at least 3 months' worth of living expenses.

If you're concerned about your ability to afford living expenses, there are financial hardship programs available through your bank. For instance, you might be able to switch to interest-only repayments on your loan or have late fees waived.

## Insights from Finder's parents



### **Kate Browne** | Personal finance expert

“One simple change when you are expecting a baby or you have had a baby is to switch to a family health insurance plan as soon as possible. Even if your little one doesn't need the cover straight away, you will be glad that you did when they start needing the dentist, the optometrist or even need to get super expensive braces.

If you can try and get prepared before you start a family, factor in how well you can live on one wage if you are a couple, think about the high costs of daycare and also what you value in terms of education. Also look at where you are living and whether you can afford to stay in that area, as well as factors like the number of bedrooms and even bathrooms in your current home.

Having a baby is a wild and unexpected ride full of highs and lows but with a little clever planning your budget doesn't need to be the same.”



### **Sarah Megginson** | Senior home loans editor

“Children can add a lot to the weekly bills, especially with nappies. And now that I have 3 children, our food and water bills have increased a lot! But my bigger concern was working out how to have time off work, drop my income for a period of time and still afford to pay for my life.

We saved up so I could afford to take 6 months off work with each child and then eased back 2–3 days a week. My big tip is to have a goal of how much time you'd like off. Be really specific and work out how much your life costs you each week, and how much money you need to 'replace' your income during parental leave – enough to cover your bills plus a little 'fun money' to fund those late night online shopping purchases while you're feeding the baby.

The first 6 months especially are a wild ride, full of emotions, highs and lows. If you can save up enough to take 6–12 months off, you can always go back to work early if you want to and can work it out with childcare. But having pressure to return to work 3 or 4 months after your baby is born can be really stressful.”

## References

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- <sup>7</sup> Phillips, B. and Narayanan, V. (2021). Financial stress and social security settings in Australia Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods. ([https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2021/4/Financial\\_Stress\\_and\\_Social\\_Security\\_Settings\\_in\\_Australia\\_PDF\\_0.pdf](https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2021/4/Financial_Stress_and_Social_Security_Settings_in_Australia_PDF_0.pdf))

## Methodology

Finder conducted a nationally representative survey of 1,033 parents with children under the age of 12 in July 2021. The sample demographic skews towards younger parents due to this group being more likely to have young children.

Respondents were carefully asked to answer each question with regard to their eldest child under 12, unless instructed otherwise. Calculation estimates and extrapolations are based on Australian population data by age from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

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