

Home and away: the living arrangements of young people

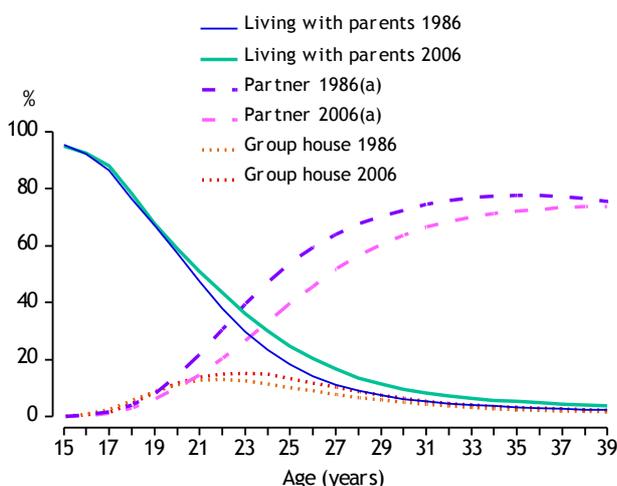
Moving out of the parental home has traditionally been an important step in the transition from dependent childhood to independent adulthood. Changes in housing and living arrangements are often related to milestones such as starting or finishing education and starting work. Other factors associated with young people's living arrangements include their level of financial security and housing affordability.

Since the 1970s, young people have tended to reach many of the major life milestones later, and this is reflected in the trends in living arrangements, which show a greater proportion living in the parental home.¹ Additionally, more young people who have moved out of the parental home are renting, rather than buying a home.

Trends in living arrangements

Young people are now more likely to be living with their parents than they used to be. In 2006, almost one in four (23%) people aged 20–34 years were living at home with their parents, compared with 19% in 1986. Over these decades young women had the biggest relative change in their living arrangements, with the proportion living at home increasing from 13% to 18% (up 36%). However, young men were more likely than young women to live with their parents. In 1986, 24% of young men were living at home, increasing to 27% by 2006 (up 16%).

Selected living arrangements



(a) Includes couples living in group houses.

Source: ABS Censuses of Population and Housing

Data sources and definitions

Most data in this article are sourced from the 2006 ABS Census of Population and Housing and the ABS 2006–07 Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey (FCTS). The FCTS collected information from people aged 18–34 years about leaving the parental home. For more information see [Family Characteristics and Transitions, Australia, 2006–07](#) (ABS cat. no. 4442.0). Census data exclude people not at home on census night and people for whom the relationship in household was not stated. Unlike the FCTS, the census includes people living in non private dwellings such as hotels, staff quarters and residential colleges. This accounts for some of the difference in the proportion of young people living at home between these two data sources.

Young people refers to people aged 20–34 years.

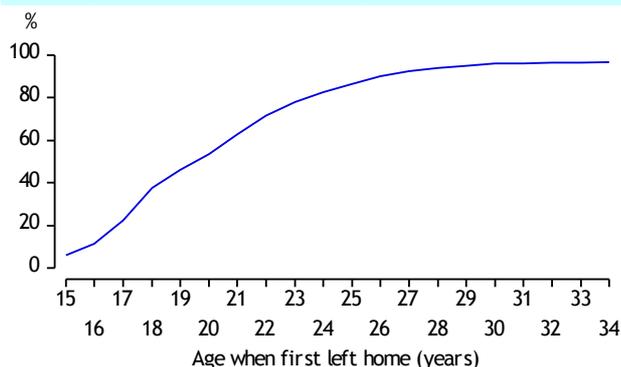
People living at home are those who usually live with at least one parent. These people are identified by their relationship to the household reference person. People who never left home but no longer live with their parents, for example those who bought the family home from their parents, are excluded.

This change in the living arrangements of young people is related to the trend towards partnering at a later age (see [Australian Social Trends March 2009, 'Couples in Australia'](#)). It was less common in 2006 than in 1986 for a young person to be a partner in a couple family. The age at which being in a couple family became a more common living arrangement than living with parents was 23 years in 1986. In 2006 this cross-over point had increased to 24 years.

Group houses also became a slightly more common living arrangement over this time. This type of living arrangement was most common among those in their early 20s in both 1986 and 2006.

Over the last twenty years, the proportion of young people living with their parents increased from 19% to 23%.

People aged 18-34 years: probability of first leaving home by a certain age – 2006-07(a)



(a) Excludes people who were living separately from their parents but had never left home.

Source: ABS 2006-07 Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey

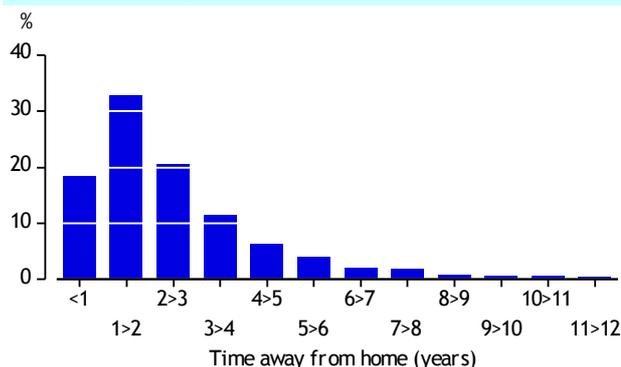
Moving out: at what age?

For men aged 18–34 years in 2006–07, the median age of first leaving home was 20.9 years (including those who left then returned later). Women in this age group tended to leave home for the first time at a slightly younger age (19.8 years).

The likelihood that a young person would have ever left home increased with age, then began to level out at around 28 years of age, where 94% of people had ever moved out. Only a further three percentage points of the population moved out by 34 years.

This leaves around 3% who hadn't left home by age 34 (excluding those who hadn't left home but were living separately from their parents). In the 30–34 years age group, only a quarter of the 12% who had never left home were actually living with their parents. The rest were not living with their parents, indicating that their

People aged 18-34 years who left home and returned: length of first time away – 2006-07



Source: ABS 2006-07 Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey

parents had moved or died. Women aged 20–24 years were three times as likely as men to not be living with their parents without having moved out (5.0% compared with 1.6%).

Among people aged 18–19 years in 2006–07, 18% were not living with their parents.

Do the leavers return later?

The increase in young people living with their parents may be due to young people leaving home for the first time at a later age, or an increased tendency to move out and later return to their parents' home after some time away, or both.² It is now quite common for young people to move out of home, then return later for a time, perhaps due to a change in circumstances or to save to buy their own home. In 2006–07, 31% of people aged 20–34 years had left their parents' home and returned at some point to again live with their parents (including 22% who were not living with their parents at the time of the survey).

People aged 20-34 years: moving out of, and back to, the parental home – 2006-07

	Age group (years)			
	20-24	25-29	30-34	20-34
	%	%	%	%
Total lives with parents	47.2	16.8	8.2	24.5
Has never left home	34.9	7.8	3.0	15.6
Left home and has returned	12.3	9.0	5.2	8.9
Total does not live with parents	52.8	83.2	91.8	75.5
Left home and has not returned	37.2	49.5	55.4	47.2
Left home and returned at least once	12.4	26.5	27.3	21.9
Has never left home, but lives separately from parents(a)	3.2	7.3	9.1	6.5
Total persons	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	'000	'000	'000	'000
Total persons	1 495.3	1 389.6	1 433.5	4 318.5

(a) Includes people whose parents may have died or moved away.

Source: ABS 2006-07 Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey

Having left home for the first time, the probability that someone would return home at least once before turning 35 was almost one in two (46%). Of those who do return home, the most common duration away was between one and two years with one-third of returnees expected to return in this period. Seven out of ten people who return to the parental home could be expected to do so within three years.

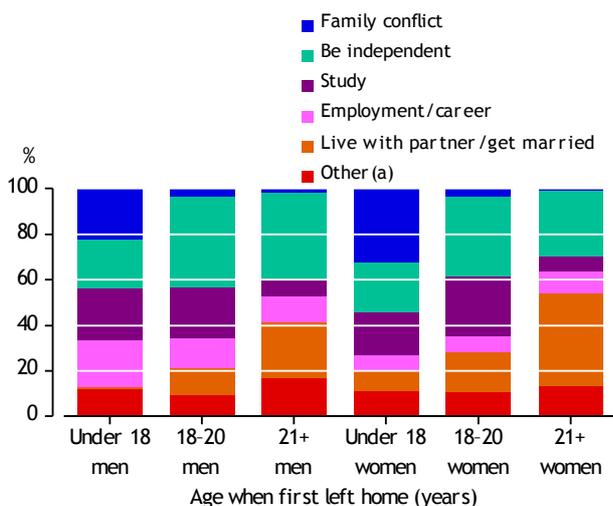
While it was slightly more common for young men living with their parents to have never left home (18% of all young men compared with 13% of young women), a higher proportion of young women (24%) than men (20%) reported returning home before moving out again.

Stay or go: why do people leave?

There have been some significant shifts in the reasons that young people leave home. From around the 1970s, leaving home to marry became less common.² A new stage of life emerged between living in the parental home and marriage, with people moving out for reasons other than marriage, such as to study, work, travel or to be independent.³

In 2006–07, 16% of all men and 22% of all women aged 18–34 years at the time of the survey had first left home before the age of 18 years. Moving out because of family conflict was more common among people who left before age 18 than people who moved out when they were older. This was the most common reason for leaving (32%) among women who left home before they turned 18. Almost one in four (22%) men who moved out before age 18 said that the main reason they left was because of family conflict. People who left at this young age because of family conflict

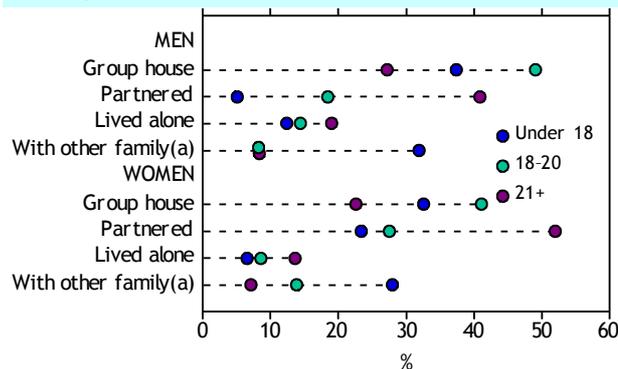
People aged 18-34 years: main reason first left home – 2006-07



(a) Includes travel; moving interstate or overseas; other reason; and reason not stated.

Source: ABS 2006-07 Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey

People aged 18-34 years: selected living arrangements when first left home – 2006-07



(a) Other family members or an unrelated family.

Source: ABS 2006-07 Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey

were more likely to move in with other family members, an unrelated family or into crisis or other temporary accommodation than those who left for another reason (43% compared with 26%).

Men who moved out before they turned 18 were three times as likely as women to say that their main reason for moving was for employment or career reasons (21% compared with 7%). Similar proportions of men (23%) and women (19%) said that they left to study.

More than one-quarter of men (29%) and women (28%) first moved out when they were aged between 18 and 20 years. The most common reason given for leaving home for the first time by both men and women who left at this age was to be independent (39% and 35% respectively). Men who moved out at this age were almost twice as likely as women to leave for employment or career reasons (13% compared with 7%).

...where do they go?

Group houses were the most common destination among people who left home before the age of 18, with 37% of men and 33% of women moving into a group house when they first left home. Moving in with other family members or an unrelated family was also common among people who left at this age (32% of men and 28% of women).

Overall, women were more likely than men to leave home to move in with a partner or to marry. This difference was especially apparent among those who moved out before they turned 18, with 23% of women in this age group living with a partner or spouse after moving out, compared with 5% of men. This was the most common living arrangement among men and women who first moved out when they were aged 21 years or older.

People aged 20-34 years engaged in work and study – 2006

	Men		Women	
	Lives with parents %	Does not live with parents %	Lives with parents %	Does not live with parents %
Working and/or studying full-time	66.2	77.0	68.7	47.8
Working full-time	51.4	67.7	45.2	38.8
Studying full-time	15.6	9.4	24.4	9.5
Working part-time only	9.8	7.7	12.3	18.6
Studying part-time only	1.3	0.5	1.5	1.8
Working and studying part-time	1.7	0.8	2.9	2.0
Employed but full or part-time status unknown(a)	5.3	4.4	4.3	4.2
Not currently working or studying(b)	15.7	9.7	10.4	25.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	'000	'000	'000	'000
Total	483.4	1 330.8	335.6	1 524.3

(a) Those who worked 0 hours in the week prior to census night.

(b) Includes those who were unemployed; not in the labour force; and/or not attending an educational institution.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Men were generally more likely than women to live alone after leaving home. In particular, the proportion of men who moved out before the age of 18 to live alone was almost twice that of women (12% compared with 7%).

Why stay at home?

Almost half (45%) of people aged 20–24 years who had never left home said that the main reason was financial. Among people aged 25–29 years, common reasons for staying at home included financial reasons (20%) and the convenience or enjoyment of living at home (also 20%).

Among 30–34 year olds who had never left home, most (67% of men and 82% of women) were living separately from their parents. This was also common among 25–29 year olds (35% of men and 59% of women who had never left home).

Characteristics of young people living at home

...are they working?

In 2006, women aged 20–34 years who were living at home were slightly more likely to be working full-time and less likely to be working part-time than those living out of home. Those women living away were more than twice as likely to be not working or studying as those living at home. This pattern is related to the child-rearing responsibilities of many women not living at home. Women who have moved out of home are more likely to have children

and are therefore more likely to be either not working or to be working part-time (see [Australian Social Trends 2006, "Trends in women's employment"](#)).

Men in this age group followed an opposite pattern. A lower proportion of those living at home were working full-time, compared with those living away. It was more common for men to be not working or studying if they were living with their parents.

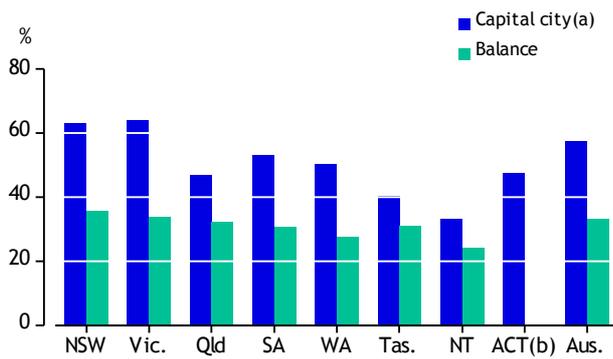
...are they studying?

Both men and women aged 20–34 years were more likely to be full-time students if they were living with their parents. This difference was more pronounced among women than men, with a much higher proportion of women living with their parents studying full-time.

Young men who were full-time students living at home spent more time than those living away on education activities.

Information from the 2006 Time Use Survey shows that 20–34 year old men living at home and studying full-time spent more time on education activities than those living away (about 31 hours per week compared with about 15 hours). The amount of time women spent on education was not associated with whether or not they lived at home.

People aged 20-24 years who lived with their parents in 2006: where they lived in 2001



(a) Capital City Statistical Division.

(b) Data for Balance not shown due to the very small number of people who live there.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

...living in a capital city

Young people from capital cities were more likely to be living with their parents than those from the non-capital city areas. This was particularly the case among those in their early twenties, who were more likely than any other age group to have had a change in living arrangements in the previous five years. In 2006, 57% of the 20–24 year olds who were living in a capital city five years earlier were living with their parents, compared with 33% of those who were living in non-capital cities five years earlier. Some of this difference was due to internal migration, with 20% of people this age from non-capital city areas moving to a capital city between 2001 and 2006, reflecting the attraction of major cities for young people especially for education and employment opportunities. Full-time education was also associated with living in a capital city. Almost one-third (30%) of the 20–24 year olds living with their parents in a capital city in 2006 were full-time students, but only 15% of those living outside capitals were engaged in full-time study.

In 2006, people aged 20–24 years who were living in Melbourne or Sydney five years earlier were more likely to be living with their parents (64% and 63% respectively) than people from other places. Those from Darwin and Hobart were the least likely to remain with their parents (33% and 40%) compared with young people from other capitals, but were still more likely to do so than those from the non-Darwin part of Northern Territory (24%) and the non-Perth areas of Western Australia (28%).

...ancestry

People aged 20–34 years in 2006 from particular Asian backgrounds (who were born in Australia but had parents who were both born overseas) had a greater tendency than people of

Ancestry of second generation Australians aged 20-34 years – 2006(a)(b)

	Ratio of people living with parents to people not living with parents	Proportion of people studying full-time	All people born in Australia whose parents were both born overseas
	Ratio	%	'000
Vietnamese	2.13	32.7	7.4
Chinese	1.40	30.8	20.7
Filipino	1.21	20.8	4.8
Lebanese	0.83	8.0	25.7
Macedonian	0.72	5.9	12.8
Turkish	0.71	11.1	7.0
Greek	0.64	5.3	38.4
Serbian	0.56	7.6	7.6
Polish	0.52	14.9	7.3
Croatian	0.49	6.1	14.8
Italian	0.47	4.8	58.0
Maltese	0.37	4.0	14.9
British and/or Irish(c)	0.30	8.6	114.7
New Zealand peoples(d)	0.30	10.3	7.9
Other	0.50	11.8	130.5
Total persons	0.54	10.0	407.1

(a) Australian born people whose parents were both born overseas.

(b) Each person could give up to two ancestry responses, for example British and Irish.

(c) British and/or Irish includes British; English; Scottish; Welsh; Channel Islander; and Manx.

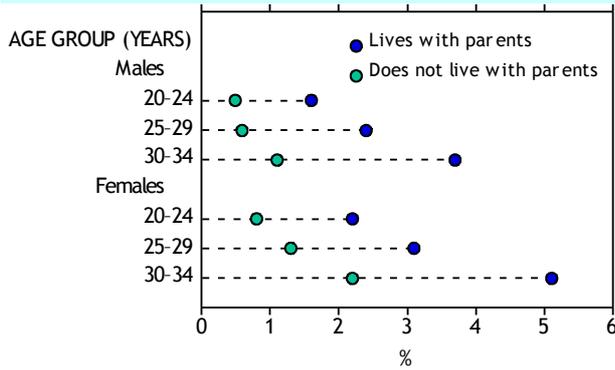
(d) New Zealand peoples includes New Zealand Peoples; Maori; and New Zealand.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

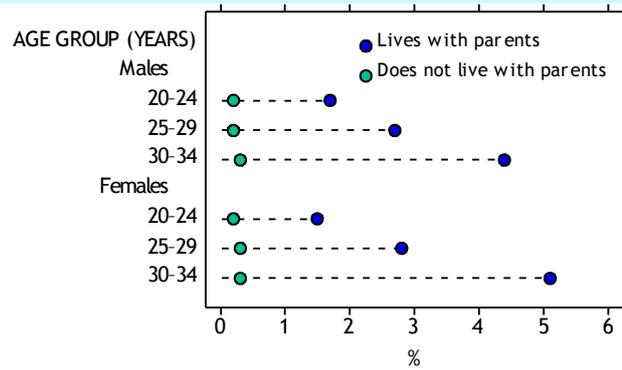
other ancestries to be living with their parents. Among second generation Australians with Vietnamese ancestry, there were two people living with their parents for every one person living away from home (a ratio of 2.13). This was much higher than the ratio for all second generation Australians living at home to those living away (0.54). People from these ancestries were also more likely to be in full-time education than other second generation Australians. One-third of people with Vietnamese ancestry were full-time students, as were 31% of people with Chinese ancestry and 21% with Filipino ancestry.

To a lesser extent, people from some other backgrounds also had a greater tendency to live with their parents. People of Lebanese ancestry had a ratio of 0.83, higher than for all second generation Australians (0.54). The ratio of people living at home to those living away was

Young carers living with a person with a need for assistance(a) – 2006(b)



Young people with a need for assistance living with a carer(a) – 2006(b)



(a) The link between recipient of assistance and carer was not explicitly collected in the census. Carers could be providing care to a person with a need for assistance other than the person living in the same household.

(b) Excludes people not living in households.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

lower among people of British and/or Irish, New Zealand and Maltese ancestries. For more information on second generation Australians see [A Picture of the Nation: the Statistician's Report on the 2006 Census, 2006, 'Second generation Australians'](#).

women aged 30–34 years living with their parents, 5.1% were providing care, compared with 3.7% of men. Overall, of those young carers living at home, over two-thirds (67%) were living with a parent who had a need for assistance.

Are they caring for someone or being cared for?

People living with their parents may be caring for someone, or be recipients of care. In 2006, 2.4% of 25–29 year old men living with their parents were carers living with a person with a need for assistance, four times the rate of those not living with their parents (0.6%). A similar difference was apparent among men in the other age groups. Women living at home were around three times as likely to be carers living with a person with a need for assistance as those living away.

Women in all age groups were slightly more likely than men to be carers living with a person who had a need for assistance. Of

Young people living at home were much more likely to have a need for assistance and be living with a carer than those who had moved out.

People living at home were much more likely to have a need for assistance (and be living with a carer) than those who had moved out. This difference became more apparent with increasing age. Among men aged 20–24 years the rate was around eight times as high among those living at home (1.7% of people living with their parents had a need for assistance and were living with a carer, compared with 0.2% of those living away). Among 30–34 year old men the rate was around fifteen times as high. Women living with their parents were also much more likely to have a need for assistance and followed the same age pattern as men. Almost all (99%) young people living at home who had a need for assistance were living with a parent providing care.

Carers and people with a need for assistance

Carers are people who, in the two weeks prior to census night, provided unpaid care, help or assistance to a person with a disability, a long-term illness or problems related to old age by assisting them with their daily activities, such as bathing, communicating with others, meal preparation and driving to appointments and activities.

People with a need for assistance are those with a profound or severe disability. They need help or assistance in one or more of the three core activity areas of self-care, mobility and communication, because of a disability, a long-term health condition (lasting six months or more) or old age.

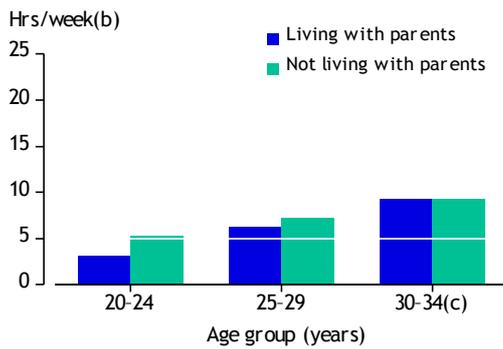
For more information see [A Profile of Carers in Australia](#) (ABS cat. no. 4448.0) and [Australian Social Trends 2008, 'People with a need for assistance'](#).

Do they help out at home?

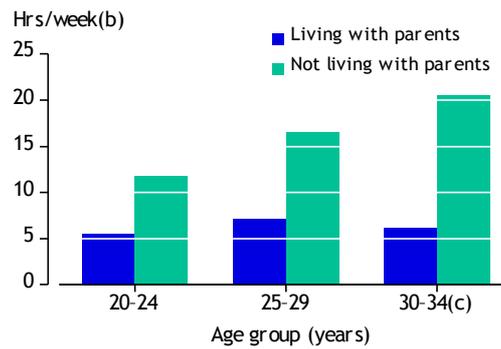
The time spent each week by 25–34 year old men living with their parents on domestic activities, such as cooking or gardening, did not differ greatly from the time spent by men this age who were living away from home. However there was a considerable difference among men aged 20–24 years. Those living at home spent on average 3 hours and 15 minutes on domestic activities each week, compared with the 5 hours and 25 minutes spent by those living away. The time 20–24 year old women spent on domestic activities similarly differed

Time spent on domestic activities(a) per week – 2006

MALES



FEMALES



(a) Main (not secondary) activity at the time. Domestic activities includes food preparation, service and clean-up; washing; ironing and clothes care; other housework such as indoor cleaning and tidying activities; domestic management; home and car maintenance and improvement; pet care; and care of the grounds. Associated travel is not included.

(b) Average hours and minutes per week by all people.

(c) Estimate for living with parents has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

Source: ABS 2006 Time Use Survey

with their living arrangements, with those living at home spending an average of almost 6 hours a week on domestic activities, compared with the 11 hours and 10 minutes spent by those living away.

Looking ahead

Given the close association of education and employment status with young people's living arrangements, it is evident that a broad range of government policies, including income support and housing policies, are potentially relevant to young people making the decision to leave home.¹ Although living with their parents helps young people to establish themselves, there is the issue of what their parents gain (or lose) from this living arrangement, for example the impact on the accumulation of retirement wealth by these parents.¹

Endnotes

- 1 Cobb-Clark, D. A., 2008 'Leaving Home: What Economics Has to Say about the Living Arrangements of Young Australians', *The Australian Economic Review*, Vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 160–176.
- 2 Weston, R., Stanton, D., Qu, L., and Soriano, G., 2001, 'Australian Families in Transition', *Family Matters*, no. 60, pp. 12–23.
- 3 Young, C, 1996 'Are young people leaving home earlier or later?' *Journal of the Australian Population Association*, Vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 125–152.