

Medical experiments

c. 1945 – c. 1970

Details

During the twentieth century, babies and children in Victorian orphanages and Homes were used as subjects for medical experiments. Reports from the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care contained details of studies carried out by the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute and the Commonwealth Serum Laboratory (CSL) between 1945 and 1970. One reason given for the use of children in institutions in medical trials was that this group of children was particularly vulnerable to epidemics. Journalists at the *Age* newspaper investigated these experiments in 1997. A report written by the Department of Human Services in November 1997 considered the issue of who had given consent for these children's participation in the medical trials. The report found that 'it is likely that the research institutes gained consent to conduct the research from staff responsible for the institutions and possibly in one case, from a Departmental employee'.

Medical experiments on 'orphans' in institutions are discussed in the 'Forgotten Australians' report (2004) and 'Protecting Vulnerable Children' (2005). Australian research institutes (including the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute and CSL) trialled new vaccines on babies and children in Victorian Homes, particularly during the period after World War Two.

Trials of a herpes simplex vaccine were carried out on babies at the St Joseph's Foundling Hospital in Broadmeadows in the 1940s and the results were published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* and the *Australian Journal of Experimental Biology and Medical Science*.

The *Medical Journal of Australia* also reported on experiments with influenza vaccines conducted by the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in the 1950s, on children under the age of 3 at Broadmeadows.

CSL tested quadruple antigen vaccines on babies and young children between 1959 and 1961 at five Victorian institutions: St Joseph's Foundling Hospital, Broadmeadows, the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home [Berry Street], East Melbourne, Bethany Babies' Home, Geelong, Methodist Babies' Home, South Yarra and Turana in Royal Park.

In 1997, the *Age* published reports about medical experiments and research trials conducted on children in Victorian institutions in the 1950s and 1960s. The media attention led the Chairman of the National Health and Medical Research Council to comment that everyone involved in clinical research needed to 'heed the lessons of the past'.

In 2009, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne strongly supported the Federal Government's apology to child migrants and Forgotten Australians and in a statement, expressed

its deep regret for the part played by researchers linked to its community in vaccination research trials conducted after World War II using children in orphanages as 'subjects'.

More info

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [St Joseph's Foundling Hospital \(1901 - 1975\)](#)
Medical experiments were conducted on babies and children at St Joseph's from the mid 1940s to the early 1960s.
Date: 1945 - 1961
- [The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home \(1906 - 1964\)](#)
CSL conducted trials at the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home
Date: 1959 - 1961
- [Bethany Babies' Home \(1928 - 1977\)](#)
CSL conducted trials at Bethany Babies' Home
Date: 1959 - 1961
- [Methodist Babies' Home \(1929 - c. 1974\)](#)
CSL conducted trials at Methodist Babies' Home
Date: 1959 - 1961
- [St Gabriel's Babies' Home \(1935 - 1975\)](#)
The Age newspaper reported in 1997 on medical experiments conducted on babies at St Gabriel's in the 1950s.
- [Turana \(1955 - 1993\)](#)
CSL conducted trials at Turana.
Date: 1959 - 1961

Resources

- Murray, John, [From the Cradle to the Grave](#), On Line Opinion, 14 August 2007
- [State Sanctioned Abuse of Children](#), Origins Harp Healing and Recovery Project for Forgotten Australians, No date
- Hughes, Gary, [Polio vaccine tested at orphanages](#), The Age, 25 October 2004
- Milliken, Robert, [Vaccines tested on Australian orphans](#), The Independent, 11 June 1997
- Shortkids Downunder, [Submission no 121 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Farrar, Lindsay, [Submission no 479 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Slatterie, Patricia and Blick, Jeanette, [Suffer the little children](#), Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions blog, 26 October 2010
- [University supports apology to Forgotten Australians](#), The Melbourne Newsroom, 17 November 2009
- Miller, Barbara, [University apologises for experiments on children](#), 18 November 2009

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