

# Infant Life Protection Act 1890, Victoria

1891 – 1915

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## Details

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The Infant Life Protection Act 1890 (No. 1198) commenced on 31 January 1891. It shifted the control of overseeing paid children's nurses to the police, and explicitly stated that people had to be registered if they were for the purpose of nursing or maintaining such infant apart taking charge of a child under two years of age 'for the purpose of maintaining such infant for a longer period than three consecutive days' or 'for the purpose of adopting such infant'.

Since the 1870s there had been mounting public concern about the fates of infants placed with paid nurses, often referred as 'baby farmers', and in 1883 an amendment to the Public Health Act placed the monitoring of such arrangements under the control of Local Health Boards.

The Infant Life Protection Act 1890 shifted the control of overseeing paid children's nurses to the police, and explicitly stated that people had to be registered if they were for the purpose of nursing or maintaining such infant apart taking charge of a child under two years of age 'for the purpose of maintaining such infant for a longer period than three consecutive days' or 'for the purpose of adopting such infant'. The clause referring to adoption was intended to regulate the work of people who brokered adoptions by taking charge of surrendered infants and matching them with adoptive parents for a fee. At this time, there was no law providing for an adoption to be recognised in law and it was not unusual for informal adoptions to be negotiated through 'baby farmers'.

The Infant Life Protection Act 1907 extended the definition of infants to include all children under five years of age and also transferred the administration of infant life protection measures to the Neglected Children's Department. The Infant Life Protection Act 1915, No. 2670 which repealed this Act, was a re-enactment of the 1907 provisions, and was consolidated in the Children's Welfare Act 1928.

## More info

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### Chronology

- **Infant Life Protection Act 1890, Victoria (1891 – 1915)**
  - Infant Life Protection Act 1915, Victoria (1915 - 1929)
    - Children's Welfare Act 1928, Victoria (1929 - 1955)
      - Children's Welfare Act 1954, Victoria (1955 - 1959)
        - Children's Welfare Act 1958, Victoria (1959 - 1971)
          - Social Welfare Act 1970, Victoria (1971 - 1978)

### Related Entries

### Related Glossary Terms

- [Baby Farming \(c. 1867 - c. 1910\)](#)
- [Infant Life Protection \(1890s - 1960s\)](#)

The Infant Life Protection Act 1890 was Victorian legislation.

#### Is amended by

- [Infant Life Protection Act 1907, Victoria \(1907 - 1915\)](#)

#### Amends

- [Crimes Act 1890, Victoria \(1890 - 1915\)](#)
- [Health Act 1890, Victoria \(1890 - 1915\)](#)

The Infant Life Protection Act 1890 repeals Part VII of the Health Act 1890.

## Resources

- Swain, Shurlee with Renate Howe, *Single mothers and their children : disposal, punishment and survival in Australia*, 1995
- Harris, Helen Doxford, *Infant Life Protection Act of 1890 - index to mothers, children, nurses and adoptive parents*, 2001
- Harris, Helen Doxford, [Infant Life Protection Act 1890 - Information compiled by Helen D. Harris OAM, 2004-10.](#), No date
- Harris, Helen D, [Victoria Police Involvement in the Infant Life Protection Act 1893-1908](#), Provenance, 2010
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), [To Remove and Protect](#), 2014

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