
13 Children's services

This chapter presents performance information for government funded and/or delivered child care and preschool services. These services seek to provide both care and developmental activities for children, although the emphasis on these two broad objectives may differ across the various child care and preschool services. The chapter does not include services that do not receive government funding (unless otherwise noted).

Child care refers to care of a child aged 12 years and younger, by someone other than the child's parents or guardian, outside the child's home. Preschool services are provided to children mainly in the year before compulsory full time schooling. Unless otherwise stated, the data presented in this chapter relate to services provided for children aged 12 years and younger.

A profile of children's services is presented in section 13.1, followed by a brief discussion of recent policy developments in section 13.2. Together these provide a context for assessing the performance indicators presented later in the chapter. All jurisdictions have agreed to develop, and aim to report, comparable indicators, and a framework of performance indicators is outlined in section 13.3. The data are discussed in section 13.4 and future directions for performance reporting are discussed in section 13.5. The chapter concludes with jurisdictions' comments in section 13.6.

The most recent Commonwealth child care census was conducted in May 1999. As processing is not yet completed, data for 1998-99 are unavailable for:

- four descriptors — the number of children accessing government funded and/or provided child care services, average hours of attendance at these child care services, average fees for some of these child care services and the qualifications and experience of staff employed in these child care services; and
- three performance indicators — the proportion of services offering nonstandard hours, access of special needs groups to these child care services, and the unit cost (recurrent expenditure per hour of service) of these child care services.

Data for 1997-98 are reported for these items in the absence of more recent data.

For the first time, the chapter contains descriptive information on the progress of centre based long day care services participating in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System introduced by the Commonwealth Government in 1994 and administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council. The Report also includes some information on the ability of children's services to meet the needs of families. This indicator has been revised this year to provide information on the ability of child care and preschool services to provide nonstandard hours of care.

Definitions, estimating methods and counting rules have been refined to improve the consistency and comparability of performance information across jurisdictions. As a result, revisions of some data reduce data comparability across years. Similarly, changes in the children's services industry have required jurisdictions to revise collection methods, and these revisions also reduce data comparability across years. It will take some time before all improvements are reflected in the Report.

13.1 Profile of children's services

The children's services data presented in this Report relate to services supported by the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. Local governments plan, fund and deliver children's services that do not receive support from other tiers of government. However, owing to data limitations, this Report records data on local government activities only where Commonwealth, State and Territory funding was involved.

The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments support a range of services for children (box 13.1). The roles and responsibilities of governments in children's services are outlined in box 13.2.

Government delivery and funding

The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments have different but complementary roles in the area of children's services. Both levels of government provide funding for services, provide information and advice to parents and the sector, and help plan, set and maintain operating standards (box 13.2).

Box 13.1 Types of children's services

Children's services aim to promote children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Services are provided for children aged 12 years and younger by someone other than the child's parents or guardian outside the child's home. This can be in the form of:

- *centre based long day care* — services provided at a centre usually providing a mix of qualified and other staff. Age-appropriate development programs and curricula are provided. The care is largely aimed at 0–5 year olds and typically operates for at least eight hours a day on normal working days for a minimum of 48 weeks per year;
- *family day care* — services provided in the carer's own home. The care is largely aimed at 0–5 year olds, but primary school children may also receive care before and after school and during school vacations. Central coordination units in all States and Territories organise and support a network of carers, often with the help of local governments;¹
- *occasional care* — services usually provided at a centre on an hourly or sessional basis for short periods of time or at irregular intervals specifically for parents who need time to attend appointments, take care of personal matters, undertake casual and part time employment, study or have temporary respite from full time parenting. These services provide developmental activities for children and are aimed primarily at 0–5 year olds. Centres providing these services usually employ some qualified staff;
- *preschool* — services usually provided by a qualified teacher on a sessional basis in dedicated preschools. Preschool programs or curriculum may also be provided in long day care centres and other settings. These services are primarily aimed at children in the year before commencing compulsory full time schooling (4 years old in all jurisdictions except WA where these children are 5 years old), although in NSW, Queensland, WA, SA and the ACT younger children may also attend;
- *outside school hours care* — services provided for school aged children (5–12 years old) outside school hours during term and vacations. Care may be provided on student free days and when school finishes early; and
- *other services* — government funded services to support children with additional needs or in particular situations (including children from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, children from non-English speaking backgrounds, children with a disability or of parents with a disability, and children living in remote and rural areas).

¹ All carers providing care in the carer's own home in WA are licensed and supported by Family and Children's Services but those who are not supported by coordination units are not represented in the figures in this chapter.

Box 13.2 **Government roles and responsibilities**

The Commonwealth Government's roles and responsibilities for child care services are:

- assisting low and middle income families with the cost of their child care fees;
- developing family day care and outside school hours care services;
- planning the location of services in conjunction with other levels of government;
- providing information and advice to parents and providers about the availability of Commonwealth funded and some State and Territory funded services;
- helping to enhance quality child care services by developing and funding a mandatory Quality Improvement and Accreditation System for centre based long day care services eligible for government funding;
- providing information, support and training to service providers through funding to organisations; and
- providing operational and capital funding to some providers.

The Commonwealth Government directly provides a small amount of funding for some preschool services in Queensland and WA in recognition of the later school starting age (AIHW 1997). The Commonwealth also provides supplementary funding for the preschool education of children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

State and Territory governments' roles and responsibilities vary across jurisdictions, and may include:

- providing operational and capital funding to non-government service providers;
- delivering some services directly (especially preschool services);
- licensing and setting standards for children's services providers;
- monitoring and resourcing licensed and/or funded children's services providers;
- providing information, support, training and development opportunities for providers;
- planning to ensure that the appropriate mix of services is available to meet the needs of the community;
- providing information and advice to parents and others about operating standards and the availability of services; and
- providing dispute resolution and complaints management processes.

The major differences in the roles of the different levels of government relate to the objectives of each for children's services. The primary focus of the Commonwealth Government is support for economic and social participation by parents. The Commonwealth Government aims to achieve this through payments such as Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate. State and Territory governments place a greater emphasis on providing developmental opportunities for children and

other forms of family support. Some State and Territory governments have a larger role in the direct delivery of children's services, particularly preschool services.²

Both levels of government are active in maintaining the quality of care provided by children's services. The Commonwealth Government is responsible for the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System which was introduced in 1994 to help improve the quality of Commonwealth funded, centre based long day care services. Long day care centres are required to participate in the system to remain eligible for Childcare Assistance. The Commonwealth Government is also undertaking preliminary work on developing quality assurance mechanisms for family day care and outside school hours care. In addition, SA and Victoria have implemented quality assurance or improvement systems for preschools, while other jurisdictions are developing them (for example, NSW is developing an accreditation system).

State and Territory governments are responsible for licensing children's services in their jurisdiction. This involves setting regulatory requirements and monitoring adherence to these standards. State and Territory governments also undertake a range of activities aimed at quality promotion, for example publication of curriculum materials and other resources, and consumer education. The types of service covered by legislation vary between States and Territories, as do the standards that apply. However, State and Territory governments and the Commonwealth Government have developed national standards for centre based long day care, family day care and outside school hours care.

The rate of implementation of these standards varies across Australia. To date, the ACT has implemented the national standards for centre based long day care and outside school hours care, and Tasmania and the NT have implemented the national standards for centre based long day care. SA has implemented national standards for centre based child care, outside school hours care and family day care. Victoria took the national standards into consideration when developing the *Children's Services Act 1996* and *Children's Services Regulations 1998* regarding long day care.

² The ACT, for example, is involved in the direct delivery of preschool services as well as providing funding for the delivery of occasional care services to support families and children. On the other hand, Queensland is involved in both the direct delivery of preschool services and the funding of the Creche and Kindergarten Association to help groups provide community based kindergartens and preschools. In NSW, the Department of Education and Training provides 77 preschool services in low socioeconomic locations or in locations with high Aboriginal populations, while the Department of Community Services provides financial assistance and licenses 843 community or local government operated preschools. The NT directly delivers preschool services, provides operational funding for all child care centres, and assists community based kindergartens and other services. SA is primarily involved in the direct delivery of preschool services. Victoria funds organisations to provide preschool services.

Victoria intends to legislate regulation of outside school hours services and family day care using the national standards as a framework.

Total reported expenditure on children's services by Commonwealth and State and Territory governments was approximately \$1.4 billion in 1998-99 (tables 13A.6, 13A.27, 13A.36, 13A.46, 13A.56, 13A.66, 13A.75, 13A.84 and 13A.95). Reported expenditure was approximately \$1.3 billion in 1997-98, but these figures are not comparable because some elements of expenditure were not included in all years.³

Commonwealth Government expenditure in 1998-99 was approximately \$1.0 billion (which includes administration expenditure of an estimated \$80.5 million for national, State and Territory offices, Centrelink and the Health Insurance Commission, expenditure of around \$5 million on Childcare Rebate for work related care in preschools and expenditure on some other services for families and children). Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate (for child care and preschool services) accounted for almost 77 per cent of Commonwealth Government expenditure on children's services in 1998-99. Other expenditure on services provision, administration expenditure for the national, State and Territory offices, Centrelink and the Health Insurance Commission, and expenditure on assets represented the remainder (table 13A.7).

Recurrent expenditure on service delivery comprised the bulk (around 83 per cent) of State and Territory government expenditure on children's services in 1998-99. Administration expenditure and capital expenditure accounted for the remainder. Preschool services accounted for the largest proportion (at least 80 per cent) of total State and Territory government expenditure across all service types.

The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments supported at least 229 000 preschool places and over 439 000 child care places in 1998-99. The majority of government supported child care places were centre based long day care places (45 per cent), followed by outside school hours care (including vacation care) places (37 per cent) and family day care places (14 per cent) (tables 13A.3, 13A.26, 13A.35, 13A.44, 13A.54, 13A.64, 13A.73, 13A.82 and 13A.93).

³ Data for 1997-98 excludes expenditure on assets for preschools in NSW, includes expenditure on additional administration items in Queensland and excludes expenditure on preschool services provided by the Education Department of WA. Data for 1998-99 excludes expenditure on preschool services provided by the Education Department of WA, and excludes lottery grants funding for which data were no longer available. Data on Queensland State administration expenditure for child care for 1998-99 reflects the transition from cash to accrual based accounting. Commonwealth administration expenditure is estimated because there were complex transitional arrangements during 1998-99.

Size of the sector

Child care services

Child care services aim to enhance children's development by providing a broad range of developmental activities for children. Child care services offer a variety of care options for children aged 12 years and younger, in a range of environments.

Data on the number of children attending child care services included in the Commonwealth Census of Child Care in 1998-99 were not available for inclusion in this Report. However, some data for 1998-99 were available from States and Territories (see attachment 13A). Data for 1997-98 are reported in the absence of more recent consistent data.

It was not possible to report on the full attendance at child care services because a complete data collection was not available. At least 618 000 children (at least 18.2 per cent of children aged 12 years and younger) had access to Commonwealth, State and Territory government funded and/or provided child care services in 1997-98 (tables 13A.2, 13A.24, 13A.34, 13A.43, 13A.53, 13A.63, 13A.72, 13A.81 and 13A.92). Of these children, at least 410 000 were aged 5 years and younger. These figures underestimate the number of children attending these services because they exclude children attending some State funded services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and SA. Changes to the data collection in 1997-98 mean that data are not comparable over time. Similarly, comparisons across jurisdictions are not possible because there are gaps in data availability (table 13.1).

Table 13.1 **Proportion of children in the population attending Commonwealth and State and Territory government funded and/or provided child care services, 1997-98 (per cent)**

Age	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
0-5 years	33.1	21.2 ^a	27.6 ^b	18.1 ^{b, c}	18.6 ^b	34.3 ^d	30.0	17.7	26.4 ^e
0-12 years	20.7 ^f	15.6	20.4 ^g	12.0 ^{b, c}	15.8 ^b	21.7	23.7	17.6	18.2 ^h

^a Excludes children attending some State funded services. ^b Excludes children attending some State funded services. ^c A significant amount of child care in WA is provided by licensed family day carers who do not receive government funding. ^d Based on response by 75 per cent of State funded services. ^e Excludes children attending State funded services in Victoria, Queensland, WA and SA. ^f Excludes children attending vacation care services. ^g Excludes children attending some vacation care services, occasional care services and services funded under the Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care program. ^h Excludes children attending State funded services in Victoria, WA and SA.

Sources: tables 13A.1, 13A.2, 13A.24, 13A.34, 13A.43, 13A.53, 13A.63, 13A.72, 13A.81 and 13A.92.

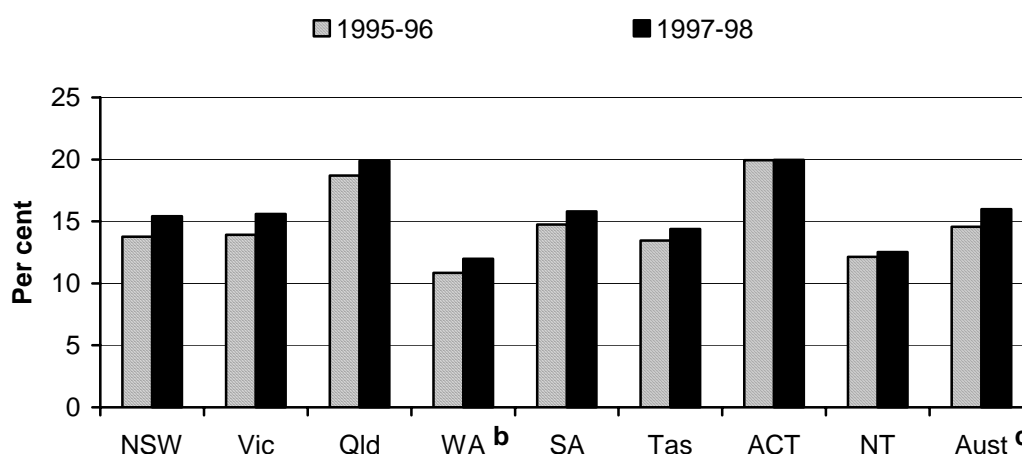
The Commonwealth Government's Census of Child Care Services is the most complete dataset on child care services and, as such, indicates the relative participation in child care services across jurisdictions. The census includes most

child care services receiving Commonwealth Government assistance. State and Territory governments may also support many of these services. The service types included in the 1999 census were centre based long day care, family day care, outside school hours care, occasional care and other care. However, data on the number of children attending child care services included in the Commonwealth Census of Child Care in 1998-99 were not available for inclusion in this Report. Data for 1997-98 are reported in the absence of more recent data.

Over 542 400 children aged 12 years and younger (16.0 per cent of children in this age group) attended Commonwealth Government supported child care services in 1997-98. Across Australia, the share ranged from 12.0 per cent in WA to 20.0 per cent in the ACT (figure 13.1). The majority (over 348 500) of those children were aged 5 years and younger. Thus, in 1997-98, 22.4 per cent of children aged 5 years and younger attended Commonwealth supported child care services (tables 13A.1 and 13A.2).

The proportion of children in the population attending child care services included in the Commonwealth child care census increased in all jurisdictions between 1995-96 and 1997-98. Nationally, the proportion rose from 14.6 per cent to 16.0 per cent over this time (figure 13.1).

Figure 13.1 **Proportion of children in the population attending child care services included in the Commonwealth Government Census of Child Care Services^a**



^a Children are defined as persons aged 12 years and younger. ^b Does not include children cared for by around 400 family day carers who are not members of Commonwealth funded schemes. ^c Includes children in other Territories.

Sources: tables 13A.1 and 13A.2.

The Commonwealth child care census collects data on variations in average hours of attendance at child care services across Australia. However, data on the average hours of attendance at child care services in 1998-99 were not available for inclusion in this Report. Data on attendance in 1997-98 are reported below in the absence of more recent data.

The average hours of attendance at child care services in 1997-98 varied considerably across Australia, for all service types. The average hours of attendance at centre based long day care centres in 1997-98 ranged from 14.4 hours per child per week in Tasmania to 26.9 hours per child per week in the NT, while the average hours of attendance at occasional care services ranged from 3.9 hours per child per week in SA to 8.4 hours per child per week in Tasmania (table 13.2). The average attendance at vacation care ranged from 2.3 days per week in Tasmania to 4.4 days per week in the NT in 1997-98 (table 13A.5).

Table 13.2 Average attendance at child care services included in the Commonwealth Government Census of Child Care Services, 1997-98 (hours per child per week)^a

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
Centre-based long day care	18.2	22.6	19.9	19.3	17.4	14.4	26.0	26.9
Family day care	19.3	16.5	21.0	17.6	14.9	14.0	20.8	27.9
Before school hours care	5.2	3.8	4.4	5.5	2.7	3.0	3.2	na ^b
After school hours care	7.2	5.5	6.7	7.7	5.0	4.8	7.5	10.6 ^b
Occasional care	6.7	4.4	6.5	6.5	3.9	8.4	7.8	5.3
Other care	15.3	24.0	20.7	17.8	18.0	20.0	0.0	29.0

^a Average attendance hours were derived by summing hours attended within each sector and dividing by the number of children who paid in the reference week. This includes children who paid but did not attend during the reference week. No information is available for mobile and Aboriginal playgroups for hours of attendance. Therefore children from these sectors are not included in the total children using other care. The children count in this section will be lower than the number of children in table 13A.2. ^b NT figures are affected by the standard working day beginning at 8am as opposed to 9am. **na** Not available.

Source: table 13A.5.

Some data on fees are available for 1999. Fees for centre based long day care ranged from \$153 per week in the NT to \$182 per week in the ACT in June 1999. The average weekly fees for family day care in June 1999 ranged from \$127 in Queensland to \$161 in SA. Fees for vacation care ranged from \$60 in NSW to \$99 in the ACT in August 1997 (the most recent figures available). The average sessional fee for before school hours care ranged from \$2.00 in the NT to \$4.57 in NSW in August 1997, and the fee for after school hours care ranged from \$4.97 in SA to \$7.93 in the NT at this time (table 13A.4).

Preschool services

Preschools provide a range of educational and developmental programs, generally on a sessional basis, to children in the year immediately before commencing full time compulsory schooling, and in some jurisdictions, also to younger children. The age from which children may attend preschools varies across jurisdictions. Children in Victoria, Tasmania and the NT are usually funded by government to attend preschool in the year before commencing schooling. Younger children in NSW, Queensland, WA, SA and the ACT may access government funded preschool services. Younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in remote areas may also attend preschools in the NT and Queensland. In SA, for example, a pre-entry program provides one session of preschool per week for 10 weeks in the year before commencing preschool, and children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds may attend preschool at 3 years of age. In the ACT, children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, children with English as a second language, children with a hearing impairment and/or whose parents have a hearing impairment may be eligible for early entry into preschool (for 5.25 hours) at 3 years of age.

This disparity in the age from which children may access preschool services has reduced the comparability of preschool data across jurisdictions. Preschool data are presented for two categories to improve comparability:

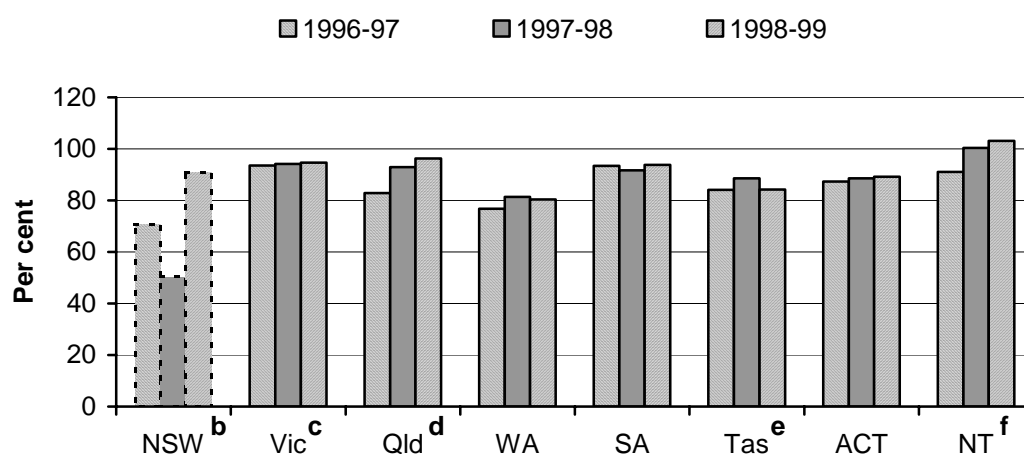
- children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling (data that are largely presented on a comparable basis for all jurisdictions); and
- younger children attending preschool services.

Approximately 241 400 children attending preschool services in 1998-99 were to begin compulsory full time schooling the following year. This represented nearly 84 per cent of all children attending preschool services in Australia in 1998-99.

Some jurisdictions differ in their approach to preschool services; as a result the following data should be interpreted with caution. Approximately 92 per cent of 4 year old (5 year old in WA) children in the population attended preschool in the year immediately before commencing school in 1998-99. Across the jurisdictions for which 1998-99 data were available, this proportion ranged from 80.4 per cent in WA to 96.3 per cent in Queensland and 103.1 per cent in the NT. There may be some double counting in the figures as evidenced by the result in the NT where data relates to the full year rather than for a specific date and reflects children moving in and out of the system (figure 13.2).

Younger children in NSW, Queensland, WA, SA and the ACT were able to attend funded preschool services in 1998-99. Approximately 46 550 younger children attended preschool services in that year (tables 13A.24, 13A.34, 13A.43, 13A.53, 13A.63, 13A.72, 13A.81 and 13A.92). This participation differed across jurisdictions, reflecting variation in the jurisdictions' policies on access to funded preschool services. The proportion of 3 year old children attending preschool services was 16.2 per cent in NSW, 21.7 per cent in Queensland and 24.3 per cent in SA (where younger children may attend a pre-entry program for one term in the year before preschool). The proportion of 4 year old children in the population who attended preschool services in WA was 64.3 per cent.

Figure 13.2 **Proportion of total children in the population who attended State and Territory government funded or provided preschool services immediately before the commencement of compulsory full time schooling^a**



^a The denominator — the population of preschool aged children — is defined as persons aged 4 years in all States and Territories except WA, where preschool aged children are defined as persons aged 5 years. The data are sourced from the ABS. ^b Data for 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99 are not directly comparable. Data for 1996-97 (but not 1997-98) include children attending preschool services other than in the year before the commencement of compulsory full time schooling. Data for 1996-97 and 1997-98 exclude preschool services delivered in centre based long day care centres. Data for 1998-99 include children aged 4 years and over using preschool services operated by the Department of Community Services and the Department of Education and Training, and children aged 4 years attending government funded or provided child care services (excluding vacation care). ^c Includes some children attending preschool services conducted in a centre based long day care centre. ^d Includes non-State preschool data for the first time in 1997-98. ^e Excludes children attending non-State preschools. ^f Data for 1996-97 were at August 1996; data for 1997-98 were for the calendar year ending 1997; data for 1998-99 were for the calendar year ending 1998. There is some double counting of children because they move in and out of preschool services of the preschool system throughout the year; as a result, the number of children in preschool exceeds the number of children in the target population.

Sources: tables 13A.24, 13A.34, 13A.43, 13A.53, 13A.63, 13A.72, 13A.81 and 13A.92.

The range of fees charged for preschool services varies widely across jurisdictions and, in some cases, within jurisdictions. In some States and Territories, such as Tasmania and the NT, preschool services were provided in 1998-99 at no compulsory cost to parents; in other jurisdictions, fees (while usually paid for the majority of children) were not compulsory (Victoria, SA and the ACT); and in some other jurisdictions, fees varied according to the provider of preschool services. Queensland is an example of the latter group: preschool services operated by the Creche and Kindergarten Association in Queensland charged average hourly fees of \$1.85 for children in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling and \$1.75 for younger children, whereas preschool services provided by Education Queensland were free.

Seven jurisdictions provided data on preschool fees in 1998-99. The definitions and methods used to collect these data vary; for example, some jurisdictions have provided data on the hourly fee while others have provided data on a weekly or annual fee, so these data are not comparable across jurisdictions.

- In NSW, the average hourly fee for children attending Department of Community Services preschools in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling and for younger children was \$1.64. Fees were not payable in Department of Education and Training preschools (table 13A.26).
- In Victoria, the median hourly fee paid by children attending preschool in stand alone preschools in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling was \$1.10 (table 13A.35).
- In Queensland, the average hourly fee paid in community based preschools and kindergartens by children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling was \$1.85; the average hourly fee paid by younger children was \$1.75. Education Queensland preschool services were free. Data were not available on the fees paid in non-State preschools (table 13A.44).
- In WA, children attending Education Department preschools in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling paid an average fee of \$9.00 per year; younger children attending these preschools paid an average fee of \$1.00 per week. Younger children attending Department of Family and Children's Services preschools paid an average fee of \$5.00 per week (table 13A.54).
- In SA, there was no compulsory fee for preschool services. The average contribution for children attending four sessions of preschool in the year immediately before commencing school was \$3.70 per week, and \$0.23 per week for younger children (table 13A.64).

- In the ACT, children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling and younger children attending preschool both paid a voluntary contribution of \$0.56 per hour (table 13A.82).
- In the NT, there was no compulsory fee for preschool services for children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling, but families may have made a voluntary contribution of \$3.50 per week (\$0.28 per hour) (table 13A.93).

Six jurisdictions supplied data on the average hours of attendance for government funded or provided preschool services in 1998-99. The average hours of attendance of children in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling ranged from 10.0 hours per week in Tasmania to 24.0 hours per week in WA (table 13.3).

Table 13.3 Average attendance at State and Territory government funded or provided preschool services, 1998-99 (hours per week)

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
Children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling	8.0	na	12.8	24.0	11.0	10.0	10.5	12.5
Younger children attending preschool	na	..	11.0	5.5	2.6	..	5.3 ^a	..

^a Includes early entry for preschool. **na** Not available. **..** Not applicable.

Sources: tables 13A.26, 13A.35, 13A.44, 13A.54, 13A.64, 13A.73, 13A.82 and 13A.93.

Staff qualifications and experience

Nationally, the proportion of staff with formal qualifications (including those studying for qualifications) in Commonwealth supported child care services was 50 per cent in 1997-98. Nineteen per cent of staff had no formal qualifications but three years full time experience. The remaining 31 per cent of staff had no formal qualifications and less than three years full time experience. There was little change in these figures between 1995-96 and 1997-98 (table 13.4).

Some additional data were available for some services receiving funding from State and Territory governments only. Across those jurisdictions for which 1998-99 data were available:

- the proportion of child care staff with formal qualifications ranged from 40.8 per cent in Queensland to 77.8 per cent in the NT (tables 13A.25, 13A.45, 13A.65, 13A.74, 13A.83, 13A.94); and
- the proportion of preschool staff with formal qualifications ranged from 48.7 per cent in the ACT to 100.0 per cent in WA and the NT (although the latter

refers to only teaching staff in preschool services provided under the Education WA 5 year old program and by the NT Department of Education)(tables 13A.25, 13A.45, 13A.55, 13A.65, 13A,83, 13A.94).

Table 13.4 Qualifications and experience of primary contact staff in child care services included in the Commonwealth Government's Census of Child Care Services (per cent)^{a, b}

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>	<i>Aust</i>
<i>1995-96</i>									
Relevant formal qualification ^c	52.3	51.5	48.4	51.7	45.3	47.4	41.3	36.8	49.9
No qualification but three years full time experience	19.4	17.9	10.6	14.6	23.4	21.7	20.7	24.0	16.9
No qualification and less than three years full time experience	28.3	30.6	41.0	33.7	31.3	30.9	38.0	39.3	33.2
<i>1997-98</i>									
Relevant formal qualification ^c	51.1	53.5	49.5	47.8	44.4	50.0	42.9	40.0	50.2
No qualification but three years full time experience	21.5	17.8	14.0	16.4	25.9	25.0	21.4	20.0	18.7
No qualification and less than three years full time experience	27.4	28.7	36.4	35.8	29.6	25.0	35.7	40.0	31.1

^a Excludes family day care, Aboriginal playgroups and occasional care neighbourhood model for which data were not available. ^b Staff who are regarded as qualified for the purposes of this chapter may not be qualified for service licensing purposes. ^c Includes staff training for a qualification.

Sources: tables 13A.8 and 13A.9.

Employment status of parents

Access to children's services differs according to the service type. The workforce status of parents is one factor that may influence children's access to services. Those services eligible for Childcare Assistance, for example, are required to give highest priority to children of parents with work related child care needs. Occasional care gives priority to parents requiring care to meet other requirements (such as to attend appointments, to take care of personal matters or to have temporary respite from full time parenting).

Nationally 74 per cent of children (defined as children younger than 12 years of age) in child care services in 1996 came from families with both parents in the workforce — up from 69 per cent in 1993. In contrast, preschools are a universal service, with no priority of access guidelines. Of those children attending preschools, only 49 per cent came from families with both parents in the workforce, compared with 46 per cent in 1993 (figure 13.3).

Across jurisdictions, the proportion of children in child care with both parents in the workforce in 1996 ranged from 59 per cent in WA to 86 per cent in the ACT. The proportion of children attending preschool services with both parents in the workforce in 1996 ranged from 37 per cent in WA to 55 per cent in NSW (table 13.5). This proportion was higher in the ACT and Tasmania, but there were large standard errors associated with these figures.

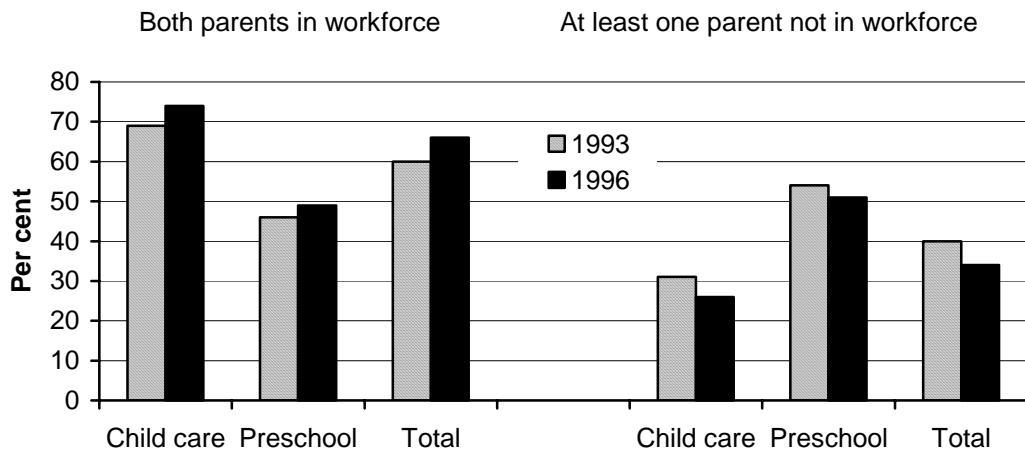
Table 13.5 Children using children's services, by employment status of parents, 1996 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Child care^a									
Both parents in workforce	81	75	67	59	75	62	86	70	74
At least one parent not in workforce	19	25	33	41	25	38	14	30 ^b	26
Preschool									
Both parents in workforce	55	45	45	37	48	61 ^b	57 ^b	53 ^b	49
At least one parent not in workforce	45	55	54	63	52	39 ^b	43 ^b	47 ^b	51

^a Data refer to children under 12 years of age. ^b Estimates are subject to sampling variability of 25-50 per cent.

Source: table 13A.10.

Figure 13.3 Children using children's services, by employment status of parents^a



^a Data refer to children under 12 years of age.

Source: table 13A.11.

Services by management type

Children's services are delivered by entities from various sectors of the economy including the government (State and local), community and private sectors. Information on the management type of services indicates the involvement of these various sectors in the direct delivery of children's services.

Data on the management type of child care services were limited. The data should be interpreted with care because the scope of the data collection varies across jurisdictions. More complete data were available on the management type of preschool services in 1998-99, and indicate considerable variation between jurisdictions (table 13.6).

Table 13.6 **Proportion of total children's services, by management type, 1998-99**

	NSW	Vic ^a	Qld	WA ^b	SA ^c	Tas ^d	ACT ^e	NT ^f
Child care								
– Community managed (including not for profit services managed by parents)	22.3	na	31.1	57.1	54.5	87.6	75.9	74.0
– Private	47.7	na	64.7	42.0	39.1	11.1	24.1	26.0
– Employer sponsored	0.0	na	na	0.0	0.9	0.7	0.0	0.0
– Government managed	30.0	na	4.3	0.9	5.5	0.7	0.0	0.0
Total^g	100.0	na	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Preschool								
– Community managed (including not for profit services managed by parents)	50.0	61.9	40.8	na	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
– Private	21.6	22.6	0.0	na	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
– Employer sponsored	0.0	0.0	0.0	na	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
– Government managed	28.3	15.6	59.2 ^f	na	95.8	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total^g	100.0	100.0	100.0	na	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^a Data were available on 224 occasional care services, Of which 98.2 per cent were community managed and the remaining 1.8 per cent were local government managed. All government managed preschools in Victoria are managed by local government. ^b Data on Family and Children's Services' preschool services were available but are not included in the table because the services were transferred to the Education Department in January 1999. All of these 37 services were community managed. Data on employer sponsored services were not available. ^c Excludes data on occasional care services. All of the 67 occasional care services were government managed. ^d Preschool data exclude children attending non-State preschools. ^e Child care data include 45 'other' services (27 community managed and 18 private) that are licensed by the ACT but not included in the count of services elsewhere in the Report. ^f Preschool services are provided by the Department of Education directly, but a range of management functions are devolved to school councils and parent management committees. ^g Totals may not add due to rounding. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 13A.28, 13A.37, 13A.47, 13A.57, 13A.67, 13A.76, 13A.85 and 13A.96.

Accreditation of centre based long day care services

The Commonwealth Government established the National Childcare Accreditation Council in 1993. The council introduced the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System in 1994 with the aim of improving the quality of care for children. Centres are required to participate in the system to remain eligible for Childcare Assistance.

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System includes five steps:

- registration with the National Childcare Accreditation Council to participate in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System;
- self study, whereby a centre makes a self assessment of the quality of its practice through consultation with staff, and with the parents of children attending the centre who complete a standard questionnaire. Centres rate the quality of their practice in relation to the system's 52 principles of quality care in a summary report that they submit to the council;
- review, whereby a peer reviewer trained by the council visits the centre to validate the centre's assessment of its own practice. Peer reviewers observe the centre, examine documentation and comment on all 52 principles. Reviewers must have Early Childhood qualifications and recent long day care employment experience;
- moderation, whereby a panel assess the quality of the centre's practice, guided by supporting examples or indicators within the written comments from the centre and from the reviewer; and
- accreditation, whereby the council makes the accreditation decision based on the above four steps. (NCAC 1999, unpublished)

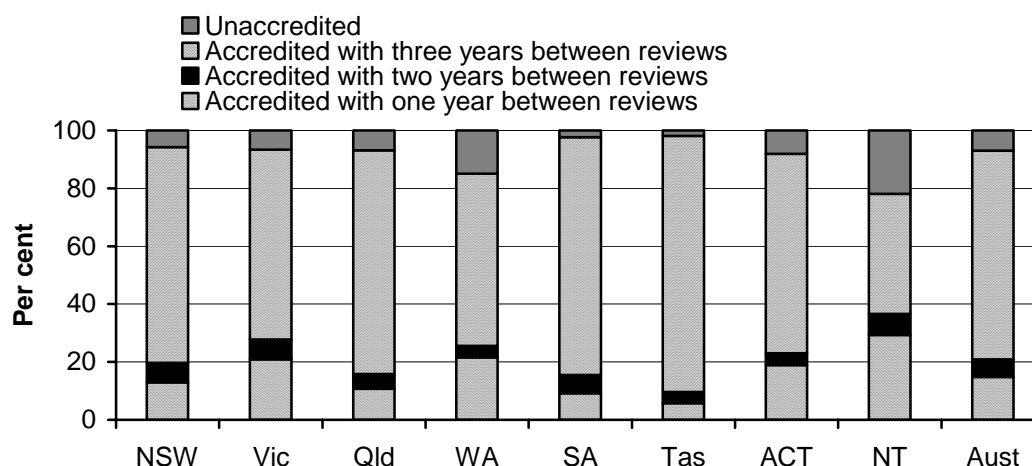
The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System is ongoing, such that accredited centres are involved in continuous quality improvement.

Data on the accreditation of centre based long day care centres are included in this chapter for the first time this year. Over 4100 centres were participating in the accreditation process in July 1999, either holding a current accreditation decision (3853 centres) or in self study, review or moderation, or awaiting an accreditation decision (290 centres) (table 13A.12). This represents all centre based long day care services receiving Commonwealth Childcare Assistance and the majority of all centre based long day care services operating in Australia.

Nationally 72 per cent of centres with a current accreditation decision were accredited with three years between reviews in July 1999, 6 per cent were accredited with two years between reviews, 15 per cent were accredited with one

year between reviews, and 7 per cent of centres were unaccredited. The majority of these unaccredited centres were working towards accreditation. These proportions varied across jurisdictions (figure 13.4). However, it should be noted that centres self select the number of years between reviews for which to aim.

Figure 13.4 **Accreditation status of centre based long day care services with a current accreditation decision, 1999^{a, b}**



^a At 16 July 1999. ^b Figures may change daily and are updated every six weeks following a council meeting.
Source: table 13A.12.

13.2 Policy developments in children's services

Commonwealth Child Care Benefit

As part of its Tax Reform Package the Commonwealth Government has decided to simplify the existing child care payments, Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate, into one payment. This simplified Child Care Benefit will apply from 1 July 2000 and will more closely integrate child care subsidies with other government assistance available for families, including the new Family Tax Benefit.

It is estimated that the maximum rate of assistance for the new Child Care Benefit will be around \$120 per week (an increase of \$7.50 per week for low income families paying average fees for one child in centre based long day care). In addition, families using part time care in long day care centres will be eligible for a 10 per cent loading on the standard rate of Child Care Benefit.

The new Family Assistance Office (a joint venture between Centrelink, the Australian Taxation Office and the Health Insurance Commission) will enable families to access the Child Care Benefit and the new Family Tax Benefit through a single agency with consistent rules and processes. The office will provide families with a range of access options, including face-to-face access through a network of offices, telephone and mail access.

Review of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System

The Commonwealth's Child Care Advisory Council is reviewing the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System for centre based long day care services. The council has developed a series of draft recommendations for change to the system's process and has proposed 40 draft new principles of quality care which were the subject of consultations with the sector in late 1999. The council will incorporate the outcomes of the consultation process in its final report due in March 2000.

Over the past two years, the Commonwealth Government has been working in partnership with a range of stakeholders, including the National Family Day Care Council (Australia) and the National Out of School Hours Care Association, to develop workable quality assurance systems for family day care and outside school hours care.

Proposals for a quality assurance implementation model and quality measures for family day care are under consideration. Independent consultants have been engaged to review the proposals and to undertake a cost effectiveness study of various quality assurance implementation models. A quality assurance system for family day care will be implemented progressively. Development of this system is progressing during 2000.

The National Out of School Hours Care Association has provided the Commonwealth Government with a report outlining the elements of quality care identified by children, parents and staff in outside school hours care services. A draft quality assurance system is to be developed for consultation with the sector.

Application of the goods and services tax to child care services

The introduction of the goods and services tax in July 2000 will have an impact on future data collections, given its general applicability to the sector. Child care provided at approved child care services (generally those receiving Commonwealth, State or Territory government funding) such as centre based long day care, family day care, before and after school hours care and occasional care, or by informal

carers, will be GST free. Although approved child care services will incur this tax on supplies used in providing child care, they will be able to claim tax credits on inputs they use in providing these services.

Child care provided at non-recognised facilities — that is, those not receiving government funding (babysitters, play centres, holiday camps, sporting and craft programs and the like) — will be required to add goods and services tax to the cost of their services but will also be able to claim tax credits on inputs they use in providing these services.

13.3 Framework of performance indicators

The framework of performance indicators is based on a number of common objectives for children's services across Australia (box 13.3). The relative emphasis placed on each objective varies across jurisdictions.

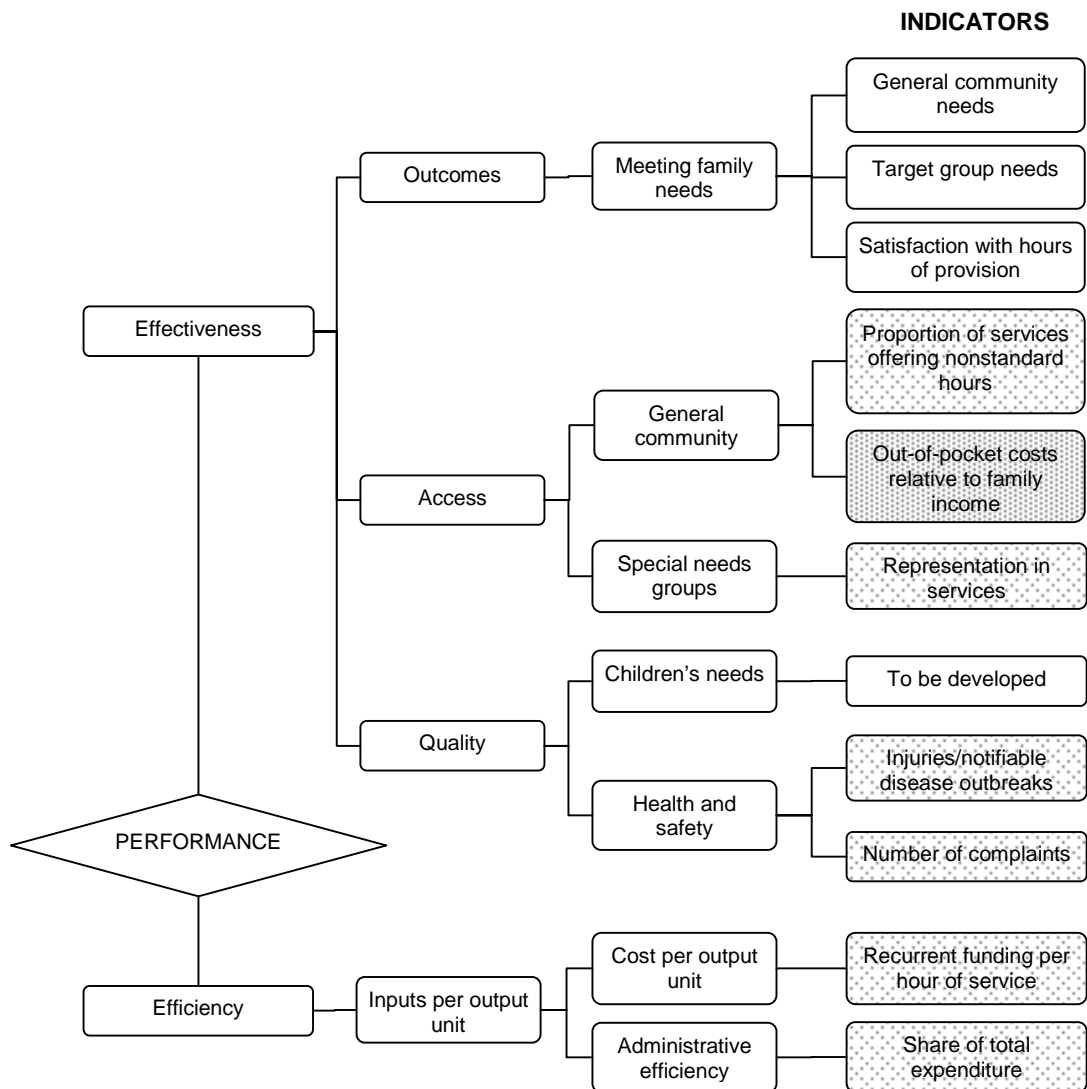
Box 13.3 Objectives for children's services

Children's services aim to:

- provide support for parents in caring for their children;
- meet the care and education needs of children in a safe and nurturing environment; and
- provide these services in an equitable and efficient manner.

This year the Children's Services Working Group reviewed all of the performance indicators identified in the framework. This process identified 10 indicators for reporting the effectiveness and efficiency of the system that provides children's services (figure 13.5). The framework is similar to the one presented in previous Reports, but some indicators and descriptors have been refined for this Report. Other indicators, such as family income by service type, have been considered for future reporting. Definitions for all indicators are provided in table 13A.106.

Figure 13.5 Performance indicators for children’s services



Changes to definitions and counting rules made in previous years have improved the comparability of data presented in this chapter. Some changes to indicators for this Report include a new indicator for assessing access to children’s services and refinements to one of the health and safety indicators (number of complaints). These changes are discussed below.

Nonstandard hours of care

Anecdotal evidence on the views of parents in 1994 indicated that there may be an increasing requirement for overnight and early morning care, later closing times for services, and longer sessions at preschools (Australian Consumers' Association 1994). Performance information on the ability of children's services to meet the needs of families was included in last year's Report for the first time. This year the definition of the indicator was refined to produce information on the proportion of child care and preschool services, by service type, that were able to provide nonstandard hours of service.

Substantiated complaints

This year reporting is refined for substantiated complaints against which action was taken. This change will improve the availability of data for this element of the indicator (a quality indicator for children's services).

Out-of-pocket costs

This year a new definition was developed for the out-of-pocket costs relative to family income indicator. The new definition will enable more frequent (annual) reporting for this indicator. It is currently defined for only centre based long day care and family day care but will be extended to other service types over time.

Meeting family needs

This year the Steering Committee commissioned a consultancy to investigate the feasibility of using consumer views in performance indicators for children's services. The work undertaken in the consultancy will feed into future development of children's services performance indicators (box 13.4).

Ongoing work to provide a more comprehensive set of performance indicators and to improve existing indicators and the data is discussed in section 13.5.

13.4 Key performance indicator results

Different delivery contexts, locations and types of client may affect the effectiveness and efficiency of children's services. Appendix A contains detailed statistics and short profiles on each State and Territory, which may assist in interpreting the performance indicators presented in this chapter.

Effectiveness

Access of general community — proportion of services offering nonstandard hours

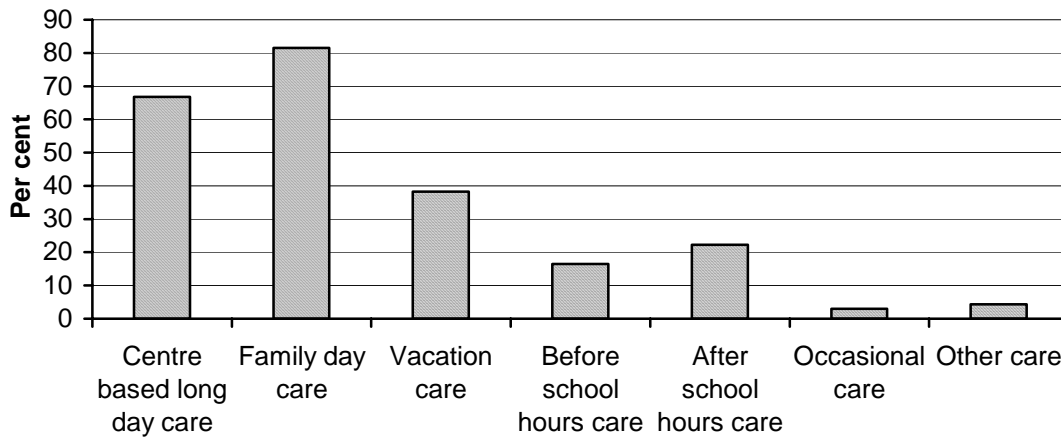
The proportion of services offering nonstandard hours of service is an indicator of community access to children's services. The reporting for this indicator has been extended this year to include preschool services offering nonstandard hours of service. What constitutes nonstandard hours varies across service types as follows:

- child care:
 - centre based long day care services providing service for more than 10 hours per day on Monday to Friday and/or providing service on weekends;
 - family day care services providing service for more than 10 hours per day on Monday to Friday and/or providing service overnight and/or on weekends;
 - vacation care services providing service for more than 10 hours per day;
 - before school care services providing service for more than two hours before school;
 - after school care services providing service for more than three hours after school;
 - occasional care services providing service for more than eight hours per day;
 - other services providing service for more than 10 hours per day; and
- preschool services providing service for more than six hours per day.

However, it should be noted that other policy decisions and factors may affect the amount of time that parents use the service. Extended periods of 24-hour care, for example, may generate different legislative and funding responses as well as affecting parental decision making, and there may also be issues for those families that use both residential care and long day care.

Nationally 81.5 per cent of family day care services provided nonstandard hours of care in 1997-98 (the latest year for which data were available) — the highest proportion across all service types. Centre based long day care had the next highest proportion at 66.8 per cent (figure 13.6).

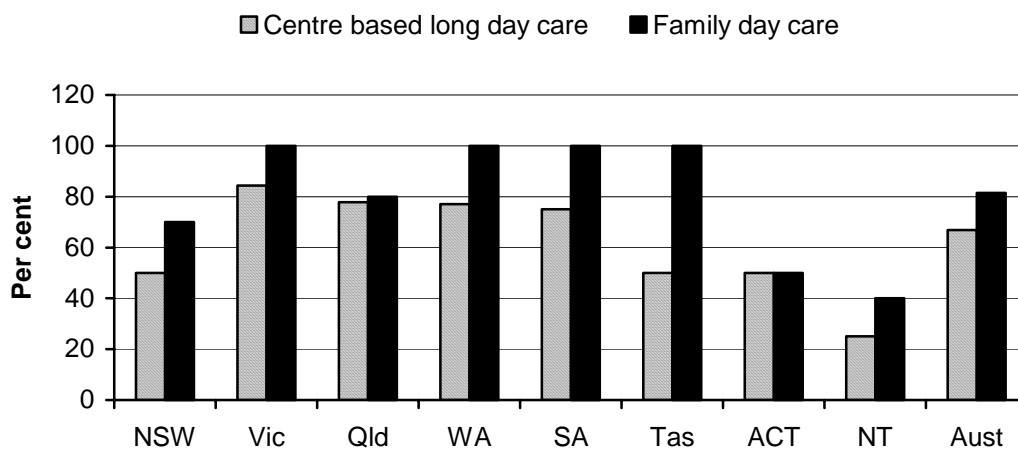
Figure 13.6 Proportion of services included in the Commonwealth's Census of Child Care Services providing nonstandard hours of care, by service type, 1997-98



Source: table 13A.13.

Centre based long day care services accounted for the majority of Commonwealth supported child care services in 1997-98. Across jurisdictions, the proportion of centre based long day care services offering nonstandard hours of care ranged from 25.0 per cent in the NT to 84.4 per cent in Victoria in 1997-98 (figure 13.7).

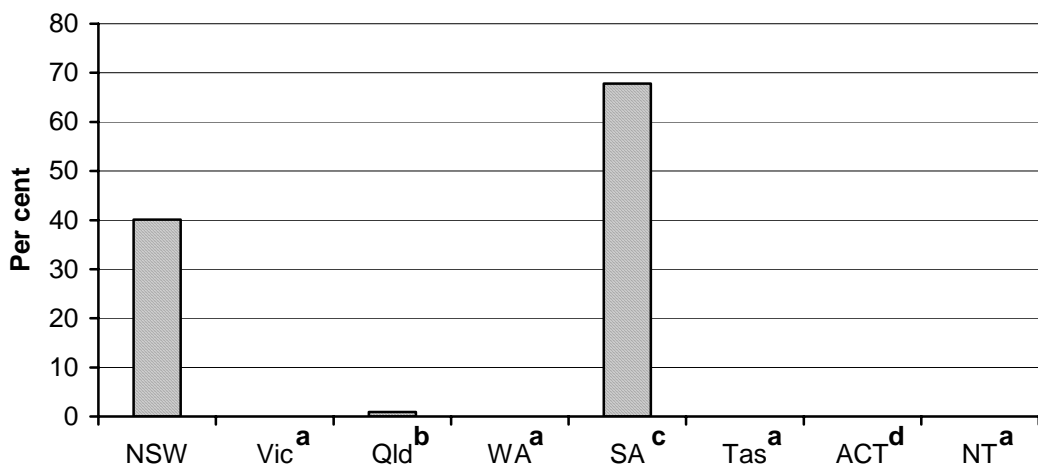
Figure 13.7 Proportion of selected services included in the Commonwealth's Census of Child Care Services providing nonstandard hours of care, 1997-98



Source: table 13A.13.

Across jurisdictions, the proportion of services offering nonstandard hours of family day care ranged from 40.0 per cent in the NT to 100.0 per cent in Victoria, WA, SA and Tasmania (figure 13.7). Limited data were available on the proportion of preschool services offering nonstandard hours. For those jurisdictions for which 1998-99 data were available, the proportion of services offering nonstandard hours ranged from 0 per cent in the ACT to 67.8 per cent in SA (figure 13.8).

Figure 13.8 Proportion of preschool services offering nonstandard hours of service, 1998-99



^a Data on the number of services offering nonstandard hours were not available. ^b Data relate to the number of Creche and Kindergarten Association preschools only. ^c Preschools are encouraged to offer back to back preschool services to assist parents who would otherwise be unable to access preschool. The take-up rate is most significant in country locations where to limit access to one session per day over four days per week would make it impractical for children who travel long distances. In these situations children generally access their preschool entitlement of four sessions over two days as opposed to the usual four half days. ^d No services offered nonstandard hours.

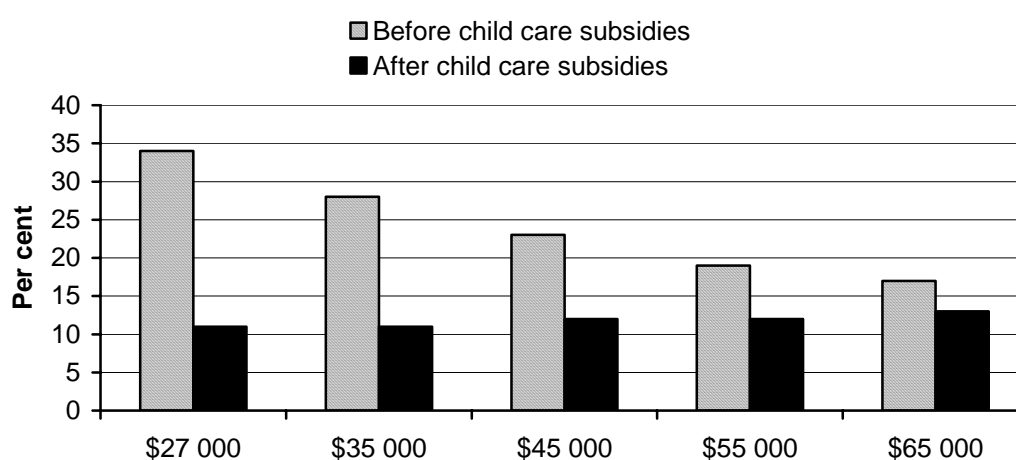
Sources: tables 13A.29, 13A.38, 13A.48, 13A.58, 13A.68, 13A.77, 13A.86 and 13A.97.

Access of general community — out-of-pocket costs relative to family income

The definition for the indicator out-of-pocket costs relative to family income has been revised this year. The new definition measures out-of-pocket child care costs as a proportion of weekly disposable income before and after the payment of child care subsidies. This modelling is undertaken for families with one child in care and two children in care for five indicative levels of gross annual family income. Currently data for only centre based long day care and family day care services are available, but the indicator will be extended to other service types over time. The model is based on children attending full time care (equal to 50 hours per child per week).

After the payment of child care subsidies, out-of-pocket costs as a proportion of weekly family income increase with gross annual family income (figure 13.9). Families with one child in care at April 1999 and an annual gross family income of \$27 000 spent 11 per cent of their weekly disposable income on centre based long day care. Families with an annual gross family income of \$65 000 spent 13 per cent of their weekly disposable income on centre based long day care.

Figure 13.9 Out-of-pocket costs of centre based long day care for families with one child in full time care at April 1999, as a proportion of weekly disposable income, by gross annual family incomes



Source: table 13A.21.

In June 1999 out-of-pocket costs for long day care centres for families with disposable incomes of \$27 000 ranged from 10 per cent in both Queensland and the NT to 14 per cent in the ACT — see table 13.7.) For families with an annual gross family income of \$65 000 the proportion ranged from 12 per cent in the NT to 15 per cent in Tasmania and the ACT — see table 13.7.)

The out-of-pocket child care costs, after child care subsidies were paid, as a proportion of weekly disposable income for families with *two* children in full time care in April 1999 ranged from 16 per cent for families with a gross annual family income of \$27 000 to 21 per cent for families with an income of \$65 000 (figure 13.10).

Across jurisdictions in June 1999, the proportion for families on an annual income of \$27 000 with two children in full time care ranged from 13 per cent in the NT to 21 per cent in the ACT, and the proportion for families with an annual income of \$65 000 ranged from 19 per cent in the NT and Queensland to 25 per cent in the ACT (table 13.7).

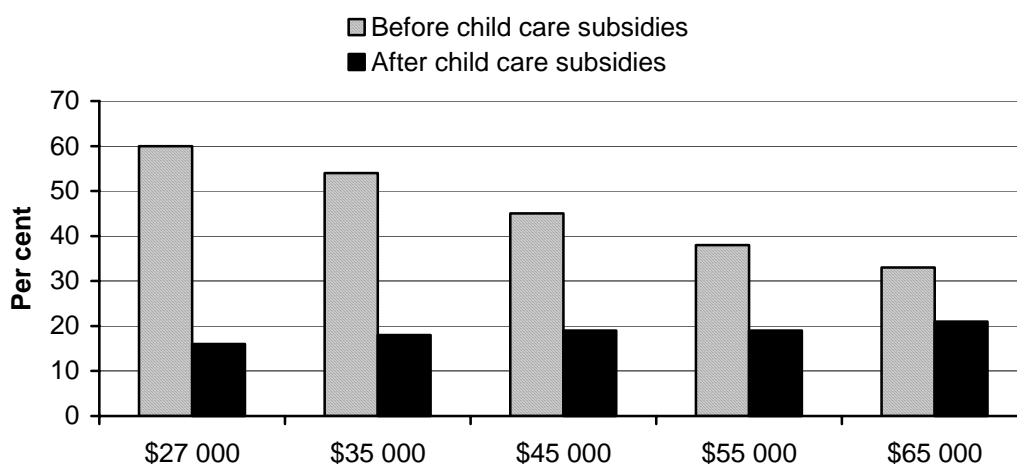
Table 13.7 Out-of-pocket costs of centre based long day care (after the payment of subsidies) at June 1999, as a proportion of weekly disposable income, by gross annual family incomes (per cent)^a

<i>Annual income</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
One child in care								
\$27 000	12	11	10	11	12	13	14	10
\$35 000	12	11	10	11	12	13	13	10
\$45 000	12	12	11	11	12	13	14	11
\$55 000	13	13	11	12	13	14	15	11
\$65 000	14	14	13	13	14	15	15	12
Two children in care								
\$27 000	18	16	14	15	17	19	21	13
\$35 000	20	18	16	17	19	21	22	16
\$45 000	20	19	17	18	20	21	22	17
\$55 000	21	19	18	19	20	22	24	18
\$65 000	23	21	19	20	22	24	25	19

^a Attendance based on each child attending 50 hours of centre based long day care per week. Fees are at June 1999. Childcare Assistance and Childcare Rebate payments are at 1 April 1999. Disposable income is based on 20 September 1999 taxation and social security parameters.

Source: table 13A.22.

Figure 13.10 Out-of-pocket costs of centre based long day care for families with two children in full time care at April 1999, as a proportion of weekly disposable income, by gross annual family incomes



Source: table 13A.21.

After the payment of subsidies, out-of-pocket costs for family day care as a proportion of weekly disposable income for families with an annual income of \$27 000 and with one child in full time care in June 1999 ranged from 6 per cent in

Victoria and Queensland, to 11 per cent in SA, Tasmania and the ACT. The proportion for families with two children in care ranged from 7 per cent in Victoria and Queensland to 15 per cent in SA, Tasmania and the ACT (table 13.8). The proportion for a family on an annual income of \$65 000 with one child in full time care ranged from 10 per cent in Victoria, Queensland and the NT, to 13 per cent in SA, Tasmania and the ACT, while the proportion for a family on the same income with two children in care ranged from 15 per cent in Victoria and Queensland to 21 per cent in South Australia (table 13.8).

Table 13.8 Out-of-pocket costs of family day care (after the payment of subsidies) at June 1999, as a proportion of weekly disposable income, by gross annual family incomes (per cent)^a

<i>Annual income</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
One child in care								
\$27 000	9	6	6	9	11	11	11	7
\$35 000	9	7	7	10	11	11	11	8
\$45 000	10	8	8	10	11	11	11	9
\$55 000	11	9	9	11	12	12	12	9
\$65 000	12	10	10	12	13	13	13	10
Two children in care								
\$27 000	12	7	7	13	15	15	15	8
\$35 000	15	10	10	15	17	17	17	11
\$45 000	16	12	12	16	18	18	18	13
\$55 000	17	14	13	17	19	19	19	15
\$65 000	18	15	15	19	21	20	20	16

^a Attendance based on each child attending 50 hours of family day care per week. Fees at June 1999. Childcare Assistance and Childcare Rebate payments at 1 April 1999. Disposable income is based on 20 September 1999 taxation and social security parameters.

Source: table 13A.23.

Access of special needs groups to children's services

Commonwealth data on the representation of special needs groups in children's services for 1998-99 were not available for inclusion in this Report. However, some 1998-99 data were available from States and Territories (see attachment 13A). Combined data for 1997-98 are reported in the absence of more recent complete data.

The proportion of total (including Commonwealth, State and Territory) government funded child care attendees from special needs groups for 1995-96 and 1997-98 are presented in table 13.9. The representation of children from single parent families among attendees of government funded child care services was greater than their representation in the community. Children from single parent families represented

19.0 per cent of government funded child care attendees in 1997-98, and 15.7 per cent of children in the community. The representation of children from non-English speaking backgrounds, children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, children with a disability and children from rural and remote areas in child care services in 1995-96 to 1997-98 was lower than their representation in the community.

Table 13.9 Proportion of Commonwealth and State and Territory government funded child care attendees from special need groups (per cent)^a

	<i>Representation among attendees at child care services</i>		<i>Representation in the community</i>
	<i>1995-96</i>	<i>1997-98</i>	
Children from non-English speaking backgrounds	9.6 ^b	10.7 ^c	12.6 ^d
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children	1.9 ^b	1.6 ^c	3.7 ^d
Children from single parent families	20.8 ^e	19.0 ^f	15.7 ^d
Children with a disability	2.6 ^e	2.0 ^c	7.6 ^g
Children from rural and remote areas	na	21.3 ^h	30.7 ^{d, i}

^a Comparisons between the representation of children from special needs groups among attendees of child care services and their representation in the community should be treated with caution because there were definitional differences. Data refer to children under 12 years of age. ^b Excludes children attending some State services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, Tasmania and the NT. ^c Excludes children attending some State services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA and SA. ^d Representation in the community relates to 1996. ^e Excludes children attending some services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania and the NT. ^f Excludes children attending some services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania and the ACT. ^g Data on children with a disability were obtained from the 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, and refer to children aged 14 years and younger. ^h Excludes children attending some services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA and Tasmania. ⁱ Refers to children aged 14 years and younger. **na** Not available.

Source: table 13A.15.

Data on the representation of children from special needs groups in child care services were available for all jurisdictions on a comparable basis from the Commonwealth Census of Child Care. The proportion of these children in Commonwealth supported child care was sometimes substantially different across jurisdictions. However, this variation largely reflected variation in the representation of children from the special needs groups in the community.

The proportion of child care attendees from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background ranged from 0.5 per cent in Victoria (where their representation in the population was 0.9 per cent) to 14.5 per cent in the NT (where their representation in the population was 35.9 per cent). The proportion of child care attendees from rural and remote areas ranged from 17.5 per cent in SA (where their representation in the population was 30.2 per cent) to 43.6 per cent in the NT (where their

representation in the population was 59.8 per cent). The ACT does not have rural and remote areas attendees (table 13.10).

Table 13.10 Proportion of child care attendees from special needs groups, 1997-98 (per cent)^a

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>	<i>Aust</i>
Children from a non-English speaking background^b									
Representation in services	15.2	12.5	6.0	8.3	5.9	3.1	12.2	7.3	10.7
Representation in community ^c	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children^b									
Representation in services	1.4	0.5	2.4	2.7	1.2	0.8	0.8	14.5	1.6
Representation in community ^d	3.3	0.9	5.5	5.3	2.8	5.4	1.9	35.9	3.7
Children from a single parent family^e									
Representation in services	17.5	17.5	21.1	21.3	21.9	19.4	17.4	18.2	19.0
Representation in community ^d	15.9	14.4	16.7	15.4	16.9	16.9	15.4	18.9	15.7
Children with a disability^f									
Representation in services	2.1	1.9	1.8	2.0	3.2	2.3	1.7	1.8	2.0
Representation in community ^g	6.6	6.6	8.3	10.3	9.6	7.2	na ⁱ	na ⁱ	7.6
Children from rural and remote areas^{b, h}									
Representation in services	21.8	21.7	22.5	21.3	17.5	20.2	0.0	43.6	21.3
Representation in community ^{d, j}	29.0	28.0	36.9	30.6	30.2	39.9	0.2	59.8	30.7

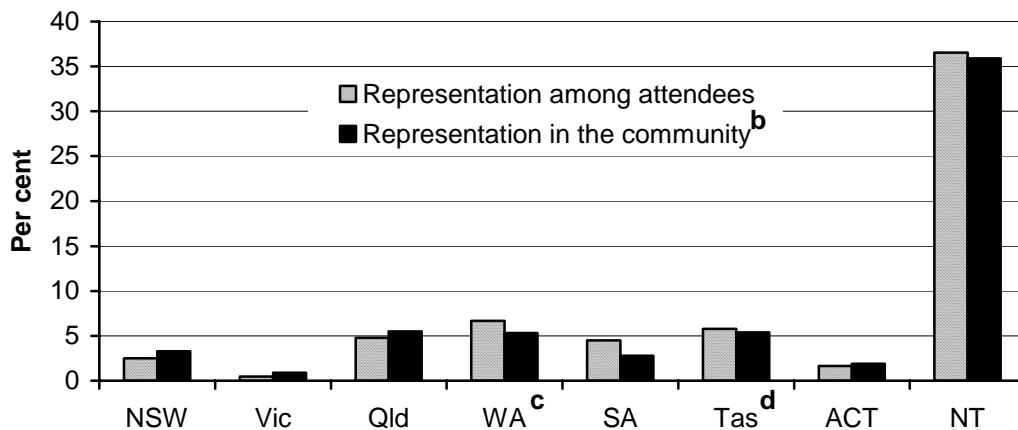
^a Excludes children attending Aboriginal playgroups. ^b Includes vacation care, which overlapped outside school hours care. ^c Data were obtained from the 1996 Survey of Child Care. Australian average was used because data were not available by jurisdiction. ^d Data were obtained from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. ^e There was no information on the number of children from single parent families available for mobiles, occasional care neighbourhood models, occasional care, Aboriginal playgroups and vacation care. ^f The number of children with disabilities using child care excludes those children whose parents had a disability. ^g Data on children with a disability were obtained from the 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, and refer to children aged 14 years and younger. Population data were estimated residential population at June 1998. ^h Excludes occasional care neighbourhood models for which data were not available. ⁱ Data on children with a disability were not available for publication. ^j Relates to children aged 14 years and younger.

Source: table 13A.16.

Data on the proportion of preschool attendees from the specified special needs groups are less extensive for all jurisdictions. The most complete 1998-99 data available relate to the representation of children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds (excluding children who attended preschools for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs). The proportion of children attending preschools who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in 1998-99 was broadly similar to their representation in the community. The proportion ranged

from 0.5 per cent in Victoria (where representation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in the community was 0.9 per cent) to 36.5 per cent in the NT (where representation in the community was 35.9 per cent) (figure 13.11).

Figure 13.11 **Proportion of preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, 1998-99 (per cent)^a**



^a Comparisons between the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in attendees of preschool services and their representation in the community should be treated with caution because there are definitional differences and differences in the base population. ^b Data were obtained from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. ^c Excludes younger children attending preschool and children attending non-government preschools. ^d Excludes children attending non-State preschools.

Sources: tables 13A.30, 13A.39, 13A.49, 13A.59, 13A.69, 13A.78, 13A.87 and 13A.98.

The proportion of preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds has remained relatively stable over recent time. The proportion of SA preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds was 4.5 per cent in 1996-97, 4.3 per cent in 1997-98 and 4.5 per cent in 1998-99, for example (figure 13.12).

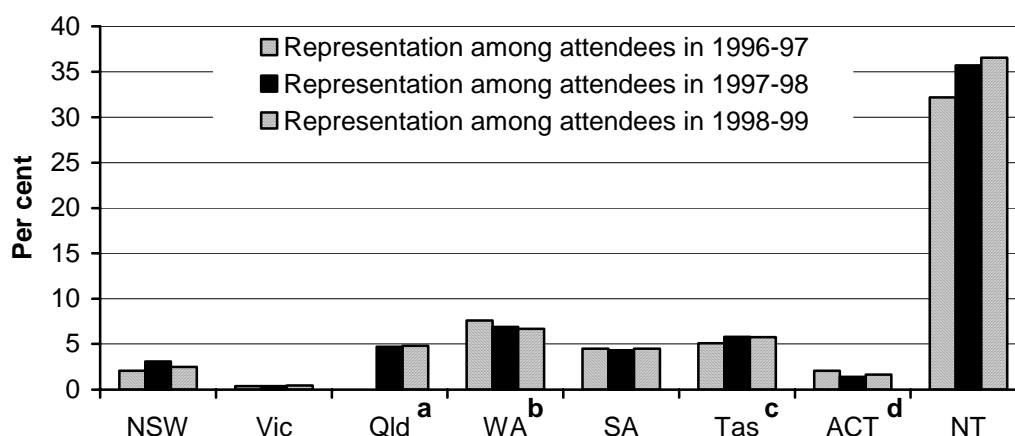
Data on the representation of other special needs groups among government funded preschool attendees are limited for 1998-99.

- Children from non-English speaking backgrounds represented 7.5 per cent of children attending preschool in NSW, 14.9 per cent in Victoria, 8.4 per cent in SA and 9.6 per cent in the ACT, compared with a national representation of 12.6 per cent in the community.
- The proportion of preschool attendees from single parent families was 10.1 per cent in NSW, 11.6 per cent in Victoria and 15.3 per cent in SA, compared with community representation of 15.9 per cent, 14.4 per cent and 15.5 per cent in those States respectively.
- Children with a disability represented 8.4 per cent of preschool attendees in NSW compared with representation in the community of 6.6 per cent,

3.8 per cent in Victoria compared with community representation of 6.6 per cent and 12.9 per cent of preschool attendees in SA compared with community representation of 9.6 per cent. They represented 8.1 per cent of preschool attendees in the ACT, compared with a national community representation of 7.6 per cent (the ACT representation in the community figure being unavailable).

- The proportion of preschool attendees from rural and remote areas was 52.3 per cent in NSW, 9.9 per cent in Queensland, 33.2 per cent in SA, 42.1 per cent in Tasmania, 0.6 per cent in the ACT and 29.7 per cent in the NT, compared with community representation of 29.0 per cent, 36.9 per cent, 30.2 per cent, 39.9 per cent, 0.2 per cent and 59.8 per cent in those jurisdictions respectively (tables 13A.30, 13A.39, 13A.49, 13A.59, 13A.69, 13A.78, 13A.87 and 13A.98).

Figure 13.12 **Proportion of preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds — time series (per cent)**



^a Data for 1996-97 were not available. Data for 1997-98 relate to community based kindergartens and preschools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing Education Queensland preschools.

^b Excludes younger children attending preschool and children attending non-government preschools.

^c Excludes children attending non-State preschools. ^d Data for 1996-97 include children attending the Early Entry and Mainstream programs.

Sources: tables 13A.30, 13A.39, 13A.49, 13A.59, 13A.69, 13A.78, 13A.87 and 13A.98.

Quality

An important focus of Commonwealth and State and Territory governments is to set and maintain appropriate quality standards in child care and preschool services. The indicators of the quality of children's services are the number of serious injuries, the number of notifiable outbreaks of disease, and the number of substantiated complaints per registered or licensed service, by service type. These data should be

treated with caution because there may be differences in reporting between jurisdictions. Work on another indicator — the extent to which children’s services are meeting children’s needs — will be pursued in the future.

The data are limited on the three quality indicators for 1998-99. All jurisdictions provided some information on the number of serious injuries to children per registered or licensed child care and preschool service for 1998-99.

- In NSW, 22 children attending centre based long day care services received a serious injury, at the rate of 0.05 injuries per service. Two children attending vacation care services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.01 injuries per service. Thirteen children attending preschool services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.02 injuries per service. No children attending occasional care or other care services received a serious injury (table 13A.32).
- In Victoria, 315 children attending children’s services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.11 injuries per service. This figure is based on the number of reported serious injuries where medical attention was sought by either the children’s services centre or by the parent or guardian (table 13A.41).
- In Queensland, 26 children attending centre based long day care services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.03 injuries per service. Four children attending family day care services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.04 injuries per service. One child attending occasional care services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.01 injuries per service (table 13A.51).
- In WA, six children attending centre based long day care services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.02 injuries per service. Two children attending family day care services (excluding family day carers who are not members of coordination units) received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.11 injuries per service (table 13A.61).
- In SA, three children attending a centre based long day care service received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.02 injuries per service (table 13A.70).
- In Tasmania, two children attending centre based long day care services received a serious injury, at the rate of 0.03 injuries per service. Three children attending family day care services received a serious injury, at a rate of 0.27 injuries per service. No children attending vacation care or occasional care services received a serious injury (table 13A.79).
- In the ACT, three children attending centre based long day care services received a serious injury, at the rate of 0.04 injuries per service. Three children attending school age care services (including vacation care, before school hours care and after school hours care services) sustained a serious injury at the rate of

0.03 injuries per service. No children attending occasional care or preschool services received a serious injury (table 13A.88).

- In the NT, seven children attending centre based long day care services received a serious injury, at the rate of 0.16 injuries per service. One child attending occasional care services also sustained a serious injury, at the rate of 0.33 injuries per service. No children attending other care services received a serious injury (table 13A.99).

Three jurisdictions provided information on the number of notifiable outbreaks of disease per government provided, registered or licensed service for 1998-99.

- In NSW, there were 352 notifiable outbreaks of disease at centre based long day care services, 30 at vacation care services, 111 at occasional care services, 15 at other care services and 292 at preschool services, at the rates of 0.83, 0.09, 1.18, 0.75 and 0.36 per service respectively (table 13A.33).
- In the ACT, there were seven notifiable outbreaks of disease at centre based long day care services, two at occasional care services and two at preschool services, at the rates of 0.09, 0.18 and 0.02 per service respectively (table 13A.89).
- In the NT, there were two notifiable outbreaks of disease at centre based long day care services, at the rate of 0.05 outbreaks per service. There were no notifiable outbreaks of disease at occasional care and other care services (table 13A.100).

Seven jurisdictions provided data on the number of substantiated complaints and alleged breaches of regulations made to the State and Territory government regulatory bodies for 1998-99.

The results for the substantiated complaints indicator should be interpreted with caution. Limitations of this indicator include: the priority that some jurisdictions give to developing well-informed client groups as part of improving their service delivery (a limitation in that well-informed clients may be more likely to make a complaint than clients without access to this information); differences in the number of approved care providers or parent users per service in each service across States and Territories, and variance in complaints management systems across jurisdictions. For example, in SA the department is the sole sponsor of Family Day Care and deals with all complaints that may otherwise be managed at a scheme level in other States and Territories and, as such, would not be reported on.

- In Victoria, there were 194 substantiated complaints relating to all licensed children's services, at the rate of 0.07 per service (table 13A.42). Action was taken against all of these complaints. Strong warnings or statutory or legal action was the result in 54 (27.4 per cent) of these complaints.

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- In Queensland, there were 231 substantiated complaints relating to centre based long day care services, 23 relating to family day care services and seven relating to outside school hours care services, at the rates of 0.26, 0.26, and 0.01 per service respectively. There were also four substantiated complaints relating to other care services. Action was taken against all these complaints. There were no substantiated complaints relating to occasional care services (table 13A.52).
 - In WA, there were 122 substantiated complaints relating to centre based long day care services and 12 relating to family day care services (excluding those family day carers who are not members of coordination units), at the rates of 0.35 and 0.63 per service respectively. Action was taken against all of these complaints. There were no substantiated complaints against occasional care, other care and preschool services (excluding those services provided by the Education Department) (table 13A.62).
 - In SA, there were 17 substantiated complaints relating to centre based long day care and 26 substantiated complaints relating to family day care at rates of 0.09 and 2.00 per service respectively. Action was taken against all of these complaints (table 13A.71).
 - In Tasmania, there were four substantiated complaints relating to centre based long day care services and two relating to family day care services, at the rates of 0.06 and 0.18 per service respectively. Action was taken against all of these complaints (table 13A.80).
 - In the ACT, there were five substantiated complaints relating to centre based long day care services, at the rate of 0.06 substantiated complaints per service. Action was taken against all of these complaints. There were no complaints against outside school hours care, occasional care and preschool services (table 13A.90).
 - In the NT, there were 30 substantiated complaints relating to centre based long day care services, at the rate of 0.68 substantiated complaints per service. Action was taken against all of these complaints. There were no substantiated complaints relating to occasional care and other care services (table 13A.101).

Efficiency

Some differences in indicator results for jurisdictions may reflect different counting and reporting rules for financial data. Differences may also reflect the treatment of various expenditure items (for example, superannuation).

Unit cost

A proxy indicator of efficiency is the level of government inputs per unit of output (unit cost). The indicator used here is government expenditure per hour of service. Data were sought from all governments on their expenditures by service type (table 13.11). However, incomplete data and changes in collection method make it difficult to compare expenditure across jurisdictions and over time.

Unit cost data for children's services do not yet contain user cost of capital.

Data on Commonwealth Government recurrent expenditure by service type are comparable across jurisdictions. However, although some State and Territory data for 1998-99 were available for inclusion in this report (see attachment 13A), Commonwealth data were not, therefore data for 1995-96 and 1997-98 are reported in the absence of more recent data.

Commonwealth Government recurrent expenditure per hour was lowest for centre based long day care services in 1997-98 (ranging from \$1.39 per hour in the ACT to \$2.19 per hour in Queensland). Commonwealth Government recurrent funding per hour of occasional care tended to be lower in 1997-98 than in 1995-96, whereas funding per hour of outside school hours care tended to be higher in 1997-98 than 1995-96 (table 13.12).

Table 13.11 Commonwealth and State and Territory Government real recurrent expenditure per hour of service (1997-98 dollars)^a

		<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
Centre based long day care	1995-96	2.01	2.16 ^b	2.47	2.29	2.14	1.90	0.93	1.7
	1997-98	2.00	1.89 ^b	2.20	1.99	na	1.99	na	2.3
Family day care	1995-96	2.00	2.13	2.41	2.40 ^c	3.47	2.39	1.79	2.0
	1997-98	2.31	2.50	2.52	2.87	3.10	2.67	2.35	2.3
Vacation care	1995-96	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
	1997-98	na	na	1.33	0.78 ^d	na	na	0.85	0.49 ^f
Outside school hours care ^e	1995-96	1.07	na	1.07	1.39	1.00	1.14	0.62	0.7
	1997-98	2.46	na	2.43	3.13	2.46	2.65	1.77	2.7
Occasional care	1995-96	na	na	na	4.29	2.54	na	0.33	16.97
	1997-98	1.55	na	2.36	4.10 ^d	na	na	1.55	10.80

^a Commonwealth Government expenditure data exclude administration expenditure. Data are not available for 1996-97. ^b Excludes State expenditure because only incomplete data are available. ^c Expenditure by the State Government on family day care include costs associated with licensing private home-based carers not attached to a family day care scheme. ^d Refers to funded hours for State administered services, not total number of hours provided by these services. ^e Disaggregated data are not available for before school hours care and after school hours care. ^f Represents funding between 1 July 1997 and 27 April 1998. **na** Not available.

Source: table 13A.20.

Table 13.12 Commonwealth Government real recurrent expenditure per hour of service (1997-98 dollars)^a

		<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
Centre based long day care	1995-96	2.01	2.16	2.47	2.29	2.22	1.90	0.96	1.70
	1997-98	1.88	1.89	2.19	1.96	2.05	1.91	1.39	1.91
Family day care	1995-96	2.00	2.13	2.41	2.40	3.47	2.39	1.79	2.09
	1997-98	2.31	2.50	2.52	2.79	2.93	2.67	2.35	2.33
Vacation care	1995-96	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
	1997-98	7.71	6.81	3.16	6.77	4.42	na	10.99	9.13
Outside school hours care ^b	1995-96	1.07	1.32	1.07	1.39	1.00	1.14	0.62	0.72
	1997-98	2.46	2.01	2.43	2.85	2.16	2.65	2.11	2.78
Occasional care	1995-96	4.75	3.76	na	4.33	9.82	6.30	1.98	16.97
	1997-98	3.85	1.54	2.21	3.77	4.23	2.24	2.06	10.80

^a Expenditure excludes administration expenditure. Data are not available for 1996-97. ^b Disaggregated data are not available for before school hours care and after school hours care. **na** Not available.

Source: table 13A.18.

Five jurisdictions provided data on recurrent expenditure per hour of preschool service in 1998-99: it was \$2.39 in Victoria, \$3.45 in Queensland, \$4.49 in the ACT and \$6.70 in the NT for children in the year immediately before commencing compulsory full time schooling, and \$3.77 in WA for younger children (tables 13A.40, 13A.50, 13A.60, 13A.91 and 13A.102).

Administration and regulation costs

Another measure of efficiency is administration and regulation expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure. These data can include the costs of activities relating to the planning, policy development, resource management, quality assurance and regulation of children's services. The extent to which these are included in the data varies, and allocations of the costs of departmental overheads may also differ. Thus, comparisons across jurisdictions and over time are difficult.

Estimated administration costs accounted for 8.2 per cent of total Commonwealth Government expenditure in 1998-99 (table 13A.7). As discussed earlier, the roles of the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments differ in relation to funding and delivery of children's services. In particular, State and Territory governments have an important role in licensing services and monitoring standards (box 13.2). For this reason, it is not appropriate to compare the administration and regulation costs of the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory governments. Differences in State and Territory government licensing arrangements also limit the comparability of administration and regulation costs across States and Territories.

Five jurisdictions provided data on the administration and regulation proportion of total government expenditure on child care services in 1998-99.

- In Queensland, administration and regulation costs (including administration expenditure for the outside school hours care activities for young people program which targets children 13–15 years of age) represented 25.2 per cent of the total (table 13A.46).
- In WA, administration and regulation costs (including costs of support services for child care) represented 47.8 per cent of the total (table 13A.56).
- In Tasmania, administration and regulation costs represented 40.7 per cent of the total (table 13A.75).
- In the ACT, administration and regulation costs represented 23.4 per cent of the total (table 13A.84).
- In the NT, administration and regulation costs represented 15.0 per cent of the total (table 13A.95).

Three jurisdictions provided data on the administration and regulation proportion of total government expenditure (including Commonwealth and State and Territory government expenditure) on preschool services in 1998-99.

- In Queensland, administration and regulation costs represented 7.0 per cent of the total (table 13A.46).
- In WA, administration and regulation costs (including costs of support services for preschools but excluding expenditure by the WA Education Department) represented 52.8 per cent of the total (table 13A.56).
- In the ACT, administration and regulation costs represented 4.7 per cent of the total (table 13A.84).

Three jurisdictions provided data on administration and regulation expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure on both child care and preschool services in 1998-99.

- In NSW, administration and regulation costs represented 10.1 per cent of total government expenditure — a slight decrease from 10.8 per cent in 1997-98 (table 13A.27).
- In Victoria, administration and regulation costs represented 5 per cent of total government expenditure, a fall from 5.4 per cent in 1997-98 (table 13A.36).
- In SA, administration and regulation costs represented 5.5 per cent of total government expenditure — only a slight increase from 5.4 per cent in 1997-98 (table 13A.66).

13.5 Future directions in performance reporting

This year the Steering Committee commissioned a consultant to investigate the feasibility of using consumer views to measure the performance of children's services. The consultancy was completed in November 1999 (see box 13.4 for a summary of the key findings). The Review's Steering Committee and Children's Services Working Group will meet in early 2000 to discuss how they will progress the consultant's recommendations.

The challenges for reporting the performance of children's services include improving:

- the appropriateness and completeness of the indicator set;
- the content of the dataset;
- the measurement of unit costs; and
- the reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' access to mainstream services.

Improving the appropriateness and completeness of the indicator set

This year each performance indicator identified in the framework was reviewed, and plans were prepared for their future development. Some changes suggested through this process are reflected in the reporting for this year's Report (see section 13.3). Other changes and improvements have been proposed for future reporting.

New indicators that may reflect the extent to which services meet some aspects of parents' needs have been suggested for future collections. These include:

- the proportion of service delivery locations/sites with co-located services (for example, a facility that provides centre based long day care, sessional preschool services and occasional care as separate entities);
- the number of services that a family uses; and
- participation in services by family income.

It has also been suggested that the current indicator of access to children's services by special needs groups be refined to provide data for each child care service type (such as centre based long day care, family day care and occasional care).

Work on these indicators will be complemented by the National Community Services Information Management Group's Children's Services Working Group, which is developing a national minimum dataset for children's services. The

development will increase comparability in children's services data and help the working group develop measurable indicators and descriptors.

Improving the content of the dataset

Last year the Steering Committee reported that data collected for future Reports would relate to a standard sample week, which will be a typical week in August (that is, a week that does not include any public holidays). NSW, Victoria, WA, SA, the ACT and the NT (for preschools only) currently collect data on this basis. Moving towards national consistency in the timing of data reported by each of the jurisdictions remains a future goal for this Report.

Improving the measurement of unit costs

The Steering Committee is working with the children's services sector to improve reporting of unit costs by introducing a more consistent treatment of:

- superannuation costs (see SCRCSSP 1998);
- payroll tax (see SCRCSSP 1999b); and
- depreciation and the user cost of capital.

Accounting for these cost elements should improve the comparability and accuracy of unit cost information in future Reports.

Improving reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' access to mainstream services

In May 1997 the Prime Minister requested that the Steering Committee give priority to developing indicators that reported the performance of mainstream services in meeting the needs of Indigenous Australians. This is an important task, but large gaps remain. This chapter contains information on the representation of Indigenous children in government funded child care services and in the population for each jurisdiction. It also reports the representation of Indigenous children among preschool attendees for all jurisdictions, subject to definitional differences across jurisdictions. The availability and coverage of nationally consistent data on the delivery of services to Indigenous clients will improve in future Reports.

Box 13.4 Issues in using consumer views in performance indicators for children's services

The Steering Committee (on behalf of the Commonwealth, States and Territories) commissioned a consultancy in August 1999 to investigate the feasibility of using consumer views in performance indicators for children's services. The consultant produced the final report in November 1999.

The consultancy report identified a considerable body of work involving the collection of client views (mainly from parents) on children's services, but did not identify any operating model that could be directly adapted to suit the Australian purposes. However, a new US national initiative is scheduled to start collecting data on a framework of performance indicators in children's services in 2000.

The report noted that the framework of performance indicators should be balanced between indicators based on the perspectives of parents and children. However, although desirable, it was not yet possible to identify indicators based on children's views. The report commented that parents' views were particularly useful for the development of access indicators (for example, parent perceptions of services' hours, location and cost).

The report emphasised that specific questions on service performance were most useful for performance comparison, accountability and service improvement purposes. In particular, the report highlighted the need to examine the validity of responses (for example, subjectivism in satisfaction responses, and lack of direct experience of some services aspects).

The validity of responses could be improved by:

- asking respondents to comment on only those aspects of a service with which they have direct experience (which is particularly important when collecting parent views on services used by their children); and
- avoiding the use of 'satisfaction with' questions in favour of more objective approaches (for example, whether, or how often, a particular aspect of a service is experienced).

Source: Gain (1999).

13.6 Jurisdictions' comments

This section provides comments from each jurisdiction on the services covered in this chapter. Appendix A contains detailed statistics and short profiles on each State and Territory, which may assist in interpreting the performance indicators presented in this chapter. The information covers aspects such as age profile, geographic distribution of the population, income levels, education levels, tenure of dwellings and cultural heritage (such as aboriginality and ethnicity).

“ Commonwealth Government comments

Progress was achieved across jurisdictions in 1998-99 on developing a national minimum dataset for children's services for the National Community Services Information Management Group. This is foundation work which, it is anticipated, will achieve improvements in data definition and data collection processes that will flow through to subsequent editions of the Report on Government Services.

Commonwealth data for reporting on the provision of child care in 1998-99 in this report is limited. A Census of Child Care Services was conducted in May 1999 and processing of data has not yet reached a stage where it could be used for reporting.

Consequently, Commonwealth data for this report are limited to some financial data by State and by service type and aggregated administrative data.

Previously, Commonwealth data for intercensal years were estimated based on anticipated patterns of child care service provision. As noted in last year's report, comparability across years has become complicated by the dynamic nature of child care and it is not considered to be realistic to continue estimating intercensally based on previous performance.

Provision of child care services that recognise and respond to the changing needs of Australian families is a priority for the Commonwealth's Childcare program.

The changing nature of child care is reflected in the current commitment to develop flexible/innovative services addressing the needs of rural and remote communities in areas where mainstream models are not feasible. Services include forms of mobile services covering a number of communities, on-farm care for isolated farm families and multi-sited child care services with a mobile support unit.

In addition, there is a project to examine, through research and pilots, child care arrangements to meet the needs of families with sick children and shift workers where the existing service options are not suitable or available.

Pilot projects have also been developed to assist children whose families may not be able to meet all their needs for care as a result of family crisis or difficult ongoing circumstances; for example parent/s incapacitated by alcohol or drugs or undertaking rehabilitation, parent/s who are deceased or terminally ill, or families who are separating. These services extend beyond the provision of child care by coordinating referral to a range of family support services.

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New South Wales Government comments

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The 1998-99 year saw an exciting initiative for NSW with the establishment of the Office of Childcare within the Department of Community Services.

The Office was announced by the Minister for Community Services, Faye Lo Po' in June 1998 and has responsibility for the NSW Government's policy, funding, planning and regulatory functions for children's services and to coordinate and support the work of our Children's Services Advisers. The Office is headed by Associate Professor June Wangmann formerly of the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University.

The first year has been a very active one for the Office with more than \$1 million being allocated towards important research in the early childhood field; encompassing literacy practices, outcomes for children with a disability, the links between children's services and child protection, the effects of multiple care arrangements, and the development of practice guidelines on transition to school and the development of an early childhood curriculum.

A number of the projects are being conducted in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Training and in most instances the research is being undertaken by our Universities.

Already findings from the first stage of the literacy project have been presented at international education forums in Hong Kong, Helsinki and New Zealand and at national forums in Adelaide, Canberra, Darwin and Brisbane.

Additionally the year continued the implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at improving service quality and access opportunities for children, families, and communities. Among these initiatives were:

- \$7.8 million in recurrent and capital funding allocated to the establishment of 1863 new child care places in areas of high need;
- in excess of \$3 million allocated to developing innovative and flexible services in response to the needs of rural families and communities resulting in the creation or improved access to more than 1300 places with enhanced opportunities for Aboriginal children to attend an early childhood service; and
- \$1.3 million to improve health and safety as part of implementing national standards for outside school hours care services.

These initiatives clearly demonstrate NSW's continued commitment to assist with the provision of a strong community service system providing quality and choice with paramount consideration for the needs of children through partnerships with services providers, families, communities, early childhood professionals and with other government agencies.

In terms of data the year saw NSW win a Silver Award at the 12th national Government Technology Productivity Awards for its new Children's Services Information System.

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Victorian Government comments

“ The Victorian Government is committed to supporting families in caring for their children in their early years by ensuring that all children are given the opportunity to access high quality children’s services. The provision of quality local services for young children and families is seen as being fundamental to the wellbeing of the community.

The Department of Human Services is responsible for licensing children’s services in Victoria. As at 30 June 1999, there were approximately 2850 licensed centre-based services providing almost 100 000 places for children aged 0–6 years. In addition, Victoria either funds directly or manages Commonwealth/State Government funding to approximately 1600 agencies providing children’s services at approximately 2100 service delivery locations across the State, comprising preschool, occasional child care and TAFE long day care.

A range of providers is responsible for the delivery of these services including committees of management, local government, companies, tertiary education institutions, non-government schools, government schools and private individuals.

Victoria is committed to the development of flexible, integrated services, enabling families to access a range of services at the one location. For example, while the role of the preschool program has remained consistent for a number of years, there is now greater variety in how the program is delivered. Preschool can operate as a stand-alone service, or can be delivered as part of, or along side other forms of part day or long day care. An increasing number of long day care centres are offering a funded preschool service, with 441 long day care centres (approximately 26 per cent) receiving preschool funding in 1999. As well, the majority of preschool providers also provide other programs such as three year old groups, school age care and/or occasional care. Furthermore, recent amendments to the Education Act have meant that state primary schools can now become preschool providers.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring access to preschool education for all eligible Victorian children. To this end, the Government has recently announced that the Health Card Grant will more than double commencing from the beginning of 2000. The Health Card Grant is provided to services for families on low incomes and is used to reduce fees for those families.

In line with the decision to move to a sample week data collection from 1998, Victoria has changed the timing of each of the children’s services data collections to August. In addition, the 1998 data collection forms were modified to ensure that the data items matched the definitions as contained in the Data Collection Manual at that time. This has meant that Victoria has been able to provide more data for the 2000 Report than has been previously provided. However, it was not possible for Victoria to provide some data items for this Report due to the specific operational and administrative arrangements in the Victorian children’s services sector compared with other jurisdictions.

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Queensland Government comments

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The Queensland Government acknowledges that the support of families and the care and education of children is of vital importance for the future of our society and is a key role of government. The government remains committed to supporting the provision of good quality children's services, and to the development of a cohesive, responsive and sustainable child care sector.

A significant achievement of the Queensland Government has been the development of the *Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000 – 2005*. In 1998-99 wide consultations were undertaken to inform the development of the Plan, which identifies key priorities and directions for the next five years and clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the State Government and other stakeholders in working toward this vision. A key element of the Plan is the development of a new regulatory framework that supports the provision of quality, accessible child care that is responsive to the diverse and changing needs of children and families. Further consultation regarding the framework is planned for early 2000.

In addition, the Queensland Government has implemented a number of funding programs and strategies to facilitate access for all Queensland children and families to appropriate child care services. In particular, a range of initiatives has been implemented to benefit young children, families and services in rural and remote areas. Funding was made available to establish a Rural Outreach Network for approximately 80 children's services located in rural and remote areas of the State. The Network will provide computer equipment and applications to link services to the Internet, to each other and to the Department and will provide assistance and support to services and families experiencing isolation. Funding was also provided to establish the fifth Remote Area Families Service in the State, to develop an additional 21 Rural Children's Centres and to build on existing infrastructure within rural and isolated communities to extend the range of services for children and families.

The Queensland Government is committed to using data and research to review performance and inform planning and decision-making. While the value of performance measurement of government service provision is recognised, it is noted that some inconsistencies in the definition of terms and collection methodologies impact on the comparability of data presented in the chapter. However, Queensland remains committed to working with other jurisdictions to address these inconsistencies and develop a core set of nationally agreed data items and definitions which will enhance the availability, integrity and comparability of data for future reports.

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Western Australian Government comments

Family and Children's Service's is the State Government department responsible for children's services (0–12 years) in Western Australia. The department is committed to the principle of ensuring good quality care for children from 0–12 years and does this by licensing child care services for children prior to compulsory school age, funding and supporting providers and contributing to planning for new services.

In addition to staff at the Child Care Licensing Unit, Family and Children's Services employs children's services officers in every local office to support the maintenance of quality across all services types and these officers also have a contract management responsibility for state funded children's services.

There is a significant number of private family day care providers in Western Australia who are supported and regulated by Family and Children's Services but not counted in this report.

During 1999 an industry consultative committee has been assisting the department in the development of a set of broad standards for Outside School Hours Care services. These will be developed into draft regulations and a plan for implementation put in place in 2000.

A State initiated Review of the jointly funded Commonwealth/State Occasional Care Program demonstrated the benefits of a flexible child care model in rural and remote communities. In particular the high level of access by Aboriginal children across the state was very encouraging.

All state funded kindergarten programs are now provided by the Education Department following the final transfer of the Family and Children's Services funded services at the end of 1998. Current provision for children in the calendar year in which they turn four is two half-day sessions per week except for some designated Aboriginal preschools where provision is four half-day sessions per week.

Changes are planned for the school entry age and from 2001 only children with their fourth birthdays falling on or before 30 June 2001 will be eligible to enter Education Department kindergarten programs. From 2001 onwards all eligible children will be able to attend kindergarten for four half day sessions per week. From 2002 children attending pre-primary, the year prior to the first year of compulsory schooling, will be able to attend for five full days per week.

South Australian Government comments

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The Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) is the State Government agency responsible for children's services in South Australia. It operates the majority of preschools with the remaining operated by non-government and religious organisations. DETE is also responsible for the administration of Family Day Care and the operation of occasional child care services (run in conjunction with preschool services) and TAFE child care centres. The department provides advisory support to all children's services regardless of their funding source and performs the licensing and approvals function for child care centres, family day care and outside school hours care.

New Child Care Centre Regulation came into operation on 3 April 1999 following extensive consultation with the child care centre industry. These regulations incorporate national standards with the exception of those relating to child staff ratios. The decision to postpone the implementation of new child staff ratios was in recognition of the pressures currently facing the child care industry. A commitment has been made to review the child staff ratios early in the year 2000.

South Australia commissioned independent market research to ascertain parent views on their awareness about the existence of the range of children's services. The research indicated a high level of awareness about the existence of the range of children's services and that parents generally acclaimed the benefits of those services. A major concern was the view that the cost of care was the predominant factor inhibiting the use of child care.

During the period seven child care centres closed in South Australia. This followed the closure of 15 child care centres in the previous two years. A priority for South Australia was to support the child care sector that was experiencing a downturn in utilisation. The Premier allocated \$1 million to child care centres and outside school hours care centres to assist them in restructuring their operations following Commonwealth changes to funding arrangements.

South Australia continues to develop initiatives to support quality improvement of services. A focus during 1998-99 was the development of a new curriculum SACSA (South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability) Framework addressing needs from birth to 18 years and the implementation of Partnerships 21, a new local management model for children's services and schools that is designed to increase parent and community participation.

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Tasmanian Government comments

“ Tasmania is committed to supporting a strong, vibrant and sustainable child care industry that provides high quality, age appropriate developmental programs for children.

Located within the Department of Education, the provision of child care and preschool services underpins the Government's view that excellent children's services are fundamental to developing a creative, responsive community that embraces diversity, social tolerance and respect for others. Child care provides a significant contribution to the State economy, in terms of staff employed and also the ability to release parents in the workplace.

This year has seen the first full year of the child care portfolio under the Department of Education. It has provided many opportunities for the industry and the Department to work together in a consultative manner and to build on the vision to better meet the child care needs of families, improve flexibility and reduce duplication and fragmentation in service delivery. An Early Childhood Review currently under way will provide recommendations which will further benefit the closer relationship between education and child care.

New legislation is being developed through a consultation process involving key representatives of the child care industry. The proposed legislation and the accompanying standards are expected to be available for public consultation in the latter part of the financial year.

A number of new initiatives have been developed to support the child care industry. They include the provision of capital funding to rural services to upgrade or extend their buildings to meet licensing standards and a new mentorship program. The purpose of the latter is to provide peer support for child care services not meeting licensing standards. The mentorship program has been expanded to include assistance to services: in supporting the professional development of child care workers, in upgrading the skills of senior child care staff and in maintaining financial viability. Funding is also available for the development of a draft policies manual for Outside School Hours Care services and centre based services.

The Tasmanian Government has remained committed to the need for performance measurement and the development of a new database system for child care services in Tasmania will help to ensure that the required statistics are able to be maintained. Acknowledgment is made that some of the statistics are to be treated with caution until such time as they are known to be providing accurate comparisons across all services, States and Territories.

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Australian Capital Territory Government comments

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The ACT has a strong commitment to family support and thus has maintained funding in real terms to child care for family support purposes. The family support program also funds a variety of behaviour management programs and provides hands-on support for children with special needs not eligible for Commonwealth funding.

This funding complements the Commonwealth's child care program, which is oriented towards participation in employment. The two programs provide a broad coverage for the ACT's child care needs. In addition the ACT Government in partnership with parent associations offers all four year olds 10.5 hours of sessional preschool per week in the year before school.

ACT still shows one of the highest participation rates in child care in Australia reflecting the relatively high employment figures in the ACT. There is more than sufficient supply of child care places to meet demand in the ACT resulting in only two small new centres opening in the past year and growth is expected to remain low in the near future.

Two significant policy developments for Children's Services in the ACT include new legislation and a draft strategic plan for preschools. In October 1999 the ACT Government released a draft strategic plan for preschools in the context of early childhood services. The draft plan was developed after consultation with preschool staff, service providers and interested people involved in early childhood services in the ACT. The Government has endorsed the draft plan and is seeking further community input through its referral to the Legislative Assembly for the ACT, Standing Committee on Education.

In November 1999, the Legislative Assembly gazetted a new Children and Young People Act to come into force by May 2000. The legislative changes through this Act provide better processes for enforcing licence conditions and include licensing of Family Day Care Schemes in the ACT for the first time. The new licensing system will include implementation of National Standards for Family Day Care.

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Northern Territory Government comments

“ Children’s services are an integral and essential part of the growing network of child and family support services in the Northern Territory, contributing significantly to the total health and development of the Northern Territory population. In 1998-99, the provision of these services was overlaid by the continuing impact of social, economic and policy change in the last few years, together with the impetus for innovation and new responses to child, family and community needs.

In support of these new directions, a number of projects commenced or continued during 1998-99 to trial alternative approaches, particularly aiming to better integrate health, care and education services for young children. Additional subsidies were also provided to encourage extension of child care service hours for shift and weekend workers, and provision of care for babies.

Development of appropriate children’s services in remote communities remains a key focus for the children’s services program in the NT. Preschool education is available in all urban areas and the majority of rural areas. There are a growing number of remote Aboriginal communities operating or considering the development of additional early childhood programs. One new innovative service commenced operation and construction of a further two facilities was undertaken in 1998-99. Service delivery support arrangements continue to be built for these services.

A significant and persistent difficulty is the recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified staff, particularly outside the Darwin area. This is exacerbated by high population turnover (five times the national average in 1995-96), contributing to challenges in assuring service quality and viability. Strategies to address this situation include implementation of a competency assessment support scheme, the first stage of which commenced in 1998-99. A resource folder including guidelines for child care centre operators was developed and distributed, together with a policies and procedures manual for outside school hours services.

1999-2000 will see a focus on consolidating existing initiatives, and on furthering the development of remote area and integrated services for children.

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