
COMMUNITY SERVICES PREFACE

Support to those in need takes many forms and is provided through a wide range of mechanisms involving both governments and the community.

The community itself is typically a major source of assistance to those it considers in need of support. This can be through donation of time or money to not-for-profit organisations or by informal arrangements such as within family, by neighbours or by friends. For example, in 1993, more than 570 000 people over the age of 15 years were the principal source of care for people with a handicap, with around 74 per cent of these people caring for a person with whom they resided (ABS Cat. No. 4430.0).

Government support

Governments also assist through payments to specific groups of individuals or families — for example, unemployment benefits and aged, disability and supporting parent pensions — or by funding service provision. Only government funding of service provision — whether by itself or by non-government organisations — is covered in this Report.

Governments at all levels provide funding for a broad suite of community services to individuals and families in Australia. These include services to older people and people with a disability as well as child care, emergency shelter and meeting the protection and support needs of families. Many services for which governments provide funding — such as services for families in crisis and the homeless — act as a safety net for individuals and families. Others, such as children's services are provided because the community considers their availability to be desirable.

Communities differ in composition and need and in their views as to the level, type and availability of services for which governments should provide funding support. While this may enable different types of need to be specifically targeted, it has also contributed to a duplication and overlap of programs with a large number and type of service providers and delivery mechanisms.

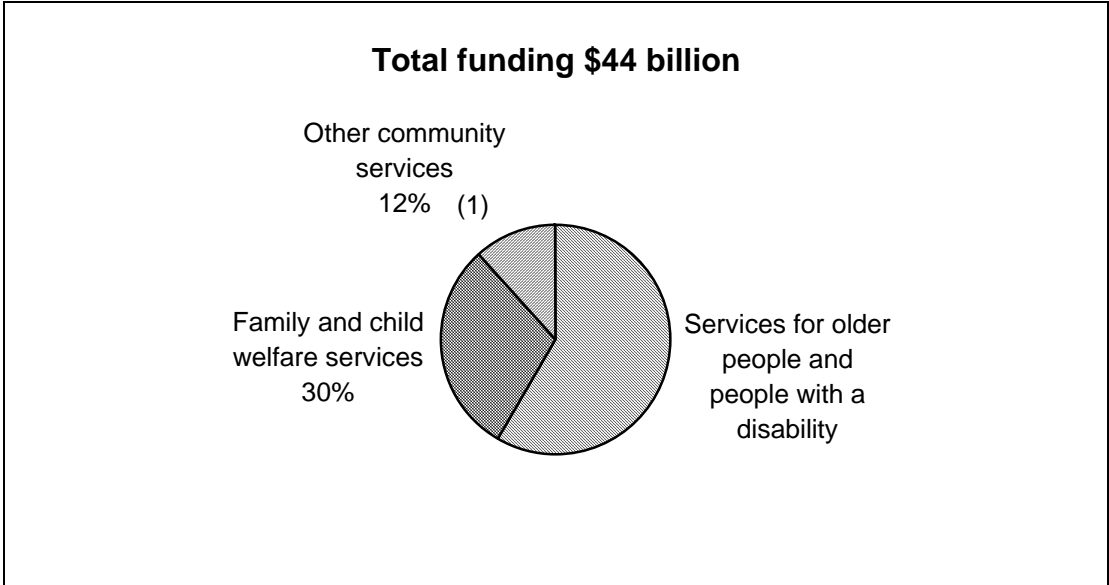
In 1993–94, governments provided over \$44 billion for funding of social security and welfare (ABS Cat. No. 5501.0) but only about 11 per cent of this (\$5 billion) was used by government to fund the production of services (AIHW 1996). Government funding of the production of services was made up of \$2.7 billion by the Commonwealth Government, \$2.3 billion by State and Territory Governments and \$5 million by Local Governments (AIHW 1996).

Individual governments produce some services themselves and also provide funds to others (including other levels of government) to produce services. In 1993–94, about 10 per cent of Commonwealth Government funding was spent on its own production of services compared with around half of State and Territory Government funding (AIHW 1996).

Government funding of community services has been growing significantly. Over the period 1988–89 to 1993–94, funding increased in real terms by 43 per cent while real expenditure per person increased by 34 per cent (AIHW 1996).

Services for older people and people with a disability accounted for 58 per cent of total expenditure in 1993–94. Expenditure on all areas increased, but family and child welfare services experienced the greatest growth — for example, their recurrent expenditure increased by 64 per cent in real terms over the period 1988–89 to 1993–94. It should be noted that some programs are unable to differentiate between clients in different groups. Home and Community Care services for example, provide assistance to both the aged and younger people with a disability.

Government expenditure on community services by service type, 1993–94 (per cent)



1 'Other community services' includes supported accommodation, rent rebates, prisoners aid and English language courses for migrants.

Source: AIHW 1996

Interactions

Many clients have complex needs, requiring support from a range of different services. Measuring the output of an individual service is often more

straightforward than determining whether the combined outputs of all of the services being provided to a client constitute the most efficient and effective way of meeting client's needs.

The development of effective links and flexibility between services is critical to ensuring that all of a client's needs are met. At the client level, this may involve case management and interaction between a number of providers. At the policy level, it may involve reviewing the scope of different service types to minimise overlap and the potential for gaps in some areas of service delivery and duplication in others. Examples of these links include providing assistance to older people with a disability and providing respite care in child care services as part of child protection and support services.

The links make it necessary to develop performance indicators capable of measuring performance across the sector. Such indicators need to recognise that community services are often only one part of governments' overall strategies to address social issues. For example, while indicators such as homelessness reflect the performance of the community services sector, they also reflect a significant number of other influences. Further, these types of measures need to be supplemented by measures which assess the effectiveness of both individual services and the total set of services by their impact on the end user.

Community services also interact with other service areas including the health, housing, education and justice systems. Recognising these links could also enable a more holistic approach to meeting individual needs.

Recent developments

A recent trend for many areas of community services has been a move towards community based care and away from institutional support. The change has been designed, in areas such as aged care and care for people with a disability, as a means of enabling clients to better integrate in the community. For child protection and support services, it has led to an emphasis on keeping children with their families or in family environments where appropriate, rather than in group or residential care.

The population aged 65 years and over was 2.1 million in 1994. It is projected to increase rapidly in number and as a proportion of the total population (ABS Cat. No. 3201, ABS Cat. No. 3222.0). This will have a significant impact on both the composition of community services and the level of assistance provided.

The role played by government in the provision and funding of community services has changed in recent years. These changes have included; an increase

in the use of purchaser-provider arrangements and contracting out; the emergence of for-profit providers; and an increased emphasis on case management and gatekeeper services. Factors contributing to these changes have been efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government funded or provided services and governments' desire to improve the accountability and transparency of their activities.

Future directions

The coverage of the Report may be extended in future years to include other community service areas such as employment programs. The collective analysis of the community service sector may also benefit from the Australian Bureau of Statistics community services industry survey which is planned for release in February 1997. Such developments, combined with a more holistic approach to the analysis of service provision, will facilitate a more comprehensive analysis of the community services sector in future Reports.