
Chapter 15: Protection and support services (PR)

The protection and support chapter

Protection and support services aim to assist individuals and families who are in crisis or experiencing difficulties that hinder personal or family functioning. They do this by alleviating the difficulties and reducing the potential for their recurrence.

This chapter reports on:

- *child protection services*: the functions of government that receive and assess allegations of child abuse and neglect, and/or harm to children and young people, that provide and refer clients to family support and other relevant services, and that intervene to protect children;
- *out-of-home care services*: care for children placed away from their parents for protective or other family welfare reasons; and
- *supported accommodation and assistance services*: services to assist young people, adults and families who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

Indigenous data in the protection and support chapter

The protection and support services chapter in the *Report on Government Services 2003* (ROGS) contains the following data items on Indigenous people:

- Indigenous children who were the subject of child protection notifications, 2001-02;
- Indigenous children who were the subject of a substantiation, 2001-02;
- Indigenous children who were on care and protection orders, 30 June 2002;
- Indigenous children who were in out-of-home care, 30 June 2002;
- Proportion of children in out-of-home care placed with relatives/kin, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2002;
- Proportion of children aged under 12 years in out-of-home care placed in home-based care, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2002;
- Placement of Indigenous children in out-of-home care, 30 June 2002;

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- Proportion of clients who had no substantive change in income source after Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) support, by Indigenous status, 2001-02;
 - Accommodation type on exit from SAAP support, 2001-02;
 - Change in labour force status after SAAP support, 2001-02;
 - SAAP clients who exited from the service and who returned to SAAP agencies before the end of that year, 2001-02;
 - Indigenous people among SAAP clients, and the proportion of requests for SAAP service from Indigenous people that did not result in the assistance requested, 2001-02; and
 - Indigenous clients by met and unmet support needs, 2001-02.

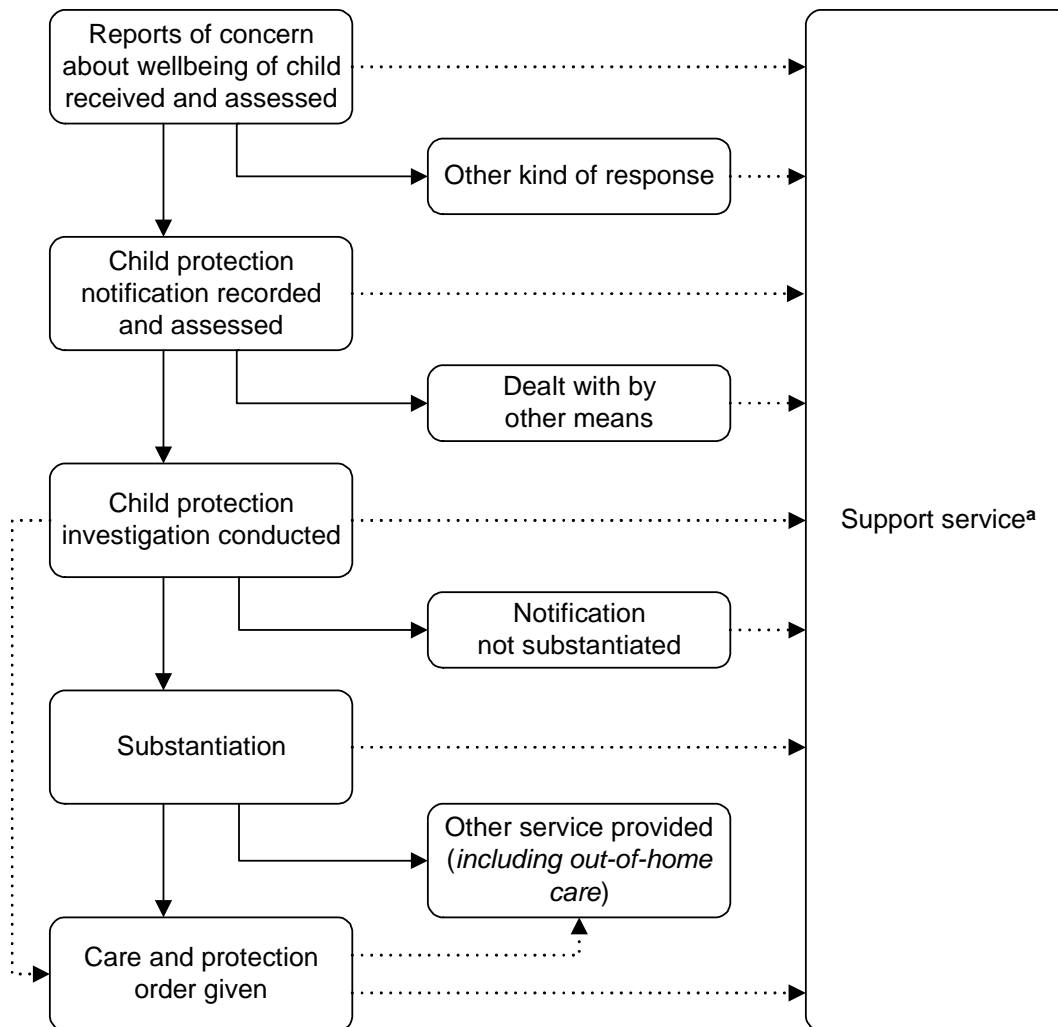
Supporting tables

Supporting tables for data within the protection and support services chapter of the compendium are contained in the attachment to the compendium. Supporting tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by the abbreviated chapter name (for example, PR.A5 is table 5 in the protection and support services attachment to the compendium).

As the data are directly sourced from the *Report on Government Services 2003*, the compendium also notes where the original table, figure or text in the Report can be found. For example, where the compendium refers to 'ROGS 2003, p. 6.15' this is page 15 of chapter 6 of the Report and 'ROGS 2003, 6A.2' is attachment table 2 of attachment 6 of the Report.

Child protection system

Figure PR.1 Child protection system



Note: Dashed lines indicate that clients may or may not receive these services, depending on need.

^a Support services include family support or family preservation services provided by community service departments and referrals to other agencies. ROGS 2003, p. 15.7.

Current research

Box PR.1 Current research in child protection

During 2001-02, the Department of Human Services (DHS) in Victoria undertook detailed research and analysis of its child protection system as outlined in the report *An Integrated Strategy for Child Protection and Placement Services* (DHS 2002). This analysis was undertaken partly as a response to rising rates of both notifications and renotifications of child abuse and neglect.

The report looked at the characteristics of children and families involved in the child protection system. Some of the findings were that:

- more than 75 per cent of families investigated for suspected child abuse were on pensions, benefits or low incomes, and 45 per cent were sole parent families;
- around one-third of parents had problems with alcohol abuse, one-third had substance abuse problems, 19 per cent had a psychiatric disability and more than half had experienced family violence. All of these factors, including the presence of more than one of these factors, have increased over the past five years;
- the proportion of renotifications of child abuse and neglect rose from 36 per cent of all notifications in 1993-94 to 61 per cent of notifications in 2000-01;
- there was evidence of an increase in the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the Indigenous community, with the number of substantiations for Indigenous children increasing by 88 per cent between 1995-96 and 2000-01; and
- a number of families were offered only limited assistance by child protection, and many families had chronic problems that were not addressed through their involvement in the child protection system.

The report concluded that demand for child protection and placement services in Victoria could be more effectively managed and, in the longer term reduced. The report sought to identify better responses to the often complex and chronic problems experienced by some families and to allow intervention earlier to prevent child abuse and neglect occurring. It proposed an integrated strategy to improve child protection practice in Victoria.

Source: Department of Human Services (DHS) (2002); ROGS 2003, p. 15.3.

Notifications

All jurisdictions, apart from Victoria and the NT, screen each incoming report before deciding whether it will be designated and counted as a notification, thus reducing the proportion of reports that become notifications. WA and Tasmania undertake a further screening process, designed to differentiate between concerns relating to child protection and family support/other matters, which further reduces

the number of notifications. For WA and Tasmania therefore, only ‘child harm/maltreatment’ notifications are the subject of this Report.

In all jurisdictions, notifications are investigated when deemed appropriate, based on the policies and practices in that jurisdiction. Once it has been decided that an investigation is required, the investigation process is similar across jurisdictions. The community services department obtains further information about the child and their family by checking information systems for any previous history, undertaking discussion/case planning with agencies and individuals, interviewing/sighting the child and/or interviewing the caregivers/parents. At a minimum, the child is sighted whenever practicable, and the child’s circumstances and needs are assessed. This investigation process will determine whether the notification is substantiated or not substantiated (figure PR.1).

Nationally, 9421 Indigenous children and 90 103 non-Indigenous children were the subject of child protection notifications in 2001-02. The rate of notifications per 1000 children in the population aged 0–16 years was 51.6 for Indigenous children and 21.1 for non-Indigenous children (table PR.A4).

Substantiation

The criteria for substantiation vary across jurisdictions. In some jurisdictions, a notification is substantiated when an incident of abuse or neglect has occurred or is likely to occur; in others, it is substantiated when the child has been harmed or is likely to be harmed, or when there is a combination of action and harm.¹

If an investigation results in substantiation, then intervention by the relevant community services department may be needed to protect the child. This intervention can take a number of forms, including referral to other services, supervision, counselling or recourse to the court, or placement in out-of-home care.

Nationally in 2001-02, 3254 Indigenous children and 22 059 non-Indigenous children were the subject of a substantiation. The rate of children who were the subject of a substantiation per 1000 children in the population aged 0–16 years was 17.8 for Indigenous children and 5.2 for non-Indigenous children (table PR.A4).

¹ In the past child protection legislation and policy focused on the identification and investigation of narrowly defined incidents that were broadly grouped as types of abuse or neglect. Across all jurisdictions, the focus is shifting away from the actions of parents and guardians, towards the outcomes for the child, and the identification and investigation of actual harm to the child and the child’s needs.

Care and protection orders

Although child protection substantiations are often resolved without the need for a court order (which is usually a last resort), recourse to the court may take place at any point in the child protection investigation process (figure PR.1). The types of order available vary across jurisdictions.

Nationally, 4264 Indigenous children and 16 293 non-Indigenous children were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2002. The rate of children on care and protection orders per 1000 children in the population aged 0–17 years was 22.1 for Indigenous children and 3.6 for non-Indigenous children (table PR.A4).

Out-of-home care

Out-of-home care services provide care for children and young people aged 0–17 years who are placed away from their parents or family home for reasons of safety or family crisis. These reasons include abuse, neglect or harm, illness of a parent and the inability of parents to provide adequate care. The placements may be voluntary or in conjunction with care and protection orders.

Out-of-home care services are either home-based care (such as foster care, care with the child's extended family and other home-based arrangements), facility-based care (such as family group homes and community residential care), or independent living (which is often intensively supported) as a transition to full independence or supported placements. Across jurisdictions, there has been a shift away from the use of facility-based (or residential) care towards foster care and other forms of home-based care, including relative/kinship care. Intensive family support services are increasingly seen as an alternative to the removal of the child from their home for child protection reasons (see page 15.4, ROGS 2003).

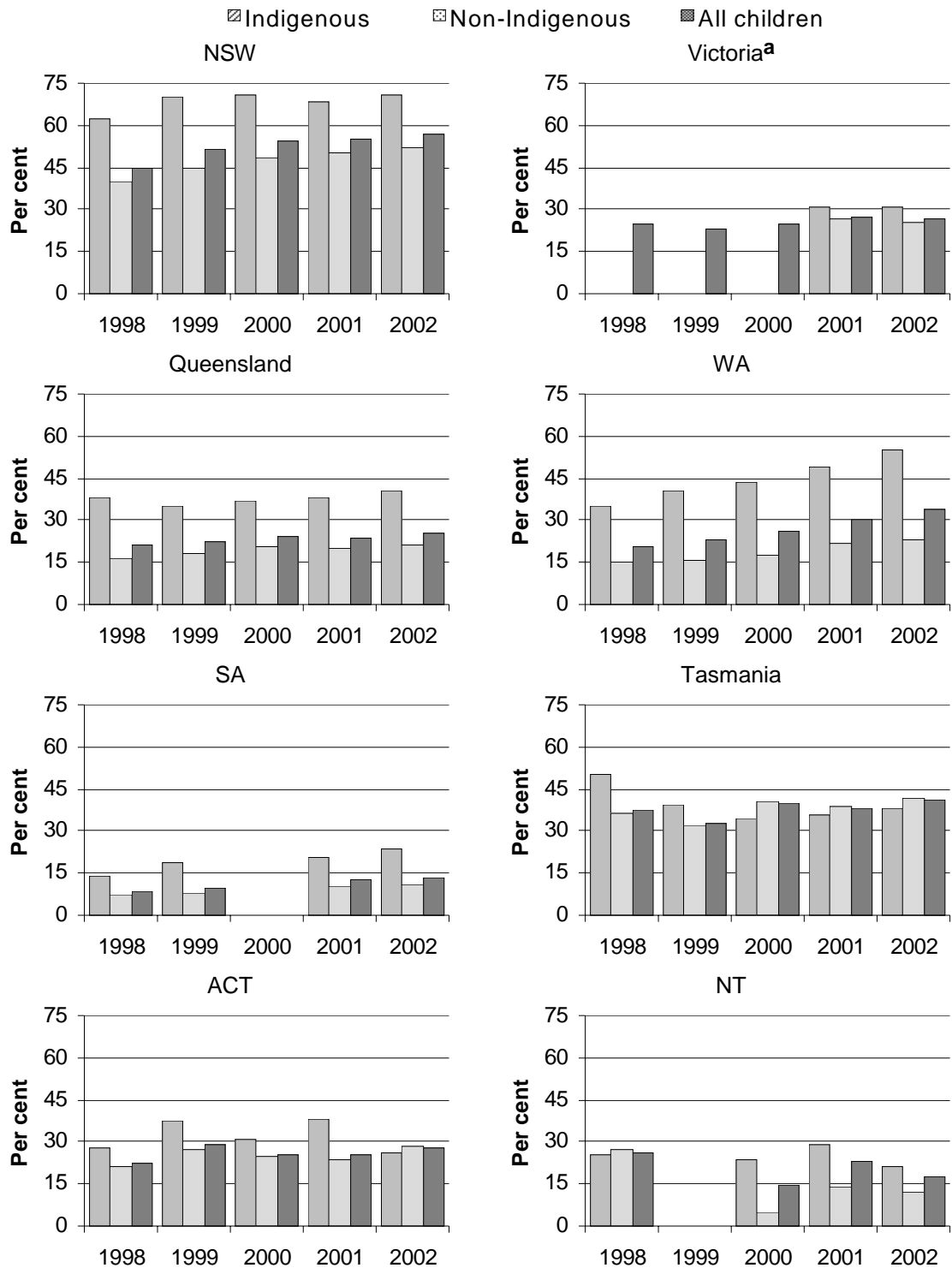
Out-of-home care is one of a range of services provided to families and children where there is a need to provide safe care for a child. The current emphasis in policy and practice is to maintain the child within the family if at all possible, and to place a child in out-of-home care only if this will improve the outcome for the child. If it is necessary to remove the child from their home, then placement with the wider family or community is sought where possible, particularly in the case of Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 1999). Continued emphasis is being placed on improving case planning and case management processes, to facilitate the safe return home of children in out-of-home care and to maximise case workers' contact time with children and families.

Nationally, 4199 Indigenous children and 14 681 non-Indigenous children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2002. The rate of children in out-of-home care per 1000 children in the population aged 0–17 years was 21.7 for Indigenous children and 3.2 for non-Indigenous children (table PR.A5).

Service quality — placement with extended family or in home-based care

The type of placement is an indicator of the quality of child placement. Placing children with their relatives or kin is generally preferred for children in out-of-home care. The proportion of children placed with relatives or kin at 30 June 2002 ranged from 56.9 per cent in NSW to 13.3 per cent in SA. The proportion of children placed with relatives or kin was greater for Indigenous children than for non-Indigenous children in all jurisdictions except Tasmania and the ACT (figure PR.2).

Figure PR.2 Proportion of children in out-of-home care placed with relatives/kin, by Indigenous status, 30 June



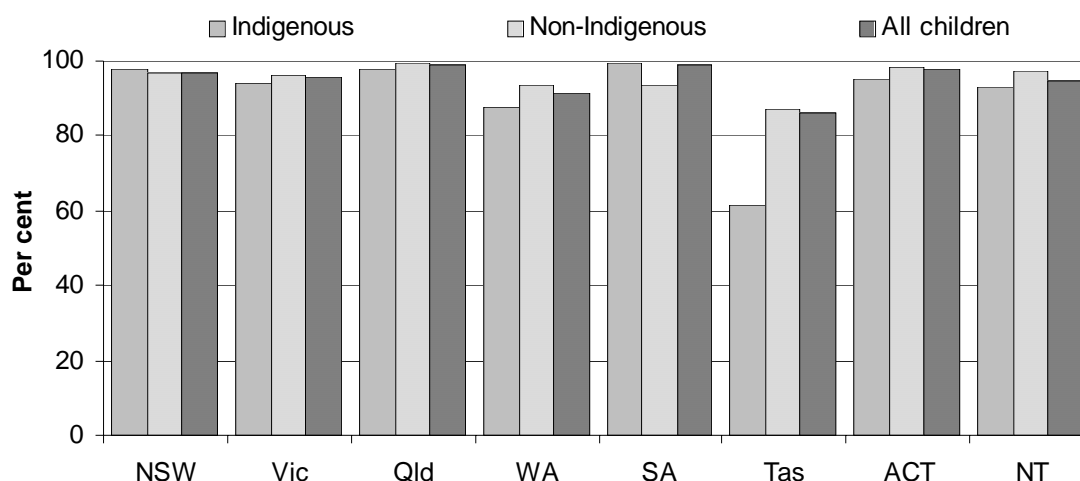
^a Prior to 2001, Victoria was unable to provide data by Indigenous status.

Sources: AIHW *Children in out-of-home care, Australia data collection* (unpublished); ROGS 2003, p. 15.25; tables PR.A25, PR.A37, PR.A49, PR.A61, PR.A73, PR.A85, PR.A97, PR.A109.

Placing children in home-based care is generally considered to be in their best interests, particularly for younger children. The proportion of children aged under 12 years who were placed in home-based care at 30 June 2002 ranged from 99.1 per cent in SA to 86.0 per cent in Tasmania. In all jurisdictions except NSW and SA, the proportion of Indigenous children aged under 12 years placed in home-based care was smaller than the proportion of non-Indigenous children (figure PR.3).

It is also desirable to place children locally, so some elements of their life remain unchanged (for example, enabling the child to continue attendance at the same school). Data are not yet available for this indicator.

Figure PR.3 Proportion of children aged under 12 years in out-of-home care placed in home-based care, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2002



Source: AIHW *Children in out-of-home care, Australia data collection* (unpublished); ROGS 2003, p. 15.25; table PR.A12.

Service quality — placement in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

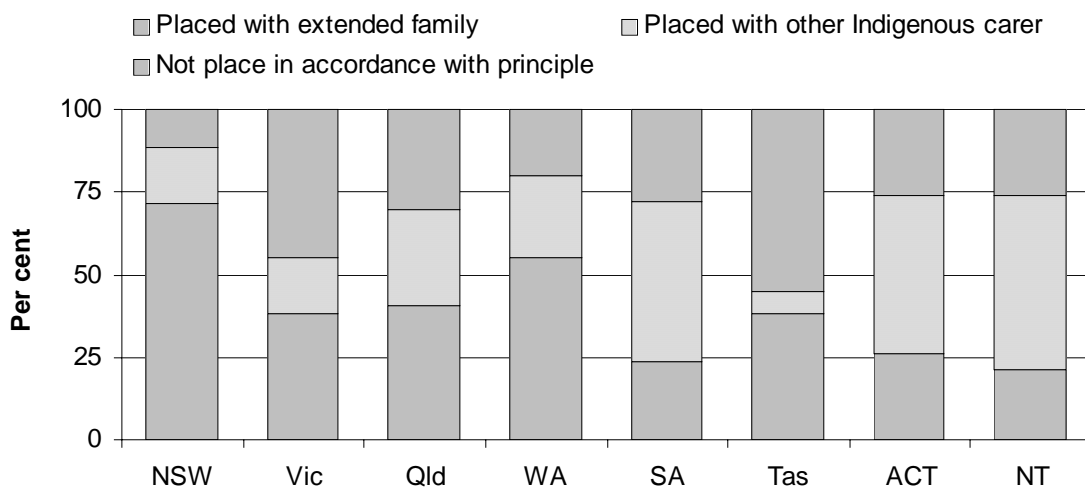
According to the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, the following hierarchy or placement preference should be pursued for Indigenous children:

- placement with the child's extended family (which includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous relatives/kin);
- placement within the child's Indigenous community; or
- placement with other Indigenous people (NSW Law Reform Commission [NLRC] 1997).

All jurisdictions have adopted this principle either in legislation or policy. The proportion of Indigenous children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2002 placed in accordance with the principle ranged from 88.3 per cent in NSW to 44.8 per cent in Tasmania (figure PR.4).

The preferred placement option outlined under the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is placement with the child's extended family. The proportion of Indigenous children in out-of-home care placed with extended family at 30 June 2002 ranged from 71.6 per cent in NSW to 21.4 per cent in the NT. Placement with other Indigenous care providers (the child's Indigenous community or other Indigenous people) also complies with the principle. The proportion, at 30 June 2002, placed with other Indigenous care providers ranged from 52.4 per cent in the NT to 16.3 per cent in NSW (table PR.A11).

Figure PR.4 Placement of Indigenous children in out-of-home care, 30 June 2002^{a, b, c}



^a Excludes Indigenous children living independently and those whose living arrangements were unknown. ^b 'Placed with another Indigenous carer' includes those living in Indigenous residential care. ^c Note that data for Tasmania and the ACT relate to a small number of Indigenous children (29 and 27 respectively) in care at 30 June 2002.

Source: AIHW *Children in out-of-home care, Australia data collection* (unpublished); ROGS 2003, p. 15.26; table PR.A11.

Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP)

Supported accommodation and assistance services aim to assist people who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless as a result of a crisis, including women and children escaping domestic violence. The primary focus of SAAP is to use a case management approach to support homeless people and women and children escaping domestic violence. Through this process, clients are offered a

range of services, including supported accommodation; counselling; advocacy; links to housing, health, education and employment services; outreach support; brokerage; and meals services.

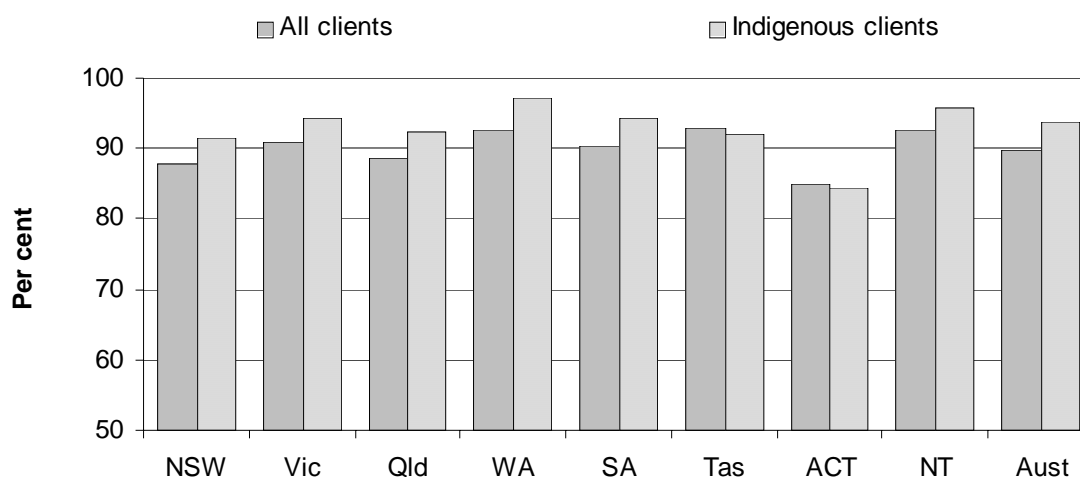
Client outcomes — achievement of independent living

An important outcome is clients' achievement of self reliance and independence. Characteristics that may indicate whether clients can live independently include their income, housing status and workforce status. These characteristics of clients are recorded at the end of their support period.

In all jurisdictions in 2001-02, most clients had no substantive change in income source between entering and exiting the program (figure PR.5). The majority of clients entering SAAP were receiving government benefits, and they were still receiving them when they exited SAAP support.

Client independence is enhanced when the client moves from having no income before entering SAAP services to obtaining some income (including wages and/or benefits) on exit from SAAP services. The proportion of all clients in 2001-02 who had no substantive change in income source ranged from about 93.0 per cent in Tasmania to 84.9 per cent in the ACT.

Figure PR.5 Proportion of clients who had no substantive change in income source after SAAP support, by Indigenous status, 2001-02^a



^a Excludes clients of high volume agencies (those accommodating 50 or more clients per night, telephone referral agencies, day centres, and information and referral centres) because data on income source after support were not collected.

Source: SAAP NDCA Administrative Data and Client Collections (unpublished); ROGS 2003, p. 15.41; tables PR.A112 and PR.A113.

The proportion of clients in 2001-02 who moved from having no income support to obtaining some income ranged from 3.5 per cent in the ACT to 2.1 per cent in Queensland, WA and the NT. The proportion of clients who obtained their own benefit or a wage ranged from 2.0 per cent in SA to 0.8 per cent in Tasmania. The proportion who had no income before or after support ranged from 9.9 per cent in the ACT to 2.9 per cent in the NT. Nationally, 0.9 per cent of clients exiting the program moved from having a wage to receiving a government payment, or from having some income to having no income (table PR.A112).

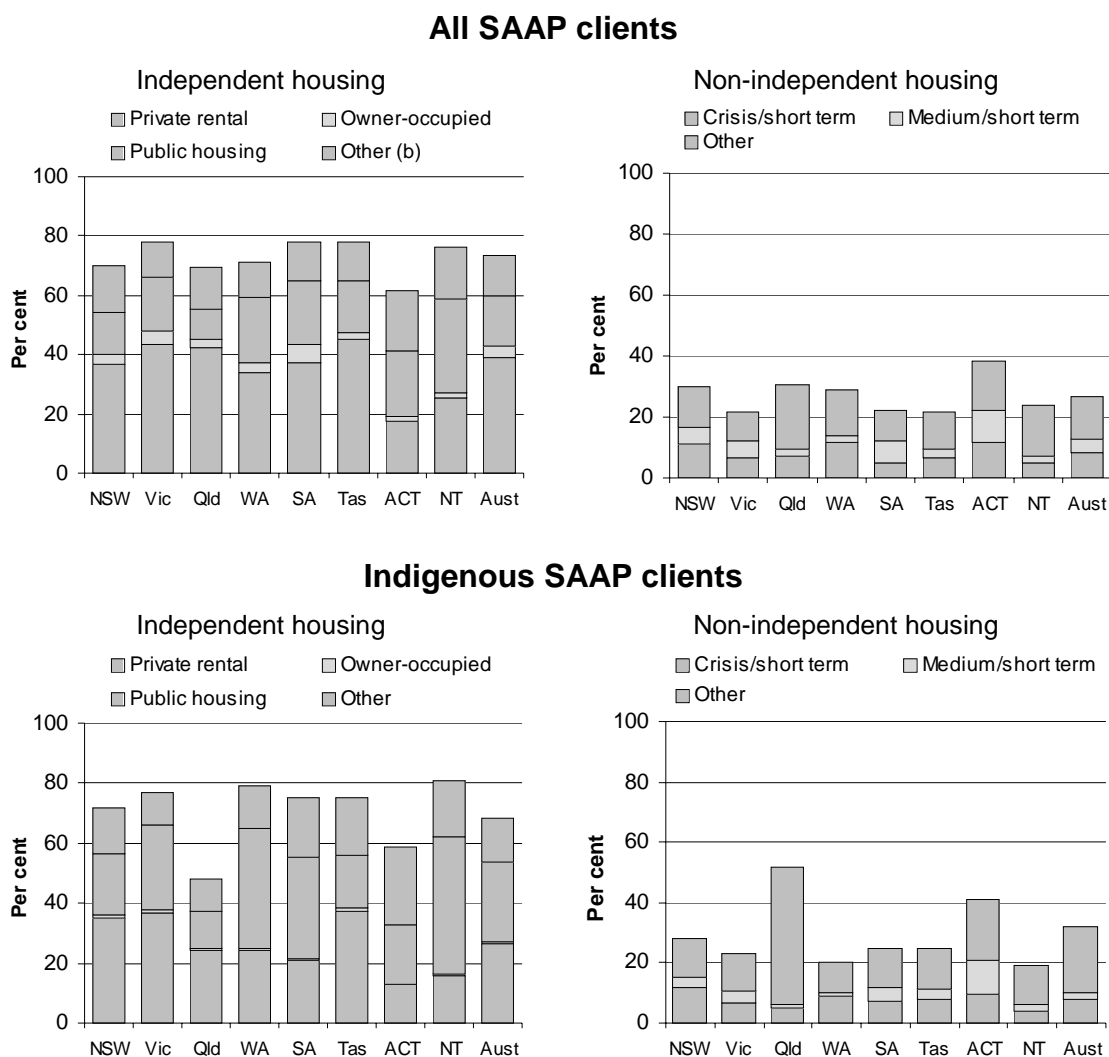
The proportion of Indigenous clients in 2001-02 who had no substantive change in income source ranged from about 97.1 per cent in WA to 84.5 per cent in the ACT. The proportion who moved from having no income support to obtaining some income ranged from 2.2 per cent in NSW to 0.5 per cent in WA. The proportion who obtained their own benefit or a wage ranged from 1.2 per cent in Victoria to 0.2 per cent in WA. The proportion of Indigenous clients in 2001-02 who had no income before or after support ranged from 12.6 per cent in the ACT to 1.9 per cent in WA. Nationally, 0.4 per cent of clients exiting the program moved from having a wage to receiving a government payment, or from having some income to having no income (table PR.A113).

The proportion of clients achieving independent living at the end of a support period indicates the independence of clients after program support. Nationally, 73.5 per cent of clients achieved independent housing at the end of a support period in 2001-02. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous clients achieving independent housing at the end of a support period was 68.1 per cent in 2001-02 (figure PR.6).

By type of independent housing on exiting from SAAP, 39.2 per cent of all clients in 2001-02 moved to private rental housing (26.6 per cent of Indigenous clients), 17.0 per cent entered public housing (26.6 per cent of Indigenous clients) and 3.6 per cent moved to owner-occupied housing (0.6 per cent of Indigenous clients) (figure PR.6).

By type of non-independent housing, 12.9 per cent of all clients in 2001-02 continued to live in SAAP accommodation (9.9 per cent of Indigenous clients): 8.3 per cent in crisis or short term accommodation (7.6 per cent of Indigenous clients) and 4.6 per cent in medium to long term accommodation (2.3 per cent of Indigenous clients) (figure PR.6).

Figure PR.6 Accommodation type on exit from SAAP support, 2001-02^{a, b}



^a Excludes high volume records because not all items are included in high volume forms. ^b 'Other' independent housing may include living rent free in a house or flat. 'Other' non-independent housing may include: SAAP funded accommodation at hostels, hotels or community placements; non-SAAP emergency accommodation; car, tent or squat; and an institutional setting.

Source: SAAP NDCA Administrative Data and Client Collections (unpublished); ROGS 2003, p. 15.43; table PR.A114 and PR.A115.

Employment is another indicator of clients' achievement of self reliance and independence. Nationally, 8.8 per cent of support periods in 2001-02 involved clients who were employed before support, while 33.3 per cent of support periods involved clients who were previously unemployed (ROGS 2003, table 15A.162). Of the clients who were unemployed when entering the program, about 7.3 per cent were employed at the end of the support period (2.6 per cent full time, 1.5 per cent part time and 3.2 per cent on a casual basis), 81.6 per cent remained unemployed and 11.1 per cent were not in the labour force (table PR.A116).

For Indigenous clients who were unemployed when entering the program in 2001-02, about 4.1 per cent were employed at the end of the support period (1.3 per cent full time, 1.0 per cent part time and 1.7 per cent on a casual basis), 83.4 per cent remained unemployed and 12.6 per cent were not in the labour force (table PR.A117).

The performance information above relates to relatively short term outcomes — that is, outcomes for clients immediately after their support period. Longer term outcomes are important, but there are challenges in collecting information on these outcomes. The data collection for SAAP allows for the measurement of the number of clients and the number and types of service provided to clients (box PR.1).

Box PR.1 Issues when analysing SAAP data

The following four important issues need to be considered when analysing SAAP data.

- Informed consent is an essential component of the integrity of the data. The principle of client/consumer rights (which underpins informed consent) recognises that clients do not receive services under a mandatory order. They have the right to accept or reject the services offered, as they have the right to provide or not provide information while receiving SAAP services.
- Comprehensive information cannot be collected for all clients, such as casual clients and clients of high volume agencies (those accommodating 50 or more clients per night, telephone referral agencies, day centres, and information and referral centres).
- Clients consented to provide personal details for the SAAP client collection for 85 per cent of support periods in 2001-02. A weighting system has been developed to adjust for agency non participation (95 per cent of agencies participated in the client collection) and non-consent.
- Caution should be taken when comparing 2001-02 client data with previous years data because 2001-02 data are based on estimated support periods per client rather than observed support periods per client as reported in previous years.

Source: AIHW (2002); ROGS 2003, p. 15.45.

An important longer term indicator of whether clients are achieving self reliance and independence is whether a client has needed to return to SAAP services. If a client received two or more support periods over the year, then they must have returned to the program (but not necessarily to the same agency) for a period of support during the year.

Nationally, 31.8 per cent of clients returned to SAAP services in 2001-02 after having exited the program less than 12 months earlier (table PR.A118). It may be

appropriate, however, for some clients to receive more than one support period (moving from crisis to medium term accommodation, for example). Of Indigenous clients, 35.0 per cent returned to SAAP services nationally in 2001-02 (table PR.A119). One group that makes multiple use of SAAP are women and children escaping domestic violence. A number of SAAP clients with long term problems also access SAAP services a number of times before being able to address their issues.

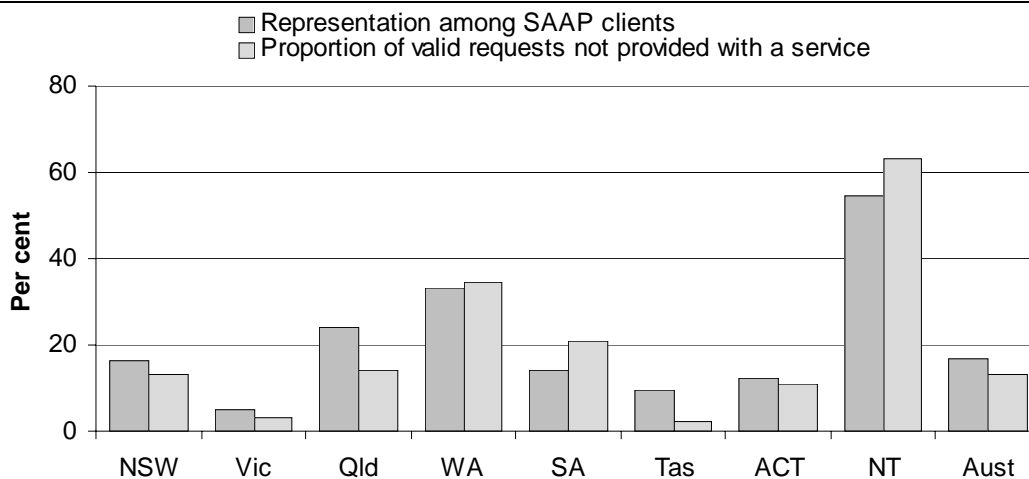
Access and equity — proportion of people who receive a service

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services target homeless people in general, but access by special needs groups (such as Indigenous people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds) is particularly important. Data for assessing access to SAAP services are available from the data collection on unmet demand. Data for 2001-02 were based on surveys conducted between 22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002.

Assessing the experience of target groups using data from the unmet demand collection is problematic. The client data and unmet demand data are not comparable. The client collection counts clients and each client's cultural status. The unmet demand collection is based on valid requests for services and records the cultural status of everyone in the group — making no distinction between adults and accompanying children. Also, the two-week sample period over which data were collected might not be representative of the eventual success of clients accessing SAAP services over the full year (see notes to tables, ROGS 2003, 15A.170–15A.171).

Nationally, the proportion of requests for SAAP service from Indigenous people in the data collection period in 2001-02 that did not result in the assistance requested (13.3 per cent) was lower than the representation of Indigenous clients among SAAP clients (16.7 per cent). In all jurisdictions except the SA and the NT (and WA to a lesser extent), the proportion of requests from Indigenous people that did not result in the provision of a service was lower than the representation of Indigenous people among clients (figure PR.7).

Figure PR.7 Indigenous people among SAAP clients, and the proportion of requests for SAAP service from Indigenous people that did not result in the assistance requested, 2001-02^{a, b}



^a The number of people unable to be provided with a SAAP service was the 'unmet demand'. See notes to table PR.A55 for more detail. ^b Excludes people who refused offered assistance; those who made a similar request at a SAAP funded agency within the collection period (to limit double counting); and those whose request was not met because either the referral was inappropriate (wrong target group) or the agency did not provide the type of service requested.

Source: SAAP NDCA Administrative Data and Client Collections (unpublished); ROGS 2003, p. 15.50; table PR.A122.

Appropriateness — matching of service with expressed needs

The proportion of clients receiving services that they need is an indicator of appropriateness. Data are collected on which services are needed by clients and whether these services are provided or the clients are referred to another agency. The range of needed services is broad (ranging from meals to laundry facilities to long term accommodation), so the effect of not providing these services varies.

Nationally, the proportion of clients who received needed services or were referred to another agency for needed services was 92.7 per cent in 2001-02 (table PR.A123). Nationally, 89.2 per cent of Indigenous clients in 2001-02 either received needed SAAP services or were referred to another agency for these services — 3.5 percentage points lower than the proportion for all clients. Across jurisdictions, the proportion ranged from 98.2 per cent in the NT to 83.5 per cent in Queensland (figure PR.8).

Figure PR.8 Indigenous clients, by met and unmet support needs, 2001-02



Source: SAAP NDCA Administrative Data and Client Collections (unpublished); ROGS 2003, p. 15.52; table PR.A124.