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## 14 Children's services

Children's services aim to meet the care, education and development needs of children, although the emphasis on these broad objectives may differ across the services. Child care services reported in this chapter include those provided to children aged less than 13 years, usually by someone other than the child's parents or guardian. Preschool services are provided to children mainly in the year or two before they commence full time schooling. Younger Indigenous children living in remote areas in the NT and Queensland also may attend preschools. In the ACT, children from Indigenous backgrounds, children with English as a second language, and 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 per week) at 3 years of age.

This chapter presents performance and descriptive information for government funded and/or delivered child care and preschool services. Unless otherwise stated, the data relate to services that are supported by the Australian, State and Territory governments and provided for children aged less than 13 years. Local governments also plan, fund and deliver children's services. Given data limitations, however, this chapter records data on local government activities only where Australian, State and Territory government funding and licensing are involved. The chapter does not include services that do not receive government funding (unless otherwise noted).

### *Indigenous data in the children's services chapter*

The children's services chapter in the *Report on Government Services 2005* (2005 Report) contains the following data items on Indigenous people:

- Proportion of children from special needs groups attending Commonwealth approved child care services, 2004.
- Proportion of preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds (relative to representation in the community, and among attendees), 2003-04.
- Proportion of preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds for each year between 1999-2000 to 2003-04.

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The 2005 Report also notes that the Australian Government provides supplementary funding for the preschool education of children from Indigenous backgrounds (2005 Report, p. 14.6).

### *Supporting tables*

Supporting tables for data within the children's services chapter of the compendium are contained in the attachment to the compendium. These tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by an 'A' suffix (for example, table 14A.3 is table 3 in the children's services attachment to the compendium). As the data are directly sourced from the 2005 Report, the compendium also notes where the original table, figure or text in the 2005 Report can be found. For example, where the compendium refers to '2005 Report, p. 14.15' this is page 15 of chapter 14 of the 2005 Report, and '2005 Report, 14A.2' is attachment table 2 of attachment 14 of the 2005 Report.

## **Access of target groups — representation in services**

The 'participation rates for special needs groups' indicator is explained in box 14.1. The data for this indicator is not complete or not directly comparable.

### **Box 14.1 Participation rates for special needs groups**

'Participation rates for special needs groups' are included as an output (equity — access) indicator of governments' objective to ensure that all Australian families have equitable access to child care and preschool services, that there is no discrimination between groups, and that there is consideration of the needs of those groups who may have special difficulty accessing services.

This indicator is defined as the proportion of children using child care services who are from targeted special needs groups, compared with the representation of these groups in the community. Data are reported separately for child care and preschool services. Targeted special needs groups include children from a non-English speaking background, children from an Indigenous background, children from low income families, children with a disability and children from regional and remote areas.

The representation of special needs groups among children's services users would be expected to be broadly similar to their representation in the community.

The data indicate that the representation of children in special needs groups among users of Australian Government supported child care is sometimes substantially different across jurisdictions. This variation largely reflects jurisdictional differences in the representation of children from special needs groups in the community (table 14.1).

The proportion of children using child care services in 2004 who were from an Indigenous background ranged up to 11.0 per cent in the NT (where the representation of Indigenous children in the population was 36.7 per cent). Nationally, the representation of children from an Indigenous background among child care users was lower than this group's overall representation in the community (table 14.1).

**Table 14.1 Proportion of children (aged 0–12 years) from special needs groups attending Australian Government approved child care services, 2004 (per cent)**

<i>Representation</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>	<i>Aust</i>
Children from non-English speaking backgrounds									
In child care services	17.3	13.5	6.3	8.0	6.7	3.4	12.0	8.4	11.6
In the community <sup>a, b</sup>	8.8	8.0	2.7	3.6	3.0	1.1	2.1	4.1	6.1
Children from Indigenous backgrounds									
In child care services	1.6	0.5	2.4	1.7	1.3	1.0	0.7	11.0	1.6
In the community <sup>c, d</sup>	3.6	1.0	5.9	5.8	3.1	6.4	2.1	36.7	4.1
Children from low-income families									
In child care services	27.3	27.5	32.6	31.7	32.2	31.1	11.9	18.5	29.1
In the community <sup>e</sup>	23.3	21.2	24.7	25.2	30.8	26.7	10.3	24.1	23.7
Children with a disability									
In child care services	2.1	2.1	1.9	1.7	3.5	2.2	2.0	2.4	2.2
In the community <sup>f</sup>	8.6	7.2	7.9	9.2	9.9	7.3	7.2	na	8.2
Children from regional and remote areas									
Children from regional areas									
In child care services	25.7	22.5	38.7	18.4	16.1	99.5	–	72.6	28.7
In the community <sup>a, d</sup>	30.0	29.1	45.6	24.0	26.9	97.6	0.3	48.9	33.4
Children from remote areas									
In child care services	0.4	0.1	1.5	5.0	1.9	0.5	..	27.4	1.4
In the community <sup>a, d</sup>	0.8	0.1	4.7	9.2	4.8	2.4	..	51.1	3.2

<sup>a</sup> Data for 1999-2000 to 2002-03 relate to children aged 0–14 years at June 2001 and were obtained from the ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing. Data for 2003-04 relate to children aged 0–11 years and were obtained from the ABS 2002 Survey of Child Care. These data are not strictly comparable to the proportion of children from a non-English speaking background using the services. <sup>b</sup> Estimates for the smaller jurisdictions are based on small sample sizes and are consequently subject to high sampling error. Data for Tasmania, the ACT and the NT, in particular, need to be interpreted with caution. <sup>c</sup> Data relate to children aged 0–14 years at June 2001 and were obtained from the ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing. <sup>d</sup> These numbers do not include innovative or flexible services that receive direct funding from the Australian Government and are targeted towards children from these groups. <sup>e</sup> Data relate to children aged 0–12 years and were obtained from the ABS 1999-2000 Survey of Income and Housing. <sup>f</sup> Data are estimated from the ABS 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers and relate to children aged 0–14 years, and are thus not strictly comparable to the proportion of child care service users with a disability. **na** Not available. – Nil or rounded to zero. .. Not applicable.

*Source:* AGCCCS (unpublished); ABS (unpublished) 1999-2000 Survey of Income and Housing; ABS (unpublished) 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers; ABS (unpublished) 2002 Child Care Survey; table 14A.1; 2005 Report, p. 14.15, table 14.3.

Data on the proportion of preschool attendees from the specified special needs groups are less extensive for all jurisdictions. Across jurisdictions, the proportion of preschool attendees in 2003-04 who were Indigenous was broadly similar to the representation of Indigenous children in the community (table 14.2).

The proportion of preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds has been relatively constant over time within jurisdictions, except in the NT, where it has increased steadily since 1999-2000 (figure 14.1). Data on the representation of other special needs groups among government funded preschool attendees are provided in table 14.2.

**Table 14.2 Proportion of children (aged 0–12 years) from special needs groups attending State and Territory funded or provided preschools, 2003-04 (per cent)**

<i>Representation</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>	<i>Aust</i>
Children from non-English speaking backgrounds									
In preschool services	6.6	13.5	1.0	na	9.3	na	7.5	na	6.2
In the community <sup>a, b</sup>	8.8	8.0	2.7	3.6	3.0	1.1	2.1	4.1	6.1
Children from Indigenous backgrounds									
In preschool services	3.0	0.9	5.6	8.7	5.5	5.3	2.9	43.1	4.5
In the community <sup>c, d</sup>	3.6	1.0	5.9	5.8	3.1	6.4	2.1	36.7	4.1
Children with a disability									
In preschool services	6.8	3.7	1.4	2.5	14.3	na	4.6	5.9	4.7
In the community <sup>e</sup>	8.6	7.2	7.9	9.2	9.9	7.3	7.2	na	8.2
Children from regional and remote areas									
Children from regional areas									
In preschool services	32.2	29.3	na	23.5	29.1	98.6	0.9	na	23.1
In the community <sup>d</sup>	30.0	29.1	45.6	24.0	26.9	97.6	0.3	48.9	33.4
Children from remote areas									
In preschool services	1.2	0.1	na	9.9	5.7	1.4	..	na	1.9
In the community <sup>d</sup>	0.8	0.1	4.7	9.2	4.8	2.4	..	51.1	3.2

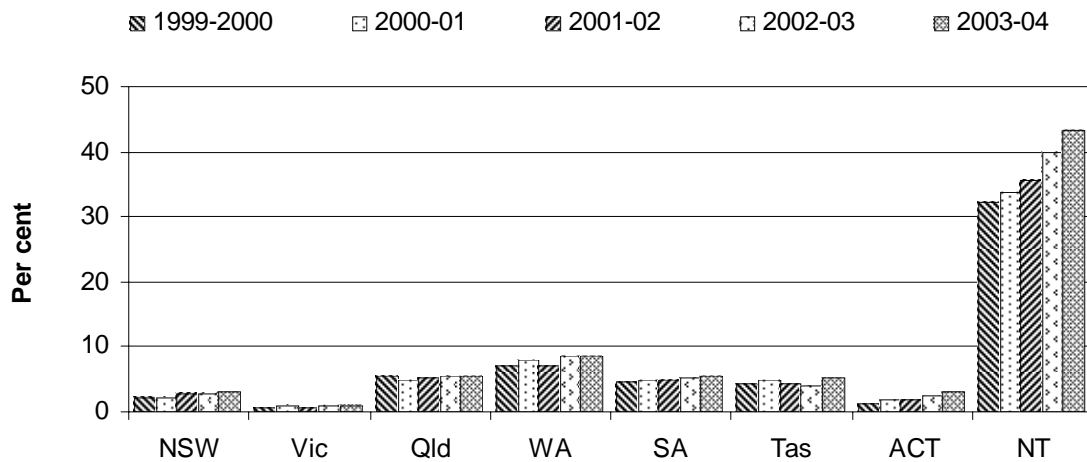
<sup>a</sup> Data for 1999-2000 to 2002-03 relate to children aged 0–14 years at June 2001 and were obtained from the ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing. Data for 2003-04 relate to children aged 0–11 years and were obtained from the ABS 2002 Survey of Child Care. These data are not strictly comparable to the proportion of children from a non-English speaking background using the services. <sup>b</sup> Estimates for the smaller jurisdictions are based on small sample sizes and are consequently subject to high sampling error. Data for Tasmania, the ACT and the NT, in particular, need to be interpreted with caution. <sup>c</sup> Data relate to children aged 0–14 years at June 2001 and were obtained from the ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing. <sup>d</sup> These numbers do not include innovative or flexible services that receive direct funding from the Australian Government and are targeted towards children from these groups. <sup>e</sup> Data are estimated from the ABS 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers and relate to children aged 0–14 years, and are thus not strictly comparable to the proportion of preschool users with a disability. **na** Not available. **..** Not applicable.

*Source:* ABS (2001); State and Territory governments (unpublished); tables 14A.2, 14A.3, 14A.4, 14A.5, 14A.6, 14A.7, 14A.8 and 14A.9; 2005 Report, p. 14.17, table 14.4.

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Figure 14.1 **Preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds**

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Source: State and Territory governments (unpublished); tables 14A.2, 14A.3, 14A.4, 14A.5, 14A.6, 14A.7, 14A.8 and 14A.9; 2005 Report, p. 14.18, figure 14.5.

### **Future indicator development**

The Review will continue to improve the appropriateness and completeness of the performance indicator framework. Future work on indicators will focus on developing an access indicator for Indigenous preschool enrolment and attendance rates.