
3 Children's services

Children's services aim to meet the care, education and development needs of children. In this chapter, child care services are those that are provided to children aged less than 13 years (that is, 0–12 years), usually by someone other than the child's parents or guardian. Preschool services are services provided to children mainly in the year or two before they begin full time schooling. To acknowledge the important links between children's services and education, this chapter is included in the 'Early childhood, education and training' section of the *Report on Government Services 2009* (2009 Report).

The data in this chapter relate to services that are supported by the Australian, State and Territory governments. Local governments also plan, fund and deliver children's services. Due to data limitations, the only local government data included are where Australian, State and Territory government funding and licensing are involved.

The major improvement to reporting on children's services this year include reporting a measure and data for 'Indigenous preschool attendance' for the first time.

Indigenous data in the children's services chapter

The Children's services chapter in the 2009 Report contains the following data items on Indigenous people:

- representation of Indigenous children in Australian Government approved child care services (compared to their representation in the community)
- representation of Indigenous children in State and Territory Government child care and preschools (compared to their representation in the community), 2007-08
- children absent from non-government preschools, 2007.

The 2009 Report also states that the Australian Government provides supplementary funding to support the participation of Indigenous children in preschool programs. In 2008, an estimated \$13.9 million was provided on a per

capita and project basis to 1250 preschools. The funding covers 8900 full time equivalent Indigenous preschool enrolments (DEEWR unpublished).

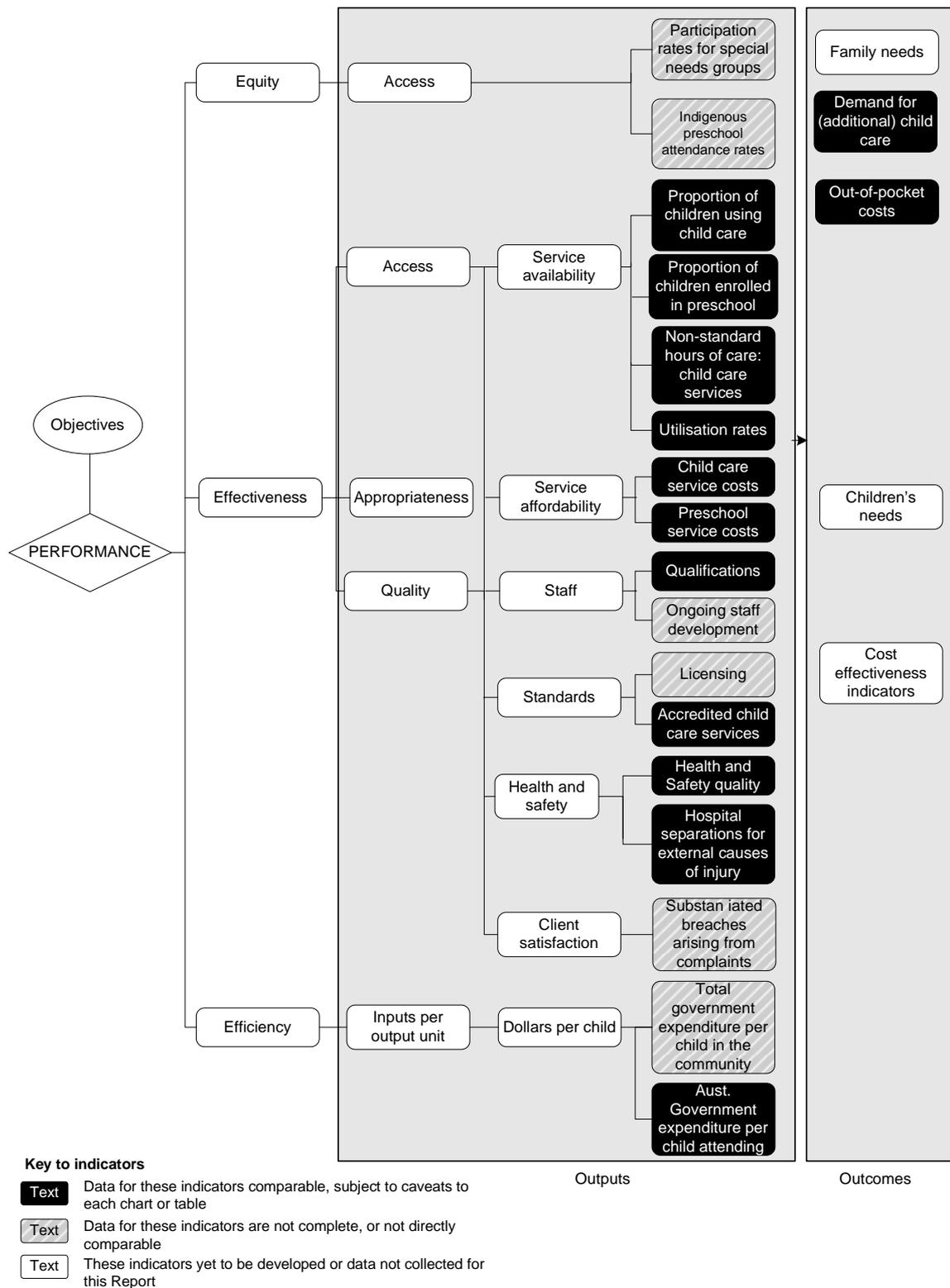
Attachment tables

Attachment tables for data within the children's services chapter of this compendium are contained in attachment 3A of the compendium. These tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by an 'A' suffix (for example, table 3A.3 is table 3 in the children's services attachment). As the data are directly sourced from the 2009 Report, the compendium also notes where the original table, figure or text in the 2009 Report can be found. For example, where the compendium refers to '2009 Report, p. 3.15' this is page 15 of chapter 3 of the 2009 Report, and '2009 Report, table 3A.2' is attachment table 2 of attachment 3A of the 2009 Report.

Framework of performance indicators

Data for Indigenous people are reported for a subset of the performance indicators for children's services in the 2009 Report. It is important to interpret these data in the context of the broader performance indicator framework outlined in figure 3.1. The performance indicator framework shows which data are comparable in the 2009 Report. For data that are not considered directly comparable, the text includes relevant caveats and supporting commentary.

Figure 3.1 Performance indicators for children's services



Source: 2009 Report, figure 3.2, p. 3.12.

Participation rates for special needs groups

'Participation rates for special needs groups' is an indicator of governments' objective to ensure that services are provided in an equitable manner to all special needs groups in the community, and that there is consideration of the needs of those groups which may have special difficulty in accessing services (box 3.1).

Box 3.1 Participation rates for special needs groups

'Participation rates for special needs groups' 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 (for 0–5 and 6–12 year olds) and preschool services (3–5 year olds). Targeted special needs groups include children from a non-English speaking background, Indigenous children, 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 being broadly similar to their representation in the community, may indicate equity of access.

Therefore, a higher participation rate is desirable.

Data reported for this indicator are not directly comparable. Updated data for childcare services were not available for this Report.

Data for participation by special needs groups using Australian Government approved child care services were previously sourced from the Australian Government Census of Child Care Services (AGCCCS), which was discontinued following the 2006 AGCCCS. Anticipated replacement data (for 2008) for this indicator were not available for the 2009 Report. Data for 2006 can be found in the attachment tables and the 2008 Report.

Data on the representation of special needs groups for children aged 3–5 years in government funded preschools are provided in table 3.1. The data provide a broad indication of the relative access to preschool for special needs groups.

- Indigenous children's representation in preschools varied across jurisdictions, though at the national level, they participated at a similar proportion (4.9 per cent) to their representation in the community (4.5 per cent).

Data on representation of special needs groups in State and Territory child care and preschools, for children aged 0–12, can be found in attachment table 3A.4.

Table 3.1 Proportion of children (aged 3–5 years) from special needs groups attending State and Territory funded or provided preschools, 2007-08^a

<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 ^c	10.1	17.1	4.7	na	10.5	na	8.1	na	9.9
In the community ^b	23.2	21.6	11.6	15.6	13.5	7.2	16.1	38.7	18.7
Indigenous children									
In preschool services ^c	3.7	1.0	7.7	9.1	6.2	5.2	2.7	43.5	4.9
In the community ^b	4.1	1.2	6.4	5.8	3.5	6.4	2.3	41.8	4.5
Children with a disability									
In preschool services ^{c, d}	6.3	6.1	7.4	3.1	15.5	na	4.4	5.3	6.6
In the community ^b	7.7	6.5	8.6	10.2	8.3	7.2	14.3	np	8.0
Children from regional areas ^e									
In preschool services ^c	31.4	28.5	89.5	23.6	29.0	98.3	1.0	45.5	35.8
In the community ^b	28.0	27.5	45.1	24.5	26.2	97.7	0.1	48.2	32.3
Children from remote areas ^e									
In preschool services ^c	1.3	0.1	10.5	8.7	5.8	1.7	..	54.5	4.1
In the community ^b	1.0	0.1	6.2	11.8	5.8	2.6	..	68.2	4.2

^a See table 3A.4 for complete footnotes and definitions. ^b Data showing representation in the community are sourced from the ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, except for 'children with a disability', which are sourced from the ABS 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. Data for children in the community aged 3–5 years are different to the data for children in the community aged 0–12 years included in table 3A.4.

^c 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. Data on preschool services may include some children aged 3 years or 5 years for all jurisdictions. Preschool data in the NT may include some children aged greater than 5 years in very remote areas. ^d Data are not directly comparable between jurisdictions because there is no national definition or standard on children with a disability. ^e Regional and remote areas based on the Australian Standard Geographical Classification of Remoteness Areas (ASGC) (ABS 2001). Regional areas include inner regional and outer regional areas. Remote areas include remote, very remote and migratory areas. **na** Not available. **np** Not published. **..** Not applicable.

Source: State and Territory governments (unpublished); ABS (unpublished), derived from *2006 Census of Population and Housing*; ABS (unpublished), derived from *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003*; table 3A.4; 2009 Report, table 3.2, p. 3.15.

Indigenous preschool attendance rates

'Indigenous preschool attendance rates' is an indicator of governments' objective to ensure that services are provided in an equitable manner to all special needs groups in the community, and that there is consideration of the needs of those groups which may have special difficulty in accessing services (box 3.2).

Box 3.2 Indigenous preschool attendance rates

‘Indigenous preschool attendance rates’ is defined as the number of Indigenous children absent from non-government preschools, as a proportion of all Indigenous children enrolled in non-government preschools. A child is considered ‘absent’ if they missed one or more of the sessions they were enrolled in during the reference week.

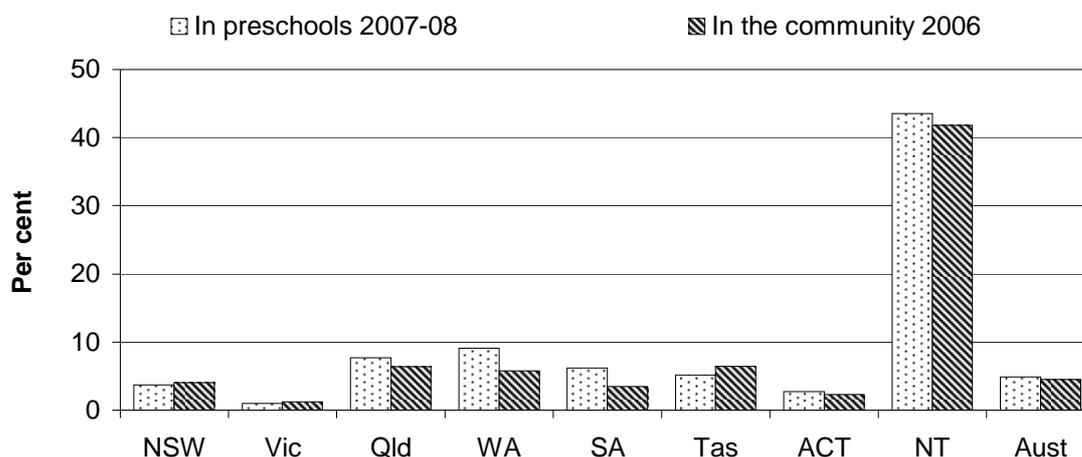
Attendance rates are measured by absentee rates. A low absentee rate indicates a higher rate of attendance at preschools, and is desirable.

Preschool attendance is not compulsory, and data are limited to Indigenous children enrolled in non-government preschools.

Data reported for this indicator are not complete, as they do not include Indigenous children enrolled in government preschools.

‘Indigenous preschool enrolment rates’ provides a broad indication of access to preschools. Indigenous enrolments in government and non-government preschools between 2003-04 and 2007-08 increased slightly in almost all jurisdictions, and nationally are similar to Indigenous children’s representation in the community (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Proportion of Indigenous children aged 3–5 years, in the community and enrolled at preschools ^{a, b, c, d}



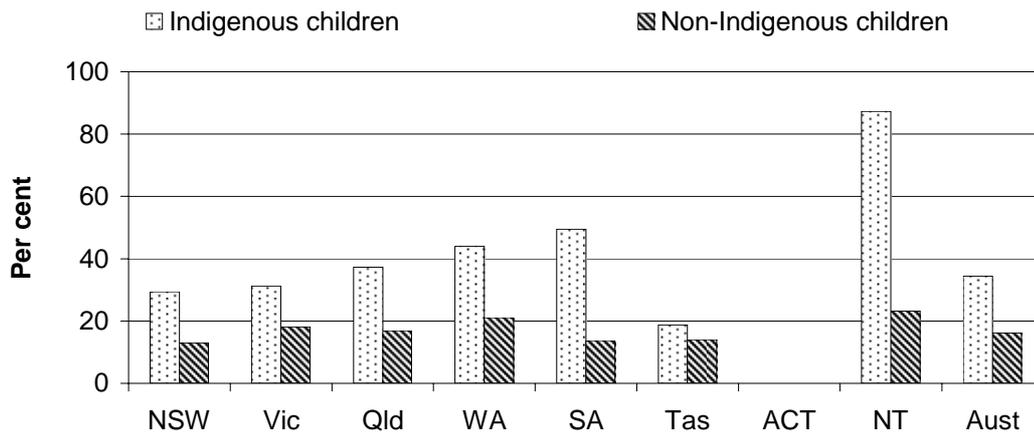
^a Data showing representation in the community are sourced from the ABS 2006 *Census of Population and Housing*. ^b Data for the representation in preschool services are from State and Territory enrolment data. ^c All Indigenous data relate to people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin who self identify or are identified by a parent or guardian to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. ^d The ABS Census Post Enumeration Survey has estimated an undercount of Indigenous people in the 2006 Census, and the estimates of the proportional representation in the community of Indigenous children should be treated with caution.

Source: ABS (unpublished), derived from 2006 *Census of Population and Housing*; State and Territory governments (unpublished); table 3A.4; 2009 Report, figure 3.3, p. 3.16.

‘Indigenous preschool attendance rates’ provide a broad indication of the participation of Indigenous children in preschools. These data are sourced from the National Preschool Census (NPC) and relate only to non-government preschools. These data may overlap with the preschools data provided by State and Territory governments and are therefore not directly comparable with other preschool data included in the Report. The National Preschool Census collected data from 3248 of the 3274 non-government preschools in scope for the 2007 NPC (which represents approximately 70 per cent of all government and non-government preschools) (DEEWR unpublished).

Nationally in 2007, non-attendance by Indigenous children (34.5 per cent) was significantly higher than non-attendance by non-Indigenous children (16.2 per cent) (figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Enrolled children absent from non-government preschools, 2007 a, b, c, d, e, f



a Data on attendance are limited to non-government preschools, and exclude government preschools. At the national level, around 70 per cent of children are in preschools considered to be ‘non-government’, though this percentage varies across jurisdictions. **b** Preschool attendance is not compulsory. **c** Attendance measured during the week of 30 July–3 August 2007. Children are counted as absent if they miss one or more of the sessions that they were enrolled in during this week. Absences due to illness may be higher during winter than at other times of the year. **d** ‘Non-Indigenous children’ has been derived by subtracting ‘Indigenous children’ from ‘all children’. **e** Data are suppressed for the ACT due to the small number of Indigenous children enrolled in non-government preschools. **f** The Australian totals include jurisdictions for which data are published only.

Source: DEEWR (unpublished), *National Preschool Census 2007*; table 3A.5; 2009 Report, figure 3.4, p. 3.17.

Attachment tables

Attachment tables for data within this chapter are contained in the attachment to the compendium. These tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by an 'A' suffix (for example, table 3A.3 is table 3 in the children's services attachment). The tables included in the attachment are listed below.

- Table 3A.1** Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia, as at 30 June 2008
- Table 3A.2** Representation of special needs groups in attendees at Australian Government approved child care services, children aged 0–12 (per cent)
- Table 3A.3** Representation of special needs groups in attendees at Australian Government approved child care services (per cent), by age group, 2008
- Table 3A.4** Representation of special needs groups in attendees at State and Territory Government child care and preschools, children aged 0–12, 2007-08 (number)
- Table 3A.5** Children absent from non-government preschools, 2007

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2001, *Australian Standard Geographical Classification*, Cat. no. 1216.0, Canberra.