10 PROTECTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

10.1   Introduction

The focus in this chapter is on the following government funded services:

- child protection;

- supported placements for children; and

- supported accommodation assistance program.

These services are combined in a single chapter, despite their differences, because they have significant links and share a broad objective: to assist individuals and families in difficulty or in crisis by stabilising the situation and alleviating its effects, and reducing the likelihood of its re-occurring.

Not covered in this chapter are government services to individuals and families in crisis which are provided as part of more general service provision. Several of these programs — for example, child care, disability services and aged services — are covered in other chapters of the Report.

Within the chapter, each of the three services is considered separately at the detailed level because they have different specific objectives, services, modes of delivery and client bases, and because the roles of each level of government differ in relation to funding, service delivery and regulation.

Expenditure data

Detailed comparable data on the size of the services dealt with in this chapter are not available. Efforts to address this shortcoming are discussed later in the chapter (Section 10.2.5).

It is estimated that total recurrent government expenditure for protection and support services was about $560 million across Australia in 1994–95. The largest component was supported placement, following by crisis and supported accommodation and child protection (Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1: Components of recurrent expenditure on protection and support services, 1994–95 (per cent)

Total expenditure $560 million

Crisis and supported accommodation 33%

Supported placement 46%

Child protection 21%
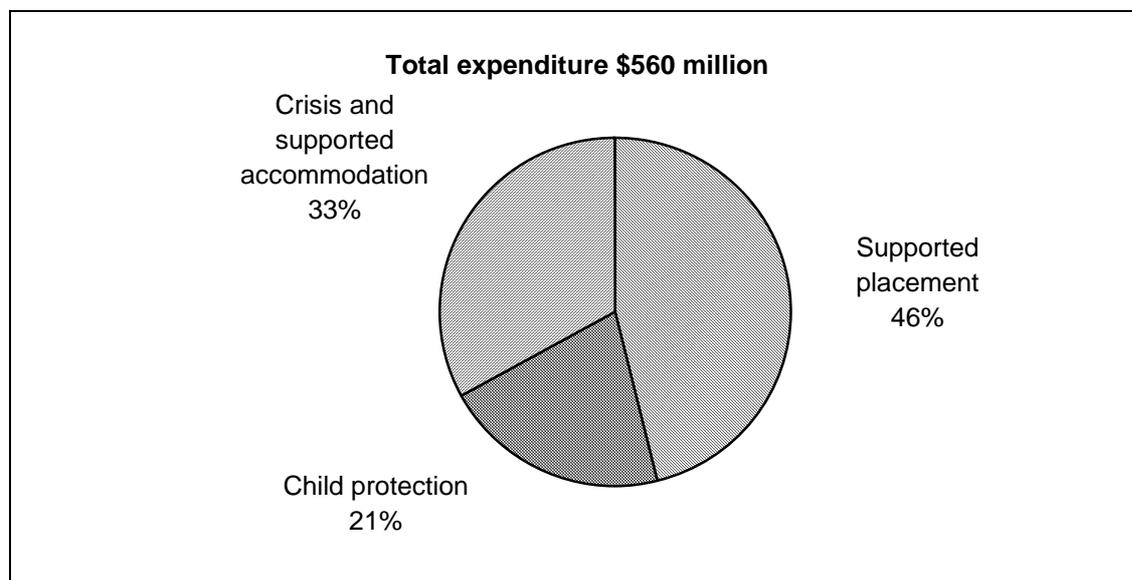
Source: SCRCSSP 1995

Profile of clients

A Victorian Government study examined the socio-demographic characteristics of 10 000 families investigated by child protection services as a result of a notification of child abuse and neglect in 1993–94 (DHS unpublished). There were significant limitations to the data, but the study indicated the family characteristics of Victorian clients of these services were significantly different from those of the general community (Box 10.1).[1]

A WA study (Cant and Downie 1994) of families investigated as a result of a notification of child abuse and neglect indicated:

- intact families[2] were under represented, blended families were over-represented and single parent families were over represented relative to the general population; and

- indigenous children were over represented relative to their population share.

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[1] Data limitations included: the absence of guidelines to assist field staff to assess the applicability of the family characteristics in each case; some relevant information not being available to field workers in some cases; and the counting of 'episodes' rather than individual children. Therefore, families who were investigated more than once and families with sibling groups were over-represented in the study.

[2]   Children living with both biological parents.

> **Box 10.1: Socio-demographic characteristics of Victorian families investigated by child protection services, 1993–94**
>
> The main findings of the study of families investigated as a result of a notification of child abuse and neglect were that:
>
> - 60 per cent of families were renting compared with 23 per cent in the wider community;
>
> - 58 per cent of families were on a pension or benefit compared with 26 per cent in the wider community;
>
> - 46 per cent were single parents compared with 17 per cent in the wider community;
>
> - 90 per cent of families had moved in the past 5 years compared with 42 per cent in the wider community;
>
> - 28 per cent of parents were associated with domestic violence;
>
> - 21 per cent of parents were associated with alcohol and/or substance abuse; and
>
> - 9 per cent of parents were associated with a psychiatric disability.
>
> *Source:*   DHS unpublished

Links

The links between child protection and supported placement services are particularly strong, with these services supporting each other in assisting children and families. If child protection services are able to reduce the occurrence and re-occurrence of child abuse and neglect, then they will affect the need for supported placement services. There is also a relationship in the other direction: if supported placements for children improve the safety of children over the longer term (for example, if they assist in the safe return of children to their families) then they will reduce the role for protection services.

Crisis and supported accommodation also contributes to the protection of children, because many clients are adults with accompanying children who are escaping domestic violence or family crisis. Many youth refuge services provide *de facto* short term assistance to children under 16 years in the absence of other available crisis accommodation, although these services have not been structured to support such children.

To the extent that crisis and supported accommodation services reduce the risk of harm to children, they also affect the demand for child protection services. Thus, the outcomes of some of the services determine the task of other services.

10.2   Child protection

10.2.1   Introduction

Child protection services aim to assist families in their role of providing safe and nurturing environments for children to develop and grow, and to ensure the safety of children at those times when families are unable to fulfil this role.

The protection of children from suspected child abuse and neglect encompasses a range of services, including:

- educating the community;

- responding to notifications of suspected child abuse and neglect, and undertaking investigations subject to legislative provisions;

- supporting families and strengthening their capacity to safely care for their children;

- placing children elsewhere when their safety cannot be assured within the family;

- supervising children subject to a statutory order; and

- organising counselling and therapy for children subject to abuse or neglect, and their families.

This chapter presents performance information that focuses primarily on the second and fourth of these functions.
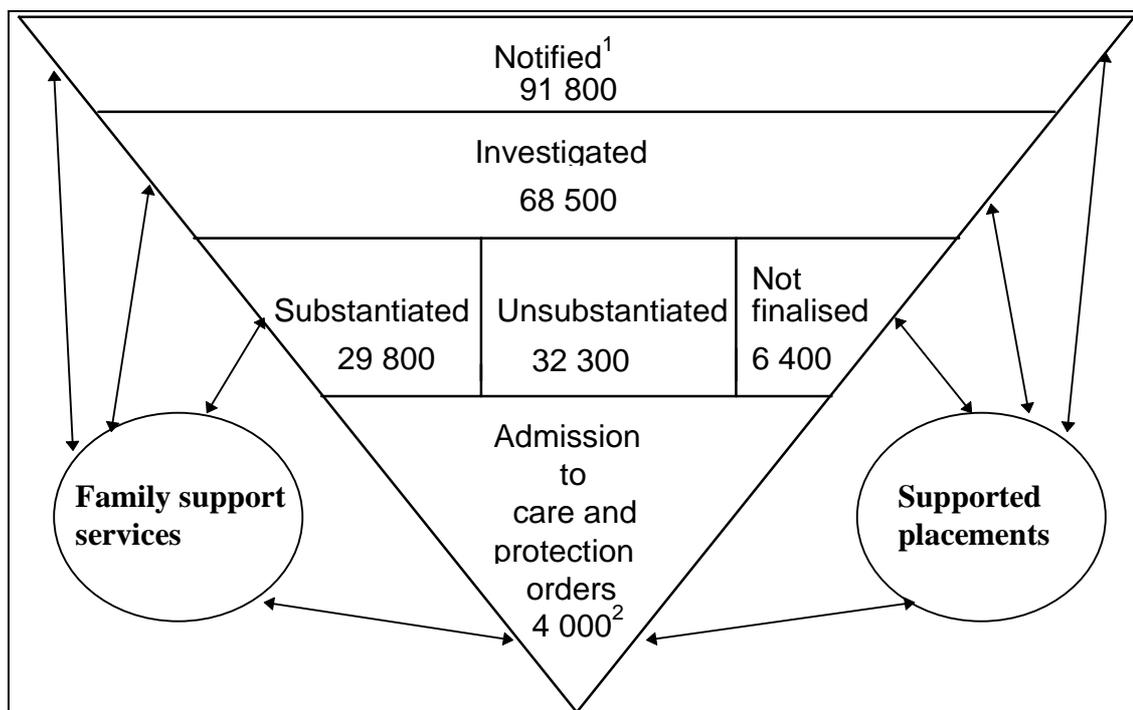
10.2.2   Profile of the sector

All jurisdictions generally follow the same steps once a notification of child abuse and neglect has been received:

- initial receipt and recording of callers' concerns;

- assessment of the appropriate response such as no response required, family support needed, or further child protection investigation and assessment needed;

- investigation and assessment; and

- determination of the child and family's protection and support needs.

These stages, the links with family support and supported placement services and the progress of cases in 1995–96 are shown in Figure 10.2.

Figure 10.2:   Child protection and welfare services, 1995–96 (numbers)


```
                          Notified[1]
                           91 800
              _____
                        Investigated
                          68 500
         _____
        |              |               | Not          |
        | Substantiated| Unsubstantiated| finalised   |
        |   29 800     |    32 300      |  6 400      |
        |_____|_____|_____|

                        Admission
                           to
                        care and
                        protection
                         orders
                         4 000[2]
```

Family support services

Supported placements

1   A child could be the subject of more than one notification in a year.

2   Not all admissions in 1995–96 were as a result of a notification of abuse and neglect in 1995–96. As a result, the number of children admitted to care and protection orders did not correspond exactly with the number of children subject to notifications. Excludes SA data.

Source: Various tables Attachment 10A

Despite common elements, jurisdictions vary in their legislation, definitions, policy and procedures. These differences affect the comparability of data across jurisdictions, including the proportion of notifications that are investigated, the definition of what is deemed to be a 'notification' and 'investigation', the alternatives to court orders, the legislative requirements of court orders for the protection of children, and the different types of orders available in each jurisdiction.

Notifications of child abuse and neglect

In 1995–96, about 91 800 referrals were classified by jurisdictions as notifications of suspected child abuse and neglect. Of these, 68 500 were investigated, 62 100 were finalised and child abuse and neglect was determined to have taken place in around 48 per cent of cases finalised.

For those jurisdictions for which data were available, the number of children subject to notification per 1000 children varied from 7 in WA to 22 in Victoria (Table 10.1). The number of children subject to finalised investigations per

1000 children was highest in NSW and SA and lowest in WA. Substantiations per 1000 children varied from 2 in WA and Tasmania to 8 in NSW.

Table 10.1: Children subject to notification, investigation, substantiation, and care and protection orders, 1995–96 (number per 1000 children)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Notifications[1]								
Indigenous children[2]	55	90	42	28	62	27	104	10
All children	16	22	14	7	18	19	15	9
Finalised investigations[3]								
Indigenous children[2]	48	61	34	22	51	12	85	10
All children	14	12	10	5	14	9	11	8
Substantiations								
Indigenous children[2]	30	32	15	9	25	3	48	6
All children	8	6	4	2	6	2	5	4
On care and protection orders at 30 June 1996[4]								
Indigenous children[2]	17	16	19	8	na	8	26	2
All children	3	3	3	2	na	3	3	2

na not available.

1   For children aged 0 to 16 years.

2   Relative to the population of indigenous children in each jurisdiction. The rate of notifications of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT was over-estimated slightly due to the method used to estimate the indigenous population.

3   Victorian data relate to direct investigations.

4   For children aged 0 to 17 years.

Source: Various tables Attachment 10A

Changes in the policy directions of many jurisdictions are leading to the separation of notifications of child abuse and neglect from other concerns for the wellbeing of children (Section 10.2.3).[3] These changes are limiting the extent to which referrals may be classified as notifications.

Care and protection orders

There is some variation in the data provided for children under orders because each jurisdiction has its own legislation governing the protection of children, including the type and range of orders available to its Children's Court. Care and protection orders mostly follow investigations of child abuse and neglect, although a small proportion of orders are issued for other reasons.

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3   For example, the New Directions policy in WA has resulted in an apparent decrease in notifications but an additional 2 500 referrals now called Child Concern Reports.

The total number of children on care and protection orders at 30 June 1996 was 12 300: 71 per cent were guardianship orders, 12 per cent involved custody to a third party, and the remainder were orders that gave the department some responsibility for the child's welfare. The range among jurisdictions in the number of children on care and protection orders at 30 June 1996 was between 2 and 3 per 1000 children. During 1995–96, 4000 children were placed on new care and protection orders.

Expenditure

Comparable data on child protection expenditure were not available. A study of child protection costs in Victoria, NSW and Queensland estimated that indicative expenditure in these three States was $28.70 per head of the population aged between 0 and 16 years in 1993–94. Based on this, national expenditure was likely to have been around $120 million.

Administrative arrangements

State and Territory Government community services departments have statutory responsibility for responding to notifications of suspected child abuse or neglect and acting to ensure children's protection (including using Children's Courts). The role of police departments varies across jurisdictions, but they are involved in all jurisdictions in investigations of child abuse and neglect of a criminal nature.

The non-government sector provides a range of individual and family support services, counselling services and intervention services. Some children who have been abused or neglected (or are at risk of abuse or neglect) and their families are able to access these services. Funding is provided by state and territory community services departments, as well as other sources.

The Commonwealth Government has no direct role in the delivery of child protection services. Its role is focused on research, coordinating the National Child Abuse Prevention Strategy and, more recently, funding targeted special family services such as parenting initiatives.

10.2.3   Recent developments

The focus on the initial intake of notifications and assessment of needs has increased following concerns about:

- the proportion of investigations which result in substantiation of abuse or neglect; and

- the impact of unnecessary investigations on families who may nevertheless benefit from family support.

Increased awareness of the critical links between child protection and the broader context of child and family welfare is leading to significant policy developments. Policy aims include more clearly identifying the nature of suspected child abuse and neglect and effectively targeting children at significant risk of harm and their families, while ensuring an effective response to those children and their families where concerns exist for their general wellbeing. This continuing shift in emphasis is increasing pressure to more clearly define the role of family support services funded by community services departments.
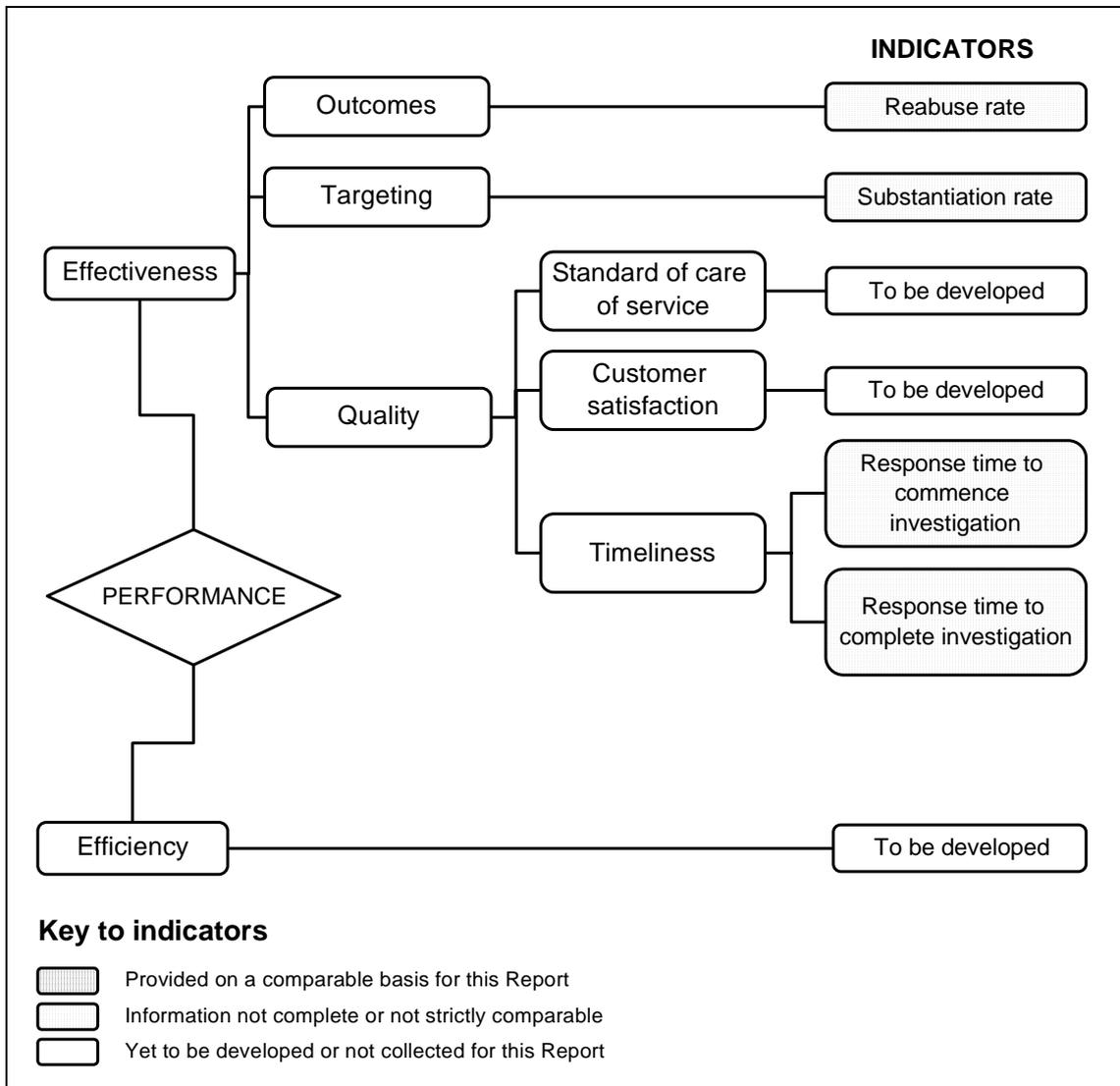
Other policy developments include:

- enhancing the involvement of children, young people and families in decision making at all stages of the child protection process; and

- developing effective responses to the needs of families for intensive support which decrease the need for removing children from family care.

10.2.4   Framework of performance indicators

The recent developments in child protection are reflected in the substantially improved performance indicator framework for the 1997 Report (Figure 10.3). Key result areas and indicators to assess performance have been identified, and measures of effectiveness (in terms of service quality and client outcomes) have been improved. A description of all indicators is provided in Attachment 10A.

Effective links with the Protection and Care of Children Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee of Community Services and Income Security Administrators (SCCSISA) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) have also enabled significant progress in improving the indicator framework and the quality of data. In addition, progress has been made in clarifying differences among jurisdictions in the terminology they use to describe service activities and definitions of descriptors.

Figure 10.3:   Draft framework of performance indicators for child
                protection services

INDICATORS

Outcomes ——————————————— Reabuse rate

Targeting ——————————————— Substantiation rate

Effectiveness

Standard of care of service ——— To be developed

Customer satisfaction ————— To be developed

Quality

Timeliness

Response time to commence investigation

Response time to complete investigation

PERFORMANCE

Efficiency ———————————————————————— To be developed

Key to indicators

Provided on a comparable basis for this Report

Information not complete or not strictly comparable

Yet to be developed or not collected for this Report

Effectiveness

The *effectiveness* key result areas identified are the extent to which:

- child protection investigations are targeted to those children at risk of significant harm;

- children who are notified in relation to suspected child abuse or neglect are helped to receive appropriate services;

- children who are abused or neglected are protected from further harm; and

- children who are at risk of further harm are assisted by strengthening their families.

Service quality is measured by process indicators such as the time taken to respond to and complete investigations, the standard of service and customer satisfaction. The measure developed for service targeting is the proportion of investigations finalised leading to substantiations. Targeting involves balancing caution and excessive investigation (Section 10.2.6).

Client outcomes are measured by indicators of client benefit such as the number of children for whom intervention prevented further abuse or neglect.

Efficiency

Efficiency is reported in terms of cost-based measures. Data were derived from a benchmarking study undertaken by Victoria in conjunction with NSW and Queensland. A description of all indicators is provided in Attachment 10A.

10.2.5 Future directions

Scope of services

Given the strong links of services covered with other family support services it is considered desirable to have a more comprehensive coverage of child and family protection and support services in future Reports.

Further work will need to be undertaken to scope the nature and quantity of support services, as well as their inter-relationship with protective services and supported placements.

Framework of indicators

The main improvement to the framework will be to fill the gap in the reporting on efficiency. A preliminary set of efficiency indicators has been agreed. The next step is to plan a strategy for developing the method and counting rules for data collection.

Improving data quality

The revised 1997 Report framework was developed to improve reporting, comparability and, therefore, performance review over time. Areas highlighted for further data quality improvement include:

- the number of jurisdictions able to provide data in relation to specific indicators;

- comparability of data across jurisdictions. Improved consistency in meaning of common terminology is seen as fundamental to improved performance assessment over time. The Protection and Care Performance Indicator Working Group of SCCSISA plans to continue to review terminology and definitions used across jurisdictions within the limits of government policy and legislation. The AIHW will improve counting rules and comparability of data through its ongoing role in this area; and

- collection and reporting on efficiency indicators.

The ability to report nationally on outcomes for children and families using child protection and supported placement services is a goal for future Reports.

10.2.6   Key performance results

Effectiveness — substantiation rate

Around 75 per cent of the 91 800 notifications across Australia in 1995–96 were investigated. The increase in notifications over the period 1993–94 to 1995–96 was accompanied by a 9 per cent increase in the proportion of finalised investigations which substantiated claims of abuse and neglect. The substantiation rate — one measure of the degree to which services are well targeted — varied from 12 per cent in Tasmania to 57 per cent in NSW in 1995–96 (Figure 10.4). This variation may be partly explained by different interpretations of what constitutes an 'investigation' or 'substantiation' across jurisdictions. Comparisons were also affected by policy changes in WA (New Directions policy) and Tasmania (definitional change to 'substantiation').

In this area, the substantiation rate attempts to measure the effectiveness of targeting of investigation, recognising the human as well as financial cost of investigation where no abuse or neglect can be substantiated. Like all such targeting measures, however, it needs to be considered in conjunction with measures of total expenditure and expectations about the incidence of abuse or neglect.

Figure 10.4:   Finalised investigations that substantiated claims of child abuse and neglect, 1993–94 to 1995–96 (per cent)[1]
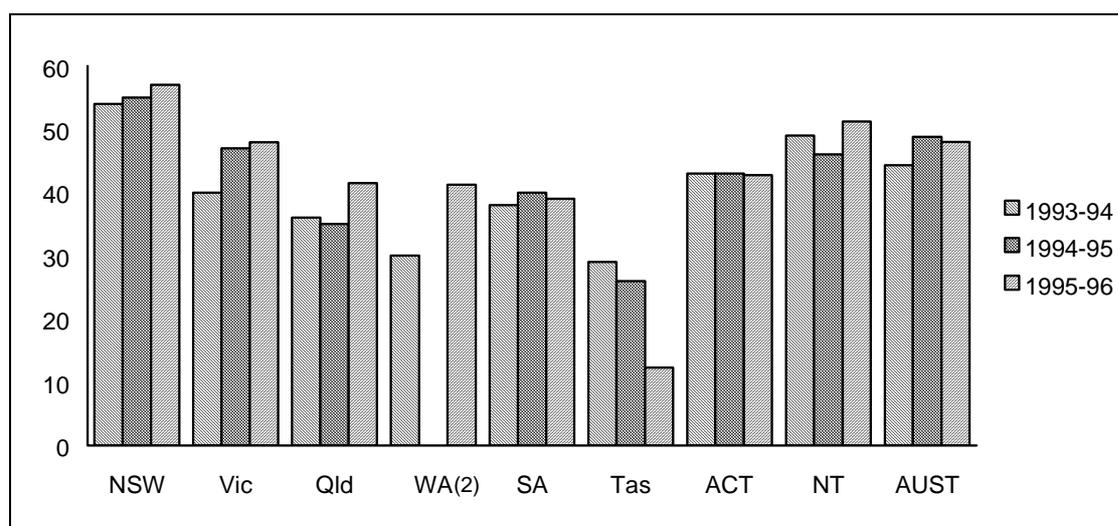
1   Variations in substantiation rates may in part be explained by different interpretations of what constitutes an 'investigation', or 'substantiation' across jurisdictions. Time series comparisons were also affected by policy changes.
2   Data not available for 1994–95.
Source: Various tables Attachment 10A.

Effectiveness — repeat abuse and neglect

An overall outcome measure for children is minimisation of the proportion of completed and substantiated investigations followed by a further substantiated case of abuse and neglect within 12 months of case closure. This varied from 3 per cent in the NT to 16 per cent in Victoria in 1995–96 for estimates calculated in the same way (Figure 10.5). The percentage for Queensland, while higher, was estimated using a different method and was not fully comparable. Data were not available for SA and Tasmania. The data available should be interpreted with care because there was a lack of comparability, including the comparability of case closure data.

Figure 10.5:   Repeat abuse and neglect within 12 months of case closure, 1995–96 (per cent)[1,2]
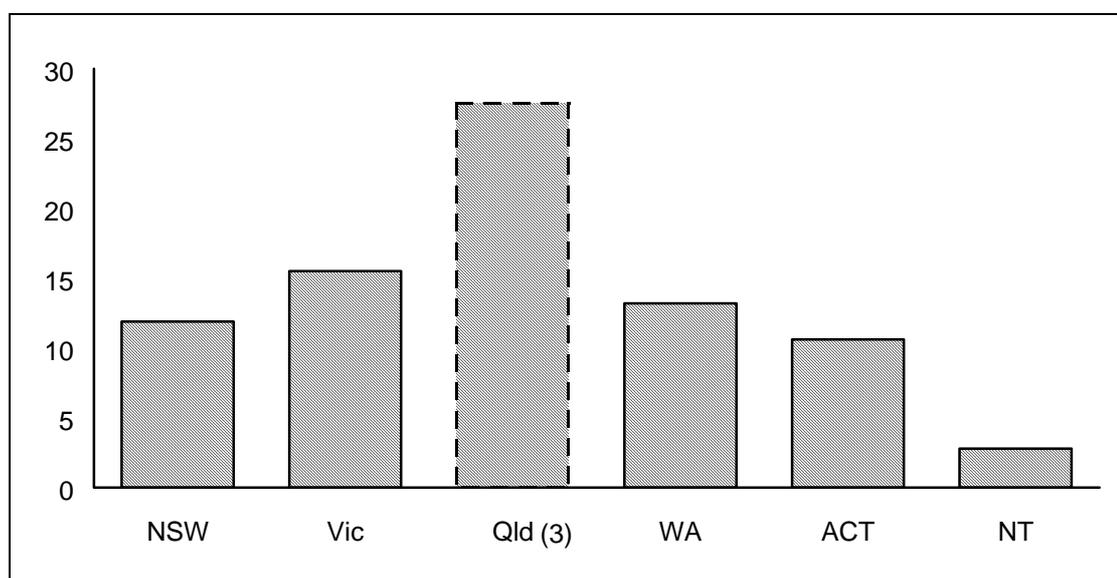
1   The definition of case closure may differ among jurisdictions.
2   SA and Tasmania were unable to provide data.
3   Queensland estimate using a 'backwards' method; other jurisdictions estimated using a 'forward' method.
Source: Various tables Attachment 10A

Effectiveness — timeliness

Data were collected on the degree to which jurisdictions met their own standards for commencing and completing investigations. Jurisdictions varied in their definitions of an 'investigation', urgency categories they assigned to investigations, and their timeliness standards.[4] Therefore, these data were not comparable across jurisdictions. The main results were:

- NSW — 54 per cent of commencements and 46 per cent of completions within the state standard;
- Victoria — 78 per cent of commencements[5] and 65 per cent of completions within the state standard;
- Queensland — 58 per cent of commencements and 91 per cent of completions within the state standard;
- WA — 78 per cent of commencements within the standard but no standard time was available for completions;
- ACT — 64 per cent of commencements within the territory standard;

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4   The timeliness standards in each jurisdiction are set out in Attachment 10A.

5   For direct investigations.

- NT — 66 per cent of commencements and 96 per cent of completions within the territory standard; and
- SA and Tasmania — data not available.

Efficiency — unit costs

A Victorian Government study (DHCS 1995) benchmarked the State's child protection service against those of NSW and Queensland. The study provided indicative information on overall resourcing of child protection, the relative cost of service provision in each state, and resources and costs across five identified 'core' stages of child protection work.

These five stages were:

- action to receive reports of child abuse (notification);

- the investigation of these reports (investigation);

- actions to secure the safety of the child;

- applications to courts for protection orders or variations of orders (applications); and

- ongoing case management of a situation where abuse has occurred (intervention) and administration.

Although the objectives of the three benchmarking partners' child protection services were essentially identical, services' procedures, and the legislation upon which these procedures were based, were not. The report urged caution in interpreting the results because each state had:

- mildly different social conditions;

- substantially different legislative environments; and

- substantially different bureaucratic histories.

The cost per child in the wider population (0 to 17 year olds) of providing the child protection service varied from $33 in Victoria to $28 in NSW and $25 in Queensland (Table 10.2). Victorian data included increases in budget allocations related to the introduction of mandatory reporting.

Table 10.2: Costs of child protection services, 1993–94

	Units	*NSW*	*Vic*	*Qld*
Total expenditure	$	42 540 392	37 303 699	20 762 624
Population 0 to 17 years	No.	1 536 895	1 128 544	843 231
Cost per child	$	33	28	25

Source: DHCS 1995

An analysis of the cost of providing a response at the key stages of protective services revealed that the most significant costs were for the application (to court) stage when the cost per service varied from $3596 in Victoria to $2667 in NSW and $3056 in Queensland (Table 10.3). In comparison, the cost per child of responding to a notification were relatively low, from $95 in Victoria to $168 in Queensland.

Table 10.3: Cost of child protection activities, 1993–94 ($ per activity)

	NSW	Vic	Qld
Notification	140	95	168
Investigation	394	319	269
Application	2 667	3 596	3 056
Intervention	2 909	1 987	2 135

Source: DHCS 1995

The administration share (including program management and corporate services expenditure) of child protection expenditure was similar amongst the three States in 1993–94: 37 per cent in NSW, 40 per cent in Queensland, and 41 per cent in Victoria. A detailed breakdown of administration costs was available for two States:

- for Victoria 15 per cent of expenditure was on administration; 18 per cent on program management; and 9 per cent on corporate services; and

- for Queensland 9 per cent of expenditure was on administration; 17 per cent on program management; and 14 per cent on corporate services.

In summary, the study concluded that:

> ...the activities where Victoria's costs are significantly higher than the benchmarking partners are application and intervention. Both these areas are inextricably linked to court processes. The higher costs here are possibly driven by the requirements of legislation or the court system. (DHCS 1995, p. 44)

10.3   Supported placements

10.3.1   Introduction

Supported placements are arrangements for children to live with people other than their parents for reasons of safety or family crisis. They include both placements where carers are not related to the children (for example, foster carers, group home carers, residential care workers) and where carers are members of the children's extended families or kinship system. They do not include arrangements whereby people other than the parents care for children

without the need for departmental intervention to ensure the wellbeing of children.

Children are placed for a variety of reasons such as abuse or neglect, illness of parents, or the temporary inability of parents to provide adequate care. Placements may be voluntary or the result of care and protection orders.

Funding of supported placements is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments. However, non-government organisations are also significant service providers.

Differences in placement arrangements across jurisdictions affect the comparability of data about who uses supported care services, and associated costs. Differences occur in:

- the allocation of responsibility among departments (for example, whether children with disabilities, children in the juvenile justice system, and children placed to access education and other services are included);

- the use of non-government providers; and

- the degree to which services provided by non-government organisations in particular jurisdictions are government funded and the funding mechanisms used.

10.3.2 Profile of the sector

Children enter supported placement services for many reasons. The breakdown of reasons identified in a WA study included:

- to provide respite for a care giver (20 per cent);

- as a result of a child abuse and neglect investigation (18 per cent);

- because the care giver could not care adequately (13 per cent);

- because the care giver had a physical or psychiatric illness (15 per cent);

- because the care giver had a conflict with the child (7 per cent); and

- because the care giver was in custody, homeless or unable to be located (13 per cent) (FCS 1995).

Comparable information across jurisdictions on reasons for children entering supported placement services was not available.

Number of children in placement

Based on information from jurisdictions which provided data, about 14 000 children were in supported placements at 30 June 1996 (Table 10.4). About 10 500 of these children (75 per cent) were on a legal order and the rest were placed voluntarily.[6] Over 20 000 children were in at least one supported care placement during 1995–96. The number of children in supported placement (whether or not on a legal order) at 30 June 1996 was 3 per 1000 child population in most jurisdictions (Table 10.4).

Table 10.4: Children in supported placement, 30 June 1996

	NSW	Vic	Qld[1]	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT[1]	Aust
Children aged 0 to 17 years in supported placement (number)									
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1 233	318	503	379	162	44	25	47	2 712
Other	4 204	3 067	1 607	827	902	464	156	41	11 267
All children	**5 437**	**3 385**	**2 110**	**1 206**	**1 064**	**508**	**181**	**88**	**13 979**
Proportion of children aged 0 to 17 years in supported placement									
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	33	36	13	16	19	9	27	2	20
Other	3	3	2	2	3	4	2	1	2
All children	**3**	**3**	**2**	**3**	**3**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**3**

1   Queensland and NT figures only included children who were on a legal order and were not comparable with other jurisdictions.
*Source:*   Various tables Attachment 10A.

Indigenous children made up 19 per cent of the children (0 to 17 years of age) in placements at 30 June 1996, compared with a population share of 3 per cent. Australia wide, facility based placements accounted for 13 per cent of all children in supported placement, and 87 per cent of children were in home based placements. Extended family placements made up 28 per cent of the children in home based placements, although this is likely to be understated because many jurisdictions have not yet developed systems for identifying the relationship of the carer to the child. Of home based placements, 6500 children (or 54 per cent) were in foster care and 294 (or 2 per cent) were in group care services.

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6   The numbers of children on orders or those placed voluntarily excluded Queensland and the NT (whose child populations comprised around 25 per cent of the Australian child population). These jurisdictions could only provide data on children in supported placements who were on a legal order.

The length of time for which children had been in supported placement on a continuous basis at 30 June 1996 varied across jurisdictions.[7] Relative to the national distribution, a higher proportion of children in placement in Tasmania and the ACT had been so for less than 6 months; SA and the NT had a higher proportion of children who had been in placement for more than two years. The share in placement for 6 to 12 months was generally uniform across jurisdictions (Figure 10.6).

Figure 10.6:   Distribution of children by length of time in continuous supported placement, 30 June 1996 (per cent)
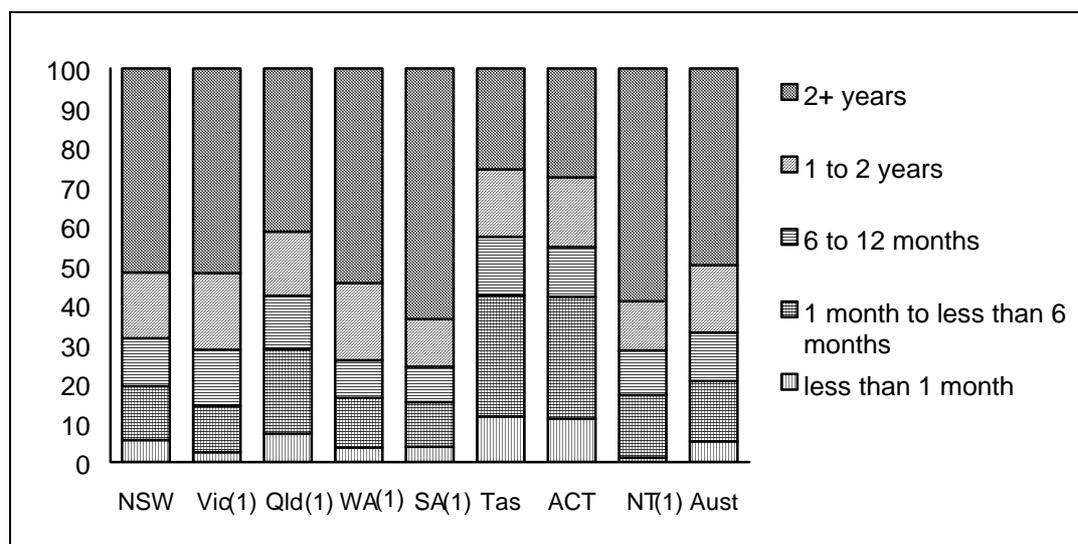
1   Queensland data related to time on current placement, not continuous placement. Victoria, Queensland and NT data included only a subset of children in supported placement services — that is, only children on a legal order, not those placed voluntarily. Victoria, WA and SA had a number of children for whom the time in continuous placement was not known. The shares in the unknown category were: Victoria (6 per cent), SA (4 per cent), and WA (5 per cent).
Source: Various tables Attachment 10A

10.3.3   Recent developments in the sector

Supported placement services for children have been influenced by changes in philosophy and policy over time. Placements moved away from large children's homes during the 1970s and 1980s. This was influenced by strong evidence that children in large institutions looked after by a variety of staff were unable to bond with care givers. Understanding of the impact of separation from families on the wellbeing of children has improved in the 1990s. This increasing focus

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7   Time in continuous placement was defined as the length of time of child has been in supported placement services on a continuous basis at 30 June. A return home of less than seven days did not break the continuity of placement.

on the importance of extended family networks has been accompanied by the development of intensive family intervention programs to avert the risk of separation in cases of child maltreatment and other family crises.

Most jurisdictions are undertaking or planning to undertake major reviews of their supported care services. In addition, recent significant studies are informing policy and service provision. Research undertaken in NSW into wards leaving care highlighted the need for planned support of these young people. Queensland's evaluation of the needs of children in placements and their families, and of the extent to which these needs were being addressed, is being used to inform service reforms in that state.

10.3.4   Framework of performance indicators

The overall goal of placing children is to enable families to retain or resume the care of their children, and where this is not possible, to provide the children with quality long term care that includes a consistent care provider.

Thus the key result areas for supported placement services are the extent to which:

- supported placements is only used when family based support services are not sufficient to ensure adequate care;

- children are placed with extended family or kinship networks wherever possible;

- a stable and safe environment is provided in placements; and

- family identity and links for children is provided in any placement.

The indicator framework developed for supported placements in this Report is more directly related to these key result areas than in the 1995 Report (Figure 10.7). A description of all indicators is provided in Attachment 10A.

Effectiveness

The *effectiveness* indicators were generally based on interim rather than final outcomes which can often be known only many years after children have left care. They aimed to indicate whether the key results identified were likely to be being achieved.

There have been developments in some specific indicators:

- the extent to which children are placed with extended family members is reported for the first time in this Report;

- measurement of the extent of abuse and neglect in placements has been refined to ensure that it is measuring the degree of abuse and neglect by care givers in supported placement;

- the proportion of children under twelve years who are in family based supported placement is a new indicator that is reported for the first time; and

- the proportion of indigenous children who are placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care givers is a new indicator.

Figure 10.7:   Framework of performance indicators for supported placement
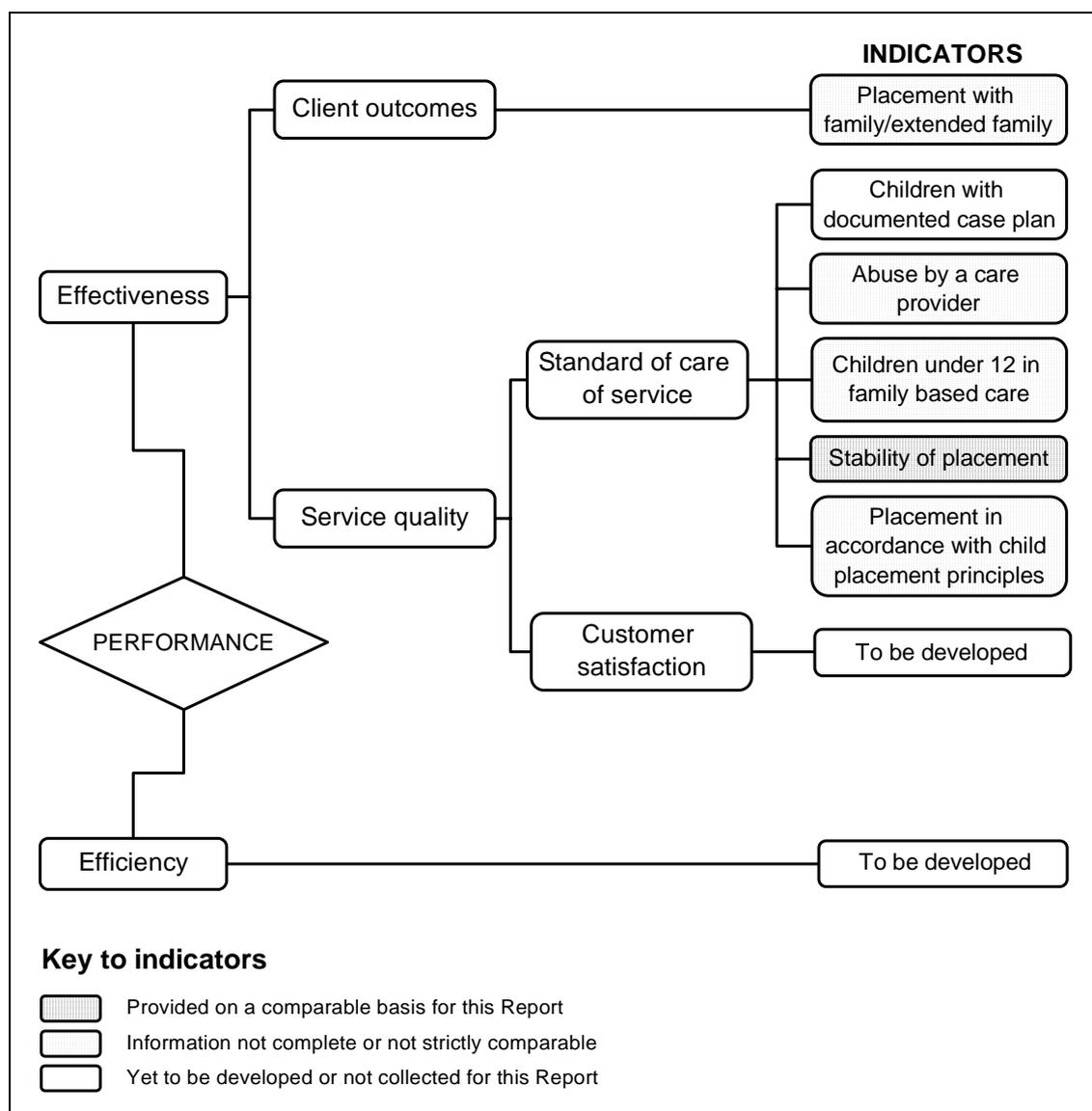
The proportion of children with a documented case plan is not reported, but jurisdictions are working towards identifying the percentage of children in care where documented case planning is evident. The measure of the number of placement changes for children in supported placement is not robust and it is intended that this measure be further refined for the next Report.

Efficiency

No *efficiency* indicators were available. Some preliminary indicators are being investigated for inclusion in the framework for the next Report.

A description of all indicators is provided in Attachment 10A.

10.3.5   Future directions

Action is under way to overcome many of the data gaps and weaknesses identified.

Scope of services

Child protection and supported placement services have strong links with family support services. Further work will need to scope the nature and quantity of support services, as well as their inter-relationship with protective services and supported placements. This work would signify a step towards more comprehensive coverage of child and family protection and support services.

Framework of indicators

Improvements to the descriptors and indicators planned for the next Report include:

- developing counting rules on the reasons for entry to care — this is to be undertaken with the AIHW as part of the ongoing improvements to the counting rules for the collection of supported placement data; and

- refining the measure of stability of placements (that is, the number of placements) to incorporate the length of time that children remain in care.

Improving data quality

Data for some indicators in the new framework are not currently being collected by all jurisdictions, although each has committed to developing this capacity.

Formal case planning has been identified in local and international research as a key process in the development of appropriate care and family support services.

Jurisdictions are working towards collecting data on the percentage of children in care where documented case planning is evident.
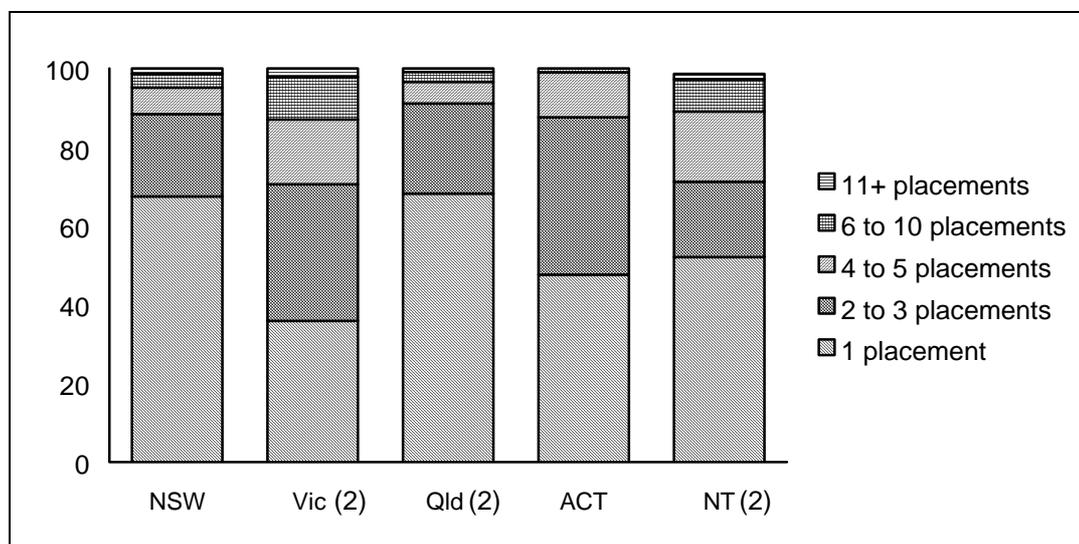
Other ongoing steps include:

- improving comparability of data across jurisdictions by reviewing terminology and definitions used (Section 10.2.5);

- collecting and reporting on efficiency indicators; and

- developing alternatives to provider generated data for measuring client outcomes — it is desirable to develop a strategy for conducting a sample survey of clients across a number of jurisdictions and collecting information on client outcomes after clients leave supported placement.

10.3.6   Key performance results

Number of placements and length of time in care

Stability in placements is an indicator of service quality particularly for those children who require long term placements. Data were collected on the number of placements over the past two years for children who had been in continuous placement longer than six months (Figure 10.8). Care needs to be exercised in interpreting these data, as they cover all children from those who had been in care from six months and one day through to those who had been in care for many years. Most children had less than four placements in the past two years — more than 85 per cent were in this category in NSW, Queensland and the ACT.

Figure 10.8:   Distribution of number of placements in past 2 years for children in continuous supported care, 1995–96 (per cent)[1]

With regard to length of time in care, most children who had been in continuous placement for more than six months had been in continuous placement for over two years[8] (Figure 10.9). This does not however provide an indication of the average expected length of stay in care for children in placement.

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8   Continuous supported placement defined as a length of time a child has been in supported placement services on a continuous basis at 30 June. A return home of less than seven days does not break the continuity of placement. Data are for children in continuous supported placement for longer than six months. There was a small proportion of children for whom the length of stay is not known.

Figure 10.9: Distribution of length of stay of children in continuous supported placement, 30 June 1996 (per cent)
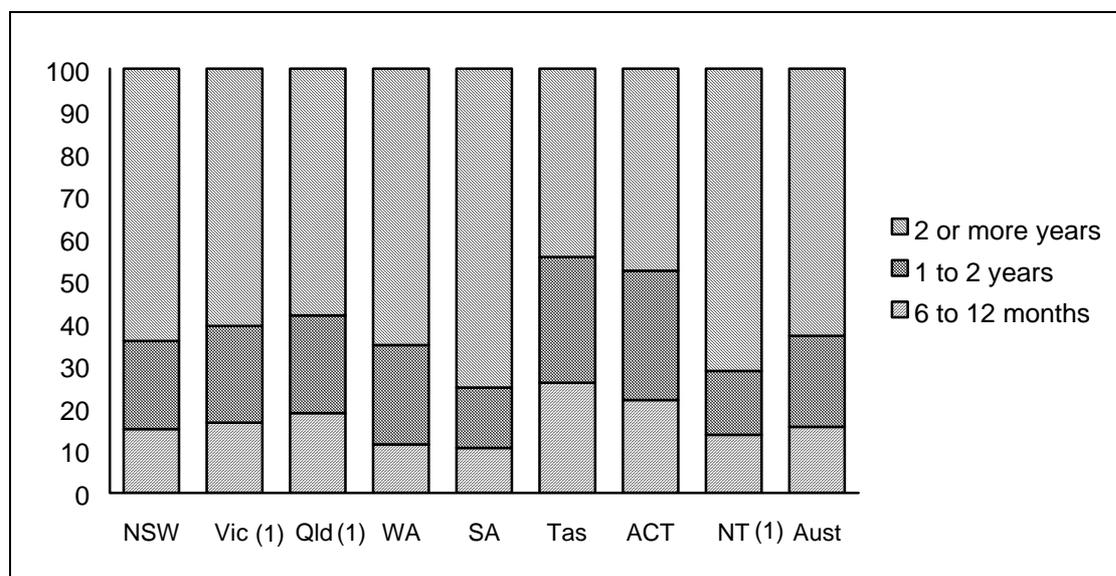
1 Victoria, Queensland and NT data only included children who were on a legal order and were not comparable with other jurisdictions. In addition, Queensland data related to the length of time that a child had been in their current supported placement at 30 June.
*Source:* Various tables Attachment 10A.

Nature of placements

A further indicator of the quality of child placement is the suitability of the type of placement. However, it is only possible to make limited comparisons of the nature of placement performance of jurisdictions because data are either not collected or collected on different bases in a number of states and territories.

Some comparisons were, however, possible (Figure 10.10). For instance, the proportion of children under 12 years placed in family/foster model care ranged from 87 per cent in Victoria to 100 per cent in the ACT; children placed with relatives/kin ranged from 8 per cent of children in SA to 39 per cent in NSW; and the proportion of indigenous children placed with indigenous care givers ranged from 67 per cent in SA to 90 per cent in NSW.

Figure 10.10: Proportions of children in preferred placements, 30 June 1996 (per cent)
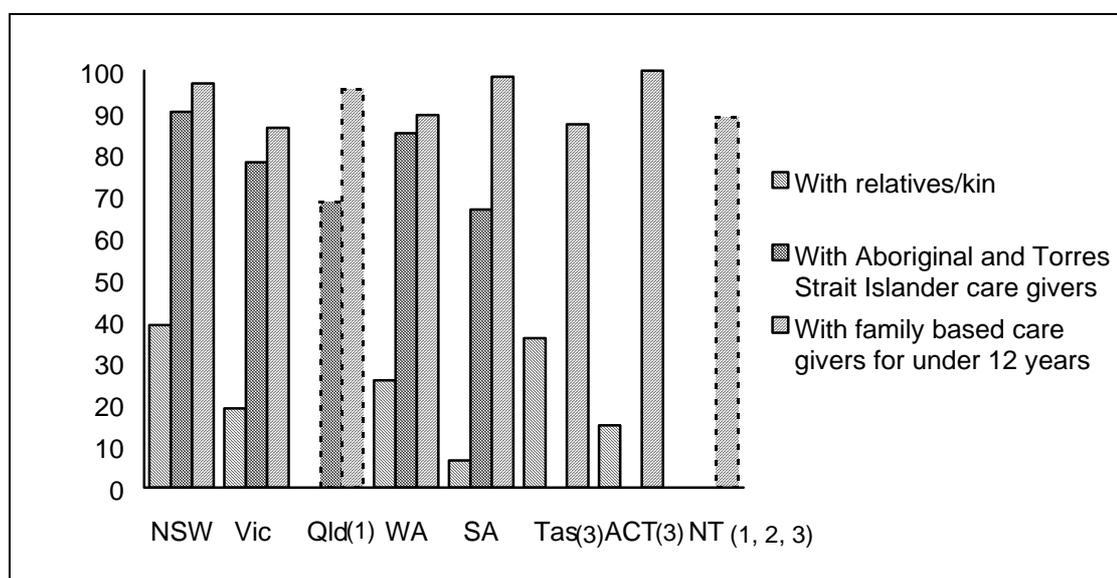
1   Queensland and NT data were not comparable with other jurisdictions because only children on a legal order were included.

2   The share of children placed with relatives/kin in the NT was not available.

3   Tasmania, ACT and NT could not provide data on children with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care givers.

Source: Various tables Attachment 10A.

Safety in supported placement

Three jurisdictions (WA, Tasmania and the ACT) were able to provide data on safety in placement for 1995–96. The indicator measured the proportion of supported placements in which there was substantiated abuse or neglect of the child during that year and where the person believed responsible was a care giver in that placement. The rate was less than 1 per cent of children in placement for each of these jurisdictions.

Outcomes of supported placement

There is little information available on the longer term outcomes for children in supported placement. A recent NSW study, however, provided some observations for that State (Box 10.2).

Box 10.2: Outcomes of young people leaving wardship in NSW

In NSW about 100 wards leave care each year. The main findings of a study of the experiences of young people leaving wardship in NSW in 1992–93 were that:

Entry to care

- the age of children who entered care was, on average, 7 years; and

- the most common reason for entry to wardship was neglect due to inability of carers to cope (28 per cent) because of combinations of poverty, mental illness, intellectual disability, and drug and alcohol dependency. Neglect was a major reason for entry to care for over half of the young people in interview and non-interview groups.

Experience in care

One of the major and most common difficulties children face in out of home care is that they are often moved through a series of different placements. The study found that there was an average of 8.4 placements per child. It indicates little stability in placement. Foster care, in its various forms, was the most common placement, both before admission to wardship and during wardship.

The abuse of children in care: 8 young people (of 78) in the interview group and 11 in the non-interview group (of 66) suffered some form of abuse or neglect while wards.

There were a number of patterns of family contact, but there were few cases where children had continuing, regular contact with even one parent. Stable and continuous contact was more common with siblings where they were placed together, though being placed together was no guarantee of continuing, conflict-free contact.

Leaving care

The majority of young people in the interview group were at school, or in further education, or employed full time just before they left care. Thirty-six per cent were unemployed — with wards clearly being over-represented among the unemployed.

Life after care

Respondents were interviewed three months and twelve months after discharge from wardship. At three months nearly all the young people (93.6 per cent) were either positive or indifferent to being discharged — most felt the same way before they were discharged. At 12 months, consistent with their views just after discharge, most young people said they had been ready for discharge, but eight young people (17.8 per cent) said they had not been and two others would have preferred to wait until they were 21.

Source: DOCS 1996

10.4   Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

10.4.1   Introduction

The focus in this Report was on crisis and supported accommodation and assistance services provided by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Crisis and supported accommodation services funded by State and Territory Governments outside of SAAP were excluded, as were housing capital funds which are allocated via the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP).[9]

SAAP commenced operations in 1985 and is covered by agreements between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. The program is governed by the *Supported Accommodation Act 1994* and is overseen by the National SAAP Coordination and Development (CAD) Committee. The Committee is given responsibility under the Act for coordinating and establishing the national direction of the program.

The aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help people who are homeless to achieve the maximum degree of self-reliance and independence (*Supported Accommodation Act* 1994).

SAAP services are largely delivered by non-government agencies, with some local government participation. They are oriented to resolving crises, re-establishing family links where appropriate, and re-establishing clients' capacity to live independently of SAAP. A major focus of the program is to facilitate the integration of people who are homeless into the community and increase their access to housing, employment, income support, education and training and other opportunities and services.

The first *1995–98 National Strategic Plan* (CAD 1995), developed by the CAD, contains program directions which have been identified as priorities for the SAAP (Box 10.2). These have been incorporated into the revised performance indicator framework developed for the 1997 Report. However, reporting and analysing comparative performance under this performance indicator framework was not possible for the 1997 Report because data from the national

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[9]   The CAP is a tied program under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) which is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Security and administered by State and Territory housing departments as part of the CSHA. It has been viewed in the past as the capital arm of SAAP, in that it has funded most of the accommodation in which SAAP services are based.

data collection (which began on 1 July 1996) are not available until March 1997. Full reporting will be possible from the next Report.

### 10.4.2   Profile of the sector

SAAP has evolved over the past eleven years from a program that traditionally addressed only the immediate 'shelter' needs of people who were homeless or in crisis, to a program that uses a variety of approaches which emphasise the return of individuals and families to independent life in the community.

SAAP clients are diverse and may have a range of immediate or long term complex difficulties relating to their homelessness. These may include poor literacy and general education, poor employment record, low self esteem, a lower standard of general health, psychiatric difficulties or drug and alcohol problems — factors which may seriously affect their ability to manage their own affairs, for example, accessing labor market programs, public housing and rental accommodation. Other clients may have suffered abuse or neglect and economic hardship. At the same time, broader socioeconomic factors impinge on homelessness, affecting both the numbers of homeless people and the outcomes which can be achieved.

SAAP agencies aim to meet immediate support and accommodation needs. Assistance may include short to medium term accommodation, outreach, counselling, transport, the provision of meals, advocacy on the client's behalf, and providing links and/or referral to other services such as legal advice, living skills, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Part of the approach is to encourage clients to take personal responsibility and link them to specialist support services, and to access entitlements from various government and non-government services.

SAAP is jointly funded and managed by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. Funding grew from $121 million in 1989–90 to $212 million in 1996–97 ($119 million of Commonwealth Government funding and $93 million from State and Territory Government funding). SAAP recurrent funding per head of the Australian population averaged about $12 in 1995–96 and ranged from about $9 in Queensland to $30 in the ACT (Figure 10.11).

Figure 10.11: Recurrent SAAP funding, 1995–96 ($ per head of population)
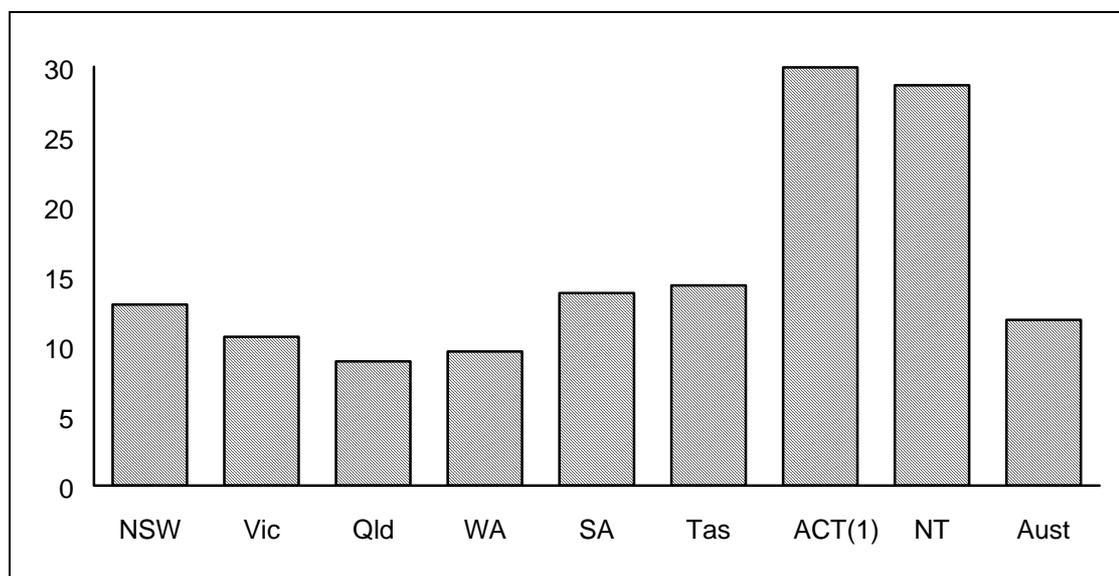

1   The ACT estimate includes $2 million one off redevelopment funds, $0.3 million SAAP Reform Funds and $0.2 million rollover from 1994–95 in addition to the recurrent base grant ($6.7 million). The inclusion of the other figures with the recurrent base grant severely distorts the information. Per capita funding based on the recurrent base grant would be lower ($22).
Source: Various tables Attachment 10A.

SAAP assists a range of people, including those youth, domestic violence victims; families; and single men and women (Figure 10.12).

Figure 10.12: SAAP funding by client group, Australia, 1995–96 ($m)
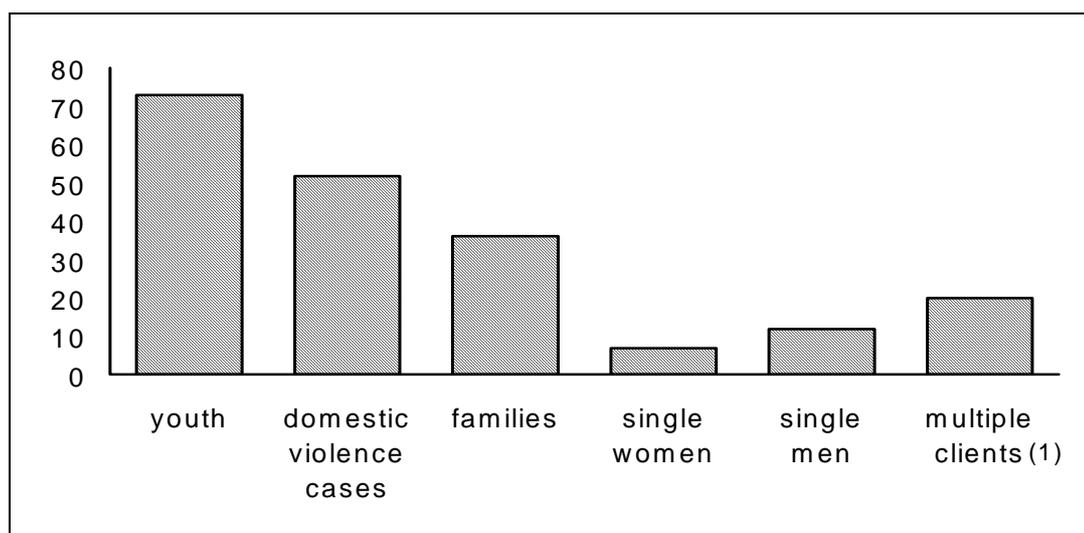
1   Services targeted to more than one client group, usually families or chronically homeless people.
Source: Various tables Attachment 10A.

Based on a two week national census conducted in September 1995, an average of 10 000 people used SAAP accommodation services each night (DHFS 1996).[10] This census had severe flaws which limit the reliability of this estimate.

10.4.3   Recent developments

The National Data Collection, which commenced on 1 July 1996, has been a major achievement for SAAP. It is managed by the AIHW which performs the role of the National Data Collection Agency. The data collection aims to meet the needs of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and SAAP providers, and will assist strategic planning, efficient and effective service provision, and planning and reporting to state funding agencies. The data will be obtained from: ongoing national service user collections; national administrative data; an annual two week collection to measure people who were not accepted into services; and two special annual collections which focus on priority issues which are not possible to chart through the ongoing collection. The data will be reported at six monthly intervals, and will provide comprehensive information, analysis and comment on all components of the collection.

A national SAAP research program is being developed and will be implemented in 1997, directed at improving management; measuring outcomes; developing new insights; and contributing to improved program outcomes.

A major strategic direction for SAAP is the progressive implementation of a case management system within SAAP agencies. This is aimed at enhancing practices and systems to assess and develop strategies to meet clients needs effectively. A National Case Management Framework was developed in May 1996, and a set of national principles were drafted for consultation with agencies. Over the past eighteen months, a series of case management advisers have been appointed to work with agencies to help implement and/or further develop case management practices.

The new SAAP agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments have clarified arrangements for advising Commonwealth and State and Territory Ministers. This has involved the provision within the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 for a Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness to advise the Commonwealth Minister on SAAP

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10   Survey response rates varied across jurisdictions and among service types, so these data represent only a proportion of the accommodation services provided by SAAP funded outlets (that is, unweighted aggregates). Non-accommodation services were not within the scope of these surveys.

and broader homelessness matters. State Ministers have a variety of advisory arrangements in this area.

10.4.4 Framework of performance indicators

Broad program directions have been identified and included within the 1995–98 *SAAP National Strategic Plan* (CAD 1995) endorsed by the National SAAP CAD Committee (Box 10.3).

Box 10.3: Program directions for SAAP

The 1995 to 1998 national strategic plan for SAAP identified twelve broad program directions:

- a much greater focus on client assessment;

- a case management approach to all clients;

- early intervention to prevent homelessness;

- a more flexible approach to accommodation provision;

- improved access to, and links with, other related services and programs;

- training and skills transfer;

- the development and implementation of national standards with service funding based on outcomes;

- improved management of services;

- improved strategic planning in the light of national, state and regional priorities;

- the encouragement of innovation and best practice;

- a national communication strategy; and

- data collection, analysis and research linked directly to strategic planning, management and performance.

Source: CAD 1995

These program directions have been incorporated into the performance indicator framework developed for this Report (Figure 10.13). However, this framework is best seen as only the starting point for more comprehensive indicators. The indicators in Figure 10.13 are suggestions only and will need to be validated during 1997. Because data were not available for this Report, the focus of this

section is on the nature of the effectiveness measures that have been developed for future reporting.

Effectiveness indicators

Effectiveness measures have been developed for quality, access, appropriateness and client outcomes.

The quality indicators are based on the degree to which agreed case plans exist for clients, and client satisfaction with services. (A client satisfaction measure is still to be developed.)

Access is measured by the proportion of people who receive a service relative to those who seek services.

The capacity to meet, either directly or via referral, the expressed needs of clients is used as a measure of the appropriateness of services.

Access and appropriateness data for target groups — for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and clients from a non-English speaking background — will be used to assess the extent to which their specific needs are met. For each population sub-group, access is calculated as the proportion of people *receiving* a service in relation to the total number of people *seeking* a service for a given period.
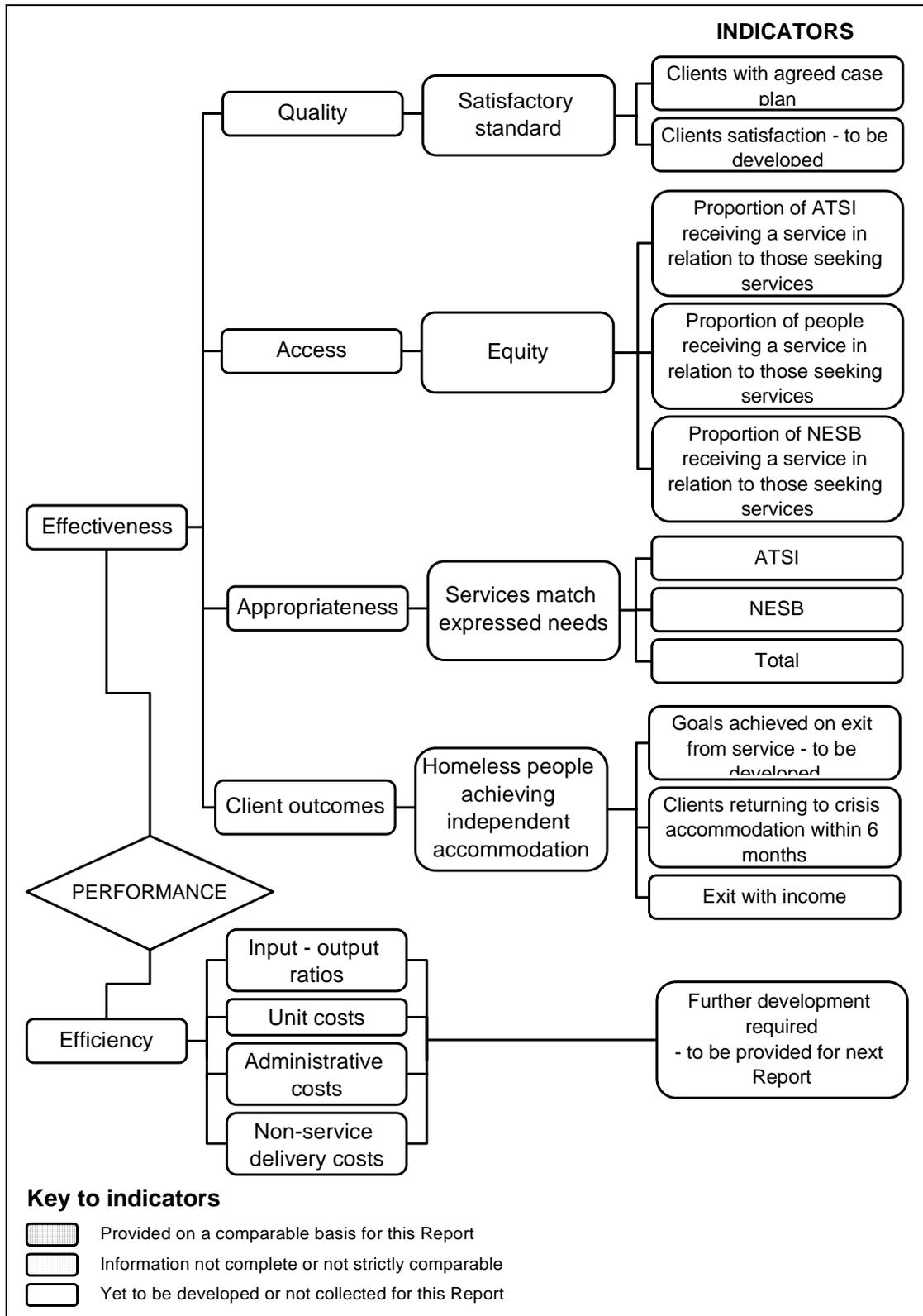
Client outcomes are focused on the degree to which homeless people have achieved identified goals on leaving a service.

A description of all indicators is provided in Attachment 10A.

Efficiency indicators

Efficiency indicators are still being developed (Section 10.4.5).

Figure 10.13: Draft framework of indicators for SAAP

INDICATORS

Effectiveness
- Quality → Satisfactory standard
  - Clients with agreed case plan
  - Clients satisfaction - to be developed
- Access → Equity
  - Proportion of ATSI receiving a service in relation to those seeking services
  - Proportion of people receiving a service in relation to those seeking services
  - Proportion of NESB receiving a service in relation to those seeking services
- Appropriateness → Services match expressed needs
  - ATSI
  - NESB
  - Total
- Client outcomes → Homeless people achieving independent accommodation
  - Goals achieved on exit from service - to be developed
  - Clients returning to crisis accommodation within 6 months
  - Exit with income

PERFORMANCE

Efficiency
- Input - output ratios
- Unit costs
- Administrative costs
- Non-service delivery costs

→ Further development required - to be provided for next Report

Key to indicators

- Provided on a comparable basis for this Report
- Information not complete or not strictly comparable
- Yet to be developed or not collected for this Report

10.4.5 Future directions

Improvements to the Report will focus on the indicator framework and the quality of data upon which reporting will be based in the next Report.

Framework of indicators

Improvements to the framework are intended in the areas of client satisfaction, client outcomes and efficiency.

A nationally consistent instrument to measure client satisfaction with services is to be developed, together with nationally agreed practice and management standards for SAAP services. These will underpin the future measurement of quality within the sector.

Further work is to be undertaken to identify more relevant client outcome indicators which better reflect the impact which services are expected to make on the circumstances and wellbeing of homeless people.

A number of efficiency indicators are also being developed. These will incorporate a mixture of productive efficiency measures such as unit costs and administrative costs. The collection of meaningful efficiency indicators for the SAAP area will require the development of special measures.

Improving data quality

Progressive refinements and enhancements will need to be made as the data are collected through the National Data Collection. Further developments to the collection in 1997 will include two special collections which target specific issues and extensive work in developing software to enable SAAP agencies to move to electronic data capture.

To complement quantitative information provided through the National Data Collection, additional information (including qualitative information) will be provided through a national research program. This will not only increase understanding of SAAP, but help refine the indicator framework and the appropriate set of indicators.

10.4.6 Key performance indicator results

In the 1995 Report, information from the one night and two week surveys of SAAP were used to report on performance. These surveys, which ceased in the latter half of 1995, had severe shortcomings and have been replaced by a new collection to provide comprehensive good quality data which commenced in July 1996. That new collection will provide:

- comprehensive, national, systematic, quality information;

- protection of client privacy and confidentiality;

- protocols governing collection, dissemination and use of data; and

- comprehensive reporting for the Commonwealth, States and Territories, and SAAP agencies.

The data from this collection are being processed and will not be available until March 1997. As a result, performance indicator data for SAAP are not available for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the program in this Report.

The data will be available for measuring performance in each jurisdiction against indicators of quality, access and client outcomes in the next Report.