
12 Children's services

This chapter presents performance information for government funded and/or delivered child care and preschool services. These services seek to provide appropriate care and developmental activities for children, although the emphasis on these two broad objectives may differ across service types. The chapter does not include services that do not receive government funding (unless otherwise noted).

Child care refers to care of a child aged 12 years and younger by someone other than the child's parents or guardian outside the child's home. Preschool services are mainly provided to children in the year before full time schooling. Unless otherwise stated, the data presented in this chapter related to services provided for children aged 12 years and younger.

The Report now includes some limited information on the ability of children's services to meet the needs of families. One indicator that relates to hours of operation provides information on the ability of services to provide nonstandard hours of child care. Another indicator provides information on the number of preschools providing the option of part day or full day care and education.

Definitions, estimating methodologies and counting rules have been refined to improve the consistency and comparability of performance information across jurisdictions. As a result, revisions of some data for earlier years reduce data comparability across years. Similarly, changes in the children's services industry have required jurisdictions to revise methodologies, and these revisions also reduce data comparability across years. It will take some time before all improvements are reflected in the Report.

12.1 Profile of children's services

The children's services data presented in this Report relate to services supported by the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. The role of local government in planning, funding and delivering children's services is acknowledged, but this Report does not present data on funds and activities solely supported by local government. The Report includes local government data only where that level of government was involved in Commonwealth, State or Territory funded programs.

Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments support a range of services for children (box 12.1). The roles and responsibilities of Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments in children's services are outlined in box 12.2.

Box 12.1 Types of children's services

Children's services aim to further children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Services are provided for children aged 12 years and younger by someone other than the child's parents or guardian outside the child's home. This can be in the form of:

- *centre based long day care* — child care services provided at a centre, usually by qualified staff. Age appropriate development programs and curricula are provided;
- *family day care* — care provided for children in the carer's own home. It is largely aimed at 0–5 year olds, but primary school children may also receive care before and after school and during school vacations. Central coordination units in all States and Territories organise and support a network of carers;
- *occasional care* — child care usually provided at a centre on an hourly or sessional basis for short periods of time or at irregular intervals specifically for parents who need time to attend appointments, take care of personal matters, undertake casual and part time employment, study or have temporary respite from full time parenting. These services are usually delivered by qualified staff and provide developmental activities for children;
- *outside school hours care* — care provided for school aged children (5–12 years old) outside school hours during term and vacations. Care may be provided on student free days and when school finishes early;
- *preschool* — services usually provided by a qualified teacher on a sessional basis in dedicated preschools. Preschool programs or curriculum may also be provided in long day care centres and other settings; and
- *other services* — government funded services to support children with additional needs or in particular situations (including children from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, children from non-English speaking backgrounds, children with a disability or of parents with a disability, and children living in remote and rural areas).

Government provision and funding

The common objective for children's services is to provide support for parents by meeting the care and education needs of children in a safe environment (box 12.3). The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments have different but complementary roles in the area of children's services. Both levels of government

provide funding for services, information and advice to parents and the sector, and help plan, set and maintain operating standards (box 12.2).

The major differences in the roles of the different levels of government related the objectives of each for children's services. The primary focus of the Commonwealth Government is supporting workforce participation by parents (DHFS 1998). The Commonwealth Government aims to achieve this through payments such as Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate.

State and Territory Governments have a broader focus for children's services, aiming to meet a wider variety of family needs. Some State and Territory Governments have a larger role in the delivery of children's services, particularly preschool services.

Both levels of government are active in maintaining the quality of care provided by children's services. The Commonwealth Government is responsible for the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System which was introduced in 1994 to help improve the quality of Commonwealth funded centre based long day care services. Centres are required to participate in the system to remain eligible for Childcare Assistance. The Commonwealth Government is also undertaking preliminary work on developing quality assurance mechanisms for family day care and outside school hours care. In addition, some States and Territories have implemented quality assurance systems for preschools while other jurisdictions are developing them.

State and Territory Governments are responsible for licensing children's services in their jurisdiction, which involves setting regulatory requirements and monitoring their adherence to these standards. The types of services covered by legislation vary between States and Territories, as do the standards that apply. In response, State and Territory Governments and the Commonwealth Government have developed national standards for centre based long day care, family day care and outside school hours care. The rate of implementation of these standards varies across Australia.

Total expenditure on children's services by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments was at least \$1.3 billion in 1997-98 (tables 12A.6, 12A.24, 12A.32, 12A.39, 12A.48, 12A.55, 12A.61, 12A.67 and 12A.76). Expenditure was approximately \$1.1 billion in 1995-96 and \$1.3 billion in 1996-97, but these figures are not comparable because some elements of expenditure were not included in all years (SCRCSSP 1998a).

Box 12.2 **Government roles and responsibilities**

The Commonwealth Government's roles and responsibilities for child care services are:

- assisting low and middle income families with the cost of their child care fees;
- developing family day care and outside school hours care services;
- planning location of services in conjunction with other levels of government;
- providing information and advice to parents and providers about the availability of Commonwealth funded and some State and Territory funded services;
- helping to enhance quality child care services by developing standards and by funding a mandatory Quality Improvement and Accreditation System for centre based long day care services eligible for government funding;
- providing information, support and training to service providers through funding to organisations; and
- providing operational and capital funding to some providers.

The Commonwealth Government also directly provides a small amount of funding for some preschool services in Queensland and WA in recognition of the later school starting age (AIHW 1997). The Commonwealth also provides supplementary funding for the preschool education of children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

State and Territory Government roles and responsibilities vary across jurisdictions and may include:

- providing operational and capital funding to non-government service providers;
- delivering some services directly (especially preschool services);
- licensing and setting standards for children's services providers;
- monitoring and resourcing licensed and/or funded children's services providers;
- providing information, support, training and development opportunities for providers;
- planning to ensure that the appropriate mix of services is available to meet the needs of the community;
- providing information and advice to parents and others about operating standards and the availability of services; and
- providing dispute resolution and complaints management processes.

Commonwealth Government expenditure in 1997-98 was approximately \$1 billion (this includes administration expenditure of \$57.2 million for central office, Centrelink and the Health Insurance Commission). Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate accounted for almost 80 per cent of Commonwealth Government

expenditure on children's services in 1997-98 (excluding administration expenditure for central office, Centrelink and the Health Insurance Commission) (table 12A.7).

Recurrent expenditure on service provision comprised the bulk (over four fifths) of State and Territory Government expenditure on children's services. Administration expenditure and expenditure on assets accounted for the remainder of State and Territory Government expenditure. Preschool services accounted for the largest proportion (at least two thirds) of total State and Territory Government expenditure across all service types.

The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments supported at least 230 000 preschool places and over 450 000 child care places in 1997-98. The majority of government supported child care places were centre based long day care places (43.5 per cent), followed by outside school hours care places (22.5 per cent) and vacation care places (17.1 per cent) (tables 12A.3, 12A.23, 12A.31, 12A.37, 12A.46, 12A.54, 12A.59, 12A.65 and 12A.74).

Size of the sector

Child care services

Child care services aim to enhance children's development by providing a broad range of developmental activities for children. Child care services offer a variety of care options for children aged 12 years and younger, in a range of environments.

It was not possible to report on the full attendance at child care services because a complete data collection was not available. At least 618 000 children (at least 18.2 per cent of children aged 12 years and younger) had access to government funded and/or provided child care services in 1997-98 (tables 12A.1, 12A.2, 12A.21, 12A.30, 12A.36, 12A.45, 12A.53, 12A.58, 12A.64 and 12A.73). Of these children, at least 410 000 were aged 5 years and younger. These figures underestimated the number of children attending these services because they did not include children attending some State funded services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and SA. Changes to the data collection in 1997-98 mean that data are not comparable over time. Similarly, comparisons across jurisdictions are not possible because of gaps in data availability (table 12.1).

Table 12.1 Proportion of children in the population attending Commonwealth and State and Territory Government funded and/or provided child care services, 1997-98 (per cent)

Age	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
0-5 years	33.3	21.2 ^a	27.6 ^a	18.1 ^{a, b}	18.9 ^a	35.4 ^c	30.8	17.8	26.5 ^d
0-12 years	20.7	15.6	20.2 ^e	12.0 ^{a, b}	15.9 ^a	22.2	24.2	17.4	18.2 ^f

^a Did not include children attending State funded services. ^b A significant amount of child care in WA is provided by licensed family day carers who do not receive government funding. ^c Based on response by 75 per cent of State funded services. ^d Did not include children attending State funded services in Victoria, Queensland, WA and SA. ^e Did not include children attending some vacation care services, occasional care services and services funded under the Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care program. ^f Did not include children attending State funded services in WA and SA. **na** Not available.

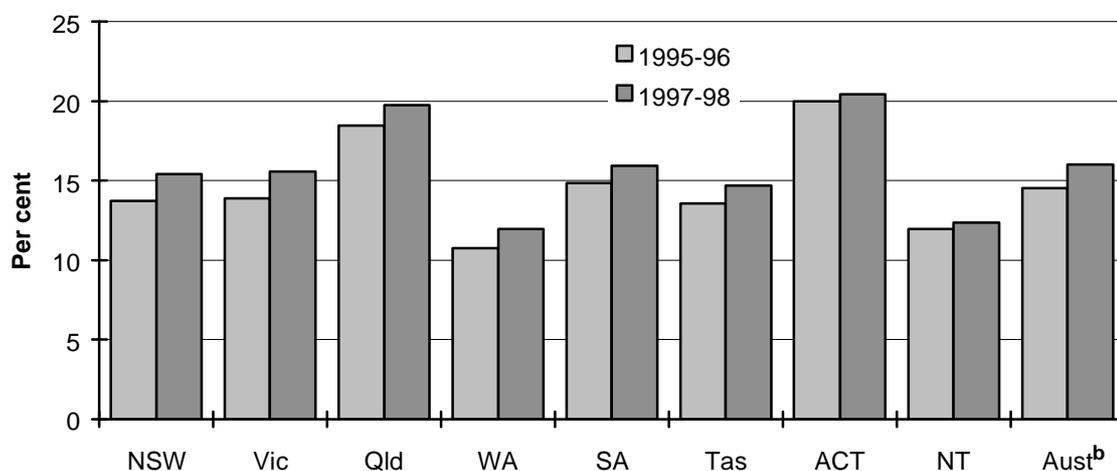
Sources: tables 12A.1, 12A.2, 12A.21, 12A.30, 12A.36, 12A.45, 12A.53, 12A.58, 12A.64 and 12A.73.

The Commonwealth Government's Census of Child Care Services is the most complete dataset on child care services and as such, indicates the relative participation in child care services across jurisdictions. The census includes most child care services receiving Commonwealth Government assistance. State and Territory Governments may also support many of these services. The service types included in the 1997 census were centre based long day care, family day care, before and after school hours care and vacation care.

Over 542 200 children aged 12 years and younger (16.0 per cent of children in this age group) attended Commonwealth Government funded child care services in 1997-98. Across Australia, the share ranged from 12.0 per cent in WA to 20.4 per cent in the ACT (figure 12.1). The majority (over 348 400) of those children were aged five years and younger. Thus, in 1997-98, 22.5 per cent of all children aged five years and younger attended Commonwealth funded child care services (tables 12A.1 and 12A.2).

The proportion of children in the population attending Commonwealth supported child care services increased in all jurisdictions between 1995-96 and 1997-98. Nationally, the proportion rose from 14.5 per cent to 16.0 per cent (figure 12.1).

Figure 12.1 **Proportion of children in the population attending child care services included in the Commonwealth Government Census of Child Care Services^a**



^a Children are defined as persons aged 12 years and younger. ^b Includes children in other Territories.
Data sources: tables 12A.1 and 12A.2.

The Commonwealth child care census provided data on variations in average hours of attendance at child care services across Australia (table 12.2). The average hours of attendance at family day care ranged from 14 hours per child per week in Tasmania to 27.9 hours per child per week in the NT, while the average weekly hours of attendance at occasional care ranged from 3.9 hours per child per week in SA to 8.4 hours per child per week in Tasmania. The average attendance at vacation care ranged from 2.3 days per week in Tasmania to 4.4 days per week in the NT in 1997-98 (table 12A.5).

Table 12.2 **Average attendance at child care services included in the Commonwealth Government Census of Child Care Services, 1997-98 (hours per child per week)^a**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Centre-based long day care	18.2	22.6	19.9	19.3	17.4	14.4	26.0	26.9
Family day care	19.3	16.5	21.0	17.6	14.9	14.0	20.8	27.9
Before school hours care	5.2	3.8	4.4	5.5	2.7	3.0	3.2	na
After school hours care	7.2	5.5	6.7	7.7	5.0	4.8	7.5	10.6
Occasional care	6.7	4.4	6.5	6.5	3.9	8.4	7.8	5.3
Other care	15.3	24.0	20.7	17.8	18.0	20.0	0.0	29.0

^a Average attendance hours were derived by summing hours paid for within each sector and dividing by the number of children who attended in the reference week. No information is available for mobile and Aboriginal playgroups for hours of attendance. Therefore children from these sectors are not included in the total children using other care. The children count in this section will be lower than the number of children in table 12A.2. **na** Not available.

Source: table 12A.5.

The Commonwealth Census of Child Care Services collected information on the average fees for child care services across jurisdictions. Fees for centre based long day care ranged from \$146 per week in Queensland to \$174 per week in Tasmania in August 1997. The average weekly fees for family day care in August 1997 ranged from \$121 in Victoria and Queensland to \$152 in Tasmania, and those for vacation care ranged from \$60 in NSW to \$99 in the ACT. The average sessional fee for before school hours care in August 1997 ranged from \$2 in the NT to \$4.57 in NSW, and the fee for after school hours care ranged from \$4.97 in SA to \$7.93 in the NT (table 12A.4).

Preschool services

Preschools provide a range of educational and developmental programs, generally on a sessional basis, to children in the years before commencing schooling. The age from which children may attend preschools varies cross jurisdictions. Children in Victoria, Tasmania and the NT usually only access government funded preschools in the year before commencing schooling. Younger children in NSW, Queensland, WA, SA and the ACT may access government funded preschool services. In SA, for example, a pre-entry program provides one session of preschool per week for 10 weeks in the year before commencing preschool, and children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds may attend preschool at 3 years of age.

This disparity in the age from which children may access preschool services has reduced the comparability of preschool data across jurisdictions. Preschool data are presented for two categories to improve comparability:

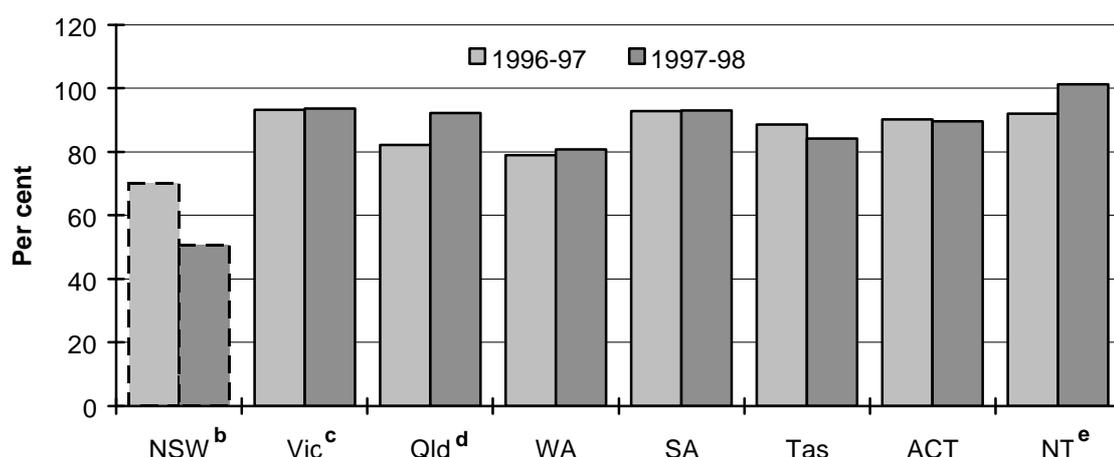
- children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling (data which are largely presented on a comparable basis for all jurisdictions); and
- younger children attending preschool services.

Approximately 203 100 children attending preschool services in 1997-98 were to begin full time schooling the following year. This represented nearly 80 per cent of all children attending preschool services in Australia in 1997-98.

Over 75 per cent of 4 year old (5 year old in WA) children in the population attended preschool in 1997-98. Across the jurisdictions for which 1997-98 data were available, the proportion of 4 year old (5 year old in WA) children in the population attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing school ranged from 50.6 per cent in NSW to 100 per cent in the NT. However, the data for NSW did not include children attending preschool services in long day care centres and therefore undercounts the proportion of NSW children attending government

funded preschool services. In comparison, this proportion ranged from 70.2 per cent in NSW to 93.1 per cent in SA in 1996-97, when data were available for all jurisdictions (figure 12.2).

Figure 12.2 Proportion of total children in the population who attended State and Territory government funded or provided preschool services immediately before the commencement of full time schooling^a



^a The denominator – the population of preschool aged children – is defined as persons aged 4 years in all States and Territories except WA, where preschool aged children are defined as persons aged 5 years.

^b Data for 1996-97 (but not 1997-98) includes children attending preschool services other than in the year before the commencement of full time schooling and is not directly comparable with data for 1997-98 (indicated by the broken lines). Data for both years excludes preschool services delivered in centre based long day care centres. ^c Includes some children attending preschool services conducted in a centre based long day care centre. ^d Includes non-state preschool data for the first time in 1997-98. ^e NT data for 1996-97 were as at August 1996; data for 1997-98 were for calendar year ending 1997.

Data sources: tables 12A.1, 12A.21, 12A.30, 12A.36, 12A.45, 12A.53, 12A.58, 12A.64, and 12A.73.

The range of fees charged for preschool services varied widely across jurisdictions, and in some cases, within jurisdictions. In some States and Territories, such as Tasmania and the NT, preschool services were provided at no cost to parents; in other jurisdictions, fees (while usually paid for the majority of children) were not compulsory (Victoria and SA). In some other jurisdictions fees varied according to the provider of preschool services, for example preschools operated by the Department of Education and Training in NSW did not charge fees, but received average donations of \$6 a week for sessional preschools and \$14 a week for full day preschools.

Six jurisdictions provided data on preschool fees in 1997-98. The definitions and methodologies used to collect these data vary and, as a result, these data are not comparable across jurisdictions. Jurisdictions reported the following data:

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- in NSW, the average hourly fee for both younger children and children attending Department of Community Services preschools in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling was \$3.48. Fees were not payable in preschools provided by the Department of Education and Training (table 12A.23);
 - in Victoria, the median hourly fee paid by children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling was \$1.03 (table 12A.31);
 - in Queensland, the average hourly fee paid in community based preschools and kindergartens by children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling was \$1.75; the average hourly fee paid by younger children was \$1.70 in 1997-98. Education Queensland preschool services were free. Data were not available on the fees paid in non-state preschools (table 12A.37);
 - in WA, children attending Education Department preschools in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling did not pay fees but may have made a voluntary contribution of \$9 per year. Younger children attending Department of Community Services preschools paid an average fee of \$5.00 per week, while younger children attending Department of Education preschools paid an average fee of \$1.00 per week (table 12A.46);
 - in SA, children attending preschool in the year before commencing full time schooling did not pay a compulsory fee but may have made a voluntary contribution of \$3.70 per week. Similarly, younger children may have made a voluntary contribution of \$0.23 per hour (table 12A.54); and
 - in the NT, there was no average hourly fee for preschool services for both younger children and children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling (table 12A.74).

Six jurisdictions supplied data on the average hours of attendance for government funded or provided preschool services in 1997-98. The average hours of attendance of children in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling ranged from 9.4 hours per week in NSW to 22.1 hours per week in WA (table 12.3).

Table 12.3 Average attendance at State and Territory government funded or provided preschool services, 1997-98 (hours per week)

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
Children attending preschool in the year immediately before commencing full time schooling	9.4	na	14.4	22.1	11.0	10.0	10.5	na
Younger children attending preschool	10.1	..	11.0 ^a	4.7	0.7 ^b	na	5.5	na

^a Average attendance in services related to community based kindergartens only. ^b Pre-entry program provides one session of preschool for 10 weeks in the year before preschool. **na** Not available. .. Not applicable.

Sources: tables 12A.23, 12A.31, 12A.37, 12A.46, 12A.54, 12A.59, 12A.65 and 12A.74.

In 1997-98, younger children in NSW, Queensland, WA, SA and the ACT were able to attend funded preschool services. Approximately 53 840 younger children attended preschool services in that year (tables 12A.21, 12A.30, 12A.36, 12A.45, 12A.53, 12A.58, 12A.64 and 12A.73). This participation differed across jurisdictions, reflecting variation in the jurisdictions' policies governing their access to preschool services. The number of younger children attending preschool services as a proportion of 3 year old children in the population was 3 per cent in the ACT, 18 per cent in NSW, 22 per cent in Queensland and 24 per cent in SA (where younger children may attend a pre-entry program for one term in the year before preschool). The proportion of 4 year old children in the population who attended preschool services in WA was 85 per cent.

Staff qualifications and experience

Nationally, the proportion of staff in Commonwealth supported child care services with formal qualifications was 50 per cent in 1997-98. The proportion of staff with no formal qualifications but with three years full time experience was 19 per cent in that year. The remaining 31 per cent of staff had no formal qualifications and less than three years full time experience. There was little change in these figures between 1995-96 and 1997-98 (table 12.4).

Table 12.4 Qualifications and experience of primary contact staff in child care services included in the Commonwealth Government's Census of Child Care Services (per cent)^a

	<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>
<i>1995-96</i>									
Relevant formal qualification ^b	52.3	51.5	48.4	51.7	45.3	47.4	41.3	36.8	49.9
No qualification but three years full time experience	19.4	17.9	10.6	14.6	23.4	21.7	20.7	24.0	16.9
No qualification and less than three years full time experience	28.3	30.6	41.0	33.7	31.3	30.9	38.0	39.3	33.2
<i>1997-98</i>									
Relevant formal qualification ^b	51.1	53.5	49.5	47.8	44.4	50.0	42.9	40.0	50.2
No qualification but three years full time experience	21.5	17.8	14.0	16.4	25.9	25.0	21.4	20.0	18.7
No qualification and less than three years full time experience	27.4	28.7	36.4	35.8	29.6	25.0	35.7	40.0	31.1

^a Excludes family day care, Aboriginal playgroups and occasional care neighbourhood model for which data were not available. ^b Includes staff training for a qualification.

Sources: tables 12A.8 and 12A.9.

Some additional data were available for some services receiving funding from State and Territory Governments only. Across those jurisdictions for which 1997-98 data were available:

- the proportion of child care staff with formal qualifications ranged from 28.8 per cent in Tasmania to 77.8 per cent in the NT; and
- the proportion of preschool staff with formal qualifications ranged from 51.4 per cent in the ACT to 100 per cent in the NT.

Employment status of parents

Access to children's services differs according to the service type. The workforce status of parents is one factor which may influence children's access to services. Those services eligible for Childcare Assistance, for example, are required to give highest priority to children of parents with work related child care needs. Occasional care gives priority to parents requiring care to meet other requirements (such as to attend appointments, to take care of personal matters or to have temporary respite from full time parenting).

Nationally 74 per cent of children (defined as children younger than 12 years of age) in child care services in 1996 came from families with both parents in the workforce, increasing from 69 per cent in 1993. In contrast, preschools are a

universal service, with no priority of access guidelines. Of those children attending preschool services, only 49 per cent came from families with both parents in the workforce, compared with 46 per cent in 1993 (figure 12.3).

Across jurisdictions, the proportion of children in child care with both parents in the workforce in 1996 ranged from 59 per cent in WA to 86 per cent in the ACT. The proportion of children attending preschool services with both parents in the workforce in 1996 ranged from 37 per cent in WA to 55 per cent in NSW (table 12.5). This proportion was higher in the ACT and Tasmania, but there were large standard errors associated with these figures.

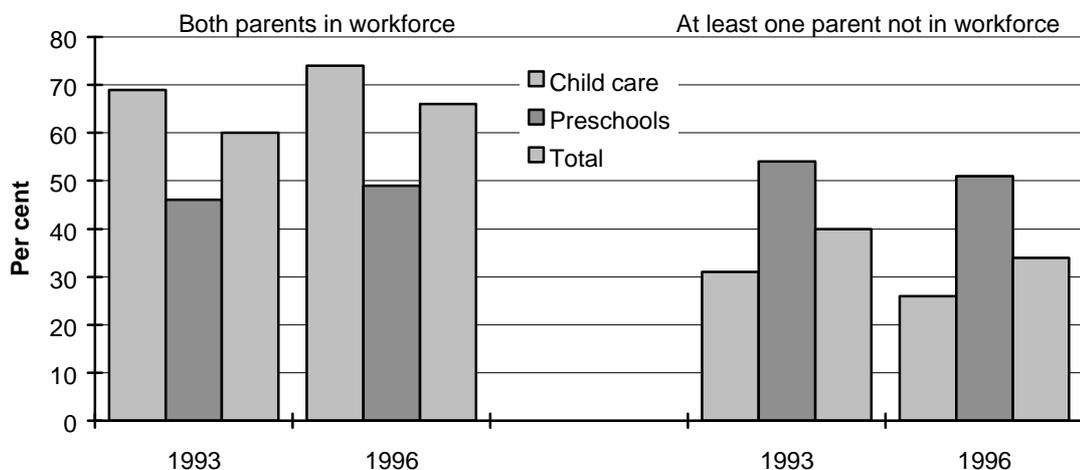
Table 12.5 Children using children's services, by employment status of parents, 1996 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
<i>Child care^a</i>									
Both parents in workforce	81	75	67	59	75	62	86	70	74
At least one parent not in workforce	19	25	33	41	25	38	14	30 ^b	26
<i>Preschool</i>									
Both parents in workforce	55	45	45	37	48	61 ^b	57 ^b	53 ^b	49
At least one parent not in workforce	45	55	54	63	52	39 ^b	43 ^b	47 ^b	51

^a Data refers to children under 12 years of age. ^b Estimates are subject to sampling variability between 25 per cent and 50 per cent.

Source: table 12A.10.

Figure 12.3 Children using children's services by employment status of parents^a



^a Data refers to children under 12 years of age.

Data source: table 12A.11.

12.2 Framework of performance indicators

The framework of performance indicators is based on a common objective for children's services across Australia (box 12.3).

Box 12.3 Objective for children's services

The common objective for children's services is to provide support for parents in caring for their children by ensuring that the care and education needs of children are met in a safe and nurturing environment.

Ten indicators have been identified to report the effectiveness and efficiency of the system that provides children's services (figure 12.4). The framework is similar to the one presented in previous Reports, but some indicators and descriptors have been refined for this Report. Definitions for all indicators are provided in attachment 12A.

Changes to definitions and counting rules made in previous years have improved the comparability of data presented in this chapter. Some changes to indicators for this Report include a new indicator for assessing access to children's services and refinements to one of the health and safety indicators (number of complaints). These changes are discussed below.

Nonstandard hours of care

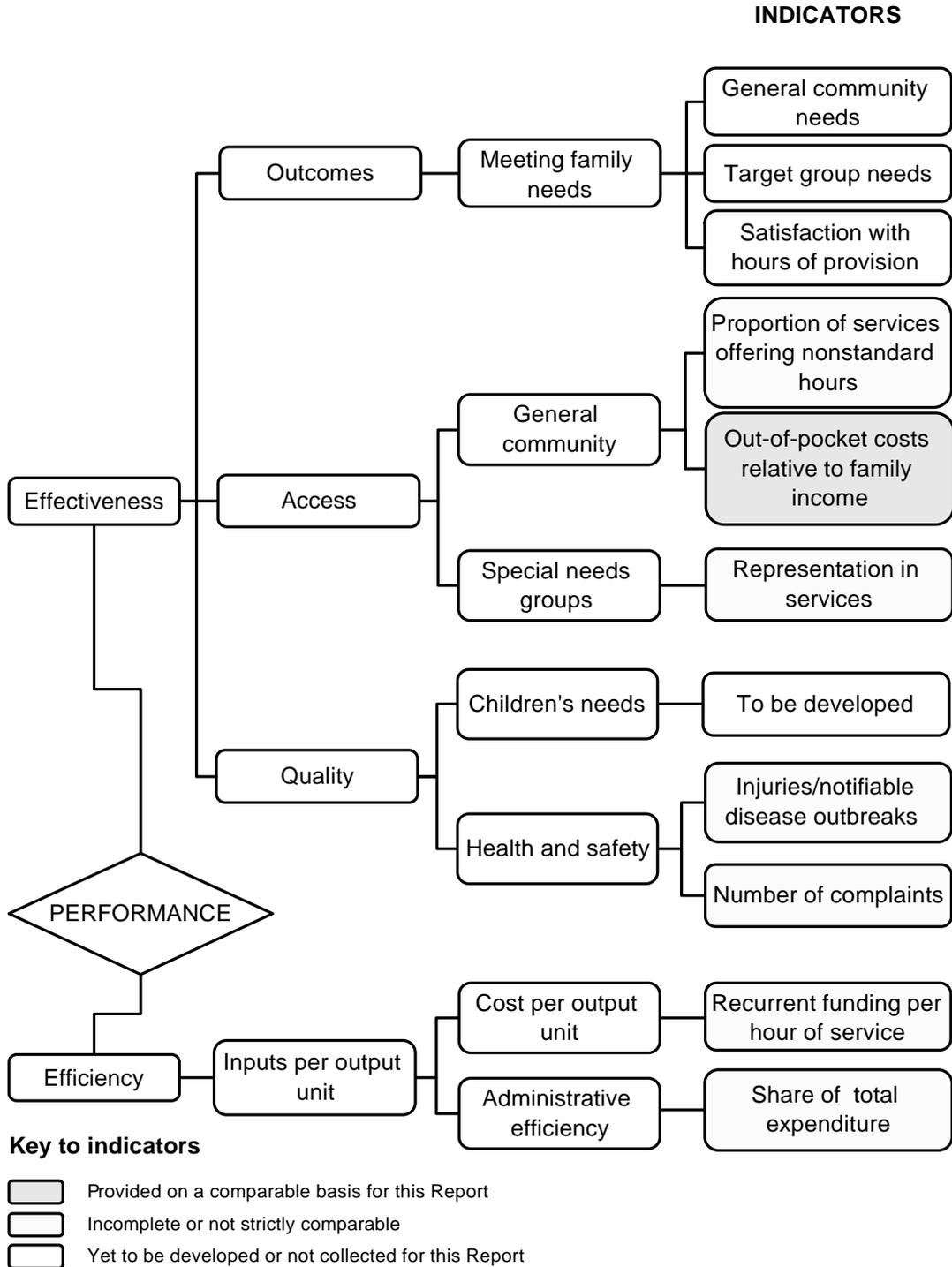
Anecdotal evidence on the views of parents in 1994 indicated that there may be an increasing requirement for overnight and early morning care as well as later closing times for services and longer sessions at preschools (Australian Consumer's Association 1994).

Previous Reports included some descriptive information on the ability of children's services to meet the needs of families. This year the definitions for these variables were strengthened to produce two new indicators that report on hours of operation:

- the proportion of child care services providing nonstandard hours of care, by service type; and
- the proportion of preschools providing the option of part day and full day services.

These two indicators will provide some insights into the ability of children's services to fulfil these demands.

Figure 12.4 Performance indicators for children's services



Substantiated complaints

The definition of a substantiated complaint was refined for this Report, which will improve the consistency of data collected on the number of substantiated complaints per registered or licensed service (a quality indicator for children's services).

12.3 Future directions

Last year the Steering Committee reported that it would undertake a parent satisfaction survey for children's services. However, it was subsequently decided to defer this task at this stage. Instead improvements for this Report focused on the current set of indicators. The parent satisfaction survey will provide valuable information and remains a future goal for this Report.

The challenges for reporting for children's services include improving:

- the appropriateness and completeness of the indicator set;
- the content of the dataset; and
- the treatment of superannuation.

Improving the appropriateness and completeness of the indicator set

New indicators that may reflect the extent to which services meet some aspects of parents' needs have been suggested for future collections. These include:

- the proportion of service delivery locations/sites with co-located services (for example, a facility that provides centre based long day care, sessional preschool services and occasional care as separate entities);
- the number of services that a family uses; and
- participation in services by family income.

It has also been suggested that the current indicator of access to children's services by special needs groups be refined to provide data for each child care service type (such as centre based long day care, family day care and occasional care). New descriptors have also been suggested for future collections. These include the number of services by management type and the number of services accredited by service type.

Work on these indicators will be complemented by the National Community Services Information Management Group Children's Services Working Group, which is developing a national minimum dataset for children's services. The

development of the minimum dataset will increase comparability in children's services data and help the working group develop measurable indicators and descriptors.

Improving the content of the dataset

Data collected for future reports will relate to a standard sample week, which will be a typical week in August (that is, a week that does not include any public holidays). To date, there has been no consistency in terms of timing across the data reported by each of the jurisdictions.

Improving the treatment of superannuation

A study by the Steering Committee of the treatment of superannuation found differences between the reported costs and estimated true costs for a range of services including public hospitals, police services and school education. In *Superannuation in the Costing of Government Services* (SCRCSSP 1998b), the Steering Committee recommended more consistent treatment of superannuation costs, which may improve the comparability and accuracy of unit cost information in future Reports. It is not clear how this will affect children's services data but this issue will be considered in the future.

12.4 Key performance indicator results

Effectiveness

Access of general community

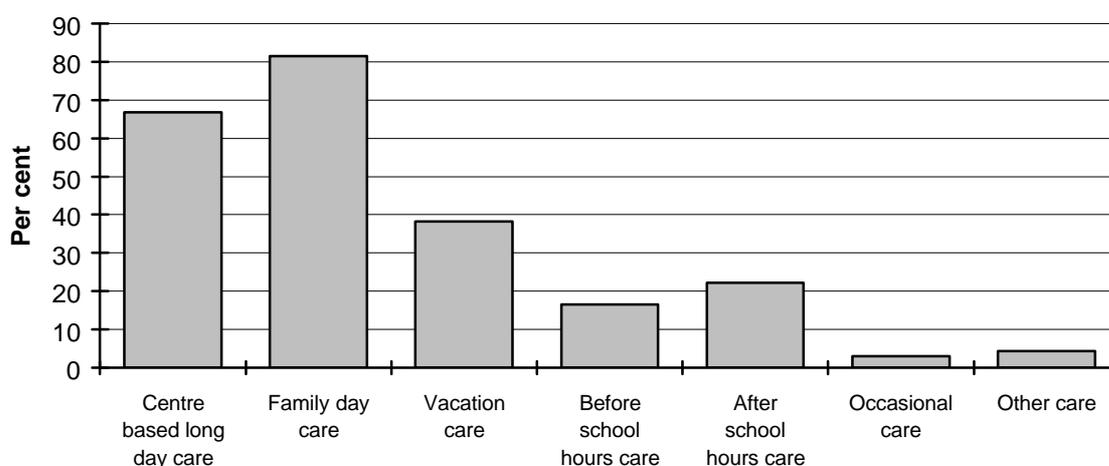
The proportion of services offering nonstandard hours of service are an indicator of community access to children's services. What constitutes nonstandard hours of care varies across service types as follows:

- centre based long day care services providing care for more than 10 hours a day on Monday to Friday and/or providing care on weekends;
- family day care services providing care for more than 10 hours a day on Monday to Friday and/or providing care overnight and/or on weekends;
- vacation care services providing care for more than 10 hours a day;

- before school hours care services providing care for more than two hours before school;
- after school care services providing care for more than three hours after school;
- occasional care services providing care for more than eight hours a day; and
- other services providing care for more than 10 hours a day.

The Commonwealth Census of Child Care Services provides the most complete dataset of information on the proportion of child care services providing nonstandard hours of care. Nationally 81.5 per cent of family day care services provided nonstandard hours of care in 1997-98 — the highest of all service types. Centre based long day care had the next highest proportion at 66.8 per cent (figure 12.5).

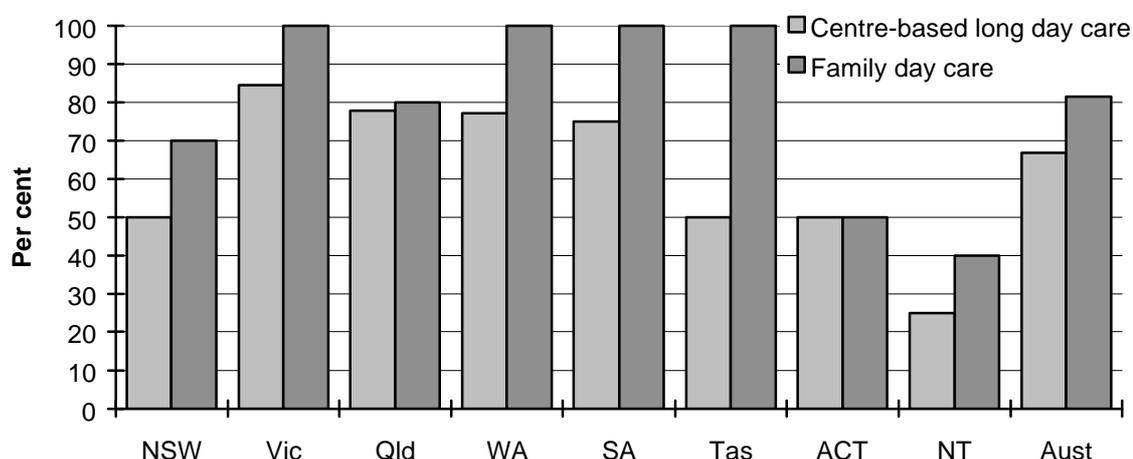
Figure 12.5 Proportion of services included in the Commonwealth’s Census of Child Care Services providing nonstandard hours of care, by service type, 1997-98



Data source: table 12A.12.

Centre based long day care services accounted for the majority of Commonwealth supported child care services in 1997-98. Across jurisdictions, the proportion of centre based long day care services offering nonstandard hours of care ranged from 25.0 per cent in the NT to 84.4 per cent in Victoria in 1997-98 (figure 12.6).

Figure 12.6 **Proportion of selected services included in the Commonwealth's Census of Child Care Services providing nonstandard hours of care, 1997-98**



Data source: table 12A.12.

Across jurisdictions, the proportion of services offering nonstandard hours of family day care ranged from 40.0 per cent in the NT to 100.0 per cent in Victoria, WA, SA and Tasmania (figure 12.6).

Limited data were available on the proportion of preschool services offering the option of part day or full day care and education. Regarding those jurisdictions for which 1997-98 data were available, the proportion of services offering these options ranged from zero in the ACT (which offers part day sessional preschool) to 77.3 per cent in SA (table 12.6).

Table 12.6 **Proportion of preschool services providing the option of full day or part day care and education (per cent)**

	NSW ^a	Vic	Qld ^{a, b}	WA ^a	SA ^{a, c}	Tas	ACT	NT
1995-96	91.9	na	na	na	na	na	5	0
1996-97	91.9	na	na	43.3	78.1	na	na	0
1997-98	5.3 ^d	na	4.3	18.7	77.3	na	0	na

^a Included preschool services for younger children. ^b Education Queensland defined sessional preschool on a different basis from that used in the data collection, so data may not accurately represent the proportion of services offering the option of full day and part day services. Data for 1997-98 relates to only community based kindergartens and preschools. ^c On average 10 per cent of children attending preschool access full day sessions. ^d Excludes Department of Community Services preschools. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 12A.25, 12A.33, 12A.40, 12A.49, 12A.56, 12A.62, 12A.68 and 12A.77.

Access of special needs groups to children's services

The proportion of total (including Commonwealth, State and Territory) government funded child care attendees from special needs groups for 1995-96 to 1997-98 is presented in table 12.7. The representation of children from single parent families and from rural and remote areas in government funded child care services was greater than their representation in the community. Children from single parent families represented 19.0 per cent of government funded child care attendees in 1997-98, and 15.7 per cent of children in the community, for example. The representation of children from non-English speaking backgrounds, children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and children with a disability in child care services in 1995-96 to 1997-98 was lower than their representation in the community.

Table 12.7 Proportion of Commonwealth and State and Territory government funded child care attendees from special need groups (per cent)^a

	<i>Representation in attendees at child care services</i>		<i>Representation in the community</i>
	<i>1995-96</i>	<i>1997-98</i>	
Children from non-English speaking backgrounds	9.6 ^b	10.7 ^c	12.6 ^d
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children	1.9 ^b	1.6 ^c	3.7 ^d
Children from single parent families	20.8 ^e	19.0 ^f	15.7 ^d
Children with a disability	2.6 ^e	2.0 ^c	6.7 ^g
Children from rural and remote areas	na	21.3 ^h	17.3 ^d

^a Comparisons between the representation of children from special needs groups in attendees of child care services and their representation in the community should be treated with caution because there were definitional differences. Data refer to children under 12 years of age. ^b Did not include children attending some State services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, Tasmania and the NT. ^c Did not include children attending some State services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA and SA. ^d Representation in the community related to 1996. ^e Did not include children attending some services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania and the NT. ^f Did not include children attending some services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania and the ACT. ^g Representation in the community was for 1993. ^h Did not include children attending some services in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA, and Tasmania. **na** Not available.

Source: table 12A.14.

Data on the representation of children from special needs groups in child care services were available for all jurisdictions on a comparable basis from the Commonwealth Census of Child Care. The proportion of children in Commonwealth supported child care was sometimes substantially different across jurisdictions. However, this variation largely reflected variation in the representation of children from the special needs groups in the community.

The proportion of child care attendees from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background ranged from 0.5 per cent in Victoria (where their representation in the population was 0.9 per cent) to 14.5 per cent in the NT (where their representation in the population was 35.9 per cent). The proportion of child care attendees from rural and remote areas ranged from 17.5 per cent in SA (where their representation in the population was 17.3 per cent) to 43.6 per cent in the NT (where their representation in the population was 55.7 per cent). The ACT did not have rural and remote areas (table 12.8).

Table 12.8 Proportion of child care attendees from special needs groups, 1997-98 (per cent)^a

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
<i>Children from a non-English speaking background^b</i>									
Representation in services	15.2	12.5	6.0	8.3	5.9	3.1	12.2	7.3	10.7
Representation in community ^c	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.6
<i>Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children^b</i>									
Representation in services	1.4	0.5	2.4	2.7	1.2	0.8	0.8	14.5	1.6
Representation in community ^d	3.3	0.9	5.5	5.3	2.8	5.4	1.9	35.9	3.7
<i>Children from a single parent family^e</i>									
Representation in services	17.5	17.5	21.1	21.3	21.9	19.4	17.4	18.2	19.0
Representation in community ^d	15.9	14.4	16.7	15.4	16.9	16.9	15.4	18.9	15.7
<i>Children with a disability^f</i>									
Representation in services	2.1	1.9	1.8	2.0	3.2	2.3	1.7	1.8	2.0
Representation in community ^g	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7
<i>Children from rural and remote areas^{b, h}</i>									
Representation in services	21.8	21.7	22.5	21.3	17.5	20.2	0.0	43.6	21.3
Representation in community ^d	11.7	18.6	23.6	23.6	17.3	27.1	0.3	55.7	17.3

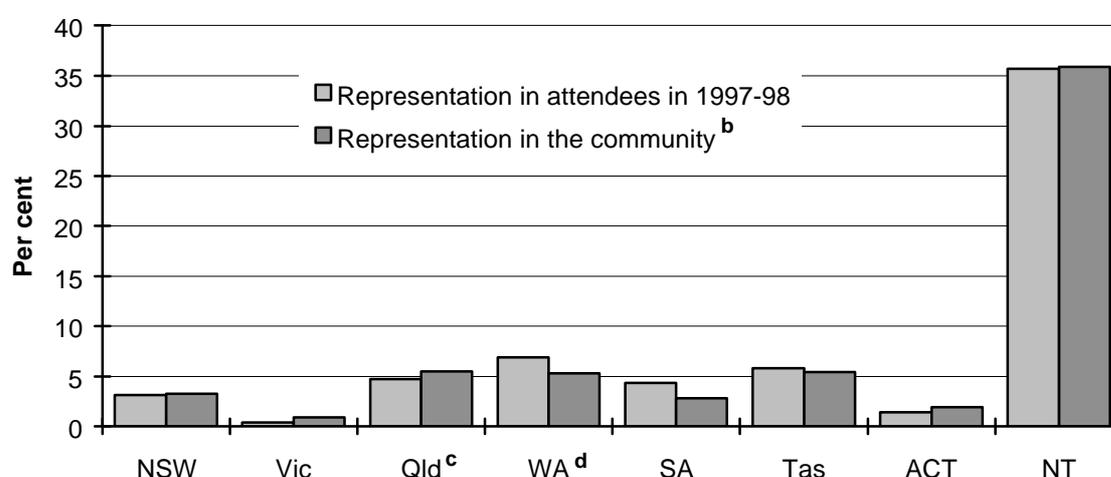
^a Did not include children attending Aboriginal playgroups. ^b Vacation care was included which overlapped children in outside school hours care. ^c Data were obtained from the 1996 Survey of Child Care. Australian average was used because data were not available by jurisdiction. ^d Data were obtained from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. ^e There was no information on the number of children from single parent families available for mobiles, occasional care neighbourhood models, occasional care, Aboriginal playgroups and vacation care. ^f The number of children with disabilities using child care did not include those children whose parents had a disability. ^g Data were obtained from the 1993 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. The Australian average was used because data were not available by jurisdiction. ^h Did not include occasional care neighbourhood models for which data were not available.

Source: table 12A.15.

Less extensive data were available on the proportion of preschool attendees from the specified special needs groups. The most complete data available related to the representation of children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds (not including children who attended preschools for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training

and Youth Affairs except in Victoria). The proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children attending preschools was broadly similar to their representation in the community. The proportion of children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds who attended preschool services in 1997-98 ranged from 0.4 per cent in Victoria to 35.7 per cent in the NT. The representation of children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in the community was 0.9 per cent in Victoria and 35.9 per cent in the NT (figure 12.7).

Figure 12.7 **Proportion of preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, 1997-98 (per cent)^a**

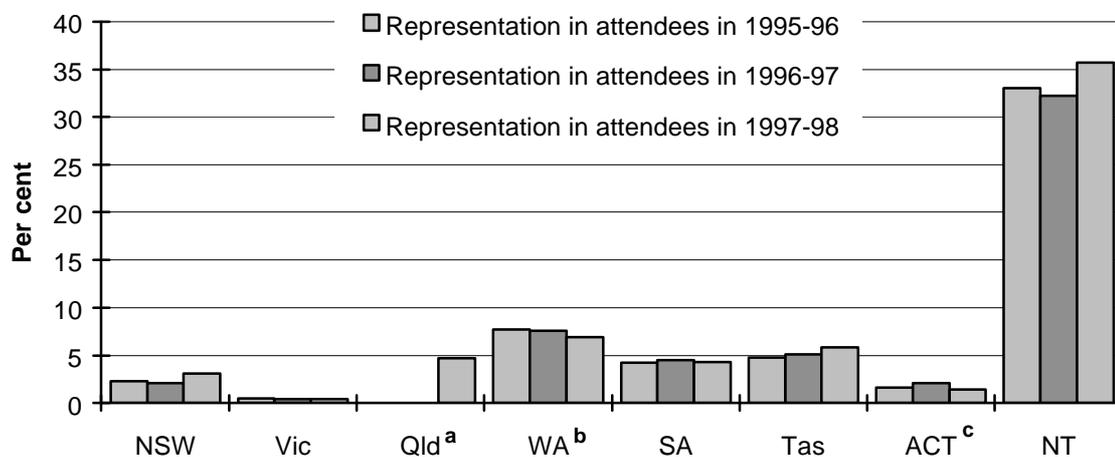


^a Comparisons between the representation of children from special needs groups in attendees of preschool services and their representation in the community should be treated with caution because there were definitional differences and differences in the base population. ^b Data were obtained from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. ^c Data relate to community based kindergartens and preschools and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children attending Education Queensland preschools. ^d Did not include younger children attending preschool and children attending non-government preschools.

Data sources: tables 12A.26, 12A.34, 12A.41, 12A.50, 12A.57, 12A.63, 12A.69 and 12A.78.

The proportion of preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds has remained relatively stable over recent time. The proportion of SA preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds was 4.2 per cent in 1995-96, 4.5 per cent in 1996-97 and 4.3 per cent in 1997-98, for example (figure 12.8).

Figure 12.8 Proportion of preschool attendees from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds — time series (per cent)



^a Data for 1995-96 and 1996-97 were not available. Data for 1997-98 relate to community based kindergartens and preschools and children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds accessing Education Queensland preschools. ^b Did not include younger children attending preschool and children attending non-government preschools. ^c Data for 1996-97 include children attending the Early Entry and Mainstream programs.

Data sources: tables 12A.26, 12A.34, 12A.41, 12A.50, 12A.57, 12A.63, 12A.69 and 12A.78.

Limited data were available on the representation of other special needs groups in government funded preschool attendees in 1997-98. Children from non-English speaking backgrounds represented 11.2 per cent of children attending preschool in NSW and 8.4 per cent in SA preschools, compared with a national representation of 12.6 per cent in the community. The proportion of preschool attendees from single parent families was 11.4 per cent in NSW and 15.5 per cent in SA, compared with community representation of 15.9 per cent and 16.9 per cent in those States respectively. Children with a disability represented 11.9 per cent of preschool attendees in SA and 7.3 per cent of preschool attendees in the ACT, compared with a national representation of 6.7 per cent in the community. The proportion of preschool attendees from rural and remote areas was 10.8 per cent in Queensland and 30.4 per cent in the NT, compared with community representation of 23.6 per cent and 55.7 in those jurisdictions respectively (tables 12A.26, 12A.34, 12A.41, 12A.50, 12A.57, 12A.63, 12A.69 and 12A.78).

Quality

An important focus of Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments is to set and maintain appropriate quality standards in child care and preschool services. The indicators of the quality of children's services are the number of serious

injuries, the number of notifiable outbreaks of disease and the number of substantiated complaints per registered or licensed service, by service type. Work on another indicator — the extent to which children's services are meeting children's needs — will be pursued in the future.

The data available on the three quality indicators for 1997-98 were limited. Four jurisdictions provided some information on the number of serious injuries to children per registered or licensed child care and preschool service for 1997-98:

- in NSW, four children attending occasional care services received serious injuries, at the rate of 0.02 injuries per service. Twenty children attending preschool services also received a serious injury, at the rate of 0.02 injuries per service (table 12A.28);
- in Queensland, 27 children attending centre based long day care services sustained serious injuries, at the rate of 0.03 injuries per service. Five children attending family day care services sustained a serious injury at a rate of 0.04 injuries per service (table 12A.43);
- in WA, four children attending centre based long day care services sustained a serious injury, at the rate of 0.01 injuries per service, and two children attending family day care services sustained a serious injury, at a rate of 0.1 injuries per service (table 12A.52); and
- in the NT, 34 children attending centre based long day care services and five children attending family day care services sustained serious injuries, at the rates of 0.8 and 0.5 per service respectively (table 12A.79).

Two jurisdictions provided information on the number of notifiable outbreaks of disease per registered or licensed service for 1997-98:

- in NSW, there were 25 notifiable outbreaks of disease at occasional care services and 342 outbreaks of disease at preschool services, at the rates of 0.15 and 0.38 per service respectively (table 12A.29); and
- in the ACT, there was one notifiable outbreak of disease at preschool services, at the rate of 0.01 per service (table 12A.70).

Four jurisdictions provided data on the number of substantiated complaints and alleged breaches of regulations made to the State and Territory Government regulatory bodies for 1997-98:

- in Victoria, there were 104 substantiated complaints over the 12 month period ending 30 June 1998, at the rate of 0.03 substantiated complaints per service. Formal action was taken against 19 substantiated complaints in the 12 month

period ending 30 June 1998, leading to four service providers being fined, ten formal warning being issued and five cases awaiting a hearing (table 12A.35);

- in Queensland, there were 106 substantiated complaints relating to centre based long day care services and eight complaints relating to family day care services. Formal action was taken in relation to these complaints, however not all of these complaints were proven (table 12A.44);
- in the ACT, there were three substantiated complaints against all registered or licensed child care and preschool services, at a rate of 0.037 complaints per service (table 12A.71); and
- in the NT, there were 15 substantiated complaints against centre based long day care services, and action other than fining, suspending the provider or revoking the provider's licence was taken with all of these complaints (table 12A.80).

Efficiency

Some differences in indicator results for jurisdictions may reflect different counting and reporting rules for financial data. Differences may also reflect the treatment of various expenditure items (for example, superannuation).

Unit cost

A proxy indicator of efficiency is government inputs per unit of output (unit cost). The indicator used here is government expenditure per hour of service. Data were sought from all governments on their expenditures by service type (table 12.9). However, incomplete data and changes in methodology make it difficult to compare expenditure across jurisdictions and over time. This year the Commonwealth used a different methodology to compile its 1997-98 data; data for 1995-96, but not 1996-97, have been revised on a consistent basis.

Data on Commonwealth Government recurrent expenditure by service type was comparable across jurisdictions. Commonwealth Government recurrent expenditure per hour was lowest for centre based long day care services in 1997-98 (ranging from \$1.39 per hour in the ACT to \$2.19 per hour in Queensland). Data for 1995-96 were also available for centre based long day care, family day care, outside school hours care, and occasional care. Commonwealth Government recurrent funding per hour of occasional care tended to be lower in 1997-98 than in 1995-96, whereas funding per hour of outside school hours care tended to be higher in 1997-98 than 1995-96 (table 12.10).

Table 12.9 Commonwealth and State and Territory Government real recurrent expenditure per hour of service (1997-98 dollars)^a

		<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
Centre based long day care	1995-96	2.01	2.16 ^f	2.47	2.29	2.14	1.90	0.93	1.70
	1997-98	2.00	1.89 ^f	2.20	1.99	na	1.99	na	2.39
Family day care	1995-96	2.00	2.13	2.41	2.40 ^b	3.47	2.39	1.79	2.09
	1997-98	2.31	2.50	2.52	2.87	3.10	2.67	2.35	2.33
Vacation care	1995-96	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
	1997-98	na	na	1.33	0.78 ^d	na	na	0.85	0.49 ^e
Outside school hours care ^c	1995-96	1.07	na	1.07	1.39	1.00	1.14	0.62	0.72
	1997-98	2.46	na	2.43	3.13	2.46	2.65	1.77	2.78
Occasional care	1995-96	na	na	na	4.29	2.54	na	0.33	16.97
	1997-98	1.55	na	2.36	4.10 ^d	na	na	1.55	10.80

^a Commonwealth Government expenditure data excludes administration expenditure. Data are not available for 1996-97. ^b Expenditure by the State Government on family day care included costs associated with licensing private home-based carers not attached to a family day care scheme. ^c Disaggregated data are not available for before school hours care and after school hours care. ^d Refers to funded hours for State administered services, not total number of hours provided by these services. ^e Represents funding between 1 July 1997 to 27 April 1998. ^f Excludes State expenditure because only incomplete data were available. **na** Not available.

Source: table 12A.19.

Table 12.10 Commonwealth Government real recurrent expenditure per hour of service (1997-98 dollars)^a

		<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
Centre based long day care	1995-96	2.01	2.16	2.47	2.29	2.22	1.90	0.96	1.70
	1997-98	1.88	1.89	2.19	1.96	2.05	1.91	1.39	1.91
Family day care	1995-96	2.00	2.13	2.41	2.40	3.47	2.39	1.79	2.09
	1997-98	2.31	2.50	2.52	2.79	2.93	2.67	2.35	2.33
Vacation care	1995-96	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
	1997-98	7.71	6.81	3.16	6.77	4.42	na	10.99	9.13
Outside school hours care ^b	1995-96	1.07	1.32	1.07	1.39	1.00	1.14	0.62	0.72
	1997-98	2.46	2.01	2.43	2.85	2.16	2.65	2.11	2.78
Occasional care	1995-96	4.75	3.76	na	4.33	9.82	6.30	1.98	16.97
	1997-98	3.85	1.54	2.21	3.77	4.23	2.24	2.06	10.80

^a Expenditure excludes administration expenditure. Data are not available for 1996-97. ^b Disaggregated data are not available for before school hours care and after school hours care. **na** Not available.

Source: table 12A.17.

Four jurisdictions provided data on recurrent expenditure per hour of preschool service in 1997-98; it was \$1.63 in NSW, \$3.32 in Queensland, \$2.62 in WA and \$4.28 in the ACT (tables 12A.27, 12A.42, 12A.51 and 12A.72).

Administration and regulation costs

Another measure of efficiency is administration and regulation expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure. These data can include the costs of activities relating to the planning, policy development, resource management, quality assurance and regulation of children's services. The extent to which these are included in the data varies, and allocations of the costs of departmental overheads may also differ. Thus, comparisons across jurisdictions and over time are difficult.

Administration and regulation costs (excluding central office, Centrelink and the Health Insurance Commission administration expenditure) accounted for 1.4 per cent of total Commonwealth Government expenditure in 1997-98, compared with 2.0 per cent in 1995-96 (table 12A.6).

As discussed earlier, the roles of the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments differ in relation to funding and provision of children's services. In particular, State and Territory Governments have an important role in licensing services and monitoring standards (box 12.2). For this reason, it is not appropriate to compare the administration and regulation costs of the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory Governments.

Five jurisdictions provided data on the administration and regulation proportion of total government expenditure on child care services in 1997-98:

- in Queensland, administration and regulation costs represented 22.3 per cent of the total. This figure includes an estimate of corporate costs (table 12A.39);
- in WA, administration and regulation costs (including costs of support services for child care) represented 33.8 per cent of the total (table 12A.48);
- in Tasmania, administration and regulation costs represented 32.5 per cent of the total (table 12A.61);
- in the ACT, administration and regulation costs (including costs of funded and non-funded services) represented 22.2 per cent of the total (table 12A.67); and
- in the NT, administration and regulation costs represented 7.2 per cent of the total (table 12A.76).

Four jurisdictions provided data on the administration and regulation proportion of total government expenditure (including Commonwealth and State and Territory Government expenditure) on preschool services in 1997-98:

- in Queensland, administration and regulation costs represented 3.8 per cent of total government expenditure on preschool services (table 12A.39);

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- in WA, administration and regulation costs (including costs of support services for preschools but excluding expenditure by the WA Education Department) represented 18.6 per cent of the total (table 12A.48);
 - in the ACT, administration (that is, expenditure on salaries for preschool administrators) and regulation costs represented 3.6 per cent of the total (table 12A.67); and
 - in the NT, administration and regulation costs represented 11.8 per cent of the total (table 12A.76).

Administration and regulation expenditure for Victoria represented 5.4 per cent of total expenditure in 1997-98; it included one-off expenditure to finalise new children's services legislation, prepare for implementation and support the sector after implementation, as well as administration costs for all licensed services (not just funded services) (table 12A.32).

NSW and SA provided data on administration and regulation expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure on both child care and preschool services in 1997-98:

- in NSW, administration and regulation costs represented 10.8 per cent of total government expenditure (excluding expenditure on assets) on children's services (table 12A.24);
- in SA, administration and regulation costs represented 5.4 per cent of total government expenditure, only slightly down from 5.5 per cent in 1996-97 (table 12A.55).

12.5 Jurisdictions' comments

This section provides comments from each jurisdiction on the children's services covered in this chapter. Appendix A contains detailed statistics and short profiles on each State and Territory, which may assist in interpreting the performance indicators presented in this chapter. The information covers aspects such as age profile; geographic distribution of the population; income levels; education levels; tenure of dwellings; and cultural heritage (such as aboriginality and ethnicity).

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Commonwealth Government comments

The year 1997-98 saw a number of changes in Commonwealth funding arrangements for child care as well as other changes within the child care sector itself. These changes occurred over the entire year; consequently, a combination of full year and part year effects is reflected. Further changes in block granted funding arrangements will not be evident until the next round of reporting.

It should be noted that, while some improvements occur through the iterative approach to performance reporting, comparability across years is affected by other changes and complicated by the dynamic nature of child care.

The Commonwealth has been revising the methodologies it uses to estimate the number of children who use services in response to changes in the industry and patterns of usage. Previous methodologies are no longer considered accurate measures of usage.

This year's Report includes actual numbers from the Census of Child Care Services conducted by the department in 1997.

The new methodology has been used to update the 1995-96 figures and these updated figures have been used in this Report to provide a comparison with the estimated number of children in 1997-98. These are not comparable to those used in last year's Report which estimated up the Census data and provided numbers based on utilisation ratios.

The Commonwealth notes the low level of usefulness of the children's services report to governments as reported in the *Feedback on the Report on Government Services*. The Commonwealth, States and Territories are working closely together to improve the quality of national data for children's services. The work undertaken by the National Community Services Information Management Group to develop a national minimum data set for children's services is integral to this process and will improve the quality of performance reporting.

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New South Wales Government comments

The 1997-98 year saw NSW continue to roll out a range of initiatives aimed at improving service quality and access opportunities for children, families and communities.

Among these initiatives in excess of \$5.5 million in additional capital and recurrent funding was allocated to establish 748 new preschool and occasional care places in high need areas of the State, as well as improvements in funding levels for 11 Aboriginal preschools in rural and remote areas. The increased funding also included monies to help improve access to occasional care and preschool services for an estimated 13 000 families.

Further initiatives saw NSW seek and gain agreement from the Commonwealth Government for families using State funded vacation care services to be eligible for Commonwealth Childcare Assistance funding, bringing about improved affordability for the families of the approximately 14 000 children using these services on any one day during the school holidays.

These initiatives underline NSW's continued commitment to assist with the provision of a strong community service system during a period of some volatility in child care nationally.

As part of the changes occurring nationally, NSW submitted a response to the Senate Inquiry on Child Care, commenting that commitments which improved life chances for children at an early stage of development were concomitant with greater benefits for society. The funding of child care, rather than being viewed as an economic exercise has a greater good to offer in terms of positive outcomes for individuals and the building of strong social capital.

The provision of appropriate information for families and for service providers and the monitoring of compliance to standards, continued to be an important focus for NSW. During the year a major review was conducted of the head legislation, the *Children (Care and Protection) Act 1987*, under which the child care regulations in NSW apply. Legislative changes resulting from the review will be commented on in next year's Report.

The usefulness of the data provided for this collection continues to hold concern for NSW, as commented on in last year's Report. NSW views data as a core component of enabling rigorous policy debate, but does not see the structure of the current collection as an effective framework in this regard. The establishment of the National Community Services Information Management Group is seen as a vehicle for possible changes to the data collection.

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Victorian Government comments

The Department of Human Services licenses and/or funds children's services in Victoria, including funding Statewide support services. It is not directly involved in service provision.

As at 30 June 1998, there were approximately 3250 licensed centre-based services for children aged 0–6 years. In addition, as at 30 June 1998, Victoria either funded directly or managed Commonwealth/State Government funding to approximately 1600 agencies providing children's services at approximately 2100 preschool, occasional child care or TAFE long day care services across the State. These figures do not include school age child care services where administrative responsibility transferred to the Commonwealth during 1997-98.

A range of providers are responsible for the delivery of these services, including incorporated bodies, local government, companies, tertiary education institutions, non-government schools and natural persons.

During 1997-1998 a number of new initiatives were implemented which aimed to enhance the provision of child care and preschool services throughout the State.

- New children's services legislation (*Children's Services Act 1996* and *Children's Services Regulations 1998*), which established a separate legislative framework for the licensing and operation of children's services, commenced on 1 June 1998. The regulatory framework introduced a range of new and enhanced arrangements for the licensing of children's services in Victoria. Major changes include a move to three year licensing, new 'fit and proper' tests for licensees and criminal record checks for all new staff.
- Under the Koorie Early Childhood Education Program, Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers were employed in the Department's regional offices (commencing in January 1998) to increase and enhance the participation of Koorie children in preschool services. Preliminary data from August 1998 shows that this initiative has already increased the Koorie preschool participation rate.
- 1998 saw the first full year of operation of the preschool quality improvement process in which funded preschool service providers were required to undertake an evaluation of the quality of their service.

Although some data items could not be provided for this Report, it is anticipated that more data will be available for the 2000 Report. In line with the decision of the Working Group, Victoria has moved to an August sample week data collection from 1998. In addition, data items included on the 1998 data collection forms have been modified to reflect data required for the 2000 Report. Ultimately, however, the extent to which data quality and comparability improves will be influenced significantly by the work being undertaken to develop a minimum data set with agreed definitions.

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Queensland Government comments

The Queensland Government is committed to its role of providing and supporting high quality child care services, and continues to develop and implement programs which respond to the needs of children and their families across Queensland.

A number of projects were undertaken in 1997-98 to enhance the quality of service provision for children and their families. These included the allocation of funds to assist outside school hours care services to upgrade facilities to meet national standards.

Statewide consultations were held to inform the review of the Queensland child care legislation, and the incorporation of national standards for centre based long day care and family day care. Further consultation occurred to inform the implementation of the national standards for outside school hours care and the introduction of a quality baseline for outside school hours care services in Queensland.

Young children and their families in rural and remote areas have benefited from the allocation of grants to develop innovative services in local communities. An outreach service was developed to respond to the needs of families in far north west Queensland in a flexible and appropriate way, and a website, Cooee Kids, has been created to improve access to child care information for families living in rural and remote areas.

Assistance was provided to child care services in 26 isolated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island communities, and funding was provided to three community organisations to support the advisory process involved in targeting funds to these communities.

Queensland recognises the value of performance measurement of government service provision as well as the need for nationally consistent data in order to make valid comparisons across jurisdictions. However, some inconsistencies exist in this chapter in the definition of terms and collection methodologies. The development of a core set of nationally consistent data items and definitions has the potential to improve the availability, integrity and comparability of data for future Reports.

In order to report on a more comprehensive basis, Queensland has expanded the scope of the data reported for the 1999 Report to include preschool services provided by non-state schools.

Queensland will continue its efforts to provide quantitative and qualitative data, and supports the publication of performance information to inform policy decision making and to promote accountability.

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Western Australian Government comments

The WA Government is committed to the principle of ensuring quality care for children and early educational opportunities for all children prior to commencement of full time schooling.

Family and Children's Services is responsible for licensing for child care places, support to providers and contributes to planning of new services. The Education Department of Western Australia provides early Childhood Education Programs in the form of a kindergarten program for children in the year they turn four and a pre-primary program for children in the year they turn five. In 1998 the transfer of kindergarten places from the Department of Family and Children's Services to the Education Department was completed.

The State has comprehensive regulations for child care services, including all family day carers (irrespective of their participation in family day care schemes), and occasional care. During 1998 the Community Services (Child Care) regulations have been reviewed, and drafting of new regulations will commence in 1999.

Following consultations with service providers, industry representatives and parents regarding standards in outside school hours care, a project has now commenced to develop regulations for these services.

In 1998 the Education Department increased the access to the full time (four days per week) government funded pre-primary program to all children in the year they turn five. In 1999 all children will have access to a kindergarten program (two half-days per week) in the year they turn four.

The body of the Report includes cautionary notes on making comparisons between States and Territories; it should also be noted that the WA child care figures do not include children attending early childhood education programs, these are included in the child care figures for some other States and Territories. In addition, the definition of administrative costs in this Report include costs associated with regulation and support to child care industry; in WA, these roles form a significant part of the Government's contribution to the children's services industry. The definitions used, therefore, produce an inflated figure of administrative costs.

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South Australian Government comments

The SA Government is committed to continued support for families with dependent children by supporting their access to a range of quality children's services. The Department of Education, Training and Employment operates 97 per cent of preschool services, with the remaining services operated by non-government organisations. The department continues to administer the Statewide family day care program and, whilst it no longer administers the outside school hours care program, continues to support the operation of outside school hours care services with 84 per cent of all programs being run on government school premises.

The department has completed the implementation of national standards for outside school hours care and commenced the implementation process for family day care. New Child Care Centre Regulations will be in place in April 1999.

Ten child care services closed in 1996-97 and a further five services closed during 1997-98. In response to these closures the Premier has made restructuring grants available to community managed child care centres. To date, 15 centres have amalgamated their operations or been taken over by other operators. Whilst there have been no closures in the private child care sector, this sector has been affected by the downturn in demand for services, with the market value of businesses being adversely affected and reports of operators facing severe financial difficulties. Of particular concern is the ongoing provision of services to rural communities.

The Child Care Business Initiative which is designed to enhance child care centre administrative and management systems has now been implemented in more than 90 community managed child care centres. The department has also initiated a strategy to improve administrative and management systems in outside school hours care by developing a financial management package and training sessions for operators.

Under the *Children's Services Act*, the department has an ongoing commitment to the provision of information relating to children's services and support for families. In acknowledgment of the critical role that parents play in providing early experiences to support the growth and development of their children, the department has produced resource booklets — *Growing and Learning in the Family*, to enhance parents' understanding and support for children's learning; *Eclipse*, a document to support literacy in early childhood; and *Foundations Areas of Learning*, a curriculum document for staff in preschool and child care.

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Tasmanian Government comments

The Tasmanian Government is committed to facilitating the provision of high quality child care services which effectively meet the needs of Tasmanian children and their families.

Heralding a new era in monitoring and supporting child care services, the 1997-98 year saw the final preparations of the transfer of the child care portfolio from the Department of Community and Health Services to the Department of Education. This move presents new challenges and many opportunities to better meet the child care needs of families, improve flexibility, and to reduce duplication, overlap and fragmentation of service delivery.

A child care website has been developed to assist parents access information about child care and to provide existing and potential child care providers with relevant information. An interactive complaints system is part of this process.

The Tasmanian data provided for this Report is not complete due to incompatibilities between the data that is currently collected and the data required for this Report. A database is currently being developed that will include the information required to meet the needs of the Report. The comprehensiveness of the Report provides a useful basis for States and Territories to assess child care service provision across Australia.

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“ Australian Capital Territory Government comments

The family support program funds a variety of behaviour management programs which allow child care staff to obtain specialist help on programming for children with behaviour difficulties. Some group and individual programs are also available to help improve interactions between parents and children and to promote self esteem. These services have met a great need and focus on early intervention aimed at improving children's social skills and their capacity to learn in group settings as they get older.

The ACT Government provides hands on support for children with special needs not eligible for Commonwealth funding. The ACT funding complements the Commonwealth's SUP support for its child care program which is oriented towards participation in employment. Both governments provide child care programs which give a broad coverage for the ACT's child care needs. In addition the ACT Government in partnership with parent committees offers all 4 year olds at 30 April each year 10.5 hours of sessional preschool per week in the year before school.

The ACT still shows one of the highest participation rates in child care in Australia (figure 12.1) which probably reflects the relatively high employment figures. There is more than sufficient supply of child care places to meet demand, resulting in only two small new centres opening in the past year, and growth is expected to remain low in the near future.

1998 has seen the implementation of a new school age care licensing handbook. By the end of this year all school age care services in the ACT will be required to meet national standards for outside school hours care.

Legislative changes are currently being drafted to enable the licensing of family day care schemes and to provide better processes to enforce licence conditions. Licensing of family day care schemes would allow the ACT to implement the national standards for family day care. New licence conditions are being trialed which incorporate national standards on a voluntary basis.

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Northern Territory Government comments

The NT Government is committed to supporting families with their child raising responsibilities by promoting the availability of good quality and appropriate children's services.

Current components in achieving this include the extensive direct provision of sessional preschool education through the NT Department of Education and Training, and the implementation of a five year plan for children's services support and development to 2001. This plan aims to promote access, appropriateness, quality, affordability and choice in child care services for families and children.

The proportion of community based services previously in receipt of Commonwealth operational funding in the NT is higher than the national average (62 per cent at June 1997, compared with about 34 per cent nationally). Changes in federal funding for these services have had an impact across the sector as a whole, as child care service providers adjust to the realities of supply and demand. This impact is exacerbated by changes in workforce participation.

During 1997-98, revised minimum standards for child care centres were implemented, reflecting the national minimum standards. Implementation arrangements are now being developed for the introduction of minimum standards in other child care settings.

Quality promotion activities during 1997-98 included the further development of a competency assessment support system for children's services, the provision of capital upgrading funding to child care centres and outside school hours care services, and support for flexible course delivery and outside school hours care service management.

Development of early childhood care services in remote Aboriginal communities has continued. Funding, licensing and service support systems are gradually shaping appropriate responses to the particular contexts in which these services are being delivered.

The NT data provided for this Report are not complete due to incompatibilities between current data collected and the requirements of this Report. Work is continuing to better align the two systems for the future.

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