
14 Protection and support services

Protection and support services aim to assist individuals and families in crisis or experiencing difficulties that hinder personal or family functioning. They aim to alleviate the difficulties and reduce the potential for recurrence. This chapter reports on:

- *child protection services*: functions of government that receive and assess allegations of child abuse and neglect, provide and refer clients to family support and other relevant services, and take statutory action to protect children (section 14.1);
- *supported placement services*: care for children placed away from their parents for protective or other family welfare reasons (also referred to as out-of-home care) (section 14.2); and
- *supported accommodation and assistance services*: services to assist, young people adults and families who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless (section 14.3).

Within each section of this chapter, a profile of the service is presented, followed by a brief discussion of recent policy developments. Together these provide a context for assessing the performance indicators presented later in the section. All jurisdictions have agreed to develop and report comparable indicators, and a framework of performance indicators is outlined for each service. The data are then discussed, and each section concludes with a discussion of future directions for performance reporting. The chapter concludes with jurisdictions' comments.

The major improvement from the 1999 Report is the inclusion of new outcome and quality indicators for child protection and supported placements. Data are also included on efficiency for child protection and supported placements for the first time. Also included is a discussion of descriptive data on investigations and substantiations by Indigenous status, and descriptive material on intensive family support services. Work will continue to develop strategies to enable reporting of data on intensive family support services.

Protection and support services covered in this chapter are provided mainly through State and Territory community services departments. The Commonwealth Government is involved in researching child protection, funding preventative strategies, and funding and planning supported accommodation and assistance. A

range of other government services (such as education, health, justice, housing, police and disability services) also affect children who come into contact with community services departments for protective reasons.

Recurrent expenditure on child protection and supported placements was at least \$435 million across Australia in 1998-99 (table 14A.1). Recurrent expenditure on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was \$230 million across Australia in that year (table 14A.62).

14.1 Child protection services

Profile of protection and support services

Child protection services are provided to protect children and young people at risk of harm within their families or in circumstances in which their families do not have the capacity to protect them. Child protection activities may include:

- receiving and responding to allegations of child abuse and neglect, including investigation and assessment where appropriate;
- providing support services (directly or through referral) where harm or a risk of significant harm is identified, to strengthen the capacity of families to care safely for children;
- initiating formal statutory intervention, including applying to the court for protective orders, to secure the safety of children or young people;
- ensuring the ongoing safety of children and young people by working with families to resolve protective concerns;
- working with young people to identify alternative support living arrangements where family reunification is not possible;
- working with families to reunite children — removed for safety reasons — with their parents as soon as possible; and
- securing permanent alternative care when it is determined that a child is unable to be returned to the care of their parents.

This section provides information on statutory child protection assessment and response services. In the future, information on intensive family support services to families involved in the child protection system will be included. This year a description of these intensive services is provided (box 14.1).

Box 14.1 Intensive family support services related to the protection of children

The delivery of care and protection services by Australian community welfare departments is underpinned by two fundamental principles: first, that children must be protected from harm, and second, that it is generally in the best interests of the child for them to live within their family network.

Jurisdictions provide for a range of intensive family support services which aim to strengthen and support families to prevent the long term removal of children from their families for protective reasons. Recourse to the courts to take over guardianship of children, and the placement of children in out-of-home care, are seen as last resort measures and usually are only pursued when all other attempts at maintaining the child within their family have failed.

Intensive family support services are aimed at:

- preventing family separation;
- reunifying families after children have been removed for protective reasons; and
- providing intensive therapeutic services for the child and/or family members to deal with the effect of child abuse and/or neglect.

Intensive family support services are usually coordinated by departmental child protection workers. They may be delivered by child protection workers, other specialist workers, special-purpose intensive family support teams or funded non-government services. A variety of services may be provided, including assessment and case planning, individual and family counselling, parenting skills development, problem solving training, mediation, anger management, respite care, brokerage and referral services, and practical and financial support. Generally intensive intervention is provided over three to six months.

Roles and responsibilities

State or Territory community welfare departments are responsible for investigating and assessing child abuse and neglect reports, and making court applications when an order is required to protect a child. These departments also fund family support services and supported placements services, which may be delivered by the government or by the non-government sector. The non-government sector plays a significant role in the delivery of these services in all States and Territories (see the survey of community services in SCRCSSP 1997).

Other areas of government also have a role in child protection and, more broadly, provide services for children who have come into contact with community services departments for protective reasons.

Examples include:

- the police services' role in investigating serious allegations of child abuse and neglect, particularly criminal matters;
- the courts' role in deciding whether a child will be placed on an order;
- the role of education and child care services in providing services for these children, as well as in mandatory reporting and protective behaviours education in some jurisdictions;
- the health sector's role in supporting the assessment of child protection matters and delivering therapeutic, counselling and other services; and

Certain environmental and demographic factors are associated with the incidence of child abuse and neglect (box 14.2).

Box 14.2 Factors often associated with child abuse and neglect

Factors identified as common to many child abuse and neglect substantiations include social factors (such as social stresses, social isolation, poverty, unemployment, cultural expectations and norms, and poor housing) and lack of access to, or inability to access, support services.

A 1995 Victorian study found that families investigated as result of a notification of child abuse and neglect tended to be more likely than the wider community to:

- be renting (60 per cent compared with 23 per cent in the wider community);
- be on a pension or benefit (58 per cent compared with 26 per cent);
- be a single parent family (46 per cent compared with 17 per cent); and
- be more mobile (90 per cent of families had moved in the past five years compared with 42 per cent in the wider community).

Other major factors associated with child abuse and neglect include parents' disability, mental health, poor parenting skills and substance abuse.

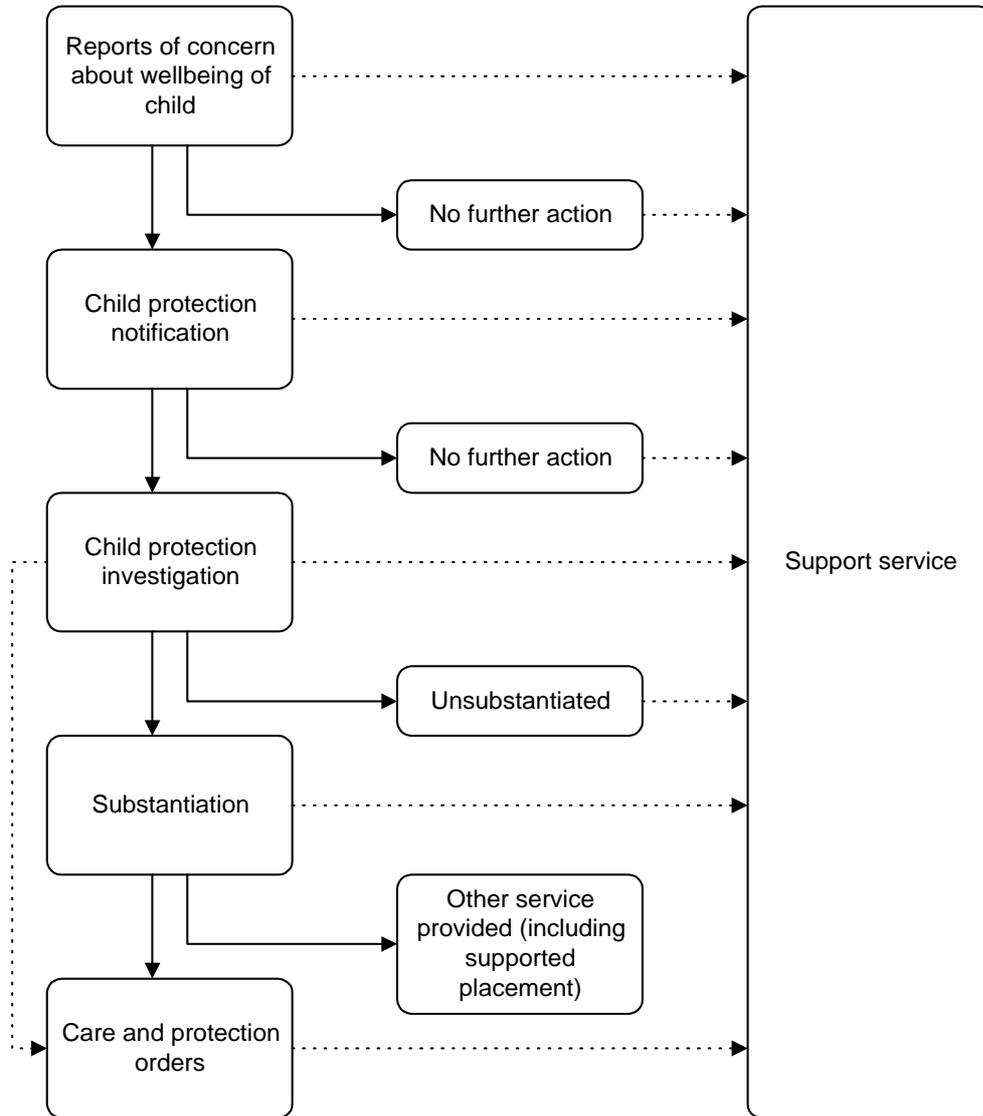
Sources: AIHW (1997); DHS (1995).

The child protection notification, investigation and substantiation process

There are various broad stages in the child protection/investigation process (figure 14.1), but the specific procedures vary across jurisdictions, reflecting differences in legislation, policies and practices. Authorised departments are notified of concerns about the wellbeing of children. These reports may be made by groups of people mandated to report abuse or neglect (box 14.3), or by other

members of the community (including children subject to abuse or neglect). The most common sources of notifications in 1997-98 were parents or guardians, friends or neighbours, school personnel and police (AIHW 1999b).

Figure 14.1 **Child protection investigation process**



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

Jurisdictions count notifications at different points in responding to a child protection report, ranging from the point of initial contact with a caller to the end of a screening and decision making process. This means the number of notifications is not comparable across jurisdictions.

Box 14.3 **Common definitions of types of abuse and neglect**

Although there are significant differences across jurisdictions in how child protection matters are defined, definitions of types of abuse and neglect (that is, physical, sexual, emotional and neglect) are reasonably consistent.

Physical abuse

In most States physical abuse or maltreatment is any non-accidental injury inflicted on a child which results in physical injury to the child. Some States define the type of maltreatment. Tasmania, Victoria and WA refer to physical injuries as a result of neglect. NSW defines physical abuse as the:

... non-accidental injury to a child by a parent, caregiver or another person responsible for the child. It includes injuries which are caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings, bruising, lacerations or welts, burns fractures or dislocation, female genital mutilation, attempted suffocation or strangulation and death.

Sexual abuse

Most State and Territory definitions of sexual abuse are based on the child being subjected to behaviours and actions inappropriate to the child's age or level of development. WA defines sexual maltreatment as:

... occurring when a child has been exposed or subject to sexual behaviours or acts which are exploitative and/or inappropriate to his or her age of developmental level. Harm which results from sexual maltreatment includes significant emotional trauma, physical injury or impaired development, although in some circumstances harm may not be identifiable.

Neglect

Many States and Territories refer to commissions or omissions of the caregiver that results in an impairment to the child's development. ACT defines neglect as:

... any serious omission or commission by a person which jeopardies or impairs the child's psychological, intellectual or physical development. The most common forms of neglect are: inadequate supervision of young children for long periods; failure to provide adequate nutrition, clothing, personal hygiene; failure to seek needed or recommended medical care which may otherwise result in serious harm to the child and disregard for potential serious hazards in the home.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse definitions vary across the States and Territories. However, most refer to attitudes and behaviours directed at a child or young person which leads to impairment of their social, emotional, cognitive and intellectual development or to impairment of their psychological, physical or emotional development. In Victoria, emotional abuse is seen to have occurred:

... when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats or the witnessing of family violence. It also includes hostility, derogatory name calling and put-downs, or persistent coldness from a person, to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired.

Source: AIHW (forthcoming).

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- Victoria and SA have what can be described as mainly caller defined notifications. Instances where a caller believes a child is in need of protection are designated by the department as notifications. As a result the rates per 1000 children are highest in these States. NT notifications are also caller defined, but data entry issues (which are being addressed) mean the count does not reflect this designation.
 - NSW, Queensland and the ACT screen each incoming report before deciding whether it will be designated and counted as a notification. This reduces the proportion of calls that become notifications. The number of reports that are screened out is not recorded in this collection. Courts determine whether a child or young person will be placed on a care and protection order and have a role in determining such matters as family contact and reunification.
 - WA and Tasmania also undertake a screening process with incoming reports, but their policies incorporate a narrower definition of child protection than used by other jurisdictions. They define only reports of suspected maltreatment as notifications; other reports of concern which would be counted as notifications in other States are classified as child and family concern reports, and the response is different from that to notifications of abuse and neglect. Thus the proportion of calls recorded as notifications is likely to be lower in WA and Tasmania than in other jurisdictions. The number of reports that are screened out is not recorded (figure 14.1).

Notifications of child abuse and neglect will be investigated if required, which involves the department obtaining further information about the child and their family, and assessing the child's circumstances and needs. This process determines either:

- that there is no reasonable cause to suspect the child has been, is being, or is likely to be abused or neglected, or that there is insufficient information to determine abuse or neglect, and the notification is classified as unsubstantiated; or
- that child abuse or neglect is substantiated.

Tasmania also has a 'child at risk' category. This applies when the notification is not classified as substantiated, but when there are reasonable grounds for suspecting the possibility of previous or future abuse or neglect, so further involvement of the department is considered to be warranted. These cases may be substantiated in other jurisdictions. If harm or risk of harm is substantiated, action will be taken to protect the child if it is required (including court action if warranted).

The family can be referred to appropriate support services at any point during the process of responding to a child protection notification.

In 1998-99 there were around 103 000 notifications (although defined differently across jurisdictions) of suspected child abuse and neglect. The number of notifications increased between 1996-97 and 1998-99 in SA (by 30 per cent), WA (by 22 per cent), Queensland (by 21 per cent), NSW (by 1 per cent) and Victoria (by 9 per cent), and decreased in Tasmania (by 72 per cent) (table 14.1).

Table 14.1 Notifications of child abuse and neglect^a

	NSW	Vic ^b	Qld ^c	WA	SA	Tas ^d	ACT	NT ^e
Number of child protection notifications ^f								
1996-97	^g	31 707	15 478	2 099	10 094	2 363	1 220	481
1997-98	31 223	33 163	17 233	2 447	11 651	1 016	1 125	710
1998-99	31 513	34 679	18 721	2 568	13 132	653	1 358	na
Number of individual Indigenous children notified per 1000 Indigenous children aged 0–16 years ^h								
1996-97	^g	92.6	33.5	18.1	63.2	10.0	43.9	9.4
1997-98	35.4	113.2	37.5	18.8	81.5	1.6	52.4	13.1
1998-99	49.3	na	24.5	18.8	107.3	2.4	44.4	na
Number of individual non-Indigenous children notified per 1000 non-Indigenous children aged 0–16 years ^h								
1996-97	^g	22.0	13.1	3.5	18.3	15.0	11.5	7.7
1997-98	16.4	23.1	13.9	4.1	20.7	7.4	11.3	9.5
1998-99	15.7	na	16.0	4.3	22.8	3.6	16.8	na
Number of individual children notified per 1000 children aged 0–16 years ^h								
1996-97	^g	22.8	14.2	4.3	19.5	15.0	12.1	8.3
1997-98	17.1	24.0	15.3	4.9	22.5	7.1	12.0	10.9
1998-99	16.9	24.7	16.5	5.1	25.3	3.5	17.3	na

^a Definitions of a notification vary. Refer to footnotes for each State and Territory in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. ^b Data on Indigenous children are not included for 1998-99 due to concerns regarding data quality. A review of this data are underway and data are expected to be available for the next Report. ^c 1996-97 data relate to the 1996 calendar year. ^d New intake and assessment guidelines were introduced in July 1999, which are likely to have contributed to the drop in the number of notifications in 1998-99. Child and family concern reports are no longer included in the count for notifications. Notifications include allegations of maltreatment, and the focus of the department is on the level of harm rather than the incident. ^e Data on child protection and supported placement services for 1998-99 are unavailable. ^f If a child was the subject of more than one notification in the period, then each notification was counted in the number of notifications. ^g 1996-97 data were available for the period 1 April 1997 to 30 June 1997, during which 7776 notifications were made (representation in population: 39.3 per 1000 Indigenous children; 18.3 per 1000 non-Indigenous children; 19.0 per 1000 children). ^h Each child was counted only once even if the child was the subject of more than one notification in the year.

Sources: tables 14A.3, 14A.5, 14A.7, 14A.9, 14A.11, 14A.13, 14A.15 and 14A.17.

All jurisdictions screen the information received from callers before deciding whether to commence a child protection investigation (table 14.2). The processes used are similar once it has been decided that an investigation is required, and they include checking information systems for any previous history; obtaining information from other organisations and individuals who have had contact with the family; undertaking discussion/case planning with agencies and individuals; interviewing/sighting the child; and interviewing caregivers/parents. At a minimum

this process involves sighting the child whenever practicable, determining an outcome and assessing protective needs.

Table 14.2 Investigations of child abuse and neglect

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic^a</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT^b</i>
Number of investigations of child abuse and neglect ^c								
1996-97	4 976	14 416	12 926	1 933	7 323	1 878	999	473
1997-98	22 183	14 693	14 484	2 285	4 841	609	912	684
1998-99	19 798	13 708	15 010	2 450	5 198	653	1 192	na
Number of Indigenous children who were subject to finalised investigation per 1000 Indigenous children aged 0–16 years ^d								
1996-97	22.8	65.3	27.3	14.4	52.0	7.0	34.6	9.3
1997-98	24.9	80.9	26.2	16.3	46.7	1.6	38.7	12.5
1998-99	34.9	na	14.8	17.5	53.3	2.4	41.6	na
Number of non-Indigenous children who were subject to finalised investigation per 1000 non-Indigenous children aged 0–16 years ^d								
1996-97	9.5	11.1	9.6	3.2	14.9	13.0	8.9	7.6
1997-98	10.4	10.5	9.2	3.5	9.4	5.0	8.7	9.2
1998-99	8.3	na	8.9	4.0	10.3	3.1	15.3	na
Number of children who were subject to finalised investigation per 1000 children aged 0–16 years ^d								
1996-97	9.9	11.8	10.6	3.8	15.9	13.0	9.3	8.2
1997-98	10.8	11.1	10.2	4.2	10.5	4.8	9.2	10.5
1998-99	9.2	11.1	9.3	4.7	11.5	3.1	15.8	na

^a Data on Indigenous children are not included for 1998-99 due to concerns regarding data quality. A review of this data are underway and data are expected to be available for the next Report. ^b Data on child protection and supported placement services for 1998-99 are unavailable. ^c If a child was the subject of more than one investigation in the period, then each investigation was counted in the number of investigations. ^d Each child was counted only once even if the child was the subject of more than one investigation in the year. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.3, 14A.5, 14A.7, 14A.9, 14A.11, 14A.13, 14A.15 and 14A.17.

An investigation will result in a substantiation or a decision not to substantiate (table 14.3). If an investigation results in substantiation, action may be needed to protect the child. This often occurs without the need for a court order, but a children's court or equivalent may issue a care and protection order based on an application and recommendation from child protection services. This may take place at any point in the child protection investigation process (figure 14.1). The children's court judiciary (magistrate or judge) determine whether a child or young person should be placed on a care and protection order based on the evidence presented. Not all applications sought by community service departments are granted. For applications that are granted, different care and protection orders are available, such as requiring supervision by the authorities, or part or full custody or guardianship to the State. The types of orders available vary across jurisdictions.

Table 14.3 Substantiations of child abuse and neglect

	NSW	Vic ^a	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT ^b
Number of substantiations of child abuse and neglect ^c								
1996-97	1 791	7 034	4 895	982	2 527	244	376	252
1997-98	8 406	7 357	6 323	1 135	1 915	135	411	343
1998-99	7 540	7 251	6 373	1 215	2 114	128	442	na
Number of Indigenous children who were the subject of a substantiation, per 1000 Indigenous children aged 0–16 years ^d								
1996-97	10.8	38.1	12.6	9.4	25.9	2.4	17.7	6.1
1997-98	12.9	46.4	15.8	10.8	26.3	0.4	23.7	7.3
1998-99	16.6	na	9.9	11.6	26.8	1.1	16.2	na
Number of non-Indigenous children who were the subject of a substantiation, per 1000 non-Indigenous children aged 0–16 years ^d								
1996-97	4.2	5.8	3.9	1.8	5.6	1.8	3.9	3.3
1997-98	4.7	5.6	4.5	1.9	4.0	1.1	4.4	4.4
1998-99	4.0	na	4.8	2.0	4.6	1.1	5.0	na
Number of children who were the subject of a substantiation, per 1000 children aged 0–16 years ^d								
1996-97	4.5	6.2	4.1	2.2	6.2	1.9	4.1	4.4
1997-98	5.0	5.9	5.1	2.4	4.7	1.1	4.7	5.6
1998-99	4.5	6.3	5.1	2.5	5.2	1.1	5.2	na

^a Data on Indigenous children are not included for 1998-99 due to concerns regarding data quality. A review of this data are underway and data are expected to be available for the next Report. ^b Data on child protection and supported placement services for 1998-99 are unavailable. ^c If a child was the subject of more than one substantiation in the period, then each substantiation was counted in the number of substantiations. ^d Each child was counted only once even if the child was the subject of more than one substantiation in the year.

Sources: tables 14A.3, 14A.5, 14A.7, 14A.9, 14A.11, 14A.13, 14A.15 and 14A.17.

Just under 18 000 children were on care and protection orders at 30 June 1999. Children may be placed on care and protection orders for a number of reasons, but the majority of children on such orders have been the subject of a substantiation of abuse or neglect. In some State and Territory legislation a wide range of child and parent factors (including disability, mental health issues and imprisonment) may lead to a child or young person being placed on an order (table 14.4). In other States' legislation, the need for an order (care and protection) is defined more narrowly.

Child protection services and care and protection orders relate to children aged 0–17 years. The target population for supported placements, discussed in section 14.2, is also aged 0–17 years. However, while the services related to 0–17 year olds in all jurisdictions, data for rates for notifications, investigations and substantiations are calculated for children aged 0–16 year olds, given differences in jurisdictions' legislation, policies and practices in relation to 17 year olds.

Table 14.4 Children on care and protection orders^a

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic^b</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT^c</i>
Number of children on care and protection orders								
At June 1997	5 764	3 865	3 249	785	1 172	508	264	111
At June 1998	5 987	4 215	3 433	799	1 102	520	255	138
At June 1999	6 948	4 358	3 609	1 019	1 024	440	236	na
Number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders per 1000 Indigenous children aged 0–17 years								
At June 1997	20.4	22.7	17.2	8.2	18.4	5.0	21.5	2.6
At June 1998	22.3	28.2	16.5	8.1	15.3	4.6	31.2	3.1
At June 1999	28.7	na	16.7	11.0	14.9	4.6	24.0	na
Number of non-Indigenous children on care and protection orders per 1000 non-Indigenous children aged 0–17 years								
At June 1997	3.1	3.2	2.9	1.3	2.9	4.0	2.9	1.5
At June 1998	3.1	3.5	3.1	1.3	2.7	4.2	2.7	1.9
At June 1999	3.5	na	3.2	2.2	2.5	3.5	2.6	na
Number of children on care and protection orders per 1000 children aged 0–17 years								
At June 1997	3.7	3.4	3.7	1.7	3.3	4.0	3.2	1.9
At June 1998	3.8	3.7	3.8	1.7	3.1	4.2	3.2	2.4
At June 1999	4.4	3.8	4.0	2.9	2.9	3.6	3.0	na

^a Types of care and protection orders vary. Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. ^b Data on Indigenous children are not included in the current report due to concerns regarding data quality. A review of this data are underway and data are expected to be available for the next Report. ^c Data on child protection and supported placement services for 1998-99 are unavailable.

Sources: tables 14A.3, 14A.5, 14A.7, 14A.9, 14A.11, 14A.13, 14A.15 and 14A.17.

Policy developments in child protection services

Many States and Territories are continuing to implement child protection reforms to deal with the increasing number of notifications of child abuse and neglect across Australia, and to ensure that children and families receive the types of service most likely to best meet their needs. WA and Tasmania have implemented classification systems which separate child maltreatment from child concern reports, and SA and Victoria have implemented systems which differentiate between cases of serious risk (such as sexual abuse or serious physical abuse) and those of significant need (such as a child who is consistently inadequately dressed for the weather, or a child who is consistently dirty or unwashed). Under Victoria's system of differential responses, the decision about the most appropriate response type is determined on the basis of not only the problem type or assigned risk level, but also the response most likely to initiate a constructive outcome for the child and family. The ACT has also introduced new legislation which is expected to be proclaimed in the first half of 2000.

This has allowed the development of alternative and supportive approaches to families rather than a purely investigatory response. Victoria and SA have implemented risk assessment frameworks which assist social workers in determining the consequences of harm and the likelihood of abuse or neglect occurring or re-occurring, and which assist in targeting services to those families and children at highest risk or need.

Several States are giving consideration to the introduction of the *Looking After Children* approach to care planning for children and young people in out of home care.

Several jurisdictions have introduced or passed new legislation. Queensland's Act, to be proclaimed in early 2000, shifts the emphasis from abuse or neglect, to whether a child or young person has suffered harm or is likely to suffer harm. This has enabled a more inclusive and child focused approach. NSW's Act, also expected to be proclaimed in 2000, provides staff with greater flexibility in responding to a child abuse report. It also shifts the focus to the children and young people most at risk, and emphasises a search for early solutions through cooperation between government and community agencies. WA is continuing intensive work in drafting new child protection legislation, and has introduced new specialist protection teams to deal with investigatory and statutory work with children. The ACT has passed the *Children and Young People Act 1999*, which is expected to be proclaimed no later than May 2000.

State and Territory community services ministers agreed in October 1996 to establish a steering committee to consider the transfer of child protection orders and proceedings across jurisdictions. Victoria has taken the lead role in the development of a legislative and policy framework that would allow for orders and proceedings to be transferred. New Zealand is a participant in this initiative. The protocol to implement the transfer of orders and proceedings commenced on 1 November 1999.

Framework of performance indicators

The framework of performance indicators for child protection services is based on shared government objectives (box 14.4). The framework identifies key result areas which indicate the extent to which these broad objectives are met (figure 14.2).

New and refined indicators

The report from Gain and Young (box 14.5) was completed in 1998. Following consultation in each jurisdiction, two new outcome and quality indicators were proposed for child protection:

- substantiation after an initial decision not to substantiate; and
- continuity of case workers.

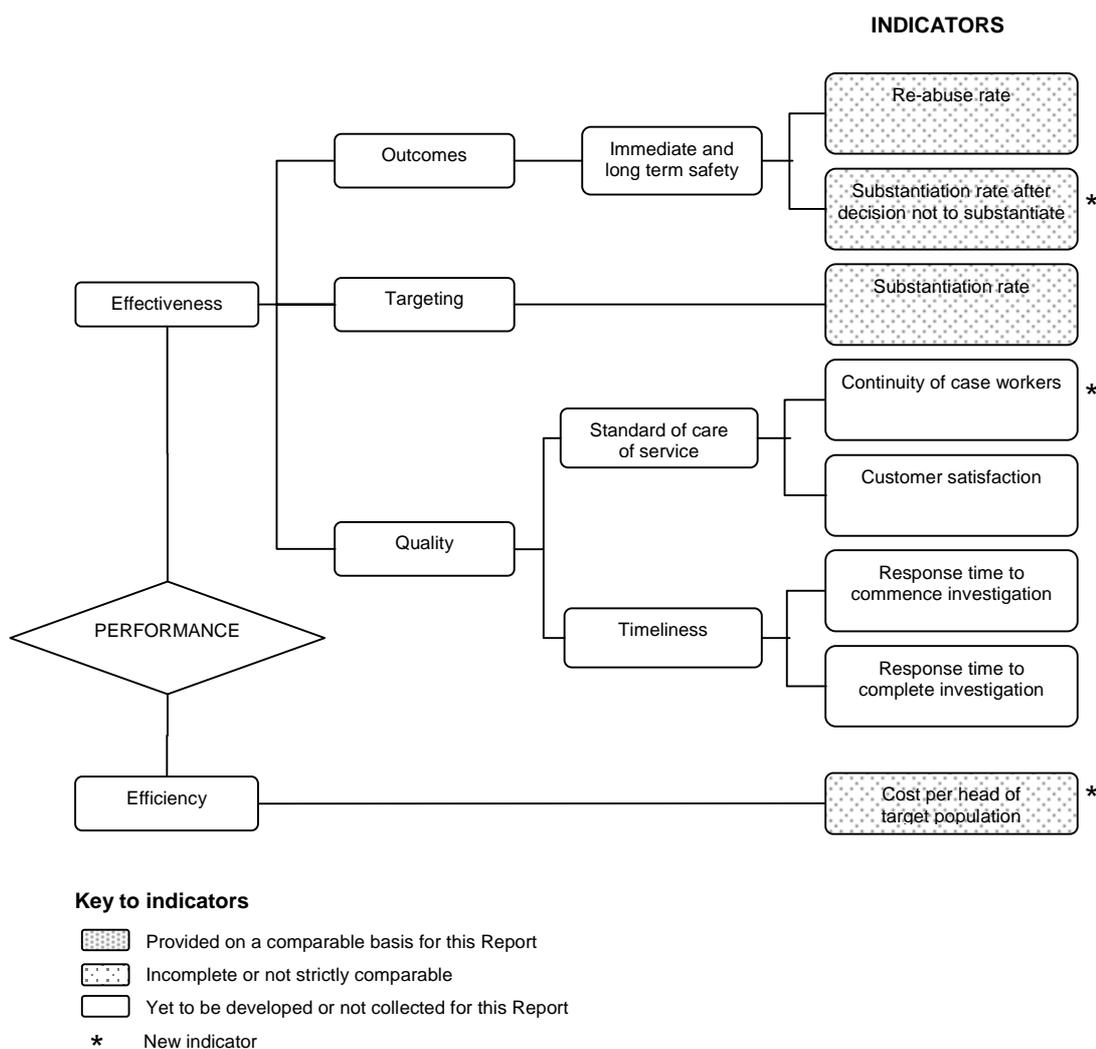
Box 14.4 Objectives for child protection services

The aims of child protection services are to:

- protect children and young people at risk of harm within their family or in circumstances in which the family of the child or young person does not have the capacity to protect them; and
- assist families to protect children and young people.

These services should be provided in an efficient and effective manner.

Figure 14.2 Performance indicators for child protection services



Data are provided in this Report for the first new indicator. The second indicator measures the number of different case workers involved in a particular case over a certain period of time. This reflects the degree of continuity or stability for the child in terms of dealing with the same case worker. Data on the continuity of case workers are not being provided in this Report.

The method for measuring the re-abuse rate has been refined. Measurement has also been made at a shorter point in time for the first time, to capture immediate safety. Also for the first time, efficiency data are reported. Ongoing work to provide a more comprehensive set of performance indicators and to improve existing indicators and the data, are discussed in 'Future directions in performance reporting'.

Box 14.5 Developments in outcome indicators for child protection and supported placements

An international literature review and critical analysis of child protection and supported placement outcome indicators was commissioned by the Steering Committee (on behalf of the States and Territories) in May 1998.

Major theoretical issues highlighted in the review concern:

- the difficulty of clearly distinguishing output and outcome indicators; and
- the difficulty of defining outcomes that are a direct measure of program effectiveness, given a lack of knowledge of causal links between child protection and support activities and improved outcomes.

Long term outcome indicators, for example, are vital for showing what happens in children's lives, but on their own cannot be used as measures of the effectiveness of child welfare services because many other factors help shape the circumstances of a child's life.

The review noted that outcome indicators for both child protection and supported placements can be classified as indicators of safety, permanency/stability or child wellbeing. The report recommended specific outcome indicators for the goals of safety and permanency/stability.

No preferred indicators for the child wellbeing goal were identified, given the lack of well developed and tested indicators in the international literature. However, the authors note that child (and family) wellbeing is an important area of outcomes, and that the development of indicators should be pursued as a longer term priority.

Source: Gain and Young (1998).

Key performance indicator results

Different delivery contexts, locations and types of client may affect the effectiveness and efficiency of child protection services. 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.

Outcomes — repeat abuse and neglect

Child protection services aim to prevent the recurrence of abuse and neglect towards children. One way of observing whether this is achieved is to measure re-abuse (or re-substantiation). Re-abuse may involve a range of types of abuse and neglect with varying levels of seriousness. This Report provides data on two indicators of re-abuse. The key difference between the two indicators is the condition of case closure.

The first indicator, ‘repeat abuse and neglect after case closure’, reports on those cases that were closed during the previous financial year and for which a further substantiation occurred within 12 months of case closure, as a proportion of all cases that were closed during the same period. This indicator has been reported in previous Reports.

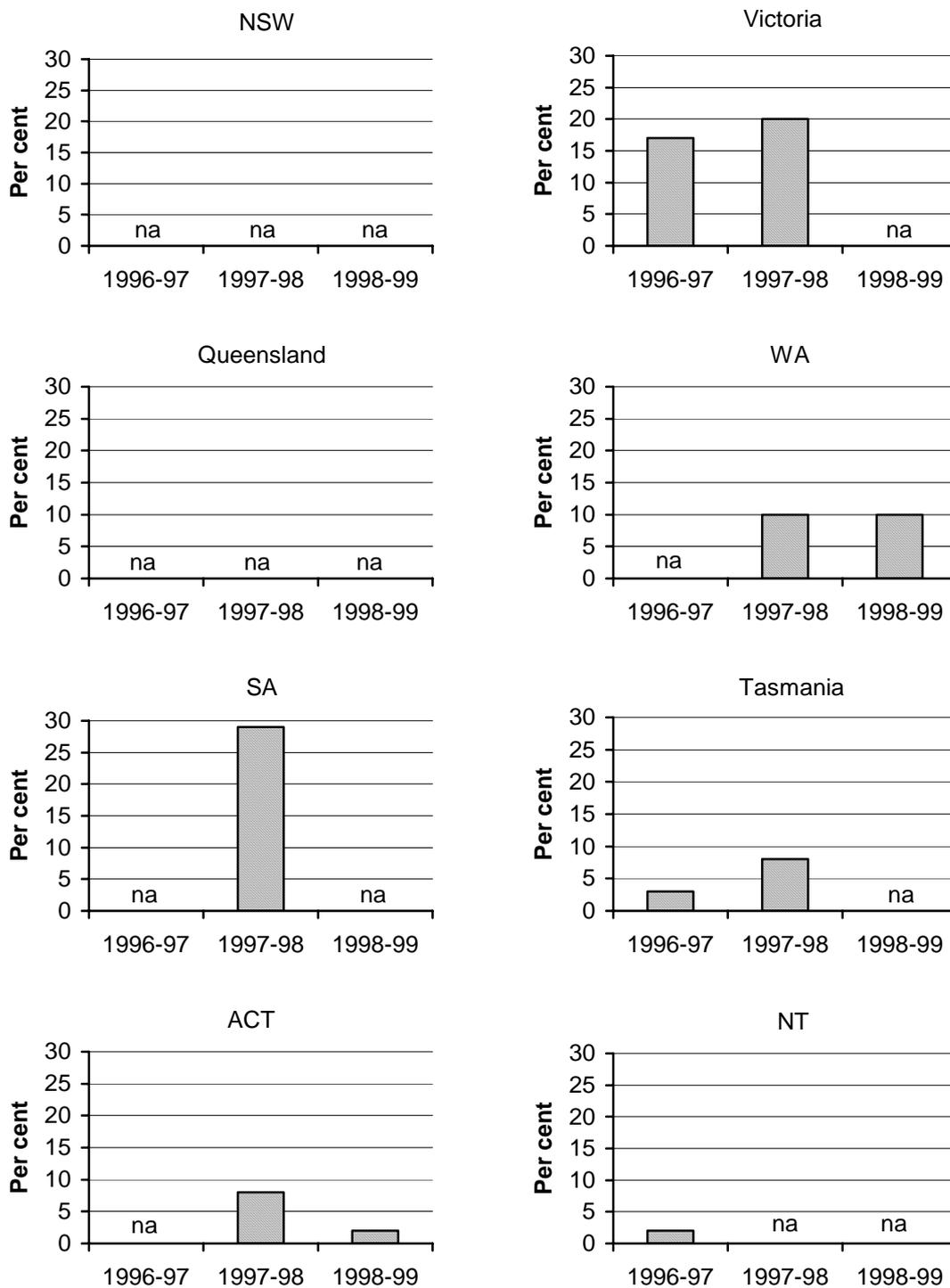
The second (and new) indicator, ‘repeat abuse and neglect for all cases’, counts substantiations that occurred in the current financial year and for which there was a previous substantiation in a preceding time period (three months and twelve months) as a proportion of all cases that were substantiated in the current financial year.

For this year’s Report, the Steering Committee has decided to report results for both indicators. In future Reports, the latter indicator will be reviewed to assess differences in the definition of case closure across jurisdictions.

Data on ‘repeat abuse and neglect after case closure’ that are comparable across jurisdictions were not available for this Report. However, data are comparable within each jurisdiction between 1996-97 and 1998-99 (figure 14.3). Victoria, WA, Tasmania and the ACT were the only jurisdictions that supplied data for at least two years.

- Victoria’s rate of repeat abuse and neglect after case closure was 20 per cent in 1997-98, compared with 17 per cent in 1996-97.
- The WA rate of repeat abuse and neglect after case closure was 10 per cent in 1998-99, unchanged from 1997-98.

Figure 14.3 Repeat abuse and neglect within 12 months of case closure^{a, b}



^a Children who were the subject of another substantiated notification in the 12 months after their cases were closed (as a proportion of all children who were the subject of a substantiated notification in the previous year and whose cases were closed during the previous year). ^b Data are not comparable across jurisdictions because definitions of substantiation vary significantly. Consequently, rates should not be compared across jurisdictions. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.4, 14A.6, 14A.8, 14A.10, 14A.12, 14A.14, 14A.16 and 14A.18.

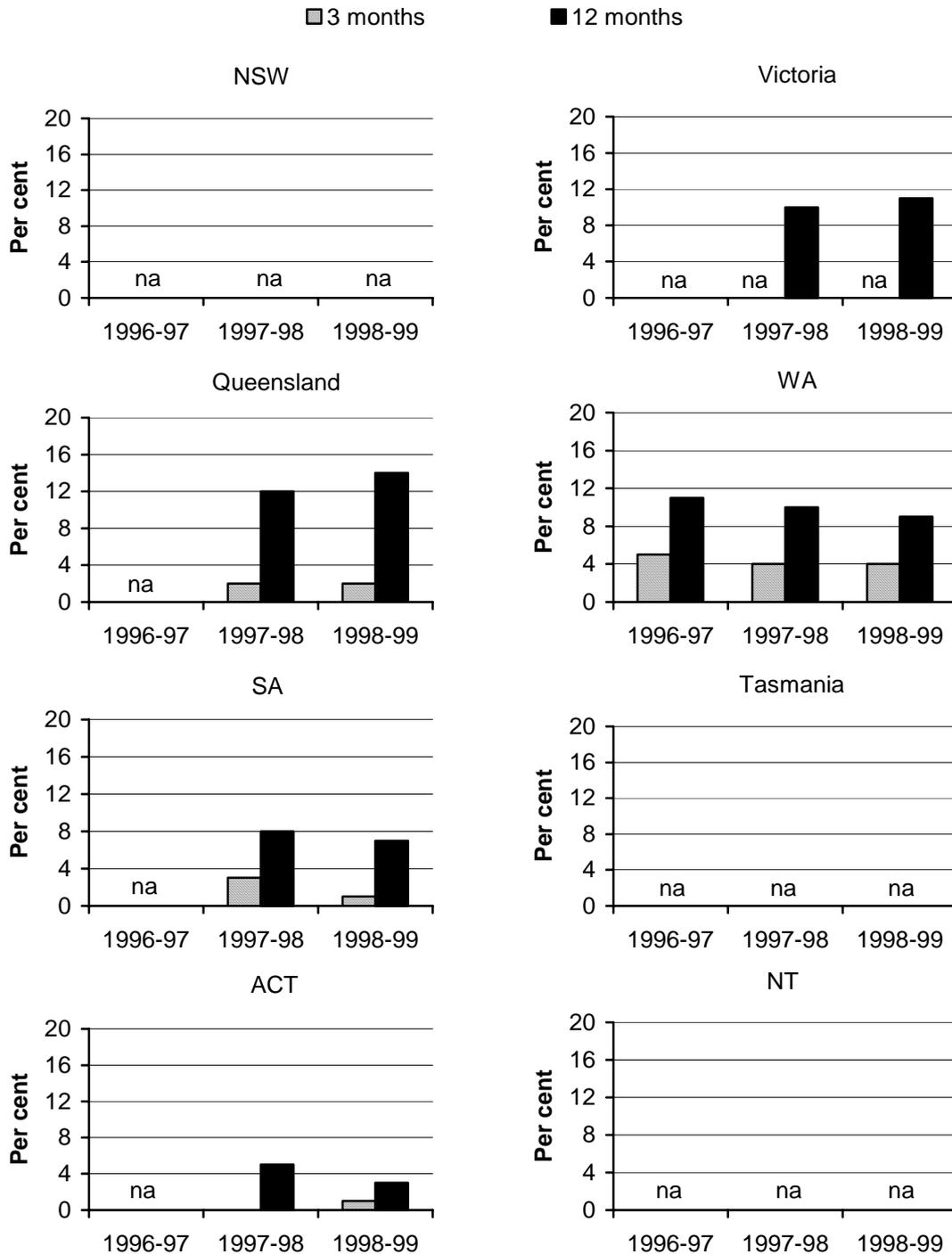
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- Tasmania's rate of repeat abuse and neglect after case closure was 8 per cent in 1997-98, compared with 3 per cent in 1996-97.
 - The ACT's rate of repeat abuse and neglect after case closure was 2 per cent in 1998-99, compared with 8 per cent in 1997-98.

Only two jurisdictions (WA and the ACT) were able to supply 1998-99 data on repeat abuse and neglect within 12 months of case closure.

Data on 'repeat abuse and neglect for all cases' that are comparable across jurisdictions were not available for this Report. However, data are comparable within each jurisdiction over time (figure 14.4). This is a new indicator this year and only five jurisdictions (Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA and the ACT) were able to provide data on this indicator for 1998-99. These jurisdictions were also able to provide data for at least one previous year.

- In Victoria, the proportion of substantiations related to children who had been party to a prior substantiation within the previous 12 months increased from 10 per cent in 1997-98 to 11 per cent in 1998-99.
- In Queensland, the proportion of substantiations related to children who had been party to a prior substantiation within the previous 12 months increased from 12 per cent in 1997-98 to 14 per cent in 1998-99. The proportion of substantiations related to a prior substantiation within the previous three months remained constant at 2 per cent for 1997-98 and 1998-99.
- In WA, the proportion of substantiations related to a prior substantiation within the previous 12 months fell consistently from 11 per cent to 10 per cent to 9 per cent during 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99 respectively. Over the same period, substantiations related to a prior substantiation within the previous three months remained relatively constant at around 4 per cent.
- In SA, the proportion of substantiations related to a prior substantiation within the previous 12 months fell from 8 per cent in 1997-98 to 7 per cent in 1998-99. Substantiations related to a prior substantiation within the previous three months fell from 3 per cent to 1 per cent over the same period.
- In the ACT, the proportion of substantiations related to a prior substantiation within the previous 12 months fell from 5 per cent in 1997-98 to 3 per cent in 1998-99. Substantiations related to a prior substantiation within the previous three months were zero in 1997-98 and 1 per cent in 1998-99.

Figure 14.4 Proportion of children who were substantiated during the year, where there was a prior substantiation in the previous 3 months and 12 months^a



^a Data are not comparable across jurisdictions because definitions of substantiation vary significantly. Consequently, rates should not be compared across jurisdictions. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.4, 14A.6, 14A.8, 14A.10, 14A.12, 14A.14, 14A.16 and 14A.18.

Outcomes — substantiation after decision not to substantiate

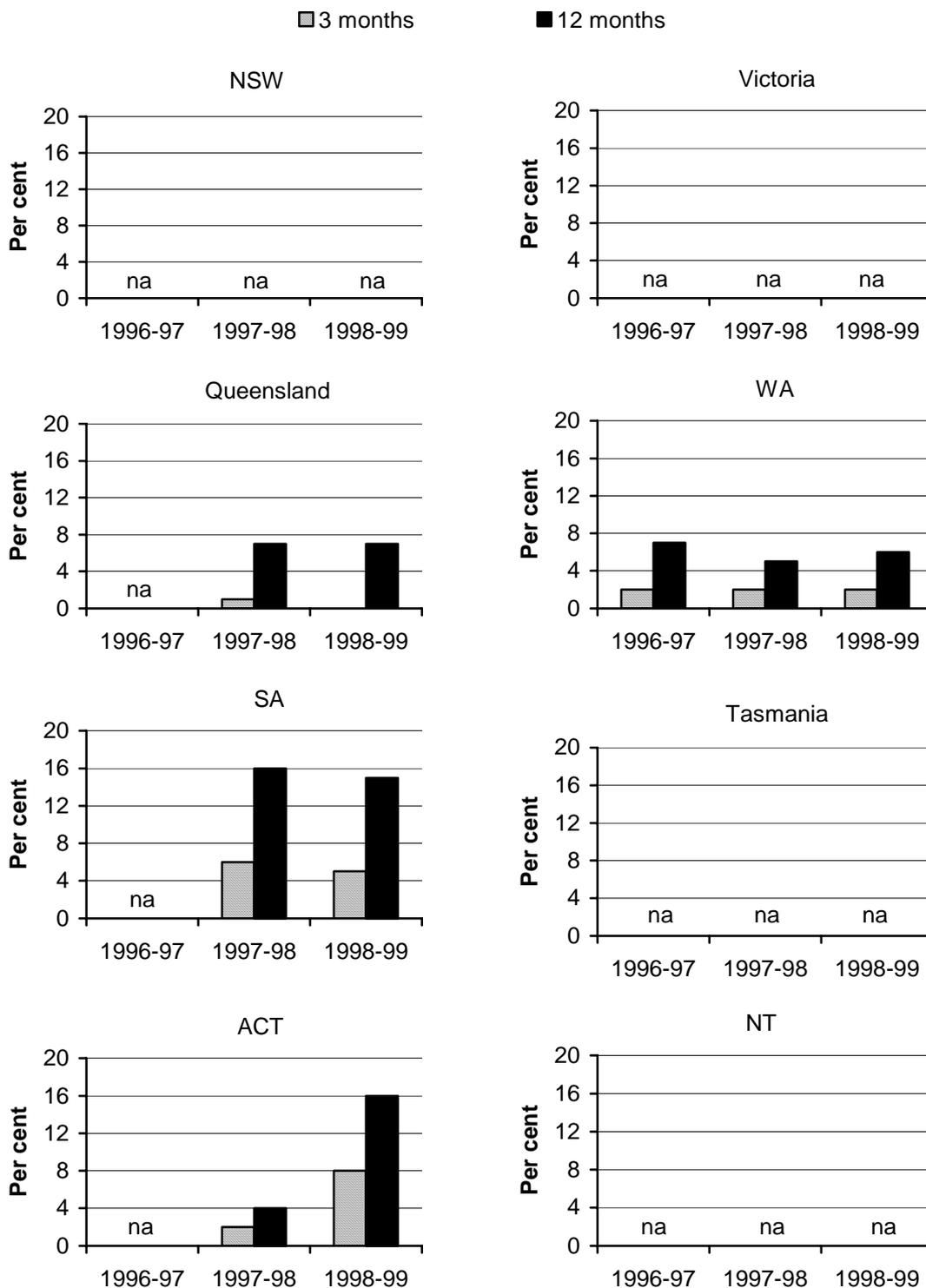
This indicator measures the proportion of children who were the subject of substantiation in the financial year where an investigation in the previous three months and twelve months led to a decision not to substantiate.

These are important indicators of the outcomes of these services, because they partly reveal the extent to which intervention by child protection services has not succeeded in preventing further abuse. The reported results will be affected by factors that are beyond the control of child protection services — such as changes in the family situation (for example, illness, unemployment, a new partner) — so the focus is on changes in the indicator value over time.

Data that are comparable across jurisdictions were not available for this Report. However, data are comparable within each jurisdiction over time (figure 14.5). Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania and the ACT were able to provide data for at least two years.

- In Queensland, the proportion of children involved in a substantiation where there was prior decision not to substantiate within the previous 12 months remained constant at 7 per cent for 1997-98 and 1998-99. The proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in 1998-99 who were also the subject of a previous decision not to substantiate within the previous three months were less than 1 per cent in 1998-99.
- In WA, the proportion of children involved in a substantiation where there was prior decision not to substantiate within the previous 12 months initially fell between 1996-97 and 1997-98 to 5 per cent, then increased marginally to 6 per cent in 1998-99. The proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in 1998-99 who were also the subject of a previous decision not to substantiate within the previous three months remained constant at 2 per cent between 1996-97 and 1998-99.
- In SA, the proportion of children involved in a substantiation where there was prior decision not to substantiate within the previous 12 months fell from 16 per cent in 1997-98 to 15 per cent in 1998-99. Similarly, the proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in 1998-99 who were also the subject of a previous decision not to substantiate within the previous three months fell from 6 per cent in 1997-98 to 5 per cent in 1998-99.
- In the ACT, the proportion of children involved in a substantiation where there was prior decision not to substantiate within the previous 12 months increased significantly from 4 per cent in 1997-98 to 16 per cent in 1998-99. The proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in 1998-99 who

Figure 14.5 Proportion of children who were substantiated during the year, where there was a previous decision not to substantiate^a



^a Data are not comparable across jurisdictions because definitions of substantiation vary significantly. Consequently, rates should not be compared across jurisdictions. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.4, 14A.6, 14A.8, 14A.10, 14A.12, 14A.14, 14A.16 and 14A.18.

were also the subject of a previous decision not to substantiate within the previous three months similarly increased significantly from 2 per cent in 1997-98 to 8 per cent in 1998-99. However, this proportion relates to a relative small number of cases.

Targeting — substantiation rate

Targeting, like appropriateness, is conceptually difficult to measure. The substantiation rate (the proportion of finalised investigations that result in substantiation) attempts to measure the effectiveness of targeting of investigation, recognising the human and financial cost of investigation where there is no abuse or neglect. Decisions on targeting must weigh up these costs of investigation with the cost of failing to investigate a case where abuse and neglect has occurred. However, the substantiation rate only provides information on one aspect of targeting — the proportion of investigations where abuse and neglect was substantiated. It provides no information on cases that were not investigated but for which an investigation would have substantiated abuse and neglect.

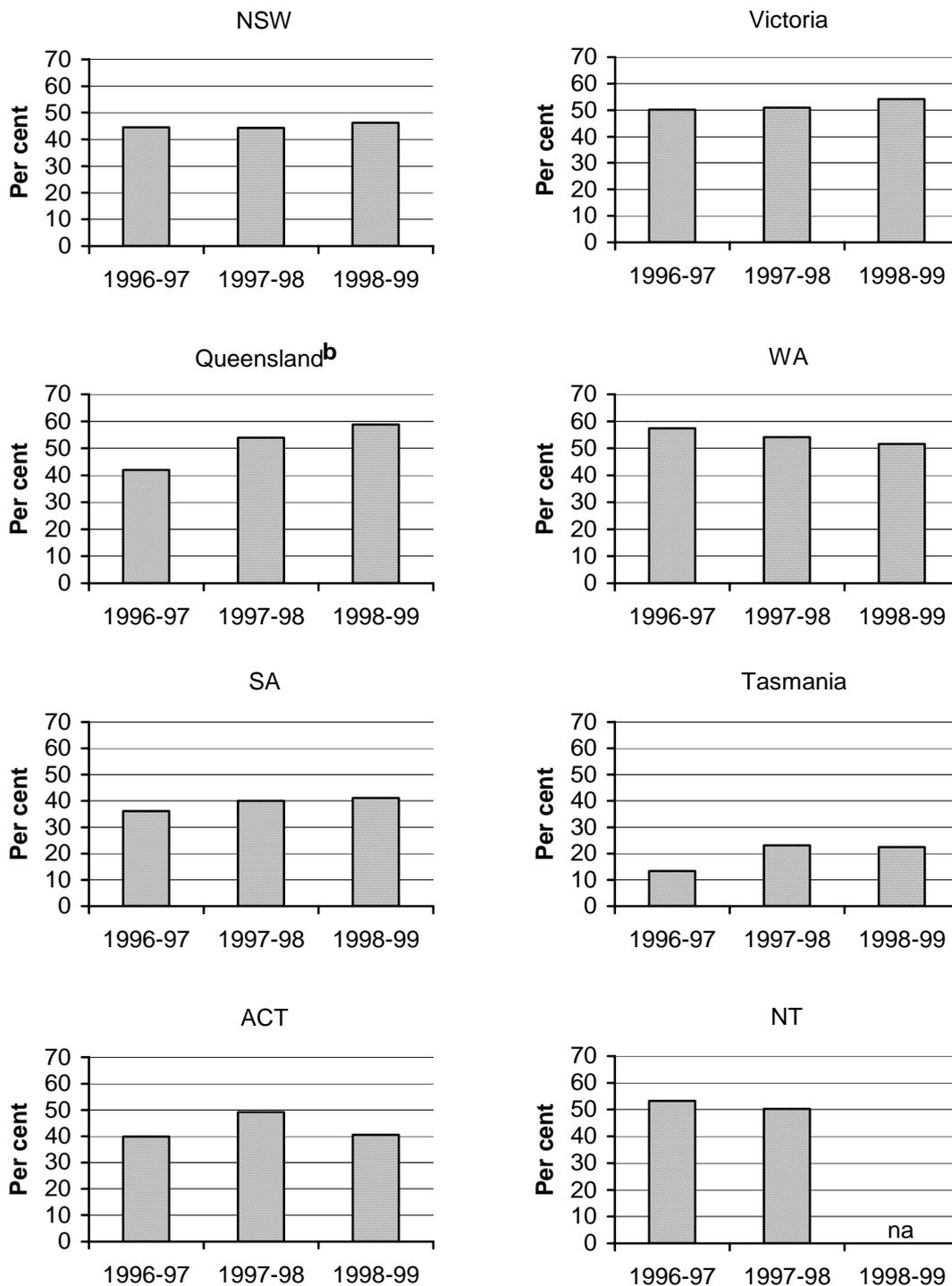
An increase in the substantiation rate may reflect better targeting (that is, the same number of investigations better targeted at cases where abuse and neglect has occurred) or more narrow targeting (that is, fewer investigations targeted at highest priority cases). In the latter case, the benefit (both human and financial) from fewer investigations needs to be weighed up against the costs of abuse and neglect having occurred in the ‘lower risk’ (as determined by the assessment process) cases that were no longer being investigated.

Thus, differences in the substantiation rate across jurisdictions (when comparable data are available) and changes over time within jurisdictions should be used to prompt further analysis, rather than be considered as definitive performance information.

Data that are comparable across jurisdictions were not available for this Report because definitions of substantiation vary across jurisdictions. However, data are comparable within each jurisdiction (figure 14.6). Five jurisdictions provided data for the three years 1996-97 to 1998-99.

- In NSW, the substantiation rate remained relatively stable between 1996-97 and 1998-99 (45 per cent, 44 per cent and 46 per cent respectively).
- In Victoria, the substantiation rate remained relatively stable between 1996-97 and 1998-99 (50 per cent, 51 per cent and 54 per cent respectively).

Figure 14.6 Proportion of finalised investigations of child abuse and neglect that were substantiated^a



^a Data are not comparable across jurisdictions because definitions of substantiation vary significantly. Consequently, rates should not be compared across jurisdictions. ^b From 1997-98 those notifications where it is possible to substantiate the presence of risk factors, which place a child in risk of significant harm, are also included. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.3, 14A.5, 14A.7, 14A.9, 14A.11, 14A.13, 14A.15 and 14A.17.

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- In Queensland, the substantiation rate increased from 42 per cent in 1996 to 59 per cent in 1998-99. However, this may reflect a change in counting rules between 1996-97 and 1997-98.
 - In WA, the substantiation rate declined from 57 per cent in 1996-97 to 52 per cent in 1998-99.
 - In SA, the substantiation rate increased from 36 per cent to 41 per cent.
 - In Tasmania, the substantiation rate increased from 13 per cent in 1996-97 to 23 per cent in 1998-99.
 - In the ACT, the substantiation rate increased from 40 per cent in 1996-97 to 49 per cent in 1997-98, then declined to 41 per cent in 1998-99.

The NT had data for only 1996-97 and 1997-98, and the substantiation rate declined from 53 per cent to 50 per cent.

Efficiency

A proxy indicator of efficiency is government expenditure on child protection per head of target population (defined as children aged 0–16 years). Expenditure data are provided by jurisdiction for the first time in this Report.

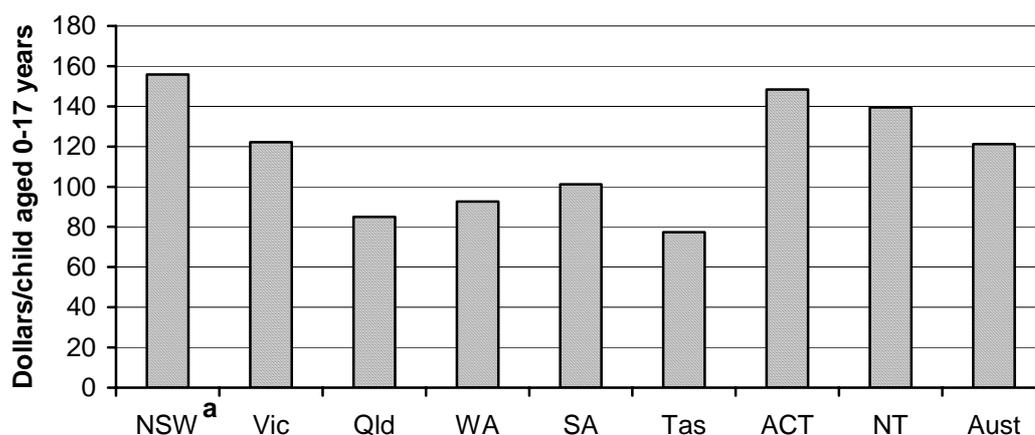
It is an objective of the Review to report comparable estimates of costs. Ideally, the full range of costs to government is counted on a comparable basis. Where the full costs cannot be counted, costs should be estimated on a consistent basis. Table 14A.2 in attachment 14A identifies the level of consistency across jurisdictions for a number of expenditure items. The scope of activity covered may also differ and influence comparability. Expenditure may include, for example, some elements of family support services for some jurisdictions.

NSW, Victoria, WA and Tasmania were the only jurisdictions able to provide separate recurrent expenditure data for child protection and supported placements. Recurrent expenditure on child protection per child aged 0–16 years ranged from \$17 in WA to \$79 in NSW in 1998-99 (table 14A.1). Given that these data are reported for the first time, differences should be interpreted with care because they may relate to variations in the scope and allocation of expenditure items. Tasmania, for example, allocates all salary expenditure to supported placements.

Recurrent expenditure data from Queensland, SA, the ACT and the NT could not be split between child protection and supported placement services. Therefore analysis is based on combined expenditure on child protection and supported placements services. (Given that the target populations are children aged 0–16 years for child

protection and children aged 0–17 years for supported placements, a population of children aged 0–17 years is used for child protection and supported placement combined.) Recurrent expenditure data on child protection and supported placements per child aged 0–17 years ranged from \$77 in Tasmania to \$156 in NSW in 1998-99 (figure 14.7).

Figure 14.7 Recurrent expenditure on child protection and supported placement services, 1998-99



^a NSW data include expenditure on support services for families. If these are excluded, recurrent expenditure per child aged 0–17 years in 1998-99 was \$140.

Source: table 14A.1.

Future directions in performance reporting

Improving reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' access to mainstream services

In May 1997 the Prime Minister requested that the Steering Committee give priority to developing indicators that measured the performance of mainstream services in meeting the needs of Indigenous Australians. This is an important task. This Report contains information on child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations per 1000 Indigenous children for each jurisdiction. The number of investigations and substantiations per 1000 Indigenous children for each jurisdiction is reported as a descriptor. The proportion of Indigenous children on care and protection orders in each jurisdiction is also reported. The data are subject to definitional differences.

Improving measurement of outcomes

States and Territories devised a new indicator for child protection services (continuity of case workers) following the literature review on outcomes in child protection services. The indicator considers how many different case workers deal with a child over a given period. Data are not yet reported against this indicator, and the States and Territories and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare are examining options to report on this indicator in future Reports.

Using client surveys

Client views can be used to report on service delivery and to learn important information about how to improve services. National client surveys are used in a number of service areas in the Report, including vocational education and training, police services and housing. A national client satisfaction survey in disability services was reported in the 2000 Report for the first time.

Applying these principles to child protection services is not yet common practice in Australia or overseas (DHS 1998). The Department of Human Services in Victoria is undertaking a two-phased project to investigate a survey method and to develop and pilot a questionnaire.

The goal of the Victorian Child Protection Client and Family Survey is to establish client and family feedback processes as an integral part of child protection case practice and planning. Stage one of the Victorian project — the development of the method — was completed in June 1999. This stage involved a series of consultations with clients, family members, external stakeholders, child protection workers and managers to assess their views about how best to conduct the survey and what questions to ask. This was particularly important because there are few prior examples of client and family surveys in this field. Stage two — the finalisation and testing of the survey instrument and method through a major pilot — has commenced and will be finalised by June 2000. Stage two includes a survey of 200 clients (young people over the age of 11 years) and 200 families from four regions. Quotas will be set for different stages of the child protection process to see how experiences and opinions change over time. Integral to the project will be the feedback process following the survey. Upon completion of stage two, the method will be reviewed before the survey and feedback process is implemented Statewide.

Improving the comparability of data

The States and Territories and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare commissioned a consultancy in July 1998 on the comparability of child protection

data (AIHW (forthcoming)) (box 14.6). The report was released in 1999 and maps the commonalities and differences in States and Territories for key output categories for child protection, such as notifications, investigations, substantiations and court orders. The States and Territories and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare are examining the feasibility of developing and applying generic national labels to the common tasks of child protection across Australia.

Box 14.6 General findings of the child protection comparability study

What is child protection?

Jurisdictions differed in how they define child protection; however, once a matter is defined as a child protection matter, the way in which jurisdictions respond is broadly similar. Some jurisdictions direct some concerns down a child and family support pathway rather than child protection. These jurisdictions have lower rates of notifications, investigations and substantiations as a result.

Notifications

The three broad approaches to notifications are:

- caller defined notifications — for example SA, Victoria and the NT;
- screening by departmental officers to decide whether referral becomes a notification — for example, Queensland, the ACT and NSW; and
- differentiation of concerns about children and families from allegations of child maltreatment — for example, WA and Tasmania.

Investigations

The investigation processes are reasonably consistent across States and Territories, and the point at which investigations are counted is also reasonably consistent.

Substantiations

The concept of substantiation is used differently by jurisdictions, which affects comparability of data. Some substantiate an incident, others substantiate harm or risk of harm, and some substantiate a combination of these factors.

Although the definitions of types of abuse and neglect are reasonable consistent across jurisdictions (box 14.3), variation in the interpretation of these definitions was observed across jurisdictions.

Source: AIHW (forthcoming).

Including reporting on family support services

There are strong links between child protection, crisis accommodation and family support services. Coverage in this chapter may extend to family support services as

data become available. As a first step, a description of intensive family services across Australia is included in this year's Report.

Work is in progress through the National Community Services Information Management Group to undertake a scoping study of family support services. This will include scoping the current family support data collections and identifying boundaries between family support services and other services such as child protection and juvenile justice.

Improving the measurement of unit costs

For the first time data on a proxy efficiency indicator is reported — average cost to government per child aged 0–16 years (the target population). Strategies for improving both cost data and the unit of output will be developed to improve efficiency data in the medium term.

The Steering Committee is working with the child protection and supported placements sector to improve unit cost data by introducing a more consistent treatment of:

- superannuation costs (see SCRCSSP 1998);
- payroll tax (see SCRCSSP 1999b); and
- depreciation and the user cost of capital.

An additional challenge will be to improve the apportionment of costs across activities. This will require strategies to improve the consistency of the treatment of overheads and allocation of staff time (see SCRCSSP 1999a for analysis of how police services have dealt with these issues).

More consistent treatment of these cost elements should improve the comparability and accuracy of unit cost information in future Reports.

14.2 Supported placements

Profile of supported placements

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

Supported placements can be in either home based care (such as foster care, care with the child's extended family, and other home based arrangements) or facility based care (such as family group homes and community residential care). Across jurisdictions there has been a shift away from the use of facility based (or residential) care towards foster care and other forms of home based care. The goal of child protection intervention is family reunification where this can be safely achieved, and many supported placements are seen as a temporary alternative to assist the family (AIHW 1998). SA is undertaking a research project on reunification, looking at:

- the characteristics of children and families that are associated with children's entry to care and their return home;
- the proportion of children who return home from care, and the outcomes for these children; and
- the child, family and system factors that present barriers to reunification.

It is hoped that this study will inform practices in reunification and in turn provide better outcomes for children who have been removed from their parents' care.

State or Territory government departments fund supported placements, which may be provided by the department or the non-government sector. The non-government sector plays a significant role in providing services in all States and Territories.

Composition of client groups

Approximately 16 000 children were in supported placements across Australia at 30 June 1999. The rate of supported placements per 1000 children aged 0–17 years was highest in Tasmania (4.4 per 1000) and lowest in the ACT (2.2 per 1000) (table 14.5).

Children may enter supported placement for short term or long term care. The proportion of children in continuous supported placement for two years or more ranged from 43.4 per cent in Queensland to 56.4 per cent in the ACT (figure 14.8). The proportion of children in supported placement for less than one month ranged from 2.9 per cent in the ACT to 10.7 per cent in SA.

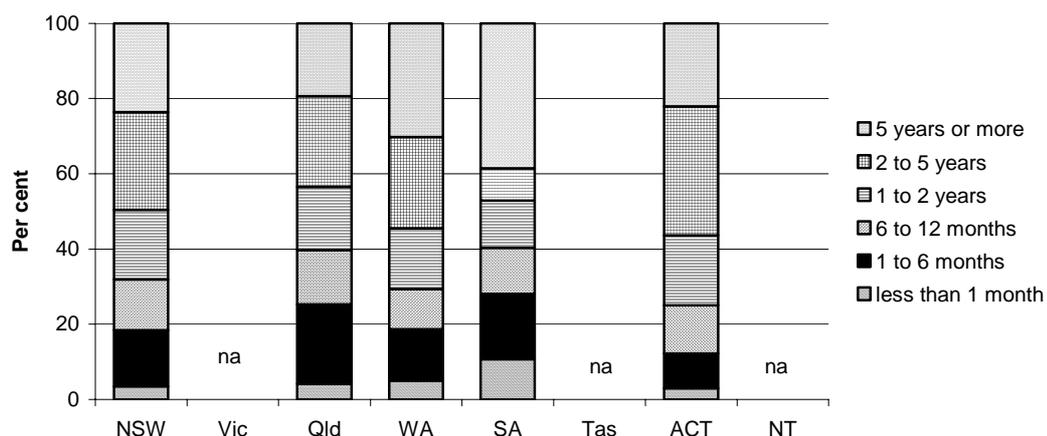
Table 14.5 Children in supported placements^a

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic^b</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT^c</i>
Number of children in supported placements								
At June 1997	5 417	3 393	2 211	1 050	1 149	461	173	111
At June 1998	5 603	3 615	2 346	1 093	1 007	442	179	137
At June 1999	6 359	3 581	2 613	1 192	1 045	533	174	na
Number of Indigenous children in supported placements per 1000 Indigenous children aged 0–17 years ^c								
At June 1997	25.6	30.5	11.7	12.8	22.9	5.5	20.8	2.6
At June 1998	21.5	30.7	10.1	11.6	18.0	4.6	24.4	3.0
At June 1999	29.2	na	11.0	13.7	18.5	5.8	16.0	na
Number of non-Indigenous children in supported placements per 1000 non-Indigenous children aged 0–17 years								
At June 1997	2.7	2.7	1.9	1.6	2.6	3.6	1.8	1.5
At June 1998	2.9	2.9	2.2	1.7	2.4	3.5	1.8	1.9
At June 1999	3.1	na	2.4	1.8	2.5	4.3	1.9	na
Number of children in supported placements per 1000 children aged 0–17 years								
At June 1997	3.4	3.0	2.5	2.2	3.2	3.7	2.1	1.9
At June 1998	3.5	3.2	2.6	2.3	2.8	3.6	2.2	2.3
At June 1999	4.0	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.9	4.4	2.2	na

^a Supported placements data are not the same for each State and Territory. Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. ^b Data on Indigenous children not included for 1998-99 due to concerns regarding data quality. A review of this data are underway and data are expected to be available for the next Report. ^c Data on child protection and supported placement services for 1998-99 are unavailable.

Sources: tables 14A.19, 14A.24, 14A.29, 14A.34, 14A.39, 14A.44, 14A.49 and 14A.54.

Figure 14.8 Children by length of time in continuous supported placement, 1999^{a, b, c}



^a At 30 June. ^b Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania and the NT were unable to distinguish between respite and non-respite care. Both types of placements were included. ^c Supported placements data are not the same for each State and Territory. Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.19, 14A.24, 14A.29, 14A.34, 14A.39, 14A.44, 14A.49 and 14A.54.

Policy developments in supported placements

Supported placements is one of a range of family services provided to children who are in need of care or protection. The current emphasis in policy and practice is to maintain the child within the family if possible, and to place a child in out-of-home care only if this will improve the outcome for the child. If it is necessary to remove the child from home, then placement with the wider family or community is sought where possible, particularly in the case of Indigenous children (AIHW 1999b).

Continued emphasis is being placed on improving case planning and case management processes, to ensure children in out-of-home care do not drift in care and to maximise case workers' contact time with children and families.

Framework of performance indicators

The framework of performance indicators for supported placement services is based on shared government objectives (box 14.7). The framework identifies key result areas which indicate the extent to which these broad objectives are met (figure 14.9).

Box 14.7 Objective for supported placement services

Supported placement services aim to provide quality care for children and young people aged 17 years and under who cannot live with their parents for reasons of safety or family crisis.

These services should be provided in an efficient and effective manner.

New and refined indicators

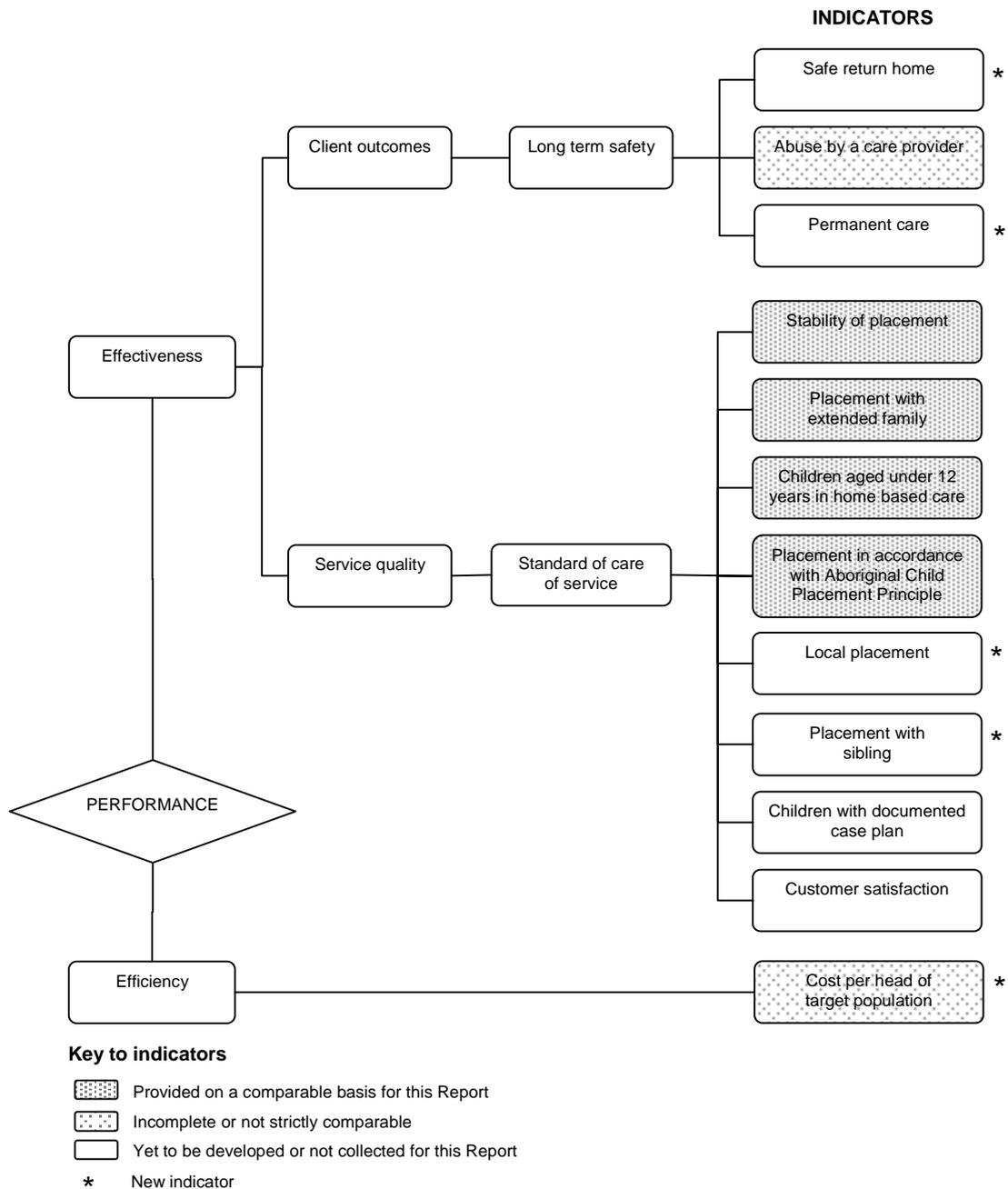
Following the Gain and Young (1998) report, four new outcome and quality indicators have been developed for supported placements:

- a safe return home;
- permanent care;
- the placement of siblings together; and
- local placements.

The indicator of placement stability has been refined. The existing approach reports a child's number of placements has over a given period (excluding home). In

addition, data on a child's number of different carers has over a given period are included this year.

Figure 14.9 Performance indicators for supported placement services



This adds another dimension to the indicator stability of placement. The first measure considers the number of movements or physical disruptions to the child's living arrangements; the second reveals how many carers the child has had during their care experience.

For the first time, efficiency data are reported as cost per head of target population (children aged 0–17 years). Ongoing work to provide a more comprehensive set of performance indicators, and to improve existing indicators and the data, is discussed in ‘Future directions in performance reporting’.

Key performance indicator results

Different delivery contexts, locations and types of client may affect the reported results of supported placement services. 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.

Client outcomes — abuse by a care provider

One indicator of supported placement effectiveness is the safety of clients in care situations. Only WA, Tasmania and the ACT were able to provide data on the incidence of substantiated child abuse or neglect by a care provider in 1998-99. The number of substantiated cases as a proportion of all children in out-of-home care ranged from 0 per cent in the ACT to less than 1 per cent in WA and Tasmania (tables 14A.53, 14A.48 and 14A.38 respectively).

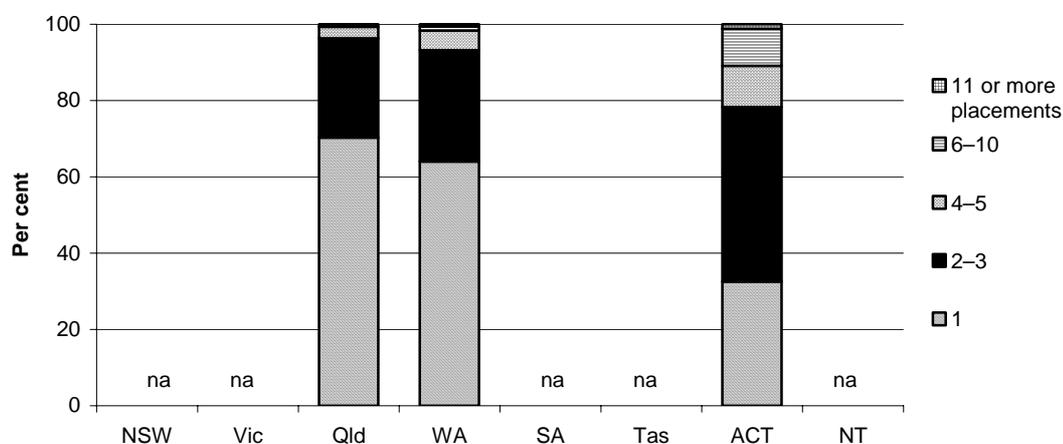
Service quality — stability of placement

Stability of placement for children placed away from their family for protective reasons is an important indicator of service quality, particularly for those children who require long term placements. Many children will quite appropriately have more than one placement — for example, an initial emergency placement followed by a longer term placement — but more than three or four placements for a child may indicate some instability.

Data were collected on the number of placements for children who had exited out-of-home care in 1998-99. Data were grouped according to the length of time in care (one month to less than six months; six months to less than one year; one year to less than two years; and two years or more). This indicator measures a child’s number of moves (excluding home).

Most children in Queensland and WA who exited out-of-home care in 1998-99 and who had been in out-of-home care for less than 12 months had had only one placement. The proportion of children who had had one placement ranged from 32.5 per cent in the ACT to 70.3 per cent in Queensland (figure 14.10).

Figure 14.10 Number of placements for children exiting care after less than 12 months, 1998-99^{a, b}



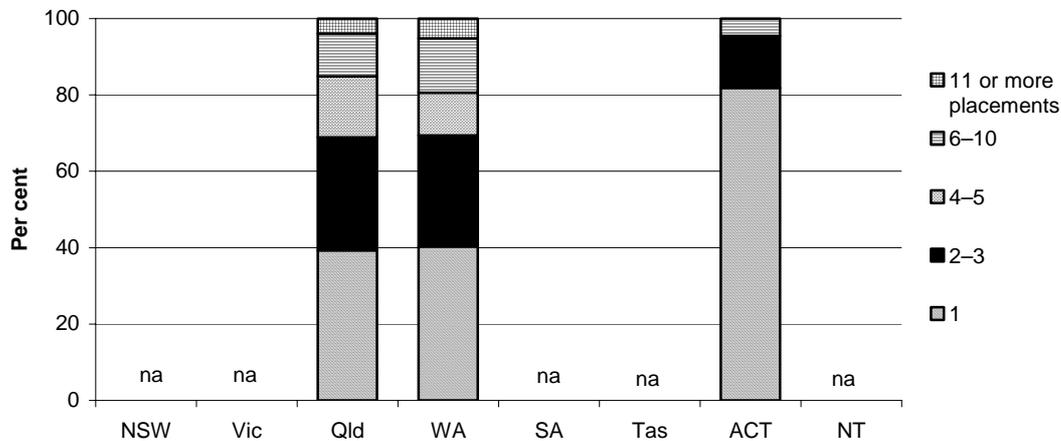
^a Data refer to children exiting care in 1998-99. ^b Supported placements data are not the same for each State and Territory. Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.21, 14A.26, 14A.31, 14A.36, 14A.41, 14A.46, 14A.51 and 14A.56.

Children who had been in out-of-home care for 12 months or more tended to have more placements than those who had been in out-of-home care for less than 12 months. However, in the ACT, most had still had only one placement (81.8 per cent). In Queensland and WA, most had had two or more placements (60.7 per cent and 59.7 per cent respectively). The proportion of children who had been in out-of-home care for 12 months or more with six placements or more ranged from 0 per cent in the ACT to 5.2 per cent in WA (figure 14.11).

Data are also provided on the number of *different* care situations of a child in out-of-home care over a given period. Again, the data relate to those children who exited out-of-home care in 1998-99 (figures 14.12 and 14.13). With the exception of SA, the majority of children exiting care after less than 12 months had had only one care situation. The proportion of children having had only one care situation ranged from 28 per cent in SA to 72 per cent in Queensland (figure 14.12).

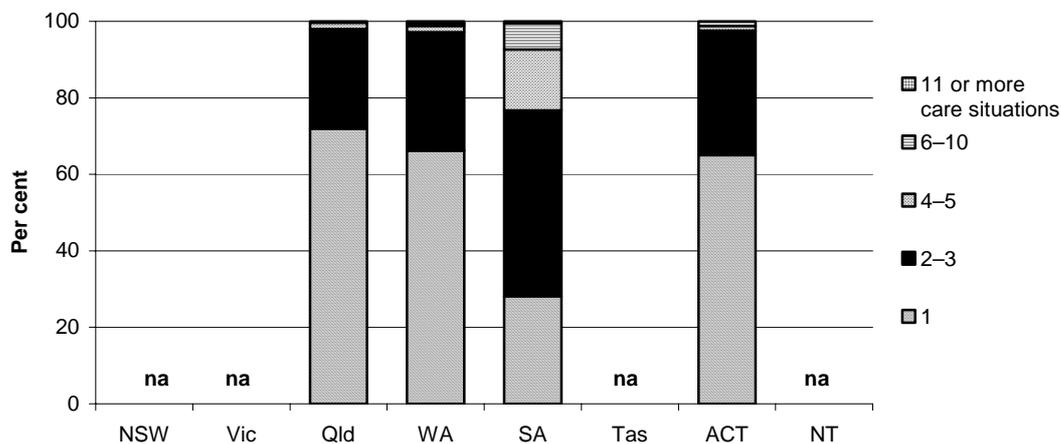
Figure 14.11 Number of placements for children exiting care after 12 months or more, 1998-99^{a, b}



^a Data refer to children exiting care in 1998-99. ^b Supported placements data are not the same for each State and Territory. Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.21, 14A.26, 14A.31, 14A.36, 14A.41, 14A.46, 14A.51 and 14A.56.

Figure 14.12 Number of different care situations for children exiting care after less than 12 months, 1998-99^{a, b}



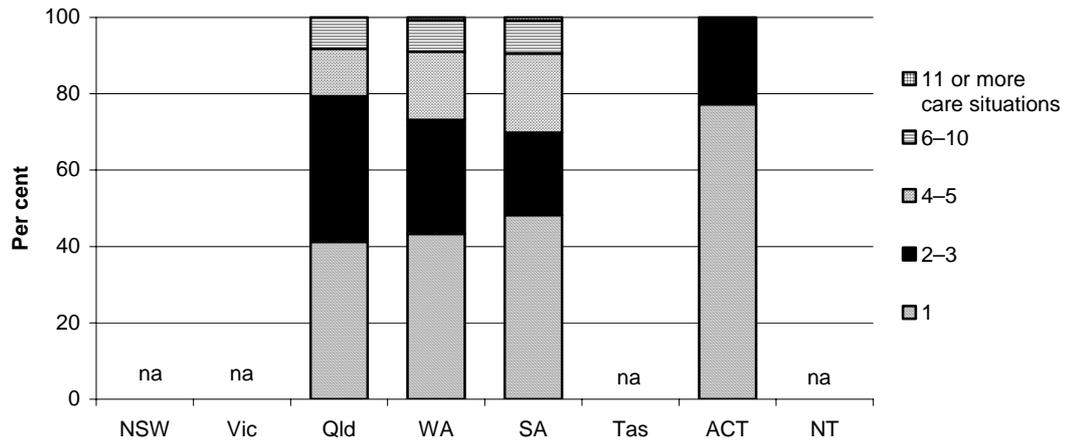
^a Data refer to children exiting care in 1998-99. ^b Supported placements data are not the same for each State and Territory. Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.22, 14A.27, 14A.32, 14A.37, 14A.42, 14A.47, 14A.52 and 14A.57.

Children who had been in supported placements longer tended to have more care situations. The exception is the ACT, which represents only a small number of

children. For Queensland, WA and SA, the proportion of children exiting care after 12 months or more who had had more than one placement ranged from 51.7 per cent in SA to 58.8 per cent in Queensland (figure 14.13).

Figure 14.13 Number of different care situations for children exiting care after 12 months or more, 1998-99^{a, b}



^a Data refer to children exiting care in 1998-99. ^b Supported placements data are not the same for each State and Territory. Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.22, 14A.27, 14A.32, 14A.37, 14A.42, 14A.47, 14A.52 and 14A.57.

Service quality — placement with extended family and in home based care

The type of placement is another indicator of the quality of child placement. However, it is only possible to make limited jurisdictional comparisons because data were collected differently across jurisdictions.

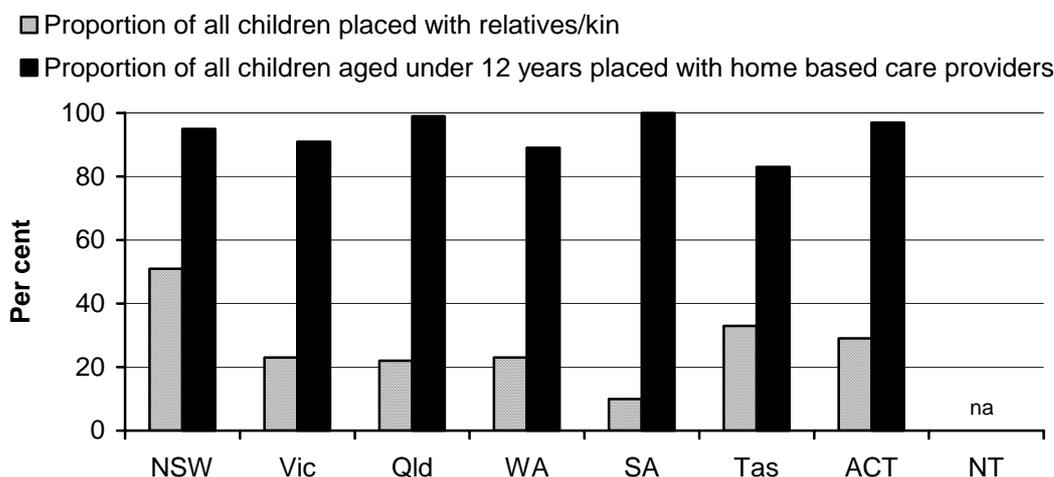
Placing children with their relatives or kin is generally preferred for children in supported placements. The proportion of children placed with relatives or kin (at 30 June 1999) ranged from 10 per cent in SA to 51 per cent in NSW (figure 14.14).

Placing young children in home based care is generally considered to be in their best interests. The proportion of children aged 12 years and under who were placed in home based care (at 30 June 1999) ranged from 100 per cent in the SA to 83 per cent in Tasmania (figure 14.14).

It is also desirable to place children locally so some elements of their life remain unchanged. Local placement would enable the child to continue attendance at the

same school, for example. Local placement is a new indicator for this year's Report but data are not yet available.

Figure 14.14 Proportion of children in preferred placements, 1999^{a, b}



^a At 30 June. ^b Refer to footnotes for each State and Territory in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include.

Sources: tables 14A.20, 14A.25, 14A.30, 14A.35, 14A.40, 14A.45, 14A.50, and 14A.55.

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

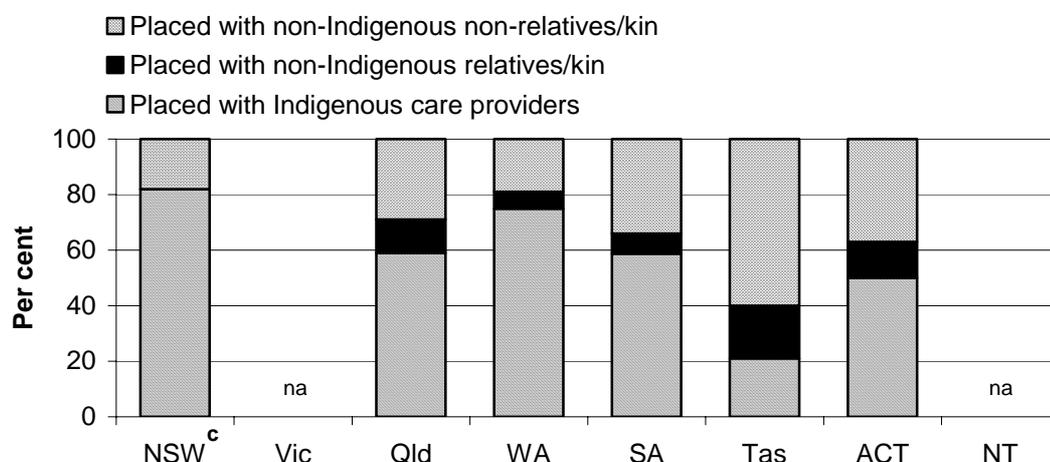
The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle has the following order of preference for placement of Aboriginal children:

- with the child's extended family;
- within the child's Aboriginal community; or
- with other Aboriginal people (NLRC 1997).

All jurisdictions have adopted this principle either in legislation or policy.

Placement with Indigenous care providers ranged from 21 per cent in Tasmania to 82 per cent in NSW at 30 June 1999 (figure 14.15). Placing Indigenous children with non-Indigenous relatives or kin (that is, part of their extended family), is one option that also complies with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle; the proportion of Indigenous children in such placement was highest in Tasmania (19 per cent) and lowest in WA (6 per cent).

Figure 14.15 Placement of Indigenous children, 1999^{a, b}



^a At 30 June. ^b Refer to footnotes in the source tables for information about what each jurisdiction's data include. ^c NSW could not provide data on the number of Indigenous children placed with non-Indigenous relatives/kin. **na** Not available.

Sources: tables 14A.20, 14A.25, 14A.30, 14A.35, 14A.40, 14A.45, 14A.50 and 14A.55.

Efficiency

A proxy indicator of efficiency is government expenditure on supported placements per head of target population (children aged 0–17 years). Expenditure data are provided by jurisdiction for the first time in this Report.

It is an objective of the Review to report comparable estimates of costs. Ideally, the full range of costs to government is counted on a comparable basis. Where the full costs cannot be counted, costs should be estimated on a consistent basis. Table 14A.2 in attachment 14A identifies the level of consistency across jurisdictions for a number of expenditure items. The scope of activity covered may also differ and influence comparability. Expenditure may include, for example, some elements of family support services for some jurisdictions.

Victoria was unable to provide any expenditure data. NSW, WA and Tasmania were the only jurisdictions able to provide separate recurrent expenditure data for child protection and supported placements. Recurrent expenditure on supported placements per child aged 0–16 years ranged from \$55 in Tasmania to \$81 in NSW in 1998-99 (table 14A.1). Given that these data are reported for the first time, differences should be interpreted with care because they may relate to variations in the scope and allocation of expenditure items. Tasmania, for example, allocates all salary expenditure to supported placements.

Recurrent expenditure data from Queensland, SA, the ACT and the NT could not be split between child protection and supported placement services. Therefore analysis is based on combined expenditure on child protection and supported placements services. See the results in 'Efficiency', section 14.1 (including table 14A.2).

Future directions in performance reporting

Improving reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' access to mainstream services

In May 1997 the Prime Minister requested that the Steering Committee give priority to developing indicators that measured the performance of mainstream services in meeting the needs of Indigenous Australians. This is an important task, but large gaps remain. The number of Indigenous children in supported placements for each jurisdiction is reported (subject to data differences between jurisdictions), as is the proportion of Indigenous children in preferred placements. Work is progressing to increase the availability and coverage of nationally consistent data on the provision of services to Indigenous clients.

Improving the measurement of unit costs

Efficiency data are reported for the first time as cost per head of target population (children aged 0–17 years). Strategies will be developed for both improving cost estimates and defining and measuring the unit of output.

The challenges facing supported placement services to improve their unit cost data are similar to those discussed for child protection services (see 'Improving the measurement of unit costs', section 14.1).

14.3 Supported accommodation and assistance

Profile of supported accommodation and assistance

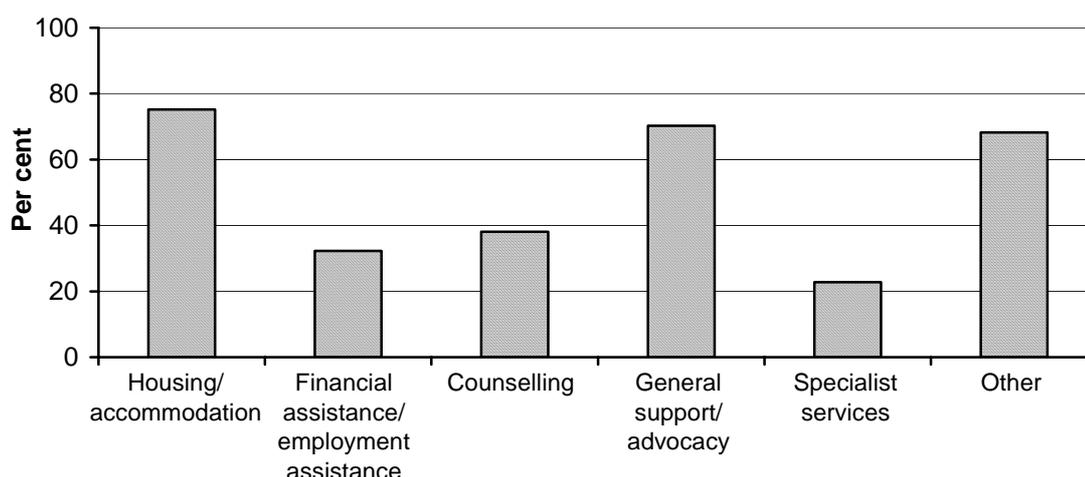
Supported accommodation and assistance services aim to assist people who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless as a result of a crisis, including women and children escaping domestic violence. This section reports on services provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments jointly fund the program, which

was established in 1985 to consolidate a number of existing programs. (Definition of terms used throughout this section can be found at the end of attachment 14A.)

Services provided

Services available under the program include supported accommodation, counselling, advocacy, links to health, education and employment services, outreach support and meals services. Housing and accommodation services were provided in 75 per cent of support periods in 1998-99. General support and advocacy (70 per cent of support periods), counselling (38 per cent), financial and employment assistance (32 per cent) and specialist services (23 per cent) were also commonly provided (figure 14.16).

Figure 14.16 Composition of SAAP support periods, 1998-99^{a, b}



^a Agencies may provide more than one type of service as a part of a single support period; thus services provided do not sum to 100 per cent. ^b Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.59.

Agencies providing SAAP services

SAAP provides support services to a range of groups, such as homeless families, single men, single women, young people, and women and children escaping domestic violence. Around 1200 agencies are funded under the program, and most principally target one client group. SAAP services were delivered in 1998-99 by agencies targeting:

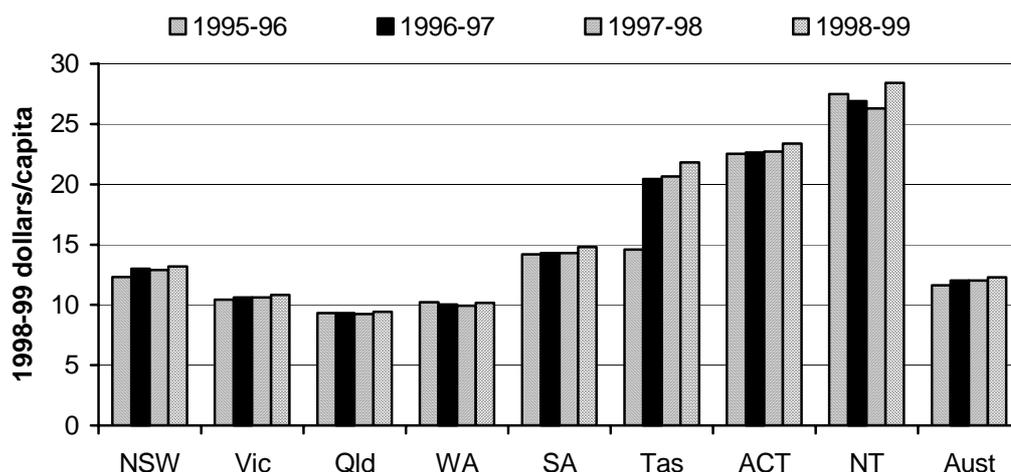
- young people (39 per cent of agencies);
- women escaping domestic violence (22 per cent);

- single men (8 per cent);
- families (8 per cent); and
- single women (4 per cent).

Agencies targeting multiple client groups or providing general support accounted for 20 per cent of providers in 1998-99 (table 14A.60).

Agencies also vary in their service delivery model. The most common model in 1998-99 was medium to long term accommodation (40 per cent of agencies), followed by crisis or short term accommodation (33 per cent). All accommodation services also involved support services. Agencies also provided services other than accommodation such as outreach support (5 per cent of agencies), day support (2 per cent), and telephone information and referral (1 per cent) (table 14A.61).

Figure 14.17 Recurrent SAAP funding per person in the total population^{a, b}



^a Total recurrent allocations (including State and Territory level allocations for program administration) were included in the analysis. ^b The total population figure is not indicative of the demand for these services.

Source: table 14A.64.

Roles and responsibilities

SAAP services are delivered by non-government agencies primarily, with some local government participation. States and Territories are responsible for day-to-day operations and directly fund the SAAP agencies. Research, strategy and other planning and development activities are coordinated at the national level by the National SAAP Coordination and Development Committee (which includes representatives of the Commonwealth and each State and Territory government).

Recurrent funding of these services was \$230 million in 1998-99, of which the Commonwealth Government contributed 56 per cent and the State and Territories contributed 44 per cent (table 14A.62). Combined Commonwealth and State and Territory government funding increased (in real terms) in all jurisdictions from 1997-98 to 1998-99 (table 14A.63). Funding per person in the total population ranged from \$9.40 in Queensland to \$28.40 in the NT in 1998-99 (figure 14.17).

Policy developments in supported accommodation and assistance

The current Commonwealth–State Agreements for SAAP were due to expire at the end of 1999 but, to enable completion of Commonwealth–State bilateral negotiations for new agreements, ministers agreed to extend existing agreements to 30 June 2000. As required under the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*, a national evaluation was conducted and completed in early 1999 (box 14.8). It drew on completed State and Territory evaluations, and will feed into future policy directions and the future of the program.

Box 14.8 National SAAP evaluation

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was evaluated during 1998 and the first part of 1999 by a team drawn from the Social and Economic Research Centre and the Australian Urban Research Institute at the University of Queensland. The report of the evaluation was released in April 1999. The evaluation found SAAP to be a very successful program in addressing the broad range of often complex problems and issues of homelessness.

It recommended building on the strengths of the program to continue the improvements to effectiveness and efficiency achieved during the current set of Commonwealth–State agreements. The report pointed to the development of comprehensive data collection as a significant achievement and strength of the program because it enables a better understanding of homelessness, improves monitoring and provides comprehensive information about SAAP and SAAP clients. The report also recommended expanding research activities and developing improved performance indicators, particularly for the measurement of client outcomes. In developing improved indicators, the report commented that the use of a bottom–up approach that involves the SAAP agencies needs more attention.

Commonwealth and State community services ministers announced in April the release of the evaluation report, indicating that they agree that SAAP is a vital and successful program and that they strongly support the continuation of SAAP as a joint Commonwealth–State program. They also announced strategic themes and a framework for the new SAAP program.

Source: DFCS (1999).

Framework of performance indicators

The framework of performance indicators for supported accommodation and assistance are based on the program's objectives (box 14.9).

Box 14.9 Objective for SAAP services

SAAP services aim to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help people who are homeless achieve the maximum possible degree of self reliance and independence.

These services should be provided in an equitable and efficient manner.

The reporting framework for SAAP is shown in figure 14.18. Ongoing work to provide a more comprehensive set of performance indicators, and to improve existing indicators and the data, is discussed in 'Future directions in performance reporting'.

Key performance indicator results

Different delivery contexts, locations, and types of client might affect the cost of supported accommodation and assistance services or the outcomes achieved. 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.

Outcomes

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

In all jurisdictions, most clients had 'no substantive change' in income source between entering and exiting the program (table 14.6). However, it should be noted that the majority of SAAP clients entering SAAP were receiving government benefits and were still receiving them when they exited SAAP support.

Figure 14.18 Performance indicators for SAAP services

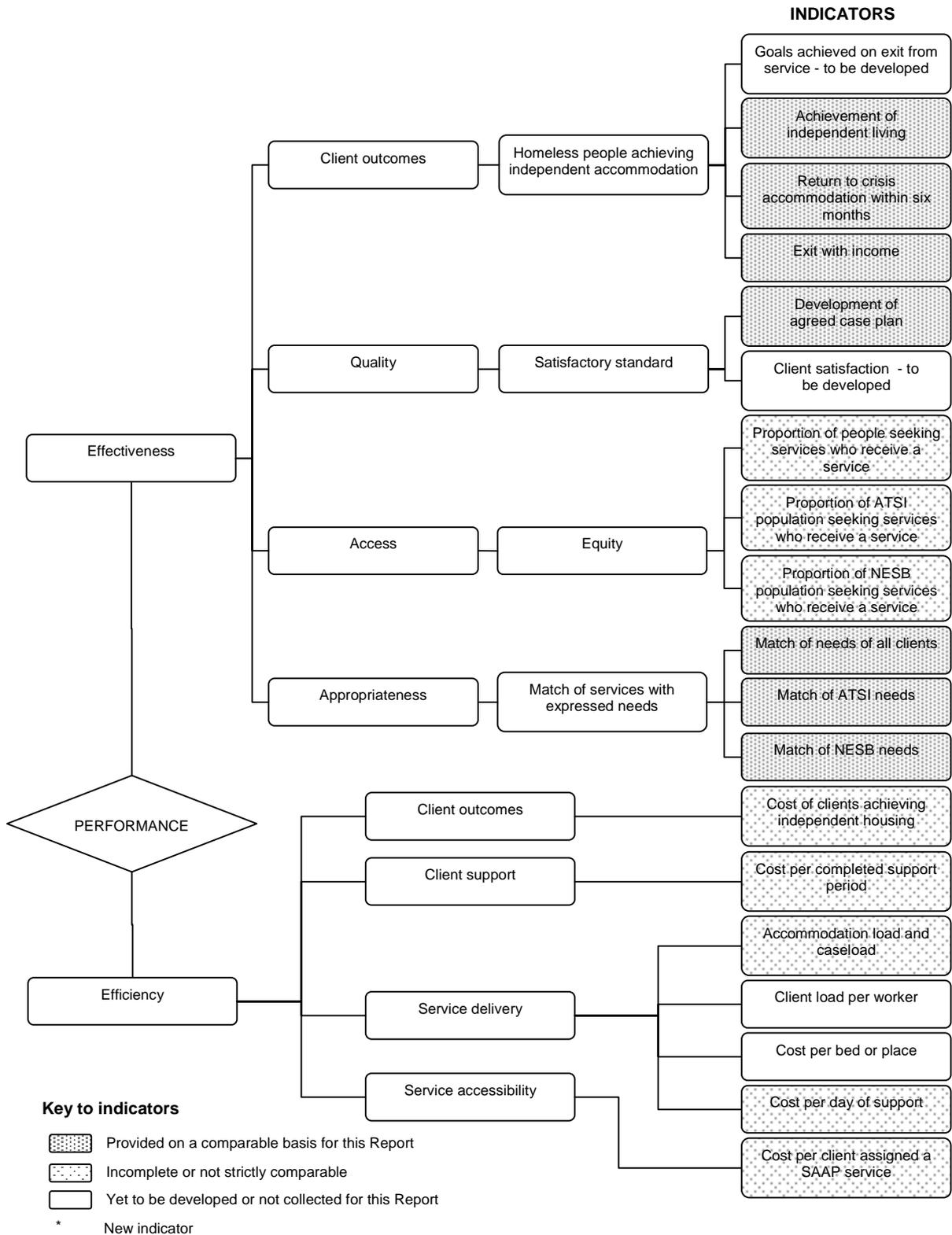


Table 14.6 Change in client's income source after SAAP support, 1998-99 (per cent)^{a, b}

	<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>
Moved from no income to some income	3.6	3.8	3.5	2.4	3.0	2.4	4.2	3.0	3.4
Obtained own benefit/extra benefit/wages	1.6	2.0	2.2	1.6	2.1	0.9	1.6	2.2	1.8
Had no substantive change	85.5	88.2	85.1	91.5	88.9	92.2	84.5	84.6	87.3
Had no income before or after support	8.6	5.0	8.4	3.3	5.1	3.9	9.3	9.3	6.6
Moved from wage to government payments/ some income to no income	0.6	1.1	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.9	0.9
Total^c	100.0								

^a Excludes high volume records (data collected from SAAP agencies with 50 or more new clients on a daily basis) because income source after support was not collected. ^b Preliminary data. ^c Total may not equal 100 due to rounding errors.

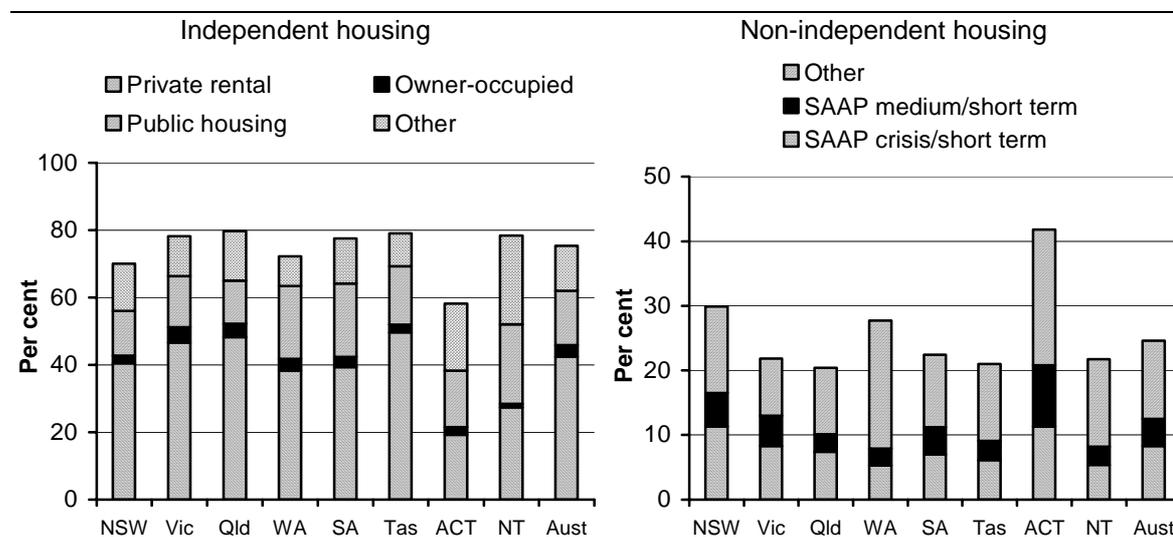
Source: table 14A.65.

The proportion of clients who had 'no substantive change' in income source ranged from 84.5 per cent in the ACT, NT and Queensland to 92.2 per cent in Tasmania and WA. Moving from having no income before receiving services to obtaining some income, or obtaining their own benefit, an extra benefit or a wage, indicates greater client independence. The proportion of clients who moved from having no income support to obtaining some income ranged from 2.4 per cent in WA and Tasmania to 4.2 per cent in the ACT. The proportion of clients who obtained their own benefit, an extra benefit or a wage ranged from 0.9 in Tasmania and the ACT to 2.2 per cent in Queensland and the NT.

The proportion of clients who had no income before or after support ranged from 3.3 per cent in WA to 9.3 per cent in the ACT and the NT. Nationally 1 per cent of clients exiting the program moved from having a wage to having a government payment, or from having some income to having no income.

The proportion of clients achieving independent living at the end of a support period indicates the independence of clients after program support. Nationally 75 per cent of clients achieved independent housing at the end of a support period in 1998-99 (figure 14.19). The proportion ranged from 58 per cent in the ACT to 80 per cent in Queensland. It is important to note that data are only available for a third of completed support periods, so may not be representative of the total SAAP population.

Figure 14.19 Change in clients' type of housing after SAAP support, 1998-99^{a, b, c}



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

Source: table 14A.66.

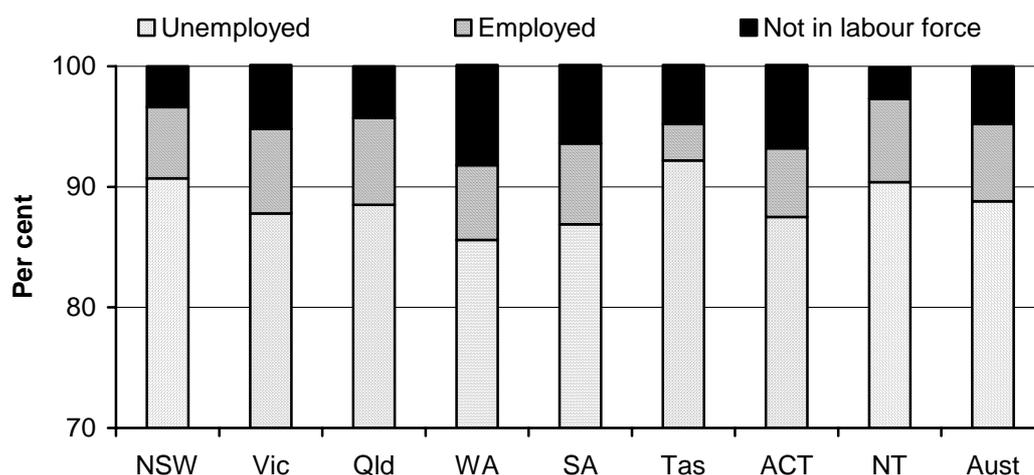
By type of independent housing, 42 per cent of all clients moved to private rental housing, 16 per cent entered public housing and 3 per cent moved to owner-occupied housing in 1998-99. The proportion of clients moving to private rental housing was highest in Tasmania (50 per cent) and lowest in the ACT (19 per cent). The proportion of clients moving to public housing ranged from 13 per cent in Queensland to 24 per cent in the NT.

By type of non-independent housing, 13 per cent of all clients continued to live in SAAP accommodation — 8 per cent in crisis or short term accommodation and 4 per cent in medium to long term accommodation. The proportion of clients remaining in SAAP accommodation was highest in the ACT (21 per cent) and lowest in WA (8 per cent) (figure 14.19).

Employment is another indicator of clients' achievement of self reliance and independence. Nationally, clients in only 45 per cent of support periods were participating in the workforce before support in 1998-99 (while clients in 9 per cent of support periods were employed and clients in 36 per cent of periods were unemployed) (table 14A.67). Of the clients who were unemployed when entering the program, 6 per cent were employed at the end of the support period (2 per cent full time, 2 per cent part time and 3 per cent on a casual basis), 89 per cent remained unemployed and 5 per cent were not in the labour force (figure 14.20). Across

jurisdictions, the proportion of clients who achieved employment ranged from 3 per cent in Tasmania to 7 per cent in Queensland.

Figure 14.20 Change in the labour force status of clients after SAAP support, 1998-99^{a, b, c}



^a Data are for people who are unemployed when entering SAAP services. ^b Excludes high volume records because not all items are included on high volume forms. ^c Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.68.

The performance information above relate to relatively short term outcomes — that is, outcomes for clients immediately after their support period. Longer term outcomes are important but, as in most service areas, there are challenges in collecting information on these outcomes. The data collection for SAAP allows for the measurement of the number of clients and the number and types of service provided to clients (see box 14.10).

Box 14.10 Issues when analysing SAAP data

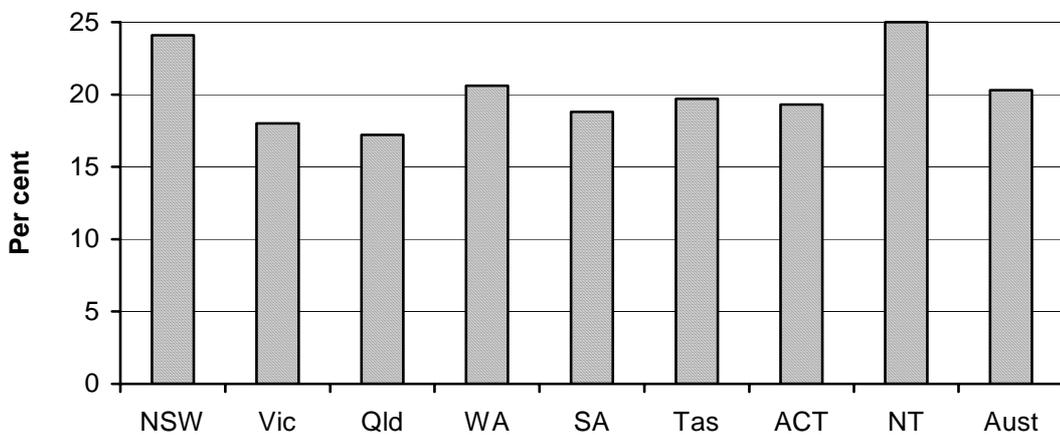
Two important issues should be considered when analysing SAAP data:

- informed consent is an essential component of the integrity of the data. The principle of client/consumer rights (which underpins informed consent) recognises that clients do not receive services under a mandatory order. They have the right to accept or reject the services offered, as they have the right to provide or not provide information while receiving SAAP services; and
- comprehensive information cannot be collected for all clients, such as casual clients and clients of high volume agencies (those accommodating 50 or more clients per night, telephone referral agencies, day centres and information and referral centres).

An important longer term indicator of whether clients are achieving self reliance and independence is whether a client has needed to return to SAAP services. If a client received two or more support periods over the year then they must have returned to the program after their initial support period.

Nationally 20 per cent of clients who exited from the program in 1998-99 returned before the end of the year. Across jurisdictions, the proportion ranged from 17 per cent in Queensland to 25 per cent in the NT (figure 14.21). However, it may be appropriate for some clients to receive more than one support period (moving from crisis to medium term accommodation, for example). For example, one group that makes multiple use of SAAP includes women and children escaping domestic violence. This is evident in the data for the NT which has the highest return rate and also the highest number of Indigenous women clients who tend to use SAAP services for short respite periods to escape family violence and who then return to their community. There are also a number of SAAP clients who have long-term problems who may access SAAP services a number of times before being able to address their issues and move on.

Figure 14.21 Clients who exited from the service in 1998-99 and who returned before the end of that year^a



^a Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.69.

A further medium term indicator of achieving self reliance and independence is achieving independent housing and not returning to SAAP within a specified period (in this case, six months). However, given the data issues above, current estimates may not be representative of all clients: for example, nationally only approximately 42 per cent of clients provided information on their accommodation after exiting at least one support period over the year (table 14.7).

Table 14.7 Indicative estimates of clients exiting to independent housing and not returning within six months, 1999^{a, b}

<i>Unit</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>	<i>Aust</i>
Clients who provide information on accommodation on exit from support									
no.	9 906	13 709	6 055	4 149	3 304	1 728	1 065	1 607	41 523
As a proportion of total clients ^c									
%	32.8	42.8	36.9	47.5	38.9	47.7	45.5	43.6	41.6
Clients recorded as exiting to independent accommodation and not returning within six months									
no.	4 428	6 535	2 819	1 955	1 611	811	391	760	19 310
Indicative estimates of clients exiting to independent housing and not returning within six months ^d									
%	44.7	47.7	46.6	47.1	48.8	46.9	36.7	47.3	46.5

^a See notes to table 14A.70 for details of how the estimates were calculated. ^b Preliminary data. ^c Estimate based on estimated total number of clients for 1998-99 (not 1999). ^d Clients recorded as exiting to independent accommodation and not returning within six months as a proportion of clients who provide information on accommodation on exit from support.

Source: table 14A.70.

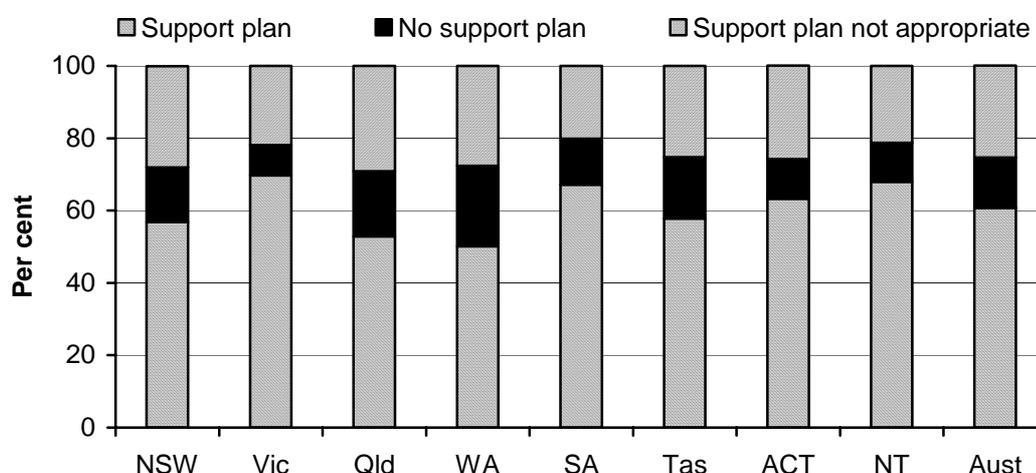
It is possible to estimate the proportion of clients who exit to independent housing and do not return to SAAP within six months (based on the subset of clients who provide information of accommodation on exit). However, given the potential for bias in the data, these estimates should not be used for definitive performance comparisons across jurisdictions; rather, they may be used to prompt further analysis of the reasons for cross-jurisdictional differences.

It is important to have data that are representative of all SAAP clients. Strategies are being implemented to improve the data quality progressively, including client consent rates and the collection of exit information. It is hoped that the data will eventually be robust enough to allow comparative performance assessment.

Quality

Reflecting an increased emphasis on case management, the existence of an agreed support plan is an indicator of service quality. However, an agreed support plan may be judged to be not appropriate for some support periods (such as when a support period is of a short term nature). Nationally, the case worker in 25 per cent of support periods judged that a support plan was not appropriate. This proportion ranged from 20 per cent of support periods in SA to 29 per cent of support periods in Queensland. There was an agreed support plan for 61 per cent of support periods nationally in 1998-99. The proportion ranged from 50 per cent in WA to 70 per cent in Victoria (figure 14.22).

Figure 14.22 Support periods, by existence of a support plan, 1998-99^{a, b}



^a Excludes high volume records because not all items were included on high volume forms. ^b Preliminary data.

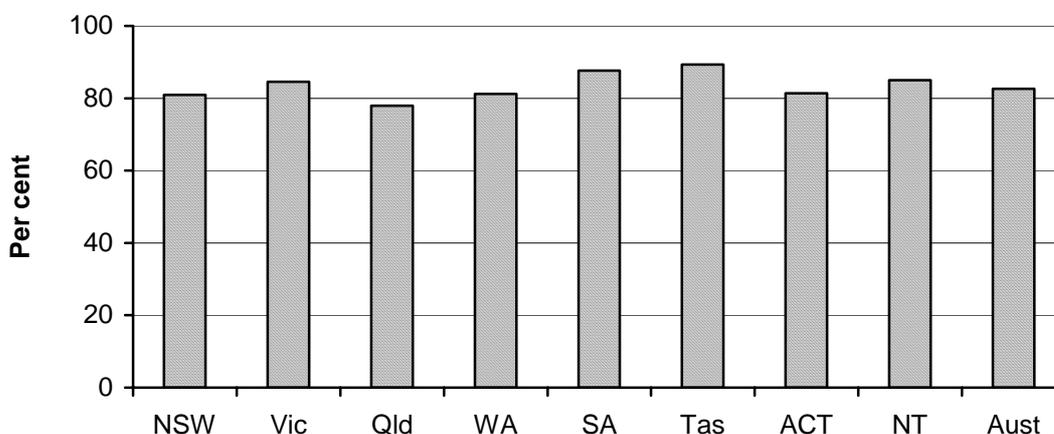
Source: table 14A.71.

Access

The ability of services to assist those in need is an indicator of access. Data from a two week sample period in November 1998 suggests that around 83 per cent of people seeking SAAP services received the assistance requested in that period. The proportion of potential SAAP clients who received support ranged from 78 per cent in Queensland to 89 per cent in Tasmania. The estimates of unmet demand should be interpreted with caution because the two-week sample period over which data were collected may not be representative of the eventual success of clients accessing SAAP services over the full year (figure 14.23).

Potential clients were not provided with services for a number of reasons, including lack of available accommodation (the main reason for 81 per cent of potential clients who were not provided with services), insufficient staff (4 per cent), and lack of facilities for special needs such as disability, culturally specific needs and other special needs (3 per cent) (table 14A.72).

Figure 14.23 SAAP support periods as a proportion of estimated total SAAP service requests, 12–25 November 1998^{a, b, c, d, e, f}



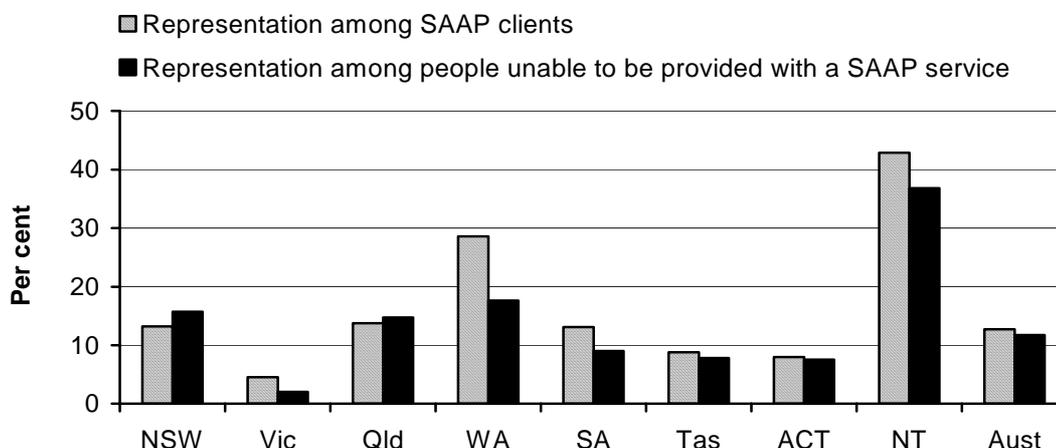
^a Data should be interpreted with extreme caution because both the number of SAAP clients and unmet demand were estimated. ^b See table 14A.73 for an explanation of how the number of SAAP clients was estimated. ^c Unmet demand estimates were only based on information collected in the two-week period 12 to 25 November 1998. ^d See notes to table 14A.56 for the definition of unmet demand. ^e Data on unmet demand should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, a person can make a request on more than one occasion and to more than one SAAP agency. While double counting has been limited through the exclusion of those requests where the person had made a similar request to a SAAP agency within the collection period, this information may not have been available to record. Therefore, the total numbers do not represent actual people. Second, a number of people may receive ongoing support or accommodation from a SAAP agency at a later time, quite possibly soon after their initial request. As a result, this estimate may overstate the actual level of unmet demand. Third, a number of potential clients have their needs met by other means and do not return to a SAAP agency. Many factors influence the capacity of individual SAAP agencies to meet day-to-day demand for their services; it is not possible to identify a two-week period which is 'typical' for all SAAP agencies. ^f Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.73.

The SAAP targets homeless people in general, but access by special needs groups (such as Indigenous people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds) is also important. Nationally, 12 per cent of people unable to be provided with a service were Indigenous in 1998-99, compared with 13 per cent of clients who were Indigenous. In NSW and Queensland, the representation of Indigenous people among people unable to be provided with a service was higher than the representation of Indigenous people among clients; the inverse occurred in Victoria, WA, SA, Tasmania, the ACT and the NT (figure 14.24).

On average, the representation of people from non-English speaking backgrounds in people unable to be provided with a SAAP service (8 per cent) was lower than their representation among SAAP clients (10 per cent). The ACT and the NT were the only jurisdictions where the representation of people from non-English speaking backgrounds among people unable to be provided with a service was higher than their representation among SAAP clients (figure 14.25).

Figure 14.24 Indigenous people among SAAP clients and among people unable to be provided with a SAAP service, 1998-99^{a, b, c}



^a The number of people unable to be provided with a SAAP service was the 'unmet demand'. 'Unmet demand' estimates are based on the SAAP Unmet Demand Collection and thus should be interpreted with caution. See notes to table 14A.74 for more detail. ^b Unmet requests exclude those where the person refused an offer of assistance; those where a similar request was made at a SAAP funded agency within the collection period (to limit double counting); and those where the reason their request was not met was either that the referral was inappropriate (wrong target group) or that the service requested was not provided by the agency. ^c Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.74.

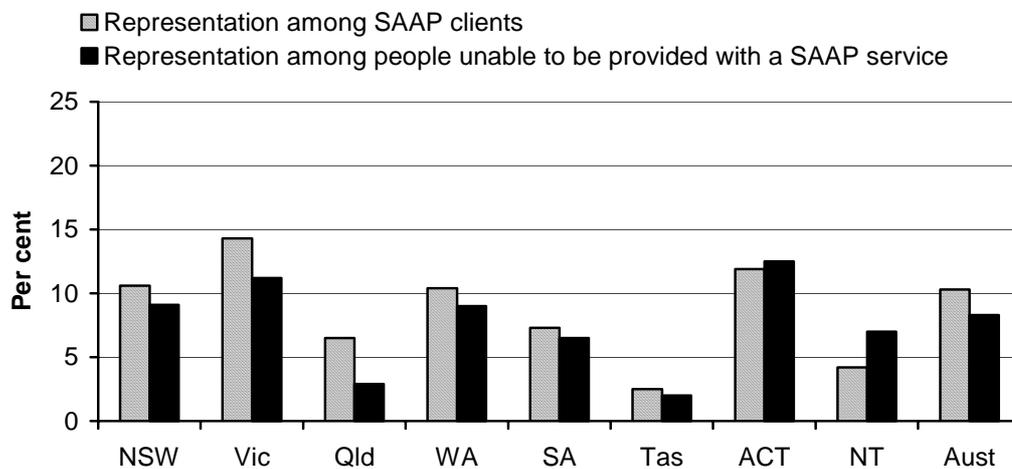
Appropriateness

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

The proportion of clients who received needed services or were referred to another SAAP agency for needed services was 91 per cent in 1998-99. Across jurisdictions the proportion ranged from 89 per cent in NSW to 95 per cent in WA and the NT (figure 14.26).

Ninety-two per cent of Indigenous clients either received needed SAAP services or were referred to another agency for these services in 1998-99 — 1 percentage point higher than the proportion for all clients. Across jurisdictions, the proportion ranged from 88 per cent in NSW to 95 per cent in Queensland and the NT (figure 14.27).

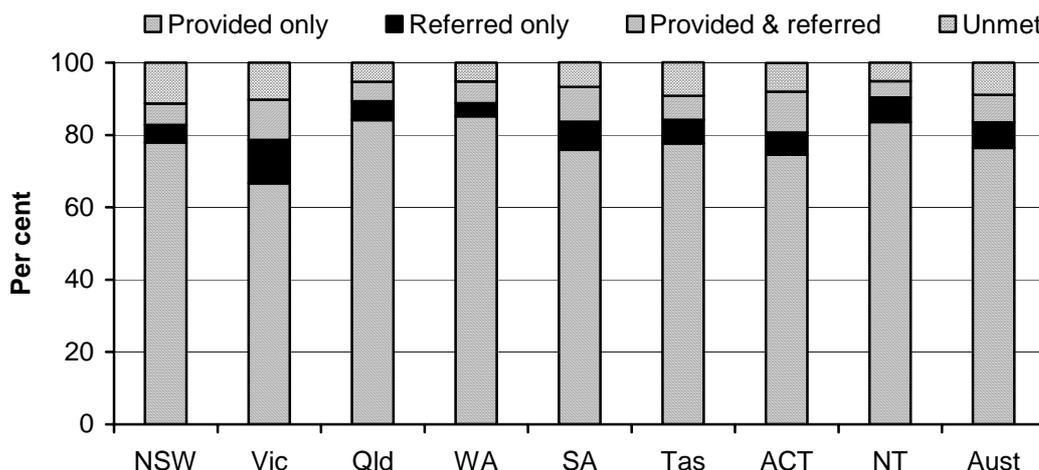
Figure 14.25 People from non-English speaking backgrounds among SAAP clients and among people unable to be provided with a SAAP service, 1998-99^{a, b, c}



^a The number of people unable to be provided with a SAAP service was the 'unmet demand'. 'Unmet demand' estimates are based on the SAAP Unmet Demand Collection and thus should be interpreted with caution. See notes to table 14A.55 for more detail. ^b Unmet requests exclude those where the person refused an offer of assistance; those where a similar request was made at a SAAP funded agency within the collection period (to limit double counting); and those where the reason their request was not met was either that the referral was inappropriate (wrong target group) or that the service requested was not provided by the agency. ^c Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.75.

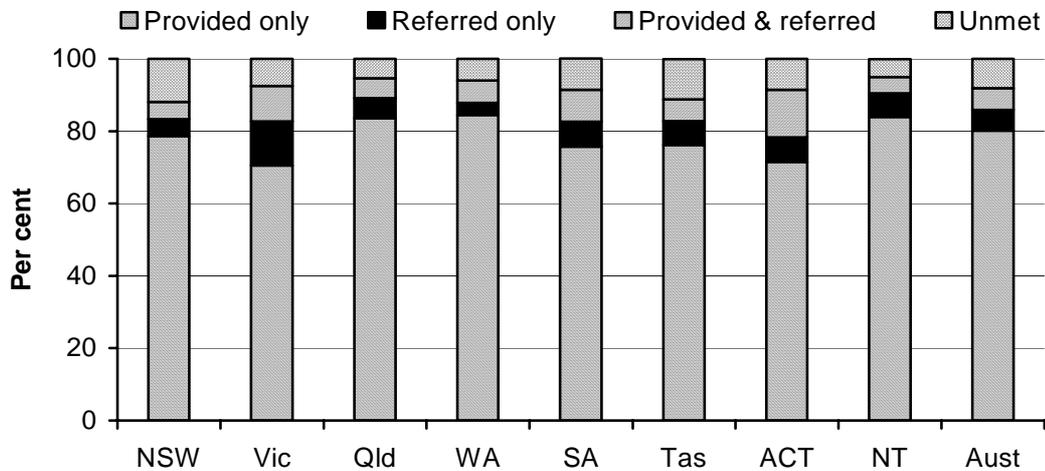
Figure 14.26 Support needs of SAAP clients, by met and unmet, 1998-99^a



^a Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.76.

Figure 14.27 Support needs of Indigenous clients, met and unmet, 1998-99^a

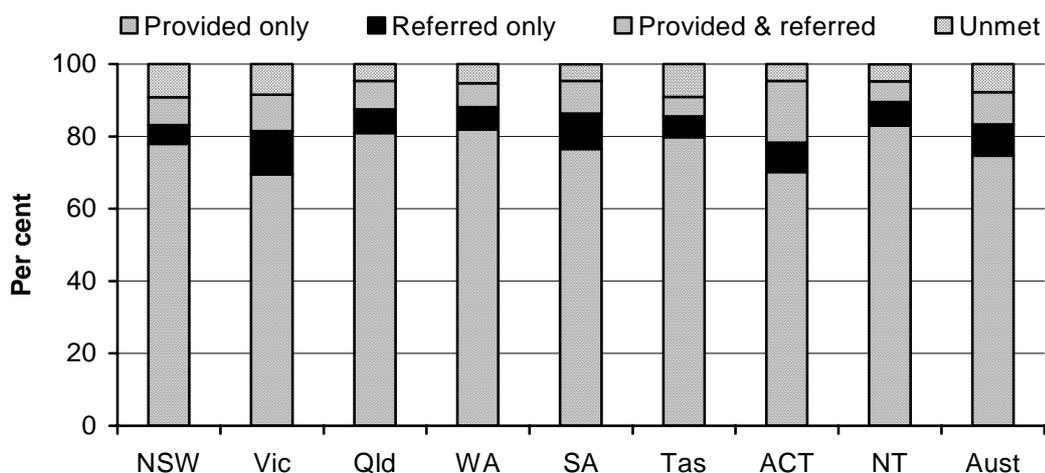


^a Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.77.

Ninety-two per cent of clients from a non-English speaking background, either received needed services or were referred to another agency in 1998-99 — one percentage point higher than the proportion for all clients. Across jurisdictions, the proportion ranged from 91 per cent in NSW and Tasmania to 95 per cent in Queensland, WA, SA, the ACT and the NT (figure 14.28).

Figure 14.28 Support needs of clients from non-English speaking backgrounds, met and unmet, 1998-99^a



^a Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.78.

Efficiency

A proxy indicator of efficiency is the level of government inputs per unit of output (unit cost). Across jurisdictions there are varying treatments of expenditure items (for example, superannuation) and different counting and reporting rules in generating financial data. Efficiency indicator results may reflect these differences.

The unit cost analysis includes only expenditure by service delivery providers. Conceptually, unit cost indicators should include some of the administration costs borne by State and Territory departments in administering these services, but this is not yet possible. Unit cost data do not yet contain capital costs.

Some categories of SAAP clients were not included in efficiency calculations, such as accompanying children. Significant assistance was also provided to a number of clients on a short term basis, such as potential clients (defined as 'unmet demand') and casual clients (see table 14A.87 for definitions).

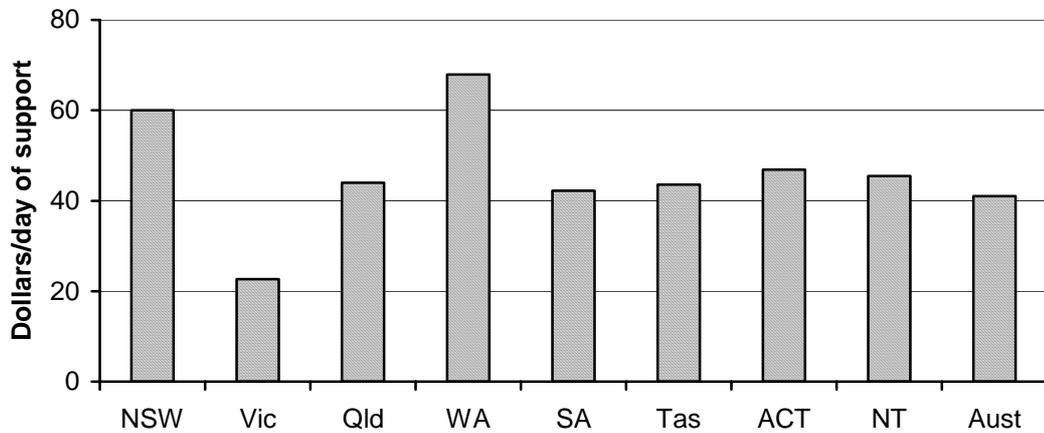
The recurrent cost to government of clients achieving independent living is a broad indicator of the cost of achieving outcomes. An indicator of achieving independent living is the number of clients exiting to independent housing and not returning within six months. However, as discussed earlier, there are data quality issues with this indicator. It is hoped future Reports will include data on this indicator.

The recurrent cost per day of support for homeless clients receiving support and/or supported accommodation (excluding casual and potential clients, and accompanying children who receive services as clients in their own right) averaged \$41 in 1998-99. It ranged from \$23 in Victoria to \$68 in WA (figure 14.29).

The recurrent cost per completed support period (excluding casual clients and accompanying children who receive services as clients in their own right) averaged \$1589 in 1998-99. Across jurisdictions, it ranged from \$925 in the NT to \$2596 in the ACT (figure 14.30).

Nationally, the recurrent cost per client accessing SAAP services was \$2208 in 1998-99. This varied across jurisdictions, from \$1346 in the NT to \$2863 in the ACT (figure 14.31).

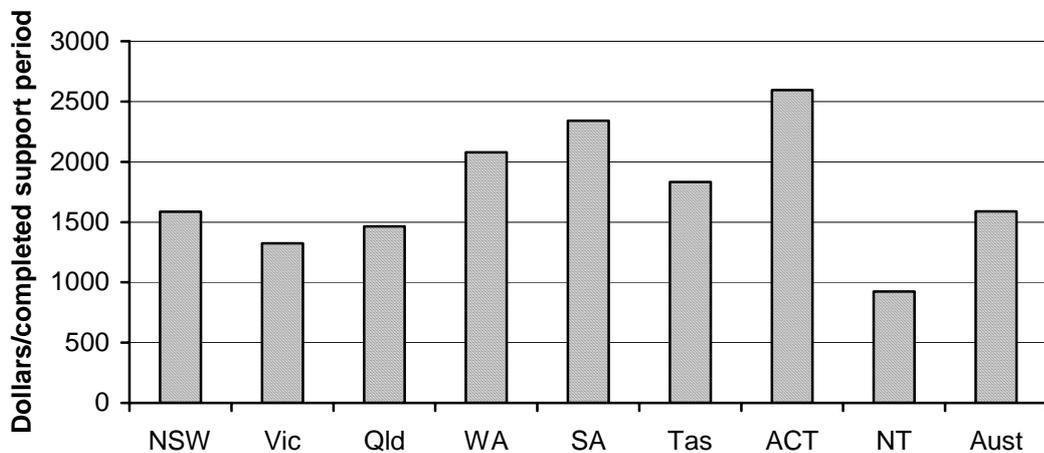
Figure 14.29 Recurrent cost per day of support for homeless clients, 1998-99^{a, b}



^a See notes to table 14A.79 for a description of what the analysis includes. ^b Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.79.

Figure 14.30 Recurrent cost per completed support period, 1998-99^{a, b}



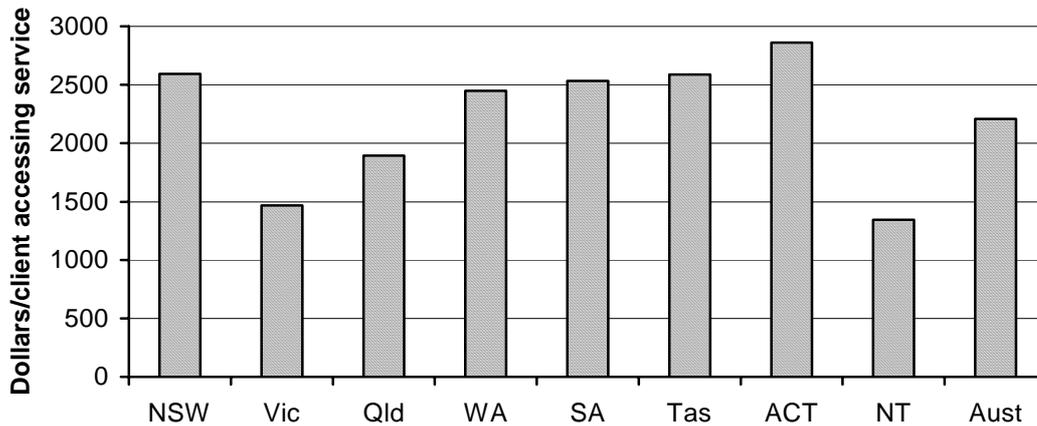
^a See notes to table 14A.80 for a description of what the analysis includes. ^b Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.80.

The average accommodation load is an indicator of the average number of people accommodated per day per agency. The average accommodation load ranged from 5.4 in the NT to 11.0 in the ACT in 1998-99. The average caseload is an indicator of average number of people being supported per day per agency. The average caseload ranged from 9.4 in WA to 24.4 in Victoria in 1998-99 (figure 14.32).

Differences in the average accommodation load and caseload may reflect differences in the average size of agencies across jurisdictions.

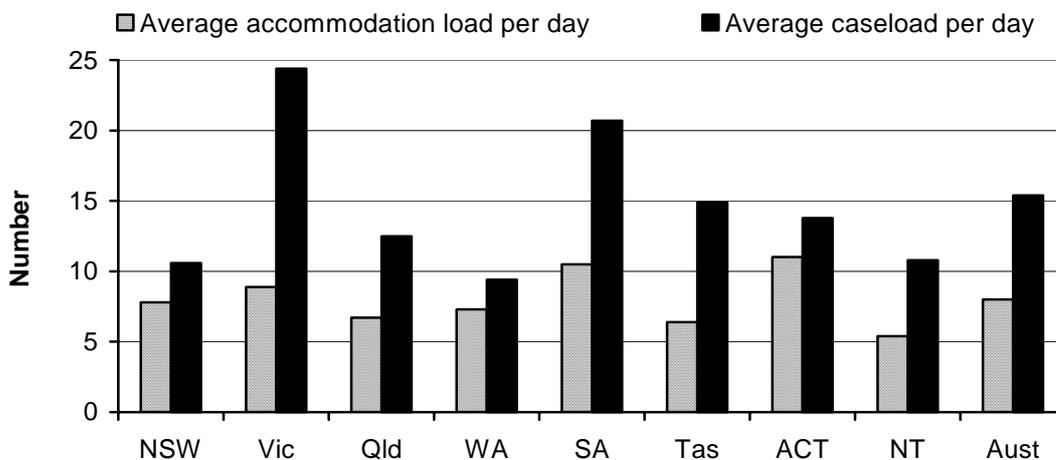
Figure 14.31 Recurrent cost per client accessing services, 1998-99^{a, b, c}



^a Estimate based on the following calculation: of 151 931 forms received nationally in 1998-99, 108 576 forms had a valid alpha code and related to 71 284 clients. This represents an average of 1.52 support periods per client. Assuming that clients who did not supply alpha codes were provided with the same number of support periods, it is estimated that the remaining 43 355 forms represent 28 523 individuals. The best national estimate for the total number of clients is, therefore, 71 284 + 28 523 = 99 807. This calculation has been applied to each State/Territory, using the relevant client and form numbers. The average number of support periods varies in each State and Territory. The national estimate varies from the total of each State/Territory estimate because of rounding. ^b See notes to table 14A.81 for a description of what the analysis includes. ^c Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.81.

Figure 14.32 Average accommodation load and caseload per day, 1998-99^{a, b}



^a See notes to table 14A.82 for a description of how accommodation and caseload were estimated. ^b Preliminary data.

Source: table 14A.82.

Future directions in performance reporting

Improving reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' access to mainstream services

In May 1997 the Prime Minister requested that the Steering Committee give priority to developing indicators that measured the performance of mainstream services in meeting the needs of Indigenous Australians. SAAP data are more advanced in this respect than child protection and supported placement services, but gaps remain. The availability and coverage of nationally consistent data on the provision of services to Indigenous clients will improve in future Reports.

Measuring client satisfaction

Client satisfaction is an important indicator of quality. The national SAAP evaluation involved some work on assessing client satisfaction. Further work is planned as part of the new SAAP Agreements to develop appropriate client satisfaction measures.

Improving data and information collection

Next year's focus will be on improving the data and information collection — in particular, improving data quality and the already high response rates, conducting special data collections and research (for example, the special collection on children accompanying adults in SAAP conducted in May and June 1998), and reviewing parts of the collection to improve collection arrangements.

A computer software package (SAAP Management and Reporting Tool — SMART) has been developed for agencies to electronically collect client information, which will improve the quality and usefulness of the data. This package is being progressively implemented by agencies (with approximately one third now using the package). It has been designed to enable data to be extracted periodically for input to the program's national data collection. This package will improve efficiency by eliminating the need for the collection of information via individual paper forms, and improve data quality by eliminating errors through checks built into the software. The package will enable the periodic collection of additional data for special purposes.

Improving the measurement of unit costs

The Steering Committee is working with the supported accommodation and assistance sector to improve unit costs by introducing a more consistent treatment of:

- superannuation costs (see SCRCSSP 1998);
- payroll tax (see SCRCSSP 1999a); and
- depreciation and the user cost of capital.

Accounting for these cost elements should improve the comparability and accuracy of unit cost information in future Reports.

14.4 Jurisdictions' comments

This section provides comments from each jurisdiction on the three services covered in this chapter (child protection, supported placements and supported accommodation and assistance). 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).

Commonwealth Government comments

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1999 has been a very significant year for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in terms of completing a range of reform activities under the third SAAP Agreements and in setting the directions and framework for the fourth set of Agreements due to commence in 2000. The early part of 1999 saw the completion and release of the national evaluation of SAAP. Commonwealth and State Ministers in setting the directions for SAAP IV subsequently used this report. A Memorandum of Understanding for SAAP IV was completed and agreed in principle by all Ministers in the second half of 1999. In releasing the MOU Ministers stated that it represented a long-term commitment by all jurisdictions to homeless people. The MOU acknowledged that homelessness is a complex problem that requires a flexible range of responses across the breadth of the human service delivery system. In this context SAAP is seen as one part of a continuum of responses to homelessness and domestic violence.

There is a commitment to a new accountability and reporting framework, which will involve further research and data collection aimed at a better understanding and measurement of program achievements.

Completion of the reform activities for SAAP III has particularly included:

- development and refinement of the NDC, including upgrading quality control;
- streamlining data input by use of special computer software;
- completion of a number of research projects including on:
 - Indigenous homelessness;
 - SAAP clients with high and complex needs;
 - working with accompanying children utilising case management;
 - early intervention;
 - measurement of client outcomes;
 - bibliography of research on homelessness over the past 10 years;
 - modelling project on estimation of homelessness.
- development of a range of training and resource material for SAAP agencies to assist with improving client outcomes.

In addition to funding SAAP the Commonwealth has funded complementary programs that assist homeless people, including \$60 million to the Youth Reconnect Program to provide early intervention services to young homeless people, \$42 million to the Family Relationships Program, \$25 million to the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, and \$500 million to the Fight Against Drugs.

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New South Wales Government comments

Child protection and supported placements

The new Children and Young People (Care and Protection) Act 1998 is expected to be proclaimed during the year 2000. The Act creates new responsibilities for the Department of Community Services (DoCS) in prevention of child abuse and family breakdown. It creates the expectation that all Government agencies and relevant funded community organisations will work together to tackle family problems early. Another expectation is that all relevant agencies will seek ways of empowering children, young people and their families to participate in decision-making. There is provision for forms of dispute resolution that don't involve appearance before the Children's Court (mediation, conciliation, etc.) to be used wherever possible. In the spirit of encouraging self-determination, the Act provides for greater involvement by Aboriginal families and communities in decision-making about the care of children and young people.

The new Act is part of a broad-based reform of the NSW child and family services system. Initiatives include:

- New internal processes intended to ensure consistency in the way DoCS responds to people who report concerns about a child or young person or request a service. A TeleService Centre will receive and manage initial calls from all over NSW, and new risk assessment and case management tools will be made available to child protection staff.
- To support parents in their role, the NSW government recently launched the NSW Parenting Campaign – accompanied by a series of booklets with easy-to-read, practical information on raising children.
- The NSW Government is extending the Families First initiative, a collaborative strategy offering a coordinated and accessible network of supportive services to families with children from birth to eight years.

Supported accommodation and assistance

NSW has strong reservations about the quality of data gathered for the 'unmet demand' indicator. These centre on the reliability of data collection procedures lack of a linkage key to differentiate between clients and occasions of service. There are limited details on reasons for demand not being met. NSW looks to a renewed focus on strategies that prevent homelessness and promote early intervention where people are at risk of becoming homeless for long-term, sustainable, reduction in demand for SAAP services.

The SAAP IV agreement will provide opportunities for NSW to make substantial improvement in performance on measures of efficiency and effectiveness. There will be a strong emphasis on early intervention and 'prevention', as well as reduced reliance on accommodation as the predominant service response. During 2000, NSW will develop performance monitoring for SAAP services, ensuring that these are consistent with the indicators in this Report.

Victorian Government comments

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The Victorian Risk Framework (VRF) has been developed and in part implemented during 1998-99. It is a guided professional judgement approach to the assessment of risk in child protection work and has been developed in close consultation with experienced child protection workers and a wide range of other professionals. The VRF comprises a set of assessment guides, underpinned by a unifying theory of risk assessment and principles for good practice.

The VRF is being gradually implemented in the Victorian Child Protection program alongside the Enhanced Client Outcomes initiative (see 1997-98 Report). This incremental implementation strategy acknowledges the magnitude of changes associated with the introduction of the new approach to risk assessment and provides for a period for refinement in response to user feedback before the VRF is fully implemented.

A Working Together Strategy (WTS) has been developed in Victoria which crosses traditional program boundaries. It involves collaboration between Child Protection and Care, Juvenile Justice, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, and Drug Treatment Services and aims to provide a more integrated approach that meets the needs of high risk/high need young people.

Victoria's Placement and Support Program continued to undergo significant redevelopment during 1998-99. The changes included consolidation of service delivery with non-government agencies and a further reduction in residential care in favour of more home based options.

Another recent initiative has been the establishment of Aboriginal Family Preservation Programs (AFPP). These Programs offer intensive, home based, family centred counselling and support services which target Aboriginal families at risk of having a child or young person removed or aim to reunite children in out of home care with their family. Pilot AFPP are operating in three rural regions, with two more (one rural and one metropolitan) planned. The Programs employ Aboriginal staff, and operate alongside an Aboriginal cooperative. In addition to AFPP, seven Aboriginal Case Management positions have been created to support Aboriginal clients on Custody/Guardianship to Secretary Orders.

For SAAP services during 1998-99, Victoria has moved to further focus these services on their core business — the provision of support to clients. This has been complemented by the movement of management of the housing stock to other service providers. Parallel with this change, a *Quality Improvement Workbook for Victoria SAAP Case Management* was prepared. It is designed to assist services providers measure good practice in each of eight case management elements, and to measure the organisational features which support good case management practices.

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Queensland Government comments

Child protection and supported placements

The *Child Protection Act 1999*, a significant component of Queensland's Child Protection Reform Strategy, will be proclaimed in March 2000, bringing the state's legislative framework into line with modern practice. A significant feature of the Act is the concept of protecting children and young people from harm, rather than the narrower construct of protection from abuse or neglect. The Act refers to the need to protect children from harm in all circumstances where parents are unable or unwilling to do so, irrespective of the cause.

The Queensland Government has provided additional funds of \$100m over four years to resource implementation of the Child Protection Act 1999 and to address the issues raised in the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions conducted during 1999. There will be an increase in the numbers of front-line workers in child protection and an upgrade of community services. In particular, Indigenous child protection services have had enhanced staffing to meet the requirements of the new Act regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Development of Queensland's Child Protection Reform Strategy has included a major collaborative process, Partnership in Action, whereby the Department and community services at both peak and local levels have formed planning groups to consider needs and recommend change. The range of placement types and services required to meet the varied needs of children and young people in care or at risk of harm have been identified. This includes the needs of young people who are homeless and those unable to live in family-based care.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

In line with recommendations from the 1998 Queensland Evaluation of SAAP, a joint Ministerial Advisory Arrangement providing advice to the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care on the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is being established. This will ensure better coordination of supported accommodation services.

The Renewing SAAP Initiative will include a review of the current SAAP service system, to analyse the spread and mix of existing services and identify needs and gaps in service provision. Projects will analyse the viability of existing service models and develop benchmarks for funding to achieve effective and efficient client outcomes. Sub-regional service integration projects will apply a place management framework to ensure outcomes for clients that encompass effective crisis and post crisis responses and link SAAP services to available prevention, early intervention and support services.

Guidelines to facilitate access to services by people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are being developed. The Queensland Government is developing strategies to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness and family violence within Indigenous communities.

Western Australian Government comments



Child Protection

There has been further consolidation of the new specialist teams structure introduced in 1997-98 during this year. The Child Protection Teams who handle investigation and statutory work have continued to develop their specialised skills. Intensive Casework teams have been formed to work with families and individuals with significant needs. A major initiative has commenced in the Perth metropolitan area and one major regional area. The WA Police Service and Family and Children's Services will now respond jointly to reports of child abuse and neglect of a very serious/criminal nature. The project will be evaluated in late 2000 and may be extended to other regional and remote areas.

The independent evaluation of the New Directions Approach to Child Protection introduced in Western Australia in 1995-96 was completed by Professor Nigel Parton and Dr Corinne Wattam. The report concluded that New Directions was "a particularly bold and sophisticated approach to issues and problems which are facing a number of state child welfare organisations across the English speaking world." The report made a number of suggestions for additional research and evaluation that will be taken up in the year ahead.

Supported Placements

Work has continued to adapt the Looking after Children (LAC) program from the U.K. to the Western Australian situation, prior to its implementation. Considerable collaborative work has also taken place with funded out of home care services to develop a system of collecting and reporting output and outcome measures to the department.

Provision of leaving care services has been a major focus of the supported placements area in 1998-99. The new Transitional Support Service has assisted a number of young people in their move to independent living. A mentoring project involving young people who have themselves been in care has also been successful and may be expanded.

SAAP

SAAP in Western Australia 1998-99 was impacted by the introduction of the Crisis Assistance, Supported Housing (CASH) Award which came into effect on 1 January 1998. Family and Children's Services sought and obtained additional funds from the Commonwealth Government. Priority was given to funding 24 hour and extended hour services. As at 30 June 1999, 48 services had received \$3.4 million in funding increases including back payments to 1 January 1998. The assessment of applications will continue into 1999-2000.

Reform Projects were the other major focus during the year. 1998-99 saw the operation and/or completion of eight projects focussing on case management, service standards, boarding houses, and interdepartmental protocols.

Three new services were funded during 1998-99 and the Commonwealth extended the Derby rural and remote domestic violence pilot project and included it in the SAAP program.



South Australian Government comments

Child protection

The centralising of notifications of child abuse through the Child Abuse Report Line has improved public accessibility and has provided improved consistency in determining the reports of child abuse and neglect that require a departmental response. The differential response system has resulted in a higher proportion of notifications being responded to, and has ensured a rapid coordinated interagency response to children in current and imminent danger. While notifications of child abuse have risen steadily over recent years there has been very little increase in the number of children where abuse or neglect has been substantiated.

The research-based Risk Assessment instrument to assist staff in targeting intervention responses to families where the risk of further abuse is high, is currently being validated. Changes will be made to ensure the application of the Risk Assessment instrument is culturally appropriate and has a high degree of accuracy in its identification of future risk.

Supported placements

Supported Placement provision in SA is designed to ensure a continuum of placement outcomes from primary support to families (family preservation and reunification services); supplementing the care provided by birth families (respite and short term care provision) to providing care outside of the family for children and young people who can no longer remain with their birth family (long-term placements). In December 1997 the recruitment, training and support of foster carers was contracted to non-government service providers. This has resulted in a significant change in the provision of supported placement services in South Australia. A mid term review of supported placement arrangements is being undertaken and will identify and address any difficulties in the current system and inform future policy, services planning and purchasing decisions.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

Developments in 1998-99 include enhanced training, improvements in services in the Inner City, a pilot early intervention service for families at imminent risk of homelessness and the establishment of a Dispute Resolution Training, Education and Mediation Service. A Training Advisory Group has been established with various representatives from SAAP service providers, State and Commonwealth governments. Priority areas identified for training include Managing Challenging Behaviours, Cultural Sensitivity, Management Training and developmental work on Case Management for clients with children.

An appraisal of the current SAAP services for homeless families was conducted internally by the department. Further discussions and examination are planned for the year 2000.

Tasmanian Government comments

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Child protection – care and protection services

During 1999 resource constraints temporarily halted projects associated with implementing the provisions of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997. Despite this setback Tasmania is now progressing towards proclamation of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 on 1 July 2000. The legislation maximises opportunities for children to grow up in a safe and stable family environment and to reach their full potential. The central principles of the legislation are based on the best interests of the child being paramount, that families are responsible for the care and protection of their children and that the Government will work in partnership with the community to support families. The legislation also provides a sound platform from which to invest resources in preventive services which enhance the safety and wellbeing of children and young people at risk and their families.

Supported placements – out of home care

The implementation of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 will see the establishment of a Commissioner for Children. Under the legislation the Commissioner will be required to establish a range of advisory mechanisms to ensure that the views of children and children in care are represented. In 1999 Tasmania established an Advisory Group of Young People in Care. The aim of consultation with this Advisory Group was to jointly develop a Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for young people placed in the care of the State.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services

Forty services were funded from SAAP in 1998-99 to provide a comprehensive safety net and support service for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. As a result of the 1998 Evaluation of SAAP services and in response to an increasing need to improve the service delivery model for SAAP services, a restructure of these services commenced in December 1999. The results of this restructure will be implemented in conjunction with the introduction of SAAP IV in July 2000.

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Australian Capital Territory Government comments

Child protection

The drafting of new legislation was undertaken and the Children and Young People Act 1999 will be proclaimed in the first half of the year 2000. The new Act will change child protection practice in the ACT in a number of key ways, including the introduction of Family Group Conferences.

A new computerised client information system for child protection and supported placement services was developed and introduced in December 1999. This will assist in the collection and analysis of data and will improve the ability to report on performance measures.

Supported placements

The recommendations of the Review of Substitute Care Services in the ACT were considered and a preferred option for restructuring foster care services has been put for further consultation. Work on the outcomes of the Review is continuing. A commitment has been given to introduce the Looking After Children program and the introduction of quality standards.

Emphasis has continued to be placed on increasing the number of Indigenous carers and funding was provided for a non-government agency to recruit, assess, train and support Indigenous foster carers.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

The ACT has continued to progress the implementation of a service purchasing environment, as part of its public sector reform program. Reviews of a range of sectors were undertaken. These reviews will inform future strategic planning, service purchasing and contract management, in order to facilitate more effective service delivery to clients in ACT SAAP services.

The ACT continues to have strains put on the SAAP sector through the scarcity of accommodation, due to the historical development and nature of the Territory. The vacancy rate in the private rental sector is currently the lowest in the country.

Northern Territory Government comments

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The Family and Children's Services Program (FACS) of Territory Health Services is responsible for child protection and out of home care services, and the administration of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

The NT population is comparatively youthful with approximately 34 per cent of the population being under twenty years of age. One in three children are Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander, of whom up to 70 per cent live on Aboriginal communities in rural areas.

Child protection and supported placements

Universal mandatory reporting applies and all allegations accepted as notifications must be investigated by way of a home visit. All investigations whether substantiated or not are independently reviewed by Child Protection Teams which may recommend further action in relation to the management of the case.

Where children are placed, foster care is the primary placement option. Comparatively few children are in group home care which is provided by FACS and one non-government organisation.

A new comprehensive Policy and Practice Manual for FACS staff was issued during the year. The manual documents policy, practice standards and operational procedures relating to child protection, out of home care and family support practice, as well as the operation and responsibilities of the Family Matters Court in the NT.

Another major innovation in the last year has been the introduction of a new client information system. Because of the system changeover this year data for child protection and supported placements was not ready in time for publication.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

The twenty-nine service outlets which are funded under SAAP in the NT are located in the five main population centres, and provide services to a range of clients, including a significant proportion of Aboriginal clients, many of whom are from rural and remote areas.

The high proportion of Aboriginal SAAP clients in the NT (42.9 per cent) compared to the National average (12.7 per cent) presents particular challenges for the program. These issues are explored in the national report commissioned as part of the SAAP Research Program, "Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Islander context and possible implications for the SAAP" and in the "Northern Territory SAAP rural and remote women's project". These projects finalised during 1998-99 will contribute to improving the cultural appropriateness of SAAP service delivery in the implementation of SAAP IV.

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