



Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

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The Hon Dr Michael Wooldridge MP
Minister for Health and Family Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

The Institute is pleased to present to you *Australia's Welfare 1997: Services and Assistance*, a report covering those aspects of Australia's welfare and welfare services for which data are currently being collected either nationally or in some States and Territories. The report is required under the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*.

Yours sincerely

Professor Janice Reid
Chair

21 October 1997

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Preface

Australia is spending more on welfare services than before. Welfare services expenditure by governments and non-government organisations in 1995–96 was \$8.9 billion or \$489 per person, an increase in real terms of 62% (or 51% per person) since 1989–90.

This is reflected in an improvement in the provision of welfare services in recent years. For instance, the number of clients who received some support from open employment services which prepare and support people with a disability to work in the open labour market increased from around 18,500 to 22,200 between 1995 and 1996; the number of older persons being cared for in nursing homes and hostels increased from 113,000 in 1992 to almost 124,000 in 1996; and the number of children attending child care services funded through the Children's Services Program is estimated to have increased almost threefold between 1989 and 1996 from around 150,000 to 570,000.

Despite the increased spending on welfare services, however, in 1993 there were an estimated 13,500 people with a profound or severe handicap who needed accommodation, accommodation support or respite care services, but who were not receiving these services; at least 47,000 people considered to be homeless received assistance from agencies funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in the 6 months from June to December 1996; and around 25,500 children were the subject of a substantiation of child abuse and neglect in 1995–96.

These are a few figures showing the contrasting faces of community services in Australia. While the proportion of economic resources (GDP) spent on community services has risen from 1.3% to 1.8% in 6 years, too many people remain in need of services, too many carers continue day in, day out without respite or help, and too many children live in deprived social and economic circumstances.

The Institute is required by law every 2 years to bring together the facts on Australia's welfare services, the need for these services, their use, cost and the outcomes of service provision. Whether enough is being done is for the reader to conclude.

Australia's Welfare is the third in the series which began in 1993. In the last 2 years, data have become available on people using various services such as supported and crisis accommodation, on unmet demand for disability services and on the provision of respite services for the aged. Importantly, a National Community Services Information Agreement has been put in place, linking government agencies, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Institute in a joint effort to produce consistent, timely information on demand for and supply of community services across Australia.

The present edition is the product of the hard work of many, led by Helen Moyle who has combined the role with her normal heavy workload in children's services and protection information. The volume packs information compactly but readably into 9 chapters. This year, a commissioned chapter from Peter McDonald of the Australian National University details how families use welfare services, and shows that welfare services are essential to the maintenance and good health of Australian family life.

Use *Australia's Welfare 1997* as a specialist reference in a particular field, as a general reference on welfare services in Australia, or as a description of the state of Australian social policy. Whatever the reader's focus, *Australia's Welfare 1997* is an up-to-date, reliable and interesting digest of how Australians need and help each other.

Richard Madden
Director

Acknowledgements

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Symbols

The following symbols are used in the tables and figures of this report:

—	nil or rounded to zero
..	not applicable
n.a.	not available
n.p.	not published
\$A	Australian dollars
m	million
b	billion
%	per cent
nec	not elsewhere classified
'000	thousands
*	subject to relative standard error of between 25% and 50%
**	subject to relative standard error of more than 50%
N	number

