



# 1 Introduction

This report is the third in a series of biennial reports on Australia's system of welfare services and assistance. The problems involved in defining the scope and boundaries of that system were discussed in detail in the first biennial report (AIHW 1993) and also referred to in the second report (AIHW 1995). While recognising the complexities involved in the definition of welfare services, both the first and the second reports took as their focus the welfare-related functions of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, as set out in the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*:

- (a) aged care services;
- (b) child care services (including services designed to encourage or support participation by parents in educational courses, training and the labour force);
- (c) services for people with disabilities;
- (d) housing assistance (including programs designed to provide access to secure housing in the long term and programs to provide access to crisis accommodation in the short term);
- (e) child welfare services (including, in particular, child protection and substitute care services); and
- (f) other community services.

Each report has taken the previous one as a base. However, the scope of the reports has gradually widened.

The first report contains a historical overview of Australia's welfare system, as well as an outline of the development of welfare statistics in Australia. Also included in that report are separate chapters on housing assistance (long-term and short-term), children's services (child care and child welfare), aged care services and disability services. While the main focus is on the need for, provision, costs, use and outcomes of services, each chapter also includes a historical account of the development of the area and some discussion of data development issues.

Each of the substantive chapters in the second report—housing assistance and services, children's services and child welfare services, services for frail older people and services for people with disabilities—includes information on government outlays on welfare services and assistance, indicators of need for services, a detailed picture of the amount and type of services being delivered, a profile of the people receiving those services, and some broad outcomes measures for welfare services (for instance, accessibility, appropriateness, affordability and quality). In addition, the second report contains a chapter providing a detailed overview of welfare services expenditure, based on a synthesis of data from a number of different government databases, and a chapter

outlining the problems, achievements and likely future directions with regard to national data development in welfare services.

*Australia's Welfare 1997: Services and Assistance* builds on the first two reports. Like the second report, it contains separate chapters on welfare services expenditure, aged care services and disability services. Information on housing, however, is provided in two separate chapters: one relating to housing assistance and the other to accommodation and services for people in crisis. This latter chapter contains data from the first national data collection on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Similarly, information relating to services for children is contained in two separate chapters: one relating to child protection services and the other to children's services and family support services. The child protection chapter includes, for the first time in the *Australia's Welfare* series, national data on children in out of home care (substitute care). An overview of family support services is also provided for the first time in the series, as an initial step towards the goal of developing a national data collection in the area. Finally, this third edition contains a special feature chapter on family and welfare services. This chapter documents family changes in Australia since the mid-1970s, in terms of demography, economic conditions, family functioning and the relationship of the nuclear family to extended family networks, and includes projections of likely trends in family arrangements over the next 10 years. The chapter also examines the implication for welfare services of the current diversity of family arrangements and the directions of change in the family and, conversely, the implications for families of directions in welfare policy.

### **Need for national community services data**

*Australia's Welfare 1993: Services and Assistance* identified a number of directions in welfare services funding, provision and delivery. These directions were highlighted again in the 1995 report and, as the substantive chapters of this report show, have become of increasing importance in the last 2 years. These directions include:

- funding and service delivery arrangements that are outcome focused, including the use of output-based funding;
- the continued development of national standards and accreditation systems to assess and monitor quality of services;
- the increasing separation between the policy makers and funders of services and the bodies responsible for delivering services through the 'purchaser-provider' model;
- the emphasis on choice for the consumer through competition, which, along with the purchaser-provider model, has encouraged 'competitive tendering' for service funding and/or the use of voucher-type arrangements for clients;
- the pressure to exercise fiscal restraint, as evidenced by competitive tendering, increased targeting of service provision and emphasis on 'user-pays' in a context of increasing government expenditure on community services; and
- a clarification of and changes in the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government—Commonwealth, State and Territory, and local government—in relation to the funding, provision and delivery of community services and housing assistance.

Nationally consistent data on community services are vital in order to monitor and evaluate the impact of these trends in community services funding, provision and delivery.

The need for nationally consistent information was identified as a key component in the implementation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) proposed reforms to health and community services and public housing (AIHW 1995:318). At its meeting in June 1996, the Council agreed to broad directions in reform in health and community services through a partnership between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories, with an emphasis on achieving better integration of care, a stronger focus on outcomes and more client-centred care. COAG also reaffirmed its commitment to fundamental changes in the respective government roles and responsibilities in the provision of housing assistance (see Chapter 5) (COAG 1996). At the time of writing (September 1997), the Council has not met again, and while governments are still exploring shared approaches to reform, it is not clear what role COAG will play in the future. Work is proceeding in the health and community services areas under the auspices of Health and Community Services Ministers, with an emphasis on bilateral negotiation of practical reforms to achieve specific objectives. Timing for agreement and implementation of reform objectives will therefore depend on progress with Commonwealth-State discussion in specific areas. Housing chief executive officers are currently considering the directions and nature of reform for long-term housing assistance (see Chapter 5).

Nationally consistent community services data are also vital for the purposes of the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision. This Review was established by the Prime Minister, State Premiers and Chief Ministers at the COAG meeting in July 1993. One of its objectives is to collect and publish national performance indicators on the effectiveness of government-funded services in achieving desired policy outcomes and the efficiency of governments in providing these services (SCRCSSP 1995:iii). The other objective is to publish information on service provision reforms that have been implemented, or are under consideration, by Commonwealth and State or Territory Governments. The Review operates under the sponsorship of COAG, with the Industry Commission providing the secretariat to the Review's Steering Committee. Two reports on the performance of government-funded services have been published (SCRCSSP 1995, 1997a), and one report on service provision reforms (SCRCSSP 1997b).

The Review sets out a number of reasons for collecting and publishing performance indicators on government-funded services:

- Developing a better understanding of how existing services perform and how clients' needs are currently met is viewed as a central element in improving outcomes for clients and giving taxpayers value for money.
- Service provision is made 'more transparent' and accountability strengthened.
- Performance information provides the basis for a 'clearer delineation' of the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government in service delivery.
- Governments are assisted to 'improve their service delivery through "yardstick competition", that is, by facilitating comparisons with programs with similar objectives

within the same jurisdiction, across jurisdictions, or between modes of service delivery' (SCRCSSP 1995:2-3).

The government-funded services on which performance is reported include housing assistance, aged care services, disability services, children's services, and protection and support services (that is, child protection services and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program). Working groups have been established for each of the service areas and are composed of representatives from all jurisdictions (Commonwealth, and States and Territories), local government (where appropriate) and specialist input, such as this Institute and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The 1997 report acknowledges the limitations of the currently available data (SCRCSSP 1997a:xxv). National performance indicator data are limited both in terms of their quality and, in many instances, their availability.

### **Recent national developments in community services information**

The lack of reliable national statistics to monitor the output and outcomes of welfare services was identified in *Australia's Welfare 1993: Services and Assistance* (AIHW 1993:31). Trends in service funding, provision and delivery outlined here and the emphasis on measuring service performance make it clear that all levels of government, managers, planners, service providers and carers need better community services information, that is, information which is timely, relevant and nationally consistent. Since the 1995 edition of *Australia's Welfare*, there have been some important national developments in community services information.

#### **National community services industry study**

The 1995-96 Community Services Industry Survey which was discussed in *Australia's Welfare 1995* (AIHW 1995:312) was conducted by the ABS in August 1996. A sample of 5,600 community service organisations was surveyed and data collected on: type of organisation; staff; sources of income; expenditure, both capital and recurrent; assets and liabilities; technological base; and service activities. A number of different survey forms were designed so that the questions were appropriate for each particular community services area. For instance, separate forms were used for child care organisations, peak bodies and government departments. Preliminary results from this survey have already been published (ABS 1997). It is expected that a publication containing final and more detailed information will be released in October 1997.

#### **National classifications of community services activities**

As outlined in the last biennial report, a national classification system for community services was initiated by the Institute in 1994 to support the Community Services Industry Survey (AIHW 1995:312). The classification was developed by the AIHW and the Victorian Department of Human Services in conjunction with all community services departments, the ABS and representatives from the non-government sector. The classification provides a framework for the future development of administrative data in the community services field. It contains three types of classifications: activities; target group; and delivery setting. The draft classification was used in the 1995-96 ABS Community Services Industry Survey and was published by the Institute in September 1997 (AIHW 1997). In this edition of *Australia's Welfare*, the draft 'activities' classification has been used to classify family support services (see Chapter 4).

### **National Community Services Information Agreement**

As foreshadowed in *Australia's Welfare 1995* (AIHW 1995:322), a National Community Services Information Agreement was developed in 1995–96 and came into effect in early 1997. This Agreement puts in place the consultative structures and processes necessary to improve the national information available across the community services sector.

In late 1995, the Institute began work on the development of the national infrastructure required to improve national community services information. Following discussion with other agencies, in March 1996 the Institute proposed to the Standing Committee of Community Services and Income Security Administrators (SCCSISA) that it commence discussions with Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions and the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) on planning the development of such information. SCCSISA endorsed the Institute's proposal and agreed that the Institute undertake this task.

Drawing on the experience in the health sector, the Institute argued that the best way to achieve a nationally integrated and coordinated approach to developing community services information would be through an agreement between the major community services authorities in all jurisdictions. This agreement would provide the national infrastructure and decision-making processes necessary to develop consistent information. A plan establishing a longer term view of information developments and needs, and identifying priorities, could also be formulated. For these reasons, SCCSISA agreed that an agreement be negotiated between the various parties. A steering committee was established, an agreement was drafted and the draft agreement endorsed by SCCSISA in October 1996.

The National Community Services Information Agreement came into effect from 1 March 1997 as a multilateral agreement between the Commonwealth, State and Territory community services authorities, the ABS and the AIHW. This agreement covers the areas of aged care, disability services, children's services, child protection services, juvenile justice and emergency relief services. While ACOSS participated in formulating the Agreement, it decided not to be a signatory, since it considered that it was not seen as representing all the non-government sector.

The National Community Services Information Management Group, comprising senior representatives of the signatories to the Agreement, was set up to manage the Agreement and to oversee the National Community Services Data Committee. This committee, which includes representatives from government and non-government sectors, is responsible for coordinating the development of data definitions, standards and classifications. An overall objective is to promote consistency between the national health and community services definitions and standards.

Specific objectives of the Agreement are to:

- provide a framework to facilitate, coordinate, plan, manage and prioritise national information developments, in order to:
  - link data and data development to policy and program development;
  - identify data gaps;
  - prioritise data development activities;

- develop agreed national uniform data definitions;
- agree on national minimum data sets;
- coordinate data developments in both government and non-government agencies; and
- reduce duplication of data development and collection by coordination with other human services sectors;
- provide a structure for developing data standards, uniform definitions and classifications that will:
  - improve existing data;
  - ensure data collections across the community services sector are consistent and comparable while retaining individual collections; and
  - develop a national community services data dictionary;
- improve access to consistent and timely information between all levels of government, service providers, consumers and funders, whilst ensuring privacy and confidentiality requirements are met.

By signing the Agreement, each jurisdiction has indicated a strong commitment to working cooperatively with the other jurisdictions to improve and develop national community services information. The Agreement provides an opportunity to bring together a diverse range of often uncoordinated and unintegrated data developments within an agreed structure at a national level. An early output of these arrangements will be publication of the initial National Community Services Data Dictionary, proposed for early 1998. SCCSISA has provided financial support in 1997–98 to assist the Institute to develop the data dictionary.

The National Community Services Information Management Group is now moving to the next stage: the drafting of a National Community Services Information Development Plan. This Plan will draw on the current national developments and achievements, establish priorities and build an integrated approach to information development that will provide a national information structure and direction. The Plan will provide a 5–10 year vision for community services information development and recommend a set of directions for more immediate development activities.

The National Community Services Information Agreement is a landmark recognising the importance of good information as the basis of policy making and community discussion.

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