



4 Children's and family services

4.1 Introduction

In Australia, assistance is provided to families and children through family income support and through children's and family services. Services are designed to assist families with child-rearing, to prevent family problems or breakdown and to help children and families in crisis. While attempts have been made to categorise family and children's services according to these functions, it is important to note that any one service can fulfil more than one function. The predominant focus of this chapter is on children's services—that is, child care services for children under school age and of primary school age, and preschool services (see Box 4.1).

Child care services provide care and developmental activities for children whose parents need care for work-related and/or personal reasons, and for children in family crises, including those at risk of abuse and neglect. (Parents needing care for work-related reasons include those who are working, looking for work or studying or training for work.) Formal child care services are funded by the Commonwealth Government and by State and Territory Governments, and are provided in the main by local government, non-government organisations, and private-for-profit bodies. Informal child care services are provided by relatives and friends, and by other individuals such as paid babysitters and nannies.

Preschool services provide educational and developmental programs for children in the year or two before they begin school full-time. These services are mainly funded by State and Territory Governments, and are either provided by non-government organisations or located within the school system. While preschool services are often regarded as a form of 'child care' (ABS 1997a; EPAC 1996a), child care and preschool services historically were developed as separate services and there are important differences between them (see Box 4.1). There is an increasing trend, however, towards integrating the two services, as discussed in this chapter (page 109).

Children's services have been a focus of government attention in the past 2 years and a number of inquiries into the provision and delivery of child care and preschool services have been completed, including the Economic Planning and Advisory Committee (EPAC) Child Care Task Force (1996b) and the Senate Employment, Education and Training (EET) Committee Inquiry into Early Childhood Education (1996).

This chapter also describes family support services (Section 4.3), such as counselling and mediation, parent education, family preservation services, financial counselling, neighbourhood houses and playgroups. Although family support is provided informally by family members and friends, the focus here is on government-funded services which may become necessary when these informal networks break down or where they do not exist, or where informal assistance is considered to be inappropriate. The section

Box 4.1: Formal children's services—types and definition

- **Long day care centres** are purpose-built facilities in which staff provide care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age. These centres are generally open for at least 8 hours per day, 5 days per week, 48 weeks of the year.
- **Preschools or kindergartens** offer educational and developmental programs, usually sessional, to children in the year or two before they begin full-time school. Sessional programming generally involves a distinct group of children meeting for three or four sessions per week, each session being about half of the normal school day (2.5 to 3 hours). In addition to operating on a sessional basis, most preschools are open only during school terms, characteristics which mark their main difference from long day care centres.
- **Family day care schemes** are networks of individuals providing care and developmental activities in their own homes for children 0–12 years. Family day care providers are recruited and supported by a central coordination unit, which administers the scheme.
- **Outside school hours care services** offer care and activities for primary school age children out of school hours. There are three major types of care: before school, after school and vacation care. 'Year round care' services enable parents to access before and/or after school care and vacation care through one contact point.
- **Occasional care services** generally provide care for children under school age for short periods of time, to assist parents who need care for personal reasons, such as attending adult education classes or medical appointments, going shopping, or simply for respite.
- **Multifunctional centres** are located in rural areas and operate a number of different child care services for children 0–12 years from the one building. This range of services generally includes long day care, outside school hours care and mobile services.
- **Multifunctional Aboriginal children's services (MACS)** are culturally specific children's services, which are provided to meet the particular needs of Indigenous communities. They operate as long day care centres, with playgroups, enrichment and nutrition programs, services for mothers and other types of services.
- **Mobile services** provide child care, playgroups, older children's activities, toy and book library services, and parental support and advice for families living in rural and remote areas.

Sources: DHFS 1996a; Moyle et al. 1996; Moyle et al. 1997.

does not focus on services providing assistance with legal matters or domestic violence or those with a primary focus on youth as clients. Some of these services are discussed in Chapter 7. Out of home placement services, a family support service used to care for children in need of protection, in other family crises or for respite care, are discussed in Chapter 6.

The following section on children's services (Section 4.2) discusses the need for services, provision and delivery of services, expenditure, use of services and outcomes (in terms

of accessibility, affordability and quality). Family support services (Section 4.3) are discussed in terms of their aims, target population, funding, provision and delivery, and use.

4.2 Children's services

Data sources

There is currently no national children's services data collection and data on children's services are highly fragmented. The Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) administers two data collections—the Child Care System and the Child Care Census—which cover most child care services funded under the Children's Services Program (CSP) (page 101).¹ The Child Care System is an administrative data collection containing information about agencies which receive payments from DHFS to provide child care services funded under the CSP. The Child Care Census collects information from CSP-funded service providers on their staff, children and parents using the service and various aspects of the service provision.² Limited information about families claiming the Childcare Cash Rebate is collected by the Health Insurance Commission. States and Territories also collect data about child care and preschool services.

Children's services data were obtained from the Commonwealth and the States and Territories for the COAG review of Commonwealth/State service provision, for the first time in 1996 (SCRCSSP 1997). It is difficult to combine data from the various jurisdictions to obtain a national picture, however, because of differences in the scope and coverage of the data collections, in data classifications and definitions, and in data collection periods.

The ABS Child Care Survey is conducted every 3 years, with the latest survey having been undertaken in March 1996. While this survey is useful, since it covers children using formal child care services and preschools and in informal care arrangements, the data cannot be disaggregated to any great extent; for instance, particular data items cannot be examined at a State and Territory level.

This chapter uses the CSP collections as the main data source, supplemented by data from the States and Territories and from the ABS surveys where appropriate.

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- 1 Throughout this chapter the term 'CSP-funded' covers all agencies receiving funding through the CSP, including agencies which are approved for Childcare Assistance only. An 'agency' is the organisation, body or enterprise which provides the services, except in the case of family day care, where it refers to the family day care coordination unit (see Box 4.1).
 - 2 From 1993 to 1996 inclusive, DHFS conducted a 'rolling census' of services—that is, there were two groups of service types which were surveyed every other year. In 1997, long day care centres, family day care services and outside school hours care services will be included in the census.

Need for children's services

At June 1996, in Australia, there were 3.4 million children 12 years of age and under, representing the potential population for child care services (Table A4.1). The potential population for preschool services is difficult to identify, however, since the age at which children attend these services varies across the States and Territories. Additionally, some children participate in preschool programs provided in long day care centres rather than attend sessional preschools (page 109).

One of the main reasons why child care is needed is to enable parents to participate in the labour force, that is, to undertake or look for paid employment. At June 1996, in almost half of the 846,100 couple families and in more than a third of the 152,800 one-parent families where the youngest child was under 5 years of age, both parents were (or the sole parent was) in the labour force (Table 4.1). A higher proportion of families had both parents (or the sole parent) in the labour force where the youngest child was 5 years of age or older. Both parents were in the labour force, for instance, in around two-thirds of couple families and in well over half of the one-parent families where the youngest child was aged 5–9 years.

Table 4.1: Families with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, by age of youngest child, June 1996

Age of youngest child	Both parents (or a sole parent) in labour force ('000)	Percentage of total families	Total families ('000)
Couple families with youngest child aged:			
0–4	405.9	48.0	846.1
5–9	305.1	68.1	448.2
10–14	302.9	73.2	413.7
One-parent families with youngest child aged:			
0–4	57.2	37.4	152.8
5–9	66.3	58.5	113.4
10–14	74.2	63.0	117.8

Note: The labour force includes people who are employed and people who are unemployed (not employed and actively looking for work).

Source: ABS 1996a:16–17.

In March 1996, the total number of children 12 years and under with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force was estimated to be 1.6 million (ABS 1997a:32). It is important to note, however, that not all of these children will need child care; for instance, in some couple families where both parents are working, child care is provided only by the two parents, who work different hours (see Chapter 3).

The EPAC Task Force, in its interim report on the provision of child care services, produced some projections of the demand for child care, based on the projected numbers of children in the age groups 0–4 years and 5–11 years and on projected female labour force participation (EPAC 1996a:195). The task force estimated that the demand for formal child care (excluding preschools) for children aged 0–4 years would increase

from 406,000 to 441,000 children between 1996 and 2001, while the demand for informal care would increase only from 180,000 to 185,000 children.³ For children aged 5–11 years, it was estimated that the demand for formal care would increase from 153,000 to 183,000 children over the same period, but that the demand for informal care would remain unchanged at 575,000 children (EPAC 1996a:60). These base projections assume no change in the cost of child care to parents—that is, in child care fees or in the government subsidy for child care—since it is assumed that increases in costs reduce the demand for care.

EPAC also produced a number of illustrative projections examining how increases in fees, in government fee relief for child care and in female labour force participation might affect the demand for child care. It was estimated, for instance, that a 10% increase in fees, without any change in government income support, would lead to a fall in the demand for formal care for children aged 0–4 years, from 406,000 to 369,000 children between 1996 and 2001 (EPAC 1996a:61). All EPAC child care projections use the ABS population projections, which assumed a constant total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.865 to estimate the number of children aged 0–4 years and 5–11 years. If fertility rates continue to fall, however, particularly among women with the highest labour force attachment (see Chapter 3), this will have a considerable impact on the demand for formal and informal child care.

Provision and delivery of children’s services

Child care services

The Children’s Services Program (CSP)

The majority of child care services are funded through the Children’s Services Program (CSP), which is administered by the Department of Health and Family Services. CSP services are mainly funded by the Commonwealth Government; State and Territory Governments also contribute funding through joint agreements with the Commonwealth. CSP-funded services have been established under a number of different Commonwealth child care strategies, including the 1988 and 1992–96 Commonwealth/State National Child Care Strategies and the Commonwealth-only 1994 New Growth Strategy (Moyle et al. 1996). While most CSP funding is administered by the Commonwealth, States and Territories may also administer CSP funding for specific child care services.

The major forms of funding at July 1997 were as follows:

- Capital grants are provided to non-profit organisations and local governments to assist in establishing and equipping long day care centres, family day care schemes and outside school hours care services.

3 The methodology used for calculating the demand for formal care and informal care in the base period is not explained in the EPAC report.

- Operational funding is provided to non-profit community organisations and local government to assist in operating family day care schemes, outside school hours care services, occasional care services, multifunctional services and multifunctional Aboriginal children's services. This type of funding is also provided to community-based long day care centres in disadvantaged areas (see Box 4.2).
- Vacation care services are funded through block grant arrangements (Moyle et al. 1997).⁴
- A number of programs and services for children and parents with additional needs are funded under the CSP. The Supplementary Services Program, for instance, funds workers to support child care staff in integrating children with additional needs, such as children with a disability, into child care services and to provide culturally and developmentally appropriate programs for these children.
- The long day care rate of Childcare Assistance is provided by the Commonwealth Government to reduce fees for low- and middle-income families using Commonwealth-approved long day care centres, family day care services, occasional care centres, multifunctional services and multifunctional Aboriginal children's services. The outside school hours rate of Childcare Assistance is lower than the long day care rate and is provided by the Commonwealth Government to reduce fees for low-income families using approved before/after school care services and vacation care (year round care) services.
- The Commonwealth-funded Childcare Cash Rebate assists parents with the costs of child care used while they are working, studying, training or looking for work. The rebate can be claimed for part of the costs of work-related child care in formal children's services, such as long day care centres and preschools, and in informal care, such as care provided by a paid babysitter.

Priority of access guidelines give parents who need care for their children for work-related reasons first priority to child care places. The guidelines apply to CSP-funded long day care centres, family day care services, before/after school care services, vacation care services (year round care model) and multifunctional services (AIHW 1995:137).

Major changes to Commonwealth funding of child care services were announced in the 1997–98 Budget, including changes to outside school hours care funding and limits to the availability of Childcare Assistance for children in care for non-work-related reasons (see Box 4.3). Most of these changes will come into effect from 1 January 1998.

Other Commonwealth assistance

The Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) also funds child care to assist parents to participate in the Adult Migrant English Program.

4 The Commonwealth makes a Specific Purpose Payment to the States and Territories for vacation care services, and most jurisdictions contribute additional funding under the National Child Care Strategy Agreements.

Box 4.2: Changes to Commonwealth child care policies—1995 and 1996

The Child Care Legislation Amendment Bill, which aimed to limit the payment of Childcare Assistance to 12 hours of non-work-related care a week, did not pass in the Senate.

In March 1996, the Australian Tax Office (ATO) issued a draft ruling on the interpretation of the term 'business premises' for purposes of the fringe benefits tax exemption granted for child care facilities located on employers' 'business premises'. This was confirmed in the ATO's final ruling made in December 1996, when the term was clarified as meaning 'premises where the employer has exclusive occupancy rights in respect of the premises and uses those premises for his or her business operations' (ATO 1996:3).

A number of changes to child care provision were announced in the 1996–97 Federal Budget, for example:

- Operational subsidies to community-based long day care centres would cease from 1 July 1997; funding would be provided to assist services to manage change in the transition period. Supplementary funding would be provided to assist services in disadvantaged areas and to support children with additional needs, particularly children with a disability.*
- From 1 January 1998, the new Commonwealth Service Delivery Agency (Centrelink) would assess eligibility for all child care payments and make payments fortnightly in advance, either to an approved child care service or directly to the family. From 1 April 1997, where family income was above \$70,000 a year for a one-child family (plus \$3,000 for each dependent child), the Childcare Cash Rebate would be reduced from 30% to 20%.*
- A new National Planning Framework would be developed to address factors such as inequities in the distribution of and access to child care services and the significant growth in government expenditure on Childcare Assistance. Priority of access guidelines and the payment of Childcare Assistance for non-work-related reasons would be reviewed as part of this process. A new National Information Strategy would be developed to improve information for parents and child care providers.*
- Uncommitted community-based and employer-sponsored long day care centre places, to be established under the 1994 New Growth Strategy, would not go ahead. Some capital funding would be retained to develop child care services in rural and remote regions.*

In September 1996, DHFS contacted the Work and Childcare Advisory Services to inform them that Commonwealth funding would cease from 31 December 1996.

The major 1997–98 Federal Budget child care initiatives are described in Box 4.3.

Sources: Commonwealth of Australia 1996a; DHFS 1996c, 1996d; EPAC 1996a.

Although there are some child care centres which receive operational funding from the department and which are specifically for participants in the program, the program mainly helps clients to access child care in mainstream services and assists them with the costs of care (DIMA personal communication).

Box 4.3: 1997–98 Federal Budget strategies for child care

A number of changes to child care provision were announced in the 1997–98 Federal Budget. The major changes are as follows:

- *From 1 January 1998, Childcare Assistance for school age children using child care centres and family day care services, operational subsidies for outside school hours care services (including year round care services), the outside school hours care rate of Childcare Assistance, and (from 1 February 1998) vacation care block grant funding will be incorporated into a new income-tested Childcare Assistance payment for school age children. The new payment will be available to families with children in Commonwealth-approved child care centres, family day care services and outside school hours care services.*
- *Over the next 4 years, establishment funding will be provided to assist new community-based outside school hours care services during their first 2 years of operation. Disadvantaged area subsidies will also be available to support eligible outside school hours care services in rural and regional areas where there is no alternative care 'within a reasonable distance'. An additional 2,500 family day care places will be provided, particularly to assist families living in rural and remote areas, while additional funding will be available to establish new community-based long day care centres in disadvantaged rural and remote areas where there is no alternative child care.*
- *From 1 January 1998, the payment of Childcare Assistance for non-work-related care will be limited to 20 hours per week per child in long day care centres, family day care services and outside school hours care services, with exemptions for families and children in specific circumstances, such as families in crisis and children at risk of abuse and neglect.*
- *Under the new National Planning System, only 7,000 new long day care centre places will be eligible for Childcare Assistance in each of the years 1998 and 1999.*
- *From 1 January 1999, Childcare Assistance will no longer be paid fortnightly in advance to service providers (see Box 4.2), but will be paid fortnightly in arrears to families, in conjunction with the introduction of a new Childcare Smartcard. This card may only be used to pay for child care provided in Commonwealth-approved services.*

Sources: Commonwealth of Australia 1997a; DHFS 1997a, 1997b.

Indirect assistance is provided by the Commonwealth through the taxation system. There is a fringe benefits tax exemption for child care facilities located on 'business premises' (see Box 4.2) and for contributions made by employers to reserve places for their employees' children in CSP-funded long day care centres, family day care services, and outside school hours services. Goods used in long day care centres, outside school hours care services, and in family day care co-ordination units are exempt from sales tax, except in employer-sponsored services.

State/Territory and other involvement

State and Territory Governments also provide funding for child care services, in addition to the funding they contribute to the CSP. New South Wales, for instance,

provides an operational subsidy to most non-profit long day care centres and occasional care services, and State-only funded outside school hours care has been provided in Victoria since the 1980s. Many jurisdictions fund vacation care and/or occasional care services without any Commonwealth involvement and some provide fee relief for these services. State and Territory Governments also fund special programs and services for children with additional needs. The South Australian program Intervac, for instance, assists the inclusion into vacation care services of children with special needs, such as children with disabilities, while the Queensland Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Program funds child care services in Indigenous communities.

State and Territory Governments are responsible for licensing and regulating child care and for implementing the national standards for centre-based long day care, family day care and outside school hours care (page 126).

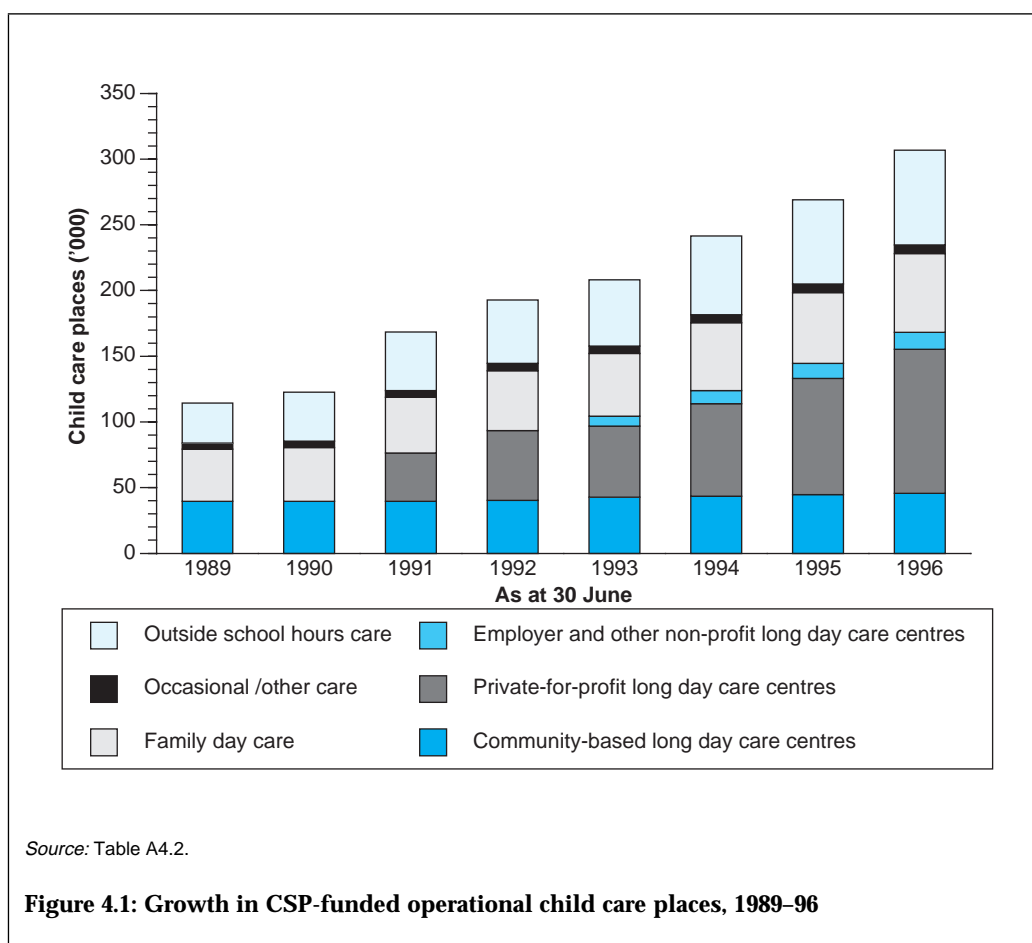
Local government, non-profit community organisations, private-for-profit enterprises and employers also establish and operate child care services. In past years, employers have purchased places in established child care services for the children of their employees, although the 1996 Tax Office ruling (see Box 4.2) may affect these arrangements.

Trends in the provision of CSP-funded child care places

The major aim of the various Commonwealth child care strategies (page 101) has been to meet the demand for work-related care. The majority of places funded under the various strategies have been in long day care centres, family day care and outside school hours care. As a consequence of these strategies, the number of operational child care places funded through the CSP has increased almost threefold: from 114,391 places in June 1989 to 306,575 in June 1996 (Figure 4.1; Table A4.2).

The number of places in private-for-profit and employer-sponsored and other non-profit long day care centres increased more than threefold between 1991 and 1996, with places in private-for-profit long day care centres doubling between 1993 and 1996. This enormous growth was a response to eligibility for Childcare Assistance being extended, from 1 January 1991, to users of these services (Moyle et al. 1996:25).⁵ In contrast, places in community-based long day care centres grew only 15% between 1991 and 1996. One of the main reasons for this disparity in growth is that community-based long day care centres (unlike the other types of long day care centres) have been subject to strict planning requirements in the form of a 'needs-based planning' process. Under this process, decisions allocating new child care places to particular areas are made on the basis of demonstrated need in the area for work-related care. New planning initiatives to control the growth of long day care centre places were announced in the 1997-98 Budget (see Box 4.3).

5 Currently, all CSP-funded long day care centres are approved for Childcare Assistance. Up to 1 July 1997, 'community-based long day care centres' also received operational funding through the CSP (see Box 4.2). Community-based centres are non-profit services that incorporate parents on their management committees.



Growth in the number of places in family day care schemes, which are also subject to the needs-based planning process, was considerably greater than in community-based long day care centres, that is, 41% between 1991 and 1996. In recent years, the Commonwealth has focused on increasing the number of family day care places, because they provide a high proportion of the long day care for babies and because family day care is considered to be a more flexible form of care for parents who do not work standard hours (AIHW 1995:134). Furthermore, family day care services have lower establishment costs than long day care centres, in terms of expenditure on building and equipment.

Outside school hours care places more than doubled between 1989 and 1996. They accounted for the majority of places promised under the 1988 and 1992-96 National Child Care Strategies (50,000 out of 80,000 places), and almost all of the places had been established by 30 June 1996. These places were promised in response to the high demand for care for children of primary school age, particularly care that children could access throughout the year.

At 30 June 1996, there were considerable variations between the States and Territories in the distribution of CSP-funded child care places by service type (Table 4.2). Places in private-for-profit long day care centres accounted for high proportions of all long day care centre places in the larger States, but for much lower proportions in the smaller States and in the Territories. In Queensland, for instance, 83% of all long day care centre places were located in private-for-profit long day care centres, compared with 21% of all places in Tasmania and 22% in the Northern Territory. There were more CSP-funded centre-based long day care places than family day care places in every State and Territory, but the ratio of long day care centre places to family day care places varied considerably by jurisdiction. In Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, for instance, there were around 20% more centre-based long day care places than family day care places, while in Queensland there were almost five times as many places in long day care centres as in family day care.

It is important to note that the number of CSP-funded places shown in Table 4.2 does not represent the total number of child care places in Australia. These statistics do not include CSP-funded vacation care places, which are funded under the block grant arrangements, nor State-only funded places nor unfunded places.

Table 4.2: CSP-funded operational child care places, by type of service, 30 June 1996

Type of service	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Long day care centres									
Community-based	16,389	10,868	7,322	3,661	4,043	1,440	992	886	45,601
Private-for-profit	33,999	19,848	41,556	9,009	3,412	436	1,121	310	109,691
Employer and other non-profit	3,839	4,349	1,482	1,212	663	170	837	219	12,771
Family day care	19,151	16,383	10,682	3,689	5,134	1,682	2,510	860	60,091
Occasional care	1,408	1,322	744	559	441	250	132	46	4,902
Multifunctional services	55	75	99	152	51	—	—	116	548
MACS	460	170	120	117	126	27	—	105	1,125
Outside school hours care ^(a)	24,092	18,215	13,587	5,488	6,076	1,685	1,989	714	71,846
Total	99,393	71,230	75,592	23,887	19,946	5,690	7,581	3,256	306,575

(a) Includes vacation care funded under the year round care model.

Source: DHFS 1996b.

Sponsorship of agencies providing CSP-funded child care services

At 30 June 1996, there were a total of 7,932 agencies funded by the CSP to provide different types of child care services under various types of sponsorship (Table 4.3).⁶

⁶ A 'sponsor' is the individual, organisation, body or enterprise which is responsible for the agency which provides the service (see footnote 1). Where services are funded, the sponsor signs the funding agreement and is accountable for the funds. The sponsor and the agency may be one and the same.

Although the Commonwealth Government was a major funder of services (page 101), it sponsored only a very small proportion, mainly those in the occasional care/other service category. State and Territory Governments sponsored a slightly higher proportion of child care services, for instance, employer-sponsored and other non-profit long day care centres such as TAFE college child care centres. Non-profit organisations were a major sponsor of long day care centres, occasional care/other services, and outside school hours care services, while local governments were a major sponsor of family day care. A small proportion of outside school hours care services were sponsored by private-for-profit organisations under an outside school hours care pilot program (Moyle et al. 1997:9).

Table 4.3: Agencies providing CSP-funded child care services, by type of sponsorship, 30 June 1996 (%)

Type of sponsorship	Long day care centres			Family day care ^(a)	Occasional/ other care ^(b)	Outside school hours care ^(c)
	Community-based	Private-for-profit	Employer and other non-profit			
Local government	37.7	..	4.5	42.4	17.8	13.3
Non-profit	49.3	..	56.2	34.6	68.6	64.9
Religious/charitable	12.2	..	9.7	15.8	4.8	12.7
Privately owned	..	100.0	15.5	..	..	0.3
State/Territory Government	0.5	..	13.4	7.2	4.9	7.8
Commonwealth Government	0.3	..	0.7	—	3.6	—
Total^(d)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of agencies	1,112	2,456	292	366	651	3,055

(a) Family day care coordination units.

(b) Includes occasional care centres and neighbourhood model services, MACS and other multifunctional services.

(c) Includes vacation care funded under the year round care model.

(d) Totals do not always add to 100% since sponsorship is unknown in 0.3% of agencies providing occasional/other care, and 1% of agencies providing outside school hours care.

Source: DHFS 1996b.

Preschool services

State and Territory Governments fund preschool services for children in the year or two before they begin full-time school (Table A4.3) (Moyle et al. 1996). In Queensland and Western Australia, the first year of full-time school is Year 1, while the other States and Territories offer a full-time pre-Year 1 program. Currently, Commonwealth funding for preschool services is limited to that portion of the supplementary funding provided to the States and Territories for the education of Indigenous children (Commonwealth of Australia 1995:70) and the recurrent funding provided to Queensland and Western Australia for children in pre-Year 1 (Commonwealth of Australia 1997b:2.5).

Entitlement to preschool services varies considerably among the different jurisdictions. In South Australia, for instance, all children are entitled to four terms of preschool

before entering the full-time pre-Year 1 program, while in New South Wales there is no explicit policy regarding universal access to preschool.

Some jurisdictions provide funding to non-government organisations to operate preschool services, while others both fund and provide preschool services. Traditionally, preschools were provided by community organisations in facilities separate from primary schools, and this is still the case for most preschools in Victoria and New South Wales. These community preschools are funded by the department responsible for community services in those two States. Some community preschools are also found in other States, but funding for these is now mainly provided by the State education departments. In Tasmania and the Northern Territory, preschools are funded and provided by the education departments, and located within primary schools. State and Territory Governments are responsible for ensuring the quality of preschool services, for instance, through licensing and regulation where applicable.

No national information on the number of preschool places is available because of the problems of comparability of data between the different jurisdictions. In 1995, there were more than 5,200 preschools Australia-wide, including mobile services (Moyle et al. 1996:9–22).

Linkages between preschools and child care services

In recent years, the differences between preschools and long day care centres have become less distinct. In response to the demand for 'preschool education' from working parents, many long day care centres now provide a specific preschool program run by a qualified preschool teacher. There is also an increasing emphasis on educational and developmental activities within long day care centres, partly as a consequence of the introduction of the national accreditation system (page 126). Some preschools have extended their hours and weeks of operation in order to qualify for Childcare Assistance, which enables them to be more competitive financially. It has been suggested that in some areas, such as parts of New South Wales and Queensland, children in low-income families attend preschool programs in long day care centres for reasons of affordability and accessibility.

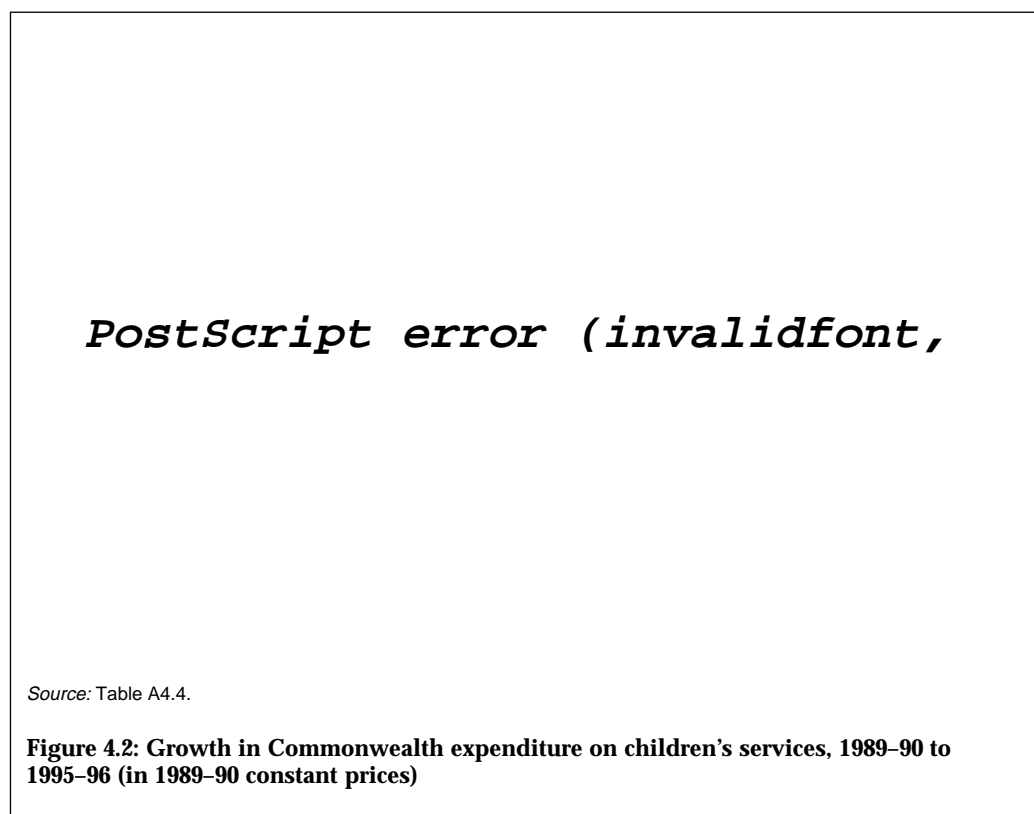
The extent to which the various jurisdictions support and promote the linkages between the two service types varies considerably. In States and Territories where preschool and child care services are the responsibility of a single government department, this has led to closer linkages between the two services. In Victoria, for instance, the two services are the responsibility of the Department of Human Services and they are licensed under the same set of regulations. The department's funding arrangements since 1994 have encouraged preschools to offer other children's services (including long day care) in their facilities, and also have created incentives for long day care centres to employ qualified preschool teachers. Where preschool and child care services are the responsibility of two different departments, however, such linkages have been slower to develop.

The CSP census shows that many long day care centres provide a preschool program for children in the year before they begin school full-time. At August 1995, 55% (or 1,736) of the 3,180 long day care centres had a preschool program run in-house by a qualified preschool teacher (DHFS 1996e), although this proportion varied considerably

in the different jurisdictions, ranging from 71% in New South Wales and 70% in the Australian Capital Territory to 18% in Western Australia and 15% in the Northern Territory. The high proportion of centres in New South Wales with this type of program is partly explained by the fact that under New South Wales licensing regulations, long day care centres with 30 or more places are required to employ a qualified preschool teacher (Moyle et al. 1996:102).

Government expenditure on children's services

Total Commonwealth expenditure on children's services through the CSP increased almost fourfold in real terms (1989–90 constant prices) between 1989–90 and 1995–96, from \$215.8 million to \$854.4 million (Figure 4.2; Table A4.4). This level of growth of expenditure was mainly due to the extension of eligibility for Childcare Assistance to long day care centres other than community-based centres in January 1991 and the consequent growth in places in the private-for-profit sector (Table A4.2), and to the introduction of the Childcare Cash Rebate on 1 July 1994.



In 1995–96, total Commonwealth expenditure in current prices was \$990.6 million, of which \$657 million was spent on Childcare Assistance and \$120.5 million on the Childcare Cash Rebate, measures which reduce the amounts parents pay for child care (Table 4.4). Operational subsidies paid to child care services to assist with running costs

accounted for \$131.8 million, which consisted of \$44.9 million paid to community-based long day care centres, \$52.5 million to family day care schemes, \$26.3 million to outside school hours care services and \$7.4 million to occasional care services.⁷ Capital grants or loans to assist sponsors in establishing services accounted for \$10.8 million, while expenditure on vacation care services funded under the block grant arrangements was \$5 million. Of the remaining expenditure, \$52.9 million was spent on child care services, such as supplementary services and the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Program for sole parents, and \$12.6 million on family services (see Section 4.3) (DHFS unpublished data).

Between 1990–91 and 1995–96, there was a shift from expenditure on service provision to expenditure on measures to reduce the costs of child care for parents, partly reflecting the relative growth in long day care centre places attracting only Childcare Assistance. Over the period, the proportion of CSP expenditure on capital loans, capital grants and operational subsidies fell from 29% to 14%, while the proportion of expenditure on Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Cash Rebate increased from 58% to 78% (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Commonwealth expenditure in current prices on children's services, by type of expenditure, 1990–91 to 1995–96 (\$m)

Type of expenditure	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
	\$m					
<i>Childcare Assistance</i>	143.1	289.5	384.0	497.4	592.1	657.0
Community-based long day care centres	64.8	99.4	113.4	127.6	131.8	129.3
Family day care	44.6	88.1	104.3	123.1	135.4	144.3
Private-for-profit and employer-sponsored and other non-profit long day care centres	28.2	94.3	158.0	235.7	310.9	369.4
Occasional care and outside school hours care	5.4	7.6	8.4	11.0	14.0	14.1
Operational subsidies	65.2	92.1	99.7	112.3	119.8	131.8
Capital ^(a)	5.7	10.1	5.6	4.2	4.2	10.8
Other ^(b)	31.7	48.2	56.8	62.4	69.7	70.5
Childcare Cash Rebate	..	..	..	..	87.5	120.5
Total expenditure on child care	245.6	439.8	546.2	676.4	873.4	990.6

(a) Includes capital loans and capital loans repayments after 1994.

(b) Includes services such as supplementary services; vacation care; Jobs, Education and Training (JET); and family services.

Note: Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.

Sources: DHHCS 1991; DHHCS 1992; DHHLGCS 1993; DHFS unpublished data.

⁷ Total also includes \$0.7 million for the superannuation guarantee.

The proportion of Childcare Assistance going to private-for-profit and employer-sponsored and other non-profit long day care centres increased from 20% in 1990–91 to 56% in 1995–96. Over the same period, the proportion of Childcare Assistance going to community-based long day care centres fell from 45% to 20%, while the proportion going to family day care fell from 31% to 22%. In 1995–96, as in previous years, only a very small proportion (2%) of Childcare Assistance expenditure went to occasional care and outside school hours care services (AIHW 1995:129).

No nationally comparable data on State and Territory expenditure on child care and preschool services are available. In Victoria, where the Department of Human Services mainly funds non-government organisations and local government to provide children's services, expenditure on children's services in 1995–96 was \$63.4 million, most of which went to fund preschool services (SCRCSSP 1997:495).⁸ In South Australia, where the Department of Education and Children's Services has a central role in both funding and providing preschool services, total expenditure on children's services in 1995–96 was \$53.3 million (SCRCSSP 1997:509).

Use of children's services

Between 1989 and 1996, the number of children using CSP-funded services is estimated to have increased more than threefold, from 153,100 to 570,300 (Table 4.5). There were, however, considerable differences in the rate of increase by service type, which to some extent reflects the rate of increase of operational places (Table A4.2). The number of children in family day care, for instance, doubled over the period, while the number using long day care centres increased around fivefold. Generally, there were many more

Table 4.5: Children in CSP-funded services, by type of service, 30 June 1989, 1991, 1994, 1995 and 1996

Type of service	1989	1991	1994	1995	1996
Long day care centres	60,800	135,400	227,300	266,900	311,000
Family day care	51,800	61,000	88,700	91,800	102,400
Outside school hours care ^(a)	29,900	46,800	63,900	99,300	112,600
Other formal care ^(b)	10,600	19,000	16,800	39,100	44,300
Total children	153,100	262,200	396,700	497,100	570,300

- (a) In 1996 there were estimated to be 26,600 children in vacation care (year round care). CSP statistics do not include these children in the total as it is considered that they may also be attending before/after school care.
 (b) Includes occasional care centres and neighbourhood model services, MACS, other multifunctional services and mobile services.

Notes

1. Data are estimates only and are rounded to the nearest 100. Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.
2. Children using more than one service type are included in each service type.

Sources: AIHW 1993:133; AIHW 1995:133; DHFS 1996–97.

⁸ This excludes funding provided by the State Government to Commonwealth–State jointly funded child care services—approximately \$2.5 million (Vic DHS personal communication).

children using services than there were places, indicating that some children are in care part-time.

More than half of all children using CSP-funded child care services at 30 June 1996 (311,000 or 55%) were in long day care centres, with over a third (208,200 or 37%) of all children in CSP-funded services attending private-for-profit long day care centres. Once again, there were considerable variations by State and Territory, which to a great extent reflects the provision of places. More than half of CSP-funded child care places in Queensland, for instance, were in private-for-profit long day care centres, and over half the children using CSP-funded services in that State were in this type of service (Tables 4.2, A4.5).

In 1995, there were over 270,000 children enrolled in State and Territory preschools (Moyle et al. 1996:9–22). In several States (New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia), the enrolments included children 2 years below the age for beginning full-time school. Some children attending preschools were also in long day care, either family day care or long day care centres. In the 1995 CSP census, 18% (or 574) of the 3,180 long day care centres reported that they took children out to a local preschool during the census week, with the proportion varying considerably between the different jurisdictions, ranging from 49% of centres in Western Australia to only 1% of centres in New South Wales (DHFS 1996e).

The ABS Child Care Surveys estimated that, while the number of children using formal child care services increased by 18% between November 1990 and March 1996, the number of children under 12 years using any type of child care fell by 10% over the period. This was due to a fall of 11% in the number of children in informal care. The number of children attending preschool services (classified by the ABS as a formal child care service) fell by 25%—from 267,200 to 200,600—over the same period (Table 4.6).⁹

At March 1996, 20% of children under 12 years of age had used ‘formal child care services’ (including preschools) in the week prior to the survey, 36% had been cared for in informal arrangements, and a little over half (52%) had not been cared for by persons other than their parents. The proportions of children using child care services varied by age, with formal services, for instance, being used least by children under 1 (8%) and children aged 9–11 years (6%), and most by children 4 years of age (62%) (Table A4.7).

The age distribution of children using different types of formal child care services also varied, some of these differences being related to the purpose for which the service was set up. While CSP-funded long day care services—that is, long day care centres and family day care—were predominantly used by children under school age, 4% of children in private-for-profit centres and 21% in family day care were 6 years of age or older and thus were using these services for outside school hours care. There were

9 As in previous surveys (AIHW 1995:135), the ABS estimate of the number of children attending long day care centres (177,700) is considerably lower than the CSP estimate (311,000). The difference between the two estimates is particularly large in some jurisdictions (Table A4.6). In general, data on children in long day care centres from the CSP census and the ABS survey are used in this chapter only when findings are consistent.

Table 4.6: Children under 12 years using formal and informal care, by type of care, November 1990, June 1993 and March 1996

Type of care	November 1990		June 1993		March 1996	
	('000)	%	('000)	%	('000)	%
Formal care						
Before/after school care	44.0	1.5	85.8	2.8	111.7	3.6
Long day care centres	113.1	3.8	146.7	4.8	177.7	5.7
Family day care	78.1	2.6	80.7	2.6	96.2	3.1
Occasional care ^(a)	..	..	50.0	1.6	52.4	1.7
Other formal care	57.4	1.9	30.0	1.0	22.2	0.7
Preschool	267.2	8.9	236.9	7.7	200.6	6.5
<i>Total children using formal care</i>	<i>530.4</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>596.2</i>	<i>19.3</i>	<i>624.4</i>	<i>20.1</i>
Informal care						
Sibling	196.5	6.5	159.1	5.2	165.1	5.3
Other relative	781.0	26.0	707.1	22.9	726.0	23.4
Non-relative	412.2	13.7	389.1	12.6	318.0	10.2
<i>Total children using informal care</i>	<i>1,270.5</i>	<i>42.3</i>	<i>1,166.2</i>	<i>37.8</i>	<i>1,128.3</i>	<i>36.4</i>
<i>Total children using formal and/or informal care</i>	<i>1,548.5</i>	<i>51.6</i>	<i>1,504.9</i>	<i>48.8</i>	<i>1,501.8</i>	<i>48.4</i>
Total children under 12 years	3,003.7		3,085.9		3,102.8	

(a) Occasional care was included as 'other formal care' prior to 1993.

Note: Components do not add to totals as children could use both formal and informal care.

Source: ABS 1997a:12.

considerable differences in the extent to which the various types of formal services were used to care for very young children, that is, children under 2 years of age. The proportions of children using child care services who were in this age group ranged from 10% of children in private-for-profit long day care centres to 21% in family day care (Table 4.7).

The ABS survey estimated that almost all children (94%) attending preschool services at March 1996 were under 5 years, with 59% of these children aged 4 years and 33% aged 3 years (ABS 1997a:13). The ages of children being cared for in informal care arrangements varied according to the type of carer (ABS 1997a:13), with children in the care of siblings more likely to be older than children in other informal care arrangements. At March 1996, 86% of children cared for by siblings were 5 years of age or older, compared with 46% of children cared for by relatives and 59% cared for by non-relatives. Other relatives were more likely than non-relatives and siblings to care for very young children, with 21% of children cared for by other relatives being under 2 years of age, compared with 13% cared for by non-relatives and 4% cared for by siblings.

Consistent with these findings, the 1996 ABS survey found that a very small minority of children using long day care centres (5%) and a more substantial minority in family day care (24%) were attending school. The majority of children being cared for by siblings

Table 4.7: Ages of children in CSP-funded child care services, by type of service, 1994 or 1995 (%)

Type of service	Age of children (years)						Total	Total number of children
	Under 1	1	2	3–4	5	6 and older		
Long day care centres								
Community-based	3	13	22	54	6	<1	100	76,857
Private-for-profit	2	8	18	58	9	4	100	142,513
Employer and other non-profit	5	15	21	50	7	2	100	16,655
Family day care	5	16	19	31	8	21	100	84,211
Occasional/other care ^(a)	5	15	27	49	3	1	100	15,590
Outside school hours care ^(b)	—	—	—	<1	10	90	100	74,772

(a) Includes occasional care centres, MACS and other multifunctional services.

(b) Does not include children in vacation care.

Notes

1. The CSP census in 1995 covered only long day care centres and family day care services. The most recent year for which data on occasional care and outside school hours care services are available is 1994.
2. Rows may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Sources: DHFS 1996a:68, 111, 148, 171; DHFS 1997d:25, 47, 69, 85.

(88%), however, and by persons other than relatives (62%) were attending school (ABS unpublished).

The proportions of children in child care and preschool services with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force varied among the different formal service types and among the different types of informal arrangements. Consistent with priority of access guidelines (page 103), the majority of children in CSP-funded long day care and outside school hours care were there for work-related reasons. The proportions ranged from 93% in before/after school care services to 69% in private-for-profit long day care centres (Table 4.8).

There were substantial differences between the States and Territories in the proportions of children in work-related care in the various services. Almost all children (95%) in private-for-profit long day care centres in the Australian Capital Territory, for instance, were in work-related care, compared with around two-thirds in private-for-profit long day care centres in New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania.

Children with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force were more likely to use formal and informal child care services, with the exception of occasional care and preschools (ABS 1997a:32). The ABS survey also estimated that, while 53% of all children under 12 years of age had both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, 91% of children in before/after school care, 80% in family day care, 68% in long day care centres, 55% in occasional care services, 49% in preschools and 69% in informal care arrangements were in this category (ABS 1997a:32). More than a third (39%) of all children with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, however, used neither formal nor informal care in the week prior to the survey. Primary school children with

Table 4.8: Children in CSP-funded child care services for work-related reasons, by type of service, 1994 or 1995 (%)

Type of service	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Long day care centres									
Community-based	85	82	80	79	78	71	89	86	81
Private-for-profit	65	81	65	76	84	67	95	91	69
Employer and other non-profit	84	84	70	82	76	80	87	88	82
Family day care	93	89	96	91	77	86	97	98	91
Occasional care centres	33	28	31	31	30	41	39	18	31
Multifunctional services	70	68	72	62	60	..	..	89	70
MACS	26	43	64	69	47	45	..	87	45
Before/after school care	94	91	93	92	91	77	93	94	93
Vacation care	86	83	89	82	85	..	99	..	86

Notes

1. The CSP census in 1995 covered only long day care centres and family day care services. The most recent year for which data on occasional care and outside school hours care services are available is 1994.
2. The total number of children in each service type in each State/Territory can be found in Table A4.8.

Sources: DHFS 1996a:28–31; DHFS 1997d:28, 50, 72, 80.

both parents in the labour force, for instance, may not need formal care if one parent works only during school hours or is unemployed and looks for work only during school hours (see Chapter 3).

Comparing the proportions of children using a child care service who had both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, however, with the proportions of children using the service whose parents stated that they were in care for ‘work-related’ reasons (Table 4.9) suggests that parents in the labour force do not necessarily use specific services for these reasons.¹⁰ The two proportions are very similar for children using long day care centres, family day care and before/after school care; for instance, 91% of children in before/after school care had both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, while the parents of 89% of children stated that they used before/after school care for work-related reasons. However, the two proportions are very different for children using preschools, occasional care services and informal care arrangements. While 49% of children in preschools, for instance, had both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, parents of only 19% of children in preschools stated that they were using this service for work-related reasons.

¹⁰ Note that ‘work-related reasons’ include studying/training for work in addition to working and looking for work (being in the labour force).

Table 4.9: Children under 12 years in child care, by parents' reasons for use, by type of care, March 1996 (%)

Type of care	All reasons for use				Total ('000)
	Work-related	Personal	Beneficial for child	Other	
Formal care					
Centre-based long day care	65.8	29.9	33.7	5.4	177.7
Family day care	78.9	20.2	17.8	*5.2	96.2
Before/after school care	89.0	9.1	5.9	*3.0	111.7
Occasional care	33.4	46.4	47.1	*4.2	52.4
Preschool	19.4	16.7	90.5	8.7	200.6
Other formal care	*20.7	63.1	32.4	*9.5	22.2
Informal care					
Siblings, other relatives or other	49.8	46.2	5.7	11.4	1,128.3

* Subject to relative standard error of between 25% and 50%.

Notes

1. 'Work-related': includes working, looking for work and studying/training for work. 'Personal' reasons: includes non-work-related study or training, shopping, social or sporting activities, giving parents a break, doctor's visits and voluntary/community activities. 'Beneficial for child': includes 'good for child' and to 'prepare child for school'.
2. Rows total to more than 100% because some parents gave more than one reason for using that type of care.

Source: ABS 1997a:18-19.

Outcomes

In general, the aims and objectives of Commonwealth and State and Territory children's services programs are to provide services which are accessible, affordable and of high quality, and which support parents in their child-rearing and other activities. The stated objective of the CSP is 'to assist families with dependent children to participate in the work force and the general community by ensuring the affordability of child care and promoting adequate supply and quality of child care' (DHFS 1996d:173). The New South Wales Children's Services Policy Statement for Funded Services similarly states that 'pre-school services aim to provide pre-school aged children with accessible, affordable, quality education/care services, and to support parents in child-rearing' (NSW DCS 1995:4).

With the enormous rise in expenditure on children's services, growing attention is being paid to the outcomes of service provision. The focus on outcomes as a performance measure of publicly funded services is also part of the 'general direction of public sector reform' (Lyons 1996:7). In the discussion here, the performance of children's services is examined in terms of meeting the program objectives of accessibility, affordability and quality. The effect of child care on children has been the subject of considerable research and debate and will not be discussed here; an overview of 40 years of research on this topic can be found in Ochiltree (1994).

Accessibility

Unmet demand for children's services

One measure of the accessibility of child care and preschool services is the level of unmet demand for such services. According to the ABS Child Care Survey, between June 1993 and March 1996 the proportion of children under 12 years of age for whom parents reported that they needed either some formal child care or additional formal child care halved, falling from 16% to 8% of children (Table 4.10). This compares with a slight fall in unmet demand, from 17% to 16%, in the preceding 3-year period (AIHW 1995:125). The substantial fall between 1993 and 1996 was undoubtedly due to increases in the supply of child care places over the period (see Table A4.2).

Table 4.10: Children under 12 years of age for whom parents required some or more formal care, by main type of care required, June 1993 and March 1996 ('000)

Main type of (additional) formal care required	Age 0–2		Age 3–5		Age 6–11		Total (0–11)	
	1993	1996	1993	1996	1993	1996	1993	1996
Before/after school care	*0.7	n.p.	16.5	n.p.	107.9	67.5	125.1	84.9
Long day care centres	35.2	22.6	23.0	15.4	*5.6	n.p.	63.8	39.0
Family day care	27.7	12.8	18.7	10.5	13.7	*5.7	60.2	29.0
Occasional care	90.7	40.8	62.4	21.2	38.7	20.2	191.8	82.1
Preschool	*4.5	*2.8	25.6	17.5	—	—	30.0	20.3
Total^(a)	164.4	81.5	149.9	83.3	174.8	96.9	489.2	261.7
Number of children in age group	778.6	776.4	768.9	779.2	1,538.3	1,547.2	3,085.8	3,102.8

(a) Totals include children who required (additional) 'other' formal care.

Sources: ABS 1994:17; ABS 1997a:30.

This fall in unmet demand varied according to the age of the child and the type of care needed, factors which were interrelated. The sharp fall (from 21% to 10%) in the proportion of children 0–2 years for whom parents needed some or more formal care was mainly due to a decrease in the number of young children for whom parents needed family day care and occasional care. For older children, aged 6–11 years, the fall (from 11% to 6%) was primarily due to the decrease in the number of children for whom parents needed before/after school care (Table 4.10).¹¹

At March 1996, of the 261,700 children for whom parents needed some or more formal care, the need was greatest for before/after school care services for children aged 6–11 years and for occasional care services, particularly for children aged 2 years or younger. The need for additional formal care was greatest where both parents were (or a sole parent was) in the labour force, although the need for additional care was not necessarily work-related. While 60% of children for whom some or more formal care was needed had both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, the proportion of children for whom additional care was needed for work-related reasons was 45% (ABS 1997a:29, 28).

11 The (additional) occasional care required for children aged 6–11 years refers to 'care required on an occasional basis' rather than 'care provided in an occasional care centre'.

Accessibility of preschools

It is difficult to measure the accessibility of preschools due to the difficulties in defining the target population, as noted previously (page 100). Some States and Territories have estimated the proportion of their eligible population attending preschool services, with most estimates ranging between 80% and 90% (Moyle et al. 1996:11–22).

Accessibility of child care services for parents in the labour force

One of the goals of the CSP is to 'improve access to child care arrangements for parents at work, or who study, train or seek work' (DHFS 1996d:173). In terms of achieving this goal, according to DHFS estimates, at 30 June 1996 72% of the demand for long day care had been met (DHFS 1996f:102).

DHFS (1996g:3) has stated that around 450 places per 1,000 children aged 0–5 years are needed to meet the demand for work-related care for children below school age.¹² Comparisons between the number of operational long day care places and DHFS target population figures indicate substantial differences between jurisdictions in access to long day care (centre-based and family day care), with the number of places per head of target population ranging from 531 per 1,000 children in Queensland to 241 per 1,000 in South Australia at June 1996 (Table 4.11).¹³ Access to the different types of long day care places varied between the States and Territories, with the number of centre-based places ranging from 438 places per 1,000 in Queensland to 148 per 1,000 in South Australia, and the number of family day care places ranging from 201 per 1,000 in the Australian Capital Territory to 64 per 1,000 in Western Australia.

The accessibility of CSP-funded long day care also varied by geographic location. At June 1996, only 57% of the demand for work-related child care for children under school age was estimated to have been met in rural areas and only 41% in remote areas (DHFS 1996f:102). The number of long day care places per head of target population was 279 per 1,000 in rural areas and 192 per 1,000 in remote areas, compared with 377 per 1,000 in capital cities and 448 per 1,000 in major urban areas (Table 4.12).¹⁴ This reflects differences in the supply of centre-based long day care places in these areas. While there were also differences in the supply of family day care places, they were not as great and the pattern of supply was quite different, with family day care places per head of target population being highest in rural areas and lowest in major urban areas.

12 While DHFS defines its benchmark in terms of places per 1,000 children 0–5 years, its target population is defined as children 0–4 years with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force or studying/training.

13 It is important to note that these ratios are based on 1994 target population figures and will be slight over-estimates for jurisdictions such as the Northern Territory, whose population 0–4 years is estimated to have increased by 5% between 1994 and 1996, and slight under-estimates for jurisdictions such as Tasmania, whose population 0–4 years is estimated to have fallen by 4% over the period (ABS 1996b, 1997b).

14 Note that planned and operational places are included in the total number of places. If data on the number of operational places in the different geographic regions were available, the ratios of places to target population would be lower.

Table 4.11: CSP-funded operational long day care places and places per 1,000 children in the target population, by State and Territory, June 1996

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Total long day care places	73,378	51,448	61,042	17,571	13,252	3,728	5,460	2,275	228,154
Target population ^(a)	238,831	159,292	114,962	57,821	54,977	13,734	12,506	6,968	659,091
Centre-based places per 1,000 children	227	220	438	240	148	149	236	203	255
Family day care places per 1,000 children	80	103	93	64	93	122	201	123	91
Total long day care places per 1,000 children	307	323	531	304	241	271	437	326	346

(a) Population of children aged 0–4 with both parents or sole parent in the labour force or studying/training in 1994.

Source: Table 4.2; DHFS unpublished data.

The National Planning Framework discussion paper notes inequities in access to long day care places at the Statistical Local Area (SLA) level, with some SLAs having no long day care places and others having an oversupply of places in relation to the benchmark (DHFS 1996g:3). A number of initiatives announced in the 1997–98 Federal Budget—including the new National Planning System, increased funding for family day care places and new funding for community-based long day care centres located in ‘disadvantaged rural and remote areas’—are aimed at reducing geographical inequities in the distribution of CSP-funded child care places (see Box 4.3).

Table 4.12: CSP-funded long day care places (planned and operational) and places per 1,000 children in the target population, by geographic location, June 1996

	Capital city	Major urban	Rural	Remote	Total
Centre-based long day care	119,768	22,003	27,238	2,410	171,419
Family day care	34,697	4,543	19,122	2,138	60,500
Total long day care places	154,465	26,546	46,360	4,548	231,919
Target population ^(a)	409,955	59,193	166,228	23,715	659,091
Centre-based places per 1,000 children	292	372	164	102	260
Family day care places per 1,000 children	85	77	115	90	92
Total long day care places per 1,000 children	377	448	279	192	352

(a) Population of children aged 0–4 with both parents or sole parent in the labour force or studying/training in 1994.

Source: DHFS unpublished data.

Child care programs/services for parents and children with additional needs

As noted previously, a number of special child care programs and services for parents and children with additional needs are funded by the Commonwealth through the CSP, and by State and Territory Governments without any Commonwealth involvement (see pages 104 and 105). Parents and children with additional needs are also given priority of access to CSP-funded child care services (AIHW 1995:137).

Comparing the representation of children with additional needs in children's services with their representation in the general population gives some indication of their access to services (AIHW 1995:143). Where CSP data are used, these data represent the minimum level of use of children's services by these children, since the data do not include children with additional needs using State-only funded child care and preschool services.

Children in one-parent families were more likely to use child care services targeted at work-related care and informal care arrangements and less likely to use preschools than children in couple families. These findings are not surprising, given that sole parents generally have a greater need for child care than families where there is another resident parent available to care for children. While 14% of children under 12 years were estimated to be in one-parent families in 1996 (ABS 1997a:15), 28% of children in CSP-funded family day care, 23% of children in outside school hours care and 19% of children in long day care were the children of sole parents, according to the 1994 and 1995 CSP censuses (DHFS 1996a:70; DHFS 1997d). The 1996 ABS Child Care Survey estimated that 18% of children in informal care, but only 11% of children in preschools, were from one-parent families (ABS 1997a:15).

It appears that *children with a disability* were less likely to use most CSP-funded child care services than other children. The ABS estimated that, in 1993, 4% of children under 5 years and 8% aged 5–14 years had a disability or handicap (ABS 1993), while in 1994 and 1995, except in multifunctional Aboriginal children's services, less than 3% of children attending CSP-funded services had a disability (Table 4.13).¹⁵ While less than 1% of children attending CSP-funded services had a parent with a disability, there are no published population data available to assess whether parents with a disability were more or less likely to use child care services than other parents.

Children from a non-English-speaking background were also less likely to use child care and preschool services than other children. The 1996 ABS Child Care Survey estimated that, although 13% of children under 12 years were in families where the main language spoken at home was not English, only 8% of children in long day care centres, 10% of children in preschools and 10% of children in informal care arrangements, for instance, fell into this category (ABS 1997a:15). Of children in CSP-funded child care services, 10% were identified as being of 'non-English-speaking background', defined as children 'where one or both parents have a first language other than English' (Table 4.13). No

15 It is important to note that the ABS definition of 'children with a disability or handicap' is not identical to the CSP census definition of 'disability'.

Table 4.13: Children with additional needs using CSP-funded services, by type of service, 1994 or 1995

Type of service	Children with additional needs					Total children attending
	Child with disability	Parent with disability	Child at risk of abuse and neglect	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	Non-English speaking background	
	Number					
Long day care centres	5,671	1,415	1,013	2,970	26,768	236,025
Family day care	1,992	327	519	794	4,863	84,212
Occasional care	282	118	68	119	912	12,861
MACS	66	6	n.a.	1,355	21	1,732
Multifunctional services	15	2	1	71	18	997
Before/ after school care	1,536	179	164	1,132	7,108	74,772
Total	9,562	2,047	1,765	6,441	39,690	410,599
	Percentage					
Long day care centres	2.4	0.6	0.4	1.3	11.3	100.0
Family day care	2.4	0.4	0.6	0.9	5.8	100.0
Occasional care	2.2	0.9	0.5	0.9	7.1	100.0
MACS	3.8	0.3	n.a.	78.2	1.2	100.0
Multifunctional services	1.5	0.2	0.1	7.1	1.8	100.0
Before/ after school care	2.0	0.2	0.2	1.5	9.8	100.0
Total	2.3	0.5	0.4	1.6	9.7	100.0

Notes

1. Some children may be included in more than one additional needs category.
2. Percentages do not add to 100% because children without additional needs are not included in this table.
3. Vacation care not included.
4. The CSP census in 1995 covered only long day care centres and family day care services. The most recent year for which data on occasional care and outside school hours care services are available is 1994.

Sources: DHFS 1996a:71, 115, 151, 174; DHFS 1997d:29, 51, 73, 89.

population data are available to classify the national population according to this definition.

Indigenous children were less likely than other children to use CSP-funded services, other than multifunctional Aboriginal children's services which are specifically for Indigenous peoples and, to a much lesser extent, multifunctional services which operate in rural and remote areas (Table 4.13). Although Indigenous children comprised an estimated 3% of the Australian population aged 0–12 years at June 1995 (ABS 1996c), they accounted for more than three-quarters of all children attending multifunctional

Aboriginal children's services and 7% of those attending multifunctional centres, but less than 2% of children attending all other CSP-funded services.

Children who were referred to CSP-funded child care services because they were assessed as being *at risk of abuse and neglect* accounted for less than 1% of all children attending these services. No data are available on the number of children at risk of abuse and neglect in the total population (see Chapter 6).

Affordability

The purpose of Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Cash Rebate is to make child care more affordable for parents. Currently (at 1 July 1997), eligibility for the long day care rate of Childcare Assistance is assessed by Centrelink (see Box 4.3), with eligible families paying reduced fees to approved child care services and the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) reimbursing service providers. Eligibility for the outside school hours care rate of Childcare Assistance, which is available only to families eligible for all or part of the higher rate of the Department of Social Security Family Payment, is assessed by service providers who are responsible for adjusting fees accordingly. The Childcare Cash Rebate, on the other hand, is administered by the Health Insurance Commission and paid to parents through Medicare offices on receipt of claims for child care expenses.

From 1 January 1998, there will be major changes to these payment arrangements. Between 1 January and 31 December 1998, Childcare Assistance will be paid fortnightly in advance to service providers by Centrelink.¹⁶ The Childcare Cash Rebate will be administered by Centrelink, and will continue to be paid in arrears to families, but to a nominated bank account rather than as a cash payment. New arrangements for the payment of Childcare Assistance will come into force from 1 January 1999 (see Box 4.3).

DHFS estimated that, at June 1996, 76% (or 279,000) of the 366,000 families with children in long day care were receiving Childcare Assistance, with 55% of families in receipt of the payment receiving the full rate (DHFS 1996b). A slightly lower proportion of families with children in community-based long day care centres received Childcare Assistance (74%) than families with children in other long day care centres (77%) and in family day care (77%). The 1994 CSP census shows that the full outside school hours rate of Childcare Assistance was paid for only 15% (or 11,105) of the 74,772 children attending CSP-funded before/after school care services and the partial rate for 4% (or 3,001) of children (DHFS 1996a:73).

The vast majority (237,979 or 92%) of the 258,092 families who claimed the Childcare Cash Rebate in 1995–96 were claiming for the expenses incurred in using formal child care services only. A small minority claimed the rebate for expenses incurred in using informal care (9,459 or 4%) or formal and informal care (10,654 or 4%) (HIC personal communication).

¹⁶ Note that these arrangements differ from those announced in the 1996–97 Federal Budget (see Box 4.2).

The number of families using long day care services and receiving Childcare Assistance increased by 33% between June 1994 and June 1996 (from 209,300 to 279,000 families) (AIHW 1995:144). The increase in the number of families receiving the Childcare Cash Rebate between 1994–95, the first year of the program, and 1995–96 was 13% (from 210,802 to 237,979 families) (HIC personal communication).

The 1996 ABS Child Care Survey estimated that, where eligible, parents were more likely to be claiming or intending to claim the Childcare Cash Rebate for children in formal child care services targeted at work-related care, than for children in occasional care, preschools and informal care (ABS 1997a:23). At March 1996, for instance, parents were claiming the rebate for 67% of eligible children in family day care, but only 37% of eligible children in informal care. Parents of 42% of the 73,300 eligible children using informal care for whom the rebate was not claimed said that this was mainly because of their lack of awareness of the rebate. Parents of another 44% of these children said that they did not claim because the carer was not registered (a requirement for receiving the rebate) (ABS 1997a:24).

While Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Cash Rebate make child care more affordable, the actual amount families pay for child care is dependent not only on their income level, but also on the number of their children in care, the hours in care and the fees charged.

Childcare Assistance for one child is provided at the maximum rate of 83.04% of a set 'ceiling fee', with higher rates applying where there is more than one child in care. Currently (at 1 July 1997), the ceiling fee is \$115 for 50 hours of care a week or \$2.30 per hour. Families with one child in full-time care who are eligible for maximum Childcare Assistance, for instance, pay a minimum fee of \$19.50 (the 'ceiling fee' less 83.04%) plus the 'gap fee' (the difference between the 'ceiling fee' and the amount charged by the service provider). Families eligible for partial Childcare Assistance pay the minimum fee plus the 'gap fee' plus some portion of the difference between these two, depending on their income level.¹⁷

Currently (at 1 July 1997), parents eligible for the *Childcare Cash Rebate* for one child in care pay the first \$19.50 of their weekly child care costs, but can receive a rebate of 30% of the remainder up to \$28.65 per week if their family income is \$70,000 a year or less. Families with one child whose family income is above this level are eligible for a similar rebate of 20% of child care costs up to a maximum rebate of \$19.10. Parents receiving Childcare Assistance can also claim the Childcare Cash Rebate.

The average weekly full-time fees for different types of CSP-funded long day care services, and thus the gap fees charged to parents receiving maximum Childcare Assistance, varied considerably between the States and Territories (Table 4.14). Within each jurisdiction, private-for-profit long day care centres charged the highest fees, except in South Australia

¹⁷ The Childcare Assistance threshold for maximum Childcare Assistance is \$522 per week. Families are eligible for partial Childcare Assistance up to an annual income cut-off of \$65,743 for one child in care, \$77,084 for two children in care and \$94,095 for three or more children in care.

Table 4.14: Average full-time weekly fees for CSP-funded long day care, by type of service, June 1996 (\$)

Type of service	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Long day care centres									
Community-based	142	147	131	143	163	157	147	135	144
Private-for-profit	150	148	142	148	157	163	167	135	148
Employer and other non-profit	148	139	136	137	150	145	151	132	143
Family day care ^(a)	131	119	118	127	127	135	124	120	124

(a) Includes administration levy. Family day care fees are based on reported fees at August 1995 and adjusted by the CPI to June 1996.

Source: DHFS 1997c.

and the Northern Territory, while family day care services charged the lowest. Among long day care centres, private-for-profit centres in the Australian Capital Territory charged the highest fees on average, while community-based centres in Queensland charged the lowest. Family day care services were most expensive in Tasmania and cheapest in Queensland and Victoria. With the 'ceiling fee' at \$115 per week (at June 1996), gap fees for full-time care for one child ranged from an average of \$3 per week for family day care services in Queensland to \$52 per week for private-for-profit long day care centres in the Australian Capital Territory.

Child care costs and the level of Commonwealth assistance provided to a number of different types of families using long day care services for 40 hours per week at April 1997 are shown in Table A4.9.¹⁸ The income-tested nature of assistance is readily apparent. Where families with one child under 5 years used a long day care centre to care for their child, a sole parent pensioner with one child, for instance, paid \$32.86 per week, while a two-income couple on 2.5 average weekly earnings (AWE) paid \$111.73 per week. The relatively high cost of child care for low-income families is highlighted here, with the sole parent pensioner paying \$32.86 for child care out of a disposable income of \$287.51 per week. The marginal cost of having two children in long day care is considerably higher for high-income families than for low-income families. For family day care services, for instance, a sole parent pensioner with two children under 5 paid only \$7.92 per week more than a sole parent pensioner with one child under 5, while a two-income couple on 2.5 AWE with two children under 5 paid \$93.45 per week more than a two-income couple on 2.5 AWE with one child under 5.

Although no comprehensive information is available, it appears that there are considerable variations in the costs of preschool services offered in the different States and Territories. In 1996 in Queensland, for instance, government preschools located in primary schools did not charge any fees, while community kindergartens charged on

¹⁸ This table provides examples of the child care costs of different types of families on different income levels, using a set number of hours of care per week. Note that this table is illustrative only; families use long day care services for varying numbers of hours per week.

average \$8.40 for a full day session and \$5.40 for a half-day session (Moyle et al. 1996:14).

Many States and Territories provide their own form of fee relief for low-income parents using preschools and child care services not attracting Childcare Assistance. Victoria, for instance, makes an additional grant available to agencies (other than long day care centres) providing preschool services to enable them to reduce fees charged to low-income families, while South Australia provides fee relief for State-only funded occasional care services.

Quality

In the child care area, there are two ways of assuring quality of services: the first is termed *child care standards*, which are the 'quantifiable inputs' viewed as necessary to provide a good quality service, and the second is termed *accreditation*, which focuses on the way in which a service operates (Brennan 1994:201).

Child care standards—such as physical environment, health and safety features, staff-child ratios, staff qualifications and program activities—are generally incorporated into legislative regulations or funding guidelines. All States and Territories license and regulate centre-based long day care and occasional care services. Currently (at July 1997), family day care schemes and/or providers are licensed and regulated in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, with all other States and Territories attempting to achieve key minimum standards, for instance, staff-child ratios, through statute, ordinance or exemption (SCSWA 1993:9). CSP-funded family day care schemes are also required to adhere to the guidelines specified in the Commonwealth's *Handbook for Family Day Care* (DHS 1995). Currently, only the Australian Capital Territory licenses and regulates outside school hours care, although where States and Territories administer outside school hours care funding, service providers are generally required to sign funding agreements by which they agree to provide a service in accordance with specified child care standards.

Since child care standards vary among the different jurisdictions, sets of national standards for long day care centres, family day care and outside school hours care have been developed by Commonwealth, State and Territory representatives and endorsed by the Community Services Ministers Conference. These national standards provide minimum standards for the different service types and the responsibility for implementing them rests with State and Territory Governments. It is expected that most jurisdictions will have implemented the national standards for all three types of services by the end of 1997. In New South Wales, for instance, the national standards are reflected in the Centre Based and Mobile Child Care Services Regulations (No. 2) 1996 and the Family Day Care and Home Based Child Care Services Regulations 1996, while the Australian Capital Territory is in the process of changing its outside school hours care licensing conditions to reflect the national standards.

Currently, only long day care centres receiving Childcare Assistance on behalf of parents take part in an *accreditation* process, although the Commonwealth Government has promised that accreditation will be extended 'in an appropriate form through the children's services sector' (Moylan 1996:9). In March 1997, the Minister for Family Services approved a grant to the National Family Day Care Council 'to begin the

process of developing a quality assurance program for the family day care sector' (Moylean 1997a).

All CSP-funded long day care centres are accredited through the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC), which was established by the Commonwealth Government in 1993 (see Box 4.4). All long day care centres in receipt of Childcare Assistance are required to register with the council to participate in the QIAS.

Each centre must set up an accreditation committee—composed of parents, centre staff and centre administrators or proprietors—and make a self-assessment of their centre against 52 principles of quality care. The centre assessment is then validated by a peer reviewer. A panel of three moderators examines both the centre and reviewer reports and recommends whether a centre should be accredited and the period between reviews. On the basis of this recommendation, the council decides whether the centre should be accredited and whether the period between reviews should be 1, 2 or 3 years.

Box 4.4: The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS)

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System consists of 52 principles which define specific aspects of quality in four areas:

- *interactions—interactions between staff and children, interactions between staff and parents, and interactions between staff (e.g. principle 5 'Staff are responsive to children's feelings and needs');*
- *the centre's program (e.g. principle 19 'The program fosters personal and social development');*
- *nutrition, health and safety practices (e.g. principle 40 'Staff encourage children to follow simple rules of hygiene');* and
- *centre management and staff development (e.g. principle 50 'The centre provides regular learning and training opportunities for staff').*

To be accredited, a centre has to reach the standard required for each principle.

There are four standards of care—'unsatisfactory', 'basic', 'good quality' and 'high quality'.

Of the 52 principles, 20 are 'core principles' in which it is necessary to achieve 'good quality' in order to receive accreditation.

The highest standard that can be achieved in most of the principles is 'high quality'. 'Good quality' is the highest standard which it is possible to achieve in five of the principles, 'basic' in three principles.

Centres can be granted a certificate of accreditation with either 1, 2 or 3 years between reviews, depending on the standards of care reached in each of the specific principles.

Source: NCAC 1993.

A centre cannot be accredited if it is rated as 'unsatisfactory' against any of the principles, or if it receives a 'basic' rating against one of the core principles. However, it may continue to offer parents access to Childcare Assistance if it implements a plan of action to improve quality of care in relation to the relevant principles.

As of 26 June 1997, all 4,134 long day care centres in receipt of Childcare Assistance had registered to participate in the QIAS. Of the 3,082 centres where a decision about accreditation had been made, 91% (or 2,799) had been accredited, while 9% (or 283) had not reached the standard required for accreditation and, with the help of trained support staff, were working through a plan of action approved by the council to bring them up to standard (Table 4.15).

Table 4.15: Accreditation status of CSP-funded long day care centres, at 26 June 1997

Stage of process	Number of centres
<i>Accredited</i>	2,799
Accredited with 1 year between reviews	1,158
Accredited with 2 years between reviews	327
Accredited with 3 years between reviews	1,314
Plan of action—Not accredited	283
Awaiting decision	138
Being reviewed	277
Self assessment	637
Total number of centres	4,134

Source: NCAC unpublished data.

The Small Business Deregulation Task Force, which reported in November 1996, argued that the QIAS should be radically altered. It recommended that ensuring the quality of child care services should be solely a State and Territory responsibility and that the link between participation in the QIAS and the receipt of Childcare Assistance be removed, with participation of centres in the QIAS becoming 'purely voluntary' (SBDTF 1996:89). In response, the Commonwealth Minister for Family Services reiterated the Government's intention to review the QIAS and its support for 'a very strong accreditation system for the child-care sector in this country' (Australia 1996:6493). Subsequently, as a first step in the QIAS review announced in the 1996-97 Budget, the Minister announced that an independent appeals panel would be established to consider appeals against accreditation decisions (Moylan 1997a).

Quality assurance for preschool services varies considerably across the States and Territories, partly depending on the way in which these services are provided and delivered. In relation to standards, in New South Wales, for example, preschools receiving funding from the Department of Community Services are licensed under the same regulations as long care centres, while preschools funded by the Department of School Education and located in government schools are regulated by departmental policy documents. In some jurisdictions, performance indicators on the outcomes of service provision have been developed to measure the quality of preschool services. In South Australia, all funded preschools must be participating in the Quality Assurance Framework by

February 1998, and will be required to include some performance indicator data in their annual report to the Department of Education and Children's Services (SA DECS 1995). All funded preschool agencies in Victoria are required to undertake a quality improvement process as a condition of funding. A number of quality assessment processes may be used, including a preschool quality assessment checklist developed by the Department of Human Services (Victoria DHS 1996a). New South Wales Department of School Education preschools are integral parts of primary schools, and outcomes are monitored through the school's planning and reporting process.

4.3 Family support services

The provision of family support services is complex, with a wide range of services funded at all levels of government (Commonwealth, State and Territory and local government), through various government departments. While the Commonwealth does not directly provide family support services, State and Territory Governments may be involved in both their funding and delivery. Both levels of government often fund local government and non-government organisations to deliver services, and these bodies may also add their own funding or fund services without any additional assistance.

Several reports have highlighted the lack of national information in this area (AIHW 1993, 1995; Industry Commission 1995). While a number of State, Territory and Commonwealth government departments have well-developed data collections relating to their jurisdiction, there has not yet been an attempt to develop a national data collection with consistent scope, coverage and data definitions.

A national collection is difficult to implement, however, without an understanding of the basic structure and arrangements for the provision of family support services across Australia. No comprehensive audit has yet been undertaken of these services in the various jurisdictions. In order to provide some context for the development of national data in this area, this section provides a brief outline of the current structure of family support services, and the history of their development. While every effort is made to present a picture of family support services funded by governments, in the case of the States and Territories the picture is incomplete. Additionally, while recognising the significant input of local government and community sectors, this chapter will not examine these contributions as information in this area is not readily available. The following section therefore discusses examples of family support services funded by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, within a classification framework described below.

Classifying family support services

Support services for families are often classified in terms of their prevention level, where primary prevention services are universally available, secondary prevention services are directed to clients at risk, and tertiary prevention services are directed to clients in crisis, generally in an intensive format (Gledhill 1994:99). This section will not attempt to classify services according to this system, as agencies providing family support services often conduct activities across two or more of these levels and a single activity may fall into more than one class. However, it is worth noting that commen-

tators claim that governments are tending to concentrate funding towards the crisis end of this continuum. In particular, it has been asserted that gaps are appearing in the provision of generally available primary prevention family services in Australia (Gledhill 1996:4).

While there have been many other attempts to classify family services (e.g. Wolcott 1989a), for the purposes of this report, the *National Classifications of Community Services* (AIHW 1997) will be used (see Chapter 1). Services which are generally perceived to be 'family support services' tend to fall into one or more of the following classes:

- Counselling—services which help service users to assess their circumstances and relationships, and to make choices, decisions and plans for the future. Assistance is provided by discussions with trained counsellors in individual and group sessions. Such services include telephone counselling, crisis counselling, family therapy and mediation (AIHW 1997:13).
- Development of family/household management skills—services which re-establish and maintain minimum levels of family, household and child-rearing management skills. Such services include parenting education and family preservation (AIHW 1997:13).
- Financial information, advice or referral—provision of information, advice, counselling or referral about the planning and management of financial resources, for example, in relation to household budgets (AIHW 1997:11).
- Community/community centre-based development and support—provision of a wide range of coordinated groups and activities focused on enhancing simultaneously the personal and community support and development capacities of people living within a defined geographical community. Examples of activities which may be included in this classification are those undertaken through neighbourhood houses and playgroups (AIHW 1997:61).

As most family support services involve a range of activities, any one service may fall in a number of classes. For the purposes of this chapter, the primary activity of the service will be used to classify services, with some reference to relevant class of secondary activities where appropriate. Two further classes are of interest as they cover some of the secondary activities of the family support services discussed here. These are: 'individual advocacy' (services aimed at enabling access to services or entitlements by providing an advocate to speak for and negotiate on behalf of service users, and/or enabling self advocacy); and 'mutual support and self-help' (services which facilitate and coordinate groups to exchange information and experiences, to provide activities to meet common needs and/or to provide social, therapeutic and practical support) (AIHW 1997:13).

Within the proposed classification, wherever possible, services will be described and discussed in terms of their aims, target populations, funding, delivery and use.

Commonwealth-funded family support services

While family support services are essentially a State and Territory government responsibility, the Commonwealth Government plays a role in funding a range of such services. Commonwealth involvement in this area largely grew out of its responsibil-

ities in relation to family and marriage law, and its role in establishing the Family Support Service Scheme in 1978.

Attorney-General's Department

The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department (AGD) is currently responsible for a range of programs which developed as a result of family and marriage law. The department's Legal Aid and Family Services Division (LAFS) administers the following sub-programs, known collectively as the Family Services Program:

- Family and Relationship Counselling
- Family and Child Mediation
- Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy
- Contact Services
- Family Skills Training
- Marriage and Relationship Education.

The historical development of these sub-programs is discussed in Box 4.5.

The Family Services Program aims to enable fair access to processes for resolving legal and family relationship problems. As part of this program, Legal Aid and Family Services contracts eligible community-based organisations to provide a range of family services for married and de facto couples, sole parents and children. Funded organisations are required to be a member of one of three peak bodies: Centacare Australia (a federation of independent Catholic welfare agencies); Relationships Australia (a specialist professional provider of relationship support and enrichment services, with member organisations in each State and Territory); or Family Services Australia (representing a wide range of organisations with diverse approaches to service delivery) (AGD 1996c:8). Each of the peak bodies is represented on the Family Services Council which advises the Attorney-General on policy and practice for the Family Services Program (AGD 1996a:4).

Counselling

Family and Relationship Counselling

Contracted community-based organisations provide family and child counselling to couples during pre-marriage, marriage, separation, reconciliation, divorce and re-marriage. The counselling aims to assist couples to develop conflict resolution and negotiation skills (AGD 1997:1). Additional projects occasionally are funded as part of this sub-program. Those currently under way include: two Family Violence Research and Intervention projects, which aim to develop alternative service delivery models to address violence in families and appropriate materials and training programs for service providers; and the Community Development Officers project, which aims to increase access to the Family Services Program by families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (AGD 1996a:2-4).

Box 4.5: History of family support services administered by the Attorney-General's Department

The Attorney-General's Department first became involved in funding 'marriage guidance' in 1959 as a consequence of the Matrimonial Causes Act of that year. At that time, 19 voluntary organisations were funded across Australia to keep marriages 'stable and healthy' and to keep couples out of divorce courts. In 1975 the Matrimonial Causes Act was replaced by the Family Law Act, which provided funding for 'marriage counselling'. Shortly after, in 1976, the Marriage Act 1961 was amended to provide funding for 'marriage education'. By 1978, the Commonwealth was funding 22 community-based organisations to provide marriage counselling services and 12 to provide marriage education services. These initiatives have continued to receive funding, and are now known as the Family and Relationship Counselling sub-program and the Marriage and Relationship Education sub-program.

In 1985 a pilot project in alternative dispute resolution for family law matters was established. This developed into what is now known as the Family and Child Mediation sub-program and four organisations were funded to provide this service in 1989.

The Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy sub-program was piloted in 1990, following recommendations made in the National Inquiry into Homeless Children, conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1989. Family Skills Training for disadvantaged families was also piloted in 1990 as a result of recommendations made in the report of the National Committee on Violence in 1989.

The Contact Services sub-program was established under the Family Services Program in the 1995–96 Budget 'to promote the safe and appropriate transfer of children between separated parents, and safe and appropriate interaction between the visiting person and the child during supervised visits' (AGD 1996b:9).

The Family Law Reform Act 1995 includes amendments which aim to establish a new approach to dealing with children. The revised legislation emphasises parental responsibility for the care, welfare and development of children rather than giving parents any rights to custody and access. This highlighted focus on children brings with it the possibility of children's needs increasingly being included in family counselling and mediation and hence the need to re-examine and redevelop existing service delivery models.

Sources: AGD 1996a:1–3; AGD 1996b:5–9.

Family and Child Mediation

The *Family Law Act 1975* refers to the provision of family and child mediation as 'a form of dispute resolution for matters that could be the subject of proceedings under the Act' (AGD 1997:1). Issues addressed through mediation include financial and property matters and parenting responsibilities. As with all mediation services, an impartial mediator assists the parties involved to make their own decision by helping them to identify and isolate relevant issues, by discussing options and by facilitating a consensual outcome (AGD 1997:1).

Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy

This sub-program aims primarily to prevent youth homelessness. Mediation is used to resolve conflict between young people and their caregivers, while family therapy examines the emotional dynamics of family relationships which are causing the conflict (AGD 1997:1).

Development of family/household management skills

Contact Services

In cases where there has been a breakdown of the parental relationship, community legal and family services organisations are contracted to provide contact services (changeover and visiting services). These services aim 'to facilitate safe contact arrangements for children whose parents are in high conflict over the contact' (AGD 1997:1). The ultimate aim of such services is to attain independent management of contact where appropriate.

Family Skills Training

Organisations funded to deliver family skills training attempt to develop parenting and family functioning skills in order to promote positive parenting and non-violent problem-solving. This preventive service is aimed at meeting the needs of low income families, sole parents, locationally disadvantaged families and families with children with disabilities, as well as the specific needs of Indigenous families and families from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (AGD 1997:1).

Marriage and Relationship Education

This is a preventive service which aims to assist clients to develop skills which promote positive stable relationships and reduce the likelihood of marriage breakdown. Guidance and support are offered by trained educators across a range of life stages, including the period prior to marriage, during marriage, re-marriage, divorce, parenting and retirement (AGD 1997:1). As a result of the 1996–97 Budget, 34 new services were funded under this sub-program, some through existing organisations.

The Family Services Program in perspective

An indication of the relative sizes of the sub-programs within the Family Services Program can be gained by an examination of the relative expenditure levels, the number of organisations funded and the estimated number of clients assisted (Table 4.16). The family and relationship counselling sub-program is by far the largest element of the Family Services Program in terms of all of these factors, accounting for approximately 60% of the expenditure and two-thirds of the clients in 1995–96. During 1996–97, Legal Aid and Family Services commenced work on the development of a quality assurance strategy (FAMQIS) and an information system (FAMnet), a project which is expected to be completed by June 1998.

Department of Health and Family Services

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) currently provides funding for a range of family support services through the Family and Children's Services Program. For instance, the Commonwealth provides funding to a variety of organisations to: conduct Commonwealth-funded Family Support Services;

Table 4.16: Expenditure, number of organisations and estimated number of clients, AGD Family Services Program, 1995–96

Sub-program	Expenditure (\$m)	Organisations funded	Estimated no. of clients
Family and Relationship Counselling	15.2	41	89,315
Marriage and Relationship Education	1.8	39	26,254
Family Mediation	4.9	17	2,875
Family Skills Training	1.9	21	9,376
Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy	1.8	12	2,881

Notes

1. 'Clients' refers to the total number of individuals attending the service, except in the case of Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy, in which case 'clients' refers only to the number of adolescents attending the service.
2. Table does not include information about Contact Services as this information is not available.
3. The same organisations are often funded to provide services under a range of the above sub-programs and some clients may access more than one sub-program.

Source: AGD unpublished data.

undertake a range of parenting initiatives; and operate Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies.¹⁹ The services provided as a result of this funding are discussed below.

Commonwealth-funded Family Support Services were originally funded under the Family Support Services Scheme, established in conjunction with the States and Territories in the late 1970s (see Box 4.6). The DHFS continues to provide funding to 35 agencies to deliver such services across Australia. Funding for these agencies was not transferred to the States and Territories when they assumed responsibility for the Family Support Program in 1987–88 (DHFS personal communication). The 1996–97 funding level for the Commonwealth-funded Family Support Services sub-program was \$1.53 million. Grants for recipient organisations vary and funds can be used for a wide range of services and purposes, including counselling services, transport for disabled children, preventive services for children or families at risk, and to pay the salaries of directors of community service organisations.

Development of family/household management skills

Parenting education initiatives

As part of the Strengthening Families Strategy, introduced by the Federal Government in the 1996–97 Budget, \$4.3 million was allocated over 2 years to enable community organisations to develop 'best-practice parenting education programs'. Of these funds, \$1.37 million will contribute towards testing and developing a national network of home visiting projects, known as 'Good Beginnings', which will focus on child abuse prevention and parenting education. These projects will be managed by the National

¹⁹ Between 1990 and 1997 the Commonwealth also funded the Family Resource Centres Program to improve the effectiveness and quality of services provided to families with children in regions of rapid growth and identified need (Commonwealth of Australia 1996b). It was announced in the 1997–98 Federal Budget that funding for Family Resource Centres will cease at the end of 1997.

Box 4.6: History of the Family Support Services Scheme

Late 1960s and early 1970s. The need for family support services was identified and publicly debated.

1975. The Family Services Committee was established to examine the needs of families in Australia and to make recommendations regarding the role of all levels of government in delivering services to meet these needs.

May 1977. The Committee recommended that 'services should be funded which were designed to prevent family breakdown or were of a developmental nature which took account of the variety of family structures and functions' (Bullen & Robinson 1994:10).

1979. The Commonwealth funded pilot family support services under the Family Support Services Scheme, aimed at encouraging and assisting 'the development of a range of services designed to support families in their responsibilities in the rearing and development of children' (Bullen & Robinson 1994:10).

1985. The Welfare Ministers Conference agreed in principle that the existing Commonwealth-funded scheme be retained and that expansion be funded via a joint 50:50 Commonwealth–State cost-sharing arrangement.

January 1986. Following a Commonwealth–State Working Party report on the future of the scheme, the Minister for Community Services announced that it was an effective and innovative program which was meeting the needs of families in crisis. He stated that the scheme would have a permanent place in Commonwealth funding arrangements and that there was a good basis for negotiating future cost-sharing arrangements with State and Territory Governments.

1987. The Family Support Program officially began in January, based on bilateral Commonwealth–State agreements. National program guidelines listed the following types of services as eligible for funding: neighbourhood-based family support services (e.g. family centres, information and referral services), home management assistance (e.g. family aide/homemaker services, family counselling, home budget counselling) and parent support (e.g. parent education/effectiveness, self-help groups) (Wolcott 1989b:30).

June 1988. The Minister for Community Services and Health stated that the Family Support Program delivered services which were essentially a State welfare responsibility. Hence the Commonwealth Government would maintain funding, and leave State Governments in control of program management. Consequently, following the 1988–89 Federal Budget, rather than receiving a tied grant for the specific purpose of funding the Family Support Program, the States received a general revenue appropriation from which they could allocate funds to family support services according to their own priorities.

Post-1990. Various States and Territories (e.g. New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania) have continued to fund agencies to provide family support services in a similar format to that developed under the original Family Support Services Scheme. Others have dispersed the component services across a range of departmental programs.

Sources: Bullen & Robinson 1994:10–12; Wolcott 1989b:30.

Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) (Moylan 1997b). Funds will also be directed towards additional research and the establishment of a community-based advisory council to replace the National Child Protection Council (DHFS personal communication). The initiatives are based on the belief that 'providing parents with the information necessary to deal with some of the pressures of day-to-day life should lead to a reduction in the incidence of child abuse' (Moylan 1996:15).

Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies

The department funds Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies to assist with the fostering and adoption of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and with related family welfare matters (DHFS personal communication). While not strictly a family preservation service, many of the activities conducted by these agencies seek to keep families together or to find the most culturally appropriate solution for the care or placement of children. Services provided by the agencies are extremely varied and may also be classified as 'individual advocacy', 'mutual support and self-help' or 'community/community centre-based development and support'.

The first Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies were established in the 1970s in response to concern that a disproportionate number of Indigenous adults entering the criminal justice system had been placed in institutions or other non-Indigenous placements as children, care which was culturally inappropriate (D'Souza 1993:40). The department now funds 11 agencies across Australia—2 in New South Wales, 5 in Queensland, and 1 each in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Many agencies also receive funding from their State or Territory Government.

Community/community centre-based development and support

Playgroups

Playgroups are designed to bring together, on a regular basis, groups of younger children with their parents or carers for informal or semi-structured sessions. Children may be between birth and school age, and playgroups may include children in other forms of children's services. For example, many family day care providers take the children in their care on a regular basis to a playgroup 'session', often in conjunction with other family day care groups. Playgroup sessions are held in a variety of venues, such as private homes, community centres and preschools. The aim is to provide a stimulating, creative and caring environment which encourages and enhances positive interaction between participants, including the parents and carers. As such, playgroups view themselves as a 'community networking service', assisting parents to make contacts with others in their community.

The department provides funding to playgroup associations in each State and Territory to assist these organisations to act as resource centres for individual playgroups, providing a support and advisory service. The Playgroup Council of Australia reported that in December 1996 there were nearly 9,000 playgroup sessions nationwide, with approximately 120,000 families as members (Playgroup Council of Australia unpublished). As part of the 1997–98 Budget, government assistance to playgroups was increased with additional funding of \$1 million per year allocated for 3 years from

1998–99 ‘to improve developmental opportunities available through playgroups for children with a parent at home’ (Newman 1997:4).

Department of Industry, Science and Tourism

Financial information, advice or referral

The Commonwealth Financial Counselling Program

The Commonwealth Financial Counselling Program is administered by the Small Business and Consumer Affairs Division within the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism (DIST). The aim of the program is ‘... to provide reasonable access to financial counselling services for low income families and individuals and small business who are experiencing financial difficulty’ (DIST 1996:2). In order to achieve this aim, the Commonwealth provides grants to community-based organisations and local government community service organisations to provide financial counselling services and/or resources and training for financial counsellors (DIST 1996:2).

The types of activities generally undertaken by the funded organisations include: direct casework with clients in financial distress, including individual advocacy and negotiation (e.g. with creditors); referral to other services; and group advocacy, community development and education, training and professional development for financial counsellors, and promotion of financial counselling (DIST 1996:3).

The program commenced in 1990 when 30 organisations were successful in attracting grants. Total funding for the program was \$1.9 million in 1996–97, distributed between 44 organisations—14 in New South Wales, 9 in Victoria, 6 in Queensland, 4 in Western Australia, 6 in South Australia, 1 each in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, and 3 in the Northern Territory. It is estimated that 10,000 new clients were assisted during 1996 (DIST personal communication).

Department of Primary Industries and Energy

Financial information, advice or referral

The Rural Counselling Program

The objective of the Rural Counselling Program is: to encourage, in times of low farm income and attendant family stress, the provision of appropriate financial and adjustment counselling to farm families in those areas most in need of such counselling service; and to provide direct financial incentive for local self-help community groups, based in rural and provincial Australia, to respond to the need for rural counselling through the employment of suitably qualified rural counsellors (DPIE personal communication). The program also aims to assist farming families to access other government programs and services.

The Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE) funds community-based organisations to employ counsellors on a full- or part-time basis. The main responsibility of counsellors is to provide free, objective, confidential financial analysis for farm families and to provide assistance according to the circumstances (DPIE personal communication). While counsellors must be responsive to the personal difficulties

arising as a result of financial problems, they are generally expected to refer clients to other agencies for counselling with social/psychological problems.

The department began funding the Rural Counselling Program in 1986. During 1996–97, funding of \$5.05 million was provided to 71 organisations (28 in New South Wales, 13 in Victoria, 12 in South Australia, 8 in Queensland, 9 in Western Australia and 1 in Tasmania). During 1996, the program assisted 9,293 clients. The main forms of assistance were: helping clients to negotiate with creditors; helping clients to access Department of Social Security and Rural Adjustment Scheme assistance; and referral to other agencies, such as those providing counselling for social/psychological problems (DPIE personal communication).

Following the 1997–98 Budget, funding for the Rural Adjustment Scheme and the Rural Communities Access Program (of which the Rural Counselling Program is one of six elements) will be redirected to the government's new Integrated Rural Policy Package, to be announced in late 1997 (Commonwealth of Australia 1997a:102)

State/Territory-funded family support services

As stated earlier, there is currently no comprehensive information on family support services provided and/or funded by State and Territory Governments. This section will therefore use examples of programs to illustrate the types of services available in each jurisdiction, under each of the specified classes.

A number of States and Territories continue to fund agencies to provide a range of family support services in a similar format to the model developed for the Family Support Services Scheme in the late 1970s. An example of agencies providing such multifaceted services are those funded in New South Wales, known as 'Family Support Services' (see Box 4.7). These services were early forerunners of the more tightly targeted, intensive family preservation services discussed below (Hamilton 1993a:x).

Counselling

Counselling and mediation services

State and Territory Governments fund a wide range of counselling and mediation services in addition to those which are privately funded and those funded by the Commonwealth Government. The types of services funded vary across jurisdictions, but generally range from one-to-one telephone crisis counselling services to child sexual abuse counselling and mediation services for families experiencing parent-adolescent conflict.

State and Territory Governments usually fund non-government agencies, such as Lifeline, Relationships Australia and Centacare, to deliver these services. Organisations are often funded to provide these services in conjunction with a range of other family support services. For example, in Tasmania, family counselling and mediation are provided by agencies funded as 'Family Support Services' under the Government's Family Support Program. Parent helplines—providing information and counselling services to assist parents—are funded in most States and Territories. This service is discussed as an example of parent education in the 'development of family/household management skills' class of services, illustrating the difficulty in classifying family support services.

Problem gambling initiatives

Many States fund initiatives to assist problem gamblers and their families, including counselling services and other innovative measures. Such programs may be partially funded from revenue raised under gaming legislation. Two States in which a great deal of attention has been given to gambling counselling and education are Queensland and Victoria.

The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care (DFYCC) in Queensland provides funding to a number of community-based organisations to provide 'Break Even' services for problem gamblers. Break Even involves a range of counselling services (e.g. addictions, financial and relationships counselling) for gamblers and their families. Organisations funded under this program also undertake community education campaigns to raise awareness of the consequences of excessive gambling and conduct joint ventures with gambling industry groups to bring about changes. Relationship Australia, Lifeline and Centacare are currently contracted to provide Break Even services in six locations across Queensland (Qld DFYCC personal communication).

The Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) funds a range of problem gambling services and initiatives. In 1996–97, community-based organisations were funded to deliver:

- G-Line—a central 24-hour free call crisis intervention and referral line;
- Problem Gambling Counselling and Liaison Services—18 counselling and referral services; and
- professional training and development—State-wide skills development for problem gambling, financial counsellors and liaison officers.

In addition to these services, funding has been provided to conduct research in this field and to develop innovative service models (e.g. for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds who are experiencing difficulties with gambling or financial management) (Vic DHS personal communication).

Development of family/household management skills

In-home support

In-home support for families is funded in some form by most jurisdictions. For instance, organisations funded as 'Family Support Services' in New South Wales provide a significant source of in-home support for families (see Box 4.7). In Victoria, in-home support services are funded as part of the Family Support Program; these services aim to support families where there is a moderate or severe level of distress or dysfunction because of life stress or vulnerability. Services are targeted to families with children aged 0–18 and focus on practical assistance and parent education (Vic DHS unpublished).

Parenting education

Services funded by State and Territory Governments in this area include the provision of parenting information either through telephone helplines or printed material, as well as through more formalised family skills training. The level of support provided through State and Territory Governments in this area varies markedly.

Box 4.7: Family Support Services in New South Wales— a multifaceted approach

Agencies were first funded as 'Family Support Services' in 1978, when a small number of organisations were successful in attracting money under a Commonwealth-funded pilot program which became the sole responsibility of the State Government in 1988 (see Box 4.6). The State Government retained the Family Support Program as a separate and distinct program from 1988 until 1991, when it was absorbed into the Community Services Grants Program, funded by the New South Wales Department of Community Services.

Family Support Services aim to prevent family breakdown and promote family strengths. These services have three main objectives—to promote positive relationships within families as well as a safer and more caring environment for children; to develop support networks and provide referral to agencies delivering other services, including self-help services; and to act as advocates for families to government and other agencies. In order to meet these objectives, agencies funded as Family Support Services undertake activities such as:

- providing one-to-one support to families (family worker services) either in their own home or at centres;
- conducting group activities, including parenting skills training, personal development, mutual self-help groups, home and financial management skills, education/information sessions, socialisation or drop-in activities and playgroups;
- providing information and referral; and
- assisting in community development initiatives.

Services are generally delivered by local community groups, although some are sponsored and delivered by larger organisations such as Centacare and Barnardo's.

In 1994 there were 134 family support projects being conducted by 129 organisations, funded as 'Family Support Services'. A census of Family Support Services in August 1994 indicated that, during the census week, family support projects: serviced approximately 4,200 family worker clients; worked with approximately 1,270 families in which children were known to have been notified to the Department of Community Services as being 'at risk'; and provided group activities for approximately 3,300 participants. During 1993–94, approximately 10,850 group sessions were provided.

The census also found that clients tended to be disadvantaged and have low incomes. For instance, 57% of clients were from one-parent families, 76% of client families had a pension or benefit as their main source of income and 79% rented their accommodation, including 49% of client families living in public housing. Domestic violence was an issue for approximately 45% of client families.

Sources: Bullen & Robinson 1994:1; FSSANSW 1995:2–6.

State and Territory Governments often purchase education packages developed by specialists in early childhood development and parenting and then modify them according to their own needs. For instance, the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P),

developed by educational psychologists at the University of Queensland, forms the basis for the Positive Parenting Programs in both Victoria and Western Australia.

In Victoria, as part of the Positive Parenting Program, a wide range of written parenting information products, professional resources and training programs has been developed (Vic DHS 1996b:1). Parenting resources include parent 'tip sheets', a positive parenting video and a positive parenting booklet, which are available to parents through service providers or the Department of Human Services. In Western Australia, an innovative Positive Parenting Program was piloted in 1996. The pilot—a behavioural, family intervention program for 3- and 4-year-olds—has the ultimate aim of preventing behavioural problems in adolescence. The program aimed to provide parents with a free 4-week parenting course, four 15-minute follow-up phone calls from a counsellor, and a video workbook and manual on child care (Evans 1996:1).

An alternative approach to parenting education has been adopted by the South Australian Government. The 'Parenting SA' campaign aims to bring parenting information, support and advice together in a coordinated way. The campaign achieves this through the provision of a Parent Helpline, community programs, innovative workplace parenting forums and the establishment of the 'Parenting SA Home Page' on the Internet. The Home Page provides parents, grandparents, step-parents, practitioners and professionals with up-to-date parenting information on 48 different subject areas (Parenting SA Home Page 1997). Material for the campaign has been developed by the Office for Families and Children in conjunction with Child and Youth Health.

Family preservation

There is a wide range of child welfare services, all of which are a State/Territory responsibility. While child protection and out of home placement are discussed in Chapter 6, other support services which attempt to assist families who have entered (or are in danger of entering) the child protection system are examined here. These services are known as family preservation services.

During the 1990s there has been a growing trend towards funding family preservation services and programs, rather than out of home care, for children in families where there is risk of abuse, neglect or conflict. This policy direction has evolved partly out of a desire to contain increasing welfare costs, and partly out of a philosophical shift away from using out of home care. This shift has occurred in the belief that 'removing a child at risk from the family may produce second order effects of greater and more lasting detriment than the original problem' (Hamilton 1993b:17).

Intensive family preservation services are distinguished from other family support services in that they are targeted at families where serious protective intervention is imminent. They are less restrictive than alternative child protection measures but remain highly interventionist services for families whose children are identified by the State as needing protection (Blake et al. 1995:52).

Intensive family preservation programs were introduced into most States in the early 1990s. Currently, State Governments provide funding for such programs under a variety of names. For example, Victoria funds Families First, Aftercare and Koori Family Preservation Services as family preservation services, and Tasmania funds an Intensive Family Support Program in its southern region. The Victorian system is discussed here

as an illustrative example of family preservation at work in the States and Territories (see Box 4.8).

It is important to recognise that a great deal of family preservation work is undertaken as part of the general casework of child protection workers, by agencies funded as 'Family Support Services' and agencies funded to provide a range of other support services to families. For instance, the Northern Territory does not fund a distinct family preservation program, but their child protection case workers conduct intensive family-based work with families where there are protective concerns regarding the children.

Financial information, advice or referral

Some form of financial counselling is funded in most States and Territories. Types of services funded vary but may include telephone advice or referral to a non-government organisation providing financial counselling services. Alternatively, financial counselling and advocacy may be included as part of a general family support package developed for a family at risk of having their child removed because of protective concerns or for a family accessing agencies funded as 'Family Support Services'. Some States use gambling revenue to fund debt/financial counselling services.

The Victorian Financial Counselling Program supports families and individuals in financial difficulty, targeting families and individuals on low incomes. The recurrent budget of \$2.3 million per annum purchases services from 52 agencies across the State. In 1995-96 over 11,000 client cases were seen; in 70% of cases, clients had annual incomes of \$20,000 or less. Additional funding has been made available over recent years to expand the provision of financial counselling services and to develop innovative service models (Vic DHS unpublished).

Community/community centre-based development and support

State and Territory Governments are involved in funding a range of services, initiatives and resources which aim to strengthen communities and develop networks of support for families. The Home-Start program and neighbourhood houses and community centres are examples of services which perform a community development and support role. These programs conduct a range of activities, such as parenting education, and provide mutual support and self-help, again demonstrating the difficulty in classifying any one family support service.

Home-Start

Home-Start is a voluntary home visiting scheme 'through which volunteers (who are parents themselves) offer support, friendship and practical help to families with at least one child under 5 who are experiencing stress and difficulties' (Barnes 1995:323). Home-Start was founded in the United Kingdom in 1973, and by 1997 there were 206 schemes worldwide, including six in Australia. Five of the schemes are in New South Wales and one in Victoria. The Department of Community Services in New South Wales funds the Home-Start scheme as part of the Community Services Grants Program.

Families with young children may refer themselves or be referred to Home-Start by a community agency or worker, for example, a child health nurse. Reasons for referral are numerous, including 'post natal depression, illness, disability, marital problems,

Box 4.8: Family preservation services in Victoria

In 1991, Canterbury Family Centre received State government funding to conduct a pilot program, now known as Families First, based on the Homebuilders model developed in the USA. A series of pilots were run in the 1991–93 period and an evaluation was completed in 1993. During this period the Government made the commitment to expand the program across the State by 1995, agreeing to fund non-profit organisations and the relevant government department to provide these services.

Families First provides counselling and education to prevent the removal of children or adolescents from their families because of protective concerns. The service aims to reduce child abuse risk factors initially present in the family, and to connect the family with ongoing support services which strengthen their ability to successfully nurture their child, thereby avoiding placing the child in out of home care. The program may also help young people who have been placed in out of home care to be reunited with their own families.

The target group for Families First is restricted to referrals from child protection workers within the Victorian Department of Human Services, and then only when those workers would otherwise remove a child within 3 days to an out of home placement for protective reasons.

Characteristics which are consistent across Families First projects are that services are:

- *intense (workers assist a maximum of two families for up to 20 hours per week each);*
- *home-based and family-centred;*
- *flexible and responsive; and*
- *brief (generally only 4–6 weeks).*

An additional program component, known as Aftercare, was trialled in three regions in 1996–97. The aim of Aftercare is to provide continuity of service, either following a regular Families First intervention or within approximately 6 months of a Families First case being closed. The service enables the worker to assist the family for an additional 3 months, for up to 10 hours per week. This service is only used when other family support services are unavailable or unsuitable. It is generally provided when there is a high likelihood that the child will be placed in out of home care and a high probability that the Aftercare service will prevent this occurring.

A number of Koori Family Preservation Services are scheduled to commence in Victoria in 1997. These services are also based on the USA Homebuilders program but have been adapted to suit Koori needs. Changes to the model include a longer period of assistance for referred families (3 months) and a greater emphasis on community development work.

During 1996–97, \$2.14 million was allocated to 10 providers for Families First; \$45,000 to three providers for Aftercare; and \$450,000 for Koori Family Preservation, which is expected to be distributed to three providers. The department is expecting to assist 377 families through Families First, 36 through Aftercare and 27 through Koori Family Preservation Services in 1996–97.

Sources: Blake et al. 1995:52; Hamilton 1993a:41; Livingstone 1993:27; Vic DHS personal communication.

geographical isolation and loneliness, several small children under five, or multiple birth' (Barnes 1995:324).

Volunteers in the program all have parenting experience and are required to undertake a short preparation course. Families are initially contacted by volunteer visitors on a one-to-one basis but every effort is made to link families into social networks and other support structures. One example of such activity are the Home-Start Playgroups which are run for families and volunteers every 2 months (Barnes 1995:324).

Community centres/neighbourhood houses

Neighbourhood houses, sometimes known as neighbourhood or community centres, are funded by governments in all States and Territories. Local governments make a particularly significant contribution in this area, often by building and maintaining premises for community use.

Neighbourhood houses play an important role in 'combating isolation of families in the community' (Wolcott 1989a:23). In addition to providing a venue for families to make contact with other people in the community, neighbourhood houses generally provide access to a wide range of services, such as education, counselling, skill development and recreation activities.

The Queensland Government, through its Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, funded 100 neighbourhood centres in 1996–97. Funding is generally used to finance a coordinator and some administrative assistance. Centres are intended to provide a range of preventive services for families and individuals, including promoting social change within the community (Qld DFYCC personal communication).

The Tasmanian Department of Community and Health Services funded 29 neighbourhood houses during 1996–97. Neighbourhood houses provide a meeting place as well as a wide range of community services, such as effective parenting courses, life skills classes and recreational activities. They are intended to assist community members into employment, break down family isolation and develop community cohesion (Tas DCHS 1995:39).

4.4 Summary

Children's services

The structure, funding, administration, regulation and delivery of children's services are extremely complex. The majority of child care services are funded through the Children's Services Program (CSP) which is administered by the Department of Health and Family Services. CSP services are mainly funded by the Commonwealth Government; State and Territory Governments also contribute funding through joint agreements with the Commonwealth. States and Territories also provide child care funding outside these joint agreements and are mainly responsible for funding preschool services.

There have been a number of significant changes in children's services in this decade, including an enormous growth in the number of child care places, in the number of children in child care, and in child care expenditure. Between June 1989 and June 1996,

the number of child care places funded through the CSP increased from 114,391 to 306,575 places, while the number of children in CSP-funded child care services increased from 153,100 to 570,300. Between 1989–90 and 1995–96, Commonwealth expenditure on children’s services through the CSP increased from \$215.8 million to \$854.4 million in real terms (1989–90 constant prices).

The largest growth in CSP-funded child care places over the period was in places in private-for-profit and employer-sponsored and other non-profit long day care centres. This growth was a response to eligibility for Childcare Assistance being extended to users of long day care centres, other than centres receiving a CSP operational subsidy, from 1 January 1991. The growth in centre-based long day care places attracting Childcare Assistance is reflected in the shift in Commonwealth CSP expenditure from expenditure on service provision to expenditure on measures to make child care more affordable for parents. Between 1990–91 and 1995–96, the proportion of Commonwealth expenditure on capital loans, capital grants and operational subsidies fell from 29% to 14%, while the proportion of expenditure on Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Cash Rebate increased from 58% to 78%. In 1995–96, more than half (56%) of all Childcare Assistance expenditure went to private-for-profit and employer-sponsored and other non-profit centres.

Between 1990 and 1996, there was a shift from the use of informal child care arrangements to formal child care services. The number of children in formal child care services increased by 18% between November 1990 and March 1996, while the number of children in informal care fell by 11%. Overall, over the period, the number of children under 12 years using any type of child care fell by 10%.

In recent years, the differences between two types of children’s services—preschools and long day care centres—have become less distinct and several jurisdictions now support and promote linkages between the two service types. In 1995, 55% of CSP-funded long day care centres provided a preschool program for the children in the year before full-time school, while 17% of centres took children out to a local preschool.

The enormous growth in expenditure on child care services is one of the reasons why growing attention is being paid to the outcomes of service provision, addressed here in terms of accessibility, affordability and quality. The level of unmet demand for children’s services halved between 1993 and 1996. Commonwealth statistics on the accessibility of child care services for parents in the labour force, however, indicate significant regional variations in the number of places per head of children in the target population.

Child care has been made more affordable for substantial numbers of families through Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Cash Rebate. In 1995–96, 279,000 families with children in long day care received Childcare Assistance, while 237,979 families received the Childcare Cash Rebate, mainly for expenses incurred in using formal services. Where child care costs and the level of Commonwealth assistance provided to different types of families using long day care services are examined, the income-tested nature of assistance is readily apparent. The marginal cost of having two children in long day care is considerably higher for high-income families than for low-income families.

Service quality is assured through child care standards and accreditation. Most State and Territory Governments are expected to implement nationally agreed child care standards for long day care centres, family day care and outside school hours care by the end of 1997. Currently, among CSP-funded services, only long day care centres are required to participate in a formal accreditation process, although there is support from the Commonwealth to extend an appropriate form of accreditation throughout the children's services sector.

The period since the beginning of this decade has been one of rapid change in the children's services sector. It is expected that the pace of change will continue, given new Commonwealth initiatives, such as the removal of operational subsidies from community-based long day care centres and outside school hours care services, new payment arrangements for Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Cash Rebate, and the new National Planning System initiatives.

Family support services

This chapter also presents an overview of the provision of family support services in Australia. This brief overview classifies a range of government-funded family support services according to whether their primary function is to provide: counselling; development of family/household management skills; financial information, advice or referral; or community/community centre-based development and support.

Although family support services are primarily a State and Territory government responsibility, the Commonwealth Government funds a number of services in this area. Historically, Commonwealth involvement grew largely from its role in relation to family and marriage law (programs currently funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department) and its role in establishing family support services in States and Territories in the late 1970s (programs currently funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services). Additional family support services, such as financial counselling for rural families, are funded and administered within other Commonwealth portfolios and are the result of varied historical developments.

State and Territory Governments provide funding for family support services under all of the specified classifications. Examples are used to illustrate the types of services funded in each jurisdiction. These include problem gambling initiatives in Queensland and Victoria, Family Support Services in New South Wales, Families First in Victoria, Positive Parenting Programs in Western Australia and Victoria, the Home-Start scheme in New South Wales, and neighbourhood houses in Queensland and Tasmania.

It is hoped that this exploratory information will provide an initial step towards the goal of developing a national data collection for family support services.

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