

Appendix 1: State and territory variation

There is significant variation in the number of support periods reported for accompanying children across the states and territories beyond what would be expected given differences in population size and the number of support periods for clients. There are five possible reasons for this:

1. Different proportions of agency target groups that cater for children

In general, agencies that cater for people with children are family, women escaping domestic violence, and cross target/multiple or general agencies. Each state and territory has a different proportion of these agencies, which ultimately affects how many accompanying children can receive assistance. ABS census figures indicate that there are many more homeless people than those that are counted in SAAP, and SAAP NDCA *Demand for SAAP assistance* reports indicate that there is hidden need for homeless services in each state and territory (ABS 2003; AIHW 2003a). Where there are fewer agencies for people with accompanying children, the fewer support periods they will have.

2. Non-reporting of children's data

The extent to which accompanying child details are not reported to the NDCA is a relatively unknown quantity. While the NDCA uses a variety of quality assurance measures, including a weighting system to adjust for non-participation by agencies that should have returned records, it cannot always adjust for agencies that return some records but not others (see Appendix 2 for more information about the weighting system).

3. Accompanying children may have been reported as *clients*

It is likely that some accompanying children are reported as *clients*, either through misinterpretation of the distinction between a client and an accompanying child, or perhaps the view that 'accompanying children are clients in their own right and must receive a service as such', and the full component of data should be collected to reflect this (DoCS, 2001:8). However, there are far more accompanying children in each jurisdiction than there are clients under the age of 18 years, suggesting that, overall, agencies are recording accompanying children on their parent or guardian's client form.

4. Differences in client profiles, in particular, Indigenous status

Different cultural groups have different patterns of use of SAAP services. In particular, Indigenous women with children use SAAP services more often than other client groups, and contribute higher rates of child support periods.

5. Differences in the use of the high volume form

There are some agencies which use the shorter high-volume form because they have a high client turn-over. In general, high volume clients have shorter support periods and return more frequently to SAAP.

Reasons for variation across the states and territories

Using general population size as a guide for estimating the expected number of accompanying child support periods and comparing this to the actual numbers reported, three groups of states and territories can be determined:

- New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland
- Western Australia and South Australia
- Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland

Although Victoria (24%) and Queensland (20%) have smaller general populations of children under 18 years than New South Wales (34%), agencies in those states reported more accompanying child support periods (ABS 2003a). Table A1.1 shows that Victoria had almost double the number reported in New South Wales (25,650 compared with 12,950).

Queensland (13,200) also had slightly more accompanying child support periods than New South Wales.

For Queensland, differences in cultural background composition and the use of high volume forms may explain the higher than expected number of accompanying child support periods, based on general population size. Queensland has a higher Indigenous population in SAAP than New South Wales and Victoria, and Indigenous females in Queensland return to SAAP more frequently than those in NSW (2.6 support periods each compared to 1.6, AIHW 2003d: 13; AIHW 2003f: 13). In addition, around 850 accompanying child support periods were recorded on high volume forms in Queensland compared to around 300 in New South Wales.

In relation to whether accompanying children are being reported as clients, an examination of the number of support periods for clients aged under 18 years shows New South Wales had the highest number of support periods for clients aged under 18 (5,400) as would be expected by its higher general population of people of this age. This jurisdiction also has a large proportion of youth agencies (45%), compared to 36% in both Victoria and Queensland (AIHW 2003d:49; AIHW 2003f:49, AIHW 2003i:49). This suggests that in New South Wales, accompanying children are not being reported incorrectly as clients to any significant extent. The slightly greater number of support periods for children under 18 reporting on their own in Queensland (4,300) compared to Victoria (4,100) may be explained by these jurisdictions having the same proportion of agencies targeting youth (36%), and clients in Queensland being more likely to return more frequently to SAAP than clients in Victoria.

The large difference between the number of accompanying child support periods in New South Wales and Victoria suggests that different proportions of agency target groups that cater for accompanying children and the non-reporting of accompanying child data could be factors.

In relation to differences in agency target group proportions, of those agencies that generally cater for accompanying children (family, women escaping domestic violence and cross-target agencies), New South Wales has fewer agencies (41%) than Victoria (56%) (AIHW 2003d:49; AIHW 2003i:49). However, New South Wales has 30 more agencies for women escaping domestic violence than Victoria but returns proportionately less accompanying child support periods from these agencies than Victoria (20% compared to 27%, Table A1.2).

Assuming that Domestic violence agencies in these states are, on average, of a similar size and have the capacity to support a similar volume of clients, it is possible that there is a significant level of non-reporting of children's data from domestic violence agencies in New

South Wales. When accompanying child data items were introduced to the Client Collection in July 2000, many domestic violence agencies in New South Wales expressed concerns about completing this data due to confidentiality and privacy concerns, and therefore may not return information on children as frequently or if at all compared to other jurisdictions.

Western Australia and South Australia

South Australian agencies reported more accompanying child support periods than those in Western Australia (9,800 compared to 8,000) despite its smaller population size. However, if the number of accompanying child support periods recorded on high volume forms is subtracted, Western Australia (which does not use high-volume forms) has more accompanying child support periods than South Australia (6,350). Because the alpha code is not collected for accompanying children on the high-volume form, the actual number of children recorded on these forms cannot be estimated, but it is likely that a high proportion of these records would be for a relatively small number of children who returned to SAAP more often (AIHW 2003g:36; IHW 2003j:36).

Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory

As with support periods provided to clients, the Northern Territory had more accompanying child support periods (3%) than the Australian Capital Territory (1%) despite its smaller population size. This is due to the higher proportion of support periods for women with children who used SAAP services because of domestic violence, which is highly prevalent amongst Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Considering its population size and client profile, the number of accompanying child support periods reported in Tasmania is to be expected in relation to the other states.

A1.1 Tables

Table A1.1: Support periods for clients under 18 years and accompanying child support periods by state and territory, Australia, 2002-03 (includes high volume records)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT		Total
Support periods for clients under 18 years										
									%	Number
0-4 years	0.7	2.1	0.3	1.0	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.9	200
5-12 years	3.1	4.0	4.1	2.5	2.0	1.0	1.0	5.3	3.3	600
13-15 years	27.9	17.5	31.0	19.6	21.9	29.3	30.1	18.3	25.2	4,600
15-17 years	68.0	75.6	64.3	76.4	75.3	68.7	67.6	75.4	70.2	12,800
Age missing	0.3	0.8	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.4	100
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	..
Total	29.6	22.4	23.6	5.5	10.1	4.2	2.8	1.9	100.0	..
Total (number)	5,400	4,100	4,300	1,000	1,800	800	500	300	..	18,300
Accompanying child support periods										
0-4 years	45.7	40.6	44.1	45.0	43.4	42.4	52.1	53.3	43.5	33,000
5-12 years	41.4	43.4	43.2	42.1	42.0	44.2	37.1	39.6	42.5	32,200
13-15 years	7.7	9.7	8.9	6.0	9.5	8.9	6.9	4.6	8.6	6,500
15-17 years	3.0	4.3	2.3	2.0	3.0	2.3	2.7	1.6	3.1	2,400
Age missing	2.2	2.0	1.6	4.8	2.0	2.2	1.2	0.8	2.2	1,700
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	..
Total	17.1	33.9	17.4	10.6	12.9	3.9	1.3	2.9	100.0	..
Total (number)	12,950	25,650	13,200	8,050	9,750	2,950	1,000	2,200	..	75,750
Total (number) excluding high volume records	12,650	25,650	12,350	8,050	6,350	2,950	1,000	2,200	..	71,250

Notes

1. Accompanying child support periods are weighted to adjust for agency non-participation.
2. Support periods for clients under 18 years are weighted to adjust for agency non-participation. They are also adjusted for client non-consent because age of client is a consent item.
3. 'Age missing' for support periods for clients under 18 years is a pro-rated estimate based on the total number of missing records for age for all clients.

Sources: SAAP Client and Administrative Data Collections.

Table A1.2: SAAP Client Collection: forms returned with child details by primary target group and state and territory (per cent)

State/territory	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross-target/multiple/general	Total %	Total (number)
New South Wales	23.4	82.1	32.2	12.1	20.3	10.1	17.2	11,582
Victoria	31.2	18.0	65.2	36.1	27.4	52.5	35.7	24,065
Queensland	17.4	0.0	3.2	27.5	17.6	10.8	17.4	11,718
Western Australia	6.6	0.0	0.0	7.8	18.2	3.2	11.8	7,950
South Australia	16.9	0.0	0.8	12.0	10.0	3.6	9.0	6,098
Tasmania	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	17.4	4.2	2,847
Australian Capital Territory	1.9	0.4	0.0	3.1	1.4	0.0	1.4	938
Northern Territory	2.3	0.0	0.0	1.3	4.6	2.5	3.3	2,212
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>..</i>
Total %	5.5	0.4	2.2	17.8	51.2	22.9	100.0	..
Total	3,707	268	1,476	12,014	34,492	15,453	..	67,410

Sources: SAAP Client and Administrative Data Collections.

Appendix 2: Data issues

The majority of the data in this report was obtained from the SAAP Client Collection. The Client Collection form collects data about Clients (adults or unaccompanied children) that received ongoing or substantial support from a SAAP agency. Data include basic demographic information and the services required by and provided to each client. Information is also collected about client circumstances before and after receiving SAAP support. In addition, basic demographic information about the children accompanying SAAP clients is also collected, along with the support services needed and provided to each accompanying child (see Appendix 3 for a copy of the client form). In effect, accompanying child data is a subset of the Client Collection, as information cannot be collected about accompanying children independently of their parent or guardian due to the design of the Client form. It is more efficient to collect children's information this way as the same data items (such as living situation, type of accommodation and reasons for seeking assistance) don't have to be collected twice, and the link between the parent/guardian and child is established.

This report contains analyses of information collected from the data items relating to accompanying children on the Client Collection form. In addition, some of the tables in chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 use data about clients who have presented at SAAP with an accompanying child(ren). Some of the main data issues associated with the analyses in this report are those concerning the use of accompanying child data in conjunction with that of their parents or guardians, analysing the duration of support for accompanying children, informed consent and alpha codes, high volume forms, and weighting the data to adjust for non-consent and agency non-participation.

Combining accompanying child data with client data

Apart from the number of accompanying children in SAAP presented in Chapter 1, and the demographic information about children presented in Chapter 2, accompanying child data is presented at the accompanying child support period level. This is because children may accompany a different parent or guardian in each of their support periods, and may have different circumstances in different support periods. This is also the case for clients. Where analyses are based on items which are only found on the client section of the Client Collection form (for example, accommodation type before and after support and main reason for seeking assistance), the data has been presented at the client support period level.

Duration of support for accompanying children

Data about the start and end dates of support periods and accommodation periods are not collected for accompanying children. Client (parent or guardian) support period and accommodation period start and end dates are used as a proxy for accompanying children, but it should be noted that children may only be supported or accommodated for part of a parent's support period. There is therefore a degree of uncertainty about the actual length of support for accompanying children, although it is more than likely that a large majority of children are supported along with their parents or guardians for the entirety of their support periods. The Accompanying Children Special Collection, conducted in 1998, showed that 88% of accompanying children stayed for the entire duration of their parent or guardian's

support period. This rate, however, differed according to the age of the child, with children aged 12–17 years spending the entire support period with their parent in 81% of cases, whereas children aged under 2 years spent the entire support period in 91% of cases (AIHW 1999: 34).

Informed consent and alpha codes

In assessing the quality of data in any collection, it is important to consider not only overall participation rates but also the degree to which returned data collection forms are complete. All data collections and surveys invariably have some missing data, but this does not necessarily undermine the validity or reliability of information obtained. However, high levels of non-response to particular questions mean that some caution should be exercised when interpreting the data because the results may not fully reflect the entire population of interest.

In this context it should be noted that the protocols established for the National Data Collection require that SAAP clients and accompanying children provide information in a climate of informed consent. However, consent in the case of accompanying children is more complicated than that for the client. Young children are not able to understand the purpose of the collection and cannot, therefore, give informed consent. In addition, the question concerning the age at which young people are able to give consent has no simple, universally accepted answer. Consent can be obtained from either the parent or guardian or the child depending on family circumstances and whether or not the child is judged able to comprehend what is being asked of her/him. In cases where there is an objection from the parent or guardian about the data collection, the wishes of the parent or guardian take precedence.

If consent is not obtained, only a limited number of questions can be completed on data collection forms, and an 'alpha code' is not recorded. Alpha codes are used to create a linkage key, which allows data collected on separate occasions from the same client or accompanying child to be combined without identifying the client or accompanying child. Thus alpha codes allow enumeration of actual clients and accompanying children in addition to occasions of support. However, where there is no consent obtained from the client, it is assumed that consent is not given for any accompanying children recorded on the client form, even if child alpha codes have been given.

Across Australia, consent and valid alpha codes with consent (termed 'valid consent') were obtained from clients in 88% and 86% of support periods respectively (AIHW 2003b: 81). These rates were the highest since the inception of the National Data Collection in July 1996. In all states and territories, valid consent was obtained in the majority of cases, ranging from 80% in Tasmania to 89% in the Northern Territory. Across primary target groups, valid consent ranged from 82% for single women's agencies to 93% for single men's agencies.

Nationally, the percentage of forms returned with child details that had valid consent increased from 76.7% since the inception of child alpha codes in 2001–02 to 78.4% in 2002–03. However, the rate of consent for accompanying children varied across the states and territories (Table A2.1). Overall, valid consent for children ranged from 73% in New South Wales to 86% in the Australian Capital Territory. Nationally, valid consent rates varied according to agency target group, ranging from 73% for agencies targeting families to 84% for single men's agencies.

Agency target group valid consent rates for children also differed across the states and territories. For instance, valid consent for domestic violence agencies ranged from a low of

70% in Tasmania and New South Wales to 89% in the Northern Territory. For agencies that targeted young people, accompanying child valid consent records ranged from 64% in Queensland to 87% in the Australian Capital Territory. For family agencies, valid consent records were returned in 57% of cases in Queensland, to 91% in the Australian Capital Territory.

These variations in valid consent rates indicate that clients in different agencies and in different states and territories respond differently to providing their consent for personal information about themselves and any children that accompany them. On the other hand, the variations may indicate that particular types of agencies have different practices when informing clients of their rights in the National Data Collection.

High Volume forms

Except for Chapter 1 and Appendix 1, this report has not included accompanying child records from high-volume forms. This is because high-volume forms only collect the number and age of children that accompany a parent or guardian. Where data about clients with children have been discussed in this report, high-volume records have been excluded because they do not contain information such as main reason for seeking assistance and after support information. In addition, the number of children on high-volume forms cannot be calculated because there is no alpha code and year of birth information that can be used to attribute numerous support periods to the same child.

Adjusting for non-consent and agency non-participation in the Client Collection

To ensure that the data collected in the Client Collection accurately reflect the work done under the auspices of SAAP, it is important that there is a high level of participation among SAAP-funded agencies. The 2002–03 Client Collection achieved an agency participation rate of 94%. This means that no forms were obtained from client presenting at the 6% of SAAP agencies that did not participate in the Client Collection. In addition, valid consent was not obtained for 14% of support periods for clients and 22% of support periods for accompanying children at participating SAAP agencies, so that either personal information was not recorded on the forms for these support periods or the data could not be used because a valid alpha code was not provided. In order to provide accurate data about all clients and accompanying children presenting at SAAP agencies, the data collected in the Client Collection must be adjusted for agency non-participation, if necessary, and non-consent.

The simplest way of adjusting for non-participation and non-consent is to scale up estimates at the total level. This assumes that, on average, the demographic characteristics and circumstances of people are the same regardless of whether or not data about them were reported to the NDCA. There may, however, be some differences between the profiles of support periods with and without consent. Consequently, distributions based only on support periods with consent may differ from those that would have been obtained had consent been provided in all cases. The varying valid consent rates by state and territory and primary target group (see Table A1.1) suggest that there are differences between support periods with and without consent. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has therefore developed an adjustment scheme that allows for differences between support periods with consent and those without. The scheme also adjusts estimates to allow for agency non-participation (if this occurs), for clients who give valid consent for some support

periods but not for others (referred to as 'mixed consent'), and for clients who do not give consent in any of their periods of support. The scheme is outlined below.

There is no strictly objective method that can be applied to the data from the Client Collection to adjust estimates for incomplete response. Karmel (1999:23, 26) describes the statistical assumptions underlying the adjustment scheme developed by the Institute. It has the following features:

- The collection is divided into specified groups, or strata. Within the strata it is assumed that support periods with valid consent (that is, with consent and a valid alpha code) represent support periods without valid consent. This means that the characteristics of support periods within each stratum are assumed not to depend on whether valid consent was obtained. The strata are defined in terms of characteristics available for all support periods in participating agencies.
- If there are any non-participating agencies within a state or territory it is assumed that, on average, participating and non-participating agencies provide a similar volume and profile of support.
- Some clients have mixed consent. Assumptions about the extent and nature of mixed consent are made to estimate the number of clients and the average number of support periods per client. Adjustments made for clients with mixed consent within subgroups are derived using simulation techniques and by-product data from the Client Collection.
- For support periods, two weights for adjusting estimates are derived:
 - a *non-participation weight* – a range of information is available for all support periods in participating agencies and estimates using these data are adjusted only for agency non-participation
 - a *full non-participation non-consent weight* – for estimates using data that require consent, weights that adjust for both agency non-participation and client non-consent are used.

It is possible for these two weighting schemes to give slightly different estimates for the same item. Since estimates derived using the non-participation weights are based on a much larger sample of support periods than those using the full non-participation non-consent weights, the former (where available) are preferred because of their greater accuracy.

- For accompanying child support periods, only a *non-participation weight* is used (see above). The same base stratification is used for the accompanying child and client support period weights.
- For clients and accompanying children, only one weight is derived since valid consent is required to derive these estimates. The number of accompanying children can only be estimated for 'general' (not high-volume) support periods as an alpha code for children is not collected on the high-volume form (see 'high volume forms' above).
- A *non-participation weight* is derived for each support period in participating agencies, and a *full non-participation non-consent weight* is derived for each support period with valid consent. A client weight is derived for each client with at least one support period with valid consent. Estimates of totals are then found by summing the relevant weights for each support period or client with the characteristics of interest.

In estimates of numbers of clients, inaccuracies caused by identical linkage keys for a small number of clients and changing linkage key information for the same client are not considered in the adjustment scheme.

In this report nearly all estimates of clients and accompanying children and their support periods obtained using data from the Client Collection have been adjusted for agency non-participation and, where applicable, client non-consent using the scheme just outlined. No other adjustments have been made for errors or omissions or for data not obtained as a result of question exclusions on the high-volume form.

A2.1 Tables

Table A2.1: SAAP Client Collection: general forms with accompanying children returned with valid consent by state and territory and primary target group, Australia, 2002-03 (per cent)

State/territory	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross-target/multiple/general	Total %	Total number with valid consent	Total forms
NSW	84.0	84.7	73.5	72.2	70.0	81.4	73.3	8,488	11,582
Vic	77.9	82.2	76.9	82.9	71.3	83.5	78.0	18,781	24,065
Qld	64.3	60.0	97.1	56.8	88.8	83.8	77.7	9,108	11,718
WA	66.3	100.0	—	62.9	86.6	84.1	83.0	6,600	7,950
SA	79.9	—	81.8	84.5	80.5	81.9	81.5	4,969	6,098
Tas	—	—	—	—	69.5	80.2	79.6	2,266	2,847
ACT	87.1	—	—	90.5	82.4	—	85.9	806	938
NT	83.3	—	—	67.8	89.1	66.0	83.4	1,844	2,212
Total %	76.8	83.6	76.3	73.1	78.8	82.3	78.4
Total number with valid consent	2,850	200	1,150	8,800	27,150	12,700	..	52,862	..
Total forms	3,707	268	1,476	12,014	34,492	15,453	67,410

Notes

1. Based on forms returned from agencies in scope for the Client Collection during the reference period. Not all agencies funded under SAAP are required to participate in the Client Collection. For example, agencies that only provide support to other agencies or that only provide casual assistance lasting less than 1 hour are not required to participate in the collection. Consequently, some agencies funded under SAAP are not included in this table (see AIHW 2003b, Chapter 2).
2. 'Valid consent' refers to all forms with a valid alpha code that were answered with consent (see 'alpha code' in the Glossary).

Sources: SAAP Client and Administrative Data Collections.

