



5 Children's and family services

5.1 Introduction

Children's and family services include a wide range of services provided by governments or with government funding. They include child care and preschool services, parent education and advice, family support and early intervention services, and child protection and out-of-home care services. Services for families and children can be provided or funded by all three tiers of government.

Income support for children and families is the sole responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth has also provided funding for child care and family support services since the 1970s. A recent Commonwealth initiative is the Stronger Families and Communities strategy, introduced in 2000, which provides funds for a range of initiatives aimed at strengthening family relationships and community networks. These include early intervention programs to improve parenting and family relationships, and funding for community development activities. The strategy is also funding a longitudinal survey of Australian children that will address a major gap in knowledge and information about early childhood experiences and their impact on education, health, employment, crime and social problems.

State and Territory Governments are responsible for child protection and out-of-home care services. In addition, they are increasingly providing support to families through a broader range of services. All jurisdictions now provide some funds for child care, preschools and family support services. There has also been an increasing focus on early intervention services, which are seen to be effective in reducing the need for more intrusive child protection interventions at later stages.

Many State and Territory Governments have introduced cross-departmental strategies, such as Families First in New South Wales and Strengthening Families in Victoria. These strategies attempt to assist families in a more holistic way, by facilitating coordinated service delivery and providing seamless access to different types of children's and family services.

This chapter includes those family and children's services for which national data are available: child care and preschool services, child protection and out-of-home care services, and adoptions. A focus of the chapter is on the trends in children's and family services from 1990 onwards. It is not possible, however, to provide a national picture on the full range of these services. In particular, it is very difficult to compile national data on many of the services provided by State and Territory Governments, as the type and nature of such services vary across jurisdictions.

The chapter begins with some background information on the social and economic changes to families that have occurred over the last decade. Section 5.3 provides data on trends in Commonwealth family payments, as well as on Commonwealth expenditure on family payments and tax expenditures. Section 5.4 examines the use of formal and informal child care and preschool services, the provision of and trends in formal child care services, and the outcomes of these services. Sections 5.5 on child protection and out-of-home care services, and 5.6 on adoptions, present information on the trends in these areas between 1990 and 2000. Section 5.7 discusses national data developments in children's and family services, including in the area of family support services.

5.2 Families and children in Australia

There have been major social and economic changes in Australia in the last 30 years that have led to significant alterations in family structures. Some of the more important of these include:

- declining fertility rates and an increasing preference for smaller families;
- increasing numbers of de facto relationships;
- increasing divorce rates;
- increasing numbers of one-parent families;
- increasing labour force participation rates of women of child-bearing age; and
- increasing joblessness in families (Gregory 1999; McDonald 2000).

Many of these changes began in the late 1960s, with the pace of change increasing during the 1970s and 1980s and slowing somewhat during the 1990s. This section focuses on social and economic changes in families over the last decade, as well as on the current state of families in Australia. The changes in family structures and patterns have implications for the types of services needed to support families and provide a useful context in which the data on trends in children's and family services can be interpreted.¹

Family formation and dissolution

Patterns of family formation continued to change during the 1990s. In particular, there were decreases in marriage and fertility rates, further delays in family formation, and increases in the proportion of children born outside marriage.

The age-specific marriage rate for men decreased from 43.5 per 1,000 to 34.8 per 1,000 and for women from 41.6 per 1,000 to 32.8 per 1,000. The fertility rate also decreased falling from 1.9 births per 1,000 women to 1.75 births. The median age of both men and women at first marriage increased by around 2 years during the decade, and the median age of mothers at birth increased by 1.4 years (Table 5.1).

1 For more detail about socio-demographic change and families, refer to AIHW (1997).

The proportion of children born outside marriage increased from 22% of births in 1990 to 29% in 1999. Children born outside marriage include those born in de facto relationships, as well as those born to single mothers. While there was an increase in the proportion of children born outside marriage, there was also an increase in the proportion of births where paternity was acknowledged: from 95% in 1990 to nearly 98% in 1999.

Table 5.1: Indicators of family formation and dissolution, 1990 and 1999

	1990	1999
Marriages		
Age-specific marriage rate (per 1,000 men/women) ^(a)	43.5/41.6	34.8/32.8
Median age at first marriage (men/women) ^(a)	28.1/25.8	30.1/27.9
Births		
Median age of mother at birth ^(b)	28.3	29.7
Total fertility rate (no. of children per woman) ^(b)	1.90	1.75
Per cent of children born outside marriage ^(b)	22.2	29.2
Per cent of births where paternity acknowledged ^(b)	95.0	97.6
Divorces		
Age-specific divorce rate (per 1,000 men/women) ^(a)	10.9/10.9	12.7/12.7
Rate of children under 18 involved in divorce (per 1,000 children) ^(a)	9.8	11.3

(a) ABS 1991a, 2000a, 2001a.

(b) ABS 1991b, 2000b.

Family dissolution was also more prevalent, with divorce rates continuing on an upward trend. The age-specific divorce rates for both men and women increased from 10.9 per 1,000 in 1990 to 12.7 per 1,000 in 1999. There was also an increase over the decade in the number of children affected by divorce: from 9.8 per 1,000 children aged 0—17 years in 1990 to 11.3 per 1,000 in 1999.

These changes in family formation and dissolution are reflected in the changes in the characteristics of families with dependent children.

Characteristics of families

One of the most significant changes in families in the 1990s was the large increase in the number of one-parent families. The estimated number of one-parent families with children aged 0—14 years increased by 54% over the decade to reach 453,600 in 2000 (Table 5.3). The number of couple families with dependent children aged 0—14 grew only marginally over the same period. Broad data for 30 June 2000 show that there were 2,171,300 families with children aged 0—14 years, with 79% of these being couple families and 21% one-parent families (Figure 5.1).

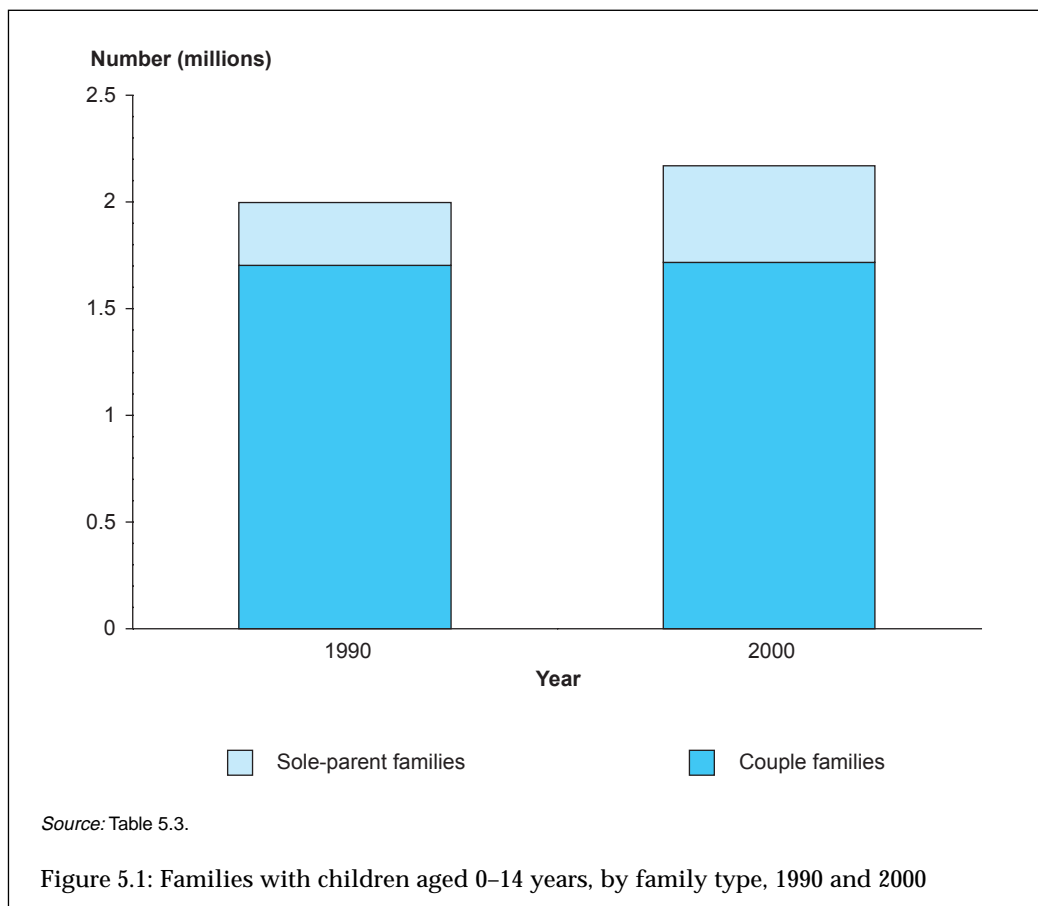
Couple families

In 1997 there were 1,905,300 couple families with children aged 0—17 years (ABS 1998)².

² Detailed data on families with children aged 0–17 years are not available after 1997.

Couple families had an average of 2.0 children. In 91% of couple families with dependent children the parents were married, while in 9% they were living in a de facto relationship.

Just under 9% of couple families with children aged 0–17 were step or blended families with 363,800 children in this age group living in them.



One-parent families

In 1997 there were 502,900 one-parent families with children aged 0–17 years. The majority of sole parents (84%) were female. On average, sole parents had fewer children than couples, with an average of 1.7 children aged 0–17. Most sole parents with dependent children had previously been married (63% separated or divorced, 7% widowed) and 30% had never married (ABS 1998).

Children

The number of children in Australia aged 0–17 years increased by 164,100 (4%) between June 1990 and 2000 (Table 5.2). The number of children aged over 4 years rose in all age

ranges over this period, while the number aged 0—4 began to decline in the mid-1990s. This decrease reflects declining fertility rates.

While the number of children aged 0—17 increased over the decade, they represent a falling proportion of the total population. At 30 June 1990 this group constituted 27% of the population, compared with 25% at 30 June 2000 (Table 5.2). The distribution of the child population by age, however, varies somewhat across States and Territories, ranging from 24% in South Australia and Victoria to 31% in the Northern Territory (Table A5.1).

Table 5.2: Estimated number of children aged 0–17 years and as proportion of total population, by age group, selected years from 30 June 1990 to 30 June 2000

Age (years)	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000
	Number ('000)					
0–4	1,258.2	1,284.7	1,298.0	1,297.0	1,283.6	1,263.1
5–12	1,996.7	2,034.9	2,057.1	2,090.4	2,110.0	2,129.5
13–17	1,308.3	1,266.2	1,257.7	1,289.4	1,322.7	1,334.7
<i>Total children 0–17</i>	<i>4,563.2</i>	<i>4,585.8</i>	<i>4,612.8</i>	<i>4,676.8</i>	<i>4,716.3</i>	<i>4,727.3</i>
Total population	17,065.1	17,494.7	17,854.7	18,310.7	18,751.0	19,157.0
	Proportion of total population					
0–4	7	7	7	7	7	7
5–12	12	12	12	11	11	11
13–17	8	7	7	7	7	7
<i>Total children 0–17</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>25</i>

Source: ABS 2001.

Families and employment

The 1990s was a period of relatively strong economic growth, with the number of employed people increasing from a low of 7.6 million in 1993 to over 9 million at June 2000 (ABS 2000c). There was a corresponding fall in the unemployment rate: from 11% in August 1992 to 7% in June 2000.

The labour force participation rates of women of child-bearing age continued to rise in the decade up to June 2000, though the increase was not as great as in previous decades. The rates for women aged 25—34 years, for example, increased from 66% in August 1990 to 70% in August 2000 (ABS 1990a, 2000d).

The growth in employment between 1990 and 2000 also benefited families with dependent children. The number of couple families with dependent children aged 0—14 years and both partners employed increased by 44,600, and the number of employed sole parents with children aged 0—14 by 84,100 (Table 5.3).

While the number of families with all parents in employment grew over the decade, there was also an increase in the number of families with no parent employed, particularly among one-parent families. The number of these families increased by 74,300 between 1990 and 2000. In addition there was a rise of 21,300 in the number of couple families in which neither partner was employed.

Table 5.3: Employment patterns of families with dependent children,^(a) by family type, 1990 and 2000

Employment patterns and family type	1990		2000	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Couple families				
Both partners employed	932.0	54.7	976.6	56.3
One partner only employed				
Husband employed	633.5	37.2	573.9	33.4
Wife employed	30.0	1.8	47.1	2.7
Neither partner employed	107.8	6.3	129.1	7.5
Total	1,703.3	100.0	1,717.7	100.0
One-parent families				
Parent employed	130.3	44.1	214.4	47.3
Parent not employed	164.9	55.8	239.2	52.7
Total	295.2	100.0	453.6	100.0

(a) Includes children aged 0–14 years.

Source: ABS 1990b, 2000e.

In 2000, 56% of couples with children aged 0–14 years had both partners in employment, while 8% had neither partner in employment. In one-parent families with dependent children aged 0–14, 47% had a parent who was employed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

The profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families differs from that of other Australian families in a number of ways. Indigenous families are more likely to be one-parent families and to have on average a larger number of children and larger households (Daly & Smith 1996). Indigenous parents also tend to be younger and to have lower levels of education than other Australian parents. Indigenous families are much more likely to be economically disadvantaged, with lower employment rates of parents and much lower median incomes.

5.3 Assistance for families

Up to July 2000, the Commonwealth Government provided a range of assistance for families in the form of income support payments, family assistance payments and tax expenditures. Family assistance payments and tax transfers for families were designed to assist with the costs of raising children, including recognising the indirect costs of reduced workforce participation by some families with young children. Higher assistance was targeted to families with low incomes. Income support in the form of Parenting Payment was also available for sole parents with no income or a low income and parents whose partner had no income or was on a low income (FaCS 2000a). These payments and tax transfers are described in more detail in Box 5.1.

The tax reform package that took effect from 1 July 2000 provided for a fundamental restructure of family assistance. The stated aims of these reforms were to:

- ¥ simplify payment structures;
- ¥ improve work incentives;

Box 5.1: Commonwealth family payments and tax expenditures

Applicable prior to 1 July 2000

Family Allowance—paid to low- and middle-income families with dependent children, subject to an income and assets test. The rate paid was dependent on family size. Extra assistance in the form of Guardian Allowance was available for sole parents. Minimum Family Allowance was paid to families with incomes below a means-tested threshold, while a lower income threshold was used to identify families eligible for the More than Minimum Family Allowance.

Family Tax Initiative—included the Family Tax Payment which provided additional assistance to families with low to middle incomes. Part A was available for each dependent child, while Part B was paid to single income families with children aged under 5 years. The Family Tax Assistance was the equivalent type of assistance accessed through the tax system.

Parenting Payment—income support payments for one parent with responsibility for caring for a child under 16 years of age. The two main streams were Parenting Payment (single) paid to sole parents with no income or low income and Parenting Payment (partnered) for the primary carer in a couple family. For couple families Parenting Payment was broken down into Basic Parenting Payment which was non-taxable and income-tested on the income of the parent receiving the payment and Additional Parenting Payment which was taxable and income-tested on family income.

Dependent Spouse Rebate (with children) and Sole Parent Rebate—provided tax relief in the form of rebates for sole parents and tax-payers with a dependent spouse and children.

From 1 July 2000

All these forms of assistance (excluding Additional Parenting Payment) were combined to form the Family Tax Benefit.

Family Tax Benefit Part A replaced the following payments to provide assistance with the general costs of children—Minimum Family Allowance, More than Minimum Family Allowance, Family Tax Payment Part A and Family Tax Assistance Part A.

Family Tax Benefit Part B replaced the following assistance formerly provided to single income families, including sole parents—Basic Parenting Payment, Guardian Allowance, Family Tax Payment Part B, Family Tax Assistance Part B, Dependent Spouse Rebate (with children) and Sole Parent Rebate.

Other forms of assistance for families that are still available include:

- *Parenting Payment (couple) and Parenting Payment (single);*
- *Maternity Allowance—an income-tested lump sum payment for each newborn or adopted child in the family;*
- *Maternity Immunisation Allowance—payable at age 18 months for fully immunised children (appropriate for the age); and*
- *Double Orphan Pension—for children whose parents are both dead, or one parent is dead and the other cannot care for the child, and for refugee children under certain circumstances.*

Source: ATO 2000; FaCS 2000a.

- provide a choice of delivery through the transfer payments or the tax systems; and
- support the choices families make in balancing their work and parenting responsibilities.

The new Family Tax Benefit, Parts A and B, combined ten forms of assistance that were previously available in the tax and transfer systems. The forms of assistance now paid as the Family Tax Benefit are outlined in Box 5.1. The reforms also included the introduction of the Family Assistance Office to administer the new system of family assistance. These offices are located in all existing Centrelink, Australian Taxation Offices and Medicare offices (ATO 1999).

There were also changes to the assistance provided for child care, with the Child Care Benefit replacing Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate (see Box 5.6).

Trends in family assistance

The number of families in receipt of Family Allowance decreased by 8% between 1990 and 2000, from 1.89 million to 1.74 million. There was a similar fall in the number of children for whom the allowance was paid, from 3.67 million in 1990 to 3.41 million in 2000, a decrease of 7% (Table 5.4).

The number of families in receipt of More than Minimum Family Allowance (MMFA) increased significantly over the decade, rising from 564,000 in 1990 to 926,300 in 1999 and then falling to 911,300 in 2000. Since the MMFA was targeted to low-income families, the data indicate that there was a large increase in the number of families with incomes below the income test threshold.

Over the same period, there was a decrease in the number of families in receipt of Minimum Family Allowance: from 1,326,900 to 832,300. The fall in the number of middle-income families eligible for this payment is likely to be related to the rise in the number of low-income families as well as to an increase in the number of families with incomes above the income test cut-out.

The introduction of the Family Tax Payment in 1997 provided additional assistance to a significant number of families with children. There were 867,000 families in receipt of Family Tax Payment Parts A and B in June 2000 (Table 5.4). The number receiving Family Tax Payment Part A declined from 512,700 in 1997 to 454,700 in 1999, but then increased to 510,200 in 2000. There was a similar trend for Part B, with the numbers declining from 393,000 in 1997 to 342,600 in 1999 and then increasing to 356,500 in 2000.

In relation to income support payments for families, the number of sole parents receiving Parenting Payment (single) increased by nearly 60% during the 1990s to reach 397,300 in 2000. This is in line with the rise in the number of sole parents over the decade (as outlined earlier). It should be noted that many sole parents receive a partial rate of Parenting Payment because they also have earned income.

The number of recipients of Parenting Payment (partnered) decreased by around 17,000 between 1996 and 2000, probably related to falls in the number of unemployment payment recipients in the last few years of the 1990s.

Table 5.4: Number of recipients of family assistance and income support payments for families, selected years from June 1990 to June 2000 ('000)

Type of payment	1990	1992	1994	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Family assistance payments								
<i>Number of recipients</i>								
Family Allowance ^(a)								
More than Minimum	564.0	772.7	841.9	883.9	918.5	909.2	926.3	911.3
Minimum	1,326.9	1,156.8	986.0	928.5	893.2	866.4	846.9	832.3
Family Tax Payment								
Part A	..	..	..	..	512.7	479.3	454.7	510.2
Part B	..	..	..	..	393.0	364.2	342.6	356.5
<i>Number of children</i>								
Family Allowance ^(a)								
More than Minimum	1,142.6	1,495.5	1,683.1	1,759.1	1,821.2	1,799.4	1,770.6	1,791.3
Minimum	2,529.9	2,224.6	1,855.9	1,738.3	1,669.9	1,619.4	1,670.6	1,614.7
Family Tax Payment								
Part A	..	..	..	..	976.6	919.9	868.1	951.2
Part B	..	..	..	..	852.1	797.3	751.7	773.1
Income support payments								
<i>Number of recipients</i>								
Parenting Payment (single)	248.9	287.2	313.4	342.3	358.9	372.3	384.8	397.3
Parenting Payment (partnered) ^(b)	..	..	..	237.3	239.3	236.5	227.7	220.3

(a) Over the decade there were some changes in the income test thresholds for Family Allowance which may have impacted on the numbers eligible for More than Minimum and Minimum rates.

(b) Refers to parents receiving Additional Rate.

Source: FaCS 2001.

Increases in levels of assistance

The amount of Commonwealth assistance provided to families with children, particularly to low-income families, increased over the 1990s. This was due to the introduction of the Family Tax Initiative in 1997 for low- and middle-income families, but also to increases in the rates of other payments for families. For a sole parent with one child under 5 in receipt of Parenting Payment, for example, rates of assistance rose by 13% in real terms between 1991 and 2000. For unemployed couples with one child under 5, real rates of assistance rose by 6% over the same period (FaCS 2000a).

Increases in the assistance the Commonwealth provides to families with dependent children have been an important factor in reducing rates of child poverty (Harding & Szukalska 2000). Higher levels of assistance have benefited unemployed couples, sole parents and low-income working families.

Commonwealth expenditure on assistance for families

Commonwealth outlays on the main types of family payments and tax expenditures for families in the 1999–00 period are shown in Table 5.5. Family Allowance and Parenting Payment were the two largest expenditure items, accounting for some 90% of assistance for families. The total cost to the government on the main types of assistance for families (excluding the Dependent Spouse Rebate with Children) was \$13.7 billion.

Table 5.5: Commonwealth expenditure on the main types of assistance for families, 1999–00

Type of expenditure	(\$m)
Family assistance and income support payments	Outlays
Family Allowance	6,564.8
Family Tax Payment	537.2
Maternity Allowance	211.6
Parenting Payment	5,764.0
Tax expenditure	Revenue forgone
Family Tax Assistance	390
Sole Parent Rebate	260

Note: Data were not available for the Dependent Spouse Rebate with Children.

Source: FaCS 2000a, 2001; Treasury 2001.

5.4 Child care and preschool services

Formal child care services provide care and developmental activities for children usually between the ages of 0 and 12 years. Informal child care is provided by relatives and friends and other individuals such as paid babysitters and nannies. Child care enables parents to participate in employment, education and training, community activities, and personal activities such as attending medical appointments or going shopping it may also be used for family support. Preschool services offer educational and developmental programs for children in the year or two before full-time school (see Box 5.2). Child care and preschool services are important in satisfying children's needs for companionship, play opportunities and social, physical, emotional and intellectual development.

The section that follows discusses data sources, the need for child care and preschools, the use of formal and informal child care and the provision and delivery of formal child care services, including government expenditure. The section concludes by examining service outcomes in terms of accessibility (including affordability) and quality.

Data sources

There are a number of different data collections relating to child care and preschool services (see Box 5.3). The information used in this chapter, however, is mainly drawn from the ABS Child Care Survey and the Commonwealth Child Care Census and Child Care System. While the ABS survey and the Commonwealth census are used to present a picture of the overall patterns of use, the data are not directly comparable. The survey collects information from parents on the use of child care by children aged 0–11 years, with child care including all formal child care services and preschools, as well as informal care. The census collects information from Commonwealth-supported child care service providers, with children using these services generally being 0–12 years (AIHW 2000b).

Data on child care and preschool services funded solely by States and Territories are not used in this chapter. It is difficult to combine data from the different jurisdictions to present a national picture of child care services, because of factors such as differences in the scope and coverage of the collections and in the classifications and definitions used. A major limitation of the data on child care and preschool services is that data on the

Box 5.2: Formal child care services—funding/licensing types and definitions

Long day care centres are facilities (purpose-built or modified to provide child care) 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 and kindergartens offer educational and developmental programs for children in the year or two before they begin full-time school. Dedicated preschools offer sessional programs during school terms only. Sessional programs generally involve a distinct group of children meeting for around two to four sessions per week, each session lasting half the normal school day or the full school day. A long day care centre may also provide a preschool program run by a qualified early childhood teacher.

Family day care schemes comprise networks of individuals who provide 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 developmental activities for primary school-aged children out of school hours. The main types of services provided are before school care, after school care, vacation care and care on ‘pupil-free’ days.

Occasional care services generally provide care and developmental activities for children under school age for short periods of time, to assist parents who need care for reasons such as attending adult education classes, medical appointments, going shopping, or simply for respite.

Other formal services include multifunctional services, multifunctional Aboriginal children’s services (MACS) and mobiles. Multifunctional services are located in rural areas and provide a number of different child care services for children 0–12 years from the one building. MACS are culturally specific services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Mobiles provide services such as preschool services, playgroups, older children’s activities, toy and book library services, and parental support and advice for families living in rural and remote areas.

Source: AIHW 2000b.

provision of care continues to be collected by the type of funded and/or licensed service (Box 5.2). This no longer captures the complexity of contemporary child care services, however, nor the reality of service delivery (AIHW 2001a). In the past decade, services have changed considerably, both in the way they are provided and the way they are used by parents and children. Service providers have moved into a more flexible type of service provision in order to meet parents and children’s needs and market demands. A service provider funded and licensed as a long day care centre, for example, will provide long day care but may also provide a preschool program, occasional care, and after school care for primary school children. A new method of data collection, reflecting the current state of the sector, has been proposed for the National Children’s Services Minimum Data Set, now under development. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.7.

Box 5.3: Child care and preschool services data collections

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Child Care Survey is conducted every 3 years and is a supplement to the ABS Labour Force Survey. The latest survey was conducted in 1999. This is an Australia-wide sample survey on the use of and demand for child care and preschool services.

The Commonwealth Child Care Census (CCC) is a census of Commonwealth-supported child care service providers, conducted by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). In most years between 1988 and 1999, the census collected information from Commonwealth Child Care Support service providers on their staff, the children and parents using the service and various other aspects of service provision. The latest complete census of all Commonwealth-supported services was carried out in 1999. A census of family day care, multifunctional, MACS and mobile services was conducted in May 2001.

The Child Care System (CCS) was an administrative database that was managed by FaCS and which contained information about Commonwealth-supported child care service providers. This system ceased operation at the end of 2000.

Centrelink has two data systems operating for Child Care Benefit payments (see section on Provision below). One system contains details about families and children eligible for CCB; the other (COS—Child Care Operator System) contains a limited amount of information about child care service providers.

State and Territory government data collections contain information about the child care and preschool services that these governments fund and/or license (see Provision section). There are, however, great variations in the nature and extent of these collections.

The need for child care and preschool services

All parents of children 12 years of age and younger could potentially need someone other than themselves to care for their children. In 2000 there were nearly 3.4 million children aged 12 years and under in Australia, representing the upper limit of the potential population in need of child care (see Table 5.2). Of these children, approximately 260,000 were 4 years of age and represent the potential population needing preschool services (ABS 2001).³

One of the main reasons that parents need child care is to participate in the workforce. Data on parents' participation in the labour force, that is, in paid employment or looking for work, can therefore be used to estimate the potential number of families who need child care for employment-related reasons.

In 2000 there were 839,500 couple families and 162,800 one-parent families in Australia with at least one child under 5 years of age. In nearly half of the couple families both

3 The age at which children are eligible to attend preschool services, however, varies somewhat between jurisdictions (Press & Hayes 2000:64).

parents were in the labour force and almost 40% of the sole parents were in the labour force (Table 5.6). Where the youngest child in the family was aged 5–9 years, both parents in 69% of couple families were in the labour force, as were 61% of sole parents. Labour force participation for mothers increased steadily according to the age of the youngest child: 32% in 1996 where the youngest child was aged less than 1 year, compared with 66% where the youngest child was aged 6 (AIHW 1999a:97).

Table 5.6: Families with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force, by age of youngest child, June 2000 ('000)

Age of youngest child (years)	Both parents (or a sole parent) in labour force	Per cent of total families	Total families
Couple families with youngest child aged:			
0–4	415.1	49.4	839.5
5–9	335.4	69.2	484.4
10–14	289.0	73.4	393.7
One-parent families with youngest child aged:			
0–4	63.0	38.7	162.8
5–9	93.9	60.9	154.1
10–14	92.7	67.8	136.8

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

Source: ABS 2000d.

It is important to note that the potential need for child care is not the same as the expressed need for child care. Potential need is a broader concept and can include those who have not yet expressed a need for child care, but who may do so in the near future and/or start to use child care. Not all parents in the workforce will express a need for child care. For instance, in couple families where parents are in paid employment, one parent may work at home, or they may work different hours because they prefer to look after their children themselves.

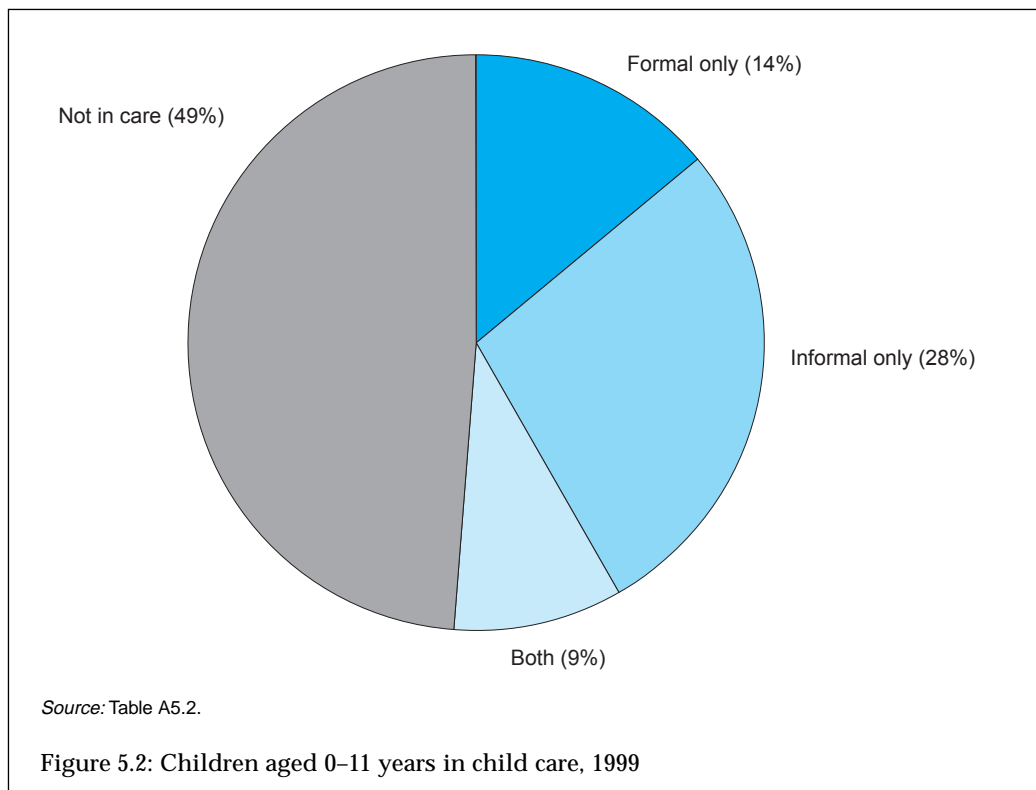
The need for child care may increase following the new Welfare Reform initiatives which are aimed at increasing participation in employment, education and training by parents dependent on government income support. These initiatives include an expanded range of training, employment and support services for these parents, including improved child care fee assistance and an additional number of before and after school child care places. Parents in receipt of Parenting Payment whose youngest child is at least 6 years of age will be required to attend an annual interview at Centrelink, while those whose youngest child is between 13 and 15 years will be subject to an activity test (Commonwealth of Australia 2001).

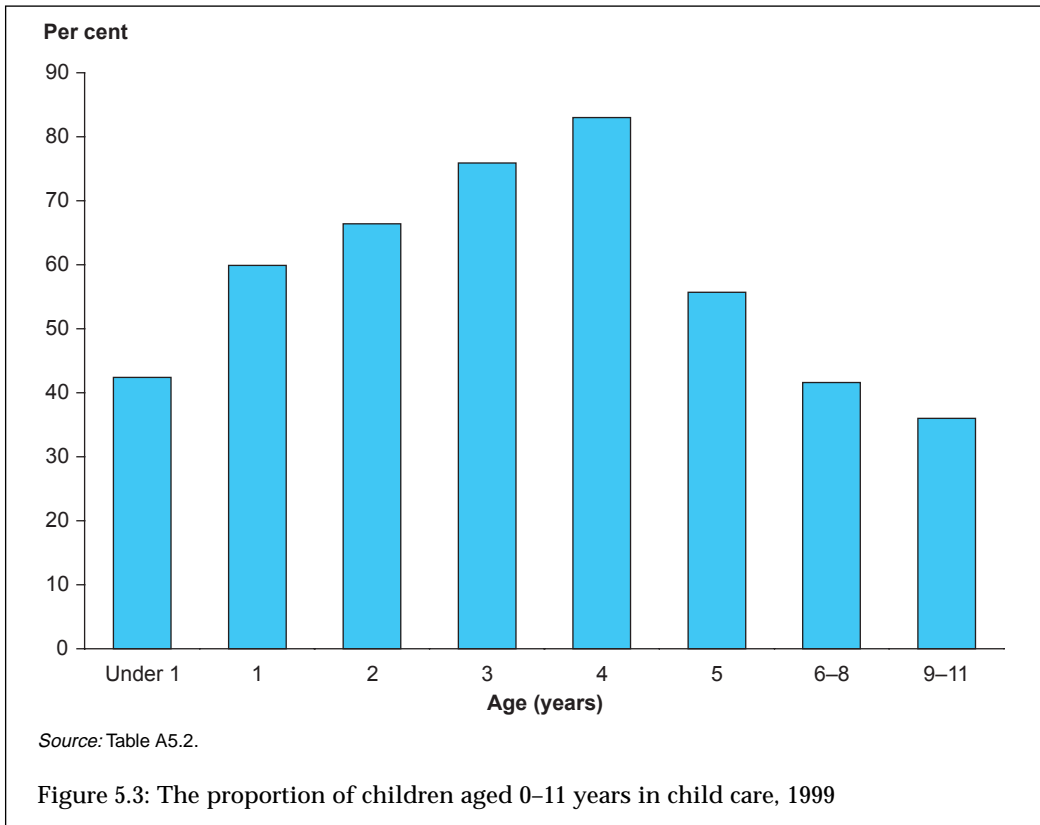
While parents participation in employment, education and training creates much of the need for child care in Australia, there are other reasons. Parents may need child care for personal reasons, because they think it is beneficial for the child, or as a form of family support. There is also evidence that child care and preschool services can be particularly beneficial for children from low-income families (Centre for Community Child Health 2000). The provision of these services has been highlighted as a cost-effective early intervention strategy for such children.

The use of child care

The ABS estimated that, in 1999, just over half (51%) of the 3.12 million children aged 0—11 years in Australia were in child care in the survey week, with 14% using only formal care, 28% only informal care and 9% both formal and informal care (Figure 5.2). The ABS definition of in care includes children using formal child care and preschool services as well as those being cared for in informal arrangements by family members (other than parents) friends, neighbours and paid babysitters for 1 hour or more in the week prior to the survey (ABS 1999a:3).

The proportion of all children using care varied with the age of the child, being higher for each year of age up to age 4. In 1999, 42% of children aged less than 1 year were in care, compared with 83% aged 4 years (Figure 5.3). The proportion of children using care was significantly lower at age 5 (56%) and lower again at ages 9—11 years (36%) (ABS 2000f). Most children aged 5 and older are at school and thus less likely to need care.





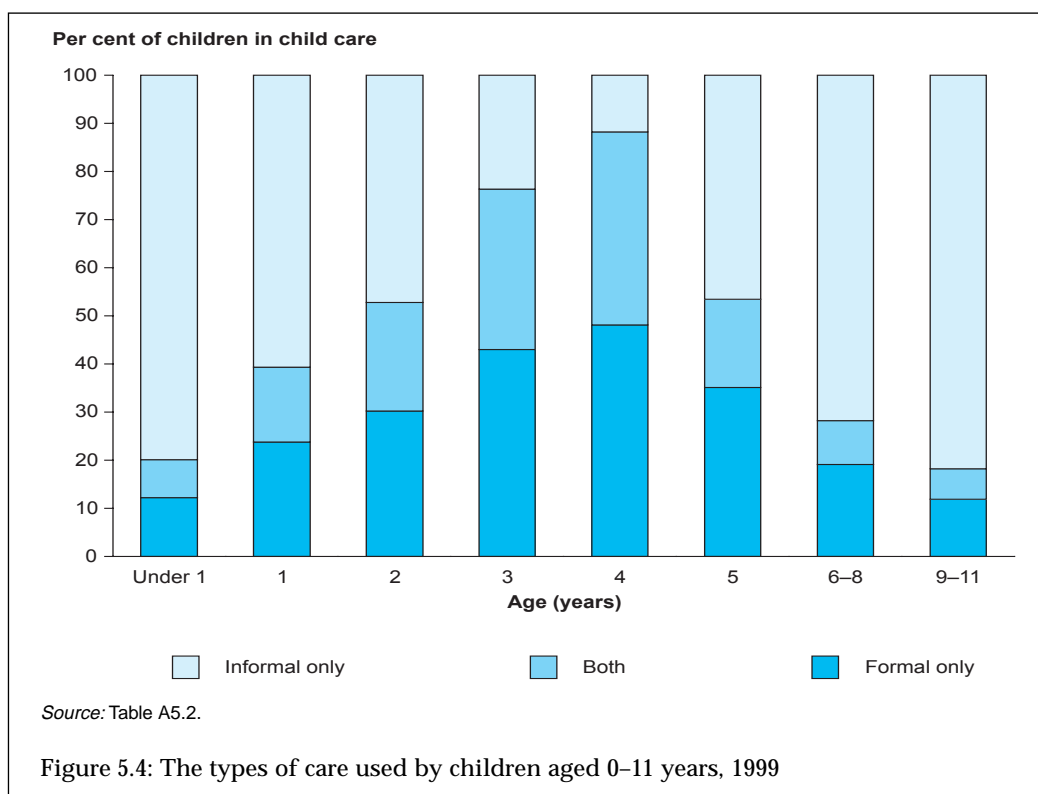
Use of formal and informal child care

The types of child care used also varied with the age of the child. Informal care was the most common both for very young children and for children aged 6 years and over. In 1999, the proportion of children in child care who were using only informal care was 80% for those aged under 1 year, 12% for those aged 4 and 82% for those aged 9–11 (Figure 5.4).

The use of formal care varied correspondingly, being higher for each year of age up to age 4. For children aged under 1 year using care, 12% were in formal care only and 8% were using both formal and informal care, while for children aged 4 the corresponding percentages were 48% and 40%. The high proportion of children using formal care at age 4 reflects the fact that almost half (49%) were attending preschool services. The proportion of children aged 5 years in child care who used formal care was significantly lower, with 35% using only formal care and 18% using both formal and informal care. For children aged 9–11 using care, 12% were using only formal care and 6% both formal and informal care.

Types of formal and informal care

The types of formal and informal care used by children in 1999 are shown in Table 5.7. It should be noted that where a child was in more than one type of care during the survey period, they were counted for each type.



Among children aged 0–4 years in care, the most common type was care by a grandparent (45%) and the next most common was in a long day care centre (27%), followed by preschool (22%). For children aged 5–11, care by a grandparent was also the most common type (38%). Care by an unrelated person was the next most common type (25%), followed by before and after school care (20%).

While grandparents were the most common carers for children in both age groups, children cared for by grandparents and other informal carers were more likely to be in care for shorter periods of time than children in formal care. The relationship between hours of care and the use of formal and informal care is discussed in the following section.

Table 5.7: Children aged under 12 years in child care, by type of care and by age group, 1999

Type of care	0–4 year olds		5–11 year olds	
	Number ('000)	% of total in care	Number ('000)	% of total in care
Formal care				
Before and after school care	*1.6	*<1	152.5	20
Long day care centre	225.9	27	16.1	2
Family day care	72.1	9	15.0	2
Occasional care	41.5	5	*1.4	*<1
Preschool	186.0	22	45.7	6
Other formal care	24.2	3	5.2	1
<i>Total children who used formal care^(a)</i>	<i>509.6</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>223.6</i>	<i>29</i>
Informal care				
Grandparent	376.6	45	286.1	38
Brother/sister	12.3	1	61.9	8
Other relative	94.8	11	127.4	17
Other person	104.7	13	189.3	25
<i>Total children who used informal care^(b)</i>	<i>549.0</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>613.2</i>	<i>80</i>
Total children in care^(c)	837.5	100	761.8	100

(a) Components do not add to total as children could use more than one type of formal care.

(b) Components do not add to total as children could use more than one type of informal care.

(c) Components do not add to total as children could use both formal and informal care.

* Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

Source: ABS 2000f:11.

Hours in care

Overall, the majority of children (85%) in child care were there for less than 30 hours per week (Table A5.3). Only 7% were using care for 45 hours or more per week.

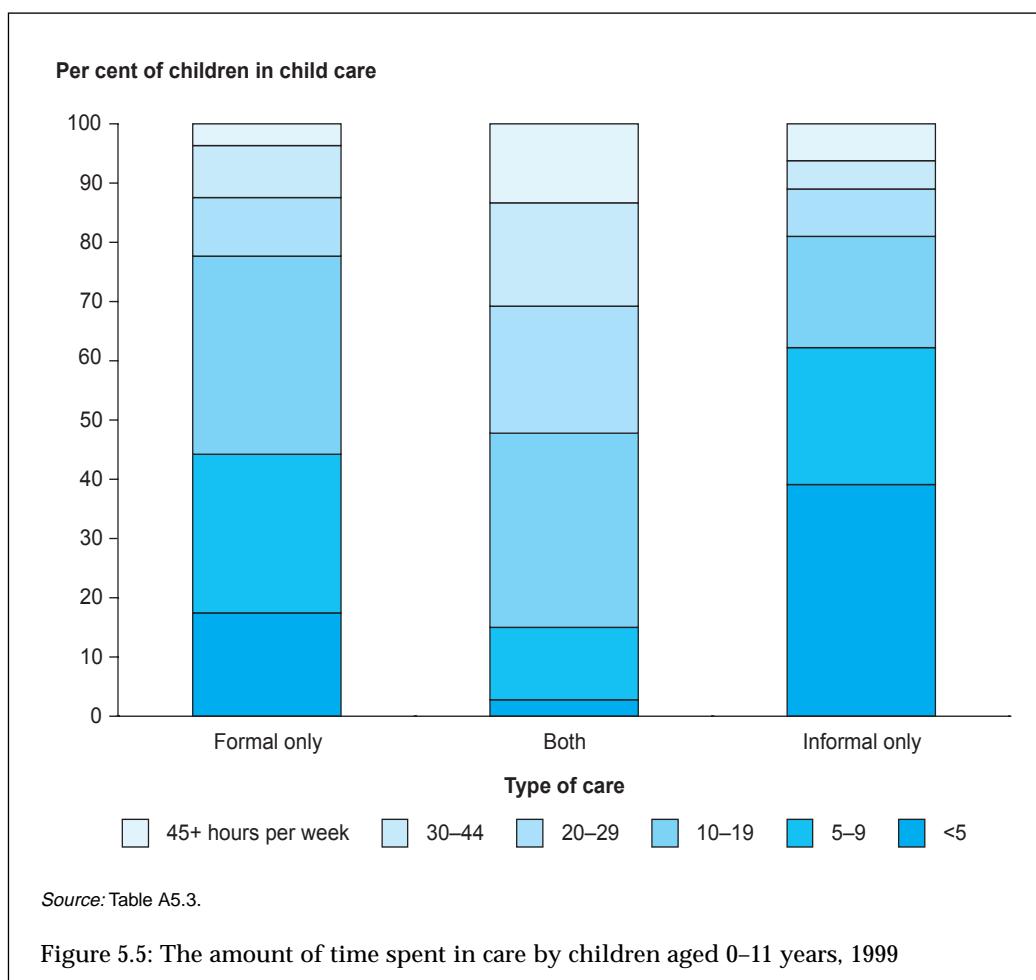
Children using informal care only were much more likely to be in care for fewer hours than those using formal care only or those using both formal and informal care (Figure 5.5). For example, 39% of children using only informal care were in care for less than 5 hours per week, compared with 17% using only formal care and 3% using both.

Children who used both types of care were most likely to be in care for longer periods: 30% for 30 hours or more per week, compared with 11% using only informal care and 13% only formal care.

Reasons for using child care

The main reason parents gave for using child care differed by the type of care and the age of the child (Table 5.8). For children aged 0–4 years the most common reason for using formal care was that it was considered beneficial for the child (44%), closely followed by work reasons (37%), while informal care was mostly used for personal reasons (49%).

For around half or more of children aged 5–11 in care, parents reported that the main reason was work-related (67% of children in formal care and 49% in informal care). Parents were more likely to report that they mainly used *formal* care because it was



beneficial for the child rather than for personal reasons, while they were more likely to report that they used *informal* care for personal reasons rather than because it was beneficial for the child. For 18% of children aged 5–11 in formal care and 4% in informal care, the main reason given was that it was beneficial for the child. Personal reasons were the main reason care was used for 36% of children in informal care and 7% in formal care.

It is important to note that the ABS survey does not provide information on what types of services parents use to care for their children while they are working. Parents may use a child care or preschool service for their child while they are at work, but may not say that the main reason (or one of the reasons) for using this service is work-related. Thus in 1999, for example, both parents (or the sole parent) of 44% of children attending preschools were employed. However, parents of only 14% of children in preschools said that the main reason they were using this service was work-related, while parents of 20% of children gave work-related as one of the reasons for using the service (ABS 1999a:33, 17).

Table 5.8: Children aged 0–11 years in child care, by main reason parents gave for using care, by type of care and age group, 1999

Main reason	Formal care		Informal care	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
0–4 year olds				
Work-related	189.0	37	218.9	40
Personal	69.7	14	268.7	49
Beneficial for the child	222.5	44	18.6	3
Other	28.4	6	42.7	8
Total	509.6	100	549.0	100
5–11 year olds				
Work-related	149.9	67	303.2	49
Personal	16.3	7	222.6	36
Beneficial for the child	40.6	18	22.2	4
Other	16.7	7	65.2	11
Total	223.5	100	613.2	100

Note: 'Work-related' includes working, looking for work and studying/training for work. 'Personal' 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 the child' includes 'good for the child' and to 'prepare child for school'.

Source: ABS 2000f:17–18.

Trends in the use of child care

During the 1990s there was an increase in the number of children 0–11 years using child care. Between June 1993 and June 1999 the number of children aged 0–4 in care rose by 7% from 780,900 to 837,500, while the number aged 5–11 rose by 5% from 724,000 to 761,800 (Table 5.9). The increase in the 0–4 age group in care occurred during a period when the total number of children in this age group declined (Table 5.2).

This trend in the use of care was due to a rise in the numbers of children in both age groups using formal care between 1993 and 1999. Those aged 0–4 years using only formal care increased by 17%, from 245,900 to 288,500, while those using both formal and informal care increased by 14%, from 193,300 to 221,100 (Table 5.9). Over the same period, the number of children aged 5–11 using only formal care rose by 60%, from 92,800 to 148,600, and those using both formal and informal care rose by 17%, from 64,200 to 74,900 (ABS 2000f).

Table 5.9: Children aged 0–11 years in child care, by age group and type of care, June 1993 and June 1999 ('000)

Type of care	June 1993	June 1999
0–4 years		
Formal only	245.9	288.5
Both	193.3	221.1
Informal only	341.7	327.9
Total	780.9	837.5
5–11 years		
Formal only	92.8	148.6
Both	64.2	74.9
Informal only	567.0	538.2
Total	724.0	761.8

Source: ABS 2000f:11.

In contrast, the number of children using only informal care decreased between 1993 and 1999 for both age groups: 4% for those aged 0—4 years and 5% for those aged 5—11.

The provision of formal child care services

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) supports the provision of formal child care services through Commonwealth Child Care Support (Box 5.4). The Commonwealth has a range of strategies under this program that promote the supply, affordability and quality of child care services in order to support parents to participate in the workforce and the community (FaCS 1999a:182).

Box 5.4: Commonwealth Child Care Support

The key objective of Commonwealth Child Care Support (CCCS) is to assist families with dependent children to participate in the workforce and the general community by supporting the provision of affordable quality child care. The major funding mechanisms include:

Child Care Benefit—which assists families with their child care costs (see Affordability, page 170).

- Since July 2000, most long day care centres, all family day care schemes, most outside school hours care services, some occasional care services, and some multifunctional services are approved to offer the Child Care Benefit (CCB) to eligible children using their services. These services offer the maximum rate of CCB (depending on family income) for up to 50 hours of work-related care and for up to 20 hours of non-work-related care a week. Service providers are required to participate in the Commonwealth's quality assurance processes (where this applies). Services previously approved for the former Childcare Assistance payment are approved for the CCB.*
- Service providers not approved for the CCB (such as State/Territory-only funded occasional care and preschool services) and individuals providing informal care can register for the CCB. Parents using registered services can claim the minimum CCB if they use care for work-related reasons. Service providers previously registered for the former Childcare Rebate are registered for the CCB.*

Operational and capital funding—all family day care schemes, some occasional care centres, some multifunctional services, all Multifunctional Aboriginal children's services (MACS) and some mobiles receive operational funding on an ongoing basis. Some long day care centres and outside school hours care services in rural, remote and urban fringe areas receive the Disadvantaged Areas Subsidy (DAS). Family day care schemes and outside school hours care services may also receive capital funding in the form of loans, grants and upgrades.

Additional support for children with special needs—all types of service providers can receive funding to assist them to integrate children with additional needs, such as children with a disability, into their services.

Source: AIHW 1999a:99; FaCS website 2001 www.facs.gov.au.

Box 5.5: Commonwealth child care initiatives, 1999–2001

In December 1999, the then Minister for Family and Community Services, the Hon. Jocelyn Newman, announced the funding of two Family Crisis Child Care Pilot Projects. These pilot projects were aimed at assisting families in severe crisis, such as families where parents have an alcohol or drug addiction. Additional pilots were announced in 2000 and 2001, including the Caravan Parks Family Crisis Pilot in January 2001.

In the 2000–01 Federal Budget, a number of child care initiatives were announced as part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and have now been introduced.

- *From January 2001, under the In Home Care Initiative, families who do not have access to standard child care services or whose child care needs cannot be met by existing services are eligible to have child care provided in their own home. This includes families living in rural areas, parents who work shift hours or non-standard hours of work and parents with a sick child or a child with a disability.*
- *From January 2001, operators of long day care centres (community-based and private) and other private-for-profit bodies are eligible for Commonwealth funding to provide family day care and outside school hours care in areas of need as identified by the National Planning System.*
- *From 1 July 2001, the Commonwealth provides incentives to encourage private operators to establish child care centres in rural areas where there is unmet demand for child care for children under school age and no existing child care centre.*

Source: FaCS 2000c; Newman 2000, 2001.

New priority of access guidelines are now in operation for parents wanting to access Commonwealth-supported child care services (FaCS 2000b:5). These guidelines give first priority to a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect, followed by a child of a single parent who satisfies, or of parents who both satisfy, the work/training/study test. Within each of these categories, children in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families; children in families which include a person with a disability; children in families on low incomes; children in families with a culturally diverse background; children in socially isolated families; children of single parents are to be given priority.

The Commonwealth has introduced a number of initiatives in relation to child care in the last few years. The most important of these was the introduction of the Child Care Benefit (CCB) in July 2000. The CCB, which assists families with their child care costs, replaced Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate (see Affordability section, page 170, for more detail). With the introduction of the CCB, there was a shift in focus from funding service providers to funding parents to use approved services. Various other Commonwealth child care initiatives have been introduced in the past 2 years, including the In Home Care Initiative, where families with particular needs are supported to have child care provided in their own homes (Box 5.5).

All State and Territory Governments fund dedicated preschool services for children in the year or two before they begin school full-time (Press & Hayes 2000). They also provide some funding for child care services mainly occasional care services, vacation

care services and, in some jurisdictions, long day care centres (AIHW 1999a:100—6). These governments are also responsible for licensing/regulating child care services within their jurisdiction. The Commonwealth and some State and Territory Governments have accreditation processes in place for some of their funded services.

As noted previously, nationally comprehensive and comparable data on State and Territory funded preschool and child care services are not available, although illustrative data are published in the *Report on Government Services* (SCRCSSP 2001:641—69). For instance, the report shows that in 2000 there were around 61,500 children in Victoria, 18,000 in South Australia and 6,400 in Tasmania attending preschool services in the year before full-time school.

Because of the lack of national data, the following sections will focus solely on formal child care services supported by the Commonwealth, using data from the Commonwealth child care data collections (see Box 5.3).

Sponsorship of service providers

Although the Commonwealth has a major role in supporting the provision of child care services, it does not directly provide such services. Prior to 1 July 2001, with the exception of centre-based long day care services, generally only non-profit bodies were eligible for Commonwealth support to provide child care services. This situation has now changed, however, with private-for-profit bodies now eligible for Commonwealth support to provide family day care and outside school hours care services in specified geographic areas (see Box 5.5).

In June 2000, the type of sponsorship of Commonwealth-supported child care services varied according to the type of service provided.⁴ For example, outside school hours care (75%) and occasional care services (62%) were predominantly sponsored by non-profit organisations (Table 5.10). Local government (41%) and non-profit organisations (39%) were the main sponsors of family day care services. In contrast, the majority of long day care centres (67%) were privately owned. State and Territory Governments were responsible for sponsoring only a small minority of Commonwealth-supported child care services, ranging from 1% of long day care centres to 11% of occasional care services. As noted, the Commonwealth Government did not sponsor any child care services.

4 A sponsor is the entity (person, organisation or enterprise) that is legally responsible for the provision of the services. For licensed services, the sponsor is the licensee. For funded services, the sponsor is the entity that signs the funding agreement and is accountable for the funds.

Table 5.10: Commonwealth-supported child care service providers, by type of sponsorship and service, 30 June 2000 (per cent)

Type of sponsorship	Long day care centres	Family day care ^(a)	Outside school hours care ^(b)	Occasional/other care ^(c)
Local government	9	41	16	11
Non-profit	20	39	75	62
Religious/charitable	4	16	6	15
Privately owned	67	—	—	1
State/Territory Government	1	3	3	11
Total	100	100	100	100
Total number of agencies	4,012	372	4,706	655

(a) Family day care coordination units.

(b) For these services, the 'sponsor' is counted for each service type rather than each service provider. Note that one service provider may provide more than one service type (before school care, after school care, vacation care).

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

Source: FaCS unpublished data.

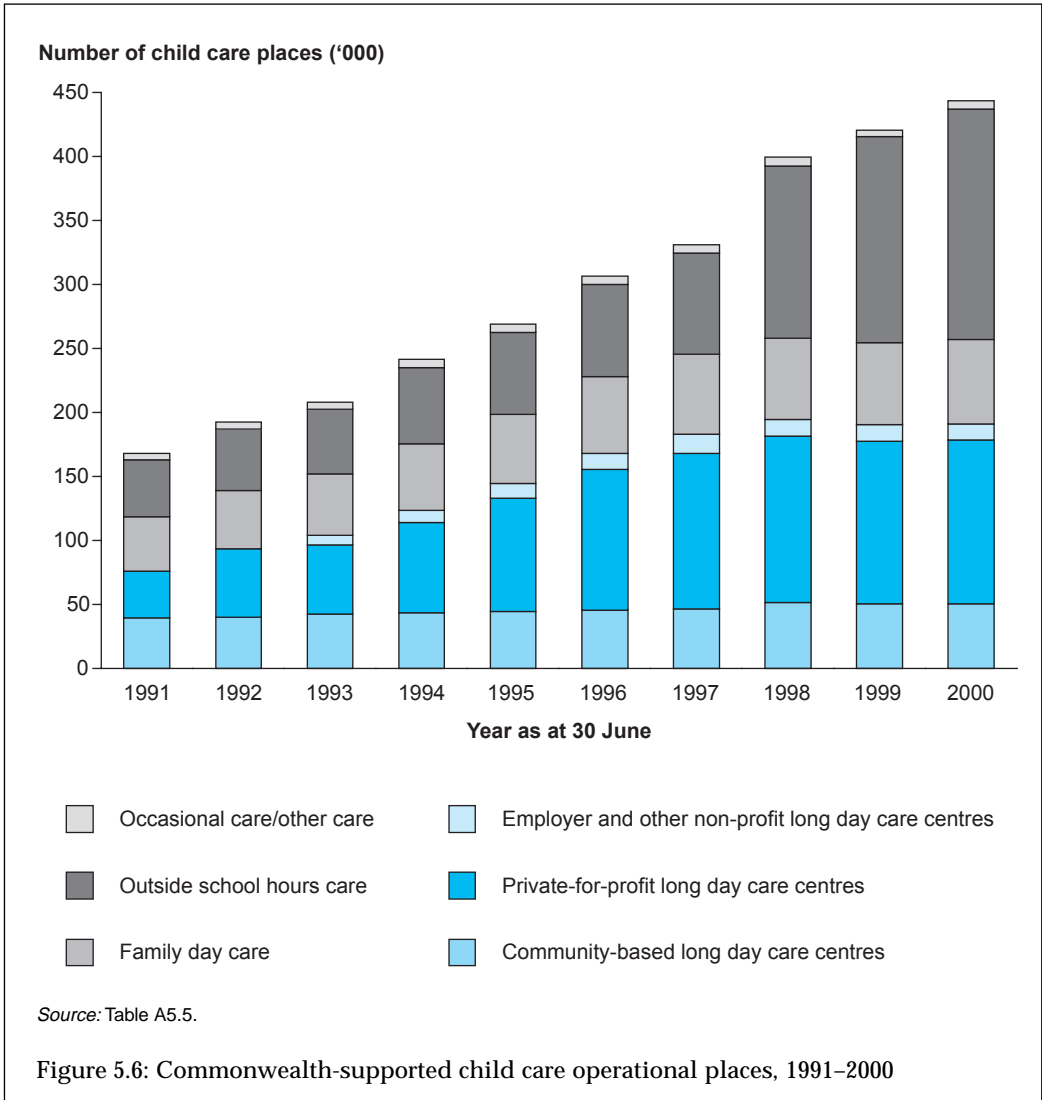
Trends in Commonwealth-supported child care

Number of service providers and child care places

Between 1991 and 2000, the total number of service providers supported by the Commonwealth increased by 145% (from 3,972 to 9,745) (Table A5.4), while the total number of Commonwealth-supported child care places increased by 164% (from 168,276 to 443,444) (Table A5.5). For each service provider, the total number of child care places is equivalent to the total number of children who can use the service at any one time during the hours that the service operates. The number of children using child care services is higher than the number of places, since most children are not in care full-time (Powlay 2000).

Although there was a significant increase in Commonwealth-supported services and places over the period, the increase was not evenly distributed across all service types (Figure 5.6).

The number of long day care centres places grew at a very fast rate between June 1991 and June 1996, reflecting the enormous unrestricted growth in the private-for-profit sector over that period. Prior to 1998, private-for-profit long day care centres (unlike community-based centres) were not subject to strict planning requirements in the form of the Commonwealth's needs-based planning process (AIHW 1997:105). Between June 1996 and June 1998, the rate of growth of this sector was much slower, with the number of funded places increasing by 18% compared with a 55% increase in the preceding 2 years. The number of places in private-for-profit centres increased by only 7% from June 1997 to June 1998, probably reflecting the implementation of the National Planning System in April 1998 (which covered all types of long day care centres) (AIHW 1997:104). Between June 1998 and June 2000 the number of places in private-for-profit centres fell slightly by 1%.



The number of places in community-based centres rose between 1991 and 1998 from 39,567 to 51,710 (31%), but then fell slightly (by 3%) over the next 2 years. The number of places in employer and other non-profit centres also increased up to 1997, but then fell over the next 3 years. The fall in the total number of places in long day care centres from 1998 probably reflects problems with the viability of services because of falling utilisation rates over the period (see section on Met demand).

Places in family day care services grew steadily over the decade, from 42,501 in 1991 to 66,294 in 2000, an increase of 56%. In recent years, the Commonwealth has focused on increasing the supply of family day care places, partly because it is considered to be a

more flexible form of care and to meet the needs of parents who do not work standard hours (AIHW 1995:134). Family day care fees are also cheaper than those for centre-based care, making family day care more affordable for families (AIHW 2001b).

The number of places in outside school hours care services recorded in the CCS database increased from 44,449 in 1991 to 179,743 in 2000. It is important to note, however, that the large increase between 1997 and 1998 (from 78,970 to 134,354) was mainly due to the inclusion of some Commonwealth-funded places not previously recorded in the database (following changed funding arrangements) and to changes in counting methodology (AIHW 1999a:102).

Number of children

The total number of children using Commonwealth-supported services almost doubled between 1991 and 1999: from 262,200 to 508,200 (Table 5.11). Between 1991 and 1995, the number of children using long day care centres increased at around the same rate as the number of places (85% compared with 89%). From 1995 to 1999, however, the number of children using services increased by 20% while the number of places grew by 32%, reflecting declining utilisation rates over the period (see section on Met demand).

In 1999, more than half (59%) of the children in Commonwealth-supported child care were using long day care centres and 21% were in before and after school care.

Characteristics of children in Commonwealth-supported child care

The majority of children using Commonwealth-supported services were in families with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force or studying/training for work. The proportion of children in this category in 1999 ranged from 89% of children using private-for-profit centres to 99% in before/after school care services (FaCS 2000b:8). This reflects the previous priority of access guidelines (AIHW 1995:137).

Table 5.11: Number of children in Commonwealth-supported child care, by type of service, 1991–99

Type of service	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1999
Long day care centres	135,400	158,400	190,600	227,300	251,000	n.a.	294,700	301,500
Family day care	61,000	66,100	78,800	88,700	85,600	n.a.	85,000	83,100
Before and after school care	46,800	50,700	53,500	63,900	n.a.	96,400	99,500	107,400
Vacation care	..	..	..	n.a.	n.a.	24,300	31,000	69,300
Other formal care	19,000	26,500	20,900	16,800	n.a.	19,100	n.a.	16,100
Total children	262,200	301,700	343,800	396,700	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	508,200

Notes

1. 'Other formal care' includes occasional care centres, MACS and other multifunctional services.
2. These data measure occurrences of care and include some double-counting where children attend more than one service. Total for 1999 excludes children in vacation care, since many of these children would also have been attending before/after school care.
3. Figures for 1991–94 are estimates based on previous years Census data. Figures for 1995–97 are from the CP Census conducted in August of each year and are weighted for non-response. However, not all service types were surveyed in each of these years.
4. Components may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: AIHW 1999a; FaCS 2000b.

Age of children

The age distribution of children attending the different types of services varied, reflecting the different aims of these services. Long day care services, for instance, are targeted to children below school age. In 1999, the majority of children in long day care centres and family day care services were aged 0–4 years, while almost all the children in outside school hours care services were 5 years and older (Table A5.6). There was, however, a strong indication of a more flexible type of service provision, with 29% of the children in family day care and 13% in private-for-profit long day care centres being 5 years and older and thus using these services for school-aged care.

Private-for-profit centres tended to have a lower proportion of very young children than other types of long day care centres. For example, 34% of children using private-for-profit services were 2 years and younger, compared with 45% in community-based centres.

Table 5.12: Children with special needs as a proportion of all children using Commonwealth-supported child care, by special need and type of service, 1999 (per cent)

Type of special need	Long day care centres	Family day care	Occasional/other care ^(a)	Before/after school care	Vacation care	All services ^(b)
Children from one-parent families	19.3	26.6	17.9	25.4	n.a.	21.9
Child with disability	1.8	3.5	2.4	2.0	3.2	2.1
Parent with disability	0.9	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.6
Child at risk of abuse/neglect	0.4	0.5	1.2	0.1	0.4	0.4
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1.4	1.0	12.3	0.9	1.2	1.5
Culturally diverse background	12.6	7.5	7.2	10.5	7.9	11.1
Total number of children in care	270,235	81,418	10,979	99,902	57,521	462,534

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

(b) Total excludes children in vacation care, since many of these children would also have been attending before/after school care.

Notes

1. Some children may be included in more than one special needs category.
2. These data are unweighted and therefore are not adjusted for agency non-response.

Source: AIHW analysis of FaCS 1999b.

Children with special needs

The Commonwealth provides specific funding to assist parents and children with special needs to access services (AIHW 1999a:99). Parents and children with special needs include children from one-parent families, children and/or parents with a disability, children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, children from culturally diverse backgrounds, and children at risk of abuse or neglect.

In 1999, children from one-parent families constituted the largest group of children with special needs using Commonwealth-supported child care services (22%), followed by children from a culturally diverse background (11%) (Table 5.12). The proportion of children from other groups with special needs using child care was 2% or less. The use of services by children with special needs varied by service type. The relatively high proportion of children in occasional care/other services who were Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander is because this category includes multifunctional Aboriginal children's services (MACS) which are specifically provided to meet the cultural needs of these children.

The proportion of children in Commonwealth-supported child care (22%) who were from one-parent families was higher than the proportion in the population. In 1997, 16% of Australian children aged 0—4 and 19% aged 5—11 were from one-parent families (ABS 1999a). It is hardly surprising that one-parent families are more likely to use child care services than other families, given that they are likely to have a greater need for child care because there is no co-resident parent available to provide care.

In contrast, the proportion of children in child care who had a disability and the proportion who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander was lower than the proportion of these groups of children in the population.⁵ Of children in Commonwealth-supported child care services in 1999, 2.1% had a disability, while 4% of children in Australia aged 0—4 years and 9% aged 5—14 had a disability (ABS 1999b:14). Similarly, only 1.5% of children in these child care services were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, whereas Indigenous children were estimated to constitute 4% of the Australian population aged 0—12 years in 2000 (AIHW 1999a). One of the main reasons why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are less likely to use formal child care than other families is that many of them prefer to use informal care provided by family and friends (ABS 1995).

No population data are available to classify Australian children according to the definition of culturally diverse background used in the Commonwealth Child Care Census. There are also no population data on parents with a disability or children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Government expenditure on child care

Between 1991—92 and 1996—97, Commonwealth expenditure on child care services more than doubled in real terms (constant prices), increasing from \$503 million to \$1,134 million (Table 5.13). This was mainly due to the growth in expenditure on Childcare Assistance fee subsidies, reflecting the increase in the number of private-for-profit long day care centres over the period. From 1996—97 to 1998—99, however, total Commonwealth expenditure on child care services fell by 4% (in constant prices), falling by 7% between 1996—97 and 1997—98 and then increasing again by 4% from 1997—98 to 1998—99. Between 1996—97 and 1998—99, expenditure on Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate fell by 8% in real terms, while expenditure on service provision (including JET assistance) fell by 13%. The fall in expenditure on fee subsidies probably reflects the drop in utilisation rates of long day care centres over the period.

5 In making these comparisons, however, it is important to note that the definitions of 'disability' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' used in the ABS population surveys are not identical to those used in the Commonwealth Child Care Census, and the methods used in collecting these data are different.

Between 1991–92 and 1998–99, there was a shift from expenditure on service provision to expenditure on measures that reduce the costs of child care for parents. Over the period, the proportion of Commonwealth expenditure on Other services for families with children (which included capital loans, capital grants and upgrades, and operational subsidies) fell from 32% of total expenditure to 17%, while the proportion of expenditure on fee subsidies increased from 64% to 73%.

From 1999–00, child care expenditure is reported on an accrual basis, rather than on a cash basis. Child care expenditure in 1999–00 was \$1,278 million in current prices.

Table 5.13: Commonwealth expenditure on child care services by type of expenditure, 1991–92 to 1999–00 (\$m in current and constant prices)

	Childcare Assistance ^(a)	Childcare Rebate	Other services ^{(a)(b)}	JET ^(c)	Departmental running costs	Total (current prices)	Total constant (1998–99 prices)	Deflator
1991–92	289	..	145	..	14	449	503	89.2
1992–93	384	..	154	..	16	555	607	91.4
1993–94	497	..	170	..	23	691	751	92.0
1994–95	592	87	181	..	34	894	965	92.6
1995–96	657	121	191	10	36	1,014	1,072	94.6
1996–97	711	127	206	7	41	1,092	1,134	96.3
1997–98	640	123	218	5	40	1,026	1,050	97.7
1998–99	677	121	182	10	102	1,091	1,091	100.0
<i>Break in series</i>								
1999–00	749	164	195	11	158	1,278	1,250	102.2

(a) Including Special Purpose Payments.

(b) Other services for families with children. Includes: Operational subsidy and capital funding.

(c) Jobs, Education and Training Program (JET). Child care for eligible parents undergoing training (AIHW 1999a:99).

Note: In 1999–00, expenditure is reported on an accrual basis. Prior to 1999–00, it is reported on a cash basis.

Source: ABS 2000g; FaCS unpublished data.

Outcomes

The aims and objectives of government support for child care services are to provide services that are accessible, affordable and of high quality, and that allow parents to participate in the labour force and undertake other activities. As a condition of government funding and regulation, these services must promote and enhance children's emotional, intellectual, social and physical development.

The long-term effects of child care on children continue to be the subject of considerable research and debate. One of the main aims of the FaCS longitudinal study of Australian children, for instance, is to assess the impact of non-parental care on children's development and wellbeing.

The discussion in this section, however, focuses on service outcomes rather than client outcomes. Service outcomes are discussed in terms of accessibility including affordability and quality.

Accessibility

Unmet demand for formal child care services

One direct measure of unmet demand comes from the ABS Child Care Survey, which asks parents whether they wanted to use either some formal child care or additional formal care, but did not do so (ABS 2000f:26). In 1999, the survey found that the proportion of children for whom parents said that they wanted to use formal care but did not do so was 6% (or 201,100 children). The main reasons for parents not using the formal care they wanted were that the care available was too expensive (33% of children), there were no places available (14%), and no care existed in the local area or parents had no knowledge of its existence (12%) (ABS 2000f:32).

The survey also found another 6% of children (193,600) whose parents said that they did not want to use any formal care (or any additional care) because of problems with the accessibility of services. The main reasons were that the care available was too expensive (82%), care was not available when required (10%) and transport or distance was a problem (8%) (ABS 2000f:32).

The level of unmet demand relates to the population of children for whom parents had problems in accessing formal care, rather than only to those who reported that they needed formal care but could not obtain it. Thus, in 1999, the level of unmet demand for formal care would be for 397,400 children. This compares with a total of 733,200 children using formal care at this time.

Commonwealth estimates of met demand

FaCS uses labour force survey data and other information to estimate the extent to which its funded services have met the demand for work-related child care. Met demand is expressed as the ratio of the number of places provided to the estimated number of places required.

The department's National Supply Demand Model estimates the number of places required for children needing work-related care. In making these estimates, the model takes into account factors such as the number of children with both parents (or a sole parent) working, looking for work, studying or training; parents full-time and part-time labour force participation. It also takes into account parents preferences for formal/informal care; and parents preferences for different service types (DHFS 1998:144). The model, however, does not take into account the effect of cost (or affordability) on parents demand for child care.

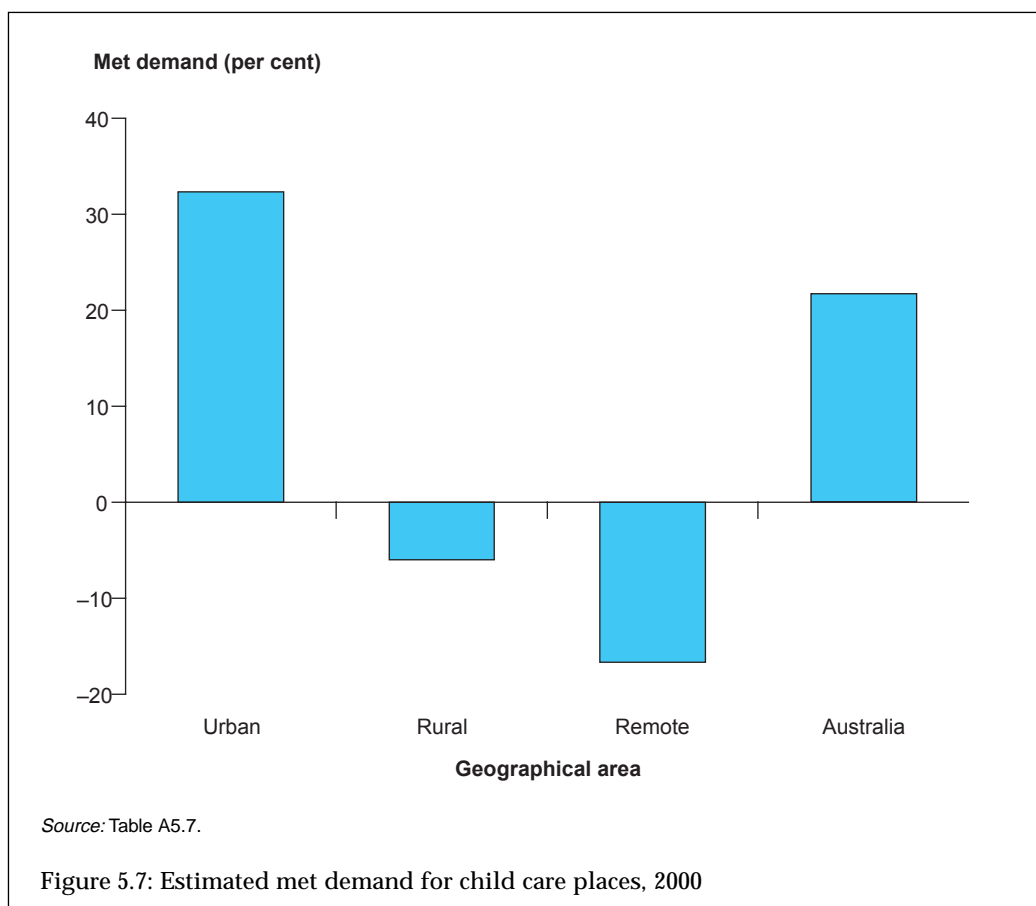
The FaCS estimates of met demand and the ABS Child Care Survey estimates of unmet demand use very different methodologies and have a different scope. The FaCS model examines the extent to which Commonwealth-supported child care services meet the demand for work-related care, while the ABS survey asks parents to report their unmet demand for all child care and preschool services for work-related care and non-work-related care. However, even when these differences are taken into account, the FaCS estimates are inconsistent with the ABS estimates.

In June 2000, FaCS estimated that, Australia-wide, there was an oversupply of places of 22% for children under school age needing work-related care (Figure 5.7). The estimated level of oversupply varied considerably, however, by geographic area.

Oversupply was estimated to be greatest in urban areas (32%), while there was an under-supply in rural areas (6%) and remote areas (16%).

In relation to outside school hours care services, at the national level there was an estimated oversupply of before/after school care places and an under-supply of vacation care places. At June 2000, FaCS estimated that, Australia-wide, the level of met demand for before/after school care was 110% and for all outside school hours care places (including vacation care), 84% (FaCS 2000a:197). Wide variations in met demand by geographic area were also noted.

FaCS (2000b:12-13) has pointed to the declining utilisation rates of long day care centres and before/after school services as a further indication of an oversupply of places. Between 1997 and 1999, average utilisation rates in long day care centres measured by total child hours paid for as a percentage of total capacity fell from around 80% to 71%, continuing the fall from a 90% utilisation rate in 1995. Similarly, average utilisation rates for before/after school care measured by total days attended as a percentage of total days available fell from 76% to 68% between 1997 and 1999.



Box 5.6: Commonwealth Child Care Benefit (CCB)

From July 2001, where children use approved services, families with incomes of \$29,857 or less receive the maximum rate of CCB of \$129 per week for 50 hours of care for one child not at school—or \$2.58 per hour of care used. Above this income level, the CCB tapers down to a minimum rate of \$21.70 per child for 50 hours of care per week—or \$0.434 per hour of care used. Families with one child in care are eligible for the minimum rate of CCB when family income is \$85,653 or more. The rate of CCB for children at school is 85% of that payable for children not at school. Families with more than one child in care are paid a loaded (additional) rate of CCB, as are families with children using long day care centres and family day care services for part-time care.

Families with children in work-related care using registered services (e.g. State/Territory-only funded child care or preschool services, or informal care) can claim the minimum rate of CCB.

Families using approved care can choose to have their CCB paid to the child care services (i.e. directly reduce the fees that they pay) or can receive it in the form of a lump sum from the Family Assistance Office (FAO) at the end of the financial year. Families using registered care can claim the CCB from the FAO during the year.

As the ABS Child Care Survey found, however, affordability of care has an impact on parents' demand for care. It is thus likely that the falling utilisation rates in long day care centres between 1995 and 1999 can partly be attributed to the decline in the affordability of care over the period. More recently, utilisation rates in long day care centres increased from 74% in April 2000 to 87% in October 2000 (Datacol 2001). This increase followed the introduction of the CCB, which improved the affordability of care.

Affordability

As noted earlier, the Commonwealth Government provides fee subsidies to make child care more affordable for families. The Child Care Benefit (CCB) was introduced in July 2000, as part of a new tax system to improve the affordability of care (Box 5.6). The payment is not only higher in dollar terms than the fee subsidies that it replaced (Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate), but is simpler to calculate and administer (AIHW 1999a:116—18). The payment is indexed annually.

In the 2000 December quarter, 444,400 families had claimed the CCB as a fee reduction, around 39% receiving the maximum rate and around 26% the minimum rate. At this time, there were another 26,500 families using approved services who were eligible to claim the CCB as a lump sum at the end of the 2000—01 financial year (FaCS unpublished).

Despite assistance having been increased, most families receiving the maximum CCB still pay some of the costs of child care, since fees are generally higher than the maximum amount of assistance available. The amount that families pay for child care depends on the fees charged, family income, the number of children in care and the hours of care that they use.

At June 2000, average full-time weekly fees for community-based long day care centres were \$175, and for private centres (private-for-profit and employer-sponsored) \$167 a week (FaCS unpublished). Fees for 50 hours a week of family day care were \$139 at May 1999 (FaCS 2000b:77). This compares with the maximum CCB of \$122 for 50 hours of care a week at 1 July 2000. A family with one child in care full-time at a private centre, for example, and receiving the maximum CCB would thus have had child care costs of \$45 per week in mid-2000. In 1999, however, most children in long day care services were not using full-time care only 14% of children in long day care centres (community-based and private) and 3% in family day care were using 50 hours of paid care per week (Powlay 2000). Thus, when examining the affordability of child care, it is more appropriate to look at costs for part-time care.

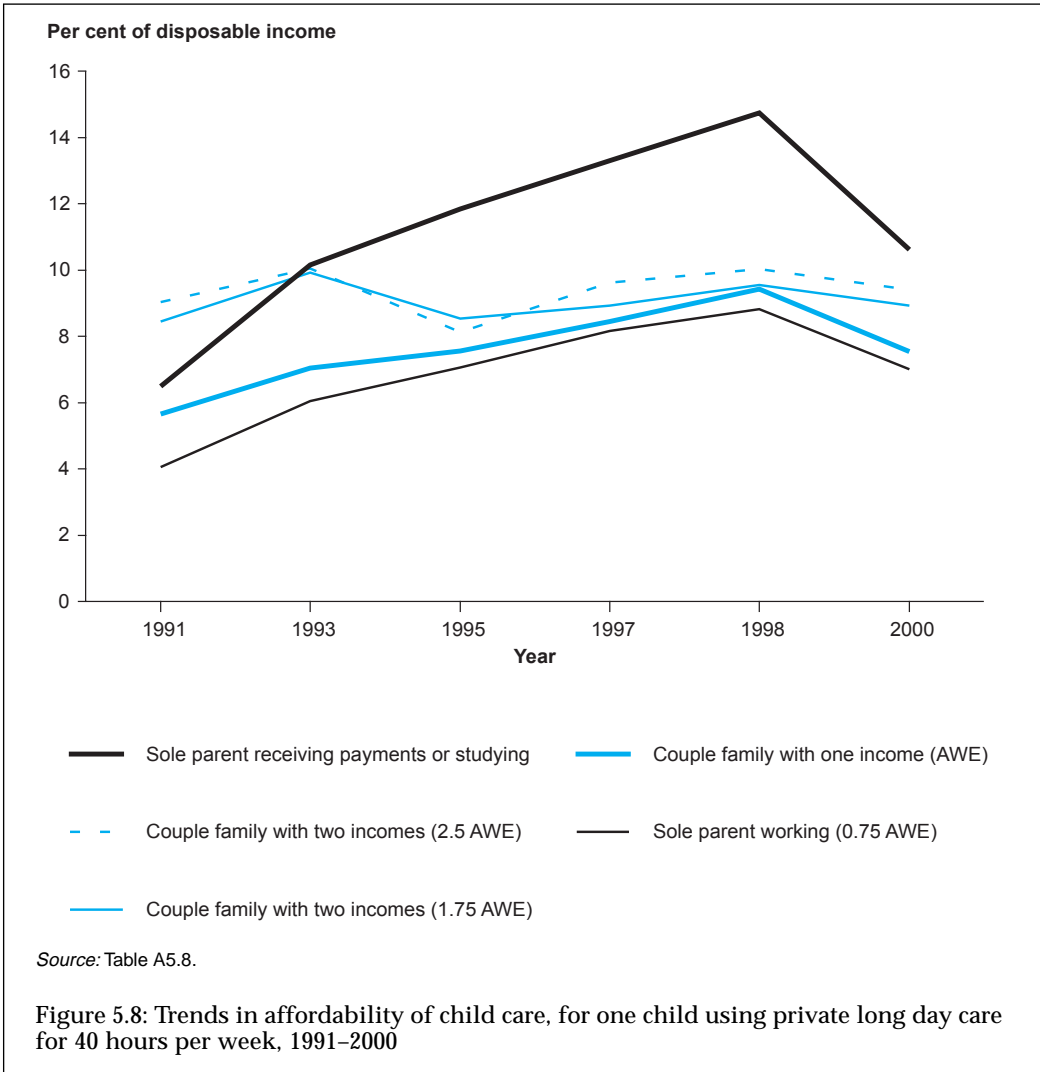
Changes over time

The AIHW (2001b) has examined changes over time in the affordability of long day care services. This analysis examines affordability for five different hypothetical families with one child using 20 hours of paid care a week and with one child using 40 hours of paid care a week. Child care costs (fees charged, less government assistance) as a percentage of disposable income were taken as the indicator of child care affordability. Data for families with one child using 40 hours of care in a private long day care centre are presented here for illustrative purposes (Figure 5.8).

Over the period 1991—98, child care became less affordable for all the family types using long day care centres. Child care costs as a proportion of disposable income increased for all family types, particularly for the low-income families. For example, for a couple on average weekly earnings (AWE) using a private long day care centre for 40 hours a week, child care costs relative to disposable income increased from 5.7% to 9.4%. In contrast, the affordability of family day care services fell slightly for the lower income families but improved slightly for the two highest income families over the same period (AIHW 2001b). Among families using family day care for 40 hours a week, for example, child care costs as a proportion of income increased from 5.3% to 6.2% for sole parents on Parenting Payment and fell from 9% to 8% for couple families on 2.5 AWE.

Child care costs as a proportion of disposable income fell for all family types using all types of long day care services in July 2000 following the introduction of the CCB. Between 1998 and 2000, child care costs relative to disposable income for families using private long day care centres for 40 hours a week fell from 14.7% to 10.6% for a sole parent on Parenting Payment and from 9.4% to 7.5% for a couple on AWE. Affordability improved markedly for families with low and middle incomes who were using family day care services (AIHW 2001b). In 2000, sole parents on Parenting Payment and sole parents on 0.75 AWE were paying nothing for 20 or 40 hours of family day care, while couples on AWE were paying 0.8% of their disposable income for 20 hours of care and 1.7% for 40 hours of care.

These data, however, overstate the improvements in the affordability of care at this time (except where costs fell to zero). One of the reasons for child care costs falling relative to disposable income is that disposable incomes increased to compensate families for the effects of the goods and services tax (GST). Because purchasing power reduced with the



introduction of the GST, the increases in disposable income (and thus in child care affordability) are generally not as great as they appear. Affordability might not have improved at all, however, if the new tax system had applied the GST to child care fees.

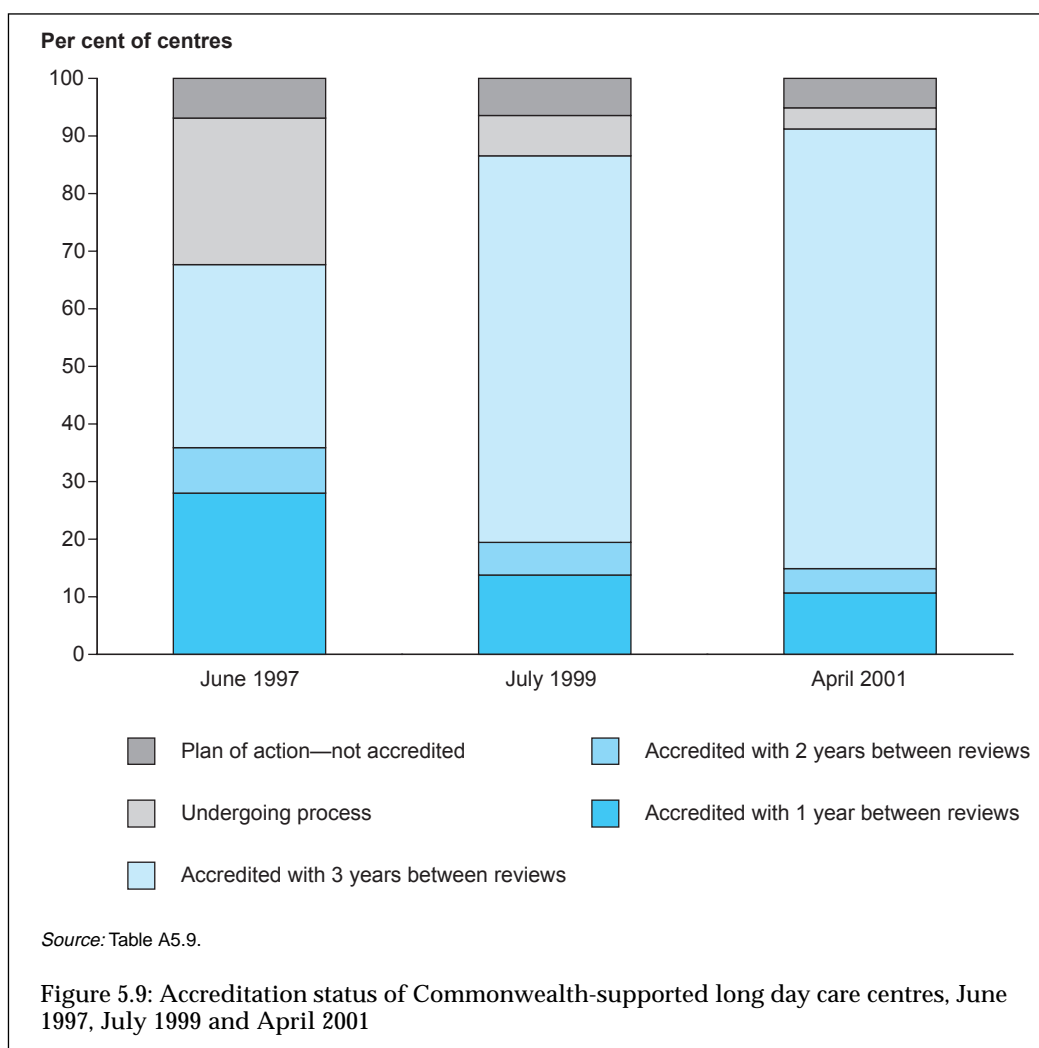
Quality

Legislative regulations (or funding guidelines) and accreditation (or quality assurance) systems are the two mechanisms for assuring quality in the child care sector. The regulations specify the minimum standards which must be met (or quantifiable inputs) in order for the service to operate. These standards relate to the physical environment, health and safety, staff—child ratios, staff qualifications and program activities. Licensing provisions exist for many, but not all, types of child care services.

Accreditation processes (or quality assurance systems), on the other hand, focus on measuring the quality of aspects of the services that are delivered, for instance staff responsiveness to children in their care (AIHW 1997:127).

Accreditation

The Commonwealth Government is responsible for accrediting all long day care centres approved for the CCB through its Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), which is administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council. The current accreditation system has been reviewed and revised, but the revised QIAS will not be implemented until 2002 (NCAC 2001). From 1 July 2001, family day care schemes are required to participate in a quality assurance scheme that was developed in consultation with the family day care sector. A quality assurance system is also being developed for outside school hours care services in consultation with that sector, with implementation planned for 2002–03.



At April 2001, almost all long day care centres approved for the CCB were accredited, around three-quarters of them for the maximum period (3 years). Between June 1997 and April 2001, the proportion of all long day care centres that were accredited increased from 68% to 91%, with the proportion accredited for 3 years increasing from 32% to 76%. The number of long day care centres undergoing the process of accreditation decreased from 25% in 1997 to 4% in 2001. At April 2001, only 5% of all long day care centres were not accredited and were working through a plan of action approved by the National Childcare Accreditation Council to bring them up to standard (Figure 5.9).

Staff qualifications

The quality of care has been shown to be strongly related to whether or not staff working in those services have had appropriate training in the child care area (Ochiltree 1994). State and Territory child care licensing regulations all contain specifications of recognised qualifications for various staffing positions.

Information on relevant qualifications held by child care workers was collected in the Commonwealth Child Care Census for every service type. While relevant qualifications vary slightly by service type, they generally include qualifications in early childhood and primary teaching, child care, nursing and other relevant areas such as social work and business management. In 1999 just over half of workers in long day care centres, one-fifth of family day care providers, and around 40% of workers in other services had at least one relevant qualification (Table A5.10). The proportion of workers with no relevant qualification but currently studying for one ranged from 6% in family day care to 20% in vacation care. The proportion of workers who had no relevant qualifications and were not studying for any, but who had worked in the child care sector for more than 3 years, was highest for family day care providers (44%) and lowest for workers in private-for-profit long day care centres (14%).

Information on in-service training undertaken by staff was also available from the Child Care Census. In 1999 more than half of workers in all types of child care services had undertaken in-service training in the previous 12 months (Table A5.10). Family day care workers were the most likely to have done so (88% of coordination unit staff and 77% of care providers), followed by staff in private-for-profit long day care centres (70%).

5.5 Child protection and out-of-home care services

Child protection is the responsibility of the community services department in each State and Territory. Children who come into contact with the department for protective reasons include those:

- who have been or are being abused or neglected or otherwise harmed; and/or
- whose parents cannot provide adequate care or protection.

The aim of child protection services is to protect children and young people who are at risk of harm within their families, or whose families do not have the capacity to protect them. The services include:

- receiving and responding to reports of concern about children and young people, including investigation and assessment where appropriate;
- providing support services to strengthen the capacity of families to care safely for their children;
- initiating intervention, including applying for a care and protection order through a court if necessary and placing children and young people in out-of-home care to secure their safety;
- ensuring the ongoing safety of children and young people by working with families to resolve protective concerns;
- working with families to reunite children (who were removed for safety reasons) with their parents as soon as possible; and
- securing permanent alternative care when children are unable to live with their parents (SCRCSSP 2001:686).

This section examines trends over the last decade in the number of child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations, children on care and protection orders, and children in out-of-home care. Some data on trends for Indigenous children are also provided.

Data sources

The AIHW has been responsible for collecting the national child protection data since the early 1990s. The data cover three main areas of child protection:

- child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations (formerly referred to as child abuse and neglect);
- children on care and protection orders; and
- children in out-of-home care.

In addition, some preliminary national data on family preservation services were collected for the first time in 1999–00. These are specialist services that seek to prevent the separation of children from their families, or to reunify families where separation has already occurred. Only three jurisdictions, however, could provide data on the characteristics of clients receiving these services so the data on these services are not included in this chapter. There are no other national data on family support services or on the other work undertaken by child protection workers to keep children safe.

The national child protection data were extracted from the administrative systems of the State and Territory community services departments according to definitions and counting rules agreed to by the departments and the AIHW. For more information about child protection processes, refer to AIHW (2001c).

Children who are in need of protection

Concerns about children and young people who may be in need of child protection services can be brought to the attention of the community services departments by parents, other relatives or children themselves, by people outside the family or by professionals who have contact with children and families.

Box 5.7: Child protection in the 1990s

Child protection policies have continued to evolve during the 1990s. During this period increasing numbers of children were reported to State and Territory child protection authorities for child protection reasons. This put the child protection system under increasing pressure as more resources were required to deal with larger numbers of children coming into the system.

During the 1990s it was also recognised that a forensic style investigation was generally not the most appropriate way of dealing with many of the families who were reported to child protection authorities. A large number of the reports that come to community services departments are about situations in which parents are under stress and not coping with their parental responsibilities. Across Australia, the responses of child protection authorities to reports of concerns about children or harm to a child have become less punitive and less interventionist, and more focused on collaboration and helping parents.

Most jurisdictions have introduced options for differential responses, that is ways of responding to the less serious reports about children. These differential responses do not involve a formal investigation and generally involve the provision of some kind of advice or family support service. More resources have been directed to family support services although there are no data at the national level on the number of families or children in receipt of such services (see Data Developments section, page 192).

At the same time many jurisdictions have changed the focus of their child protection systems away from the actions of the parents and guardians to the outcomes for the child. The focus has therefore moved from the identification and investigation of narrowly defined incidents referred to as child abuse and neglect, towards the identification and investigation of actual harm or risk of harm to the child, and to meeting the child's protective needs.

Other significant changes include the introduction of structured risk assessment tools (for example in South Australia) to help workers identify children in high-risk circumstances, to determine what services are necessary for the child and the family, and to document the basis for decisions and provide some consistency of response.

The importance of early intervention and prevention has also been recognised and more resources have been allocated to this area. Early support for families is now seen to be effective in preventing or reducing the level of more intrusive interventions at later stages.

Source: AIHW 2001c; Cashmore 2001; Johnstone 2000.

There are, however, a number of factors associated with involvement in child protection services. Socioeconomic status is one important factor, with the available data indicating that it is children from families with low socioeconomic status who are most likely to be in the child protection system. Data on the socioeconomic status of families in the child protection system are not available at the national level, but studies in a number of different jurisdictions have demonstrated the link between child protection and low socioeconomic status.

A 1995 Victorian study, for example, found that families who were investigated by the child protection services were more likely to be on a pension or benefit than those in the wider community (58% compared to 26%) and were more likely to be in rental housing (60% compared to 23%) (Prent & Lewis 1996). A South Australian study (Hood 1998), examining referrals from the child protection services to the Women's and Children's Hospital, found that 82% of the children referred lived in areas in the two lowest socioeconomic clusters. A New South Wales study (Weatherburn & Lind 1997) also found that reports (or notifications) of child abuse and neglect to the Department of Community Services were correlated with poverty and unemployment.

Weatherburn and Lind (1997) argue that both economic stress and social disadvantage can disrupt the parenting process in ways that lead to child abuse or neglect. Their study found a correlation between the level of social and economic stress in an area and the rates of notifications of child abuse and neglect. They noted, however, that the effects of social and economic stress can be exacerbated or ameliorated by a range of other factors.

The relatively high rates of Indigenous children in the child protection system are consistent with these findings. The national data show that the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiations are six times higher than the rates of other Australian children, while the rates of Indigenous children in out-of-home care are nine times higher than those of other children (AIHW 2001c). The lower socioeconomic status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is likely to be an important factor in this over-representation.

Family disruption appears to be another important factor that is associated with involvement in the child protection system. The national child protection data show that children from one-parent families and from step or blended families are over-represented in child protection substantiations (AIHW 2001c). This over-representation is likely to be related to the additional stresses that sole parents face. For example, they are more likely to have low incomes and be financially stressed, and to have less support in their immediate family.

Other factors that have been associated with involvement in the child protection system include residential instability, crowded dwellings, domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse, and psychiatric disability (Prent & Lewis 1996; Weatherburn & Lind 1997).

Trends in the use of child protection services

The AIHW has national data on the number of child protection investigations and substantiations for the years from 1990–91 to 1999–00, and on the number of notifications for the years from 1995–96 to 1999–00. The definitions of these terms are provided in Box 5.8.

Before examining national trends it is important to note that each jurisdiction has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to child protection. The related data reflect some important variations in what jurisdictions do and in how they count child protection matters. These differences are apparent in the variation in the rates of children aged 0–16 years in child protection notifications, investigations and

substantiations. In relation to substantiations, for example, rates ranged from 6.3 per 1,000 children in Victoria to 0.7 per 1,000 in Tasmania. For more information about the differences between jurisdictions, see AIHW (1999b).

Box 5.8: Definitions for notification, investigation and substantiation

Notification—is a contact made to the authorised department by persons or other bodies making allegations of child abuse and neglect, child maltreatment or harm to a child. The data on child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations in the national data collection relate to those notifications received by community services departments between 1 July and 30 June of the relevant financial year.

Investigation—is the process whereby the community services department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification and makes an assessment of the degree of harm or risk of harm for the child. After an investigation is completed, a notification will either be ‘substantiated’ or ‘not substantiated’.

Substantiation—a notification will be substantiated where it is concluded after investigation that the child has been, is being or is likely to be abused or neglected or otherwise harmed.

It should be noted that children can be the subject of more than one notification, investigation and substantiation in any year.

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

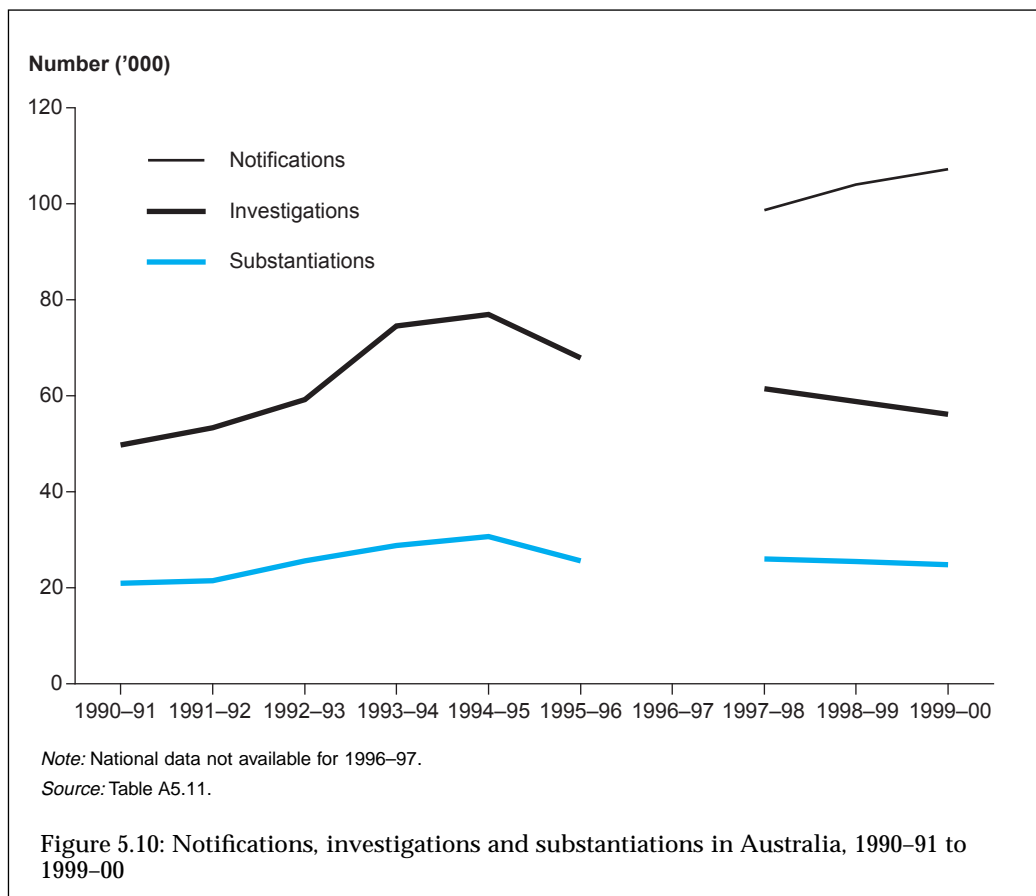
The national trend in notifications is one of increasing numbers between 1995—96 and 1999—00 (Figure 5.10). Across Australia, the number of notifications increased by 17% over this 4-year period to reach 107,134 in 1999—00. While there are no earlier national data on notifications, it is likely that the number of notifications increased significantly in the first half of the 1990s as there were large increases in the number of investigations.

Possible reasons for the increase in the number of notifications include:

- increased reporting by professionals as a result of the mandatory reporting provisions in most jurisdictions;
- increased awareness in the community about child abuse and neglect and the role of community services departments in this area; and
- increases in the number of children who require a child protection response, for example, because of an increase in the incidence of child abuse and neglect or inadequate parenting causing harm to a child.

Between 1990—91 and 1994—95, the number of investigations across Australia increased by 55% to reach 76,954. The number then fell each year to 56,083 in 1999—00. The trend in substantiations during the 1990s was similar, that is one of increasing numbers up to

1994—95, followed by a period of decreasing numbers. Substantiations rose by 47% from 20,868 in 1990—91 to 30,615 in 1994—95, and then fell by 19% to 24,732 in 1999—00 (Table A5.11).



National trends, however, mask the different trends that have occurred in each State and Territory over the last decade. Increases in numbers of children in the child protection system in one jurisdiction can cancel out decreases that occur in another, so that what has occurred in each jurisdiction can vary significantly from the national trends.

In particular, policy changes within jurisdictions can have a major impact on the numbers of children in the child protection system. The decrease in the number of investigations and substantiations from the mid-1990s, for example, was primarily due to changes in child protection policy in a number of jurisdictions. These changes allowed for a significant proportion of reports of concerns about children to be dealt with in ways other than through a formal investigation. These policies were introduced at different times in these States, but in each case led to substantial decreases in the number of investigations and substantiations.

In jurisdictions where these types of policies were not introduced, such as Victoria and Queensland, the number of investigations and substantiations did not significantly decrease, and in some cases continued to increase over the 1990s.

Trends in Queensland and Western Australia

The data for Queensland and Western Australia illustrate the different trends and show the impact of policy changes on the number of child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations.

The broad trend in Queensland was one of increasing numbers of children in the child protection system. Notifications increased by 24% between 1995–96 and 1999–00. Investigations decreased for a period in the early 1990s and then increased up to 1997–98. The number of investigations fell by 25% between 1990–91 and 1992–93, then increased by 79% to reach 15,245 in 1997–98, remaining relatively stable since then (Figure 5.11). The number of substantiations followed a similar trend to the number of investigations, with the overall trend one of increasing numbers.

The decrease in the number of investigations and substantiations in the early 1990s followed the introduction of a new framework for managing child protection matters in 1992. The three tenets of this framework were: a three-level response to reports of harm to ensure the level of intervention does not exceed that which is necessary to protect the child; ongoing assessment of the child's protective needs; and participation by families in decision-making processes (Elliott & Sultmann 1998).

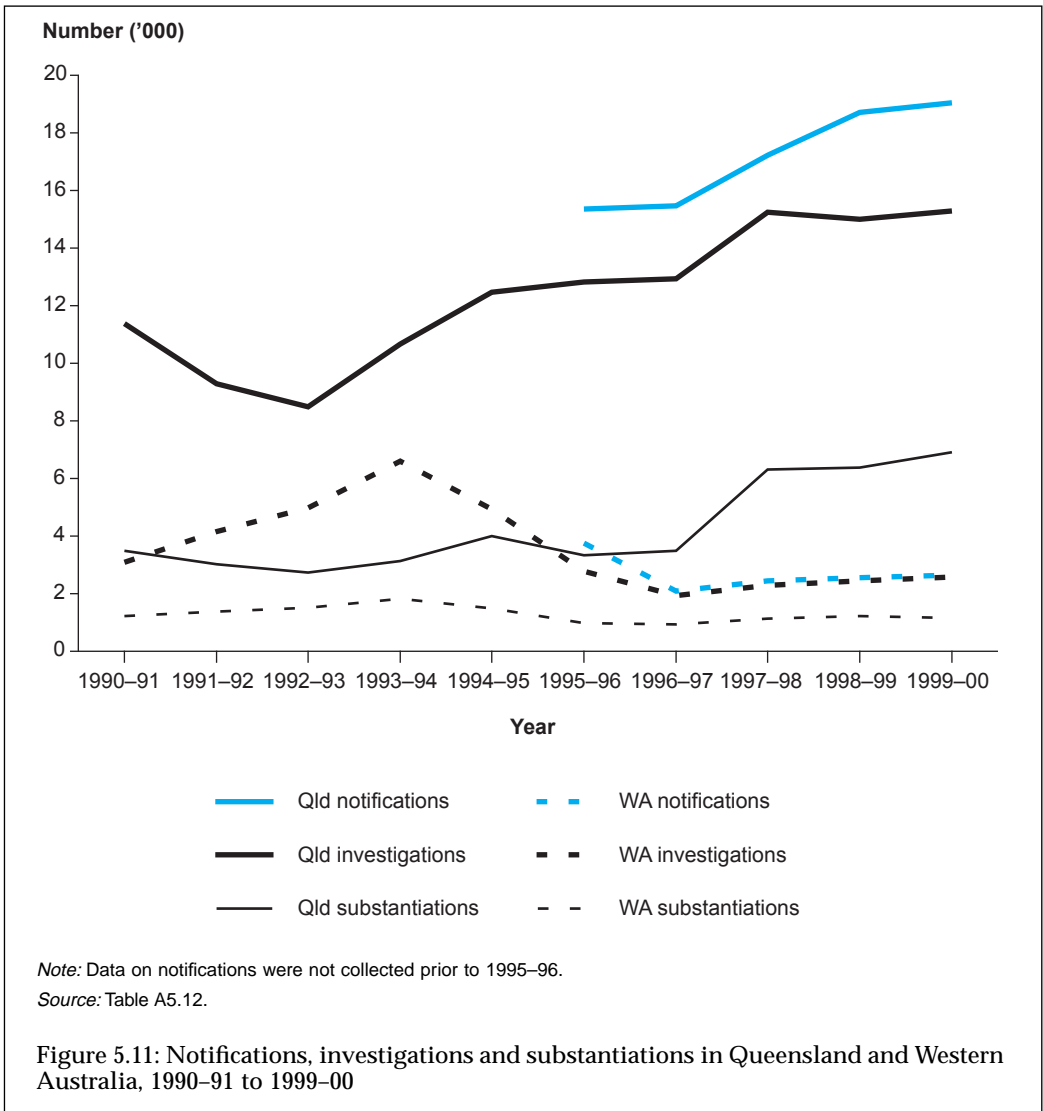
The trends in Western Australia were very different from those in Queensland and reflect the major new policy directions taken in the mid-1990s. Under *New Directions*, which was piloted in 1994 and phased in during 1995 and 1996, reports of concerns about children and their families were distinguished from concerns about maltreatment of children, and where there was no indication of maltreatment, they were dealt with separately and not classified as a notification. A new definition of maltreatment that focused on harm to a child rather than an action was also introduced.

After the piloting and phased introduction of *New Directions*, there was a substantial decrease in the number of notifications, investigations and substantiations (Figure 5.11). The number of investigations, for example, decreased by over 71% between 1993–94 and 1996–97.

The very different trends in child protection services in these two jurisdictions illustrate the impact that policy changes can have on the number of children in the child protection system. Major changes in policies can have fairly dramatic effects on numbers, and can make it very difficult to determine underlying trends in the incidence of child abuse and neglect or children who are in need of protection.

Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

The trends in the numbers of children on care and protection orders and the number in out-of-home care may be better indicators of such trends (see Box 5.9 for definitions). This is because these areas have not been subject to such major changes in policies, and because they generally involve children for whom there are more serious concerns about their safety and wellbeing.



Children on care and protection orders

At any point in the child protection process, the community services department can apply to the relevant court to place the child on a care and protection order. Such action is usually only taken as a last resort in situations where the department believes that continued involvement with the family is required to ensure the protection of a child. This may occur in situations where supervision and counselling are resisted by the family, where other avenues for resolution of the situation have been exhausted, or where removal of a child into out-of-home care requires legal authorisation.

Box 5.9: Definitions of care and protection orders and out-of-home care

Care and protection orders are legal or administrative orders or arrangements which give community services departments some level of responsibility for a child's welfare. The level of responsibility varies with the type of order or arrangement. These orders include guardianship and custody orders; supervision and other finalised orders; and interim and temporary orders.

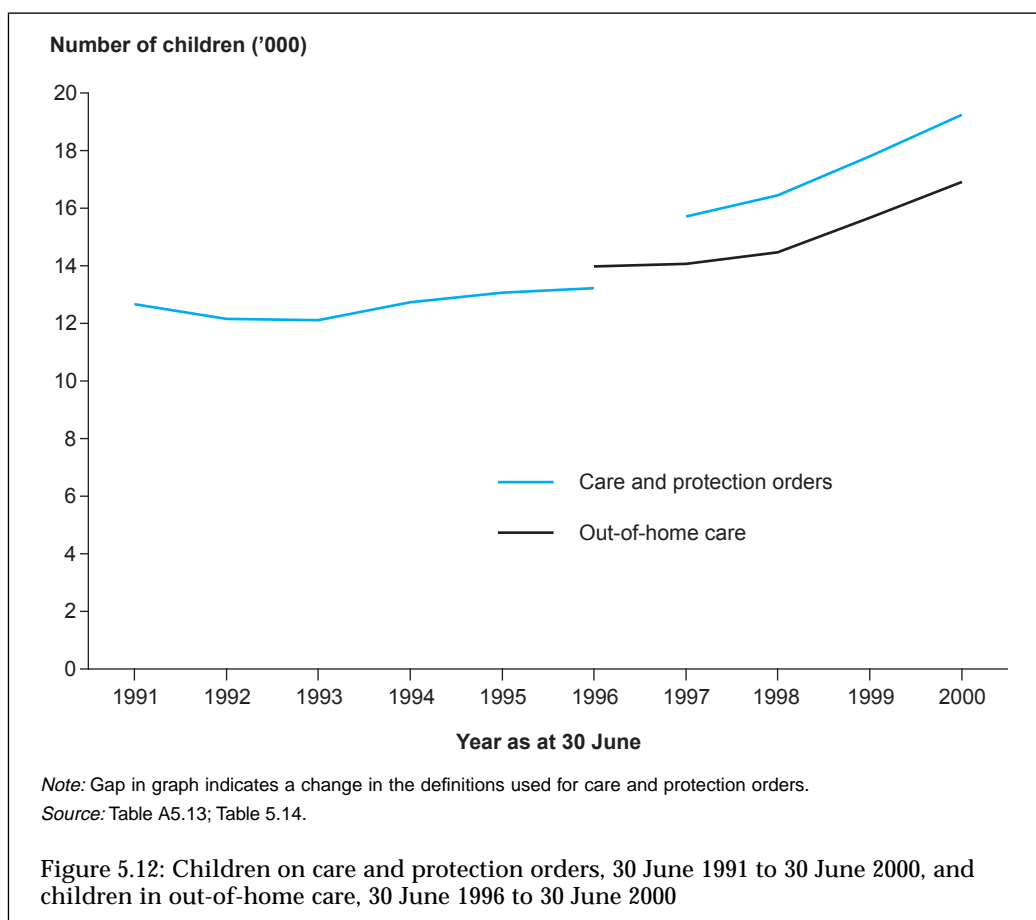
Out-of-home care is defined as out-of-home overnight care for children and young people under 18 years of age where the State or Territory makes a financial payment. It includes residential care, foster care and relative/kinship care. Children in out-of-home care can be placed in a variety of living arrangements or placement types. The following categories are used in the national data collection:

- *Home-based care—where placement is in the home of a carer who is reimbursed for expenses incurred in caring for the child. This category of placement is further divided into:*
 - *relative/kinship care—where the caregiver is a family member or a person with a pre-existing relationship to the child;*
 - *foster care—where care is provided in the private home of an approved carer who receives a payment which is intended to cover the child's living expenses;*
 - *other home-based care—care in private homes that does not fit into the above categories.*
- *Facility-based care—where placement is in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placements for children and where there are paid staff. This category includes facilities where there are rostered staff, where there is a live-in carer (including family group homes), where staff are off-site (for example, a lead tenant or supported residence arrangement), as well as other facility-based arrangements.*
- *Independent living—where children are living independently, such as those in private boarding arrangements.*

In the national data, the number of children on orders and the number of children in out-of-home care are counted at 30 June of the relevant year and are therefore a prevalence measure.

There was a large increase in the number of children on care and protection orders across Australia between 30 June 1991 and 30 June 2000 (Figure 5.12). The data from 1991 to 1996 include children on guardianship and non-guardianship orders. The number of children on these orders increased by 4%, from 12,680 in 1991 to 13,241 in 1996.

The scope of the data collection was broadened in 1997 to include a wider range of care and protection orders and administrative arrangements that were issued for protective reasons. The number of children on care and protection orders continued to increase



from 1997, rising 23% from 15,718 in 1997 to 19,262 in 2000. There was a corresponding increase in the rates of children on orders: from 3.3 to 4.1 per 1,000 children over the same period (AIHW 1998, 2001c).

The number of children on orders rose in all jurisdictions except Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory between 1997 and 2000. Increases were particularly large in the Northern Territory, where the number doubled, in Western Australia where it increased by 40% and in New South Wales where it rose by 32%.

Children in out-of-home care

While children may be placed in out-of-home care as well as on a care and protection order, the two data collections are separate and children are counted separately in each collection (see Box 5.9 for definitions). The trend in out-of-home care has been one of increasing numbers of children using these services. Between June 1996 (when national data were first collected) and June 2000, the number of children in out-of-home care in Australia rose from 13,979 to 16,923, an increase of 21% (Table 5.14, Figure 5.12). The rate of children in out-of-home care also increased over this period, from 3.0 children per 1,000 in 1996—97 to 3.8 per 1,000 in 1999—00 (AIHW 1998, 2001c).

Table 5.14: Number of children aged 0–17 in out-of-home care, by State/Territory, 30 June 1996 – 30 June 2000

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
1996	5,437	3,385	2,110	1,206	1,064	508	181	88	13,979
1997	5,486	3,393	2,211	1,050	1,193	461	173	111	14,078
1998	5,603	3,615	2,346	1,093	1,055	442	179	137	14,470
1999	6,359	3,581	2,613	1,192	1,045	533	174	177	15,674
2000	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923

Source: AIHW 2001c.

The number of children in out-of-home care increased in all jurisdictions between 1996 and 2000, particularly in New South Wales (by 30%) and in the Northern Territory (by 50%) (Table 5.14).

There is likely to be a range of complex reasons for the increases in the number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care from 1996 onwards. At the broad level the increase indicates that there are growing numbers of children whose families are considered unable to adequately care for them. This may be due to broader economic changes placing greater pressures on families, higher levels of family disruption or the increased prevalence of other problems such as substance abuse. The increase is consistent with the rising number of child protection notifications that occurred in most jurisdictions during the 1990s. Increases may also be related to greater use of short-term care orders for children, and improvements in recording practices.

Types of out-of-home care

There was some change in the types of out-of-home care in which children were placed between 1996 and 2000. The number of children in facility-based care fell significantly over this period, from 1,818 at 30 June 1996 to 1,222 at 30 June 2000 (Table 5.15). This decrease continues the longer term trend towards the deinstitutionalisation of children that began in the late 1960s (see Chapter 4).

Over the same period, there was a 25% increase in the number of children who were in home-based care arrangements: from 12,156 in 1996 to 15,169 in 2000. Not all jurisdictions, however, were able to provide data on the type of home-based care in which children were living over this 5-year period, and national data are available only for 1998 and 1999. Between June 1998 and June 1999 the number of children in foster care grew slightly, from 8,089 to 8,212, while the number of children in relative/kinship care increased by 18%, from 4,446 to 5,254.

Data from three jurisdictions, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, are provided for 30 June 1996 to 30 June 2000 to give some indication of trends in the different types of home-based care over that period (Table A5.14). In New South Wales the number of children in foster care decreased by 6%, from 2,661 to 2,510, and those in relative/kinship care increased by 78%, from 2,143 to 3,812. At 30 June 2000 relative/kinship care represented 54% of all placements in out-of-home care in New South Wales.

Table 5.15: Children in out-of-home care, by type of care, 30 June 1996 – 30 June 2000

Type of care ^(a)	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
			Number		
Foster care	n.a.	n.a.	8,089	8,212	n.a.
Relative/kinship care	n.a.	n.a.	4,446	5,254	n.a.
Other home-based care	n.a.	n.a.	126	183	n.a.
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>12,156</i>	<i>12,553</i>	<i>12,661</i>	<i>13,649</i>	<i>15,169</i>
Facility-based care	1,818	1,509	1,415	1,314	1,222
Independent living ^(b)	n.a.	n.a.	183	218	208
Other ^(c)	5	16	211	316	324
Total	13,979	14,078	14,470	15,497^(d)	16,923
			Per cent		
Foster care	n.a.	n.a.	55.9	53.0	n.a.
Relative/kinship care	n.a.	n.a.	30.7	33.9	n.a.
Other home-based care	n.a.	n.a.	0.1	1.2	n.a.
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>90</i>
Facility-based care	13	11	10	9	7
Independent living ^(b)	n.a.	n.a.	1	1	1
Other ^(c)	—	—	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

(a) Data on type of home-based care could not be provided by all jurisdictions in 1996, 1997 and 2000.

(b) These data were not collected prior to 1998.

(c) This includes unknown living arrangements.

(d) Data exclude 177 children from the Northern Territory because data on type of care could not be provided.

Source: AIHW 1997, 1998, 1999a, 2000a, 2001c.

In Victoria and Western Australia, there were increases in the number of children in both foster care and relative/kinship care over the same period. In Victoria, the number in foster care rose by 21%, from 1,849 to 2,237, while those in relative/kinship care rose by 51%, from 638 to 962. In Western Australia the rate of increase was not as great: foster care numbers increased by 18%, from 651 to 769, and relative/kinship care numbers by 10%, from 309 to 341.

Trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system has been well documented. For example, in 1999–00 their rates in substantiations were four times higher than those for other children in New South Wales and seven times higher in Western Australia (AIHW 2001c).

This section includes trends data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection substantiations, on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care. These data are not as comprehensive as the data for all children since not all jurisdictions could provide data on Indigenous status for each year.

The quality of the data on Indigenous status is one of the major issues to be considered when analysing trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The data vary across jurisdictions and over time. Increases in the recorded numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system over time may therefore

be due to improvements in the quality of the data. For example, in New South Wales during 1998–99, the system for recording Indigenous status was improved. While there was a large increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiations, on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care in this year, it is not clear how much of this increase can be attributed to improved reporting methods.

In 2000 the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) commissioned the ABS to develop a set of principles and standards to govern the collection and use of Indigenous client data in community services, including child protection. These standards and principles have been approved by the NCSIMG and a plan for their implementation is currently being developed.

Substantiations

The available data indicate that the greatest number of substantiations involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children occurred in 1997–98. The number peaked at different times, however, in different jurisdictions. For example, in New South Wales, it peaked in 1994–95, while in South Australia the number continued to increase throughout the 1990s (Table 5.16). These trends are influenced by changes in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in need of protection as well as changes in child protection policies and, as noted above, in the methods used to identify and record Indigenous status.

Table 5.16: Number of child protection substantiations involving Indigenous children, by State/Territory, 1993–94 to 1999–00

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
1993–94	1,216	301	n.a.	414	198	9	33	n.a.	n.a.
1994–95	1,405	239	660	342	225	14	23	194	3,102
1995–96	1,060	269	539	208	203	12	41	117	2,449
1996–97	n.a.	365	565	217	239	16	23	128	n.a.
1997–98	749	514	1,085	302	330	3	44	178	3,205
1998–99	1,026 ^(a)	n.a.	856	327	337	8	25	n.a.	n.a.
1999–00	763	570	504	332	338	4	6	172	2,689

(a) From 1998–99 the system for recording Indigenous status in New South Wales was improved, resulting in an increase in the number of clients who were identified as Indigenous.

Source: AIHW 1997, 1998, 1999a, 2000a, 2001c.

Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders at 30 June increased considerably from 1995 onwards (Table 5.17). Much of this increase occurred after the scope of the data collection was broadened in 1997. Between June 1997 and June 2000 the reported number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders rose by 52%, from 2,548 to 3,861. In comparison, the number of other children on care and protection orders grew by only 17% over the same period.

Table 5.17: Number of children on care and protection orders at 30 June 1995 – 30 June 2000 and number in out-of-home care at 30 June 1996 – 30 June 2000, by Indigenous status

	Children on care and protection orders		Children in out-of-home care	
	Indigenous	Other children	Indigenous	Other children
1995	2,048	11,020	n.a.	n.a.
1996	1,951	11,290	2,711	11,268
1997 ^(a)	2,548	13,170	2,785	11,293
1998	2,868	13,581	2,634	11,836
1999 ^(b)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2000	3,861	15,401	3,496	13,427

(a) The scope of the data collection on children on care and protection orders was changed in 1997, so the data collected from 1997 onwards are not comparable with those collected in prior years.

(b) The system used to record the Indigenous status of children in New South Wales was changed in 1998–99 resulting in a large increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. Victoria could not provide data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in 1999.

Source: AIHW 1997, 1998, 1999a, 2000a, 2001c.

The trend in the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care was also one of increase: from 2,711 in 1996 when data were first collected to 3,496 in 2000. Between 30 June 1996 and 30 June 2000 the number of Indigenous children in out-of-home care rose by 29%, while the number of other children rose by 19%. The data indicate that the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on orders and in out-of-home care have increased at a higher rate than those of other children, though some of this increase may be due to improvements in the quality of the Indigenous data.

5.6 Adoptions

The community services departments in each State and Territory are also responsible for all adoptions in Australia. These include both local and intercountry adoptions. Each State and Territory has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to adoption.

When an adoption order is granted, the legal relationship between the child and the biological parents is severed. The legal rights of the adopted child are as if he or she had been born to the adoptive parents, and the legal rights that exist from birth with regard to the birth parents (inheritance and name, for instance) are removed. A new birth certificate is issued to the child bearing the name(s) of his or her adoptive parent(s) as the legal parent(s), and the new name of the child, where a change has occurred (AIHW 2001d).

This section examines the trends in adoptions in the 1990s and some of the reasons for these trends. Data are also provided on the adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Box 5.10: Categories of adoption used in the national data collection

Placement adoptions—adoptions of children who are legally available and placed for adoption but who have had no previous contact or relationship with the adoptive parents. Placement adoptions are broken down into the following two categories:

- *local placement adoptions—adoptions of children who were born in Australia or who were permanent residents of Australia before the adoption; and*
- *intercountry placement adoptions—adoptions of children from countries other than Australia.*

‘Known’ child adoptions—adoptions of children who have a pre-existing relationship with the adoptive parent(s) and who are generally not available for adoption by anyone other than the adoptive parent(s). ‘Known’ child adoptions include adoptions by step-parents, other relatives and carers.

Before 1998–99, adoptions were categorised as either relative or non-relative adoptions. The difference between the old and the new categories is that adoptions by carers are now included with adoptions by step-parents and other relatives, whereas prior to 1998–98 they were included with adoptions by non-relatives.

Data sources

As with child protection, the national data on adoptions come from the administrative systems of each State and Territory community services department. The categories used to classify adoptions in the national data collection are outlined in Box 5.10. For more information about the data and definitions, refer to the *Adoptions Australia* series (for example, AIHW 2001d).

Table 5.18: Number of adoptions in Australia, by type of adoption, 1990–91 to 1999–00

	Adoptions of Australian children by non-relatives	Adoptions of Australian children by relatives	Intercountry adoptions	Total
1990–91	472	277	393	1,142
1991–92	418	295	338	1,052
1992–93	306	250	227	783
1993–94	314	228	222	764
1994–95	311	320	224	855
1995–96	217	177	274	668
1996–97	263	177	269	709
1997–98	178	154	245	577
	Local placement adoptions	‘Known’ child adoptions		
1998–99	127	172	244	543
1999–00	106	159	301	566

Note: From 1998–99 the categories for adoptions were changed. Carers who had a previous relationship to the child were included with adoptions by step-parents and other relatives in the category ‘“known” child adoptions’. Prior to 1998–99 adoptions by carers were included in the category ‘adoptions by non-relatives’ (see Box 5.10).

Source: AIHW 2001d.

Trends in adoption

The overall trend in adoptions in Australia over the last decade is one of decreasing numbers (Table 5.18). There was a large decrease in the first half of the 1990s when the number fell from 1,142 in 1990–91 to 764 in 1993–94. The number of adoptions then fluctuated over the next few years before decreasing to 577 in 1997–98. The number remained fairly stable after this and in 1999–00 there were 566 adoptions. This trend during the 1990s follows a strong downward trend that began in the early 1970s when there were nearly 10,000 adoptions in Australia (AIHW 2001d).

Local placement adoptions

The decrease in adoptions during the 1990s was primarily due to a fall in the number of Australian-born children being adopted by non-relatives (now referred to as local placement adoptions). This fall is attributable to the decrease in the number of Australian-born babies who are available for adoption, because of more effective fertility control and changed community attitudes to single parents.

The way that local placement adoptions are conducted has undergone major changes in the past decade. To a varying degree in different jurisdictions, adoption has changed from a guarded practice, where files were sealed and parties to the adoption had no contact with each other, to an open practice where each party to the adoption can have some say in what happens to the child. Of those local adoptions in 1999–00 where the type of agreement was known, 92% had some type of information exchange or contact between the parties to the adoption, with only 8% of relinquishing parents requesting no contact (Table 5.19). (These data were not collected prior to 1998–99.)

Table 5.19: Local placement adoptions, by type of agreement between parties to the adoption,^(a) 1999–00

Type of agreement	Number	Per cent
Contact and information exchange	46	74
Contact only	—	—
Information exchange only	11	18
No contact ^(b)	5	8
Total^(b)	62	100

(a) This table excludes 24 adoptions in Queensland where there are no provisions for information exchange or contact agreements at the time of the adoption and 20 adoptions for which information on type of agreement was unknown.

(b) This includes one dispensation by the Family Court.

Source: AIHW 2001d.

In addition, a large area of activity for community services departments in relation to adoption is in assisting people who were party to an adoption prior to open adoption practices to gain information about their adoption. In all jurisdictions, people who were party to an adoption can apply for identifying or non-identifying information regarding the adoption. This may lead to contact between the parties, for example between an adoptee and their birth mother. If a party to the adoption wishes to remain anonymous and/or not to be contacted, a veto may be lodged which makes it illegal for the other

parties to either gain information and/or to have contact. Such vetos are not available in Victoria. In 1999—00 there were 5,008 information applications lodged in Australia, compared with 114 contact vetos and 32 information vetoes (AIHW 2001d).

‘Known’ child adoptions

The number of Australian-born children adopted by relatives (now included in known child adoptions) decreased by 44% between 1990—91 and 1997—98. The number of known child adoptions continued to decrease up to 1999—00 (Table 5.18). Most known child adoptions (72%) in 1999—00 were adoptions by step-parents who wished to legally incorporate the child into the new family, but this practice has become less common over the last decade. There were 253 children adopted by step-parents in 1990—91, compared with 114 in 1999—00 (AIHW 1993, 2001d).

Adoptions by relatives, other than step-parents, are generally discouraged because of the confusion and distortion that may occur to biological relationships. There were only two adoptions by relatives other than step-parents in 1999—00 (AIHW 2001d). When children need to be placed in the care of relatives other than parents, most jurisdictions have policies that promote the use of guardianship or custody orders rather than adoption.

Intercountry adoptions

The number of intercountry adoptions declined in the first half of the 1990s, but increased by one-third between 1993—94 and 1999—00 (Table 5.18). The increase is likely to be related to the continuing decreases in the number of local children available for adoption as well as the greater availability of overseas-born children for adoption, partly as a result of the opening of adoption to Australian families in some countries.

An important development in relation to intercountry adoptions was the ratification of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions by Australia in December 1998. The convention streamlines the processes required for intercountry adoptions and establishes uniform procedures to be followed by the countries who are parties to the convention (see AIHW 2001d). At June 2001, 31 countries had ratified and 15 countries had signed but not yet ratified the convention. The number of countries ratifying the convention is likely to increase over the next few years.

In December 1999 Australia and China signed a bilateral agreement that allows Australian residents to adopt children from China. The first adoptions of Chinese children under this agreement will be reported in the 2000—01 adoptions data.

Since 1990—91, the majority of children in intercountry adoptions have come from South Korea (32%), followed by India (11%) and Thailand (9%) (Table 5.20).

Table 5.20: Intercountry adoptions by country of origin, 1990–91 to 1999–00

Country of origin	Number	Per cent	Country of origin	Number	Per cent
South Korea	888	32	Guatemala	45	2
India	303	11	Mauritius	31	1
Thailand	252	9	Bolivia	27	1
Philippines	202	7	Other Americas	22	1
Sri Lanka	190	7	Other Europe	21	1
Colombia	189	7	Poland	19	1
Ethiopia	142	5	Other Asia	15	1
Fiji	97	4	Cambodia	13	—
Romania	66	2	Other Africa	6	—
Chile	53	2	Oceania	5	—
Taiwan	51	2	Middle East	4	—
Hong Kong	50	2			
Brazil	46	2	Total	2,737	100

Notes

1. Other Europe includes: Albania, England, Germany, Greece, Macedonia, Malta, Portugal, Serbia, Turkey and Yugoslavia.
2. Other Americas includes: Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Haiti, Honduras, Peru, United States and Uruguay.
3. Other Asia includes: Bangladesh, China, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam.
4. Other Africa includes: Ghana, Mauritius, Morocco, South Africa and Zimbabwe.
5. Oceania includes: Papua New Guinea, Nauru, New Zealand, Samoa and Vanuatu.
6. Middle East includes: Lebanon and Syria.

Source: Unpublished AIHW data.

Adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Since 1991–92 when data on adoptions of Indigenous children were first collected, there have been 63 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children adopted in Australia. The number of such adoptions of decreased sharply after 1994–95 (Table 5.21). The relatively low number of adoptions of Indigenous children reflects cultural differences in relation to adoption. If an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child cannot be cared for by his/her parents, the role of caregiver is traditionally assumed by an appropriate member of the extended family, without a formal adoption (Boss 1992).

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, which outlines a preference for the placement of Indigenous children with other Indigenous people when they are placed outside their family, applies to adoption as well as to out-of-home care (Lock 1997). In more than half of these adoptions between 1991–92 and 1999–00, the adoptive parents were also Indigenous.

Table 5.21: Number of Indigenous adoptions, by relationship to and Indigenous status of adoptive parents, 1991–92 to 1999–00

	Indigenous adoptive parent			Non-Indigenous adoptive parent			Total
	Relative	Non-relative	Total	Relative	Non-relative	Total	
1991–92	2	3	5	—	3	3	8
1992–93	—	5	5	—	2	2	7
1993–94	1	6	7	—	6	6	13
1994–95	—	7	7	—	5	5	12
1995–96	—	2	2	—	5	5	7
1996–97	2	1	3	—	4	4	7
1997–98	—	3	3	—	1	1	4
1998–99	—	—	—	—	3	3	3
1999–00	1	1	2	—	—	—	2
Total	6	28	34	—	29	29	63

Source: AIHW 2001d.

5.7 Data developments

Over the last few years, there have been a number of important developments at the national level in the data on children's and family services.

Child care and preschool services

At the end of 1999, the National Children's Services Data Working Group of the NCSIMG agreed on a set of data items to be included in the first and second stages of a National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) for child care and preschool services. In the first half of 2000, the AIHW developed a draft data manual for the first stage of the NMDS. A data collection form based on the draft data manual was field tested in the second half of the year. The field test was undertaken in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory and involved 17 child care and preschool service providers. The field test, in particular, highlighted the complexity of service provision and the lack of consistency between the types of services that providers were licensed and/or funded to provide and those that they actually offered in response to parents' and children's needs (AIHW 2001a).

Following the field test, the Data Working Group agreed that the data collection would be structured around the services actually offered to children, rather than the type of funded and/or licensed service. It was also agreed that, where possible, information would be collected on individual children and their families and on individual workers rather than aggregated by service provider. The draft data manual was extensively revised to reflect these and other recommendations arising from the field testing. The Data Working Group is currently finalising the first stage of the NMDS for child care and preschool services.

Child protection

In 2000 the National Child Protection and Support Services data working group (NCPASS) reviewed the national framework for collecting and reporting data on child protection and child concern reports. The aim of this review was to establish the feasibility of updating the national reporting framework to:

- more accurately reflect the current responses of States and Territories to child protection and child concern reports;
- present a more comprehensive data set; and
- increase the consistency and comparability of the reported data.

After consultations with States and Territories a proposed new framework for national reporting on child protection and child concern matters was developed. The proposed framework reflects the significant shift in child protection policy and practice that locates child protection as part of a broader framework of services for the safety and wellbeing of children. It focuses reporting on:

- the range of reports received in relation to the safety and wellbeing of children;
- the range of responses to such reports; and
- the outcomes of direct departmental contact with children and/or families.

While reflecting new concepts that underpin changes in policy and practice by most States and Territories in recent years, for most jurisdictions the framework will not require a significant shift in what is being reported nationally. The feasibility of the new framework is currently being assessed by States and Territories and by NCPASS. The outcomes of the review of the national framework will then be reported to the NCSIMG.

Family support services

In 2000 a scoping study of family support services was commissioned by the NCSIMG. The aim of the study was to assess the scope of family support services funded by State, Territory and Commonwealth community services departments, and to provide an overview of the current data collection efforts in relation to these services.

An agreed definition of family support services was developed for the purposes of the study: 'Services that seek to benefit families by improving their capacity to care for children and/or strengthening family relationships'.

The report from the scoping study *Family Support Services in Australia 2000* (AIHW 2001e) describes the programs that each jurisdiction funds or delivers in the area of family support services, and provides a broad description of the data collection systems in place or planned. The major categories of family support services identified were:

- information and referral;
- education/skill development;

- counselling, mediation or therapy;
- residential and in-home support; and
- advocacy.

The report noted that data collections relating to family support services were in place, at least in part, in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth. Plans existed to commence collections in other jurisdictions, and to extend or review existing collections in most States, Territories and the Commonwealth. Data systems varied from detailed unit record collections about activities, to 6-monthly aggregates of information on key outputs and performance measures.

This scoping study is one step in an ongoing process to provide meaningful, useful and beneficial information about an important area of community services.

5.8 Conclusion

Over the last decade there have been ongoing changes in family structures and patterns that have implications for children s and family services. There were increases in both the number of one-parent families and the number of families with no parent in employment. The number of sole parents on income support increased by nearly 60% between 1990 and 2000, and there was also a significant increase in the number of low-income families in receipt of More than Minimum Family Allowance. Over the same period there were real increases in the level of Commonwealth income support provided to families with dependent children.

In the area of child care, the number of Commonwealth-supported service providers and child care places increased considerably over the decade. A large component of this increase was due to the growth in the number of places in Commonwealth-supported private-for-profit long day care centres up to 1998. In the first half of the decade, the number of children using long day care centres increased at around the same rate as the number of places. However, from 1995 to 1999 the number of places increased at a greater rate than the number of children using services, reflecting declining utilisation rates over the period.

During the 1990s there was a shift from Commonwealth expenditure on child care service provision (operational subsidies and capital funding) to expenditure on measures that reduce the costs of child care for parents (fee subsidies). Expenditure grew rapidly up to 1996—97, but then fell slightly in real terms to 1999—00 mainly because of the fall in expenditure on operational subsidies and fee subsidies probably reflecting falling utilisation rates.

The introduction of the Child Care Benefit in July 2000 (at the beginning of the 2000—01 financial year) improved the affordability of child care and the utilisation of services improved, at least in the short term. It will be interesting to examine trends in service use and expenditure over the longer term, when data become available.

The use of State and Territory child protection and out-of-home care services also increased in the 10 years up to 2000. During the last 5 years there were rises in the number of child protection notifications, as well as large increases in the number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care. These indicate that there are growing numbers of children whose families are considered to be unable to provide adequate care or protection for them.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in child protection and out-of-home care services. Over the last 5 years the number of them on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care increased at a greater rate than the number of other Australian children in these services. Some of this increase was due to improvements in the identification of Indigenous status.

The number of adoptions in Australia continued to fall between 1990—91 and 1999—00, mainly due to decreases in local adoptions. Intercountry adoptions declined during the first few years of the 1990s, but increased by more than one-third between 1993—94 and 1999—00. A large area of activity for State and Territory community services departments is in assisting people who were party to an adoption in earlier years to obtain more information about their adoption.

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