

# 5 Conclusion

The national child protection data cover three areas of child protection:

1. child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations;
2. children on care and protection orders; and
3. children in out-of-home care.

These data come from the administrative databases of the community services department in each State and Territory.

Each jurisdiction has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to child protection and these are reflected in the data that each jurisdiction provides. These differences mean that the data provided by the different States and Territories are not strictly comparable. This is particularly the case for the data on notifications, investigations and substantiations.

Work is now being undertaken by the NCPASS Data Group to improve the comparability of the child protection data. A new national framework with different counting points has been developed and its feasibility is currently being assessed by States and Territories.

Changes to policies and procedures that occur within the States and Territories also affect the child protection data. Child protection systems are constantly being modified and this means that the data may change from year to year. Major changes in the numbers of children in the child protection system, therefore, often reflect changing administrative practices, rather than changes in the number of children who are in need of protection. Aside from administrative data, however, there is no other source of data at the national level on children who are regarded as being in need of protection.

Some preliminary data were collected on family preservation services this year and NCPASS will continue the development of these data. In addition, some preliminary work on the broader range of family support services was undertaken in 2000 with funding from CSMAC. The report from this study includes an assessment of the scope of family support services funded by State, Territory and Commonwealth community service departments, and an overview of the current data collection efforts in relation to these services (AIHW 2001).

Over time, it is hoped that national data can be reported on the broader range of services that are provided to child protection clients. This would provide a broader perspective on the child protection work undertaken by community service departments and other agencies.