

24 Community services

Community services are part of a wide range of social programs – including health, education, and income security – designed to enhance individual or community wellbeing and to provide opportunities for full participation by all citizens in social and economic life (AIHW 1993:11-12). Most community services are targeted to meet specific needs, and some are specifically designed to assist young people with particular needs.

This chapter presents information on the availability and use of those community services which the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is required to report on every 2 years. These include services for families and children (divided here into counselling services and child protection services); services for people with disabilities; housing assistance services; and services for homeless people.

Counselling services for youth

The Commonwealth Government and State/Territory Governments fund a variety of 'family support services', of which counselling services are a part. Some counselling services are targeted specifically for young people. The Commonwealth's Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy program (formerly in the Attorney-General's Department, but now part of the Department of Family and Community Services) is aimed primarily at preventing youth homelessness, using mediation to resolve conflicts between young people and their caregivers. In 1995-96, twelve organisations were funded under this program (a total of \$1.8 million), and served 2,881 clients (AIHW 1997: 133).

State/Territory Governments also fund non-government agencies to provide counselling services, including telephone counselling, some of which (such as Youthline) are targeted at young people.

A wide range of organisations, many funded under the Commonwealth's National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, provide counselling and other services to young people (Mitchell 1999:2-7).

Child protection services

Community services departments in each State and Territory are responsible for protecting children (mainly persons under 18 years of age) who have been abused or neglected, children who have been abandoned, or children for whom there is no adequate provision for their care (for example, the child's parent is ill or in gaol) (AIHW 1997:189). The AIHW compiles annually the data on child protection services from community services departments in each jurisdiction. Table 24.1 presents these data from 1997-98 for children aged 12-16 or 12-17 years for three specific types of services:

- children who were the subject of a notification to the community services department of abuse or neglect, and an investigation has resulted in the case being classified as substantiated, that is, there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has been, or is being, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed (*substantiation of abuse/neglect*);
- children who have been placed on a *care and protection order* by the relevant court, often because the child has been abused or neglected, but in some cases because adequate provision has not been made for the child's care, or there has been an irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between the child and his or her parents;
- children who have been placed by the community services department in *out of home care*, that is, in an institution or with a family other than their parents, and the State/Territory Government makes a payment for the child's care.

The analysis is limited to ages 12-16 years for children who were the subject of a substantiation, because very few individuals aged 17 years were recorded in the data. Furthermore, due to differences between the States and Territories in what is counted as a substantiation, the data for the first group have not been aggregated to produce national rates.

Table 24.1: Youth in the child welfare system, by age group and State/Territory, 1997–98 (rate per 1,000)

| Age group (years) | NSW | Vic | Qld | WA | SA | Tas | ACT | NT | Australia |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| Children who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse/neglect | | | | | | | | | |
| 12–14 | 5.7 | 6.2 | 5.5 | 2.2 | 3.5 | 1.2 | 4.5 | 6.0 | .. |
| 15–16 | 3.8 | 4.2 | 2.7 | 1.3 | 2.1 | 0.6 | 2.8 | 3.2 | .. |
| Children on care and protection orders at 30 June 1998 | | | | | | | | | |
| 12–14 | 4.7 | 4.1 | 4.8 | 2.1 | 4.5 | 5.1 | 3.6 | 2.5 | 4.3 |
| 15–17 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 5.0 | 1.6 | 5.0 | 5.8 | 3.1 | 2.3 | 4.0 |
| Children in out of home care at 30 June 1998 | | | | | | | | | |
| 12–14 | 4.4 | 3.5 | 3.6 | 2.6 | 4.2 | 5.4 | 2.8 | 2.5 | 3.8 |
| 15–17 | 3.6 | 5.7 | 2.5 | 2.2 | 2.7 | 3.2 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 3.7 |

Notes

1. Numbers for 'children who were subject of a substantiation of abuse/neglect' have not been combined to produce rates for all Australia, due to differences between States and Territories in the definitions of 'abuse and neglect' and in the way 'substantiations' are made.
2. Figures for children in Western Australia who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse/neglect do not include 14 children for whom age details are not known.
3. Most children in out of home care were also on a care and protection order.

Source: AIHW Child Welfare and Population Databases.

- The highest rates of substantiations of abuse/neglect were recorded in the Northern Territory, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland, all above 5 per 1000 for children aged 12–14 years. However, these figures should be interpreted with care because the procedures for reporting and definitions of substantiations differ considerably between jurisdictions.
- For all of Australia, just over four children per 1,000 aged 12–17 years were on care and protection orders.
- Just under four children per 1,000 aged 12–17 years were in out of home care.

Disability services

The prevalence of disability among the youth population is covered in Chapter 7, where it is stated that about 9% of this age group reported having some form of a disability. There are a variety of services to meet the needs of people with a disability: formal services, equipment and environmental modifications; and informal support. Formal services include income support, specialist disability support services, and relevant generic services (AIHW 1999a:214). This section reports on the first two of these formal services as they pertain to the youth population.

There are several types of disability-related income support services for people with a disability. The Disability Support Pension is the main form of income support for people with a disability who are aged over 15 years and less than the age of eligibility for the Age Pension. At June 1998 there were over 551,000 recipients of this pension, of whom 13,137 (2%) were aged 16–19 years and 47,905 (9%) were aged 20–29 years. The Child Disability Allowance is paid to parents of children with a disability who need a lot more care and attention than a child of the same age who does not have a disability. There were over 101,000 children being cared for by recipients of this allowance in June 1998, of whom 2,243 were aged 16–24 years. Other disability-related income support services to which some young people are eligible are the Mobility Allowance (for people aged 16 or more who cannot use public transport without substantial assistance and who are working, training or looking for work), the Sickness Allowance (for people of workforce age who must temporarily stop working in their job or studying full-time due to a medical condition), and the various carer pensions (AIHW 1999a: 229–232).

A range of specialist disability support services are provided to people with a disability (AIHW 1997: 316). These include:

- accommodation support – institutional accommodation, group homes, and in-home support;
- community support – advocacy and information service, therapy, counselling, and support groups;
- community access – continuing education, independent living training, and assistance with transition from education to work;
- respite – centre-based or home-based services;
- employment services – open employment and supported employment services.

Most of these support services are funded under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement (CSDA). The Agreement provides for annual collections of data on an agreed date, known as the 'snapshot day'. These data are compiled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and the results for the 1998 collection are shown in Table 24.2 in the form of rates of service use. The rates are calculated by dividing the number of recipients of a particular type of service by the number of persons under age 65 (or aged 15–64 for employment services) with a 'profound' or 'severe' core activity restriction (see Chapter 7), the ones most likely to seek assistance from disability support service providers.

Table 24.2: Use of disability support services on the 'snapshot day' in 1998 (rate per 1,000 persons with 'profound' or 'severe' core activity restriction)

| Age group (years) | Accommodation | Community support | Community access | Respite | Employment |
|---|---------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 15–19 | 19.2 | 33.8 | 28.1 | 9.5 | 33.3 |
| 20–24 | 53.2 | 35.7 | 82.7 | 9.4 | 119.9 |
| 15–64 | .. | .. | .. | .. | 34.4 |
| 0–64 | 31.8 | 21.5 | 22.2 | 3.7 | .. |
| <i>Number of services provided (all ages)</i> | <i>20,913</i> | <i>14,158</i> | <i>14,040</i> | <i>2,448</i> | <i>17,664</i> |

Note: An individual may receive more than one type of service on the 'snapshot day', hence users may be counted more than once.

Source: AIHW analysis of the 1998 CSDA Minimum Data Set collection (preliminary and ABS 1998 Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers (population figures adjusted to June 1998)).

- Relatively high usage rates were reported for people with a disability aged 20–24 years for all types of services. For example, their use of employment services was more than three times that of all working-age persons with profound or severe core activity restrictions.
- People with a disability aged 15–19 years also had relatively high rates of service use, particularly for community support and respite services.

Most of these support services are funded under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement (CSDA). The Agreement also provides for annual collections of data on an agreed 'snapshot day'. These data are compiled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and the results for the 1999 collection are shown in Table 24.3.

Table 24.3: Users of disability support services on 'snapshot day', 1998 (rate per 1,000 persons with 'profound' or 'severe' core activity restriction)

| Age group (years) | Accommodation | Community support | Community access | Respite | Employment |
|---|---------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 11–19 | 19.2 | 33.8 | 28.1 | 9.5 | 33.3 |
| 20–24 | 53.2 | 82.7 | 82.7 | 9.4 | 119.9 |
| 15–64 | .. | .. | .. | .. | 34.4 |
| 0–64 | 31.8 | 21.5 | 22.2 | 3.7 | .. |
| <i>Number of services provided (all ages)</i> | <i>20,913</i> | <i>14,138</i> | <i>14,040</i> | <i>2,448</i> | <i>17,664</i> |

Note: An individual may receive more than one type of service on the 'snapshot day', hence users may be counted more than once.

Sources: AIHW analysis of the 1999 CSDA Minimum Data Set collection (preliminary); ABS Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers (population figures adjusted to June 1998).

- Accommodation support was the most common service type provided for all users on the 'snapshot day' (20,913), followed by employment, community access, and community support services.
- The most common type of service for the youth population on the 'snapshot day', however, was employment support (3,538), about 20% of all requests for assistance in this category.
- While there were relatively few requests overall for respite assistance (2,448), 29% of these were for people aged 12–24 years.

Housing assistance services

Governments at all levels are involved in a variety of ways of assisting people to obtain adequate shelter. This section describes some of these public housing programs and highlights those which particularly serve the needs of young people: rent assistance for people in non-government housing; public rental housing; and community housing. Services for homeless people are covered in the next section.

Rent assistance generally takes the form of a non-taxable income supplement paid to individuals and families who are eligible for a payment from the former Department of Social Security (now the Department of Family and Community Services – FaCS) and who are not renting from a State housing authority and are not home owners or purchasers. In September 1998 there were 940,100 income units receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance and receiving an average assistance of \$29.82 per week; 20% these income units were headed by a person under 25 years of age. Of the income units headed by a person under 25 years, 70% were single-person units, 17% were sole parents, 9% were couples with children, and 3% were couples without children (FaCS 1999).

Public rental housing is available to households with incomes below a given threshold. Rents are charged according the household's income until payments are equal to a market rent. In 1995-96, approximately 15% of tenant households paid market rents; the remainder (85%) received a 'rent rebate' – the difference between the market rent and the rent charged (AIHW 1997:159-160). In June 1998, there were 395,000 households occupying public rental housing, of which 5,700 (1.4%) were 'single only persons under 25 years'. This figure (1.4%) does not include couples under 25 years, or single parents under 25 years with children (AIHW 1999b:1).

Community housing is provided by non-profit community and local government organisations for people on low to moderate incomes. This type of service covers a range of housing options, including rental housing cooperatives, rooming houses, and housing for people with special needs. It is estimated that there were 2,127 funded community housing organisations in Australia as at June 1998, of which 944 participated in a 'mapping project' (AIHW 1999c:5). Of these organisations, 10% named 'young people' as their primary target group, and 6% of the dwellings they operated (over 30,000 in total) had 'young people' (either homeless or low income) as one of their target groups. About 7% of the households using these services (and for which information was available) were individuals or income units headed by a person under 25 years of age (AIHW 1999c:124, 130, 154).

Services for homeless people

People who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless may be supported in a number of ways. Some receive assistance from community services such as family support programs or programs for the mentally ill. Others may receive assistance from programs or agencies funded primarily to support those who are homeless. The two major national programs providing assistance to the homeless are the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and the Crisis Accommodation Program. The latter mainly provides capital funding for community-based accommodation, whereas agencies funded by SAAP directly provide accommodation and other support to people in need. Young people form a significant component of the clients of SAAP agencies.

SAAP agencies are moving away from focusing solely on immediate needs, such as accommodation, towards addressing the underlying causes of the client's crisis. In particular, the Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Task Force funded pilot projects to develop models of service provision that would emphasise the 're-engagement of young homeless people in family, work, education, training and the community' (AIHW 1997:225–26).

Data on SAAP providers and clients is provided by funded agencies to the SAAP National Data Collection, maintained by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). In June 1998 there were 1,190 funded SAAP agencies in Australia, of which 39% had 'young people' as their primary target group. The other primary target groups were 'cross target/multiple/general' (20%), 'women escaping domestic violence' (21%), 'single men only' (8%), 'single women only' (4%), and 'families' (8%) (AIHW 1999d:20). It is estimated that 93,600 individuals were assisted by SAAP agencies in 1997–98. The distribution of these clients by sex and age is shown in Table 24.4.

Table 24.4: SAAP clients by sex and age group, 1997–98 (per cent)

| Age (years) | Males | Females | Total |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Under 15 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 2.0 |
| 15–19 | 9.4 | 11.3 | 20.7 |
| 20–24 | 7.0 | 9.1 | 16.1 |
| 25–29 | 6.2 | 8.7 | 14.9 |
| 30+ | 23.7 | 22.6 | 46.2 |
| Total | 47.2 | 52.8 | 100.0 |
| <i>Number</i> | <i>44,100</i> | <i>49,400</i> | <i>93,600</i> |

Notes

1. Client numbers have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.
2. Components may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: AIHW 1999a:364.

- Nearly 21% of all SAAP clients were aged 15–19 years; an additional 2% were under age 15, and 16% were aged 20–24 years, a total of 39%, or 36,500 clients.
- Female clients outnumbered male clients in the younger ages. For clients below age 25 years, there are 1.2 times as many females as males.

Community services

The SAAP data collection contains information on the types of support provided to clients for each period of support. Some clients had more than one support period, and thus the number of support periods is greater than the number of clients. Also, clients could receive several types of support in each period. The types of support are shown in Table 24.5.

Table 24.5: SAAP support periods by client's age and type of service provided, 1997–98 (per cent)

| Support services provided | Under 15 years | 15–19 years | 20–24 years | 25+ years | All ages |
|---|----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Housing/accommodation | 67.4 | 76.3 | 79.2 | 83.4 | 81.1 |
| Financial/employment | 22.6 | 41.8 | 39.5 | 34.7 | 36.7 |
| Counselling | 55.6 | 40.1 | 38.7 | 37.1 | 38.2 |
| General support/advocacy | 72.1 | 76.8 | 74.2 | 73.0 | 73.9 |
| Specialist services | 23.5 | 20.5 | 22.8 | 25.3 | 23.9 |
| <i>Other support</i> | | | | | |
| Meals | 59.2 | 48.3 | 50.2 | 63.3 | 58.2 |
| Laundry/shower | 55.8 | 44.9 | 47.8 | 62.2 | 56.4 |
| Recreation | 43.7 | 33.2 | 24.8 | 26.8 | 28.0 |
| Transport | 50.0 | 48.0 | 35.8 | 29.6 | 34.6 |
| <i>Number of support periods (unweighted)</i> | | | | | |
| | 1,773 | 22,961 | 17,852 | 72,391 | 114,977 |
| <i>Number of support periods (weighted)</i> | | | | | |
| | 2,800 | 34,100 | 26,000 | 100,600 | 163,300 |

Notes

1. Clients were able to receive multiple services so percentages do not total to 100.
2. Clients could have more than one support period, and thus the number of support periods is greater than the number of clients.
3. Percentages are calculated using unweighted numbers of support periods.

Source: AIHW 1999a:364; 1999d:76.

- The 36,500 SAAP clients below age 25 years had an estimated 62,900 support periods, approximately 1.7 support periods per client.
- As expected, the most common type of service provided was assistance with housing or accommodation. Younger clients were less likely to receive this type of assistance than older clients: about two-thirds of support periods for those under 15 years involved this type of assistance, compared to 76% of those aged 15–19 years, 79% of those aged 20–24 years, and 81% of those aged above 25 years.
- Around three-quarters of support periods for younger clients (those aged under 25 years) included 'general support/advocacy' services. Specific types of assistance under this heading, in order of magnitude for younger clients (those under 25 years), were 'advice/information', 'advocacy/liaison on behalf of client', and 'living skills/personal development'.
- Over 55% of the support periods for clients under 15 years, and 40% for those aged 15–19 and 20–24 years, included at least one type of counselling. The most common types of counselling were 'emotional support' and 'family/relationship counselling and support'.
- 'Financial/employment' assistance was included in 23% of the support periods for clients under 15 years, and 40% for those aged 15–19 and 20–24 years. The main type of service in this category was 'financial assistance/material aid'.

- 'Health/medical services' was the main type of 'specialist services' provided. Over 12% of support periods for younger clients included some type of health service (data not shown).
- Practical types of assistance, such as meals, personal hygiene, recreation, and help with transport, were included in a high proportion of support periods for younger clients.

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